DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

The Nottingham Business School

The effectiveness of the National Student Survey and local institutional surveys as a management tool for setting effective strategies in higher education

Thesis

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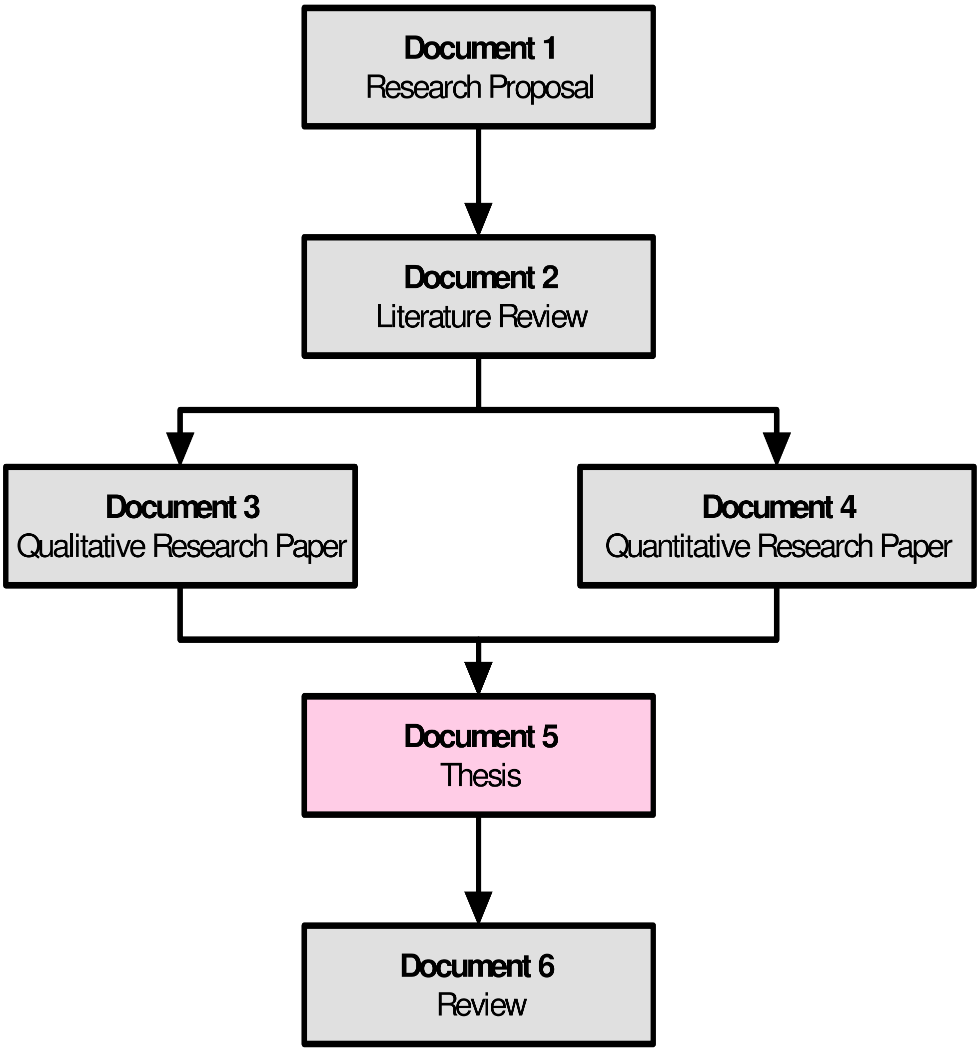

Diagram 1: Document 5 contextualised in DBA programme

This thesis is part of a body of work comprising five documents and a self-reflective review as shown in the above diagram and leads on from the findings of the qualitative research paper submitted as Document 3 and the quantitative research paper submitted as Document 4.

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Abbreviations

BCU – Birmingham City University

BCBS – Birmingham City Business School

BCUSES – BCU Student Experience Survey

BI – Business Intelligence

CAP – Course Action Plan

CEBE – Construction, Engineering and the Built Environment

CELT – Centre for Learning and Teaching

DfBIS – Department for Business Innovation & Skills

DL – Dominant Logic

DSS – Decision Support Systems

FOG – Faculty Operations Group

FAP – Faculty Action Plan

HEFCE – Higher Education Funding Council for England

HEA - Higher Education Academy

HEI – Higher Education Institutions

HESES – Higher Education Students Early Statistics Survey

HESA – Higher Education Statistics Agency

HMIC – Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary

ICT – Information and Communications Technology

IPR – Individual Performance Review

KPI – Key Performance Indicators

MOOCs – Massive Open Online Courses

NHS – National Health Service

NSS – National Student Survey

NSSE – National Survey of Student Engagement

OLAP – On-line Transaction Processing

PTES – Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey

PRES – Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

QAA – Quality Assurance Agency (for Higher Education)

RAE – Research Assessment Exercise

REF – Research Excellence Framework

RQ – Research Question

SNC – Student Number control

SOP – Standard Operating Procedures

THE – Times Higher Education

UAP – University Action Plan

UCAS – University and Colleges Admissions Service

UKBA/UKVI – UK Border Agency/UK Visas and Immigration

VCO – Vice-Chancellor's Office

VT – Visiting Tutor

Synopsis

This thesis investigates some of the primary institutional challenges linked to the management and reporting of student satisfaction and examines how institutions use, and manage, the business intelligence arising out of student satisfaction surveys. It investigates the effectiveness of setting institutional strategies aimed at improving the student experience and, in its detail, the study assesses the extent to which principal survey instruments, primarily the National Student Survey (NSS), accurately capture the views of students.

The research endeavours to undertake a critical review of the NSS enabling the thesis, based on a case study organisation, to serve as a robust tool to guide the setting of strategy aimed at improving the student experience. It investigates the extent to which the NSS accurately capture the views of the students surveyed and whether this is represented in the recorded level of satisfaction. It also looks at key stakeholders within the organisation and their understanding and reaction to the NSS process and its principal outputs.

The thesis concludes that, although the NSS does capture views of students insofar as students complete the questionnaire, the survey fails at a basic level due to a number of factors. The thesis challenges the validity of the results of the survey, the conclusions drawn from the survey, and the meaning placed on them.

Key stakeholders, within the case study organisation, do not fully understand and react to either the NSS process or its principal outputs and this is compounded by the students' approach to the survey.

Local institutional surveys have the potential to provide a rich source of data to complement the NSS but are not used to their full potential so represent both positive and negative responses to the limitations of the NSS. Finally, the thesis makes a number of recommendations to Universities and those academics and administrators, in charge of the strategy, management, and implementation of the annual NSS and local institutional surveys.

Keywords

National Student Survey; NSS; course surveys; module evaluation surveys; student satisfaction surveys; local surveys; questionnaires; student satisfaction; strategy; institutional strategy; student experience.

1.0 Introduction - Aims, Objectives and Research Questions

This thesis is designed to help organisations understand, manage and react to the National Student Survey (NSS) more effectively and efficiently by examining the students' understanding of the survey and the approach they take when participating in the survey. It is an original attempt to critically appraise the NSS by undertaking a series of evaluations that have highlighted some of the limitations of the NSS when used as a management tool.

It relates to management practice because, as a result of this work, HEIs will be better placed to be both reactive and proactive in regard to the NSS in different and more effective ways. This DBA relates to the management practice of organisations in regard to the management of the NSS, and local institutional surveys, the interpretation and use of the results of the surveys, and what organisations can do to make their strategic use of the survey more effective.

An effective management tool is the body of evidence that allows managers to make informed decisions; it is a tool used by managers to drive the business effectively and efficiently. One such tool used by HEIs is the NSS which is designed to measure student satisfaction. The results of these surveys are generally used by HEIs to inform strategy aimed at improving the student experience and, as a consequence, driving the HEI towards a higher measured level of student satisfaction (and consequently higher positioning in the various league tables). The NSS is also used by the Government as a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) and informs government policy on, for example, student number control and, in the future, the level of student fees that HEIs will be permitted to charge; all HEIs understand that their league table position is a critical factor in their continued success.

The aim of this research is to provide insight into some of the primary institutional challenges linked to the management and reporting of student satisfaction and to examine how institutions use, and manage, the business intelligence arising out of student satisfaction surveys, e.g. in the setting of institutional strategies. In its detail, the study also assesses the extent to which principal survey instruments, primarily the NSS, accurately capture the views of students.

Implicit in this is obtaining a better understanding of the students' knowledge of the NSS and the use made of the survey by HEIs; this will be used to examine the extent to which the results of the published NSS and/or institution based satisfaction surveys accurately represent the views of the students who are surveyed.

A critical evaluation of survey instruments of this type will also provide a better understanding of their adequacy, failings, potential contributions to strategic decision-making, and the students' choice of course and/or institution. This will, in turn, provide valuable insight into some of the primary institutional challenges linked to the management and reporting of student satisfaction.

This research will investigate whether the NSS can be considered to be an effective tool to be used for informing business decision-making and setting strategies; it is accepted that many of the management tools are imperfect, however, if this research is able to demonstrate the limitations of the NSS as a management tool, managers will be able to take this into account and make improved decisions.

The NSS seeks to obtain the views of final year students only; this research aims to obtain an understanding of the value and purpose of supplementing the NSS with local surveys, carried out at modular and/or course level with all students surveyed (across all years), and will identify the tensions that exist between, or the complementarity of, local institutional surveys and the NSS. Finally, it is hoped that the research will provide a better understanding of the models of student satisfaction in relation to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and proposes a number of management actions aimed at improving the validity of surveys.

The focus of the research is upon the students' understanding of the wording used in the survey and their approach to completing both the NSS and local institutional surveys; it does not focus upon the design of the survey itself or the individual questions used therein. Inevitably, however, there will be implicit criticism of the style, wording, and approach taken by the NSS but the researchers' intention is not to re-design the survey but to provide meaningful understanding of the challenges faced by HEIs in managing the survey as it currently stands.

Additionally, the research also includes some implicit criticism of academics and the approach taken in managing the survey. Implicit criticism of academia is neither the intention, nor the aim, of the research but highlighting these issues will contribute to management practice in the general management of the NSS by HEIs.

The researcher is personally involved in the implementation of survey instruments in a professional setting at the Birmingham City Business School (BCBS), one of six Faculties at Birmingham City University (BCU), which was the driver for the professional interest in this area of work. For the purposes of this research BCU, and in particular the BCBS, is used as a case study.

1.1 Previous research underpinning Documents 1 - 4

The research that was carried out in Documents 3 and 4 focused on various aspects relating to student satisfaction and comprised, in Document 3, qualitative research into whether the senior management at BCU understood, measured and controlled the factors that determine student expectations and whether they translated those factors into relevant service specifications. The research found that a significant majority of the work undertaken by the University was reactive rather than proactive resulting in the University using a strategy of dealing with issues when they arise rather than preventing them from arising in the first place. The overall conclusion drawn from the research, carried out in Document 3, was that the senior management of the institution do not fully understand the motivation of the students; accordingly, it is questionable whether the institution is able to translate that understanding into service delivery.

Document 4 researched whether universities belonging to the Russell Group displayed higher levels of performance, as indicated in the three KPIs published by Unistats, than the other groupings of universities. The research also examined the degree of correlation, if any, between the three published KPIs namely the UCAS entry requirements (measured in UCAS Points), the level of Student Satisfaction and the level of Graduate Employment.

The research concluded that Russell Group universities do not produce consistently higher rates of student satisfaction or higher levels of graduate employment and there is little consistency in two of the three published Unistats data with many courses at universities showing wide variations year-on-year in the level of student satisfaction and the rate of graduate employment.

The findings from Document 4 also demonstrated that there is a low level of association between the three sets of KPIs (Entry qualifications, NSS level of student satisfaction, and the rate of graduate employment) with low levels of correlation between any of the pairs of variables. Accordingly, this suggests that courses with entry requiring a higher number of UCAS points, or courses with higher levels of student satisfaction, do not necessarily achieve higher levels of graduate employment.

The earlier research undertaken, Documents 1-4, was based on the concept that that researcher wished to carry out a study into the pure mechanics and the validity of the NSS. Ultimately the research moved into the area of utilisation of the NSS in HEIs, and how the Institution uses the results of the survey to inform strategy, as this was deemed to more of greater relevance and value to the Institution, and the community as a whole, whilst providing valuable knowledge and insight into management practice.

At the same time, it was recognised that Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQs) were used as a mechanism for informing managers on issues similar, if not identical, to those raised in the annual NSS. As the questions in the MEQs were largely the same as the questions in the NSS, with the use of identical wording, expressions, and concepts, it was thought appropriate to use interviews with students to confirm whether or not students understand the meaning of the words and expressions contained in the surveys (both local and NSS) and whether they understood the use that the institution made of the various surveys.

Together with the position of the Institution in the various league tables, Institutions place a lot of emphasis on the results of the surveys and use the outcome and analysis of the surveys to inform strategy aimed at improving the student experience. However, if either the data is unreliable, or the results of the survey are misinterpreted, managers should exercise caution when relying on the results of the survey.

It follows that institutional surveys that are based on the methodology or wording used in the NSS survey may also be flawed. The purpose of this research is to investigate current management practice into the use of the NSS as a management tool for informing and setting strategies aimed at improving the student experience.

1.2 Research Questions

The main outcome of the earlier research, carried out as part of this DBA, supports and justifies the proposal for the Document 5 research in that, as there is little correlation between the three KPIs published by Unistats, there is relevance in researching the extent to which the NSS, and other local institutional surveys, effectively capture the level of student satisfaction. This is particularly relevant given the reliance placed on these surveys by institutions, the use of the results of the NSS in published league tables, and the extent to which institutions use the NSS for setting the strategy aimed at improving the student experience.

It follows that, if the NSS is not representative of the views of students, the reaction of key stakeholders within organisations in relation to the NSS process, and it principal outcomes, in informing strategy may also be flawed. Finally, many institutions use local surveys to supplement the NSS, and obtain the views of all of the students across all of the years, and this research investigates whether these surveys have a positive or a negative impact on the limitations of the NSS and complement the understanding of the results of the NSS.

The overall objective of the research is to establish the robustness of the NSS and other associated measurements of student satisfaction in guiding management decision-making concerning the student experience. This justifies the three research questions for this thesis which are as follows:

1. To what extent does the NSS accurately capture the views and level of satisfaction of the students surveyed?
2. How do key stakeholders within the organisation understand and react to the NSS process?
3. To what extent do local surveys, such as the Module Evaluation Questionnaires completed by students at Birmingham City University, complement the understanding of the results of the NSS?

Figure 1a, below, shows how the research questions are linked to the central theme of this research, the NSS, although it should be remembered that local institutional surveys are also considered.

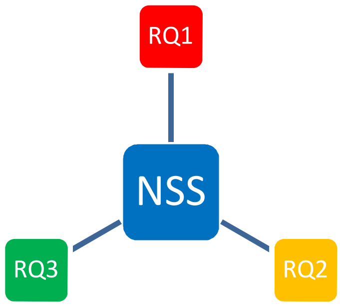


Figure 1a: Relationship of research questions to central theme

Given the focus of this research, the following Section is designed to introduce the reader to the primary instruments used for both surveying and reporting student satisfaction at BCU.

1.3 Background/contextual information relating to current research

1.3.1 The NSS

In the UK, Higher Education students were considered to be the "primary customers" of a University (Crawford, 1991), even before they were liable for the payment of up-front tuition fees. As if to confirm this status of the student as customer, the Higher Education Funding Council for England introduced a National Student Survey. The NSS, (HEFCE, 2011), completed annually, is aimed at all undergraduate students in the final year of study. The survey comprises 23 questions, divided into five analytical scales with respondents asked to give a selected level of agreement to each question. Question 22 asks for an overall satisfaction score and question 23 relates to the performance of the Student Union (although this question was introduced for the first time in the 2013 survey).

A copy of the most recent NSS questionnaire is attached at Appendix A (NSS questionnaire).

The survey is independently managed by Ipsos Mori who identify both the courses run by the institution and the students who will be invited to participate in the annual survey; selection of students is based upon the annual statistical return, made at the end of the previous academic year by the institution, by identifying enrolled students who will be entering the final year of study in the next academic year.

Students are invited to complete the survey by e-mail sent to them by Ipsos Mori which provides details of the log-on and password required to complete the survey. A response rate of 50% must be achieved for the course to be included in the published results; additionally, each course surveyed must receive a minimum of 23 responses. Inevitably not all of the courses surveyed are included in the published survey as a result of two factors; firstly, where the response rate is poor and secondly where the course is small or there are insufficient students enrolled on the course, i.e. less than 23. Institutions are able to track the current response rate after the survey has been opened and are provided with details of the students, and the courses that are being surveyed, to enable the institution to remind students, inter alia, to complete the survey.

1.3.2 BCU institutional Student Experience Survey (BCUSES)

Each year Ipsos Mori, on behalf of BCU, undertake an internal Student Experience Survey, (See Appendix B - Birmingham City University Student Experience Survey on-line questionnaire) aimed at capturing the views of all undergraduate and postgraduate students. The survey contains all of the NSS questions together with some additional questions in the core NSS areas, a separate section on the Student Union, and comprises, in total, 33 questions. This survey, used by Ipsos Mori at a number of institutions across the UK, is based on a standard questionnaire and is tailored specifically to each individual institution.

In the 2013 BCUSES, additional, optional, sets of questions were included which covered careers, social opportunities, feedback from students, welfare resources and facilities, the learning community, and intellectual motivation; the survey also contains a "free comment box". The results of the institutional Student Experience Survey and the NSS are analysed by the university and discussed at various meetings of the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee and Senate. Each Faculty is required to publish an action plan based on the results of the two surveys (NSS and BCUSES) aimed at improving the results of the survey in the following year.

The questions that are bespoke to BCU and relating specifically to the NSS questionnaire are highlighted in pink in Appendix B (Birmingham City University Student Experience Survey on-line questionnaire).

1.3.3 The approach taken to survey instruments at BCU

Survey results are a primary reference point for decision-makers as a means of identifying issues and problems and improving the overall delivery of service. Management have two primary aims in regards the delivery of education, firstly, to generally improve the student experience and, secondly, to achieve higher levels of achievement as measured by the NSS. Both of these are drivers for management decisions, both are interconnected, and the NSS is relied upon by institutional management, at BCU, as the main means of measuring current levels of student satisfaction. After the results of the NSS have been published, a detailed analytical report identifying the current areas of strengths and weaknesses is prepared by the Vice-Chancellor’s Office. The University’s strategic plan also sets aspirational levels for student satisfaction, and the related positioning in league tables, together with a timetable for achieving these levels - accordingly improving the current levels of achievement is seen to be a high priority.

The Vice-Chancellor at BCU has defined a set of benchmark levels for Faculties, Departments, and Courses and failure to match, or exceed, this benchmark is the trigger for the production of an action plan aimed at ensuring that the results of the following year’s survey are improved. Any individual course, that falls below the prescribed benchmark for the course, and which is based upon the national average and/or the benchmark level for the competitor group, is placed under "special measures" and the Course Leader is required to produce a Course Action Plan (CAP) aimed at improving student satisfaction in the following year. Course Leaders are responsible for preparing the CAP which is consolidated into a Faculty Action Plan (FAP) by the Associate Dean (Academic); this, in turn, becomes part of the wider University Action Plan (UAP).

The University committee structure has three main committees at both University and Faculty level. These comprise the “Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee”, the “Teaching and Learning Committee” and the “Student Experience Committee” and are collectively charged with improving the quality of the course, the student experience, and the level of student satisfaction. These committees also own, discuss, and monitor the various action plans and is the main mechanism for improving the levels of student satisfaction on what are perceived as “non-performing courses”. The University also has the Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT), which initiates and develops policy and support that enhances the quality of the student and staff learning experience and which feeds into improving the levels of student satisfaction. CELT provides advice and assistance to the Faculties and Course Teams in regard to the preparation of action plans.

The University recognises that the NSS only captures the views of final year undergraduate students limited to a fixed set of questions. It recognises that institutions need to capture the views of all students, at modular level, during the delivery of the module to be fed into continuous improvement of the module and that this cannot achieved by the sole use of the NSS. Accordingly, the University is keen to capture the views of all students, at all levels of study and undertakes a variety of institutional-wide surveys to underpin the findings of the NSS. This is achieved by mandating that all Faculties must undertake, each Term (or Semester) modular level surveys to capture the views of all students. Additional surveys are undertaken by Corporate ICT, Library and Learning Resources, and by the Students Union and all of these surveys are undertaken with the overall aim of improving the level of student satisfaction.

1.3.4 BCBS Module Survey

The Faculties, at BCU, are required to undertake their own student satisfaction surveys at modular level. There is no prescribed, or standard, format for this survey and each Faculty has their own format and processes with, at the time of writing, little consistency across the University.

Courses at BCU are owned by Faculties and comprise a number of taught modules for each level of study. Students are required to complete 120 credits for each year of study with 360 credits entitling them to an honours degree at undergraduate level. Students who pass a module are awarded the defined number of credits, normally 15 for a single module and 30 for a double module, and students normally study eight 15 credit modules (or a combination of 15 and 30 credit modules) in a single year. Modules are either categorised as core, (compulsory), or optional (student has a choice of which module to study). The diagram below, Figure 1b, shows the entity relationships for this schema.

Generally, courses comprise many modules and modules can be taught on a number of courses. Lecturers, who belong to a single Faculty, teach on a number of courses and a number of different modules and some modules are taught by more than one lecturer. The dotted lines, in Figure 1b, represent relationships that may, or may not, exist in that some courses run across two Faculties. For example, BSc Business and Psychology is a combined honours course where the Business part belongs to one Faculty and the Psychology belongs to a different Faculty.

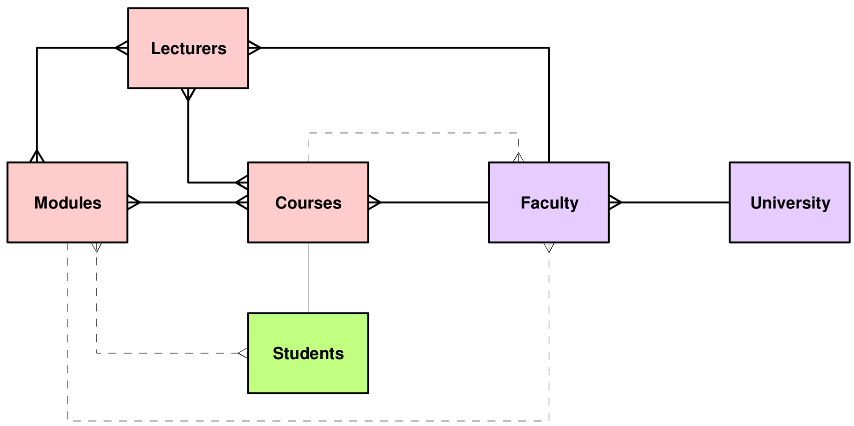


Figure 1b: Model showing entity relationships at BCU

Similarly, in some instances modules are owned by one Faculty but are taught to students studying courses that belong to another Faculty. An example of this is BSc (Hons) Business and Law which is a course owned by the Business School but where the law modules are taught by a Faculty that does not own the course. Students are enrolled on a single course, and a course can have many students enrolled upon it. The link to a module for a student is via the course; and there is a dotted line between the student and the module with the student studying many modules and the module having many students registered upon it.

Each year the researcher is responsible for managing the BCBS survey of student satisfaction across the entire portfolio of taught modules. Questionnaires are distributed to all of the students studying each module during one specified week of each semester. The questionnaires are completed by all students attending a chosen taught session. After completion, the questionnaires are collected by a student representative (nominated by the students themselves) and returned to the office of the researchers' PA by the nominee. The questionnaire (Appendix C - Module Evaluation Questionnaire) is based on the NSS but the questions are suitably modified to relate to a module rather than to the course as a whole.

Data from the completed questionnaires is input into a database, designed and built by the researcher, which enables a detailed analysis of the results of the questionnaire. The results are presented in report format, by the researcher, to the Faculty Operations Group (FOG) and to the individual Course Teams; this is then reported through Boards of Study to the student cohorts and to the Student Experience Committee. The comments, from the three open-ended questions, are forwarded to the relevant Head of Department so that they can be disseminated to the individual member of staff responsible for the module to which the comment relates.

The Faulty sets a series of benchmarks for the performance of individual modules; modules that fail to achieve the minimum benchmark are identified and, where modules are delivered by a team of academics, the performance of each individual academic is also monitored. A system of benchmarking is also used to identify the under-performance of individual academics. The results of the module questionnaires are used in the annual monitoring process, and the annual performance review of each academic, with resultant action plans being prepared, where necessary, for individual improvement at both academic and module level. Should a module fail to achieve the benchmark level of satisfaction, the Module Leader is required to produce a Module Action Plan (MAP) aimed at improving student satisfaction in any subsequent delivery of the module. Should any individual academic fail to achieve the required benchmark this is discussed in the annual Individual Performance Review (IPR) and a personal action plan developed aimed at enhancing individual performance.

1.4 Setting the scene

In March 2012, a report entitled "Measuring Success, League tables in the public sector" was published by the British Academy on the damaging culture of league tables which covers the rankings of schools, police forces and universities. The report concludes that "*…many league tables have all the appearance of being useful but are often one-dimensional and can have perverse side effects that cause more harm than good."* (Foley and Goldsteyn, 2012, p.47)

A key recommendation of the report identified the need for better evaluation of league tables, and for more discussion of the drawbacks, to ensure that they meet the aims and best serve policymakers, professionals, and the general public.

The traditional and familiar definition of the student experience, in the UK, is largely comprised of teaching, learning, assessment and feedback; indeed, this is the basis of the questionnaire in the annual NSS. In 2012, however, the survey introduced a new question seeking the views of students on the quality of the Student Union at each university. (National Student Survey, 2014).

The government, in its White Paper entitled "*Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System"* (DfBIS, 2011), sets out changes to the funding methodology of higher education institutions. The White Paper also laid out a framework for the publication of key performance indicators that are required to be published on university websites and which will enable students, applying to university, to compare courses on a like-for-like basis. With the introduction of higher tuition fees, it is thought to be inevitable that the expectations of both students, and their parents, will rise and students, embarking on a course of study at university, will be increasingly looking for ways to get the most out of their investment. This is evidenced by a recent report published by the Higher Education Policy Institute entitled *"The Academic Experience of Students in English Universities."* (HEPI, 2013). This report concluded that almost one out of every three first-year students at UK universities say that their course provides poor value for money and, although most students are happy with their course, dissatisfaction has grown since fees were introduced for English students; dissatisfaction has also increased with the escalation of higher fees.

It remains to be seen what this will mean for institutions but the government reforms are specifically aimed at, firstly, increasing the levels of competition between the universities and, secondly, improving the student experience. Consequent to this is an onus placed on universities to provide a greater level of attention to student satisfaction than has been the case to date. It is interesting to note that the general level of student satisfaction has, since 2008, increased year-on-year as reported by both the NSS (NSS, 2012) and the THSES (Times Higher Education, 2013). This change of emphasis in government policy introduces a potential conflict for many universities – the importance of the student experience conflicting with the need for academic excellence. At the same time, universities must not underestimate the wider value to young people of the time they spend at university – the growing strength of an instrumental attitude to education (Small, 2013).

The current, and most visible, measure of quality for most universities is their ranking in the published league tables. Accordingly, the importance of league tables reflecting the opinions of students is increasing with anecdotal evidence suggesting that many academics take the view that "*only students who aren't happy complete the survey: so the surveys aren't accurate*" (Quote from Document 3). If this is the case, it is no longer a position that universities will be able to maintain or ignore. As part of the Governments' current strategy for higher education the existing process for Student Number Control (SNC) was reviewed and has been changed. Each University is allocated the number of students that they are permitted to recruit to undergraduate courses each year. This restriction, however, only applies to Home/EU students with universities being allowed to recruit an unrestricted number of international students. SNC is particularly challenging as provisional student numbers are only confirmed by the universities each year in early August during the annual "clearing" process; actual numbers being confirmed in late October.

At the start of the academic year 2012/13 this process was changed in two specific regards. Firstly, students who obtained an A-level profile of AAB were excluded from SNC and universities were able to recruit an unlimited number of students with this A-level profile, or better. For academic year 2013/14 this strategy was extended to exclude students with an A-level profile of ABB or better. The full impact of this strategic change is being assessed at the time of writing although a number of universities are extremely nervous about the potential damage this will cause to their profile. The second strategic change was the removal of a substantial number of students (20,000) from SNC that were then made available for universities to submit a bid to receive these additional numbers. The universities who were allowed to bid were limited to those universities who were charging an average fee for new undergraduate students of less than £7500 per year at the start of 2012/13.

As a direct consequence of this change of policy, a number of universities reviewed the fees they were proposing to charge to enable them to have an average fee of less than £7500 per year and bid for additional numbers. Colleges of Further Education, who were running degree courses (albeit they are mainly degrees at foundation level), were also able to bid for these additional student numbers and consequently approximately half of the 20,000 additional places were allocated to Colleges of Further Education. The overall impact of these two changes to the HEFCE policy on SNC is that there was greater competition amongst universities for students outside SNC control. It is generally thought that students, especially internationally, will place an ever increasing importance on the overall position of the University in the published league tables.

This research has been undertaken in a shifting and rapidly changing regulatory environment and the researcher's analysis is based upon the published and documented position as at 1st November 2013. The reader will note the subsequent announcement in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, delivered to Parliament on 5th December 2013, which removed the cap on student numbers by allocating a further 60,000 student places at HEIs for academic year 2014/15 and an unlimited number of student places commencing academic year 2015/16. The implementation and effect of these changes are not included in this research.

The above paragraphs frame the political environment within which educational institutions currently work with a continually and rapidly changing financial environment necessitating the need for institutions to continuously adapt.

Having given a brief introduction to the research the next chapter reviews the current literature relating to the research topic.

2.0 Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this chapter is to review the relevant literatures within the conceptual framework of the area of research being undertaken. The researcher used a relevance tree as the technique for identifying relevant literatures; this chapter starts with a brief introduction to Relevance Trees and continues with a review of each of the relevant literatures.

2.1 Introduction

A Relevance Tree (Daim et al, 2013) is a Judgment-Based Technique used to undertake a morphological analysis assisting the selection of a specific research project from a more general set of goals; the methodology of relevance trees requires the researcher to determine the most appropriate path of the tree by arranging, in a hierarchical order, the literatures, and sub-literatures, in a logical order to ensure that all possible literatures have been considered. The relevance, within the overall research, of the literatures and sub-literatures that have been identified is then evaluated.

The relevance tree, as a technique, was chosen as it is particularly useful in the construction of scenarios by breaking down the subject into their constituent parts; in so doing, important literatures are recognised, and incorporated, into the conceptual framework.

Shields and Rangarajan (2013, p. 24) define a conceptual framework as "*the way ideas are organized to achieve a research project's purpose.*" Berman (2013, p.3) refers to a comparison between work undertaken by Smyth (2004) and Leshem and Trafford (2007) who provide contrasting criteria for the development of a conceptual framework with some common ground and a degree of distinctiveness.

The researcher built on these two sets of criteria (see Table 1, below) to assist the definition of the research problem, the establishment of a theoretical coherence, and the organisation of the design and implementation of the research.

• provision of a common language	• unity within appropriate theories
• a set of guiding principles against which judgements and predictions could be made	• direction to research design and accompanying fieldwork
• a set of reference points from which to locate the research questions within contemporary theorising	• coherence between empirical observations and conceptual conclusions
• a structure for organisation of the content of the research and for framing of conclusions for the research	
Smyth (2004)	Leshem & Trafford (2007)

Table 1: Criteria for considering utility of conceptual frameworks

Source: Berman (2013, p.3)

The concepts and theories in the literatures combine into the following model:

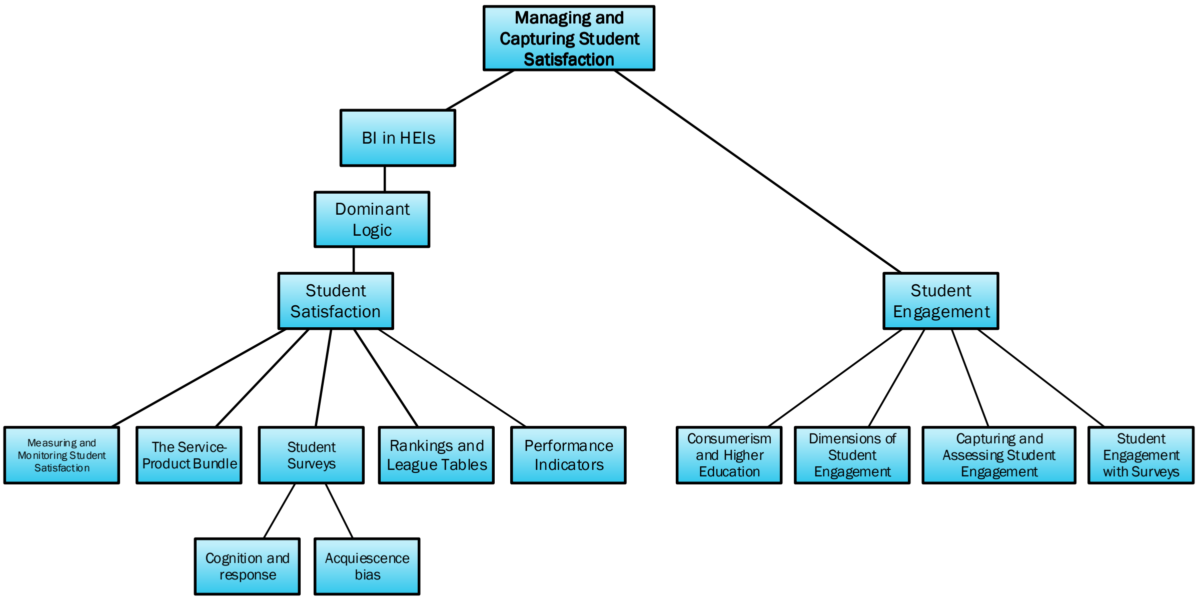


Figure 2: Relevance Tree for Literatures

The literature review starts with a discussion of Business Intelligence (BI) in HEIs, followed by a short review of the literature of Dominant Logic, and continues with a discussion of the literatures around Student Engagement and Student Satisfaction using literature that, although it may not be theoretically rich, is highly focused on current issues in higher education.

BI is of paramount interest to university decision makers due to the reliance placed on it by the University in framing strategy and measuring performance and improvement – including the use of student survey data.

It is important to understand and determine the Dominant Logic of the Organisation that is being studied as this impacts upon the method by which senior managers within the organisation deals with the increasing diversity of strategic decision-making.

2.2 Business Intelligence in HEIs

The discussion commences with a look at the notion of Business Intelligence in HEIs.

