

Research ExeQutive



UNIVERSITY OF
EXETER

Students as
**Change
Agents**

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER
**STUDENTS'
GUILD**



Q - Step

**A step-change in
quantitative social
science skills**

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Nuffield Foundation
ESRC and HEFCE

Project Report

Research ExeQtive Project Report

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Available online: www.socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/q-step/

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Analysis of Need

The University of Exeter, like all universities, is a vast network brimming with information. Knowledge is produced and scrutinised by academic researchers, disseminated to students in lectures and seminars and measured by formal assessments. These processes are monitored by the Departments and Colleges and by the Senate, and the operation of the University as a whole is overseen by the Council, Management Team and professional services. All this is scrutinised by the Guild, through the Academic Representation system, Guild Council and Sabbatical Officers, whilst a proliferation of student societies and publications circulate information on a more decentralised basis. In a very real sense, the University is nothing but a vast conglomerate of information relationships.

However, effective information management is needed to put these relationships to the best possible use. Most individuals will not come into contact with most information, particularly in relation to the needs and interests of Exeter students. Lecturers have contact with students in relation to their own fields of study, the Guild is mainly exposed to practical concerns about University life, and on-campus businesses are aware of students mainly as consumers. There is currently no process of unified information-sharing which treats student preferences as a holistic information source and aggregates questions of interest from all stakeholders.

A process of this kind has the potential to explore relationships between aspects of the student experience not usually compared, and to act as a link between academic and market research efforts. Particularly as a student-led process, it would help improve the engagement of students with the University's management, and encourage social science students in particular to become active in producing collaborative research. It would help the University to become the “living laboratory”¹ that it aspires to be.

¹ See <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/sustainability/education/campuslivinglab/>

Initial Idea

As a student of social sciences, including quantitative research methods, and an academic representative, I became intrigued by the many different systems of information at work within the University. At the same time as reps such as myself were gathering information about student preferences, professional services and the Colleges were investigating similar issues for their own purposes, and academics with an interest in social systems were conducting independent research inside and outside of the University.

The 2014 establishment of the University of Exeter Q-Step Centre, a body intended to improve quantitative skills among social science students,² inspired me to imagine a student-driven research tool to bind together these various interests: a randomly selected panel or “jury” of Exeter students, incentivised to complete a series of anonymous “omnibus” surveys consisting of questions of interest to a variety of University stakeholders, and informed by the error-minimising advice of the Q-Step academics. This panel would have three main uses:

- 1) Providing the Guild and SSLCs with information about how students feel their university experience could be improved
- 2) Providing the University's Management Team and professional services with market research on the preferences and desires of student “consumers”
- 3) Providing lecturers, postgraduate students and undergraduate Q-Step students with a chance to conduct research of academic interest, and with a teaching aid for quantitative research methods and data analysis modules

I decided to run a pilot study of a student research panel, in collaboration with the Q-Step Centre, in order to discover whether my idea is viable as a long-term University institution.

² See www.socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/q-step/aboutus/

Development and Design

I initiated my project under the umbrella of “Students as Change Agents”, a scheme which aims to help students run independent initiatives to improve the University experience. Having decided to combine research interests from various stakeholders for the sake of knowledge connectivity, I set about contacting some of these stakeholders, including the Guild, Exposé, and the College of Social Sciences and International Studies' Associate Dean for Research and Knowledge Transfer,³ to investigate whether they would fine the research panel useful if established. The key stakeholders which emerged from this investigation were the Guild's Academic Representation system and the newly established Q-Step Centre.

I attended a Q-Step staff meeting in order to explain my idea more thoroughly. The staff were receptive and agreed to provide me with advice and support in exchange for the use of my panel as a tool for teaching and student-led research. Ben Street, VP Education of the Guild, echoed this support and ventured that the scheme could simultaneously be used to improve academic reps' knowledge of the students they represent. As a Subject Chair and College Officer, I was well aware of the difficulties of obtaining information from students, and had intended that one of the main purposes of the research panel be to improve the flow of information in this area.

I met with Emily Barrett, Student Engagement Assistant with CSSIS, in order to work out the practical details of my project. We identified two key problems to solve: obtaining a list of students from which to select a random sample, and creating an incentive for students selected to respond to the questionnaire invitations. Emily undertook to solve the former issue; for the latter, I decided to apply to the University's Annual Fund for cash incentives, and to consult with the Q-Step academics to consider non-monetary options.

³ Professor Anne Barlow, Law School: www.socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/law/staff/barlow/

I then set about designing the brand for my research panel. I agreed with Emily that it would be beneficial to incorporate branding elements from both the Q-Step Centre, to emphasise my close involvement with them, and the “Exeter brand”, exemplified by institutions such as Exeposé,⁴ Exepert⁵ and XpressionFM.⁶ I decided in the end to name my project the “Research ExeQtive”, making its purpose clear at the same time as incorporating the letters “Q” and “X”. I Designed a logo to represent the panel and circulated it amongst interested parties to general satisfaction.

Emily and I contacted Abigail Dixon, Communications officer at the University's Communication and Marketing Services,⁷ to request access to a list of all student email addresses. The University operates an open email service, where each student's email address is identifiable and contactable by any service user. Our rationale, therefore, was that student email addresses are public to all students anyway, so there should not be a privacy issue associated with providing me with a list. Abigail contacted Caroline Dominey, the University's Records Manager, who agreed that I could have access to a list of email addresses, provided that no additional information was provided in the list, that I use the list only for the purpose of this project, and that I delete the list as soon as it is no longer needed. Throughout this project I have stayed true to these conditions.

At this point I was approached by Neil French, the University's Marketing Research Manager,⁸ who requested a meeting with me to discuss the University's rules around surveys and to provide advice on making the surveys as effective as possible. At this meeting, Neil informed me that I would not be allowed to send survey invitations to third year students as this may detract from University attempts to encourage them to complete the National Student Survey. He also revealed that a similar research panel was trialled a couple of years ago, but suffered from disappointingly low response rates.

4 See www.exepose.com/

5 See www.exeter.ac.uk/careers/research/exepert/

6 See www.xpression.fm/

7 See www.exeter.ac.uk/departments/communication/press/whoweare/abigaildixon/

8 See www.exeter.ac.uk/departments/communication/marketing/whoweare/neil/

This survey, however, had three crucial differences to the ExeQtive proposal which I have developed: it was non-randomised, relying upon voluntary membership and therefore not necessarily representative, it relied upon prize draw entry as a financial incentive rather than unconditional token gifts as the ExeQtive would, and no repeated attempts at contact were made. As I found out later, all three of these factors would make the ExeQtive model more viable as a research tool than this previous attempt.

Neil's final request was that the ExeQtive restrict itself to selecting and surveying students from one of the Colleges. He suggested that he would find this scale of survey more useful, as he already operates several University-level surveys and would have few questions to add to the ExeQtive omnibus. After consultation with the Guild and Q-Step Centre, however, I decided to retain the University-scale sample of my original proposal. I knew from my experience as a rep that many issues faced by students transcend the boundaries of Colleges. The Academic Representation System therefore requires a research tool which can effectively represent the views of all Exeter students and transcend SSLC and College boundaries. I therefore decided to accept that professional services would have little use for my project, focusing instead upon delivering services to academic staff and student representatives.

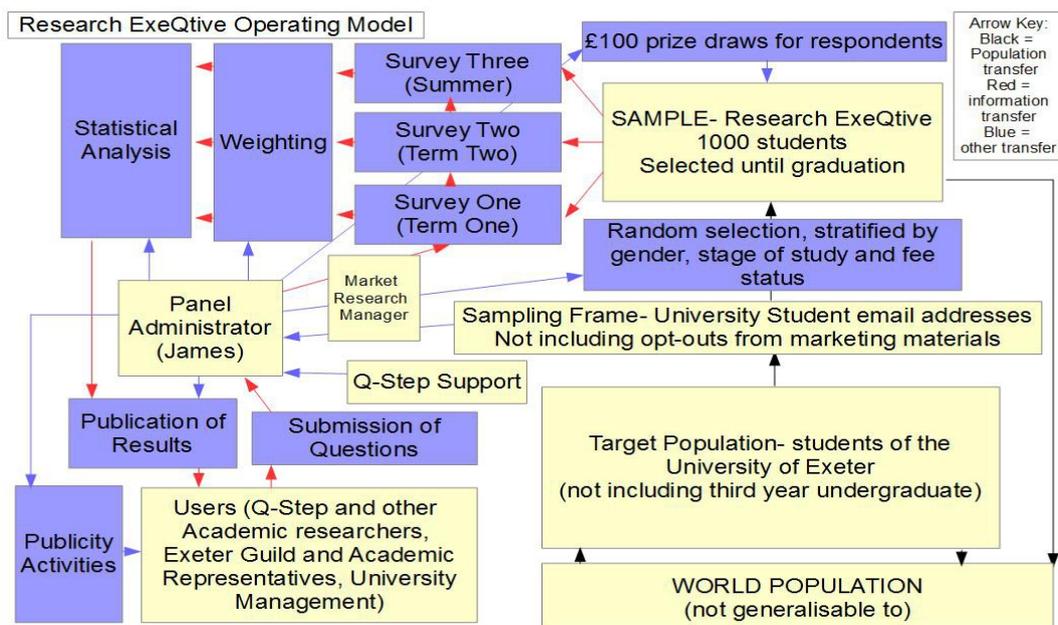


Illustration 1: Operating Model for the Research ExeQtive at the end of the Design phase

Pilot Study

At this point I set about consulting the staff of the Q-Step Centre in preparation for a pilot of the ExeQtive model. I decided to use this opportunity to conduct my dissertation research, which, exploring the relations between psychology and political preferences, bore a strong resemblance to an omnibus survey due to containing questions with no clear connecting theme. Using the “natural” opportunity of the 2015 General Election, I planned a survey consisting of voting intention and political compass questions along with a set of questions testing psychological disposition.

