

QM PLUS



QMplus 2016/17 Student Survey

Executive Summary by Brett Lucas - E-Learning Unit

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1 Background

1.1 Introduction

During the academic year 2012/13, QMplus (QMUL’s online learning environment based on the *Moodle* software platform) and at that time QMplus Groups & Portfolios (Our e-Portfolio software based on the *Mahara* software platform) were introduced to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Postgraduate Medicine, The Institute of Dentistry and a few programmes in the Faculty of Science & Engineering. We surveyed all students at that time¹.

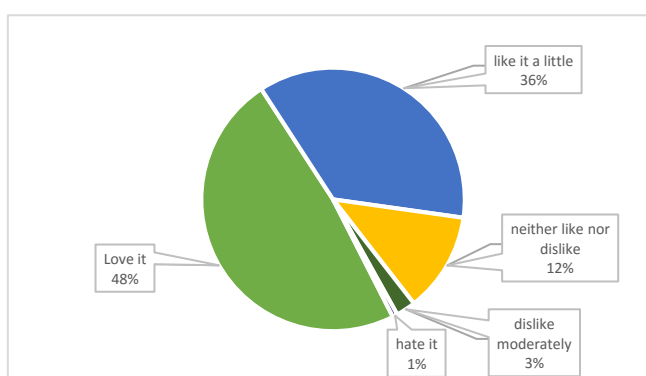


Figure 1: Students’ overall attitude to QMplus

In the following year (2013/14) QMplus was rolled out across the remaining schools and institutes of the institution including all schools in the Faculty of Science & Engineering, the Undergraduate Medical programme (MBBS) and the joint programmes in Nanchang and Beijing. All taught programmes were now supported by a ‘*substantial online component*’ and an important objective from the QMUL strategic plan 2010-15 had been met. At the end of that year we ran our second student survey of QMplus².

Since then QMplus usage has grown and so too has the richness and diversity of its use. Every year we have deployed enhancements to the system for students, teachers and administrators, many of which are locally developed within QMUL IT services. In 2014/15 we rebranded the e-Portfolio to QMplus Hub and promoted its use more widely across the university. Three years after we last asked students what they thought and with all the changes we have made, 2017 seemed like an appropriate window to approach our key users once more.

At the beginning of 2016/17 the E-learning Unit launched an ambitious 4 year e-learning strategy³ which aims to deliver enhanced teaching and learning opportunities to staff and students through the e-learning systems it supports and intends to provide and support robust technologies to facilitate flexible and tailored pedagogies.

To ensure that we develop our systems in appropriate ways we have embarked upon a process of listening to what our users think about our systems and what they need. This started with a staff survey of e-

¹ QMplus Student Survey 2012/13 – Full report: <https://www.elearning.capd.qmul.ac.uk/students/survey-results/201213-2/>

² QMplus Student Survey 2013/14 – Full report: <https://www.elearning.capd.qmul.ac.uk/students/survey-results/201314-2/>

³ QMUL E-learning Strategy: <https://www.elearning.capd.qmul.ac.uk/about-us/e-learning-strategy-2016-2020/>

learning carried out in November 2016. This student survey will generate important supporting data to help drive the implementation of our strategy.

1.2 Aims, objectives and methodology

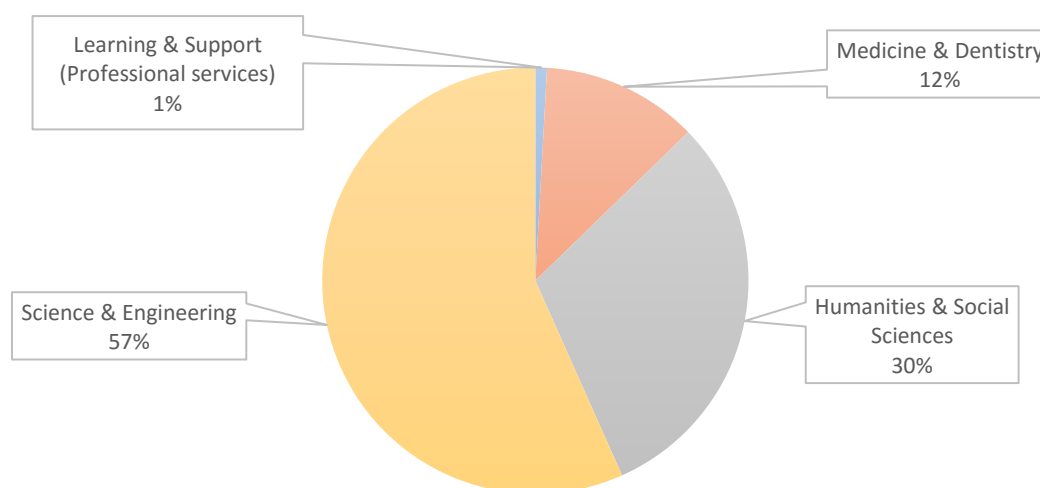
The primary aims of the survey were to find out:

- what students who have been using it to learn, study and revise really think of it.
- whether changes we have made to QMplus since we last carried out the survey 3 years ago had any impact on student learning and/or student perceptions of it.
- if the balance of design and usability is right.
- whether students felt that their learning experience has improved by using the tool.
- whether help, support and training are meeting the needs of our main users.
- what kinds of features students would like to see going forwards.

The survey was designed and delivered through the Bristol Online Survey tool (BOS) and consisted of 29 questions. It was carried out over six weeks from mid-January to the 1st of March 2017. Students were offered an incentive of the chance to win £200.00 of shopping vouchers to complete the survey.

In total we received 1827 responses more than double the 780 we received in the 2013/14 survey and three times more than the 542 responses in the first survey we ran in 2012/13. This represents a response rate of around 9% of the total eligible headcount⁴.

Figure 2: Proportion of survey respondents represented by each faculty



⁴ Data source: Queen Mary Strategic Planning Office statistics: <http://qm-web.planning.qmul.ac.uk/FactsAndFigures/Enrolment/index.html>

2 Key Findings

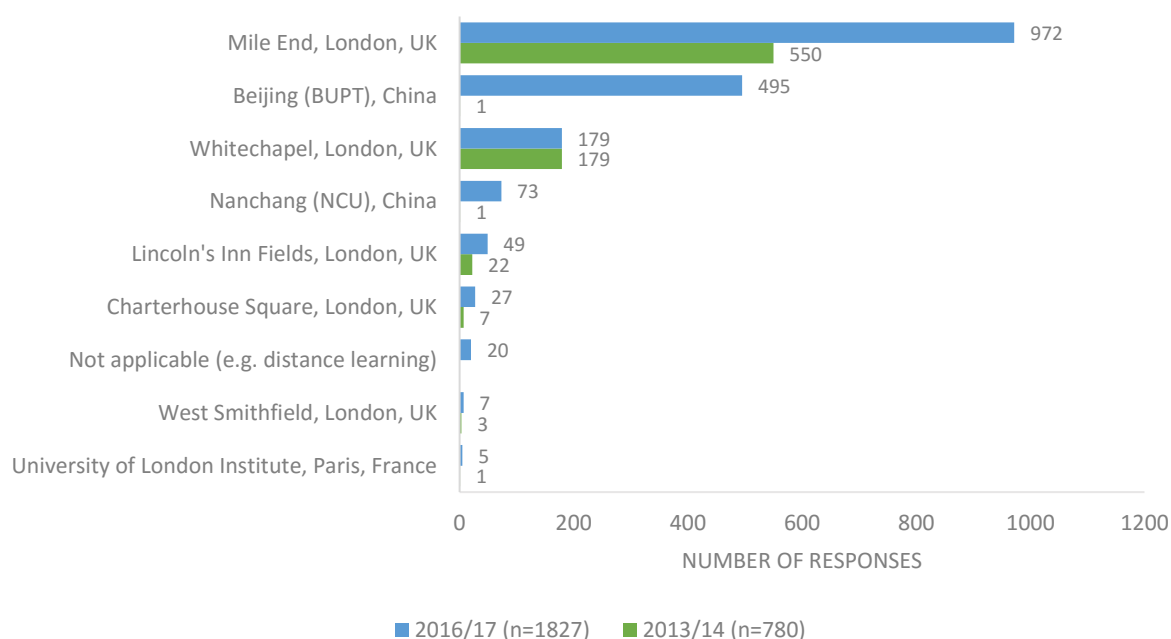
2.1 About the respondents

In this section we asked students about their study mode, campus and their general attitude to using technology in their studies.

Of the 1827 responses we received, 90% were studying full time (1652) while 5% (87) were studying at a distance. A further 5% were studying part-time on campus. This breakdown of respondents was almost the same as the last time we ran the survey.

