‘Student Expectations of Higher Education’

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Session descriptor

Edge Hill’s Student Charter sets out the terms of partnership between the University and its students and summarises what a student can expect from the institution and what is expected of them in return. The UK Quality Code for Higher Education also refers to working in partnership with students in shaping and delivering their learning experience. This session will draw upon University policies and findings from national research to consider students’ expectations of teaching, assessment and support including personal and professional development. We shall also look at the recent clarification of consumer protection law as it affects universities and students.
‘Students at the heart of the system’
(HE White Paper, 2011)

Financing students

Improving the student experience

Increasing social mobility

A new, fit-for-purpose regulatory framework
Financing students

• “A new system for higher education funding which ensures that no first-time undergraduate student will have to pay fees up-front and that people are only ever asked to contribute towards the cost of their education, once they can afford to do so.”

• “To be successful, institutions will have to appeal to prospective students and be respected by employers. Putting financial power into the hands of learners makes student choice meaningful.”

• “We expect new courses to offer increased value for money, as they will be delivered by a range of providers with different business models... This will further improve student choice by supporting a more diverse sector.”
Improving the student experience

• “We will remove the regulatory barriers that are preventing a level playing field for higher education providers of all types, including further education colleges and other alternative providers... It will also lead to higher education institutions concentrating on high-quality teaching.”

• “We will radically improve and expand the information available to prospective students, making available much more information about individual courses at individual institutions and graduate employment prospects.”

• “Student charters and student feedback will take on a new importance to empower students whilst at university.”
The report sheds new light on what students perceive as value for money, and what is important to them. It also provides evidence about the information students need and what they get, how their courses are managed and structured, and the role of technology in shaping their experiences. It raises the issue of what feedback students expect – something that comes up regularly in QAA’s reviews and that universities and colleges still need to consider very carefully.”
Value for money

• Institutions and the sector need to explain the relationship between fees and the quality and value of their degree.
• To support student choice, there should be greater information and transparency of information on how money is spent on teaching and learning activities.
Information and support

• Institutions need to provide more realistic information about their courses including what they [students] should expect and what was expected of them. A broad sector approach to increased public information about students in higher education could help students prepare them for the realities of higher education.

• To support student choice, there should be greater information and transparency of information on what qualifications academics have in their subjects and for teaching, how academics are hired and trained and how teaching is structured and allocated.

• There need 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.
Information and support (contd)

• 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**. Students should have clear avenues for support that they are comfortable using for personal and academic concerns.

• 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.
Information and support (contd)

- 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.

- 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.

- Students want more support for employability, focusing on processes, guidance support available and development opportunities, including internships, placements and work experience.
Information and support (contd)

• Students want opportunities to meet and interact with other students, engage with their course and participate in extra-curricular activities, both social and academic-related. This means building relationships between Students’ Unions, institutional student services and support and departmental activities. Across the sector this requires greater support, promotion and development opportunities for those in student-facing roles.

• 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. Direct intervention strategies such as peer mentoring of incoming students, were well regarded by students.
How courses are managed

• Students almost exclusively spoke of their educational learning experience in terms of their course. Students’ concerns about quality of teaching on their courses highlight the need for strong local management and oversight of teaching allocation, quality and enhancement. Institutions should support departments in ensuring staff are qualified and trained.

• Institutions should support departments in ensuring students are offered sufficient small-scale seminars and tutorials.

• Joint honours courses need stronger management and coordination.
How courses are managed (contd)

• 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.

• 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**.

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

• 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 assessments, managed at the course level, over standardised feedback turnaround times.

• 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.
Role of technology

• 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.

• Institutions should consider students’ preferences for functional infrastructure and face-to-face interactions when allocating resources related to teaching and technology.
‘Student Experience Research’, NUS/QAA (2012)

Teaching and learning

Independent learning and contact hours

Subject differences

First Year Student Experience
Student Experience Research (NUS) – findings

Teaching and learning

• Over 90% of students said that teaching skills were important or very important to a good quality learning and teaching experience and half of students linked inspirational teaching to their academic progress.

• Half wanted more interactive and group teaching sessions to develop peer relationships (which they connected with employability).

• Over four-fifths felt that contact hours directly improved the quality of their learning experience. Class sizes were also significant since smaller class sizes = better use of contact hours.

• Most students said the concept of ‘independent learning’ had not been formally explained to them.

• Students reported an average 19.5 hours of independent learning p.w. – translates to around 250 hours per semester across all modules.

• Students expected independent learning hours to increase as they progressed through their course.
Student Experience Research (NUS) (contd)

Student support

• Two-fifths of students wanted more individual tutorials and more contact time with their personal tutor.
• Students appreciated guidance in how to use independent learning time effectively.

Employability

• Two-thirds of students went to university to increase their career opportunities.
• Three-quarters said their course prepared them for employment.
• Students on vocational programmes including teacher education and health-related subjects felt significantly more prepared for employment.
• Careers information, advice and guidance were not a priority for most students during their first year.
Student Experience Research (NUS) contd

Student engagement
• Less than half of students felt their feedback was acted upon.
• Half said they had some involvement in helping shape the content of their course.

