



QAA

What students think of their higher education

Analysis of student written submissions to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2011-12

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Executive summary

Changes in UK higher education since 2010 have led to an increased focus on the engagement of students in their learning experience. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) enables students to contribute to its reviews of higher education providers through participation in review teams, and also by means of a **student written submission (SWS)** for each review.

This paper presents the findings of an analysis of 14 SWSs relating to institutions that underwent QAA review in 2011-12. The scope of the analysis, and the methodology used by students to draw up their SWS are explained in the introduction. This is followed by sections on detailed findings, grouped thematically. Full lists of the submissions used, and the quotations drawn from them, can be found in the appendices.

The analysis indicates that student representative bodies are enthusiastic about having the chance to participate in shaping their own education. Their submissions provide an invaluable source of feedback and creative thinking, although the challenge of engaging sufficient numbers of students was an issue for some student representative bodies.

Academic provision was recognised as the most important factor for students, and contact hours were considered crucial to a successful course of study. There was a focus on three aspects relating to academic provision: contact with personal tutors, module tutors and supervisors; value for money; and hidden costs.

In institutions where personal tutors changed from year to year, students felt anonymous and unsupported. This perception was compounded when students believed assessments were made by module tutors who had not had an opportunity to get to know them as individuals. The significance of such perceptions was apparent in the consumerist approach students took to their higher education experience. They applied a simple algorithm to calculate value for money: £3000 divided by the number of tutor contact hours. While other resources were acknowledged as part of the costs, comparisons across disciplines led to a general conclusion that the amount of contact time for the fees paid was inequitable. The issue of hidden costs arose in all but three of the submissions as concerns that the true costs of a degree programme were not communicated effectively.

References to **class size** arose mainly from programmes in the arts, performing arts and music disciplines in relation to rehearsal and studio spaces. While there were some references to the need for **staff development**, there were few if any references to the teaching qualifications of staff.

References to **student feedback** reflected two different understandings of the term, one in relation to the education experience (academic staff providing feedback and support to students on their assignments) and the other in the context of quality assurance (mechanisms for students to express their views). There were more references to the feedback and support provided to students than to any other topic in the submissions.

Feedback provided to students was seen as synonymous with assessment. Commentary on this theme extended to discussions of work placements. There were particular concerns about knowing what was to be assessed, the length of time taken to provide feedback, and the quality of feedback provided in order for students to develop from it.

While virtual learning environments and student portals were increasingly used to communicate with students, there were serious concerns about inefficient and inconsistent systems. Higher education providers may have underestimated the negative impact that

disparate and unreliable systems can have on the student experience: such concerns were raised in all but one of the submissions.

Staff-student liaison committees had not been established by all providers. Where they did exist there was a wide variance in the frequency with which they were held, the level of student representation, the agendas, how information was disseminated and whether any action was taken. Nonetheless, the submissions indicated that changes had been made in **response to student feedback** and there was confidence that the student voice was heard.

Introduction

Changes in UK higher education as a result of the government White Paper *Higher education: students at the heart of the system* (BIS, 2011) have prompted a focus on engaging students as partners in the quality of their learning experience and its outcomes. It is now widely accepted that the views of students, individually and collectively, should inform quality systems with the purpose of improving the student educational experience for both current and future cohorts. Student involvement in quality can have a positive influence on the delivery and development of any aspect of the educational experience, whether implemented centrally by the higher education provider, or by a faculty, department, or individual member of staff. By involving students in quality assurance and enhancement, higher education providers enable them to be active participants in shaping their own education, and they gain access to a vital source of feedback and creativity.

This publication is an analysis of views expressed by students in written submissions to QAA when their higher education providers were due for a QAA review.

QAA is an independent body that draws its funding from: government (through the UK higher education funding councils); universities and other providers of UK higher education (through subscriptions); and, to a smaller extent, chargeable services (through QAA Enterprises). Its mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education.

QAA visits providers to review how well they are fulfilling their responsibilities for academic standards and quality, using 'peer review' methods that respect the autonomous and independent nature of universities in the UK. It also maintains the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and other guidance for higher education providers on maintaining academic standards and improving quality.

QAA promotes student engagement by appointing at least one student as a full member of each review team, and by inviting students to submit their views in writing through a formal document (the SWS) when their higher education provider is reviewed.

The documents analysed in this paper

This paper presents an analysis of 14 SWSs (see Appendix 1), each pertaining to an institutional review conducted by QAA in 2011-12. The review method was **Institutional Review (England and Northern Ireland) (IRENI)**.¹ When conducting reviews, the review team refers to the Quality Code, making judgements about whether the stated Expectations have been met. In relation to the subject of this paper, *Chapter B5: Student engagement* is particularly relevant.²

The 14 student written submissions relate to reviews of:

- four research-intensive higher education providers
- eight specialist providers (including one independent provider)
- two teaching-intensive providers.

The recommendations made by the students are listed in Appendix 2.

1 IRENI, which replaced Institutional Audit, was first used in 2011-12. Full details of the methodology can be found at www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook-second.aspx.

2 www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/documents/quality-code-chapter-b5.pdf

The student experiences represented and quoted (appendices 3 and 4) are specific to context and, therefore, cannot be generalised across the UK higher education sector. However they are likely to be informative in indicating what matters to students and how higher education providers can better meet their needs and expectations. Permission to use the submissions for analytical research was obtained from each student representative body. QAA recognises the limitations implicit in the small sample size but believes that this paper offers a useful contribution, from the student voice, to the debate regarding perceptions of the learning experience and what constitutes quality.

The organising framework for this analysis reflects that of the suite of [guidance documents](#)³ on four themes published by QAA in August 2013. The themes were student workload, class size, teaching qualifications, and responding to student feedback. However, students also understood 'feedback' in a different sense: commentary on their work provided by academic staff. As this proved a particularly important theme for this sample of students it has been included as a separate section ('Feedback and support provided to students', see page 11).

Structure and methodology of the submissions

The length of the 14 submissions ranged between 3,000 and 7,000 words, with two exceptions at 9,000 and 11,000 words.⁴ The number of authors contributing to the submissions ranged from a few senior union officers⁵ to an extended group of union officers and representatives.⁶ This variation presented some challenges to the student representative bodies in the production of the submissions.⁷

Most of the submissions followed the structure of the higher education provider's self-evaluation document (SED),⁸ using its subheadings as a framework. However some adopted a more discursive approach.⁹

There was little indication of higher education providers having supported student representative bodies in providing the submissions, other than in the analysis of institutional data and responses to specific requests for information.¹⁰ Where submissions used direct quotations from students, these have been included in this paper (Appendix 4), to evidence the student voice where appropriate. All such entries have been anonymised but have not been otherwise edited except minimally for clarification. Direct quotations from the submissions are presented in text boxes.

Most submissions acknowledge the difficulty in obtaining information from the entire student body. Some groups were identified as difficult to contact, notably part-time students, mature and distance learning students and students on accredited courses delivered by collaborative partners.¹¹ It was noted that where there were multiple campuses it was often difficult to gather information. Thus many of the submissions acknowledged that the quality of the student responses obtained may not be representative of the whole student experience.

3 www.gaa.ac.uk/improvinghighereducation/pages/guidance-documents.aspx

4 SWS 14, 8

5 SWS 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12

6 SWS 7, 8, 11, 13, 14

7 Appendix 4

8 The document that must be submitted to QAA by the provider in advance of the Institutional Review; see www.gaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx.

9 SWS 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 13

10 SWS 8

11 Appendix 4

In preparing their submissions, student representative bodies made effective use of a range of sources of evidence, including the National Student Survey (NSS);¹² the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES); the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES); annual monitoring reports and action plans; periodic reviews; and minutes of academic boards, academic standards committees and learning and teaching committees. In some submissions these were supplemented by other mechanisms for gathering feedback, such as focus groups, student forums, course representatives and union officers.

Some submissions used anonymised student union casework data, together with initiatives with such themes as the 'student voice', 'students as change agents' and 'student perceptions'. A small number of submissions also collected information through online surveys in an attempt to ensure the inclusion of part-time, mature and international students. One submission concluded that 'dealing with concepts as intangible as [the] student experience necessitates at times using anecdotal evidence where an important point needed to be made'.¹³

Themes that emerged from the analysis

The following themes emerged from analysis of the student written submissions and will be discussed in this paper.

- Student workload: tuition hours and programmed learning:
 - contact with tutors and supervisors
 - value for money (including the number of tuition hours)
 - hidden costs.
- Class size and teaching qualifications.
- Feedback provided to students:
 - clarification of what was being assessed
 - the quality of feedback in helping students to improve
 - the speed with which results and feedback were returned
 - support while on work placement
 - effective communication.
- Responding to student feedback
 - staff-student liaison committees.

¹² <http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/>

¹³ SWS 12

Student workload: tuition hours and programmed learning

Students' comments indicated that academic provision was the factor that they considered most important, and there was a perception that contact hours are the key to a successful course of study.¹⁴ Three aspects relating to contact time emerged: contact with tutors and supervisors, value for money, and hidden costs.

