

Satisfied – but students want more feedback

There's praise for teaching in survey but also a desire for more individual guidance, write **Rebecca Attwood** and **Louise Radnofsky**

Students are still less than satisfied with the feedback they receive, the results of this year's National Student Survey show.

While teaching received high praise, satisfying 82 per cent of UK students, just over half – 54 per cent – agreed that feedback had been prompt and had helped to clarify things they did not understand.

For the UK as a whole, students' views on assessment and feedback have improved by one percentage point since last year.

Staff received the highest accolade for their explanatory skills – 86 per cent of students agreed that they were good at this – and 82 per cent felt staff were enthusiastic about what they are teaching.

Overall, 81 per cent of UK students were satisfied with their experience at university or college.

Sally Hunt, general secretary of the University and College Union, said the overall levels of satisfaction were testament to the hard work of university staff. But she said: "The massive class sizes that

we now have in our institutions do make individual feedback much harder to deliver."

Welcoming the high satisfaction levels, a Universities UK spokesperson said: "Institutions take student feedback seriously – it helps to bring about change. HEIs will analyse the results of the NSS to continue improving provision for students, along with their own surveys and what they hear from the various channels within the institution."

For the second year running, the UK's only private university, Buckingham, tops *The Times Higher's* league table – but it has found a new rival in Oxford, which enters in second place, just ahead of the Open University.

Terence Kealey, vice-chancellor of Buckingham University, attributes his institution's success to the fact that it is private. He said: "We are the one university whose sole customer is the student."

Sir Michael Bichard, rector of the University of the Arts, London, which received one of the

lowest scores in *The Times Higher's* survey, of 3.54 out of a maximum 5, said the university was "disappointed and surprised that the many positive steps we have taken to improve the student experience have not been reflected in the latest satisfaction figures".

Among individual departments, the most satisfied first-degree students are genetics undergraduates at Leicester – 99 per cent of them endorsed their teaching and they gave high marks in every other category, data from the Higher Education Funding Council for England shows.

Media studies at the new Cumbria University was the worst rated on overall satisfaction – just 15 per cent of students said they were satisfied with their course.

Most students unions, and the National Union of Students as a whole, have given the survey strong backing. But the students union at Cambridge University continued to urge students to opt out of the survey, arguing that the questions were "over-simplistic to the point of meaninglessness".

Melvena McKendrick, Cambridge's pro vice-chancellor for education, wrote to students saying it would be "a glaring omission for Cambridge to be the only university not to have its results

posted along with those of other institutions when prospective applicants are making comparisons", but the university did not get enough responses to be included.

A spokesperson for the university said 91 per cent of Cambridge students who had responded to the survey were satisfied with their university experience.

METHODOLOGY

The Times Higher satisfaction score is an overall measure of the ratings provided by students in the National Student Survey. It is an institutional average of the scores received for 21 questions. Students rated teaching, assessment, learning support, organisation and resources at their universities, as well as their personal development as a result of their course, using a five-point scale. Some smaller institutions were omitted. This year, the Higher Education Funding Council for England published the percentage of students who gave their overall satisfaction a score of 4 or 5, in a separate question.

