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## Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey

17 February 2011

By [Rebecca Attwood](#)

Prospectus promises don't always match reality, so how can young people get what they need to make an informed choice? As the *Times Higher Education* Student Experience Survey reveals what undergraduates really think about campus life, Rebecca Attwood learns that universities are working hard to improve

The personal statement has been honed, the courses carefully chosen and the offers are starting to arrive. Soon prospective students will be waiting for their exam results to finally determine which university they will attend.

But if the sixth-formers planning to start university this autumn had been making their decisions a year later - when the cap on tuition fees will treble to £9,000 - would they have approached the application process differently?

"The research would be even more important. If you were paying that much you'd have to be 100 per cent certain," says Andrew Price, 17, a student at Pershore High School, a comprehensive in Worcestershire.

Fellow pupil Rebecca Dawkes, who has applied to study earth sciences, agrees.

"I'd think more carefully about where I was going. I'd probably go for a three-year course rather than a four-year course," she says, reasoning that this would save her the cost of an additional year of fees.

Although many details of the 2012 funding regime and its impact on both students and institutions remain unclear, universities can be certain of one thing - the hike in the tuition fee cap will mean greater-than-ever student scrutiny.

*Times Higher Education's* annual Student Experience Survey, which gathers the views of more than 13,000 undergraduates, explores the factors that matter most to them - from the quality of teaching to the social life on campus.

Students were asked to rate on a seven-point scale 21 aspects of university life that - unlike those of other surveys - were chosen by students themselves (see box, below).

Although most students see good teaching, enthusiastic staff and a well-structured course as vital, the *THE* survey shows just how important social and environmental aspects can be.

Across the sector, some areas of the student experience have seen improvements since 2008. These include security, high-quality facilities, helpful and interested staff, relationships with teaching staff, and fair workload. And there have been no areas of the student experience that students, on average, feel have worsened over the past two years.

When comparing university groups on their performance in different aspects of the student experience, Russell Group and 1994 Group institutions do consistently well across the domains of teaching and learning (for example, quality of staff and course), social life (such as community atmosphere) and facilities. As a group, Million+ institutions perform below average, but the University of Central Lancashire's score is above average and those of the University of Sunderland and of Leeds Metropolitan University have improved substantially over the past year. The GuildHE group's strength is in the teaching and learning area, while the forte for University Alliance members appears to lie in the facilities of its member institutions.

There were also significant differences in results according to the type of degree. Physical science students reported the most positive student experience. Other subject areas where students' experience was above average included languages, history and philosophy in the humanities, and medicine, dentistry and biological sciences. Subject areas with experience ratings that fell significantly below average included subjects allied to medicine, veterinary science, agriculture and related subjects, architecture, building and planning, business and administrative studies, mass communications and documentation, creative arts and design, and education.

"Of course, these differences could be due to a number of factors, including not only the nature and performance of the

subject area itself, but also the institutions and the types of students attracted to these subjects in the first place," says Eleanor Simmons, associate director of OpinionPanel, the market research company that conducted the survey.

But one university seems to have the edge when it comes to an excellent all-round experience. Top of the poll - for the fifth year in a row - is Loughborough University, which excelled in respect of its sports facilities, extracurricular activities, campus environment, facilities, social life, students' union and library.

The universities in the top 10 remain unchanged from last year, despite some jostling for position. In second place is the University of Sheffield. Undergraduates voted its students' union number one in the country, and Sheffield also achieved top marks for its library and social life. The University of East Anglia comes in third place, closely followed by the University of Cambridge.

Ask most sixth-formers what matters most to them when choosing a university and, unsurprisingly, a good course and excellent teaching feature heavily.

The universities of Oxford and Cambridge both score highly in these areas, coming number one in the category "high-quality staff/lectures". Oxford is also voted the best for good personal relationships with teaching staff.

However, sixth-formers told *THE* that non-academic factors played a key part in their decision-making too.

"I didn't want to be a student in London - I wanted to go to the more 'campusy' unis," says Tabatha Bergin, a student at Saffron Walden County High School. "It is an amazing city and I want to live there after I've graduated but I want to go to uni in a student city. London is expensive and you wouldn't be able to afford any of the things you'd want to do."