As can be seen in Figure 3 below, by far the majority of students were based at the Mile End Campus in London (972 respondents or 53%), however for the first time we had students on the Joint Programme in Beijing responding to the survey and representing our second highest response rate (495 or 27%) – this result compared to the single response we got in 2013/14 from that campus! Students at Nanchang University also provided 73 responses compared to none last time.

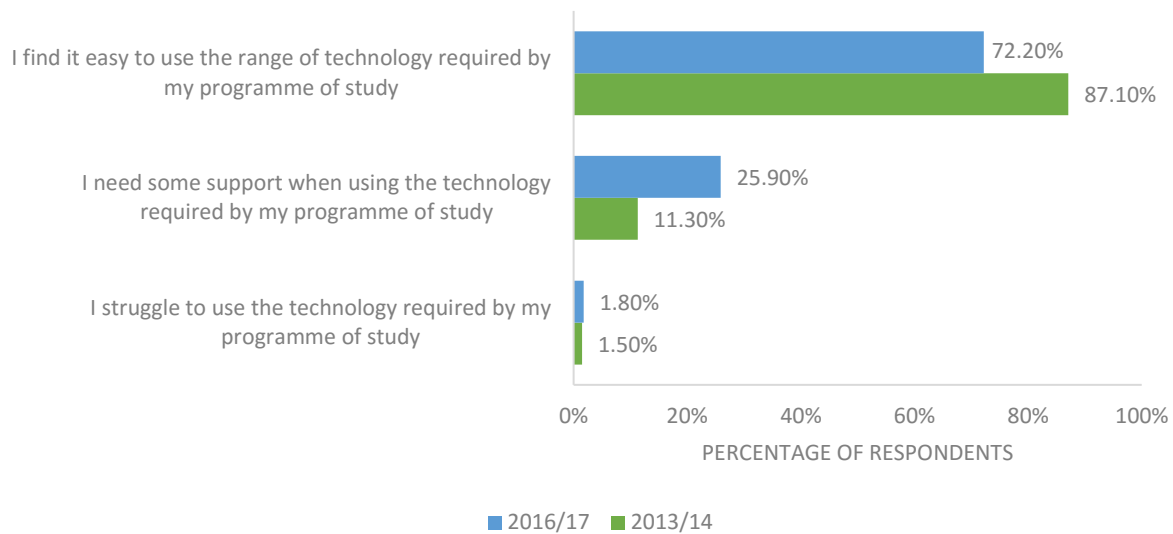
Figure 3: Comparison of response rates by main campus of study 2016/17 versus 2013/14



We asked students how they felt about using technology 'generally' in their studies and we found that overall they are finding it less easy to use technology in their studies in 2016/17 than they did in the 2013/14 QMplus survey. In the bar chart below a 15% drop can be seen in the number of students who simply found using technology 'easy' with little to no support required. Correspondingly those who felt they needed some support increased by the same amount.

To try and understand where this change might be coming from we filtered the data for three Schools and the two Joint Programmes combined.

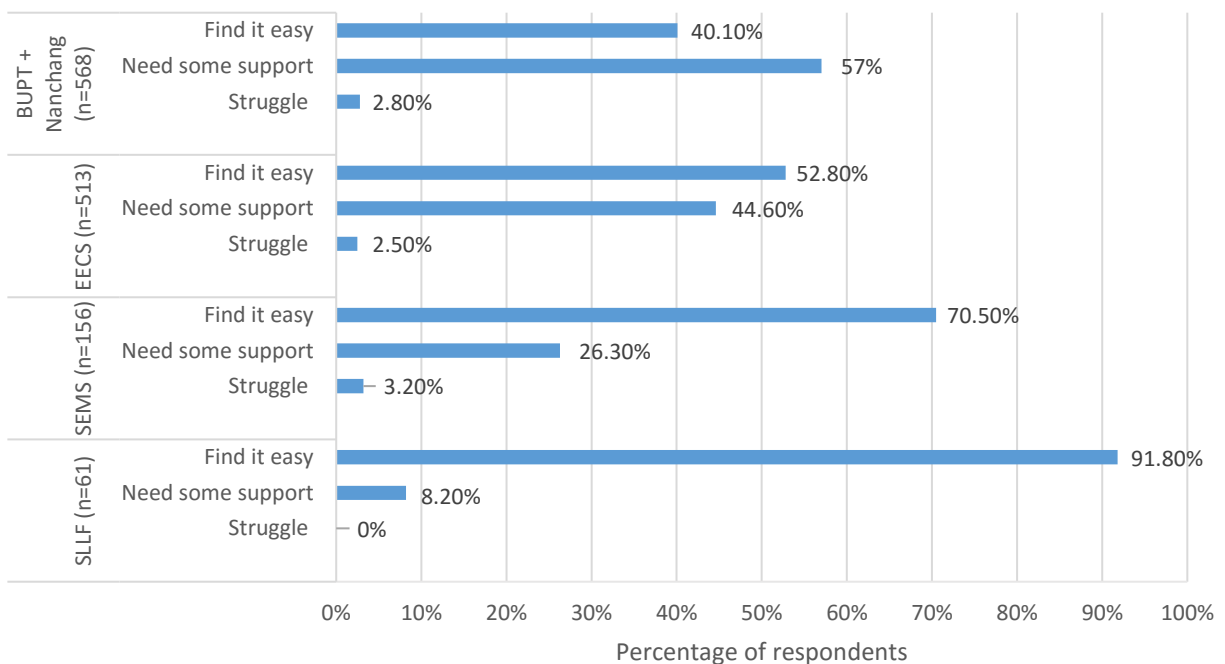
Figure 4: Student feelings about using technology generally in their studies – All respondents (n=1827)



Results in Figure 5 may suggest that Humanities and Social Science Students (represented by SLLF) find it easier to use technology in their programmes, whereas Science & Engineering programmes e.g. SEMS and EECS may have more needs for support. We may be seeing results here that reflect how much technology students are expected to interact with in some disciplines compared to others. Students studying on these programs may require more support than just a tool like QMplus.

Students based in China also showed a higher proportion than the average needing some support.

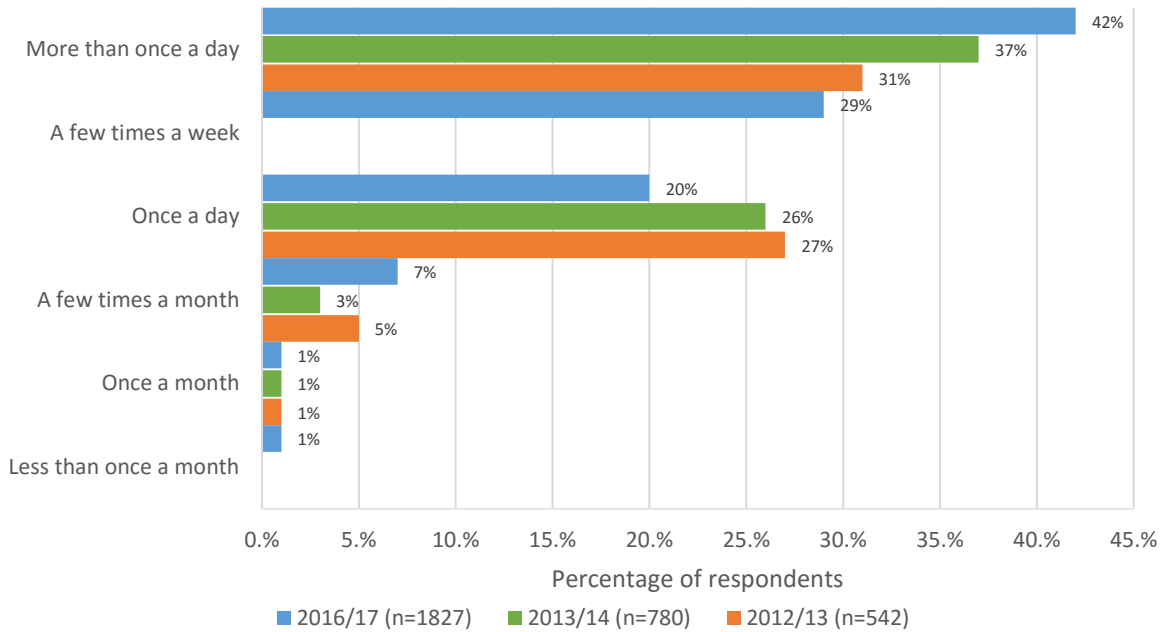
Figure 5: Student feelings about using technology generally in their studies – Departmental comparisons



2.2 Use of QMplus

In this section we asked students how often they access QMplus, what devices they own and use to access QMplus and a couple of questions about mobile devices.