BI can be traced back to 1865 when Devens used the term to describe how Sir Henry Furnese gained profit, in banking, by receiving and acting upon information about his environment, prior to his competitors. "*Throughout Holland, Flanders, France, and Germany, he maintained a complete and perfect train of business intelligence. The news of the many battles fought was thus received first by him, and the fall of Namur added to his profits, owing to his early receipt of the news*." (Devens, 1865, p. 210). Devens argued that Furnese excelled in collecting and reacting on information retrieved for business advantage and this remains the core feature of BI. Although it remained dormant for many years, Luhn resurrected the term in 1958 in an article in the IBM Journal in which he employed the Websters dictionary definition of intelligence being *"the ability to apprehend the interrelationships of presented facts in such a way as to guide action towards a desired goal."* (Luhn, 1958, p.314).

BI has grown with the development of computers and is generally accepted to have evolved from Decision Support Systems (DSS), that originated in the 1960s, in the use of computer-aided models created to assist with decision-making and planning. DSS was fully developed throughout the mid-1980s and then developed into further computerised systems such as Data Warehouses, Executive Information

Systems, online analytical processing (OLAP) all of which became collectively known as BI in the late 80s. According to Kroonenberg the ultimate goal, by detecting patterns within data, was to reduce the multiple dimensions of the data to a single dimension to enable the decision-makers to understand the data and act accordingly (Kroonenberg, 2008). BI applications generally use data stored in a data warehouse – a database used for reporting and analysing data – by integrating data from one or more sources to create a central repository for all of the data created within the business. The data warehouse stores all current data, and as much historical data as is available, and a is used to create business reports to inform senior management decision-making.

Evelson (2010) uses Forrester Research (an independent technology and market research company) to distinguish between the two concepts of *BI* and *data warehouses* by using Forrester's broad definition of BI *"is a set of methodologies, processes, architectures, and technologies that transform raw data into meaningful and useful information used to enable more effective strategic, tactical, and operational insights and decision-making."* (Evelson, 2010, on-line blog).

BI has a number of practical and important uses and purposes that inform the value of the business and measures competitive advantage including *measurement or business process management* (the creation of a hierarchy of performance metrics and benchmarking that informs the business leaders about progress against strategic goals), *analytics* (quantitative processes enabling business to optimise), *reporting* (that serves the strategic management of a business as against operational reporting that provides for efficiency measures), *collaboration* (enabling the engagement of different sections both within the business and external to the business to work together) and *knowledge management* (enabling the company data to be driven through strategies and practices to identify, create, represent, distribute, and enable the adoption of insights and experiences leading to learning management and regulatory compliance).

2.3 Dominant Logic

The concept of Dominant Logic (DL) was first espoused by Prahalad and Bettis in 1986 who, when researching into acquisitions and structural changes to the core business of a company, suggested that the cognitive orientation of the decision makers influenced the way senior managers dealt with the increasing diversity of strategic decisions in the company.

Dominant (general management) Logic is seen as the way in which the conceptualisation of the business by managers has an influence in their critical decision-making regarding the allocation of resources for product development, sales and marketing, distribution, the use of technologies, and human resource management. So, for example, a university may be willing to allocate large sums to research activity and development but less on infrastructure for teaching if the dominant logic of the university was "research": Dominant Logic is generally performed by controlling the choice of key individuals, budgeting, salaries, organisation structure, and other issues and is stored via schemas. It can be thought of as a structure with tools used by senior managers for strategic decision-making; their view of the world (mind sets) being determined by their previous experiences.

Prahalad et al. (1986, p.491) suggest that the dominant senior management logic also tends to be influenced by the 'core business,' the historical basis for the growth of the business (e.g. students in the newer universities), the characteristics of this core business influencing the managers framing of problems they encounter in specific ways.

Prahalad (2004, p.171) argues that *"the dominant logic embedded in an organisation may keep it on the road ahead, but it also acts as a blinder to peripheral vision… managers need to look beyond the borders of their industries and geographies to find new opportunities and rethink the logic of the business".*

Prahalad and Bettis (1986, p.486) describe the dominant logic of the company as the DNA of the organisation reflecting how managers are socialised and manifests itself in an implicit theory of competition and value creation; They describe it as being *"embedded in standard operating procedures, shaping not only how the members of the organisation act but also how they think"* so that it becomes "*the lens through which managers see all emerging opportunities*" thereby making it difficult for companies to embrace a broader logic for competition and value creation. (Prahalad & Bettis (1986, p.487).

Over a period of time the business models, processes and general approach to competition becomes embedded within organisations and come to represent the dominant logic of that organisation limiting the ability of managers and leaders within the organisation to drive innovation, seize new opportunities, and react to threats.

Prahalad (2004, p.176) describes a variety of approaches that companies need to take to break free from the blinders of their current dominant logic to enable them to understand and engage with the opportunities that are available on the periphery of their market. Prahalad concludes that managers need to focus on experimentation and look at developing 'next practices' rather than focusing on 'best practices' whilst measuring this by benchmarking activities. Companies generally benchmark against their own sector and it should be remembered that 'best practices' mean that other companies also undertake this activity; benchmarking best practices will not enable the company to generate a competitive advantage. Actually, the opposite will be true as all companies will converge to the same model as benchmarking activities enables the company to match the capabilities of other companies.

The dominant logic of the organisation, therefore, sets the agenda for the strategic management and the direction taken by the senior management and dictates the various metrics that are used to measure success both within the organisation and within the competitive environment; in the case of BCU this is particularly relevant to the field of the management of Customer (Student) Satisfaction by performance indicator metrics and the emphasis placed by the institution on Student Engagement.

2.4 Student satisfaction

Having discussed BI and DL, the discussion continues with the notion of student satisfaction and includes sub-literatures on Measuring Student Satisfaction, the Service-Product Bundle, Student Surveys Rankings and League Tables and ends with a discussion of Performance Indicators.

2.4.1 Measuring and Monitoring student satisfaction

Douglas et al. (2006) took the view that student satisfaction, retention, and recruitment were all closely linked and suggested that student satisfaction had become an extremely important issue for university's management with the implied aim of maximising student satisfaction thereby retaining students and improving the institutions' performance; this, in turn, would be reflected in the published league tables. Previous research studies (for example; Galloway, 1998 and Banwet & Datta, 2003) utiltised the SERVQUAL framework (Parasuraman et al., 1988) as a means of measuring and understanding the students' perceptions of quality/satisfaction but given that SERVQUAL had been heavily criticised over a number of years (Buttle, 1996; Asubonteng et al., 1996; Pariseau & McDaniel, 1997; Aldridge and Rowley, 1998), Douglas et al. (2006) suggested that the concept of the service-product bundle is a valid and reliable tool for the design of a satisfaction survey which segments a University's service offering enabling management to target resources at areas that are perceived to receive low levels of satisfaction but are of relatively high importance.

Survey literature is inexorably linked to student questionnaires (which provides the main source of student satisfaction data) so any review must consider the monitoring, measurement and definition/determinants of student satisfaction. The measurement and monitoring of the level of satisfaction that students have with their learning experience has become a core activity that HEIs are undertaking both from a business perspective and from a regulatory perspective as this forms one of the main KPIs upon which they are judged (Kerridge and Mathews, 1998; El Ansari and Oskrochi, 2004, 2006). Nationally, and internationally, the reported level of satisfaction is deemed to serve as a comparative guide for students to assist in their decision-making process when choosing what course to study, and/or institution to attend, and is published in a variety of formats as institutional performance indicators (Murphy and Harris, 1995; White et al., 1999).

Student satisfaction has been extensively researched. Zink and Vob (1999, p.1019) concluded that student satisfaction is "*a critical criterion in a model of excellence for*

HEIs" whereas Krahn and Bowlby (1997, p.176) found that "*happy graduates allow HEIs to justify their existence*". Ping (1993, p.348) went further and suggested that *"the analysis of customers' (students') satisfaction is a way to assess whether HEIs are fulfilling their role"*. Elliott and Shin (2002, p.206) showed there was a correlation between the level of "*student attraction [level of applications], motivation, and retention"* and the reported level of overall student satisfaction whilst Chambel and Curral (2005, p.142) suggested that *"student satisfaction is related to a university's ability to identify and meet students' needs and expectations".* From the above it can be seen that it is imperative that the measurement of student satisfaction truly represents the 'actual' level of the satisfaction of students with their course. This is supported by the NSS (2014) who claim that *"the higher education bodies, students' unions and the government have agreed that there should be a regular national survey of students to obtain their views on the quality of the teaching, assessment, and support experienced. The NSS is an annual survey that gives students the opportunity to provide feedback on their student learning experience. The NSS also aims to assist future generations of higher education students in their key choices of what and where to study, by allowing them to see anonymous feedback on subjects and institutions."* (National Student Survey, 2014).

A number of research papers have been published in regard to the measurement of student satisfaction with the various services provided by Universities. A number of factors have been identified as having the potential to impact upon the level of student satisfaction that is measured and reported. Terenzini and Pascarella (1980, p.279) identified "*a relationship between the students' informal contacts with members of faculty (academics) and the level of student withdrawals"* supported by Butt & Rehman (2010, p.5449) who found that "*the retention level of enrolled students was a good indication of the level of satisfaction by the students of their program and, by implication, the quality of their university education*".

Butt and Rehman (2010) undertook a further study investigating the determinants of students' satisfaction in higher education, and their influence on the level of student satisfaction in Pakistan, and found that, although there was evidence that the students were generally satisfied with higher education, the level of satisfaction was different for male and female students which they stated was due to the socio-economic setting in the country. However, they concluded that *"teachers' expertise, courses offered, learning environment and classroom facilities"* were the most significant determinants of student satisfaction in higher education (Butt and Rehman, 2010, p.5450). Grüber et al. (2010) investigated students' perception of the services they are offered at a German university, and how satisfied they were with them, by using a new tool to measure fifteen dimensions of student satisfaction at an institutional level that covered most aspects of student life. They took this approach as they argued that many existing surveys *"were poorly designed, lacked standardisation and gave no evidence concerning reliability or validity"*. The results of the study showed that students' satisfaction with their university was based on a relatively stable *"person-environment relationship"*; students were most satisfied with their placements, internships, and the atmosphere amongst fellow students; they were most dissatisfied with the university buildings and the quality of the lecture theatres.

Blair, Orr, & Yorke (2012) noted that, since the introduction of the NSS in 2005, the average satisfaction scores vary across different disciplines and a report (Vaughan and Yorke, 2009) had been commissioned by G*L*AD (Group for Learning in Art and Design) to look at how the discipline of Art and Design has experienced and responded to the NSS with particular reference to the two major areas of *"feedback and assessment"* and *"organisation and management"*. The report showed that there was considerable variation across institutions in terms of the ratings students gave to NSS questions in these two broad areas. The conclusion drawn by Vaughan and Yorke was that there had been differential success in addressing aspects of the student experience although the report did not attempt to gain an understanding of the basis of the ratings given by students to these questions. G*L*AD subsequently commissioned Blair et al. to carry out a small research project which takes a snapshot of how a small group of art and design students interpreted the NSS questions in 2011; the key aim of the study was an attempt to understand the ways in which students understood the NSS questions. Amongst a number of important findings were two key outcomes, firstly, the key role that technicians play in the way students answer the NSS questionnaire was highlighted by the responses as the students interviewed all thought that the relationship with these staff was key to how they viewed their course experience. Secondly, issues were identified with the differentiation in the approach of sub-groups of students around the responses and understanding relating to the interpretation of the actual questions by particular groups of students such as international students, or those with dyslexia.

Vaughan and Yorke (2009) also highlighted the approach taken by dyslexic students when filling out questionnaires stating *"there have been instances identified where such students have got the feedback scale on similarly structured questionnaires the wrong way round, thereby giving the opposite view to the one they intended – does this also follow for the NSS?"* (Vaughan and Yorke, 2009, p.31).

Student surveys are therefore critical to the measurement of student satisfaction but the literature demonstrates serious shortcomings in both the accuracy and the relevance of the surveys. Despite this, surveys are used by the various league tables to report student satisfaction and, in turn, used by institutions to measure their own performance. Recently the Vice-Chancellor of the researchers' own institution stated "*We must accept that rankings are here to stay, our reputation is suffering as the media is giving more focus to them…rankings are not perfect, they do not tell the whole story of an institution however they do reflect the relative 'quality' or reputation of an institution which can have a deleterious effect…"*

It can be seen from the above literature that there are a number of substantial issues that may impact upon the accuracy of the reported levels of student satisfaction even though this forms a major part of the institutions BI - it follows that inaccurate BI has the potential to lead to the setting of poorly framed organisational decision-making and strategies that have the potential to fail.

This Section of the literature also demonstrates that data collection by the use of student surveys is a key component of the BI of institutions and the Government. Surveys are used in a number of ways to assess the performance of the institution both internally, nationally and internationally, however, the capture of this data is dependent upon a number of factors including the engagement of the student population which is discussed later in this chapter.

2.4.2 The Service-Product Bundle

Sasser et al., (1978) describes the outcome of *service* delivery as a *tangible product* with the *product* offering comprising a *bundle of goods and services*. This bundle, a combination of the service-product, is the inseparable offering of goods and services which, in the HE sector, comprises the academic offering delivered by universities to its students and consists of three distinct elements namely (1) the physical or facilitated goods, (2) the explicit service (the sensual service provided), and (3) the implicit service (the psychological service).

In the HE sector, the facilitated goods, delivered by a university, include lectures, tutorials, hand-out materials, materials available to the students on-line, and any recommended texts and references. Physical facilities such as the lecture theatres, seminar, workshop, IT Labs, and other sundry rooms (including their level of furnishing, decoration, and lighting) are also included as well as ancillary services such as catering, library, and sports and social amenities. Explicit services would include the expertise and knowledge of staff (together with the consistency of teaching quality), the ease of access to all staff (including academic, administrative and support staff) and the level of difficulty of the subject content. Implicit services include items such as the friendliness and approachability of the staff, the level of pastoral care available and provided, the level of diversity and equality, and the availability of staff together with their general capability, and competence. Douglas et al., (2006) develop this and say that implicit services "*also includes the ability of the university's environment to make the student feel comfortable, the sense of competence, confidence and professionalism conveyed by the ambience in lectures and tutorials, feeling that the student's best interest is being served and a feeling that rewards are consistent with the effort put into coursework/examinations.*"

Most Universities currently use a number of different techniques to assess the level of satisfaction that the students have in the service-product bundle ranging from in-house questionnaire surveys to focus groups and formal committees; it should be noted, however, that all techniques are based on the students' perception of the various parts of the service.

Price et al. (2003) investigated the impact that facilities have on the choice of university by undergraduates by surveying a number of universities over a two-year period in order to determine students' reasons for selecting a particular university. The results for each of the two years were fairly consistent, the top eight reasons being the university had the right course, the availability of computers, the quality of the library facilities, the teaching reputation of the institution, the availability of "quiet" areas, the availability of areas for self-study, the quality of public transport in the town/city and, a friendly attitude towards students. This demonstrated that the students' perception of the facilities provided by University provides one of the main drivers for the decision-making process.

According to D'Andrade, R.G. (1984), Deming summarised this position by stating that *"most people form their opinions based on the people that they see, and they are either dissatisfied, or delighted, or some other point on the continuum in between".* This view was supported by Banwet and Datta (2003) in saying *"services are delivered to people by people, and the moments of truth can make or break a university's image".* The conclusion drawn in the various research studies suggest that all employees of a University should adhere to the principles of providing a high quality customer service experience irrespective of whether they are involved in teaching, administration, management, or in a general support role. (Low, 2000).

One of the student-facing functions present in all universities is the Administration Office and Galloway (1998) investigated the role and impact that this function has on the perception of service quality by students. He studied this issue in one UK University and discovered that, not only did the quality of service delivered in this function directly influence the students' perception of the quality of the whole institution, but it also had a direct impact on the academic and technical staff within the Faculty. Galloway concluded that quality of the service delivered by front-line staff had a direct impact on students, potential students, and other stakeholders who they came into contact with and suggested that the main predictors of quality for students were *"whether or not the office has a professional appearance, whether the staff dress smartly (subjective), the incidence of the staff being too busy to help, and* *whether the opening hours personally convenient for the students".* (Galloway, 1998, p.25)

2.4.3 Student Surveys

The results and analysis of sector-wide surveys are designed to measure student satisfaction with their *'student experience'* however, whilst they certainly satisfy much psychometric criteria, they have received widespread criticism of certain aspects of their design and implementation. In the UK, the NSS, which has been administered to final-year undergraduates since 2005, is of particular importance as the results are regarded by the UK Government as one of the key indicators of institutional performance and is promoted as an influencer of the students' choice of institution. Similarly, in Australia, the Course Experience Questionnaire has been used for a number of years to measure graduates' experiences of their programs of study. The U.S. Higher Education sector have a similar survey to the UK NSS being the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and is the prominent instrument used for institutional assessment purposes attempting to measure *"student engagement through survey questions about student attitudes and behaviours"*; it claims to provide *"indirect evidence of student learning"*. All of these surveys were piloted extensively, but Yorke (2009) suggests that *"some technical aspects of the instruments have received less attention than they warrant…[including] response style (in which acquiescence bias figures prominently) and the use - or non-use - of negatively stated items."* (Yorke, 2009, p.721).

2.4.3.1 Cognition and Response

In recent years, cognition has been recognised as playing an important part in responding to questions and this has dominated the literature on surveys (Tourangeau et al., 2000, and Krosnick, 1999). For general surveys, the procedures to enhance response quality are well documented, however, surveying an adult population, such as a student body, is far from simple with slight variations in question wording being likely to affect the responses received; additionally, there is an increasing body of empirical evidence that suggest that both the characteristics of the respondent and the characteristics of the individual question may have an effect on the reliability of the responses to the surveys questions posed. (Krosnick, 1991; Krosnick & Fabrigar, 1997).

Krosnick (1991) developed a *satisficing theory* to explain why the reliability of responses differs between individual respondents and why the responses are sometimes affected by the wording of the questions. From a cognitive perspective, Krosnick suggested that there was a four-stage cognitive operation on the part of respondents - *"Interpret the item and judge its intent, search the memory for relevant information, integrate what has been retrieved into a judgement, and translate the judgement into a response by selecting from the proffered options."* (Krosnick, 1991, p.218) and suggested that some respondents may simply skip lightly through Stages 2 and 3, and select the first response that seems adequate – in this case they would be, what he termed, *"satisficing."* The satisficing theory proposes three stages that impact upon the question-answering process starting with the motivation of the respondent to perform the task, followed by the difficulty of the task, and finishing with the respondents' cognitive ability to perform the task.

McClendon (1991) suggested that, when using a questionnaire with a Likert scale, the respondents only see one side of an issue and this requires them to consider their own substantive alternatives or counter-arguments before they can give a considered response to the question or statement that is given in the questionnaire. This may be fairly straightforward for some items but this may not be the case for all questions or statements; resolving this uncertainty may involve more cognitive effort than many respondents are willing, or able, to give.

When surveys are administered by telephone, or completed under a time constraint self-imposed by the respondent, the answers are produced in a very short time and are likely to reflect what the respondent can call quickly to mind. This induces satisficing with respondents proceeding directly to the fourth stage and Surridge suggests, in her annual report on the NSS surveys, that it may be no coincidence that, when the NSS was administered by telephone, the respondents consistently gave higher ratings than those respondents who completed the corresponding survey by paper or online. (Surridge, 2007).

2.4.3.2 Acquiescence bias

Acquiescence bias, which is often referred to as *'yea-saying',* is the tendency for respondents in questionnaires to always select responses that affirm the statement and is a potential threat to the validity of questionnaire surveys. Rorer (1965) categorised acquiescence bias into the *response set* and *response style.* Response set relates to the conscious or unconscious desire on the part of respondents to present themselves in a particular light whereas response style comprises a *tendency to select a particular response category irrespective of the item content* where, for example, a questionnaire respondent might tend to always choose the positive option in a questionnaire that uses a Likert scale. Rorer also suggests that acquiescence is further complicated with the likelihood (or strong possibility) that the respondent will tend to choose the first-presented option - a primacy effect and this would potentially have a strong influence in surveys, such as the NSS questionnaires, where the items all have Likert scales starting from the left with 'strongly agree' and ending with 'strongly disagree'; In these surveys the primacy effects might be confounded with the acquiescence effects.

Krosnick (1999) reviewed a number of published studies into acquiescence bias and concluded that the proportion of 'yea-saying' respondents was usually around 10%. Johanson and Osborn (2004), in their study, found a broadly similar proportion of 'yea-saying' respondents but extended the results by concluding that the reverse was also true in that 'nay-saying' accounted for 3-5% of responses.

Yorke (2009) also suggested the existence of an additional bias that they termed an *'indifference bias'* where respondents consistently choose the neutral option or mid-point in a Likert scale. Yorke detected a relatively small total of six respondents, from a sample of 7109, who consistently selected the neutral option and interpreted this as indicating indifference and suggested that *"indifference could also be expressed by selecting response categories with minimum (or even without) reference to the item, but would be difficult — if not impossible — to detect".* (Yorke, 2009, p.723)

The mid-point of a Likert scale that goes from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' is also problematic as it is sometimes used by respondents to register views other than neutrality and includes respondents who are demonstrating **ambivalence and indifference**. Some respondents will use this mid-point to register that the item does not apply to them whilst others will use it where they are unable to make a meaningful response or understand the statement or question being posed. (Yorke, 2013). The NSS, the NSSE and the CEQ all use a five-point response scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' and with the mid-point separating agreement from disagreement; this led to some disagreement amongst researchers as to how to best resolve the mid-point controversy. This is particularly relevant in the NSS as the mid-point is taken to be "not satisfied" when the results are analysed, published and then combined, often with other data, to create rankings and league tables.

2.4.4 Rankings and League Tables

Student surveys, league tables, and published rankings of universities are rising in importance with universities aware of the impact that the tables are having on public opinion.

In 2009, Cameron, made a speech on the Conservative party's plans for *giving power back to the people* and the expansion of political accountability. He revealed the central plank of this agenda comprising *setting data free* and said that *"In Britain today, there are over 100,000 public bodies producing a huge amount of information … Most of this information is kept locked up by the state. And what is published is mostly released in formats that mean the information can't be searched or used with other applications, like online maps. This stands in the way of accountability … We are going to set this data free.* (Cameron, 2009).

Since the May 2010 election, the Coalition Government has shown a commitment to a large expansion of the amount of data being made available with much of it available online including data originating from both central and local government which covers a wide range of activities, including financial ones. This is not a new development as, historically in England and Wales, comparative rankings were being published as far back as the nineteenth century where economic performance indicators included comparisons, for example, between primary schools based on the performance of their pupils.

In the latter part of the 20th century, however, there has been a rapid growth in the public sector of interest in the use and measurement of performance indicators for public institutions partly driven by the ideology of the competitive marketplace. The main driver for the provision of publicly accountable information, in the Higher Education sector, was the use of published data enabling prospective students to make a more informed choice of both course and university.

The alternative approach, widely used in the education sector, involves the use of ranking systems or league tables to evaluate the performance of a unit or institution against other comparable units or institutions. In a paper regarding the impact that league tables have on student recruitment, Roberts and Thompson (2007, p.10), define a league table as *"a published set of quantitative data designed to present comparative evidence regarding the quality and/or performance of organisations".* They suggest that data reflecting agreed standards (indicators) should be compiled and published only after the most significant measures of quality and performance are established and agreed.

Combinations of a number of performance indicators are often used for the purposes of ranking the participating institutions and are then published in what are often called “league tables”. These rankings and league tables are used to pressurise the various service providers, whether schools, universities or hospitals etc., into improving their respective performance without having to specify the benchmark performance measure. Visscher (2001) suggests that *"…a fundamental problem that surrounds the discussion of public sector performance monitoring is the relative lack of systematic evaluations of its effects and whether its stated aims have been achieved"*.

2.4.5 Performance Indicators

There are a number of criticisms made on the use of performance indicators as a means of improving organisational performance in the public sector both on theoretical and empirical grounds. Hallgarten (2001, p.189), in his paper on the league tables used for schools, summarises the criticisms of the use of performance indicators by stating that *"it should come as no surprise that performance indicators change an organisation's priorities. That is precisely their purpose. The concern occurs when such indicators skew priorities to the extent that other, normally less measurable, goals are relegated or jettisoned".* As a result of the bad publicity associated with the use of performance indicators in league tables, particularly due to the lack of appropriate evaluations of their usefulness, the disadvantages and weaknesses of league tables have generally tended to be highlighted as opposed to their strengths.

Foley and Goldstein (2012, p.19) quotes Tilley (1994) and suggests that although an indicator is a pointer it is not a direct measure and consequently the term **performance indicator** needs to be taken seriously. They quote Tilley as arguing that "*indicators are better or worse depending on how precisely they tap the underlying feature they are supposed to assess*" and accordingly there is a need to recognise that indicators are precisely that - an indicator - and do not constitute a definitive judgment on institutions (or individuals) but simply an indicator upon which a judgement can be based.

A study by Smith (1995), on the unintended consequences of publishing performance data in the public sector, identified eight important problems which performance monitoring may generate. Firstly, *tunnel vision* where there is a managerial focus on quantifiable phenomena at the expense of all others. However, this suggests that it is the problem of unquantifiable objectives in the public sector that is particularly acute given the diversity of stakeholder preferences that exist. The second problem identified is *sub-optimisation* – the pursuit of narrow local objectives at the expense of the aims of the organisation as a whole and this thought to be particularly prevalent in a public sector environment such as a university. *Myopia* is where performance indicators provide only a snapshot of an organisations activities and ignores the long-term developments that are taking place, and the consequences of this development. Myopia is also thought to be particularly prevalent in higher education where, for example, the QAA make a snapshot inspection of an institution and judges its performance accordingly – this makes the performance indicators measured by any inspection an imperfect tool for assessing current management practice, due to the cumulative nature of developments. Three of the problems identified by Smith were related to data with *measure fixation*, firstly where institutions concentrate and focus on the measures of success rather than managing the underlying objectives, secondly *misrepresentation*, where there is a deliberate manipulation of the data sets that are collected and, finally *misinterpretation,* an unintentional misreading of the data where institutions either fail to understand the data correctly or are unaware of its limitations.

Two of the more serious unintended consequences of league tables relate to organisational behaviour. The organisation may deliberately manipulate its *behaviour* which is aimed at maximising the institutions' league table position and is known as *gaming*. An example of this is where the institution concentrates on teaching students how to pass a specific test rather than teaching to a syllabus. At the other end of the scale of organisational behaviour is *ossification* where organisations become paralysed due to performance management processes which create an excessively rigid system of management. Once the performance data has been captured the next stage in the process is for the data to be reported and this raises a number of issues with three important conflicts to be resolved. Firstly, where there is a conflict between the accessibility of the information (together with the intelligibility of the information and measures used) against the accuracy of the information that is to be published, secondly between the availability of information and its validity as a performance measure and finally, between the qualitative and quantitative data captured and the data-capture measures used. (Bird et al., 2005).

The majority of the existing literature and on-going debates relates to the growing league table culture in schools although the publication of the Browne report *"Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education. An independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance"* (Browne, 2010), and the subsequent White Paper "*Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System"* (DfBIS, 2011), confirmed the desire for the increased use of league tables by students (including international students), foreign governments, and funding bodies as a means to inform their decisions as to the choice of university. The effect of this suggests that universities can no longer afford to ignore their overall positioning in the various league tables.

The globalisation of the higher education sector has also led to universities across the world competing for students, staff, and funding with the result that internationalisation is taking a higher profile on the agenda of all institutions. By the end of 2010, throughout the world, there were 3.5 million students studying overseas with the numbers of international students expected to rise by a further 10% in the current decade; although the rate of increase is expected to slow, the overall numbers of these students are expected to continue to rise. Figures published by HESA confirm that approximately 12% of all students at UK universities are from overseas countries categorised by the British Council as being from outside the EU. As the higher education sector becomes increasingly market oriented, where prospective students are faced with an increasing level of choice in which to invest a significant amount of money, the growing demand for information on the various universities has increased the importance of the published league tables and other published performance indicators. (British Council, 2012).

Vaughn (2002) identified three broad types of ranking systems that were being used with the first, and most common, being based upon the aggregating of a variety of different indicators to create an overall single score for each institution. The specific example cited by Vaughn was the university rankings published in the UK. The second type is where the rankings are based across university departments, being based upon subject areas, rather than the individual institution. Finally, the third category being *other* and includes all ranking systems that do not fall within the first two categories. Vaughn created this third category due to the large number of new ranking systems that have been developed over the years prior to his study and gave an example of a Japanese survey undertaken by Recruit Ltd. that contains a total of 88 questions in the survey; the results are published for each of the individual questions ranking the institutions in order of result and it is possible for an institution to have a different ranking in each of the 88 questions with no attempt at providing a single ranking for each institution.

Bowden suggested that it is easy to conclude that some institutions may be tempted to manipulate the variables to enhance their position in the published tables albeit there is no actual evidence to suggest that this is happening. (Bowden, 2000). In this regard HEFCE, in their review, reminded readers that *"data require(s) interpretation and some conceptual framework, but league tables often combine performance indicators in an ad hoc way that may not even reflect the compilers' own concept of quality"* concluding that *"part of the problem of university rankings is that it is impossible to reach a universally acceptable definition of the concept of academic 'quality'."* (HEFCE, 2008 p.12).

Many of the rankings published as league tables fail to provide either an empirical justification or a theoretical justification for the selection of the indicators chosen and the weightings applied to them (Dill and Soo, 2005). Other researchers, notably Bowden (2000) suggest that the weightings applied to the various indicators were questionable; this is supported by the HEFCE report on the impact of league tables on higher education in England (HEFCE, 2008) which concludes that the choice of indicators were "*questionable"* or *"lacks conversion rationale".*

In a study on the benchmarking of universities, published in the Oxford Review of Education, Turner (2005) reflects that the method of aggregation commonly used by the majority of the league tables is *"excessively simplistic"* and argues that *"simply adding indicators together does not allow for a robust or meaningful ranking system."* This is supported by HEFCE (2008, p. 16) in their review of league tables when they referred to a large number of discrepancies in the weightings that are applied to the various indicators and provide a number of examples: *"entry standards"* receive a weighting of 11% in The Times league table compared to a 23% weighting in The Sunday Times league table, however, *"staff-student ratio"* receives a weighting of 17% in The Guardian league table compared to a weighting of 9% in The Sunday Times league table. This demonstrates the low level of consistency that exists across these three published league tables. Clearly substantial differences such as the above can lead to significant changes to an institutions ranking in a particular table and HEFCE (2008, p. 20) comment that the differences in the way in which the various weightings are applied, and the single ranking calculated, are often hidden within the body of the league table. They claim that there is insufficient transparency in the calculation of the rankings and state that the compilers should clarify any distinctions they make between inputs, processes and outcomes.

Although the calculation of the aggregate can have dramatic effects on an institution's ranking, these discrepancies are often ignored in regard to information made available for prospective students. The NSS, however, is different from the other rankings in that it relies solely on the views of existing students and is, of course, also used by a number of other league tables as a component part of their overall ranking system. A significant criticism, however, on the NSS is that it only surveys final year undergraduate students and Bowden (2000) supports this criticism and argues that, as well as a diversity of indicators in surveys, there should also be a diversity of students included in the survey.

The five main surveys (Sunday Times University Guide, The Times Good University Guide, The Guardian University Guide, the Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities and the QS World University Rankings) do not provide a total coverage of the university sector as these surveys mainly concentrate on full-time undergraduate courses and base their rankings solely at institutional level and not subject level. This necessarily excludes all of the postgraduate and research provision and a large number of specialist institutions that teach predominantly and/or part-time students. (HEFCE, 2008 p.5)

This view is well supported by a number of eminent researchers who continue to argue that the traditional league tables and rankings were ill-equipped to cater for *"non-standard students"* and those studying for qualifications other than a degree. There is also an assumption that all students are living and studying away from home whereas, in recent years, there has been a noted increase in the number of home-based students; and this trend is expected to increase in the light of the significant increase in the tuition fees paid by students. (Sarrico et al., 1997, Eccles, 2002). Based on these assumptions, the league tables omit a number of indicators that are more relevant to the non-standard students including part-time students and students studying on distance learning programs. This was highlighted in the HEFCE report which also commented that living costs, bursaries, and non-academic facilities are also omitted. The HEFCE report also concluded that what they called *"traditional"* applicants namely *“younger applicants with higher academic achievements and social class"* were more likely to use league tables to assist in their choice of course and institution compared to other applicants outside this group. (HEFCE, 2008)

Given current government policy in regard to the transparency of data in the higher education sector, there is an increasing need for universities to understand, and manage, the tensions that exist between institutional performance (as demonstrated by their position in the league table) and their policies and priorities with those of the government. Examples of this are provided in the HEFCE report and include policies and priorities relating to academic standards, increasing demand for widening participation, and policy development in relation to community engagement (HEFCE, 2008 p.6).

According to HEFCE, league tables are already *"being used for a broader range of purposes than originally intended and being bestowed with more meaning than the data alone may bear."* (HEFCE, 2008 p.7). Foley and Goldsteyn (2012) suggest that the general consensus appears to be that league tables are likely to remain in a prominent position in university education and will increasingly influence all aspects of the higher education landscape. They conclude that, as a consequence of this, all universities will be compelled to design their strategies in relation to their league table rankings, and their aspirations, irrespective of any concerns they may have about the quality of the published data that is currently made available to students.

This Section of the literature demonstrates that data collected via student surveys is a key component of the BI of both local institutions and the Government and is used in a number of ways to monitor, assess and publicise the performance of the institution internally, nationally and internationally.

2.5 Student Engagement

Having discussed Student Satisfaction, the literature review continues with a review of education specific literatures and starts with a focus on student engagement, continues with Consumerism within Higher Education, the Dimensions of Student Engagement, Capturing and Assessing the Student Experience, and finally finishes with the issue of Student Engagement with Surveys.

Student engagement is an integral component of UK higher education, features strongly in the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education, and is associated with the principle of student involvement being a continuous and dynamic process. Student engagement has also become one of the metrics by which UK universities are measured and judged and, accordingly, students are expected to fully participate in quality enhancement and assurance processes. (Quality Assurance Agency, 2012). Luescher-Mamashela (2010, p.279) found that universities are increasingly including students within their management structures, and management committees, and concluded that universities are becoming more clearly defined by their market position and, as a result, the relationship between the university and their students appears to be undergoing a radical transformation.

