

Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2013

The University of Essex took part in the Higher Education Academy's Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) in 2013, which is a national survey designed to find out what postgraduate students think of the quality of teaching, assessment, feedback and other aspects of their study.

The Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies at Essex had a total response rate of 74%. This is a huge improvement over last year's 28%.

The most significant headline is that 87% of respondents felt that the overall experience of their course met or exceeded expectations. This represents a significant improvement on last year's score of 71%.

Areas of Excellence

Our scores were over 90% in:

Teaching quality	90.9
Detail in comments on submitted work	91.3
Quality of organisation of the course	91.3

Over 80% in:

Effectiveness of teaching and learning methods	87
The intellectually stimulating nature of the course	82.6
Staff being good at explaining things	82.6
Staff enthusiasm for their subject	82.6
Depth of analysis of ideas	82.6
Opportunities to judge and evaluate information etc	85.7
Fairness of assessment arrangements and marking	86.4
Fit of timetable	82.6

There were many more areas where performance was good but not excellent; the scores were in the 70s which is good but there could be improvement.

Of greater concern were the areas where scores were below 70% ; these need attention:

Feedback helping clarify things not understood	68.2
Required standards known for dissertation	68.4
Supervisor skills and knowledge for dissertation	68.4
Supervisor effort to understand my difficulties	68.4
Access to specialist equipment	66.7
Development of research skills	69.6
Development of transferable skills	63.6
Better preparation for future employment	69.6
Content of degree matches expectations	65.2

Below 60%

Guidance on topic selection and refinement	57.9
Applying theory to practice in new situations	56.5
Confidence in presenting myself	50.0
Improvement in communication skills	56.6
Feedback from me has led to concerns being acted on	56.5

The proportion of students who felt that their programme had either met or exceeded their expectations on key areas of the survey:

Quality of teaching and learning	87	(up on last year 71)
Assessment and feedback	65.2	(down on last year 86)
Organisation and management	73.9	(up on last year 71)
Learning resources	82.6	(down on last year 100)
Skills and personal development	73.9	(down on last year 86)
Career and professional development	73.9	(down on last year 86)
Overall experience of my course	87	(up on last year 71)

It is particularly good to see that there has been an improvement in overall satisfaction, which is the most vital measure, and the quality of teaching, which is also central and a key concern. While some of these results are less good than last year, they are still good, apart from the score for assessment and feedback where the reduction is much more significant. We have seen the results of redoubling efforts to increase participation in future years, so these results are more representative and warrant careful attention.

It is evident that course organisation has been improved, with closer attention to keeping students fully informed at all time of course developments. We continue to monitor closely the quality of course feedback and try to maintain the timely return of marked coursework through staggering submission deadlines, regularly reminding staff of marking deadlines, and publishing dates by which students can expect feedback on coursework. However, there is definitely a need for more work on this, and staff effort will be put into better procedures and timing.

The improvement in the scores for the quality of teaching and learning is very welcome. The content of many seminars has been reviewed in order to improve further both the relevance and the coherence of modules. We have worked to include more student presentations and other exercises to enhance the active engagement of students with the learning materials and to promote confidence. However, again there is more to do in this area as the students are still giving this area a lower score than we would wish. Further thought will be given to how to promote communication skills and confidence in presentation.

It is a concern that the score for responding to feedback is so low. We greatly value the feedback we have received and take seriously the concerns expressed in surveys and in the SSLC meetings.

Examples of responses are:

MA counselling students wanted more instructive teaching rather than relying on open discussion. The tutor changed the style of teaching accordingly and this was strongly welcomed.

Timing of assignments and deadlines are often a concern. They are under constant review, and work is ongoing to stagger assignments through the year.

Student achievements are posted on the newsletter as well as staff contributions.

Presentations in class are being promoted more fully and consistently as a means of enhancing student confidence and encouraging ownership of learning.

Individual online timetables are now more consistent and complete after students raised the issue of problems in this area.

Some students on courses which include modules from a range of approaches have found this difficult. Active attention is being given to promote the cohesion within courses and the integration of modules into the overall course thinking and direction.

We would like to thank our students for taking the time to complete the survey. We are always looking for ways to improve the teaching provision and student experience. Students are strongly encouraged to approach the Centre and discuss any issues during the academic year either through the Staff-Student Liaison Committee or by raising them directly with module co-ordinators, Course Directors, or the Director of the Centre.