A FRAMEWORK FOR THE DELIVERY OF BUILT ENVIRONMENT STUDENT SATISFACTION IN ENGLAND.

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Abstract

Significant changes have occurred within the higher education sector in England with further changes are anticipated as a result of the changes to the on-going policy development related to higher education in England. Government policy development from Dearing (1997) through to Browne (2010) has introduced major changes to the funding, structure and governance of the HE sector. This development has continued with the proposals to introduce more choice and competition into the HE sector along with measures to deliver teaching excellence, with the publication of the White Paper *"Success as a knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice"* (2016). The impact of the on-going policy development has resulted in greater access to higher education but also increased financial pressures on students and their family. This study assesses the impact of the continuing policy changes on the provision of higher education in England and the impact on the student experience. The quality of the student experience is an important aspect of the policy development and as a result this is measured and reported upon. The National Student Survey (NSS) is an important measure of student satisfaction and is proving to be a key policy driver in HEI's relating to quality of provision. The built environment subject area has benefited from the widening participation agenda and as a result, the diverse demographics of the student population create a complex mix of student expectations within a built environment school. A review of the literature is undertaken to document the policy development, identify the issues relating to the NSS and its use, the factors affecting student expectations and perception of quality and assess the resultant impact on HEI's. The research will use a single embedded case study approach that seeks to analyse the student experience within the School of the Built Environment at the University of Salford to propose a conceptual framework to deliver increased student satisfaction levels.

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

A key policy driver within the higher education sector from Robbins (1963), Dearing (1997) to Browne (2010) has been to improve access to higher education to meet the needs of increased 'social demand' and the needs of the national economy. Changes in funding sources of higher education have posed significant issues for higher education institutions on many levels. The relationship between students and the providers of higher education has changed as a result. Students are increasingly being considered as 'consumers' or 'clients' in how they interact with universities. This view impacts on the institution in terms of the level of service they provide, the pressures of meeting the expectations of students and other stakeholders. The increased expectations of students, coupled with the reduction of per capita student funding, is putting significant pressure on the system. Pressures for organisational change in response to the requirements for demonstrating academic and financial accountability through external and internal audits are significant. Audits of 'quality' in relation to academic standards through institutional and collaborative audits by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) have a major impact on the reputation of an institution and therefore institutions need to have robust and responsive systems in place to meet the challenges. Development of the National Student Survey began in 2001 as a new method for quality assurance in higher education in England. A fundamental element of this new method was to be *'information about the quality and standards of learning and teaching that each institution would publish to address the needs of students and other stakeholders'* (Ramsden and Callender, 2014). Audits of quality increasingly play a significant part in the increased competition between institutions and the student experience as reported by the National Student Survey (NSS) is central to the perceptions of an institution to provide a high quality educational experience. The quality of the student experience has become a central pillar of the policy development at government level and as a result within the higher education sector. What is meant by 'the student experience' and the role of the National Student Survey in measuring the quality of the student experience is explored to provide context to the aim of providing a conceptual framework to improve the student experience.

The increasing importance of the student experience has developed with the idea that students should be *'at the centre of the process of learning and teaching'* (Dearing Report, 1997). This development has been reflected in many influential government reports in the UK and is closely related to the development in government policy towards higher education. *Students at the Heart of the System,* includes a chapter exploring *'better student experience and better qualified graduates'* (BIS, 2011) and identifies the *'student experience'* as one of the three challenges the government' reforms aimed to tackle. The report asserts that *'institutions must deliver a better student experience; improving teaching, assessment, feedback and preparation for the world of work'* (BIS 2011). It goes on to argue that *'all universities must offer a good student experience to remain competitive'* (BIS 2011) and goes on to state:

"*The changes we are making to higher education funding will in turn drive a more responsive system. To be successful, institutions will have to appeal to prospective students and be respected by employers. Putting financial power into the hands of learners makes student choice meaningful."*

The 2011 White Paper calls for *'a new focus on the student experience and the quality of teaching'* while the '*overall goal is higher education that is more responsive to student choice, that provides a better student experience and that helps improve social mobility*.' (BIS 2011). It is evident that the officially approved understanding of the student experience is inseparable from the idea that students should be judges of the quality of higher education. The power of students to demand satisfaction and to choose among alternatives will oblige higher education institutions (HEI's) to become more reactive to their needs. The introduction of the National Student Survey (NSS) and more recently the Key Information Set (KIS) data has the potential to significantly impact on the reputation, research income and student recruitment is also a significant challenge for many institutions. The use of NSS data to inform the numerous league tables and also as part of the information provided to students as part of the university application process has resulted in universities operating in a more competitive and market driven environment. The position of a university in any league tables will impact significantly on its brand image, which will inevitably impact on its ability to attract potential students (James *et al*., 1999; Palacio *et al*., 2002). Asthana and Biggs (2007) argued that the

National Student Survey (NSS) has become increasingly important in the decision making process for students in selecting which University they will attend. Recruitment and retention of students has moved up the agenda of most universities' due the policy to increase the UK student population in line with Government targets. Poor retention rates have adverse funding consequences for institutions (Rowley, 2003). Thus recruitment, student satisfaction and retention are closely linked and student satisfaction has become an extremely important issue for universities and their management. As a result, it is in the interest of higher education providers to maximise students' satisfaction with their experience while at university and minimise dissatisfaction. This will assist in retaining students as well as to improving the institutions' performance in league tables, and so aid recruitment. Focussing resources on critical areas relating to improving the student experience and ultimately, student satisfaction is significant for institutions seeking to attract and retain students. The role of the National Student Survey and the reporting of results may prove to be significant for many institutions as an indication of quality to potential students and their parents.

The research has developed from the author's professional practice within built environment higher education. The change of government policy within higher education has had a direct impact on the professional practice of the author in terms of the management and delivery of built environment academic programmes. The response to the changes in policy by the identified stakeholder groups will determine the success of the sector in delivering the stated purpose of higher education. Ultimately, understanding the key drivers to ensuring satisfaction for both the providers and participants of higher education will enable a framework to be developed to ensure delivery of an efficient and effective higher education system which meets the needs of country, industry and end users. The results of the National Student Survey (NSS) reveal that the overall satisfaction levels with built environment programmes are on average lower than that of other subjects (Higher Education Academy, 2012). Built environment programmes have consistently underperformed on the National Student Survey when compared to the "all subject" results. This is of concern to institutions offering built environment programmes and to some extent to those stakeholders who rely on the university sector to provide a high quality education that meets the requirements of the industry and the professional bodies. Built Environment higher

education provides the construction industry with a supply of graduates to undertake the professional roles within the sector that is increasingly important as university level programmes are becoming the norm for managerial roles and professional body recognition. In order to attract high quality applicants to built environment programmes and ultimately, to the construction industry, it is important to understand the reasons for the lower satisfaction levels to ensure these issues can be addressed to produce a more positive outcome. As demonstrated within the research (Ramsden, 2013; Marcus, 2008; Longdon, 2006) a number of additional factors impact on the expectations and satisfaction levels of students including the local context of where the students are undertaking their studies. The type of institution, the perceived quality of that institution, the demographics of the student population and the level of interact of the students with the institution for accommodation etc.

1.2 Aim

The aim of the research is to propose a conceptual framework for the delivery of enhanced student satisfaction for built environment students. The framework will provide guidelines relating to developments in pedagogy, measures to improve student satisfaction with the management and organisation of their studies and employability.

The research will review factors affecting levels of satisfaction with their experience of higher education as reported by the National Student Survey (NSS) only. Many other methods of measuring student satisfaction levels exist on an institutional and national level that adds to the knowledge regarding factors influencing student perception of their experience. The National Student Survey has been used as the measure due to the extensive use of the data by the QAA, institutional audits of quality, use in KIS data and in national league tables. The research does not address issues of student participation and engagement.

The rationale for the research focussing on built environment student satisfaction stems from a desire to meet the expectations of students wishing to build a career within this sector and to understand the reported significant differences in perception of the experience by students on the same course, undertaking the same modules, in the

classroom environment, with the same tutors and undertaking the same assessment. These students are also subject to the same process and procedure at a School and institutional level. The research seeks to understand the diversity of the student cohorts within built environment education and the complexity of the expectations the students bring with them and propose ways to enhance the experience for all students within the cohort. A significant aspect of the research is to address the challenges faced by a case study provider in improving the quality of student experience and as a consequence the level of satisfaction reported in the National Student Survey. The decision to concentrate on one institution as a case study is to ensure that institutional level factors can be addressed as part of the framework to improve satisfaction rates. Research indicates that many factors contribute to the overall perception of the quality of the educational experience producing a very complex picture. The institutional context coupled with factors such as the student cohort demographics and programme of study result in difficulties producing a 'one-size fits all' solution.

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

1. To document the extant literature on the stated purpose of higher education and the developments in government higher education policy.

2. To investigate and document the extant literature on the concept of student satisfaction in higher education and the purpose and the primary mechanism for measurement in England.

3. To explore and document the concept of student satisfaction for built environment subject areas and the role of the National Student Survey in measuring satisfaction levels.

4. To explore the critical factors in promoting a satisfactory experience of higher education for built environment students.

5. To explore the challenges associated with promoting a satisfactory experience of higher education for built environment students.

6. To develop a conceptual framework to influence measures taken to improve the student experience for built environment students and as a result increased student satisfaction rates as measured by the National Student Survey.

1.4 Research Question

This research will endeavour to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does the expectations of students undertaking vocational based, professionally accredited built environment programmes influence the perception of the student experience?
2. What aspects of the student experience are critical for enhancing built environment student satisfaction rates?

1.5 Research Design.

Saunders *et al.,* (2009) describes methodology as the theory of how research should be undertaken, including the theoretical and philosophical assumptions upon which research is based and the implications of these for the method or methods adopted.

This is a single embedded case study utilising a mixed method approach including a trend analysis of existing quantitative data, content and theme analysis of the verbatim comments and semi-structured interviews with students and academic staff. According to Bryman (2008) mixed method research means adopting a research strategy employing more than one type of research method. It can also mean working with different data types (Brannen, 2005).

Investigation of a phenomenon provided the initial approach to the research. The research design was an iterative process that developed as the literature review progressed. It quickly became apparent that the area of student satisfaction was an extremely broad and complex concept. The importance of treating the research topic in a holistic manner, however, was evident from an early stage, as much of the published research reviewed for this research failed to address the broad definition of student satisfaction. The literature review proved to be a vast task, as the problem unfolded into an array of individual areas for consideration. The complexity of measuring and assessing the area of student satisfaction that was encountered in the literature led to consideration of a conceptual framework to assist in developing an understanding in the subject. There was a general consensus within the literature of the need to listen to the student voice as part of the process of accessing quality within the higher education sector. The development of government policy relating to higher education funding within the UK and related measures of quality of provision has been a significant factor driving the introduction of the National Student Survey.

The aim of the study was to develop a conceptual framework or decision support tool that a school of built environment could use to improve the levels of student satisfaction within the undergraduate programmes within the school, the desired result being a mechanism that can be used to improve satisfaction levels across all areas of it business and therefore meet its institutional objectives. In Chapter 4, the potential research approaches are considered in more detail. It was thought that, due to the complexity of the problem, the use of more than one research method would be beneficial and arguably essential to address the multi- faceted nature of measuring and improving student satisfaction levels. According to Teddie and Tashakkari (2008), quantitative and qualitative approaches have both strengths and weaknesses, and can and should be combined where appropriate.

The research has unfolded into a series of phases. Each phase has been conducted within the overall conceptual framework to address the objectives in a logical manner, each phase building on the previous one.

Phase 1 Literature Review and Methodological Development

The literature review focuses on the concepts of student satisfaction and the use of tools to measure levels of student satisfaction within higher education institutions and programmes of study. The literature review also considers the impact of UK government policy development within higher education sector and the impact at an institutional level. A general investigation of the concept of student satisfaction and its evolution at the global, national and local levels was undertaken. Furthermore, the key concepts and ideas relating to student satisfaction and the measurement processes are established.

Objective 1: To document the extant literature on the stated purpose of higher education and the on-going development in government higher education policy.

Objective 2: To investigate and document the extant literature on the concept of student satisfaction in higher education and the purpose and the primary mechanism for measurement in England.

Phase 2 Analysis of National Student Survey data

The second phase of the research represented the commencement of the primary data collection. Initially, the data from the National Student Survey (NSS) results from the University of Salford over a period of 7 years from 2008 to 2014 was subjected to a trend analysis to establish the institutional response to the survey and establish a clear picture of levels of satisfaction within the institution. This was further developed with a detailed analysis of the data from a typical School of Built Environment including a theme analysis of the Verbatim Comments provided by the students who participated in the survey over the identified period of time.

This phase of the research represents the main focus of the thesis, with the aim of identifying the key factors influencing the student satisfaction levels. The emergent themes from the initial theme analysis were further explored using semi-structured interviews with built environment students and teaching staff concerned with improving

the quality of student experience. This sought to confirm the initial findings whilst also seeking to explore in depth the nature of the causes of satisfaction and dis-satisfaction within the student group. The identified themes were also explored in depth with the teaching staff to further understand the issues.

Objective 3. To explore and document the concept of student satisfaction for built environment subject areas and the role of the National Student Survey in measuring satisfaction levels.

Objective 4. To explore the critical factors in promoting a satisfactory experience of higher education for built environment students.

Objective 5. To explore the challenges associated with promoting a satisfactory experience of higher education for built environment students.

Phase 3 Development of a Conceptual Framework

The outcomes of the analysis of the data collected in phase 2 of the research were used to develop an initial conceptual framework for the improvement of the quality of the student experience and the report levels of satisfaction in measurement tools such as the National Student Survey. Using the factors identified in phase 2, a methodology for scoring, weighting and ranking these features was developed.

Objective 6: To develop a conceptual framework to influence measures taken by providers of Built Environment education to enhance the student experience and as a result, improve student satisfaction rates as measured by the National Student Survey.

1.6 Research Limitations

The research has been conducted during a period of significant change in government policy and consequential changes in the higher education sector. The research has

been undertaken within one case study provider of built environment higher education and therefore may have limited application to another institutional context.

1.7 Thesis Structure

The thesis reports the research work over eight chapters. The chapters are organised as follows:

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Introducing the research topic, the chapter discusses the main issues relating to the quality of student experience with the higher education sector and presents the aims and objectives of the research together with a brief overview of the research design.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review and Synthesis

The review of the literature is presented in this chapter. It is divided into two principle sections. In the first section, the general concept of student satisfaction as a measure of quality is explored and its relevance to both government policy and the management of higher education institutions is investigated. The context of the research is presented in the second section, which evaluates the student experience within a typical School of the Built Environment, leading to an evaluation of the factors affecting student satisfaction levels.

Chapter 3 – Conceptual Framework

Using the indicators developed in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 seeks to explain the development of the conceptual framework and its refinement at each stage of the research process. The chapter presents the initial conceptual framework for evaluating the factors influencing student satisfaction.

Chapter 4 – Research Philosophy, Methodology and Design

The methodological approaches adopted for this research are explored in this chapter. It explores the philosophical foundations of the research followed by a detailed elaboration and justification of the methods used.

Chapter 5 – Analysis of National Student Survey Data 2008-2015 for case study

This chapter reports on the initial phase of the primary research, consisting of two discrete segments of activity. The first, an exploratory study using a longitudinal trend analysis to establish the student satisfaction levels at the University of Salford and specifically within the school of built environment. The second stage was to undertake a detailed analysis of the verbatim comments from the NSS results from surveys completed from 2008 to 2015.

Chapter 6 – Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews

This chapter reports on the third phase of the primary research. The findings from the analysis of the NSS data and the verbatim comments is used to inform the key themes explored in depth during the semi structured interviews undertaken with students and staff within the school to explore in detail the factors influencing students' perceptions of their experience.

Chapter 7 – Data Analysis and Discussion

Chapter 7 is the final data analysis chapter and presents the analysis of all the data collected and key themes are revisited with discussion of the emerging themes.

Chapter 8 – Research Findings

This chapter readdresses the research questions and presents the overall finding from the data analysis and the final conceptual framework is presented.

Chapter 9 – Conclusions and Recommendations

In the final chapter, a summary of the findings will be presented and the conclusions to the research are formulated. The contribution of the research to the current research landscape is explored with a reflection on the development of the framework. Finally, avenues for further work are suggested.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the basis for the development of the thesis. It sets out the background and motivation for the research, research statement of the problem, the research questions and the research aim and objectives. It also highlighted the scope of the research, the research methodology, and finally the structure of the thesis. The rationale for the research is to identify the critical factors impacting on student satisfaction with their experience of higher education and to enhance the experience for the diverse population of those participating in built environment higher education.

The literature review will consider in detail the on-going government policy development towards higher education with consideration of the implications for HEI's and for those participating in higher education. The research concentrates on elements of policy concerning the growing emphasis on the student experience, the measurement and reporting of levels of student satisfaction with the experience and the response from individual institutions in trying to address matters raised by students.

The focus of this research relates to enhancing the student experience for built environment students and therefore will explore the issues surrounding the development of policy concerning the identified factors affecting the student experience and factors impacting on student satisfaction levels.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW AND SYNTHESIS

2.1 Part 1 – The concepts of main knowledge domains: Introduction

The literature review and synthesis have been undertaken to gain a comprehensive understanding of the field of study in order to understand the concepts associated with the research problem identified in Chapter 1 (see Section 1.4) and to establish the relationships between the different knowledge domains related to the student experience of higher education including student expectations, student satisfaction and higher education policy development and the collective impact on the whole issue. The literature review also provides a critical review of the nature and purpose of higher education in England and considers how this relates to the changes in policy relating to higher education in England over time, primarily since the publication of the Robbins Report (1963) to the Browne Report (2010). The review of the literature considers the use of the National Student Survey (NSS) in the broader context of higher education policy and its relationship with the student experience. The aim is to inform the overall research project by raising issues and questions which will help shape the subsequent strands of the research, including the questions asked in the interviews with students and lecturing staff to inform the proposed framework for improving the student experience and the research recommendations. The literature synthesis led to the identification of the gap in the knowledge and the development of the aim, objectives, research questions and the conceptual framework. The literature review is presented in three parts. Part 1 reviewed the literature related to the main knowledge domains concerned with the nature and purpose of higher education, higher education policy development in England, student expectations and experience and the National Student Survey (NSS) as a mechanism for measuring the quality of the student experience. Part 2 reviews the integration between the concepts associated with the main knowledge domains. Part 3 synthesised the literature to highlight the knowledge gap and provide the justification for the research. Therefore the chapter is structured as follows;

1. A review of the nature and purpose of higher education and higher education policy development.
2. Student expectations of higher educations and experience.
3. The NSS as a mechanism for measuring the quality of student experience.

2.2 A review of the nature and purpose of higher education and higher education policy development.

2.2.1 The nature and purpose of higher education.

The nature and purpose of higher education has developed over many hundreds of years since its emergence in classical Greece. The Greek idea of higher education was described in Plato's dialogues. Barnett (1990), identifies the key elements in Plato's idea of higher education to be (a) *a sense that what ordinarily counts as knowledge is contaminated,* (b) *the possibility to see through the conventional knowledge of appearances' to a new realm of unchanging 'knowledge'*, (c) *criticism of conventional knowledge through a 'discourse of reason'*, (d) *critical examination of knowledge acquired,* and (e) *education was connected with the idea of freedom of enquiry.*

During Medieval times, higher education began to develop more recognisable institutions of learning with the concept of the 'university' being born. Within the new university, the masters and students were considered as joint participants in educational enterprise. Within this form of higher education, what was considered to be knowledge required continual reassertion and demonstration that occurred primarily through structured discussion and debate. The nature and purpose of higher education during medieval times continued the themes developed in ancient Greece but also considered the value of study, a system of governance of the fledgling institutions and access to learning for all who wished to participate. This idea of higher education largely prevailed in England until 1828, when the debate was reopened with the establishment of a non-conformist university college in Gower Street, London and what followed in terms of expansion of institutions of higher education. The debate relating to higher education and its role in an increasingly industrial society was lead by Newman (1852) who set out his ideas in *Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education*. Newman

considered that knowledge imparted should be 'liberal' and that learning should form *'a connected view or grasp of things'*. He believed that higher education should be grounded in something more than being 'useful' and not confined to the particular. Newman's idea of higher education related to the continuous process of intellectual reflection on what had already been perceived. Newman (1852) states the purpose of higher education to be *'to open the mind, to correct it, to refine it, to enable it to know, and to digest, master, rule, and use its knowledge, to give it power over its own faculties, application, flexibility, method, critical exactness'.*

To a large extent, the concept of the nature and purpose of higher education remained essentially unchanged until the pressures of the continued developments of a technological age ultimately started to have an impact. These developments were coupled with major socio-political changes following two world wars and the expectations of society. The perceptions of the role of universities and the purpose of the knowledge development taking place within higher education began to once again be debated and reassessed. During the 1960's, the UK and the wider western world, witnessed an exponential expansion of higher education. The requirement for research and development into areas such as science, technology, medicine and its practical application in an industrial, technological and military context contributed to this expansion. As the same time, changes in social expectations needed to be underpinned and supported by the government. This resulted in the expansion of the institutions able to offer higher education programmes to include polytechnics and colleges of higher education. Also, the relationship between universities and the state changed significantly during this period with changes to funding and increasing regulation.

Since World War II, equality of educational opportunity has been the foundation of social and political debate. The debate was originally linked to concepts of individual and social mobility but increasingly also became associated with social class or with people from disadvantaged family backgrounds. The 1944 Education Act began the process of widening access to education through changes related to secondary education in an attempt to provide some measure of educational equality. The UK governments' attempts to expand access to higher education correspond to three key policy 'moments'

(Trow, 2005) that has substantially changed the scale and scope of the higher education enterprise. The development of the changes in policy specifically relating to the funding of higher education can be traced back to the Robbins Report (1963). The Robbins committee was appointed by Treasury minute dated 8th February 1961 to '*review the pattern of full-time higher education in Great Britain and in the light of national needs and resources".* Within the report, Robbins stressed that higher education should not be supply constrained and stated '*courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so'* (Robbins Report, 1963, p8). In terms of the policy, Robbins (1963) asserted that higher education should fulfil the following purposes a) instruction in learning; b) promotion of general powers of the mind; c) the advancement of learning; d) the transmission of a common culture. It was in evidence to the Robbins Report that the idea of a student loans system with income-contingent repayments was raised in the UK context (Barr and Crawford, 2005). In 1966, Secretary of State Anthony Crosland introduced a binary policy creating a 'distinctive' higher education sector within the local authority system. Many of the new polytechnics were formed during the expansion of higher education in 1960's in response to the increased demand for technical education. This led to a rapid expansion of institutions providing access to higher education courses and as a result a larger proportion of the population had the opportunity to benefit from higher education. Watson (2007) suggests that the on-going policy to widen participation is linked to social justice but "*the government has relied primarily on an economic rationale"*.

