

National student survey: interim report on the 2003 pilot and outline of issues for future implementation

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Executive summary

1. This document provides an update on the development of the national student survey. It was prepared as background for delegates attending dissemination events in November 2003.

Key points

2. During summer 2003, a pilot of the national student survey was conducted in England, Wales and Northern Ireland with 23 higher education institutions. This report summarises:
- a. The background to the survey.
 - b. The processes involved in the pilot.
 - c. Results emerging so far.
 - d. Plans for further analysis of the pilot data.
 - e. An outline of issues to be addressed in developing the survey for full implementation.
3. Once the pilot results have been fully analysed in early 2004, we will consult formally with the sector and stakeholders on the implementation of the survey.
4. We expect to conduct the first full-scale survey in January 2005, with results being published in summer 2005.

Further information

5. For further information, contact:
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Or, at HEFCE, Graeme Rosenberg, g.rosenberg@hefce.ac.uk.
6. Additional information about the pilot and analyses of results will be made available as they emerge, on the project web-site <http://iet.open.ac.uk/nss/>

Background and introduction

Origins of the national student survey

7. Following the completion of subject review by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), the HE sector, HEFCE, QAA and the Government agreed the following principles for a new quality assurance framework for HE in England:
- a. Recognising the primary responsibility of each higher education institution (HEI) to operate robust internal mechanisms for setting, maintaining and reviewing quality and standards; for generating information about its quality and standards; and for publishing the key parts of that information.

- b. Meeting public information needs, so that stakeholders – and above all students – can obtain information which is up-to-date, consistent and reliable about the quality and standards of teaching and learning at different HEIs.
- c. Lightness of touch, so that the burden on HEIs is reduced to the minimum consistent with proper accountability and meeting information needs, and so that the greatest value is secured from the resources used.

8. A Task Group chaired by Professor Sir Ron Cooke, then Vice-Chancellor of the University of York, was set up in 2001 to make recommendations on the information about the quality and standards of teaching that the new quality assurance framework should generate. Accurate and up-to-date information about the quality and standards of provision was recognised as important to enable potential students and their advisers to make informed decisions, to inform the judgements of other stakeholders, and to help secure accountability for the use of public funds.

9. The Task Group analysed findings of studies about the information needs of students and other stakeholders. This analysis confirmed the importance of teaching quality as one of several key factors considered by prospective students when selecting what and where to study. For many students, this was found to be especially important at the stage during the applications process when they develop a short-list of choices. However, many used published entry requirements as a proxy indicator of quality, highlighting the need for more satisfactory indicators of quality. The analysis also confirmed the general demand by prospective students for the information to relate to individual programmes.

10. In the absence of external peer review at subject level, the Task Group agreed with the student representatives on the group that students themselves were well placed to provide feedback on quality, and that published results of student feedback should be an essential component of the new information set. Alongside other information – including data on student progression, achievement and destinations, and summaries of external examiners' findings – this feedback would meet the requirements of stakeholders, and prospective students in particular, for information on which to base judgements about the quality and standards of teaching.

11. In November 2001 the Task Group invited responses to its initial proposals in 'Information on quality and standards of teaching and learning: proposals for consultation' (HEFCE 01/66). These proposals drew as far as possible on existing sources in order to generate suitable public information. The report set out several options in respect of student feedback, recognising that this element would require additional information-gathering in order to produce consistent and comparable feedback. The option recommended in HEFCE 01/66 was for institutions to continue to collect feedback at a detailed level internally, and to seek to derive from the internal surveys more comparable information that each HEI would publish; and for the then First Destinations Survey (FDS, now the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey, DLHE) to be extended to include questions about quality, the results of which would be published nationally.

12. At the same time as the HEFCE 01/66 consultation, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) consulted on a range of proposed changes to the FDS. Respondents to this and to HEFCE 01/66 rejected the proposed extension to the FDS for a number of reasons. However, respondents to HEFCE 01/66 provided no consensus on the best alternative means of meeting the requirement to generate comparable student feedback data.

13. The Task Group published its final proposals, in the light of the consultation, in 'Information on quality and standards in higher education: final report of the Task Group' (HEFCE 02/15). Given that consistent and comparable results from student feedback are essential elements of the overall package, the Task Group concluded that a separate national survey would need to be introduced, and that internal feedback collected by institutions should be gathered and reported on a more consistent basis. The report envisaged that the national survey would produce results at HEI level, and that internal feedback would generate more detailed results for each HEI.

The student feedback project

14. The Task Group recognised that much further work would be required to scope out and design the national survey, and to move towards more consistent practices for internal feedback. To this end, a Student Feedback Project Steering Group (SFPSG) was established, also chaired by Sir Ron Cooke. A project was commissioned to review student feedback mechanisms within HEIs and internationally, and to scope out and develop the proposals. The project team consisted of the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information at the Open University (CHERI), leading on internal feedback, and consultants SQW Ltd and the NOP Research Group scoping out the national survey.¹

15. The final report by SQW, NOP and CHERI, 'Collecting and using student feedback on quality and standards of learning and teaching in HE' and of the SFPSG was published in May 2003 on the HEFCE web-site (www.hefce.ac.uk under Publications/R&D reports). Key conclusions of the project were that:

- a. Stakeholders (prospective students in particular) would value published results of consistently collected student feedback. They demand comparable results at a detailed level, in order to inform judgements relating to individual programmes; results at HEI level only would be of limited value.

¹ Work on the other elements of the new public information about quality and standards was taken forward through a teaching quality information (TQI) pilot. The intention was that results of student feedback, when ready for publication, would be integrated into the TQI web-site and presented alongside the other data as part of a package. 'Information on quality and standards in higher education: final guidance' (HEFCE 2003/51) sets out the final specification of the other elements of TQI, describes the publication arrangements, and confirms the plan to integrate the results of student feedback into the TQI web-site.

- b. The primary purpose of the national student survey (NSS) should be to provide valid and appropriately detailed public information about students' feedback on teaching quality, in order to help inform (alongside other information) the judgements of prospective students, their advisers and other stakeholders about the quality of teaching. This recognises the importance of such judgements in the choice-making process of applicants to HE in particular. It would also contribute to public accountability for HEIs' use of public funds.
- c. The primary purpose of internal feedback surveys in HEIs is to contribute to the management and enhancement of quality. Current practices in this area vary between and within institutions, focusing at different levels and on different issues as appropriate to meet this objective. Given this need for variation, and given that the NSS could generate results at subject level, the publication of the results of internal feedback would no longer be necessary.
- d. Thus, to meet its objectives the NSS must aim to generate results at subject level at each HEI. This means that large volumes of responses, and therefore a census survey of all relevant students, would be required. Otherwise the results may not be reliable at the subject level.
- e. The survey should be directed at undergraduate students at or near to the point of completing their programmes of study. Further consideration would be needed about the potential to include non-completers.
- f. The survey should focus on providing information about teaching quality (defined fairly narrowly), and should use a single, generic questionnaire. A questionnaire, drawn largely from the course experience questionnaire (CEQ) used in Australian universities, was proposed by SQW/NOP (attached at Annex A). This provided a useful starting point, but needed to be tested and developed further.
- g. There were concerns to ensure that the survey would be robust, and further assessment would be needed about how far results could be reliably disaggregated. There were related concerns about likely response rates, about the costs of the new survey, and about how the survey would relate in practice to HEIs' internal surveys.
- h. A large-scale pilot was recommended, as well as consultation with the sector and stakeholders, before the survey was implemented nationally.

The national student survey pilot

16. The sponsoring bodies (HEFCE, UUK, SCOP and QAA) accepted in full the conclusions of the SFPSG. We organised a pilot of the survey, in order to:

- a. Develop and test the reliability of the questionnaire, and refine it for use in a full-scale survey.

