

## **“Top Tips” to help improve National Student Survey student satisfaction**

UCL's Overall Satisfaction score fell from 88% to 85% in the 2012 National Student Survey (NSS) results. This is the average for the whole higher education sector and reduces UCL to 20th amongst Russell Group institutions. Following this serious decline, Professor Anthony Smith, the Vice-Provost (Education) visited Faculty Teaching Committees (FTC) to discuss how the results should be used to inform how the student experience can be enhanced and how they can be improved in future. These produced valuable discussions and suggestions which have been collected below as “Top Tips” for spreading good practice amongst faculties and departments.

### **Assessment and Feedback of Work**

This is an area which has scored lowest in the NSS, both at UCL and nationally, although sector satisfaction scores have improved. Many of the negative student comments received relate to this area.

- *Review marking practices* – many FTCs noted that it was often difficult for staff to meet the service standard deadlines for returning assessed work to students. Increasing student numbers were cited. Where this problem arises, a review of the assessment practices should take place and consideration given to the feasibility and sustainability of continuing current practice, as well as to alternative strategies. What is the most effective way to ensure that students have met the learning outcomes? CALT Teaching Fellows can support and advise (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/calt/discipline-specific>).
- *Student awareness of types of feedback* – students may not realise that feedback on work encompasses more than tutor's written comments. Evidence indicates that face-to-face feedback is welcomed. This could be in one to one discussions with students, at tutorials or seminars, or in personal tutor meetings. It can also take the form of oral assessment of work such as the Crits used by the Faculty of the Built Environment and Slade School of Fine Art. Ensuring that students are aware that this also constitutes feedback early on in their programmes and reinforcing it throughout their studies, should lead to greater student appreciation of the range of feedback provided.
- *Clear marking criteria* – ensuring that marking criteria are consistent and clear in student handbooks is important, as well as making sure all staff are fully informed too. Linguistics (Division of Psychology and Language Sciences) makes marking criteria clear by including them on the front-page of each course on Moodle.

### **Teaching, Academic Support and Other Areas**

- *Scheduling of work and deadlines* – many of the negative NSS student comments refer to the frustration and stress caused by having to hand in work for different modules at the same time. Whilst recognising that this can be difficult when students take modules offered by different departments and faculties, greater consideration needs to be given to phasing assessment deadlines, particularly in the final year.
- *Making full use of Personal Tutor meetings* – using these meetings, in line with the UCL policy, to provide students with a range of support and advice,

including feedback on work, revision and exams advice, careers and future studies guidance (pointing them to the UCL Careers Service if necessary) and providing an opportunity to discuss concerns. Thought may be given to scheduling one of these meetings (a student “health-check”), in Term 2 of the final year. This activity will support students and also covers a number of key NSS areas.

- *Ensure student awareness of routes to provide feedback* –students need to know how they can raise concerns and also highlight things that they are happy with. This feedback might be given in a number of ways, in person to tutors and other staff, through questionnaires, to student representatives and the Staff Student Consultative Committee (SSCC). Action resulting from student feedback must be fed back to them through the website, Moodle, the SSCC etc
- *Making good use of the NSS results* – the NSS is an important source of indicative data to help to identify good practice and areas where students are dissatisfied and expressing concern. The data can be used to explore this further, perhaps through comparisons with other sources of student feedback, or in more detailed discussions with students (e.g. focus groups, or at the SSCC). Where satisfaction levels are particularly low against the UCL and sector averages, teaching teams should work with students to understand their concerns. An action plan should be developed and its implementation plan discussed at the Teaching Committee and SSCC.

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