

How does the decision-making process in university choices vary based on age, gender and ethnicity?

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Literature and Policy context

- Quality of information and information availability criticised in HE White Paper (2016)
- Type of information sought and valued by students much discussed, with limited common findings
- One size fits all approach not possible with IAG and to support student choices and decision-making appropriately

Setting of the research

- Niche provider, associate faculty of post-1992 university
- Applied science and business management Fd, BSc and M programmes – Animal and Land, Sports, Equine
- Also Veterinary Nursing provision- RCVS accredited
- FE provision mirrors HE provision in key areas through BTEC and Access to HE programmes

Why was this a project of interest?

- Decision-making research focus on larger institutions
- Some research looking at WP groups in isolation
- With massification of HE, what encourages or deters a range of “non-traditional” students to pursue HE studies?
- How do they understand the purposes, expectations and demands of HE?
- Which information is accessed by whom, and how can this be changed?

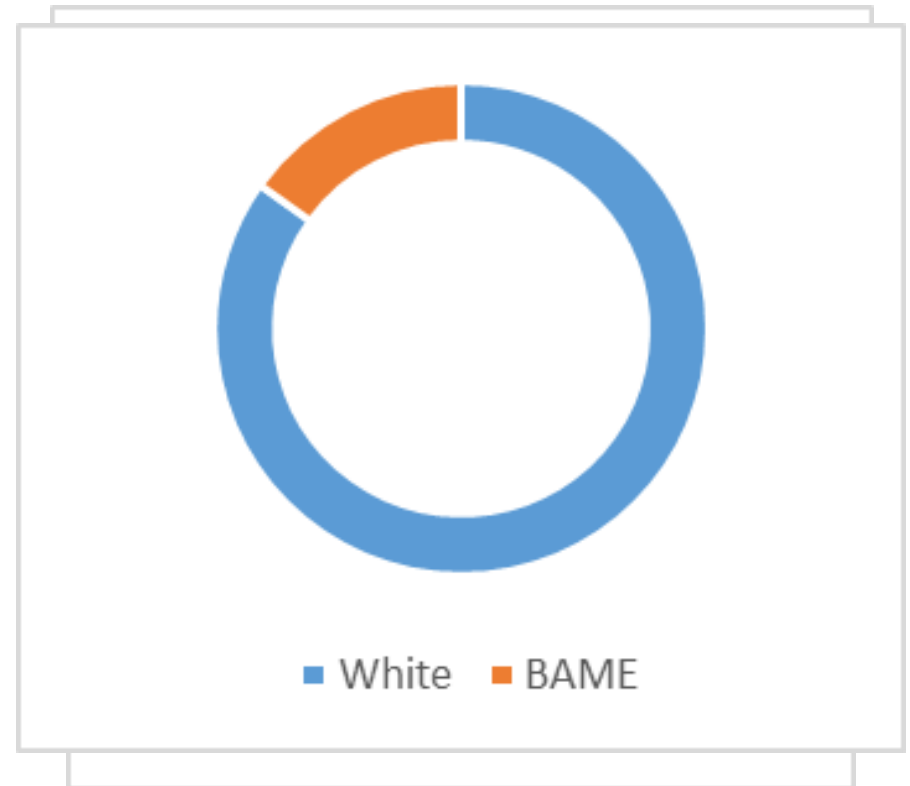
Approach

- Questionnaire

- (Individual brief interviews)

Findings- Sample Population demographics

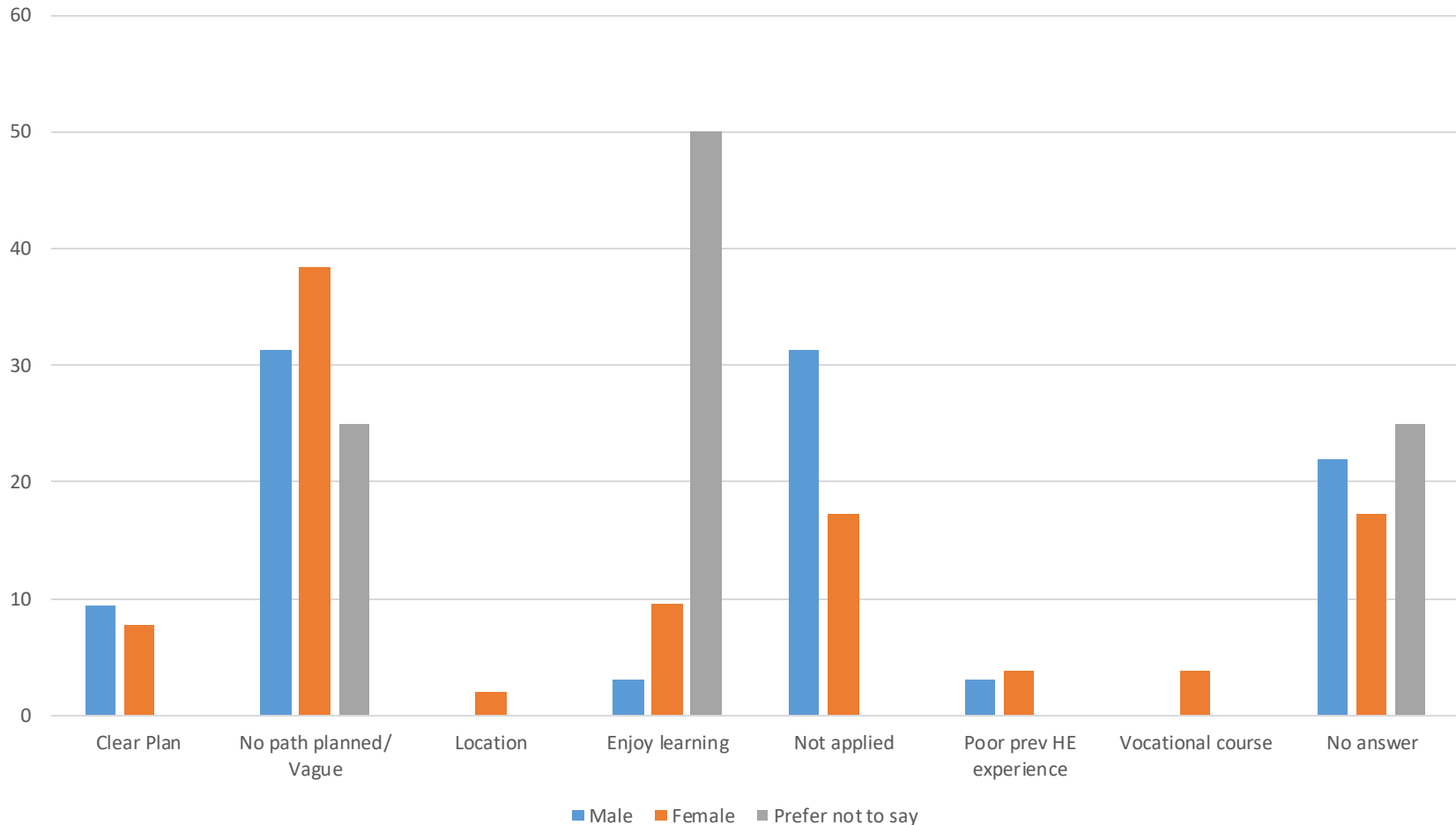
- 88 Participants
- 21 Access to Higher Education courses
- 16 Subsidiary Diploma (BTEC)
- 51 BTEC Diploma