- b. Provide evidence to inform decisions about how to conduct the full-scale survey, including:
 - i. How to define the target population for the survey.
 - ii. The timing and methodology for collecting the data.
 - iii. The administrative arrangements and likely costs.
 - c. Assess the robustness of the survey and the feasibility of disaggregating results to the desired level from the future full-scale survey.
 - d. Begin work on the nature of the results that would be published from the full-scale survey.
17. Preparation for the pilot began in May 2003, following the conclusion of the student feedback project. Since then we have undertaken the following:
- a. CHERI was commissioned to test the questionnaire as proposed in the SQW/NOP report, and develop it for use in the pilot.
 - b. All HEIs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland were invited to take part in the pilot. More than 60 volunteered and 23 were selected.
 - c. A National Student Survey Pilot Steering Group (NSSPSG) was established, chaired by Professor Gillian Slater, Vice-Chancellor of Bournemouth University. The group will oversee the pilot and the consultation, and make recommendations to the sponsoring bodies on implementing the first full-scale survey. Membership of the NSSPSG is attached at Annex B.
 - d. A national co-ordinator for the pilot was appointed, to co-ordinate work by a 'central' survey team at the Open University's Institute of Educational Technology, the pilot HEIs, HEFCE, and the NSSPSG.
 - e. Preparations were made to identify and survey students at each of the pilot HEIs during the summer, using a range of methods and administrative arrangements. Due to the timing of developments it was not possible to administer any of the pilot questionnaires any sooner than July 2003, though it would have been beneficial to test a range of timings, including during term-time.
 - f. Using HESA data, we identified students to be included in the survey and provided target lists to the pilot HEIs, who supplied their contact details.
 - g. Questionnaires were administered between July and September, using a variety of methods. Data were then coded and compiled.
 - h. The first in a series of planned analyses of the data has been performed, and further detailed analysis is currently under way.

18. The section below provides a more detailed description of the pilot project and of the results emerging from initial analysis.

The national student survey pilot

Development of the pilot questionnaire

19. Following the conclusion of the student feedback project, we commissioned CHERI to test and develop the questionnaire as proposed in the SQW/NOP report. During May 2003, CHERI conducted a series of 10 focus groups at six HEIs, involving a total of 59 students. Students were asked to complete the questionnaires individually, and then as a group discussed each question, and general perceptions of the questionnaire. Students were asked about their understanding of each question, and the extent to which they perceived it to be relevant.

20. The questionnaire, and the results of the focus groups, were then discussed at a seminar of experts in student feedback and surveys. The following issues were addressed in developing the questionnaire for use in the pilot:

- a. Most of the items in the pilot questionnaire were taken directly from the SQW/NOP proposal (and hence many were derived from the CEQ), largely on the basis that they were unproblematic in the CHERI focus groups, and had been extensively used and tested in the Australian CEQ. Some of the items proposed by SQW/NOP were omitted, largely because of problems identified in the CHERI focus groups. Some items, in particular an additional set of questions about assessment, were added to ensure that all key (generic) dimensions of teaching quality were covered. Most of the added items had been tested previously in other surveys such as internal institutional surveys, and would in any case be tested in the pilot..
- b. The focus on students' perceptions of different aspects of teaching quality was retained, though some suggested the questionnaire should be broadened to include other aspects of the student experience or their approaches to learning.
- c. An option was included to respond that a question was 'not applicable', to see if this would help assess the relevance of questions, and with the intention that an analysis of pilot results would reveal whether or not this option would be necessary in future.
- d. An open-ended item for comments was included, partly to encourage responses and partly to test whether the information it generated would be useful to the analysis. This replaced the table of 'best and worst' aspects proposed by the SQW/NOP report, which had generally received negative responses in the CHERI focus groups.
- e. Most negatively phrased questions, which tended to be disliked in the CHERI focus groups, especially those that were randomly set to negative, were removed or

rephrased. A small number were retained where the sense of the question required negative phrasing.

21. A revised questionnaire was drawn up for use in the pilot after some final checks against the CEQ scales (to ensure that essential items had not been omitted from core scales). This was approved by the NSSPSG. The pilot questionnaire was deliberately made longer than the final version is expected to be. It was intended that an analysis of the pilot results would identify ways in which a reliable questionnaire could be constructed with fewer questions.

22. Two paper-based versions (one randomly ordered and one structured) and a web version (structured) were produced for the pilot. All had identical questions and response options. The structured version is included in Annex C.

Scope and coverage of the pilot

23. All HEIs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland were invited to take part and asked to indicate what kind of involvement they would be prepared to have. Over 60 volunteered, mostly as 'passive' participants (ie, that their students would be surveyed and followed up by a centrally commissioned body, with little input from the HEI).

24. We estimated that we needed 6,000-10,000 responses to perform the necessary analyses, and that to ensure this volume of responses the pilot should include 40- 45,000 students. This implied the need for approximately 20 HEIs of different sizes. A total of 23 HEIs were then selected, partly to provide different levels of institutional involvement in the survey so that different administrative arrangements could be tested, and also to broadly represent the sector as a whole. The following 23 HEIs were selected for the pilot:

- University of Birmingham
- Queen's University Belfast
- Bournemouth University
- Canterbury Christ Church University College
- Chester College of Higher Education
- De Montfort University
- Edge Hill College of Higher Education
- University of Essex
- University of Hertfordshire
- Kent Institute of Art & Design
- University of Leicester
- University of Luton
- University of Manchester
- University of Newcastle upon Tyne
- University of Northumbria at Newcastle
- University of Nottingham
- Open University
- University of Portsmouth

- Royal Northern College of Music
- Southampton Institute
- University of Wales Institute, Cardiff
- University of Ulster
- University of Westminster.

25. To identify students to be surveyed in the pilot, we used HESA data relating to the 2001-02 academic year, as that was the latest available. The general intention was to survey undergraduate students at or near to completion of their programmes. However, HESA data about completion is available only several months after students complete, and we had to use data from the previous academic year to identify the sample. It was generally straightforward, using the available data, to identify students for whom the course is structured and hence the expected length of study is known. It was not possible to systematically identify students on more flexible programmes where the expected length of study is not known (and will not be known until after completion). For such students, who could not simply be omitted from the pilot, we decided to include those that had experienced a significant period of undergraduate study at the HEI, regardless of whether or not they might complete in 2002-03.

26. The base population for the pilot survey was taken as students who were:

- active during the 2001-02 academic year and had not left by 31 July 2002
- home domiciled
- studying at undergraduate level and registered at a pilot institution (including on provision franchised to other providers)
- not funded primarily by the NHS
- not funded by the Teacher Training Agency.

27. For students where the expected length of course was known, they were included in the pilot if the programme (at any undergraduate level) was expected to end during the 2002-03 academic year. In deciding whether a course was expected to end during 2002-03 we took account of direct entry into the second (or subsequent) year of a course, as well as any years the student had repeated prior to 2002-03. This was done by adding the course length to the student's commencement date, and then adding the elapsed time since the start of the course and the year of the course the student was on at 31 July 2002.

28. For students where the expected course length was not known, we included any student meeting the above criteria who had, in addition, started in 2000-01. In effect this meant that students in their third year of unstructured programmes were included.

29. For large HEIs, the number of students to be included in the pilot was capped at 2,500, selected randomly (with the exception of two of the large HEIs that included all students).

30. HEIs were provided with target lists of the relevant students, with their HESA unique student identification numbers (HUSIDs) and other details to enable institutions to identify them easily. The HEIs were invited to remove students who had left or should not be

surveyed for other reasons; such students were not replaced. HEIs then compiled names and contact details of the relevant students and returned them to HEFCE.

31. HEIs in the pilot raised queries about or removed students for a variety of reasons, including:

- i. Students in dispute with the HEI.
- ii. Students whose welfare could be at risk if surveyed.
- iii. Students repeating a year in 2002-03.
- iv. Students who had changed courses or transferred in 2002-03.
- v. Students who for some other reason, including withdrawal from the course or failure, would not graduate in 2002-03.
- vi. Students that the HEIs categorised as continuing education students. Where HEIs removed such students (not all did so) this accounted for the largest number of removals.

