

Understanding the reasons why students fail to submit assignments

Authors

Samantha King,
University of Northampton, UK
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2497-2982
Samantha.king@northampton.ac.uk

Alison Loddick (Corresponding Author),
University of Northampton, UK
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-3908-6935
alison.loddick@northampton.ac.uk

Abstract

This research investigates why undergraduates at a widening-participation institution in the UK fail to submit assignments and whether the reasons differ by ethnicity. This addresses two issues current in higher education: student attrition, which has been shown to correlate positively with non-submission of assignments; and the ‘awarding gap’ between Black and White students: the difference in the percentage of ‘good’ degrees (first or upper-second class) awarded to each ethnic group. Previous research has identified the problem of non-submission and the demographic profile of those more likely not to submit assignments. However, very few studies have explored the reasons why.

Eighty-eight students provided their reasons for not submitting an assignment through an open-ended question within a survey. Thematic analysis revealed that students' reasons fell into three categories: situational, dispositional and institutional. Two-thirds of the reasons for non-submission were situational, including health, mental health and family and caring responsibilities. As many situational factors could be accommodated by students applying for extensions and mitigating circumstances, institutions should explore why often students do not make use of these processes. Another frequently cited factor was the timing of assignment deadlines, which is of interest to those with responsibility for planning the student workload. Comparing ethnicities, White students were significantly more likely to report health-related reasons for non-submission than their Black counterparts. Further research is needed to explore this finding.

Keywords

Widening-participation; non-submission; awarding gap; attrition

Introduction

Non-submission of summative assignments is a concern in Higher Education globally. Non-submission is a strong predictor of non-completion of studies which impacts students and institutions. While much research exists investigating the demographic profile of students likely not to submit assignments, very few studies explore the reasons why. If universities could understand how to reduce non-submission, interventions could be put in place which could positively impact student retention. The aims of this research were twofold: firstly, to investigate why non-submission of summative assignments occurs among undergraduates; secondly, to explore whether the reasons for non-submission vary with ethnicity.

This research was conducted at the University of Northampton in the UK. The University of Northampton is a ‘widening participation’ institution. This means that it draws its students typically from social groups which are traditionally underrepresented in Higher Education. This can include students from GEM (Global Ethnic Majority) backgrounds, students from lower-income families and students who are the first in their families to go to university. At the University of Northampton, assignment submission dates are fixed; however, students can request a two-week extension if they have mitigating circumstances. If a student fails to submit at the first opportunity (with or without an extension), they are offered a second submission date, but with the penalty that the highest grade that can be achieved for the assignment is the lowest pass grade.

Non-submission carries both personal and financial consequences for students and universities (1). At the University of Northampton, in the academic year 2021/22, 61% of foundation and first-year students with a non-submission on their student record failed to continue their studies into the following academic year. (1,2). The impacts on students of dropping out of university include financial loss, potential psychological trauma and negative effects on future employment

(3). In terms of the university, there is both a reputational and a financial impact. The numbers above who did not complete their studies equate to a loss of more than £6 million in student tuition fees alone for the university. Research confirms that this is not a unique phenomenon. At a university in Australia, only 11% of students who had a non-submission in their record went on to complete their studies (2).

The second aim of our research, comparing the reasons for non-submission by ethnicity, was prompted by a quantitative study by Loddick and Coulson (4). Loddick and Coulson found that GEM students were more likely than White students to miss the first submission point for an assignment, leading to their grade being capped. This contributes to the awarding gap, which is the difference in the percentage of Black and White students who gain a 'good' degree (first or upper-second class). Loddick and Coulson's analysis concluded that if all students submitted assignments at the first submission point, the GEM awarding gap could be reduced by 50%. Reducing the awarding gap between Black and White students is currently a major focus in Higher Education in the UK (5) to promote equality of opportunity for students of all ethnicities.

The GEM awarding gap is well documented in the UK with the Office for Students (6) reporting that, in England, 83.6% of White students are awarded a first or upper-second class degree (the two highest grades of four) compared with less than 66% of Black students. This is a significant difference given that many graduate employers and postgraduate courses in the UK require their applicants to have an upper second-class degree as a minimum (7).

