

# Factors Influencing the Transition to PGT Study, and Support Requirements for PGT Students

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# Background – Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Education



**493,000** PGT students in UK  
HE (21/22, cf. 271,000 12/13)



**16,900** PGT students at UCL  
(21/22, cf. 46,800 in total)



**100** PGT students in UCL  
Chemistry (cf. 35–50 UG MSci)

## UCL Chemistry's five PGT programmes:

- MSc Applied Analytical Chemistry
- MSc Chemical Research
- MSc Materials for Energy and Environment
- MSc Materials and Molecular Modelling
- MRes Organic Chemistry: Drug Discovery

# Background – PGT Transition

- Transition UG → PGT often involves:
  - New country/city
  - New institution
  - New e-learning platform
  - New staff
  - New social network
  - Sometimes, new language of instruction
- Comparatively little research compared to the UG transition.

# Factors Influencing the PGT Transition



## Student Background

- Personal Background
- International vs home
  - Language barrier
  - Socio-cultural differences



## Learning and Teaching

- Web-based learning
- Face-to-face lectures and activities
- Masters-level study skills
- Academic differences (learner identity)



## Finance

- Master's Loan
- Part-time work vs study



## Support

- From the institution
- From peers

# MSci Chemical Education Research Project



- Conducted by You Cheng, 4<sup>th</sup> year MSci Chemistry student in 2021-22
- Research questions:

What are the **biggest factors** experienced by students during their **transition** into PGT education in the Department of Chemistry?

Is there a relationship between student **background** and their views on those factors?

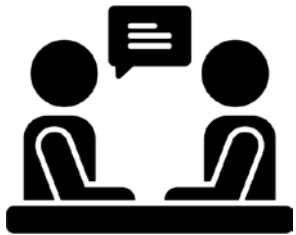
Are there any improvements in **support** that could be adopted to ease PGT transition?

# Methodology

Ethical approval ID:  
14323/002



- **Survey** (MS Forms, Feb 22)
  - 2021–22 chemistry PGT cohort invited by email ( $N = 65$ )
  - 32 responded
  - Mixture of closed (5-point Likert) and open questions



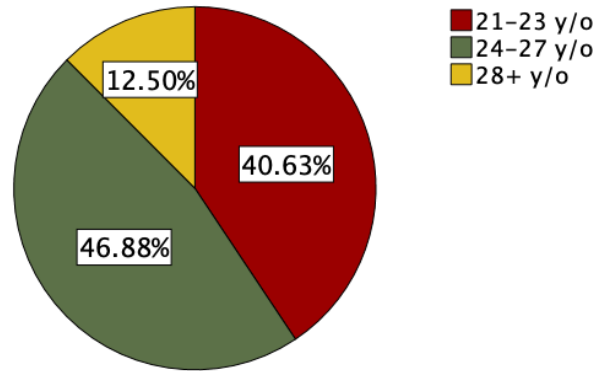
- **Interviews** (Feb/Mar 22)
  - Survey responders invited by email, 4 participated
  - 30 min with You
  - Questions based on findings in survey



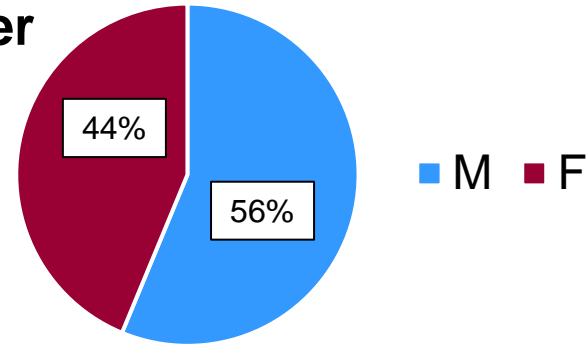
- **Data Analysis:**
  - Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)
  - Thematic analysis (open questions, interviews)