Meanwhile, knowing that her degree will not be an easy ride, would-be medic Fiona Hartley wants to study in a university where she will be able to let off steam when she is not slogging away at her books. Although the number one priority for the student at Pershore High School is to study in a city with a major hospital, she also wants good extracurricular activities.

"It has to be a place I like living in because I'm going to be there for a long time - a place where I'll meet lots of people and be able to do all the clubs I want to do."

Dawkes says she crossed one London university off her shortlist because "I'm quite sporty and it didn't seem to centre that much around sport".

According to our survey, the universities offering the best social lives are Leeds, Loughborough and Sheffield, while the best extracurricular activities and societies can be found at Oxford, Loughborough, the University of Warwick, UEA, Cambridge, Durham University and Sheffield. The top sports facilities are at Loughborough.

Lizzi Routledge, another student at Saffron Walden County High School, plans to start a maths degree this September. One criterion she used in narrowing down where to study was whether it had a 24-hour library.

"I know it sounds weird," she says. "The thing is that once I start to work, I get to a point where I want to keep going. I'm the kind of person who can work all through the night. I can't work at home in my bedroom at all - there are far too many distractions. Being in the library gets you in the right mindset."

Students taking part in our survey voted Oxford and Sheffield as having the best library facilities in the country.

But, although they may not top our poll, other universities have made significant improvements - most notably, the University of Sunderland.

Sunderland saw the biggest overall improvement. A jump of 22 places from 79th in 2009 to 57th in 2010 and an increased score led to it receiving the 2010 *Times Higher Education* Award for Most Improved Student Experience (see "most improved" table, below).

Ben Marks, managing director of OpinionPanel, says: "The opening of the university's sports and recreation facility, CitySpace, in 2009, has clearly been highly regarded by students - the rating of sports facilities at Sunderland witnessed a huge increase between 2009 and 2010.

"Other areas of notable improvement were support and welfare, relationships with teaching staff, fair workload and convenient facilities."

Julie Mennell, Sunderland's deputy vice-chancellor (academic), says the university has undergone a £75 million campus development programme, with changes including a £7.5 million sciences complex, redevelopment of the Murray Library, and a refit of the Media Centre.

The university has also been making a concerted effort to give feedback to students on improvements made. "We have always listened to our students and acted upon their views and issues," says Mennell. "What we've not always done is tell them about it."

So Sunderland has introduced Student Voice, a programme that ensures the university "lets students know what we are

doing".

"The fact that we have shown our students that we act on their views has been important," says Mennell.

The second most-improved university was the University of Chester, which moved from 67th position in 2009 to equal 43rd.

James Down, 22, who is in his third year of a psychology with criminology degree at Chester, says he has certainly noticed plenty of changes for the better.

"Up until last year, I'll be honest, our main canteen was looking a bit poor. A lot of our fully catered and semi-catered students have to eat there, so the students raised it (as an issue). They've refurbished it this year and it is looking absolutely immense."

Jenni Moss, a 25-year-old student studying for a BSc in human nutrition at Chester, paints a similar picture.

"This summer we've had a refit of the whole of the bottom of the library and an extension to include a massive quiet study area and also a 24-hour computer lab," she says. "In the Kingsway campus they have new sports facilities, which are fab. Also, we've got a new Riverside campus for the nurses and teaching staff - a new building that's been acquired this year and the library there is fantastic."

Despite the current financial constraints on universities, a race among other institutions to make similar improvements in time for the first year of the new funding regime seems likely.

Craig Mahoney, chief executive of the Higher Education Academy, says: "Surveys like this, and the HEA's postgraduate student surveys, help us to understand what students think about different aspects of their experience. This informs our work, and the work of everyone involved in improving student learning experiences. We welcome it."

Aaron Porter, president of the National Union of Students, says *THE's* Student Experience Survey allows students "a real voice to say what they think about their experiences and universities".

It is a voice that is set to get louder.

"As tuition fees are once again tripled, students will increase the pressure on their universities to deliver a high standard of academic, social and environmental experience," he warns.