Contact with tutors and supervisors

Firstly, there were responses relating to contact with **personal tutors, module tutors and supervisors**. Some students had expressed concerns about continuity of support as personal tutors changed with each academic year.

'I don't feel that the personal tutor system is very effective. I have had a different tutor every year for the last four years of my course and this means that they cannot and do not get to know me or my study progress very well.'

'I also felt that having a personal tutor who was different each year has been detrimental and would have liked the university to have helped me with the transition between these tutors.'

'Personal tutors [were] allocated but were changed every year therefore [I] didn't feel as supported this way as tutor[s] have a busy timetable as well.'

'It has come to my third year and I do not feel that any of [the] staff know me well enough to provide a reference for me. I think this is due to lack of contact with one person such as a personal tutor.'

Students felt module tutors did not have an opportunity to get to know them as individuals and, consequently, students were unable to benefit fully from excellent teaching because there was little contact time scheduled in which to develop discussion.¹⁵ Both undergraduate and postgraduate student groups experienced difficulty arranging meetings with their supervisors, although supervision was good when they did meet.¹⁶ Changes in postgraduate supervision were not uncommon, and the issues arising in such circumstances were to do with continuity of supervision. Successive supervisors were not always informed of the guidance their predecessors had given, and consequently, in some higher education providers, there was a need to review the process of appointing supervisors and for regular review of students who experienced a change in supervisor. While higher education providers usually have policies on supervision that outline the level of support to be provided to students, there was a lack of consistency in how they were implemented.¹⁷

Value for money

A second aspect was a consumerist approach to education which focused on value for money.¹⁸ Students applied a simple algorithm to calculate this: £3000 divided by the number of tutor contact hours, as in the examples quoted.

'£3000 is a lot of money to spend on 4 hours of contact time a week.' Joint Honours (Arts)

'2 hours contact time per week: £3000. You work it out.' Textiles

14 SWS 4, 9

15 SWS 1, 4

16 SWS 1, Appendix 4

17 SWS 10, 11, Appendix 4

18 SWS 11

'The situation for me as a 3rd year now is I have this semester between 4-6 hours [per week] of contact time, I am paying £3290 for it.' Law

'Amount of contact time for arts students in proportion to the fees paid is definitely not fair.'
Joint Honours - Modern Languages

While students acknowledged that other resources such as libraries, rehearsal spaces, studios and workspaces were included in costs, comparisons across disciplines led to a general conclusion that the amount of contact time for the fees paid was inequitable.

'Why does my course cost the same as Chemistry or Medicine, when I use no resources except the libraries and have only 6 hours contact time per week?' Politics

'There's not enough contact time. For each 20-credit module I'm only in one hour a week, or 2 if there's an extra seminar on. There's not the chance to speak to staff to make sure you're on the right track.' Geography

'Not enough contact time. Involves a great deal of independent work which can sometimes feel like I'm teaching myself.' Theology

International students often perceived themselves as customers and expected the level of service to reflect the higher level of fees they paid. This expectation was not only in relation to contact hours but extended to the standards of accommodation and availability of resources such as computers.¹⁹ Some higher education providers had introduced a modular framework for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes which had reduced the number of teaching weeks in each academic year.²⁰ There was a concern that this might have an impact on contact hours.

It was suggested there was a need to promote resources, such as special collections, more effectively²¹ and it was thought that where books are regarded as essential texts they should be fully funded from tuition fees.²² While a number of providers had increased the availability of texts and had extended library opening hours (often to 24 hours), the development and expansion of learning spaces in libraries, and extended opening hours, were considered important in order to facilitate the amount of independent study that is required.²³

'At other universities 24-hour access to their libraries is standard practice, why should this one, one of the largest universities in the UK, not have this as well. Future students who will pay £9,000 a year should at least be given the option to go into their library at any time they want.'

A number of submissions²⁴ stressed the need for universities to clearly communicate that contact hours were only one aspect of a range of resources to which students had access.

'The University has a responsibility to communicate to students the value of the other learning resources available and the value of independent study. This message will become of greater importance when the tuition fee increases in 2012 in order that the increased expectations of students can be managed and met.' SWS 4

19 SWS 13
20 SWS 11
21 SWS 4
22 SWS 6
23 SWS 2, 4, 8, 9, 12, 13
24 SWS 4, 13

Hidden costs

The third aspect relating to programmed learning and the information given to students was that of hidden costs and its impact on student debt. There was a concern that the true costs of a degree programme were not communicated effectively, that this matter required greater transparency, and that students needed support in managing such costs.²⁵

Courses that require study abroad or professional placement often require students to commit to two sets of accommodation. Work placements also incur travel costs.²⁶ Practical-based courses and field trips incur additional costs for materials, equipment, clothing and travel. While students on creative arts courses expected some additional costs, they had not anticipated the level actually incurred.²⁷ The cost of essential texts varied widely across subject areas and was perceived to be unfair. It was suggested that increasing the number of core texts available through libraries and through the digitisation of key chapters²⁸ could ease this burden. There were some recommendations that prospectuses and websites should clearly state the extra costs likely to be incurred for each specific course. The continuous monitoring of such costs was seen as essential.²⁹

25 SWS 4, 12
26 SWS 12, Appendix 3
27 SWS 9, Appendix 3
28 SWS 5, Appendix 3
29 SWS 9, 12

Class size and teaching qualifications

References to class size arose mainly from programmes in the arts, performing arts and music disciplines and related to rehearsal spaces and studios.³⁰ Many of the comments related more generally to the quality of teaching.

Quality of teaching

The student view of the quality of teaching in many of the SWSs was generally very positive,³¹ as evidenced in NSS results. In one university it was rated at 92 per cent placing this institution fourth nationally.³² There were particular references to staff providing excellent knowledge of industry, professional knowledge and experience,³³ and a statement that universities should 'promote the evident staff engagement with concerns about teaching'.³⁴ One submission³⁵ recommended that all graduate teaching associates complete an appropriate teacher training programme.

There was confidence that raising concerns at teaching and learning committees had a positive impact on teaching standards.³⁶ While there were some references to the need to develop some staff,³⁷ there were few if any references to the teaching qualifications of staff. Other indicators of teaching quality used in the submissions were:

- 'student choice' awards³⁸ or university teaching awards, with one submission noting 'over three thousand nominations have been received in the past two years alone'³⁹
- the number of appeals and complaints made in an academic year⁴⁰
- the number of referrals to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.^{41 42}

The views expressed included the following.

'I felt as if we were really a part of the research being taught, rather than just recipients of the research.'

'I have gained a deeper understanding of my working practice and to be more critically aware of my work. Improve[d] my conceptual thinking.' Design Products

'Thumbs up to him for making Medieval Latin an exciting subject for it is not an easy job.'

Concerns were raised about the inconsistency in the quality of teaching within departments and schools and across sites and campuses,⁴³ with some staff being described as ineffective lecturers.⁴⁴ There were instances where relocation and institutional mergers had a detrimental effect on the quality of teaching which resulted in a poorer student experience.⁴⁵

30 Appendix 3
31 SWS 9, 12
32 SWS 8
33 SWS 3
34 SWS 12
35 SWS 8
36 SWS 4, 8, 9 11, 12
37 SWS 6, 9, 11
38 SWS 4
39 SWS 8
40 SWS 1
41 SWS 8
42 SWS 6
43 SWS 9, Appendix 2
44 SWS 11, Appendix 2
45 SWS 9, Appendix 3

One institution scored 71 per cent satisfaction for academic support but the SWS noted there was 'a massive contrast across the sites and courses in this satisfaction rate'.⁴⁶ There were recommendations that providers do more to 'promote the evident staff engagement with concerns about teaching'⁴⁷ and to share good practice between schools and across faculties.

On the subject of programme design there was a need for modules to reflect current technological and digital practices and, where appropriate, to reflect industrial practices.