# Results – Participant Background

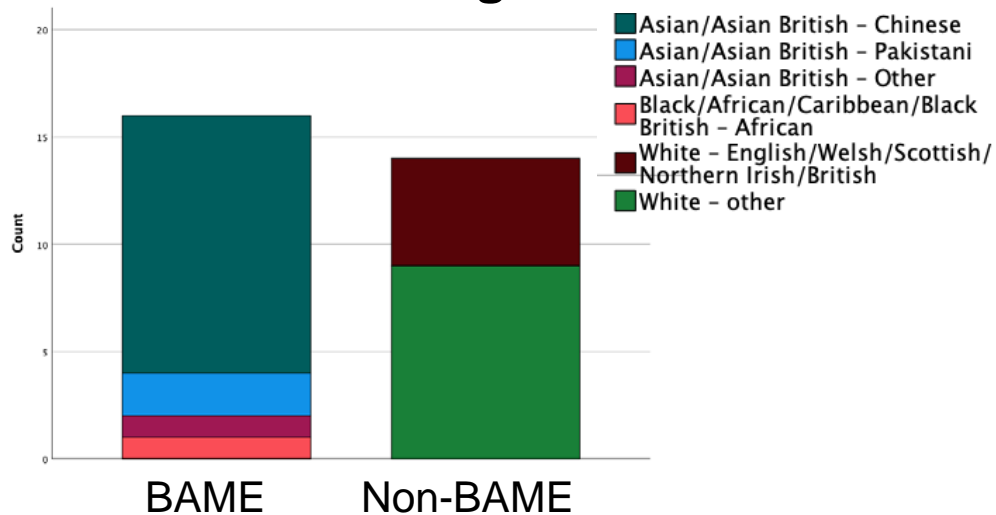
### Age



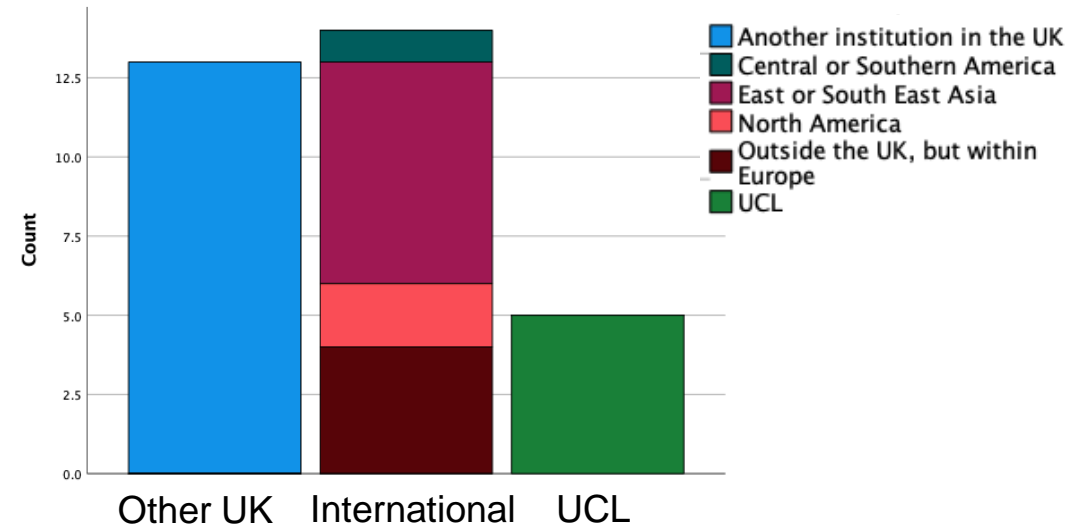
### Gender



### Ethnic Origin



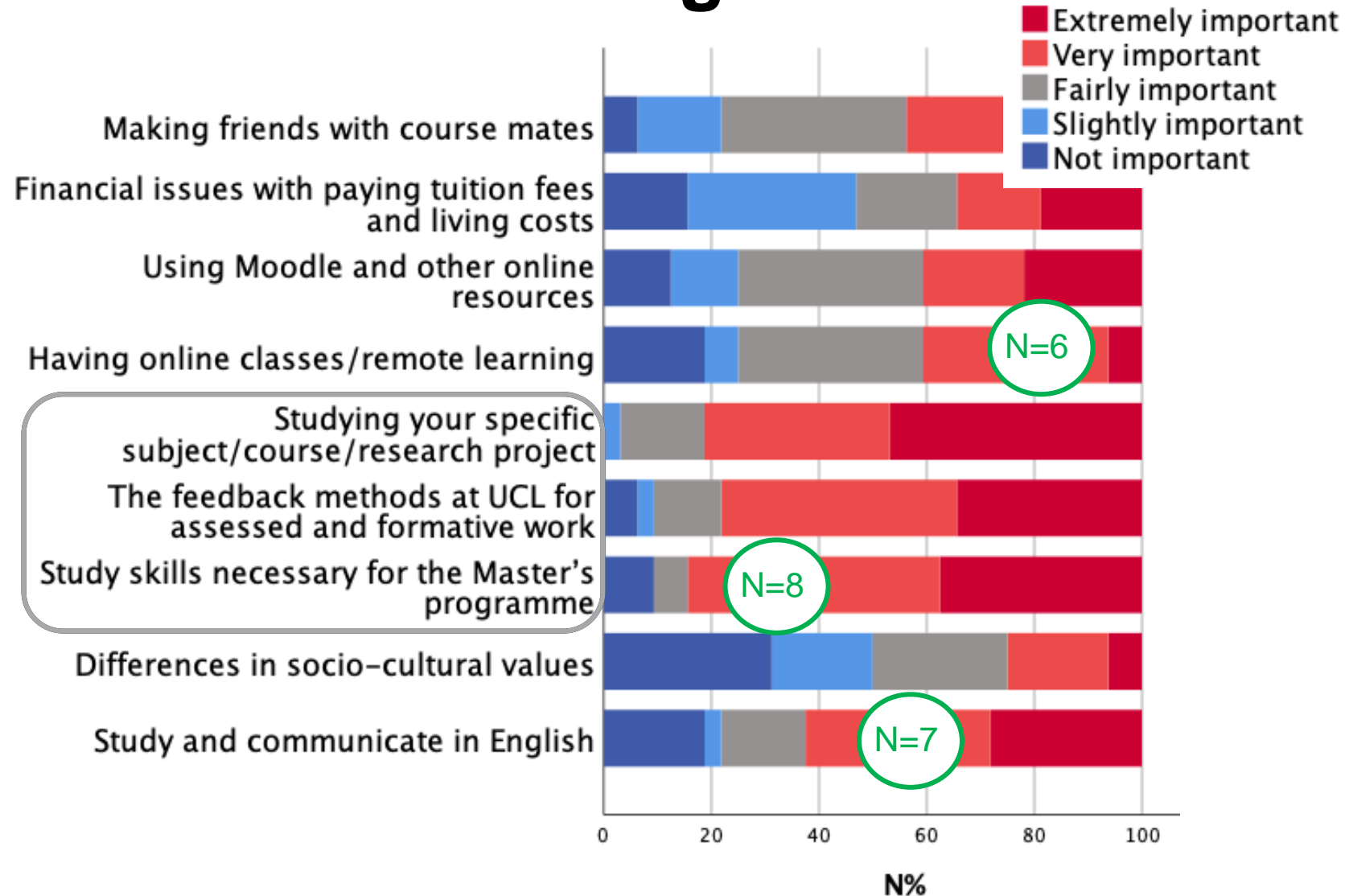
### Most Recent Previous Education



# Survey Results – Transition Challenges

Q: How important, if at all, were each of the following factors for you during your PGT transition?

Q: Which was the most challenging factor during your PGT transition?





# Survey Results – Support (2/2)



I found the information about my specific programme on the UCL Moodle Master's page useful