Policy development continued into the 1980s when Conservative governments reformulated the Robbins principle, making courses available *'to all those who can benefit from them and who wish to do so'* (Robbins, 1963). In the 1987 White Paper on Higher Education: 'Meeting the Challenge' which preceded the 1988 Education Reform Act, a revised policy on access included recognition of three routes into higher education: academic qualifications, vocational qualifications and access courses for adults. It also acknowledged the right of institutions to admit people from other routes '*if fully satisfied of their capacity to benefit'*. This change led to rapid growth and 'mass' participation. In 1992, under the Further and Higher Education Act, new universities based on the former polytechnics were formed resulting in the binary divide being abolished and two new sectors were created, a unified higher education sector including

the former polytechnics and a further education sector of newly incorporated colleges, focusing on levels below higher education and, like the former polytechnics, removed from local government control. The Act also resulted in the set up of Higher Education Funding Councils for the UK nations. The setting up of the Higher Education Funding Councils also proved to be significant in relation to the development of policy relating to the funding of higher education. For most of the post war period, the constraint on numbers of universities places was largely a matter for the admitting institutions depending upon the physical and financial capacity as perceived by these institutions. This changed in 1994–1995 when HEFCE capped numbers (HEFCE, 1994). The reason for this was that in the previous three or so years, student numbers had increased significantly, more rapidly than expected by the government, thus applying unanticipated pressure to public funding. The influence of government on how HEIs behave in relation to student numbers was gaining ground at this time due to the use of funding formulae by the newly established Funding Councils (Tapper & Salter 1994; Deer, 2002).

In 1996, a Committee of Inquiry had been agreed by both of the major political parties in response to the '*sense of crisis in UK higher education'* (Watson, 2007) '*To make recommendations on how the purposes, shape, structure, size and funding of higher education".* (NCIHE, 1997) The previously described expansion of the sector that took place between 1987 and 1997 had resulted in a serious funding crisis, the function of higher education had been blurred by the removal of the binary divide coupled with the growth in the 'knowledge economy' with the result of more pressure on an already over stretched system (Lunt, 2008). The context for the Dearing Committee's works was the acknowledged existence of a serious funding crisis due to the expansion in participation rates. The Government was trying to reduce its expenditure on higher education while recognising the importance of widening participation to achieve its wider economic and social objectives (Adnett and Tlupova, 2008).

The Dearing Report (1997) made a large number of recommendations concerning renewed growth of student numbers. The government set out a 50 percent participation target with a reformulated concept of access offering *'the opportunity of higher education to all those who have the potential to benefit'* and providing courses *'which satisfy both students and employers'.* This concept represented a change in educational policy and

to some extent represents the changing relationship between higher education, knowledge and society. In the past, according to Barnett (1997), higher education held a privileged position where it created knowledge that was then made available to society. This relationship is changing in response to changing economic pressures and expectations of individual members of society as described by Barnett (1997) when he states *"Crudely speaking, society is coming to determine the forms of knowing that it wishes for itself. It is no longer content to leave their definitions to the academics…or even their production. Higher education, furthermore, is having to respond to the epistemological agenda being put on it by the wider society"*. Political policy continued to influence the further expansion of the sector with the justification for the further expansion related to improving the economic performance of the nation in addition to the policy of widening access. In the 2003 White Paper – *The Future of Higher Education* it states that the long term challenge for British universities consists of: (i) improving standards; (ii) widening access; (iii) strengthening links with business; (iv) competing globally. The White Paper requires universities to make better progress in harnessing knowledge for wealth creation (DfES, 2003, p. 17). Charles Clarke, Secretary of State for Education and Skills at the time, suggested that the wider non-economic benefits as suggested in the Robbins Report (1963) are *'overrated'* and that *'universities exist to enable the British economy and society to deal with the challenges posed by the increasingly rapid process of global change'.*

This idea that universities exist to benefit the economic prosperity of the country is subject to some debate but led to the increase in the provision of 'professional education' that is vocationally based and is closely linked to specific professions. This is particularly true within the built environment subject area. According to J.J. Paul, in *The Flexible Professional in the Knowledge Society (2011)*, "*The term knowledge society has been used to indicate not only the expansion of participation in higher education or of knowledge-intensive or high-technology sectors of the economy, but rather a situation in which the characteristics of work organisations across the board change under influence of the increasing importance of knowledge"*.

The higher education system has undergone significant structural changes as a result of the described development of social and economic policy in relation to the provision of

higher education. The increase of vocationally based programmes offered in universities in the UK has been significant and to some extent reflects the emphasis that has been placed on the economic benefits to the UK of highly skilled graduates entering the market place. A key issue in view of these developments, is has the nature and purpose of higher education fundamentally changed from the traditional understanding as a result. Barnett (1990, p 203) argues that in order for education to be viewed as 'higher education' it must promote;

"1. A deep understanding, by the student, of some knowledge claims.
2. A radical critique, by the same student, of those knowledge claims.
3. A developing competence to conduct that critique in the company of others.
4. The student's involvement in determining the shape and direction of the critique (i.e. some form of independent inquiry).
5. The student's self-reflection, with the student developing the capacity critically to evaluate his or her own achievements, knowledge claims and performance.
6. The opportunity for the student to engage in that enquiry in a process of open dialogue and co-operation (freed from unnecessary direction)."

In the context of built environment higher education, it is apparent that the epistemological base traditionally associated with higher education of securing objective knowledge and truth is somewhat undermined. This is due to the inter-disciplinary nature of the subject that consists of a range of knowledge with and epistemological base ranging from scientific theory to the more management and social science subjects. This raises questions as to the nature and purpose of higher education and how this relates to the increase in professional education within the sector. In terms of this study, it is important to establish if built environment programmes can be considered to be 'higher education'. If we consider the view of higher education as stated by Barnett (1990), we can conclude that the defining factor is the students ability to critically review knowledge claims and through a process of critical reflection be aware of the impact of any stance taken or action performed. The ability of the student/graduate to be able to be self-aware regarding the evaluation of thoughts and actions, be able to understand that different alternatives exist and a process of appraisal and modification is necessary in light of experience is a crucial requirement of a higher education. It would

follow that if the curriculum and the processes for delivery of that curriculum, endeavours to develop the identified skills then it can be considered higher education. The expansion of the epistemological base from the traditional scientific base coupled with the widening participation agenda does not in itself result in a dilution of the nature and purpose of higher education. The fundamental idea of higher education relating to students and their tutors working together in the process of critically evaluating and appraising knowledge claims is more difficult to reconcile in an era of mass education (Barnett 2003; 2012). This is not an issue of philosophy but rather one of resources to deliver such an educational experience.

2.2.2 Higher education policy development.

Dearing (1997) recommended increasing the public funding of higher education and crucially the introduction of a graduate contribution to tuition costs. The Report highlighted that universities and colleges cannot continue with the reduction in the unit of funding of recent years *'without significant damage to the quality of the student experience and to the research base'*. The Dearing Committee recommended that individual students should meet part of the costs of full-time higher education when they could afford to, through repayment loans after graduation linked to income and by that grants be restored to support those from low income families (Wagner, 1998). As the Report itself states '*there is overwhelming evidence that those with higher education qualifications are the main beneficiaries from higher education in the form of improved employment prospects and pay. Individuals who benefit in this way are not drawn proportionately from the socio-economic groups that currently fund higher education through general taxation'*. According to Watson (2007) the Labour government at the time implemented most of the recommendations of the Dearing Report with the exception of the recommendations relating to tuition fees.

The economic argument was gaining more significance at this time. The benefit to the economy of the country was stressed repeatedly and also the benefits to the individual of a higher education begin to come to the fore. The rate of return for a university education is estimated to be high (Blundell, *et al*, 2000). Dearing (1997) drew attention to the significant returns earned by graduates in the labour market when recommending

students make a contribution to their tuition costs. This view has persisted as asserted by Adnett and Slack (2007) that the private rate of return of participation in higher education remains above the expected rates of return of alternative investment opportunities of similar risk. Policy makers have conventionally assumed that social rates of return are in line with private rates of return that leads to the further presumption that a rise in participation of 'under-represented' groups would benefit society generally. Since 1998, universities have charged fees at a flat rate annual fee to undergraduates. The government continued to be faced with the competing pressures to widen participation and further increase participation, with the ability to fund higher education. The economic pressure to switch more of the cost of higher education onto students was therefore compelling given the evidence suggesting benefit to the individual student.

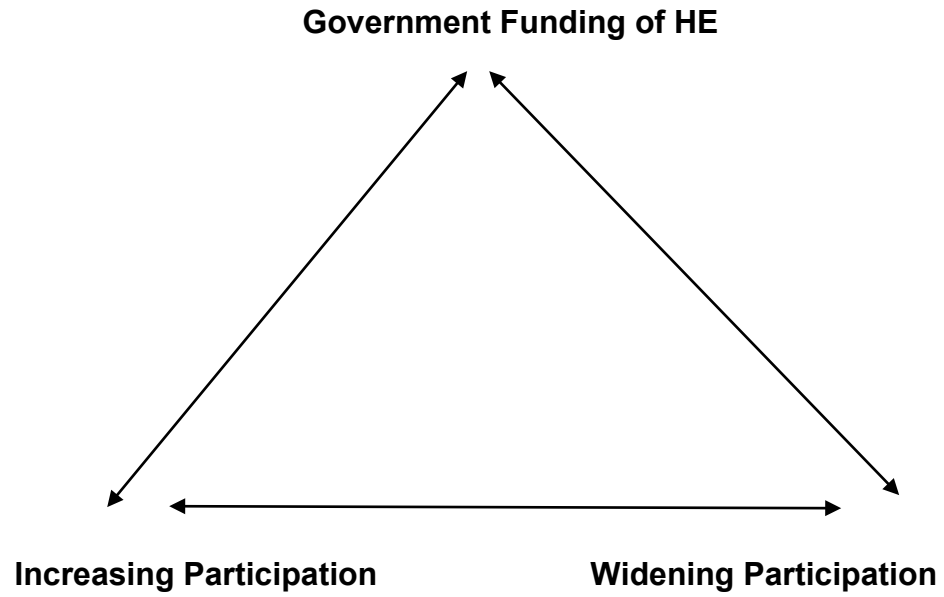


Figure 1- The higher education policy trilemma (Adnett and Tiupova, 2008)

The Higher Education Act, 2004 was enacted with the introduction of 'top-up' or variable tuition fees up to £3000 from 2006 which universities were permitted to introduce provided that they sign up to an 'Access Agreement' with the new Office for Fair Access (OFFA). The fees provision was accompanied by a system of student loans (no student would be required to pay fees up-front), means-tested grants, and university bursaries

(Johnson, 2004). The introduction of income-contingent loans was broadly in line with funding arrangements introduced in Australia, Sweden, New Zealand, South Africa and Chile (Chapman, 2006). The National Union of Students opposed the plans on the grounds that *'it would further widen the gulf between the haves and the have-nots on campus and after graduation'* (BBC, 2004). One of the key aspects of the Higher Education Act (2004) was the commitment to increasing participation in the face of continuing variation in participation by social class. Evidence suggests that '*British higher education has become a mass higher education system in its public structures, but remains an élite one in its private instincts'* (Scott, 1995, p.2). According to Watts and Bridges (2006), *"participation rates of those from lower socio-economic groups remains low in part because it is unclear in what way young people from these groups benefit from higher education, and how far the benefits outweigh the costs".*

The economic benefit to the country of widening access to higher education and increasing participation was a significant justification for the continued expansion of higher education (Glennerster, 2002). To be economically successful as a nation requires an educated, skilled workforce. Politically it is also seen as important to be inclusive and ensure those from lower socio-economic groups are able to participate in the technological and economic benefits of the job market as it changes with developments in technology (Mayhew *et al.,* 2004). The increasing financial pressure of meeting the policy objectives and funding the higher education system resulted in the further development of the policy with the commissioning of the Browne Report.

The Browne Report (2010) made recommendations on the future funding and organisation of the higher education sector. The key elements of the changes are that any university or college will be able to charge fees of up to £6,000. In exceptional cases, universities will be able to charge higher contributions up to a limit of £9,000, subject to meeting much tougher conditions on widening participation and fair access. Universities wishing to charge over £6,000 will have to show how they will spend some of the additional income making progress in widening participation and fair access. As the policy has been put into operation it has become evident that many universities opted to charge the £9,000 upper limit of student contribution. The implementation of the recommendations presented in the Browne Report (2010) does result in a

significantly different higher education system. Private payments by individuals will represent a far greater proportion of the funding to universities and there will be more differentiation between universities than currently.

A key policy driver from Robbins to Browne has been to increase access to higher education to meet the needs of increased 'social demand' and the needs of the national economy. The challenge for higher education institutions does not just relate to the increase in student numbers but also the increased access to previously under – represented groups such as women, mature students and ethnic minorities (Dearing 1997, Report 5). Coupled with this is the numbers of 'access students' entering higher education with non-standard qualification. This has also resulted in the significant changes in the curriculum with expansion of non-traditional vocational disciplines reflecting trends in the work place and the demand for work-related knowledge. New pressures on teaching and assessment methods to reflect the trend for 'student centred' learning and increased use of I.T. in delivery, assessment and support are also requiring significant organisational change from institutions. Also, new modes of study to including part-time, blended and distance learning within a flexible modular structure need to be accommodated by institutions to meet the demand of students and industry. With respect to the widening participation agenda universities who are recruiting universities rather than selecting universities have little choice but to embrace it, which puts them in a different relationship to the student market when compared to those universities where demand will exceed supply, often by a very significant margin (Filippakou *et al*., 2012). Tight (2012) found that participation in higher education has widened significantly in the last 60 years particularly for females and students from ethnic minorities. Women are more likely than men to participate in higher education and students from ethnic minorities that participate have increased significantly. Progress has also been made in the numbers of mature students. However, participation in higher education of people from lower socio-economic groups has resulted in relatively little progress. Young people from less advantaged socio-economic situations are under-represented when compared with those from more privileged backgrounds. However, Gorard (2008) supported by Tight (2012), has suggested this can be largely explained by students from less advantaged socio-economic on average achieving lower school-level qualifications.

Changes in funding sources of higher education have posed significant issues for higher education institutions on many levels. The relationship with students and end users has changed as a result. Students are increasingly being considered as 'consumers' or 'clients' in how they interact with universities. This view impacts on the institution in terms of the level of service they provide, the pressures of meeting the expectations of students and other end users. The increased expectations of students are coupled with the reduction of per capita student funding putting significant pressure on the system. This can be evidenced by rising staff-student ratios, cuts in academic and support staff across many institutions in an attempt to balance the books. A crucial deficiency in the development of the policy according to Trow (2007 p.24) is that the staff views of the changes are largely un-tapped, they *"simply do not know what is going on inside the colleges and universities while pronouncing… about what should be happening*".

The introduction of the policy to introduce tuition fees firstly in the form of 'upfront' undergraduate means-tested fees in 1998 followed by the loan based regime in 2006 and updated in 2012, can be clearly linked with the notion of the student experience within the literature. The introduction of the policy on fees can be associated with the appearance of the various student surveys including the National Student Survey introduced in 2005 and operated on an annual basis since that time. The development of government higher education policies including those set out in the White Paper *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System* (BIS 2011) was aimed at creating increased competition between higher education providers and a market-like culture in England. Measures included within the White Paper included allowing institutions to recruit uncapped numbers of high achieving 'A'-level students thus increasing competition between institutions to recruit such students and helped to crystallise the idea of the student experience as it is now understood (Baird and Gordon, 2009). The development of the market culture within the higher education environment in the UK and the concentration of the student experience have also been reflected in the experience of other higher education systems in Australia (Meek and Wood, 1997) and in Europe (Sarrico and Rosa; Vuori, 2013). In addition to the policy regarding increasing completion, The White Paper (BIS, 2011) also identified improving the student experience as one of the three challenges the reform sought to address along with

financial stability and social mobility. It stated, *"Institutions must deliver a better student experience; improving teaching, assessment, feedback and preparation for the world of work".* (BIS 2011,p.4). It went on to call for greater employer engagement in higher education in order to enhance student employability and indicated the Government's wish to increase competition further by encouraging higher education work in further education (FE) colleges ('HE in FE') and by making it easier for smaller institutions, without significant research profiles and with limited subject ranges, to gain a university title.

2.2.3 The Teaching Excellence Framework

In November 2015, the Government published its Higher Education Green Paper, *Fulfilling our potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*. (BIS, 2015) The paper stated that its *"core aims are to raise teaching standards, provide greater focus on graduate employability, widen participation in higher education, and open up the sectors to new high quality entrants"*. It outlines the government's vision for higher education in England and aims to seek views from a wide section of society. To achieve these aims a number of proposals were included within the four parts of the paper cross a range of issues.

- *"introduce a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF);*
- *increase participation by students from disadvantaged and under-represented groups in higher education;*
- *introduce a single gateway for providers to enter the sector; and*
- *re-shape the funding and regulatory architecture for the higher education system". (BIS, 2015)*

Part A: Teaching excellence, quality and social mobility contains significant proposals aimed at driving up the quality of teaching within the higher education sector and to allow prospective students and other stakeholder's to identify high quality providers. Teaching quality is to be assessed and TEF levels identified with those institutions

delivering '*teaching excellence'* being awarded higher TEF levels that would in turn unlock permission to charge higher fees. The TEF's methodology has yet to be confirmed but it is to be informed by the outcome of a '*technical consultation'* (2016) on the metrics, assessment process and incentives. The Green Paper suggests higher education institutions will be required to submit '*institutional evidence'* to attest to the teaching quality and would need to apply to be assessed for TEF levels above level 1. In order to meet the eligibility requirements to be assessed for higher TEF levels, institutions will need to be able to demonstrate they are '*fulfilling widening participation expectations'*. The issue of social mobility is addressed with the focus on the *'progression of white males from disadvantaged backgrounds and the success of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students in higher education'.* The expectation is the TEF will also '*recognise the efforts that providers make to improve the access and experience of students from all backgrounds'*.

Further provisions are made within Parts B, C and D to simplify entry to the higher education sector for new providers and to simplify the mechanisms for assuring quality and governance of the sector. The government intends to *'place the prime emphasis on championing the interests of students'* as many students now *'meet the majority of their course costs through their fees'*. A new Office for Students would be created to deliver this aim. The Green Paper is a significant policy development with wide ranging measures to reform quality assessment, the structure and governance of the higher education sector. Significantly for higher education providers it places a greater emphasis on the quality of teaching and links the ability to increase fees to improve standards.

On 16th May 2016, the government published the White Paper "Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility & Student Choice" (BIS 2016) following consultation on the Green Paper. The aim of the policy development is to deliver good value for all stakeholders of higher education system. The White Paper sets out its proposals around four main themes. The first involves the introduction of increased competition by making it easier for new providers to enter into the higher education market. The second area surrounds the important area of teaching. The White paper points to the lack of information available to students regarding the teaching

quality of institutions. It describes *'good teaching' as a broad definition that includes "learning environments, student support, course design, career preparation and 'soft skills', as well as what happens in the lecture theatre or lab".* The White Paper points to the findings of the HEPI-HEA Student Academic Experience Survey (HEPI-HEA, 2015) that consistently finds some dissatisfaction amongst the students related to teaching and learning. The proposals aim to increase the information available to prove that teaching and learning has improved as a result of the market driven system introduced in 2012. The current processes of measuring teaching quality are often related to student satisfaction levels that can be imperfect measures. Good teaching and learning may come in many different forms and may not be related to overall student satisfaction. The third theme relates to the widening participation agenda and to fair access to the most selecting universities while the fourth part of the White Paper relates to the research landscape.

As the focus of this research relates to enhancing the student experience for built environment students it is the aspects of the policy development related to teaching and widening participation that is of most interest. The key features of the White Paper related to teaching are:

- The creation of an Office for Students by merging the Office for Fair Access with the learning and teaching functions of the Higher Education Funding Council for England.
- Retaining the proposed link between the teaching excellence framework and tuition fees, but phasing the system in more slowly. Universities that meet basic standards in 2017-18 and 2018-19 will be allowed inflation increases in tuition fees, ahead of the introduction of differentiated caps in 2019-20.
- Higher education institutions participating in the full TEF will be divided into three tiers after being assessed: meets expectations, excellent, and outstanding. From 2019-20, institutions that met expectations will be permitted to increase their fees at a rate equivalent to 50 per cent of inflation. Those institutions in the top two categories will be eligible for a full inflationary rise but if an institutions TEF level

subsequently dropped, they would be required to lower the fees they charged, including for existing students.

- The government estimates that the value of awards stemming from the TEF from higher undergraduate fees for teaching excellent institutions will be worth on average around £1 billion a year during the first ten years of its operation.
- Proposals to pilot subject-level TEF assessments that will begin in the third year of the scheme, ahead of full introduction in year four.
- Universities will be assessed according to their performance on a range of metrics including student satisfaction, retention and graduate employment, while also drawing on qualitative institutional submissions and expert judgements.
- Students will eventually be able to access detailed information on graduate earnings by individual degree course. The information will be provided using HMRC tax data, rather than information from the Destination for Higher Education Leavers survey run. The headline results on graduate earnings will be published in summer 2016, followed by detailed breakdowns by subject and institutions in late autumn 2016.

The publication of the White Paper was followed very quickly by the announcement of the government intention to bring forward new legislation in the form of the Higher Education and Research Bill (Queens Speech, 18th May 2016 www.gov.uk accessed 19 May 2016). The aim of the draft legislation is *"To ensure that more people have the opportunity to further their education, legislation will be introduced to support the establishment of new universities and to promote choice and competition across the higher education sector."* The government identifies a number of key facts to support the introduction of the draft legislation including the fact that the UK needs more highly skilled graduates to fill the expected graduate job vacancies generated between now and 2022. Employers are suffering skills shortages, especially in high skilled STEM areas; at the same time at least 20% of employed graduates are in non-professional roles. Over 60% of students said they feel their course is worse than expected and a third do not believe it represents value for money.

The key aspects of the Bill relating to this research are to ensure that all those with the potential to succeed in higher education will be able to access education from a wide

range of high quality universities. This process will be supported by the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework that will put in place incentives to drive up the standard of teaching in all universities, and give students clear information about where teaching is best and what benefits they can expect to gain from their course. The TEF aims to raise teaching standards so students and employers get the skills they need and will ensure funding of teaching in higher education is linked to quality, not simply quantity.