46 SWS 9
47 SWS 12, Appendix 2

Feedback and support provided to students

Feedback means commentary on how well something is being done. Many of the points raised in the 14 submissions interpreted 'student feedback' as feedback on their work provided to students by academic staff. (See next section for student feedback on how well providers responded to their views.)⁴⁸

Students value formative feedback as an essential part of the learning process and in preparing for formal assessment.⁴⁹ There were many schools and subject areas where the process was working well, particularly when formative feedback was provided by staff who knew students individually.⁵⁰ NSS data indicated there were wide variations in the levels of satisfaction with assessment and feedback⁵¹ which, in one university, ranged from 27 per cent to 91 per cent across courses.⁵²

'One area in urgent need of attention is that of feedback. Despite a university wide target of returning feedback in three weeks..., NSS scores...show there is no consistency across courses in student satisfaction for feedback waiting times with scores spread between an impressive high 100% and a seriously concerning low 24%.' SWS 12

'The significant range of satisfaction [with assessment and feedback] in the NSS is an area of real concern and becomes a trend between these courses throughout the 2010/11 results.' SWS 14

'The percentage of students indicating overall satisfaction for Assessment and Feedback from the 2011 NSS scores shows some areas are falling short. A more detailed analysis shows there are improvements required in the timeliness of feedback, developmental feedback, clear assessment and marking criteria and more personalised feedback from staff who have worked closely with students.' SWS 4

'Improvements to the overall satisfaction for assessment and feedback in 2010/11 from 2009/10 were small....' SWS 9

There was a need to stagger assessments to relieve pressure on resources such as studio spaces,⁵³ and a belief that students should be actively involved in the marking and assessment processes.⁵⁴

Clarification of what was being assessed

While NSS results indicated most students believed assessment arrangements and marking had been conducted fairly, students would have greater confidence if a transparent and consistent marking structure was available.⁵⁵

There were recommendations that templates be created giving detailed assessment and marking criteria;⁵⁶ that students should be involved in marking and assessment⁵⁷ and that a minimum standard of feedback should be defined.⁵⁸

48 SWS 4, 9, 12, 14

49 SWS 3

50 SWS 3, 4

51 SWS 1, Appendix 3

52 SWS 9

53 SWS 3

54 SWS 2, 6, 12

55 SWS 6

56 SWS 4, 6, 10, 14

57 SWS 12

The quality of feedback in helping students to improve

There was evident enthusiasm for students to be actively involved in the processes of peer assessment and feedback. There were several references to inconsistencies within universities in the standard of feedback provided to students⁵⁹ and the need for standardised assessment feedback forms.⁶⁰ Students considered it essential to have face-to-face feedback for at least one piece of coursework in each module. Guidance on how to make the most of feedback should be provided to students in their first year. There were several references⁶¹ to developing the personal tutor system to maximise the value of feedback, to the use of virtual learning environments (VLEs) as assessment and feedback tools⁶² and to the need to share good practice between schools and departments.

'Some staff provide little or no feedback on work, meaning you may make the same mistakes in future essays.' Linguistics

'Lack of detail of feedback in essays does not say how you can achieve the next level up.' Sociology

'Not enough feedback overall, marking does not seem to correspond with assessment criteria. Feedback during the course does not match final grades (ie is misleading about how well you are doing, compared [to] the grade you get).' Textiles

'The course managers seem to focus on adding more opportunity to get feedback but what we need is quality feedback. Often it is rushed and poor.' Medicine

The speed with which results and feedback were returned

There were particular concerns about the length of time it took to receive feedback on assessment tasks.⁶³ The stated expectations for return of assessed work were between three and six weeks, but as these deadlines were often missed,⁶⁴ it was recommended that the turn-around time for coursework and feedback should be published and such deadlines adhered to.⁶⁵

'Length of time to receive feedback often at the handing in point of the next set of coursework before any feedback given, and that is too late.' Food Science

'Feedback for practical exercises sometimes was not given back until after the next one was handed in, meaning that it was difficult to know where you needed to improve from the previous practical.' Geography

'Feedback on exam results and essays it is supposed to take 4 weeks to get your exam results however some modules took as long as 6 weeks, which is not fair. We get penalised for late submission yet the markers don't give us extra marks for late results. Just something to think about.' Healthcare

58 SWS 6

59 SWS 5, 6, Appendix 2

60 SWS 5, 11, 14

61 SWS 1, 5, 6, 14

62 SWS 4

63 SWS 1, 4, 5, 7, 9, Appendix 2

64 SWS 7

65 SWS 9, Appendix 2

Support received while on work placement

Another area related to assessment and feedback was support received while on work placement. While there was some praise for the support and information available to students on work placement in some institutions,⁶⁶ it was sometimes lacking in others.⁶⁷ It was suggested that there should be a designated member of staff responsible for providing advice and support to students on work placement and that good practice should be disseminated.⁶⁸ There was some concern about the number of work placements offered that were either unpaid or lacked basic support.⁶⁹

Effective communication

The efficiency of communication with students was an area of serious concern in several of the submissions,⁷⁰ particularly the ways in which information on changes to timetabling and student email was managed.

'The overriding recommendation is that [the provider] improve the way it communicates with its students on both institutional and everyday course related matters.' SWS 14

'We would like to reiterate that the institution should consider wide methods for wider dissemination of the PRES results.' SWS 8

'An area of concern from the NSS results of 2011 is the satisfaction with the communication of changes to the course or teaching. 12 courses scored below the 50% threshold, with the lowest satisfaction level recorded at just 14%.' SWS 9

Virtual learning environments

Communication was most often discussed in the context of the use of VLEs and student portals.⁷¹ There were suggestions that VLEs could be utilised to improve communications and there was some indication that training to use the VLE was needed for both staff and students. A number of submissions acknowledged that VLEs were used effectively to share learning resources and there was some innovative use of blogs and of using the VLE for assessment and feedback.⁷² However, there were several references to inefficiencies and difficulties with VLEs and student portals.⁷³

'The Virtual Learning Environment is an amazing online bank of information in relation to the course. It's easy to understand but still full of detail.'

'I thought the VLE was really good, and many of the staff were good at putting online readings up, which made it very useful when the books in the library were taken.'

'Lecture notes and recordings on the VLE are very useful as they help you understand the module more and this is a good way to initiate further reading.'

66 SWS 6

67 SWS 14

68 SWS 12

69 SWS 3

70 SWS 6, 8, 9, 12, 14

71 SWS 1,2,3,4,5,8,9,10,13, Appendix 2

72 SWS 4

73 SWS 4, 5, 9 13, 14

'Many lecturers fail to appreciate the utility of providing resources on the VLE. Lecture slides that are uninformative or absent, make revising for exams extremely difficult.'

'On a Programme level there needs to be a better illustration of what the platforms are and a clearer navigation to understanding course content. Design Products Focus Group.'

'Communication of matters of importance such as changes and improvements to students' learning opportunities and experiences are generally very well communicated through the VLE.' SWS 2

'The [provider name] website and online catalogue of students' work is a helpful resource for potential students. The [posting] of student videos [online]...was of great help to overseas students and home students who were unable to attend college open days.' SWS 13

'The new VLE area [where] students and staff can share learning resources, issues or ideas...is an excellent improvement and should be further developed. The reliability of both the VLE and Portal are...variable. Combining two complex and quite different systems would be an understandably difficult task but perhaps the root of the problem is the understanding of which system provides what and how well it provides this service to students.' SWS 4

Social networking sites

There were several references to the value of social networking sites in providing students with an opportunity to interact with fellow students before their arrival and suggestions how they could be better used to communicate information prior to first arrival on campus.⁷⁴

74 SWS 1, 2, 9, 10

Response to student feedback

Some references to student 'feedback' in the submissions related to the formative or summative feedback made available to students by academic staff (see previous section: 'Feedback and support provided to students'). The remainder of the comments focused on **how providers collect and use feedback from students** about the quality of their education experience. Such information may be gathered in the form of written commentary at the end of a module, through staff-student liaison committees (SSLCs) or student-staff forums (SSFs), or through other mechanisms such as focus groups.

Staff-student liaison committees

Some submissions stated that SSLCs were not yet a requirement in all higher education providers and in some had only recently been established.⁷⁵ Where SSLCs did not exist students believed the only vehicle available for them to provide feedback was through the National Student Survey (NSS) and the International Student Survey (ISS).⁷⁶

Where SSLCs did exist, there was wide variance in the frequency with which they were held, the level of student representation, the agenda items, how information was then disseminated to the student body, and whether any action was taken on concerns raised by student representatives.⁷⁷ Not all SSLCs considered external examiner reports or module evaluations. Where they had been considered, it was recommended that the progress of action plans as a result, should be discussed at subsequent SSLC meetings.⁷⁸

It was recognised that many higher education providers had moved to an electoral system for appointing student representatives and had established systems of training and support for newly appointed representatives. SSLCs were generally seen as a valuable forum for sharing good practice across institutions particularly for personal tutoring, assessment and feedback and resources.

In relation to SSLCs, it was suggested that:

- agendas be revised to ensure wider representation of part-time students, mature students and those whose studies take place at outlying campuses
- academic librarians attend SSLCs in all schools and departments
- action plans be created to address areas identified as requiring development and to inform programme design
- outcomes of SSLCs and their action plans be disseminated to students as quickly as possible so that they can be discussed in various forums
- school charters be reviewed annually.

Regarding the content of SSLC agendas, it was suggested that SSLCs consider:

- student retention and progression records
- formal complaints made by students
- the provider's responses to external examiners' reports
- module evaluations
- data from NSS, PRES, PTES and other external sources
- progress on action plans from previous meetings.