I found the induction wk info on the Moodle Master's page useful

I found the info on the pre-term Welcome Master's page useful

I felt supported at UCL by the parents/family

I felt supported at UCL by my friends/other students

I felt supported at UCL by my personal tutor

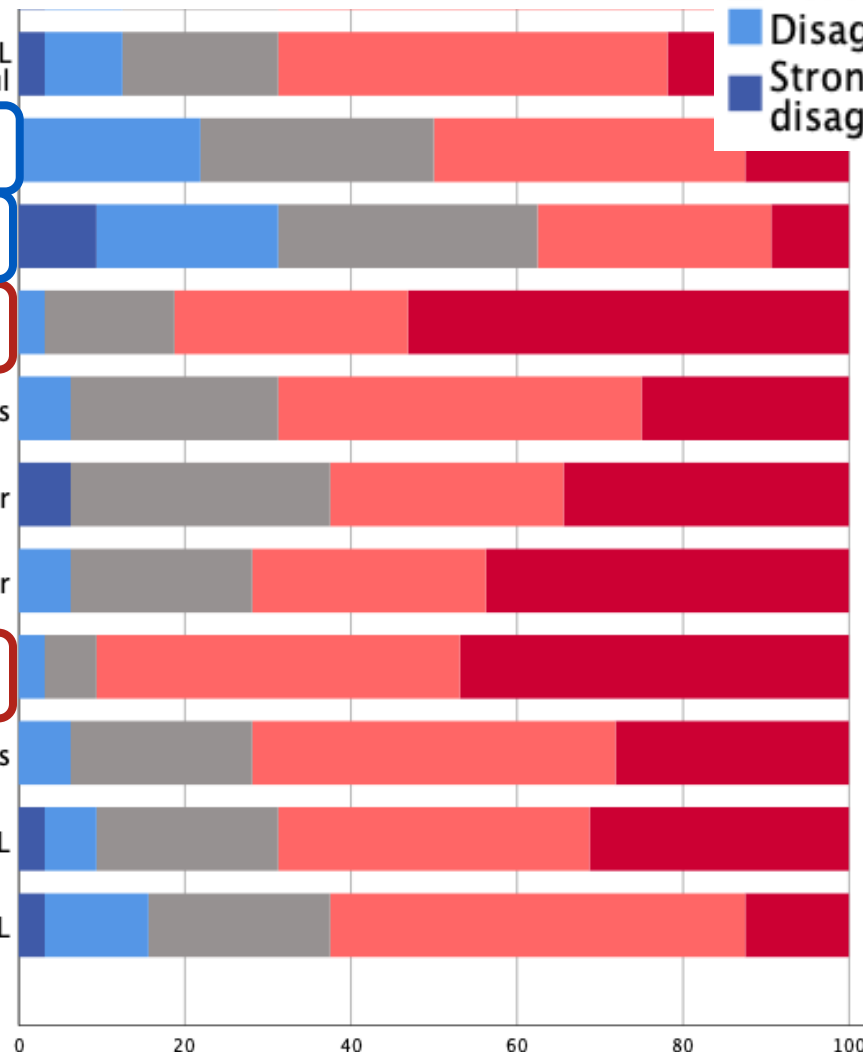
I felt supported at UCL by my Programme Director