In order to establish the psychological questions, I paid a visit to Dr Darren Schreiber,⁹ a lecturer whose interest in political psychology mirrors the focus of my research. He suggested that I incorporate a psychological scale, consisting of a series of statements where agreement or disagreement is measured to produce an average score representing a respondent's disposition. After doing some research, I concluded that the Need for Closure Scale¹⁰ would best suit my research interests, and located a shortened 15-item version to use in my questionnaire.

I then arranged a meeting with Dr Travis Coan, a political lecturer with the Q-Step Centre, to discuss research methodology. Travis emphasised the importance of a random representative sample and suggested that the most effective ways of increasing survey response are token monetary gifts given to all the sample regardless of participation and repeated attempts to contact the sample and ask them to complete the survey. Travis recommended a textbook on survey methodology,¹¹ which I acquired and read, using its recommendations to design my questionnaire. Crucially, I learned that a successful survey depends upon establishing a relationship of trust and shared social identity between researcher and participants; rather than emphasising the financial incentive for

9 See www.socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/politics/staff/schreiber/biography/

10 See www.terpconnect.umd.edu/~hannahk/NFC_Scale.html

11 Dillman, D. A. *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*, 2nd Ed. (2007), New York City: Wiley

taking part, then, I decided to generate a sense of obligation by providing unconditional gifts and explicitly identifying myself as a member of the student body.

Having designed my survey, I began to create it using LimeSurvey, a free survey application recommended by the lecturers of the Q-Step Centre.¹² I sent a draft survey to all stakeholders with whom I had corresponded and adopted several of their suggestions to make my questionnaire as effective as possible. I selected a random sample of 1200 student email addresses,¹³ and, being unable to judge the students' year of study, sent it to Neil French, who removed all third-years to produce a sample of 1020 students. Having prepared my survey and sample, I made an application for £1000 to the University of Exeter Annual Fund on the behalf of the Q-Step Centre. In my application I emphasised the importance of information connectivity within the University and highlighted the exciting opportunities for students to use the scheme to investigate topics for the benefit of their own research projects. I concluded that the Research ExeQtive has the potential to improve all aspects of the Exeter experience; academic, pastoral and social. I requested £1000 in order to provide a token reward of £1 to each student in my sample¹⁴ in the form of an Amazon gift token; a small payment, but enough to purchase a music download and create a social obligation to complete the survey. My application was declined; as feedback the Annual Fund commented that the project was worthwhile but did not require monetary incentives to operate.

Having prepared all other aspects of the survey, I tried to seek approval from the College's Ethics Committee.¹⁵ As an undergraduate researcher, I would normally be held ethically accountable by my dissertation supervisor; however, as I conducted this research during my second year of study, I had no supervisor. I contacted Dr Hannah Farrimond,¹⁶ a member of the Committee, to

12 See www.limesurvey.org/en/

13 Using the true random number generator www.random.org for a genuinely random sample

14 Had I received the funding I would have randomly removed 20 students from my sample to produce a sample of exactly 1000. As I did not receive funding, however, there was no need to do this and I retained the sample of 1020.

15 See www.intranet.exeter.ac.uk/socialsciences/ethicscommittee/

16 See <http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/sociology/staff/farrimond/>

find out more. She replied that it would not be necessary for my project to be scrutinised by the Ethics Committee as my research subjects are not a “high risk” population and my survey does not contain any particularly sensitive questions. She recommended that I continue to consult the Q-Step Centre for advice on both ethical considerations and methodology.

On the 31st of March 2015, the first email was sent to my sample. In order to demonstrate the project's place within the Q-Step Centre, the mailings were sent from qstep@exeter.ac.uk by Mariann Sarquis-Sepulveda, the Centre's Administrator.¹⁷ Mariann received the mailing list and messages from me and delivered them to the students of my sample, ensuring that attempted replies to the emails were sent to my email address for my attention. In order to maximise individual privacy, the email addresses were inserted within the email's blind carbon copy field.

Response rates to the questionnaire were low, at 20.4% (208 usable responses out of the sample of 1020). This can be partially explained by the absence of token gift incentives, partially by the lengthy nature of the Need for Closure Scale questions, and partially by the large volume of email communications which students are required to process, leading to respondent fatigue. The low response rate is not as much of a problem for election surveys as for other forms of research, as Dillman notes: an election survey is likely to attract responses from those who are already likely to vote, and an excessively high response rate may result in invalid data as people without well-developed political views may struggle to synthesise them purely for the sake of completing the survey. This is undesirable, and hence in this case the response rate is relatively unproblematic; however, a higher response rate would be needed to produce authoritative findings in future research.

Having closed my survey at midnight on the 7th of May, I downloaded the responses onto the software package IBM SPSS Statistics 22, in order to analyse and explore the information within.

¹⁷ See www.socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/q-step/staff/

Results and Findings

I began my analysis of the data set by weighting it according to gender. This helped to minimise any errors resulting from the low response rate by making the data set more representative of the University population.

Illustration 2 shows which political parties the respondents were most likely to vote for. It demonstrates that the Conservative Party is most popular among Exeter students, followed by the Green and Labour parties. These results are similar to those of a far larger survey simultaneously conducted by Exeposé,¹⁸ demonstrating the high potential for validity of my randomised, post-weighted research.

