

Title: My course has challenged me ?? . . . student interpretation of the revised NSS questions

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Session Learning Outcomes

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

- Explore how a range of students might interpret seemingly straightforward questions in a variety of ways.
- Understand how they can prepare for, and respond to, student perception of quality in the revised NSS question bank.
- Contextualise this particular study in the current HE landscape – to quote the SEDA Conference theme: *Higher and Further Education are under pressure to both deliver and demonstrate teaching excellence. This pressure has probably never been as intense as it is today, and is likely to increase as we experience new quality regimes such as the TEF and our students become more demanding in terms of 'value for money'.*

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

The University conducts an internal student satisfaction survey twice a year in the first / second years of study, as well as encouraging students to take part in the NSS in their final year. Results inform decisions from the local (e.g. opening hours of specific buildings) to the institutional (e.g., policy on turnaround time for feedback). To respond appropriately to students' views expressed via surveys, it is important to gain a feeling for how students interpret the questions, and how this affects the ways in which they answer.

A number of questions in the National Student Survey have changed for 2017. This was seen as a good opportunity to revisit earlier papers such as the GLAD Report (2005) and to focus specifically on the MMU Internal SS with students to:

- Explore their understanding of the questions and, with respect to the internal survey, check that we are asking the right questions
- Strengthen students inclination to participate by
 - familiarising them with the University's approach to and purpose in seeking student feedback
 - demonstrating what use we make of the information they provide

- Providing information about other, more immediate, feedback routes: staff-student liaison committees, student representation, complaints procedure.

The Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching designed / facilitated focus groups, asking Faculties to identify classes in which they would set aside 45 minutes to an hour for CELT to run a group. This approach has a number of key advantages:

- Similar approach to each focus group, not varied by subject.
- Opportunity for anonymous comment to staff other than programme teams.
- Simplicity of organisation, and not attempting to attract students to a different, additional event
- Access to a more representative cross-section, giving a more balanced output.
- This approach had worked well in the past for other initiatives aimed at quality enhancement.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

- A report on the findings of focus groups held with students about their interpretation of the revised schedule of NSS questions – 15 minutes
- What Manchester Met has done / intends to do as a result of these focus group findings – 10 minutes
- A discussion of the wider implications for the sector, the TEF and for institutions based on the above explorations. 20 minutes
 - What are the implications for universities based on the findings of this study?
 - What can universities do to ameliorate the effects of student interpretation of NSS questions?

References

- Blair, B. et al (2005) 'Erm, that question... I think I probably would've just put something in the middle and sort of moved on to the next one, because I think it's really unclear': How art and design students understand and interpret the National Student Survey. GLA / HEA
- HEFCE (2014) 'Review of the National Student Survey' www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/Year/2014/nssreview/ updated to include material from the 2015 consultation paper www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/roiconsult/events/#d.en.105316
- HEFCE (2016) UK review of the provision of information about higher education: National Student Survey results and trends analysis
- Institute of Education (2010) Enhancing and Developing the National Student Survey <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2010/hepublicinfouserneeds/2>
- NUS (2015) Proposed changes to NSS and Unistats: NUS response NUS responds to the four UK HE funding councils' consultation on changes to the National Student Survey, Unistats and information provided by institutions