



QAA

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

A STUDY OF UK HIGHER EDUCATION

Commissioned by the
Quality Assurance Agency

RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

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Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1**

Institutions and the sector need to explain the relationship between fees and the quality and value of their degree. There is also a need for financial education and information for students on how universities are funded and where their money goes, as there is still a lack of understanding around the case for funding universities in a new way.

- **Recommendation 2**

Institutions should support departments in ensuring staff are qualified and trained and that students are offered sufficient small-scale seminars and tutorials.

- **Recommendation 3**

To support student choice, there should be greater information and transparency over of information on how money is spent on teaching and learning activities, what qualifications do academics have in their subjects and for teaching, how are academics hired and trained and how teaching is structured and allocated. Information could include nuanced statistics on size of tutorials and seminars, department-level teaching staff-student ratios and staff teaching qualifications to allow students to choose courses offering what is most important to them.

- **Recommendation 4**

There should be better coordination between academic staff and library staff about the availability and accessibility of resources. Academics should consider availability and costs of materials when recommending course materials to students.

- **Recommendation 5**

Institutions should be cautious of using technology as a replacement for face-to-face interactions, or as a substitute for developing an active and collaborative learning environment and community.

- **Recommendation 6**

Joint honours courses need stronger management and coordination by and across course leaders. Where students are allowed to do joint degrees, course leaders need to facilitate and oversee the organisational and structural elements of the combined course.

- **Recommendation 7**

There needs to be clear and simple statements communicated for the most important aspects of a student's degree, focused at the course-level. Institutions should be cautious of using these as marketing opportunities and setting unrealistic expectations or 'selling' an undeliverable experience.

- **Recommendation 8**

Students want more support for their employability, focusing on processes, guidance support available and development opportunities, including internships, placements and work experience. There is a need for more information on employability, with a focus on 'process' and development opportunities, rather than 'product' statistics.

- **Recommendation 9**

Institutions need to offer more course-level information and better organisation of their offering of internships, placements, work experience and skills support, all tailored to specific subjects, with support available from those with experience in those industries and fields.

- **Recommendation 10**

Because most students want to go into specific graduate fields, generic graduate employment statistics or wage statistics are largely irrelevant.

- **Recommendation 11**

Institutional feedback time targets may not be tackling the most salient issues in feedback quality. The pressure for quick feedback returns with limited staff time can exacerbate the problems students have identified with feedback detail and personalisation. Institutional policies should prioritise quality, format and timing of feedback in relation to other assessments, managed at the course level, over standardised feedback turnaround times.

- **Recommendation 12**

Institutions should ensure that feedback is collected and acted upon for both current and future students.

- **Recommendation 13**

Students almost exclusively spoke of their educational learning experience in terms of their course. This raises the need for strong course-level management of curriculum, quality and standards, with a clear structure of academic management mirroring undergraduate student-facing aspects, including local feedback and evaluation, module and course review.

- **Recommendation 14**

There is a need for local management of feedback processes in relation to the structure of the course, and that feedback and evaluation needs to be an issue for individual academics, a collective issue across a course and an institutional responsibility to assure quality across courses. Closing the feedback loop needs to be improved, particularly how information is fed back to students, and done at the local level as much as possible.

- **Recommendation 15**

There should be support for staff development and training (both initial and continuing support), public information about teaching qualifications, along the lines of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) and institutional reward for teaching and recognition of teaching excellence.

- **Recommendation 16**

Staff should be supported, trained and developed to enhance teaching and learning; good teaching staff should be retained as a priority.

- **Recommendation 17**

Students' concerns about quality of teaching on their courses highlight the need for strong local management and oversight of teaching allocation, quality and enhancement.

- **Recommendation 18**

Staff need to be supported by their institutions to provide the interaction, support and guidance that is important to students. This includes manageable teaching loads, a balance between teaching and research responsibilities and meaningful reward, recognition and progression opportunities related to teaching and support activities.

- **Recommendation 19**

There needs to be recognition that students enter higher education on different trajectories, they need different kinds and levels of support, and the institution needs to be responsive to students' needs. A considered balance needs to be sought between having clear and consistent procedures and being flexible and accommodating for students.

