

9 June 2016

## **Higher Education Policy Institute and Higher Education Academy**

### **The 2016 Student Academic Experience Survey**

This survey, published annually since 2006, shows how full-time undergraduates rate their time in higher education and what their attitudes are to policies that affect them. It has a big impact on policymakers and Jo Johnson, the Minister for Universities and Science, referred to it in the 2015 HE Green Paper and the 2016 HE White paper.

This year the survey has been modified to correlate students' satisfaction levels with other features of the student experience. It examines the gap between what students expect from their lecturers and their lecturers' perceived characteristics; knowledge of access to counselling services; expectations of the time it takes academics to return assignments; and attitudes towards the idea of future fee rises.

The survey of more than 15,000 undergraduates was based on research conducted independently by YouthSight.

The full report can be found at: <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2016.pdf>

#### **At-a-glance:**

- The large majority of students – 85 per cent – are satisfied with their course. This is broadly consistent with previous years although there has been a 2 per cent decline since 2015 (P8, Paragraph 2.1)
- While satisfaction levels have remained consistent, student perception of value for money has fallen significantly from 40 per cent in 2015 to just 37 per cent this year (P12, Paragraph 3.1)
- The overwhelming majority of undergraduates – 86 per cent – do not want the Government to let universities raise their fees where they can demonstrate excellent teaching (P36, Paragraph 7.2)

- Teaching quality - as shown by having teachers who are helpful and supportive, for example – has a major effect on student satisfaction and is more important to them than class size or speed of marking assignments (P9, Paragraph 2.2)
- Students who live in university accommodation and first-year students show higher levels of satisfaction (P10, Paragraph 2.3)
- Students from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds show lower levels of satisfaction with teaching quality and whether their university experience has met their expectations, which may be due to the fact that they are more likely to live at home while studying (P10, Paragraph 2.3)
- Perceptions of whether university is good value for money are falling in all four parts of the UK from 53 per cent in 2012 to 37 per cent today, but are lowest in England. This decline is likely to be partly explained by the fact that students are incurring much larger debts than in the past while universities' teaching income has not increased commensurately (P14, Paragraph 3.1)
- A majority of students – 54 per cent – think their work should be returned in two weeks or less, but fewer than one-third of students – 31 per cent – receive their work back this quickly (P25, Paragraph 5.3)
- More than half of students – 57 per cent – say it is very important for staff to have received training in how to teach but only 21 per cent think their lecturers demonstrate this “a lot” (P29, Paragraph 5.5)
- Students are much more anxious than the general population but many do know how to contact the counselling support service at their university (P31-32, Paragraph 6.1)

### **Other key points:**

- There are more than twice as many students who feel their experience has exceeded their expectations – 27 per cent – than those who have been disappointed (P11, Paragraph 2.3)
- Among the disappointed students, Asians stood out, with 17 per cent feeling that their experience had not lived up to expectations

(P11, Paragraph 2.3)

- Overall, the disappointed students cited lack of support for independent study as one of the reasons, but this was markedly higher among Asian students and those who live at home or on their own (P11, Paragraph 2.3)
- This provides evidence that students who do not live with their peers may be missing out on some of the study support networks that living in halls or shared houses provide, and that institutions need to consider how to ensure that students living with family or on their own do not feel isolated (P11, Paragraph 2.3)
- There is strong evidence that students equate contact time with good value: 58 per cent of students taking medicine and dentistry, where contact time is high, think they are getting good value for money compared to only 30 per cent of students taking technology, social studies, mass communications and documentation, or European languages (P15, Paragraph 3.1)
- Three quarters of students want more information about how their tuition fees are spent. This may be one way to improve perceptions of value for money (P17, Paragraph 3.3)
- There are big differences in workload between disciplines with students taking subjects allied to medicine such as nursing working for 47 hours a week compared to 25 hours for students of mass communications and documentation (P19, Paragraph 4.1)
- On average, full-time undergraduates work for 33 hours a week, split between 12 contact hours, 15 hours of independent study and six hours on off-campus course-related work such as a placement (P18, Paragraph 4.1)
- While 26 per cent of students think it is very important for those who teach them to be active researchers, only 38 per cent think this is demonstrated "a lot" (P29, Paragraph 5.5)
- There are key differences in perceptions of value for money by institution type, with higher perceptions among specialist institutions and the Russell Group, and lower among post-92 universities (P16, Paragraph 3.1)
- Three-quarters of students feel that most of their teaching staff encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning, with

the majority also feeling that staff clearly explain course goals and are helpful and supportive (P21-22, Paragraph 5.1)

