

SEN11D018

PRES EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of East Anglia
SREPARNA GHOSH

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Response rates and sample characteristics**
 - The overall response rate for UEA was 50% ranging from 100% in AHP to only 17% from DEV.
 - SCI had a particularly good response rate and therefore the results of PRES might over represent the views of SCI students and under represent those from other Faculties.
 - SSF had the most ethnically diverse students while HUM had the least.
 - Males comprised 48% of the sample
 - Students with disabilities comprised 5% of the sample and most of them had a learning disability
 - Employed students comprised 40% of the sample and a majority of them worked between 1-10 hours per week.
 - The majority of students were partly or fully funded by UEA (188 of 597), Research Councils (163 of 597), followed by themselves (131 of 597).
 - Funding varied by Faculties with the majority of HUM students partly or fully funding themselves while the majority in other Faculties were at least fully or partly funded by UEA.
- **Supervision**
 - UEA outperforms other Universities on the majority of indicators related to supervision with the exception of topic selection and supervisors taking the effort to understand difficulties encountered by students.
 - However there are disparities across Faculties with students from FMH (74%) having the least favourable supervision and those from HUM (83%) reporting the best supervision; it should be noted that across all Faculties, the scores are equal to or better than the national average with regards to supervision.
 - The majority of students reported they were satisfied with the frequency of the meetings with their primary supervisor; however 1 in 4 wanted to meet their full supervisory team more often.

- **Skills Development**
 - UEA lags behind others with regards to each indicator of development of PGR skills. The only indicator where UEA performs at par with other Universities is with regards to development of analytical skills.
 - There are considerable differences across Faculties with students from SSF on an average reporting the lowest scores on this indicator (67%), 10 percentage points below the national average. It should also be noted that a significant minority (11%) of students from SSF strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statements. SCI reported the highest (79%) scores on an average on this indicator while FMH scored 73% and HUM scored 76%.

- **Infrastructure**
 - UEA also lags behind on a number of metrics related to infrastructure. The differences range from 7% with regards to satisfaction with working space and 6% with regards to computing resources and facilities. The only area where it performs at par with others is with regards to having adequate access to equipment necessary for doing research.
 - The Ph.D. student experience with regards to infrastructure is extremely variable. While the average for SCI is 76%, for SSF it stands at 53%; FMH is only marginally better than SSF at 58% while for HUM, the figure is 62%, indicating that with the exception of SCI, none of the Faculties score at par with the national average.
 - Qualitative analysis indicates that students encountered difficulties finding a space to work in the library often having to compete with undergraduates. This was felt most acutely by students who had a working space in the past (ENV) and no longer do so. A lack of working space was also cited as being a problem for students in DEV.
 - Problems with IT and the network were also reported as an issue by students across all Faculties.

- **Intellectual Climate**
 - UEA outperforms other institutions on every item except for the questions on whether students feel integrated into the department's community. However it should be noted that 21% strongly disagreed or disagreed that they felt integrated with the community of their discipline or their department.
 - Satisfaction with the intellectual climate varies substantially across Faculties. Students from FMH on the average report feeling least integrated (53%), followed by SSF (58%), HUM (65%) and SCI (69%).
 - Qualitative analysis indicates that a number of reasons are associated with students' isolation including a lack of communal working space (both within and outside of their Schools), very few opportunities for socialization for Ph.D. students, loneliness inherent in the process of writing a dissertation (particularly for students in SSF and HUM who do not work as part of a team) and a large number of international students who may have thinner social networks than those of home students.

- **Goals and Standards**
 - Although a majority of students reported having a good understanding of the standards required for thesis and requirements of the Ph.D., UEA scored a few percent lower than others except for the question on whether students had an understanding of the requirements and deadlines for formal monitoring of progress.
 - HUM students had the greatest understanding of goals and standards with an average of 79% agreeing or strongly agreeing, followed by SCI (75%) and SSF (74%). Students from FMH (66%) had the least understanding.

- **Thesis Examination**
 - A slightly higher percentage of students at UEA thought the exam process was fair and timescales were reasonable when compared to other institutions; however UEA scored less favourably on items that measured support and guidance (6% difference for pre-viva preparation and 5% difference for post-viva changes).

- **Professional Development and Career**
 - This is a general area of concern nationally, though UEA does compare favourably to other institutes. While 50% of students nationally agreed that they are encouraged to reflect on their professional development needs, 55% of students from UEA reported the same. Despite this, 1 in 5 students at UEA disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were encouraged to reflect on their professional development.
 - There are substantial variations across Faculties with regards to this index. SSF came in the lowest with only 37% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing in contrast to 55% of students from FMH.
- **Roles and Responsibilities**
 - The items assessing roles and responsibilities were related to whether students had an understanding of individuals responsible for specific tasks within the institution. UEA performed slightly above the national statistics on most of the items with the exception of whether the institution valued feedback from research degree students. Only 56% of students agreed or strongly agreed and 13% of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.
 - The understanding around roles and responsibilities was generally evenly distributed across Faculties with only slight variations ranging from 64% in HUM to 69% in FMH.
- **Teaching Opportunities**
 - With regards to whether students had adequate opportunities to gain experience of teaching, only 54% at UEA agreed or strongly agreed in contrast to 58% nationally. Of those who had been given the opportunity, 73% reported that the experience was worthwhile, slightly higher than the national average.
 - In contrast to students from FMH where the average score for the items on the teaching scale was 53%, HUM scored 65%. SCI and SSF fell in between with a score of 61% and 60% respectively.

- **Personal factors**
 - Majority of students at UEA reported being supported by their families and friends and the figures are at par with national statistics. A slightly lower percentage of students report being financially less strained at UEA than nationally.