2.3 Student Experience

The concept of the 'student experience' and what is being measured by the various surveys (such as the National Student Survey, HEPI-HEA Student Academic Experience Survey and the Times Higher Student Experience Survey) is not always aligned. The student experience could be defined as including all aspects of the student interaction with their chosen institution including (a) the marketing, application and admissions processes, (b) the teaching, learning and assessment, (c) the resources available and the campus experience and (d) how the institution supports the student transition into employment on graduation. The institutional response from the different institution has been varied and can be categorised by the type of institution (Temple *et al.,* 2014) with the more research-intensive universities responding differently to more teaching focused institutions. The introduction of surveys such as the NSS has lead to a cultural shift in higher education in recognising and responding to student feedback related to their experiences. The experience of students will be affected by a range of institutional responses in terms of the policies and procedures introduced in response to the on-going government policy developments and the institutional strategy and it should not just be considered an issue affecting course teams or individual academic's. Internal facing policies such as human resource policies, funding of the estate requirements and organisation and management of resources that are not readily associated with the narrow view of the student experience being related to the learning experience but have a significant impact on the student. The student experience as a distinct set of linked activities to be managed is a relatively recent phenomenon. Many factors could be identified as being included in the student experience but like all experiences, likely to be unique to each individual (Kolb, 1984). Much of the literature related to the student

experience in the context of higher education concentrates on particular aspects of the experience for students notably on the teaching and learning and on particular groups of students such as mature, part-time or international students (Temple *et al.* 2014). The idea of managing the whole student experience is relatively new in higher education and is first expressed in the 1990's by Haselgrove in the text, The Student Experience published in 1994. The book considered an approach to the measurement of student satisfaction taken by the then University of Central England that defined a set of indicators linked to student satisfaction (Green *et al*., 1994) to include (a) travel to the institution, (b) access to facilities such as the library, computer rooms, catering, (c) support mechanisms, (d) teaching and learning, (e) social activities and (f) financial matters. The students were surveyed regarding these issues and the results analysed to inform *"a set of priorities on which management attention can be focussed"* (Haselgrove, 1994). The link between student satisfaction and educational quality was not proven given the varied expectations of the students (Green *et al*., 1994). As the debate continues regarding the idea of student satisfaction indicating quality, the significance attached to the view of the student body on matters of academic judgement it remains a concern of many commentators. Staddon and Standish (2012) suggest that the focus on the student perspective *"puts students in a relation to their learning that is very different to what has traditionally been the case…authority is now being ceded to the novice – to those who might once have been thought of as standing in need of induction and, hence, as unable to understand well…the nature of this [educational] good"* and further suggests *"to see student choice as the arbiter of quality is an abnegation of responsibility o the part of providers of higher education. Standards are not raised but abandoned"* (cited in Temple *et al*., 2014). It should be noted that the link between student satisfaction and quality in terms of educational gain and performance is not evidenced within the literature (Gibbs, 2012).

Pressures for organisational change in response to the requirements of demonstrating accountability through external and internal audits are significant. Audits of 'quality' in relation to academic standards through institutional and collaborative audits by the QAA have a major impact on the reputation of an institution and therefore institutions need to have robust and responsive systems in place to meet the challenges. Indicators of quality have been an important driver in shaping the politics of higher education and

institutional priorities (Patrick and Stanley, 1998). The policy developments described have emphasised the overall quality of undergraduate education in the UK. A number of studies undertaken (QAA 2009, HEPI 2006, 2007, 2010, 2012; Brennan *et al.*, 2009) to inform the debate have raised a number of important issues related to;

- The differences in quality between institutions within the UK that had been assumed to be of comparable quality.
- The quality of the UK higher education system when compared with other national systems.
- The adequacy of national quality regimes.

Audits of provision play a part in the perception of quality of institutions but there is some concern that the quality audits have emphasised scrutiny of an institution's quality assurance processes to a greater extent than of its educational processes and outcomes. The advent of league tables and their impact on reputation, research income and student recruitment is also a significant challenge for many institutions. The position of a university in any league tables will impact significantly on its brand image, which will inevitably impact on its ability to attract potential students (James *et al*., 1999; Palacio *et al*., 2002). Asthana and Biggs (2007) argued that the National Student Survey has become increasingly important in the decision making process for students in selecting which University they will attend. Recruitment and retention of students has moved up the agenda of most universities' due the policy to increase the UK student population in line with Government targets. Poor retention rates have adverse funding consequences for institutions (Rowley, 2003). Thus recruitment, student satisfaction and retention are closely linked and student satisfaction has become an extremely important issue for universities and their management. The literature suggests that universities may wish to maximise students' satisfaction with their experience at university and minimise dissatisfaction. This will assist in retaining students as well as to improving the institutions' performance in league tables, and so aid recruitment. This makes the focussing of resources on the critical areas relating to improving the student experience and ultimately, student satisfaction as expressed in the ability to retain students and the National Student Survey more significant. It should be noted that the link between

student satisfaction and quality in terms of educational gain and performance is not evidenced within the literature (Gibbs, 2012).

The student as a 'consumer' is likely to impact on their expectations relating to the level of service they receive and perceptions relating to the quality of student experience (Crawford, 1991). This view is supported by Eagle *et al.,* (2007) and Brown (2011) and it can be demonstrated that people who are experienced in exercising choice in relation to the services they choose and where to spend their money are unlikely to be 'passive recipients' of services (Wright and Ngan, 2004). This situation is likely to apply to students when exercising choice in relation to the university they attend. To some extent, the introduction of the National Student Survey (NSS) by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in 2005 confirms the concept that the student has moved from a being in partnership with their institution in advancing their studies to a consumer of its services (Aldridge, 1998). The data collected from the National Student Survey is used for a number of purposes including as a part of institutional quality assurance mechanisms and also to provide students with information when gathering information relating to higher education institutions. The data is also used in the production of league tables of university performance such as those published in the *Times Higher Educational Supplement* and The Guardian newspaper. Many universities are concerned with the outcome of the National Student Survey and the resultant impact it will have on the institutions position in the published league tables. As a result, understanding student expectations and successfully meeting those expectations is critical for many institutions. Satisfaction is a subject that has received attention from many disciplines and as a result has many definitions and conceptual theories associated with it (Oliver, 1997). However, there is a general consensus that satisfaction comes from the meeting of expectations. Expectations are the benchmark by which a customer measures a service experience and they may be realistic or unrealistic. Satisfaction is derived from a number of components linked to customer expectations and needs. Linking satisfaction to those components can explain differences in satisfaction levels and indicate where service providers can most effectively improve their service to enhance satisfaction. Research undertaken by Cadotte and Turgeon (1988) into customer satisfaction is concerned with identifying the drivers of satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction. The interesting aspect of this research is that it suggests that

fixing all the dis-satisfiers will not necessarily create satisfied customers. Douglas *et al,* (2008) identified that there are a small number of 'critically critical" determinants important in achieving student satisfaction, namely, *'communication and responsiveness within the teaching, learning and assessment environment, and access and responsiveness within the ancillary services environment'.* They found that for students the main sources of dissatisfaction are *'attitude, responsiveness, tangibles, team work, communication, management, access and socialising...communication and responsiveness are the most crucial determinant of quality as it is a major source of satisfaction and dissatisfaction within the area of teaching, learning and assessment and are likely to lead to changes in behaviour and are therefore "Critically Critical"; and usefulness is a major satisfier in teaching, learning and assessment, but not a significant dis-satisfier'.* In support of this view, Rogers and Smith (2011) identified that the strongest predictor of student satisfaction was the students' perceptions that staff showed genuine interest in their learning needs and progress. They found that students' value academic staff that are genuinely interested in their needs and progress. The ability of an institution to translate the areas that are likely to result in satisfied students can be challenging given the many competing factors needing to be resourced at a time of keen competition to attract students and therefore income to the institution. Therefore the ability of an institution to balance the needs of the institution with the expectations of students will be crucial to future success. These concepts are applicable to the outputs of the NSS because deliverers of built environment courses need to recognise expectations, respond where possible, and sensibly manage expectations where response is not possible.

Changes in funding sources of higher education have posed significant issues for higher education institutions on many levels and the relationship with students and stakeholders has changed as a result. Students are increasingly being considered as 'consumers' or 'clients' in how they interact with universities. This view impacts on the institution in terms of the level of service they provide and the pressures of meeting the expectations of students and other stakeholders. The increased expectations of students are coupled with the reduction of per capita student funding putting significant pressure on the system. This can be evidenced by rising staff-student ratios, cuts in academic and support staff across many institutions in an attempt to balance the books.

A crucial deficiency in the development of the policy according to Trow (2007) is that the staff views of the changes are largely untapped; they *"simply do not know what is going on inside the colleges and universities while pronouncing…about what should be happening".*

2.4 Aspects of quality in higher education

The policy development described is largely concerned with improving educational quality for those participating in higher education. In attempting to improve quality it is necessary to understand what represents quality and how this can be measured within the diverse educational settings present within the higher education sector in England. There have been a number of attempts to define quality in higher education with a significant contribution to the discussion made by Harvey and Green (1993) who outline a number of important matters that should be considered. Firstly, that quality can be seen as a relative concept and what matters is whether one educational context has more or less quality than another and secondly, that quality may be seen to be relative to purposes, whether to the purposes and views of customers or relative to institutional missions. A further conception of quality made by Harvey and Green (1993) is that of quality as transformation, involving enhancing the student in some way. This conception comes into play when examining evidence of the educational gains of students (in contrast to their educational performance). This transformation conception of quality is also relevant when examining the validity of student judgements of the quality of teaching, where what they may want teachers to do may be known from research evidence to be unlikely to result in educational gains.

The introduction of the increased fee contribution following the Brown Report (2010) puts the student in the position of becoming a 'consumer' of higher education. The student as a 'consumer' is likely to impact on their expectations relating to the level of service they receive and their perceptions of the quality of student experience they receive (Crawford, 1991). It can be demonstrated that people who are used to exercising choice in relation to the services they choose and where to spend their money are unlikely to be 'passive recipients' of services (Wright and Ngan, 2004). This situation is likely to apply to students when exercising choice in relation to the university

they attend. To some extent, the introduction of the National Student Survey (NSS) by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) confirms the concept that the student has moved from a being in partnership with their institution in advancing their studies to a consumer of its services (Aldridge, 1998. p199). The National Student Survey is aimed at all final year students and seeks their views on 22 statements relating to teaching, assessment, academic support, management and organisation, learning resources, personal development and overall satisfaction with their course. The results of the survey are used to produce league tables of university performance and published widely. Many universities are concerned with the outcome of the NSS and the resultant impact it will have on the institutions position in the published league tables. As a result, understanding student expectations and successfully meeting those expectations is critical for many institutions. Research undertaken by Cadotte and Turgeon, (1988) into customer satisfaction is concerned with identifying the drivers of satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction. The interesting aspect of this research is that it suggests that fixing all the dis-satisfiers does not necessarily create satisfied customers. Douglas *et al.,* (2008) identified that there are a small number of 'critically critical" determinants important in achieving student satisfaction, namely, *'communication and responsiveness within the teaching, learning and assessment environment, and access and responsiveness within the ancillary services environment'.* They found that for students the main sources of dissatisfaction are *'attitude, responsiveness, tangibles, team work, communication, management, access and socialising…communication and responsiveness are the most crucial determinant of quality as it is a major source of satisfaction and dissatisfaction within the area of teaching, learning and assessment and are likely to lead to changes in behaviour and are therefore "Critically Critical"; and usefulness is a major satisfier in teaching, learning and assessment, but not a significant dis-satisfier'.* In support of this view, Rogers and Smith (2011) identified that the strongest predictor of student satisfaction was the students' perceptions that staff showed genuine interest in their learning needs and progress. They found that students' value academic staff that are genuinely interested in their needs and progress. It is interesting to note that the idea of dialog between students and their tutors has been central to the stated nature and purpose of higher education from Plato through to the modern age. Students working with their tutors in the creation and dissemination of

knowledge, rather than passive recipients of a service, continues to be an important driver of satisfaction.

Higher education is a complex environment with many different factors impacting on the perception of quality and with what is measured in accessing quality. Biggs (1993) identified three categories of variables that can be used to usefully compare educational settings namely ‘presage’, ‘process’ and ‘product’. Presage variables seek to define the context before the students start learning, process variables relate to the context as students are learning and product relates to the outcome of the learning process. There are a number of limitations with this approach due to the range of higher education institutions in England related to the resources available, the reputation of an institution and to some extent with the size. The ability of an institution to attract the most academically able students will impact on the outcome of quality measures of an institution. The process variables in terms of the outcome compared with the use of the resources an institution has available is a good indicator of quality although limited data is available from institutions in England as this aspect is not routinely measured by QAA. However, process indicators such as class size, who undertakes the teaching, quality and quantity of feedback and levels of student engagement are measured and can provide a useful insight into the perceived quality (Gibbs 2010). The literature on the validity of indicators of quality is copious but mostly from the US and tends to be focused on specific issues such as critiquing particular university league tables, critiquing a particular government-defined performance indicator, establishing the characteristics of a particular student feedback questionnaire, or examining the characteristics of a particular indicator such as research performance (Gibbs 2010). The focus of this research in terms of enhancing the student experience will examine a range of process and product variables to identify relationships between them and the potential impact on the student experience for built environment students. The process variables relevant to this research concern those associated with teaching, learning and assessment and include class size, class contact, academic support and feedback and that are considered in the NSS. The product variables are related to the outcomes of the educational processes such as student performance and employability. Few studies in the UK have focussed on educational gain despite this being a clear predictor of quality. Studies have tended to focus on entry qualifications in terms of UCAS points and the

output in terms of degree classification but this can be fraught with difficulties in interpreting the data due to the differences at an institutional level (Yorke, 2009). The differences at institutional level is further complicated by the sometimes significant differences at departmental level within an individual institution. The results of the NSS has shown individual institutions can have the highest rated departments in one subject area and at the same time, have a department with the lowest rated. Although the institutional factors such as reputation, resources etc. will be stable in such cases, educational leadership within a department is shown to make a huge difference in creating cultures that value teaching that can contribute significantly to the quality of the student experience (Ramsden, 1998, Gibbs *et al*., 2008b). The subject area can show differences in measures of educational quality due to the fact that different subject areas achieve educational quality in different ways (Gibbs, 1999). In the UK, distribution of key indicators of quality such as degree classification and employability is markedly different between subject areas (Yorke *et al*., Bridges *et al*., 2002 as cited in Gibbs, 2010). Even the definition of subject areas within the key measures of quality such as the NSS is difficult to interpret due to the mechanisms for grouping individual degree programmes into subject groups.

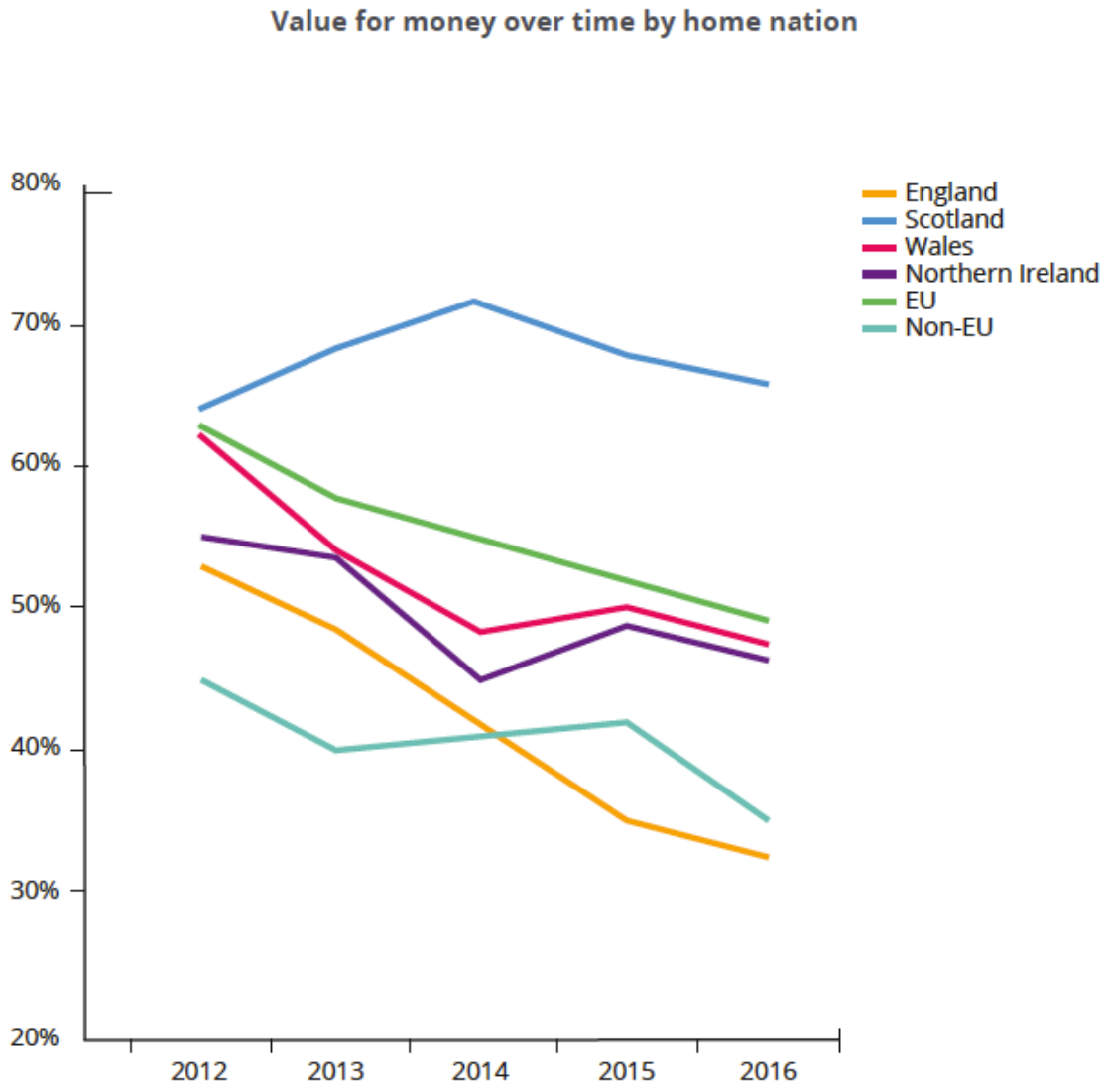
2.4.1 Class size and contact hours.

Analysis of a large number of studies related to class-size effects on the educational experience has revealed that the more students there are in a class, the lower the level of student achievement (Glass and Smith 1978; 1979). The studies also reveal that the quality of the educational processes in the class, the quality of the physical learning environment, the extent to which student attitudes are positive and the extent of them exhibiting behaviour conducive to learning is negatively impacted upon by having large class-sizes (Smith and Glass, 1979). Evidence of the impact of large class-sizes on student performance was demonstrated by Lindsay and Paton-Saltzberg (1987) who suggest that "*the probability of gaining an 'a' grade is less than half in a module enrolling 50-60 than it is in a module enrolling less than 20"*. Subsequent UK studies have reported significant negative correlations between the class size and the average student performance (Gibbs *et al.*, 1996; Fearnley, 1995). As shown the size of the class

has a negative effect on performance but can also impact negatively on the quality of the student engagement (Lucas *et al.*, 1996). However, good quality teaching and learning can take place in large class environments and some evidence suggests that with the right support this can be achieved (Gibbs and Jenkins, 1992) and provide a good experience for the student.

The issue of class contact hours is more complex than the mere number of hours spent in the classroom. How the class time is used, the pedagogical model employed and as a result, the consequences for the amount independent study by students have been demonstrated to be a more effective indicator of quality learning experience. Additionally, the nature of the class contact and the amount of interaction between the student and the lecturer is associated with increased educational gains (Pascarella 1980, Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Students' perception of value for money indicates a strong link with the number of contact hours they receive on their programme of study as shown in Figure 2 (HEPI-HEA, 2015; 2016).

The important factor is shown to be the quality of the engagement generated by the class contact (Gibbs, 2010). Gibbs goes on to conclude that the number of class contact hours has little to do with educational quality but rather it is the pedagogical model used and the implications for the quality and quantity of related independent study that will determine the quality. The issue around student perception of receiving value for money and the class contact hours is shown to be important in the satisfaction with their experience. The nature and purpose of higher education is characterised by students developing the skills to become independent learners rather than reliant on classroom sessions to provide the whole learning experience.



(Base: all respondents in each nation – 2016 England (11,597), 2016 Scotland (945), 2016 Wales (520), 2016 Northern Ireland (312), 2016 EU (1,051), 2016 Non-EU (796). Value for money defined as Good/Very Good value for money combined)

Figure 2 - Value for money over time by home nation (HEPI-HEA, 2016)

2.4.2 Teaching Quality

As previously demonstrated, teaching quality is a central pillar of the current policy agenda in higher education. Surveys of higher education (HEPI, 2016) student experience have repeatedly shown that students place a high level on importance on teaching skills and the continuous development of knowledge and skills of teaching staff. Lecturers who have teaching qualifications (normally a Postgraduate certificate in higher

education, or something similar) have been found to be rated more highly by their students than teachers who have no such qualification (Nasr *et al.*, 1996; HEPI-HEA 2012; 2014; 2015; 2016).

Gibbs (2010) points to longitudinal studies undertaken in eight countries measuring student assessment of their of teachers and on teachers' thinking of compulsory initial training during their first year of university teaching. *"They found improvements on every scale of the 'student evaluation of educational quality'* (Coffey and Gibbs, 2000*),* and *"improvements in the sophistication of teachers' thinking" (Trigwell et al., 2004).* As *Gibbs and Coffey (2004) conclude "This improvement in measures of teaching quality could not be attributed to mere maturation or experience as teachers in a control group in institutions without any initial training were found to get worse over their first year, on the same measures". The quality of school teaching in the UK is in part underpinned by a belief that initial or in-service training is essential and the, admittedly limited, evidence suggests that the same belief would be justified in UK higher education".* The importance of teaching quality of student satisfaction has been demonstrated in the Annual Student Experience Survey (HEPI- HEA) over a number of years with the latest results in 2016 revealing the strongest correlation yet between teaching quality and the impact on student satisfaction. The results suggest teaching quality represents nine of the ten strongest correlations with overall satisfaction. Figure 3 below shows the characteristics of teaching staff student's value compared with the student perception of how the identified characteristics are demonstrated.

As demonstrated in Figure 3, students consider training and on-going continuous development of teaching and subject knowledge and skills as very important. The data also shows students are less likely to agree that these skills are demonstrated a lot by the teaching staff. The Annual Student Experience Survey questions students in more detail regarding their experience of teaching than the NSS. The student rating of the teaching in the National Student Survey is related to how the students respond to statements such as '*Staff are good at explaining things' 'Staff have made the subject interesting', 'Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching'* and *'The course is intellectually stimulating'.* There is much less emphasis on the characteristics of the

teaching staff with the emphasis on the outcomes of the learning experience. However the outcome of the NSS in relation to "Teaching on my Course' is considered to be a key indicator of quality. The on-going policy development in higher education has resulted in students as consumers becoming more demanding and becoming increasingly concerned with value for money. The evidence from the surveys conducted by HEPI, HEA and in the NSS indicate that student are increasingly linking teaching quality with value for money and that students are prepared to contribute the required effort as long as they feel this is being matched by the institution by being offered high quality teaching by staff who are prepared to continually develop their skills.