32. Across the 22 HEIs (the Open University was held back to be surveyed later), 47,974 students were included in the target lists sent out by HEFCE. After removal of students by the HEIs, contact details were returned for a total of 44,008 students.² The number of students returned as a proportion of the original HEFCE target lists varied considerably between HEIs (between 100 per cent and 66 per cent). This was largely due to the element of discretion that HEIs had in removing students, and the different ways in which it was done. Because of the need for swift agreements between the pilot HEIs and HEFCE on the samples, we accepted these variations. We will use the pilot experience to inform the approach to identifying the survey population and ensuring greater consistency in future.

Administration and data collection

33. The pilot was designed to test the effectiveness of different collection methods and administrative arrangements, and produce evidence about the costs involved. A range of collection and follow-up methods and administrative arrangements were agreed with the pilot HEIs.

34. Initially two versions of the questionnaire were produced – one structured (see Annex D), the other with identical questions in random order. A majority of the pilot HEIs chose to use the structured version, the others used the random one. A web-based version was developed slightly later, following the same ordering of items as the structured version. Two of the pilot HEIs used the web version. Due to time constraints the questionnaires did not adhere to best practice in accessibility. Instead, as a short-term expedient, contact details were provided on the questionnaire through which alternative formats could be requested if needed.³ This will be resolved in future and standard good practice followed.

²Around 200 of these were later found to be unusable (where HEIs did not provide sufficient contact details), and questionnaires were not despatched to these students.

³In the event, no requests for alternative formats were received, and there were very few queries about the meaning of questions or how to fill in the questionnaire.

35. A covering letter for the questionnaire was drafted. HEIs were sent this and asked to accept or amend it as they felt appropriate. The HEIs chose who the letter should be signed by, and various combinations were chosen, including signatures by the Chief Executive of HEFCE or HEFCW, the local vice-chancellor and/or the head of the local student union.

36. The initial mail-out was conducted during July 2003. Two of the HEIs handled the initial postal questionnaire themselves, and one further HEI handed them out at degree ceremonies or posted them. Sixteen provided contact details to HEFCE, and the Open University (OU) survey team posted out the initial questionnaire centrally. Two further HEIs, who would have preferred to provide details to HEFCE for central mailing-out, were unable to provide personal contact details.⁴ For these institutions, a hybrid method was devised whereby the OU printed the questionnaires, labelled them with HUSIDs, and stuffed them into envelopes labelled with matching HUSIDs. These were then sent to the HEIs, where they stuck address labels over the HUSID labels.

37. Several HEIs did some local awareness raising of the questionnaire.

38. One HEI which planned to survey by electronic means only was delayed while the web version was developed. The OU was also held back in order to do some targeted experiments at a date nearer to OU students completing.

39. In all cases questionnaires were labelled with students' HUSIDs, so that responses could be matched to HESA student record data for the purposes of analysis. The HUSID was the only means of identifying respondents included in the process.⁵ Respondents using the web-site were required to enter their own HUSID and a piece of personal data. Institutions handling part or all of the mail-out themselves had the task of matching HUSID labels to postal addresses.

40. In most cases, completed questionnaires were returned direct to the OU, where they were scanned and follow-up lists were automatically generated. HEIs handling the mail-out themselves received responses directly and had the task of logging them in order to generate follow-up lists, and forwarding data to the OU.

41. After the initial mail-out, there was greater variation in the range of follow-up methods used. For seven HEIs, the OU survey team sent out postcard reminders, including an offer to send another copy of the questionnaire. For five HEIs, students were posted another copy of the questionnaire: three of these were done centrally by the OU; two were done by the HEIs themselves. Students of five HEIs were followed-up centrally by telephone: for two of these, responses were collected over the phone; for the other three, students were reminded by

⁴ This was because of the nature of the information that these HEIs provide to students about passing on contact details. We have since advised HEIs to inform students that the institution may pass on personal data for the purpose of the NSS (see HEFCE Circular letter 22/2003, 'National student survey: administration').

⁵ In eight cases, the respondent removed the label and these responses were not processed.

telephone to return their questionnaires. A further four HEIs did their own telephoning – three to collect the responses over the phone, and the fourth only to remind students to return their questionnaires.

42. Given the higher than expected level of response, we decided to limit the amount of further following up of non-respondents. Students of three HEIs were followed up for a second time during late August/early September, two with postcard reminders, and the third with a second copy of the questionnaire in the post.

43. The electronic experiment ran to a slightly later timetable, reflecting the need to develop a functioning web-based questionnaire. In the short timescales involved, communication problems were encountered within the HEI in question and the students' e-mail addresses at the HEI were accidentally deleted. In order to proceed with testing the web version, students were notified of the web-site by post, and they needed to log in from their own internet connections. Hence only a low response to this experiment was expected and achieved. However, a subsequent electronic experiment involving a sample of over 1,800 OU students produced a response rate at least in line with the overall rate for the pilot, and at much lower cost.

44. Using this range of methods, data were collected between July and September 2003. The final cut-off date for accepting responses for inclusion in the analysis was 30 September 2003, by which time over 16,000 had been received. This represents a total response rate of around 40 per cent. This is significantly better than the return expected and reflects good work by those involved, including those at the pilot HEIs.

45. A full analysis of collection methods and response rates is still under way, and will take account of respondents' profiles and characteristics. At this stage there are some trends and conclusions that can be derived:⁶

a. At that time of year (July to September), a significant proportion of the cohort is not available, having gone abroad to travel or moved out of the known address for good. Although data were not recorded systematically on this, on the basis of the telephone follow-ups by some institutions it was estimated that this could be in the region of 25-30 per cent of the cohort, but could vary between institutions.

b. The initial postal questionnaire, to the home address or suitable alternative, achieved an overall response rate of approximately 20-25 per cent, although there are variable factors between institutions.

⁶ Estimates of the response rates produced by the initial mail-outs and subsequent following up are tentative. The timing of response was generally taken as a proxy indicator of which questionnaire the student was responding to. However, a steady trickle of responses to the initial mail-out continued throughout the period, so some caution about the accuracy of this proxy is needed.

- c. Following up by each of the means used was worthwhile, producing a second surge of a further 10-15 per cent response. Postcards possibly did a bit better than sending a second copy of the questionnaire; this may have been due to 'parental pressure'.
- d. The most effective means of following up was collecting the responses by telephone. This was more effective when done by the HEI, achieving a further response of around 30 per cent and 45 per cent respectively for two different HEIs. A central agency doing this achieved a further 20-25 per cent response for the HEIs in question. The HEIs and the central agency used apparently similar resources, although calls were timed differently during the day. It appears that the differences between local and central phoning may have been due in part to differing reactions of people answering the calls. They were perhaps more likely to be welcoming if the call was from the HEI than if it was from an unknown call-centre or agency, even one that said it was phoning on behalf of a known HEI.⁷
- e. Telephoning to remind only was less effective, and apparently only a few per cent better than postal follow-up.
- f. A second round of following up to students of three HEIs achieved approximately 5 per cent more returns. There were a few complaints from those getting a second reminder that this might be wasting public funds.
- g. HEIs with more 'traditional' student populations seem, at first analysis, to have achieved higher response rates overall. This could be due to relatively more stable home addresses of students, more reliable contact information, or stronger links to students (such as through alumni associations). Further analysis of the effects of socio-demographic variables on response rates is planned.
- h. It is not clear that awareness raising (apart from handing out at degree ceremonies) has had much effect. Focus groups so far appear to confirm this.
- i. There is no indication that HEIs achieve a better response by doing their own posting out. Yet some duplication of tasks and additional costs were incurred by some institutions doing this because of the nature of the data protection information they provide to students.
- j. Although the first web experiment did not achieve a good response for local reasons, the web version functioned well, and it elicited positive feedback. The second web experiment with the OU, running to a later timetable, achieved a response of more than 40 per cent, although the students in question are distance learners and