- **Recommendation 20**

The role and function of personal and academic tutors may need to be revised at some institutions. Students should have clear avenues for support that they are comfortable using for personal and academic concerns.

- **Recommendation 21**

Institutions need to foster a welcoming and supportive sense of community, between staff and students, and involving all staff (e.g. academic, professional and administrative). For students this involves a sense of shared aims, shared identity and shared spaces—at the subject level and institutionally.

- **Recommendation 22**

Since students related to the academic community at the course-level, this indicates the importance of local-based partnership work for engaging students and suggests institutions should avoid overreliance on institutional-level representational forms of student engagement.

A local-based approach requires multiple forms of, and more localised approaches to, partnership between senior management, central services, academic departments and Students' Unions.

- **Recommendation 23**

As part of a focus on a 'localism' approach to representation, there needs to be greater evidence-based decision-making, particularly at the local level, in response to student concerns, teaching quality and course management.

- **Recommendation 24**

Institutions should collect their own data on the student experience, representing a local and devolved approach to quality enhancement.

- **Recommendation 25**

Students' Unions may want to promote the availability of non-drinking-associated activities, societies and clubs.

- **Recommendation 26**

To offer opportunities for the full range of students there may be need for dedicated institutional staff to work in partnership with Students' Unions and course-level management, mediating engagement with those students typically insulated from the Students' Union.

- **Recommendation 27**

Students wanted opportunities to meet and interact with other students, engage with their course and participate in extra-curricular activities, both social and academic-related. This requires sophisticated promotion and coordination of student services, within institutions this means building relationships between Students' Unions, institutional student services and support and departmental activities. Management and leadership can be provided at the institutional level through Directors or Pro-Vice Chancellor of Student Engagement positions. Across the sector this requires greater support, promotion and development opportunities for those in student-facing roles.

- **Recommendation 28**

Institutions and sector agencies should consider the purpose, role and effectiveness of student charters.

- **Recommendation 29**

Institutions should consider where they can offer targeted, direct, and pro-active support – such as telephone conversations with students, 'halls representatives' who fostered community in student accommodation, and peer mentoring schemes.

- **Recommendation 30**
Institutions need to provide more realistic information about their course, including what they should expect and what was expected of them.
- **Recommendation 31**
Students need more support for the transition from school or college and into higher education, particularly in terms of how to study, the level of support provided by the institution and the expectations for students. Improvements in transition needs to be balanced between higher education institutions and Schools, as higher education institutions alone cannot respond to 'consumer choice' when consumers are trained in a certain environment with subsequent expectations. Students suggested videos and websites that could help prepare them for the academic expectations of higher education
- **Recommendation 32**
Institutions should consider direct interventions in students' transitional experiences, not only the general provision of services. Direct intervention strategies, such as peer mentoring of incoming students, were well regarded by students.
- **Recommendation 33**
Students need sufficient transitional support, and the recognition that students' transitional experiences differ widely (and wildly upon occasion); additional support can include materials and information sent before students enrol, extended Freshers' Weeks, such as 'The First 100 Days', and Re-freshers' Weeks for second year students.
- **Recommendation 34**
A broad sector approach to increased public information about students in higher education could help students prepare them for the realities of higher education.
- **Recommendation 35**
As several students commented that their educational experience was 'not like American films' (see Map 3) there is a potential opportunity for British filmmakers in this area.
- **Recommendation 36**
Regarding finances, students spoke as often about immediate financial concerns, such as money for food, rent and transport, as for tuition fees and student loans. There should be increased access to flexible part-time work, paid internships and educational maintenance loans and grants.
- **Recommendation 37**
There needs to be a collective, institution-wide response to support for student services and student affairs, offering a balance of course-based provision and access to centralised services

coordinated at the course-level. This includes greater institutional responsibility, oversight and partnership with wider aspects of the student experience, including accommodation, transport, cheap and healthy food options, family-study balance and social activities.

- **Recommendation 38**

Institutions should consider students' preferences for functional infrastructure and face-to-face interactions when allocating resources related to teaching and technology.