2.5.1 Consumerism and Higher Education

Investment, freedom of choice, and value for money are the three themes that have dominated recent debate and literature in higher education with Molesworth et al. (2009) suggesting that students have been transformed into *"demanding customers"* rather than the traditional view of them being *"willing learners"*. Neary & Winn (2009, p.208) argue that the concept of applying free-market principles to the Higher Education sector require universities to focus on enhancing student satisfaction to enable customers to make purchasing decisions that are based on contentment with the services that are being offered, i.e. the delivery of education, and that this change extends free-market thinking into the arena of public service management although they suggest that there is *"scant evidence that students' choices are based on traditional consumer principles".*

Many universities have rebranded the student as constituting a "client" with a result of that enhancing customer satisfaction has become a management tool with Little & Williams (2010, p.125) suggesting that this would explain why *"university managers have shown least resistance to the notion of student as consumer, despite widespread criticism from academics and students."* Molesworth et al. (2009) take this a stage further and suggest that *"managerialism has encouraged a shift from an expert-led model of curriculum development (where academics decide what is best) to a consumer-oriented model".*

This move towards consumerism has, in the UK, been fed by the growing importance and reliance on the NSS which Gibbs (2010) says reinforces a consumerist focus on satisfaction and appears to largely ignore student engagement. This, however, directly contradicts the UK QAA guidance which places student engagement as a core component of quality enhancement at every level (QAA, 2012). Gvaramadze (2011, p.30) interprets this as demanding a degree of student participation *"that extends way beyond simple customer: provider relationships."*

2.5.2 Dimensions of Student Engagement

Trowler (2010), in a report entitled *"student engagement literature review"* for the Higher Education Academy, identified three interrelated dimensions of engagement namely **behavioural engagement** (*"students who are behaviourally engaged would typically comply with behavioural norms, such as attendance and involvement, and would demonstrate the absence of disruptive or negative behaviour"*), **emotional engagement** (*"students who engage emotionally would experience affective reactions such as interest, enjoyment, or a sense of belonging"*), and **cognitive engagement** *("Cognitively engaged students would be invested in their learning, would seek to go beyond the requirements, and would relish challenge"*). (Trowler, 2010, p.5).

The conventional educational processes are, however, often characterised by *"alienation or isolation"* (Taylor and Wilding, 2009) with Coates (2005, p.32) summarising the general consensus that *"enhancement is best achieved when students are active participants in their own education"*.

Robust course representation was identified as the key activity in the QAA (2011) report "*Outcomes from institutional audit: 2007–09: Student engagement and support"* which reveals that contemporary policy emphasises student participation in assurance, curriculum development, and strategic management with the central theme being the development of mechanisms for enhancing student engagement.

Ramsden (2008) argues that the central theme in the notion of representation is the assumption that representatives will influence policy and that this will be gathered through the expression of collective needs and perspectives. This is supported by Little et al. (2009) who proposed that course representatives across institutions had a similar theme which centred on gathering the views and experiences of fellow students and then contributing to the relevant decision-making bodies.

2.5.3 Capturing and Assessing the Student Experience

The main thrust of current research and criticisms of the published surveys is based on the effectiveness of the current league tables as a means of comparing institutions and courses.

Despite all of the criticism relating to the use of the data, the data that is published appears to be taken at face value whether it originates from the NSS (or league tables), or local institutional surveys, and the main thrust taken by institutions, when responding to the survey results, is to ensure that higher levels of satisfaction are achieved the following year. At no stage does there appear to be any enquiry as to whether the data that is published is accurate. There is, however, anecdotal evidence to suggest that the effectiveness of the surveys in capturing the opinions of the students is flawed and the research being carried out by this researcher is based upon the hypothesis that the NSS does not accurately represent the current view of the students who participate in the survey regarding the "quality of the course as a whole"; this, of course, is the stated aim of the NSS.

The strategy used by many universities is based on an analysis of the results of the NSS with earlier research undertaken by this researcher suggesting that universities use a reactive approach rather than a proactive approach (Document 3).

2.5.4 Student Engagement with Surveys

The increasing emphasis on student engagement in higher education in the UK has also highlighted the importance of measuring the student experience and, traditionally, student experience surveys have been used as indicators of quality which in turn, partly, inform the rankings of HEIs in league tables; these surveys are also used by HEIs to assist with initiatives for quality enhancement.

To improve/increase the reliability and usefulness of the data captured by student experience surveys, it is important that students engage with the survey process but, unfortunately, these surveys frequently suffer from low response rates.

Porter (2004) recognised the commonality of low participation rates in student surveys whereas Surridge (2009b) finds that the surveys decrease their generalisability due to the differences between the attitudes and experiences of the participants and non-participants.

Furedi (2011) suggests that comparing institutions based on results of student experience surveys may be misleading and, as institutional policy is currently being informed by the results of these surveys, states that this raises potential issues due to the imbalance between student opinion (as captured by the NSS) and the students' reluctance to give their views.

Groves et al. (2006, p.731), however, noted that *"non-response does not necessarily cause non-response bias or invalidate survey findings in all instances"*. Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf (2008) suggest that many students are not sure what the surveys are used for and do not understand the impact of the survey on either the teaching staff or the institution.

Other researchers have found that many students do not believe that the course evaluations exercise has any real impact (Campbell and Bozeman, 2008).

2.6 Relevance to the Research

The above Sections discuss the various literatures related to the subject matter of the research and outlines the various themes that informed the overall research undertaken by the researcher. This led the researcher to conclude that league tables, and the ranking systems, are key components in the Dominant Logic of the institution influencing the organisational decision-making processes in regard to strategic and operational management.

Great relevance is placed by BCU (and many other HEIs) on the results of both national and local student surveys with operational and strategic decisions being taken as a consequence of the results of the surveys and the published league tables. Many HEIs include the position of the institution in the league tables as a key component of their Corporate and Strategic Plan and use the results of the surveys, and published league tables, to develop their strategy through the use of action plans and various other initiatives. They subsequently frame institution-wide policies and strategies based on improving their position in the league tables with the NSS being a core component in their thinking and decision-making processes.

However, if the results of the surveys do not truly represent the views of all of the students (or a statistically significant proportion of the students), the survey does not provide the information that it aims to capture, or the information that is provided is misunderstood, it is questionable whether the importance placed by institutions on the results of the surveys and league tables is justifiable.

The above demonstrates why the researcher chose to position the study in the literature, and how the literature informed the work being undertaken. The research seeks to determine whether the views of the student population are accurately captured in the NSS, the extent to which the students understand the meaning and importance of the NSS as a management tool, and whether the use of the published results of the surveys (and subsequent league tables) effectively informs the setting of strategies.

3.0 Research Design, Methods and Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the research design, methods and methodology appropriate to the overall aim of the research project designed to help organisations understand, manage, and react to, the NSS more effectively and efficiently. This will improve managers' ability to make informed decisions by using the results of the NSS as a management tool for setting effective strategies aimed at improving the student experience.

This chapter opens with a discussion of the researchers' research philosophy, followed by methodology and techniques, moves on to provide an outline of the research undertaken, walks through the qualitative and quantitative data collection and finishes with an examination of the ethical considerations associated with the research.

3.1. Ontology

Ontology is the philosophical study of the nature of being, becoming, existence, or reality, as well as the basic categories of being and their relations and is traditionally listed as a part of the major branch of philosophy known as "metaphysics"; ontology deals with questions concerning what entities exist, or can be said to exist, and how, according to their similarities and/or differences, such entities can either be grouped, related within a hierarchy, or subdivided.

One common approach to defining entities is by answering a series of questions such as "what is it, how is it, how much is it and where is it?" Other examples of ontological questions include "are all entities objects, how many levels of existence or ontological levels are there, what constitutes the identity of an object and when does an object go out of existence as opposed to merely changing?" and the questions extend to whether, or not, beings exist other than in the modes of objectivity and subjectivity.

3.2. Epistemology

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge and concerns the question of what is, or should be, regarded as acceptable knowledge in a given discipline. It questions what knowledge is, how it can be acquired, and the extent to which knowledge pertinent to any given subject, or entity, can be acquired and can or should be studied according to the same principles, procedures, and ethos as the natural sciences.

3.2.1 Positivist Research

The position that affirms the importance of imitating the natural sciences is invariably associated with an epistemological position known as positivism defined by Bryman and Bell (2003, p.16) as a "*position that advocates the application of the method of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond*." Positivism also includes a number of principles: "only phenomena, and hence knowledge, confirmed by the senses can genuinely be warranted as knowledge - *this is known as the principle of phenomenalism*. The purpose of theory is to generate hypotheses that are able to be tested and accordingly allow explanations of laws to be assessed - *known as the principle of deductivism.* Knowledge is arrived at through the gathering of facts that provide the basis for laws - *the principle of inductivism*. *Science must be conducted in a way that is value free (objective)* and there is a clear distinction between scientific statements and normative statements*",* i.e. subjective rather than objective statements, *"with the belief that the former are the true domain of the scientist."* (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p.16). Fisher (2007, p.17) takes this further and suggests that "*the intention of positivism is to produce general laws that can be used to predict behaviour,* in terms of probability at least, if not with absolute certainty these general laws would form and open an orthodox body of knowledge, and *the positivist method would be the standard approach for all scientific endeavours."*

The main advantage of positivist research is that it relies on quantitative data that positivists believe to be more reliable than qualitative research and, accordingly, is more **scientific** and **trustworthy** providing objective information researchers use to make scientific assumptions. Positivism also follows a well-defined structure and, since there are set laws and rules to be followed, there will be little room for error thereby making the study more accurate by using objective mathematical and scientific tools; however, some scholars put forward the view that since positivists believe that everything can be measured and calculated there is a linked tendency towards inflexibility resulting in unexplained phenomena being disregarded.

3.2.2 Interpretive Research (Interpretivism or Phenomenology)

Bryman and Bell (2003, p.17) define Interpretivism as *"subsuming the views of writers who have been critical of the application of the scientific model to the study of the social world…they share a view that the subject matter of the social sciences - people and their institutions - is fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences."* researchers who use this stance believe that "*reality is socially constructed* and that our understanding of reality is not a simple account of what is, rather it is something that people in societies and groups form from their interpretation of reality which is in turn influenced by their values and their way of seeing the world." (Fisher, 2007, p.20).

The main advantage of phenomenology is that it offers the prospect of authentic accounts of complex phenomena with the researcher allowed to deal with the complexity by looking beneath the superficial aspects of social reality and provide descriptions that are detailed enough to reflect the complexity of the social world. It is also suited to small scale research as it generally relies on in-depth interviews without expensive and sophisticated technology used for the purposes of data collection and analysis enabling the researcher to capture rich descriptions of personal experiences in a way that is immediately accessible and interesting to a wide range of readers. The main disadvantage, on the other hand, is that the emphasis phenomenology places on subjectivity, description and interpretation contrasts with the scientific emphasis on objectivity, analysis, and measurement leading, as interpretivist research does not normally involve large numbers or instances of the phenomena being studied, to issues and questions about whether the findings are generalisable.

It is useful, at this point, to consider the differences between Positivism and Interpretivism illustrated in Table 3, below.

The current research being undertaken presented the researcher with a decision as to the ontological position and whether the researcher's position was that reality "is out there, independent of the observer, doesn't change and has its own laws" or whether it was one where "reality is socially constructed". Viewing Table 3, above, it was possible to position the research within either a positivist or interpretivist framework but with a realisation that the two paradigms were appropriate to different aspects of the research being carried out.

Assumptions	Positivism	Interpretivism
Nature of reality	Objective, tangible, single	Socially constructed, multiple
Goal of research	Explanation, strong prediction	Understanding, weak prediction
Focus of interest	What is general, average and representative	What is specific, unique, and deviant
Knowledge generated	Laws	Meanings
	Absolute (time, context, and value free)	Relative (time, context, culture, value bound)
Subject/researcher relationship	Rigid separation	Interactive, cooperative, participative
Desired information	How many people think and do a specific thing, or have a specific problem	What some people think and do, what kind of problems they are confronted with, and how they deal with them

Table 3: Comparison of main features of Positivism and Interpretivism (Pizam and Mansfield, 2000, p.23)

Accordingly, it can be said that *"whereas Ontology is reality, epistemology is the relationship between that reality and the researcher; and methodology is the technique used by the researcher to discover that reality."* (Carson et al., 2001, p.6).

3.2.3 Methodological Pluralism – Mixed Epistemology

A frequently asked question is whether it is possible to mix and match different approaches in research and whether it is possible to combine realist research with an interpretive approach. Gill and Johnson (1997) argued that, when a realist stance is taken, aspects of an interpretivist approach could be brought in as a useful adjunct to the research but claim that the reverse is not true; they argued that taking a positivist perspective would undermine the methodological basis of the interpretivist approach. In time, multi-strategy research methodology was recognised and accepted by fusing different methodologies with the aim of providing a richer insight into organisations and their workings. (Dainty, 2008).

"Methodological pluralism" or *"mixed methods"* is an emerging research paradigm used in social research aimed at discovering the truths and reality about certain social phenomena and Creswell et al (2003, P. 165) define a mixed methods research study as *"the collection or analysis of both qualitative and/or quantitative data in a single study in which the data is collected concurrently or sequentially, given a priority, and involves the integration of the data at one or more stages in the process of research"*.

This focuses on the collection, analysis and integration of a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data confirming that the concept of integration is of primary importance in methodological pluralism research studies.

Morse & Chung (2003) argue that it is possible to demonstrate the usefulness of methodological pluralism by the picture of the social world that this method provides due to the additional data collection strategies increasing the scope of the project and argue that combining both qualitative and quantitative methods will provide a more balanced perspective, overcome the limitations afforded by a single method, and move toward holism - the philosophical concept that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

According to Denscombe (2007, pp. 118-119) the advantages of methodological pluralism include providing a more comprehensive account of the research being undertaken, clear links between different methods and the different types of data, a heightened sensitivity to the nature of triangulation, and an approach that is problem-driven rather than theory-driven with an underlying philosophy of pragmatism. However, the same author identifies two main disadvantages starting with the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research tending to oversimplify issues and the underlying philosophy of pragmatism being open to misinterpretation.

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) concluded that methodological pluralism retains all the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research but with weaknesses mainly related to time, resources and training etc. but suggest that these weaknesses could generally be overcome by most researchers when carrying out research.

3.3 Research Methodology

The focus of this research is upon the managers' use of the NSS as a robust tool to guide strategy in regard to improving the student experience. By the use of a single case study, the researcher examines the endeavours by the organisation to make informed strategic choices on the basis of the outcomes of the various surveys. The researcher undertakes a critical review of the potential of the NSS and, with concomitant use of positivist data, determines the robustness of the NSS as a management tool.

When taking an interpretivist stance, although the analyses of qualitative data can provide certain answers, there is additional value in also using a quantitative approach which would add value and sense-make of the issues. In the research project, the researcher identified a number of research questions in regard to the use of surveys and student satisfaction, and concluded that there was a clear rationale for using a single case study with methodological pluralism.

A small part of the research being undertaken fits very clearly into the positivist epistemology as it deals with numbers, laws, truths, and *things can be validated, tested, and repeated etc*., however, the major part of the research fits into the social constructionist view where an interpretivist epistemology should be used as the results are based on *what people think, believe and assume.*

Accordingly, for this research a pragmatic, mixed method, approach was chosen using BCU, in general, and BCBS, in particular, as a single case study for addressing the questions that are being investigated. This distinguishes the research approach from a purely qualitative approach, based on the philosophy of Interpretivism, and a purely quantitative approach, based on a philosophy of positivism.

Theoretically it would have been possible to take either an Interpretivist or a Positivist approach to deal with the three Research Questions but a mixed methods approach was chosen because of triangulation of the two approaches within the case study being consistent with the use of both interviews and questionnaires. The researcher will present to the reader, below, an example of methodological pluralism (mixed methods) within the case study in which there are examples of both positivist and interpretivist research methods; the various techniques that were used are located in the mixed methods domain using both primary and secondary data albeit the secondary data was collected by the researcher over a four-year period.

3.4. Research Strategy

A research strategy is a plan of action that gives direction to the researcher's efforts enabling the research to be conducted systematically and methodically. Saunders et al (2009, p.600) defined research strategy as "*the general plan of how the researcher will go about answering the research questions*". On a similar note, Bryman (2008, p.698) identified research strategy as "*a general orientation to the conduct of research.*" This Section details the strategy used by the researcher to complete the study.

3.4.1 Case Studies

Case studies are arguably the most useful and appropriate method to answer the type of research problems described by Perry (2001) as the *"how and why"* kind when Perry drew on an extensive body of literature describing a case study as *"an investigation of a contemporary, dynamic phenomenon and its emerging body of knowledge…using interviews, observation and other multiple sources of knowledge"*

Yin (1994, p.13) offers a technical definition of a case study as *"an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident."* Accordingly, case studies are best equipped to deal with situations when a holistic perspective of both the context and object of study is required.

A case study strategy *"investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context where multiple sources of evidence are used to construct or inform the phenomenon"* (Yin, 2003, p.23) and is used to enable the researcher to provide a holistic account of the subject area of the research being undertaken enabling the researcher to focus on the interrelationships between all of the factors including individual people, groups of people, and policies etc. within the subject matter of the case study. Yin (2003, p.13) identifies the various characteristics of a case study as the ability to “*investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context”*, the fact that it has a “*single site such as a team or an organisation”*, it uses a variety of research methods easily “*accommodating both qualitative material and quantitative data”* and suggests that case study researchers *“tend to use theoretical propositions developed prior to the case study to guide the data collection”.* Fisher (2007, p.60), however, suggests that case studies *“inevitably lack representativeness”* and there are issues with generalisability but that “*the power of the case study lies in the capacity of the case study to provide insights and resonance for the reader”.* Watson (1994), on the other hand, argues that case studies do allow the researcher to make *“generalisations…about organisational processes”* as the case study approach both enables the researcher to identify issues that influence senior managers and the extent to which the managers respond to those issues. Applying that principle to this research, the case study approach enables the researcher to identify whether or not the publication of the results of the NSS, subsequent league tables, and the position of the institution in the published league table, influence the behaviour of the senior managers and the resultant strategies that they develop.

Fisher (2007, pp.60-61) suggests that the researcher *"might be able to use the case study in the same way that a scientist uses experiments"* to determine whether the behaviour of senior managers is influenced by the theories being researched or whether it *"could be equally well explained by other theories".* It is accepted that generalisation is a potential issue and possible weakness with implications for the application of professional practice to other similar HEIs, however, the fact that the researcher is currently employed in a senior management role at BCU allows access to senior staff and their views to a level that may not have been available to outsiders however this must be balanced against the intrinsic bias of the researcher.

The alternatives, facing the researcher, comprised a full blown comparative study of a number of institutions or a unitary case study of BCU.

As the researcher worked for the organisation, where nobody had done an in-depth study of this type of institution and these issues, the researcher was in a position to *“soak and poke”*, Fenno (1986) so the researcher decided that it was appropriate to undertake a unitary case study due to the richness and depth of available data, ease of access to the data, and the researchers' in-depth local knowledge of the institution based on this rich local knowledge of setting and circumstances. However, the researcher also visited a number of other universities but only to frame the examination of BCU.

3.4.1.1 Advantages/Limitations of Case Studies

The main benefit of using a case study approach, according to Denscombe (2007, pp. 45) is that it allows the researcher to *"deal with the subtleties and intricacies of complex social situations"* enabling the researcher to take a holistic approach to relationships and social processes that is beyond the scope of a survey approach.

At the same time, it allows the researcher to use a variety of research methods and effectively encourages the use of multiple methods however, through the use of multiple sources of data, the researcher is able to validate the data captured through triangulation.

Bennett and Elman (2010, pp.505-506) also identify the advantages of single case studies that are implicitly comparative, namely either deviant, most-likely, least-likely, or crucial cases. Of these the deviant cases are those whose outcome does not fit with prior theoretical expectations or wider empirical patterns. However, the use of inductive process tracing has the advantage of potentially generating new hypotheses from these cases either particular to any individual case or potentially generalisable to a broader population.

Often the limitation of a case study approach is the difficulty of negotiating access to relevant actors however, in this research study, this proved not to be an issue due to the seniority of the researcher within the organisation being studied and the fact that the institution supported the research being undertaken.

The use of a single case study has, however, been subject to a number of criticisms, commonly cited as concern over the inter-related issues of external validity, methodological rigour, and the difficulty of researcher subjectivity.

With regard to the methodological rigour, Maoz (2002, pp.164-165) suggests that *"the use of the case study absolves the author from any kind of methodological* *considerations. Case studies have become in many cases a synonym for freeform research where anything goes".*

However, Yin (2009, pp.14-15) suggests that the greatest concern, due to a relative absence of methodological guidelines, is the absence of systematic procedures for case study research.

A second issue concerns the reliability and replicability of various forms of single case study analysis and is usually linked to the broader critique of qualitative research methods as a whole. Berg and Lune (2010, p.340) suggest that *"quantitative measures **appear** objective, but only so long as we don't ask questions about where and how the data were produced… pure objectivity is not a meaningful concept if the goal is to measure intangibles [as] these concepts only exist because we can interpret them".*

Verschuren (2003) agrees that the question of researcher-subjectivity is valid but suggests that is may simply be a methodological critique of what are less formalised and researcher-independent methods.

The third, and arguably most pronounced, limitation of single case study research is the issue of external validity or generalisability. How is it possible for a single case to reliably offer any conclusions beyond the particular? King et al (1994, p.212) suggest that *"we always do better (or, in the extreme, no worse) with more observation as the basis of our generalisation…in all social science research and all prediction, it is important that we be as explicit as possible about the degree of uncertainty that accompanies out prediction"*.

There are, however, a number of important qualifications to the argument about generalisation, firstly in relation to an idiographic single-outcome case study. Criticism of generalisability is of lesser importance when the intention is one of particularisation as Eckstein (1975, p.134) writes *"[the criticism is] mitigated by the fact that its capability to do so [is] never claimed by its exponents; in fact, it is often explicitly repudiated"*.

The second qualification concerns the difference between statistical generalisation and analytical generalisation with single case studies being less appropriate for statistical generalisation but arguably retaining significance for analytical generalisation. Gerring (2004, p.350) explains this by stating that *"theory confirmation/disconfirmation is not the case study's strong suit".*

The final qualification relates to the issue of case selection with Seawright and Gerring (2008) noting that it is possible to increase the generalisability of case studies with the strategic selection of cases to study and suggest that representative or random samples may not provide the richest insight. Flyvbjerg, (2006) concludes that "***properly used****, atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors… and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied"*.

May (2011, p.226) writes *"the goal for many proponents of case studies […] is to overcome dichotomies between generalizing and particularizing, quantitative and qualitative, deductive and inductive techniques".*

Single case studies possess clear limitations but any research method involves necessary trade-offs; inherent weaknesses of any one method can potentially be offset by situating them within a broader, pluralistic mixed-method research strategy. Whether or not single case studies are used in this fashion, they clearly have a great deal to offer.

3.4.2. Case Study Methods/Techniques

This research uses a number of different data capture techniques and is based on a case study of a single university (BCU) with the data mainly captured from within BCBS. The four main techniques (questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documents) were used by the researcher in this case studies for the collection of empirical data. The methods will now be discussed.

3.4.2.1 Questionnaires and the use of the Likert Scale

There are many types of questionnaires varying enormously in terms of their purpose, size and appearance, however, they all contain a number of features including a format designed to collect information for subsequent data analysis consisting of a written list of standard questions.

Questionnaires are best used with large numbers of respondents and where the information that is required tends to be fairly straightforward, relatively brief, and uncontroversial. It also helps when the social climate allows respondents to complete the questionnaire allowing full and honest answers; and when the respondents are able to read and understand the questions.

The criteria for evaluating a research questionnaire comprises an assessment of the likelihood that the questionnaire will provide full information on the research topic, the likelihood that the questionnaire will provide accurate information, the likelihood of achieving a meaningful response rate, and the adoption of an ethical stance which recognises the respondent's right to have the information they supply treated according to strict professional standards.

The NSS involves measuring students' opinions and attitudes to "*satisfaction*". There are many different approaches to capturing this opinion with controversy over which is the most appropriate measure to use. One alternative is the use of *objective measures* where individuals are asked to complete measurement scales, such as Likert-type scales or the Semantic Differential, whereas other researchers use *subjective measures* where individuals are interviewed, or complete tests such as the Rorschach or the Thematic Apperception Test. The NSS uses a Likert-type scale that follows the original format devised by Rensis Likert in the 1930s.

There is no standard use of a numerical scale, however, the majority of surveys using a Likert-type scale use a 5 or 7 scale points. Hartley noted that "s*ome use only two points: some use 100 (percentages)*" but concluded that research *"does not suggest any real reason for favouring any one number of scale points over any other number."* (Hartley, 2013, p.85).

Hartley & Betts (2013) found that the scales are usually rated from low to high, with the negative pole being located on the left hand side of the survey and the positive pole on the right hand side. They state that earlier research has shown *"that slightly higher scores are obtained on the topic in question with English speaking respondents, when this is reversed – that is when the scales start with the high positive values on the left…"* (Betts & Hartley, 2012, p.319). This is the case with the NSS which uses the scale "Definitely Agree", "Mostly agree", "Neither agree nor disagree”, “Mostly disagree”, “Definitely disagree”, and “Not applicable” from left to right on the questionnaire. Accordingly, the high, positive, values are on the left and the low, negative, values on the right with an additional final option of “not applicable” also on the right side of the scale.

Hartley (2013) suggests that it is helpful to have some questions in a survey that are “negatively worded” where respondents are required to reverse their logical thinking when considering whether they agree or disagree with the statement or question. The responses to these statements or questions would then be are usually “reversed scored” to enable them to be included in the analysis of the scores.

It is noted that the NSS only uses positively worded questions with a single statement in each of the questions and the implications of this is discussed below. However, a recent review of the NSS undertaken by Callender, Ramsden and Griggs recommends that at least one group of questions is phrased negatively *“to counter the problem that some students are completing the NSS without sufficient thought”.* (HEFCE, 2014a, p. 9).

3.4.2.2. Advantages/Disadvantages of Questionnaires

The main advantage of questionnaires is that they are economical insofar that it is possible to obtain a substantial amount of research data for a relatively low cost in terms of materials, time and expenditure. They are easy to organise and will supply standardised answers in that all respondents are asked exactly the same question with no scope for variation. A well-designed questionnaire also has the advantage that pre-coded answers can be used where questions are posed in such a way that they are answered using a Likert-scale. Depending on the system used to capture the data, questionnaires can also lead to a higher level of data accuracy in that many completed questionnaires can be fed straight into a data file that automates the processes of data entry and analysis.

Standard questionnaires have a number of disadvantages comprising, most notable, the restriction and frustration experienced by respondents when faced with pre-coded answers set out in the questionnaire leading to the temptation not to treat “tick boxes” seriously. Linked to this is that pre-coded questions can introduce bias although good research practice should minimise this. This contrasts with face-to-face interviews where the researcher can introduce a holistic approach to observing the respondent and the respondent’s behaviour and body language.

3.4.2.3. Relevance of Questionnaires to the Research Questions

Questionnaires were used to capture the views of the students over a four-year period with students from all three undergraduate years being surveyed to investigate the level of satisfaction of students over the life cycle of a typical undergraduate student. Questionnaires were issued to students twice a year, once during each Semester, on all modules being studied and the results were analysed. This relates specifically to the first research question in that it enables the researcher to compare the views of students across all three years of study. The design of the questionnaire and the management of the survey are discussed in Section 3.5.1.1, below.

3.4.2.4. Interviews

Interviews are an effective proposition for researchers and draw on the existing conversational skills that researchers already possess albeit interviews also involve a set of assumptions and understandings about the interview proposition which are not normally associated with a casual conversation. (Denscombe, 2007, p. 174).

The interviewee, when agreeing to participate in a research interview, must give consent. Interviewees are able to give responses that are treated as being “on the record” and “for the record,” however, it is possible for the interviewees to stipulate that their words are not to be attributed to them and/or not to be made publicly available; the default position is “on the record” and “for the record.”

There are a number of different types of research interview including structured interviews, which involve tight control over the format of the questions and answers (and where the researcher has a predetermined list of questions which will be put to the interviewee) and, semi-structured interviews. The researcher in semi-structured interviews has a clear list of issues to be addressed and questions to be asked although the researcher is able to be flexible in terms of the order in which the questions are put whilst allowing the interviewee to speak more widely on other issues as they develop. Unstructured interviews take semi-structured interviews to a further level to the extent that emphasis is placed on the interviewees' thoughts and the researcher simply starts by introducing a scene or a topic and allowing the interviewee to develop their own ideas and trains of thought.

The most common form of semi-structured or unstructured interview is the one-to-one format which obviously involves a meeting between the researcher and the interviewee. This contrasts with group interviews where the researcher interviews a number of respondents at the same time, allowing a number of voices to be heard, and a range of views included within the research project.

3.4.2.5. Advantages/Disadvantages of Interviews

Interviews have the advantage of producing data that deals with the topics discussed in depth and detail, subjects and issues can be probed and lines of investigation followed over a relatively lengthy period enabling the researcher to gain valuable insight to the issues discussed. The interviewees have the opportunity to expand their ideas, explain their views, and highlight the issues that they themselves deem to be important and critical; it is a very flexible method of data collection where lines of enquiry can be developed during the meeting itself.

Because interviews are pre-arranged, and scheduled for a convenient time and location, there is generally a very high response rate and the data can be checked for accuracy and relevance as it is collected. From the researcher's viewpoint, the use of interviews is much more rewarding as there is a more personal element to the method involved and the interviewees often enjoy the opportunity to discuss their ideas at length with a person whose main role is to facilitate a discussion, to listen, and not be critical.

On the other hand, compared to questionnaires, the analysis of the data is often difficult and time-consuming where the transcribing and coding of the interview date is a major task for the researcher and one which can only commence after the data has been collected; linked to this is that the responses are generally "non-standard." In certain instances, the researcher may inhibit free and frank expression so that the interviewees' responses are based on what people say they do rather than what they actually do; in other cases, the fact that the interview is being recorded can inhibit the interviewee(s) although, in practice, this is more significant at the start of the interview and often wears off reasonably quickly - it should, however, be remembered this is not always the case.

3.4.2.6. Relevance of Interviews to the Research Questions

The researcher conducted interviews with various stakeholders throughout the research process initially to inform the current working practices of the University and then to obtain qualitative data related to all three research questions. In regard to the first research question data was obtained from 1:1 interviews with students selected at random using data drawn from 1:1 interviews with senior managers undertaken during the preparation of Document 3. The second research question also draws on data obtained from 1:1 interviews with senior managers undertaken during the preparation of Document 3, 1:1 interviews with students undertaken during the current phase of the research and 1:1 interviews with Faculty managers again carried out during the current phase of the research. Finally, 1:1 interviews with senior managers undertaken during the preparation of Documents 3 and 1:1 interviews with students undertaken during the current phase of the research were used in regard to the third research question.

3.4.2.7. Focus Groups

Focus groups make particular use of group dynamics and consist of small groups of people who are bought together by a **moderator**, in this case the researcher, to explore *attitudes and perceptions* and *feelings and ideas* about the specific topic being researched. There are three distinctive and vital points about focus groups firstly that there is a focus to each session with the group discussion based upon an item or experiences about which all of the participants have knowledge. Secondly, there is particular emphasis placed on the interaction of the group which is used as the main process for eliciting information and finally the role of the researcher to facilitate group interaction (Fern, 2001). There are a number of varying definitions/descriptions of focus groups with Morgan (1993, p.12) suggesting that the hallmark of a focus group is *"the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without interaction found in a group".*

Krueger (1994, p.19) suggests that the purpose of the focus group is to produce qualitative data that *"provides insight into the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of the participants"* and reminds researchers that focus groups are not intended to develop consensus, to arrive at an agreeable plan, or to make a decision about which course of action to take - they are simply used to provide high-quality qualitative data giving the views of the participants on an issue or issues about which they have personal knowledge.

There are various types of focus groups ranging from the exploratory, the clinical, and the experiential and Calder (1977, p.358) differentiates the experiential focus group used in this research from the other types of focus groups and subdivides the experiential tasks into applied tasks and theoretical tasks. Calder considers that attitudes manifest themselves through shared life experiences, preferences, intentions, and behaviours and it is the behaviours that people have in common with each other that are important. The closer the individuals are socially, or the greater the experiences they have in common, the higher the quality of the data. In the case of a university, students in a particular Faculty share the life experiences of that Faculty, students on the same Course share the life experiences of that Course, and undergraduates all share the life experiences of being an undergraduate student, and so on.

Denscombe (2007, p.180) suggests that focus groups are useful for exploring new areas of research where the researcher quickly wishes to gain a broad feel for issues as they are perceived by particular groups of people; in this research this allows the researcher to obtain the views of the perception of the students on particular issues and are useful for gauging the extent to which there is a fair level of agreement, and a shared view, amongst a group of people in relation to specific topic and the researcher was able to quickly gain a valuable insight into the views of the students on the particular issues being discussed.

3.4.2.8. Advantages/Disadvantages of Focus Groups

Focus groups are particularly useful for understanding underlying motives and meanings that explain particular views and opinions and for exploring areas of research where the researcher wants to quickly gain a broad feel for the issues as they are perceived by a particular group of people gauging the extent to which there is a fair level of agreement and shared views amongst a group of people in relation to a specific topic and for verifying whether a particular item or experience evokes agreement or disagreement amongst members of the group or whether it simply exposes a range of views with little or no consensus.

One of the critical issues relates to the size of the focus group with larger groups having the advantage of collecting data from a wider cross-section of people and collecting data form a greater number of people providing both representativeness, convenience and economy. Weighed against this, however, are some practical considerations that tend to persuade researchers to limit the size of the group including difficulties in scheduling large meetings, the unwieldiness of managing discussion in larger groups, and inhibiting contribution from less confident members of the group.

3.4.2.9. Relevance of Focus Groups to the Research Questions

Two sets of focus groups were established, the first comprising students and the second comprising senior managers and academic staff from the Faculty. Various meetings were held during the current phase of the research with the student focus groups being relevant to all three research questions and the staff focus group related only to the second and third research questions.

3.4.2.10. Observations

Observations offer the researcher a distinct way of collecting data and does not rely on what people say they do what they say they think, rather it draws on the direct evidence of the eye of the researcher and is based on the presumption that in certain cases, it is best to observe what actually happens. There are two types of observational research namely systematic observation which is normally linked with the production of quantitative data and the use of statistical analysis and participant observation which is mainly associated with sociology and anthropology and used by researchers to understand the culture and processes of groups under investigation and which is normally linked to quality data.

In both instances there is an issue with perception where both types recognise that the process of observation is not straightforward and sensitive to the possibility that the researchers' own perception might influence the data collection rendering it unreliable.

Various events and behaviour can be observed and can be based on a number of variables including the frequency of events, events occurring at any given point of time, the duration of events, and a variable sample of people. In this research it was the duration of a defined event that was observed and measured.

3.4.2.11. Advantages/Disadvantages of Observations

The main advantage of observation is that it directly records what people do rather than relying on what they say they do, is systematic and rigorous, and eliminates bias from the current emotions or personal background of the researcher. It is efficient in that a substantial amount of data is able to be collected in a relatively short time-span and the quantitative data can be pre-coded and ready for analysis with the data generally being reliable.

Contrasting this is the fact that the observation focuses on what happens rather than why it happens and, accordingly, does not deal with the intentions of the respondent that have motivated such behaviour. It may result in an oversimplification and, often, does not include contextualisation which may have a bearing on the behaviour recorded; accordingly, it is not a holistic approach and the fact that the respondent is being observed may influence behaviour.

3.4.2.12. Relevance of Observations to Research Questions

A group of students were observed whilst they received an initial briefing on the NSS from their Programme Leader; students were then given the opportunity to complete the on-line NSS.