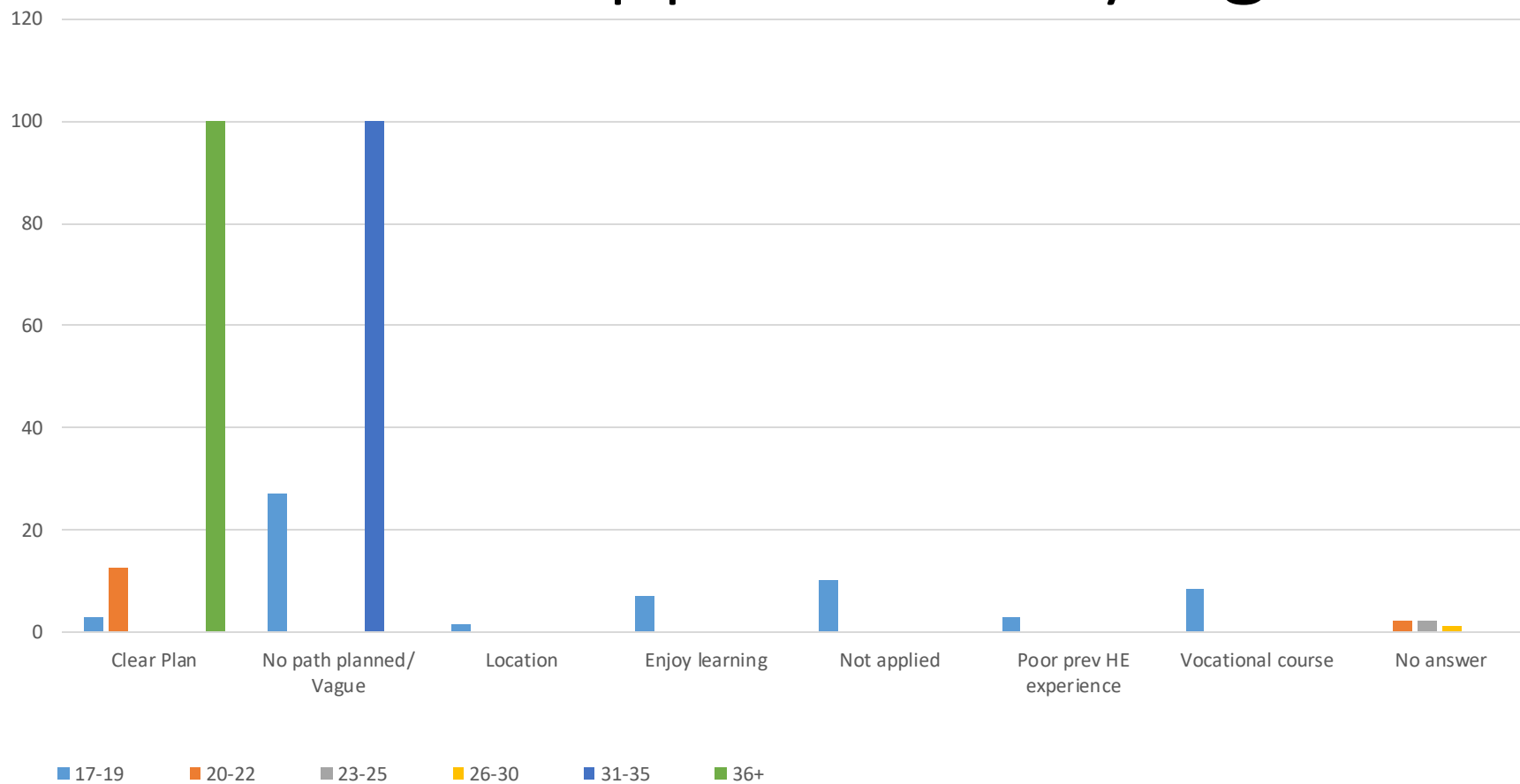
Findings- themes emerging overall

- Financial impact of studies biggest worry and biggest deterrent
- Engagement with HE to not be disadvantaged
- Uncertainty surrounding purpose, demands and value of HE participation
- Lack of understanding- can't raise aspirations?

Reasons for application by Gender



Reasons for application by Age



Don't want to be on back foot

- T (18) “because you can't get a decent job without university” S(17) “well you can get a decent job without university, as long as you have twenty years' experience”
- E(19) : “it's good to have a degree. Doesn't really matter what it is in, but having a degree is a good thing. Getting much better jobs. And there isn't much else to do...”
- C(17): “loads of people just go because it's the done thing”

Purpose and Value of HE

- W (17) “so do you pay 40 grand to learn out of a textbook at big unis then? That would definitely put me off, if I had been looking to go in the first place.”
- D (17) “not knowing where it will take me”
- S (18) “not knowing what I can actually do with a degree, so is **quite hard to get motivated** to apply and actually turn up for the course.”