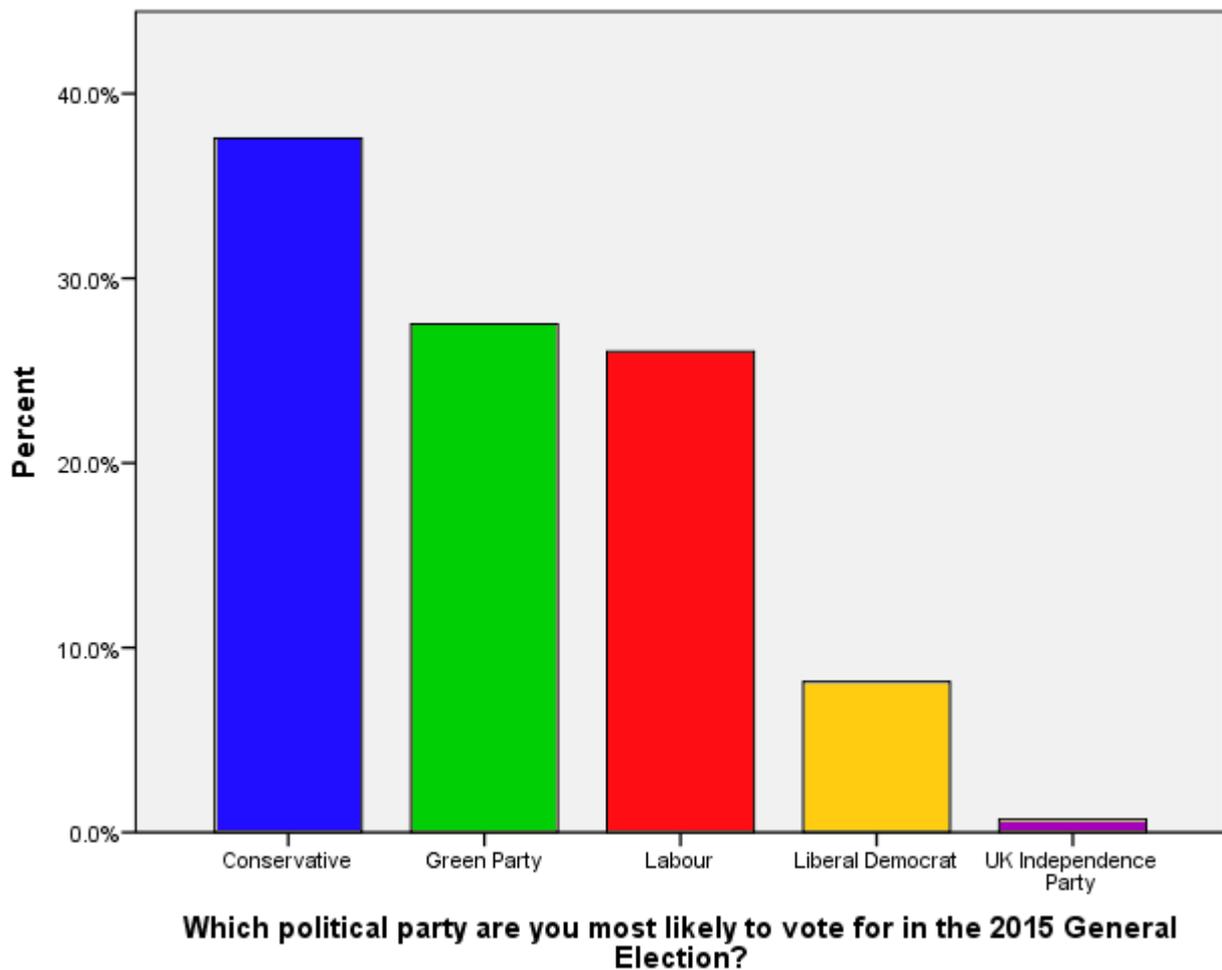


Illustration 2: Bar chart showing voting intentions of respondents

¹⁸ See www.exepose.com/2015/05/05/exeter-bleeds-blue/

Illustrations 3-7 show the frequencies of different levels of support expressed by the respondents for the five parties shown in Illustration 2. As Illustration 3 shows, attitudes towards the Conservatives are highly polarised, with large numbers of students both agreeing and disagreeing with the party. Illustration 4 demonstrates that despite being less popular in terms of voting intentions, the Green Party commands slightly greater levels of agreement than the Conservatives at the same time as enjoying relatively minor levels of disagreement. In Illustration 5, Labour forms an intermediate position, with some weak tendency towards polarisation but generally experiencing broad levels of agreement.

The Liberal Democrats, according to Illustration 6, experience relatively little disagreement and very high levels of slight agreement, but lower levels of moderate agreement and very low levels of strong agreement. They are therefore still able to summon broad, diffuse support from Exeter's student body, but this support is weak enough to be overwhelmed by that of other parties. As Illustration 7 shows, the pattern of student support for the UK Independence Party is radically different to those of the previous four parties. An extremely high percentage of students reported that they strongly disagree with UKIP.