Assessment and feedback
• Three quarters of students received written feedback within 3-4 weeks.
• The majority (three-fifths) received no written feedback on exams.
• Students wanted more verbal feedback.

Internationalisation
• Students showed little or no awareness of ‘internationalisation’ which they mostly took to refer to international students only.
First Year Student Experience

• Students received pre-entry information including financial support information, course content and induction information. Students wanted more information about accommodation.

• Academic induction was “repetitive, boring and in groups which were too big”. Too much information was given over a short space of time and more could have been supplied pre-arrival. Students preferred more practical, interactive induction activities to being told about how things worked.

• Students wanted more social induction activities at course level to help them acclimatise and socialise quickly.
Discussion (1)

In groups, consider **any one** of the themes from the KCL and NUS research:

- How do we evidence course quality to students?
- Is the balance of lectures, group sessions and tutorials correct?
- How do we support students on different ‘learning trajectories’?
- Induction - have we got it right?
- How do we support students’ employability outside vocational-professional subjects?
- How ‘joined up’ are our academic areas and support services?
- How do new learning technologies enhance face-to-face delivery?
- How do we provide feedback to students and how responsive are we to theirs?
UK Quality Code for Higher Education

• Defined by a national HE level framework and subject benchmarks (PART A), additional guidance on securing and enhancing the quality of students’ learning opportunities (PART B) and guidance concerning information published by HE providers (PART C)

• All three Parts of the Code are used at Higher Education Review to inform judgements on academic standards, quality of learning opportunities, enhancement and public information
Working in partnership with students

(UKQCHE B3) “In general, effective learning in higher education occurs when there is a partnership between the higher education provider, their staff and students. Partnership is about joint working and not a formal legal relationship based on equal responsibility and liability. Joint working is based on a mature relationship and mutual respect. In the case of learning and teaching, a partnership between staff and students can empower students to develop further as active and independent learners who recognise and take responsibility for their own learning. Such a partnership, whether through formal or informal arrangements, acknowledges that while providers are responsible for providing inclusive learning opportunities and support for learning, the effectiveness with which the learning opportunities are used is a matter for students themselves.”
UKQCHE B1 Programme design, development and approval

• Higher education providers involve students in programme design and in processes for programme development and approval.

UKQCHE B3 Learning and teaching

• The learning and teaching activities made available by a higher education provider take place within a broad learning environment which comprises both physical and virtual facilities and the culture and ethos of learning promoted by the provider and its staff working with students and other stakeholders.

• Students are uniquely positioned to comment on how the strategic approach to learning and teaching adopted by the higher education provider enables and supports student learning, and how enhancement of the opportunities provided can benefit their learning. Consequently, higher education providers involve students in developing, implementing and monitoring the strategic approach.

• Staff work in partnership with individual students to understand the implication of any specific requirements or reasonable adjustments for their teaching practices.

• Systematic consultation with students and staff about the accessibility of technological facilities enhances standards of usability.
UKQCHE B4  Enabling student development and achievement
• Professional services, academic departments and any student representative bodies work in partnership with students to achieve a seamless approach from the student perspective.
• Higher education providers work in partnership with students to understand the implications of their specific needs. Providers involve students in the process for developing a fully accessible environment, especially students with specific requirements, such as disabled or part-time students.
• Higher education providers have strategies to promote students' employability and their ability to articulate their knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. In developing such strategies, higher education providers work in partnership with students and external stakeholders.

UKQCHE B5  Student engagement
• Higher education providers working in partnership with their student body are proactive in attempting to capture the educational experience of all students.
• Higher education providers, in partnership with their student body, define and promote the range of opportunities for any student to engage in educational enhancement and quality assurance.

UKQCHE B8  Programme monitoring and review
• Higher education providers involve students in programme monitoring and review processes.
Learning and Teaching Policy

“The primary aim of teaching and learning at Edge Hill is to develop, support and challenge learners. These learners will be autonomous learners, capable of both independent and interdependent learning.”

Learning and Teaching Strategy

“Edge Hill University undertakes its learning and teaching with an aim to produce graduates who are:

- Well informed, appropriately skilled and highly employable graduates for the 21st century
- Confident, adaptable, with a good understanding of sustainable development and their environment, and who are attuned to global perspectives and cultural diversity
- Equipped to become role models and leaders in the workplace and their communities
- Committed to lifelong learning.”
Assessment Policy

“Assessment practices at Edge Hill should be both for and of learning. Assessment should have a positive role in supporting the learning of students and in quality management and enhancement. Processes will be underpinned by transparency, supportiveness, respect and value of diversity.”

Code of Practice for Personal Tutoring

“Personal Tutors are central to aspects of academic and pastoral support and guidance and are a key interface with central services for students. Edge Hill University provides a well planned, monitored and evaluated Personal Tutor system which impacts upon students’ sense of belonging, cohort identity, personal development and academic success. It is expected that students will participate in planned engagements with tutors as part of taking responsibility for their own learning.”