UNIVERSITY SATISFACTION RATINGS

Institution	Times Higher score	2007	2006	2005	Institution	Times Higher score	2007	2006	2005
Buckingham	4.39	4.28	-		Wales, Newport	3.83	3.92	3.92	
Oxford	4.23	-	-		Bradford	3.83	3.90	3.82	
Open University	4.21	4.12	4.16		Newcastle	3.83	3.87	3.80	
Loughborough	4.15	4.08	4.03		Plymouth	3.83	3.83	3.79	
Leicester	4.14	4.08	4.00		Sunderland	3.83	3.78	3.69	
Exeter	4.12	3.97	3.91		Lincoln	3.83	3.63	3.69	
Institute of Education	4.12	-	-		Thames Valley	3.83	3.60	-	
St Andrews	4.09	4.10	-		Liverpool	3.82	3.87	3.76	
East Anglia	4.06	4.08	3.95		Leeds	3.82	3.85	3.76	
Birkbeck College	4.05	3.98	3.92		Ulster	3.82	3.83	3.81	
Wales, Aberystwyth	4.01	4.05	3.90		Keele	3.82	3.78	3.76	
Kent	3.99	3.92	3.89		Heriot-Watt	3.82	-	-	
Hull	3.98	4.00	3.92		Royal Holloway, London	3.82	-	3.85	
Chichester	3.97	3.88	3.93		Imperial, London	3.81	3.90	3.72	
Glasgow	3.95	3.93	-		Bristol	3.81	3.87	3.82	
Lancaster	3.95	3.92	3.91		Gloucestershire	3.81	3.83	3.75	
Southampton	3.94	3.97	3.81		Surrey	3.81	3.75	3.70	
Portsmouth	3.94	3.80	3.70		Wales, Lampeter	3.80	3.97	3.91	
Aberdeen	3.93	-	-		Goldsmiths, London	3.80	3.83	3.81	
Durham	3.92	3.97	3.90		Brighton	3.80	3.83	3.73	
York	3.92	3.93	3.88		York St John	3.80	3.70	3.77	
Edge Hill	3.92	3.83	3.90		Hertfordshire	3.79	3.77	3.70	
Reading	3.91	3.95	3.87		Glasgow Caledonian	3.79	-	-	
Teesside	3.91	3.92	3.86		Manchester Met	3.78	3.75	3.71	
Aston	3.91	3.88	3.77		Soas	3.78	-	-	
Bolton	3.91	3.87	3.90		Manchester	3.78	-	3.78	
Bath Spa	3.91	3.70	3.80		Can'tbury Christ Church	3.77	3.85	3.85	
Bedfordshire	3.90	3.77	-		Edinburgh	3.77	3.83	-	
Dundee	3.90	-	-		Nottingham	3.77	3.82	3.79	
King's College, London	3.89	3.95	3.85		Kingston	3.77	3.75	3.63	
Wales, Bangor	3.89	3.95	3.91		Southampton Solent	3.77	3.75	-	
LSE	3.89	-	3.82		Bournemouth	3.77	3.73	3.66	
Birmingham	3.89	-	3.78		London South Bank	3.77	-	-	
Staffordshire	3.88	3.90	3.80		City, London	3.76	3.85	-	
Oxford Brookes	3.88	3.87	3.78		Chester	3.76	3.82	3.88	
Queen Mary, London	3.88	3.82	3.79		Salford	3.76	3.75	3.72	
Warwick	3.88	-	-		Wolverhampton	3.76	3.75	3.72	
Cardiff	3.87	3.87	3.87		Sheffield Hallam	3.76	3.70	3.72	
Northampton	3.87	3.85	3.77		Liverpool John Moores	3.76	-	3.80	
Central Lancashire	3.87	3.83	3.79		Nottingham Trent	3.75	3.70	3.74	
Essex	3.87	3.83	3.82		Derby	3.74	3.83	3.71	
Bath	3.87	3.78	3.76		Northumbria	3.74	3.80	3.74	
UCL	3.87	-	3.84		Brunel	3.74	3.65	3.55	
Huddersfield	3.86	3.92	3.88		Roehampton	3.72	3.75	3.68	
Wales, Swansea	3.86	3.90	3.88		Anglia Ruskin	3.72	3.73	3.78	
Queen's Belfast	3.86	3.88	3.87		Sussex	3.71	3.67	3.70	
Sheffield	3.86	3.85	3.80		East London	3.71	-	-	
Winchester	3.86	3.85	3.88		Greenwich	3.70	3.67	3.62	
West of England	3.86	3.77	3.70		Leeds Metropolitan	3.66	3.70	3.73	
Strathclyde	3.86	-	-		Westminster	3.66	3.60	3.63	
Glamorgan	3.85	3.85	3.83		Middlesex	3.65	3.68	3.56	
Worcester	3.85	3.80	3.81		Cumbria	3.65	-	-	
Liverpool Hope	3.85	3.65	3.75		London Metropolitan	3.59	-	3.50	
Coventry	3.84	3.82	3.79		University Arts, London	3.54	-	3.53	
De Montfort	3.84	3.70	3.71						

* Based on figures published by Hefce

The full results are available at www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/nss/data/2007. The launch of the new official "Unistats.com" website has again been delayed.