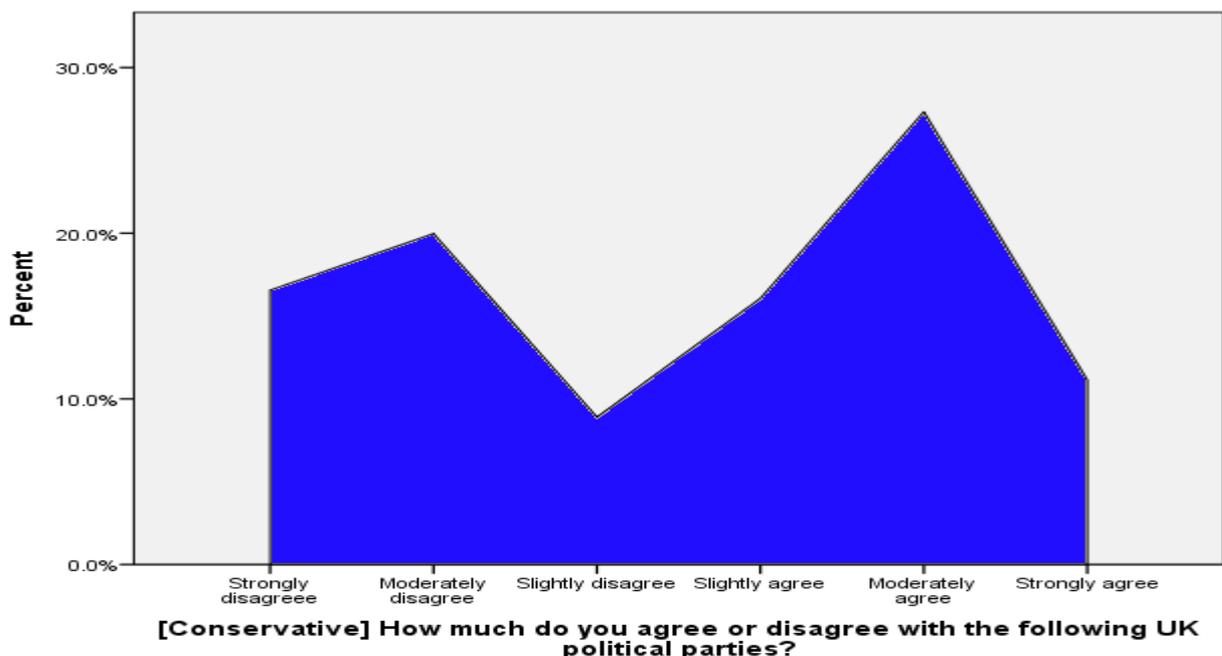


Illustration 3: Levels of support for the Conservative Party

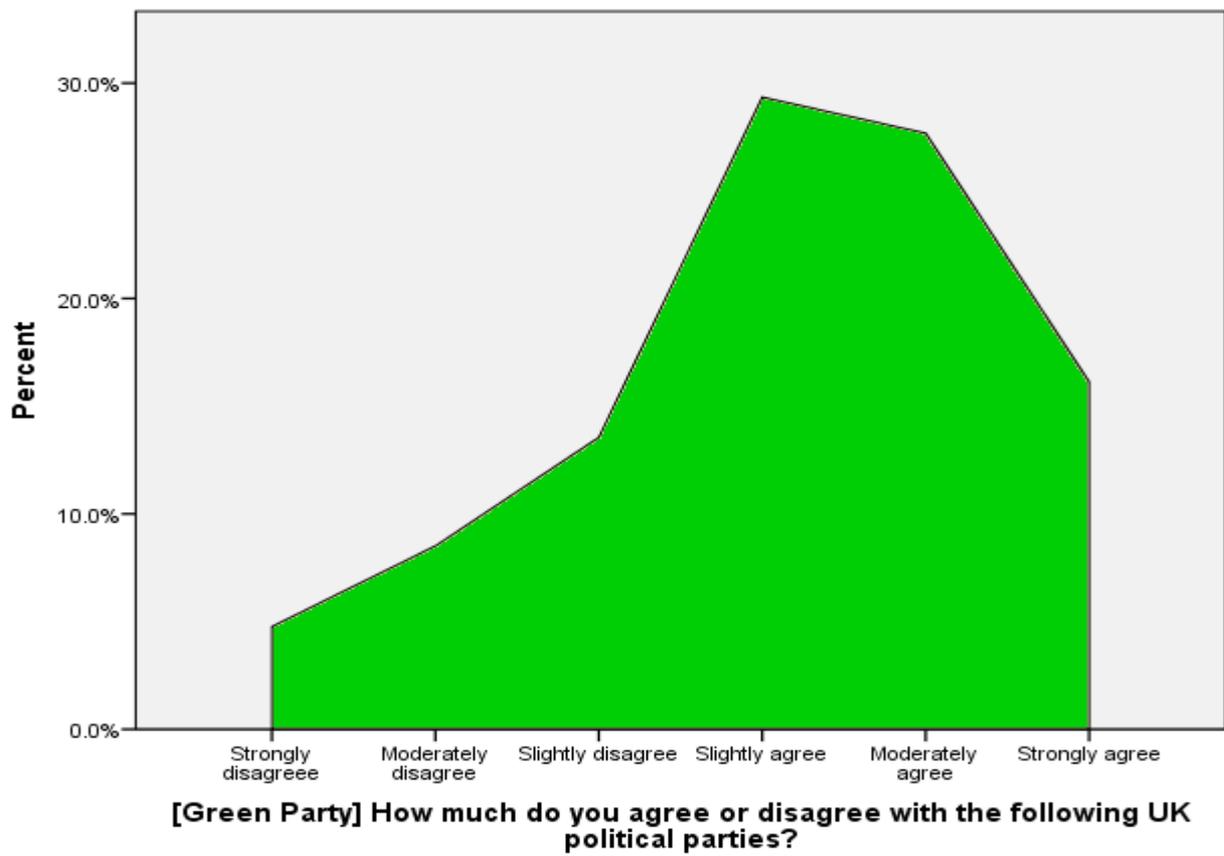


Illustration 4: Levels of Support for the Green Party

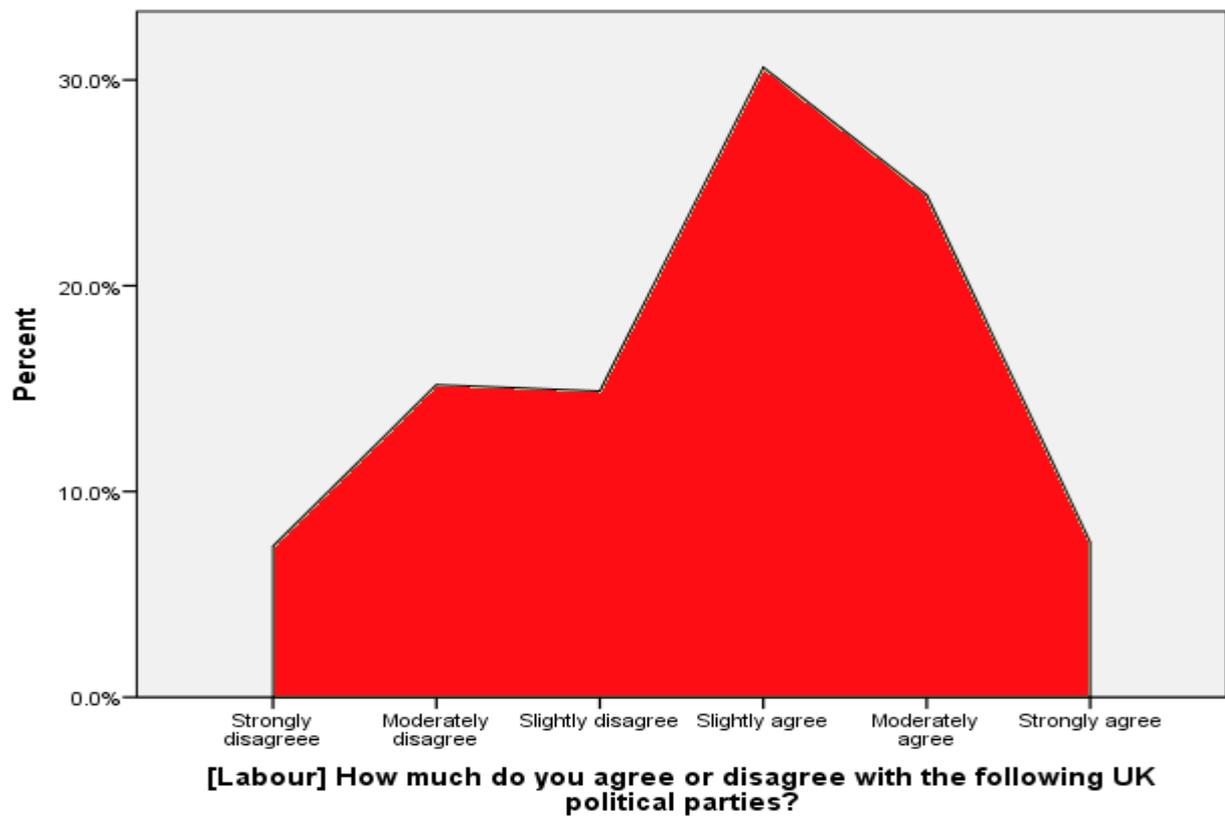


Illustration 5: Levels of Support for the Labour Party

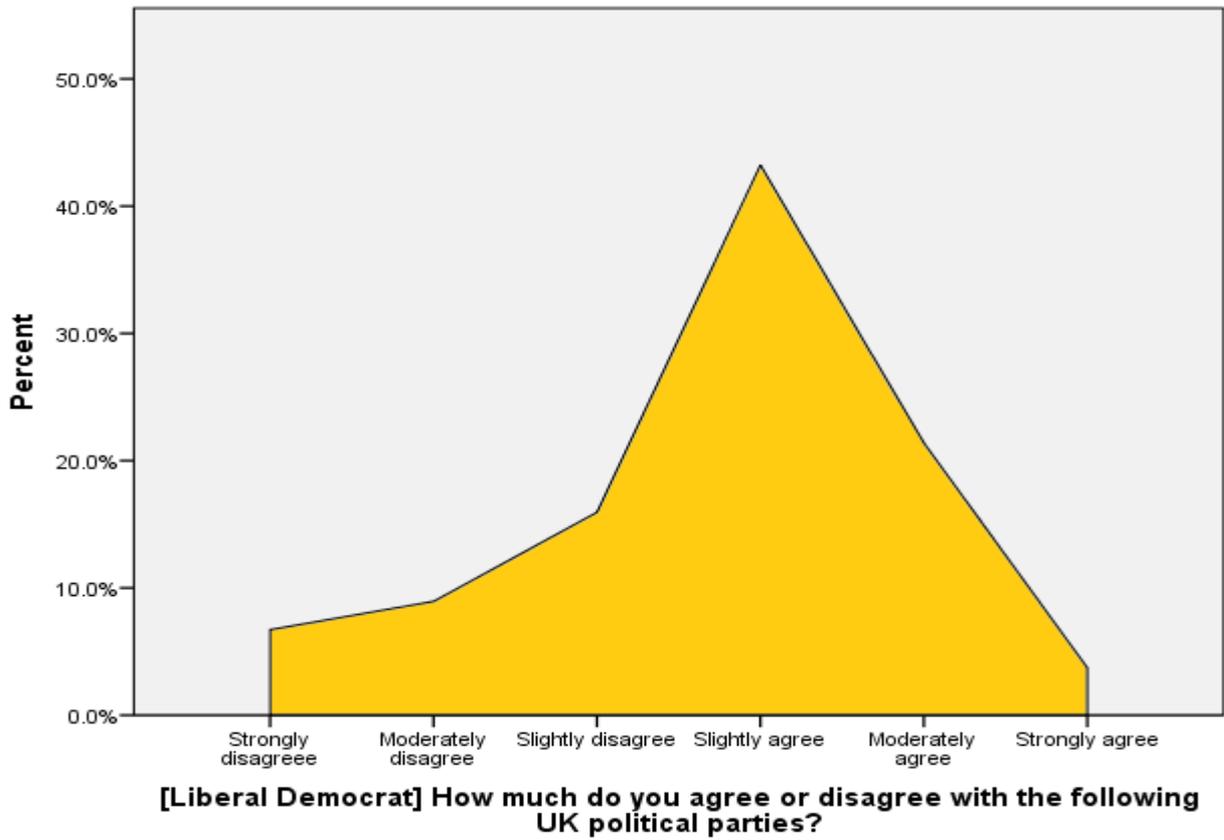


Illustration 6: Levels of support for the Liberal Democrats

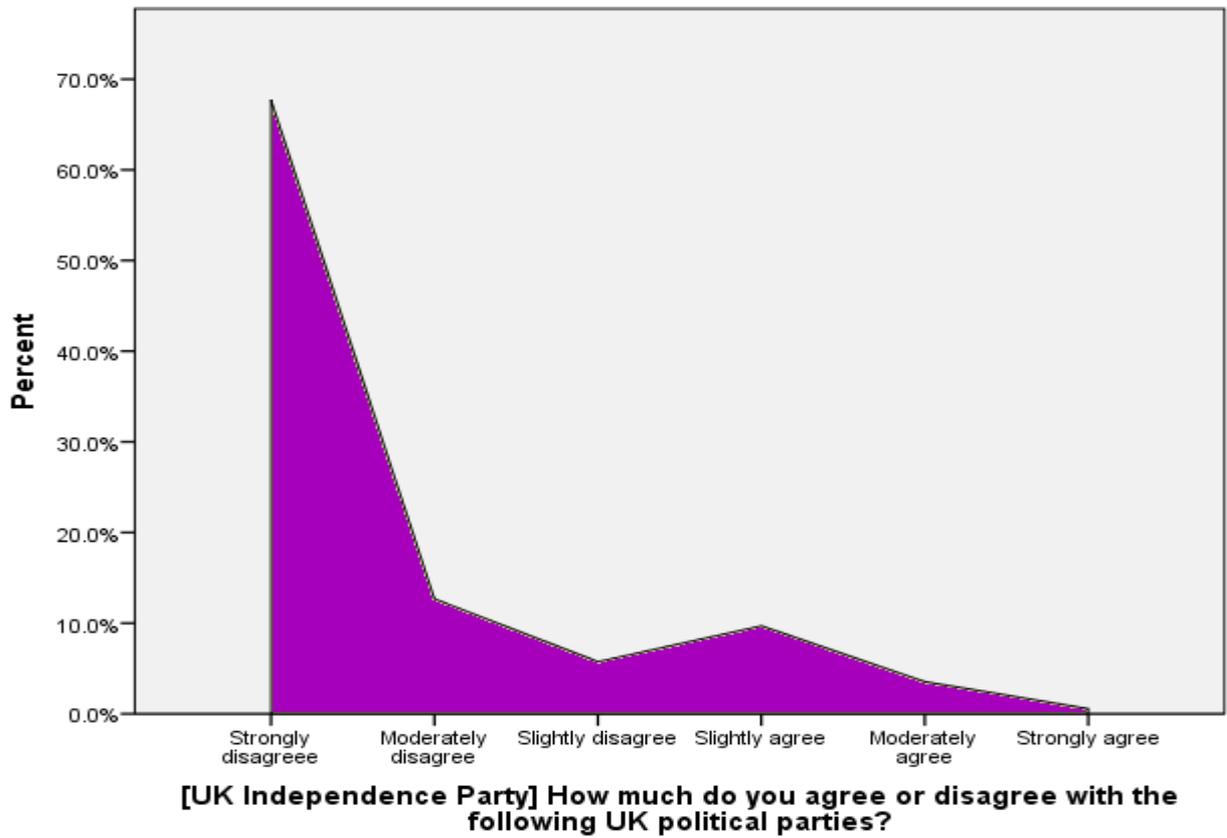


Illustration 7: Levels of support for the UK Independence Party

Illustration 8 shows the self-identified political spectrum position of respondents, ranging from strongly left-wing to strongly right-wing. It reveals that the political positions of Exeter students are both moderate and polarised; “centrist” political opinions are less popular than moderately partisan ones, but considerably more popular than extreme positions. Exeter students' politics are shown to be skewed more to the left than to the right, but reasonably high levels of support exist for both positions.