The awarding gap exists after accounting for factors such as prior academic attainment levels, gender, and subject of study (7). Reasons for the awarding gap have been suggested, which are related to Black students' experiences of higher education (5). This demonstrates the importance of our research which explores reasons for non-submission given by students of different ethnicities.

Literature Review

Defining non-submission

Non-submission can take several forms. At one extreme, students, commonly called ‘ghost’ students or non-participating enrolments (2,9), do not engage with a programme of study and submit no assignments despite remaining enrolled. The students who participated in this research did not exhibit this behaviour, and therefore, ‘ghost’ students are not the subject of this study. In our study, we focus on those students who have engaged in one or more modules but either fail to submit one assignment entirely or fail to submit at the first submission point.

Demographic profile of non-submission

Several studies have explored which students are more likely to submit. Male students have been found to have a higher rate of non-submission in both Australia (10) and Finland (11). In addition, Broecke and Nicholls (7) found that, in Australia, non-submission was more likely for students who were indigenous, studied part-time, and who had lower attainment on entry to university. While these findings are informative, understanding why certain students fail to submit assignments would make universities more effective at supporting students appropriately.

Reasons for non-submission

Despite the impact of non-submission, few studies have been conducted to investigate the issue. Those who have looked into the reasons tended to restrict their enquiry to one aspect, such as institutional or motivational factors.

Chabaya et al. (12), in an exploration of the non-submission of undergraduate research projects in a distance learning institution in Zimbabwe, used a questionnaire mainly asking about institutional factors, concentrating on the relationship between students and their research supervisors. Only three items on the questionnaire strayed from this focus and asked whether the students had "social problems", "work commitments" or faced "economic challenges". Despite the focus on institutional factors, work commitments and economic challenges were also cited by at least two-thirds of students, along with inadequate research supervision and lack of university resources. It is not unreasonable to investigate the influence of academic staff on students’

studies. In a large-scale qualitative research project exploring student disengagement, lecturers influence emerged as a significant factor (13).

Lindblom-Ylänne et al. (11) in Finland, explored motivational and dispositional factors affecting the submission of academic work. They interviewed undergraduate students in Finland who had failed to earn at least 25% of their expected credits by the end of their first year, but specifically excluded students who were affected by external factors such as family crises. This gives useful insight; students talked of being lazy, of being unable to concentrate, of being unable to manage their time and being unprepared for the amount of time they needed to devote to their studies. Many related lacking both the intrinsic motivation to succeed, and confidence in their abilities. However, it does not provide a full picture of all the factors that could be affecting student submission.

Li et al. (14), in the USA, explored all aspects of non-submission but restricted their study to first year undergraduate engineering students who had completed less than 80% of their assignments. This study reported a wide range of reasons for failing to complete assignments: having part-time work, family responsibilities, social activities, illness, stress, academic workload and the difficulty of the homework. Several students admitted their need of better time management skills. They had a limited sample of 30 students of which 90% were male.

Method

Research Approach

Understanding why students fail to submit assignments is a complex topic to research, as many students are reluctant to discuss their reasons for not completing their work. Following 12 months of trying to interview non-submitting students, we succeeded in conducting only three interviews; we therefore needed another pragmatic approach to gather student experiences. We chose to use a ‘small q’ qualitative approach, which enables the collection of qualitative data within a quantitative paradigm (15). A cross-sectional survey design was used to gather insights from a larger cohort than would be possible with interviews alone. The survey included both closed demographic questions and open-ended questions to provide qualitative insights into why

students were unable to submit their assignment. The survey was piloted with five students to check the clarity and relevance of the study.

We chose to use open-ended questions as they enabled participants to provide responses in their own words to explain the circumstances leading to their non-submission. This approach gave the data more depth than was possible with closed questions. Another advantage of the survey was that it offered anonymity, enabling respondents to answer freely (16). However, a disadvantage is that the survey did not allow us to probe for answers as interviews would have.

The survey, along with demographic questions, asked three open-ended questions regarding why the student did not submit, how they were improving their studies since, and how the university could help. The question this paper explores is:

We understand that in the past you haven't submitted an assignment before the first deadline. Please could you tell us in your own words why you couldn't meet the deadline?