⁷ There was one complaint from an HEI that three parents had objected to being phoned by a central agency. This is normal and low but does indicate that, even with well worked out scripts, there are issues of ownership.

may not be broadly representative of likely responses to this method. Administrators in the pilots tend to believe that most students would not use e-mail once they have completed; and HEIs tend to discard students' e-mail addresses shortly after students complete. However, there is clearly scope to offer this as a very low cost alternative in parallel to other collection methods, especially if the survey is conducted prior to student completion.

k. There were some problems with joint honours students wanting two forms so that they could respond separately for each subject studied.

l. It seemed that for the pilot a good method of achieving a high response was central postage, return and processing of data, but with follow-up being in part through the HEI. Due to economies of scale and the availability of appropriate equipment, it appears that greater central handling of the initial posting and of data processing was more cost-efficient than local handling, without adversely affecting response rates. For the pilot it appeared that telephoning by the HEI rather than a central agency was more cost-effective, though it is not yet clear whether this would remain the case when the exercise is scaled up.

46. Given the nature of the exercise, limited data were collected on reasons for non-response. Obviously most students who did not complete the questionnaire did not respond at all, so their reasons are unknown. When telephoned, the reasons for not responding were sometimes provided and recorded. Of those who did respond with a reason, or reasons were recorded by telephone:

- around 400 were returned by the householder as 'not available at this address'
- around 25 refused to complete the questionnaire
- around 130 responded that the questionnaire was not applicable to them for various reasons, such as they had not completed the course or it was a short continuing education course.

47. In practice there were many other 'not finished course' phone calls that were not systematically recorded. A very small number of responses were spoiled, including eight where the students removed the HUSID labels from the questionnaire, at least two where the respondent did not turn the page over, and a few were destroyed in transit. This is normal or low for such questionnaires.

48. It appeared from some of the responses that a number of students were included who had not been actively studying for some time, but were still registered as active.

49. Shortly after the collection phase was completed, the pilot HEIs met to discuss and feed back their experiences and some recommendations for the future. A note of the feedback meeting is available on the NSS pilot web-site, <http://iet.open.ac.uk/nss/>

Analysis and interim results

50. The vast majority of responses were processed centrally at the OU. HUSIDs and responses to all the closed questions (items 1 through to 9) were scanned.

51. In order to analyse responses to the open-ended item (question 10), a sample of several hundred responses from a range of HEIs were read, and a list of categories of frequently recurring issues developed. The following 29 categories emerged:

- subject being studied
- in control of learning/flexibility
- overall level of support
- careers advice
- personal guidance
- social life/meeting people/accommodation etc
- under stress
- money
- computing resources
- library
- staff availability
- support material
- overall quality of teaching
- practical/theoretical balance
- useful/relevant to my job
- fieldwork/coursework/projects
- option choices
- group work
- feedback
- lectures
- clarity of assessments/marketing schemes
- exams
- essays
- workload
- organisation
- openly split course/joint honours
- placements/year out
- deadlines
- variation in teaching standards.

52. All responses to the open-ended question were then coded manually to indicate which of the above categories were mentioned either positively or negatively. The codes were then scanned. An analysis of these data will be included in reports on the NSS pilot web-site.

53. Some focus groups of students were also held to provide respondents' feedback on the questionnaire and on the process. A report is available on the NSS pilot web-site.

54. A series of analyses of the data received is under way (see Annex D). This includes analysis by institution, by institution and subject, demographic variables, and further work taking account of students' programme outcomes.

55. The first report, setting out preliminary findings from the initial analysis, is available on the NSS pilot web-site. This is based on the 15,674 responses that had been received by 9 September 2003. It does not break down results by subject, nor include data about student demographics or the responses to the open-ended question (item 10). The provisional findings based on this initial analysis are as follows:

- a. Overall the instrument appears robust, broadly in line with the CEQ. More detailed analysis will be required to confirm this.
- b. Most of the scales used in the pilot questionnaire appear to have a high level of internal consistency, and all but one of the remainder have a moderate level of internal consistency.
- c. The 'teaching' scale appeared to have two principal components: one concerned with good teaching, the other with feedback. The 'assessment' scale appeared to have two principal components: one concerned with clear standards, the other with reproductive learning before examinations. The 'course organisation' scale also appeared to have two principal components: one concerned with course organisation, the other with students' workload. The remainder of the scales each appeared to have one principal component.
- d. Within each of these principal components, it appears possible to reduce the number of items and retain their internal consistency.
- e. A few items did not load strongly onto any of the principal components.
- f. There is no indication so far of any significant difference between the randomly ordered questionnaire and the structured one, in terms of the internal consistency of the questionnaire and its scales.
- g. All of the principal components identified, with the exception of workload, appear to be strongly associated with the three 'summative' items (questions 7, 8 and 9).

56. In general the average response across the pilot as a whole was positive. Scores between the middle point and the first positive point were consistently achieved. Sector aggregate results against each scale will be published on the NSS pilot web-site after further analysis and, if appropriate, weighting of the sample to make it more representative of the sector.

Costs

57. Estimated costs of the pilot exercise as a whole are around £400,000 in total. HEIs in the pilot were asked to estimate the costs incurred by them. For most, who had little direct involvement in data collection, the costs were between £2,000 and £3,000 per institution (this includes costs of briefing sessions and reporting on the pilot). Estimated costs for HEIs undertaking some or all of the collection themselves rose up to a maximum of around £13,500 (this was for a relatively large HEI doing its own telephoning and awareness raising, although it had the benefit of having an established call-centre).

58. These estimates were for the operation of the pilot, which used a range of methodologies. It is too soon to provide costed models for the full-scale survey, as this will depend on the methodology used. As discussed in the main section of this document, decisions about methodology should not be driven by cost considerations (within reasonable limits), and therefore costed models will be produced to reflect likely methodologies as they emerge.

Issues to be addressed for full implementation

59. This section sets out the issues that will need to be addressed in detail when developing the survey for full implementation:

- a. The questionnaire. Following on from the pilot, how should the questionnaire be refined?
- b. Scope. Which students should be included in the survey, and how should they be identified?
- c. Timing. At what point during the academic cycle should the questionnaire be administered, and when should the results be reported?
- d. Method and administration. What methods should be used to administer the questionnaire, who should undertake the administration, and what are the expected costs involved?
- e. Reporting. What categories of data should be published, and in what format?
- f. Management and review. What mechanisms should there be for overseeing the full-scale survey, and for reviewing it in order to take decisions about further surveys?

60. Analysis of the pilot data is intended to provide evidence to inform decisions about many of these issues. Once the pilot results have been fully analysed, we plan to consult formally with the sector and stakeholders on these issues. The NSSPSG will consider the full analysis of the pilot results, as well as the results of the formal consultation, in making its final recommendations on the full implementation of the survey.

61. The discussion below sets out current thinking in each of these areas, based on the pilot experience so far. The formal consultation document (expected in early spring 2004) will update and refine the issues as set out below, in the light of further analysis of pilot data, and taking into account the discussions at the November 2003 dissemination events.

The questionnaire

62. A report of the preliminary analysis assessing the internal consistency of the pilot questionnaire is available on the NSS web-site. This indicates that, when responses are analysed for the population as a whole, the pilot questionnaire appears robust. Further analysis at a more detailed level (breaking down results at institution and subject level) is under way. The report also suggests some ways in which the questionnaire can be improved, provides initial evidence to inform decisions about the structure of the questionnaire and some design features.

63. The report suggests that, as anticipated at the start of the pilot, the number of questions can be reduced without weakening the internal consistency of the questionnaire and the scales within it (and indeed may strengthen them). It suggests that the pilot questionnaire could be improved, at least in terms of statistical measures of internal consistency, by using the following scales (groups of related questions):

- a. Teaching.
- b. Feedback.
- c. Assessment.
- d. Generic skills.
- e. Workload.
- f. Support and advice.
- g. Learning resources.

