

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Centre for Research and Evaluation (CRE) was commissioned to report on a survey of the student experience among undergraduates and taught postgraduates at Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College (BCUC).

THE 'SATISFACTION' METHODOLOGY

The *Student Satisfaction* approach has been emulated and adapted by a number of further and higher education institutions in Britain, New Zealand, Sweden, Australia and Poland. The methodology has been published, in self-help form as the *Student Satisfaction Manual*.

The *Satisfaction* approach continues to be unique in combining the following elements:

- subject-determined questions;
- satisfaction and importance ratings;
- management information for action;
- feedback on action to participants.

The approach has proved to be an adaptable research tool in a variety of contexts, including students on taught programmes, postgraduate research students, staff working in higher education institutions, graduates in employment and football supporters. Central to the *Satisfaction* approach is the integration of the management information gained from the survey into a cycle of continuous quality improvement. It is important that feedback on action is provided to respondents, so that everyone is made aware of what happened as a result of the survey.

THE REPORT

The distinctive feature of Satisfaction Reports is the A–E Tables, which clearly identify areas of satisfaction and those in need of improvement. Average satisfaction ratings are combined with average importance ratings and translated into a letter, A–E. The letters provide a gradation of satisfaction from *very* satisfied (scored A), through satisfactory (B), to marginal satisfaction (C), to unsatisfactory (D) and *very* unsatisfactory (E). The case of the letter denotes the importance attributed to the particular issue by respondents, with highly rated areas designated by an upper-case letter, less important by a lower-case letter, and those relatively unimportant areas designated by a lower-case letter in parentheses (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: A-E grid for satisfaction and importance scores

	<i>Very unsatisfactory</i>	<i>Unsatisfactory</i>	<i>Adequate</i>	<i>Satisfactory</i>	<i>Very satisfactory</i>	
<i>Very Important</i>	E	D	C	B	A	7
<i>Important</i>	e	d	c	b	a	5.5
<i>Not so important</i>	(e)	(d)	(c)	(b)	(a)	5.0
	1	2.75	3.75	4.25	5.25	7

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The 'action' messages implied by each lettered outcome in the grid are outlined in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2: Grid values and action implications

	<i>Very unsatisfactory</i> <i>E</i>	<i>Unsatisfactory</i> <i>D</i>	<i>Adequate</i> <i>C</i>	<i>Satisfactory</i> <i>B</i>	<i>Very satisfactory</i> <i>A</i>	
<i>Very important</i>	Urgent need for immediate action	Action in these areas has high priority	This area to be targeted for future improvement	Ensure no slippage, improve where possible	Maintain excellent standards	7
<i>Important</i>	Action to substantially improve this area	Target this area for improvement	Ensure no slippage	Maintain standards	Avoid overkill	5.5
<i>Not so important</i>	Improve where resources permit	Ensure no further slippage	Restrict attention	Maintain standards where possible	No need for action here	5.0
	1	2.75	3.75	4.25	5.25	7

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THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire was divided into the following sections:

- Student profile;
- Course organisation and content;
- Teaching and learning;
- College environment;
- Learning resources centre;
- Computer facilities;
- Accommodation;
- Student Services;
- Students' Union;
- Catering facilities;
- Financial situation;
- Overall Satisfaction.

Students were asked questions relating to the details of their course as well as their personal circumstances. The returns were merged with information from the BCUC student database such as ethnicity, gender and age. This allowed the research team to undertake analysis of responses by a range of variables.

In addition, the questionnaire also aimed to accommodate respondents who wished to make further comments on the various aspects of their experience at BCUC.

The questionnaires were designed using scanner software allowing returned questionnaires to be electronically scanned and transferred automatically to a data file for statistical analysis using SPSS software. Qualitative comments from the questionnaires have been logged and analysed and used to improve the student experience at BCUC as well as to refine the questionnaire for future use.

DISTRIBUTION

Questionnaires were distributed by BCUC. The initial mail-out was followed up with a reminder letter and second questionnaire to addressees who had not thus far responded.

THE SAMPLE

The original sample consisted of 3102, 100 return to senders were received. In all, 714 useable questionnaires were returned, giving a total response rate of 23.8%. This is a typical response rate for surveys of this kind in the United Kingdom.