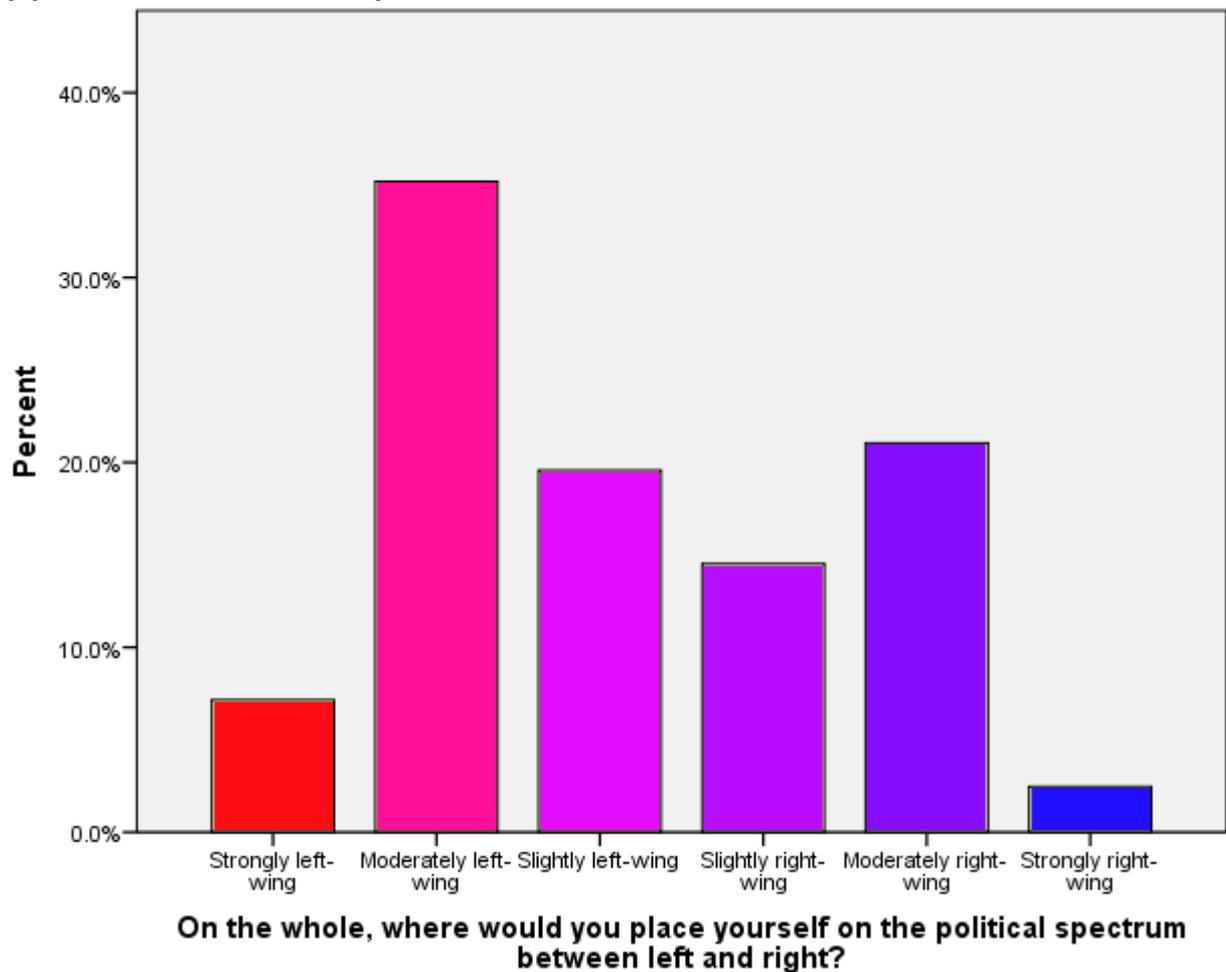


Illustration 8: Percentage identification with positions on the political spectrum

Illustration 9 dissects this political distribution to examine the political preferences of male and female students. It demonstrates that women are considerably more likely than men to be left-wing, but also slightly more likely than men to be right-wing. Men exhibit a lesser tendency towards political polarisation, being both slightly more likely to select “slightly” categories and considerably more likely to report that they are “unsure” where they stand on the political spectrum.

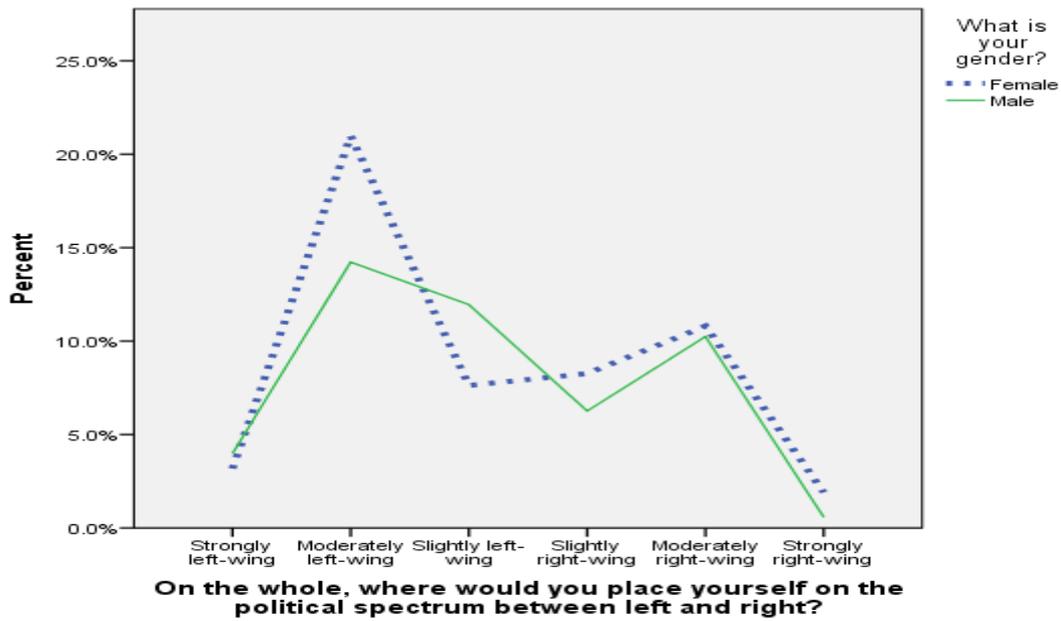


Illustration 9: Political spectrum by gender

Illustration 10 shows the political spectrum dissected according to nationality, with UK national students compared to EU and International students. It demonstrates that the polarisation of opinion apparent within Illustrations 9 and 10 is largely due to British students. EU students follow a markedly centrist pattern of political opinion, with the most moderate positions being the most popular. International students mimic the British peak in moderately left-wing opinion, but do not share the British disdain for centrism.

