

# The Impact of Studiosity on the Student Experience

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Liz Thomas Associates Ltd 2019



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Research conducted by Professor Liz Thomas, Liz Thomas Associates Ltd

November 2019

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## Executive Summary

Educational institutions are currently facing unprecedented challenges. In an increasingly internationalised, digitalised and mobile world, they are beset with economic uncertainties and face ever more competition in attracting and retaining students in order to survive and grow.

With pressures to make appropriate provisions to encourage widening participation, a growing need to cater to international students, and the imperative to maximise student satisfaction and wellbeing, universities and colleges are investigating and investing in an increasingly diverse range of complementary services to help meet the needs of an equally diverse range of students.

The EdTech field has been expanding rapidly in order to meet this demand with many companies now offering new and innovative solutions. However, this presents a new challenge in evaluating the benefits and costs of such services to determine which will deliver a valuable return on investment.

This research aims to investigate the merits of one such service, Studiosity, to help enable educational institutions to make an evaluation of its on-demand, personalised support and whether or not it can help meet their needs and, more importantly, the needs of their students.

## About Studiosity

Studiosity is an Australian-based EdTech company that provides online study support for students. This is delivered in partnership with schools, further education colleges and universities in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Dubai and Hong Kong. Their UK office is based in Richmond, London.

Studiosity connects students with academic writing specialists and core skills tutors who provide feedback on their writing assignments and help them to work through problems in a live chat session. These services are available to students 24/7, 365 days of the year.

The following UK and Ireland universities currently partner with Studiosity to provide these study support services to their students: University of Exeter; Birkbeck, University of London; Ulster University; Sheffield Hallam University; University of Greenwich; University of Roehampton; Falmouth University; Dublin City University; Plymouth Marjon University; University of Sussex and Manchester Metropolitan University



# Research Overview

The evaluation of Studiosity aimed to address a number of key questions relating to participation, student experience, staff experience and student outcomes. This paper reports on the student feedback and well-being survey, which was designed to address the question:

***How does using Studiosity impact on students' experience, including learning, confidence, motivation, skill, satisfaction and well-being?***

In summary, the survey found that:

- The significant majority of students (more than 80%) said that they had learnt 'a lot' or 'a reasonable amount' by using Studiosity.
- The significant majority of students felt that Studiosity had improved their confidence (79%), motivation (69%) and study skills (79%).
- Studiosity users were more satisfied with their course overall and in relation to their assessment and feedback than the average respondents to the NSS survey in England.
- Studiosity users had better well-being than the student population as a whole, bringing them into line with the national population.
- It can be concluded that Studiosity is developing the capacity of users to be effective independent learners, who are more satisfied with their university learning experience, and who have higher levels of well-being than the general student population.
- These findings are particularly significant in light of the demographic composition of survey respondents, as particular groups who have poorer experiences and outcomes are over-represented.

The survey tool collected information about students' experiences of using Studiosity, how they feel about their course, their well-being and help-seeking behaviour, and some basic demographic information.