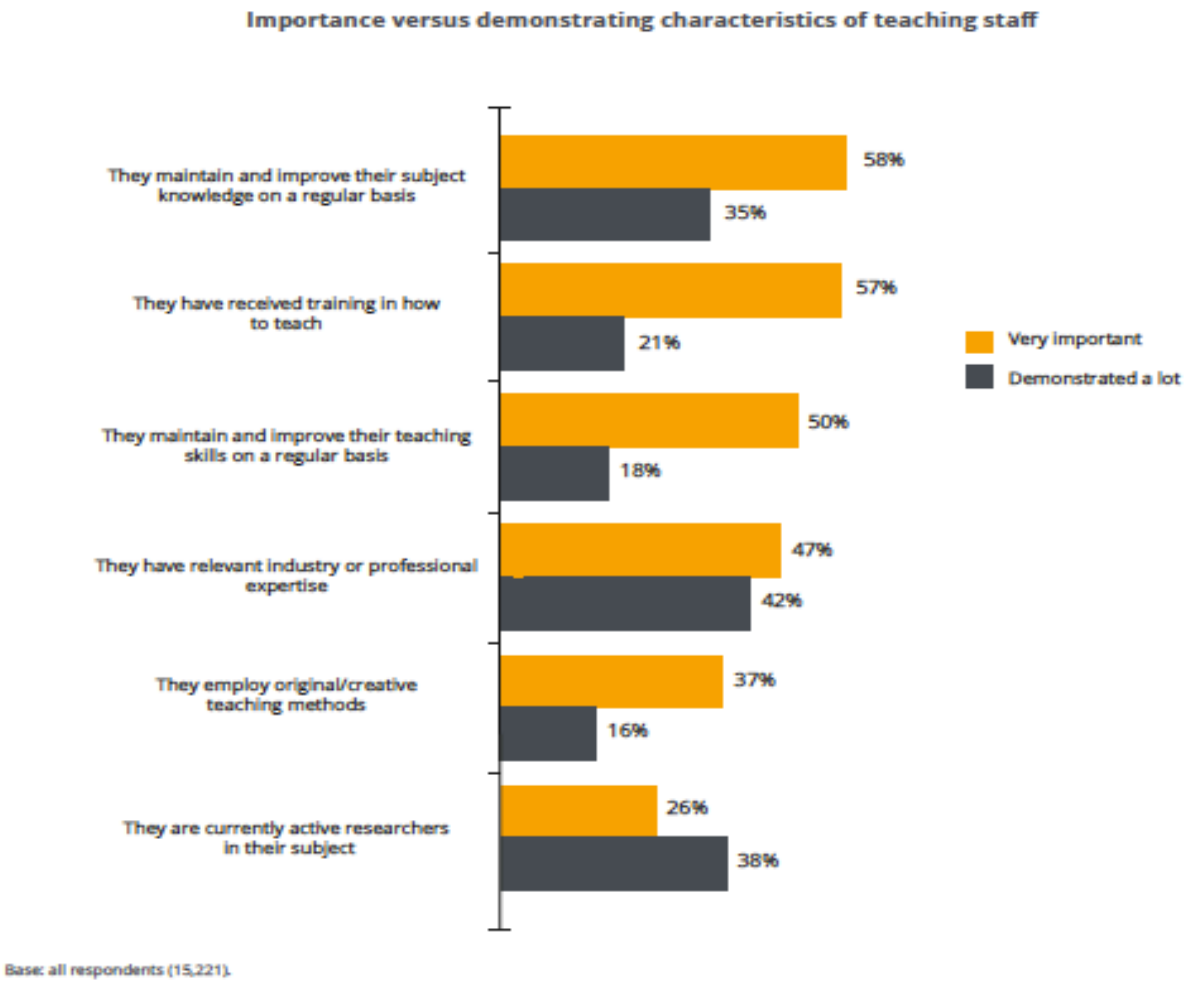


Figure 3 - Importance versus demonstrating characteristics of teaching staff (HEPI-HEA, 2016)

The relationship between quality of the lecturer's research and teaching quality has not been evidenced. Surveys of student experience also reveal that students place less emphasis on the importance of the staff that teach them being research active (HEPI-HEA, 2015; 2016). Hattie and Marsh (1996 cited in Gibbs, 2010) conclude "...*the common belief that teaching and research were inextricably intertwined is an enduring myth. At best teaching and research are very loosely coupled*". Evidence suggests that institutions that have a strong research focus often reveal a weak emphasis on teaching and vice versa. Gibbs 2010 *"suggests there is a strong negative relationship in relation to institutional priorities and this has measurable effects on educational gains ...a college whose faculty is research-orientated increases student dissatisfaction and impacts negatively on most measures of cognitive and affective development. (Astin, 1993, p363)"* There is evidence that the research environment can impact positively on undergraduate students, in a way that can be measured, where maximising the benefits to undergraduates of research strengths has been made a deliberate priority (Bergren *et al.,* 2007).

2.4.3 Assessment and feedback

Assessing students' knowledge and skills is crucial to the effectiveness of higher education and therefore the issue of how assessment and feedback is managed is a key area of concern for those who are looking to enhance the student experience. Assessment has been shown to be a powerful tool to shape and drive the learning but the methods of assessment used are not always the most helpful in supporting the teaching and learning process (Ramsden, 1997; Bloxham and Boyd, 2007). Feedback generally falls into two categories namely Formative feedback and summative feedback. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) describes formative assessment and feedback as *"Formative assessment has a development purpose and is designed to help learners learn more effectively by giving them feedback on their performance and how it can be improved and/or maintained"* (QAA, 2006). Formative feedback has been shown to deliver significant improvements in the learning experience of students allowing students to engage with their studies to a greater extent (Gibbs and Dunbar-Goddet, 2007), is a good indicator of learning gain and can increase student retention (Yorke 2001). Formative feedback is seen to be an essential mechanism in the learning process

(Gibbs, 2004) and if the feedback provided is meaningful can aid *"the student's capacity to self-regulate their own performance"* (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Self-regulation is considered to be vital in the developing the capacity of those engaged in higher education to become independent learners and to develop an awareness of the standards required in order to understand the idea of good performance. Summative assessment and feedback is typically contrasted with formative assessment and feedback in that it typically occurs at the end of the particular learning process and can be described as *"Summative assessment is used to indicate the extent of a learner's success in meeting the assessment criteria used to gauge the intended learning outcomes of a module or programme'* (QAA, 2006). Assessment and feedback should occur during the regular course of the learning process and can be an effective process to aid the teaching and learning for the students (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004). The student experience can be greatly enhanced by effective assessment in terms of the quality of the process, the assessment methodology used and the quality of the feedback provided the conditions in which assessment can support the learning shown in Table 1 below as stated by Gibbs and Simpson (2004).

Conditions where assessment can support learning.
1. Sufficient assessed tasks are provided for students to capture study time.
2. These tasks are engaged with by students, orienting them to allocate appropriate amounts of time and effort to the most important aspects of the course.
3. Tackling the assessed tasks engages the students in productive learning activity of an appropriate level.
4. Assessment communicates clear and high expectations.
5. Sufficient feedback is provided, both often enough and with sufficient detail.
6. The feedback focuses on the student performance, on their learning and on actions under the students' control, rather than on the students

themselves and on their characteristics.
7. The feedback is timely in that it is received by students while it still matters to hem and in time for them to pay attention to further learning or receiving further assistance.
8. Feedback is appropriate to the purpose of the assignment and to its criteria for success.
9. Feedback is appropriate to students' understanding of what they are supposed to be doing.
10. Feedback is received and attended to.
11. Feedback is acted upon by the student.

Table 1 - Gibbs and Simpson (2004) promoting 11 conditions under which assessment supports learning.

The results from the National Student Survey consistently reveal assessment and feedback to be an area of concern for students. To provide detailed, timely and relevant formative feedback is hugely time consuming and places a significant pressure on teaching staff to deliver. This is particularly relevant where large class sizes are present as time for individual feedback with large groups of students can prove to be impossible for lecturers. Scott and Fortune (2013) identify (a) time management, in terms of the time available for completion, (b) large class sizes, (c) workload, (d) the Academic Regulations, (e) the research output of academic staff and finally (f) issues around plagiarism as factors that can have a negative impact on the student experience surrounding the assessment process and procedure. The time demands for academic staff in producing feedback can also be an issue in providing summative feedback hence the lower satisfaction demonstrated with this aspect of higher education (HEPI-HEA, 2016). Evidence suggests that there is a strong link between the expectations of students in terms of the outcome of the investment they are making to participate in higher education and how they view the assessment process. As noted by Bloxham and Boyd (2007) *"Students are cue conscious concentrating on passing an assessment"* which is a view supported by Bates and Kaye (2013) who suggest that the increase in

fee has made little impact on the reported satisfaction levels of students but the real issue "*surrounds the fact that students are placing greater emphasis on graduate employment, and hold greater expectations of better job prospects as a result of investing more in Higher Education".*

2.4.4 Employability and graduate destinations

The ability of graduating students to gain employment quickly, in a graduate role and in field relevant to their degree is often used as a measure of quality. The Destination of Leavers of Higher Education survey (DLHE) is undertaken with graduation students to measure the success of the students in gaining graduate level employment or further study. The figures are used extensively as a measure of quality of graduating students and as a marketing tool for individual institutions.

For students in vocational subjects such as built environment the motivation for engaging in higher education is closely aligned with employability and advancement within their chosen field. The difficulty with using graduate employment as a measure of quality, is related to the impact of factors affecting graduate employment that have no clear correlation to what happens within an higher education institution such as institutional reputation, the employment market, regional issues, student age, social background and subject studied. Traditionally, within built environment higher education, there has been an important symbiotic relationship between industry, the professional bodies and higher education providers. This close relationship has also helped to maintain built environment subjects and departments within universities, the latter also contributing to professional life through research and industry engagement. The changes to the funding of higher education coupled with the on-going economic downturn have serious implications for entrants to built environment programmes and for the supply of qualified graduates to industry. A more competitive environment for individual institutions and subject areas within higher education seems likely (Universities UK 2008b) potentially creating problems for the supply of graduates for property and construction beyond the current market downturn. This could potentially have long-term implications for the sector in terms of the supply of graduates into the industry and the ability of the sector to remain competitive.

With the projected cost of a degree education under the new fee system likely to be in the region of £50,000 plus interest (at a commercial rate), the cost of gaining a degree within the built environment subject area will inevitably be compared with the benefit in terms of graduate opportunities and earning potential over the period of a career. Within the built environment professions, the influence of the professional bodies has a marked impact on the ability to progress within the profession long term. It is a requirement of all the major professional bodies (RICS, CIOB, RIBA) to meet minimum academic standards before progressing to full membership of the institutions and gaining chartered status. This requires students to gain an accredited Degree or Masters Degree that meets the approval of the particular professional body. Therefore, students who wish to enter the built environment professions will need to obtain a degree at approximately £9,000 per annum before living expenses are taken into account.

An additional factor particularly important within built environment higher education is the impact of the funding changes for part-time students and their sponsors. Under the current funding regime, part-time students (or their sponsors) are required to pay substantially increased fees since September 2012 leading to a significantly reduced participation in higher education for those wishing to study part-time (Butcher 2015). In a time of recession and on-going low demand within the construction sector with the inevitable squeeze on training and development budgets, employers within the construction sector may struggle to find the resources necessary to sponsor employees to undertake a degree programme.

2.4.5 Student expectations and experience of higher education.

The impact of the introduction of the new tuition fee regime in the UK on student expectations of their university experience has been an issue of concern for students, their families, academic's, and policy makers (Jones, 2010, Bates & Kaye, 2013). As discussed, the policy developments (Browne, 2010) resulting in the transfer of the financial burden for participation in higher education from the government to individual students, has resulted in allowing universities to charge up to £9,000 per year from September 2012. Students are able to access financial support to meet the costs of higher education in the form of a student loan that is repayable following graduation and

on research a threshold income. Given the financial investment required of students, Jones (2010) suggests the expectations of students are likely to increase as a result and greater dissatisfaction with the experience of higher education. As previously mentioned this has resulted in the move to the student being considered as a consumer in the process and the experience of higher education becoming more transactional in nature. Ramsden (2013) highlights that students entering higher education are likely to have a limited view on what to reasonably expect and that the expectations of students are also likely to be diverse in nature. The policy developments to increase participation in higher education, such as the widening participation agenda, has resulted in a significant increase not only in the numbers participating but also from a much wider spectrum of the population. This has resulted in a shift in the relationship between the higher education institution and the students with increased emphasis being placed on enhancing the student experience. The link between the students' expectations and the satisfaction reported with experience has resulted in several models being produced to explain the relationships at work between the expectations and the student satisfaction reported. Alves & Raposo (2007) identified perceived value, quality, image of institution and expectations as positive contributors to satisfaction in higher education. Zhang *et al.* (2008) developed the Student Satisfaction Index Model to demonstrate the influence of the student expectation, institutional reputation, perception of quality, perception of value and student activity on student satisfaction levels. Although student expectations are likely to be influenced by the financial commitments required, they are also likely to have expectations relating to the teaching quality, assessment, the lecturers, the facilities at the institution and the time commitments involved with their studies. The Student Academic Experience Survey (HEPI, 2015) reports a mixed response from students asked to compare their experience with their expectations with 49% reporting *"It has been better in some ways and worse in others"*. The results indicate that 28% agree the experience has been better than expected, 12% indicating it has been worse and only 9% indicating the experience was what they expected. The data (see figure 4) indicates that of those who report their experience was worse than expected, identify a variety of factors negatively influencing the perception of the experience.

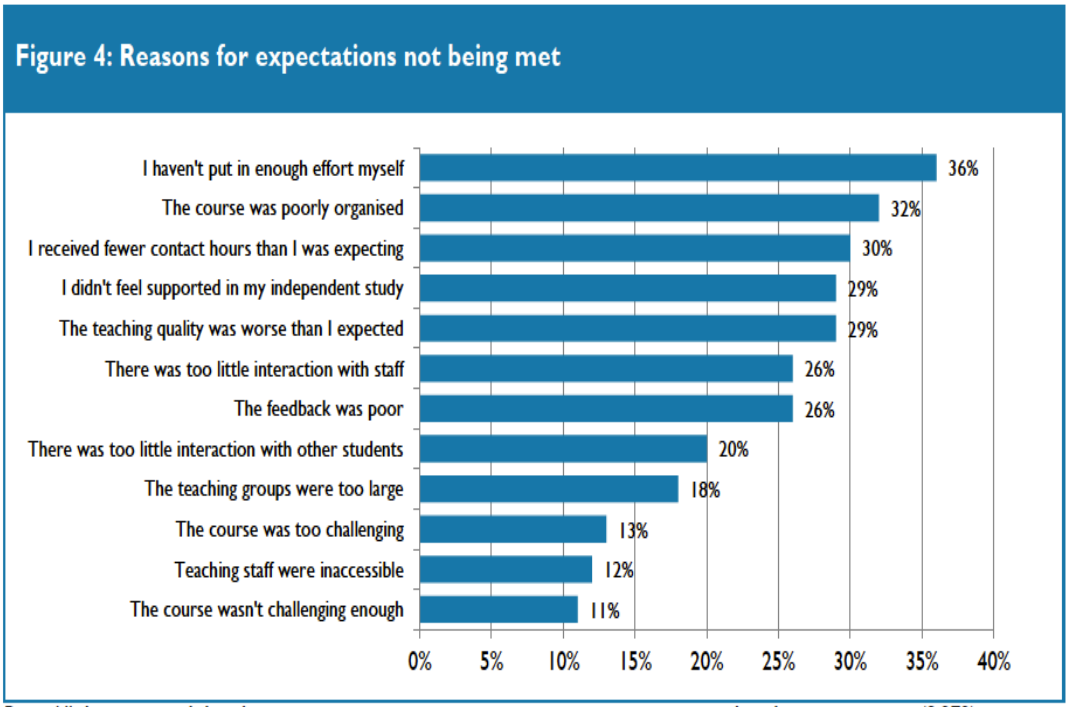


Figure 4 - Reasons for expectations not being met (HEPI-HEA, 2015)

The data suggests that an important factor in how students view their experience is related to the lecturers themselves. Several studies have shown the importance of the lecturer in influencing how the student perceives their experience. The 2016 Student Academic Experience Survey (HEPI-HEA, 2016) reveals that 85% of undergraduate students are satisfied with their course, only 37% perceive they receive good value for money. The 2016 survey introduced new areas to explore with the students including questions relating to the gap between what students expect from their lecturers and the perceived characteristics of the lecturers and expectation relating to the time taken to return marked assessment.

Many studies examining student expectations at university have been undertaken across a range of different courses and in a number of countries (Crisp *et al*., 2009; Marshall & Linder 2005; Gedye *et al.,* 2004; Longden 2006). The findings from the identified studies indicate that students often have a mixed perception of their expectations and the understanding of the role of the lecturer in supporting their learning experience. Misconceptions by students regarding the role of lecturers in their learning,

coupled with the expectation of some academic staff that students have developed the skills to be independent learners, can lead to on-going dissatisfaction with the experience on the part of both student and lecturer.

2.4.6 Expectations and experiences.

As described, a key tool for measuring the quality of the student experience in higher education in the UK is the National Student Survey that reports the levels of overall satisfaction with the experience along with satisfaction with six key areas of the experience such as teaching and assessment. As previously discussed, satisfaction with an experience is strongly linked to expectations although the NSS is does not specifically refer to expectations. Additional surveys are undertaken by HEPI, HEA and HESA do however record how the experience of higher education met with expectations. The Annual Student Experience Survey is undertaken by HEPI and HEA and reports on some aspects of the student experience not considered by the NSS notably how the experience met with they expectations. The difficulty with expectations is the personal nature of expectations and the fact that the majority have little experience of higher education (Ramsden, 2013) before entering their chosen institution and little experience of other institutions and therefore have little experience to based the expectations upon or indeed the experience they receive compared with other institutions provide. The most recent Annual Student Experience Survey published in June 2016, reports results of a similar level to previous years as described in figure 5. The results do show that for the majority of students the experience met expectations at least to some extent.

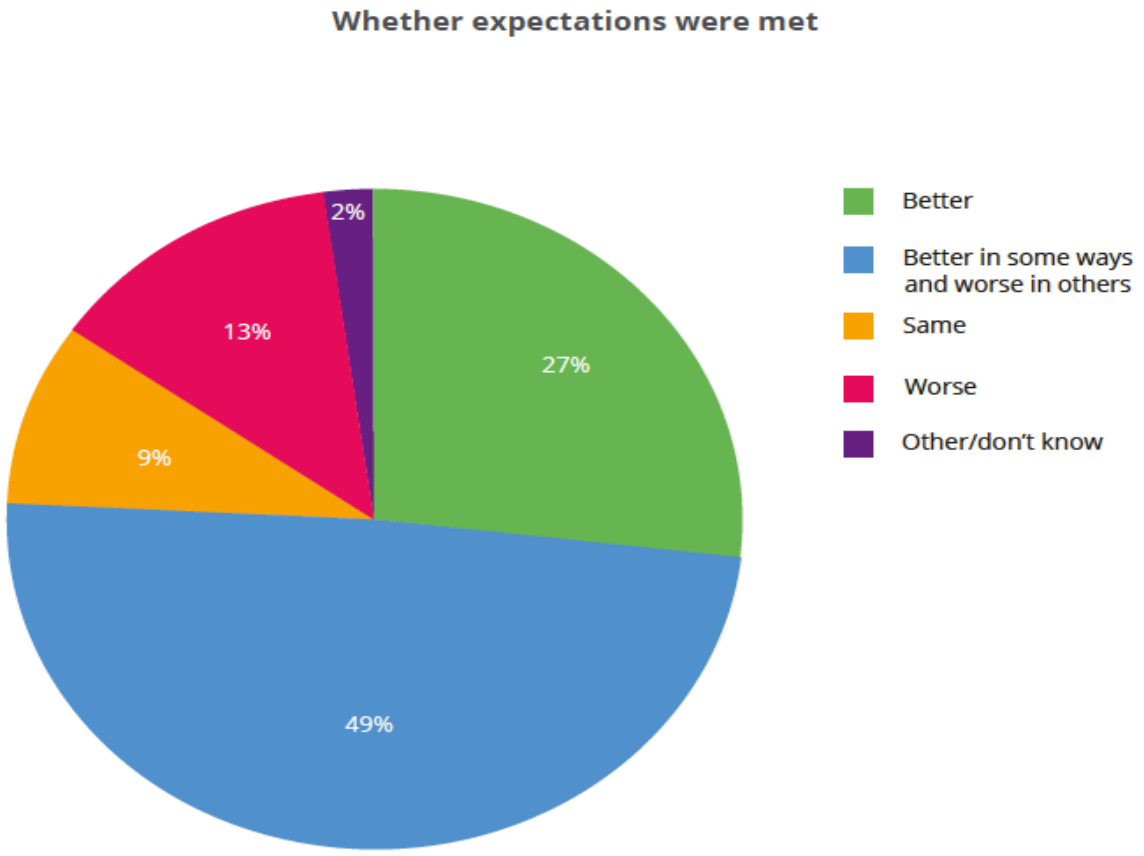


Figure 5 - Whether expectations were met (HEPI-HEA, 2016)

There are a number issues impacting on expectations of students, some are related to the on-going policy developments in higher education such as the widening participation agenda and the introduction of tuition fees. Longden (2006) examined a UK institutional response to the changing nature of first year students' expectations in response to the widening participation initiative. The results indicated a number of ''problem areas'' surrounding retention of students, as a result of disparity in aspects such as; lack of academic preparation. Additionally, Marcus (2008) discussed the issue of students having expectations that were high and unmanageable. Ramsden (2013) suggests that the widening participation agenda has resulted is a greater range and variety of student resulting in a wider variety of expectations. One factor may relate to the information students receive while choosing the institution and programme of study through including prospectuses, marketing material and information provided at the further education/sixth form provider. Marcus (2008) suggests it is the responsibility of HEIs to

ensure a fair reflection of this information and suggests those with higher retention may be doing this more effectively. The latest survey reveals that student expectations are still not being met and that some management expectations in terms of what a student can reasonably expect of their experience of higher education is required.