**HIGH-PERFORMING NEW UNIVERSITIES**

University	Overall ranking
Robert Gordon University	25
Teesside University	31
University of Portsmouth	34
University of Lincoln	-36
University of Winchester	38
University of Plymouth	39
University of Central Lancashire	41
Sheffield Hallam University	42
University of Chester	-43
Northumbria University	45

*Six new universities made it into the top 40.*

**TOP INSTITUTIONS BY REGION**

Region	University	Overall ranking
East Midlands	Loughborough University	1
Eastern	University of East Anglia	3
London	St George's, Univ. of London	27*
North East	Newcastle University	13
North West	Lancaster University	-15
Northern Ireland	Queen's University Belfast	83
Scotland	University of Dundee	5
South East	University of Oxford	6
South West	University of Exeter	18
Wales	Aberystwyth University	9
West Midlands	University of Warwick	11
Yorkshire & Humberside	University of Sheffield	2

\*Small sample (30-50 responses)

**MOST IMPROVED STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

1	University of Sunderland
2	University of Chester
3	Liverpool John Moores University
4	York St John University
5	Royal Holloway, University of London
6	University of Bristol
7	St George's, University of London
8	University of Bradford
9	University of Manchester
10	University of Kent

*The results of the Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey are used to decide the winner of our annual award for the "most improved" student experience.*

*The winner – the University of Sunderland – was announced at the 2010 Times Higher Education Awards in London in November, when more than 1,000 attendees celebrated the achievements of universities and colleges.*

*Examining both overall scores and rankings for each university between 2009 and 2010, OpinionPanel measured changes in performance. For each institution, an aggregate score was calculated based on the mean of its ranked change in score and ranked change in league table position between the two years.*

**The tale of the polls: How the survey was conducted**

**More than 13,000 full-time undergraduates took part in this year's poll, an increase of 2,000 over last year's survey.**

As in previous years, the student experience was broken down into the 21 elements chosen by students themselves as key to a good university experience.

Participants were asked to rate how their university performed in each of the areas, using a seven-point scale.

To design the survey, OpinionPanel asked 1,000 students to describe - unprompted and in their own words - how their university contributed to a positive and negative student experience.

The results from this exercise were then coded to form the 21 attributes rated by students in the survey.

"Each university's score has been indexed to give a percentage of the maximum attainable score, allowing for more intuitive comparisons between universities," explains OpinionPanel's associate director, Eleanor Simmons.

"Of course, there will be no statistical significance in the scores of similarly ranked universities. But the results are very stable year on year, and we believe are effective at highlighting where best practice occurs and where certain universities have room for improvement."

All respondents were members of OpinionPanel's Student Panel, a group of students recruited via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

A new cohort is recruited to the panel annually when Ucas sends out an email invitation. Those surveyed are in different years of their degree.

"This means there is very little systematic bias in the panel - almost the entire undergraduate student population has the opportunity to join. This massively reduces the likelihood of sampling error," Simmons explains.

As in previous years, respondents were not told the purpose of the poll and were unable to complete the survey more than once.

OpinionPanel believes these factors mitigate against the possibility of respondents artificially inflating scores in order to improve the performance of their institution.

In addition, universities do not know which of their students belong to the Student Panel, or when invitations to take part in the survey are sent out.

"It is highly unlikely that institutions themselves could influence the results," Simmons says.

While the 13,000 respondents form only a fraction of the UK full-time undergraduate population, Simmons says the sampling fraction is relatively high in comparison with a typical political opinion poll or large-scale government survey.

"More importantly, the overall sample size is large enough to generate only a small sampling error," she explains.

Each attribute is assigned a weighting. The weightings were decided by examining the factors most closely correlated with good scores in the category "I would recommend my university to a friend".

The weighting methodology was reviewed in 2008 to ensure its continued suitability, and the same weighting methodology has been used for the past two years.

Students' views were gathered between September 2009 and July 2010.

## Readers' comments

- **old duffer** 17 February, 2011

There are typically 5000+ undergrads at each uni, yet only 100-200 at each institution responded. Honest query for people who know about opinion polls:- How many responses do you need to ensure a decent coverage? It seems to me that with such a low coverage that 10 "fans" or 10 dissatisfied students could skew the whole thing. The big story here is that so few students bothered to respond.