- But only one in three feels that most staff help them explore their own areas of interest, a question that also received relatively disappointing scores last year (P22, Paragraph 5.1)
- Specialist institutions score particularly highly on ratings of teaching staff in contrast to Russell Group institutions, which do not score particularly well on issues such as providing support to students or helping them explore their own areas of interest (P22-23, Paragraph 5.1)
- Asked where they would most or least prefer their institutions to save money, students placed a priority on teaching and learning facilities, ahead of estate development (P34, Paragraph 7.1)
- Students' clear priority when it came to saving money was on maintaining contact hours and learning facilities, ahead of, if they were forced to make the choice, class sizes and staff research time (P34-35, paragraph 7.1)
- Students from overseas outside the EU are less likely to feel they have received value than EU students, who are far more positive (P14, Paragraph 3.1)
- There are key differences in perceptions of teaching by gender, with male students tending to be more critical than female, particularly when rating teaching for being structured and organised (P23, Paragraph 5.1)
- Consistently, Asian and Chinese students have lower perceptions of their teaching than their white counterparts (P23, Paragraph 5.1)

### **Key quotes:**

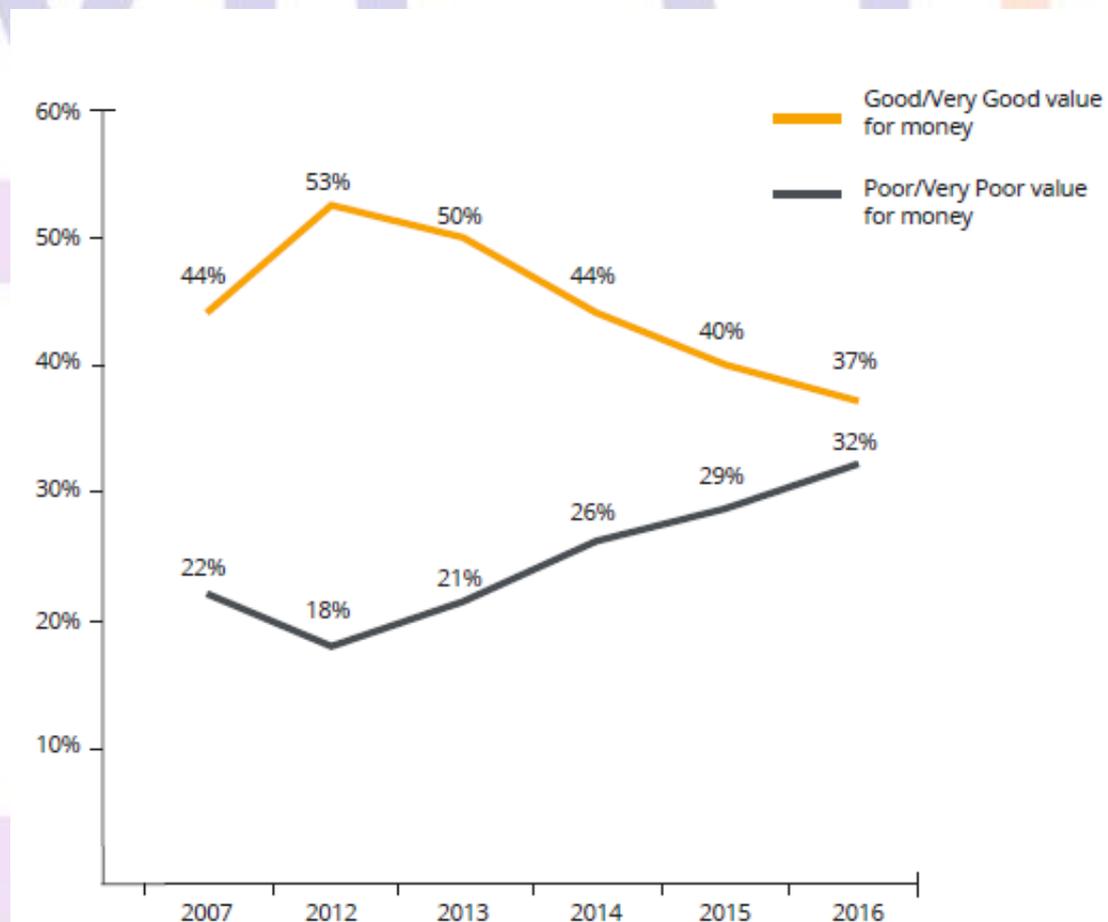
“Universities and the Government both want to see tuition fees increase, but students are strongly opposed to this. So, if the politicians are to deliver the extra cash universities say is necessary for delivering top-notch student experience, they need more covering fire from the higher education sector itself. Specifically, universities must show how any extra fee income will directly benefit their students.”

Nick Hillman, Director of HEPI

“We need to work more closely with students about their understanding and expectations of their teaching and learning experience. They are right to expect high-quality contact hours and the importance of quality rather than the quantity of contact hours is well-evidenced. Higher education is characterized by independent learning. Helping students to learn independently, through directed independent learning, is critical to their future success.”

Professor Stephanie Marshall, Chief Executive of the Higher Education Academy

### Key graphs:



### Whether expectations were met