The introduction of tuition fees in 1998 with students contributing up to £1000 per annum towards their University education represented a major change in the policy development. The development of this change to greater contributions of individuals participating in higher education continued with the contribution rising to £3290 by 2010/11 culminating in the recommendations of the Browne Review (2010) to allow universities to charge 'top-up' fees of up to £9000 per annum. With the introduction of the tuition fee system and the large financial investment required by students and their family, some concerns were raised regarding the impact this may have on raising student expectations. Jones (2010) suggested that the financial investment required would raise expectations of the university experience resulting in greater disparity between the expectation and the reality of the experience. Concern was also apparent that the introduction of the increased fees would result in the student becoming a 'consumer' in the process (Jones, 2010) and would place increased demands on HEI's. The impact of the introduction of tuition fees on expectations is unclear as the way in which expectations and experiences may be linked, particularly with relevance to students' financial investments in Higher Education is not proven. That is, since the increased fees may enhance the expectations, it is not clear how the expectations are increased or what aspects of the experience are affected. The importance of investigating the student expectations in light of the change in fees is highlighted by research documenting the effect of mismatched expectations and experiences. The picture becomes more complex in that since the introduction of the NSS in 2005, higher education institutions have responded to the feedback from students with more focus on meeting the expectations of students in terms of the students experience and teaching quality. However, Bates and Kaye (2013) contend that the increase in fee has made little impact on the reported satisfaction levels of students but the real issue "*surrounds the fact that students are placing greater emphasis on graduate employment, and hold greater expectations of better job prospects as a result of investing more in Higher Education".* Give the focus of students on the extent to which participation in higher

education improves their career prospects, the methods higher education providers can integrate employability within the curricula is becoming a key indicator of student satisfaction.

2.4.7 Employability

An important area of consideration given the financial investment required of students is concerned with the student employability expectations. Evidence suggests that the high cost of tuition fees is associated with enhanced perceptions of prospective employment (Moore *et al.* 2011; Bates & Kaye, 2013), suggesting the role of the financial investment in enhancing students' expectations of the extent to which their degree will provide employability opportunities. The issue of student employment expectations was reflected in an earlier study by Gedye *et al.,* (2004) who discussed the pressures on HEIs to prepare graduates for work. Their study examined undergraduate expectations of the value of a geography degree and found that one of the main reasons for choosing to study the subject was as a way of improving job prospects, suggesting these expectations to be evident even before the introduction of the higher tuition fees. This particular area is important considering changes in the UK and global economic climate resulting in employment prospects becoming a concern to all. The fact that students are currently paying a significantly higher fee for attending Higher Education in the UK, it could be expected that the employment expectations will be greatly enhanced.

2.4.8 Part-time students

The built environment subject area has a strong association with students studying on a part-time basis. Many built environment students engaging with higher education on a part-time basis do so as they are already employed within the industry and are required by their employer to gain an accredited degree so they can gain professional qualifications. The decline in the numbers of part-time students has been well documented in recent years generally, and within the built environment disciplines. According to HESA statistics published in January 2016, the number of students entering higher education to study on a part-time basis has fallen by 38% in five years (HESA, 2016) from 428,000 in 2010 to below 266,000 in 2015. The issue of part-time study is an important one from a government policy perspective given how part-time

study contributes to the economy (UUK, 2013), social mobility and the widening participation agenda and to providers of built environment higher education given the traditional participation from this sector. Part-time study is particularly important for the construction sector and for built environment education given the contribution of part-time students in addressing skills shortages within the sector.

The diverse range of students engaged with part-time study might result in a wide range of expectations and some particular needs not associated with those studying on a full-time basis. In built environment disciplines, students often have a wide range of experience; often have a very diverse range of working environments from infrastructure projects, through large-scale commercial work to residential. Within these areas they could be working on new build, conversion projects to refurbishment all requiring very different knowledge and skills. The expectations of the students and their employers, the difficulties in balancing work, study and individual personal circumstances, and responsibilities may result in a challenge for the student and the HEI in addressing those needs. Increasingly, those studying on a full-time basis experience similar challenges due to the financial pressures associated with higher education and as a result spending a significant proportion of their time in employment (Pollard *et al.,* 2012). Barnett (2013) suggests that rather than simply categorizing study by either full-time or part-time, higher education providers need to consider the full range of learning needs and expectations.

The need for policy makers and institutions to better understand the expectations of part-time students, the motivations and barriers to participant will assist in prioritise the needs of this group of students. The need to also consider the pedagogical models used when engaging with part-time students (HEA, 2013) and the knowledge, skills and on-going training needs of those teaching in higher education. An important issue for institutions is how to meet the needs of a diverse range of students given that students participating in higher education across the range of delivery modes on offer are likely to be taught as one group. Within built environment education it is typical for full-time and part-time students to undertake the programme of study within the same group. This can be a very valuable experience if managed appropriately but can also present many difficulties due to the range of knowledge and experience of the student group.

Butcher (2015) identified a number of key issues related to the experiences of part-time students including flexibility and motivation. Flexibility is a concept that is often associated with part-time education in terms of an institutions approach to modes of learning, place and pace, scheduling of learning, timing of assessments and academic support mechanisms. However, Barnett (2014) asserts that in reality *"the term itself is largely empty of content"* as the efforts to address issues of flexibility invariably intersect with institutional structures and systems that are unresponsive and unable to deliver the flexibility required. Part-time students often report (Butcher, 2015) that institutions are inflexible and they feel like "*an "inconvenience", of being "shoe-horned" into existing full-time structures, of being "side-lined" and experiencing a lack of differentiation which felt like "one-size-fits-all". Older students were irked that their prior skills went unrecognized".* Many part-time students report feeling like they do not have an identity and that they are isolated and disengaged from the structures provided within the institution to provide support. A key concern is that many of the structures in place to provide information, guidance, academic support are focused on full-time students and do not recognize the barriers facing part-time students. The motivation for engaging with higher education is also an important factor for part-time students. For many students, including built environment students, the main motivating factor is employability related in terms of acquiring the knowledge and skills to gain employment or to up-skill to improve career prospects. Employability is not the only motivating factor for all part-time students but for those undertaking vocationally based subject areas, it is often a central consideration. An additional consideration with both full and part-time students is the increase in mature students engaging with higher education as a result of the widening participation agenda. The needs and expectations of mature students also need to be taken into account. In the UK, there is a *"knowledge gap around the experiences of, and barriers faced, by part-time mature students in higher education"* (Butcher, 2015) and to some extent this is also increasingly a factor in addressing the needs of full-time students.

2.5 Development of the National Student Survey (NSS)

Universities throughout the world have for many years sought to benchmark their performance against other universities and to enable a process of continuous

improvement in quality and the accountability of the higher education sector. In 2001 the higher education funding bodies jointing consulted regarding a new method of securing quality in higher education. The development of the National Student Survey began in 2001 as a new method for quality assurance in higher education in England. A fundamental element of this new method was to be *'information about the quality and standards of learning and teaching that each institution would publish to address the needs of students and other stakeholders'* (Ramsden and Callender, 2014).

The Information Needs Working Group, chaired by Professor Sir Ron *Cooke 'was established in June 2002 in order to oversee:*

a. The development of recommendations on the design and implementation of a national survey to collect student feedback on the quality and standards of higher education programmes, and the publication of the results.

b. *A review of good practice in higher education institutions (HEIs) in collecting and using student feedback, and recommendations for how HEIs could improve their collection and use of internal feedback.*'

The subsequent Report entitled *Collecting and using student feedback and standards of learning and teaching in HE* (HEFCE, 2003) recommended that the data collected from students regarding their experience should be an essential element of this published information. The group also advised that a national survey of recent graduates' opinions, primarily based on the Course Experience Questionnaire, or CEQ that is used in Australia and should be supplementary to the existing HESA First Destination Survey (now the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Survey (DLHE).

The recommendations of the Report (*Collecting and using student feedback and standards of learning and teaching in HE,* HEFCE, 2003) were subject to a consultation process and as a result subsequently revised to recommend a separate national survey of final-year students, from which student feedback, disaggregated by institution, would be published. It was intended to complement this information with a more consistent

process for collecting feedback from students through HE institutions' own surveys. The Cooke Report (HEFCE, 2008) identified three principles to guide the approach:

- The need to meet public information needs – particularly students' needs – for reliable information about teaching quality in different institutions
- The need to recognise the responsibility of HE institutions for generating and publishing information about their own quality and standards
- The need to reduce the burden on institutions at the same time as ensuring proper accountability.

The Report of the Student Feedback Project Steering Group notes that the recommendations were taken up in the English Government White Paper '*The Future of Higher Education'* (2003) and states:

> *'To become intelligent customers of an increasingly diverse provision, and to meet their own increasing diverse needs, students need accessible information. We will ensure that the views of students themselves are published in a national annual survey available for the first time in autumn 2003, which will explicitly cover teaching quality. We also expect institutions to make progress on their own internal systems for securing student feedback.'*

Further recommendations were made by the steering group in relation to the National Student Survey including:

> *'The primary purpose of the national survey would be to help inform the decisions of prospective students and the judgements of other stakeholders about the quality and standards of teaching. The national survey would also contribute to securing public accountability for the use of public funds, by indicating where there are high levels of student satisfaction.'*

The National Student Survey was first conducted in 2005 at higher education institutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, as part of the revised Quality Assurance

Framework for Higher Education. The data collected would be used to *'provide the public and the higher education sector with comprehensive, comparable views of students about the quality of their education'* (HEFCE, 2005). The purpose of the National Student Survey was to inform the choices of prospective students in choosing what and where to study and to contribute to public accountability (HEFCE, 2004). It was also designed to provide useful data to individual institutions to use in their enhancement activities although this was initially seen as a minor function. The questions included in the National Student Survey are identified in Appendix 4.

2.5.1 The National Student Survey and Higher Education policy

The National Student Survey (NSS) has gained increasing significance in the context of higher education policy in the UK higher education sector. The NSS has become an important part of the quality assurance and enhancement process and participation in the survey is actively promoted by many HEI's. It has become a useful tool in benchmarking quality and enhancement activities within individual institutions and is driving improvements in quality. It has also an important source of student feedback and increased dialogue with the student population. Response rates are generally high (Brickwood, 2008) providing some validity to the data collected. The NSS aims for a minimum response rate of 50% in each institution and subject area for the data to be reported. Since the NSS has become established, the response rate is consistently above 65%.

Although minor changes have been made to the NSS since its introduction, it remains largely as it was in 2010 following the Interim Review. However, the context has now changed due to the changes in government policy relating to the funding of higher education in England. With the introduction of the requirement for students to contribute up to £9000 per annum for tuition fees, there is an increased emphasis on value for money and the accountability of HE institutions to those who fund them. According to Ramsden and Callender (2014) *'This development is linked to renewed desire on governments' part to ensure that students are able to make more informed choices about programmes and institutions. It is also related to a wish for institutions to improve their services to students and to be more responsive to student demand and study*

preferences. All governments in the UK subscribe to the notion of HE provision designed more around the needs of students and improving the quality of the student experience (although the policy levers and mechanisms for achieving this may vary between countries).'

The 2011 Government White Paper, *Students at the Heart of the System,* in part prompted by the introduction of higher tuition fees, signalled an intention *"to improve the quality of students' academic experience and to increase their educational gain"*: The White paper suggests that students should expect to obtain excellent teaching and the time students can expect to be engaged in teaching activities should be made available and any variations in teaching activities should be should be reviewed. An important element in providing more information to students and to making the HE system more responsive to students is the Key Information Set (KIS). The Key Information Set (KIS) was developed following research published in 2010 by Oakleigh Consulting and Staffordshire University relating to the information needs of students and is now widely available to potential students and other stakeholders via a variety of sources including the Unistats website. Each institution is required to make course and other information publicly available including:

- the results of the NSS questions relating to specific undergraduate programmes of study;
- the proportion of time spent on different learning and teaching activities and assessment methods,
- course accreditation by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies;
- employment and salary information including the destination of graduates six months after graduation; and
- costs and financial support including tuition fees.

An interesting development is the emphasis on the type of information provided to students and other stakeholders. The information provided goes beyond the immediate

context of teaching and learning and is more focussed on the institution itself and the total student experience. The potential for engagement with an institution in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, student services, employability services are all seen as important. The NSS data is increasingly impacting on the strategic development of individual institutions as they respond to the data (Gibbs, 2012) for marketing and internal quality assurance monitoring. The National Student Survey (NSS) is a key source of data regarding the student experience and is based on the feedback from the students themselves regarding their individual experiences. Typically, students are invited to participate in the survey before they graduate, usually during their final year. The data collected is used in a variety of ways including to inform student choice, to inform national league tables, by individual institutions to respond to the student feedback, for public accountability purposes and as an indicator of quality *(Review of Quality Assessment, HEFCE 2016, Review of the National Student Survey, NatCen Social Research, July 2014)*. The survey is administered by Ipsos-MORI on behalf of HEFCE and concentrates on six key areas including 'Teaching on my Course', 'Assessment and Feedback', 'Academic Support', 'Organisation and Management', 'Learning Resources' and 'Personal Development' with the inclusion of a statement regarding 'Overall Satisfaction'.

With the on-going policy development within higher education with the proposed introduction of the Teaching Excellence framework, developments are proposed with the collection and dissemination of information regarding the student experience. HEFCE are proposing changes to the NSS post-2017 (Sanderson & Bremner, 2015), to address the need to include data from a greater range of students from non-responder group's notably mature students and those from ethnic minorities (Heaney, 2015). Given the enduring perception of the reported student experience as a measure of academic quality, HEFCE proposes to expand the survey to include those who have withdrawn from their course on the basis that they may have withdrawn due to some dissatisfaction with their experience. The widening of the participation in the survey is to collect and report student feedback from a wider range of participants in higher education to provide a more complete picture.

2.6 Academic staff

Given the on-going policy development surrounding higher education over the past two decades and the increasing focus on the quality of the student experience (BIS/Johnson, 2015; Gunn and Fisk, 2013; Land and Gordon, 2013; 2015) very little of the literature regarding student satisfaction provides a view on the impact of the academic members of staff on delivering a high quality student experience. The evidence has revealed the impact of the academic staff on the overall student experience to be significant in terms of either providing a positive experience or a negative experience. The focus on academic staff members in delivering a high quality experience is crucial for the sustainability and success of the higher education sector. The ability of individual academic staff members to built a successful career and to gain the recognition and reward as high quality educators is key to the success of the sector.

For many higher education institutions, particularly, but not exclusively, the more research-intensive institutions the focus has been concentrated on research activities above teaching performance (Locke, 2015). The importance of higher education to national economies and to society is generally accepted but as Altbach and Musselin (2008) suggest *"the path to academic career is coming more difficult and less attractive"* and has the potential to hinder the improvement of universities. This view is further supported by Coates and Goedegebuure (2012) who state *"If academic life is to be an attractive future career choice for clever and dedicated people, then it is necessary to be able to show them a realistic description of what becoming an academic means, coupled with a career structure that meets the reality and expectations of an increasingly diversifying workforce"*. The value and status of teaching within higher education institutions is often significantly less valued than research as demonstrated by the recruitment and reward and recognition policies within the institutions (Locke, 2014). As the teaching in higher education is increasingly *"controlled and constrained and its status undermined, the less attractive it will become as a career for creative, intelligent people, even as part of a broader role, let alone as the sole focus of their professional activity" (Locke, 2015).* To some extent this is a key factor for those engaging with and teaching built environment students. As the data shows, students value those who are able teachers and who have knowledge and skills from the professional background

however, these skills are less valued by providers of higher education in favour of research outputs. As Gale (2011) suggests *"Those in the middle of their careers who have transferred to higher education from another profession to teach vocational subjects may deliberately want to focus on teaching and not research, writing and publication. Nevertheless, their prospects for advancement also appear to be slim".* Cheng (2014) goes further in suggesting *"few distinguished academic careers appear to have emerged to date solely through the 'teaching' route ... or at least ones that have been widely celebrated and valorised in the sector"*. A review of promotion policies (HEA 2009; Cashmore and Ramsden 2009) suggests that research intensive universities are less likely to have promotion policies that reward teaching excellence or performance and even where teaching performance is a criterion within the policy, a significant gap exists between the policy and implementation (Cashmore *et al.* 2013). To some extent it can be seen that institutions need to respond to increasing competition and cost pressures (Whitchurch and Gordon, 2013) and to the increased focus on the student experience with the resultant pressure on the role of the academic in delivering the complex requirements of teaching, research and enterprise (Shin, 2013). Institutions have responded to these pressures in different ways with some creating different pathways to allow for some specialism within the role for teaching, research, enterprise and academic management (McCormack, 2012; Cashmore *et al.* 2013). Within the 'teaching track' of the identified roles it can be shown that the promotion criteria is explicit in terms of the reward for teaching performance but this can lead to a limited role and possibly impact on the status of those who undertake exclusively teaching roles (Young 2006; Cashmore *et al*., 2015; Copeland, 2014). The tensions for institutions in meeting the expectations for high quality research while meeting the expectations of undergraduate students in terms of the quality of experience is challenging but given the importance of academic staff to higher education, one that must be addressed. As Rothwell and Rothwell (2014) conclude "*We suggest that university employers need to engage much more in providing a range of flexible opportunities. It is in the universities' own interests to have academic faculty who are professionally competent, pedagogically skilled, adaptive and possess the career resilience to help sustain their institutions in challenging times"*. This view is also supported by Gappa *et al.,* 2007; Coates and Goedegebuure 2010; 2012; Bexley *et al*. 2011; ACE 2014 who argue that the issues surrounding the complexity of the role of the academic is central to the growth and

development of higher education. Coates and Goedegebuure (2012) conclude *"...it is critically important that future academic work is seen to be attractive. As with much professional work, but perhaps more so than most, academic work relies on individuals' intrinsic engagement and for this a high-quality experience is essential. Finding ways to inspire and safeguard academic autonomy, broadly conceived, is essential. All work carries challenges, but any re-conceptualisation of academic work that threatens peoples' attraction to the profession or desire to fully engage is likely to do more harm than good".*

It has been demonstrated by the data from surveys (HEPI-HEA, 2014; 2015; 2016) of the student experience, that student's value those staff that are able to teach and are willing to develop their knowledge and skills related to teaching practice. Attempts have been made in the UK to raise the status of teaching through a variety of initiatives such as the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, the Learning and Teaching Subject Network, and more recently the Higher Education Academy. A number of these initiatives employed concepts of excellence within teaching practice as a way of establishing equivalence with ideas of research excellence in an attempt to restore the status of teaching in a 'world class' university. To a large extent, these initiatives have focused on excellent teaching rather than transformational learning and as a result, have had limited impact in real terms (Little and Locke 2011). Interestingly, Rothwell and Rothwell (2014) argue that issues surrounding employability are increasingly important to academics that wish to sustain their academic careers and to some extent the knowledge based for teaching, common values and emotional intelligence are important (Cheng, 2014) given the changing face of academia and the potential for needing to change role in time of uncertainty (Coates and Goedegebuure, 2012).

In the context of this study, the importance of the academic staff in all aspects of the students experience from the classroom, to assessment and feedback, academic support and overall satisfaction with the experience is evidenced throughout the literature and consistently within surveys of the student experience. The wellbeing and professionalism of academic staff is central to the success of academic institutions and to some extent has suffered due to the continued policy developments resulting in

financial pressures and the focus on the student experience faced by institutions. In order to be successful academic institutions will need to provide career structures for academic staff members that permit a stable and sustainable career allowing for reward and recognition for productive staff members (Young 2016; Cashmore *et al*., 2015; Copeland 2014). As Altbach and Musselin (2008) state *"We have been struck by the dysfunctional nature of career structures in many countries – with disturbing negative trends...Without a career structure that attracts quality, rewards productivity, and permits stability, universities will fail in their mission of high-quality teaching, innovative research, and building a 'world-class' reputation*" (cited in Locke, 2014). The ability for institutions to maintain standards in all areas of research and teaching is intrinsically linked to the shift in the work academics are required to engage with and the implications for building a sustainable career path. This in turn is crucial to enhancing professionalism in teaching and learning.

2.7 Institutional Context

There are clear issues with trying to compare higher education institutions. Many factors such as the history and reputation of an institution, the demographics of the student body and the programmes of study offered are likely to impact on the expectations of students and the experience they receive. Many universities specialise in different fields such as medicine, business, law or arts and media. Research suggests that some students respond differently to student surveys than others (*Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2002).* Students at medical schools generally respond more positively than do students on applied art or arts subjects. Students undertaking engineering courses appear to be the most reluctant to respond. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that the means of completing the survey influences the response in terms of levels of satisfaction and that those early responders to the survey are likely to be more satisfied than later responders. (Williams and Cappuccini-Ansfield, 2007).

Research published by Ainley and Weyers, (2008) suggests that the student experience to be broadly similar in Russell Group and other UK institutions *"regardless of their socio-economic background or type of university attended… students tend to have similar preferences for teaching method and approach their studies in similar ways"*.

Although this research was undertaken before the major developments in tuition fee policy, the finding are largely supported by the outcome of the HEPI-HEA survey in 2014, 2015 and most recently in 2016 which showed there are only small differences in student satisfaction when different institution types are compared (HEPI-HEA 2014; 2015; 2016).

2.8 Built Environment Context

The results of the National Student Survey (NSS) reveal that the overall satisfaction levels with built environment courses are on average lower than that of other subjects (Higher Education Academy, 2012). Built environment programmes have consistently underperformed on the National Student Survey when compared to the "all subject" results. This is of concern to institutions offering built environment programmes and to some extent to those stakeholders who rely on the university sector to provide a high quality education that meets the requirements of the industry and the professional bodies. Built Environment higher education provides the construction industry with a supply of graduates to undertake the professional roles within the sector that is increasingly important as university level programmes are becoming the norm for managerial roles and professional body recognition. In order to attract high quality applicants to built environment programmes and to the construction industry, it is important to understand the reasons for the lower satisfaction levels to ensure these issues can be addressed to produce a more positive outcome. As demonstrated in Table 2 below, built environment programmes are underperforming when compared with 'all-courses' with some significant differences between the built environment programmes available. Building Surveying has the lowest satisfaction levels of all the programmes with Real Estate producing the highest satisfaction.

	Number of courses	Sector mean	Sector min	sector max	Sector median
All courses	25,549	90.5	12	100	92
All buildings	560	82.7	42	100	85
Building Surveying	28	74.9	42	93	77.5
Quantity Surveying	28	78.4	52	92	79.5
Construction Management	37	80.5	57	94	82
Real Estate	32	81.7	63	96	83

Table 1: Comparison of sector scores for overall satisfaction with the course

Table 2 - Comparison of sector scores for overall satisfaction with the course (HEA, 2013)

Research (HEA, 2012) shows that a number of factors may influence satisfaction rates including;

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Mode of Study
- Student Expectations
- Level of satisfaction relating to specific factors addressed by the NSS questions e.g. aspects of teaching and/or assessment.
- Class size
- Cohort size
- Extent of close contact with academics
- Levels of student effort and engagement

- Volume, promptness and usefulness of student feedback
- Proportion of teaching undertaken by full-time academics and proportion of those with postgraduate teaching qualifications.

The complex interaction between the identified factors that impact on the NSS results for built environment programmes does present challenges for institutions and programme teams in their efforts to improve the student experience. The institutional context also provides an important dimension relating to all the above factors. The size of the institution, the cohort size, facilities and the demographics of the cohort etc. will impact on any measures taken to improve student satisfaction and it is unlikely that a one-size fits all approach will provide the required improvements.