⁷⁵ SWS 9, 11, Appendix 2

⁷⁶ SWS 14

⁷⁷ SWS 3, 8, 10, 12,14, Appendix 2

⁷⁸ SWS 8, 12, Appendix 2

Changes resulting from student feedback

It was evident that changes had been implemented in response to student feedback.⁷⁹ Examples included: changes to the number of course contact hours on some programmes, subsidy of course textbooks for new students, and the introduction of study skills courses.

'It feels as though we really have a voice and the Programme is very responsive to it, however within the School of Communication this voice is much less powerful.' Animation

'100% felt they had a voice and that the Programme was approachable and open to suggestions.' CWAS Focus Group

'[The staff who plan programmes] do listen to us and are responsive and approachable.' Painting Focus Group

'Tutors are approachable and students feel as though they are able to speak to them. Within the university there are lots of ways of being heard.' History of Design Focus Group.

⁷⁹ SWS2, 5, 8, 11, 12

Conclusions

The submissions indicated that **academic provision** is the most important factor for students. It was clear that students judged this provision by the number of contact hours they had with academic staff. Students were particularly interested in three factors: the amount of contact with personal tutors, the amount of contact with module tutors and supervisors, and how these first two factors amount to value for money.

In institutions where personal tutors changed from year to year, students felt anonymous and unsupported. This perception was compounded when students believed assessments were conducted by module tutors who had not had an opportunity to get to know them as individuals. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students experienced difficulties arranging meetings with supervisors, but considered the supervision received to be good when they did meet. Changes in postgraduate supervision were not uncommon, and this had implications for continuity of supervision and consistency in the level of support provided.

The submissions indicated that students adopted a consumerist approach to education which focused on value for money. Students applied a simple calculation: £3000 divided by the number of tutor contact hours. While it was acknowledged that other resources were included in costs, comparisons made between disciplines, particularly the amount of independent study that was expected, led to a general conclusion that the amount of contact time for the fees paid was often inequitable. International students, in particular, often perceived themselves as customers and expected the level of service to reflect the higher level of fees they paid; this extended to the availability of resources and the standard of accommodation. Almost half of the submissions identified the need to develop and expand learning spaces in libraries and to extend opening hours in order to facilitate the amount of independent study required.

The issue of hidden costs arose in all but three of the submissions. There were concerns that the true costs of a degree programme were not communicated effectively. Students had not been informed about the extra costs of study abroad or professional placements, including the associated costs of accommodation and travelling, or about the costs of resources for field trips and creative arts courses. The cost of essential texts varied widely across subject areas. Students thought they should be fully funded from tuition fees.

References to **class size** arose mainly from programmes in the arts, performing arts and music disciplines in relation to rehearsal and studio spaces. While there were some references to the need for **staff development**, there were few if any references to the **teaching qualifications of staff**.

Evaluation of the quality of teaching was based upon NSS results, the number of nominations for teaching awards, and the number of referrals to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). While the quality of teaching was generally seen as very positive, concerns were raised about inconsistency in the quality of teaching within schools and between campuses.

References to student feedback focused either upon feedback from students provided through quality assurance mechanisms, or upon the feedback and support provided to students, for which there were more references than for any other topic in the submissions.

Feedback provided to students was often seen as synonymous with assessment. There were many areas where the process was working well, particularly when formative feedback

was provided by staff who knew students individually. There were, however, wide variations in the levels of satisfaction with assessment and feedback.

There were particular concerns about the length of time it took to receive feedback on assessment tasks, which ranged from three to six weeks - but such deadlines were often missed. Students would have greater confidence in the standards of marking and assessment if they were provided with assessment and marking criteria prior to assessment; if there were standardised assessment feedback forms; and if they received face-to-face feedback for at least one piece of coursework in each module. Such support was also considered necessary while on work placement.

Issues relating to inefficient communication between staff and students arose in all but one of the submissions. Communication through virtual learning environments (VLEs) and student portals was an area of serious concern; it may be the case that providers underestimate the negative and lasting impact that disparate and unreliable communication has on the student experience.

SSLCs had not been established by all providers. Where they did exist there was a wide variance in the frequency with which they were held, the level of student representation, the agendas, how information was disseminated to the student body and whether any action was taken on concerns raised by student representatives. Nonetheless, the submissions indicated that changes had been implemented in response to student feedback, and there was confidence that the student voice was heard.

List of abbreviations

APR	annual programme report
ISS	International Student Survey
NSS	National Student Survey
OIA	Office of the Independent Adjudicator
PTES	Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
PRES	Postgraduate Research Experience Survey
SED	self-evaluation document (from the provider for the QAA review)
SLC	senior leadership committee
SSF	student-staff forum(s)
SSLC	staff-student liaison committees
SSF	student-staff forum
SU	students' union
SWS	student written submission
VLE	virtual learning environment

Appendix 1: List of student written submissions considered in this report

Greenwich School of Management
Institute of Cancer Research
Loughborough University
Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication
Royal Agriculture College
Royal College of Art
Royal College of Music
Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance
University of Chichester
University for the Creative Arts
University of Exeter
University College Falmouth
University of Leeds
University of York

Appendix 2: Recommendations and action points identified in the submissions

In order to maintain anonymity, each provider has been allocated a random number which bears no relation to the alphabetical list in Appendix 1.

There was a wide variation in the manner in which recommendations were presented in the submissions. Some were at the end of a subsection or presented as a distinct list (SWS 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10). However, on close reading, it was evident that not all the recommendations discussed in the narrative of the submission were actually included in the final list of recommendations. Other submissions listed action points (SWS 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14), and where this was the case all recommendations and action points arising as part of the discursive nature of the submission have been itemised and included in this appendix.

SWS 1

- There should be a single electronic resource for student records and learning (including iProgress, the portfolio, the training tracker, and Lab Book).
- Issues around support for students whose supervisors are leaving should be kept under review, including the review already due in June 2012.
- The intranet (iSpace) should be accessible off-site.
- The length and structure of modules in Perspectives in Oncology should be kept under review.
- There should be more guidance on reading material before the teaching of MSc modules, plus handouts before lectures and recordings after them.

SWS 2

- Continue review of opening hours for facilities.
- Recurring problems of online documents (room bookings) being often out of date.
- Keep website up to date for prospective candidates.
- Course material to be available on intranet across all Schools - consistency.

SWS 3

- Module content to reflect technological and digital aspects.
- Modules to effectively reflect industrial practice.
- Actions on issues raised at SLC [Senior Leadership Committee] meetings to be discussed at following meetings.
- Access to and the provision of resources and efficient allocation thereof was insufficient.
- Stagger assessments to relieve pressure on resources.
- Unpaid placements and lack of support in placements is a concern.
- Better application of Moodle⁸⁰ is required.
- A greater variety of classroom activities on MA - to be scheduled at regular times.

SWS 4

- Promote special collections more effectively.
- Library: increase number of core texts available.

⁸⁰ A virtual learning environment.

- Establish a consistent method of digitising chapters for set readings.
- Extend library hours.
- Expand and develop learning spaces in library.
- Improve personal tutoring system.
- Assessment and feedback: improve speed of feedback, developmental feedback and by staff who know students.
- Clear assessment and marking criteria.
- VLE to be used with consistency by staff.
- VLE to be used as an assessment and feedback tool.
- Consider merging VLE and Portal systems.
- Hidden/extra costs of all programmes to be stated clearly.
- Provide support for students to manage hidden/extra costs.

SWS 5

- More work is needed to harmonise support through Moodle. Training sessions on its use should be offered to students.
- Clarify the process of calculating the degree award and disseminate effectively.
- It has been suggested that pre-induction information could be sent out to new students further in advance.
- There have also been suggestions to produce a document for students in order to help them to navigate handbooks effectively, although this has not yet materialised.
- Faculty of Music to introduce a 'buddy' system for first year students.
- Digitised versions of Programme handbooks to be provided.
- Generally speaking, feedback could be more consistent across the Institution.

SWS 6

- Inconsistency in assessment criteria must be tackled to ensure consistency between Schools/ Departments and equal treatment of all students. The Union recommend that all Schools/Departments draw up detailed assessment criteria matrices to ensure students are fully aware of what is required of them.
- Practice in relation to students' involvement in quality assurance varies throughout the University, resulting in areas of low engagement amongst students. The Union recommends the University and the Union work together on an engagement strategy.
- The University has very thorough and open regulations in relation to complaints and appealing results, something which is a credit to the institution.
- Some students remain dissatisfied with the feedback they receive on their work, with levels of satisfaction falling in numerous Schools/Departments. The Union recommends a new University wide minimum standard of feedback be drawn up with student consultation.
- There remains an issue in relation to the communication skills of some lecturers, with current policies failing to address the matter effectively. The Union recommends it becomes mandatory for an academic to attend the Communicate programme where communication is identified as an area of weakness.

SWS 7

- Coursework is obviously an extremely important aspect; many students have explained their frustrations with coursework return deadlines being missed by lecturers.

