

Title: First to final year: how was your journey?

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Discuss the data collected from three cohorts at the end of their first year, and the NSS results for the same cohorts, to portray a picture of the students' journey at a small university in North West England.
- Offer their own analysis of the above data and compare it to that of the researchers.
- Hear about the role of a central academic development unit in promoting change at department level.
- Discuss the main areas of development promoted and their possible impact on improving the student journey for these cohorts.

Session Outline

The UK National Student Survey, commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in 2005, provides final year students of higher education (HE) with the opportunity to voice their opinions about their university journey (SurrIDGE, 2009). Although the survey has received some criticism (for example: Harvey, 2008), the results have become increasingly important to the sector in recent years. In the institution being discussed in this session a first year experience survey has also been conducted since 2007, with the aim of enabling the institution to benchmark improvement to its provisions and to enable data triangulation with other surveys. Such surveys have been viewed as critical to gaining a better understanding of the students transitioning journey, from other educational sectors to HE, primarily for the purpose of improving retention (Yorke & Longden, 2007). This means that as of August 2010 this institution has data reflecting the student journey, from their first to their final year, for three cohorts. This has provided an excellent opportunity to analyse how developments over this time may have impacted on the student journey. Many of these developments have been made as a response to NSS results and the story being told by this data is a very positive one. We will discuss the data, focussing on those areas that are covered by both surveys: quality of teaching; feedback and assessment; organisation of their programme; and their perception of staffs' interest in their progress. We will discuss how we, as a central unit, sought to influence academic departments in prioritising areas for development, sharing good practice and improving communication with students. Finally, we will discuss some of the most substantial changes that took place, and how these have been perceived by the students themselves.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Data sets from the NSS and FYSS, of three cohorts, will be presented and explained. (10 mins)

This will be followed by an opportunity for delegates, working in small groups, to analyse the data sets in response to the question 'What story does this data tell you about the student journey at this university?' (15 mins)

The second presenter will then discuss the areas for development, that were identified, and the ways that change was promoted. Delegates will be able to ask questions or raise issues throughout this discussion. (15 mins)

Finally, conclusions will be made and an opportunity for final questions. (5 mins)

References

Harvey, L. (2008). Jumping through hoops on a white elephant: a survey signifying nothing. *Times Higher Education*, 12th June 2008.

Surridge, P. (2009). The National Student Survey three years on: What have we learned?

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http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/evidencenet/Summaries/surridge_nss_three_years_on_summary

Yorke, M. & Longden, B. (2007) The first-year experience in higher education in the UK

(Report on Phase 1 of a project funded by the Higher Education Academy) Retrieved from Higher Education Academy website:

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