- **Jonathan Baldwin** 17 February, 2011

@old duffer

That seems a fair sample to me.

- **Notts student** 17 February, 2011

I wish my institutional put as much effort into teaching as they do trying to get people to fill out the NSS!

- **old duffer** 17 February, 2011

Well being a nerdy type I always like to look at the quality of the data. One way of doing this would be to look at the scores and ranking after x votes have been cast then after 2x votes, then 3x votes then 4x votes etc. You might have some confidence in the votes if you found that after 5x votes that the rankings and scoring had largely stabilised and only changed slightly up to 10x (where 10x is the total vote). I know that the Higher is a populist mag but it is for the higher education community so it should have some discussion on error. Or is that just too much to ask?

I am sure that some statistician could advise here. Or is that your speciality Jonathon Baldwin?

- **lain** 17 February, 2011

This table strikes me as pretty meaningless. The judgements are subjective but more importantly in virtually every case the respondent will have no experience of any other institutions so the scores will not be comparable with each other.

- **@lain** 17 February, 2011

Er yes, I think it's fair to say that a person's experience is subjective (what could be more subjective?), but that doesn't mean there isn't value in asking them about it and collating results to see if there's a trend. Very interesting reading.

- **Simon Howroyd** 17 February, 2011

Lufbra Walk on Water!

Well done!

- **younger duffer** 17 February, 2011

Sample 54 of 14,000 students, go figure. Note a well-known south yorkshire HEI are PR'ing their ranging claiming 13,000 students were asked, failing to mention that only 250 responded.

- **younger duffer again** 17 February, 2011

This makes the "PUSH Guide" look authoritative!

- **darren M** 17 February, 2011

what a joke - the scores are so close between Universities in 20th and 40th for example (2% or less) and the respondents are so small too - less than 90 at my own university out of a student body of over 9,000 - 1% of student population. Shame that the THE continues to publish this without a major health warning. I am also at a University that did well in the survey so no axe to grind. I hope the World University rankings are more robust! I wonder too if the students completing the survey knew that the results would be ranked in this way - if so they may have voted differently, just ike some do in the NSS!

- **Editor's comment**

The Times Higher Education World Universtiy Rankings are entirely separate and use a very different methodology, with 13 performance indicators used. You can read the world rankings methodology in full here: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2010-2011/analysis-methodology.html>

- **Grant Abt** 17 February, 2011

The error in these surveys is never considered, mostly because most universities are happy to claim the rewards for being 'in the top 5' or however else they want to spin it. I find it ironic that as an academic we teach our students about experimental design and all of the limitations that go along with conducting research, yet universities are not prepared to apply the same level of rigor when it suits them. Smacks of hypocrisy. Read the study below from Australia on the error in one of their surveys on postgrads. The 95% confidence interval included every mean score from all universities surveyed. It's clear that differences between most universities is so small as to make it almost impossible to conclude that one is better than another. Looking at the results, it is also apparent that rankings 1 through to 91 would all receive a first! :-)

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1558460>

- **Joe** 17 February, 2011

Old duffer - Every student has the oppurtunity to complete the NSS once, usually in there final year, so it would be impossible for every undergraduate at a university to complete it in any year!

- **Rose Clark** 17 February, 2011

On what basis do students make their decisions in the survey? Are they comparing what they encounter in their current university with their expectation of what thought the university and /or university experience would be like. Presumably unless they have older siblings then they do not have other universities to compare theirs with? Given that so much emphasis is placed on many aspects of this survey, the data collection tool is somewhat naive.

- **Liam Baxter** 17 February, 2011

Please publish the number of respondents from each University. I estimate no more than a hundred or so students from each institution many of whom have over 10,000 students. Are we supposed to give these results any credence whatsoever?

PLEASE STOP TREATING 500 YEAR OLD EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS LIKE FOOTBALL TEAMS just so you can flog a few more mags.

- **Editor's comment**

The number of respondents for each university is published in the fifth column, immediately next to the institution's overall score. It is all very transparent.