Policy for Personal Development Planning

“Faculties are responsible for ensuring that every student following a programme leading to an award within the higher education awards framework will have appropriate opportunities for PDP at all levels of their programme as part of a continuous process of personal review and development.”
Curriculum Frameworks

Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Degree Frameworks

• Eleven ‘lenses’ through which programmes are developed, delivered and reviewed in response to questions and challenges concerning:

  • (Post-)Graduate attributes
  • Inductions and transitions
  • Teaching, learning and assessment
  • Personal tutoring
  • Personal Development Planning
  • Learning Literacies
  • Work-Related and Work-Based Learning

  • Technology-Enhanced Learning and Distance learning
  • Employability
  • International dimensions
  • Education for Sustainable Development

• Web-based repository of practical guidance, research and exemplars
Edge Hill Student Charter

• Developed jointly by the University and the Students’ Union.
• Defines the partnership between Edge Hill University and its students.
• What students can expect from the University:
  • Professional and qualified staff committed to their own development
  • Well-designed and well-taught courses with teaching that challenges and extends thinking, helps develop personal skills and enhances employability
  • Clear and accurate information including timetabling
  • Integrated induction
  • Fair assessment and feedback within four working weeks
  • Personal Tutor support with regular contact and a wide range of personal and learning support services appropriate to need
  • High quality learning and social facilities
  • Clearly identified communication channels for feedback, complaints and appeals
  • Policies and procedures to safeguard health, safety and welfare.
Edge Hill Student Charter (contd)

• What the University expects from students:
  • To take their studies seriously and plan their studies and work
  • Comply with programme requirements and regulations
  • Engage fully in induction
  • Attend classes regularly and promptly with adequate preparation. Participate fully and responsibly in timetabled group learning activities
  • Spend sufficient regular time in independent study
  • Hand work in on time to set criteria and deadlines
  • Take notice of feedback for improvement
  • Seek early advice and support for academic or personal issues and make full use of the available services and facilities
  • Provide feedback on the student experience
  • Pay tuition fees and other expenses relating to the programme or use of University services or facilities
  • Comply with safety policies or procedures, respect the environment, be respectful of others and behave appropriately.
Legal obligations

• The relationship between HE providers (HEPs) and students is governed by consumer protection law overseen by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) and enforceable by local authority Trading Standards (NB this excludes academic appeals and complaints which are handled by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator)

• Students are afforded particular protection in law because they are seen to be in a weaker bargaining position than HE providers and once on programme cannot easily change institutions

• CMA guidance to HEPs (March 2015) covers all stages of the ‘student journey’, that is:
  • Pre-entry – “It is unlawful to mislead students by failing to give them the information they need to make an informed choice... Missing, hidden or inaccurate information may affect students’ decisions”, e.g. course content, teaching arrangements and full costs of study. The offer of a place is deemed to be a contract for educational services and changes to the advertised product must be notified prior to contract.
Legal obligations (contd)

• Pre-entry (contd) – “A term that affords a wide discretion to the HE provider to withdraw or cancel a course in its entirety before it commences, for any reason, effectively means the HE provider could simply choose not to run a course, and not comply with the terms of offers it made to prospective students. As such, the provision is potentially unfair.”

• Post-entry – “Terms that allow an HE provider to vary something – such as the course content or fees – may be unfair where they allow wide discretion to the HE provider to make changes to important aspects of the service. Terms allowing variation are not automatically unfair, and there is likely to be a need for an element of flexibility, given that unforeseen events or circumstances may arise, but this has to be balanced against giving an HE provider too wide a discretion to make changes to the detriment of students... a term that allows blanket changes and affords the HE provider a broad discretion to change significant aspects of the course (such as the course content, the location of study, method of assessment or the final qualification to be awarded), without describing the circumstances when and reasons why this might happen so that the student is able to foresee how and when changes might be made, is unlikely to be considered fair”.
Discussion (2)

Consider:

- How do we meet students’ expectations of us as set out in our Student Charter? What are the important areas for attention at course, Faculty or University level? Where do we think we stand in relation to consumer protection law?

- Which of our expectations of students require particular reinforcement with them and how is this managed effectively?
References

• ‘Students at the Heart of the System’ (Coalition government White Paper), Department for Business Innovation & Skills, June 2011

• ‘Student Experience Research 2012’, National Union of Students (2012)
   Parts 1-4:
   http://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/12238/2012_NUS_QAA_Independent_Learning_and>Contact_Hours.pdf
   http://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/12238/2012_NUS_QAA_Subject_Differences.pdf
   http://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/12238/2012_NUS_QAA_First-Year.pdf
   Full report:
   http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resourcehandler/d966acf8-e05a-4138-bc68-703094ebd4dd/


• ‘UK higher education providers – advice on consumer protection law’, Competition and Markets Authority (2015)

• Other information:
  • UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Part B
   ‘Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality’
  • QAA Review Knowledgebases
   http://www.qaa.ac.uk/improving-higher-education/knowledgebase-search
Thanks for your participation