In writing the questions, we took care to avoid leading or culturally specific language, and each question was reviewed to ensure clarity and relevance to the student experience. Four researchers reviewed the questions before distributing the survey. The survey was designed to be short and therefore quick to complete, as we recognised that students who had not submitted an assignment could be less likely to devote time to a long questionnaire.

Ethical approval was obtained in line with the University of Northampton research guidelines.

Data Collection

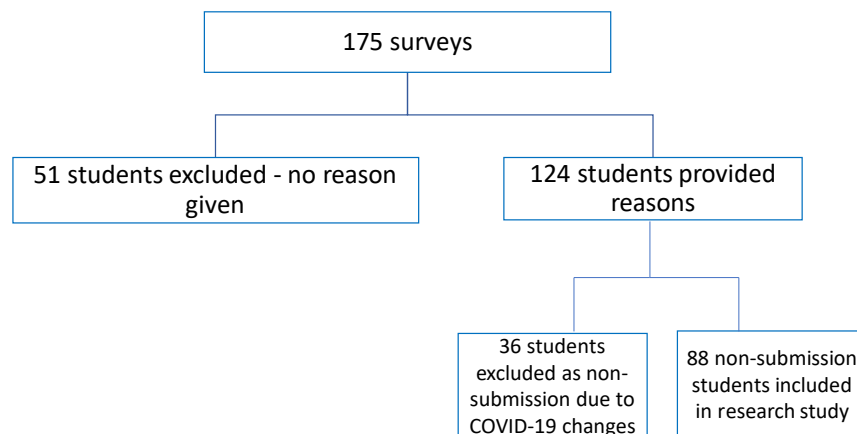
Data were collected via JISC Online Surveys. The survey was distributed to 3,144 current undergraduate students who had a non-submission on their academic record and were enrolled at the university as of May 31, 2022. As mentioned previously, due to the nature of the topic, a low response rate was expected. The survey initially yielded 175 responses, representing a response

rate of 5.6%. Of those, 124 students (3.9% of the total sample) provided reasons for their non-submission. A number of these students were excluded because their non-submission occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, special arrangements were in place, allowing students to not submit in the first assessment window and still receive full marks. This applied to 36 students from our results, leaving 88 valid student responses. Figure 1 shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria described above.

To ensure our analysis could reliably detect significant effects if they existed, we calculated required sample sizes using GPower software. For chi-squared tests on 2×2 tables (e.g., health issues vs. Black and White ethnicity), 88 participants were enough to achieve 80% power, which matched our final respondent count. For goodness-of-fit tests comparing respondent demographics with the wider non-submission student population, the required sample sizes varied by demographic categories: 88 for two groups (e.g., male vs. female) and up to 133 for five groups (ethnicity). Because we only had 88 respondents for ethnicity comparisons, the power dropped to 60%. In other words, there was only a 60% chance of detecting a real difference if one existed.

Fig. 1

Inclusion and exclusion criteria for non-submission research



Given that the survey was distributed to 3,144 students, with only 88 valid responses, we are aware of the potential for bias. The researchers noted that of the 88 respondents, only 13 (14.8%)

students subsequently withdrew from their studies. Given that university data reveals a higher withdrawal rate, we are aware of a potential bias towards students who were more engaged with their studies. Students who did not respond to the survey may have been more disengaged or may not have wanted to provide a truthful reflection, introducing non-response bias. However, given the topic, 88 responses still offer valuable insights.

Who were the students who contributed to our study?

To identify any biases within the survey sample, the demographic profile of respondents was compared with that of enrolled undergraduate students who had not submitted their work (Table 1). It should be noted that the number of students in their final year was higher than those in their first year, as they had had three years to potentially not submit.

Using chi-squared goodness of fit tests, the gender and ethnicity of the respondents were broadly similar to the 2021/22 current university students who had a non-submission on their student record ($\chi^2 (1)=0.0003$, $p=0.986$), ($\chi^2 (4)=5.22$, $p=0.265$). In terms of level or year of study, there were fewer responses from final-year students than would have been expected ($\chi^2 (2)=14.56$, $p<0.001$). This could have been due to final-year students focusing on completing their degrees..