SWS 8

- We would recommend that module evaluation results, and the subsequent action plans, are made available to students. Students should be able to access module evaluation results at the same time as they make their module choices to help them inform their decisions.
- The Students' Guild would like to ask the institution to share module evaluation results with us on an annual basis. It should be noted that we have not requested this prior to this Student Written Submission being produced.
- We would like the institution to consider wider dissemination of the PTES and PRES results.
- We would like to see section 3 of the relevant code of practice updated so that the response from the institution to any issues raised as a result of the external examiner reports, including the comments raised at SSLC, should be fed back to the next available meeting of the SSLC, even if this falls in a subsequent academic year. We believe students would benefit substantially from seeing external examiner comments as it will aid their understanding of how their assessment works.
- A copy of the institutional response to each external examiner report should be sent to the Students' Guild to allow us to check that the process is happening, that issues are not reoccurring and that any institution wide issues can be identified and raised by student representatives.
- We also believe it should be mandatory for all external examiner reports that effect (sic)[campus name] to be discussed at [campus name] with [campus name] students.
- We would recommend that the code of practice for external examiners is updated to include these points.
- We suggest that the University considers creating a compulsory ELE module for students to take on the rules relating to exams as an enhancement to the student experience.
- Consideration should be given regarding the recommended time period of at least two weeks to allow consultation on programme approvals with the SSLC. As SSLCs happen once a term, and the date for these are flexible within the term, it can be difficult for academic staff to find a time to consult with the SSLC. The University may also wish to consider introducing a schedule of dates for when the steps in programme approval should happen in the academic year.
- We believe that the completed subject benchmark statements, and other relevant programme approval documentation, should be received by the SSLC membership at least two weeks before it is discussed to allow enough time for consideration. The Subject Chair for the SSLC should sign a box to state that this has taken place as a mandatory part of the programme approval process. We will discuss this further with the Institution as we may be able to identify further alternative solutions in this area.
- We recommend that SSLCs always receive module evaluation results and that action plans in response to the feedback are shared with them, that all Graduate Teaching Associates complete required training (LTHE, ASPIRE and PCAP) and that staff are encouraged to base modules on their own research where possible. We also recommend that consideration be given to including Student Guild representatives at the Senior Tutor Forums.
- The code of practice for SSLCs and the standard agenda need reviewing to ensure that the views of all student groups are included and that all the items currently on it, such as external examiner reports and programme approvals discussed elsewhere in this submission, are dealt with appropriately.

- Consideration should be given as to whether student representation at ESGs should be included in the code of practice.
- To improve this area further we would recommend that the NSS and module evaluation results, and any subsequent action plans, are discussed at the relevant SSLC, or another relevant forum such as academic affairs meetings, and that this should be included in the relevant code of practice.
- We recommend that the University considers how to include student views in the consideration of application and induction strategies. We suggest that this could be achieved in a variety of ways; in addition to the Entry Surveys to determine not just satisfaction but descriptive reasoning behind negative responses. Any process needs to include minority student opinion in order to guarantee that inclusion is incorporated at all stages of the student experience.
- We recommend that the University considers a more tailored approach for careers support so that all groups of students are engaged appropriately.
- We recommend that further planning on capital projects at every level make[s] capacity for research students an urgent priority, so that the needs of research students are considered in all future planning. The creation and development of academic and peer networks is to us the highest priority matter in terms of postgraduate support.
- The Student Union suggests that the University takes the Wilson Review of University-Business collaboration under consideration and seek[s] to gain cooperation from all colleges.

SWS 9

- It is our recommendation that the University continue with their commitment to reduce disparity about the satisfaction of teaching across courses and campuses.
- We recommend that guidelines are published to ensure that students are informed how long feedback will take and that these timescales should always be met.
- A standardised feedback form for courses and units should be implemented to ensure that student feedback is always driving course changes.
- It is our recommendation that the Internal Communications Group and the University Campus Review ensure that communication of course and teaching changes is continued to be worked upon and improved.
- It is our recommendation that the institution commit to fully implementing any changes in the procedures for communicating and minimising timetable changes.
- Lack of specialist facilities for collaborative partner courses.
- Inadequate facilities for SU [students' union].
- We also commend the practice of direct student involvement in Validation events and Periodic Reviews
- We would strongly recommend the introduction of a Student Engagement Coordinator.
- We recommend the standardised selection of Course Representatives across the institution with clear and defined guidelines from both the University and the Student Union.
- We recommend the institution undertakes full and comprehensive research on the student view of the intranet and commit to adapting the portal to meet student expectations.
- Publish expected additional course costs in all recruitment documentation.

SWS 10

The following is a summary of the recommendations made in this submission.

- 1 The standardised marking pro forma be included in the Student Induction pack.
- 2 The Student Portal include:
 - standardised marking pro forma
 - a Policies area that includes:
 - Unfair means policy
 - Mitigating circumstances policy
 - Assessment policy
 - Student Handbook
 - Student Charter
 - Code of Discipline
 - Complaints Procedures
 - a degree classification calculator form
 - computer suite availability page
 - recent review results that is external examiner reports and quinquennial review
 - SR contact details for each cohort
 - blog where SRs can post updates regarding improvements to the School and feedback from SSCC meetings
 - a GSoM Twitter feed
 - a copy of the annual LTQES
 - future strategies for improvement in the 'You said, We did' area.
- 3 SSCC meetings include:
 - discussion of retention and progression statistics and number of complaints and appeals.
- 4 A Student Liaison Officer be appointed to assist first year students in transitioning to Higher Education.
- 5 A 'Student Life' page to be created on the website describing extracurricular activities available.

SWS 11

The predominant problems singled out in this submission are the need to a) further improve the overarching academic strategies and communications of the University and b) create an ethos of collaborative learning and development between staff and students. Problem a) is a reflection of the need for consistent academic structures (marking schemes and supervision arrangements), whereas problem b) is a conclusion on the University's long term development and the role everyday interactions between staff and students play in it.

- There was an inconsistency in the quality of teaching, with only some of the staff being described as effective lecturers.
- The SU has worked together with the University to implement a range of changes that have arisen as a result of the student voice. Furthermore there is evidence that several departments have listened to feedback from their students and been responsive in finding solutions to these issues.
- A new employability tutorial that will be rolled out across the University with the help of the Students' Union.
- A paper proposing that departmental SSLC/SSFs become university policy was discussed and accepted at the October 2011 UTC.

SWS 12

- SU reps to meet ExExs [external examiners] as part of formal structure
- Students to be involved in marking and assessment
- Feedback is inconsistent, return times vary
- Promote the evident staff engagement with concerns about teaching
- Resources: rehearsal spaces: needs to be in long term strategy
- Programme/Course Action Plans to be based upon all evidence and data provided, not selectively
- Programme/Course Action Plans to have targeted action and completion dates
- Programme/Course Action Plans to refer to previous year and state progress made
- Programme/Course Summary evaluation of progress on meeting stated targets
- Provide a short, clear version of Admissions Policy
- Feedback: investigate why disabled students are even more dissatisfied
- Disabled access to campus
- Use a range of methods/media? to communicate course changes
- Work placements: build support networks while on placement
- Monitor cost of attending, and time in getting to, work placements
- Website and prospectus: each course to indicate additional costs

SWS 13

- Communication: discussions and feedback from students suggest that the website can be hard to navigate and may be overly complicated. This restricts the usefulness of it as a tool as it takes too long to find information.
- There is a need for there to be more information about programme structure and content given to students before arrival.

SWS 14

A recommendation has been made to QAA through the National Union of Students' (NUS) review of the new Institutional Review process, that QAA consider setting the submission date for the SWS after that of the SED so as that the student body can make a direct response to the content of the SED document before the review team visit.

- Assessment and feedback is an area where things could be improved. Particularly, questions around assessment criteria being made clearer. The significant range of satisfaction in the NSS is an area for real concern and becomes a trend between these courses throughout the 2010/11 NSS results.
- A more formalised process for the appointment of student reps to SSLCs.
- An improved level of training and support to be offered to student reps.
- Clearer timescales for the turnaround of these procedures are conveyed to students making use of complaints and appeals processes
- The overriding recommendation is that [the provider] improve the way it communicates with its students on both institutional and everyday course related matters.

Appendix 3: Direct quotations from submissions relating to identified themes

Direct quotations from the student written submissions are organised in this appendix to reflect the themes used to structure this report.