3.5 Data Protection Act

The Data Protection Act 1998 defines how personal information is used by organisations, businesses or the government with everyone who is responsible for using data required to follow strict rules known as 'data protection principles'. Users of personal information data must make sure the information is "*used fairly and lawfully, used for limited, specifically stated purposes, used in a way that is adequate, relevant and not excessive, accurate, kept for no longer than is absolutely necessary, handled according to peoples' data protection rights, kept safe and secure, and not transferred outside the UK without adequate protection"*

(Source: https://www.gov.uk/data-protection/the-data-protection-act)

BCU has a "Data Controller" and, as arguably personal data was being collected in this research, the researcher wrote to the Data Controller outlining the research being carried out to ensure that the research complied with the University's obligations under the Act. The response received stated *"Thank you for raising the issue of Data Protection Act compliance with regard to your research. I am satisfied that you understand the requirement that individuals participating in the research are not identifiable from the data. Our discussions have been most useful and I am clear that from the comprehensive set of documents you produced that personal data will not be processed in this connection: the fact of anonymity is made particularly clear by your Participant Information Sheet. Consequently I am very happy under the terms of the Data Protection Act to sanction your capturing of this data and its use in your research."* (Appendix N - Letter from Controller of University Data).

3.6 Ethics and Ethical Approval

researchers are required to act within an ethical code of practice at all times and in the process of collecting and analysing the data, and in the dissemination of research findings, researchers are expected to respect the rights and dignity of all research participants, avoid harming the participants during the participants' involvement in the research, and operate with complete honesty and integrity at all times.

There are three guiding principles governing the activity of all researchers starting with the general principle that the interest of participants should be protected and that people should not suffer as a consequence of their involvement with a research project. This requires the researcher to ensure that those who contribute to research either as general informants or as a research subject should be no worse off at the end of their participation than they were when they started their participation. This places researchers with a duty to ensure that participants do not come to any physical harm, participants do not suffer psychological harm and that participants should suffer no personal harm arising from disclosure of private information collected during the undertaking of the research.

The second principle is that the researcher should always avoid deception or misrepresentation and operate in an honest and open manner with respect to their investigations. It is accepted that there are occasions when it is not possible or practicable for the researcher to be completely open and honest with all participants and in these situations researchers face an ethical dilemma which is normally covered by compliance with the code of conduct published by professional associations and institutions. The last principle is that participants should give informed consent and should not be forced, or coerced, into helping with the research. This requires the researcher to provide sufficient information about the research for the participants to arrive at a reasoned judgement about whether or not they are to participate; normally there is a need to get this consent in writing, signed by all participants, and it is in the researchers own interests to do so as this protects the researcher from possible accusations of improper conduct when recruiting participants.

As the research was being undertaken at the BCBS, and was accordingly subject to BCU regulations, ethical approval was taken to the local level and submitted to the Faculty Ethics Committee prior to the collection of any data. The ethical approval process at BCU involved the submission of a detailed research proposal together with an outline of any ethical issues arising out of the proposed research. The researcher submitted a summary of the research proposal to the Faculty Ethics Committee and subsequently, after due consideration at the FEC Committee meeting, the Chair wrote to the researcher stating *"As chair of the FRDC I am writing to confirm that the Faculty Research Committee has approved your research proposal submitted for the research you are undertaking at BCU in support of your DBA at Nottingham Trent University."* (Appendix O – FEC Committee, confirmation of Chair's approval).

NTU advised the researcher that a second ethical approval process at NTU would not be necessary but requested copies of the letters of ethical approval from BCU as the NTU policy states that, if a research student has obtained ethical approval from another institution, such as the NHS, NTU they only require the submission of the letter of ethical approval issued by that institution attached to the appropriate NTU form.

3.7 Outline of Research Design

The overall study was aimed at helping management, at the case study organisation, make informed use of the NSS; this required a systematic series of evaluations. The research was based on a series of qualitative data collection activities supplemented by the use of secondary quantitative data captured from Module Evaluation Questionnaires completed by students at the BCBS over four academic years.

The primary qualitative data was captured sequentially through a number of interviews with students and student focus groups supplemented by a series of interviews and focus groups with a range of Faculty academic staff and senior managers from within the Faculty and across the University.

The resulting data was analysed after each activity, with the results of the analysis being fed into the next activity; throughout this process the researcher was able to adapt and adjust the direction and focus of the research as it progressed. Finally, a small number of students were also observed completing the on-line NSS.

The sequence of the qualitative data collection activity is shown in Figure 3, below, and further detail of the timeline is provided in Figure 4a, below (Section 3.7.1.1).

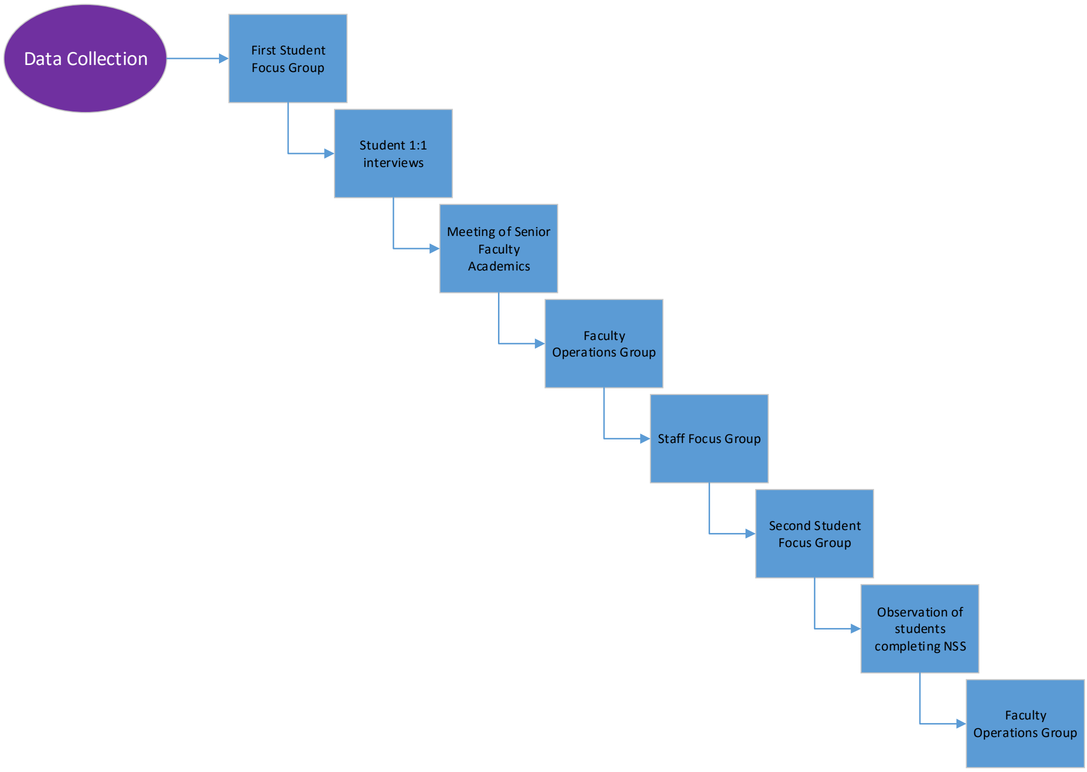


Figure 3: Flowchart showing primary data collection activities

Additionally, the timeline for the secondary data collection is shown below in Figure 4b (Section 3.7.1.1).

3.7.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

Whilst the analysis of the secondary quantitative data provided valuable initial findings the research necessitated qualitative data captured using the techniques discussed above, in Section 3.4, and, accordingly, the researcher decided to capture the views of students and staff relating to the completion, use and understanding of both local institutional and national surveys (namely the MEQ and the NSS respectively) and link this data to the three research questions.

Silverman (2013, p49) states that Qualitative Research is not simply a set of techniques to be slotted in to any research problem and, as a consequence, it is important to concentrate on data analysis rather than data gathering.

The analysis of qualitative research uses the captured data to describe the phenomenon, and what it means and aims to uncover and understand the big picture.

Both qualitative and quantitative analysis involves labelling and coding all of the data in order that similarities and differences can be recognised. All responses and comments are entered into a computer programme in order for it to be coded, counted and analysed. As the qualitative researcher rarely has a system for pre-coding, a method of identifying, labelling and coding the data needs to be developed before the analysis can proceed for the bespoke research that is being undertaken.

Analysis involves coding and classifying data, sometime referred to as categorising and indexing, with the aim of making sense of the data collected and enabling the researcher to highlight the important messages, features or findings. Saldaña (1988) defines a code as *"a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data"*.

The content can be analysed on two levels either at the basic (or manifest) level, comprising a descriptive account of the data namely what was said, but with no comments or theories as to why or how it was said, or at a higher (or latent) level of analysis, where a more interpretive analysis is provided that is concerned with the response as well as what may have been inferred, or implied, by the response.

There are many techniques that are available for coding qualitative data and the researcher went through a number of cycles; by using Initial Coding, and Pattern Coding the researcher meticulously analysed the transcribed text identifying codes, sub-categories, categories and thematic areas until a number of distinct themes emerged.

3.7.1.1 Introduction

The various qualitative data collection activities are shown in Figure 3, above, and comprised focus group meetings with students, 1:1 interviews with students, observation of students completing the NSS, and focus group meetings with senior academics, program/course leaders, and the Faculty Senior Management Team/Operations Group. The timeline for the various qualitative data gathering activities is detailed in Figure 4a, below.

All of the qualitative data collection activities (interviews/meetings/focus groups etc.) were recorded and transcribed into a text document using Microsoft Word and then imported into QSR NVivo 10 for Window for analysis.

NVivo is an advanced qualitative research analysis software tool that allows for the powerful analysis of text based data by organising the data using theme, case and in-vivo coding. The researcher imported each of the transcribed documents into NVivo and the data was analysed using a number of cycles, as described above (Section 3.7.1), until a number of distinct themes emerged from each of the meetings. The findings were then fed into the next series of meetings on an iterative basis until a finite set of findings were identified, as detailed in Section 4 – Data Analysis, below.

3.7.1.2 Initial framing of current BCU strategy on the NSS

The research carried out for Document 3, and based on eight 1:1 semi-structured interviews with senior managers included Pro Vice-Chancellors, the Chief Operating Officer, Executive Deans and other Heads of Central Departments.

This demonstrated that the extent to which the senior management of the University understood, measured, and controlled the factors that determine student expectations was, at best, extremely limited with a significant majority of the work undertaken by the University being reactive and with very little proactive work being undertaken.

This is supported by the current strategy; In August each year, when the results of the latest NSS is received, the survey is analysed by the University's Planning and Performance Department and the results are disseminated to the Faculties.

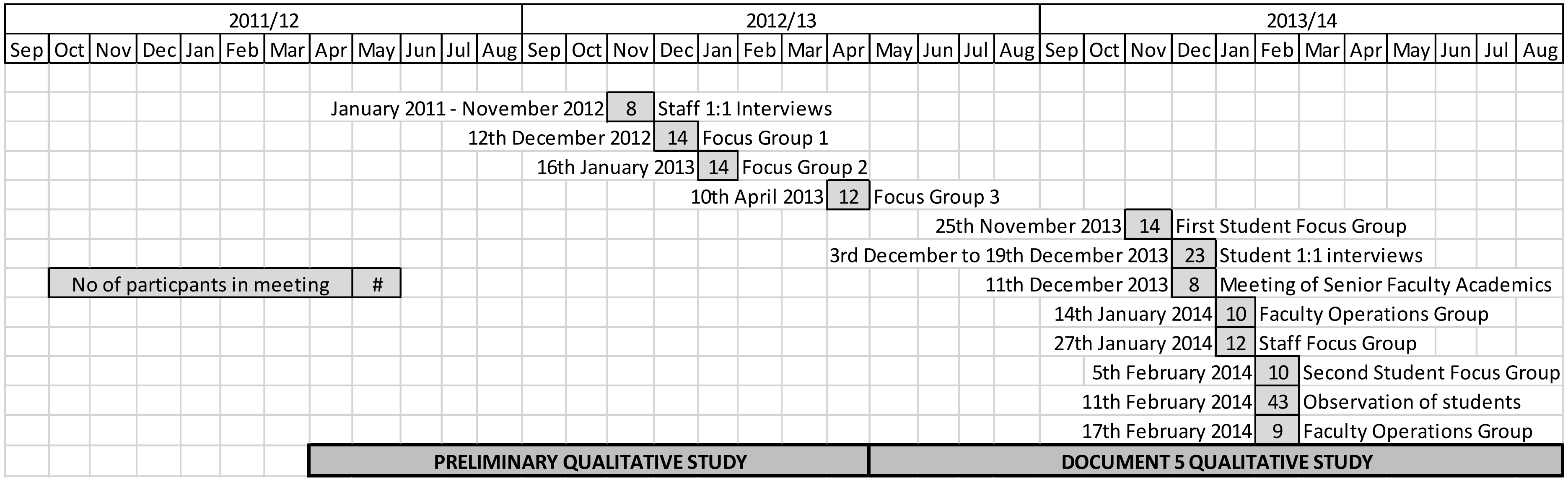


Figure 4a: Timeline for Qualitative (Primary) Data Collection

The results for each program are assessed against the university level benchmark and any program that fails to reach the benchmark is required to develop an action plan to improve the results in the following year's survey; this program level action plan is developed into a Faculty Action Plan (FAP) with the expectation that the results of the following years NSS will be improved by the actions undertaken. The University benchmark for each question in the NSS, including Question 24 (overall satisfaction), is set at 3% above the sector average.

Additionally, the comments that the students make in reply to the three open-ended questions, found at the end of the survey, are analysed under the headings of **positive** and **negative** and these are distributed as above.

The Faculties are required to review both the positive and negative comments and develop strategies for responding to the negative comments. Faculties are also required to share any examples of good practice that have been identified in the analysis of the positive comments.

As can be seen from the above, rather than attempting to set and control student expectations, and rather than preventing issues that reduce student satisfaction from arising in the first place, the University uses a strategy of dealing with any issues that have been identified in the NSS and ensure that they are not repeated in the current academic year.

Additionally, based on the perceived view that the higher level of participation in the survey leads to a higher level of student satisfaction, the work that is carried out by Faculties is also aimed at ensuring that the highest possible number of students complete the NSS. This is based on the assumption, made by the institution, that only dissatisfied students are motivated to complete the survey whilst the *apathetic majority* of students fail to complete the survey leading to the unintended consequence that the NSS results are at an artificially low level; however, there is no supporting evidence to inform or underpin this assumption (see Document 3).

3.7.1.3 First Student Focus Group

The research strategy for the capture of the qualitative data required the establishment of a representative student focus group; accordingly, a number of students were selected, at random, from each year of study from the totality of the undergraduate and postgraduate students currently studying at the BCBS and invited to join a focus group. The selection process was based on the list of all of the enrolled students compiled using the University's Student Record System from which 40 students (10 from each of the four years) were selected at random. After the selection had been completed, a check was made to ensure that at least one student from each of the main courses had been selected using this method and, as this was the case, no further adjustment was found to be necessary. The selected students were then sent an invitation by e-mail (Appendix D) to the students' university e-mail address enclosing the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix E) outlining the research that was being carried out. The Focus Group meetings were held in one of the larger Faculty meeting rooms, the status of the room was changed to meeting in progress (so there were no interruptions), the telephone was diverted, refreshments were available for both researcher and focus group members, and the blinds were closed so the occupants were not distracted by persons walking by and looking in; this protocol (Meeting Protocol) was adopted and used for all subsequent meetings. The students were taken through a brief PowerPoint presentation that outlined a series of questions to be discussed, all related to the research questions, and the meeting was recorded for later transcription and analysis.

The first focus group was attended by 14 students (out of the 20 that had agreed to participate) and was designed to obtain the general views and understanding of the students regarding the NSS; the questions discussed are listed in Appendix F. The meeting was recorded for later transcription and analysis. The analysis and conclusions are discussed in chapter 4 and resulted in the outcomes being compiled as a number of preliminary findings (Appendix H).

3.7.1.4 Student 1:1 Interviews

The second stage in the process was a series of 1:1 interviews but with a different subset of 100 students being selected at random by using the same process as described above. The participants were sent an email, containing details of the research, and invited to contact the researcher's PA to select one of the available interview times from one of eight days over a four-week period. After a period of 7 days, a reminder was sent to those students who had not responded together with a further 100 invitations sent to additional students (selected as above) resulting in an overall response rate of 11.5% and a total of 23 students participating in the 1:1 interviews.

In the interviews the students were taken through a semi-structured interview (Appendix G) and the interview was recorded for later transcription and analysis. After the final interview had taken place the interviews were transcribed and analysed and compiled as a number of preliminary findings (Appendix H).

3.7.1.5 Focus Group Meeting of Senior Faculty Academics

The next stage of the research process was a focus group discussion with a number of senior Faculty Academics from across the University designed to obtain the initial reaction to the preliminary findings from the First Student Focus Group and the 1:1 interviews with students. This focus group comprised senior academics from each of the six Faculties and those invited to attend were Associated Deans (with responsibility for the student experience) and programme leaders. A total of eight academics attended the meeting and were taken through a brief PowerPoint presentation by the researcher that outlined the preliminary findings (Appendix H) used as the agenda for the discussion. The meeting was recorded for later transcription and analysis and, although no actions were agreed for immediate implementation, the members of the focus group all agreed that the preliminary findings were extremely interesting and agreed to discuss the issues raised with their own Faculty colleagues.

3.7.1.6 First Faculty Operations Group meeting

Following the focus group meeting with senior faculty academics the researcher also reported the preliminary findings (Appendix H) to BCBS's Faculty Operations Group for information and discussed the potential for implementing any immediate management actions. Faculty Operations Group membership comprises the researcher (chair), the Associate Deans, the Heads of Academic Departments, the Faculty Financial Controller and the Administrative Operations Managers. After considerable discussion and debate, the Group agreed that the researcher should present the preliminary findings to a wider audience, within the Faculty, resulting in the formation of a Staff Focus Group with the members of this new group being nominated by the Heads of Academic Department.

3.7.1.7 Staff Focus Group

The researcher next held a Staff Focus Group meeting comprising a number of key academics from BCBS consisting of course leaders, module leaders, and senior managers; a total of twelve academics attended the meeting in which the researcher presented the preliminary findings arising out of the focus group and 1:1 interviews with the students and used this as the agenda for an open discussion with the aim of capturing a number of management actions. This resulted in a number of proposed management actions being developed and it was agreed that these proposed actions should be presented to the students at a further focus group for consultation purposes. The meeting was not recorded but the proposed actions were transcribed and agreed at the end of the meeting (Appendix J).

3.7.1.8 Second Student Focus Group

The students who had been sent an invitation to the First Student Focus Group were sent an invitation by e-mail (Appendix D) to their university e-mail address inviting them to attend an additional focus group meeting with the stated aim of discussing the proposed management actions arising out of the earlier focus group and 1:1 interviews. Invitations were also sent to members of the BCBS student council who had not participated either in the 1:1 interviews or the first student focus group. At this focus group, the students were taken through a brief presentation that outlined a series of proposed management actions (Appendix J) and the meeting was recorded for later transcription and analysis.

The second student focus group was attended by 10 students and was designed to obtain the views of the students regarding the proposed management actions. At the same time the students were invited to put forward management actions that they themselves would deem to be helpful. The meeting was not recorded but the proposed actions were transcribed and agreed at the end of the meeting (Appendix K).

3.7.1.9 Observation of Students completing the on-line NSS

The researcher arranged for a group of students to be given an opportunity, through a timetabled session, to complete the on-line NSS. Students studying for BSc (Hons) Accountancy and Finance were timetabled to complete the NSS during week commencing 10th February 2014 and the students were asked to meet in one of the computer labs for a session that would include a short briefing session (10 minutes) given by the course leader. Attendance at this session was voluntary and the students, who did attend, were not identified; the researcher did not personally know any of these students. The researcher observed these students completing the on-line survey and recorded the length of time taken by each of the students to complete the survey. The researcher did not interact with the students who had all been informed during the initial briefing session that they were to be observed and who had all consented to this process. The times recorded against each student represented the time lapse between the end of the briefing and the student standing up to leave the workstation (and included the time taken to log-in to the university system, log-in to the NSS website and finally log-out of the university system) recorded as student 1, student 2 etc. – a total of 43 students were observed (Appendix M).

3.7.1.10 Second Faculty Operations Group meeting

After the completion of all previous steps the researcher compiled a list of management actions that both the students and the academics had agreed were worthy of consideration by management and a second list of management actions suggested by the students that were not deemed appropriate by the academics (Appendix L and Appendix K respectively).

The researcher presented the complete list of management actions to the next available meeting of the Faculty Operations Group where it was agreed that all appropriate management actions should be implemented at the start of the next academic year.

The meeting was not recorded but the proposed actions were transcribed and agreed at the end of the meeting together with the identity of the person who was responsible for the implementation of each of the management actions.

3.7.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

There are various techniques available drawn from the fields of Business Mathematics, Operational Research and Statistics that collectively comprise a toolkit of methods that can be used to investigate quantitative data and help solve problems. The key to selecting the most appropriate tool is understanding the level of analysis that is required, what the analysis will provide, and the business context.

The business information that the researcher was required to present in regard to the MEQs was fairly simple – the percentage of students who answered each question in the survey in each of the available options together with overall averages and trends etc. A summary of the written comments was also required. As this was low-level analysis the quantitative data was analysed using Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Access without resorting to the higher level analysis programmes such as SPSS Statistics. The data was input in a database using a form designed by the researcher and a series of reports were exported from the database into Excel format worksheets providing summary data sheets containing the required level of management information.

This data collection exercise was repeated twice each year for four years resulting in a total number of questionnaires in excess of 37,000.

The timeline for this data collection is shown in Figure 4b, below.

3.7.2.1 MEQ surveys

The MEQ survey is undertaken bi-annually, one in each Semester, and by all students covering each of the modules that the students were studying; the first survey normally takes place in weeks 8/9 of Semester A.

The researcher based the design of the questionnaire (Appendix C) on the questionnaire used by the NSS (Appendix A) adapted to capture the students' views as to their experience on the taught module rather than the course as a whole. The

MEQ largely replicates the questions used in the NSS questionnaire but was amended to reflect a modular basis rather than a course basis.

There was no specific question in the MEQ on the area of feedback. The questions on assessment were detailed in questions 10 to 13 inclusive in the MEQ and by questions 5 to 9 inclusive in the NSS questionnaire.

Two of the questions in the MEQ map against questions in the NSS but two particular questions in the NSS on feedback namely *"Feedback on my work has been prompt"* and *"I have received detailed comments on my work"* were not covered; these questions traditionally receive low levels of satisfaction for all universities in the NSS and other published surveys.

The rationale for not including these question in the MEQ was that, at the time of the survey in Semester A, student assessments had either not been submitted, marked, or returned so that the student would have been unable to respond to these question in any meaningful way.

By the time of the second MEQ, in Semester B, although the assessments set in Semester A would have been submitted, marked, moderated, and returned to the students, the students were no longer studying the same module so any views they had on this question would not relate to the module specific questionnaire that they were completing.

The questionnaire forms were delivered to each module leader for the academic to distribute to the students during a teaching session; the academics were also provided with a set of instructions and required to finish the teaching session 20 minutes earlier than usual to allow for the questionnaires to be distributed and completed by the students. After the questionnaires had been distributed the academic was requested to leave the room to enable the students to complete the questionnaires without “duress”.

2010/11												2011/12												2012/13												2013/14											
Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
		Module Evaluation Questionnaires (last week)	Module Evaluation Questionnaires (first week)		Module Evaluation Questionnaires (last week)	Module Evaluation Questionnaires (first week)								Module Evaluation Questionnaires (last week)	Module Evaluation Questionnaires (first week)		Module Evaluation Questionnaires (last week)	Module Evaluation Questionnaires (first week)								Module Evaluation Questionnaires (last week)	Module Evaluation Questionnaires (first week)		Module Evaluation Questionnaires (last week)	Module Evaluation Questionnaires (first week)								Module Evaluation Questionnaires (first week)	Module Evaluation Questionnaires (last week)		Module Evaluation Questionnaires (first week)	Module Evaluation Questionnaires (last week)					
QUANTITATIVE DATA STUDY																																															

Figure 4b: Timeline for Quantitative (Secondary) Data Collection

Following completion of the module survey, the questionnaires were collected by a student volunteer (nominated by the students themselves) who returned the questionnaires, in a sealed envelope, to the researcher's PA. As the completion of the MEQ is dependent upon attendance at the sessions where the students are being surveyed, it follows that the views of non-attending students were not captured although it was thought that, as the survey was conducted over a five-day period and included all modules being studied by students, it was likely that very few students did not complete at least one questionnaire.

As the identity of the students completing the questionnaires were not captured (the questionnaires were completed anonymously), it was not possible to correlate the detailed attendance data for this period with the students who completed the questionnaires.

The questionnaires identified both the module and the particular timetabled session being surveyed and also identified the member of staff who delivered the session. Accordingly, where the module was taught by more than one academic, the analysis of the questionnaires enabled the sub-division of the results of the module to the individual member of staff. The identity of the academic teaching the various modules was not captured in this research as it was not relevant to the aims and objectives of the research.

The analysis of the MEQs was used, within the Faculty, as part of the annual individual performance review (IPR) of all staff to enable management to identify areas of the delivery of the module that needed to be improved. The comments that were captured in the final three open-ended questions were sent to the relevant Head of Department who, ultimately, discussed them with the relevant academic. The results of the survey were used as part of a comprehensive annual monitoring and review process and the results of the survey was fed back to the students through Boards of Study and, where the results of the survey were below the prescribed benchmark for the various levels of study, an action plan was written and monitored by the Faculty Board to ensure that improvement was achieved in the following delivery cycle of the relevant module.

3.7.2.2 Second MEQ survey

The second MEQ survey was issued to all students who were studying on taught modules in week 8/9 of Semester B. The modules at BCU are classified as either single semester, being taught in either Semester A or Semester B, or double semester where the module was taught over both semesters.

The majority of the modules are single semester modules so the results of the second MEQ related mainly to modules that have not been taught in Semester A although a small number of modules continued from Semester A as double modules; in academic year 2010/11 there were 14 double modules (out of a total of 87). The process for distribution and collection of the questionnaires was the same as for Semester A modules.

This chapter has provided an overview of the research design, methods and methodology appropriate to the overall aim of the research project designed to help organisations understand, manage, and react to, the NSS more effectively and efficiently.

The following chapter will review and analyse the qualitative and quantitative data collected within the conceptual framework of the area of research being undertaken.

4.0 Data Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to review and analyse the qualitative and quantitative data collected within the conceptual framework of the area of research being undertaken.

4.1 First Student Focus Group

The purpose of the focus group was to gain an understanding of the views of the students in regard to the NSS and the MEQ and to assess their level of knowledge in regard to the terms and expression used in the survey instruments.

The researcher hosted a focus group of students and started the meeting with a brief overview of the research project, asked the attendees to confirm that they had all received the Participant Information Sheet, confirmed that all attendees had given informed consent, and collected the signed consent forms to that effect (Standard Meeting Protocol).

The discussion was based on a series of prepared questions (Appendix F) and the researcher commenced the meeting by asking the attendees whether they had all completed at least one MEQ and then asked why they thought they were asked to complete them. The students generally welcomed the survey and thought that this was a useful process but explained that they had a number of reservations making comments such as:

> *"they are pointless",*
>
> *"the majority of times I know the lecturers and I just tick them off",*
>
> *"people say, 'Oh no not again'",*
>
> *"nothing is ever done",* and
>
> *"The teacher was no good so we complained but nothing happened".*

The Group concluded that, although the MEQs are a good idea, the students see little evidence of any outcome from the survey.

The follow-up question related to the NSS; Two of the fourteen attendees confirmed that they had completed the NSS last year and eight of the students, being final year students, would be completing the NSS in the current academic year. Seven of the attendees did not know what the NSS was, although they had heard reference to the survey, and this group included three of the students who would be completing the NSS in the current academic year. None of the students were able to articulate what the survey was used for with the majority view that it was a survey undertaken for national newspapers to enabling them to compile university league tables.

One student suggested that the NSS was undertaken to give the students:

> *"the reason to apply to a particular university so that students can rate their university"*

When the attendees who had already completed the survey were asked, by other attendees, what the NSS was like they explained:

> *"it was kind of like the Module Questionnaire but on a bigger scale"*

and concluded that the survey was related to the

> *"whole university rather than just the Business School".*

It became apparent during this discussion that the students have little idea, in regard to the NSS, as to what it is, what it is used for, or how they benefit by participating in the survey.

The focus group discussion then moved on to consider **how the University uses the MEQ and NSS surveys**. In regard to the MEQ, the overwhelming view was that it was designed to improve the module for the following year and to rate the lecturer; however, the group queried what actions were taken by the Faculty after the MEQ survey had been completed as they saw no evidence of any action being taken. The focus group generally gave a negative response to participating in the MEQ survey with comments that included:

> *"We do them because we have to",*
>
> *"we make so many comments but nothing ever happens",* and
>
> *"the whole class make comments that nothing ever changes".*

The group accepted that changes may occur in the future but suggested that they do not see it happening. They insisted that, for the Faculty to take note of their views and action the comments, a negative response was needed from the whole group and the difficulty with this was that many students don't like giving negative comments because they believe it would impact on them, personally, at a later stage of their academic career. The focus group concluded that:

> *"the comments section is the really useful bit of the questionnaire but not many students fill them in because there isn't time to do so".*

Not a single member of the focus group understood what actions the University takes as a results of the publication of the NSS. The researcher explained that the results are made available to the University in full, down to course level, and that the University takes the results very seriously; it also provides a lot of Business Intelligence that informs the University's organisational decision-making. The conclusion drawn from the discussion is that students attending BCU have no knowledge of the work undertaken by the University during the annual life cycle of the NSS, the use that is made of the data captured by the questionnaires, or how the University uses the questionnaires to inform operational and strategic plans.

The discussion then moved on to the students understanding of the expression **student satisfaction."** Many of the students held strong views with comments including:

> *"do we get value for money",*
>
> *"do you get what you expect from the course for the money paid",*
>
> *"how hard the course is", how much you take out of it",* and
>
> *"how much support you get from the tutors"*.

One of the postgraduate students stated that student satisfaction was defined by:

> *"how happy the student is at their experience of being at this university"*.

The group, however, all agreed that it is extremely difficult to measure happiness and suggested that the students' view of student satisfaction on any given day is dependent upon the mood the student is in. This was articulated by one of the students who stated:

"I have a 9.00 lecture that I don't enjoy, it's far too early, and I don't like getting up that early - I am not happy at that time so any survey I am asked to complete will not be good".

The group concluded that the timing of when students were asked to complete a survey (in the academic year) might influence the way in which the complete the survey and, therefore, the overall results of the survey.

The group was asked to articulate their understanding of the expression **course as a whole** and agreed that this:

"quite literally means the whole course, i.e. anything related to the degree itself, just a degree, the modules, and the books from the library"

This contrasts with their understanding of student satisfaction which is generally:

"everything about the university"

as they are now being asked to consider:

"just the course, which is not everything! You cannot use the same measurement for the two concepts but we are asked to do so".

The NSS also invites the student to consider the **quality of the course.** The students agreed that this referred to the contents of the modules and the teaching however there were different views expressed by students at different stages of their University career. One of the final year students stated that this expression was viewed differently in the final year as the students are only able to completely understand what they want from the course when they are in the final year when they are in a position to see whether this is being delivered or not; another student felt that the students' focus changes during their university career by explaining that during the first year:

"they do not know what they want or what is expected of them"

whereas in the final year many students:

"become more focused on employment"

The students, even though they are required to judge the course as a whole, suggested that many, if not the majority, of the students simply use the final year, and their most recent experiences, to form a view with one student suggesting that:

> *"if some work (and assignment) had just been returned and the mark was lower than [the student] wanted this will be reflected in the level of satisfaction"*.

The students, however, all agreed that the NSS is only a snapshot survey and it would be better to have a similar survey undertaken each year of the course - it would then be possible to track their satisfaction throughout the course.

The discussion then moved on to issues that the students take into account when completing the two questionnaires. In regard to the MEQ the students suggested that the main driver for their approach to completing the questionnaire was the lecturer delivering the module; the views expressed were mainly based on the lecturer and generally whether the students were happy with the general style, approach and delivery of the module by the academic. One student stated:

> *"it all depends on whether you like the lecturer, if you do you give good answers, if you don't you give bad ones and we all normally take this approach for all questions".*

The overall conclusion from this discussion is that many of the students take a holistic approach to each MEQ based on their overall experience with the Module to date and do not consider each individual question at face value. The two postgraduate students agreed that they had taken a similar approach when completing the NSS although they had taken a wider view based on all of the lecturers.

The discussion then moved on to consideration of factors that would influence the students when they were actually completing the National Student Survey. There were a number of interesting comments including:

> *"how I am feeling on the day",*
>
> *"whether I have been given an assessment back or not",* and
>
> *"whether I agree with the mark".*

Many of the students commented that they disliked the five point Likert scale and there was a general agreement by the students that they do not like the use of **neither agree nor disagree**. When asked about the meaning of **neither agree nor disagree,** a number of students thought it meant **50:50**, a number of students thought it meant **no comment** or **not sure,** and several students commented that they use the **neither agree nor disagree** option when they don't know how to answer or are undecided.

The final issue discussed was the reverse of the above questions namely **why would you not be satisfied with your student experience, the course as a whole, or the quality of the course.** The overwhelming response was that a single negative event can influence overall satisfaction and this negative event might have happened at any point during the students' university career even as early as the first year Freshers week.

4.1.1 Findings from the first student focus group

A number of findings arose out of the first student focus group most notably that the students were unaware of the robust processes that the Faculty uses for the analysis and processing of the MEQs; the students were also unaware that feedback from the MEQ analysis was provided to academics, improvements were made as a result of the questionnaires, good practice was shared, and feedback was given to the students via Boards of Study.

The students took the view that the NSS does not capture the views of the students across the whole of the course as it is based on a snapshot view delivered by students studying in the final year of the course; they also demonstrated a lack of understanding of the purpose and use of the surveys together with a lack of clarity of the main descriptors used in the survey instructions. These findings have far reaching implications for the setting of institutional strategy.

4.2 Student Interviews

To reinforce the outcome of the focus group, and to gather data regarding the students' individual approach to completing questionnaires, the researcher interviewed 23 students by using a semi-structured interview (Appendix E). The researcher commenced each meeting with the standard meeting protocol after which the students were asked a series of overview questions and then asked to complete a paper copy of either the MEQ or the NSS. Whilst completing the questionnaires, students were asked to explain their thinking and rationale for their answers and were, if necessary, asked follow-up questions - all of the comments made by the students were recorded and analysed to produce the following commentary.

Generally, the students understood the purpose of the MEQ with comments such as:

> *"to improve student satisfaction, so modules and courses can be improved",*
>
> *"so that the tutors know what the students think",*
>
> *"do the students enjoy the lectures",* and
>
> *"what is going right and what can be improved".*

A number of the students expressed the view that it was easier for them to put their views on paper rather than complain directly to the tutor whilst approximately 15% of the students stated that they had no understanding as to why the survey was undertaken or what it was used for.