The demographic profile of the survey respondents revealed that over half (58%) work during term-time: nearly a third (31%) work up to 16 hours per week, while over a quarter (27%) work more than 16 hours per week. In addition, over a third (37%) of respondents have family or caring responsibilities. Indeed, less than a quarter (23%) neither work nor have family or caring responsibilities.

Data Analysis

NVivo 12 was used to analyse the responses to the qualitative open-ended questions. An inductive approach was employed to analyse the open responses, following the method outlined by Thomas (17). The approach involved close reading of the completed surveys and used thematic analysis, where two members of the research team coded responses, and through

comparison and discussion, the final themes were created. This approach created a coding framework for quantitative analysis.

To ensure the robustness of the analysis and verify its reliability and replicability, cross-validation was performed. Following the guidelines of Woo, O'Boyle and Spector (18), the data was split into two sets, and the findings from each set were compared to assess consistency. The two groups consistently showed the reliability and reproducibility of the results. In addition, reliability was confirmed by the survey results reaching saturation; the last five respondents added no new themes to the data.

Statistical analysis, using SPSS version 28, was conducted to explore firstly, the frequency of student responses reported across the identified themes, and secondly, any significant differences across ethnicities. Chi-squared and Fisher's exact tests were used to test for significance. Due to the limited number of participants from some ethnic backgrounds, it was only possible to compare the responses from Black and White participants.

Results

The reasons students gave for not being able to submit assignments on time are categorised in Table 2. Our themes aligned with the established taxonomy used in studies into the areas of student progression and retention: namely, situational, dispositional and institutional factors (19–21). Situational factors relate to the external situation or circumstances within which each student operates; dispositional factors are internal to the student; and institutional factors are specific to the institution at which the student is enrolled. Some judgement was used when categorising responses. For example, students reporting a lack of time due to work or family commitments were considered a situational factor. A report of lack of time but no further explanation was considered more dispositional as it seemed more to indicate a lack of planning skills. We are aware that this could be considered a subjective interpretation.

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents (65%) attributed their non-submission to a single issue; the remaining students cited up to four reasons why they were unable to meet the first deadline, and

these were each counted in the relevant categories. Therefore, the total number of reasons given is larger than the number of students who responded to the survey. The main themes identified in the findings are addressed individually and then a comparison will be made between the responses of White students and Black students.

Situational Factors

Situational factors are the most widely reported factors affecting students' ability to submit work on time. Indeed, over three-quarters of respondents (78%) listed one or more situational factors affecting their ability to meet assessment deadlines.

A large minority of respondents (36%) described issues with finding sufficient time to study alongside existing family and work commitments.

'I am a single parent to 3 teenagers and I have found it difficult to get a good home/uni life balance and to concentrate on my studies at times'

'I have to work in order to study and survive so struggle to keep up with my studies and have other family commitments meaning I don't end up with much time'

Students' existing day-to-day commitments mean that any additional pressures, such as illness, make devoting the time needed for study unachievable.

'Both of my children fell ill and I am a single parent so I was up with both on my own with a succession of sleepless nights and no support. I also have to work so the only time I can study is in the evenings.'

Nearly two-thirds of students (63%) reported events beyond their control, such as bereavement, health and mental health issues, as having an impact on their ability to meet deadlines.

Unexpected events caused students to fall behind in their studies which they found difficult to overcome.

‘Illness in the house and my mental health is just everywhere right now i’m just not able to continue with all the problems and everything going on in the house’

A prevalent reason given for non-submission was mental health; it is unknown what form the mental health issues took, whether diagnosed, as students rarely gave details. However, in over half of cases (59%), mental health was cited in combination with other factors, such as bereavement, academic workload and lack of time. It is not known whether the mental health issues were related to these or other factors, but it shows the importance of providing mental health support to students in a timely manner.

Dispositional Factors

Nearly a quarter (23%) of students cited dispositional factors, most commonly lack of time and motivation. Some students reported “laziness and lack of motivation” or “procrastination”. For others, lack of motivation was linked to circumstances.

‘I had fallen behind on work [...] because of a family emergency. I tried catching up and I nearly caught but I just felt unmotivated and I didn’t have any friends to ask questions and I felt like I couldn’t go to class if I was behind. Each day my motivation got worse and [...] it seemed like it would be harder and harder to catch up.’