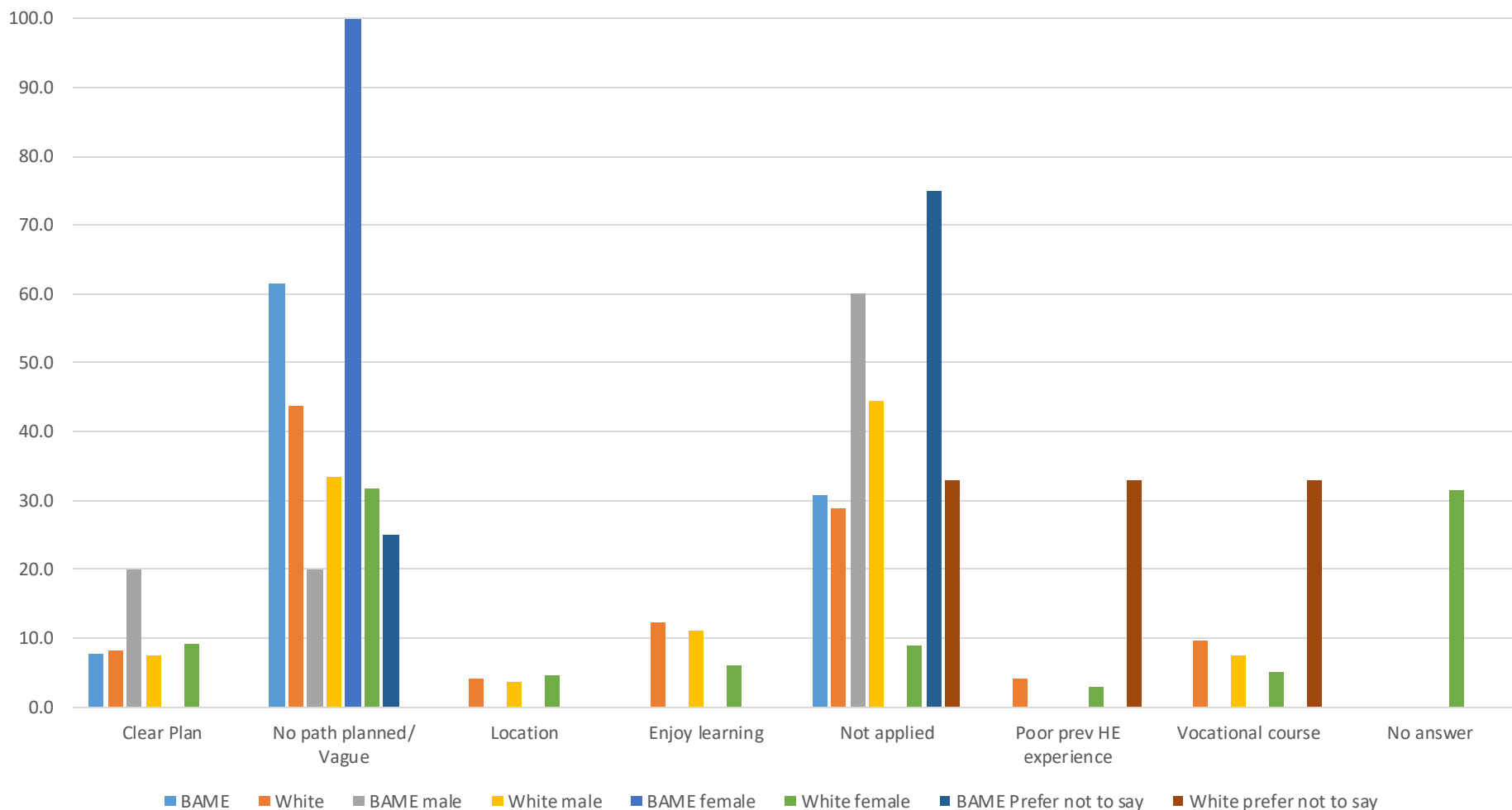
Mature students' focus

- C(23) “my goal is to come here, do the degree, then go back home and offer sports therapy and play rugby. By the time I am finished, I might not even be playing anymore. You have to travel for miles for a sports therapist in [], so I really want to bring that back to that area, as a qualified sports therapist. And having to compromise with my rugby career to get the degree adds pressure on me.”

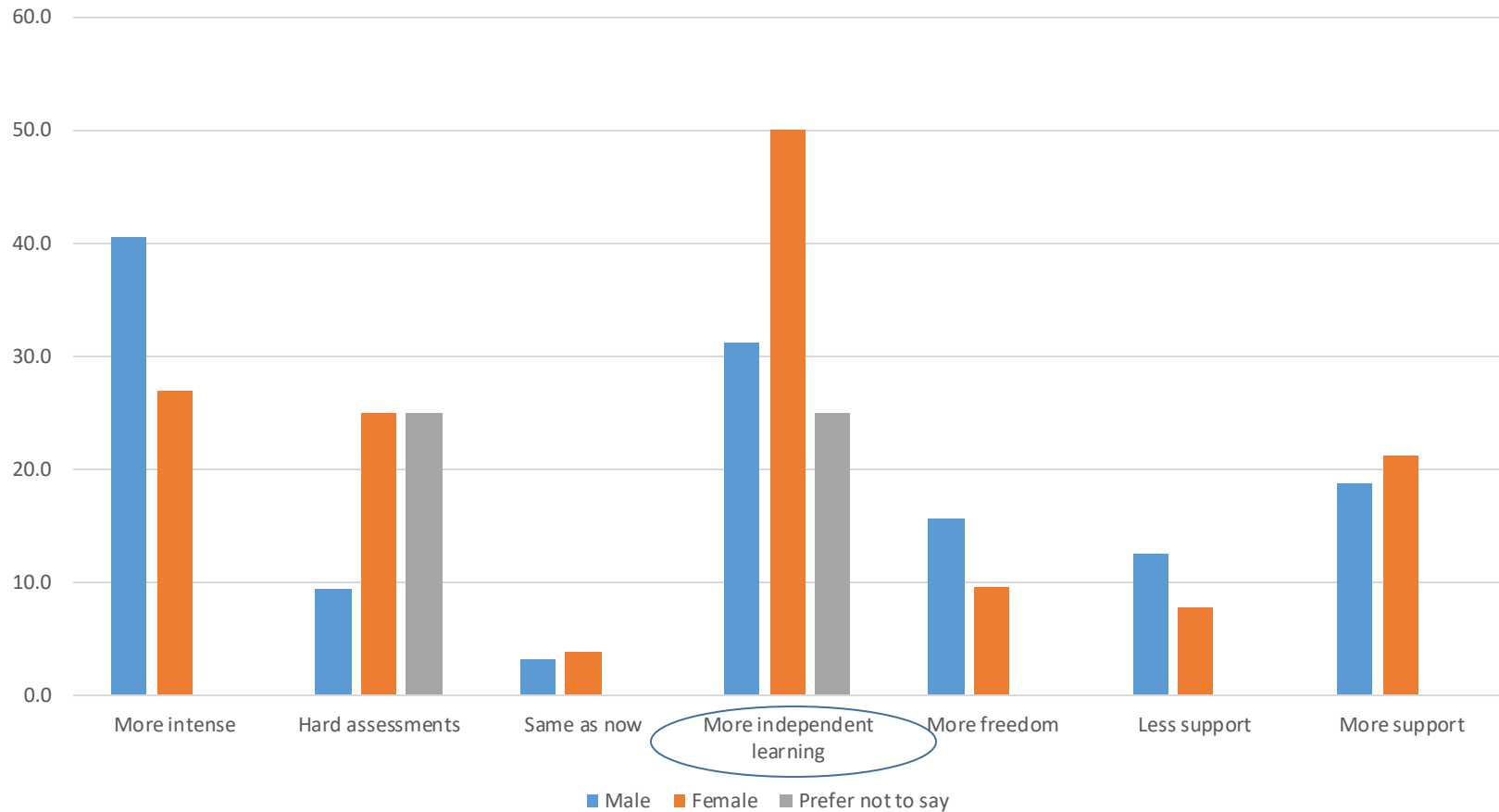
Gender and Ethnicity Distribution

Ethnicity / Gender	%
BAME female	7.0
White female	51.2
BAME male	5.8
White male	31.4
BAME Not declared	2.3
White Not declared	2.3