- **Importance of key factors**
 - The factors that were identified as being most important by a majority of students were: Supervisory Guidance (98%), Access to Appropriate Facilities (87%), Research Environment (82%) and Developing Research Skills (82%).

- **Experience of key factors**
 - Students were also asked to state whether their experiences of factors they identified as being important met their expectations or were below or above their expectations. With regards to Supervisory Guidance 63% reported it exceeded expectations while 16% reported it was below expectations. The percentages that reported their experiences exceeded their expectations with regards to the following were: Access to Appropriate Facilities (43%), Research Environment (53%) and Research Skills (52%).
 - When compared to national statistics, the student experience at UEA with regards to the experience of the research environment, (+3% - met or exceeded; 12% exceeded). However UEA lags behind on developing a range of transferable skills (-2% - met or exceeded; -6% exceeded), development of research skills (-2% met or exceeded; - 6% exceeded) and access to appropriate facilities (-2% met or exceeded; -8% exceeded).
 - Analysis at the Faculty level shows many disparities.
 - 1 in 5 students in FMH report that their experience of supervision fell below expectations.
 - In SSF 18% of students report that their expectations of opportunities to develop a range of research skills were not met.
 - 17% of students in SSF, 18% in SCI and 12% in HUM report their program did not meet their expectations of opportunities to develop a range of transferable skills.

- With the exception of SCI where 16% report their expectation regarding access to appropriate facilities were not met, more than 1 in 5 of students in each of the other Faculties reported the same, with the highest of 23% being reported in SSF.
 - 22% of students in FMH report the research environment not meeting their expectations in contrast to 18% in HUM and 16% each in SSF and SCI.
 - It is of concern that 25% of students from FMH reported that the guidance regarding provision of institutional standards and expectations of research programme were not met; the corresponding figures for other Faculties are: 18% (HUM), 19% (SCI) and 20% (SSF).
 - Although students from SSF report not having their expectations met on a number of different indicators (producing an average score of 18%), with regards to overall satisfaction, only 8% reported that their expectations were not met. The corresponding figures for other Faculties are: 19 % (FMH), 11% (HUM) and 14% (SCI).
- **Motivations for doing a PhD**
 - Nationally more people (31%) reported that they undertook a Ph.D. to improve their career prospects for an academic research career compared to UEA (27%). At UEA 38% reported that they were doing a Ph.D. because of their interest in the subject while 15% reported that it felt like a 'natural step for me'.
 - However motivations varied widely between Faculties. In SCI, 30% reported that they undertook a doctorate to improve their career prospects in contrast to 18% in FMH and 28% and 27% in SSF and HUM. In both SSF and HUM, the majority (48% and 47%) reported doing a Ph.D. because of their interest in the subject; the corresponding figures for FMH were 29.5% and 30% for SCI. A substantial minority in FMH (19%) reported undertaking a Ph.D. to improve career prospects outside of academic in contrast to only 8% in SCI and 4% each in SSF and HUM.
 - **Career Aspirations**
 - UEA students have aspirations similar to students from other institutions; however 42% of UEA students said that they wanted to have an academic

career in higher education in contrast to 44% of students nationally. However career aspirations varied widely between Faculties.

- In HUM, 61% of respondents were hoping for an academic career in contrast to 24% in FMH, 37% in FMH and 52% in SSF. In SCI, 22% aspired to a research career in higher education in contrast to only 6% in HUM. Also in SCI 21% aspired to a research career outside of higher education compared to only 2% in HUM, 10% in SSF and 7% in FMH.
 - The career aspirations are interesting when viewed in the context of motivations for doing a Ph.D. while a majority of HUM students reported they undertook a Ph.D. because of their interest in the subject, a majority still expected to have an academic career.
- **Support and Integration**
 - Qualitative analysis indicates that while most students found lecturers to be supportive, many did not feel integrated into their department of the community specific to their discipline. Many reported a lack of organized socialization activities at UEA contributing to a sense of isolation. Some students reported wanting more assistance writing despite workshops and tutorials conducted at the School level as well as by the Learning Enhancement Team (LET) at UEA. PPDs were often criticised and many did not see its relevance for their professional development.

Recommendations

- This survey shows that while UEA offers a good research environment, there are a number of areas where the Ph.D. student experience could be improved especially when we compare ourselves other institutions.
- More communal working areas dedicated for Ph.D. students and general improvements in the infrastructure.
- More opportunities for organized socialization; for instance a coffee and cake evening every month to allow students from different Schools to interact.
- Dissertation writers group for those in writing intense disciplines.
- Publicising resources available at UEA centrally, as well as within their own Schools in relation to writing, critical analysis and other aspects of dissertations.

- More opportunities for students to organize colloquia, seminars etc so they feel better integrated into their department and their disciplines. For instance a graduate students seminar (if it is appropriate to the subject/discipline) attended by other graduate students. This would also give them an opportunity to hone their communication skills.
- A greater engagement with Career Services and/or CSED so students are taught to identify 'transferable skills' that they (inadvertently) pick up while doing their Ph.D. This will allow especially students in HUM and SSF to have a broader base of career aspirations. It will also allow them to more clearly identify skills that they need to train in and skills that they possess. In addition to Schools, this would also be an appropriate site for them to reflect on their career and professional development.
- More opportunities for teaching; the University could consider rolling out the M.A. (Higher Education Practice) to its Ph.D. students. This would also additionally result in the development of transferable skills that could be applied to other sectors.
- More awareness of goals and standards especially because nearly 12% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements.

The recommendations have been made taking two critical aspects into consideration: offering Ph.D. students the opportunity to be integrated into their discipline and preparing them for an academic career while recognizing that many Ph.D. students may not find employment in academia and therefore must be simultaneously prepared for the possibility of working in an 'applied' setting.