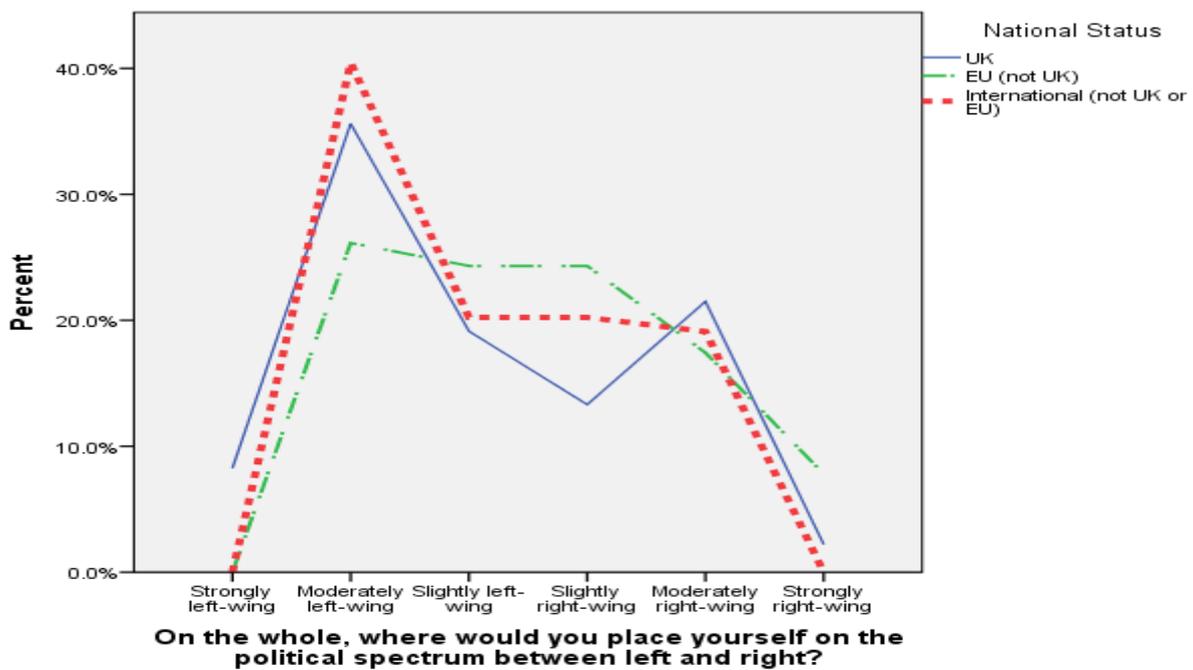


Illustration 10: Political compass by nationality

Illustration 11 shows the division of the political spectrum by College of the University of Exeter. It shows that the polarisation between left and right is present within all but two Colleges: Social Sciences and International Studies, which exhibits a clear and smooth bias towards the left, and the Business School, with a similar bias towards the right.

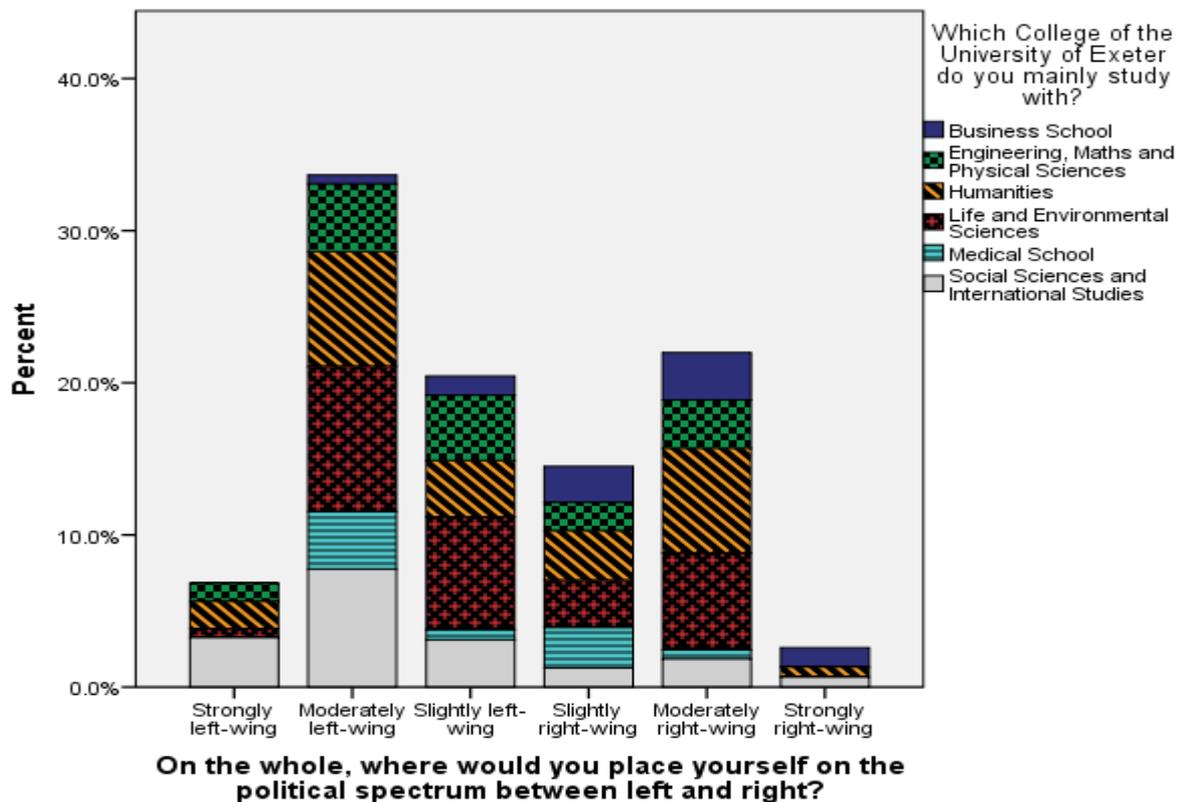
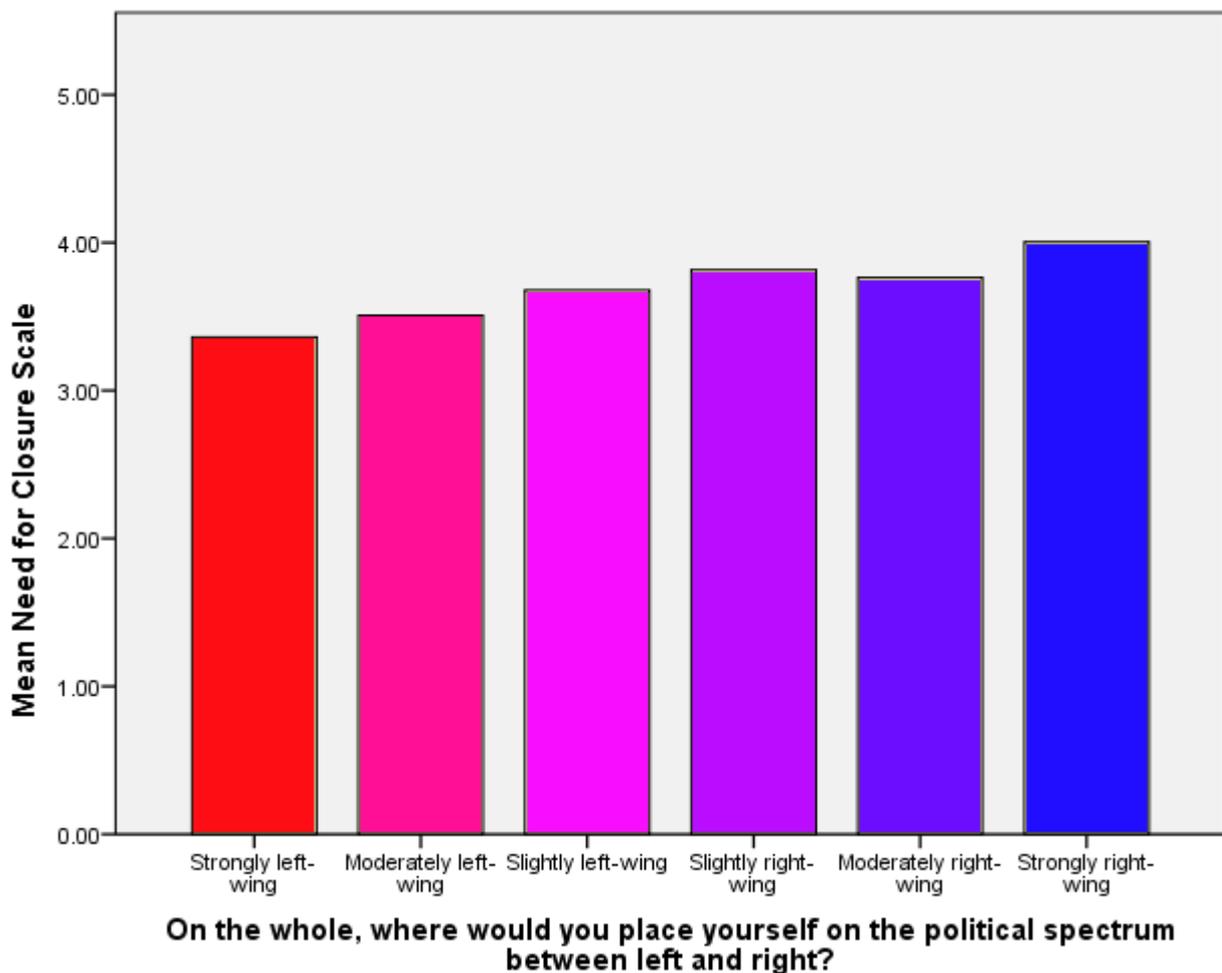


Illustration 11: Political spectrum by College

Figure 12 shows the mean Need for Closure Scale score for each category of the political spectrum. It demonstrates that more right-wing respondents tend to exhibit a higher average Need for Closure score. The Need for Closure scale measures psychological attributes such as preference for predictable situations, intolerance of ambiguity and desire for structure and order. This correlation between Need for Closure and right-wing political preferences is supported by the academic literature, which finds strong relations between neo-liberal economic conservative social preferences, and desire for order, regularity and organisation.¹⁹

¹⁹ See, for example, Carney, D. R., Jost, J. T., Gosling, S. D., and Potter, J., (2008) "The Secret Lives of Liberals and Conservatives: Personality Profiles, Interaction Styles, and the Things They Leave Behind", *Political Psychology*, Vol. 29, No. 6, pp.807-840



Conclusion

My project has highlighted the importance of information cooperation between Guild and academic stakeholders in the student experience, and has shown that a research panel model, based upon random selection, post-weighting and academic expertise, is able to generate a rich and interesting array of findings.