64. The 'course organisation and management' scale used in the pilot questionnaire does not appear in this list due to the low internal consistency of that scale as found by the preliminary analysis. Also, initial indications are that, unlike all the other suggested scales, the 'workload' scale shows only a weak relationship with students' overall perceptions of quality.

65. The analysis suggests that three or four questions should suffice for each scale, thus a revised questionnaire could have in the region of 20-30 questions. In identifying which items should be used for each scale, the following issues will need to be considered:

- a. For most of the scales, questions can be drawn from the pilot questionnaire, based largely on their statistical properties. The report of the preliminary analysis provides some indications about which questions contribute most to the scales, and which contribute least.
- b. There may also be issues of judgement. The inclusion of questions can be justified, even if statistically they do not contribute strongly to the scales, if for example:
 - i. Users of the published information have a particular interest in feedback on a certain topic (for example careers advice).
 - ii. Responses to the open-ended item in the pilot indicate that a particular issue is regarded by students as important.
- c. The proposed 'feedback' and 'workload' scales need further development as only two questions on each were included in the pilot questionnaire, and at least a

third would need to be added for each scale. Also, it appears that the phrasing of the workload questions may have been problematic (it may not always have been clear to respondents what the 'optimal' answers were).

d. In addition, for reasons discussed below, it may be useful to add a further question about the variability of students' experience.

66. Around 70 per cent of pilot respondents made use of the open-ended question (item 10). This appears to have provided a rich source of data for several potential purposes:

a. The comments have been scanned and will be provided to the HEIs in anonymised form for internal consideration.

b. Comments have been coded and are being analysed centrally. It is hoped that the coded data will provide a useful means (in addition to other analyses) of checking the validity of the questionnaire, to assist in identifying which issues tend to be most important to students, and whether the questionnaire therefore is missing any important issues.

67. This item is potentially important to help assess the validity of the questionnaire and keep the relevance of questions under review. Although the coding and analysis of these data does involve some costs (centrally), we are minded at this point to retain the open-ended question.

68. Preliminary analysis of the pilot data suggests that inclusion of the 'not applicable' option is unnecessary, although further analysis is required to confirm this. Unless this shows that the 'not applicable' option adds to the integrity of the results, it would seem preferable to omit it.

69. The preliminary analysis also suggests that there is no significant difference between the structured and randomly-ordered versions in terms of either response rates or the internal consistency of the questionnaire. However, it does indicate that with the structured version respondents were marginally less likely to use the 'not applicable' option, and marginally more likely to provide a complete set of responses. Further assessment of these issues at a more detailed level is planned. Unless the further assessment indicates there are advantages to randomising the questions, we propose to structure the questionnaire in future.

70. There is a concern about how far students on combined or joint honours programmes (and indeed other students with a variety of learning experiences) can validly summarise their responses on a single questionnaire. We are investigating this as follows:

a. From the analysis of the open-ended question, we will assess how frequently respondents (particularly those on combined/joint programmes) raised this as an issue.

b. We plan to conduct separate analysis of responses from combined/joint degree students and compare these to relevant single subject students, to assess whether there is a significant difference in results. If necessary, we will look at ways of adjusting results or reporting them separately for combined and single subject students.

c. We propose to add an additional item to the questionnaire about how variable students thought aspects of quality were, across their range of experiences. This could help assess whether there are any implications for published results, and help gauge the size of the problem for future surveys.

71. With these actions planned, we do not at this stage think it would be practicable to issue two (or more) questionnaires to combined/joint degree students. It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to systematically determine who should receive more than one questionnaire. Indeed all students have a variety of experiences, and joint honours students are in that sense just an extreme case of a general phenomenon. Even if they could be systematically identified, it would greatly complicate the processes of collecting, analysing and reporting data. Respondents receiving two or more questionnaires would essentially decide themselves how many to fill in and what set of experiences each response relates to, and this may not then be clear when analysing the data.

Scope and coverage of the 2004 survey

72. There are two possible general approaches to identifying the population for the survey:

a. The first would be to state as a general principle who should be included. For example: 'students expected to complete the final year of any undergraduate programme of greater than x FTE (full-time equivalent), during academic year z'. Institutions would then be expected to compile target lists from their own records, to meet the definition. However, previous experience has shown that many institutions would find this difficult, as it would involve anticipating the status of students while the academic year is still in session. This could involve a significant burden on HEIs, and would lead to some degree of inconsistency between and possibly within HEIs, with a risk of invalidating comparisons.

b. The second would be to follow the general approach used in the pilot, having made suitable modifications. We would use HESA data and apply a standard definition to all HEIs. Target lists would then be prepared centrally, using the standard definition. HEIs would then have the task of removing only small numbers of students for specific reasons, for example deceased students. This would ensure consistency across the sector and also involve minimal burden for HEIs.

73. For the reasons described, the latter approach is preferred. We are developing the definition that was used in the pilot, in order to exclude from the population any students who

are studying on very short courses or at very low intensity. Institutions often typify these as continuing education students.

74. For students on structured programmes where the year of completion can be predicted, we would propose excluding them if the course amounts to less than 1 FTE. For students where the course length is unknown, we would propose including them if they have had a significant engagement with the institution. This could be defined, for example, as students who have studied for an average of at least 0.5 FTE over the three years preceding the survey.

Timing

75. The pilot achieved an overall response rate of around 40 per cent, which produced sufficient data for the intended analyses. For the full-scale survey, however, we do not believe that a response rate of this order would enable the survey to produce reliable results at the desired level of disaggregation. High response rates will be vital in reducing the margins for error, improving reliability, and allowing results to be reported at a suitably detailed level. A key issue in deciding the timing and method for the full-scale survey will therefore be to ensure high response rates.

76. In addition to the concern about response rates, decisions about timing need to address other criteria:

- a. Students must be able to provide valid feedback at the chosen time.
- b. Published results must be timely and up-to-date, to help inform prospective students in their choices.
- c. Excessive cost and burden must be avoided, and institutions' internal feedback mechanisms should not be put at risk.

77. Three broad timing options have been considered for the first full-scale survey, as below.⁸ We recognised at the start of the pilot that we were unable to test pre-completion timings, so the pilot is expected to provide only partial evidence about timing.

- a. Spring 2004 (surveying students towards the end of their final years).

⁸ At an earlier stage in discussions, when the NSS was first mooted, consideration was given to integrating feedback on teaching quality with the (then) FDS. This option was rejected through consultation on those proposals and through a HESA consultation on changes to the FDS. HEFCE 02/15 sets out the reasons. The NSSPSG has re-confirmed that it would not be appropriate to consider this option, at least at this stage when the NSS (and indeed the DLHE) are new, and concerns about the robustness and integrity of both of these surveys have greater priority than possible cost savings.

- i. In terms of response rates, a range of contact opportunities would be available as students are normally in attendance at this time.
 - ii. However, this timing could adversely affect HEIs' internal feedback surveys which are often undertaken at that stage.
 - iii. Results could be ready for publication by November/December 2004 – this would generally be too late to inform applicants for 2005 entry. We would expect results published at that time to be used mainly around summer/autumn 2005 for entry in 2006.
- b. Summer 2004 (surveying students immediately after completion).
 - i. This would generally not affect HEIs' internal feedback surveys.
 - ii. However, based on the pilot experience, a significant proportion of students are not contactable at this time and this option would therefore be the most risky in terms of response rates. It may also be the most costly as less web use and greater reliance on telephoning may be implied.
 - iii. Results could be ready for publication by early 2005 – this would generally be too late to inform applicants for 2005 entry. We would expect results published at this time to be used mainly around summer/autumn 2005 for entry in 2006.
- c. Early 2005 (surveying students during their final year of study).
 - i. A range of contact opportunities would be available as students are normally in attendance at this time.
 - ii. This would generally not affect HEIs' internal feedback surveys.
 - iii. Results could be ready for publication in summer 2005, and we would expect them to be used during summer/autumn 2005 for entry in 2006.
 - iv. This option can be piloted during early 2004 to assess response rates.