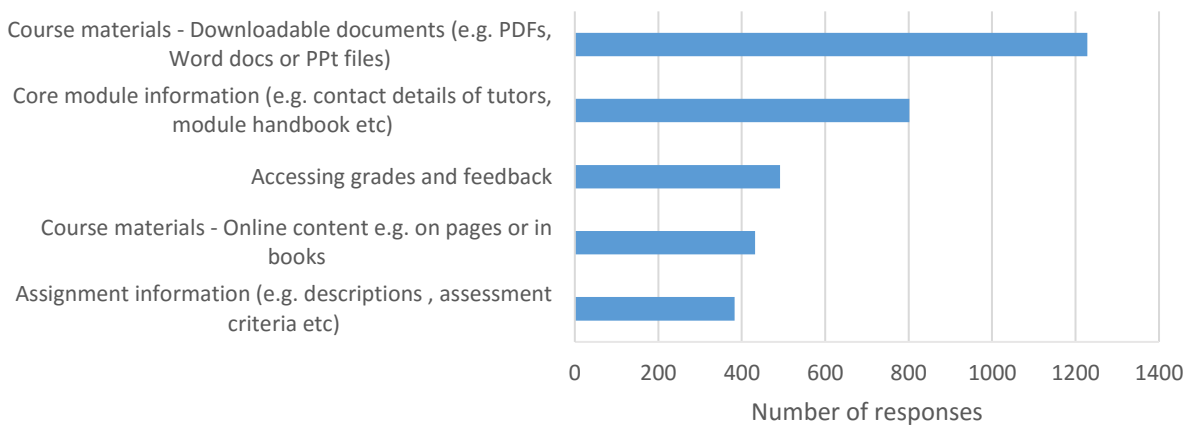
Figure 6: Frequency of Access to QMplus- 2016/17 survey vs 2013/14 and 2012/13 QMplus surveys



Frequency of access to QMplus remains high. 62% of respondents (1133) are accessing QMplus at least once a day comparable to the 63% in 2013/14. Of those, 42% are accessing QMplus more than once a day (767 respondents) up 5% from three years ago. We also see that almost all students are accessing QMplus at least once a week (91%).

We asked about device ownership and which devices students actually used to access QMplus. Windows laptop computers continue to be the most popular device to access QMplus (932 respondents), followed by Iphones (775), Windows desktops (591) and Android Smartphones (500). Ownership did not follow these results exactly with Windows laptops still the most owned device (1051) followed by Iphones (998), Android smartphones (647) then Mac laptops (616).

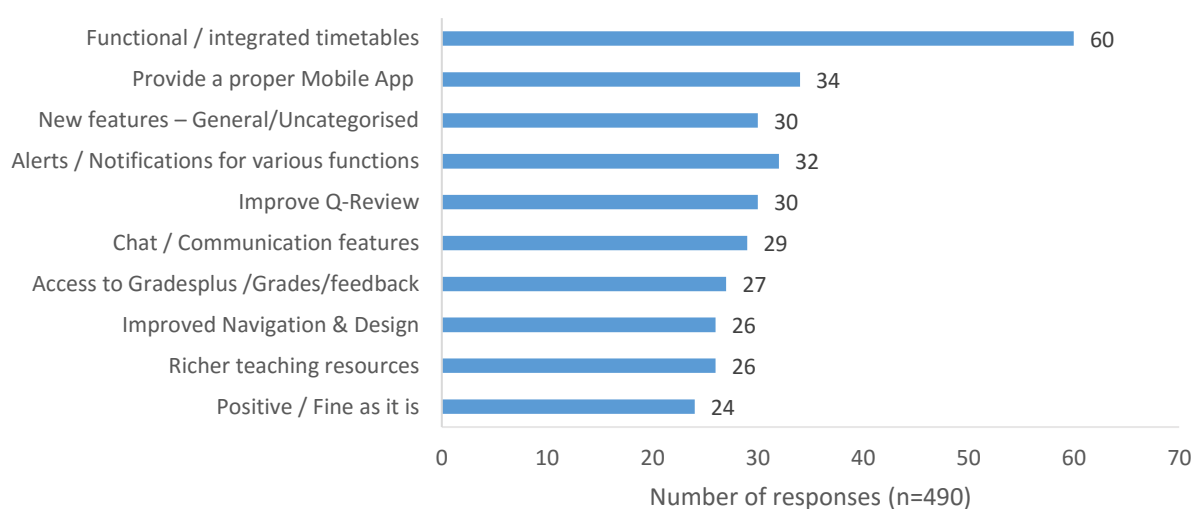
Figure 7: Functionality of QMplus that is MOST useful for you to access on your mobile phone (n=1827)



We asked respondents to pick their top 3 choices out of a list of QMplus functionality offered on a mobile device to select which were **MOST** useful. In figure 7 above you can see that the *Provision of downloadable documents, Core module information* and *Access to grades and feedback* scored particularly highly.

We also asked about other functionality they would like to see on their mobile device. that may or may not be currently offered. Of the 490 responses we received to this question the functionality most requested was timetables that actually work and are integrated properly onto their mobile devices (60 responses) *“Online timetable which can be accessed through your mobile which updates changes to the timetable automatically”*. Respondents also want a dedicated mobile app for QMplus (34) *“I don’t use it on a mobile device because I find it awkward – it would make more sense to me for this to be an app as opposed to a webpage”* and they want to receive QMplus alerts and notifications on their phone (32). Improvements to Q-Review were also mentioned (30).

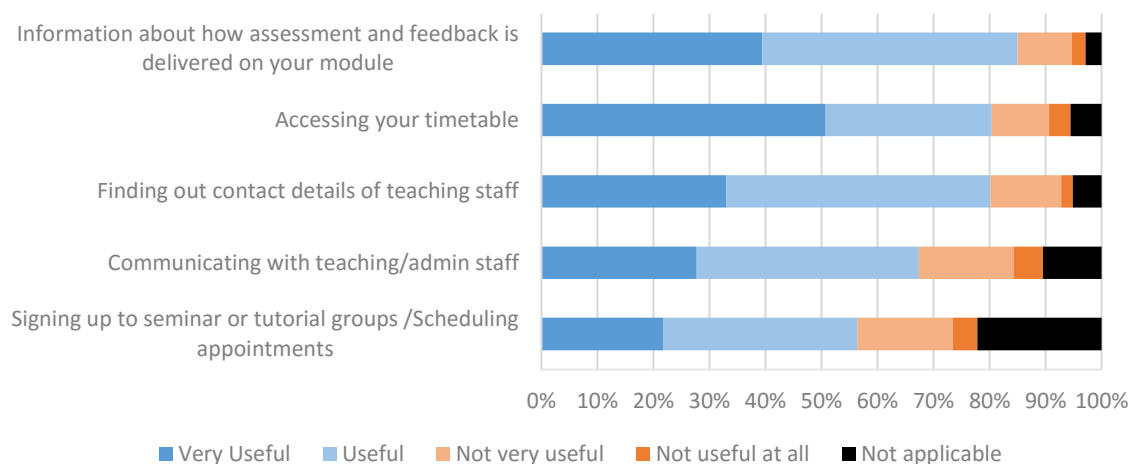
Figure 8: QMplus functionality students would most like to see on their – Top 10 responses only



2.3 SUPPORTING STUDENT LEARNING

2.3.1 General info and module admin

Figure 9: Usefulness of information provision and module administration in QMplus – 2016/17 (n=1827)