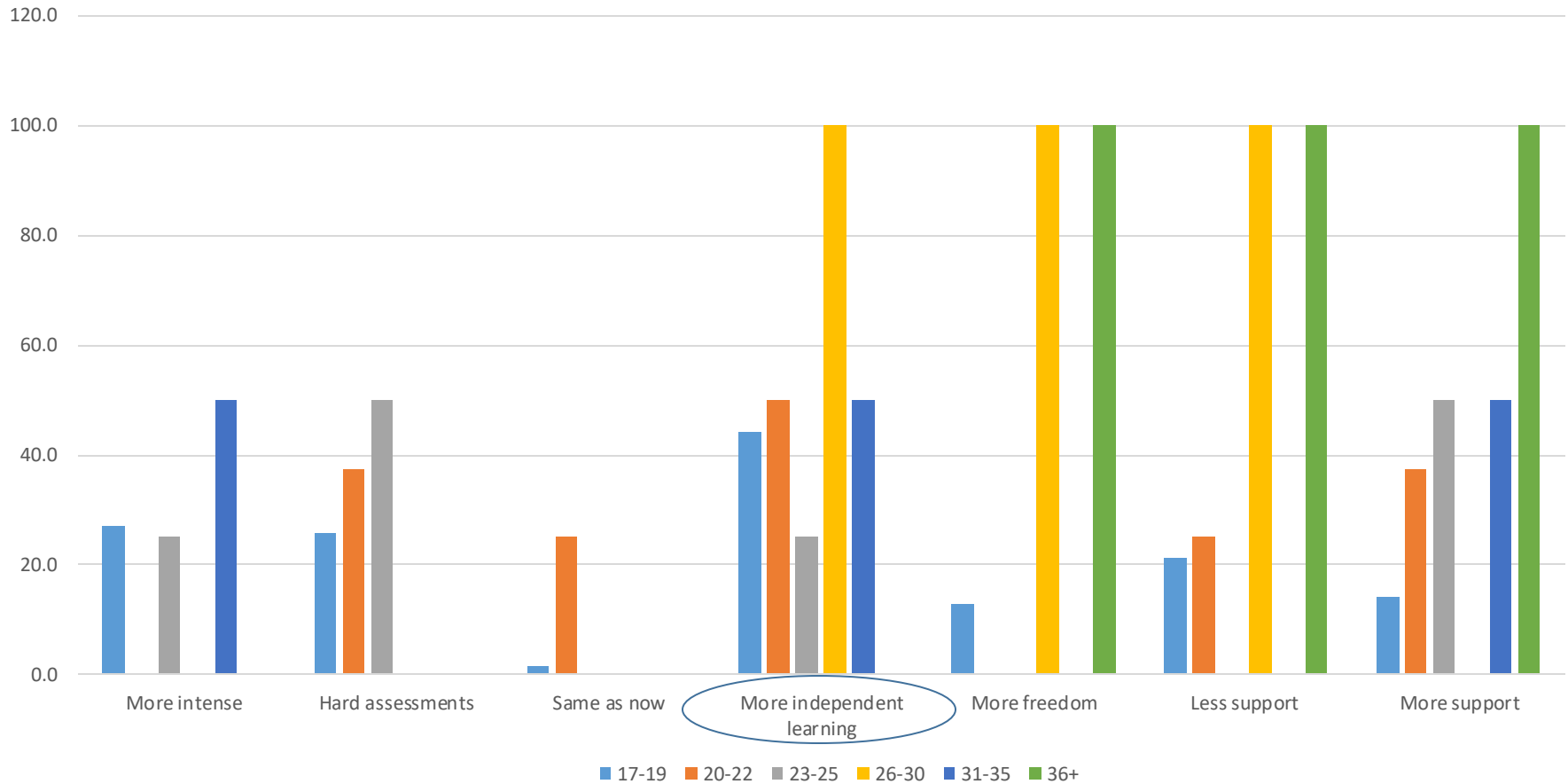
Reason for application Ethnicity & Gender