I felt supported at UCL by my supervisor

I felt supported at UCL by my lecturers

I felt part of the Chemistry department at UCL

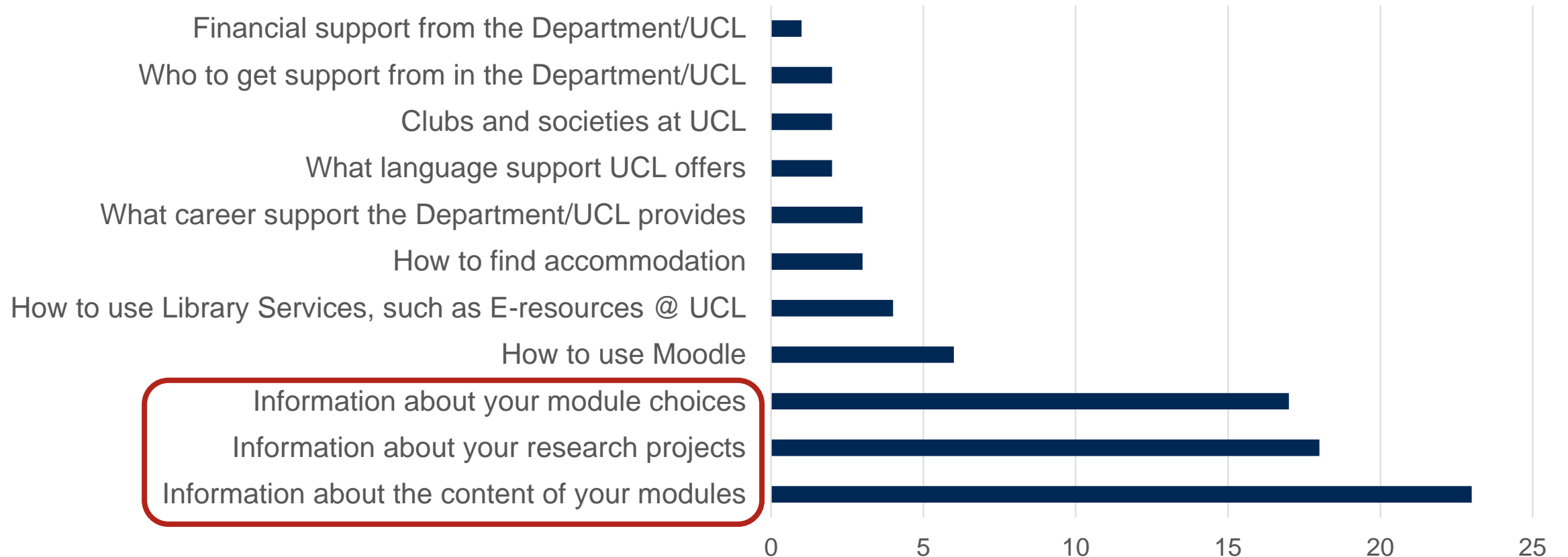
I felt part of UCL



N%

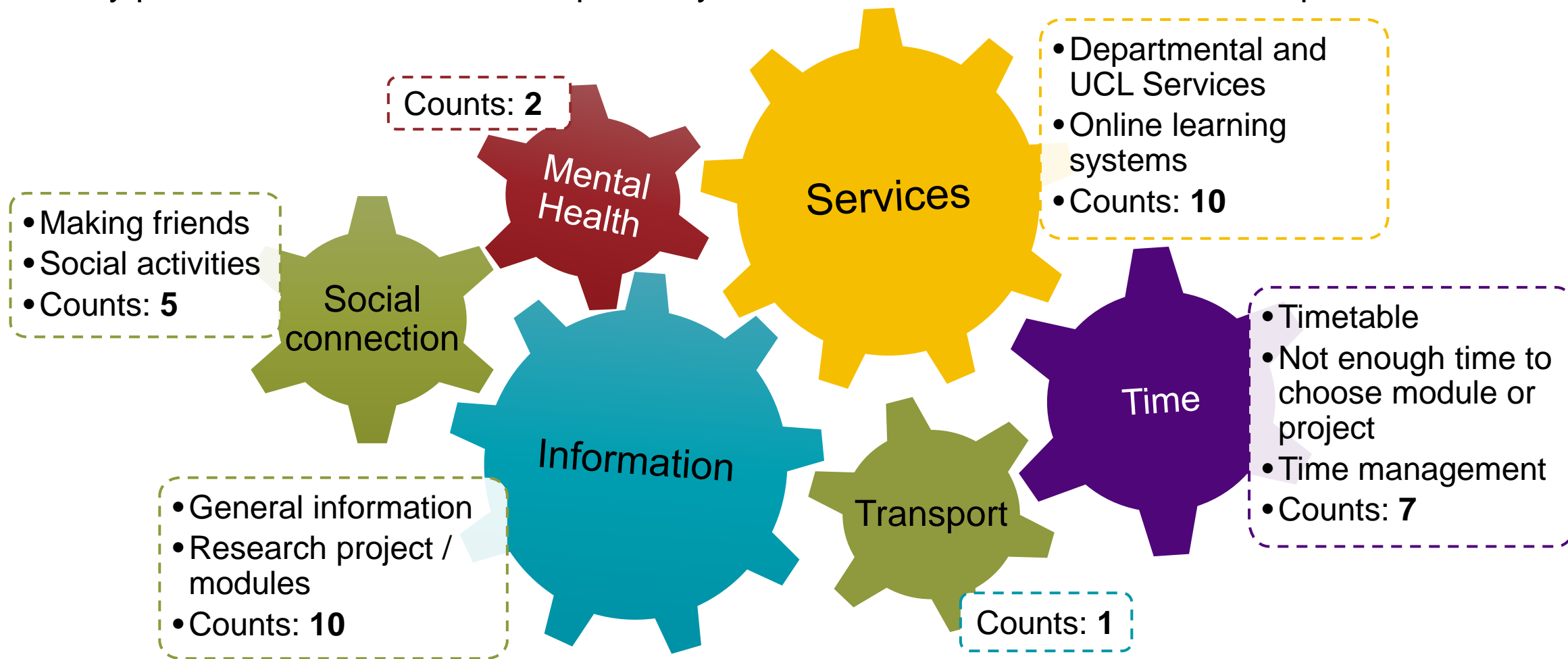
# Survey Results – Support (1/2)

Q: Prior to starting your Master’s programme at UCL, what information did you want to know? (choose 3)



# Survey Results – Support – Open Questions

During your transition, was there anything missing from the information and support the Department of Chemistry provided that could have improved your educational or extra-curricular experience?