- **N.Kumar** 17 February, 2011

for ur information.. It's not student Union as written in one of the survey columns.. it's Students' Union. it is the Union of Students.not 1 student but rather of many.I do not expect this kind of mistake from the Times Higher.

- **@Liam Baxter** 17 February, 2011

The tables already give the number of respondents from each university...

- **Paul Osborne** 17 February, 2011

Out of curiosity - how is the University of Oxford in the South East? Or is the a deliberate carving up of the country to ensure that London gets its own area, and that Oxford only has to compete with Southampton, Brighton and Kent?

- **Liam Baxter** 17 February, 2011

...and they are pitifully low.

- **Editor's comment**

Some additional points: All respondents were members of OpinionPanel's Student Panel, a group of students recruited via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. A new cohort is recruited to the panel annually when Ucas sends out an email invitation. Those surveyed are in different years of their degree. "This means there is very little systematic bias in the panel - almost the entire undergraduate student population has the opportunity to join. This massively reduces the likelihood of sampling error," Opinionpanel explains. Over 13,000 full-time undergraduates took part in this year's polling, an increase of 2,000 over last years' survey. This year, the number of institutions with a sample size of 100 or more has increased considerably.

- **Dr McAndrew** 17 February, 2011

I used to work at the University of Hertfordshire, the survey was always treated importantly, so much so that changes were made not to improve the quality of the experience, but to make students grade the survey better. Students were even presented by senior staff on the importance of giving good feedback so the Uni climbed the table - the justification given was that it would improve their job prospects.

- **David G** 17 February, 2011

Herts takes all student survey's seriously and will make sure we get good feedback. Why pick on non feedback when the responses are views we value?

- **Roy** 17 February, 2011

My lecturers always told us to fill in the feedback so the Institution looks good. The idea is good but ruined by the pressure from the Instructors get good feedback.

- **Javed Anjum Sheikh** 17 February, 2011

I hate statistics one example from survey

Respondent wise

top/bottom

001 Loughborough University 131 (84.90%)

113 University of Westminster 101(60.35%)

highest/lowest

29 University of Edinburgh 257 (78%)

93 Liverpool Hope University 030 (69.30%)

Is it true reflection

- **Consistent rankings** 17 February, 2011

Whilst I agree the base size of the sample is relatively low - the rankings from last year compared to this year are fairly consistent. Therefore those arguing that this isn't statistically viable might want to explain why most universities are within 10 places of their previous position.

If the small sample size skewed things as dramatically as some are claiming you'd expect some radical 'snakes

and ladders' type movement (e.g. 9th this year up from 88th last year). There are very few cases where this has happened, and these results closely correlate to the NSS rankings too.

- **Jack L** 17 February, 2011

I think this is quite possibly the most useless league table currently available in UK Higher education. The number of students surveyed is so low compared to the population of most of the universities as to be of limited statistical value. The level of discrimination is too small to be of any real meaning. Considering that the data in most of the columns is quoted to one place of decimals to quote the final result to two is not really valid. I think the THES has not covered itself in any glory here.

- **Philip Moriarty** 18 February, 2011

@Grant Abt.

Regarding the Australian postgraduate survey you cite, you make the following important point:

"It's clear that differences between most universities is so small as to make it almost impossible to conclude that one is better than another."

Compare this with a key conclusion of "National Student Survey: are differences between universities and courses reliable and meaningful?", JHS Cheng and HW Marsh, Oxford Review of Education 36, 693 (2010):

"Indeed, at the university level, there are relatively few universities that differ significantly from the mean across all universities and, at the course level, there is even a smaller portion of differences that are statistically significant. This suggests the inappropriateness of these ratings for the construction of league tables."

