The National Student Survey

Paula Surridge
Department of Sociology
University of Bristol

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Executive summary

1. The 2007 National Student Survey (NSS) marked the third annual survey of student experiences in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the United Kingdom. This report analyses all three surveys in order to look for areas of change and continuity in the student experience.

2. The report focuses on student, course and institutional characteristics and how these are related to the responses students give to the NSS. The report also considers in detail stability in institutional differences over time.

3. The report groups the NSS questions into six analytical scales and one measure of Overall Satisfaction. The scales are:

- Teaching and Learning.
- Assessment and Feedback.
- Academic Support.
- Organisation and Management.
- Learning Resources.
- Personal Development.

4. All six scales and Overall Satisfaction are highly rated by students. In 2007 81.4% of full-time students said that, overall, they were satisfied with their course.

5. Each of the scales showed an increase in mean scores between 2005 and 2007. This increase was largest for the Learning Resources, Organisation and Management and Academic Support scales.

6. There is a considerable amount of stability in the effects of student, course and institutional characteristics over time, with a majority of the effects being the same in each year. For example in each year female students were more positive about Teaching and Learning than were male students.

7. Whilst effects are stable over time they are also complex: no student, course or institutional characteristic had the same effect on all six scales and Overall Satisfaction.

8. Although the effects are complex, some effects are present across a number of scales. Notably Asian students were less positive than White students on the Teaching and Learning, Academic Support, Learning Resources and Personal Development scales as well as less satisfied overall. Dyslexic students were less positive than students with no declared disability on all scales except Teaching and Learning and Academic Support.

9. There are large and stable differences among the subject groups. These effects are the largest of the student, course and institutional characteristics and show a good deal of stability over time, raising issues as to whether different subject groups can learn from each other in terms of good practice.

10. Some effects do show change over time. Of note is a reduction in the differences between the responses of White and Asian students over time. Whilst Asian students remain less positive about a number of elements of their higher education experience this difference has reduced over time on the Teaching and Learning and Assessment and Feedback scales.
11. The vast majority of institutions are not significantly different in their NSS scores from those we would expect given their profile of student, course and institutional characteristics. However, there is some stability in those institutions doing better (or worse) than expected. For Overall Satisfaction, 10 institutions performed less well than expected in all three years while 11 institutions performed better than expected in all three years.

12. The majority of institutions are achieving scores for the analytical scales and levels of Overall Satisfaction which are very high. It should be recognised that a large part of the challenge for the sector lies in maintaining these high scores over time.

13. Students on NHS funded courses were included in the NSS for the first time in 2007. NHS funded students were less positive about Teaching and Learning, Academic Support, Organisation and Management and less satisfied overall. However, they were more positive about Personal Development than were other full-time students.

14. Part-time students whose courses were distance learning based were not significantly different from other part-time students in 2007, though they were more positive about Assessment and Feedback and Organisation and Management than other part-time students in 2006.

15. Part-time students who were not studying by distance learning were more positive about Assessment and Feedback than their full-time counterparts.

16. Detailed analysis of the NSS over three years has revealed high levels of stability of effects but has also highlighted the complexity of these effects. No single student group are more or less positive about all aspects of their experiences.

17. The NSS has been a catalyst for change in a number of areas. However, it is clear that a large survey such as the NSS does not hold the answers to many of the key questions facing HEIs, rather it highlights what the key questions are and provides an invaluable resource to institutions and the wider policy community.