

The taught postgraduate student experience: lessons from a Higher Education Academy survey

Chris Park

HEA Senior Associate

Lancaster University Graduate School Director

The survey

- HE Academy contract to York Consulting
 - Pilot (early Jan 2007)
- Survey
 - Open 29 Jan – 2 April 2007
 - 30 HEIs, broadly representative
 - 6,763 responses
 - Response rate – 12% overall; 5-71% by HEI
- Focus groups
 - 21 groups, 11 HEIs, 107 students

Themes

1. Motivation and choice
2. Overall experience
3. Dimensions of the experience
4. Views of particular groups of students

Conclusions

1. Motivation and choice

Motivation

Choice of institution

Motivation

Most important motivation for studying a taught postgraduate programme ...

1. to improve employment prospects [28%]
2. to progress in chosen career path [26%]
3. personal interest [16%]
4. a requirement to enter a particular profession [13%]
5. to enable progress to higher qualification [11%]

Choice of institution

All students

1. Location [38%]
2. Reputation of institution within subject area [35%]
3. Overall reputation of institution [34%]
4. Previously studied at the institution [21%]
5. Subject only available at a few institutions [28%]
6. Mode of study [28%]

Non-UK students

1. reputation of institution within subject area [46%]
2. want to have a UK qualification [36%]
3. desire to improve English [28%]
4. shortness of courses in UK [28%]
5. Want to work in UK after graduation [21%]
6. Personal or family reasons [16%]
7. Studied in UK as an undergraduate [16%]
8. Course represents good value for money [16%]

2. Overall experience

Overall views of their experience

What affects the student experience?

Overall views on their experience

- Expectation
 - The course has met/exceeded my expectation [81%]
 - Met 62%; Exceeded 19%; Not met 19%
- My studies are progressing well [88%]
 - Ability to undertake independent study [68%]
 - Quality of teaching & learning [65%]
- Motivation
 - I found the course motivating [80%]
- Employability
 - The course would improve my employment prospects [84%]
- Recommendation
 - I would recommend the course to a friend/colleague [73%]

What affects the student experience?

- Most important positive factors
 1. Good academic staff & standard of teaching and learning [mentioned by 34%]
 2. Availability/approachability of academic staff and access to relevant support [mentioned by 31%]
- Most important negative factors
 1. Poor teaching or poor teaching methods
 2. Lack of support and guidance
 3. Lack of feedback or feedback that is poor or slow
 4. Lack of course flexibility, unrealistic deadlines, poor time structure of course and/or too many changes to programme
 5. Heavy and/or unmanageable workload
 6. Limited and/or poor choice of relevant options

3. Dimensions of the experience

Teaching and learning

Organisation and management

Information and expectations

Advice

Support and finance

Teaching and learning

1. Quality

- 59% agreed that “The quality of teaching and learning on my course is consistently high”
- 20% were neutral; 21% disagreed

2. Methods

- T&L methods are effective for type of course [73%]
- sufficient contact time between staff and students to support effective learning (includes face-to-face and virtual/online contact time) [58%]

Teaching and learning

3. Development of skills and knowledge

- course is effective in developing subject-specific skills and knowledge [84%]
- transferable skills are being effectively delivered [74%]
- research skills are being effectively delivered [67%]

4. Assessment and feedback

- I receive continuous feedback on progress [44%; 31% disagree]
- I receive prompt feedback [46%; 33% disagree]
- feedback is clear when given [53%; 23% disagree]
- assessment criteria are clear and communicated [69%]
- feedback that is given is helpful [63%]

Organisation and management

- Balance
 - about right between directed and independent learning [68%]
 - about right between core and options [67%]
- Workload
 - timetable is appropriate [76%]
 - overall workload is manageable [68%]
 - I can manage learning alongside other demands on time [63%]
- Flexibility
 - there is sufficient flexibility in course to choose specific subjects that are of interest [52%]

Information and expectations

Information

- IAG received before starting course was accurate [79%]
- information provided before start was accurate reflection of actual choice of options available [70%]

Expectations

- level and demands of course as expected [68%]
- volume of work as expected [67%]
- experience of additional support able to access was in line with pre-course expectations [58%]

Preparedness

- “on balance, my skills and knowledge were at the right level for this programme of study” [77%]

Advice

- I know who to turn to if I need advice/guidance in studies [83%]
- staff are open and willing to provide advice if I need it [79%]
 - advice in relation to study skills has been effective [62%]
 - I have received good advice about study choices [53%]
 - I have participated in an effective induction process [52%]
 - academic advice and guidance regarding next step of career has been appropriate [33%]

Support and finance

Support

- library resources are appropriate [70%]
- IT facilities are appropriate [74%]
- I was able to access specialised resources (labs, rooms, equipment) [51%]
- university-based careers support is appropriate [31%]
- student support services were effective in addressing my study needs [36%]

Finance

- I was given a realistic view of financial costs before start course [76%]
- I was able to access good financial advice [30%]

4. Views of particular groups of students

Perceptions of the UK – non-UK students

Part-time students

Distance learners

Students with disabilities

Perceptions of the UK – non-UK students

- My experience of studying in the UK was more positive than I expected [57%]
- I would recommend studying in the UK to a friend or colleague [74%]
- I found it easy to adapt to teaching and learning culture in the UK [66%]
- I was effectively supported to integrate with other students [58%]
- I felt valued by my institution [56%]
- I feel that I have integrated into UK culture [49%]

Part-time students

- My needs are taken into account [61%]
- I am able to balance academic work with other responsibilities [65%]

Suggested ways in which institution could support their study ...

- Better timetabling and communication
 - Deadlines for exams and assessment
 - Scheduling of modules
 - Early notice of changes to timetable/exams
- Support and access
 - Better understanding of problems of balancing study and other commitments
 - Provide more support and/or guidance
- Staff-student interaction
 - More face-to-face contact with tutors in seminars and 1-to-1 sessions

Distance learners

- Distance learning was the right choice for me [85%]
- I am satisfied with the quality of study materials [83%]
- My needs were taken into account [75%]
- I was able to balance academic work with other responsibilities [75%]

Main challenges ...

1. Balancing study workload with other commitments
2. Self motivation and self discipline
3. Risk of feeling isolated
4. Time management

Students with disabilities

- My institution has been effective in supporting me in my studies [57%]
- The information I received pre-course was sufficient and accurate [48%; 21% disagreed]

Which one thing would improve disability support at your institution?

1. Disseminate more information about what support is available [10%]
2. Lecturers should be more aware of disabilities and their effects [8%]
3. Easier and more access to personal support [7%]
4. Improved physical access to lectures/seminars [5%]

Conclusions

Main findings

Main outcomes

Main findings

Highest rated areas:

- teaching and learning;
- assessment;
- balance within programmes;
- timetabling and workloads;
- access to resources;
- overall access to advice;
- accuracy of information, advice and guidance received before programmes start

Lowest rated areas:

- feedback;
- degree of flexibility in choosing options;
- advice about study choices;
- induction;
- careers advice and financial advice;
- student support

Main outcomes

- Most students were very positive about their experience
 - More than 80% rated their experience as having met or exceeded their expectations
 - Nearly 90% agreed that their studies were progressing well
- HE Academy plan
 - PRES-type online survey
 - Optional
 - Focus on enhancement
 - Benchmarking & longitudinal tracking