Built Environment students do present particular challenges in improving satisfaction rates. The research indicates that as a subject group, Built Environment students are less satisfied that the other students on average, male students generally are less likely to report they are satisfied with the student experience (HEA, 2012), part-time students are less satisfied than full-time students and the type of institution plays a role. The results of the NSS for the Built Environment programmes within the case study department compared with the average for the University and the average results for all higher education over a four-year period of time. The results paint a mixed picture with some significant fluctuations in satisfaction levels particularly relating to the Building Surveying programme. The results are interesting given some aspects of the student experience will be the same for all programmes e.g. the organisation and management, the facilities at the institution including library and I.T etc. An interesting aspect of the results relates to the differences in reported satisfaction rates given many of the modules on each programme are taught jointly with all programmes.

2.9 Conclusions.

This review of the literature clearly shows that ‘the student experience’ is central to government higher education policy throughout the UK, and especially to learning and teaching policies. The expression ‘student experience’ is imbued with political thinking

and forms an inescapable background to the NSS. However, even in the academic literature 'the student experience' has multiple meanings. The term covers numerous activities at different points in time in a student's life and journey such as their accommodation, social life, extra-curricular and 'consumer' experiences, and careers. So the term is not confined to issues about students' academic experience and their learning and teaching, despite both being inseparable from the student experience. Consequently, there is no single indicator that can capture the multiple meanings of the student experience and it would be unrealistic for a single survey to attempt to address all aspects of the student experience. As the debate continues regarding the idea of student satisfaction indicating quality, the significance attached to the view of the student body on matters of academic judgement it remains a concern of many commentators. Staddon and Standish (2012) suggest that the focus on the student perspective *"puts students in a relation to their learning that is very different to what has traditionally been the case…authority is now being ceded to the novice – to those who might once have been thought of as standing in need of induction and, hence, as unable to understand well…the nature of this [educational] good"* and further suggests *"to see student choice as the arbiter of quality is an abnegation of responsibility on the part of providers of higher education. Standards are not raised but abandoned"* (cited in Temple *et al*., 2014). It should be noted that the link between student satisfaction and quality in terms of educational gain and performance is not conclusively evidenced within the literature (Gibbs, 2012). As demonstrated, there is also a lack of agreement within the literature regarding what constitutes teaching excellence in the higher education sector (BIS, 2016).

The initial review of the literature has revealed that the process of widening access to a university education to improve participation rates has been a long-standing objective by all the major political parties within the UK including the current government. As the policy of increasing participation has continued to develop so has the issue of how higher education is funded. Given the priority successive governments have given to the higher education sector it may seem surprising that the funding in real terms has fallen significantly over the same period of time. The current policy seeks to address the issue of funding by requiring those who take advantage of a university education to make a significant contribution to the cost. The rationale for this is that the graduate will

benefit from the experience in terms of improved employability and higher earning as compared to those who have not gained a degree. Many commentators and student groups do not share the view of the government in terms of the rate of return for the student for their investment. The development of higher education policy has been a gradual process over four decades that has resulted in the current position as developed from the recommendations of the Browne Report (2010). However, as shown the government policy towards higher education continues to develop with further changes proposed with yet more changes to the funding regimes linked to the quality of teaching and the student experience and also opens up the possibility that for those institutions that reach the required targets for teaching and learning, increased student fees could be charged. The introduction of the current student fee regime has unfortunately coincided with a national and global economic climate struggling to grow after a deep recession resulting in high unemployment and stagnation of salary levels. The major changes to the funding system will present higher education institutions, students and construction industry employers with considerable challenges. The key stakeholders within the provision of built environment higher education reflect the symbiotic relationship between universities, students and industry.

The rationale for the research focussing on built environment student satisfaction stems from a desire to meet the expectations of students wishing to build a career within this sector and to understand the reported significant differences in perception of the experience by students on the same course, undertaking the same modules, in the classroom environment, with the same tutors and undertaking the same assessment. These students are also subject to the same process and procedure at a School and institutional level. The research seeks to understand the diversity of the student cohorts within built environment education and the complexity of the expectations the students bring with them and propose ways to enhance the experience for all students within the cohort. Identified gaps in knowledge – mature student experience, experience of mixed student group and impact on learning, mix of full-time traditional, mature students, part-time employed students.

As the literature has demonstrated, across higher education in England there is a knowledge gap around the experiences of, and barriers faced, by part-time mature

students in higher education that is particularly evident with the built environment sector. This research seeks to help fill gaps that exist in our understanding of the complex issues facing higher education providers and the ways in which the “as-lived” experience of students impacts on the perception of the experience. As previously discussed, the growing importance of the student experience and the increasing need for this to be considered as a management issue at an institutional level, in order to meet the expectations of students, thus satisfying the requirements of the on-going government higher education policy developments particularly surrounding the needs of built environment students is not matched by the empirical research in this area. The review of the literature demonstrates that there is a paucity of research considering the needs of the diverse population of built environment students and how to address these needs as a heterogeneous group.

As stated, the rationale for the focus of the research on built environment student satisfaction stems from a desire to meet the expectations of students wishing to build a career within the built environment sector and to understand the reported significant differences in perception of the experience by students on the same course, undertaking the same modules, in the classroom environment, with the same tutors and undertaking the same assessment. The identified students are also subject to the same process and procedure at a school and institutional level. The research study seeks to understand the diversity of the student cohorts within built environment education and the complexity of the expectations the students bring with them and propose ways to enhance the experience for all students within the cohort. A significant aspect of the study is to address the challenges faced by a case study provider in improving the quality of student experience and as a consequence the level of satisfaction reported in the National Student Survey. The decision to concentrate on one institution as a case study is to ensure that institutional level factors can be addressed as part of the framework to improve satisfaction rates. The literature indicates that many factors contribute to the overall perception of the quality of the educational experience producing a very complex picture. The institutional context coupled with factors such as the student cohort demographics and programme of study result in difficulties producing a ‘one-size fits all’ solution.

Chapter Three The Conceptual Framework

3.1 Introduction

The critical review and synthesis of the literature in Chapter 2 considered the main knowledge domains relating to higher education policy, student experience and education theory. As stated in in Chapter 1, Objective 6 of the research is to develop a conceptual framework to influence measures taken by providers of Built Environment higher education to provide an improved student experience and as a result increased student satisfaction rates as measured by the National Student Survey. This chapter seeks to explain the development of the conceptual framework and its refinement at each stage of the research process.

3.2 Development of the conceptual framework

A conceptual framework '*explains, either graphically or in a narrative form, the main issues to be studied – the key factors, constructs or variables – and the presumed relationships between them'* (Miles and Hubermain, 1994). Yin (2009) describes the conceptual framework as a method the researcher can use to illustrate the main concepts pertaining to the study, their inter-relationships and the context within which the concepts and inter-relationships are applicable. This view is further supported by Rauitch and Riggan (2011) who describe a conceptual framework as a set of broad ideas and principles taken from the relevant fields of enquiry that can be a useful tool in the structuring and presentation of the main concepts and inter-relationships of the study. The development of the framework assists the researcher to develop an awareness and understanding of the situation under scrutiny and to communicate this to others. It assists the researcher in setting boundaries for the research, identifying the 'how' and 'why' rather than a description of the 'what', provides a structure for the discussion of the data from the various sources and sets out a reference frame to assist in making sense of the data.

The process for development of the framework for this study is closely related to a hermeneutic approach in that it is involves paying particular attention to the historical and social context surrounding an action when interpreting a data source (Collis and Hussy, 2003). The hermeneutic circle, whereby the researcher attempts to understand *"the whole through grasping its parts, and comprehending the meaning of the parts divining the whole"* (Crotty, 1998) is a useful approach in the on-going development of the conceptual framework. The process involves an examination of the parts, defining each component before it is reintegrated into the whole (Bontekoe, 1996). The basic form of the hermeneutic circle is provided in Figure 6 and is described by Bontekoe (1996) as *"The circle has what might be called two poles – on the one hand, the object of comprehension understood as a whole, and, on the other, the various parts of which the object of comprehension is composed".*

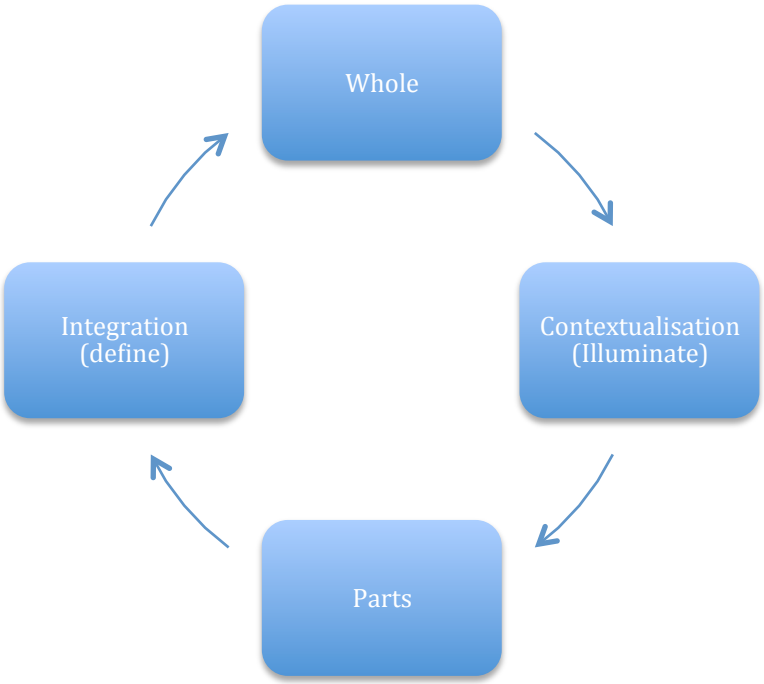


Figure 6 - Hermeneutic Circle (Bontekoe, 1996)

Applied to this research study the hermeneutic circle now becomes

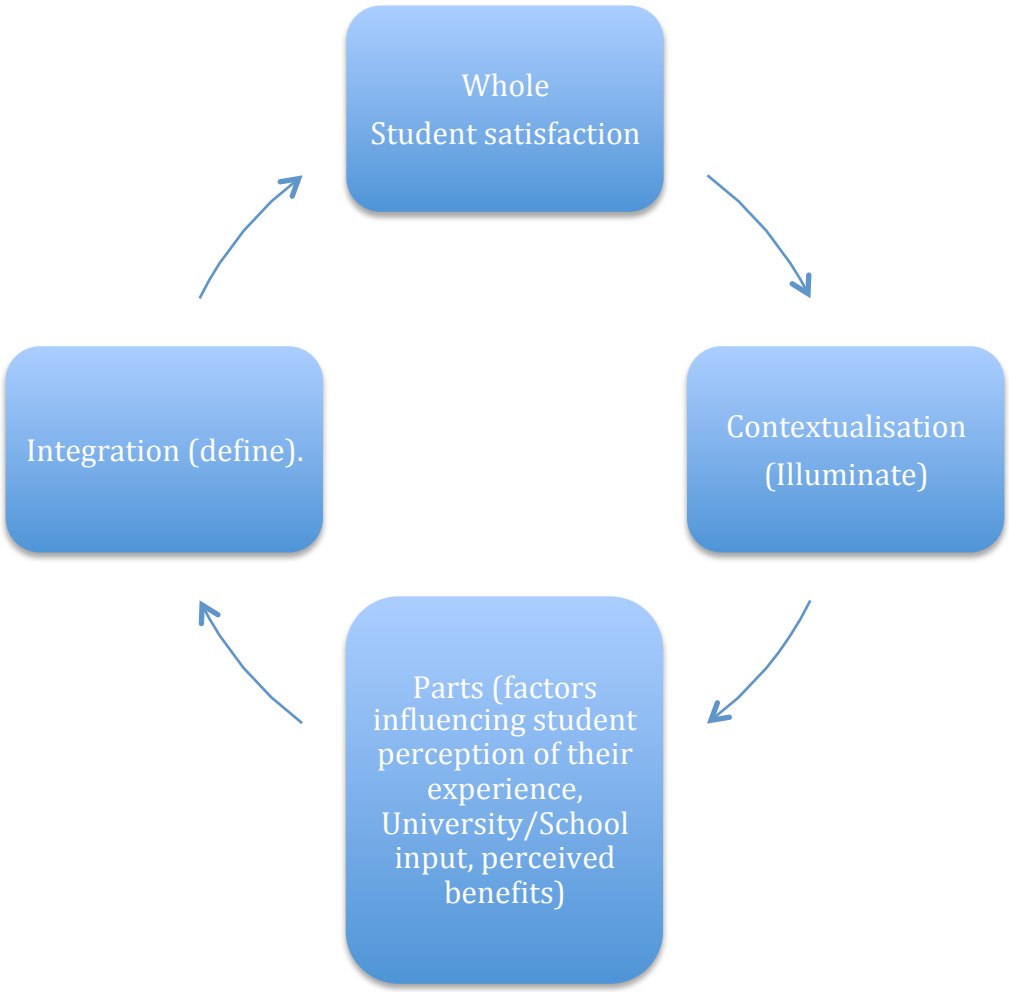


Figure 7 - Contextualised hermeneutic circle based on Bentekoe (1996).

As demonstrated in Figure 7 above, the phenomenon being investigated is understood as a 'whole', which is the 'satisfaction of students with their experience of higher education within the specified context'. In order to fully understand the whole, the parts, and how and where they integrate into the whole, need to be understood in order to define the phenomenon. Due to the complexity of the case study, use of this approach can provide a contextualisation of each of the parts to clarify the phenomenon within the context. The parts in this study include;

1. Factors influencing student perception of their experiences

2. The role of the HEI and government policy in relation to higher education.
3. Exploration of the perceived benefits as a result of their experiences.

Gadamer (1975) supports the view that the hermeneutic circle of interpretation is never closed but is on going, with movement of understanding between the whole and the parts. As a result, at the end of a circle, a new circle is generated based on the greater understanding of the phenomenon. Gadamer (1975) further contends that research findings are understood through a fusion of horizons, by which the historical horizon of the past and present horizon of the current interpreter, bridges the gap between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Put into the context of this research study, the historical horizon is the material analysed in the literature review in Chapter 2 relating to the factors influencing student perceptions of their experiences and their levels of satisfaction. This includes general issues relating to age, gender, background etc. and more specific issues relating to their experience within a typical School of the Built Environment. The present horizon includes analysis of a number of data sources including the quantitative data from the published NSS results, verbatim comments from the NSS survey over a six-year period and transcripts of interviews with students who participated in this study. Gummerson (2000) defines an important factor in this type of approach as *"pre-understanding refers to people's knowledge, insight, and experience before they engage in a research programme or consulting assignment, while understanding refers to their improved insights emerging during the programme or assignment'*. The pre-understanding of the research area will be improved as the research continues to become a pre-understanding to further investigation. As a result, this research has developed a framework of understanding based on the hermeneutic spiral concept. This concept is graphically represented in Figure 8 with some further explanation of the development stages provided below.

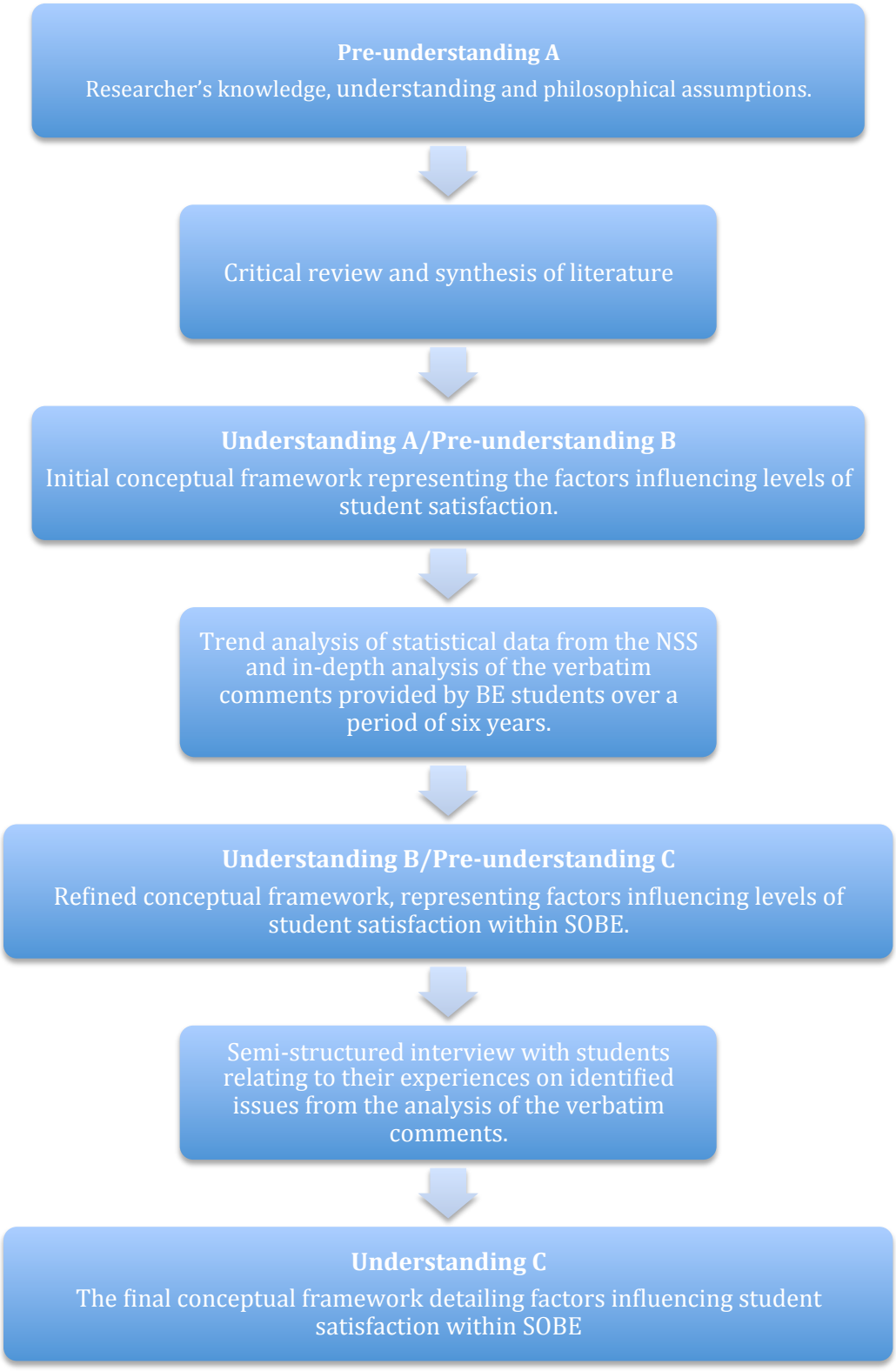


Figure 8 - Research pre-understanding based on Gummerson (2000).

Pre-understanding A of the research phenomenon, is based upon the researcher's knowledge and understanding of the subject area and is underpinned by the philosophical positioning of this research as described in Chapter 4. The pre-understanding of the subject area is further developed and improved by undertaking a critical review of the literature which was used to develop the initial conceptual framework as shown in Figure 9 below. The development of the framework assisted with the structuring and presentation of the major concepts and the inter-relationships resulting in pre-understanding B. This pre-understanding provided the basis for further investigation in the form of the trend analysis of the quantitative data from the NSS and the detailed analysis of the verbatim comments. The understanding gained from the understanding B in turn led to further revision of the framework as illustrated in Figure 9 and identified the factors for further investigation/exploration in the semi-structured interviews. The next level of the research was undertaken using semi-structured interviews with students to investigate in detail the key issues identified from the analysis of the literature, the analysis of NSS data and other relevant documentary evidence from the School/university relating to the context of the case study. Interviews with students where undertaken until the data and understanding became saturated resulting in twenty-six in depth interviews. At this stage the conceptual framework was further refined to represent the knowledge and understanding from the case study.

3.3 Initial conceptual Framework

The development of the framework has continued throughout the research study as new knowledge was gained via the analysis of the data from the identified sources. The initial framework was developed as a means of structuring and presenting the main concepts and the inter-relationships between the identified concepts. It was used to help define the boundaries of the work and to provide a structure for discussion of the literature and outcomes of the data collection. The final framework will act as a useful tool for the improvement of levels of student satisfaction with their experience within the School of Built Environment and other academic schools who have a similar make up of the student population.

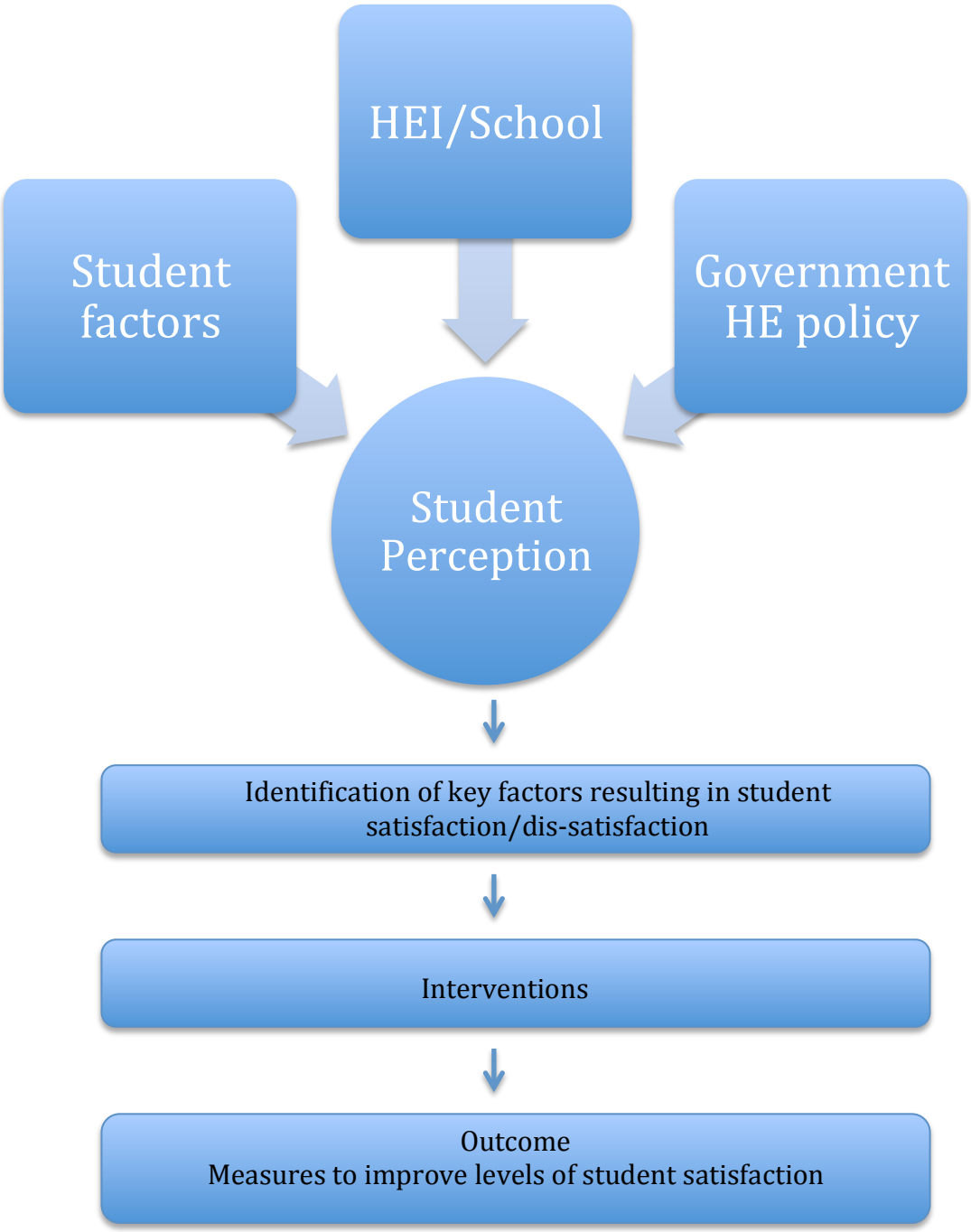


Figure 9 - Initial Conceptual Framework

3.4 Chapter summary.

This chapter presented the development of the initial conceptual framework for this research. As described, the initial framework was developed using the hermeneutic approach where a hermeneutic spiral was employed to refine the initial framework based on the empirical evidence including the literature review and from the knowledge and understanding of the researcher. The framework is to be further refined as the data analysis progresses. The next chapter will discuss the research philosophy and research methodology to be used for this research study.

