

Commentary on NSS and SSS results for the Department of History, 2010

NSS

The History Department is delighted with the scores that it achieved in both the NSS and the SSS surveys for 2010. The overall score for every section in the survey, as well as the overall satisfaction level, rose in comparison with the already-excellent 2009 results. History scores were above both the overall Faculty and University score in each section, except personal development. In total, 94% of respondents expressed overall satisfaction with their experience in the History Department at Essex. This was exceeded by a score of 97% for 'The teaching on my course'. This is a very pleasing result. Free text comments and the answers to some of the survey questions reinforce the Department's reputation for friendly and helpful academic and administrative staff.

Individual Sections.

The Teaching on My Course.

Excellent scores on all questions, with 100% expressing agreement with the comment 'The course is intellectually stimulating'.

Assessment and Feedback

96% agreed that they had received detailed comments on their work, which is extremely gratifying. The overall score for this section was 82 per cent, compared to 74% last year, which suggests that the policies adopted by the Department to address slightly weaker areas, i.e. prompt return of feedback and clarity of grade criteria, are having the desired effect.

Academic Support.

92% agreed that they had been able to contact staff when they needed to do so. In response to slightly lower levels on some questions, particularly relating to support in making study choices, the Department is reviewing its activities in the Spring term, when the next year's modules are advertised.

Organisation and Management

The overall score for this section is 89% (against a Faculty score of 77%) and there was no question with an unusually high or low score.

Learning Resources

The questions in this section relate to activities outside the Department's control.

Personal Development

Although the Department scored less well in this section, discussion with students suggests that they may not be aware of the ways in which studying History contributes to the development of employability skills. This is something that individual colleagues plan to emphasise.

Free Text Comments.

The number of positive comments by far outnumbered the negative ones. Most were comparatively short and related to department-specific, academic issues, rather than University life more generally. The friendliness of the department and the good overall atmosphere was frequently mentioned, as was the enthusiasm of the staff, their interest in their subject and their willingness to help. The large choice of modules available also featured.

SSS

There was a slight drop (of three per cent from 90 to 87%) in the number of respondents expressing overall satisfaction with their course. However, this is still an excellent result. The Department has identified a number of strategies to address issues on which the satisfaction level was comparatively lower. The pattern of responses is very similar to the NSS results, and so the comments below relate only to issues not discussed above.

Individual Sections

Degree Content

The overall score for this section was 81%, but this is definitely pulled down by the 68% who expressed agreement with the statement 'The workload for my course is appropriate'. This compares to 94% who believed that 'the content of my course enables me to acquire knowledge and understanding of the subject'. With the agreement of the Faculty Dean, there has been a reduction in the amount of work required per module across the Faculty, and this will help to address this issue.

Learning Resources.

The score of 79% is one per cent higher than last year. Most of the questions in this section are outside the Department's control, but it should be noted that the highest score, of 85%, was to the question 'The printed materials and online documentation on my courses/modules give me the information that I need'.

Free Text Comments.

Comments (both positive and negative) cover both department-specific, academic issues and more general aspects of life at the University. The lengthier comments in the negative section tended to be on non-academic matters .

Positive comments on the History Department usually focused on the friendliness of the Department, the enthusiasm and ability of the staff (some mentioned by name), and the range and level of choice of the modules. 'Helpful' was a word frequently used.