Despite this, however, future surveys may face more difficulty than the pilot project. The 2015 General Election was a particularly engaging and well-publicised event, and more mundane concerns centred around the University may attract less attention and fewer responses. Additional work, and ideally funding for token incentives, would be needed for myself, the Guild and the Q-Step Centre, to ensure that the ExeQtive becomes an effective research institution.

Appendices

Questionnaire submitted to the research panel:

Page One

1) Which political party are you most likely to vote for in the 2015 General Election?

1. Conservative
2. Green Party
3. Labour
4. Liberal Democrat
5. UK Independence Party
6. Other political party
7. I cannot vote in the UK
8. I can vote in the UK but will probably not vote
9. Unsure

2) How much do you agree or disagree with the following UK political parties?

- A- Strongly disagree
- B- Moderately disagree
- C- Slightly disagree
- D- Slightly agree
- E- Moderately agree
- F- Strongly agree
- G- Unsure

1. Conservative
2. Green Party
3. Labour
4. Liberal Democrat
5. UK Independence Party

3) On the whole, where would you place yourself on the political spectrum between left and right?

Right-wing policies include low levels of tax and government spending, restricted immigration and harsh punishment of criminals. Left-wing policies are usually the opposite.

1. Strongly left-wing
2. Moderately left-wing
3. Slightly left-wing
4. Slightly right-wing
5. Moderately right-wing
6. Strongly right-wing
7. Unsure

Page Two

4) How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- A- Strongly disagree
- B- Moderately disagree
- C- Slightly disagree
- D- Slightly agree
- E- Moderately agree
- F- Strongly agree
- G- Unsure

1. I don't like situations that are uncertain.
2. I enjoy questions which could be answered in many different ways.
3. A regular life with well-ordered hours does not suit my personality.
4. I feel uncomfortable when I don't understand the reason why an event happened in my life.
5. I feel irritated when one person disagrees with what everyone else in a group believes.

Page Three

5) How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- A- Strongly disagree
- B- Moderately disagree
- C- Slightly disagree
- D- Slightly agree
- E- Moderately agree
- F- Strongly agree
- G- Unsure

6. I don't like going into a situation when I don't know what to expect of it.
7. When I have made a decision, I feel relieved.
8. I like unpredictable situations.
9. Having a consistent routine allows me to enjoy life more.
10. I usually listen to many different opinions before forming my own view.

Page Four

6) How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- A- Strongly disagree
- B- Moderately disagree
- C- Slightly disagree
- D- Slightly agree
- E- Moderately agree
- F- Strongly agree
- G- Unsure

1. When faced with a problem, I try to reach a solution very quickly.
2. I like to be with people who do unexpected things.

3. I don't like it when a statement could mean many different things.
4. I become impatient and irritated if I do not solve a problem quickly.
5. I enjoy having a clear and structured life.

Page Five

7) Which College of the University of Exeter do you mainly study with?

1. Business School
2. Engineering, Maths and Physical Sciences
3. Flexible Combined Honours
4. Humanities
5. INTO
6. Life and Environmental Sciences
7. Medical School
8. Social Sciences and International Studies
9. Unsure

8) What is your gender?

1. Male
2. Female

9) Which region of the world do you come from?

1. United Kingdom
2. Europe and Russia
3. Americas- North and Caribbean
4. Americas- South and Central
5. Asia- East
6. Asia- South and Central
7. Asia- Southeast
8. Australia, New Zealand and Pacific
9. Middle East and North Africa

10. Sub-Saharan Africa
11. Other
12. Unsure

Application to the Annual Fund:

Description of the project:*(please briefly describe the project, including its aims and objectives)* The Research ExeQtive is a research panel of randomly selected Exeter students, who will be motivated in a structured and systematic way to respond to termly surveys. These surveys will contain questions from academics, students, Guild staff, societies, reps, and anybody else who is interested in the opinions of Exeter students. I will synthesise these questions into cohesive omnibus surveys, use my knowledge of research methods and advice from the College's Q-Step Centre to minimise errors of all sorts, and publish anonymised statistics and data sets summarising the results, to be used freely to inform anybody who is interested in them.

Why is the project/equipment needed and what difference will it make? *(clearly state the need for the project/equipment)*

The University of Exeter Strategic Plan "2015: Our Vision, Our Strategy" makes a commitment towards "interdisciplinary research" and a research environment that "removes barriers to the sharing of ideas" (pp.11), and the Guild Visions for the Future of Education for SSIS suggests that "all modules should be informed by current research with students offered the opportunity to participate in the research process" (8.1, pp.9), going on to suggest that first-hand research by undergraduates should be encouraged. This demonstrates a need for undergraduate students to become involved in research, as participants and researchers, but also as secondary analysts of recent data from familiar surroundings. The Research ExeQtive will allow undergraduates to become more involved at every stage of the research process; lecturers from the Q-Step centre have indicated that they would find the project useful as a teaching resource for their quantitative modules. Although the academic focus would primarily be from within SSIS, the Guild's Academic Representation staff have also said that they would find the project useful, as an additional source for information on student satisfaction and the student experience. The project, then, would remove barriers between student and staff, Guild and University, as well as between disciplines. It is certainly possible for everybody who is interested in student opinion to conduct their own research, but a fragmentation in methods and a lack of awareness of sources of error means that these surveys cannot be directly compared to one another, and that response rates are often too low to make representative claims. The Research ExeQtive would unite research interests from a number of different parties into a single, well-designed questionnaire; this pooling of information will ensure that the barriers between different research projects are broken down and that findings can be shared effectively, potentially finding a wider interested audience than the originators of the research topics. Interconnections between different research interests, for example, between the sociological and governance-inclined aspects of social media use (should facebook be banned within lectures? Does it make students less effective learners), could be made, allowing academic and other researchers to learn more together than any of them could individually. Using my own knowledge and frequent consultation with the Q-Step centre and the University's Market Research Manager, I will work to minimise error in the design of the surveys, and to maximise responses through a combination of incentives and social exchange theory. The Research ExeQtive, then, is a student-led project to conduct research on students for the academic benefit of students and staff from a wide variety of backgrounds and interests, in order to break down the barriers and limitations currently affecting the gathering and analysis of social knowledge.

Who will benefit directly from the project?*(please include an approximate number of individuals/students and which campuses they are based at)*

The panel will consist of 1000 students selected once a year; they will experience some residual benefits including token incentives. Academic reps and Guild staff (about 450 people) will benefit from having additional information about student attitudes, and will thus be able to do their job more effectively. Lecturers affiliated with the Q-Step centre (about a dozen) will have the chance to use the data sets generated by the project as a tool to enrich the learning experience of their students, as well as for their own research if applicable. SSIS Undergraduates interested in a career in research (perhaps three or four per year) will be able to offer their own questions to the panel and analyse their responses for this purpose. As the contacts, questionnaire, reports and data sets will be entirely online, individuals from all three campuses, and beyond, will be able to benefit from the project.

How might the project benefit the wider University community and, where applicable, the local community?

The reports and data sets will be available to anyone who is interested, including academic societies, newspapers, University management and local businesses. The Research ExeQtive is expected to provide diffuse but wide benefits to anyone who benefits from increased information about Exeter students.

Please demonstrate how the project meets the criteria set by the Annual Fund

1) Impacts a large group of students

a thousand students a year will contribute to the questionnaires, several dozen students will benefit from providing questions and analysing results, and most students will benefit indirectly from the increased ability of the Guild (and FXU) to respond to their interests.

2) Improves the student experience, or provides opportunities to students

students will have the opportunity to use a structured, joined-up source of information to investigate their own topics of academic interest; all students will be able to use the reports and data sets to increase their knowledge, both academically and personally.

3) Creates or improves links with the local community

Many businesses and other organisations based in Exeter and Falmouth may benefit from information about students' attitudes, for example, towards housing and the ideal number of house mates. Information produced within the University will be shared with the local community for mutual benefit and interest.

4) Has a long-lasting effect on the student experience

Involvement with the Research ExeQtive will enable students involved to develop their information collection and analysis skills, ideal for a range of careers including business and market research. Student participants will be encouraged by the issues raised to think more about the student experience and will be more likely to take action to improve issues which they become aware of.