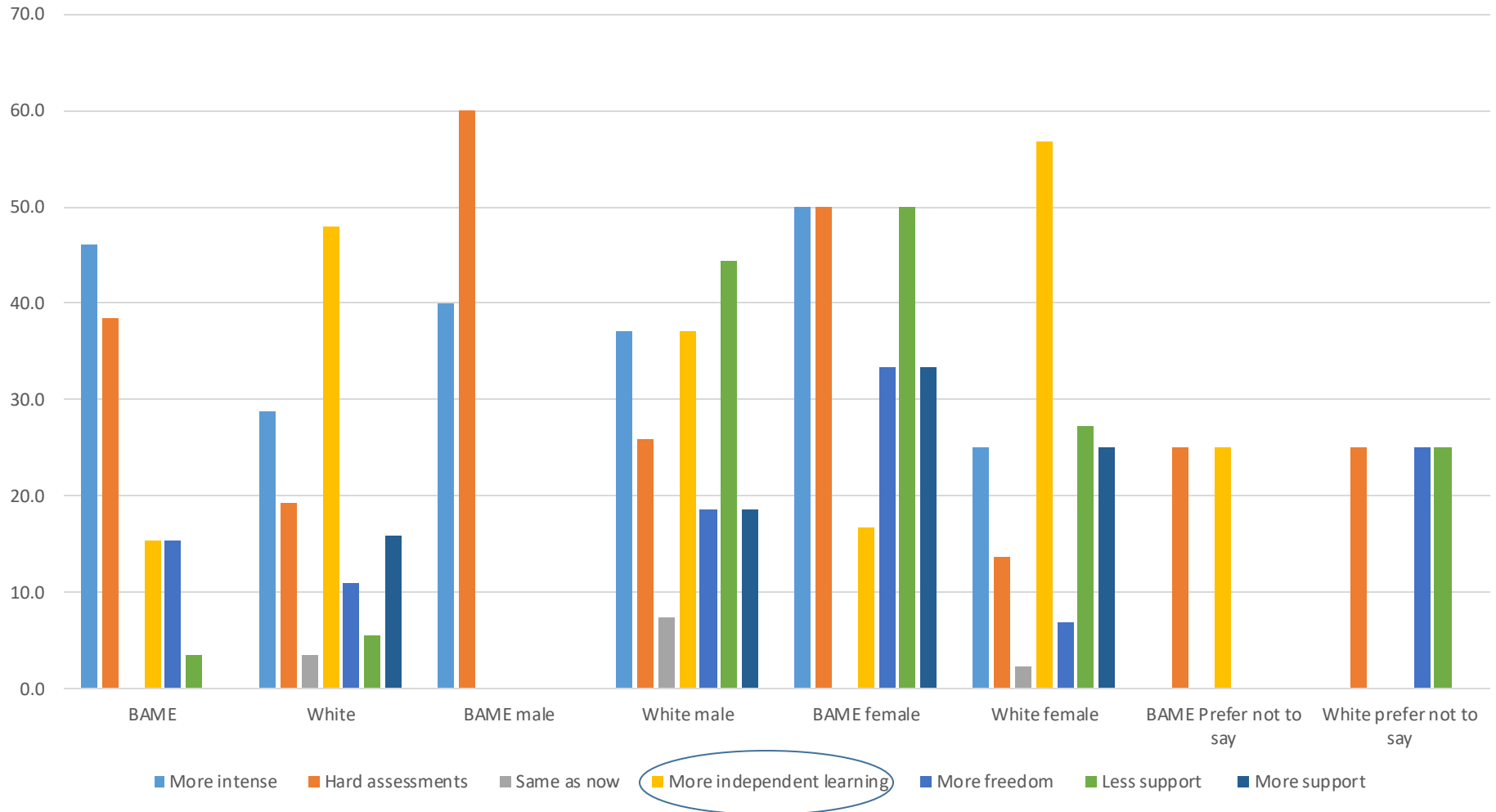
Expectations by Gender



Expectation by Age



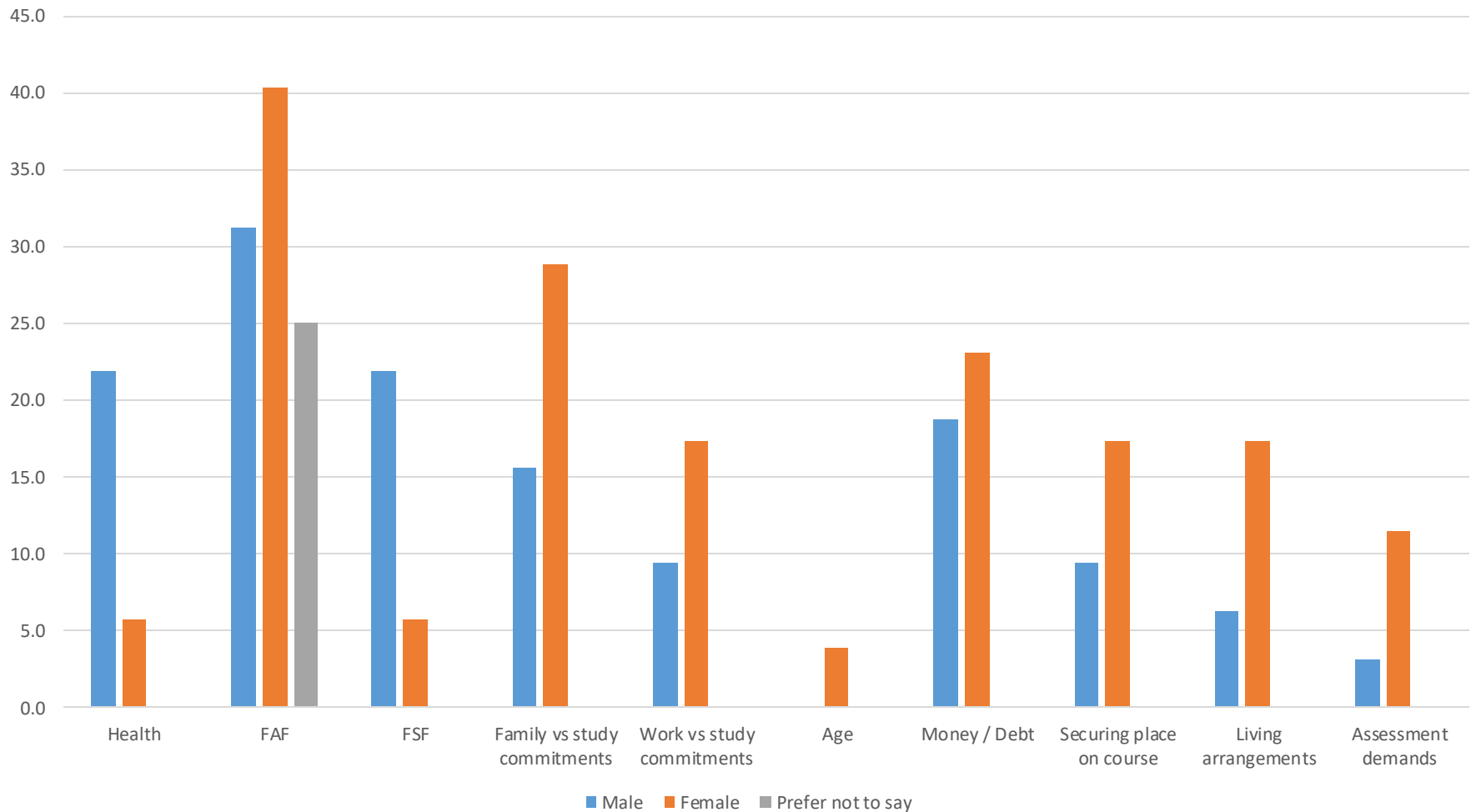
Expectations by Gender and Ethnicity



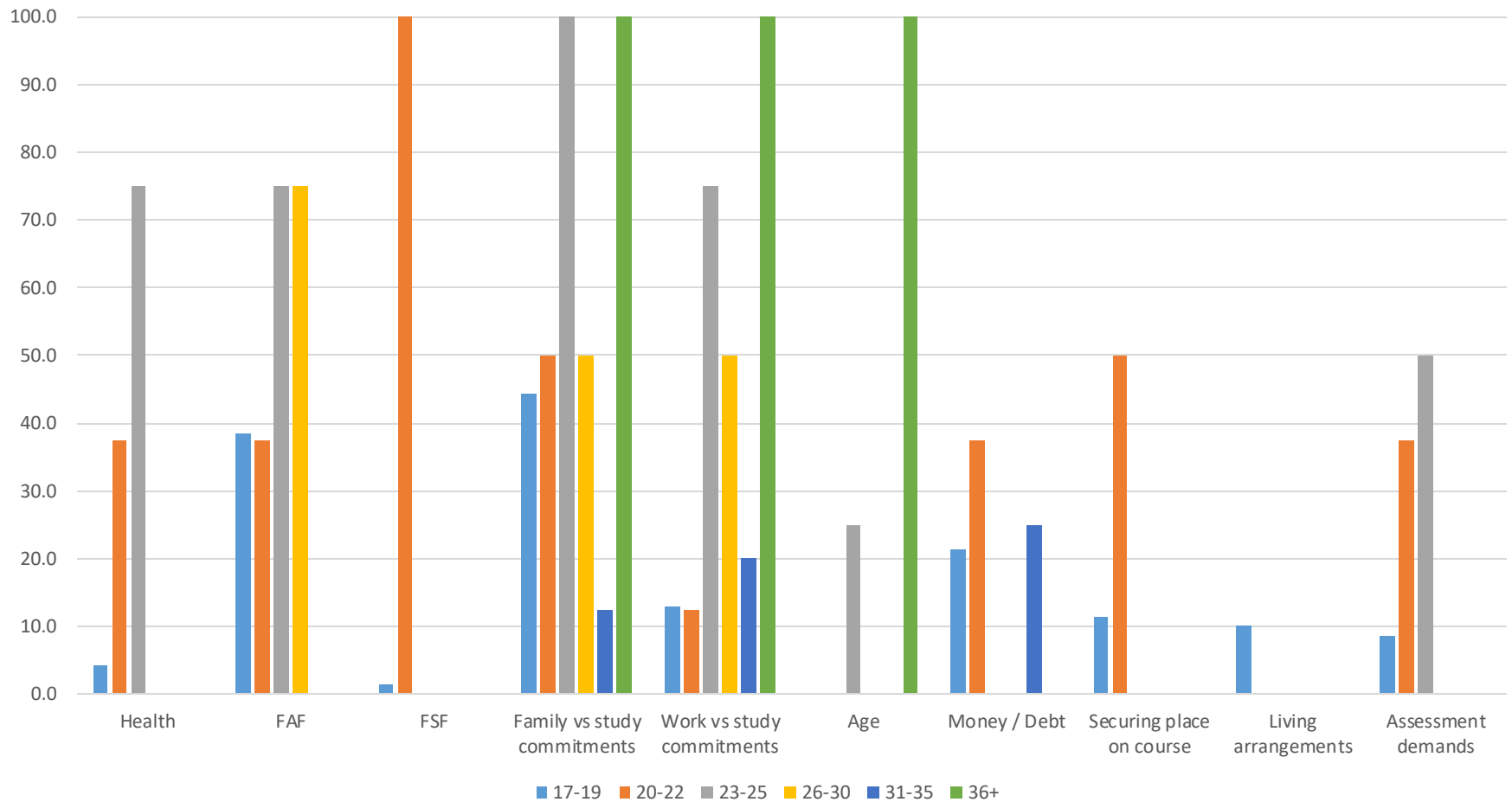
Independent Learning- Interpretations

- F (18) “you won’t get help unless you actually ask for it. There be too many of you for tutors to chase you pick up on the fact that you are struggling. And it can be hard to ask for help.”
- S (18) “they don’t give you as much help. You have to go and look at books and work it out yourself. That of the reasons I don’t want to go.”
- S (17): depends what university go to. Posh ones won’t help you...