THE BCUC STUDENT PROFILE

Response rates have been broken down according to the profile categories as they appear in the database of students provided by BCUC. It should be noted that some respondent profile details are missing (identified as *Missing*) due to a combination of non-response to a question or missing data from the database provided.

In 2005 a full survey of all students studying at BCUC was undertaken including students on collaborative programmes. In this current survey only first year undergraduate and postgraduate students studying at BCUC were included, since students in subsequent years had been surveyed last year. Students from all years were included from the Partner Colleges.

Results are only presented where there is a minimum of 10 responses. Where fewer than 10 students have responded an asterisk '*' has been inserted. Where there are 15 or fewer responses the rating is shown in the table but not highlighted in the comments.

Breakdowns are given for the six BCUC faculties and three of the partner colleges; Amersham & Wycombe College, Berkshire College of Agriculture and East Berkshire College (breakdowns are not given for Aylesbury College because fewer than 10 people responded from this college).

The highest response came from those in the **School of Continuing Professional Education** (71.4%), although there are few respondents in this faculty. A higher response also came from those in **Health Studies** (28.2%) followed by those in the **Partner Colleges** (24.4%). The lowest response rate came from students in the faculty of **Technology** (17.7%) (Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3: Response by faculty

<i>Faculty</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total sample</i>	<i>Total sample %</i>	<i>Response rate %</i>
AS	104	14.6	433	14.4	24.0
BS	91	12.7	378	12.6	24.1
Dn	92	12.9	389	13.0	23.7
HS	109	15.3	387	12.9	28.2
LT	89	12.5	446	14.9	20.0
SCPE	10	1.4	14	0.5	71.4
Tech	37	5.2	209	7.0	17.7
PC	182	25.5	746	24.9	24.4
Total	714	100.0	3002	100.0	23.8

Since the numbers are small for **Uxbridge College** (UUB) and **Aylesbury College** (UAY) these will not appear as separate partner colleges in the report but are included in the overall analysis for other breakdowns and for the overall partner college breakdowns. The highest response came from **Berkshire College of Agriculture** (UBA) (38.4%) followed by **East Berkshire College** (UEB) (28.3%). The lowest response came from those at **Aylesbury College** (UAY) (12.3%) (Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4: Response by partner college

<i>Partner College</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total sample</i>	<i>Total sample %</i>	<i>Response rate %</i>
UAW	89	48.9	404	54.8	22.0
UAY	9	4.9	73	9.9	12.3
UBA	43	23.6	112	15.2	38.4
UEB	34	18.7	120	16.3	28.3
UUB	7	3.8	28	3.8	25.0
Total	182	100.0	737	100.0	24.7

Nb missing rows due to no respondents in a category

The highest response rates came from masters students (34.1%) followed by postgraduate/professional students (25.9%). The lowest response came from foundation degree students (17.5%) (Figure 1.5).

Figure 1.5: Response by award

<i>Award</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total sample</i>	<i>Total sample %</i>	<i>Response rate %</i>
A&D Fdn Degree	16	2.2	80	2.7	20.0
Fdn Course	338	47.3	1457	48.5	23.2
Fdn Degree	6	0.8	33	1.1	18.2
HNC/D	41	5.7	234	7.8	17.5
M	206	28.9	813	27.1	25.3
PG	31	4.3	91	3.0	34.1
Total	714	100.0	3002	100.0	23.8

Figure 1.6: Response by course stage for the partner colleges

<i>Partner college and course stage</i>	n	%	Total Sample	Total Sample %	Response rate %	
UAW	1	42	47.2	178	44.1	23.6
	2	25	28.1	125	30.9	20.0
	3	18	20.2	86	21.2	20.9
	M&P	4	4.5	15	37.1	26.7
UAY	1	4	44.4	37	56.9	10.8
	2	5	55.5	28	43.1	17.9
UBA	1	19	44.1	45	40.2	42.2
	2	16	37.2	50	44.6	32.0
	3	8	18.6	17	15.2	47.1
UEB	1	19	55.9	64	53.3	29.7
	2	9	26.5	35	29.2	25.7
	3	3	8.8	8	6.7	37.5
	M&P	3	8.8	13	10.8	23.1
UUB	1	3	42.9	16	57.1	18.8
	M&P	4	57.1	12	42.9	33.3
Total		182		729		

Nb missing rows due to no respondents in a category

The highest response rate came from third years and first years at **Berkshire College of Agriculture** (47.1% and 42.2% respectively). There was also a high response from third years at **East Berkshire College** (37.5%). The lowest response came from first years at **Aylesbury College** (10.8%) (Figure 1.6).