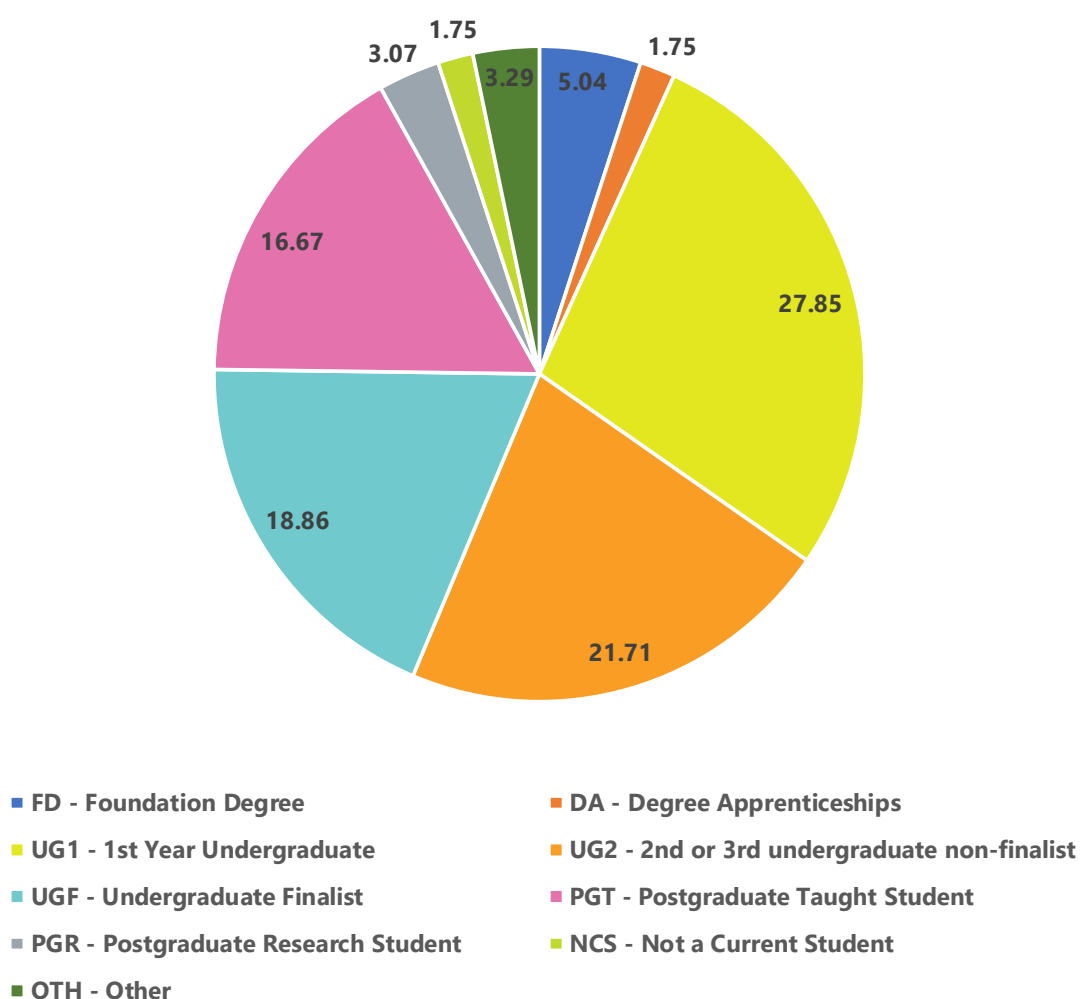
The questions used multiple choice, Likert scales and free text responses; some questions were drawn from the National Student Survey about experiences of learning and teaching, and from the Office for National Statistics personal wellbeing thresholds, considering life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness scores. The inclusion of these questions allows the responses of Studiosity users to be compared with the responses of the wider student population, and in the case of well-being, the UK population.

## About the respondents

All UK registered users of Studiosity were invited to complete the survey; 456 respondents from a range of institutions answered the survey. The majority were undergraduate students (68%), with 27.9% being first years, 21.7% being not first years and not finalists and 18.9% being finalists. 16.7% were postgraduate taught, 3.1% postgraduate research students, 6.8% were doing 'sub-degrees'; 1.8% said they were not currently students and 3.3% said they were 'other', in the comments this tended to be students doing courses prior to entry, graduates and postgraduate students.

Students' type of study is shown in Chart 1 below. In addition, the majority of respondents were UK home students (86.8%), while 8.3% were European (non-UK) and 4.8% were international students from outside of the EU. The majority of student respondents had used Studiosity more than once (88.3%), so have a good understanding of the service.

Chart 1: Type of Study (%)



## The nature and quality of the study support

*“Studiosity has been amazing, their comments are always supportive and informative. They have taught me writing techniques that I have been able to apply to all pieces of work.”*

More than 80% of students said that they had learnt ‘a lot’ or ‘a reasonable amount’ since using Studiosity, while only 6.4% said they had learnt ‘not much’ or ‘nothing’. The quality of the learning experience is followed up further by exploring students’ perceptions of the quality of the Studiosity tutors. In particular, the evaluation considers the quality of the feedback given to students and the extent to which this is clear, relevant, enables students to take responsibility for their own learning, can be applied to future assignments and motivates them to do their best work.