One student noted that:

‘I’m able to meet deadlines when I fully understand the task and am actually interested in the module’

An unexpected finding was that four students admitted to being “unaware” of the assignment deadline. Some admitted forgetfulness:

‘It was my fault completely, but I forgot that the deadline was on that day as i was focussing on other things going on in my life.’

As students had access to assignment deadlines via the university’s virtual learning environment and were reminded by lecturers, it is possible that this is a symptom of a more general lack of engagement or lack of organisation.

A few students reported a strategic decision to submit their assignments after the deadline:

‘asking for extensions seems more hassle than its worth [...] so I usually just work out if I can pass by taking the capped grade and accept that which is pointless as I'm not demonstrating my capabilities’

‘Assignment was difficult so I thought I should take myself a time instead of rushing because of deadline’

The first comment suggests that applying for extensions is not an easy process. Given the students have a need for extensions and are not using it, universities could explore how to simplify and expedite the process.

Institutional Factors

Institutional factors were mentioned nearly as often as dispositional factors, with the most widely reported being academic workload. Twelve respondents (14%) explicitly mentioned the demands of the course and competing deadlines.

‘I have found myself many times with various deadlines in the same week, and deadlines 3 weeks before those, so working on various assignments at the same time is not ideal’

Several respondents questioned the timing of deadlines.

‘Also, writing assignments at the same time while in placement, including other workbook activities that need to be completed along with the assignment.’

The effect of ethnicity on non-submission

Table 3 compares the factors cited by Black and White students as reasons for non-submission. The number of students citing health issues as a reason for non-submission is significantly higher for White students than for Black students ($\chi^2(1, n=75) = 3.91, p < 0.05$). This was also almost significant for mental health as a reason ($\chi^2(1, n=75) = 3.04, p < 0.08$). Conversely, using Fisher's exact test, Black students cite lack of motivation more frequently than White students ($p = 0.022$). However, all of these results should be approached with caution due to the small numbers of students citing each factor. For example, only five Black students mentioned low motivation compared to no White students. These areas would merit further investigation to determine whether this is a valid finding.

No other statistically significant differences were found. This may in part be due to small numbers in the different categories.

Discussion

More than three-quarters of students (78%) reported situational factors affecting their ability to submit assignments. Nearly a quarter reported dispositional factors and just less than a fifth cited institutional factors.

In line with Li et al. (14), students in our study largely attributed their inability to meet deadlines to external factors. It is important to view this result in the light of two phenomena. Firstly, the actor-observer bias (22) describes how we tend to see others' behaviour as caused by their personal qualities, but our behaviour as caused by external factors. Secondly, Miller and Ross (23) explain how we tend to view our successes as due to our personal qualities, but our failures as due to external factors. Both of these phenomena will tend to lead students to attribute their non-submission to external factors. However, it is also true that, as at many widening participation institutions, students are often juggling many roles in their lives, and their attribution to situational factors should not be dismissed.

The most frequently cited factor was mental health, often in conjunction with other situational and institutional factors such as family responsibilities, health issues, and academic workload. This finding reflects the pressure that many students find themselves under in trying to gain a higher education and highlights the importance of institutions providing timely mental health support.

Family or caring responsibilities affected the assignment submission of a fifth of students. This finding is unsurprising, as it has been found that students with family responsibilities struggle to balance their commitments, leading to increased non-submission (24). To be a widening participation institution in 2024 in the UK means to accept non-traditional students who are more likely to have significant financial and family commitments on entry (25). If widening participation in higher education is to be encouraged, the support of those students needs to be given a higher priority.

Ten per cent of students had employment responsibilities which affected their assignment submission. Over half (58%) of the students work during term-time, and it has long been known that any term-time work a full-time student undertakes will impact their attainment (26). Callender found that, for example, students who worked 15 hours a week were a third less likely to achieve a first or upper-second class degree, a class of degree considered ‘good’ by both universities and employers. While Callender’s research relates to student grades, it seems likely that rates of non-submission will be similarly impacted.

As can be seen from the demographics of our respondents, by no means all students who worked or had caring responsibilities cited this as a factor affecting their non-submission. It is a testament to students’ determination that they are largely able to combine work, family life and study, albeit with a likely impact on their grades. This ability to cope is not shared by all students, however. Universities could explore whether all potential students have a realistic idea of the time commitment that university study requires to enable them to reach an informed decision about their ability to undertake university study at this point in their lives.