78. For each of these options, we would expect results to have significant usage only by 2006 entrants. Apart from making results available to some students who might use them prior to summer 2005, there are no obvious advantages, either in terms of response rates and the practicalities of the exercise, or in terms of the public utility of the results, in surveying students sooner than early 2005. Yet there are some advantages in surveying at that time:

- a. Surveying in early 2005 would produce data that is more up-to-date at the time when it is expected to be used (summer/autumn 2005) than the other options. To the extent that the public will want up-to-date data, this option, therefore, better meets the public information need and better achieves the purpose of the exercise.
- b. This option also allows for adequate time to analyse the current pilot, publish the results, and then consult with the sector and stakeholders on a range of issues, before taking final decisions on the questionnaire, the methodology, etc. It also provides the opportunity to undertake some further piloting in early 2004 of the proposed timing.

79. We are therefore proposing that the survey should be conducted in January 2005, to produce results by summer 2005. We intend to follow on from the pilot exercise by

conducting, with some of the HEIs who were involved in the summer 2003 pilot, further piloting during January 2004. This will enable us to compare the summer and January timings, in terms of response rates.

80. There may be a concern about gathering feedback half-way through students' final year of study, rather than nearer to completion. Evidence suggests that students provide valid feedback at different points during study, and it is not necessary, in terms of the validity of feedback, to wait for completion. Nevertheless, this issue merits further investigation, as student feedback may change over time. We will use the January 2004 pilot to assess whether there are significant differences in the feedback received from completing students in summer 2003, and final year students in January 2004. We will also consider a longer-term research project to re-survey a sample of students at a range of times (during their final year, immediately after completion, and some time after completion) to see if feedback on teaching quality changes over time.

Method and administration

81. We envisage a large part of the administration being undertaken by a centrally commissioned agency. In general, we would only envisage HEIs undertaking parts of the administration where this is likely to be more effective in achieving sufficiently high response rates, or where the HEI chooses to do so for its own reasons.

82. Consideration about survey methodology relates to timing – there will be different opportunities to contact students at different stages in the academic cycle. During January we would anticipate a combination of postal and electronic surveying, with the web-based questionnaire made available to all as an alternative. The web version could be promoted simultaneously to posting questionnaires, through e-mails, and by references on the postal questionnaires.

83. The pilot so far indicates that during the summer there may be a need for HEI involvement in following up by telephone. We will need to consider, in the light of the additional January 2004 piloting, whether telephone follow-up is necessary for a January survey, and if so, who is best placed to undertake it.

84. As part of the planned consultation we anticipate seeking views from institutions about the reliability of different contact details for final year students (electronic, postal, telephone or any other) at the proposed timing. Along with the results of the additional January piloting, this would help inform the NSSPSG's recommendations about the exact methodology.

Analysis and publication of results

85. We expect that data from future surveys will be subject to similar analyses as are being performed on the pilot data. This would be handled centrally.

86. It is anticipated that the analysis of the first full survey data will generate two sets of publications. One will be a general report, similar to the annual Graduate Careers Council of

Australia publications about the CEQ. It will assess the effectiveness of the questionnaire, looking at generic issues of reliability and validity, re-assessing the scales, and evaluating their effectiveness and congruence with one another. This report would contribute to a review of the survey. It is likely to be substantial and produced after each full survey, to provide ongoing assessment and assurance about the robustness of the process. This report is expected to be primarily of interest to an academic audience and is not expected to inform prospective students and their advisers.

87. The second will be the publication on the TQI web-site of the results of the survey at a detailed level which, alongside the other information on the site, would be aimed at helping prospective students and their advisers make key choices in their education. Further information about the TQI site is available in 'Information about quality and standards in HE: final guidance' (HEFCE 2003/51). The published results will inherit the look and feel of the TQI site as a whole.

88. The survey will aim to generate results at subject level. We intend to use the same method of disaggregation to subject level as for the TQI site. Essentially, data are available at different levels, down to and including Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) principal subjects (of which there are 141), as long as the numbers are sufficiently large and results reliable enough to be reported. As with the other TQI data, users will be offered the 19 HESA subject areas as standard combinations, but data at a more detailed level (individual JACS principal subjects, or combinations thereof, as chosen by the user), would also be available if reliable.

89. As with the TQI site as a whole, users would be able to search the results:

- by institution
- within institution by the 19 HESA subject areas
- within institution by JACS principal subjects
- other possibilities will be considered and could be developed if feasible, such as by mode of study (full or part time), level of qualification aim (first degree or other undergraduate), or demographic variables
- it is anticipated that the TQI data will build up over time until a three-year rolling dataset is available, and users may then be able to choose by year (singly or combined).

90. We are in the early stages of considering a robust and useful format for publishing results. There is a danger with information of this nature that when making comparisons between institutions users may attach significance to apparent differences that are not statistically significant. We are concerned that the exercise must produce results that are resistant to such misinterpretation. At the same time, while ensuring published results must be valid and resistant to misinterpretation, it will be important for them to be clear and accessible to the general public.

91. Some initial views are set out at Annex E. The NSSPSG will make a more informed and detailed assessment of the feasibility of disaggregating results to the desired levels, and of the nature of the information that can be reliably and usefully published, when the analysis of the pilot data is complete.

Management and review

92. After the NSSPSG has made its final recommendations for full implementation, there will need to be oversight of the full survey by a steering group, including stakeholder and user group representatives, and survey/statistical experts.

93. We would expect the group to advise HEFCE, the sponsoring bodies and a centrally-commissioned survey agency on the conduct of the survey. We expect this would include:

- a. Advice on the analysis of results, and finalisation of the methodology for reporting results.
- b. Overseeing a review of the first full-scale survey, and making recommendations on the implementation of subsequent surveys. This will include development of the questionnaire and the administrative methodology, and a review of the timing and frequency of further surveys. (The current working assumption is to survey every other year, once the instrument is well established.)

Annex A

Initial questionnaire proposed by the student feedback project

For each of the questions below please use the scale 1 – 5, by circling the appropriate box, to indicate how far you agree with the statement. 1 indicates that you strongly disagree with the statement, 5 that you strongly agree, and the numbers in between intermediate positions. In responding please think about your programme of studies as a whole rather than individual lectures or modules.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
When it was needed, there was sufficient access to specialised equipment or facilities	1	2	3	4	5
Lecturers and tutors made the subjects interesting	1	2	3	4	5
Lecturers and tutors motivated me to do my best work	1	2	3	4	5
The programme helped me develop my ability to work as a team member	1	2	3	4	5
The programme improved my skills in written communication	1	2	3	4	5
As a result of my programme, I feel confident about tackling unfamiliar problems	1	2	3	4	5
I was not able to access IT resources to the extent I needed to	1	2	3	4	5
I felt a lot of pressure, from lecturers and tutors, to do well in the programme	1	2	3	4	5
The programme sharpened my analytical skills	1	2	3	4	5
Lecturers and tutors made a real effort to understand difficulties I experienced with my work	1	2	3	4	5
Over the whole programme, I was given sufficient support with my studies by lecturers and tutors	1	2	3	4	5
The sheer volume of work meant it could not all be thoroughly comprehended	1	2	3	4	5
The programme developed my problem-solving skills	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
For most of the programme, the workload was too heavy	1	2	3	4	5
I was generally given enough time to understand the things I had to learn	1	2	3	4	5
Programme materials (lecture notes, work sheets, CD-ROMs etc) were useful	1	2	3	4	5
Availability and access to library resources were appropriate for my needs	1	2	3	4	5
It was often hard to discover what was expected of me in this programme	1	2	3	4	5
Lecturers and tutors normally gave me helpful feedback on my progress	1	2	3	4	5
There was good advice available on which programme options were best suited to my needs and interest	1	2	3	4	5
Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of this programme	1	2	3	4	5
It was always easy to know what standard of work I was expected to achieve	1	2	3	4	5
Lecturers and tutors put a lot of time into commenting on my work	1	2	3	4	5
During my first year, I needed more support and advice with my studies than I received	1	2	3	4	5
I found other students helped me with my studies during the programme	1	2	3	4	5
There were insufficient opportunities to apply the theoretical knowledge I acquired to practical situations	1	2	3	4	5
My programme helped me to develop the ability to manage my own work	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Staff made it clear from the start what they expected from students	1	2	3	4	5
Lecturers and tutors were good at explaining things	1	2	3	4	5