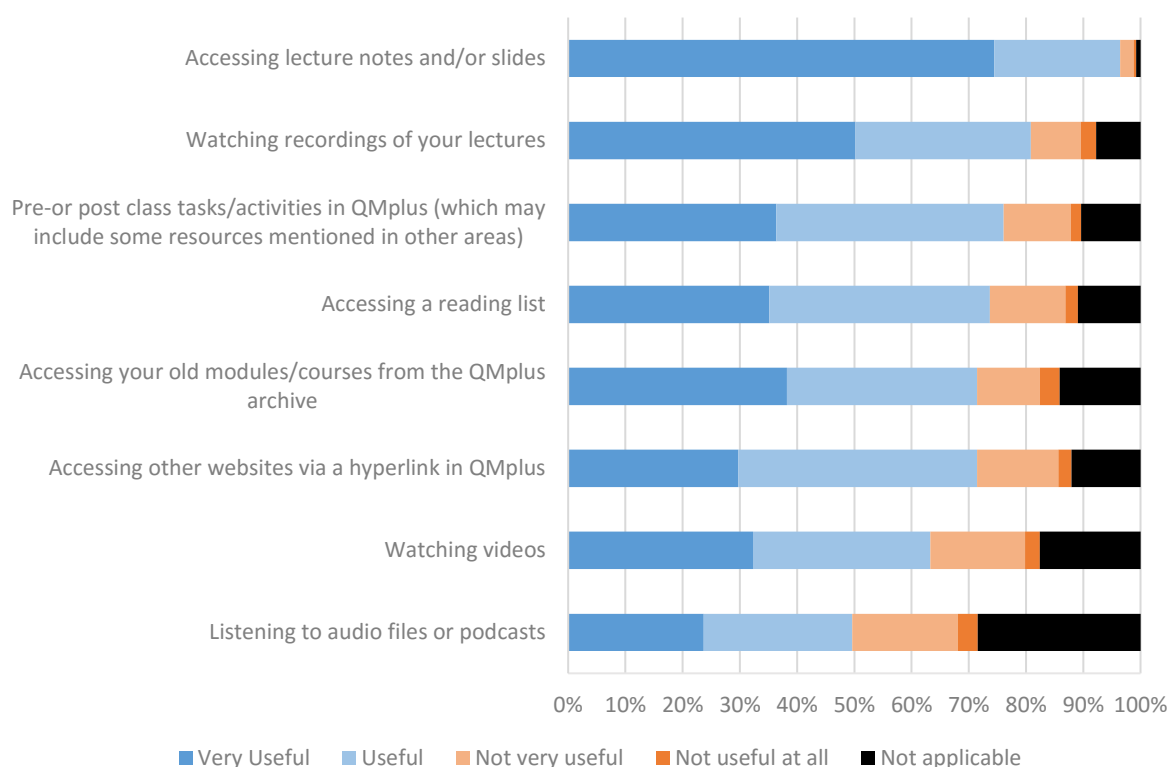
All of the main administrative functions cited in the survey were seen as being useful by students with several features seen as useful by more than 80% of the respondents. Timetable access was seen as most useful of all with slightly over 50% of respondents considering it 'very useful'. There is some correlation here with the previous section where respondents had mentioned that timetable integration was the number one piece of functionality they'd like to see on their mobile device. Understanding why timetable access has become so important might be worth investigating further with students.

As students find all of these features useful we need to make sure that module convenors are aware of how useful they can be, because, whilst assessment and feedback information, timetables and contact details should all be on QMplus module areas as part of Faculty or School e-learning templates, using QMplus to communicate with the programme team and or using QMplus to organise student groups and schedule appointments etc may not be so widely known about.

2.3.2 Teaching materials

In this section we asked students about the usefulness of 9 different types of teaching materials.

Figure 10: Attitudes towards the ways various teaching materials support learning in QMplus 2016/17 (n=1827)



Unsurprisingly the degrees of usefulness had not changed between this survey and the last, with lecture notes and slides seen as most useful by a large majority (96%). Watching recordings of lectures (Q-Review) was ranked second most useful at about the same percentage as the last survey (80%). It is also worthwhile noting that around 20% of students do not find the use of video materials or even weblinks useful.

Perceptions of the usefulness of having an archive of learning materials in your old modules also grew from 56% in 2013/14 to 72% in 2016/17. This would suggest that features like this have become better known and used as we have made them more visible in the interface.

In the final question in this section (see 2.3.6) users mentioned that they wanted wider use of Q-Review and better quality of recordings; *“Higher Quality recording so that the viewer can clearly view what is*

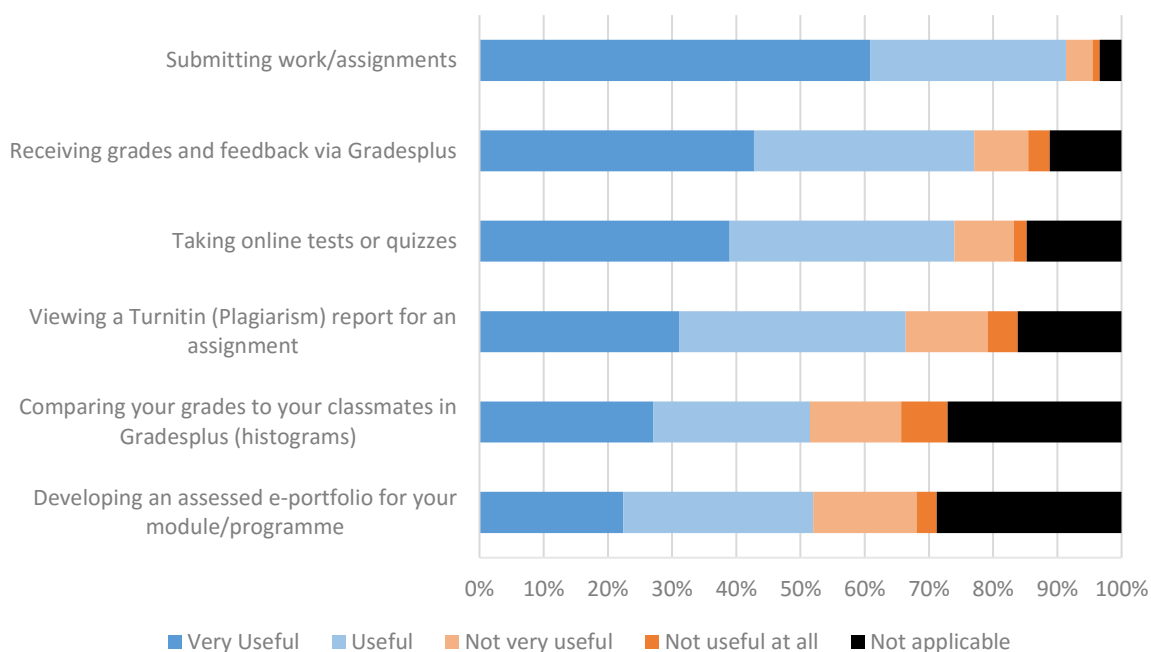
written on the board.” And downloadable recordings to watch on the commute. There was also a call for more and better teaching materials: “ I think we need more materials when learning a new course”. One thought might be on how we can make those ‘useful’ lecture notes and slides more interactive?

The information we have received regarding teaching materials in QMplus is broadly positive and enables us to say that the existing policy standards or baseline has proved effective. Now it is time for us to expand our ambition in relation to online teaching materials.

2.3.3 Assessment and Feedback Tools, Methods and Approaches

Assessment and feedback are two of the most important aspects of the student learning experience and if we can get them right in QMplus then we can make a huge impact on the way students perceive their experience at Queen Mary. There are lots of variables that make up the lifecycle of assessment and QMplus is only one part of it. Every school, department and institute has their own processes and finding alignment can be tricky.

Figure 11: Attitudes towards the ways various assessment and feedback solutions support learning in QMplus 2016/17 (n=1827)



Assignment submission proved most useful to most respondents and improvements in the process for submitting over the last few years meant we did not receive any complaints about the submission process in this survey.

It was particularly heartening to see a new piece of functionality we added to QMplus this year – **Gradesplus**, which enables a student to see all their grades and feedback from QMplus based assignments in one place with an optional histogram showing rankings in the cohort etc – be rated so useful. However, around 20% of respondents did not find the histogram functionality in Gradesplus useful and around 27% had never heard of or encountered it: “Histograms are not available on my gradesplus and would be useful”

Overall we need to do more to promote the use of QMplus to provide interim grades for students which can be displayed through Gradesplus as students find it very useful. We also need to do more work on understanding why histograms may not be seen as useful.

Another area seen as less useful though 20% more so than in 2013/14 was developing e-portfolio pages for assessment. Some 28% are not even encountering e-portfolio assessment and about 20% are not finding it useful if they do.