CHAPTER FOUR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN.

4.1 Introduction

The researcher believes that due to the significance attached to levels of student satisfaction within higher education, Higher Education Institution's (HEI's) need to establish a methodology to enhance the student experience to remain competitive in the sector. The Researcher believes there is scope in researching the student experience at the University of Salford with particular reference to built environment students and proposing a conceptual framework, which can be implemented to enhance the student experience, while taking account of the needs of the student and the institution.

The research has developed from the author's own professional practice within built environment higher education. The change of government policy within higher education has had a direct impact on the professional practice of the author in terms of the management and delivery of built environment academic programmes. The response to the changes in policy by the identified stakeholder groups will determine the success of the sector in delivering the stated purpose of higher education. Ultimately, understanding the key drivers to ensuring satisfaction for both the providers and participants of higher education will enable a framework to be developed to ensure delivery of an efficient and effective higher education system which meets the needs of country, industry and end users.

4.2 Research Philosophy

The research philosophy adopted by the researcher is important as this will underpin and shape the focus and direction of the research being undertaken. Research is based on assumptions about how the world is perceived and how social reality is interpreted and understood. Research philosophy is important in research methodology as it assists the researcher in developing the most appropriate research design for the particular circumstances. It can also widen the research horizons for researchers by helping with the identification and creation of research designs outside of the researcher' current

experience (Easterby-Smith *et al,* 2008). These beliefs and assumptions are known as research paradigms and are used to reflect the basic beliefs about how the world is perceived.

4.3 Research Paradigms

The word paradigm originated from the Greek word — "*paradeigma",* which means pattern. It was first used by Thomas Kuhn (1962) to represent a conceptual framework shared by a group of scientists that provided them with a suitable model for examining problems and proposing solutions to those problems. Kuhn (1970) defines a paradigm as *"the underlying assumptions and intellectual structure upon which research and development in a field of inquiry is based".* Denzin (1989) agrees that the paradigm is *"a set of beliefs that guide action"*. Actions in this context are methods used for arriving at the results of the phenomenon under study. Similarly, Patton (1990) describes it as a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world. Creswell (2013) defined research paradigms as a way of thinking, communicating, perceiving, and viewing the world. As demonstrated by the definitions provided, a research paradigm represents how the world works and how knowledge is extracted from the world. It shapes how the researcher thinks, writes, and talks about knowledge. It defines the type of questions to be asked and the methodologies to be used in answering the research questions. Therefore, the researcher's findings are interpreted and defined by the paradigm adopted.

Creswell (2013) categorised social reality into five paradigms: ontology (the nature of the knowledge under study), epistemology (scope of knowledge being researched), rhetorical (the discourse and use of specific terms), axiological considerations (the philosophical study of value) and methodological considerations (techniques for solving and investigating the phenomenon). These paradigms combine both the deductive and inductive view of the way social reality is interpreted. The interpretation of social reality can either be from a subjective or objective approach, irrespective of the research strategy, be it qualitative, quantitative or a mixed methodology.

Having looked at the paradigms that underpins research generally, the following sections outline the research paradigm chosen for this research study and the reasoning behind the choices made.

4.4 Justification for the selected Paradigm and Methodology

Several philosophical positions can underpin a research position. Easterby-Smith *et al*., (2008) suggest that understanding the philosophical issues of the research help to define and clarify research design. The two contrasting views on how social science research can be conducted are known as positivism and constructivism/social constructivism. A positivist approach is based on the idea that the world exists externally and should be measured using objective methods taking no account of subjective factors such as sensation, reflection or intuition. This approach also relies on the researcher being independent of the subject of the research (Remenyi *et al*., 1998). A constructivist approach to research considers the world and the understanding of the world to be affected by subjective consciousness based on how the individual relates to the world. The context within which the social action or behavior occurs becomes of utmost importance as a result (Remenyi *et al*., 1998). Therefore, this phenomenological paradigm assumes that reality is not objective or external but is socially constructed and given meaning by people (Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2008). Table 3 highlights the contrasting research methods between the two approaches.

	Positivism	Constructivism/Social Constructivism
The researcher	Must be independent	May be part of what is being observed
Human interest	Should be irrelevant	Is the main driver of science
Explanations	Must demonstrate causality	Aim to increase the general understanding of the situation
Research progress is made through	Hypotheses and deduction	Gathering rich data from which ideas are generated
Concepts	Need to be clearly defined to allow measurement	Should incorporate stakeholder perspectives
Unit of analysis	Should be reduced to the simplest terms	Should include the complexity of the 'whole' situation
Generalisation through	Statistically probability	Theoretical abstraction
Sampling requires	Large numbers selected randomly	Small number of cases selected for specific reasons.

Table 3 - Contrasting research methods between the two research approaches.

4. 5 Philosophical assumptions

The research philosophy adopted contains important assumptions about how the researcher views the world and will therefore underpin the research strategy and methodology chosen (Saunders *et al.,* 2012). In the simplest terms they can be described as:

- Ontology – what is knowledge?
- Epistemology – how do we know what is known?
- Axiology – the researcher values associated with the knowledge

Detailed consideration of the above by the researcher will help position the research within the philosophical continuum.

4.5.1 Ontological consideration

Ontology is the philosophical theory of being or reality. It considers how the world is built and has two basic views as highlighted by Bryman and Bell (2007); firstly there is the view of the real world that is independent of social actors, this approach is known as objectivism. The second view that the world is constructed from the perceptions and actions of those social actors and as a result, this is considered to be a subjective view.

An objective ontology has developed from the natural sciences and takes the view that *'social entities exist in reality external to social actors concerned with their existence'* (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). If an objective ontology views the world as independent of social actors then, at the other end of the spectrum, a subjective ontology takes the view '*that social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of those social actors concerned with their existence'* (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Figure 10 below, demonstrates the continuum of ontological assumptions as described by Morgan and Smirch, (1980) who listed six identifiable stages in the continuum of core ontological assumptions relevant to social science research. In relation to this study, it can be seen that the research could be positioned more towards the subjectivist end of the continuum as the research sets out to explore the subjective perceptions of individual students regarding their experiences of higher education. Remenyi *et al.,* (1998) stress

the need to study *"the details of the situation to understand the reality or perhaps a reality working behind them".* This approach can be associated with social constructionism as the "reality" of the research area is constructed from the perceptions and interpretations of the subjects of the study. Therefore, this research takes the ontological position of the world as created by individuals by their perceptions and interpretations sustained through the process of human actions and interactions (Morgan and Smircich, 1980; Collis and Hussey, 2005).

Social Constructivism is concerned with the life experiences of individuals who are involved with the research area and therefore, it is the ontological position adopted for this research as it is appropriate and useful for identifying the factors influencing student perceptions of satisfaction with their experience of higher education. Social Constructivism is allied to the epistemological position of interpretivism that stresses the necessity of exploring the subjective meanings motivating the actions of social actors so that the researcher can understand these actions (Saunders *et al*., 2012). As a result, the nature of this research requires an investigation of the real-life perceptions and experiences of the human factors influencing levels of student satisfaction.

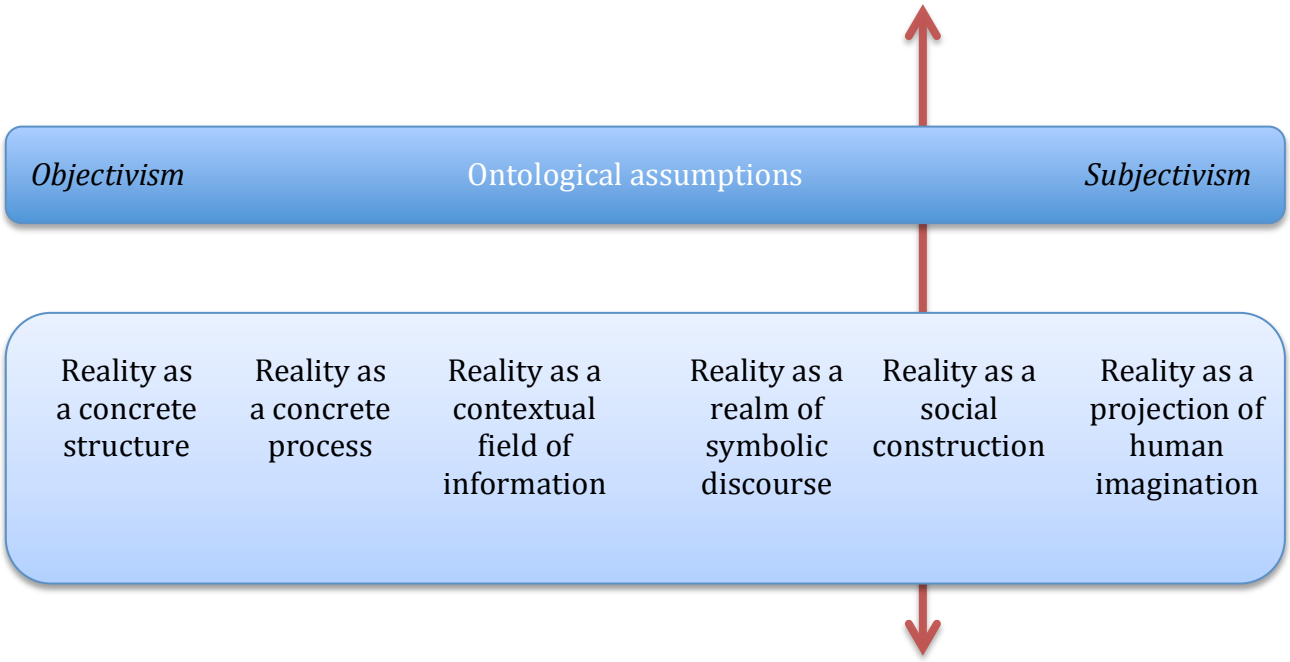


Figure 10 - Ontological positioning as adapted from Morgan and Smircich, 1980.

4.5.2 Epistemological consideration

Epistemology is derived from the Greek words episteme (knowledge) and logos (reason) (Grix, 2001). According to Dainty (2007) it represents the theory of knowledge and what is acceptable knowledge in a particular field of study and attempts to answer the basic questions regarding to how and why we know. Epistemology is the process of thinking about the nature of knowledge, its scope, validity and reliability of claims to knowledge. Easterby-Smith *et al*., (2007) describe it as a general assumption about the best way of enquiring into the nature of the world. The categorization of knowledge is one of the main preoccupations of epistemology, which is principally concerned with the theories of knowledge and what constitutes acceptable knowledge within any given field of study. The two contrasting views on how research is conducted are described as positivism and interpretivism (Saunders *et al.,* 2012).

Positivism is an epistemological position that believes that the only reliable knowledge is that which is based on sense, experience and positive justification (Creswell 2009; Easterby-smith *et al.,* 2007). Positivism stems from the philosophy known as realism. The emphasis with the positivist methodology is objectivity and the importance of unbiased data collection as a basis of a hypothesis or to test the validity of the stated hypothesis rather than the meaning being inferred subjectively through sensation, reflection or intuition. The positivist philosophical stance assumes that the researcher is independent of and neither affects nor is affected by the subject of the research (Easterby-Smith *et al.,* 2008).

The opposite approach to positivism is described as interpretivism that is based on the work of Kant (1724–1804; Dilthey (1833–1911) and Weber (1864–1920). Interpretivism recognises the difference between conducting research involving people rather that inanimate objects. It is underpinned by the idea that social reality is not objective but subjective as it is based on perception. How people react to and interpret the meanings of a situation can indicate that reality is in fact determined by people rather than by objective or external factors. A crucial aspect is related to the fact that people will interpret meanings according to their own values. A key feature of this approach relates to the fact that interpretivism recognises that the researcher will interact with the

research as it is impossible to separate what exists in the social world from the mind of the researcher (Smith, 1983; Cresswell, 1994). The basis of this epistemological approach draws from the intellectual traditions of phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. *"Phenomenology refers to the way in which we as humans make sense of the world around us. In symbolic interactionism we are in a continual process of interpreting the social world around us in that we interpret the actions of others with whom we interact and this interpretation leads to adjustment of our own meanings and actions"* (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Figure 11 below, shows the continuum of the epistemological assumptions as described above and how the nature of what constitutes knowledge changes as it moves from assumption to assumption along the continuum. This research seeks to understand the factors influencing student perception of the quality of experience they receive while undertaking their programme of study and as a result, levels of satisfaction they report through key measures of satisfaction. As the study leans toward constructivism and interpretivism and is concerned with the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the student it aligns more with a subjective ontology.

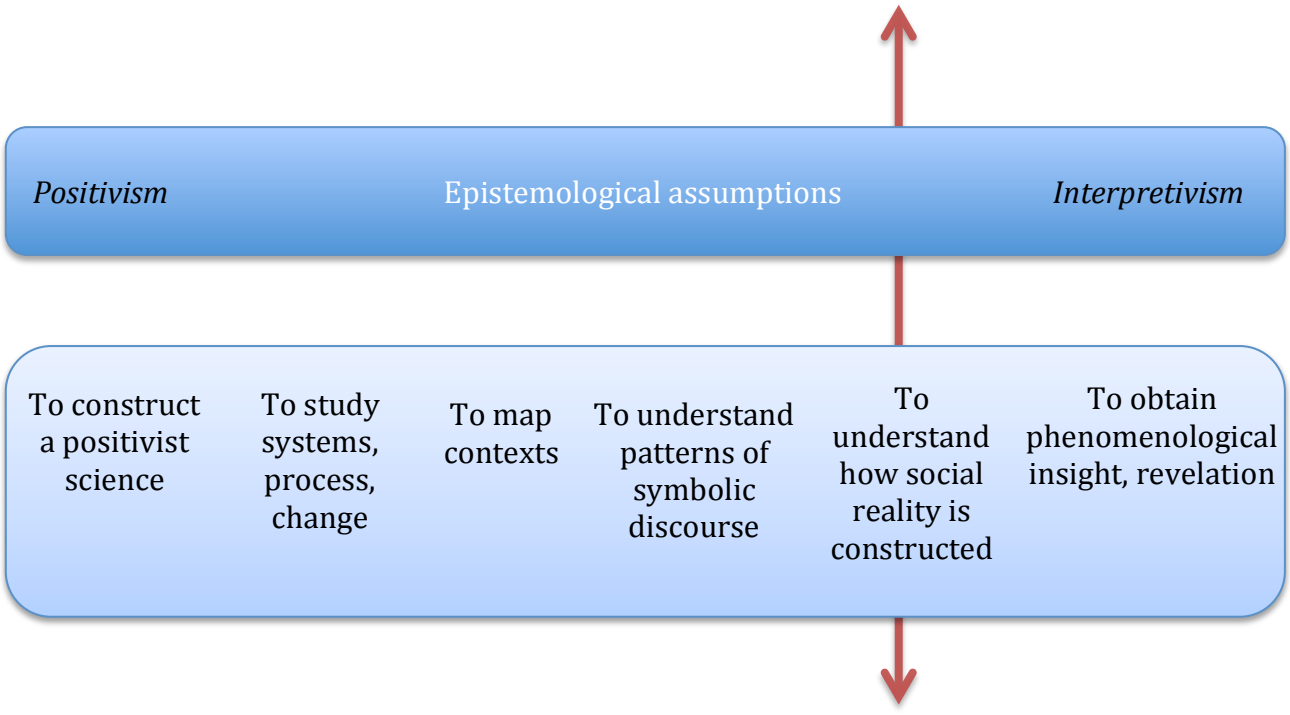


Figure 11 - Epistemological positioning as adapted from Morgan and Smircich, 1980.

4.5.3 Axiological Consideration.

The term 'Axiology' originates from the German word "Axiologie", which is defined as '*the theory of values, moral or aesthetic'*. It is a branch of philosophy that seeks to provide a theoretical account of the nature of values whether moral, prudential or aesthetic (Smith and Thomas, 1998). Axiology is concerned with values and the role of values within the research. It has been suggested (Healy and Perry, 2000) that knowledge can be recognised and evaluated differently by each individual as individuals have their own subjective knowledge about reality. Positivists contend that the process of research is value free, based on the assumption that they are detached and independent of the subject of their research and the object of the research is unaffected by the research activities. Interpretivists however, recognise that the researcher has values and these values will to some extent determine what is recognised as fact and how the facts are interpreted to draw meaning from it. The axiological skill of the researcher is concerned with the ability to articulate their values, understand how these values act as a basis for making judgements on what to research and how the research is conducted (Heron 1996). Based on this view, it may be appropriate to align the axiological assumptions with the assumptions regarding human nature identified by Morgan and Smiricich, (1980) along the philosophical continuum of social sciences shown in Figure 12. Based on the understanding of axiology, this research is positioned closer to the 'value-laden' end of the continuum. The value's held by the researcher in terms of the philosophical approach, the research strategy and the choice of data collection/analysis techniques are reflections of the researchers values and as a result, the researchers values play a role in the research. The researcher's view about human nature is represented as 'Man as a social constructor, the symbol creator' that corresponds with the ontological stance as 'reality as a social construction' and the epistemological stance 'to understand how social reality is created.

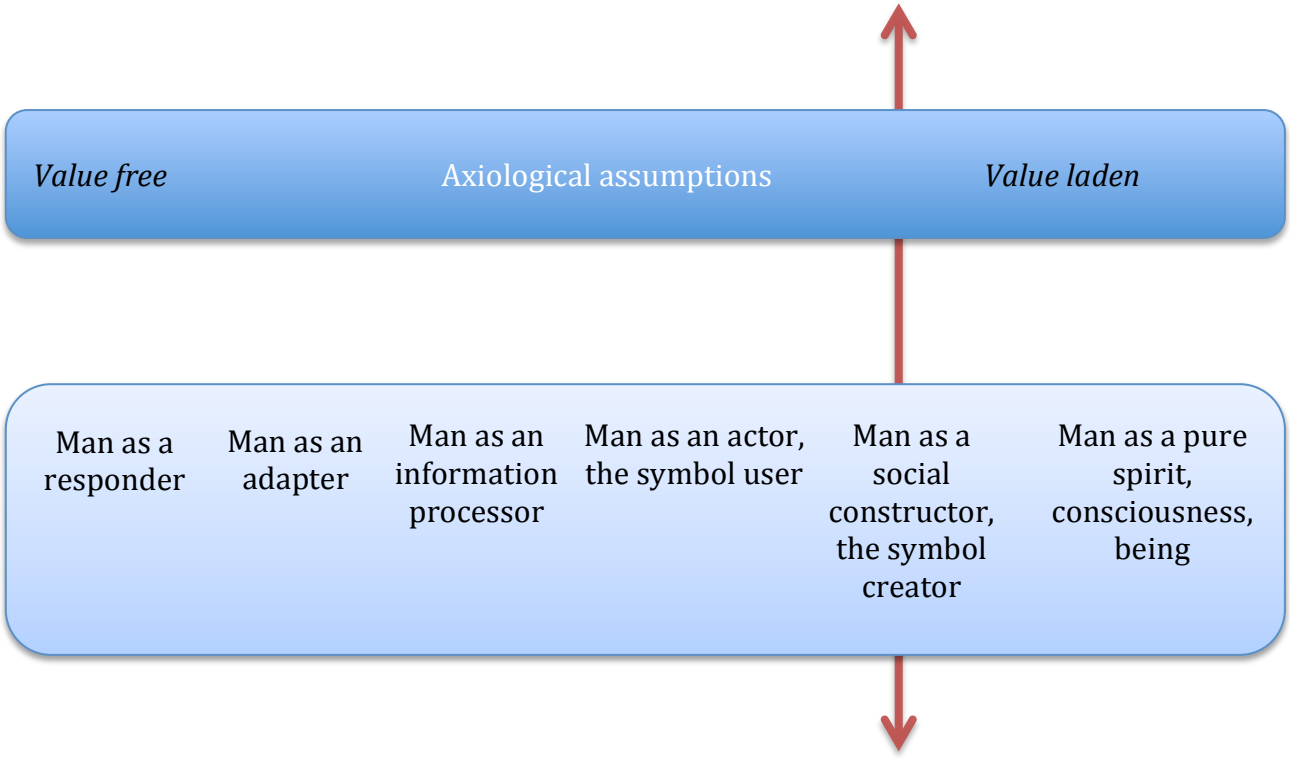


Figure 12 - Axiological positioning as adapted from Morgan and Smircuch, 1980.

4.5.4 The Philosophical positioning of this research study.

Based on the information provided above, the philosophical assumptions underpinning this research study are interpretivism and social constructivism. As stated by Kaplan and Maxwell (1994), an interpretivist researcher does not predefine dependent and independent variables, but focuses on the full complexity of individual variables making sense of the situation as it emerges. An interpretive approach allows the researcher greater scope to address issues of influence and impact (Deetz, 1996). In the interpretive approach, the researcher does not stand outside, but is a participant observer (Carr and Kemmis, 1986) who engages in the activities and discerns the meaning of the action as they are expressed within the specific social contexts. A social constructivist approach is also relevant to this study as constructivism is closely linked to interpretivism. Interpretivism often addresses features of shared meaning and understanding whereas constructivism extends this concern with knowledge as

produced and interpreted (Gephart, 1997). In the context of this research study, the meaning students assign to the factors that influence their experience will allow the researcher to understand how the identified factors impact on the student experience and how this experience can be improved. The purpose of the interpretive approach is to also gain an understanding of the context and the process of how the identified factors are important within the context. This position justifies the researcher's choice of interpretive as the philosophical rationale for this study within the parameters of a constructivist epistemological context. The overall positioning of this research is shown in Figure 13 below.