Please tick the three aspects of your programme which were best and the three which could be most improved

	Best	Could be improved
Acquiring knowledge of the subject		
Acquiring generic skills such as problem solving, team working and communication		
Quality of the teaching staff		
Access to specialised equipment		
Availability and access to learning resources such as the library, programme materials and IT		
Advice and support from staff on academic issues		
Opportunities to test theoretical knowledge in a practical situation		
A workload which was appropriate to the time and resources available to students		

Annex B

Membership of the National Student Survey Pilot Steering Group

Members

Professor Gillian Slater (Chair)	Vice-Chancellor, Bournemouth University
Professor Bob Burgess	Vice-Chancellor, University of Leicester
Professor Noel Entwistle	Professor of Education, University of Edinburgh
Alice Frost	Head of Learning and Teaching Policy Group, HEFCE
Professor Harvey Goldstein	Professor of Statistical Methods, Institute of Education, University of London
John Last	Vice-Principal, Arts Institute at Bournemouth
Dr Sofija Opacic	National Union of Students
Professor Robin Sibson	Chief Executive, Higher Education Statistics Agency
Ivor Goddard	Director General, Royal Statistical Society
John Thompson	Analytical Services Group, HEFCE
Dr Keith Trigwell	Principal Research Fellow, University of Oxford

Observers

David Caldwell	Universities Scotland
Celia Chambers	Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland
Dr Phil Gummett	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Dr Bill Harvey	Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
Dr Stephen Jackson	Quality Assurance Agency
Gareth Lewis	Higher Education Wales
Jane Tory	Department for Education and Skills
Helen Bowles	Standing Conference of Principals
David Young	Universities UK

By invitation

Christopher Harris	Executive Director, HERO
Professor John Slater	National Student Survey Co-ordinator
Professor John Richardson	Institute of Educational Technology, Open University
Jane Wilson	Institute of Educational Technology, Open University

Secretariat

Katherine Andrews	HEFCE
Graeme Rosenberg	HEFCE

Annex C

Structured questionnaire used in the national student survey pilot, summer 2003

This questionnaire asks for your views about a number of aspects of the teaching, assessment, and support provided on your recent higher education course. Please answer the questions in terms of the course as a whole. (By **course**, we mean the totality of your studies. **'Programme'** and **'degree'** are other terms sometimes used.) We realise that you will have had a wide range of teaching during your course. Please try to reflect your **general** experience of the course, rather than that on specific modules.

Instructions Please use a ball-point pen to complete the questionnaire. Do not use a fountain or felt tip pen as the ink may be visible on the other side of the page. The questionnaire will be read by a computer scanner, so please fill it in as follows. Place a 'X' in the appropriate box, keeping within the boundary, for example: . If you make a mistake and cross the wrong box, please block out your answer and then cross the correct box. For example:

For each statement, show whether you agree or disagree by putting a cross in the **one** box which best reflects your personal view.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1 Means that you definitely agree | 4 Means that you mostly disagree |
| 2 Means that you mostly agree | 5 Means that you definitely disagree |
| 3 Means that you are neutral; or cannot give a definite answer | n/a Statement does not apply |

1. The teaching on my course	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Staff were good at explaining things.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff made the subject interesting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff motivated me to work well.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff were enthusiastic about what they were teaching.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff made an effort to understand our difficulties.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff prepared their teaching thoroughly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The course was intellectually stimulating.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I received prompt feedback on my work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I received detailed comments on my work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The assessment on my course						
There was a good mix of examinations and other assessments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The criteria to be used in marking were clear in advance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assessment arrangements and marking were fair.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assessment tasks were bunched towards the end of a module/course.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To do well on this course you mainly need a good memory.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It was clear what standard was required in assessed work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The method used to produce my final overall grade was clear.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It would be possible to get through this course just by working hard around exam times.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Knowledge and skills						
I feel confident in the subject knowledge I acquired.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The course developed my problem solving skills.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The course sharpened my analytic skills.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The course helped me develop my ability to work in a team.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The course improved my communication skills.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The course helped me develop the ability to manage my own work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The course helped me to present myself with confidence.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There were sufficient opportunities to apply the theoretical knowledge I acquired to practical situations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please turn over

- 1 Means that you definitely agree
- 2 Means that you mostly agree
- 3 Means that you are neutral; or cannot give a definite answer

- 4 Means that you mostly disagree
- 5 Means that you definitely disagree
- n/a Statement does not apply

4. Course organisation and management

	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
The course was well-organised and ran smoothly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The course was flexible enough to fit in with my other commitments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The course enabled me to pursue my academic interests.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I found the overall workload was too heavy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was given enough time to understand what I had to learn.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was asked for my opinions about the course.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The background work volume suggested (for example through reading lists and practice tasks) was unrealistic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It was clear what I was required to attend, prepare, and do throughout the course.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Support and advice

I received helpful feedback from staff about my progress on the course.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I had as much contact with staff as I needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I found other students helped me understand the course.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Good careers information and advice were available.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There was good advice available to ensure that I made the choices in my studies that were right for me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
During my first year, I received sufficient support and advice with my studies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Over the course as a whole, I received sufficient support and advice with my studies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Learning resources

Course materials (paper based and online) were useful.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The library resources were good enough for my needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was always able to access general IT resources when required.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When it was needed, there was sufficient access to specialised equipment, computing facilities, or rooms.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of the course.

8. Overall, I feel the course was a good investment.

9. I would recommend the course to a friend.

10. Looking back on the experience, what do you consider to have been the best and the worst aspects? (Please use the space below and attach an additional sheet if necessary.)

If you have a disability or additional requirement which makes it difficult for you to complete this questionnaire, and you would like to provide feedback, or need an additional copy of the questionnaire, please contact Jane Wilson Telephone No: 01908 654880 or e-mail jane.wilson@open.ac.uk.

Annex D

Current and planned analyses of the pilot data

Initial analysis

1. Compare response rates to the randomised and structured versions of the postal questionnaire and to the postal and online versions of the structured questionnaire. If there are sufficient data available, compare the cumulative response rates over time in each case.
2. Compare the frequency distributions of missing responses and 'not applicable' responses for the three versions on each item. Compare the proportions of respondents with complete data across the three versions. Consider dropping items with high numbers of missing or 'not applicable' responses.
3. Evaluate the internal consistency of the a priori scales using Cronbach's alpha and the item-scale correlation coefficients. These may be lower in the randomised version than in the structured version. In addition, they may be different in the paper-based structured version and in the online structured version.
4. Compare the dispersion matrices of the responses to the first 45 items in the randomised and structured versions to determine whether they have the same underlying structure. Compare the dispersion matrices of the responses to the first 45 items in the paper-based and online structured versions. If necessary, carry out the following analyses separately for the different versions.
5. Carry out exploratory factor analysis on the responses to the first 45 items. Use communality measures as lower-bound estimates of the test-retest reliability of the individual items.
6. Use the results to construct factor-based scales containing subsets of items. Evaluate the internal consistency of the factor-based scales using Cronbach's alpha and the item-scale correlation coefficients. Identify any items with relatively low loadings in the extracted factor solution.
7. Carry out exploratory factor analysis on the scores on the factor-based scales. If the questionnaire is measuring a single dimension of perceived academic quality, there should be one second-order factor. Identify any scales with relatively low loadings in the extracted factor solution.
8. Evaluate the criterion validity of the scores on the factor-based scales by computing the correlations with responses to Items 7, 8 and 9 in the structured version.
9. Evaluate the frequencies of the coded responses to Item 10 (29 categories). Compare these responses with those given to the first 45 items and with the scores on the factor-based scales. Identify any topics raised by students that were not covered by the original questionnaire.