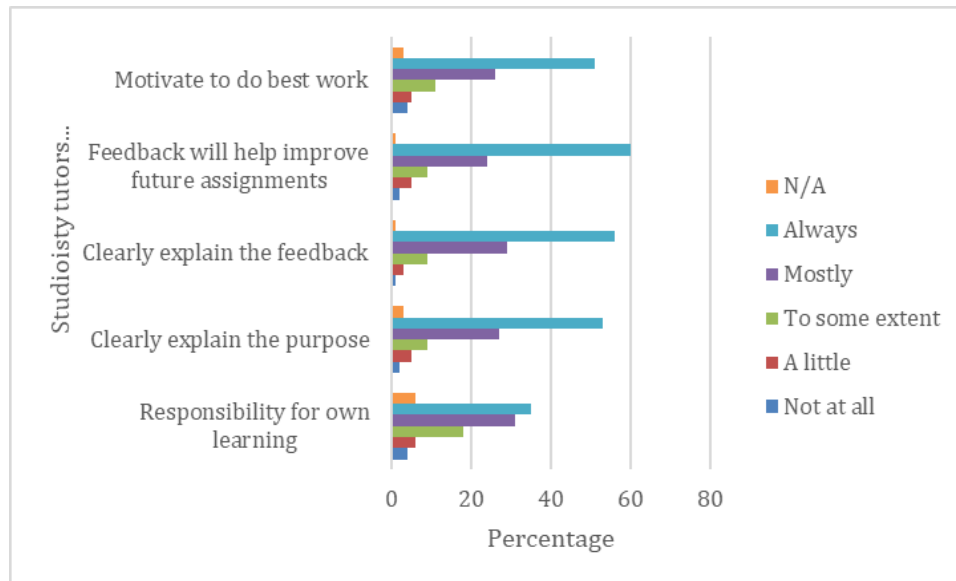
If these criteria are met then it suggests that students are not just accessing help to enable them to pass the current assignment, but rather they are developing their capacity as effective learners in higher education. Thus, the evaluation provides evidence of the extent to which Studiosity is supporting students to move beyond being surface learners, and facilitating them to become deep and effective independent learners.

In terms of clarity, the majority of students (56.3%) felt that the tutors always clearly explained the feedback, while 85.7% said that they always or mostly explained it clearly, and only 4.1% said that tutors explained feedback clearly a little or not at all. Similarly, 85.4% of students felt that feedback was relevant mostly or always.

With regards to enabling students to take responsibility for their own learning, the majority of students (89.7%) felt that tutors had explained the purpose of the service clearly to them at least to some extent; only 7 students (1.7%) felt that there had been no clear explanation of the service. Not only did students understand the purpose of the service, the majority felt that Studiosity tutors encouraged them to take responsibility for their own learning always or mostly (66.3%) or to some extent (18.1%) and only 9.3% said only a little or not at all.

Thus, the majority of students (94%) felt that the tutors encouraged them to take responsibility for their own learning at least some of the time. Furthermore, 93.1% of students felt that tutors provided feedback that would help them improve future assignments. This is reinforced by the finding that the majority of students (87%) said Studiosity tutors motivated them to do their best work at least to some extent.

Chart 2: The quality of Studiosity tutors



In summary, there is good evidence that Studiosity student feedback is contributing very positively to the development of students' capacity to be effective learners in higher education, rather than simply supporting them to pass the next assignment. This is achieved by explaining the purpose of the service, providing clear feedback that can be applied to future assignments, encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning and motivating them to do their best work.

## Impact of Studiosity on students' confidence, motivation and skills

*"Amazing service. Really targeted feedback meant that I felt able to improve my own work and do better. This felt really empowering and was incredibly motivating".*

*"They have been really helpful with my assignments where I have developed confidence and motivation to work independently both at home and in the library without any fear of failing my work. This is for example when it comes to referencing my work. Many thanks Studiosity."*

The survey asked students if they felt Studiosity had helped them with their confidence, motivation and study skills. The results are displayed in Table 1; 419 respondents answered these questions. This data demonstrates that the majority of students feel that Studiosity has improved their confidence (79.2%), motivation (69.2%) and study skills (79.0%).

Table 1: Impact of Studiosity on students' confidence, motivation and study skills

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
Confidence	2.86% 12	5.25% 22	12.65% 53	50.84% 213	28.40% 119
Motivation	3.10% 13	6.68% 28	21.00% 88	43.68% 183	25.54% 107
Study skills	3.34% 14	3.34% 14	14.32% 60	52.31% 215	27.68% 116

## Impact of Studiosity on students' satisfaction

*"As a mature student, I felt going to uni would be a struggle and I was very worried about being able to keep up with my younger colleagues. After receiving the feedback on my first essay, I felt much more confident, realising that I am not too far from achieving the best grades in my class. The advice given has taught me how to structure my work and how to improve my academic writing skills."*

One part of the survey asked students who had benefited from Studiosity questions from the National Student Survey (NSS) about their experience of their course in general.