John Holmwood has recently pointed out that despite this lack of statistical 'robustness', the media and, of course, universities themselves use the NSS to rank degree courses. Holmwood has called for a code of practice to counter this unethical mis-selling of degrees. [[http://exquisiteliferesearchresearch.com/exquisite\\_life/2011/02/code-of-practice-needed-to-halt-degree-course-mis-selling-.html](http://exquisiteliferesearchresearch.com/exquisite_life/2011/02/code-of-practice-needed-to-halt-degree-course-mis-selling-.html)]. See also the Letters section of last week's THE: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=415146&c=2>

The NSS will play a central role in the accelerated marketisation of HE post-Browne. A number of student groups are now therefore calling for a boycott of the NSS as a means of demonstrating opposition to the commodification of their education. See, for example, the Nottingham Students Against Fees and Cuts website:

<http://nsafc.wordpress.com/2011/01/28/boycott-the-national-student-survey/>

- **Oh dear** 18 February, 2011

@ConsistentRanking: I don't know what you're talking about. I'm counting 47 universities that are 10 or more places from their position last year, that's 42% of all of them. Together with ten universities that didn't even feature last time it's a bit of a stretch to talk about consistency between the years. I weep for Ms Simmons, OpinionPanel's associate director; I hope she didn't get her inadequate statistics training at my university. And I weep for the people who paid her for this shambolic study.

- **Old Loughbrurian** 18 February, 2011

If Loughborough represents the acme of student experience in these islands. I weep for us all.

- **Young codger** 18 February, 2011

@ Old Duffer

As a recent graduate of one of the higher ranked unis, I can tell you that very little effort is put into advertising these surveys by the students. I feel that the sample sizes are fair by the looks of it, but it would be interesting to see the catchment of these results as, for example, if all of the respondents were Sports Science students, the sporting facilities may be marked higher than by Physics students...

- **Rob Aldridge** 18 February, 2011

What a joke of an article and a pointless survey.

So more than 13,000 took the survey? Well do your maths - I totalled up the respondents and it came to 12,855 so

how is that over 13,000? The basic maths aside there were 1.8 Million UG students in the UK last year (UCAS) so this represents just 0.714% of UK UG students - so by even the most ambitious polling standards this is not representative. In addition to which how are most UG students qualified to compare their university against another? Do they have vast experiences? No they don't. For most it is the first and for many the last experience they have of HE.

Considering the highest number of respondents was 257 and the smallest 30 I think it is safe to say these are not like for like comparisons but rather demonstrates the contempt that UG students have for this kind of "assessment".

Well done the 1,787,145 students who had something better to do or no axe to grind.

Well done The Times for another pointless article.

- **RoryH** 18 February, 2011

What an absolute joke this is.

This is the kind of lazy journalism that lets the public down and paints a completely false picture of the way things are. My institution has over 16,000 students and just over 100 were involved in this survey meaning that the ratings could be swayed outrageously by a small number of students. We score badly in the "student union" (sic) column probably down to the fact we don't sell alcohol on campus. Is this a fair message to send out when we do fantastic in seving enhancing the experience of our students through other sevicees such as representation, welfare, volunteering, sports and societies and student media?

Our annual Students' Association survey recently showed that over 60% of our students (ie over 9000 students) stated that our Students' Association is making a positive impact on their student experience and yet this pathetic survey claims to present a clearer, more truthful message. Absolute nonsense.

A misleading survey to say the least, and unfortunatley one that some school pupils will use to make their final decision.

- **Peter Coles** 18 February, 2011

This survey is ridiculous, because it is based on such small samples, less than 1% of the student population in most instances, and in any case only around 100 individuals. Have you never heard of sampling flucuations? HINT: the square root of 100 is 10, which is 10% of the original number.

It would be an easy matter to demonstrate this survey's unreliability by picking one of the universities (one with a relatively large number of responses, i.e. over 100) and dividing the respondents in two, recalculating the position in the rankings for each half. The internal variation thus displayed probably to at least 50 places in your league table.

And another thing. Each of your overall scores is quoted to two decimal places. Do you \*really\* think the last two figures are significant, given the inherent inaccuracy of your small samples?

- **Number crunching** 18 February, 2011

I'll leave the number crunching to the statisticians amongst us, but needless to say, while the survey itself is interesting, the low response rates at some institutions would suggest that this is something which THES would be better to keep as an interesting article in their magazine.

The fact that the statistics are starting to get splashed across the BBC website as 'illustrative' is very worrying.

I would feel better about this if the editor openly admitted low response rates to external bodies, rather than simply crowing about how 'authentic' the results are.