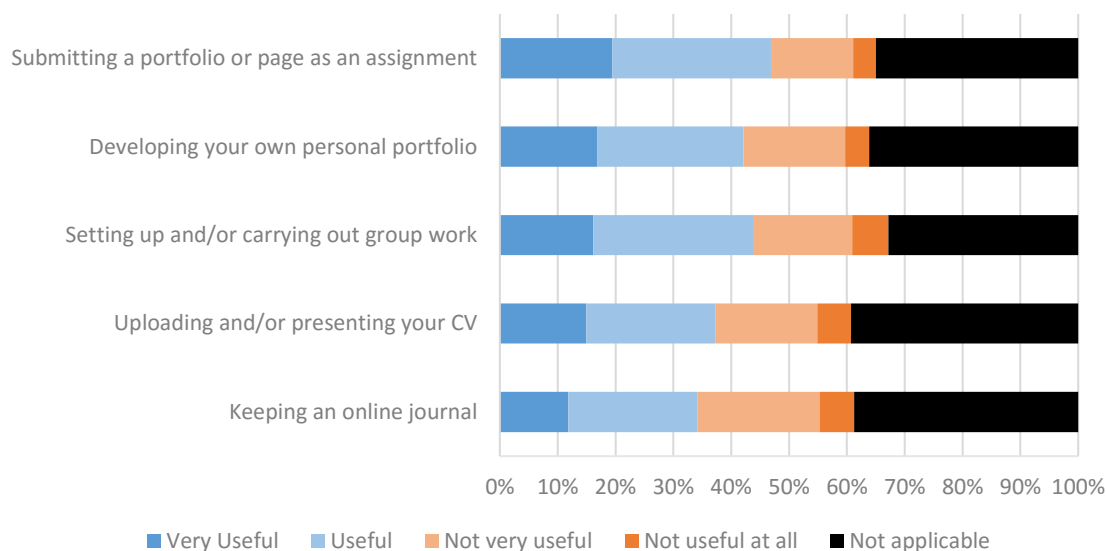
2.3.4 Groups and Portfolios

Usefulness of QMplus Hub features overall has increased dramatically since our last survey. For instance carrying out groupwork was seen as useful by 17% of respondents in 2013/14 but now more than 40% see it as being useful. Clearly QMplus Hub is being used more year by year and this is backed up by the analytics data on the system itself and the variety of support calls we now receive about how to use the tool effectively to support teaching and learning.

The fact remains that there are still large numbers of people that know nothing about the tool and its potential or perhaps more importantly that it is student driven and can be used entirely independently of module teaching. Worryingly there are still quite a high proportion of users who are not satisfied and this may be worthy of some follow-up research. What do people actually want to do with the tool? Is QMplus Hub meeting their requirements?

Over the next year QMplus Hub will be used to support the rollout of the QMUL Model and tools within it are being integrated into many modules as methods to assess in different ways e.g. reflection and evidence gathering.

Figure 12: Attitudes towards the way tools within QMplus Hub could be used to support your learning – 2016/17

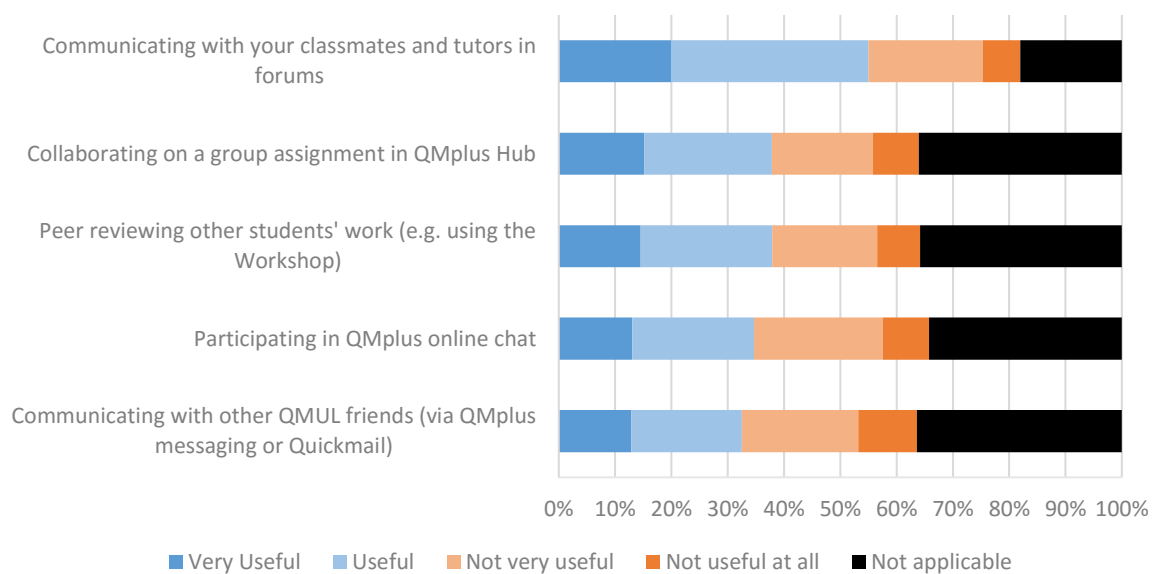


2.3.5 Collaborative activities

In this set of questions we explored the frequency of use of the 5 main tools that help facilitate collaborative learning within QMplus and/or QMplus Hub. Use of these tools would generally represent more advanced use of the system.

Like the Groups & Portfolios area, the collaborative tools in QMplus are not being used as widely as we would like. Building collaborative activities in QMplus that work can take considerable time and effort. When they work they can be particularly enjoyable for all involved. A persistent group of respondents simply do not know about some tools like chat, messaging, peer review (in QMplus) and group capabilities in QMplus Hub.

Figure 13: Attitudes towards the usefulness of collaborative activities in QMplus can be used to support learning – 2016-17 (n=1827)



Perceptions of the usefulness of all 5 tools have roughly doubled since we last ran the survey (e.g. Participating in online chat was seen as useful by 18% of respondents in 2013/14 compared to 34% in 2016/17). Despite this the percentage of respondents who did not find the collaborative tools useful is worrying e.g. 30% of respondents did not find the online chat through QMplus useful. Given that students have highlighted their desire for collaborative tools to help them with their studies, we may need to do more work to find tools that better suit their needs.

The final point to note is that the large 'Not applicable' response indicates that large numbers of students are simply not being given the opportunities to use these tools in their modules.

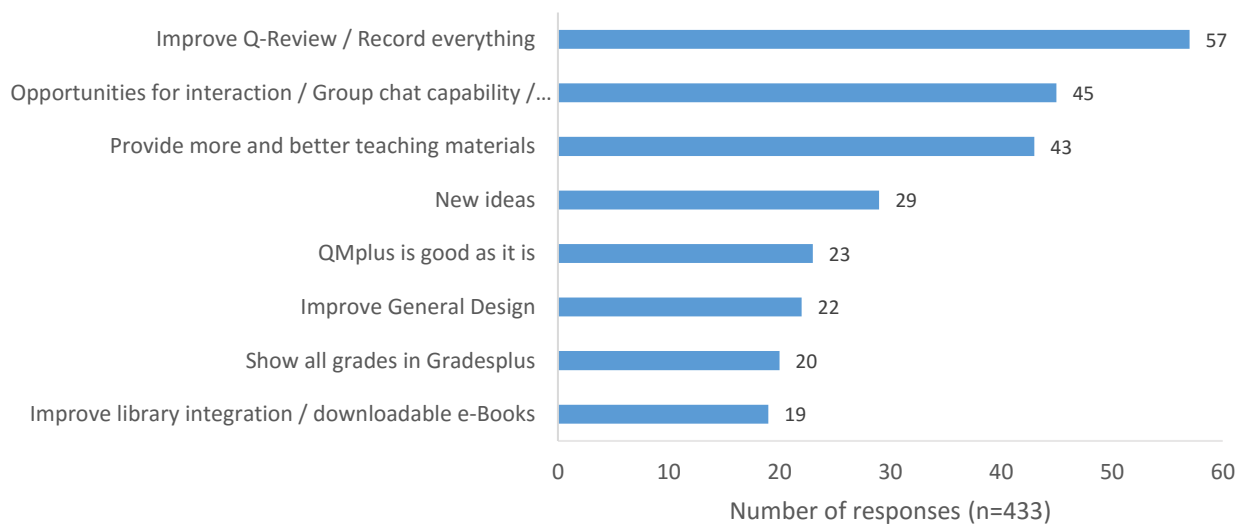
2.3.6 Other ways QMplus could be used to support your learning

The final optional question in this section asked respondents how else QMplus could support their learning. As discussed previously, improvements to Q-Review were highlighted (57 responses) as were opportunities for group chat/ interaction more generally: *"You could develop an app that lets you communicate with people in your module including the lecturer that has a friendly interface (sort of like WhatsApp but uses your university email instead of your phone number). The app could also*

allow for the lecturer to send public announcements which could eliminate the need for a qmplus forum room.”

There was also a general call for more and improved teaching materials. Lots of new ideas were mentioned e.g. being able to view attendance, a university-wide events calendar, previews of courses etc. Design was also mentioned here, respondents are looking for clearer navigation: *“QMplus should be less complicated”*.