Methodology

As [name of provider] has no sabbatical student officers, the research degrees Student President agreed to act as the Lead Student Representative for the Student Written Submission (SWS) supported by 7 volunteers spread across each course and from both [provider] sites. We, the QAA Student Committee, met on several occasions throughout the process of writing the SWS SWS1

The [name of provider] Students' Union fully appreciates the significance of the QAA SWS in regards to the value returned to the student learning experience through the QAA. Due to current time of year and activities (dissertations etc) the Student Union has produced this document under pressure of time constraints due to such issues as not having any sabbatical officers on the Student Union executive or any full-time members of staff. SWS3

There have been particular challenges in compiling this document, namely that the Students' Union is small, with only three sabbatical officers and no full time members of administrative staff. With this in mind, coupled with the fact that the author of this document has only recently come into position, there have been challenges in ensuring that the views represent as fully as possible an appropriate cross-section of the student population. SWS5

Unfortunately we have been unable to comment in detail about collaborative provision. SWS6

Whilst this SWS has tried to capture the voices of as wider range of students as possible, there are some student groups whose voices have been harder to capture in a comprehensive manner. Those from certain areas of post graduate (PG) study as well as those undertaking research degrees. Students with a disability, as well as International/EU students have also been hard to capture comprehensively. SWS14

Student workload: tuition hours and programmed learning

There is a perception that contact hours are the key to a successful course of study. The university has a responsibility therefore to communicate to students the value of the other learning resources available and the value of independent study. SWS4

There were concerns from the student body about the increase in student numbers and how this will affect teaching, space and pressure on workshops, facilities and technical staff. SWS13

Contact with tutors and supervisors

'There is a perception that contact hours are the key to successful course of study. The University has a responsibility therefore to communicate to students the value of the other learning resources available and the value of independent study. This message will become of greater importance when the tuition fee increases for the 2012 intake in order that increased expectations of students can be managed and met.' SWS4

'As academic provision was recorded as the most important factors for higher education students in the Student Voice survey it is positive to see satisfaction with these factors scored consistently high. However . . .20% of the courses at UCA said that they were unable to contact staff when they needed to. It is a worryingly high figure. The majority of academic staff at UCA do have an email address and a contact number within the institution and it is concerning that students are unable to access these even though there is an intranet staff directory through the Staff Portal.' SWS9

'The lack of contact hours was raised as an issue in certain departments for undergraduates and taught postgraduates, both of whom had an expectation of having more contact hours. Over 70% of respondents in the 2011 SES stated they felt they had too few contact hours and this was mentioned as a particular problem for first year undergraduates. There is evidence that these concerns have been listened to by departments on several occasions and changes have been made. Both undergraduates and taught postgraduates expressed that they often had difficulty arranging meetings with their supervisors, although once they were able to see them, their supervision was good.' SWS11

'Reservations were raised by some students of media courses around the amount of contact time they had with tutors or lecturers.' SWS14

'Students report some occasional problems arranging supervision appointments due to supervisor schedules, and there have also been some instances of delayed feedback on written work.' SWS1

'Improve the personal tutoring system - currently tutors change each year, students feel anonymous.' SWS4

'As academic provision was recorded as the most important factor...in the Student Voice Survey it is positive to see satisfaction with...consistently high scores. However,...20% of the courses at [the provider] said that they were unable to contact staff when they needed to. It is a worryingly high figure.' SWS9

'Post graduate students have access to a mentor. Each student has access to a team of supervisors at least once a month.' SWS10

Value for money

'The lack of contact hours was raised as an issue in certain departments for both undergraduates and postgraduates, both of whom had an expectation of having more contact hours. Over 70% of respondents in the 2011 SES stated they felt they had too few contact hours and this was mentioned as a particular problem for first year students. There is evidence that these concerns have been listened to.' SWS11

'[...] reservations were raised by some students on media courses around the amount of contact time they had with tutors or lecturers.' SWS14

'As students take on increased costs for their education it will be important that the institution ensures that this information and support is as full and available as possible.' SWS4

Hidden costs

'There is concern that all costs of a degree programme are taken into account and communicated effectively. Students are not getting the right information or the right support in order to manage these costs.' SWS4

'As fees increase it is essential that the College puts in place mechanisms to monitor the increasing impact of student debt.' SWS13

'There is concern amongst students that all costs of their degree programme are taken into account and communicated effectively. Courses which require study abroad or professional placement often result in students committing to two sets of accommodation. Practical based courses have the additional cost of material and equipment whilst field trips for essential data gathering can present unexpected costs. As students take on increased costs for their education it will be important that the institution ensures this information and support is as full and available as possible.' SWS 4

'Where books are regarded as essential texts they should be fully funded from tuition fees.' SWS 6

'Although these large additional course costs are typical of creative arts courses, 48% of students said they did not expect this level of additional cost. As part of the student voice campaign we are lobbying UCA to commit to undertaking wider scale research and publish expected additional course costs in all recruitment documentation.' SWS 9

'Monitor cost of attending, and time in getting to, work placements. (16) Website and prospectus: Each course to indicate additional costs. Website and prospectus do not do enough to inform prospective students of the costs of equipment, clothing, books, trips or travel costs they will be expected to meet in addition to paying their tuition fees. The Union feels that each courses entry in the prospectus should include information on any additional costs the course will require. Though students felt the way the University presents itself in its public information is accurate, feedback from course reps continually highlights students concerns that there is not enough information about hidden course costs, that is that both the website and the prospectus do not do enough to inform prospective students of the costs of equipment, clothing, books, trips or travel costs they will be expected to meet in addition to paying their tuition fees. The Union feels that each courses entry in the prospectus should include information on any additional costs the course will require.' SWS 12

'It should be noted that international students particularly felt that as they are paying much higher fees than EU and Home students, their attitudes differed towards the College. The fees made them feel like customers and as such they expected a higher service level from College. This included delivering on basic building maintenance such as repairing heating being broken for weeks, and improving the standard of facilities across the board from computer software to toilets and Catering.' SWS 13

'The prospectus is of a good standard however some students have expressed that they would have liked more specific information about what to expect once they enrol. Things such as additional course costs, contact time, and workspace allocations were highlight.' SWS 14

Class size and teaching qualifications

'The University has a clear policy on supervision that outlines the role of departments in ensuring that each student has access to the level of support required, however there has been a lack of consistency in the implementation of this.' SWS11

Quality of teaching and learning

'Although students were satisfied with the overall teaching standards, concerns were raised especially by undergraduate students, about the inconsistency in the quality of teaching, with

only some staff being described as effective lecturers. Despite these concerns, no doubts were raised as to the expertise of the teaching staff.' SWS11

'The student view of the quality of teaching is generally very positive and one of the University's particular strengths. SU reps raise any concerns at T&L committees which results in a positive perception of teaching standards.' SWS12

'The confidence of students in the [teaching] staff at [the provider] is a tribute to those staff and the support structures which enable this excellence.' SWS4

'Teaching standards are incredibly high at [the provider]. This is not only corroborated by statistical data but also by the positive nominations received through the Teaching Awards process, SSLC minutes and feedback from Subject Chairs.' SWS8

'In the NSS [the university] scored a 71% satisfaction in academic support. However there is a massive contrast across sites and courses in this satisfaction rate. Results range from 40% to 100% satisfaction.... The lack of parity in the levels of satisfaction...is one that needs addressing.' SWS9

...Feedback provided to students

'One area in urgent need of attention is that of feedback. Despite a university wide target of returning feedback in three weeks...NSS scores...show there is no consistency across courses in student satisfaction for feedback waiting times with scores spread between an impressive high 100% and a seriously concerning low 24%.' SWS12

'The significant range of satisfaction [with assessment and feedback] in the NSS is an area of real concern and becomes a trend between these courses throughout the 2010/11 results.' SWS14

'We are aware that specific problems continue in certain schools. The percentage of students indicating overall satisfaction for assessment and feedback from the 2011 NSS scores shows some areas are falling short. A more detailed analysis shows there are improvements required in the timeliness of feedback, developmental feedback, clear assessment and marking criteria and more personalised feedback from staff who have worked closely with students.' SWS4

'Reports on exams, recitals and written work...is very important for the development of students. [The feedback form] is a tangible document which one can refer to in the future and can record the student's path through the programme.' SWS2

'Improvements to the overall satisfaction for assessment and feedback in 2010/11 from 2009/10 were small, resulting in an overall satisfaction level of 72%.' SWS9

Clarification of what was being assessed

'Inconsistency in assessment criteria must be tackled to ensure consistency between schools and departments and equal treatment of all students. We recommend that all schools and departments draw up detailed assessment criteria matrices to ensure students are fully aware of what is required of them.' SWS6

The speed with which results and feedback were returned

'Taught course feedback to students was noted to be slow, particularly for Part A but student concerns have been acted upon and new policies are in place to earlier identify and help those struggling. Research degree feedback was sporadic for the MPhil/PhD transfer viva but better on general issues from supervisors.' SWS1

'Coursework is obviously an extremely important aspect; many students have explained their frustrations with coursework return deadlines being missed by lecturers . . . deadlines [for the return of assessed work] are often missed which meant students had submitted two or more assessment tasks before receiving any feedback.' SWS7

'There needs to be greater consistency in the meeting of deadlines for return of work and also in the guidance given to staff on the nature and function of feedback.' SWS5

'There are particular concerns surrounding the satisfaction of the prompt return of assessment and feedback.' SWS9

The quality of feedback in helping students to improve

'Some students remain dissatisfied with the feedback they receive on their work. [We] recommend a new university wide minimum standard of feedback be drawn up with student consultation.' SWS6