There was only one sandwich student in the sample. A slightly higher response rate came from part-time students compared with full time students (26.0% and 23.0% respectively). The response rate for females (29.6%) was almost twice that for males (15.6%) (Figure 1.8). Chinese students provided the highest response rate (37.9%) followed by White students (25.2%). The lowest response came from Asian students (18.9%) (Figure 1.9).

Figure 1.7: Response by mode of study

<i>Mode of study</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total sample</i>	<i>Total sample %</i>	<i>Response rate %</i>
Full-time	502	70.3	2185	72.8	23.0
Part-time	211	29.6	816	27.2	26.0
Sandwich	1	0.1	1	0.0	100.0
Total	714	100.0	3002	100.0	23.8

Figure 1.8: Response by gender

<i>Gender</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total sample</i>	<i>Total sample %</i>	<i>Response rate %</i>
Female	519	72.7	1751	58.3	29.6
Male	195	27.3	1251	41.7	15.6
Total	714	100.0	3002	100.0	23.8

Figure 1.9: Response by ethnicity

<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total sample</i>	<i>Total sample %</i>	<i>Response rate %</i>
Asian	73	10.2	386	12.9	18.9
White	535	74.9	2125	70.8	25.2
Black	61	8.5	302	10.1	20.2
Chinese	11	1.5	29	1.0	37.9
Mixed	18	2.5	90	3.0	20.0
Other	5	0.7	24	0.8	20.8
Unknown	11	1.5	46	1.5	23.9
Total	714	100.0	3002	100.0	23.8

Figure 1.10: Response by campus

<i>Campus</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
W'bourne	105	14.7
HW	233	32.6
Chal	200	28.0
Total	714	100.0

Figure 1.11: Response by age

<i>Age range</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total sample</i>	<i>Total sample %</i>	<i>Response rate %</i>
16-22	337	47.2	1720	57.3	19.6
23-34	160	22.4	677	22.6	23.6
35-44	111	15.5	341	11.4	32.6
45-54	71	9.9	197	6.6	36.0
55-64	29	4.1	53	1.8	54.7
65+	5	0.7	5	0.2	100.0
Total	713	99.9	2993	99.7	23.8
Missing	1	0.1	9	0.3	11.1
	714	100.0	3002	100.0	23.8

The highest response rate came from those at **High Wycombe campus (HW)** (32.6%). Fewer students at **Wellesbourne campus (W'bourne)** responded (14.7%) (Figure 1.10).

Higher response rates came from mature students. Response rates were above 32% for those aged 35 and over whereas they were below 24% for younger students (Figure 1.11).

The highest response came from those studying English (**Q**) (37.5%) though only a small number of these students were in the total sample. A high response also came from those studying animal science or agriculture (**D**) (36.4%) and from those studying education (**X**) (29.1%). A smaller proportion of those studying media studies/journalism (**P**) (15.1%) and those studying Engineering (**H**) (13.3%) responded.

Figure 1.12: Response by JACS code

JACS code	<i>n</i>	%	<i>Total sample</i>	<i>Total sample %</i>	<i>Response rate %</i>
B	120	16.8	422	14.1	28.4
C	42	5.9	232	7.7	18.1
D	32	4.5	88	2.9	36.4
G	32	4.5	167	5.6	19.2
H	4	0.6	30	1.0	13.3
J	32	4.5	137	4.6	23.4
K	14	2.0	61	2.0	23.0
L	40	5.6	144	4.8	27.8
M	15	2.1	55	1.8	27.3
N	138	19.3	596	19.9	23.2
P	14	2.0	93	3.1	15.1
Q	3	0.4	8	0.3	37.5
W	196	27.5	859	28.6	22.8
X	32	4.5	110	3.7	29.1
Total	714	100.0	3002	100.0	23.8