# Survey Results – Analysis by Demographic Subgroup



## LIKERT-SCALE QUESTIONS

- Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA
- Only one hypothesis rejected:

Null hypothesis: The distribution of “I found the induction week information on the UCL Master’s page useful” is the same across all categories of age

- REJECTED,  $p = 0.022$
- Older students didn’t find it useful
- 14 of 15 24–27 y/o, 4 of 4 28+ y/o

## SINGLE CHOICE - CHALLENGING FACTORS

- Studying and communicating in English (of the total 7):

6 BAME

6 previously studied internationally

- Study skills necessary for the Master’s Level (8 total):

7 younger students (21–23 y/o)

# Results – Interviews – Example Questions

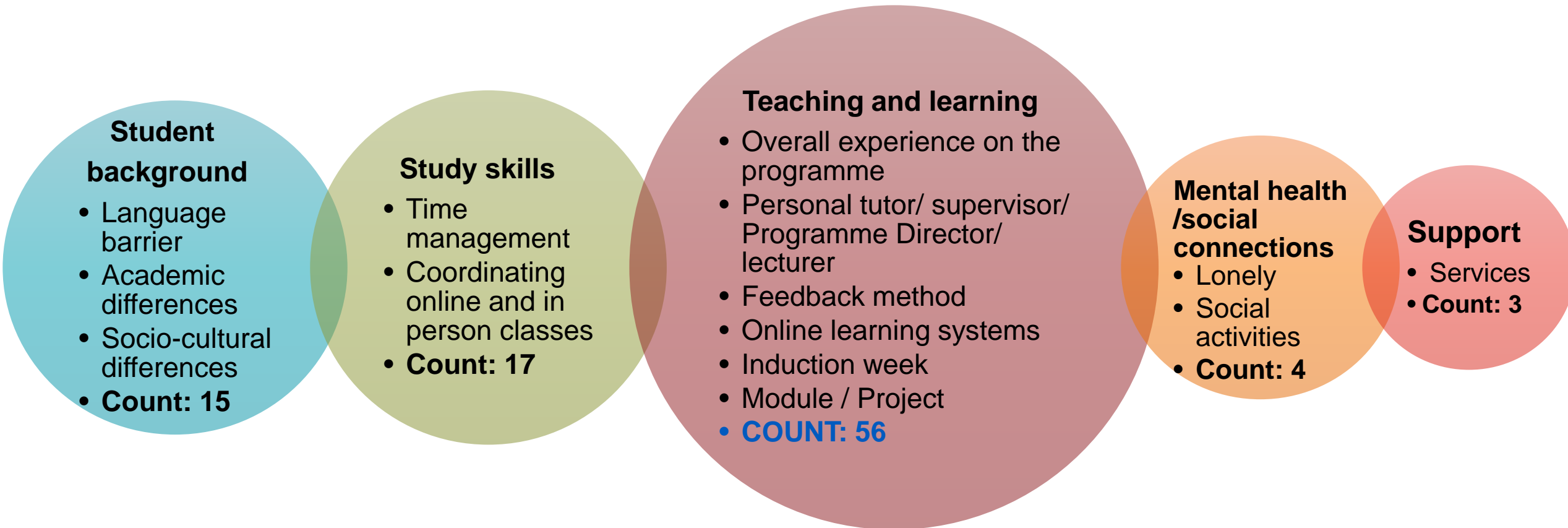
What, if any, **study skills** did you discover that you **lacked** at the start of the Master's programme (e.g., time management, the ability to critique literature, self-directed study, and so forth)? How can the school assist you?

Did you think that **learning your particular subject/project** is a **challenging** factor for your transition? Why? In what ways is it difficult?

In what areas did you feel **least supported** in by the Department of Chemistry during your transition?

Is there anything you know now that you **wish you had known** before or at the very start of term 1?

# Results – Interviews – Thematic Analysis



# Summary

## Challenges

Most important factors:

- **Study skills** necessary for the master's programme (cf. time management – interviews)
- The **feedback methods** at UCL for assessed and formative work
- Studying your **specific subject/course/research** project

Most challenging factors:

- **Study skills** necessary for the Master's programme (cf. time management – interviews)
- Studying and communicating in **English**
- **Online** classes/remote learning

## Support

Best supports: parents/family; supervisor

Worst supports: induction week info on the Moodle Master's page; pre-term Welcome Master's page