'It is noted that the overall management and monitoring of research degrees will improve with the implementation of a new online iProgress system, which tracks students' progress throughout their course.' SWS1

'Teaching staff, programme and module leaders are available to provide clarification of feedback [if requested]. This is considered to be a strong example of good practice and is generally appreciated by the student body as a whole. [However] feedback could be more consistent across the institutions.' SWS5

'It was suggested that there is a certain level of inconsistency in the marking and feedback provided by different tutors. Students felt that they would benefit from more detailed feedback so that they were aware of how to improve. Furthermore, although most students received feedback within six weeks of submission, some were still waiting longer.' SWS11

Support for work placement

'We suggest that the University takes the Wilson Review of University-Business collaboration under consideration and seek to gain cooperation from all colleges.' SWS8

'Every school and department has a designated member of staff who has within their role the advice and support of placement students. Information for placement students, such as a FAQ section and where to go for help, is provided [on the VLE] to support those on, or considering placement.' SWS6

'[We] are concerned by the number of positions offered that are either unpaid or lacking in basic support. Unpaid internships are perceived as being of having a negative impact on student progression.' SWS3

'There are currently no institutional policies on work-based placement at [the provider].'
SWS14

Effective communication

'The overriding recommendation is that [the provider] improve the way it communicates with its students on both institutional and everyday course related matters.' SWS14

'The reliability of both the VLE and Portal are something that seems to be variable. Combining two complex and quite different systems would be an understandably difficult task but perhaps the root of the problem is the understanding of which system provides what and how well it provides this service to students.' SWS4

'[There is an] over reliance on forms of communication that dyslexic students find difficult...and course information could be made more accessible if a range of methods of communication were adopted.' SWS12

'We would like to reiterate that the institution should consider wider methods of dissemination of the PRES results.' SWS8

'The University to ensure all members of staff check and respond to emails relating to an appeal at least once every 10 days where they are aware that an appeal is in progress. There remains an issue in relation to the communication skills of some lecturers, with current policies failing to address the matter effectively.' SWS6

'An area of concern from the NSS results of 2011 is the satisfaction with the communication of changes to the course of teaching. 12 courses scored below the 50% threshold, with the lowest satisfaction level recorded at just 14%.' SWS9

'Communication of matters of importance such as changes and improvements to students learning opportunities and experiences are generally very well communicated through the VLE.' SWS2

'Three courses on two campuses use course blogs very successfully to communicate with students through sharing good practice, communicating timetable changes and answering questions. Students can view and comment on each other's work, creating a community across the course. The effective use of blogs also allows students to engage in professional practice which further enhances their student experience. The success of course blogs amongst these courses is demonstrated through their NSS and ISS results.' SWS9

'The Steering Group is currently looking into the possibility of having interactive handbooks with hyperlinks and signposting available on the VLE.' SWS5

'Discussion with and feedback from students suggests that the website can be hard to navigate and may be overly complicated. This restricts the usefulness of it as a tool as it takes too long to find information.' SWS13

'Student found social networking sites very informative and felt they provided information about the university and opportunities to interact with fellow students before their arrival. International students reported they got most of their information from the internet as hard copies often arrive late.' SWS11

Virtual learning environments

'Communication of matters of importance such as changes and improvement to students' learning opportunities and experiences are generally very well communicated through the VLE.' SWS2

'The [name of provider] website and online catalogue of students' work is a helpful resource for potential students. The [posting] of student video [online]...was of great help to overseas students and home students who were unable to attend college open days. The information on the website is out of date and in places is incorrect. Whereas it is understandable that prospectuses can be out of date...this should not be the case for the website.' SWS13

'To assist the [student representative body] in supporting SSLCs [representatives] were given administrative rights to the VLE pages for each SSLC. This allowed us to poll students in different areas of the university, circulate news and, in future, run elections for all SSLC reps online.' SWS8

'External examiner and other audit results to be disseminated through the Student Portal. The School has recently begun to move resources to the Student Portal so that students can access them from any location. A strategic plan has been developed to expand this provision further to include online classes and greater online learning materials through Blackboard.' SWS10

'The new VLE area [where] students and staff can share learning resources, issues or ideas.....,is an excellent improvement and should be developed further.' SWS4

'We recommend the institution undertakes full and comprehensive research on the student view of the intranet and commit to adapting the portal to meet student expectations. SWS9 [...] the intranet and Learning Space are not the most user-friendly web pages to interact with. Students have admitted that they do not use the services as much as they might.... They get frustrated with having to log in to several different sites to access their information.' SWS14

'While [Moodle is] still in the early stages of introduction, students advise that more work is needed to make this an accessible and ultimately useful resource.' SWS5

'Develop a LinkedIn Alumni group which may provide a further source of advice and support for current students. There should be a single electronic resource for student record and learning (including iProgress, the portfolio, the training tracker and Lab Book). The intranet (iSpace) should be accessible off site.' SWS1

'The [name of provider] intranet is a fairly new but already vital addition, especially in terms of cutting down paper wastage and ease of accessing syllabi, project dates and information and in maintaining good contact.' SWS2

'The College and Students' Union utilise social media effectively.' SWS7

Response to student feedback

Feedback from students

'There is currently no requirement for departments to institute a Student-Staff Liaison Committee or Student Staff Forum. A paper proposing that they become university policy was discussed and accepted at the October 2011 University Teaching Committee.' SWS11

'There is no standardised feedback system for students to feedback on course or unit level. The only way for students to feedback is through the NSS and ISS. A standardised feedback form for courses and units should be implemented to ensure that student feedback is always driving course changes.' SWS9

'At the time of writing there have been only two SSLG meetings this academic year. The [student representative body] has highlighted the need for external examiner reports and NSS results to be discussed at the first possible opportunity in each SSLG so that the widest range of student feedback possible can be gathered and fed into the schools' ASR process. Monitoring of courses should be improved this academic year with the introduction of the module content and deliver feedback form, which will be used to gather students' opinions of their courses.' SWS14

'Areas of concern regarding quality assurance are minimal. However where concerns exist they tend to centre on the lack of representation of 'non-traditional' undergraduate students and post-graduate students.' SWS8

'There is little evidence in the SLC minutes of any actions being taken on concerns raised.' SWS3

The student voice

'Recently the student body was unsatisfied with the way that students were communicated with in the rare circumstance of their supervisor leaving. [Recommendations] for change were presented at the Student Liaison Committee and Academic Dean's Team and improvements have been made based on our recommendations.' SWS1

'When general student feedback raised concerns at the level of understanding of recital marks...the college actively involved students in the process, creating a 'mock' recital video in which students experienced being on an adjudication panel.' SWS2

'All colleges have agreed to adopt a three week turnaround time for assessment...This is another example of the University's excellent responsiveness to student feedback and demonstrates the strength of the institution and the [student representative body].' SWS8

'The SU and University have worked together to implement a range of changes that have arisen as a result of the student voice. Furthermore there is evidence that several departments have listened to the feedback from their students and been responsive in finding solutions to these issues.' SWS1

'The university takes great care in listening to the student voice. From the Vice Chancellor downwards the student voice is paramount.' SWS12

'[...] as a result of the review of students engagement in 2010 it is generally the view of the students that their voice plays an important part in developing enhancement strategies at management level.' SWS5

Appendix 4: Student comments contributing to individual submissions

Student comments that contributed to the student written submissions are organised in this section to reflect the themes used to structure this report.

Student workload: tuition hours and programmed learning

Contact with personal tutors, module tutors and supervisors

'I don't feel that the personal tutor system is very effective. I have had a different tutor every year for the last four years of my course and this means that they cannot and do not get to know me or my study progress very well. I think that students should be able to have the same tutor for the duration of their course, with monthly meetings to discuss progress. This would make the departments more personal and easier to feel a part of with a sense of belonging, which perhaps is lacking now.'

'I also felt that having a personal tutor who was different each year has been detrimental and would have liked the university to have helped me with the transition between these tutors.'

'Personal tutors allocated but were changed every year therefore didn't feel as supported this way as tutor have a busy timetable as well.'

'It has come to my third year and I do not feel that any of staff know me well enough to provide a reference for me. I think this is due to lack of contact with one person such as a personal tutor.'

'The importance of the administrator as a main point of contact to students for support, issues, questions, knowledge etc cannot be emphasised enough.' Printmaking

'The tactile nature of communication through the notice-board is really good; it ensures interaction and people coming up to the office; creating a hub/ a point of reference.'
Photography

'Support from Tutors is well above any expectations I had.' Textiles

'The technicians are amazing.' Fashion

'Great people and great dialogue between students and tutors.' Animation

Value for money

'There's not enough contact time. For each 20-credit module I'm only in one hour a week, or 2 if there's an extra seminar on. There's not the chance to speak to staff to make sure you're on the right track.' Geography

'£3000 is a lot of money to spend on 4 hours of contact time a week.' Joint Honours (Arts)

'2 hours contact time per week: £3000. You work it out.' Textiles

'The situation for me as a 3rd year now is I have this semester between 4-6 hours of contact time, I am paying £3290 for it.' Law

'Not enough contact time. Involves a great deal of independent work which can sometimes feel like I'm teaching myself.' Theology

'Why does my course cost the same as Chemistry or Medicine, when I use no resources except the libraries and have only 6 hours contact time per week?' Politics

'Amount of contact time for arts students in proportion to the fees paid is definitely not fair.' Joint Honours (Modern Languages)

'At other universities 24 hour-access to their libraries is standard practice, why should this one, one of the largest universities in the UK, not have this as well.'