It really can't be that hard to increase participation in this survey. I mean honestly 30 respondents??? You could get more than that just by ringing up the SU's at these institutions and asking them to ask their mates to fill it in - you wouldn't even need to pay anyone to help with the survey.

If you want to provide something 'illustrative' and 'authentic' it would be much better to provide some short voxpop videos from students at each institution, than muck about creating yet another football league table based on derisable participation rates. We are in the Web 2.0 era after all.

- **Jack L** 18 February, 2011

Perhaps the Editor would like to reply on some of comments made here in relation to the methodology and validity of the approach taken. Does the Editor feel, in his professional judgement, that this survey is sufficiently robust to

be worthy of the press coverage it has received. Do you think the survey has any meaningful benefit to higher education in the UK? What has it achieved?

I am genuinely interested in what the Editor feels. Please reply.

- **PaulP** 18 February, 2011

@JackL Yyou may have more luck getting a response from the editor, who I see has engaged with some of these questions, above, if you got HER gender right

- **On the response rates** 18 February, 2011

I actually take more issue with the construction of the survey than the fractional response. Rating "cheap shop and pub on campus" equally with questions about the quality of the curriculum is sketchy. Universities may not coach their students to give positive answers, but the students are aware that these responses will be used to rate the quality of their university, and that those ratings will in turn affect the value of their degrees.

The only things that really stand out here are that the London schools fare very badly compared to comparable institutions outside London. Otherwise, it's generally true that the universities which rate highly by other criteria rate highly by this survey.

- **Peggy** 19 February, 2011

Is this poll gonna be influential to those international PG students? Why did all the tables vary from each other so much? T\G\I ranks~Which one is more trustful?

- **a questioner** 19 February, 2011

So, who de we have endorsing this survey or it's findings: Eleanor Simmons - the author of the survey - biased, Aaron Porter - English Lit grad (and he hardly has a ringing endorsement), Craig Mahoney points at other surveys and really doesn't shout about how useful this one is.

Why not ask Mintel or Mori to comment on the methodology and usefulness of the findings - or better still why not approach College and School stats teachers as they have a vested interest in helpful survey?

- **Mooter:)**123 19 February, 2011

@Peggy 19 February, 2011

Is this poll gonna be influential to those international PG students?

Hi Peggy,

I don't think it is going to be influencing as international students are hardly likely to pay the stupid subscription fee. What they will see, instead are the various cynical attempts by HEIs to spin the findings of this rather flimsy piece of "research".

- **Re London** 19 February, 2011

This survey is pretty meaningless in the sense that few intelligent people would, given the choice, go to Portsmouth rather than LSE, Liverpool rather than UCL or Lincoln rather than Imperial.

However there is no doubt that the undergraduate student faces additional challenges (as well as opportunities) being in London, which is truly like a country within a country, and London-based institutions must make more effort to improve the perceived satisfaction of their undergraduates.

- **@Roy** 19 February, 2011

@Roy: It's an anonymous and secret questionnaire. Your lecturers can't possibly pressure you into completing it a particular way. Just tell the truth as you see it. Answers are always going to be subjective - that's the idea.

My institution got into hot water for this "hard sell" approach to undergrads a few years ago. Knuckles were rapped so hard that I haven't heard diddly about surveys in the nearly three years that I've been here. Frankly, it wouldn't have influenced my responses if they'd tried.

As someone who used to be involved in recruitment, I can assure all undergraduates that the process (te one that I ran, anyway) was in no way influenced by surveys of what students think of their cafeteria facilities etc. It was rare that we ever took any notice of the university from whence a qualification arose. Standard interview interest: "Oh you have a degree - that's nice. Now, about your aptitude for this job..."

- **@Re London** 19 February, 2011

"This survey is pretty meaningless in the sense that few intelligent people would, given the choice, go to Portsmouth rather than LSE, Liverpool rather than UCL or Lincoln rather than Imperial."

I think people understand that this isn't really what the report means. On the other hand, it might mean that a student should seriously consider choosing Warwick over LSE for politics, Southampton over Imperial for electronics, or St Andrews over UCL for English.

The same could be true at the less academically selective end of the spectrum, although at this end of the spectrum, students tend to be less willing to travel large distances. Still, a student choosing between Winchester and Southampton Solent, or between Brighton and Portsmouth might find the table useful.