THE COURSES THAT STUDENTS ARE HAPPIEST WITH AND MOST DISSATISFIED WITH

Subject	Institution with most satisfied students	Institution with least satisfied students	Subject	Institution with most satisfied students	Institution with least satisfied students	Subject	Institution with most satisfied students	Institution with least satisfied students
Medicine	Dundee	Cardiff	General engineering	Open University	Central Lancashire	Tourism/transport/travel	Plymouth	Greenwich
Dentistry	Sheffield	Manchester	Mechanical/production engineering	Cardiff University	UCL	Media studies	York St John	Cumbria
Anatomy/physiology/pathology	Brunel	Ulster	Aerospace engineering	Southampton	Glasgow	Publicity studies	Liverpool	Leeds Met
Pharmacology/toxicology	East Anglia	Brighton	Electronic/electric engineering	Sheffield	Warwick	Journalism	Cardiff University	Sunderland
Nursing	Edinburgh	Staffordshire	Civil engineering	Heriot-Watt	Strathclyde	English studies	Bishop Grosseteste UC	Brighton
Nutrition	Leeds Met	London Met	Chem/process/energy engineering	Imperial College	UCL	American/Australasian studies	Dundee	East Anglia
Ophthalmics	Bradford	Anglia Ruskin	Materials/minerals technology	Imperial College	Manchester Met	Classics	Exeter	Durham
Aural/oral sciences	Leeds Met	Coll St Mark & St John	Architecture	UCL	Brighton	French studies	Leicester	Newcastle
Medical technology	Bradford	Teesside	Building	Bolton	Westminster	German/Scandinavian studies	Warwick	Bath
Subjects allied to medicine	Portsmouth	Hertfordshire	Planning	Cardiff	Newcastle	Iberian studies	Bristol	Middlesex
Biology	Leicester	Westminster	Economics	East Anglia	Queen's Belfast	Linguistics	Cardiff	Ulster
Zoology	Cardiff	Wales, Bangor	Politics	Open University	Lincoln	History	Chichester	Newcastle
Mol biology/biophysics/biochemistry	Durham	UCL	Sociology	St Mary's UC	Sussex	Archaeology	Southampton	Bournemouth
Sports science	Wales, Aberystwyth	Derby	Social policy	Glasgow	London Met	Philosophy	Sheffield	Sussex
Psychology	Gloucestershire	Leeds Met	Anthropology	Soas	LSE	Theology/religious studies	Durham	King's, London
Veterinary sciences	Liverpool	Royal Vet College	Others in social studies	Cardiff University	Sussex	Fine art	Chester	York St John
Agriculture/others in vet sciences	Harper Adams UC	Writtle College	Social work	Open University	L'pool John Moores	Design studies	Brunel University	York St John
Chemistry	York	Sheffield Hallam	Human/social geography	Glasgow	Edinburgh	Music	Wales, Bangor	Leeds Coll Music
Physics/astronomy	Hertfordshire	Queen's Belfast	Law	Derby	Leeds Met	Drama	Exeter	Northumbria
Forensic/archaeological science	Staffordshire	Kingston	Business studies	Glasgow	Leeds Met	Dance	Winchester	L'pool John Moores
Geology	Open University	Leeds	Marketing	Ulster	Univ Arts, London	Cinematics/photography	UC Falmouth	Lincoln
Physical geog/environ science	Royal Holloway	Wolverhampton	Management studies	Strathclyde	Brighton	Teacher training	Swansea Inst of HE	Anglia Ruskin
Mathematics/statistics	St Andrews	Anglia Ruskin	Finance	Exeter	Salford	Academic studies in education	Keele	Greenwich
Computer science	Glasgow	Wales, Newport	Accounting	Thames Valley	Leeds Met			

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