5) Helps to promote Exeter and raise its profile

The project, originated by a student of Exeter and intended to be sustained mainly through student participation, will complement Exeter's already excellent reputation for world-leading research in which students play an active part.

Please explain why is funding for the project/equipment not available via other sources such as the College budget?

This project is in its early stages, and this term's survey is a pilot. Some evidence of results and impact would be required to justify receiving funding from an already stretched budget. The project needs an initial kick-start from the Annual Fund in order to raise confidence in its ability to get results; in future years, funding will also be sought elsewhere.

BUDGET: Amount requested from the Annual Fund: (Maximum £5,000)

£1,000

Are you requesting recurrent funding? (*Recurrent funding available for up to 3 years at £5,000 per year. Please specify number of years and amount requested for each year*) **No**

Expenditure:

Token Incentives (£1 Amazon e-voucher per person) for survey sample- £1000

How will you publicise the Annual Fund (*please remember that the Annual Fund logo must be used on all materials/website/mention in the speeches related to the project etc.*)

The Annual Fund logo will be displayed on the cover of the report when published; it will also be acknowledged in the report's introduction. If and when posters and leaflets are produced to publicise the project both to selected participants and potential users, the logo will also appear on these and on any additional materials. A web-page on the project is expected to be introduced on the Q-Step website if the pilot survey is successful; if and when this happens, the Annual Fund logo will be clearly shown and its support will be gratefully acknowledged.

Please provide any additional supportive comments that you feel will benefit your application:

I feel that my project will be effective in breaking down the informational boundaries between the University and community, and between students, academics and the Guild, to create an open and constructive site to improve the relations between them.

First Survey Mailing, 31/03/2015

Subject: Please help

Dear fellow Exeter Student,

My name is James Winterbotham, and I'm doing research for my dissertation on the political opinions of Exeter students. I have chosen you at random to ask you for help.

In a few days' time, I will send you a link to a short online questionnaire based on the **2015 UK General Election**. I would be really grateful if you could fill it in.

The questions will also relate to your personality, to see whether it influences your political choices. You don't need any specialised knowledge of politics to complete the survey, and your

response is extremely useful even if you will not be voting. The survey is totally anonymous and your response will be kept confidential.

Thank you in advance,

James Winterbotham
College Officer, Social Sciences and International Studies

Second Survey Mailing, 02/04/2015

Subject: My dissertation survey

Dear fellow Student,

I recently sent you an email asking for your help in completing a short questionnaire for my dissertation. I now send you the link to this questionnaire, and would be really grateful if you could do me the huge favour of filling it in:

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/limesurvey/index.php/258787/lang-en>

Some of the questions are based on the **2015 UK General Election**, but your response is valuable and appreciated even if you cannot or will not vote in this election. No detailed knowledge of politics is needed as I am only interested in your opinions.

I am trying to find out if a link exists between politics and personality type: some questions will not be political but will instead measure some parts of your personality. The survey is completely anonymous and confidential and I will have no way of connecting your response to your name or email address. Thank you again for your support; I could not do this important research without your help.

James Winterbotham

College Officer, Social Sciences and International Studies

Third Survey Mailing, 15/04/2015

Subject: Thank you for helping

Dear fellow Student,

Firstly, I would like to say a huge **thank you** for the many responses I have received for my survey so far! You are helping me a great deal and I hope my research will be **interesting and useful for the whole University**.

But there is **still a long way to go!** If you haven't already, it would mean a lot to me if you could **fill in the survey today**:

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/limesurvey/index.php/258787/lang-en>

Remember, the survey is **completely anonymous** and your response is **useful and important even if you have no knowledge of politics or cannot vote** in the election.

Not sure which party suits you best? I have been **working with the University to help create Election Compass 2015**, an online tool that shows how close their opinions are to yours. You can get to it below:

<https://uk.electioncompass.org/>

Thank you again for all your help; **I value and appreciate your response!**

James Winterbotham

College Officer, Social Sciences and International Studies

Fourth Survey Mailing, 20/04/2016

Subject: Registering to vote

Dear fellow student,

Thank you again for completing my questionnaire on the upcoming General Election. I'm sorry to send you so many emails; I need to do this because it's important for as many of you to respond as possible, so that the results fairly reflect our values as a student community. Once again, here is the link to the questionnaire:

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/limesurvey/index.php/258787/lang-en>

Midnight tonight is the deadline to register to vote, so if you can vote in the UK and haven't already registered please do consider it. It takes five minutes and your National Insurance number and will allow you to take part in the most exciting election in decades! You can register below:

<https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>

Thank you, and good luck for exams season!

James

Fifth and Final Survey Mailing, 06/05/2015

Subject: Last chance

Dear student,

Thank you for being patient with my emails at such a difficult time of year; I can promise you that

this will be the **last time you hear from me!**

The General Election is tomorrow; **at midnight tomorrow I will close my survey**, so you all have one last chance to fill it in. Thank you so much for all your hard work completing the responses I already have; the more responses I get the more my research can fairly reflect our student values! Remember, **it doesn't matter if you will not be voting or have no interest in politics**, just fill in the questions as best you can and your response will be just as valuable.

Here is the link, one last time:

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/limesurvey/index.php/258787/lang-en>

Once again, thank you all so much for your patience. **Your support has been amazing and I am extremely grateful.** If you are interested in the results, I will publish them this June on this part of the University's website:

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/q-step/>

Best wishes,

James

Research ExeQutive

Improving knowledge of Exeter students through a randomly selected research “jury”

What if

we got students together
to give us their
views on:

- 1) Their education
- 2) Their university
- 3) Life in general

In return for cash incentives

Then analysed the results
using academic expertise

To make Our Exeter:

- ✓ More knowledgeable
- ✓ More democratic
- ✓ and happier



**James
Winterbotham**

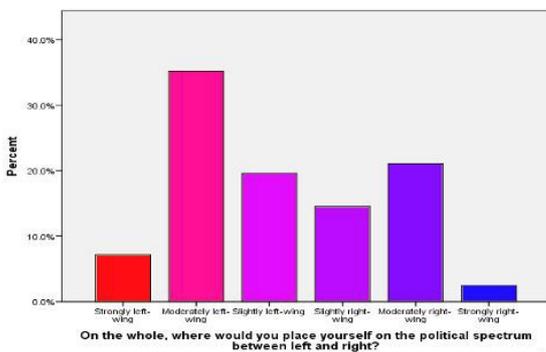
SSIS College Officer
In Collaboration with



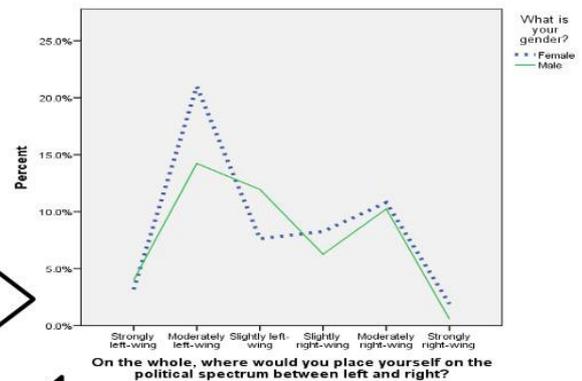
A step-change in
quantitative social
science skills

Funded by the
Nuffield Foundation,
ESRC and HEFCE

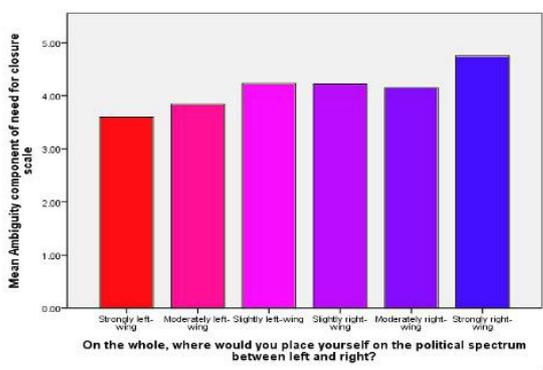
Pilot Project Key Findings: 2015 General Election Survey



Students have divided political views

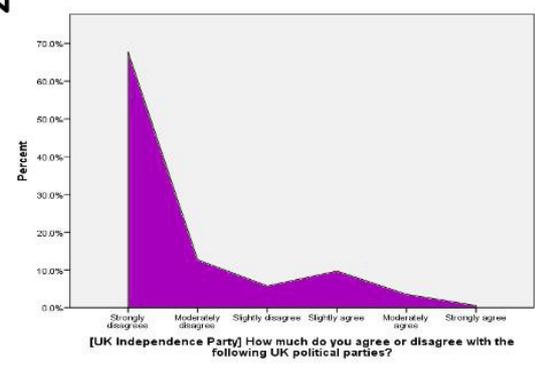


Females are more polarised than males



Left wing = acceptance of ambiguity

Students really aren't keen on UKIP!



James Winterbotham
SSIS College Officer
In Collaboration with

Q-Step

A step-change in quantitative social science skills

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