'Future students who will pay £9,000 a year should at least be given the option to go into their library at any time they want.'

'Why does my course cost the same as Chemistry or Medicine, when I use no resources except the libraries and have only 6 hours contact time per week?' Politics

'There's not enough contact time. For each 20-credit module I'm only in one hour a week, or 2 if there's an extra seminar on. There's not the chance to speak to staff to make sure you're on the right track.' Geography

'Not enough contact time. Involves a great deal of independent work which can sometimes feel like I'm teaching myself.' Theology

'At other universities 24 hour-access to their libraries is standard practice, why should this one, one of the largest universities in the UK, not have this as well.'

'Future students who will pay £9,000 a year should at least be given the option to go into their library at any time they want.'

Hidden costs

'Bearing in materials for art are a serious extra on top of this.' Fine Art

'Expensive field trips.' Geography

'Had to move away to go on placements therefore had two accommodations.' Healthcare

'It was also difficult for me financially as we had to buy new food every time and the cost of travelling to Hull was expensive which left me very tight every month.' Healthcare

'The term abroad at the end of second year is very expensive, as most people have to pay a lot of money to rent in France on top of the house they are renting in England.' Joint Honours Modern Languages

'Nearly all equipment and materials must be bought by the student, and for a design subject this can be very expensive with items such as sketchbooks, mount boards, fabrics and yarns.' Textiles

'Some core reading books in the library don't have enough copies, especially during the peak times.'

'I find it difficult to get the books I need from the library when I need them.'

'There don't seem to be enough to go around. The arrangements for recalling books are not in favour of part time students.'

'The library resources, such as the amount of books, are not sufficient for the number of students.'

Class size and teaching qualifications

'The studios in...form part of an individual's workshop, as those engaging in Sculpture usually work spatially, because there are no facilities for plaster, rubber, or generally things that need time to dry, or a permanent storage space and with an increase in numbers, students will no longer be able to achieve high standards of excellence in craftsmanship seen over the past years.' Sculpture Focus Group.

Quality of teaching and learning

'Individual research students are very pro-active in seeking tutorial support and collaborating across the university.' Textiles

'Not enough high quality teaching.' Architecture

'The department has been in a flux regarding staffing and format of teaching which has caused difficulties.' Sculpture

'I felt as if we were really a part of the research being taught, rather than just recipients of the research.'

'I have gained a deeper understanding of my working practice and to be more critically aware of my work. Improve my conceptual thinking.' Design Products

'Thumbs up to him for making Medieval Latin an exciting subject for it is not an easy job.'

Feedback to students

Clarification of what was being assessed

'The briefing at the start of every project is very well managed.' IDE

The quality of feedback in helping students to improve

'Some staff provides little or no feedback on work, meaning you may make the same mistakes in future essays.' Linguistics

'Lack of detail of feedback in essays does not say how you can achieve the next level up.' Sociology

'Not enough feedback overall, marking does not seem to correspond with assessment criteria. Feedback during the course does not match final grades (i.e. is misleading about how well you are doing, compared the grade you get). Tutors do not make it clear what they're looking for when marking the work. Different tutors have very different ways of working making it very hard to know who to please/which way to work in.' Textiles

'The course managers seem to focus on adding more opportunity to get feedback but what we need is quality feedback. Often it is rushed and poor.' Medicine

'Feedback from work has included comments such as 'no' which I do not find constructive or helpful for improvement.' Psychology

'Some staff provides little or no feedback on work, meaning you may make the same mistakes in future essays.' Linguistics

'Lack of detail of feedback in essays does not say how you can achieve the next level up.' Sociology

'Not much feedback. Some deadlines did not have mark schemes available beforehand so it was hard to understand what was covered.' Geography

'Comments and feedback on assessments can be quite brief. It is not always clear why you received the mark you did.' Joint Honours Modern Languages

'Not enough feedback overall, marking does not seem to correspond with assessment criteria. Feedback during the course does not match final grades (i.e. is misleading about how well you are doing, compared the grade you get). Tutors do not make it clear what they're looking for when marking the work. Different tutors have very different ways of working making it very hard to know who to please/which way to work in.' Textiles

'I have also had, on occasion, some very unsatisfactory exam feedback, with the same comments copied and pasted on to each student's feedback form.' English

'The course managers seem to focus on adding more opportunity to get feedback but what we need is quality feedback. Often it is rushed and poor.' Medicine

'[Feedback] is often sparse or even occasionally illegible due to poor or rushed handwriting.' POLIS

'Feedback from some pieces of work/reports has been poor; this has hindered my learning and quality of work in some instances, as I haven't been given the opportunity to learn from previous mistakes.' Mechanical Engineering

'Lack of feedback.' Business School

'Feedback needs to be drastically improved!' Biological Sciences

'Stagnant lack of feedback from critiques, tutorials etc.' Sculpture

The speed with which results and feedback were returned

'Length of time to receive feedback often at the handing in point of the next set of coursework before any feedback given, and that is too late.' Food Science

'Feedback for practical exercises sometimes was not given back until after the next one was handed in, meaning that it was difficult to know where you needed to improve from the previous practical.' Geography

'Feedback on exam results and essays it is supposed to take 4 weeks to get your exam results however some modules took as long as 6 weeks, which is not fair. We get penalised

for late submission yet the markers don't give us extra marks for late results. Just something to think about.' Healthcare

'Slow feedback on exams and other work.' Dentistry

'Length of time to receive feedback often at the handing in point of the next set of coursework before any feedback given, and that is too late.' Food Science

'Feedback for practical exercises sometimes was not given back until after the next one was handed in, meaning that it was difficult to know where you needed to improve from the previous practical.' Geography

'Feedback on exam results and essays it is supposed to take 4 weeks to get your exam results however some modules took as long as 6 weeks, which is not fair. We get penalised for late submission yet the markers don't give us extra marks for late results. Just something to think about.' Healthcare

'Long waits for feedback following essays, exams. One module failed to provide feedback from our essays (handed in November) prior to our exams (at the end of January) therefore we were unaware of mistakes that we had made previously.' Joint Honours Arts

'We did receive feedback, but would have been great to receive it after each project so we could use it to improve for the next brief.' Textiles

Effective communication

'The Virtual Learning Environment is an amazing online bank of information in relation to the course. It's easy to understand but still full of detail.'

'I thought the VLE was really good, and many of the staff were good at putting online readings up, which made it very useful when the books in the library were taken.'

'Lecture notes and recordings on the VLE are very useful as they help you understand the module more and this is a good way to initiate further reading.'

'Many lecturers fail to appreciate the utility of providing resources on the VLE. Lecture slides that are uninformative or absent, make revising for exams extremely difficult.'

'Not all lectures go on the VLE.'

'Some of the more difficult modules went over material too fast and too much was in one session, which was made even harder as the lecture slides were not put up on the VLE.'

'Examination feedback is very useful and given through the VLE service made it particularly effective.'

'The sheer lack of organisation, structure and positive energy.' Visual Communications

'The Architecture School needs some massive changes in tutoring and management asap.'

'On a Programme level there needs to be a better illustration of what the platforms are and a clearer navigation to understanding course content.' Design Products Focus Group

Response to student feedback

The student voice

'It feels as though we really have a voice and the Programme is very responsive to it, however within the School of Communication this voice is much less powerful.' Animation

'100% felt they had a voice and that the Programme was approachable and open to suggestions. CWAS Focus Group

'[The Programmes] do listen to us and are responsive and approachable.' Painting Focus Group

'Tutors are approachable and students feel as though they are able to speak to them. Within the university there are lots of ways of being heard.' History of Design Focus Group.

Appendix 5: Structure and methodology of the submissions

Authors: a=1 b=some c=many	Used SED structure	Used a discursive structure	Stated Recommendations	No Recommendations Action points identified	Length in words
1b			Y		6847
2 not stated		Y		Y	5777
3b		Y		Y	3313
4 1 + 1 academic specialist		Y	Y		PDF approx 26p + apps
5b		Y		Y	7456
6b		Y	Y		PDF approx 26p
7c		Y		Y	2583
8c	Y		Y		11839
9b		Y		Y	PDF approx 26p
10b	Y		Y		PDF approx 26p
11c	Y			Y	PDF approx 26p
12b	Y			Y	6682
13c		Y		Y	PDF approx 26p
14c	Y			Y	9071

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