Many of the reasons students gave for missing assignment deadlines, such as unexpected illness or bereavement, raise the question of why those students affected by these events had not chosen to apply for an extension due to 'mitigating circumstances', a process common in universities and designed to ensure that students are not disadvantaged if they are unfortunate enough to experience a major event of this nature during their studies. Further research would be valuable to discover why students did not take this path and whether there are barriers to accessing this.

Dispositional factors played a much smaller role in the students' ability to submit assignments, although this finding should be treated with caution; as previously mentioned, there are psychological reasons why students may attribute failings to external factors rather than dispositional factors. The lack of motivation, described by a minority of students in our study, echoes the findings of Lindblom-Ylänne et al. (11). Chabaya et al. (12), who also used a survey to collect their data, similarly found that a lack of motivation played a much smaller role in non-submission than situational factors. This could suggest that most students are motivated, but that they struggle to combine study with other areas of their lives. In-depth interviews would be needed to probe further into this area.

The main institutional factor reported was academic workload, which included the difficulties created for students by the timing of deadlines and the existence of simultaneous deadlines. This raises important questions; further research should assess whether making heavy use of summative assignments, rather than more traditional examinations, places a heavier burden on students who are studying alongside other responsibilities, and, in addition, what the impact of this may be on widening participation. As a starting point, the feasibility of scheduling summative assignments to avoid competing deadlines or deadlines during holiday periods should be investigated. The option of flexible deadlines is another interesting solution, which has been shown not only to aid students in managing workloads, but also to lead to better quality submissions while reducing students' stress (27).

There was evidence that a minority of students chose to miss deadlines for strategic reasons, accepting that there would be a negative impact on their grades. This is disadvantageous given the importance for the future of obtaining a ‘good’ degree.

Chabaya et al. (12) found that the relationship between academic staff and students was responsible for many of the non-submissions. It was encouraging that this finding was not replicated in our study. Indeed, just three students mentioned tutors in their responses. This seems a positive reflection on the important role that academic staff play.

Differences between Black and White students

From our study, it appears that a higher proportion of White students than Black students find health and mental health issues affecting their studies. It is not clear what this tells us; while it may be the case that White students suffer more ill-health than Black students, this seems unlikely. It could be that Black students are less likely to inform the university about their health problems. Olaniyan (28) found that GEM students were more likely to suffer from mental health issues and less likely to seek counselling support. The research showed that ‘having to navigate a “minefield” of racial microaggressions and “othering” ’ (28) negatively impacted students’ attitudes towards seeking help. This issue needs further exploration.

The finding that more Black students than White students appear to lack motivation requires further investigation, as the reasons why this should be the case are unclear. It must be remembered that these differences are self-reported and as such may reflect the willingness of students to cite motivational concerns. However, if ethnicity affects non-submission, this has implications for how students are supported going forward and suggests the need to address dispositional factors such as motivation, time management skills and building students’ confidence as learners. The role of institutional factors on students’ motivation should also be considered.

Limitations of the study

As previously discussed, most of the students who took part in our research (86%) had experienced non-submission but had been able to continue with their studies, which means that the views of those who did not continue are underrepresented. Also, because of the small number of respondents, it was not possible to investigate any differences by gender, year of study or programme of study.

A second limitation of the methodology is that students' responses had to be taken at face value. It was not possible to probe answers for further clarification. When the survey topic is sensitive, it is known that survey respondents tend to overestimate socially desirable responses and may underestimate or fail to mention undesirable traits (29). The ideal approach would have been to conduct interviews, and this should be considered for future studies exploring this issue.

Conclusion

This study successfully identifies factors affecting the ability of students to meet assignment deadlines. The majority of students cited situational factors, with mental health as the most frequently cited, often in combination with other factors. This highlights the importance of mental health support for students. Health issues, family and caring responsibilities and work commitments were also common reasons, as was academic workload. While many students successfully balance their family and work commitments with study, albeit with a potential impact on their grades, a significant minority do not. Some responsibility must rest with the institution, having accepted these students, to find ways of further supporting them through their studies.