The students were then asked the same question in relation to the NSS with the majority assuming a link between the survey and various (unspecified) league tables. Several students made comments such as:

> *"it will help students when applying for a course as it enables them to compare universities"*

One student stated that the NSS applied to the overall rating of universities:

> *"to find out whether the students have enjoyed their time at university".*

In regard to the use made of these of the MEQ by BCU, the general consensus was divided equally between students who had a clear view of the use made of the questionnaires and students who had no idea at all. The first category of students made comments such as:

> *"to improve what we deliver",*

"to gain student views of the academics only - to rate them" and

"to see whether the content of the module is right and how good the lecturers are".

The students who fell into the second category provided fairly consistent comments including:

"hope you do something but no idea what is actually done",

"no evidence of or any feedback given following the MEQs",

"no idea what we actually do", and

"don't know - not used for anything".

A similar pattern emerged in regard to the NSS with the majority view represented by comments such as:

"only used for ranking of universities",

"used for league tables",

"Government does something with it", and

"to rate the university according to the scores".

However, a small number of students were unaware of any action with comments such as:

"do we do anything at all?" and

"no idea - we probably look at the results."

A minority suggested that the data from the surveys was actually used but they were unclear as to the exact usage of the data:

"because it is so big we look back and see how we can improve by comparing with our own surveys",

"benchmarking and improving for the future", and

"we put the results on our web-site and we try to implement changes".

In regard to the students' understanding of **student satisfaction** the students generally articulated clarity with a degree of consensus:

"the students' experiences at university be it good or bad",

"how happy is the student on their course, is it going to benefit them in the future, does it has an impact on them personally. Do they have a fantastic relationship with the University", and

"Overall everything - the education, the student life, the experiences in the university - but NSS pushes on academic".

As regards matters students consider when deciding whether or not they were with **satisfied** when completing the MEQ the students unanimously agreed that they based their view on the weeks immediately prior to the survey: if problems had occurred with the teaching in the last few weeks this would count against the module, however, they confirmed that each individual module was considered on its own merits. This provided a sharp contrast with the NSS where the individual academic performance of the student becomes a key factor as demonstrated by comments such as:

"because I am doing well academically I am happy and enjoying the course.",

"I am on-line to get a first so I am very happy; if I was going to get a 2.2 or 3rd I would not be happy", and

"as long as I am happy with my marks I will give a good NSS; if not I won't".

A small number of the students expressed a minority view that they do consider their total experience when completing the questionnaire with a typical comment being:

"I think about all three years; what have I enjoyed and what have I not enjoyed on the course".

Having discussed, with the students, some of the background of the surveys the researcher turned to the five options that the students were asked to consider in relation to each of the questions. The students had difficulty in articulating the difference between **definitely** and **mostly** but were very clear on the difference between **Agree** and **Disagree**. When deciding whether to choose the **definitely**

agree and **mostly agree** option, the students all agreed that their experience had to be very positive to choose either of these two options:

"Never put definitely unless 100% certain",

"Majority of time use mostly unless something outstanding has happened",

"Definitely Agree- no questions or issues raised", and

"Absolutely no negative instances".

The students all agreed that for them to use **mostly disagree** *or* **definitely disagree** the opposite of what they had said in regard to choosing to use one of the positive options had to occur. Two of the students commented that only one or two issues would change their choice from a positive to a negative option.

The final option considered was the neutral choice available to the students under the heading of **neither agree nor disagree** with a minority of the students stating:

"don't agree with this answer so never use it" and

"don't like using middle column as it doesn't give an answer".

Interestingly, none other students interviewed were aware that, for the purposes of analysis, the middle column is viewed as a negative choice made by the students. Several of the students raised an issue of concern in regard to their use of this neutral option with a number of comments such as:

"I use it when I don't know or I am not sure", and

"Only ever used if the question doesn't apply to me".

The final discussion with the students related to their understanding of the **course as a whole** and, generally, the students understood that they should consider their experience over the whole of the course supported by comments such as:

"all the modules over the three years and anything that might have effected it",

"first to final year - the modules I have been studying", and

"the whole degree (both pathways) – I looked at both parts separately and found an average"

When the students filled in the actual survey, in the presence of the researcher, and were asked to explain why they had chosen a particular option, they did not do what they claimed they would do; this is supported by the following observations and comments.

One student based all responses on one particular module that had, in the students' view, been very badly delivered, other students commented:

> *"you can't really do this until you have finished - i.e. all three years",*
>
> *"you only look at what is happening now?"* and
>
> *"(the) survey is based on what is happening right now".*

Another student based responses on the assessment, and how difficult it was found to be, whilst another based all of the responses on the fact that there had been some very poor experiences, and poor grades, in the first year of the course even though this student was projected to obtain a first class honours degree.

Another student based the response entirely on the ability of the tutor:

> *"to respond to e-mails".*

Finally, one student admitted being:

> *"influenced by very recent events".*

Interestingly a significant minority, approaching 35%, of the students suggested that it would be very helpful to have an annual NSS for all three years of the course so that a comparison could be made on a yearly basis for the duration of their study in regard to their overall University experience.

4.2.1 Findings from 1:1 Interviews

The students generally have their own interpretation of the meaning of student satisfaction, and other core terms, with little understanding of the use made of the results of the MEQ/NSS. They have very little knowledge and understanding of the drivers for the MEQ/NSS, and the processes that follow the collation and analysis of the results, neither do they know the work that the University does with the results of the surveys, nor how seriously the results of the MEQ/NSS are taken by the University.

The students see little evidence of any action, or change, following the MEQ/NSS and all say that they would welcome feedback from the surveys even though they accept that any measures introduced would impact more on following years than their own experience.

Comments from students relating how poor assessment marks impact upon the responses they give to the surveys suggest that the timing of the various surveys is important. Although many students take a holistic approach to completing the surveys, events that occur immediately prior to a survey have the potential to influence the responses to a number of questions, if not the whole survey, by converting positive responses to neutral, or negative, responses; and it is equally important to recognise that some students see the use of the surveys as a means of protesting.

It was very apparent that many of the students have a good understanding of the meaning of the various expressions, and how they were required to respond to the questionnaire, which they articulated very clearly. However, when they came to complete the actual survey, they took a very different approach demonstrating that what they claim to do is not what they actually do.

Communication is vitally important and can greatly reduce the impact of negative issues when handled sensitively and humanely. Interestingly not a single student mentioned value for money – the students stated that they all knew what the fee was when they joined the course and accept that this is what it costs. They acknowledge that, although studying at a more prestigious university may help them to get a job on graduation, this does not make the course any better, give them a better student experience, or provide greater value for money.

The implication of the above is that the results of the survey may not be representative of the actual views of the students; it follows that the interpretation of the results of the survey may also be incorrect.

4.3 Focus Group of Senior Academics

Following the analysis of the results of the focus group and the 1:1 interviews, the researcher held a focus group with senior academics from the six Faculties at BCU, with the participating academics having responsibility, within their own Faculty, for the student experience. The purpose of the meeting (standard meeting protocol) was to discuss the views of the academics in regard to their knowledge, and understanding, of the NSS and the processes used by the institution, to ensure that the students completed the survey as intended; the meeting was also used to capture the views of the academics as to the purpose, intent, and management of the annual NSS; the narrative that follows represents the discussion.

Following the disappointing results from the previous years' NSS survey, the Faculties had been instructed by the Vice-Chancellor's Office to carry out an investigation as to the causes of the poor results and were told to concentrate their efforts on looking at the worst performing courses. A detailed analysis of the raw data, obtained from Ipsos Mori, suggested that the effect of students using the neutral stance was very dramatic. One of the courses, that had been investigated, received an overall satisfaction rating of 35% in the NSS; the Faculty delivering this course contacted a number of the students who had participated in the survey and discussed the approach that they had taken when they completed the on-line survey. The majority of these students commented that they had felt pressurised into completing the survey, one commenting:

> *"I don't like being pushed, I didn't want to be critical so I went straight down the middle for all questions"*;

This suggests that the perception expressed by the Vice-Chancellor's Office, and taken to inform a policy instruction issued the previous year, that the greater the number of students who complete the survey the higher the resulting level of student satisfaction, may not be correct; pressurising students to participate in the survey may actually have created a negative reaction and led to lower levels of recorded student satisfaction than might otherwise may have been achieved.

Many of the academic staff responsible for the NSS process, across the University, do not understand the students' approach to the survey and make a number of false assumptions. The focus group expressed a number of views, in regard to the NSS, including:

> *"only dissatisfied students rush to complete survey"*,

"the more students to complete the survey - the better the results will be",

and

happy students don't bother with the NSS".

The majority of the academics agreed that students do not see many, if any, actions carried out as a result of the published surveys (MEQ/NSS), the University needs to be more pro-active, and generally spends far too much time considering and reacting to the survey; energies and resources should be put into creating a fantastic student experience which, if successful, would produce happy and contented students who would, in turn, produce a good survey result.

The academics concluded that the University should run a campaign to raise awareness of the NSS; this needs to be both creative and capture the students' imagination – the most appropriate vehicle for this would be either to use the University's own media students or commission a joint project with the Student Union.

A number of those present, at this focus group, have responsibility for briefing students prior to the opening of the NSS but do not, themselves, fully understand the use and purpose of the survey, the meaning of various expressions contained within the survey, the meaning of some, if not all, of the questions, the impact that the survey has on league tables (and consequently the institution), or the approach taken by the students to completing the survey.

The findings from this focus groups suggests that the processes for managing the outcomes from the previous years' NSS, the processes related to briefing the students, and the process for managing the annual NSS are all flawed; and this may impact upon the accuracy of the results of the NSS itself.

4.4 First Faculty Operations Group Meeting

The researcher, in his role as Faculty Registrar, is responsible for chairing a weekly operations group (within BCBS) and reported the preliminary findings from the research completed to date to the Faculty Operations Group (FOG). It was agreed that it was appropriate to report these findings to a wider group from within the Faculty. The purpose of this wider focus group, and the agreed aims, was to identify potential management actions aimed at improving the student experience and increasing levels of student satisfaction. Any management actions that were identified in this focus group were to be reported back to FOG, by the researcher, for further consideration allowing the Faculty Management Group to consider whether existing strategies and operational processes were fit for purpose or required revisiting.

4.5 Focus Group Meeting of Senior Faculty Staff

The researcher met a focus group of staff from the BCBS comprising two Associate Deans, three Heads of Department and, representing both undergraduate and postgraduate courses, five Course Leaders. The purpose of the meeting was to present a briefing paper to the attendees (Appendix H) as to the findings from the focus groups and 1:1 meetings held to date and then discuss potential management actions; the main points arising out of the discussion are summarised below.

The researcher reported that many students do not adequately understand all of the questions in the NSS and often make their own interpretation as to what they are being asked. Although the students receive a briefing about the NSS, from the Student Union which attempts to contextualise the survey, the briefing is also designed to provide other key information. There were serious reservations expressed as to the quality of this briefing:

> *"the message put across by the students is all wrong"*
>
> *"the messages need to be vetted"*
>
> *"it's a great idea but we need to control what they say"*

The briefing is an absolutely critical stage of the overall process but does not appear to fulfil its objectives; it may be unrealistic to expect it to work as many of the students have suggested that they do not even listen to the briefing sessions. The students do not find the briefing interesting, or stimulating:

> *"They're a waste of time and the students simply want to finish the survey and get out of the room."*

"We need to be able to have a measure of control over these briefings and they ned to be tailored to the students on a particular courses so that we can deal with issues that have arisen and explain how we dealt with it."

The group agreed that there is an urgent need to educate the students as to the purpose and intent of the NSS and the impact that poor results have on the students themselves:

"we have to get the message across to the students as to how important the NSS is to both us and the students themselves"

The group suggested that students would be more likely to listen to other students after they understand how the survey was going to be used; They also stressed that it is essential to inform all students of the impact that choosing to use the neutral option to the questions has on the results of the survey.

An issue that came out of the student focus groups and interviews was that the course representative system is ineffective; this is particularly noticeable on courses with large student numbers. The students were not aware that issues are captured through the MEQs even though this is reported to Boards of Study.

Prior to the focus group meeting, the researcher analysed the results of the MEQ undertaken in Week 7 of Semester A and identified six modules that run across both Semesters (i.e. long thin - 30 credits) where feedback can be provided to the students using the analysis of the individual questions and the three open-ended questions where students provide comments. The researcher explained that, to date, no feedback had been provided which reinforces the students' view that:

"nothing is done with the results of the survey".

The focus group was invited by the researcher to recommend a timescale for providing feedback as it is necessary to speed up the process and provide feedback to the students with a quick turnaround; the students complain that the Faculty doesn't listen to them and this is difficult to defend when feedback is not provided which is sometimes even the case when the feedback has already been provided to the relevant academics. The MEQ provides rich data which enables module leaders to go into the classes, following the survey, and use the **you said, we did** process within a short period of the survey being completed. The focus group agreed that a new process should be developed and implemented without delay.

> *"We must get the message across that we do take the surveys seriously and that we do action issues that are raised."*

The group agreed that academics should be encouraged to include a dialogue in all lectures and tutorials comprising **how could this be improved, how is it for you** especially as this question is specifically included in the MEQ (Question 8); the overwhelming response by the students is that this is not currently the case. This should provide an opportunity to capture the student voice as part of a continuum – the process would provide an opportunity for academics and tutors to obtain a response from the students.

An example of good practice, that was shared, is the grouping of students who all have the same personal tutor where there is a very close dialogue between the tutor and the students in that particular group; the personal tutor communicates with the groups on feedback and the actions taken. To make this work across the Faculty, or indeed across the University, the tutors need to be both friendly and approachable, to counter the false perception that the students have that, **if they criticise they will be penalised in the marking of their work**:

> *"If we create the right environment, and a community spirit, then the students won't be slow in coming forward and talking to us and telling us what's wrong"*

Another issue, that was highlighted, is the potential for questionnaire fatigue; the students' view is that there are far too many surveys in any given year issued via various sources; this should be reviewed at both Faculty and University level with a degree of coordination introduced:

> *"We have no idea when other questionnaires are being issued – last year the SES was launched at the same time as the NSS and this caused wholesale confusion…"*

The group agreed that there remains a significant issue with feedback both on academic work and on issues captured by the questionnaires; unless the Faculty is able to provide adequate feedback to the students, to demonstrate that issues that are raised are being addressed, the level of student satisfaction will not – especially as most of the students did not know what use the Faculty makes of the questionnaires. Currently many of the students are under the impression that the University undertakes the two survey exercises (MEQ/NSS) because the Government mandates the use of surveys; the actual position is that the Faculty undertakes the local survey to obtain relevant Business Intelligence and analyses the NSS for the same purpose. The group agreed that the cycle of questionnaire and feedback, and the processes and timetables should be published to include a message along the lines:

> *"we do this, this is why we do it, this is what happens after we have done it, and we value your voice because that enables us to improve – so help us to improve your course and help you".*

It is accepted that the MEQ is a blunt tool designed to capture issues, however, the group concluded that the module leader should already be aware of the any issues, and problems, with the module because there should already be a dialogue between the academic and the students; all modules leaders should encourage students to be able to have a continuing dialogue with all staff and, indeed, the senior management team.

> *"There is generally pretty poor dialogue between some of the course leaders and the students and we are poor at capturing issues."*
>
> *"it is not good enough to rely on the questionnaires as this is far too late in the cycle."*
>
> *"We must capture issues much earlier before they impact on the student experience."*

There is also an issue of perception, with the MEQs, in that the students seem to be under the impression that if they complete a questionnaire one week then the tutors should be able to report back the following week. Although this is not currently possible, with a modest level of investment, the turnaround period could be greatly improved enabling the tutors to look at the three open-ended questions and report back to the students on both the positive or negative comments within a few days of the survey being completed. Regarding the positive comments, the tutors should reiterate that they will be shared as good practice whilst negative comments should be dealt with by the tutors explaining what, and how, the issues will be resolved or explaining why they occur and, if it is not possible to resolve an issue, why it is not possible to find a suitable resolution; this will also inform the continuing dialogue with the students. Where issues cannot be resolved the students should be encouraged, if they are not satisfied with this information, to raise and discuss the issue with senior management within the Faculty.

It was accepted by members of the Faculty Operations Group that many of the existing assumptions made by them about the NSS, and the various processes and actions arising out of the NSS that they currently undertook, may be flawed and that a number of management actions should be developed to improve the current position. It was also accepted that the use of the NSS as a management tool was affected by the findings and that the findings of this research should be discussed with institutional level management to increase awareness of the issues highlighted. This, in turn, would lead to improvements in the use of the NSS as a management tool for setting strategies aimed at improving the student experience.

At the conclusion of this meeting focus group the researcher agreed to prepare a briefing discussion paper for the Faculty Operations Group with proposals for management actions.

4.6 Second Student Focus Group Meeting

After the Focus Group Meeting of Senior Faculty Staff, the researcher organised a further focus group to present proposed management actions to the students. The researcher presented each of the management actions (Appendix J) which enabled the student to discuss each of the proposed management actions. The proposals received overwhelming, and unanimous, support from the students and, at the end of the meeting, the students were invited to put forward their own proposals for management action that they would like the Faculty to consider.

> *“these are really good; you just need to make sure they happen”*

"we need to make the lecturers answer for their delivery"

The students participated in a lively debate and proposed a number of their own management actions. Firstly, the students suggested they would like to receive a copy of the detailed analysis of the MEQs, and that they would then wish to meet the academic staff who delivered the various modules to discuss the feedback with them individually. The students also suggested that the academic staff should be rated according to the analysis of the survey and that this rating, together with the detailed feedback comments, should be published. Finally, the students suggested that any academic who achieved a level of satisfaction lower than an agreed benchmark level should be monitored by their line manager and, if no improvement was achieved within a defined period of time, should ultimately be prevented from teaching that module.

"good lecturers should be told by us [the students] what we think and the bad ones should be replaced"

The researcher commented that these proposals raised interesting management and ethical issues and agreed to take them forward for consideration by the Faculty Senior Management Team.

4.7 Observation of Students completing the on-line National Student Survey

The researcher attended a session where students studying BSc (Hons) Accountancy and Finance were timetabled to complete the NSS. This took place during week commencing 10th February 2014, the survey having been officially launched at the university a week earlier. Attendance at this session was voluntary, a short briefing session (10 minutes) was delivered by the course leader, and the students were not personally known to the researcher; nor were they identified. The researcher observed these students completing the on-line survey and recorded the length of time taken by each of the students to complete the survey. The time taken by each student was recorded in a log as described in Section 3.7.1.9, above.

A total of 43 students being observed and the time taken by each student was recorded against student 1, student 2 etc. and the students' times were recorded in

15 second time slots. One student recorded an exceptional time of 20 minutes and 15 seconds and this student was interviewed by the researcher at the end of the session when she confirmed that the NSS was very important to her and that most of the time had been taken by completing the open ended questions.

During this session, the researcher was accompanied by his PA who recorded a duplicate set of timing records; the records were compared at the end of the session and the timings were found to be consistent with a single anomaly. The time taken for this anomalous student was adjusted to represent the longer of the two recorded times; the **time at end** reading for Student #28 was accordingly adjusted from 10:16:45 hrs to 10:17:00 hrs.

An analysis of the results of this observation showed that, including the outlier, the students took a relatively short time to complete the survey with an average of 2 minutes and 48 seconds. Excluding the outlier reduces the average time to 2 minutes and 23 seconds with a median of 2 minutes and 30 seconds. This suggests that the students may not spend a great deal of time reading each individual question and that this, in turn, may affect their approach to answering the survey.

The detailed timing record of the observed students, who completed the on-line survey, is at Appendix M. The implications of this finding was taken into account in the proposed management actions; it also links into a number of the other findings including, for example, the general lack of understanding, by the students, as to the purpose and use of the survey by institutional management although it should be noted that this was a single recorded session and may not be reliable or representative.

4.8 Second Faculty Operations Group Meeting

After the second focus group meeting with students, and the observation of students completing the on-line NSS had been completed, the researcher reported the preliminary findings and outcomes from the two meetings to the Faculty Operations Group. FOG noted the findings, discussed the management actions proposed by the student focus group, and concluded that the three new proposals were not appropriate; they requested the researcher report back to the students with the rationale for this decision. The finalised list of proposed management actions was agreed and ownership of each action was allocated to individual members of the Faculty Executive.

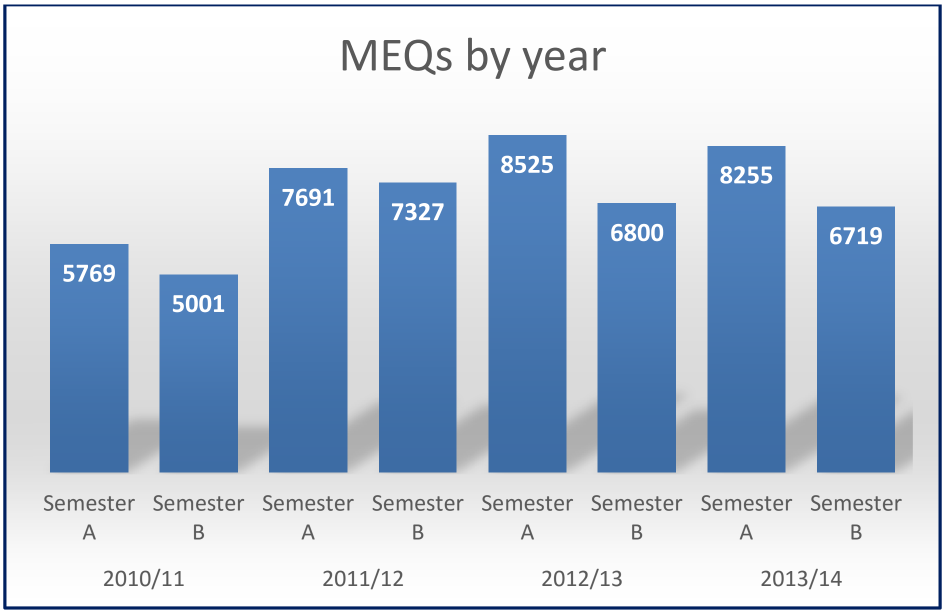
4.9 MEQs

4.9.1 Introduction

This Section provides a brief analysis of the MEQs completed by students across BCBS over a four-year period and provides a number of interesting findings which, although not central to this research, provide a degree of support to the findings obtained in the qualitative research detailed above.

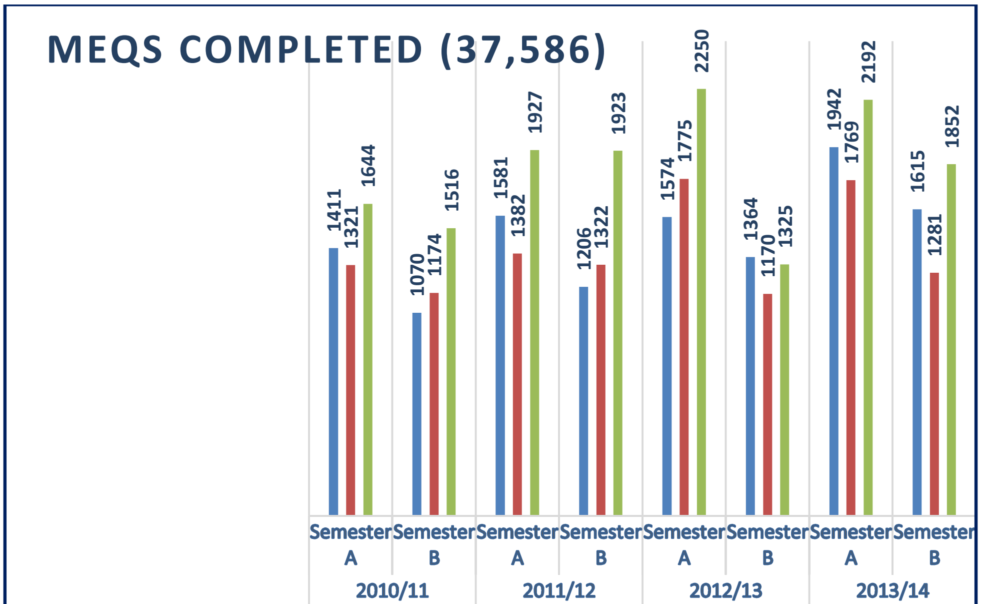
4.9.2 Questionnaires completed

The total number of questionnaires completed by students in Semester A and Semester B in the four academic years commencing 2010/11 is shown in Graph A, below. The number of completed questionnaires is dependent upon both the number of enrolled students and the design of the course; the fact that a smaller number of questionnaires were completed in Semester B in each of the survey years is not significant and mainly caused by a reduction in the number of postgraduate students due to the design of the courses.



Graph A: Total number of questionnaires completed during academic years 2010/11 to 2013/14

Graph B, below, shows the distribution of the undergraduate element of the total MEQs between the three undergraduate years of study, the number of questionnaires completed reflecting the numbers of students enrolled on the course.



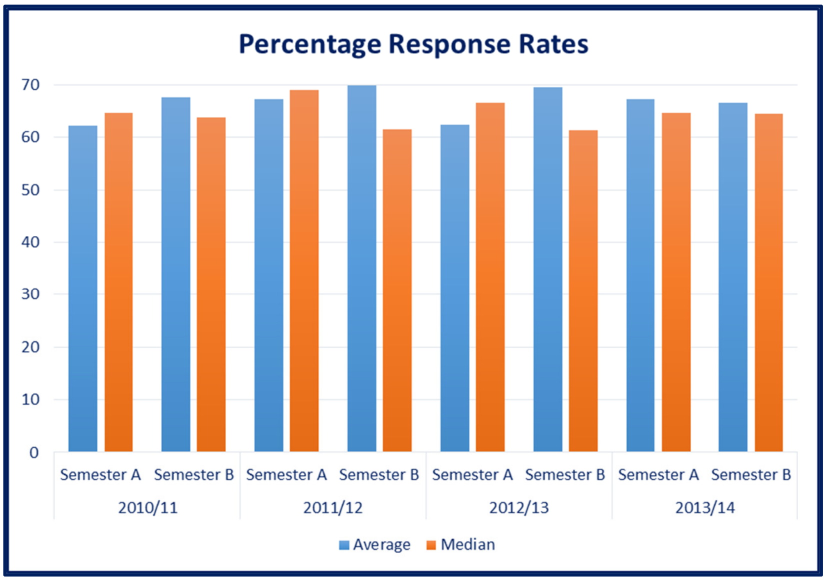
	2010/11 Semester A	2010/11 Semester B	2011/12 Semester A	2011/12 Semester B	2012/13 Semester A	2012/13 Semester B	2013/14 Semester A	2013/14 Semester B
First year undergraduate	1411	1070	1581	1206	1574	1364	1942	1615
Second year undergraduate	1321	1174	1382	1322	1775	1170	1769	1281
Third year undergraduate	1644	1516	1927	1923	2250	1325	2192	1852

Graph B: Total number of questionnaires completed during academic years 2010/11 to 2013/14 by undergraduate year of study

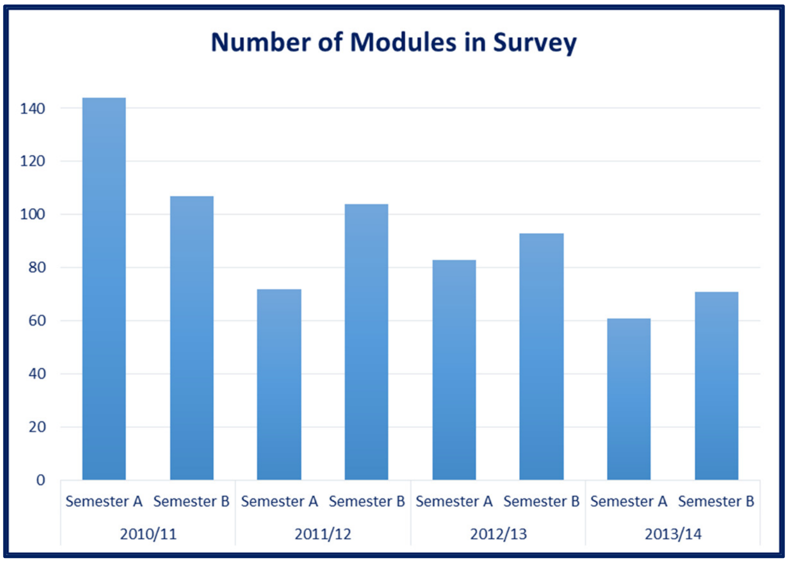
4.9.3 Response rates

The questionnaires were distributed in a controlled environment resulting in high response rates; the average across all four years of the study being 66.60% the median 64.45% - suggesting that the survey results can be taken as being reliable. Graph C, below, plots the response rates for the eight individual surveys.

Most, but not all, of the modules participated in the survey with the number of modules participating varying between the four academic years. This reflects the changes to the courses being delivered over that period with a gradual reduction in the number of modules being offered year-on-year. As the number of modules reduced, however, this was countered by a corresponding increase in the number of students studying each module. Graph D, below, shows the number of participating modules over each of the four years of the survey.

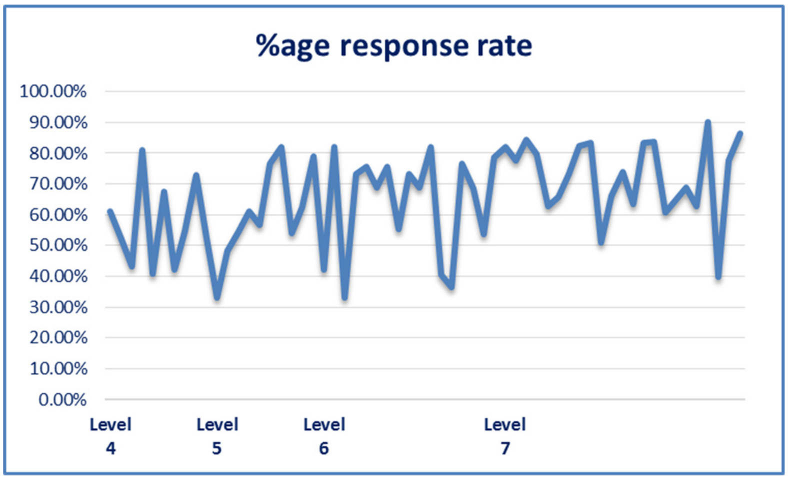


Graph C: MEQs - survey response rates



Graph D: MEQs - module participation in survey

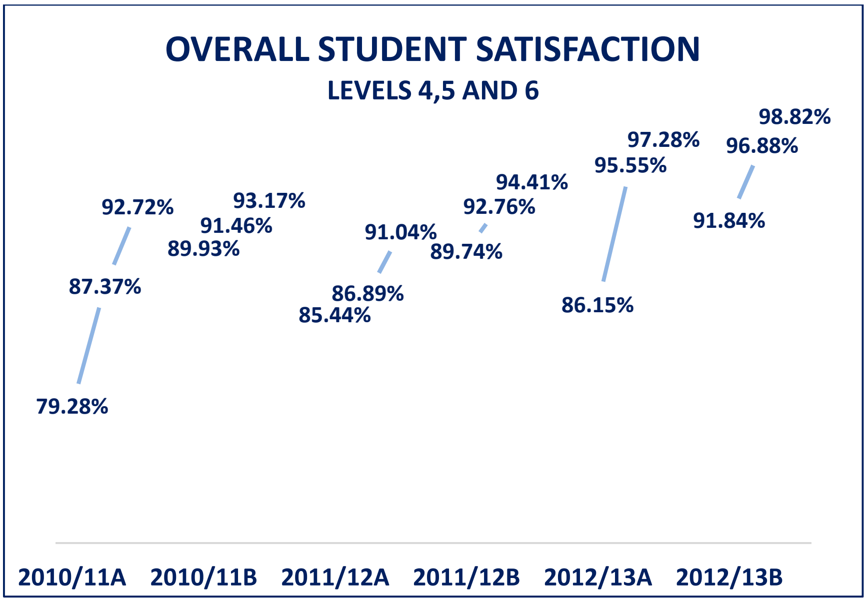
Graph E, below, shows the distribution of response rates for each module in a typical survey – 2013/14, Semester A ranging between 33.22% and 90.00 %, (average 65.40%, median 68.02%). Given that the survey was completed in-class the response rate reflects student attendance for the sessions which were surveyed.



Graph E: MEQs – typical range of response rates (per module) 2013/14, Semester A

4.9.4 Overall satisfaction

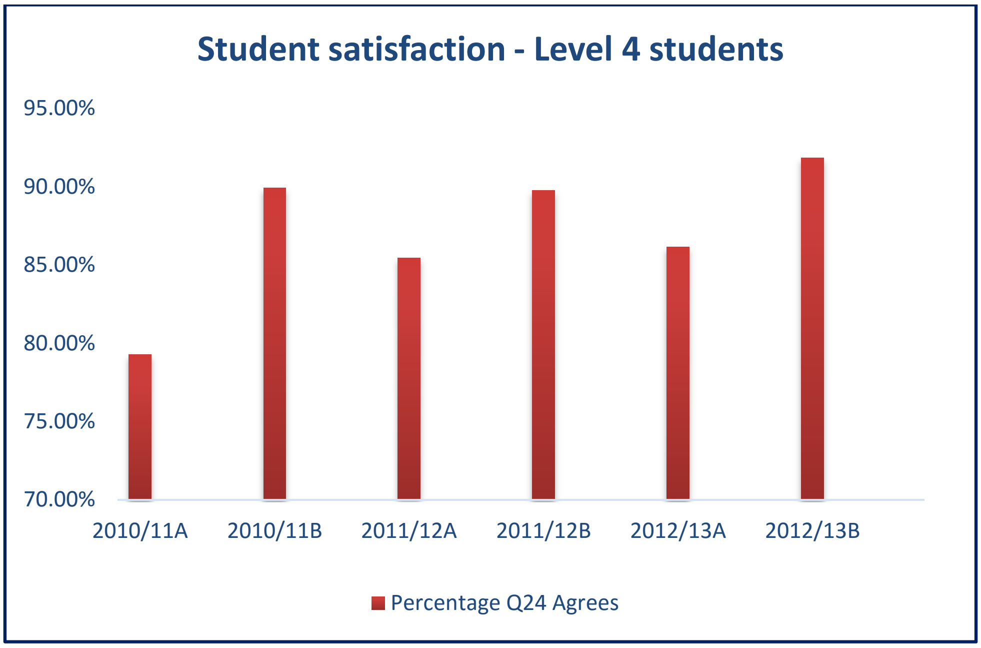
The overall rates of student satisfaction (as determined by Question 24) for the surveys completed over the first six surveys is shown at Graph F, below; each survey containing three results representing (left to right) Levels 4, 5, and 6.