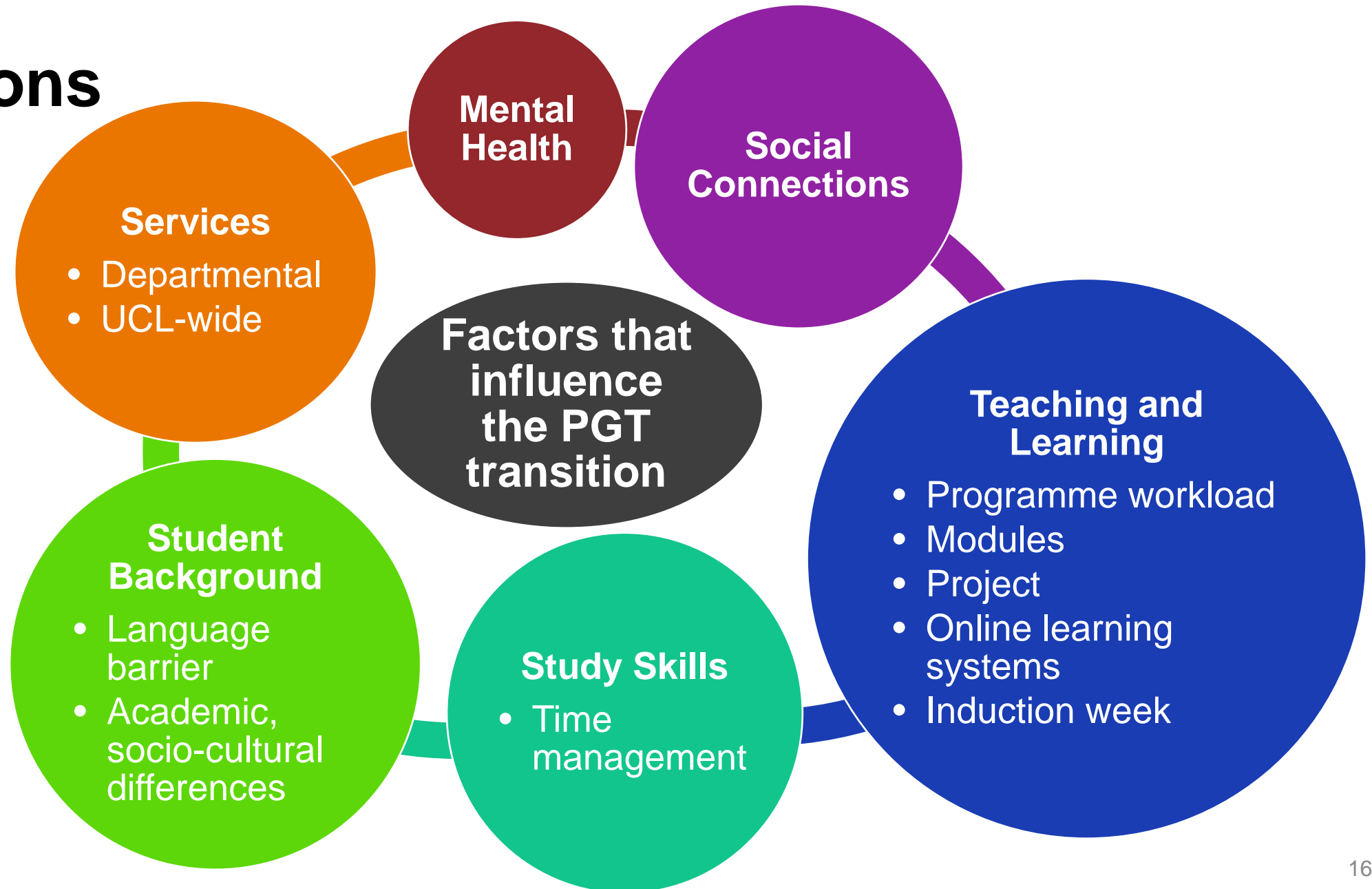
Pre-term information wanted on:

- **Module content**
- **Research project**
- **Module choices**

Interviews:

- Heavy emphasis on **teaching and learning**, less on social, cultural, language issues.
- **Mental health** highlighted

# Conclusions





# Recommendations

/01

**Early provision of module information:** refresh, prepare and make module choices (e.g., reading list).

/04

Provide: **time management training**, more workload information, and a clear outline of the year.

/02

More detailed and **earlier information** on **research project** choice.

/05

More signposting of UCL's **existing services** including mental health and instructions on how to use Moodle.

/03

Promoting social contact through additional **group activities** both within the Department of Chemistry and throughout UCL.

/06

More attention to international students' **language needs**.