

SEC15D009

Title: *UEA Response to UNISTATS and NSS Consultation*
Author: Becky Price, Market Research Manager
Date: 06/11/2015
Circulation: Student Affairs Group
Agenda: SEC15A002
Version: Draft
Status: Open

Issue

UEA response to UNISTAT and NSS Consultation

Recommendation

Please consider the attached draft UEA response to this consultation and raise any queries or comments for inclusion in the finalised response to be produced by Becky Price, Market Research Manager.

Resource Implications

N/A

Risk Implications

Potential students increasing turn to the online benchmarking information in making their decisions on where and what to study.

Performance in the National Student Survey is crucial to UEA's league table performance. Word of mouth reviews of student satisfaction play a fundamental part in some students' choices of institution.

Equality and Diversity

N.A.

Timing of decisions

27th November to allow finalised UEA response to be submitted by the deadline noon on 4th December.

Further Information

Becky Price (BIU/Planning)
Ext 1203
rebecca.price@uea.ac.uk

Background

Since the introduction of the first National Student Survey (NSS) in 2005, much has changed in the UK higher education (HE) sector. The last 10 years have brought fundamental shifts in the funding environment and we have seen the entry of new institutions and programmes and an increased diversity in the student body. The NSS itself is now a UK-wide survey, widely recognised as a set of information which can drive and monitor improvement in the student academic experience. Such information about HE is also of central importance to provide accountability, and help students make choices about study.

Over the past two years the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group has overseen a programme of research by the HE funding bodies to review information about higher education. The findings suggest that some changes are now needed to the NSS and to resources such as the Unistats website and Key Information Sets to bring them up to date and improve their effectiveness.

The Higher Education Public Information Steering Group are, therefore, now putting forward a proposal for changes to Unistats and the NSS to be implemented in 2017 and beyond and asking HEIs to comment. The proposed changes cover; presentation of the information, questions to be included and excluded in the NSS and the sample for the survey.

A PDF of the proposal is attached along with a draft UEA response which is based on input gathered from an initial email consultation with colleagues and from Planning who work closely on analysing the NSS data each year and on managing the current Unistats process. SEC are asked to comment on/ agree UEA's response.

Please note that Becky Price, Market Research Manager, will be attending a consultation event on 17th November and will bring any further insight gathered from this event to the meeting.

See

1. Review of information about learning and teaching, and the student experience: Consultation on changes to the National Student Survey, Unistats and information provided by institutions http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE.2014/Content/Pubs/2015/201524/HEFCE2015_24.pdf
2. Attachment (below)
HEFCE Student Information Consultation – DRAFT UEA Response

“

[DRAFT] - UEA response to the HEFCE Consultation on Changes to the National Student Survey, Unistats and Information Provided by Institutions

**Changes for 2017
Unistats**

1. Do you agree with the respective roles we have identified for institutions and funding bodies in meeting students' information needs?

Yes

2. Do you agree that our proposed changes to Unistats and the Key Information Set will improve the accessibility of information and ensure that the data we provide is meaningful for students?

Welcome the shift from providing data to providing information (more context and guidance on how to interpret data)

3. Do you have any comments on our proposals for Unistats and the areas we propose to ask institutions to provide on websites? Are there any gaps?

UEA are confident that the information types included already feature on the UEA website but would appreciate further clarification on the detail required.

The National Student Survey

4. Do you agree with the criteria we propose should be applied to the main National Student Survey questionnaire?

The criteria appear sensible in terms of measuring and expressing students learning and teaching experience.

5. Do you have any comments on this proposal?

In terms of the criteria that the survey should aid in HEI's being able to influence the areas measured we would suggest that open ended comments are gathered in a more useful and useable way by adding the chance to comment positively or on areas for improvement at the end of each section of the survey.

6. Do you agree that we should include questions on student engagement, to strengthen the role of the survey in improving learning and teaching?

UEA would support these inclusion of these new banks of questions.

7. Do you have any comments on the proposed themes, terminology or sequencing of our proposed student engagement questions, or any wider comments about this proposal?

Propose that questions on Teaching should feature in the survey prior to those on Student Engagement.

Query use of word "right" in some question phrasing – we would suggest that "appropriate" or "useful" would be more suitable and would avoid issues of interpretation that may come from use of "right."

Query inclusion of both "Staff value students' views and opinions about the course" and "It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on" as these seen extremely closely related and interpretation of likely nuanced differences between the two may be challenging. Propose only including "It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on."

Propose that open ended questions are included at the end of the new sections to ensure institutions can understand strengths and weaknesses in terms of these new measures so that they can take appropriate action.

8. Do you agree with the proposed rewording of questions on learning resources?

Agree with adjusting the wording of these questions and with the shift in focus away from the very unspecific "need" onto "learning."

Propose inclusion of "resources and facilities" in the Library question as opposed to just "resources" to bring in line with IT question and ensure that HEIs are able to monitor their full Library provision.

Support the changes of "specialised" to "subject specific". Query whether the aim of this question is to include subject specific resources in central Library e.g. books and journals or only those resources contained with Schools. Currently this is unclear which will limit clarity of interpretation of results and usefulness to HEIs and students.

9. Do these questions include all the areas relating to learning resources which are of importance to institutions and students? If not, which aspects are missing?