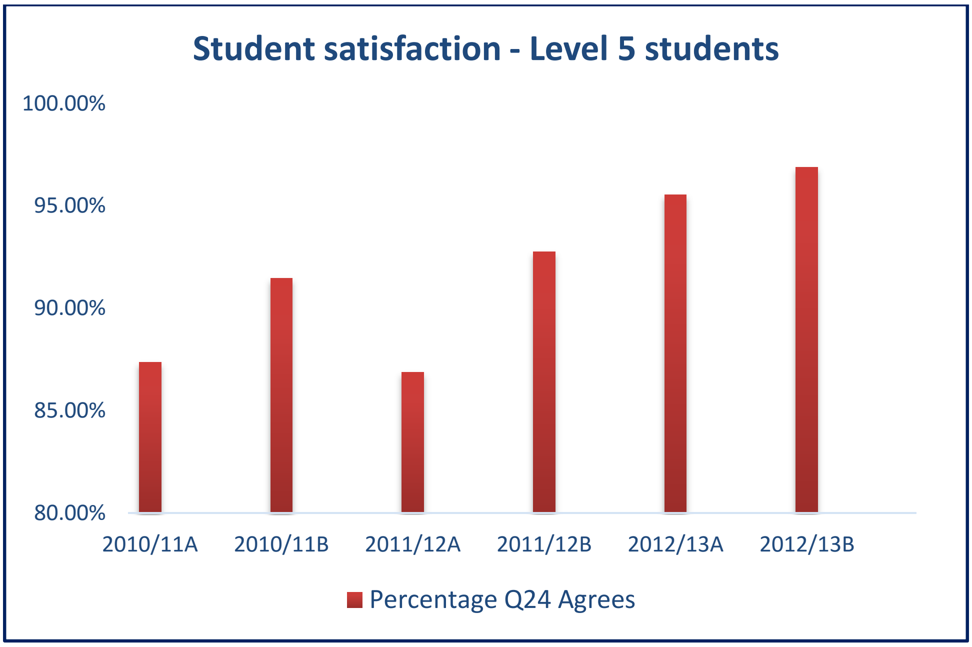
Graph F: Students studying Accountancy and Finance – level of student satisfaction (Question 24)

When comparing the overall levels of student satisfaction, for each survey year, the result achieved at Level 5 was higher than the result at Level 4, and the result achieved at level 6 was higher than the result obtained at Level 5. Additionally, the result for each Level was higher for the Semester B survey than the corresponding Semester A survey.

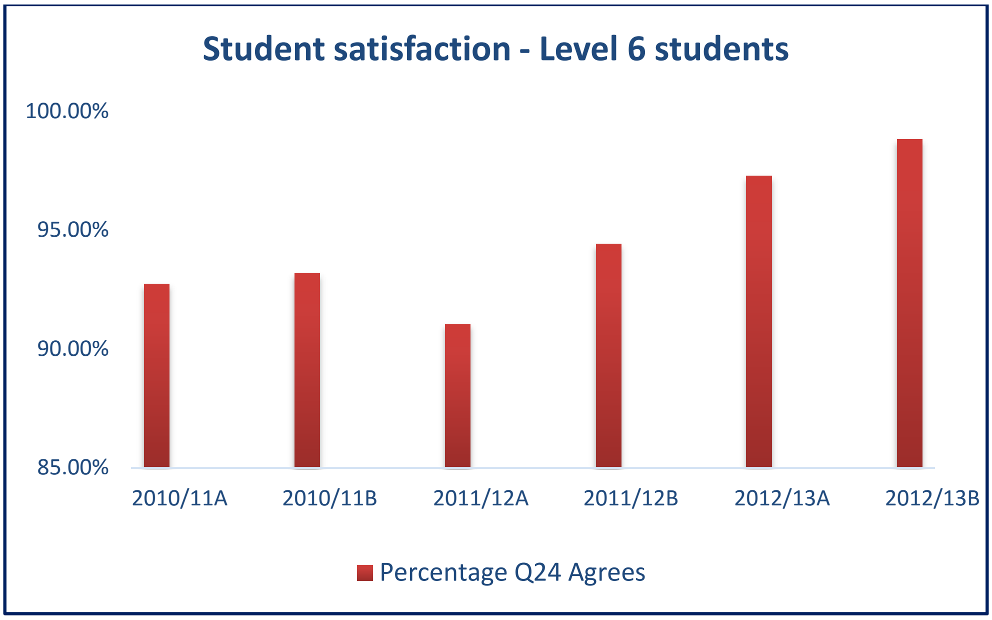
Graphs G, H, and I, all below, plot the year-on-year results for Level 4, 5, and 6 respectively and confirms that, on every occasion, Semester B results were higher than Semester A results and that the results improved year-on-year (from academic year 2011/12 onwards).



Graph G: Level 4 students studying Accountancy and Finance courses – level of student satisfaction (Question 24)

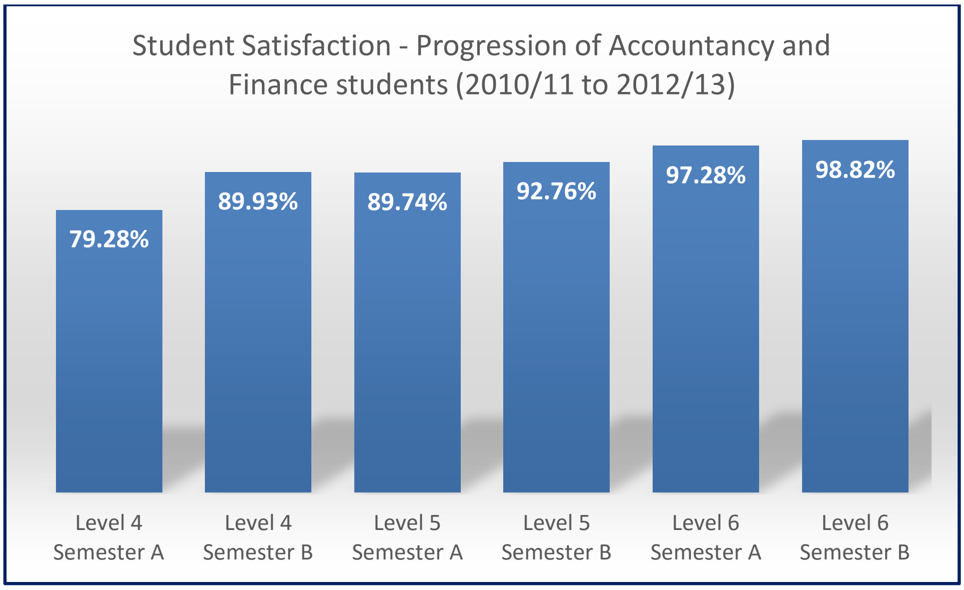


Graph H: Level 5 students studying Accountancy and Finance courses – level of student satisfaction (Question 24)



Graph I: Level 6 students studying Accountancy and Finance courses – level of student satisfaction (Question 24)

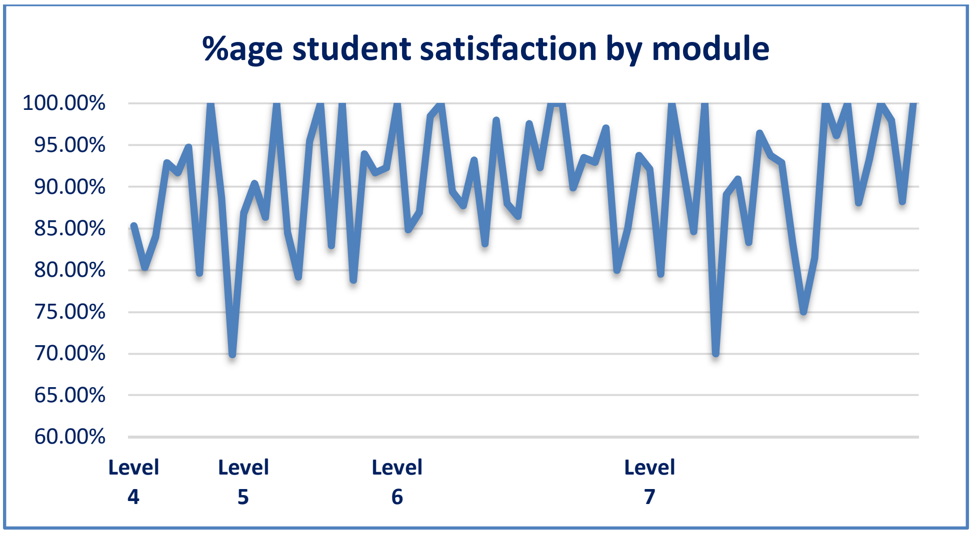
To enable a year-on-year comparison, the modules studied by students enrolled on Accountancy and Finance courses were analysed. As discreet modules were studied by students on these courses it is possible to compare the results of the student cohorts as they progress through the course, for example, MEQs for Level 5 students in 2011/12 were completed by students who completed MEQs at Level 4 in 2010/11 etc.



Graph J: Students studying Accountancy and Finance - level of student satisfaction as the students' progress through the course

Tracking students studying Accountancy and Finance, who commenced in academic year 2010/11, demonstrated a gradual increase in the level of satisfaction semester-on-semester and year-on-year and this is shown, above, in Graph J. The reason for this increase, and the increase shown between Semester A and Semester B is not identified but may be linked to the self-regulation of the level of expectation by the students themselves.

The above data is based on the average level of student satisfaction as measured by the responses to Question 24 and has been calculated as an average across all modules studied by the students at each level of study. Graph K, below, shows the average level of student satisfaction as measured by the responses to Question 24, on all individual modules studied by undergraduate and postgraduate students. This shows a range of results from 69.86 % to 100.00% at Level 4, 78.79% to 100.00% at Level 5, 80.00% to 100.00% at Level 6, and 70.00% to 100.00% at Level 7. There were 14 modules with 100% student satisfaction of which 1 was at Level 4, 3 at Level 5, 4 at Level 6, and 6 at Level 7.



Graph K: Example of level of student satisfaction (Question 24) - all modules studied during academic year 2012/13, Semester A

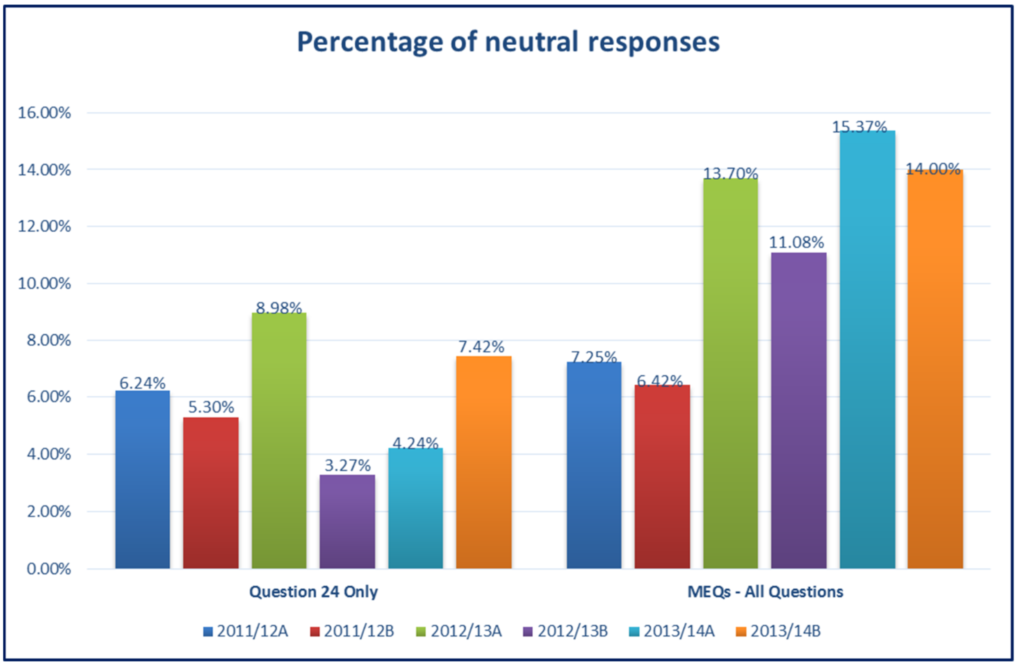
4.9.5 Acquiescence bias

Yorke (2009, 2014) suggest that there is a tendency to answer questions based on "yea-saying". The analysis of the results of the MEQ have produced some interesting results that suggest students may take an unorthodox approach to completing the. Although these results are not conclusive it does support the concern discussed below (Section 5.1.1) in regard to the attitude taken by the students when completing the local institutional surveys.

This research did not investigate the approach taken by students when completing the MEQ and compare this to the approach taken when completing the NSS however, if the students take the same approach when completing both surveys this represents a major concern.

The percentage of neutral responses is shown on Graph L, below, and is based on questionnaires completed by undergraduate student. It excludes any dataset with missing entries – a small number of students failed to answer all of the questions and were therefore excluded from this analysis.

Students used the neutral option on a relatively high number of occasions when completing the MEQs – Graph L, below, shows the occurrence of neutral responses over the duration of the MEQ surveys and shows a steady increase, year-on-year, from 2011/12 through 2013/14 when measured across all Modules and all Levels. This is particularly concerning given the methodology used by Ipsos Mori to calculate the results of the NSS by taking neutral responses as representing students not being satisfied.



Graph L: Percentage of neutral responses in MEQs

Although the impact is greatest when measuring the use of the neutral option on all questions, neutral response remains a significant influence when reviewing Question 24 alone especially when bearing in mind that the higher figures in Semester B coincides with the timing of the NSS and the phenomena may be repeated by students when completing the NSS.

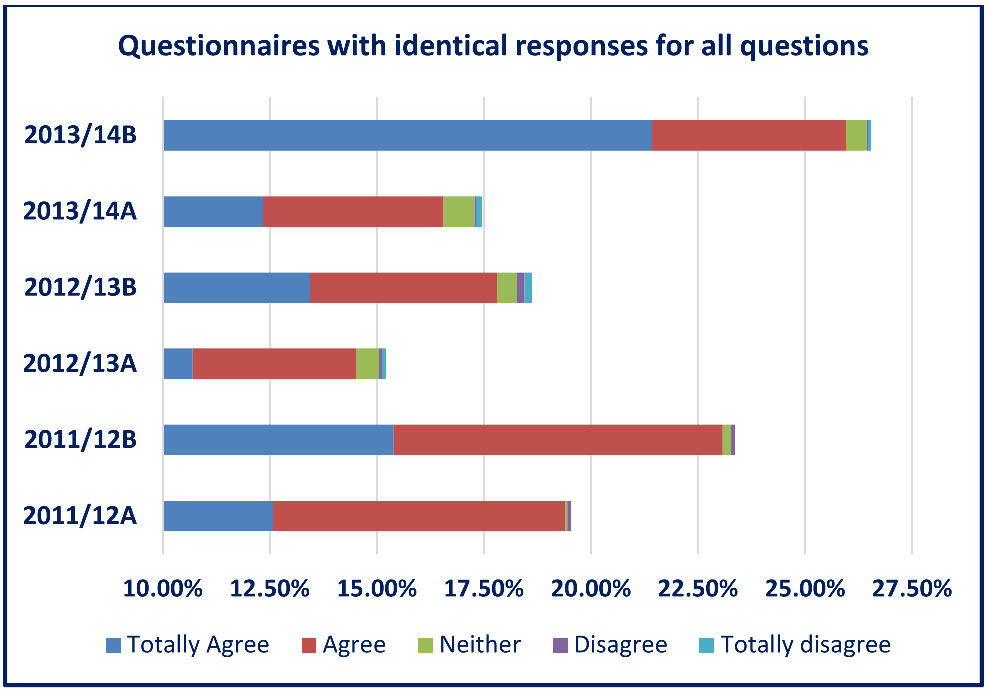
The second issue demonstrating a potential for acquiescence bias relates to the number of datasets where the response to each question was identical and reinforces the issue raised above (Section 4.9) in relation to the time taken by the respondents to complete the questionnaire.

Table 4, below, shows the overall percentage of questionnaires where the student gave the same response for all of the questions. The total number of and percentage of questionnaires with the same response to all questions is shown for each of the four academic years, by semester, with the total percentages across all of the response options shown in the final column.

	Questions 1-24 inclusive						
	No of questionnaires	**Totally Agree**	**Agree**	**Neither**	**Disagree**	**Totally disagree**	**Totals**
2011/12	4864	612	331	3	4	0	
Semester A		12.58%	6.81%	0.06%	0.08%	0.00%	19.53%
2011/12	4971	765	382	10	4	0	
Semester B		15.39%	7.68%	0.20%	0.08%	0.00%	23.36%
2012/13	4149	716	255	36	5	6	
Semester A		10.70%	3.81%	0.54%	0.07%	0.09%	15.21%
2012/13	4672	628	204	22	8	8	
Semester B		13.44%	4.37%	0.47%	0.17%	0.17%	18.62%
2013/14	5606	692	236	41	2	8	
Semester A		12.34%	4.21%	0.73%	0.04%	0.14%	17.46%
2013/14	5353	1147	273	29	2	4	
Semester B		21.43%	4.53%	0.48%	0.03%	0.07%	26.53%
						Average = 20.12%	

Table 4: Questionnaires with the same response to all questions

The significant majority of these questionnaires relate to students who took a positive approach to the survey and selected either Totally Agree or Agree – an insignificant minority gave the neutral or negative response. Almost 20% of students gave the same response to all questions which suggests that they may not have approached the questionnaire with the correct attitude. The occurrence of this phenomena is more significant in the Semester B survey and the significance of this is that it coincides with the timing of the NSS; it is also noted that the distribution of these identical responses increased as the student progressed throughout the course with the highest proportion of these responses occurring at Level 6. Graph M, below, identifies the percentage distribution between the five questionnaire response categories.



Graph M: Analysis of use of acquiescence bias

4.10 Summary

This chapter has analysed and discussed the primary qualitative data collection and the secondary quantitative data sets within the conceptual framework of the area of research being undertaken. The various techniques used by the researcher to capture data has led to a significant number of rich and interesting findings. These will all be discussed in the next chapter of this thesis where they will be combined to address and answer the three research questions within the overall aim of determining whether the NSS, and local institutional surveys, provide an effective management tool for setting strategies aimed at improving the student experience.

5.0 Research Findings

The aim of this research is to establish the robustness of surveys with a view to enhancing management practice and strategy making with regard to the student experience. By examining various aspects of student surveys, and strategic response, the research seeks to address the three questions identified in chapter 1.

The process for the researcher has been to channel reflect on the data, to structure the data and the evidence, analyse the data, and then turn it in to a series of proposed management actions which are intended to address some of the existing issues encountered by the case study institution. In doing so the research contributes to the management and wider theory and models of student satisfaction.

This chapter articulates the substantive outcomes of the research in terms of points of learning and insight and relates this directly back to the driving research questions. It provides an impact statement in terms of organisational practice within the Institution, and in the wider sector, by outlining a number of management actions that should be considered for implementation; finally, it discusses the impact of the research for the academic community, the body of theory for organisational practice in this area, and the future agenda for researchers.

Douglas et al. (2006) took the view that student satisfaction had become an extremely important issue for university management with the implied aim of maximising student satisfaction and minimising dissatisfaction thereby retaining students and improving the institutions performance; this, in turn, would be reflected in the published league tables. Accordingly, this research adds to the management of HE by researching the accuracy of the NSS based on the students' approach to the survey and their knowledge and understanding of the NSS.

5.1 Primary Findings – Research Questions

5.1.1 Research Question 1 *(To what extent does the NSS accurately capture the views and level of satisfaction of the students surveyed?).*

The overall goal of the research was to establish the robustness of the NSS and determine whether appropriate steps are taken when using the NSS as a management tool to inform strategy with regard to improving the student experience.

The research data demonstrates that students, generally, do not understand the aims and objectives of the NSS, and that, although they do recognise a loose connection between the survey and published league tables they are not aware of how the results of the NSS are used by the various stakeholder groups; neither do they recognise any link between their own completion of the survey and the overall impact that the survey has on the reputation of the institution, the position of the institutions in league tables, and any impact this may have on their own future prospects. They do not understand the importance placed on the NSS by the institution and see no evidence of any action flowing from the publication of the results of the annual survey; this supports Campbell and Bozeman (2008) who suggested that many students do not believe that the course evaluations exercise has any real impact.

When completing the survey, many of the students do not follow the instruction to read the introductory notes but go straight to the main body of the survey and answer the various questions.

Krosnick's (1991) theory of satisficing suggests that some respondents may simply skip lightly through Stages 2 and 3 of the questionnaire response process and select the first response that seems adequate.

The time taken by the group of students to complete the survey, who were observed, generally supports Krosnick's (1991) theory of satisficing although the sample observed was small and undertaken under non-controlled conditions. The time recorded against the students, who were observed, may also suggests that some students approach the survey with a preconceived idea of their responses; this approach would inevitably impact upon the outcome of survey but, as the sample observed was small, and may not be typical, further research needs to be completed in this area before firm conclusions can be drawn.

The data also suggests that a degree of "yea-saying", described by Rorer (1965) as acquiescence bias occurs, however, this may also be linked to the use of the Likert scale on the questionnaire with all questions being phrased as a positive statement. Research into the effectiveness and design of the NSS questionnaire is outside the scope of this research and not directly included although it is implicitly involved at the margins.

Krosnick (1999) concluded that the proportion of 'yea-saying' respondents was around 10%, Johanson and Osborn (2004) found a broadly similar proportion of 'yea-saying' respondents but extended the results by concluding that the reverse was also true in that 'nay-saying' accounted for 3-5% of response. The analysis of the MEQs in this research found that more than 20% of the respondents gave the same response to all questions suggesting that they may not have approached the questionnaire with the correct attitude. The researcher was unable to analyse the results of the NSS to confirm whether the extent of acquiescence bias is replicated in the NSS and this is an area that is suitable for further research.

Keywords/expressions that are used in the survey, including the expressions “quality of the course”, “course a whole”, and “student satisfaction”, are not understood by all of the students who interpret these expressions differently, some with varying levels of understanding. Additionally, many students have a tendency to form a holistic view of their general level of satisfaction, prior to starting the survey, with the result that the answers they provide are not specific to the individual questions. The students do not have a clear understanding of the meaning of all the questions, and all of the expressions used in the survey, and accordingly place their own interpretation on the questions; generally, the students do not appear to be giving sufficient thought, and applying sufficient importance, to the surveys reinforcing the conclusion drawn by Callender, Ramsden and Griggs (HEFCE, 2014a) in a recent review of the NSS.

The research data demonstrates that students do not understand the importance of the comments Section/Boxes, provided at the end of the questionnaire, and concentrate on each individual component question; the students do not understand that it is the comments that provide the institution with the richest data, with a greater level of understanding of the issues, and that these comments can be used by the institution to inform actions and act as a vehicle for change.

The mid-point of a Likert scale, that goes from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', is also problematic as it is sometimes used by respondents to register views other than neutrality and includes respondents who are demonstrating **ambivalence and indifference**.

Some respondents will use this mid-point to register that the item does not apply to them whilst others will use it where they are unable to make a meaningful response or understand the statement or question being posed. (Yorke, 2013).

There is evidence to suggest that the relatively high occurrence in the MEQ of the selection of the same response to all questions, albeit mainly on positive responses but also including the neutral response, is more widespread than may have been thought. Should this pattern of behaviour be repeated in the NSS it would have a serious impact on the outcome and the validity of the results.

The evidence also suggests that the majority of students do not understand that the use of the neutral option (Neither Agree nor Disagree) is interpreted by Ipsos Mori as being a negative response; neither do they understand the impact that the use of this option has on the overall results of the survey and consequently the positioning of the institution in the various league tables.

The researcher is able to conclude that the NSS does not accurately capture the views of the students in regard to the level of satisfaction related to the academic quality of the course, however, the survey does reflect a general level, or sense of, well-being of the students supporting the proposition of the stable person-environment relationship put forward by Grüber et al. (2010) – whether this is suitable to be used as a comparator with other institutions was not investigated.

The research has identified a number of factors that suggest that the survey does not give results as intended. These issues comprise the students’ failure to understand the aims and objectives of the survey, the students’ lack of understanding of the some of the key terms and expressions used in the NSS, confusion with the language used in many of the questions within the survey, and the general approach taken by the students in participating with the NSS.

The NSS does capture views of students insofar as the students complete the questionnaire and this does provide a level of comparison between institutions. However, as this research is based on a single case study, it is not possible to indicate the extent of which any comparison can be made and further research needs to be carried out to see whether the findings from this case study are replicated elsewhere.

The implication of the above analysis for the institutions' management of the student experience, in the case study organisation, is that the NSS is not a reliable representation of the students' views and management strategy should be revisited to take this finding into account.

Although these findings are based on a single case study, if these findings are representative of the sector as a whole, they have wider implications for many other HE institutions across the sector. The data from the NSS is used as a comparator both across the sector and by the compilers of the league tables; the stated intention is that data from the NSS allows prospective students to determine the university, and course, of their choice and this research has identified a number of issues that suggest that it is unsafe to use the NSS as a comparator in its own right.

Although it is clear that the NSS is a management tool, and does provide a degree of valuable business intelligence, this research places doubt on the reliability of the data, and the conclusions drawn from it, as used in its current form.

5.1.2 **Research Question 2** *(How do key stakeholders within the organisation understand and react to the NSS process?)*

The second research question has three components; defining the principal outputs from the NSS process, how the key stakeholders react to these outputs, and whether the key stakeholders understand the outputs. Combinations of a number of performance indicators are used for the purposes of ranking the participating institutions and then published in what are often called "league tables".

These rankings and league tables are then used to pressurise the various service providers into improving their respective performance without having to specify the benchmark performance measure. Visscher (2001) suggests that *"…a fundamental* *problem that surrounds the discussion of public sector performance monitoring is the relative lack of systematic evaluations of its effects and whether its stated aims have been achieved"*. This demonstrates and explains the importance placed by BCU on the publication of the annual NSS and how it forms part of the Dominant Logic of the institution.

The research data demonstrates that BCU uses a reactive strategy that relies upon the publication of the results of, and data from, the previous year's NSS survey; this data is analysed by a central department of the institution and published internally enabling each Faculty to develop an action plan aimed at improving the following year's survey. This process is based on the proposition that correcting issues identified in the previous years' survey will improve the following years' survey and is based on the assumption that issues raised by students are consistent year-on-year, all students use the same drivers for satisfaction, and no new unforeseen issues will arise in the coming year. The reality, however, is that new issues arise every year and these need to be captured, and actioned, prior to the survey to avoid having a negative impact on the success of this strategy.

Hallgarten (2001, p.189), in his paper on the league tables used for schools, summarises the criticisms of the use of performance indicators by stating that *"it should come as no surprise that performance indicators change an organisation's priorities. That is precisely their purpose. The concern occurs when such indicators skew priorities to the extent that other, normally less measurable, goals are relegated or jettisoned".*

At University level, the Vice-Chancellor's Office has devised key strategies designed to improve the positioning of the university in the various league tables and published a series of target KPIs, some of which are based on the results of the NSS including the position of the University, Faculties, Subjects, and programmes in the various league tables. Action plans are developed and utilised by the Faculties and are designed to enable successful alignment with these KPIs.

The approach taken by the University in preparation for the annual NSS is low-key; the University issues a briefing document approximately 6 to 8 weeks prior to the opening of the survey and the Faculties are required to engage with programme leaders and agree a schedule of briefing sessions for final year students who are eligible to participate in the survey. The briefing session contains a number of key messages and it is clear that, although the principal outputs from the survey are identified and understood, the level of understanding varies between staff in different Faculties, and between the various levels of seniority of staff, and that there is a real need for enhanced sharing, and improved articulation, of the processes and the purpose of the NSS.

A study by Smith (1995), on the unintended consequences of publishing performance data in the public sector, identified a number of important problems which performance monitoring may generate. Firstly, *tunnel vision* where there is a managerial focus on quantifiable phenomena at the expense of all others. However, this suggests that it is the problem of unquantifiable objectives in the public sector that is particularly acute especially given the diversity of stakeholder preferences that exist. The second problem identified is that of *sub-optimisation* being the pursuit of narrow local objectives at the expense of the aims of the organisation as a whole and is thought to be particularly prevalent in a public sector environment, such as a university.

The main focus at BCU is on the NSS (and the League Tables), however, the research data demonstrates that many of the staff responsible for briefing students prior to the opening of the NSS do not, themselves, fully understand the use and purpose of the survey, the meaning of various expressions contained within the survey, the meaning of some, if not all, of the questions, the impact that the survey has on league tables (and consequently the institution) and the approach taken by the students to completing the survey; all of which has a potential impact on the output of the survey itself. In this respect there is a level of consistency between students and university staff in their lack of knowledge, and understanding, of such an important instrument upon which the university's reputation and standing depends.

The collection of data enabled the researcher to capture a number of urban myths in regard to the annual survey including *"only dissatisfied students rush to complete survey"*, *"the more students to complete the survey - the better the results will be"*, and *"happy students don't bother with the NSS"* – all of which are shown to be incorrect.

The overall conclusion reached by the researcher is that the whole process by which the University prepares staff and students for the opening of the NSS, manages the process during the period when the students are entitled to complete the survey, analyses the published results of the survey, and reacts to the outcomes of the NSS is fundamentally flawed. The university would be advised to review the processes, return to basics, consider the overall aim of the survey, and revisit the method of optimising the use of the available datasets.

Key stakeholders, within the university, do not fully understand and react to the NSS process and its principal outputs as anticipated by senior managers. This is partly due to a relatively low level of understanding of the purposes and the uses of the survey, by many of the key stakeholders, and is compounded by the students' low level of knowledge and understanding of the survey as demonstrated by their approach to completing the questionnaire. This is reinforced by the number of potential management actions (detailed in Section 5.2.1, below) that may contribute to improving the effectiveness of a University's strategy for managing both the NSS and local institutional surveys.

5.1.3 Research Question 3 *(To what extent do local surveys, such as the Module Evaluation Questionnaires completed by students at Birmingham City University, complement the understanding of the results of the NSS?).*

The research data demonstrates that the Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQs) capture both quantitative and qualitative data which is then used by the institution to inform student satisfaction, however, analysis of the questionnaires have highlighted a number of issues that impact upon the results, accuracy, and reliability of the survey.

To improve/increase the reliability and usefulness of the data captured by student experience surveys it is important that students engage with the survey process but, unfortunately, these surveys frequently suffer from low response rates. Porter (2004) recognised the commonality of low participation rates in student surveys whereas Surridge (2009b) finds that the surveys decrease their generalisability due to the differences between the attitudes and experiences of the participants and non-participants.

Although there was a high level of participation in the MEQs, analysis of the MEQs evidenced relatively high levels of both acquiescence bias and the use of the neutral option – the researcher was unable to determine the cause of these phenomena.

The overall level of student satisfaction also showed a gradual improvement year-on-year as the students' progress through the course, i.e. second year higher than first year, third year higher than second year, second semester higher than first semester etc. There are many possible explanations for this, however, they were not researched although it is thought that this may, in part, be due to an increased understanding and appreciation by the student of the course as a whole, and the delivery of the course, over the period of study.

It may also represent, or reflect, the improvements put in place by the researcher, and the Faculty Senior Management Team, as a result of sharing the outcomes of this research during the research programme, however, this is not proven and would be suitable for further research.

Although the MEQs captures qualitative data, used by the Faculty to inform student satisfaction and identify issues that require action, the students do not understand the motivation for the MEQs with the majority believing that it is simply used to assess academics performance in the delivery of the module. They do not understand why the Faculty undertakes such a comprehensive survey and see no evidence that it is used either as a performance measure or to enhance student satisfaction and the student experience. The naming of the survey may also give a false impression as to the aims and objectives of the survey as the students are not given a detailed briefing prior to the survey being undertaken allowing them to draw their own conclusions as to what the survey is, and what it is used for.

The students are very nervous about making negative comments at module, level as they do not wish to appear to be critical based on the fear that the academic, about whom they make negative comments, will be able to identify them and that this would then impact on their overall academic performance in the module.

The research data demonstrates that most students like, admire, and respect the academics and have no wish to upset them by making negative comments so refrain from doing so; accordingly, they do not understand that the comments section in the MEQ, as with the NSS, provides the most valuable and richest data and that both sets of comments will be used by the Faculty to inform improvements in the delivery of the module/course.

Local institutional surveys do provide management with a limited level of information enabling the enhancement of delivery of the course but, as a consequence of the above limitations in the quantitative data captured by the current survey tools, there is an urgent need to develop more effective methods of capturing both negative comments (to be used as a vehicle for change) and positive comments (to be used to share good practice and celebrate success). The surveys also provide a rich source of quantitative data that is not used to maximum effect as there is a reluctance amongst local management to share and publish this data; it is treated as confidential management information with the full dataset remaining unpublished and with headline figures, only, shared in Boards of Study.

The use of these partial datasets supplement the traditional method of capturing student opinion through the Board of Study process with student representation providing feedback on the quality of the delivery of the modules informing the committee process of issues raised by the students. This research has identified a major flaw in this process with the majority of the students interviewed being unable to identify any of their student representatives, several students unaware of the process, and a minority of the students aware of the existence of a student representative but unable to articulate the role and purpose of these representatives. None of the students interviewed understood the process of reporting issues through Boards of Study or were able to articulate the hierarchy of the committee structure of the University; and none of the students interviewed had received any feedback from their appointed representatives.

The conclusion drawn by the researcher is that local institutional surveys are a positive response and have the potential to provide a rich source of data to supplement the limitations of the NSS but that, currently, they are not used to their full potential; the institution should revisit the use of these surveys to maximise their utilisation and benefit.

Local institutional surveys represent both positive and negative responses to the limitations of, and complement the understanding of the results, of the NSS but, to be effective, there must be coordination/consistency across the institution. This, together with a faster response time, and a clear demonstration that issues are being identified and acted upon, would have a positive effect. Analysis of the results of the MEQs, demonstrating improvement across semesters and year-on-year, indicates that the use of surveys of this type provide students with an opportunity to become familiar with the type of survey they will face when asked to complete the NSS.

The researcher is able to conclude that, at the case study institution, whilst the NSS provides a useful comparison between the participating institutions, caution should be exercises when using the data as a management tool used in the setting of strategies aimed at improving the student experience.

However, as it is not possible to confirm that students at other institutions approach the NSS in the same way as those from the case study institution, it is not possible to conclude that this applies to all HEIs.

Although useful additional and supplementary data is gathered in the local institutional surveys, which can be used to assist in the interpretation of the results of the NSS, institutions would be advised to exercise caution when interpreting the results of the NSS.

The NSS is useful to the extent that it clearly demonstrates trends across the sector and from year to year; additionally, it highlights local variations across Faculties within individual institutions which, in itself, provides valuable business intelligence.

However, institutions would be advised to exercise caution in using the NSS as a stand-alone tool and would be advised to work with the student body to improve the approach to, and the reliability of, the NSS; in this respect the researcher has devised a number of management actions that institutions would be advised to consider as an aide to improving the effectiveness of the NSS as a management tool.