Figure 14: Other ways QMplus could be used to support your learning? – (top 8 responses shown)

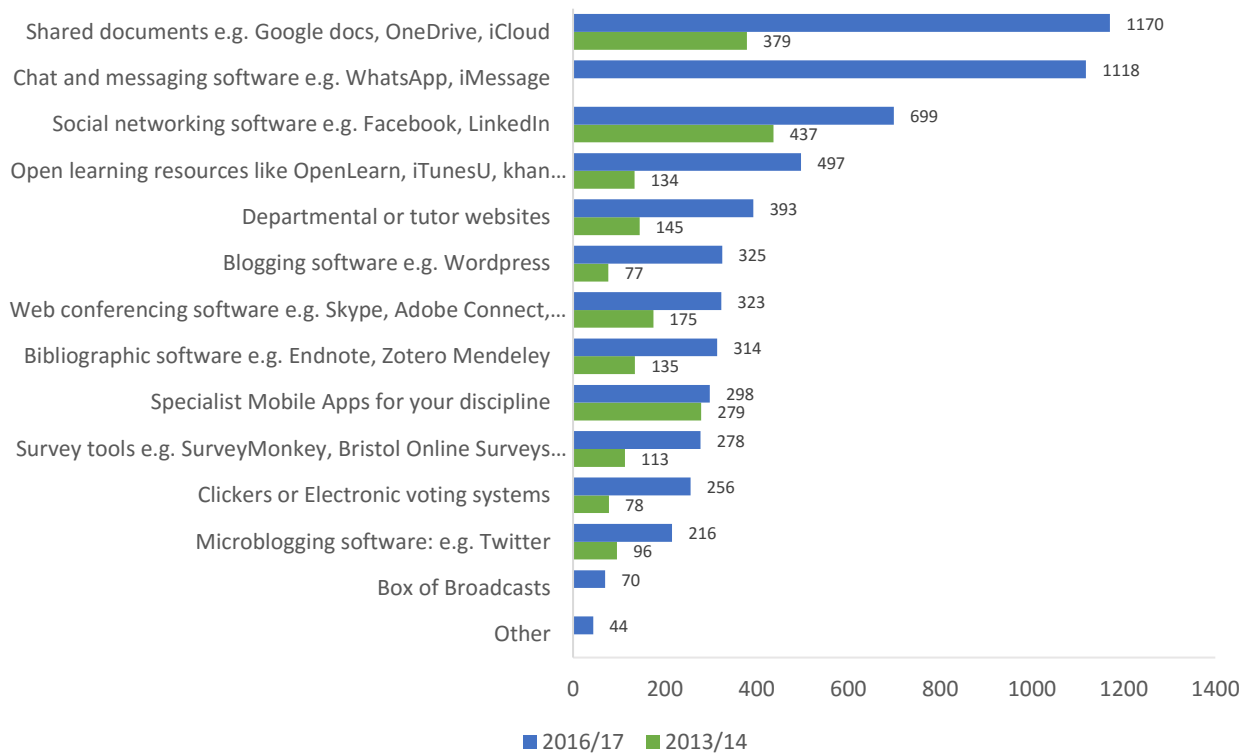


2.3.7 Other technologies helpful for your studies

Messages from the previous question are also repeated when we asked about other useful technologies used by students in their learning beyond the locally supported tools. Respondents were free to choose as many as they wished. Chat and messaging software emerged from nowhere in this survey (there was no mention at all in 2013/14) and the use of cloud sharing services has also become extremely popular.

Social networking software such as Facebook is also popular.

Figure 15: Other technologies you find helpful in your studies – 2016/17 survey vs 2013/14

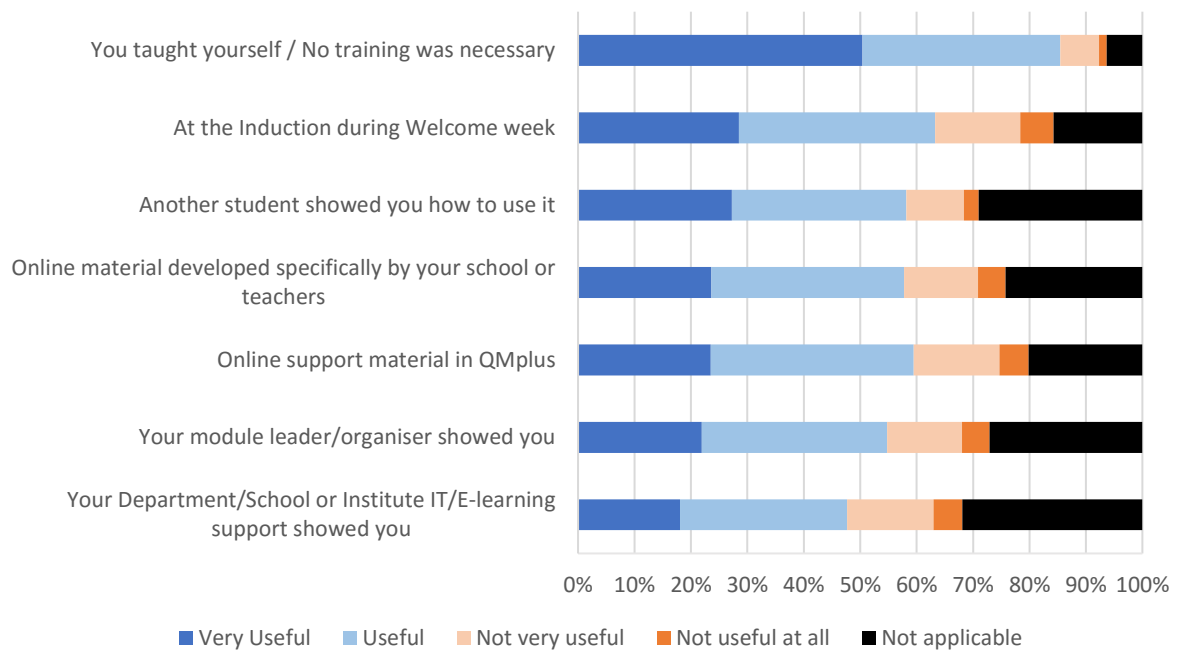


2.4 Training and Support

In this section we wanted to know how students found out about and learnt how to use QMplus and how useful they found those methods. We then asked them what they found most useful about that training and/or induction and how it could be improved. In terms of technical support we asked where they go to get support and how useful those avenues are and finally whether they had an general comments to make about support.

As we saw in the last survey, QMplus remains a relatively easy piece of software for many students to learn how to use: *“I thought it was all self-explanatory so I guess that’s a testament to QMPlus”*. Many respondents taught themselves or got help from friends, however, many also welcomed the basic overview they were given in Welcome Week.

Figure 16: Ways in which students learned how to use QMplus

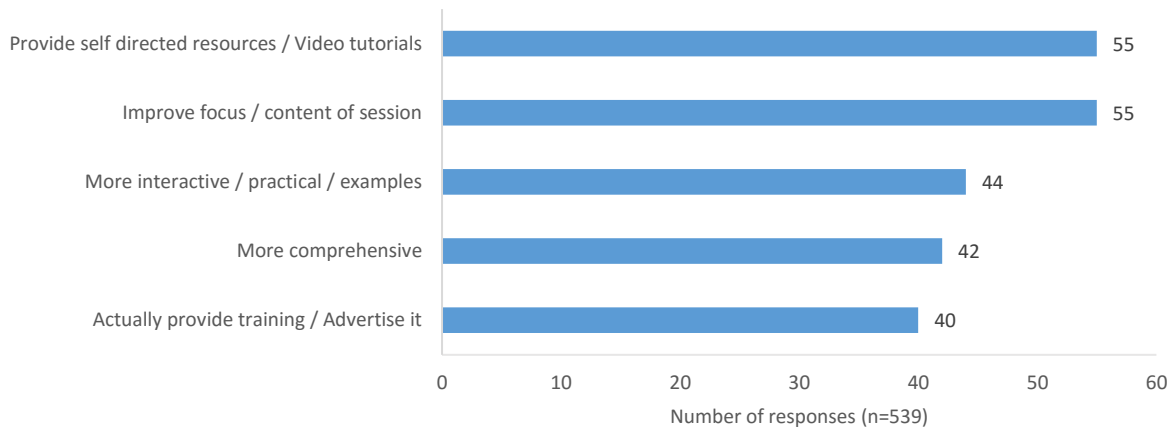


The results in this section overall suggest that QMplus is becoming more reliable and that fewer respondents are seeking out help from any of the formal support channels we investigated: *“I was a late enrolment and didn't attend the introduction, however, the design is simple and I figured out the functions pretty quick.”* When they do need help, the informal channels of asking friends, colleagues or their module convenor, as well as the online help are all preferred and seen as being useful.

When asked what they found most useful about the training received, respondents mentioned they found the basic overview most useful and being shown where to access their lecture notes and how to navigate around. Many respondents found the training informative though many didn't receive any.