Analysis by institution

10. Compare response rates and proportions of respondents with complete data by institution.
11. Evaluate the discriminant validity of the scores on the factor-based scales by comparing scores across different institutions.
12. Compare the dispersion matrices of the responses to the first 45 items across institutions. If necessary, carry out separate factor analyses on the data from separate institutions.
13. Compare the dispersion matrices of the scores on the factor-based scales across institutions. If necessary, carry out separate factor analyses on the data from separate institutions.

Analysis by institution and subject

14. Compare response rates and proportions of respondents with complete data by level of qualification aimed for (bachelor's degree, foundation degree, diploma, certificate) and subject of study (top-level JACS categories).
15. Compare the dispersion matrices of the responses to the first 45 items across subjects of study.
16. Compare the dispersion matrices of the scores on the factor-based scales across subjects of study.
17. Report a profile of the mean scores on the factor-based scales by institution and subject of study with standard errors attached.
18. Evaluate the discriminant validity of the scores on the factor-based scales by comparing scores across different levels of qualification aimed for and subjects of study.

Analysis by demographic variables

19. Compare the sample of respondents with the non-respondents and with the population as a whole in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, (presence versus absence of) disability, entrance qualifications, level of award aimed for and type of institution (pre-1992 universities, post-1992 universities, non-university institutions).
20. Evaluate relationship between response rates, missing responses and 'not applicable' responses and demographic variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, (presence versus absence of) disability and entrance qualifications (A-level scores).
21. Examine relationships between scores on the factor-based scales and demographic variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, (presence versus absence of) disability and entrance qualifications (A-level scores).

22. Estimate a national profile of scores on the factor-based scales (if necessary, for each version of the questionnaire), weighting the pilot sample so that it is representative of the sector as a whole.

Subsequent analysis (after return of December 2003 HESA data)

23. Distinguish between respondents who obtained an award, those who dropped out and those who deferred. Will there be sufficient numbers in the two latter categories to make any detailed analysis worthwhile?

24. Examine relationships between scores on the factor-based scales and final degree classification.

Annex E

Initial views on the format for reporting results

1. Initial views are that published results should aim to include the following fields:
 - number in the cohort
 - number or percentage of responses from the cohort
 - for each scale as a whole and for each of the summative items (questions 7, 8 and 9 in the pilot questionnaire):
 - an average
 - a confidence interval, taking account of response rates and other potential sources of error
 - a sector-wide adjusted average, which shows what would be expected for this cohort. We could also indicate whether the difference between the average and this 'expected' average is significant or not.

2. The above formulation has several advantages and some disadvantages:
 - a. Showing the average alongside a confidence interval reduces the chance of users misinterpreting apparent but insignificant differences between HEIs. Graphs with averages and confidence intervals could be produced to show clearly whether differences are significant: where confidence intervals overlap, apparent differences are not statistically significant.

 - b. Sector adjusted averages can be helpful in indicating if the results are different to what would be expected, given the nature of the cohort in question. An additional indication (in the examples below, an asterisk is used) could indicate whether the average score is significantly different to the adjusted average.

 - c. Different spreads of response are expected for different questions. It may be of interest to users to have an indication of the extent to which responses within the cohort were similar or whether there were significant differences of opinion. There would be several options for providing such information, such as histograms, a variance statistic, or providing access to more detailed underlying data (such as percentage responses at each of the five points on the scale). However, before developing such options, we need further assessment of how significant spreads are, within subject-level cohorts within HEIs. If such spreads in general are small, there would be little value in providing such data, except perhaps in exceptional cases.

 - d. Elements of this formulation may not be readily understood by users of the information. Users may fail to appreciate, for example, the meaning of confidence intervals and sector-adjusted averages, and the differences between them. A solution may be to offer the tables with all the suggested types of information, alongside graphs with confidence intervals.

3. There are many possible alternative approaches to reporting. Another worth considering is to report the percentages who responded 1/2 or the percentage who responded 4/5. With this approach, it might be worth showing both to avoid focusing exclusively either on the positive or the negative feedback. As with the first option outlined above, percentages of 1/2 and of 4/5 responses could be reported alongside confidence intervals and sector adjusted averages. This approach has an advantage of indicating the spread of responses, at least at the level of generally negative, neutral, and generally positive responses. A disadvantage is that results are effectively reported as if there

are only three possible responses (positive, neutral, and negative), and there is effectively no difference between 1 and 2, or between 4 and 5.

4. Further consideration is needed about:

a. Whether – in addition to the scales and items 7,8 and 9 – there is value in reporting results for individual questions. There may be interest in, for example, careers advice, library resources or computing facilities, as individual issues. However, data for all questions individually could be too detailed for general use.

b. Whether there would be value in making available ‘raw’ data at a more detailed level, in line with publication on the TQI site of HESA statistics on entry qualifications, progression, achievement and destinations. This could enable users to access information to fine levels of detail, including by a range of variables (mode, level, age, etc).

5. Examples of the above two approaches are provided below. Further evaluation of the options is necessary to assess how best to provide statistics that resist misinterpretation and are easily understood. Development of the presentational issues, such as the titles used and descriptions of the fields, and graphical presentations, will follow.

6. All data in the examples is entirely fictitious. Numbers are rounded to two decimal places. Percentages are rounded to the nearest 1 per cent. For these examples all scores are treated as if 1 is the best and 5 the worst. An asterisk alongside the sector adjusted averages indicates that the difference between this and the actual score is statistically significant.

Illustrative example 1

Institution: University of Poppleton

Subject area: Engineering

Number in cohort: 267

Percentage return: 87 per cent

Scale	Mean score	Confidence interval	Sector adjusted score
Teaching	2.82	2.73–2.91	2.70*
Feedback	2.77	2.67-2.87	2.68
Assessment	2.72	2.58-2.86	2.24*
Workload	2.15	1.95-2.35	2.21
Generic skills	3.01	2.92-3.1	3.20*
Support & advice	1.45	1.1-1.8	1.25
Learning resources	3.65	3.35-3.94	3.01*

Illustrative example 2

Institution: University of Poppleton

Subject area: Engineering

Number in cohort: 267

Number returned: 231

Scale	% responding 1 or 2	Confidence interval	Sector adjusted %	% responding 4 or 5	Confidence interval	Sector adjusted %
Teaching	60	56-64	58	9	7-11	7
Feedback	47	43-51	59*	22	17-23	16
Assessment	53	49-57	54	12	9-15	16*
Workload	46	42-50	48	26	22-34	10*
Generic skills	68	64-72	76*	7	5-9	5
Support & advice	65	60-70	75*	11	8-14	9
Learning resources	72	68-77	74	6	4-8	7

List of abbreviations

CEQ	Course experience questionnaire (used in Australian universities)
CHERI	Centre for Higher Education Research and Information
DLHE	Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey
FDS	First Destination Survey
FTE	Full-time equivalent
HE	Higher education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher education institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HUSID	HESA unique student identification number
JACS	Joint Academic Coding System
NSS	National student survey
NSSPSG	National Student Survey Pilot Steering Group
OU	Open University
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
SCOP	Standing Conference of Principals
SFPSG	Student Feedback Project Steering Group
TQI	Teaching quality information
UUK	Universities UK