5.2 Contribution to Professional Practice

The presumption made by the designers, sponsors, and users, of the NSS is that students will engage fully with the survey process and, accordingly, the results of the survey are interpreted as an appropriate reflection of the students' views; the empirical evidence captured in this research suggests that institutions would be advised to revisit these assumptions and develop more effective strategies to manage the NSS process.

There is no doubt that the NSS does provide a useful comparison between various institutions but many of the assumptions currently made about the information that the survey provides should, at the very least, be revisited.

This case study has been used to develop a number of proposed management actions designed to overcome a number of the issues raised in the findings; the intention of the research is that the aims and objectives of the NSS will ultimately be achieved and that the quality of the captured data, together with the ability of senior management to use the NSS as a resource to set effective strategies, will both be improved.

This thesis and the following management actions represents a resource available to Institutions, namely the academics and administrators in charge of the management and implementation of the annual NSS and local institutional surveys. The resource will also enable the University to enhance the student experience, register higher levels of student satisfaction in the various published surveys and, in turn, improve positioning in the published league tables.

5.2.1 Universities should develop a strategy for providing students with timely feedback from the NSS and local institutional surveys demonstrating that student comments are acted upon.

Surveys provide valuable and rich data with the additional value, over a period of time, of being able to demonstrate trends. The comments sections of the various surveys provide data which, if actioned, provide great potential for high impact, however, institutions must be able to evidence action against these comments as seen from the students' perspective.

Comments made by students, and included in the surveys, should be published by the University, at course and/or module level. Individual academics should use both negative and positive comments to inform appropriate actions embracing dialogue with the students who are studying on the module/course. It is recognised that comments from the NSS will be received after the participating students have completed the course, and left the University, but many of the comments will be relevant to the following academic year.

Feedback from the local institutional surveys should be delivered to the students as soon as possible after the survey has been closed and should include a summary of both positive and negative comments together with details of how the positive comments can be expanded and/or shared with colleagues; the negative comments should be summarised and feedback should either provide an explanation of the action that will be taken, to negate the comments in the next delivery of the module, or an explanation explaining why no action can be taken in regard to the specific negative comment.

The methodology used for analysing the questionnaires should ensure that the period between the completion of the survey and the publication of the results is reduced to a minimum to enable timely feedback to be provided to the students who participated in the survey.

5.2.2 Universities should develop a marketing/communications strategy to ensure that the students are fully aware of the NSS/MEQ processes used and that the strategy allows for continuous improvement.

Analysis of the surveys is designed to identify and capture current issues and students must be made aware of the process by which the questionnaires are designed, the survey managed and analysed, and actions identified and acted upon.

It is also necessary to ensure that the students are aware of how they will be informed of proposed actions, for both, positive and negative issues, and how issues will be escalated if required. Many issues will be captured outside the NSS and local institutional surveys and the feedback to the students must include all issues that are captured irrespective of the means of capture.

It is important to ensure that students are familiar with the techniques used by the institution for capturing and resolving issues that they raise, irrespective of how they are identified, and that the institution takes a positive and welcoming attitude to issues being raised by students.

Samples of the positive comments could also be used to great effect in various marketing materials.

5.2.3 Universities should ensure that the level of engagement and dialogue with students is sufficient to ensure that issues raised by the students are captured and acted upon as and when they arise and that actions are evidenced.

It is recognised that surveys are blunt instruments and provide a limited, albeit useful, level of data from which actions can follow. There is, however, a need to improve/increase the level of engagement with students to ensure that problems and issues are identified by management at the earliest possible time; and without relying solely on the surveys to identify issues relatively late in the life cycle of the module/academic year. It is acknowledged that this can be only achieved through an improved dialogue involving course leaders, module leaders, personal tutors and the students studying the module/course and that this should be an ongoing process throughout the academic year and not dependent on defined activities such as Boards of Studies.

Institutions should be encouraged to develop strategies to ensure that all Faculty staff, including senior management, academics, and support staff, develop improved user-friendly lines of communication with the students.

5.2.4 Universities should ensure that student representatives receive sufficient training and support to ensure that they are able to succeed in their designated role.

It is important to ensure that the students attending meetings as student representatives are adequately trained and prepared to enable them to capture and deliver the views of all of the students that they are representing. After the meetings, it is important that the students are enabled sufficiently to provide the appropriate level of feedback to the groups of students that they represent. The method/process for selecting student representatives should ensure that only the most appropriate and motivated students are selected.

5.2.5 Universities should rationalise and coordinate the annual cycle of questionnaire surveys to ensure that students do not suffer from questionnaire-fatigue.

A number of students complained that they suffer *"death by questionnaire"* in that there are too many questionnaires with the result that they become increasingly reluctant to participate in the survey and/or fail to complete them adequately and/or complete them with due diligence. The timing of the various surveys should be coordinated across the university to ensure that sufficient focus is placed on the more important surveys, especially the NSS, that students are not distracted by less important surveys, and that sufficient time is allowed within local institutional surveys to provide feedback to the participating student prior to the end of the module/course.

5.2.6 Universities should manage and ensure the adequacy, quality, and standard of delivery of briefings given to students relating to the NSS.

It is important for high quality, precise, and accurate briefings to be delivered to the students participating in the survey that are designed to ensure that the students fully understand the purpose of the survey, the various uses made of the survey, and with the meaning of all of the various expressions, words, and questions contained within the survey.

This should also ensure that the students understand both the importance of the survey and its use by the compilers of the various national league tables together with an explanation of the use employers may make of the survey. It should also include a detailed explanation of the meaning of the various questions and finally an explanation of the detrimental use of the neutral option in the questionnaire in any analysis of the survey – A guide in the form of FAQs would be helpful.

Guidelines published by HEFCE (HEFCE, 2014b) for promoting the survey should be complied with and, accordingly, consideration should be given to the appropriateness of using academics and/or students to deliver the briefing sessions, the content of the briefing, the timing of these sessions and whether they should be delivered by the Student Union.

5.2.7 Universities should consider whether to appoint Survey Champions.

Clear and distinct leadership is an important element in persuading students to engage with the NSS. One way in which this leadership might be undertaken would be by the use of survey champions, whether academic, non-academic staff, or student, and who would facilitate the raising of awareness of the importance and use of the various surveys that are carried out at the University.

This is designed to control and standardise the information that is being disseminated about the NSS, and local institutional surveys, and be the main point of contact for staff and students to direct queries and seek information. Survey champions would own the outcomes and actions and ensure compliance and the resolution of issues.

5.2.8 Universities should consider the appropriateness and method of educating students as to the importance of completing the NSS.

The NSS website (as at 1st December 2014) displayed a strapline *"Did you know…"* stating that *"it takes less than five minutes to complete the survey."* (NSS, 2015). Given that there are 23 questions to consider and two opportunities to make a written comment, assuming that a student decides not to make a written comment and that it takes approximately 1 minute to log on and complete the formalities enabling the survey, the expectation expressed by the website is that it is acceptable to take 10 seconds or less to answer each question.

Whether the suggested time for completion is realistic or not, the time taken by the sample of students who were observed by the researcher completing the NSS suggests that many students take approximately half of this time, namely, less than five seconds per question. Although this is a small random sample, and firm conclusion should not be drawn in this area without further research, it does raise a caution.

Given the above, institutions should develop a strategy to raise awareness of this issue which may lead to the NSS providing a greater degree of accuracy when capturing the students' views.

5.3 Overall Conclusions and Contribution to the Management of HE

By researching the understanding of the students' approach to, and their knowledge of, the NSS, this research study is aimed at enabling institutions to improve decision-making related to the implementation of the NSS; this has also been articulated throughout the documents.

The focus of this research is about informing management, firstly concerning the robustness of the NSS with a view to developing more effective tools for the management of the student experience and, secondly, whether the NSS is an effective vehicle for informing the setting of strategies in HEIs.

Although BCU has been used as a single case study, this research is not a study concerning the institutions' positioning in the league tables and does not investigate strategies for increasing rankings in the various league tables; nor does it concern strategies for increasing student satisfaction and/or the more effective management of academics.

The research seeks to determine the effectiveness of the NSS (and local institutional surveys) as a robust management tool, whether the views of the student population are accurately captured in the NSS, the extent to which the students understand the meaning and importance of the NSS as a management tool, and whether the use of the published results of the surveys, and subsequent league tables, effectively inform the setting of strategies by Institutions.

A number of general conclusions can be drawn which are discussed in the following Section:

5.3.1 Whether the views of the student population are accurately captured in the NSS

Furedi (2011) suggests that comparing institutions based on results of student experience surveys may be misleading and, as institutional policy is currently being informed by the results of these surveys, raises potential issues due to the imbalance between the student opinion, as captured by the NSS, and the students' reluctance to give their views. Overall the researcher is able to conclude that the NSS does not accurately capture the views of students, notably due of the students' lack of understanding of some of the key words and expressions used in the NSS and their general approach to the survey. The students' knowledge and understanding of the use made of the NSS by the Government and HEIs is poor with a number of significant incorrect assumptions made for example:

> *"used to rate the lecturers"*,
>
> *"to find out whether the students have enjoyed their time at university",*
> *"used for league tables"* and finally
>
> *"Government does something with it".*

There are a number of key areas which impact upon the effectiveness of the NSS including the lack of understanding of how the neutral response is included in the analysis of the results, the effect of giving the same response to all questions *(acquiescence bias),* and students approaching the NSS having taken a holistic approach and forming a pre-conceived idea as to their general level of satisfaction.

Groves et al. (2006, p.731) noted that *"non-response does not necessarily cause non-response bias or invalidate survey findings in all instances"*. Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf (2008) suggest that many students are not sure what the surveys are used for and do not understand the impact of the survey on either the teaching staff or the institution, a view supported by this research.

The NSS cannot be considered to be an effective tool, as originally intended, and the use made by BCU of the results of the survey should be reviewed. It is accepted that the NSS does provide valuable data and can be used to compare responses of students across the university. This, for example, allows BCU to identify courses where the students are expressing a lower level of results than other courses but these results should not be taken on face value until further investigation has been undertaken to confirm the cause(s) of the lower results.

This research project was limited to a single Faculty (BCBS) within BCU and it is not possible to generalise the results across the whole university with any degree of certainty, however, it is thought likely that BCBS is typical of all the other Faculties at BCU. A small research project (perhaps with a single focus groups containing students from all Faculties) would quickly confirm whether the results are generalisable across the Institution.

5.3.2 The extent to which the students understand the meaning and importance of the NSS as a management tool

Campbell and Bozeman (2008) found that many students do not believe that course evaluation exercises have any real impact; this is supported as the Research found that students completing the NSS (and local institutional surveys) have little understanding of the use made of the surveys by the University and see no evidence that it is used other than for marketing purposes:

> *"the results are sometimes used in advertising campaigns"*.

The students do not generally connect the results of the NSS with university strategy aimed at improving the university's league table position and, generally, do not even connect the NSS to league tables. Only a small minority of responses mentioned the league table when asked *"Do you know what use the University makes of the NSS"* and *"What…use made of the data captures [in the NSS]"*; Additionally, there was no apparent connect between the NSS and the Student Experience.

Accordingly, the researcher is able to conclude that students have no understanding of the use made of the NSS as a management tool or the importance placed on the NSS by the University.

There is value in supplementing the NSS with local surveys as the data captured provides useful comparative data albeit with limitations (as discussed above related to the NSS data), unfortunately, the students see no evidence of the use made of this data by the Faculty Senior Management Team. It was not, therefore, surprising that the students did not understand the importance placed on these local institutional surveys by the University and the use made of the data as a management tool. Finally, a caution should be highlighted over the profligacy of surveys across the university and the desire to manage the timing of the various surveys to avoid *"death by survey".* (See Management Action, Section 5.2.5, above).

The students' lack of understanding as to the meaning and importance of the NSS as a management tool is understandable given the inconsistency of the management of the NSS by academics and who, generally, take an uncoordinated approach. It is important that the students' level of knowledge of the NSS is improved and this should be led at University level to ensure the adequacy, quality, and standard of delivery of briefings given to students relating to the NSS. (See Management Action, Section 5.2.6, above).

5.3.3 Whether the use of the published results of the surveys and subsequent league tables effectively inform the setting of strategies by Institutions

Nationally, and internationally, the reported level of satisfaction is deemed to serve as a comparative guide for students to assist in their decision-making process when choosing what course to study, or institution to attend, and is published in a variety of formats as institutional performance indicators (Murphy and Harris, 1995; White et al., 1999).

Given that the data collected in the NSS is subject to various criticisms, outlined above, it follows that the data is unreliable in a number of significant areas, the results may be misleading, and the subsequent position in the league table subject to a number of caveats. However, this research is not able to conclude that BCU's position in the various league tables is misplaced as it is not possible to generalise the findings of this research across the sector.

The researcher concludes that the position in the various league tables partly informs the institutions' strategy aimed at improving their overall position in the various league tables albeit the positioning may be false or unreliable. However, the use of the published survey, and its detailed analysis, does not adequately inform strategy and BCU would be better advised to carry out further research into the students' understanding and approach to the survey in the first instance, devise alternative methods of improving the student experience, capture student opinion at local level, and subsequently ensure that their level of knowledge of student satisfaction is improved. This Business Intelligence could then be used to inform strategy more effectively.

Accordingly, the researcher suggests that, rather than relying on the data published through the NSS, BCU should accept the ranking in the league table at face value, set strategies aimed at increasing their overall ranking, and devise other, more appropriate, methods of gaining market intelligence into the views of the students.

As a consequence of the above, the use made by BCU of the NSS and its interpretation of the results are flawed. The current strategy of analysing the results of the annual NSS and reacting to both individual courses and individual questions that fall below internally defined benchmarks, fails to ensure the general level of improvement that it is designed to achieve.

Alternative strategies should be devised based on a proactive approach aimed at improving the student experience, improving the knowledge of the student body as to the importance of the NSS as a management tool, ensuring that the students are able to identify improvements that are taking place as a result of the local institutional surveys, and ensuring that all employees at the institution buy-in to the concept of continuous improvement of the student experience.

This research was undertaken under appropriate ethical guidelines with empirical, theoretical and methodological dimensions. The empirical study has used a range of theoretical and methodological devices to generate and develop some of the principles associated with institutional theory to help make sense of what happens within organisations.

The utility of different theoretical frameworks has helped make sense of internal institutional dynamics and the decision-making process. This is most notable in the presence of a strong Dominant Logic at the case study institution where current strategies have been developed based on the outcomes of the latest published NSS with major elements of the plan based wholly upon improving the KPIs as measured against the NSS and related league tables.

The presumption, made by the Government, HEIs, and other users of the NSS, is that the NSS accurately reflects the current view of the students regarding the course as a whole, with the particular emphasis placed on question 22; the assumption is that it accurately records the level of student satisfaction regarding the quality of the course at the individual HEIs being surveyed. The researcher is able to conclude that the effectiveness of the NSS, and local institutional surveys, as a management tool for setting strategies is, at best, limited, and at worst, flawed. This is because the data captured does not generally reflect the views of the students as intended by the owners/compilers of the NSS.

This research concludes that, although the NSS does provide a comparison across institutions, the level of understanding of the survey by the student, and the approach they take when completing the survey, suggests that reliance should not be placed on the accuracy of the survey in reflecting the actual level of student satisfaction. Institutions would be advised to develop more accurate tools for capturing student opinion and develop improved processes for ensuring that issues, identified by the surveys or during the academic year, are resolved when they arise and that the students are informed of this resolution.

5.4 Disclaimers and limits to “knowledge claims”

Although this research is based on a single case study, and is not widely generalisable, the research study, and many of the conclusions, will be of interest to all HEIs and those interested in the sector. If the results of this research were repeated across the sector the conclusions drawn by both HEFCE (on behalf of the Government) and the receiving Universities in relation to the reliability and the meaning placed the results of the NSS would be questionable – it would also follow that the HEIs positioning in the various league tables would need to be reviewed. However, if it was found that all students across the sector took the same approach, as that taken by students at BCU, the comparison between the various universities would remain valid albeit with less accurate and reliable data as to actual levels of student satisfaction

The future agenda for researchers in this area includes potential research into whether there is any consistency in the approach taken by students when completing the NSS. Given that students attending universities in the various sub-sectors have differing profiles, (see Document 4 – entry level qualifications) research into whether there is any consistency of approach taken by students when completing the NSS across the different sub-segments, for example by contrasting Russell Group Universities with post-92 Universities, would be valuable.

Although this research is not currently generalisable across the whole sector, many of the findings will be of great interest to all universities and the research project, as a whole, will be a valuable resource to all universities in the same comparator group as BCU.

A further area for future research would be a more detailed study into effectiveness of the NSS by identifying the factors that students take into consideration when completing the survey across the sector.

Given that larger than expected numbers of students displayed, when completing the MEQs, either acquiescence bias or the use of the neutral option, research into this phenomenon would provide an interesting insight into the mind-set of the student and allow institutions the opportunity to change patterns of behaviour. In particular, by examining the raw NSS data it would be possible to see whether these phenomena are repeated by students in the NSS or whether it is limited to local institutional surveys.

In regard to the observational study, although the researcher recorded the time taken by students in completing the NSS survey, this was not completed under controlled conditions and was only a relatively small sample. Although this produced interesting results, it is thought that the results are not generalisable and this exercise should be repeated under controlled conditions for a larger sample group across the University as a whole. An alternative approach would be to compare the time taken by students to complete the on-line survey at different institutions, across different subject areas, and on various specific courses – this data is available in the NSS database and could be a desk-based exercise.

At local level, further research should be undertaken to determine whether the proposed management actions (Section 5.2, above) have any impact on the results of the NSS.

HEFCE have, themselves, recently established created the opportunity and means for further research and are actively encouraging bids to conduct analysis or research into data from the NSS with the broad aim being to enhance understanding of the results generated by the survey and to further contribute to the work they carry out in this area.

They have created a NSS research panel comprising members drawn from HEFCE, HESA and the HEA to assess submitted proposals and the panel meets quarterly to review and manage the research proposals. (HEFCE, 2014c). The research panel will consider proposals made to HEFCE and/or the HEA to conduct analysis or research into NSS data and will allow researchers to receive data from the NSS (in one or multiple years) as 'individualised' student data in order for the researcher and/or their organisation to carry out analysis or research into the NSS dataset – and this provides the ideal opportunity to continue research in this area.

Whereas the main thrust of this research was to investigate the effectiveness of the NSS as a management tool in the setting of strategies aimed at improving the student experience, it does contain number of limitations. The most obvious limitation is the use of a case study approach and the consequent restrictions on the generalisability of the results.

There are, however, a number of other limitations including the relatively small number of students and staff who participated in the various focus groups, the fact that only students from a single faculty were included in the study, and students studying business courses may not be representative, or even typical, of the whole of the student body. Students from the Health Faculty, for example, may have different priorities etc. to Business School students. Additionally, the observational study was limited to a single cohort of students from the business school who were observed completing the NSS on-line survey only and not a range of surveys. Finally, the participating students may have been suffering from "questionnaire fatigue."

The data collected via the paper-based MEQs was manually entered into a database and may have contained a number of data entry errors, although it is thought that this would have had a minimal impact on the results of the surveys.

A further concern relates to the reported absence of evidence by the students as to actions arising from previous questionnaires and this may have impacted on their mind-set when participating in the focus groups, 1:1 interviews and the on-line observation exercise.

As stated above, there are issues with whether or not the results are able to be generalised and it is accordingly recommended that further work should be undertaken to confirm this aspect of the research. It may be possible to generalise the current findings from the case study university to its competitor group but, in order to obtain more reliable results, it is recommended that this study should be repeated across a larger sample of students, across the whole institution, and across multiple universities.

This research has, however, determined a number of important findings that will assist institutions in gaining a better understanding of the effectiveness of the NSS and the use of surveys as a management tool for setting strategies aimed at improving the student experience.

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7.0 Appendices

Appendix A – NSS questionnaire

Appendix B – Birmingham City University Student Experience Survey on-line questionnaire

Appendix C – Module Evaluation Questionnaire

Appendix D – Invitations sent to students by e-mail inviting them to participate in the research (Student Focus Groups and 1:1 Interviews)

Appendix E – Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Appendix F – Student Focus Group Questions (Session 1)

Appendix G – Outline of semi-structured 1:1 interview

Appendix H – Preliminary findings from Student Focus Groups and 1:1 Interviews

Appendix I – Student Focus Group Questions (Session 2)

Appendix J – Proposed Management Actions

Appendix K – Additional Management Actions proposed by students

Appendix L – Proposed Management Actions (final)

Appendix M – Schedule of timings of students completing the NSS

Appendix N – Letter from Controller of University Data

Appendix O – FEC Committee, confirmation of Chair's approval

Note; Appendices A and B are appended at the end of this file

Appendix C

Birmingham City Business School
Module Evaluation Questionnaire

Dear Student,

The feedback from this questionnaire will be very useful to the School and its staff members in improving the quality of your teaching and learning. Your responses are anonymous and cannot affect your marks. The module leader and lecturers will carefully consider the results and publish an evaluative report for the next cohort of students. In response to previous student feedback the results of this analysis will be made available through the module Moodle providing the next cohort of students with the actions taken in response to your feedback.

If you agree or disagree with any statement please give further comments or suggestions in the open ended questions overleaf. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Please complete the information about your course below:

Your Course or Pathway:

Module Title:

Module Lecturers:

Day:	**Time:**

Please tick ONE of the boxes for each question:

Module Teaching	Definitely Agree (1)	Mostly Agree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Mostly Disagree (4)	Definitely Disagree (5)
The Module lecturer was good at explaining things					
The Module lecturer has made the subject interesting					
The Module lecturer was enthusiastic about what they were teaching					
The Module lecturer demonstrated good knowledge of the subject					
The Module lecturer was well prepared					
The Module lecturer could be clearly heard					
The Module lecturer was responsive to the individual needs of students					
The Module lecturer sought students' views on ways to improve his/her teaching					
The module was intellectually stimulating					
Module Guidance for Assessment	Definitely Agree	Mostly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
The criteria to be used in marking were made clear in advance					
Feedback on my work/exercises within the module has helped me to clarify things I did not understand					
I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies					
I have been able to contact a Module lecturer when I needed to					

Module Organisation & Management	Definitely Agree	Mostly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
The module timetable has worked efficiently as far as my activities are concerned					
Any changes in the module or teaching have been communicated effectively					
The module was well organised and ran smoothly					
Module Learning Resources	Definitely Agree	Mostly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
The library resources and services were good enough for my needs					
I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to					
I have been able to access specialist equipment, facilities or rooms when I needed to					
The Moodle resources for the module were good enough for my needs					
Personal Development	Definitely Agree	Mostly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
The module has helped me to present myself with confidence					
The module has helped to improve my communication skills					
As a result of studying this module, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems					
Overall Satisfaction with the Module	Definitely Agree	Mostly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
Overall I'm satisfied with the quality of this module					

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS: Please write answers to the questions below as clearly as possible.

1. What were the three best features of this module?
2. What were the three worst features of the module?
3. In what ways could this module be improved?

Appendix D: Invitations sent to students by e-mail inviting them to participate in the research (Student Focus Groups and 1:1 Interviews)

Dear [ ],

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project that I am running at the Business School aimed at improving the student experience.

Alternative 1/

[I have selected you at random from the total student population and am asking if you would be able to spare 30 minutes of your time to meet me and answer a series of questions related to the Module Evaluation Questionnaires that you are familiar with and the National Student Survey that you will be asked to complete in your final year.]

Alternative 2/

[I have selected you at random from the total student population and am asking if you would be able to join a focus group to discuss issues related to the Module Evaluation Questionnaires that you are familiar with and the National Student Survey that you will be asked to complete in your final year. The focus group meetings will be held between 12:30 and 2:30 and lunch will be provided.]

Participation is entirely voluntary, and will be completely anonymous, but your responses will help to inform the strategies that will be used to improve how we manage the Faculty and will help to improve the student experience for future years.

If you are willing to participate, please reply to my e-mail and I will then ask my PA to contact you and agree a time that suits you the best.

I enclose a document that explains what I am researching in more detail.

Many thanks for your time

Kind regards

Steve Pymount

Appendix E

NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

Participant Information Sheet

1. Research Project - Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

2. Background and aim of the project

I am studying for a Doctorate in Business Administration at Nottingham Trent University and investigating student satisfaction throughout the life cycle of the student from induction and each year of study to graduation.

In this respect I would like to discuss with staff and students at pre-university stage, the following issues:

- What are the determinants of student satisfaction
- What do students understand by the terms, expressions and words used in the NSS
- How do students approach completing questionnaires related to satisfaction
- What do students' consider to be important and how does this effect them filling in univeristy based questionnaires
- Does this last issue differ when it comes to completing the NSS survey
- How does the University react to the results of the various surveys

3. Why have I been chosen?

I have invited you to participate in this research as you are representative of one of the major stakeholder groups and your views and actions inform the perception and delivery of the student experience.

4. Do I have to take part?

It is important that free informed consent is given by you so participation in this research is voluntary.

If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without having to give reason or explanation although I would appreciate being notified by 1st June 2012 as after this time, I will have analysed the interviews and started to write up the research.

If you do decide to withdraw please contact me and I will delete your recording, transcripts and any other information from the research.

5. What will happen to me if I take part?

Your involvement at this stage of my research is limited to this interview/meeting. I may request a further, second, interview/meeting to test the views of other participants.

The interview will be recorded and Interview recordings and transcripts will be stored in secure, locked storage. Personal details will not be attached to the tapes or transcripts and a pseudonym will be used in the writing up of the reports and the thesis to ensure your anonymity.

Other details specific to you and that may identify you will also be omitted and all recordings and transcripts will be destroyed within 12 months of the interviews/meetings.

6. What do I have to do?

I would like to interview you using a focus group style and using semi-structured interview questions. I will ask you a series of questions which I would like you to address openly and honestly. Your answers are not be assessed as right or wrong but will be used to inform the next stage of my research and I may wish to have the opportunity to revisit some of your answers at a later stage dependent upon the views of others.

I will also be inviting students to participate in a 1:1 interview which will again be using semi-structured interview questions. I will ask you a series of questions which I would like you to address openly and honestly.

7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those participating in the project, it is hoped that this research will result in a better understanding of student satisfaction and an improved student experience at Universities in general, and Birmingham City University in particular. It is hoped that the results of this research will be published in leading journals in due course.

8. What if something goes wrong?

The University's Registrar and Secretary at Nottingham Trent University is the designated official person at the University responsible for receiving complaints brought against the University.

Complaints will be handled by Academic Registry who have a standard procedure for dealing with complaints. They can be contacted at http://www.ntu.ac.uk/registry

9. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you which is disseminated will have your identification removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

10. Who is organising and funding the research?

The research being undertaken in fulfilment of a Doctor of Business Administration by research at Nottingham Trent University and the researcher is sponsored by Birmingham City University.

11. Who has reviewed the project?

The NTU Research Ethics Committee/Departmental Ethics has considered this research under the NTU Review Procedure and given formal approval.

12. Contacts for further information

Researcher: **Steve Pymount**, Director of Administration,

Birmingham City Business School

E: steve.pymount@bcu.ac.uk,

Tel: 07969 566008

Supervisors: **Professor Simon Mercado,** Nottingham Business School, Newton Building, Goldsmith Street, Nottingham, NG1 4BU

E: simon.mercado@ntu.ac.uk

Tel: 01158 482168

Dr. Néstor Valero-Silva, Nottingham Business School, Newton Building, Goldsmith Street, Nottingham, NG1 4BU

E: nestor.valero-silva@ntu.ac.uk

Tel: 01158 482168

Professor John Sparrow, Birmingham City Business School, Galton Building, Perry Barr, Birmingham B42 2SU

Tel: 0121 331 5000

- Thank you for agreeing the to participate in this research project -

NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Name(s) of Participant:

Working Project Title: Public Sector Improvement: Managing Quality and Consumer Satisfaction within the HE Sector - exploring the service gap

Name of Researcher: Steve Pymount

Name of Supervisor/s: Drs John Buglear and Xiaozheng Zhang

1. I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which have been explained to me.
2. I confirm that the purpose of the project has been explained to me, that I have been given information about it in writing, and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research.
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without any implications for my legal rights.
4. I give permission for the interview to be tape-recorded by research staff, on the understanding that the tape will be destroyed at the end of the project.
5. I agree to take part in this project:
    - I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied;
    - The project is for the purpose of research and/or teaching and not for treatment;
    - I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded, subject to any legal requirements.

Signatures of Students:

Appendix F

BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

Introduction – explanation, aims and objectives of research being undertaken. Sign consent form. Meeting will be recorded.

General questions

During your time at university you are asked to complete a number of questionnaires

a. Module Evaluation Questionnaires
b. In the final year the NSS

I would like to gain a better understanding of how you approach these questionnaires and how you answer each question.

I am now going to ask you a number of questions on the NSS survey and student satisfaction in general. I would like you to discuss the following questions:

1. What is your understanding of why you are asked to complete these questionnaires
    a. Module Evaluation Questionnaires
    b. NSS
2. Do you know the use that that Universities/BCU/BCBS make of these questionnaires?
    a. Module Evaluation Questionnaires (by the Faculty/University)
    b. NSS (by anyone)
3. What is your understanding of the use make of the data captured by the questionnaires?
4. Would you please give me your understanding of "Student Satisfaction"
5. What do you consider when deciding whether or not you are "satisfied"?
    a. When completing the Module Evaluation Questionnaires
    b. When completing the NSS
6. What is your general approach to these questionnaires
    a. Do you approach the internal questionnaires differently from the NSS?
7. The questionnaires asked you to select from a number of options: "Definitely agree", "Mostly agree", "Neither agree nor disagree", "Mostly disagree", "Definitely disagree" and "Not applicable".
    a. Would you please explain what you would consider when deciding whether to choose "Definitely agree" or "Mostly agree",
    b. Would you please explain what you would consider when deciding whether to choose "Definitely disagree" or "Mostly disagree",

    c. Would you please explain what you would consider when deciding whether to choose “Neither agree nor disagree”.

8. What do the NSS do with the neutral option?
9. The NSS asks you to base your view on the “course as a whole”. What do you understand this to mean? Do you do this?
10. What is meant by “quality of the course”

Thank you for your answers.

That completes the research. Thank you for participating. The recording will now be transcribed and then the data analysed. You will not be identifiable at any stage and the comments you made will not be attributable to you.

The results of the research will be published in my thesis and may be used by the University to improve the student experience.

First Student Focus Group – Questions for discussion

1. Why are you asked to complete:

    - Module Evaluation Questionnaires

    - NSS Questionnaire

2. How does the University use these questionnaires and what use is made of the data captured by these questionnaires:

    - Module Evaluation Questionnaires

    - NSS Questionnaire

3. What is your understanding of “Student Satisfaction?

4. The NSS refers to “course as a whole” - What does this mean?

5. The NSS refers to “quality of the course” - What does this mean?

6. What issues do you consider when completing the MEQ?

7. What issues do you consider when completing the NSS?

8. The NSS gives you a number of statements and asks you to rate each statement. Please distinguish between the five available options, i.e. when would you use each option:

    - Definitely Agree
    - Mostly Agree
    - Neither Agree nor Disagree
    - Definitely Disagree
    - Mostly Disagree

9. Why would you not be satisfied with your student experience, the course as a whole, or the quality of the course

Appendix G: Outline of interviews with students

Introduction – explanation, aims and objectives of research being undertaken. Sign consent form. Meeting will be recorded.

Could I start by taking details of your:

Course:

Gender:

Age Group: [18-21], [21-30], [Over 30]

H/EU or Intl:

Year of study (Level 4, 5, 6, or 7):

General questions

During your time at university you are asked to complete a number of questionnaires

c. Module Evaluation Questionnaires
d. In the final year the NSS

I would like to gain a better understanding of how you approach these questionnaires and how you answer each question. I will ask you to complete one of each type whilst I capture your thinking. I will ask you to talk out loud and tell me everything you are considering with question.

I would like you to complete the questionnaire(s) as though you were completing the actual survey. Would you please read out each question before you answer and explain why you are going to choose your answer? Any other comments you wish to make are also very welcome.

Firstly our own internal Module Evaluation Questionnaire – please base your answers on a single module of your choice. Which module would you like to use; and why?

Thank you for completing this form – have you any comments or observations you would like to make at this point? I would now like you to repeat the exercise using the NSS form – this form is the one published and used in the 2013 survey (the current survey starts in January next year and uses the same form.

I would like you to imagine that you are actually undertaking the survey. Please read the instructions and then answer the questions: there is no need to make any comments in the Positive or Negative boxes at the end of the questionnaire.8

Please do not answer Question 23 – this is on the Student Union and does not form part of this research.

Thank you for completing this form – have you any comments or observations you would like to make at this point?

I am now going to ask you a number of questions on the two questionnaire forms that you have completed. I would now like you to consider the following questions:

11. What is your understanding of why you are asked to complete these questionnaires
    a. Module Evaluation Questionnaires
    b. NSS
12. Do you know the use that is made of these questionnaires?
    a. Module Evaluation Questionnaires (by the Faculty/University)
    b. NSS (by anyone)
13. Would you please give me your understanding of "Student Satisfaction"
14. What do you consider when deciding whether or not you are "satisfied"?
    a. When completing the Module Evaluation Questionnaires
    b. When completing the NSS
15. The questionnaires asked you to select from a number of options: "Definitely agree", "Mostly agree", "Neither agree nor disagree", "Mostly disagree", "Definitely disagree" and "Not applicable".
    a. Would you please explain what you would consider when deciding whether to choose "Definitely agree" or "Mostly agree",
    b. Would you please explain what you would consider when deciding whether to choose "Definitely disagree" or "Mostly disagree",
    c. Would you please explain what you would consider when deciding whether to choose "Neither agree nor disagree".
16. The NSS asks you to base your view on the "course as a whole". What do you understand this to mean? Did you do this?
17. What is your understanding of the use that Universities/BCU/BCBS make of the data captured by the questionnaires?

Thank you for your answers.

That completes the research. Thank you for participating. The recording will now be transcribed and then the data analysed. You will not be identifiable at any stage and the comments you made will not be attributable to you.

The results of the research will be published in my thesis and may be used by the University to improve the student experience.

Appendix H: Sample comments from Focus Group Meetings and 1:1 Interviews

Why MEQ?

- Improve student satisfaction, so modules and courses can be improved
- To make improvements and see what the students think to ensure that they come to us rather than somewhere else
- To keep the modules or get rid of them
- So that the tutors know what the students think. What are the lectures like, do the students enjoy the lectures. Easier to put views on paper rather than complain to the tutor. Some tutors are brilliant but others are very poor but I do not want to complain as I might get into trouble. I am happy to do this anonymously
- What is going right what can be improved
- No idea why or what they are used for. Allow 15mins at beginning of lesson to answer as they are given out at the end when students want to leave

Why NSS?