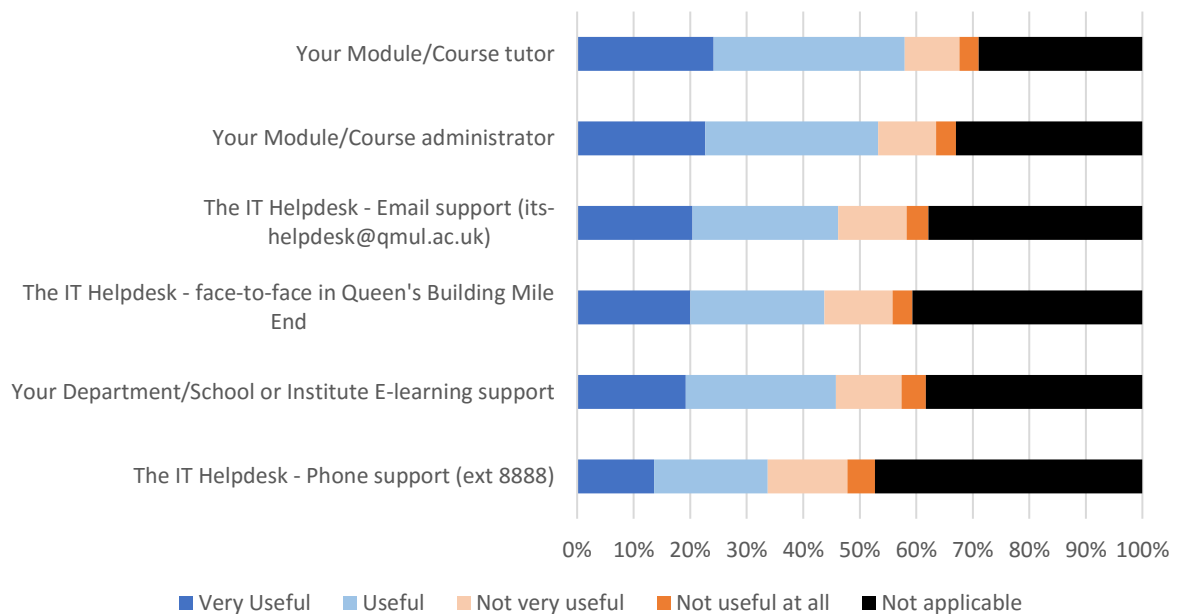
As figure 17 below shows, respondents were keen for more self-directed resources especially video-based, to show them how to use more advanced features of QMplus. For many the survey questions were the first they had heard of particular tools: *“Include more handy tips, not just what we have to know but what might be really helpful. I didn't know about the archive option or the hub until my third year for instance.”* There was also a call to make the session more practical: *“More interactive, less lecture-based”* and more comprehensive: *“We didn't really go into much of the functionality, so I don't feel like I use it to the fullest potential.”* There were also some issues identified with training actually being made available at all.

Figure 17: Top 5 comments on how the training / induction to QMplus could be improved



When technical help is required respondents found their module tutors (57%) or administrators (53%) most useful, then the more formal support provided by the Helpdesk is sought, although email (47%) or face-to-face support (43%) is considered to be the most useful, compared with the Helpdesk telephone line (33%).

Figure 18: Where students go when they have problems with QMplus and their usefulness



2.5 LOOK AND FEEL

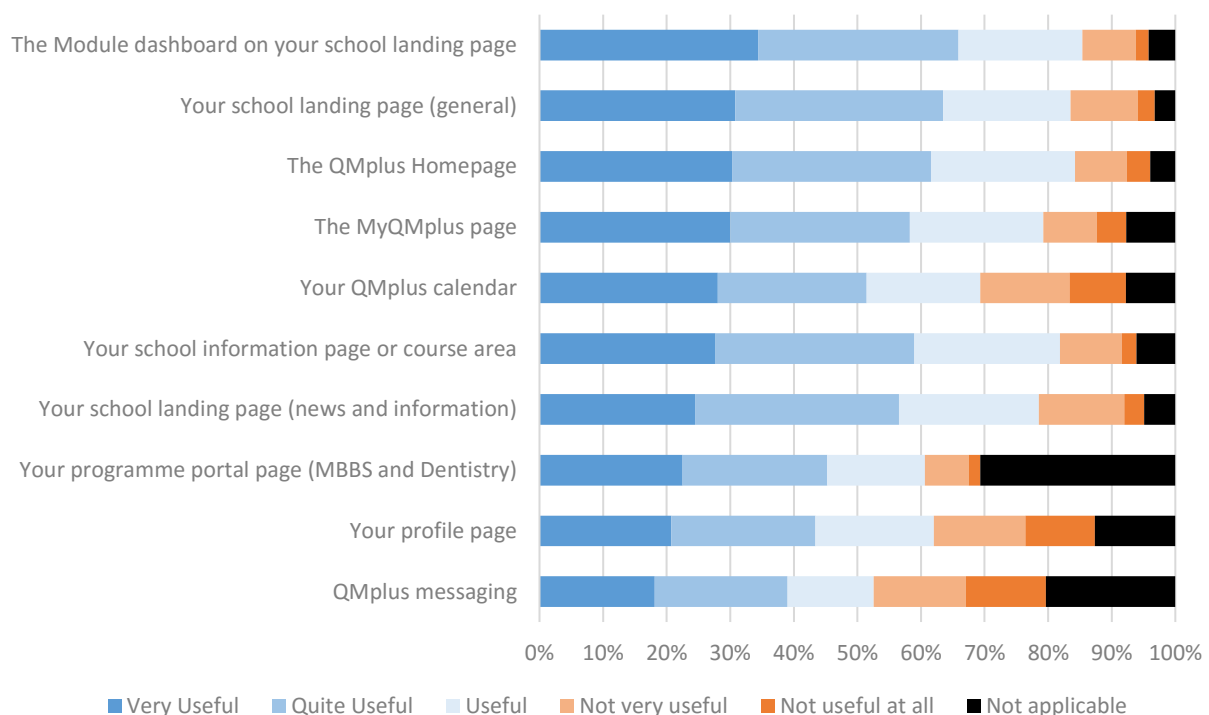
In this section we asked students about three major aspects of the design of QMplus: The overall design of the module or coursepage; the overall look and feel of other QMplus areas like landing pages, portal pages (MBBS)

etc (shown below in Figure 19); as well as QMplus navigation. We then asked a more general question about what features they liked or didn't like about the design.

In relation to the module homepage we asked students about 9 main features and more than 60% found all of these features useful. The collapsible topic sections were seen as most useful (88%), followed by the design of the learning content itself (within the topic sections)(87%).

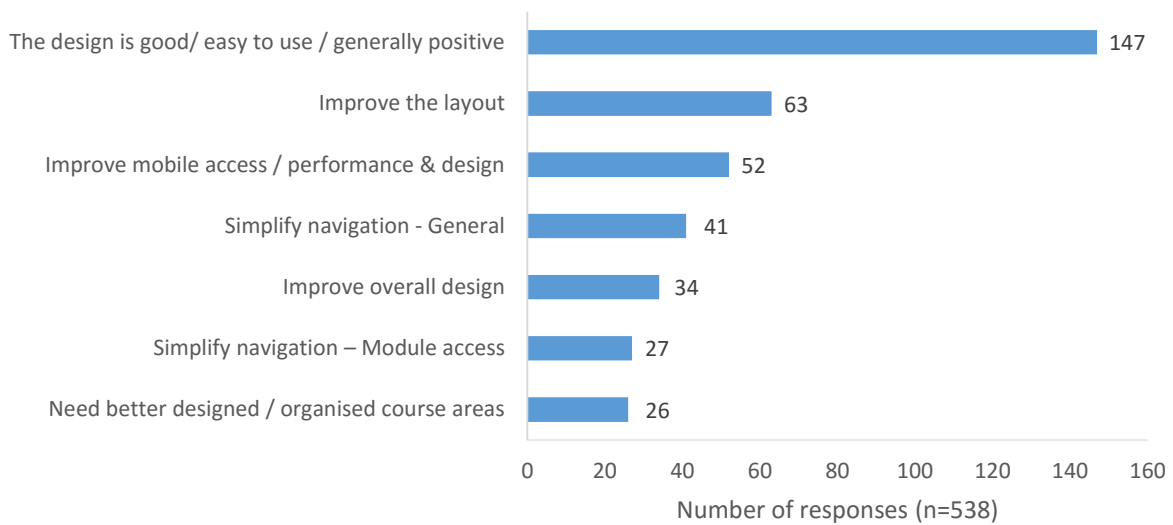
In figure 19 below we can see responses to the second question about elements of design from across QMplus. Once more all 10 elements within QMplus that we asked about were seen as being useful by more than 50% of respondents, however the module dashboard was seen as being most useful, followed by School landing pages.