These results show that Studiosity users who are full-time students have a higher level of satisfaction with their course than the student population as a whole in relation to NSS question 27, and in relation to all of the questions about Assessment and Feedback, and most questions about Academic Support on their course.

These Studiosity users have lower levels of satisfaction in relation to the question about being able to contact university staff when they needed to, which may be why they have turned to this 24/7 service.

Studiosity users who are part-time students also exhibit equivalent or higher levels of satisfaction than the part-time student population in England in general in relation to most questions, except overall satisfaction. It should be noted that the number of part-time students answering these questions is quite low, ranging between 73 and 79 respondents.



Table 2: Comparison of satisfaction between NSS and Studiosity users, 2019

NSS question	England full-time 2019	Studiosity full-time students 2019	England part-time 2019	Studiosity part-time students 2019
Q8: The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance	72%	<b>85%</b>	79%	<b>98%</b>
Q9: Marking and assessment has been fair	72%	<b>85%</b>	81%	<b>96%</b>
Q10: Feedback on my work has been timely	74%	<b>85%</b>	82%	<b>97%</b>
Q11: I have received helpful comments on my work	74%	<b>86%</b>	84%	<b>96%</b>
Q12: I have been able to contact university staff when I needed to	<b>86%</b>	84%	86%	<b>99%</b>
Q13: I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course	79%	<b>84%</b>	79%	<b>97%</b>
Q14: Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course	75%	<b>79%</b>	74%	74%
Q27: Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my course	84%	<b>90%</b>	<b>85%</b>	80%

## Impact of Studiosity on wellbeing and mental health

*"Using Studiosity provides helpful tips which positively impact my work, but also reassurance. This is really great in terms of wellbeing, as academic stress can often be overwhelming."*

In line with other surveys, a significant number of respondents to this survey have

thought about leaving (45%). Thomas (2012) reported that in two institutional surveys the figures were 33% and 42%; more recent research with UK students by Studiosity (2018) found that more than half the students reported thinking about leaving (56%). Despite this, the majority of students who responded to this survey felt comfortable studying by themselves (57%), but 29% said it resulted in self-doubt, and 30% said it makes them feel anxious.

Students reported that the most stressful part of studying is balancing work and study (56%), and the majority of students (63%) have resorted to all night studying at least sometimes. Studying all night leaves students alone and without support, and 73% of respondents said that all night studying could be reduced if 24/7 support was available. The qualitative comments indicate that those students who are juggling other responsibilities find Studiosity particularly valuable to help them study independently.

*"Due to my other family commitments, I struggle to find enough time to study for a set 'session'. However, this is an aspect which I will be working on next year. In addition to this, my placement commences in October. Thus, this service is imperative for myself remaining stress - free, whilst balancing university work, placement, volunteering opportunities and family commitments."*

*"I work full time for the NHS, have a child with special needs at home, I have a child studying away from home and I am undertaking a Masters course in Advanced practice following a long period out of education. It is very difficult for a mature student and it is expected that you can fit everything in. I was grateful of the Studiosity registration and service."*

In order to assess whether having access to and using 24/7 support in the form of Studiosity does positively impact on students' wellbeing and mental health, the survey included four personal well-being questions developed by the Office for National Statistics. By using these questions we can compare survey respondents' feelings about their own well-being with the population as a whole and with the UK student population, as the same questions were utilised in the HEPI/Advance HE Student Academic Experience Survey 2019.

*"The Studiosity tutors have made me more confident when writing, and have also made me aware of various ways to improve my personal style of writing and communication skills more generally. This improved confidence has improved my wellbeing, as I stress less about essays than before my university provided access to Studiosity."*

Table 3: Personal well-being, a comparison of the UK student population, Studiosity users and the UK population (opposite, top).