A second aim of this study was to explore whether Black and White students faced different challenges in meeting assignment deadlines. This aspect of the research has been less successful at finding answers but has raised questions around why White students may be more likely to report mental health or health issues as factors, and why Black students may be more likely to report motivational issues. These areas would benefit from future research.

Author contribution

- Conception: Loddick A, King S
- Methodology: Loddick A, King S
- Formal analysis and investigation: Loddick A, King S
- Writing – original draft paper: Loddick A, King S
- Writing – review and editing: Loddick A, King S

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Declarations

Ethical approval

- The research was approved by the Faculty of Arts, Science and Technology ethics committee at the University of Northampton – project number ETH2122-0028. The research was carried out in accordance with relevant guidelines and regulations.

Consent for Human Participants

- Informed consent was gained from the research participants prior to data collection

Consent to Publish declaration: not applicable

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Table 1

A comparison of the demographic profile between survey respondents and enrolled undergraduate students with a non-submission on their record in 2021/22

Demographic		Survey respondents (%) (n=88)	All non-submitting students (%) (n=3,144)	p-value*
Gender	Female	66	60	.986
	Male	34	40	
Ethnicity	White	44	40	.265
	Black	41	36	
	Asian	7	11	
	Mixed	6	6	
	Unknown/Other	2	7	
Level of study	Foundation/first year	32	17	<.001
	Second	27	28	
	Final year	41	55	

*Note: chi-squared goodness of fit test

Table 2*Reasons given by students for non-submission*

Assignment non-submission Factors	Number of students (n=88)	Percentage of students
Situational factors		
Mental health	27	30.7%
Family/caring responsibilities	18	20.5%
Health	15	17.0%
Employment	9	10.2%
Bereavement	6	6.8%
Other responsibilities (unspecified)	5	5.7%
Pregnancy	4	4.5%
Unexpected events (other)	3	3.4%
Technology issues	3	3.4%
Logistical issues (unspecified)	1	1.1%
 Total no. of students	 69	 78.4%
Dispositional factors		
Low energy/motivation	7	8.0%
Unspecified lack of time	6	6.8%
Unaware of/forgot the deadline	4	4.5%
Lack of planning	2	2.3%
Uncomfortable asking for support	1	1.1%
 Total no. of students	 20	 22.7%
Institutional factors		
Academic workload	12	13.6%
Not understanding the assignment brief	4	4.5%
Lack of support	1	1.1%
Poor teaching	1	1.1%
 Total no. of students	 17	 19.3%

Table 3*Reasons given for non-submission by Black and White students*

Assignment non-submission Factors	Black students (n=36)		White students (n=39)		p-value*
	No. of Students	% students	No. of Students	% students	
Situational factors					
Mental health	8	22.2%	16	41.0%	.081
Family/caring responsibilities	7	19.4%	8	20.5%	.908
Health	3	8.3%	10	25.6%	.048
Employment	4	11.1%	4	10.3%	1
Bereavement	2	5.6%	4	10.3%	.676
Other responsibilities (unspecified)	4	11.1%	1	2.6%	.188
Pregnancy	2	5.6%	1	2.6%	.605
Unexpected events (other)	2	5.6%	1	2.6%	.605
Technology issues	2	5.6%	0	0.0%	.227
Logistical issues (unspecified)	0	0.0%	1	2.6%	1
Total no. of students	28	77.8%	33	84.6%	
Dispositional factors					
Low energy/motivation	5	13.9%	0	0.0%	.022
Unspecified lack of time	3	8.3%	3	7.7%	1
Unaware of/forgot the deadline	2	5.6%	1	2.6%	.605
Lack of planning	0	0.0%	2	5.1%	.494
Uncomfortable asking for support from a tutor	1	2.8%	0	0.0%	.480
Total no. of students	11	30.6%	6	15.4%	
Institutional factors					
Academic workload	4	11.1%	5	12.8%	1
Not understanding the assignment brief	1	2.8%	0	0.0%	.480
Lack of support	0	0.0%	1	2.6%	1
Poor teaching	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1
Total no. of students	5	13.9%	6	15.4%	

*Note: chi-squared test used for mental health, health and family/caring responsibilities, Fisher's exact used for all other comparisons