

Report on the NSS and SSS results for the History Department, 2010-11

We are very pleased with the scores we achieved in both the NSS (the national student survey completed by final-year undergraduates) and SSS (an internally run survey of all other undergraduates) for 2010-11.

On the NSS, 93% of respondents expressed overall satisfaction with their experience in the History Department at Essex, a score which is above the University average of 88%. History was also significantly above the University of Essex average on the issues of Organisation and Management (University average: 81%; History: 93%), and on Assessment and Feedback (University average: 68%; History: 81%). Free text comments made by respondents highlighted in very positive terms the approachability and quality of teaching staff and the wide array of module choices.

On the SSS, 90% of respondents expressed overall satisfaction with their degree course experience in the History Department, a score which again compares favourably with a University of Essex average of 88% and a Faculty of Humanities and Comparative Studies average of 89%. The History Department scored well in responses to questions about degree content; the teaching on my degree; academic support; organisation and management; and learning resources. SSS scores were weaker in response to questions on assessment and feedback and personal development, however. Free text comments made by respondents highlighted examples of excellent teaching practice by enthusiastic, well-organised and supportive academic staff.

In the light of these results, and some of the more specific free text comments made by respondents, we:

- Continue to improve the level of communication with students about academic matters, by means of e-mail; the updated Undergraduate Handbook; and new meetings (eg: in the Spring Term 2012 on rules of assessment and academic offences), as well as our regular programme of student meetings (induction at the start of the Autumn Term, Module Fair to finalise module choices at the end of the Spring Term etc).
- Are seeking to improve our provision of pastoral support by means of a well-organised system of student mentoring; one-to-one interviews of first-year students with academics; improved communication about the available systems of support; and the introduction of new informal meetings with the Head of Department (over tea and cake!) twice a term in the Common Room.
- Are planning to put in a bid for a TALIF (Teaching and Learning Innovation Fund) grant to undertake a project to embed personal development and transferable employability skills more systematically and meaningfully in the History curriculum.
- Are using the Staff Student Liaison Committee as a focus group to discuss the issue of feedback on assessment, asking: How do students use/react to feedback, and build on feedback from one piece of coursework in their preparation of the next?
- Are planning to set up a working party (with student membership) in order to explore ways in which we can improve our provision of online module materials.

Finally, MANY THANKS to all the students (past and present) who took the time to complete the survey questionnaires in 2010-11.