Figure 19: How useful are the following areas of QMplus in terms of design and usability



We drilled down into design and usability a little further in the final question of this section. Figure 20 shows the most common responses to this question. The overwhelming response was positive: *“It is well structured and easy to follow” “It’s cool”*, however we did get a lot of respondents who disagreed and felt the layout of the site could at times be overwhelming: *“Quite a lot going on which can be a bit confusing.”* They asked for simpler navigation, particularly to their modules *“Lots of unnecessary clutter before you can get to the important bit - i.e. the list of lectures and relevant stuff to the module”*. They also wanted to see better designed course/module areas. *“power points and tutorial work are sometimes not organised by chapters and are a bit mixed up in one outlet and it is quite confusing”*, *“A lot of useless, outdated, broken links/information”*.

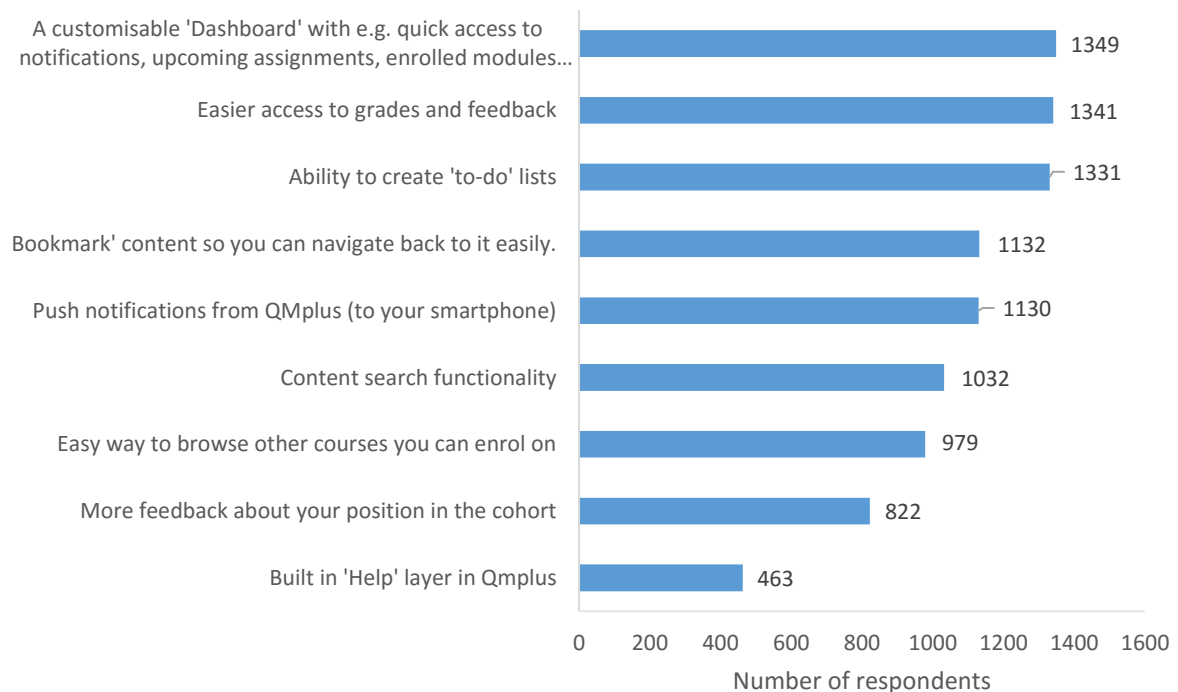
Figure 20: Detailed comments about aspects of the design – top 7 responses



2.6 The Future

In the final section we asked students to pick the 5 most useful features they'd like to see added to QMplus. The list was drawn from ideas already suggested by staff and users. The top three features (approximately 74% of respondents for each) were a Customisable dashboard, Easier access to Grades and Feedback and the ability to create To do lists.

Figure 21: Most useful features to add to QMplus



3 Key Recommendations

- Aim to at least double the total responses from Medicine and Dentistry students in the next student survey.
- Explore in more depth aspects of digital literacy discovered in the survey, how much support do our students need with technology and how can we effectively deliver that support?
- Focus more effort on the Mobile QMplus experience. Run a trial of a dedicated mobile app for QMplus and evaluate its usefulness.
- Enhance the integration between the timetabling system and QMplus e.g. allowing updates to display automatically and enable syncing to mobile devices.
- Publish a new 'Enhancement framework' for e-learning that includes a minimum standard for all modules of both administrative AND teaching materials as well as practical suggestions for enhancing materials and empowering learners.
- Encourage the use of QMplus for the storage of interim grades which can then be presented to students with their feedback through *Gradesplus*
- Continue to promote e-portfolios as an alternate form of assessment.
- Focus on functional improvements to our Q-Review service particularly around quality of audio and video and ability to capture the writing board.
- Promote to teaching staff the benefits of inclusion of Lecture capture recordings into online modules and the ways they can be incorporated in smart ways.
- Work with IT services to improve the integration of external tools where appropriate, e.g office 365 and Google docs.
- Develop our existing online resources for students to include more self-directed resources in formats requested by our users e.g. video/screencasts and develop guides which can be customised by Schools/Institutes.
- Better promote training/induction opportunities for students at the start of the year.
- Develop learning materials for staff on basic elements of good blended learning module/course design.
- Profile the benefits of using QMplus Hub for such things as reflecting in an e-portfolio, collecting evidence, sharing work with colleagues and supporting group work and interaction.
- Develop a network of volunteer student e-learning ambassadors who can help promote the 'less well known' features that students can use in QMplus Hub and QMplus.
- Overall shift of emphasis in piloting and trials to facilitating groupwork and Q-Review enhancements

4 Forthcoming plans

The following activity is currently underway or planned for the near future.

- QMplus upgrade in July 2017. The new version features enhanced messaging and notifications functionality and a brand new theme which has taken on board feedback from this survey and the recent staff survey of e-learning.
- Trial of the new Moodle mobile app in Summer/Autumn 2017.
- Brand new fully responsive and mobile friendly QMplus theme to be launched in July 2017.
- Q-Review upgrade in Summer 2017 – new version includes some quality improvements, better integration and easier editing tools.
- A second bookable video recording booth to be established at the Whitechapel campus to be launched in summer 2017 enabling easy production of high quality video content.
- Close work with the AV department and Estates to ensure that the minimum standard for all new teaching rooms includes high quality audio capture and the latest video capture technology.
- Development of a new enhancement framework which will include a new 'baseline' for all online modules/courses.
- Launch of a suite of short online courses in September 2017 for staff on key elements of e-learning and pedagogy.

5 Conclusion

The 2016/17 QMplus survey has provided an extremely valuable and informative snapshot of the primary tool provided for e-learning at Queen Mary and as such will help guide its development over the next 2 years.

1827 students took the time to tell us how they felt about a tool that they clearly feel passionately about. Not only did they complete the mandatory questions but large numbers answered the optional questions including 627 who told us how they felt about training and induction into QMplus.

We believe the healthy growth in responses to the survey may be due to smart targeting of students through a branded campaign (the cover graphic of this summary) within QMplus and via our network of learning technologists and administrators. It may also have been due to the prize!

It was also pleasing to see so many students from our Joint programmes in China willing to contribute to the ongoing development of our learning environment. On the whole the survey has delivered a positive message about QMplus from our primary users.

5.1 Improved sense of usefulness across the board

The most pleasing trend that has emerged from this year's survey is the clear and significant increase in awareness of the tools and functionality available within QMplus compared to the previous surveys, the sense of usefulness identified with the training and support options and the look and feel of the system.

Of particular note is the increase in awareness of the tools within QMplus Hub. On the other hand, the diversity of teaching materials and tools available are still not being reflected in everyday use so we need to do more to show teachers how these features can be utilised.

Of course it is not all positive news as we received strong messages about features not working well such as Q-Review and timetables – particularly on mobile devices as well as the myriad of logins required impedes access. Our students want smoother, more integrated learning experiences and they want the kind of quality they expect from widely used commercial tools. This remains one of our strongest challenges but will remain a focus.

5.2 Mobile

The rise in mobile device use continues and our survey revealed how these devices (including laptops) are now the most commonly owned devices and the ones they use most often to access QMplus. Correspondingly they are asking for a better mobile experience in terms of learning materials (e.g. downloadable e-books), authentication (not logging in multiple times) and design - even going as far as to suggest a dedicated QMplus App.

The features most desired on mobile devices are integrated timetables e.g. that synch to their phones, alerts and notifications that appear like any other mobile alert, from QMplus and they'd like to see some kind of non-commercial Chat app where they can communicate with colleagues on coursework, groupwork etc.