Worries by Gender



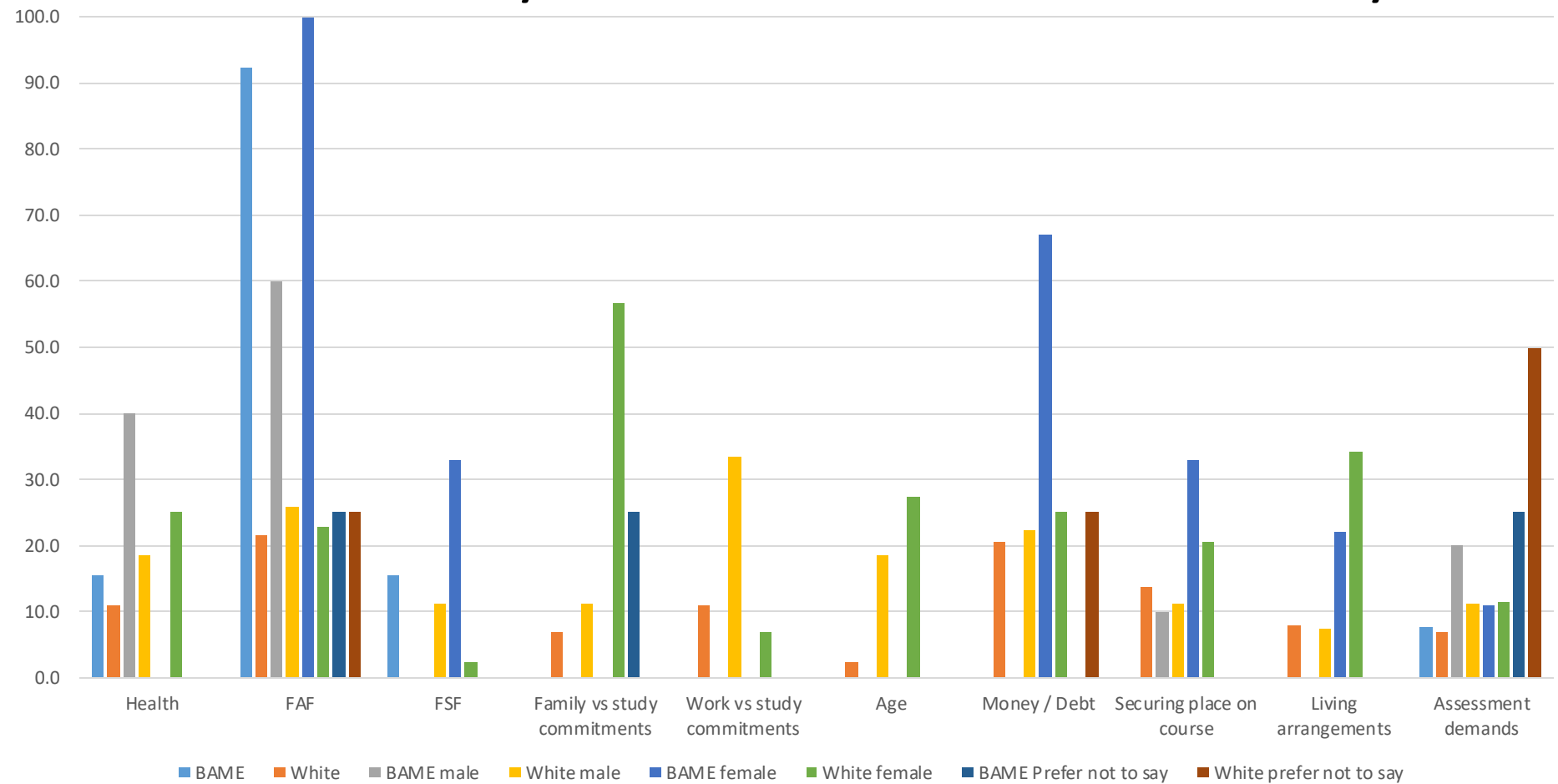
Worries by Age



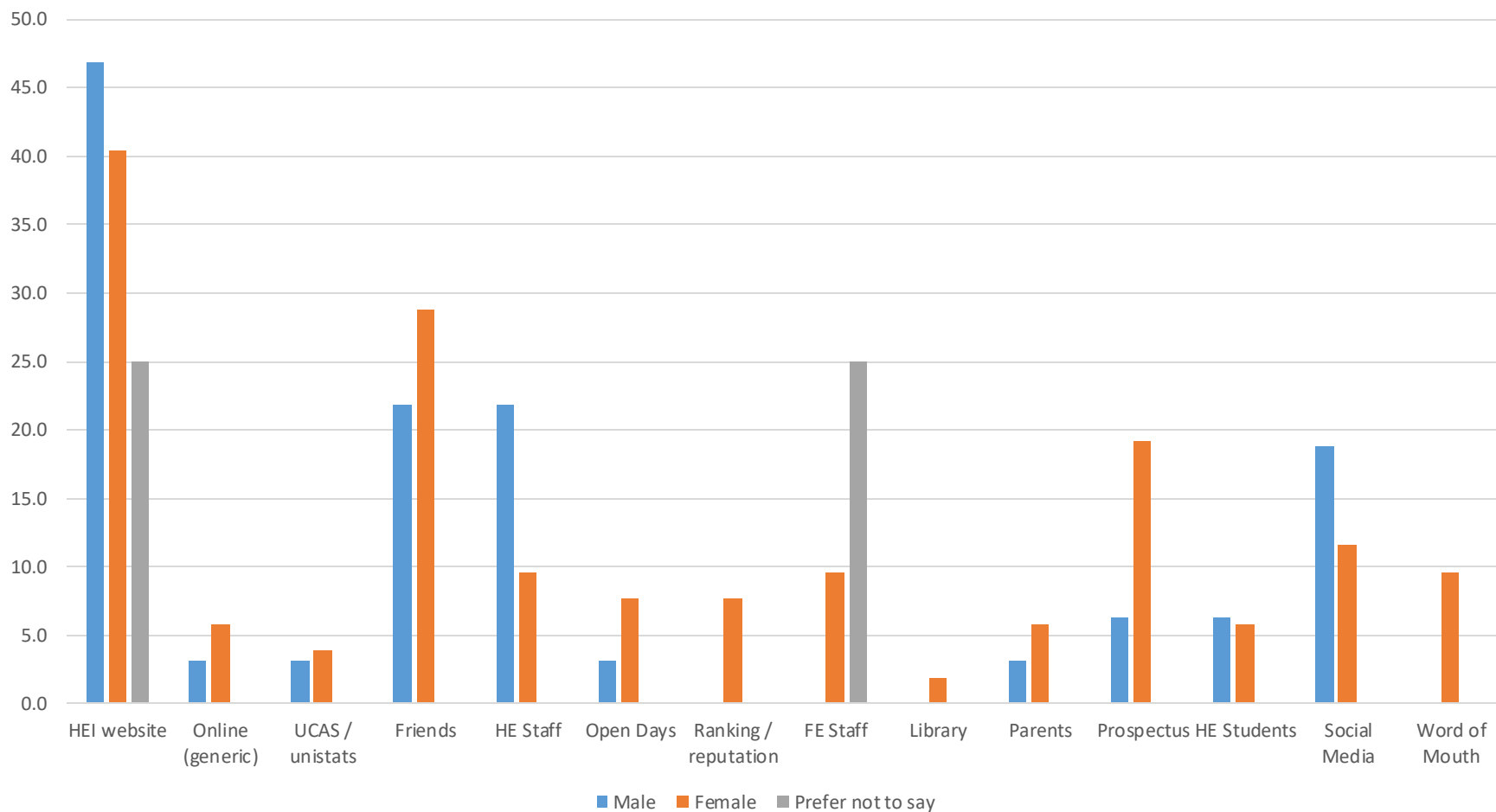
Mature student worries

- C(23) “I feel like I am not good enough, just cause there’s a language barrier between me and the paper, and I am rubbish. So that scares me a lot about HE, and sometimes I don’t think I should even try to get a degree, but go out and get experience.”
- D(31) “mine is balancing, so at the moment I am balancing family commitments, self-care and studying, which is hard, but I am scared it could become unmanageable in HE. SO when I get home, I find it hard to be doing this, cause there are more immediate things that I need to do. And I am worried about uni, cause it is obviously harder than this course. I am worried how I am going to get everything done.”