10. Do you agree with the proposed rewording of questions on assessment and feedback?

Yes.

11. Do you have any comments on our proposal to amend these questions?

Fully support rephrase from "detailed" to "helpful" and agree that this is now too closely related to Q9 "Feedback helped me clarify thing I did not understand" so agree removal of Q9.

12. Do you agree that we should remove Q3, Q5 and Q9 from the survey to ensure that it remains short?

Agree with removal of Q3.

Query removal of Q5. Should this be maintained as well as Q6? Also query clarity of current phrasing of Q6 – do students interpret this to include course work or exams only?

Agree with removal of Q9.

13. Do you agree that we should remove some or all of the personal development questions and consider how we can gather this information through an alternative route?

Agree that current questions needed revising to make more useful to potential students and HEIs. Propose that questions look at learning of transferable skills, application of learning and feeling prepared for future career.

However, disagree with removal of topic from questionnaire and would like questions on employability to remain within the core NSS questions.

Crucially, institutions are increasingly working to embed professional development learning within course teaching making it a fundamental part of students' teaching and learning experience. It is, therefore, important that this is consistently not optionally monitored.

In addition, employability factors are increasingly part of the potential student decision making so it fully fits the criteria for NSS questions to tackle this topic in the questionnaire.

14. Do you agree that we should remove Q23 and instead include an optional bank of questions related to student unions?

In light of criteria for question inclusion being focussed on teaching and learning and noting the proposed inclusion of questions on student voice agree that 23 does not fit new survey.

15. Do you have any comments on our proposals for changes to the optional banks including that the choice should be made jointly with the student union or student guild?

Will benchmark data be available for optional banks for those institutions choosing to use them? This is a particular concern if Personal and Professional development does become optional (which UEA objects to) and this is not benchmarkable as this will severely undermine the institutions ability to ensure it is meeting student need.

16. Do you have any comments on our proposals relating to discontinued questions?

No further comment.

17. How do you or your institution use the optional banks?

UEA have not used the optional banks of questions. This decision is made to avoid respondents having to complete an over long survey and avoid drop out. Other topics of interest are instead explored through internal surveys and qualitative research. It is likely that UEA will maintain this approach moving forward.

18. How could we improve the usefulness of the optional banks? Have we identified the right additional themes for new banks?

No comment

Changes after 2017

First-hand accounts

19. Do you agree with the principle of making balanced first-hand accounts from students available?

UEA have concerns regarding the publishing of verbatim comments. These can exert disproportionate influence especially when reviewed away from the quantitative findings. UEA also has considerable concerns regarding how the balanced nature of these could be guaranteed; by asking all students to comment positively and negatively the survey does not capture the relative impact of these positives and negatives nor the importance to the respondents e.g. everything can have gone extremely well for a student with one slight gripe and these would have the same presence in the presentation of their comments.

20. Do you have any comments about the possible use of NSS open text comments, or suggested alternative approaches to gathering and presenting such information?

We do not support the publication of qualitative comments

We would propose that qualitative comments are provided to individual HEIs in a more useful and useable way to aid in understanding the quantitative results of the survey and in taking action where necessary. We propose increasing the number of open ends in the survey to one at the end of each theme/section and verbatim comments being provided to HEIs coded to the most relevant quantitative question. We would always propose that the possibilities for some form of benchmarking be explored whilst maintain respondent and HEI confidentiality – a possible approach could be to provide a thematic summary of sector comments (e.g. volumes and main themes of positive and negative comments on each question section) against which individual HEIs can compare their qualitative results.

Extending the coverage of the NSS

21. Have we identified the correct priorities for extending the coverage of the NSS?

Propose that current coverage for the NSS should be maintained to preserve clarity in the results. Propose that other options for surveying other student types should be explored and opt in/ opt out.

Please note UEA's concerns regarding the current treatment of intercalating students in the sample. Currently if students intercalate between their penultimate and final year they are surveyed whilst intercalating (even if on a different course type at this time) rather than when in their actual final year of their UG studies. This seems inappropriate and should be addressed.

22. Do you agree that we should develop a flexible online survey to include all students who are on short or flexible courses?

As above – Coverage of NSS should be maintained with optional other approaches for other course types.

23. Do you have examples of how data and feedback from non-completers are currently collected by institutions?

UEA currently designing exit qualitative (telephone depth interviews) and quantitative (online survey) approaches with non-completers at the time of exiting to learn more about reasons for exiting.

24. How should we give students who withdraw from their studies an opportunity to provide feedback, and how could their views be shared?

Agree hard to reach group and have some interest in non-publishable data but do not think that this should be an extension of the NSS but instead a separate optional project.

Information for taught postgraduate students

25. Do you agree that we should consider collecting feedback for publication from taught postgraduate students about their experiences?

Yes

If this is to be implemented we would propose using the established PTES survey as opposed to launching an additional approach.

26. In light of changes to higher education fees and funding, do you agree that all three purposes of information (paragraph 24 of the consultation) are relevant to a summative taught PG feedback survey?

Agree

27. Which themes would it be important to gather and provide information on?

If this is to be implemented we would propose using the established PTES survey as opposed to launching an additional approach.

28. Do you have any other comments on this proposal?