Personal Wellbeing	UK student population*	Studiosity users	UK Population **
Life satisfaction	14%	<b>27%</b>	27%
Life worthwhile	17%	<b>40%</b>	33%
Happiness	18%	<b>33%</b>	33%
Low anxiety	16%	<b>34%</b>	37%

\* From HEPI / Advance HE, 2019    \*\* ONS aged 20-24, 2017-18

## Demographic Information

Table 4: Summary of demographic information of survey respondents

Mode of study	Full-time: 77%	Part-time: 22%	PNTS: 1%
Age	Young: 44%	Mature: 66%	PNTS: 0%
Gender	Female: 78%	Males: 22%	PNTS: 0%
Ethnicity	White British: 55%	BME: 40%	PNTS: 5%
Declared Disability	No: 78%	Yes: 19%	PNTS: 3%
FGE	No: 54%	Yes: 44%	PNTS/DK: 2%
Difficulty finding quiet place to study	No: 50%	Yes: 50%	PNTS: 0%
Part-time employed	No: 35%	Yes: 61%	PNTS: 4%
Care of dependents	No: 62%	Yes: 36%	PNTS: 3%
Usually commute more than 45 mins	No: 36%	Yes: 63%	PNTS: 1%
Nationality	UK: 87%	Non UK: 13%	

**PNTS:** Prefer not to say; **BME:** Black and Minority Ethnic (includes all non-white British ethnicities); **FGE:** First generation entrant, defined as first in immediate family, i.e. parents, step-parents, brothers and sisters, and foster-parents, to enter higher education; **DK:** Don't know; Non-UK includes international and EU students from outside of the UK.

This demographic information suggests that survey respondents differ somewhat from the higher education population as a whole in the UK. This may be accounted for by institutional type, however it is noteworthy that Studiosity appears to be attractive to older students, female students, BME students, and students with a declared disability, who are over represented in our survey compared to the UK student population based on HESA data (<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he>).

It should also be noted that significant numbers of survey respondents are first generation entrants to higher education, have difficulty finding a quiet place to do course work, have part-time employment with 47% working nine or more hours per week, have responsibility for the care of dependants and always or frequently commute for more than 45 minutes each way to their university.

Overall, survey respondents from groups that have poorer experiences and outcomes are over-represented compared to the UK population, for example in relation to age, ethnicity, disability and proxy indicators of socio-economic status. This therefore reinforces the positive benefits of the service to achieving goals relating to widening access and participation, teaching excellence, and institutional league tables.

## Conclusions

***"Studiosity is absolutely the best thing. My son is studying at another University, if they don't subscribe to Studiosity, I will pay for a subscription for him. I recommend it to all of my students even the stronger ones, to encourage them to achieve the best marks possible. The style of feedback has also helped me to improve the way that I provide feedback to students. I can't recommend enough."***

Students who have used Studiosity, usually more than once, believe that they have learnt from the experience, and it has improved their confidence, motivation and skills. The evidence suggests that Studiosity is contributing to their development as independent learners, rather than just helping them with their assignments.

Furthermore, offering students access to 24/7 study support seems to have a number of positive benefits on the student population in relation to their student experience, which is reflected in improved satisfaction with their learning experience on their course, compared to NSS data from England and improved well-being compared with the wider student population, bringing them into line with the general population.

The evidence collected from this survey indicates that Studiosity has a positive impact on student experience for a very significant majority of users, which in turn would have direct benefits for institutions concerned with metrics relating to the student experience.

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## About Liz Thomas

Professor Liz Thomas is an expert member of the Teaching Excellence Framework panel, recognising her expertise in student retention and success and learning and teaching. Current and recent research projects include:

*Understanding a whole institution approach to widening participation*  
Commissioned by the Office for Fair Access, 2017

*Creating an evaluation framework for student engagement*  
Commissioned by The Student Engagement Partnership, 2016.

*Student engagement in the context of commuter students*  
Commissioned by The Student Engagement Partnership, 2016, launched 2017

*What works? Student retention and success change programme*  
Funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2012-2016, launched 2017

*Independent learning: Student perspectives and experiences*  
Commissioned by the Higher Education Academy, 2015, published 2016

*Effective practice in the design of directed independent learning opportunities*  
Commissioned by the Higher Education Academy and Quality Assurance Agency, 2014, published 2015

Liz researches and writes about widening participation, student retention and success and learning and teaching. She is the author and editor of over ten books, and many journal articles, reports, briefings and practice guides. She regularly delivers keynote addresses and staff development workshops and programmes at higher education institutions in the UK and abroad.



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