It's a limited tool, but it does give some specific information about the fact that some universities have students who are nearly universally happy with nearly everything, while some other universities have large numbers of students who are unhappy about a lot of things.

- **young-at-heart codger** 19 February, 2011

@On the response rates

Fair point about cheap pub rates as high as good teaching - if I marked student's work giving equal weight to "spelling" and "application of knowledge" that would not be fair would it?

This is separate from NSS is it not? Guidelines to staff this year are pretty stiff when it comes to what we tell students when encouraging them to fill in the NSS.

@Student readers - are you a consumer of higher education (i.e. you want to buy the best value education) or a producer of knowledge and participant in the experience of learning? If the latter, then these surveys are shallow.

- **Never Porter** 20 February, 2011

Never Porter!! Meaninglessquestionnaire.

- **Alex** 21 February, 2011

Yes this survey is completely subjective, but this adds to its greatness! These are large groups of people who either have brilliant experiences at their institution or those who do not feel they get value for money in experience and teaching at university. I do not have experience of other institutions but I have loved every second at my own - UEA.

- **Tim Brown** 21 February, 2011

Can anyone explain how the University of Sunderland is the most improved University having jumped up 22 places when the University of Chester have moved up 24 places (more than ANY other University)???

Is there some sophisticated formula not being outlined or can someone not add up???

- **@Tim Brown** 21 February, 2011

They probably meant most improved according to the overall score on an absolute scale, rather than according to the rank on the list.

- **Editor's comment**

OpinionPanel examined changes in both rankings and overall scores for each university between 2009 and 2010. For each institution, an aggregate score was calculated based on the mean of its ranked change in score and ranked change in league table position between the two years (see box on 'Most Improved Student Experience').

- **Dara** 22 February, 2011

Goodness me - what a sour thread dripping with a sense of entitlement!

Does no one hold out the possibility that students (if not, it would seem academics) can actually balance and value this information and weight it appropriately.

And I will say it if no one else will - Well done Loughborough.

- **David Chapman** 22 February, 2011

The unmistakeable odour of sour grapes hangs over many of these comments. Loughborough's well deserved success comes as no surprise - just ask the University's alumni worldwide. The fact is that the quality of the student experience there is exceptionally high. Coincidentally, I read this blog just after speaking with a 2010 graduate in Kazakhstan. Her warm praise of the Loughborough student experience was based in part on the comparison she'd been able to draw with other government scholars from her country at various other British universities. One aspect that she highlighted does not come in for mention in your article, namely the high level of engagement of Loughborough students in rag and communit action events. Loughborough's outstanding Students Union should take a bow for making this such a priority every year.

- **Andy** 24 February, 2011

Would be interesting to see how these figures relate to employability prospects; ie. in further studies/research, in job related to course studied, in job not related to course studied, in voluntary work, time-out (travel/etc), not at work - in 6, 12 + 24 months after qualifying - as a direct comparison of satisfaction and employability.

Well done Loughborough for coming top again. Students had the opportunity to have their say, whether their experiences were positive or negative. I agree that a few students all with the same strong views can skew the results and would not represent what other students experience - but I'm afraid this is like politics where non-voters views don't count for much if the "wrong" politician gets in.

Yes its all subjective, but all things being equal - may give future students and employers an idea how students felt about their institutions and how they value their experiences and taking the time and effort to let others know about it. If students couldn't be bothered, you could assume that would tell you something else about an institution.

Sometimes feedback from students are feedback to course leaders to improve future students' experiences, yes you might not feel the benefits, but the year(s) following you hopefully will have a more positive outcome.

Yes, London institutions does appear that they need to buck up their ideas; things do cost a bit more there, so they must look to making things more value for money to attract students - loads to see and things to do, its a hub of travel to other places, excellent opportunities to meet up with students from other institutions (where you could compare notes about what's going on) and depending on your area of your studies there are plenty of work opportunities too.

- **Nicky** 1 March, 2011

Are Scottish universities not included in the survey as I can't see them anywhere in the results?

- **Nicky** 1 March, 2011

Sorry - found them

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