- So students applying can compare universities
- This is for the ranking of the universities
- Assume goes to league tables - Times shows satisfaction at universities. Does not specifically know.
- Did not know employers use the league tables.
- To see the overall satisfaction of the University
- From the government side so they can assess what is going on
- Overall rating of universities - to find out whether the students have enjoyed their time at university - would take this survey more seriously than the MEQs

Use MEQ

- Feedback to lecturers, make improvements according to what people write down
- To improve what we deliver - hope you do something but no idea what is actually done. No evidence of or any feedback given following the MEQs.
- Thinks there are too many questionnaires and does not allow for more than one lecturer
- Don't know - to see whether the content of the module is right and how good the lecturers are. Not used for anything
- We analyse the data and provide a big fancy report (but I'm guessing!) Student has no idea what we actually do. We ought to give awards to tutors who are good
- To gain student views of the academics only - to rate them
- No idea

Use NSS

- Benchmarking and improving for the future
- Only used for ranking of universities - external survey so we do nothing with it
- To rate the university according to the scores. Poor NSS results will result in university losing a degree
- We bribe students to complete this. Everyone is very happy. Students at Aston hardly ever get to see their tutors - why do they get better NSS results than us. Not enough students do the survey here! Student thinks main problem is the building and location of the campus. The journey is the big issue particularly the train station. But because I am doing well academically I am happy and enjoying the course. Other students who are not doing well hate the place and blame the campus for them failing. I am on-line to get a first so I am very happy; if I was going to get a 2.2 or 3rd I would not be happy
- We put the results on our web-site and we try to implement changes - we are getting a new campus
- Used for league tables. Don't like them and cynical because Oxbridge at the top of these tables
- Government does something with it. Do we do anything at all? Because it is so big we look back and see how we can improve by comparing with our own surveys?
- No idea - we probably look at the results but we cannot rely on the results. Answers given is the first intuitive answer without thinking it through in any detail

What is meant by Student Satisfaction?

- Students experiences at university be it good or bad
- My course and what I study, what I learnt and the overall outcome at the end of the course; includes social life, student services, student union, support and everything supports my studies and experience of being at University for three years. As long as I am happy with my marks I will give a good NSS; if not I won't
- How happy is the student on their course, is it going to benefit them in the future, does it has an impact on them personally. Do they have a fantastic relationship with the University
- Overall everything - the education, the student life, the experiences in the university - But NSS pushes on academic
- Academic and social life - we have good bar crawls! A lot of girls in the Business School are not allowed to drink because of their religion so they do not have a good social life opportunities so they are not as happy - very few non-alcoholic social life opportunities. Everything the SU does is based on drinking- one of my friends is a mature student with a baby and there is nothing for her to do.
- Don't know
- Are you getting what you expect and what you need for your course from the university and are you happy with it - does it cater for your needs? Is that just the course - split it university as a whole, then the course and everything else that comes with it - the whole package

- More than just the degree aspect , includes everything else such as opportunities, placement, post graduate studies

What do you take into consideration – MEQ

- Whole module for the term, but actually last few weeks. If problems with work have happened in last few weeks this will count against the module. Each individual module considered separately

What do you take into consideration – MEQ

- Think about all three years; what have I enjoyed and what have I not enjoyed on the course
- I am happy because I am doing well in my studies, secondly the tutors are all very friendly and approachable. Different pedagogy is awesome, really good compared to India where tutors are treated as Gods.
- Real problem with Chinese and African students as they cannot speak or write English and this is a real problem with group work as it brings down the mark - and we cannot get our good mark. We need to be able to adjust the marks - pier assessment is not enough and does not work as we do not want to upset the other students

Consider Agee

- Definitely and Mostly - never put definitely unless 100% certain. Majority of time use mostly unless something outstanding has happened
- When one or two problems (albeit minor) this has reduced the level of satisfaction even when this happened two or more years ago
- Believe it and I totally agree with no exceptions. Agree is mostly where there are a few occasions where it has not worked so it goes down a slot.
- Definitely agree- no questions or issues raised. Absolutely no negative instances. Some negativity will reduce this to agree of neutral or negative
- Definitely Agree is really strongly about the statement but if good go for lower grade

Consider Disagree

- Same as last so use "Mostly", not really consider "Definitely"
- One or two issues can reduce the score to a negative

Consider Neutral

- Don't agree with this answer so never use it.
- Don't like using middle column as it doesn't give an answer! Didn't know that neutral is negative for NSS. Students don't know but cannot be bothered to give an answer
- Happy with one pathway, unhappy with other pathway - gave neutral answer
- Don't know or not sure

Course as whole

- All the modules over the three years and anything that might have effected it. E.g. add on items such as master classes, competitions. Mainly lecturer influences. Do not consider societies etc. or printing, parking, food as question not directed at these items
- First to final year - the modules I have been studying (but this is not what the student actually did!)
- The lecturers and the quality of teaching, all of the modules - were they useful, ability to go on placement. The assessment - was it varied and did I find it easy. Nothing considered outside core syllabus. Buildings themselves not important
- The whole degree (both pathways) - looked at both parts separately and found an average
- This includes your class mates can make such a difference, SU, the campus, the IT facilities, the library and the lecturers. Rapport between tutor and students - importance to get replies to e-mails
- Not possible as however amazing the course has been this will be influenced by very recent events. Suggests an annual survey to track over the three years of the course
- You can't really do this until you have finished - i.e. all three years. You only look at what is happening now? Why not do the survey every year. Survey is based on what is happening right now.
- All of the modules on average. Answers might have been different. Looks back to first year where there were poor experiences and this reduced grade of answer

Appendix I : Agenda for second Student Focus Group meeting

Start with meeting protocol

Summary of progress and aims and objectives of this meeting

Discuss the following draft management actions:

1. Develop a strategy for providing students with feedback from the National Student Survey and the Module Evaluation Questionnaires.
2. Improve/increase the level of engagement and dialogue with students at both module and course level.
3. Review and improve student engagement with the Course level Boards of Studies.
4. Devise a marketing/communications strategy to ensure that the students are aware of the processes the Faculty/University uses for capturing student issues and improving the student experience including processes for the Module Evaluation Questionnaires and National Student Survey and the actions taken to improve the student experience.
5. Rationalise and coordinate the cycle of questionnaire surveys across the University to ensure that students do not suffer from “questionnaire-fatigue”.
6. Review the quality, standard, and delivery of the briefings given to, and designed to, ensure that the students completing the annual National Student Survey fully understand the purpose and use of the survey and understand the meaning of all questions contained within the survey.
7. Appoint Survey Champions to include academic and non-academic staff and students and designed to raise awareness of the importance and use of the various surveys that are carried out at the University.
8. Change general approach taken by the University from being reactivism to becoming proactivism.
9. Delete courses from the tail i.e. courses that fall below an agreed level of satisfaction as recorded in the NSS.

Opportunity for students to develop their own management actions

Close meeting and reminder of confidentiality etc.

Appendix J: Agenda for meeting on proposed Management Actions

Welcome and explanation of purpose of meeting

Aims and objectives

Discussion on following items proposed as potential Management Actions

- Develop a strategy for providing students with feedback from the National Student Survey and the Module Evaluation Questionnaires.
- Improve/increase the level of engagement and dialogue with students at both module and course level.
- Review and improve student engagement with the Course level Boards of Studies.
- Devise a marketing/communications strategy to ensure that the students are aware of the processes the Faculty/University uses for capturing student issues and improving the student experience including processes for the Module Evaluation Questionnaires and National Student Survey and the actions taken to improve the student experience.
- Rationalise and coordinate the cycle of questionnaire surveys across the University to ensure that students do not suffer from “questionnaire-fatigue”.
- Review the quality, standard, and delivery of the briefings given to, and designed to, ensure that the students completing the annual National Student Survey fully understand the purpose and use of the survey and understand the meaning of all questions contained within the survey.
- Appoint Survey Champions to include academic and non-academic staff and students and designed to raise awareness of the importance and use of the various surveys that are carried out at the University.
- Change general approach taken by the University from being reactivism to becoming proactivism.
- Delete courses from the tail i.e. courses that fall below an agreed level of satisfaction as recorded in the NSS.

AOB

Thanks and next steps

Appendix J: Proposed Management Actions

Management Action: Develop a strategy for providing students with feedback from the National Student Survey and the Module Evaluation Questionnaires.

It was agreed that feedback must be prepared and delivered to the students as soon as possible after the Module Evaluation Questionnaires have been completed and should contain a summary of both positive and negative comments together with details of how the positive comments can be expanded and/or shared with colleagues; the negative comments should be summarised and the feedback should either contain an explanation of the action that will be taken to negate the comments in the next delivery of the module or an explanation explaining why no action can be taken in regard to the specific negative comment. The comments appertaining to the National Student Survey should be obtained from the relevant University Department, analysed down to course and/or module level where possible, and shared with the relevant Academic Department. The individual academics should then use both the negative and the positive comments to inform appropriate actions and start/continue a dialogue with the students both in the current year and at the beginning of the following year. It is recognised that the comments from the National Student Survey will only be received after students who participated in the survey have completed the course and left the University but many of the comments will be relevant to the following academic year and the next cohort of final year students for both the module and the course.

Management Action: Improve/increase the level of engagement and dialogue with students at both module and course level.

It is recognised that the local institutional surveys are blunt instruments and provide a limited level of data albeit useful data that can be actioned and accordingly there is a need to improve/increase the level of engagement with students at both module and course level to ensure that problems and issues are identified by management at the earliest possible time and it is suggested that this can be only achieved through a dialogue between course leaders, module leaders, and personal tutors and the students studying the module/course and that this should be an ongoing process throughout the academic year and not dependent on defined activities Boards of Studies.

Management Action: Review and improve student engagement with the Course level Boards of Studies.

It was agreed by the focus group that it is important to ensure that the students attending these meetings are adequately trained and are prepared sufficiently to enable them to capture and deliver the views of all of the students that they are representing; after the meetings it is important that the students are enabled sufficiently to provide the appropriate level of feedback to all of the groups of students that they represent and that this is not currently situation. If the current process of capturing student opinion via existing Boards of Studies is to continue consideration should be given to changing the membership of the Course level Boards of Studies to enable the students to be in the majority rather than the present membership where the student representatives are outnumbered by academics and administrators and this issue should be escalated to the appropriate University level committee for further consideration.

Management Action: Devise a marketing/communications strategy to ensure that the students are aware of the processes the Faculty/University uses for capturing student issues and improving the student experience including processes for the Module Evaluation Questionnaires and National Student Survey and the actions taken to improve the student experience.

This action involves the use of questionnaires to identify and capture student issues, the process by which they are analysed and actions identified, informing the students of the proposed action together with both positive and negative issues that have been raised, ensuring that the students are aware of how the issues are escalated as appropriate, and providing general feedback to the students including issues raised in both the National Student Survey, local institutional surveys, and issues captured in other ways.

Management Action: Rationalise and coordinate the cycle of questionnaire surveys across the University to ensure that students do not suffer from “questionnaire-fatigue”.

This proposed action is to remedy the comments made by a number of students that they suffer “death by questionnaire” in that there are far too many questionnaires with the result that they become reluctant to participate in the survey and or failed to complete them properly.

Management Action: Review the quality, standard, and delivery of the briefings given to, and designed to, ensure that the students completing the annual National Student Survey fully understand the purpose and use of the survey and understand the meaning of all questions contained within the survey.

This should ensure that the students understand both the importance of the survey and its use by compilers of the various national league tables together with an explanation of the use employers make of the survey. It should also include a detailed explanation of the meaning of the various questions and finally an explanation of the middle, neutral, option in the questionnaire "Neither agree nor disagree". Consideration should be given to the appropriateness of using academics and/or students for the briefing sessions and the timing of these sessions.

Management Action: Appoint Survey Champions to include academic and non-academic staff and students and designed to raise awareness of the importance and use of the various surveys that are carried out at the University.

Management Action: Change general approach taken by the University from being reactivism to becoming proactivism.

The general approach taken by the University is to react to the results of the NSS and other surveys by identifying issues that have been raised by the students and taking appropriate action to ensure they are not repeated. This relies on a number of false assumptions.

Management Action: Delete courses from the tail i.e. courses that fall below an agreed level of satisfaction as recorded in the NSS.

This should ensure a gradual improvement of the overall average NSS for student satisfaction (Question 22) as a small number of under/poor performing courses affect the average and impact heavily on the overall performance of the institution (See document 4 for analysis and justification)

Appendix K: Additional Management Actions proposed by students

1. A copy of the detailed analysis of the MEQs should be made available to the Student course representatives who would meet with the academic staff delivering the various modules and discuss the feedback.
2. The academic staff should be rated according to the analysis of the survey and that this rating together with the detailed feedback comments should be published.
3. Any academic who achieved a level of satisfaction lower than an agreed benchmark level should be monitored by the relevant line manager and if no improvement was achieved within a defined period should ultimately be removed from teaching the module.

Appendix L: Proposed Management Actions (final)

1 Institutions should develop a strategy for providing students with timely feedback from the NSS and local institutional surveys demonstrating that student comments are acted upon.

2 Institutions should develop a marketing/communications strategy to ensure that the students are fully aware of the NSS/MEQ processes used and that the strategy allows for continuous improvement.

3 Institutions should ensure that the level of engagement and dialogue with students is sufficient to ensure that all issues are captured and acted upon as and when they arise and that actions are evidenced.

4 Institutions should ensure that student representatives receive sufficient training and support to ensure that they are able to succeed in their designated role.

5 Institutions should rationalise and coordinate the annual cycle of questionnaire surveys to ensure that students do not suffer from questionnaire-fatigue.

6 Institutions should manage and ensure the adequacy, quality, and standard of delivery of briefings given to students relating to the NSS.

7 Institutions should consider whether to appoint Survey Champions.

8 Institutions should consider the appropriateness and method of educating students as to the importance of completing the NSS using a considered approach.

Appendix M: Schedule of timings of students completing the NSS

Date/Time: 11th February 2014/10:00hrs				
Venue: Computer Lab 2				
Student	**Time at start**	**Time at end**	**Time taken**	**Count**
1	10:14:00	10:15:15	00:01:15	1
2	10:14:00	10:15:30	00:01:30	
3	10:14:00	10:15:30	00:01:30	
4	10:14:00	10:15:30	00:01:30	
5	10:14:00	10:15:30	00:01:30	
6	10:14:00	10:15:30	00:01:30	
7	10:14:00	10:15:30	00:01:30	
8	10:14:00	10:15:30	00:01:30	
9	10:14:00	10:15:30	00:01:30	8
10	10:14:00	10:15:45	00:01:45	
11	10:14:00	10:15:45	00:01:45	
12	10:14:00	10:15:45	00:01:45	
13	10:14:00	10:15:45	00:01:45	4
14	10:14:00	10:16:00	00:02:00	
15	10:14:00	10:16:00	00:02:00	
16	10:14:00	10:16:00	00:02:00	
17	10:14:00	10:16:00	00:02:00	
18	10:14:00	10:16:00	00:02:00	5
19	10:14:00	10:16:30	00:02:30	
20	10:14:00	10:16:30	00:02:30	
21	10:14:00	10:16:30	00:02:30	
22	10:14:00	10:16:30	00:02:30	
23	10:14:00	10:16:30	00:02:30	
24	10:14:00	10:16:30	00:02:30	6
25	10:14:00	10:16:45	00:02:45	
26	10:14:00	10:16:45	00:02:45	
27	10:14:00	10:16:45	00:02:45	3

28	10:14:00	10:17:00	00:03:00	
29	10:14:00	10:17:00	00:03:00	
30	10:14:00	10:17:00	00:03:00	
31	10:14:00	10:17:00	00:03:00	
32	10:14:00	10:17:00	00:03:00	
33	10:14:00	10:17:00	00:03:00	
34	10:14:00	10:17:00	00:03:00	
35	10:14:00	10:17:00	00:03:00	
36	10:14:00	10:17:00	00:03:00	9
37	10:14:00	10:17:15	00:03:15	
38	10:14:00	10:17:15	00:03:15	
39	10:14:00	10:17:15	00:03:15	
40	10:14:00	10:17:15	00:03:15	
41	10:14:00	10:17:15	00:03:15	5
42	10:14:00	10:17:30	00:03:30	1
43	10:14:00	10:34:15	00:20:15	1
Average excluding outlyer =			00:02:23	
Average including outlyer =			00:02:48	

Appendix N: Letter from Controller of University Data

*** Confidential ***

Appendix O: FEC Committee, confirmation of Chair's approval

*** Confidential ***

Appendix A (NSS Survey) and Appendix B (BCU SES) follow

National Student Survey

Ipsos MORI · Higher Education Funding Council for England (hefce) · Unistats from universities and colleges in the UK · In association with UCAS · nus national union of students · tda · DH Department of Health · Ipsos

Please write in your date and month of birth.
This information is essential to validate your response.
We may contact you again if your date and month of birth are missing or incorrect.

DD | MM

For each statement, show the extent of your agreement or disagreement by putting a cross in the one box ☒ which best reflects your current view of the course as a whole. If you need to change your answer obliterate your cross by completely shading the box ■ then place a cross in the correct box. Please use black or blue ink pen.

	Definitely agree	Mostly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly disagree	Definitely disagree	Not applicable
The teaching on my course						
1. Staff are good at explaining things	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Staff have made the subject interesting	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. The course is intellectually stimulating	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Assessment and feedback						
5. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Feedback on my work has been prompt	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. I have received detailed comments on my work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Academic support						
10. I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Organisation and management						
13. The timetable works efficiently as far as my activities are concerned	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. The course is well organised and is running smoothly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Learning resources						
16. The library resources and services are good enough for my needs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. I have been able to access specialised equipment, facilities, or rooms when I needed to	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

HUSID

Serial No.

11012598/V1

Please turn over to complete the questionnaire

	Definitely agree	Mostly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly disagree	Definitely disagree	Not applicable
Personal development						
19. The course has helped me to present myself with confidence	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20. My communication skills have improved	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
21. As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Overall satisfaction						
22. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Looking back on the experience, are there any particularly positive or negative aspects of your course you would like to highlight? (Please use the boxes below.) Please ensure that your comments do not identify you individually.

Positive

Negative

Students' Union (Association or Guild)

Thinking of all the services, including support, activities and academic representation provided by the Students' Union (Association or Guild) at your institution, to what extent do you agree with the following statement:

	Definitely agree	Mostly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly disagree	Definitely disagree	Not applicable
23. I am satisfied with the Students' Union (Association or Guild) at my institution	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

To help us validate your response please can you provide the first four characters of your email address. ☐☐☐☐

Thank you for participating in the National Student Survey 2012

You may also complete this survey online at: www.thestudentsurvey.com

Birmingham City University Student Experience Survey 2011

FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE – 20th January 2011

Reminder of BCU bespoke questions within NSS section = Pink

Thank you for taking part in this survey, which will take about 12 minutes to complete. Select your response by clicking on the circle next to the relevant response option. You can change your response to a question if you change your mind.

There are 33 questions in all. If you try to move on through the survey without answering a question, a prompt will appear to remind you to respond.

Please move between pages by clicking the 'Back' and 'Next' buttons below with your mouse - do not use the browsers 'Back' and 'Forward' buttons as this may corrupt your survey and cause it to crash.

Try to complete the survey in one session. If you need to stop and return later, close the window and your responses will be saved. When you are ready, simply click on the link in your email as before, then select "Click here to continue where you left off" to return to the page you last viewed.

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact **Colin Gardiner** at Ipsos MORI on 020 7347 3024 or **colin.gardiner@ipsos.com**, between the hours of 9:30am and 5:30pm weekdays.

The Ipsos MORI Promise

As an independent, objective research company, Ipsos MORI promises that your questionnaire will never be linked to you as an individual. Ipsos MORI is a member of the Market Research Society and is bound by its Code of Conduct not to identify individual respondent's views.

SCREENING QUESTION
S1
SA
ASK ALL - CLOSE SURVEY IF CODE 2, CONTINUE IF CODE 1
This survey is being carried out among undergraduate students except those who are in their final academic year of study. Can I confirm that you are not in your final year of your course at Birmingham City University?
Please tick one box

I am not in the final academic year of my course
I am on the final academic year of my course

Q1
SA
ASK ALL
Which academic year of your course are you currently in?
Please tick one box

First year
Second year
Third year
Fourth year or above

Q2
SA per Row
ASK ALL
For each statement, show the extent of your agreement by selecting the box that reflects your current view of your course as a whole.
Please tick one box for each of the statements below

The teaching on my course

DOWN SIDE OF GRID
a. Staff are good at explaining things.
b. Staff have made the subject interesting.
c. Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching.
d. The course is intellectually stimulating.
e. Using Moodle has helped me to learn.

ACROSS TOP OF GRID:
Definitely agree
Mostly agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Mostly disagree
Definitely disagree
Not applicable

Q3
SA per Row
ASK ALL
For each statement, show the extent of your agreement by selecting the box that reflects your current view of your course as a whole.
Please tick one box for each of the statements below

Assessment and feedback

DOWN SIDE OF GRID
a. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.
b. Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair.
c. Feedback on my work has been prompt i.e. at the time stated.
d. I have received detailed comments on my work.
e. Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand.
f. Assessment tasks have helped me to learn.

ACROSS TOP OF GRID:
Definitely agree
Mostly agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Mostly disagree
Definitely disagree
Not applicable

Q4
SA per Row
ASK ALL
For each statement, show the extent of your agreement by selecting the box that reflects your current view of your course as a whole.
Please tick one box for each of the statements below

Academic support

DOWN SIDE OF GRID
a. I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies.
b. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to.
c. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices.

ACROSS TOP OF GRID:
Definitely agree
Mostly agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Mostly disagree
Definitely disagree
Not applicable

Q5
SA per Row
ASK ALL
For each statement, show the extent of your agreement by selecting the box that reflects your current view of your course as a whole.
Please tick one box for each of the statements below

Organisation and management

DOWN SIDE OF GRID
a. The timetable works efficiently as far as my activities are concerned.
b. Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively.
c. The course is well organised and is running smoothly.

ACROSS TOP OF GRID:
Definitely agree
Mostly agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Mostly disagree
Definitely disagree
Not applicable

Q6
SA per Row
ASK ALL
For each statement, show the extent of your agreement by selecting the box that reflects your current view of your course as a whole.
Please tick one box for each of the statements below

Learning resources

DOWN SIDE OF GRID
a. The library resources and services are good enough for my needs.
b. I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to.
c. I have been able to access specialised equipment, facilities, or rooms when I needed to.
d. The university provides an appropriate environment in which to learn.

ACROSS TOP OF GRID:
Definitely agree
Mostly agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Mostly disagree
Definitely disagree
Not applicable

Q7
SA per Row
ASK ALL
For each statement, show the extent of your agreement by selecting the box that reflects your current view of your course as a whole.
Please tick one box for each of the statements below

Personal development

DOWN SIDE OF GRID
a. The course has helped me to present myself with confidence.
b. My communication skills have improved.
c. As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems.

ACROSS TOP OF GRID:
Definitely agree
Mostly agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Mostly disagree
Definitely disagree
Not applicable

Q8
SA per Row
ASK ALL
For each statement, show the extent of your agreement by selecting the box that reflects your current view of your course as a whole.
Please tick one box for each of the statements below

Careers

DOWN SIDE OF GRID
a. As a result of my course, I believe that I have improved my career prospects.
b. Good advice is available for making career choices.
c. Good advice is available on further study opportunities.

ACROSS TOP OF GRID:
Definitely agree
Mostly agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Mostly disagree
Definitely disagree
Not applicable

Q9
SA per Row
ASK ALL
For each statement, show the extent of your agreement by selecting the box that reflects your current view of your course as a whole.
Please tick one box for each of the statements below

Social opportunities

DOWN SIDE OF GRID
a. I have had plenty of opportunities to interact socially with other students.
b. I am satisfied with the range of clubs and societies on offer.
c. I am satisfied with the range of entertainment and social events on offer.

ACROSS TOP OF GRID:
Definitely agree
Mostly agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Mostly disagree
Definitely disagree
Not applicable

Q10
SA per Row
ASK ALL
For each statement, show the extent of your agreement by selecting the box that reflects your current view of your course as a whole.
Please tick one box for each of the statements below

Feedback from students

DOWN SIDE OF GRID
a. I have had adequate opportunities to provide feedback on all elements of my course.
b. My feedback on the course is listened to and valued.
c. It is clear to me how students' comments on the course have been acted upon.
d. It is clear to me where to look for responses to the issues raised.

ACROSS TOP OF GRID:
Definitely agree
Mostly agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Mostly disagree
Definitely disagree
Not applicable

Q11
SA per Row
ASK ALL
For each statement, show the extent of your agreement by selecting the box that reflects your current view of your course as a whole.
Please tick one box for each of the statements below

Welfare resources and facilities

DOWN SIDE OF GRID
a. There is sufficient provision of welfare and student services to meet my needs.
b. When needed, the information and advice offered by welfare and student services has been helpful.

ACROSS TOP OF GRID:
Definitely agree
Mostly agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Mostly disagree
Definitely disagree
Not applicable

Q12
SA per Row
ASK ALL
For each statement, show the extent of your agreement by selecting the box that reflects your current view of your course as a whole.
Please tick one box for each of the statements below

Learning community

DOWN SIDE OF GRID
a. I feel part of a group of students committed to learning.
b. I have been able to explore academic interests with other students.
c. I have learned to explore ideas confidently.
d. Within my course, I feel my suggestions and my ideas are valued.
e. I feel part of an academic community in my college or university.

ACROSS TOP OF GRID:
Definitely agree
Mostly agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Mostly disagree
Definitely disagree
Not applicable

Q13
SA per Row
ASK ALL
For each statement, show the extent of your agreement by selecting the box that reflects your current view of your course as a whole.
Please tick one box for each of the statements below

Intellectual motivation

DOWN SIDE OF GRID
a. I have found the course motivating.
b. The course has stimulated my interest in the field of study.
c. The course has stimulated my enthusiasm for further learning.

ACROSS TOP OF GRID:
Definitely agree
Mostly agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Mostly disagree
Definitely disagree
Not applicable

Q14
SA per Row
ASK ALL
For each statement, show the extent of your agreement by selecting the box that reflects your current view of your course as a whole.
Please tick one box for each of the statements below

Overall opinion

DOWN SIDE OF GRID
a. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course.

ACROSS TOP OF GRID:
Definitely agree
Mostly agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Mostly disagree
Definitely disagree
Not applicable

Q15
SA per Row
ASK ALL
For each statement, show the extent of your agreement by selecting the box that reflects your current view of Birmingham City University.
Please tick one box for each of the statements below
Induction
ROTATED a – f AND ALWAYS - ASK g LAST

DOWN SIDE OF GRID
a. I received appropriate information about when and how to join my course.
b. I was satisfied with the welcome I received from the Faculty/School staff.
c. I was satisfied with the Induction Programme provided by my Faculty/School.
d. I was satisfied with the Student Union Freshers Fair.
e. Sufficient opportunities were provided for me to socialise and make friends.
f. Communications from the University during my first year were appropriate for my needs.
g. I am pleased that I made the decision to come to Birmingham City University.

ACROSS TOP OF GRID:
Definitely agree
Mostly agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Mostly disagree
Definitely disagree
Not applicable
Don't know
Cannot remember

Q16
SA
ASK ALL
Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of the teaching at Birmingham City University?
Please tick one box

Very satisfied
Fairly satisfied
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
Fairly dissatisfied
Very dissatisfied
Don't know

Q17
OE
ALLOW DK
Looking back on the experience, are there any particularly positive or negative aspects of your course you would like to highlight?

Please ensure that your comments do not identify you individually.

Positive aspects:
Please write you answer in the space below - If you have no comments, please write in 'None'

Negative aspects:
Please write you answer in the space below - If you have no comments, please write in 'None'

Q18
SA
ASK ALL
Which phrase best describes the way you would speak about Birmingham City University?
Please tick one box

I would speak highly of Birmingham City University without being asked
I would speak highly of Birmingham City University if asked
I would be neutral towards Birmingham City University
I would be critical of Birmingham City University if asked
I would be critical of Birmingham City University without being asked
Don't know

Q19
MA per Column
ASK ALL
Which, if any, of the following Students' Union organised activities or services…

a**. are you aware of?** (Tick all boxes that apply)
b. **have you personally used?** (Tick all boxes that apply)
FOR EACH PERSONALLY USED AT PART b ASK PART c
c**. do you have a positive experience?** (Tick all boxes that apply)

DOWN SIDE OF GRID
Societies
Course Representatives
Faculty Representatives
Sports Clubs
Bars (Bar42, Lounge, Village Inn)
Student Advice Centre including Student Advisers
Volunteering
Intra Mural Competitions
Freshers Crew
Student Union Committees including Student Council
Campaigns (Fight the Cuts, National Demo, etc)
Individual representation at a University hearing or appeal
Freshers Week
Students' Union Run shops e.g. Gosta Green Art Shop, Edgbaston Union Shop
Students' Union Run Café's e.g. Lounge at City South and Lounge at City
Student Media (Spaghetti Junction/Tiger TV/Scratch Radio)
Student Academic Partners Scheme
Union Organised trips (Amsterdam, Sports Tour, etc.)
Other
None
Don't know

ACROSS TOP OF GRID:
a. aware of
b. have personally used
c. have a positive experience

Q20
SA
ASK ALL
To what extent do you consider the Students' Union and its activities and services has added value to your experience as a student here?
Please tick one box

A great deal
A fair amount
Hardly at all
Not at all
Don't know

Q21
SA per Row
ASK ALL
To what extent do you consider each of the following to be important for Birmingham City University Students' Union to provide?
Please tick one box for each item a - i

DOWN SIDE OF GRID
a. Great Experiences – for example, Making the first term at University enjoyable; Providing an opportunity to participate in activities I wouldn't normally have tried; Providing an enjoyable social programme away from the classroom
b. Providing you with opportunities to make friends for life
c. Preparing you for your future life
d. Helping you with your Personal Development
e. Providing Inspiration to exceed your own expectations in and out of the classroom
f. Provide services that students really need – for example, A Letting agency, Student Employment on Campus, Student Advice Centres
g. Provide students like yourself with a voice on issues that matter
h. Providing Student Sporting Opportunities
i. Providing Special Interest Groups (i.e. Societies)

ACROSS TOP OF GRID
Essential
Very important
Fairly important
Not very important
Not at all important
Don't know

Q22
SA
ASK ALL
Are you:
Please tick one box

Male
Female

Q23
SA
ASK ALL
What age are you?
Please tick one box

17 or younger
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25 or older
Prefer not to say

Q24
SA
ASK ALL
Which of the following best describes you?
Please tick one box

UK student
European Union student
International student

Q25
SA
ASK ALL
How would you describe the property where you now live during term time whilst attending Birmingham City University?
Please tick one box

University accommodation:
- **Oscott Gardens blocks (includes:** (Anstey / Bridgeman / Gimson / Hobbs / Leasowes / Shenstone / Squire / St Margaret's / Webster)
- **The Coppice blocks (includes:** Ash / Beech / Chestnut / Elm / Larch / Oak / Rowan / Sycamore / Willow / Yew)
- **City South Campus blocks (includes:** Oakmount / Westmount / Calthorpe)
- **Hamstead Campus blocks (includes:** Hall / Cedar / Cypress / Hazel / Aspen / Rowan / Willow / Lodge)
- **Oscott Road/Wellhead Lane** (University owned houses)

Private sector halls: (includes: Opal 1 / Jennens Court / Unite Curzon Gateway / Derwent - Canalside / IQ5 - Bath row)
Your parent's or guardians' home
Other rented accommodation (e.g. shared house)
Own residence (owned or rented)
Other (Please specify)

Q26
SA
ASK ALL
Which of these best describes your ethnic origin?
Please tick one box

Asian or Asian British Mixed
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi
Chinese
Other Asian background

Mixed
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean
Mixed - White and Black African
Mixed - White and Asian
Other Mixed background

Black or Black British White
Black or Black British - Caribbean
Black or Black British - African
Other Black background

White
White British
White Irish
Other White background

Other Ethnic background
Other Ethnic group

Prefer not to answer

Q27
MA
ASK ALL
Which, if any, of the following special needs apply to you personally?
Tick all boxes that apply

Blind or partially sighted
Deaf or other hearing impairment
Wheelchair user or has mobility difficulties
Personal care support
Mental Health difficulties
An unseen disability (e.g. asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, etc.)
Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
A specific learning disability (e.g. dyslexic)
A disability not listed above
No special needs
Prefer not to say

Q28
SA
ASK ALL
What university qualification are you currently studying for?
Please tick one box

Graduate Diploma/Certificate
First Degree with Honours
Diploma of Higher Education
Higher National Diploma
Foundation Degree
Higher National Certificate
Certificate of Higher Education
Professional
Other (Please write in)

Q29
SA
ASK ALL
Is your current course full-time or part-time?
Please tick one box

Full-time
Part-time

Q30
SA
ASK ALL
At which of the following sites do you receive the majority of your teaching?
Please tick one box

City North (Perry Barr campus)
City South (Edgbaston campus)
Millennium Point
Millennium Point (Birmingham School of Acting)
Gosta Green
Margaret Street
Bournville Campus
Vittoria Street (School of Jewellery)
Birmingham Conservatoire
At college on a franchise course
At home – long distance teaching
Don't know

Q31
MA
ASK ALL
In which, if any, of the following ways would you prefer Birmingham City University to communicate with you?
Please tick all boxes that apply

University email
Personal email
Through lecturers and academics at Birmingham City University (word of mouth)
Moodle
University notice boards
iCity
Mobile text message
Telephone call
Letter
Digital display screens
Student Union website
Social media [e.g. Facebook]
Connect
Other way (Please write in)
Do not wish to receive communications from Birmingham City University
Don't know

Q32
SA
ASK ALL
Finally, if we had any further questions relating to this survey (and being carried out with undergraduates who are not yet in their final year of study at Birmingham City University) would you be willing to be re-contacted?
Please tick one box

Yes – am willing to be re-contacted
No – am not willing to be re-contacted

Main Survey

Thank you for taking part in the Birmingham City University survey. As a token of thanks, students will be entered into a prize draw with the chance to win one of five separate £100 “Love2Shop” gift vouchers which are redeemable at many high street retailers such as Argos, Boots, Comet, Debenhams, Iceland and WH Smith. The prize draw will be administered by Ipsos MORI.
To be entered in the prize draw, please tick the box below.

ADD IN THE TICK BOX

By ticking this box, you agree for Ipsos MORI to confirm that you have completed the survey should you be drawn as a winner. This is so that Ipsos MORI can contact you about sending your prize. Your responses to the survey will remain strictly confidential. For further details, please refer to the **Privacy Statement** and **Prize Draw Terms and Conditions**.

[AFTER SUBMISSION ADD]
You have now completed the Birmingham City University survey
Thank you for your co-operation.

The following questions have been taken directly from HEFCE’s National Student Survey questionnaire: 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 3a, 3b, 3d, 3e, 4a, 4b, 4c, 5a, 5b, 5c, 6a, 6b, 6c, 7a, 7b, 7c, 8a, 8b, 8c, 9a, 9b, 9c, 10a, 10b, 10c, 11a, 11b, 12a, 12b, 12c, 12d, 12e, 13a, 13b, 13c and 14a.