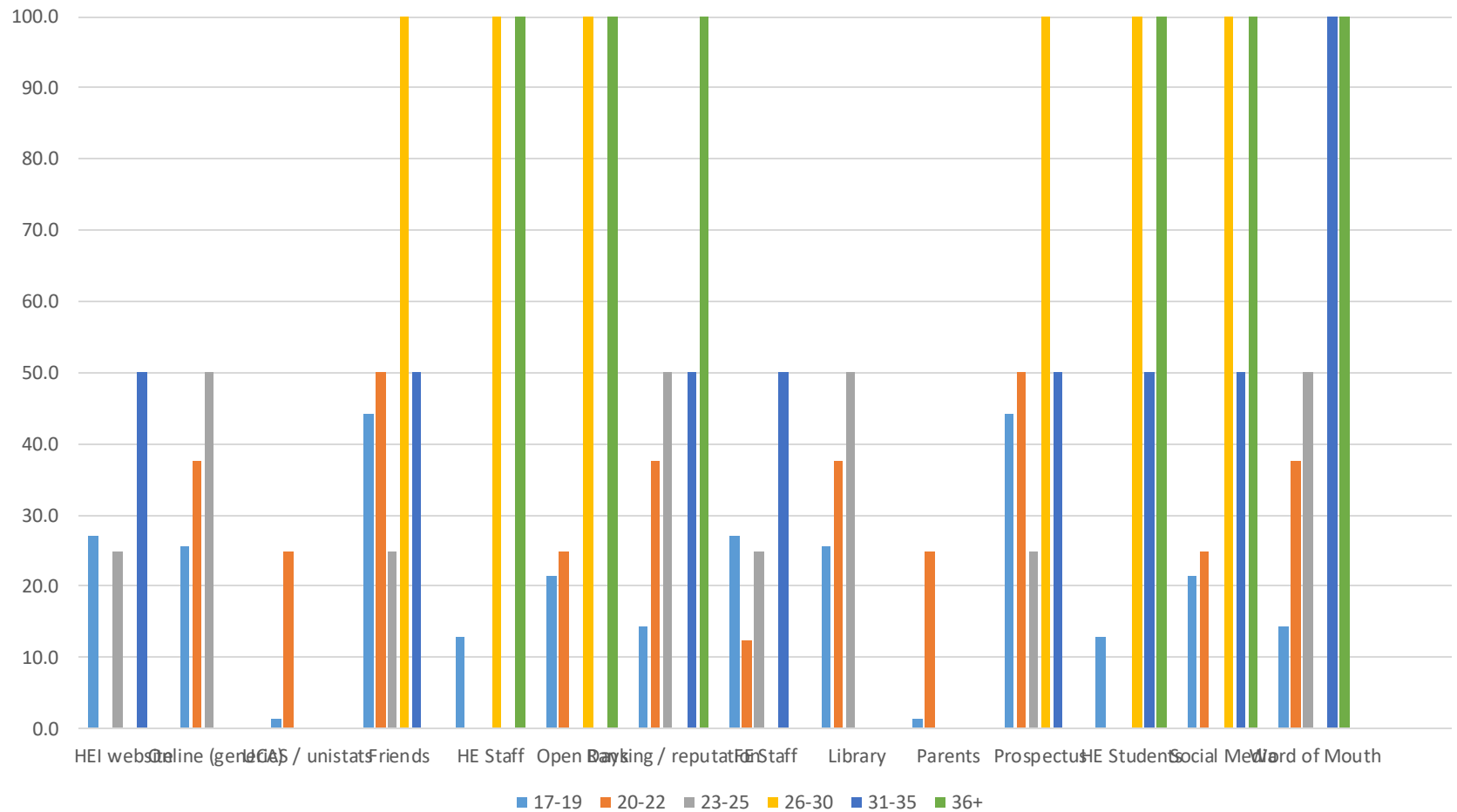
Worries by Gender and Ethnicity



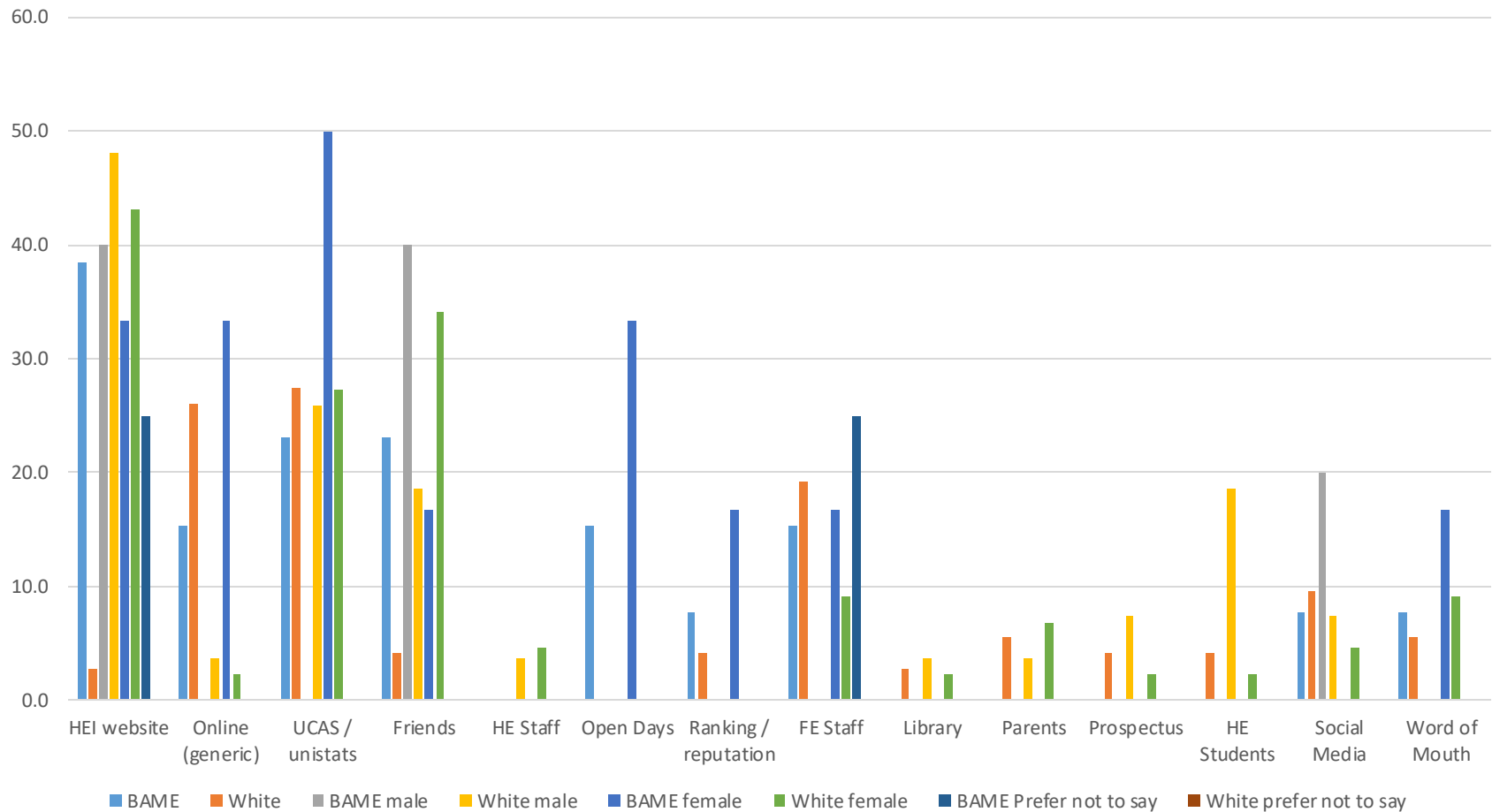
Information by Gender



Information accessed by Age



Information by Gender and Ethnicity



Preliminary Conclusions

- HE perceived as “extended compulsory education” with more freedom and less support
- Limited understanding- limited focus and motivation- limited active engagement
- Need to raise understanding of immediate and longer term influences and benefits of HE for the individual