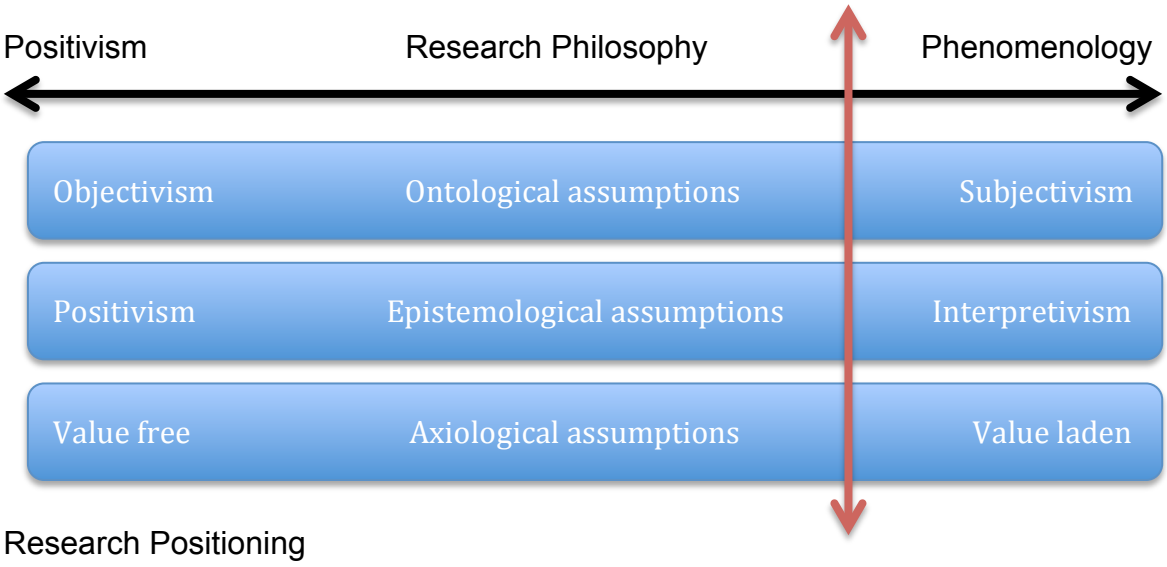


Figure 13 - Positioning the research within the philosophical continuum.

4.6 Research Approach.

When undertaking any research study it is important to follow the identified research paradigm with an appropriate research approach. There are two kinds of research approach that may result in the acquisition of new knowledge, they are known as deductive and inductive reasoning. The two approaches are fundamentally different from each other as described below and in Figure 14 and Figure 15. A deductive approach is connected with the positivist paradigm, whereas an inductive approach is closely associated with interpretivism.

4.6.1 Deductive Approach.

Deductive research involves an approach whereby the researcher starts with a theoretical proposition that is then subject to test by empirical observation. According to Saunders *et al.,* (2012) it is often associated with the natural sciences *"where laws present the basis of explanation, allow the anticipation of phenomena, predict their occurrence and therefore permit them to be controlled"* (Collis and Hussey, 2003). This approach is associated with the positivist philosophy and is used in research where the research question is presented as hypothesis, derived from theory and is subject to test. As shown in Figure 14, the process associated with deductive reasoning works from the general to the specific with four steps commonly associated with the deductive approach, these being development of theory, hypothesis, observation and confirmation. (Creswell, 2007; Gill and Johnson, 2010). This approach would rely on the use of research methods such as experiments and surveys.

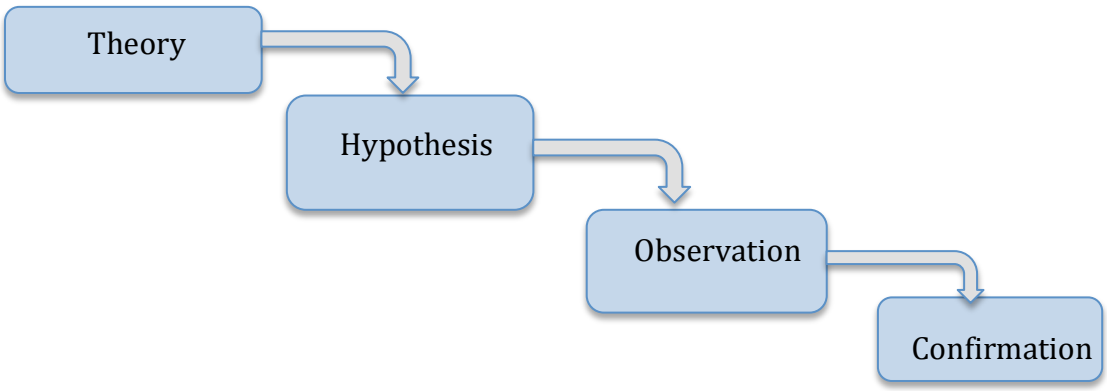


Figure 14 - Deductive approach.

4.6.2 Inductive Approach.

Inductive reasoning is concerned with developing theory from observing empirical reality by moving from specific observations to broader generalizations and theories. This approach is commonly associated with the interpretivist philosophy and allows the researcher to provide subjective reasoning with the help of real life examples (Ridenour *et al.,* 2008). Observed data and facts allow the researcher to reach a hypothesis and to propose a theory with regards to the research problem. The inductive approach uses a bottom-up approach to building hypothesis and theory as demonstrated in Figure 15 below.

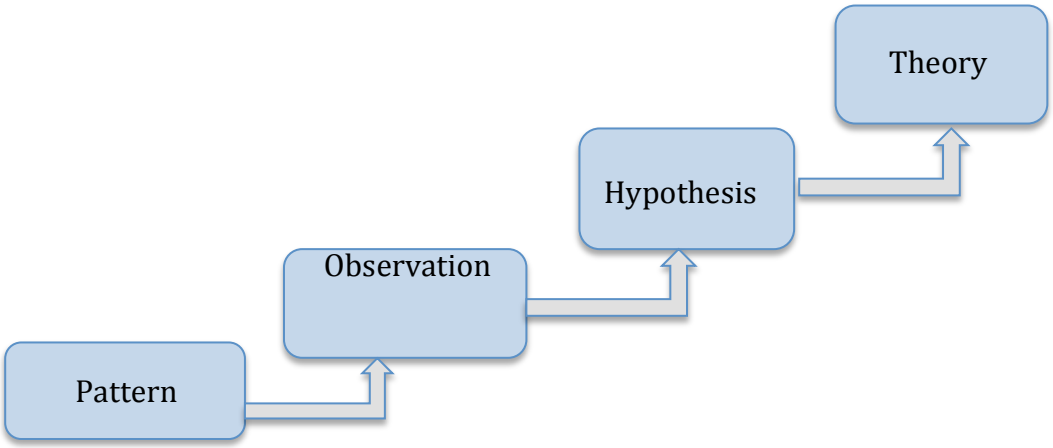


Figure 15 - Inductive approach.

The inductive approach is used in research studies where theories and hypothesis are developed after the collection and analysis of some or all of the data (Robson, 1993). The inductive method relies on instruments such as interviews.

In conclusion, the deductive approach is based on the general idea of reaching a specific situation and it is connected with the positivism paradigm. The inductive approach works on a specific idea to generalise the situation as per the research topic, which is linked with the interpretivism paradigm (Crowther and Lancaster, 2009). The nature of this research study is to propose a conceptual framework for improving student satisfaction levels as measured by the National Student Survey (NSS) within Built

Environment programmes. Therefore, for this research study, the researcher adopted both an inductive and deductive approach in the research, by first deducing from the literature and the analysis of the published data from the NSS over a six year period and then interviewing participants (inductive) in order to obtain additional rich data to explore the identified themes. According to Saunders *et al*., (2012) using both approaches makes it easy to estimate a logical and correct result but it is necessary for the researcher to combine the correct pieces of these approaches. In support of this approach, Perry (1998) asserts that when conducting research it is unlikely that any researcher could genuinely separate the two processes of induction and deduction and that it is impossible to go theory free into any study.

4.7 Research Strategy

There are many different research strategies available to the researcher. The research strategy provides an overall direction to the research and how it is conducted (Remenyi *et al.,* 1998). Yin (2009) asserts that the types of questions asked, the control the researcher has over the behavioural events and the degree of focus on contemporary events rather than historical events will govern the choice of research strategy. The choice of research strategy will also be influenced by factors such as the time and resources available to the researcher, the existing knowledge and experience of the researcher and the researchers own philosophical underpinning (Saunders *et al.,* 2012). The identified parameters provide a framework for assessing the appropriateness of the chosen research strategy. Yin (2009) and Creswell (2007) contend that each research strategy has its own advantages and disadvantages and these must be considered to ensure the most appropriate strategy is selected for the individual research study.

The research methods used will affect the results, conclusions and overall validity of the study. Naoum (2002) and Fellows (1997) describe the main methods of research data as Quantitative, Qualitative and Secondary data collection. Saunders *et al*., (2012) also suggest that a multiple method approach can be the most appropriate. Table 4 below identifies the key available research strategies and their ability to address the research questions associated with this research study.

Research strategy	Epistemological standpoint	Ability to address the research question
Experiment	Positivism	• Experiments are often highly structured, one-off, and artificial in nature. • Difficult to capture information relating to individual student perceptions of their experience of university. • Difficult to capture data relating to individual factors affecting perception of experience.
Survey	Objectivism	• Surveys are often highly structured, cross-sectional, and shallow in nature. • Surveys may result in what people claim to do rather than what they may actually do. • May not provide the detailed data regarding factors influencing perception of an experience.
Case study	Realism	• Case studies can be based on a longitudinal or cross-sectional time horizon. • More appropriate for capturing the holistic views with respects to this study. • Flexibility allows the use of appropriate methods such as interviews to explore naturally and deeply. • Appropriate for addressing the research question in the context of this study.
Action research	Subjectivism	• Action research is a valuable variant of quasi-experiments. • Planned interventions and hypothetical-deductive analysis are often used and could be difficult to implement this in the context of this research.
Ethnography	Interpretivism	• With its longitudinal nature and potential application of several methods, ethnography provides a major means of capturing the whole experience of students. Its main strength of validity is derived from the use of participant observation.

Table 4 - Evaluation of potential research strategy. Source: Saunders et al., 2012; Denscombe, 2007.

4.7.1 Literature Review and Synthesis

A review of the available literature helps the researcher understand the current body knowledge related to the field of study. It is important for the researcher to be able to position the research within the area of study, understand the limitations and how the proposed study will contribute to the knowledge of the subject area. Although the literature review is often the starting point of any research project, it is important to continue to engage with the literature throughout the study. Collis and Hussey (2003) state the researcher may undergo several cycles of reviewing the literature before establishing the research problem. This view is supported by Saunders *et al* (2012) who describe the process of undertaking the literature review as an upwards spiral that identifies a process of defining the parameters of the research questions and objectives, generating the search terms, conducting the search to obtain the literature, evaluation of that literature, recording in order to begin drafting the literature review. This process is repeated throughout the research process as it develops. The literature review aids the process in many ways as described in Table 5.

Research stage	**Use of the literature**	**Theoretical support**	
Identification of the broad area of the chosen research area	Background research	Informs the reader of the results of other research closely related to the research study.	Wallace and Wray (2011) Creswell (2009) Bryman (2008)
	Increase knowledge of area of interest and assists with research area selection	Allows for exploration of the broader field of existing literature and helps describe the area of interest.	Gill and Johnson (2002) Collis and Hussey (2003)
Definition of the research problem	Critical review of literature	Clear statement of the research problem. Provides a framework for establishing the importance of the research to be undertaken	Marshall and Rossman (2006) Creswell (2009)

	Identification of the gap in the knowledge and justification of the research problem	New findings and/or theories may emerge. Indicates a suitable research problem Explores the extent of the current knowledge within the subject area	Corbyn and Strauss (2008) Creswell (2009) Fellows and Lui (2008)
	Formulation of aim and objectives, research questions.	Assists the researcher to further refine the research objectives	Saunders et al. (2012)
Establish research philosophy and Research methodology	Research philosophy Research methodology	Provides insight into research approach and available strategies. Increase knowledge and understanding of available research methodologies. Identifies research strategy used in similar research studies of the subject area	Gall et al. (2006) Collis and Hussey (2003) Saunders *et al*. (2012) Bryman (2008) Creswell (2009)
Analysis of data collection and conclusions	Allows the researcher to answer the research questions. Allows comparison of research findings with similar studies	Indicates relationships within the data to enable the research questions to be answered and objective to be met. Provides information to be used to benchmark findings	Gall et al. (2006) Saunders et al. (2012) Creswell (2009)

Table 5 - Contribution of the literature on the research process.

4.7.2 Experimental Research

The experimental research approach relies upon the researcher to maintain control over all the factors that may affect the result of an experiment by determining or predicting what may occur. According to Cavana *et al*., (2001) experimental research can be both laboratory and/or field based, demonstrates an understanding of the way things could be if manipulated or changed and offers a high degree of reliability and internal validity. The participants' response to the factors affecting levels of satisfaction with their experience of higher education may be difficult to ascertain as satisfaction is a concept influenced by human perception. Therefore, experimental research may not be able to capture the human factors associated with influencing levels of satisfaction within the context of this research study.

4.7.3 Survey Research

The term 'survey' generally refers to the collection of information from a large sample of people that can then be analyzed to make inferences about the wider population. Survey is a non-experimental, descriptive research method that can be useful when a researcher wants to collect data about phenomena that cannot be directly observed. This method does not require a high degree of control over the environment and is commonly used to address the 'what' type of question (Yin, 2009). Surveys are used extensively as a research tool to assess attitudes and characteristics on a wide range of subjects providing a 'snapshot' of the current situation (Denscombe, 1998). This research method is used extensively to assess the levels of satisfaction of students with their experience of higher education in the UK. As indicated in the literature, data collected in the National Student Survey (NSS) is used extensively by the UK government, the higher education funding bodies and universities themselves as an indicator of quality and provides the 'snapshot' of current satisfaction levels. The data collected is a rich source of information regarding the satisfaction levels of students and therefore use of this data forms an important element in the understanding of the context for the in-depth analysis of the factors influencing student perceptions.

4.7.4 Case Study Research

Case study research involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence (Robson, 2002). Yin (2009) emphasizes the importance of context and the relationship between the context and the phenomena being researched. Case study research aims to provide rich understanding of the relationships and interactions between a host of events and factors (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Yin (2009) further emphasises the need to understand the type of research questions being asked and how the case study approach has considerable ability to help generate answers to the 'why?' and 'how?' questions (Saunders *et al*., 2012). According to Gill and Johnson (2010) the data collection used in case study research may include the analysis of records or documents, in-depth interviews, large-scale structured surveys, participant and non-participant observation and the collection of all available forms of data. Case studies are often designed to use a mix of data collection methods and as a result will require triangulation of the data to ensure the conclusions arrived at are what the researcher believes them to be.

Case studies may offer some flexibility in the approach to the research as they can focus on single or multiple cases. Single cases often form the basis for research on typical, deviant, or critical cases, whereas multiple cases can be limited to two or three settings to compare and contrast different cases. However, the ability to make generalisations from the findings of a case study often increases with the number of cases covered (Yin, 1994; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Mitchell, 2002). Given that this study aims to solve the "why?' and 'how?' form of question, the selection of a case study methodology seems appropriate. The use of various date collection methods including interviews and analysis of the data gathered from the NSS questionnaire surveys over time, offers a reliable means of capturing students' perceptions of their experience of higher education within the identified context and it also answers the research questions.

The strategies described above represent a number of the available strategies identified within the literature. Each of the identified research strategies have advantages and

disadvantages but none should be considered as more superior to another and can be linked to the ontological, epistemological and axiological continuum (see Figure 16) The most important consideration is selecting a research strategy than provides the most coherent research design to address the research question and meet the objectives of the study.

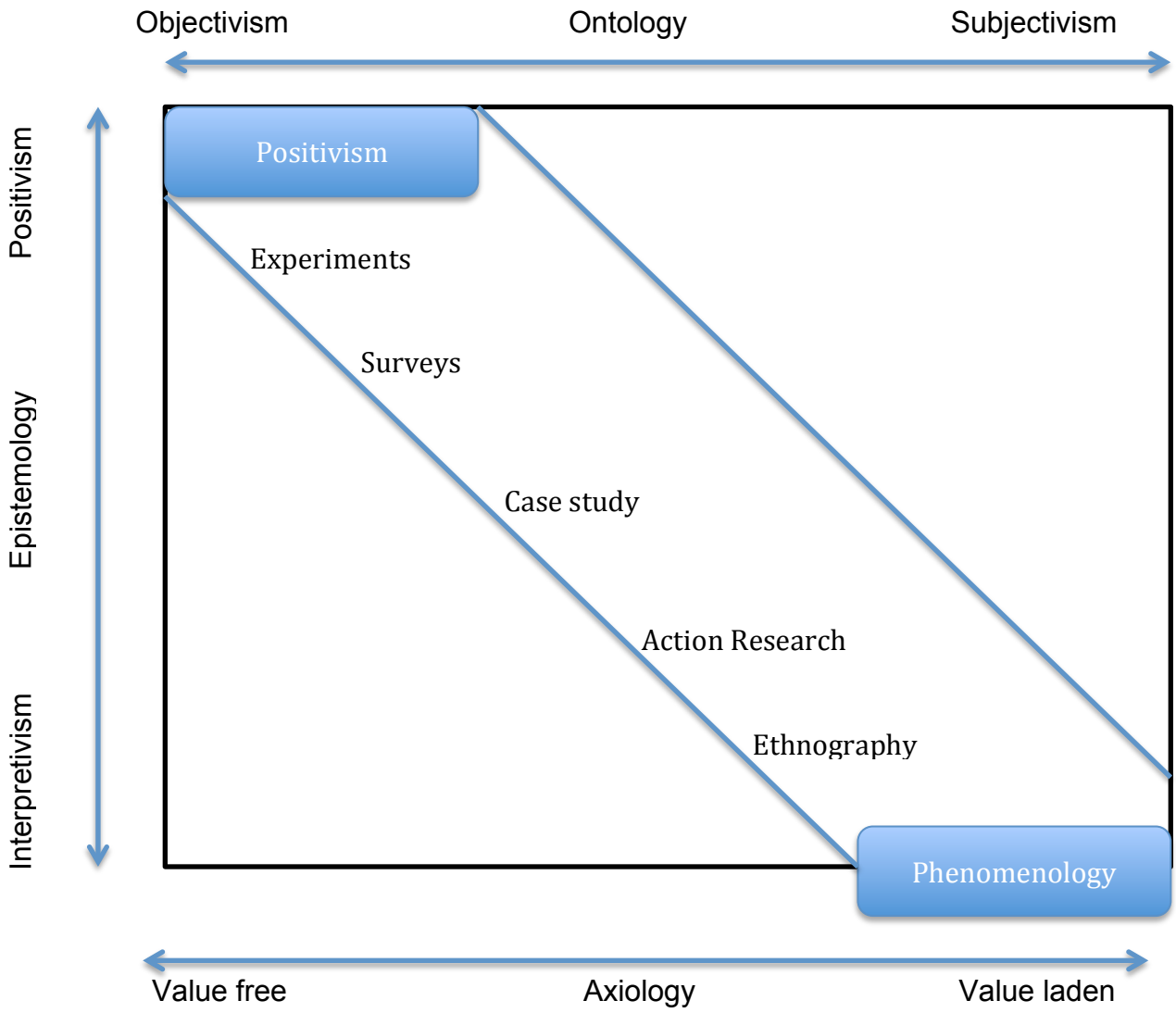


Figure 16 - Research approaches with the ontological, epistological and axiological continuum (adapted from Sexton, 2003).

This research takes a phenomenological stance and according to (Sexton, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009) action research, ethnography and grounded theory and case study are options available to research leaning toward phenomenology. This research is not seeking to describe the frequency of a phenomenon in terms of the overall objectives so survey is not considered to be the appropriate research approach. Equally, the research is not seeking to describe a culture-sharing group as in ethnography or dialogue and reflection based on data from experience as in action research. Therefore, the researcher adopts the case study strategy as the most appropriate for answering the research questions. As this study aims to provide holistic and rich accounts of the respondents' perceptions of their satisfaction with their experience of higher education within the School of Built Environment, the researcher believes a case study strategy is best suited to meet the aim and objectives of this research, as stated in section 1.2 and 1.3.

4.8 The Selection of the Research Strategy for this research study.

As previously stated, a case study approach is the most appropriate to answer the identified research questions. A case study approach allows the researcher to explore a new phenomenon or the identified phenomenon in a particular context. The evidence gathered from a case study is typically qualitative in nature and focuses on developing an in-depth view rather than a breadth of understanding. Yin (2009) describes case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence. In case study research, the researcher is responsible for collecting data during complex interactions with an individual or group thereby enhancing the researcher's subjective understanding of the situation. Data obtained from participants in the case study, forms the basis of the interpretation that the researcher makes to understand what happens in the real world situation. Yin (2009) suggests case study research allows for the exploration and understanding of complex issues. It is considered a robust research method particularly when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required. The case study method does however have a number of limitations. Case studies can be time consuming and can provide a wealth of information that can be difficult to analyse. According to Yin (2009), reliability may be a weakness as the researcher may lack training in interview

techniques that may result in unreliable observation, generalisation and conclusions. Another limitation is that case study offers *'little basis for scientific for generalisation'* (Yin 2009). Despite the limitations described above, case study research does allow the researcher to focus on a specific phenomenon and to identify the various interactive processes at work. The case study approach can use one of a number of basic designs including single or multiple case studies and can be a holistic (single unit of analysis) or an embedded (multiple units of analysis) design depending upon the number of units of analysis involved (Yin, 1994) as shown in Figure 17 below. A single case study design is used where it represents a critical, extreme or unique case, alternatively, when the case is representative or typical, revelatory or longitudinal (Yin 2009). The rationale for using multiple cases is related to the ability to replicate the outcomes across cases. The ability to predict the outcome across cases provides strong support for theoretical propositions on which the predictions were based.

In the context of this research study, the factors affecting student perceptions of their experiences of higher education within the School of Built Environment need to be identified in order to fully interpret the results of the NSS and develop a conceptual framework to improve the experience for students. Using the case study strategy, the researcher is able to go beyond an analysis of the quantitative results of the NSS and understand the behavioural conditions from the student perspective. The case study strategy for this case study is a single embedded case study approach. Miles and Huberman (1994) define the unit of analysis as a *"phenomenon of some sort of occurring in a bonded context".*

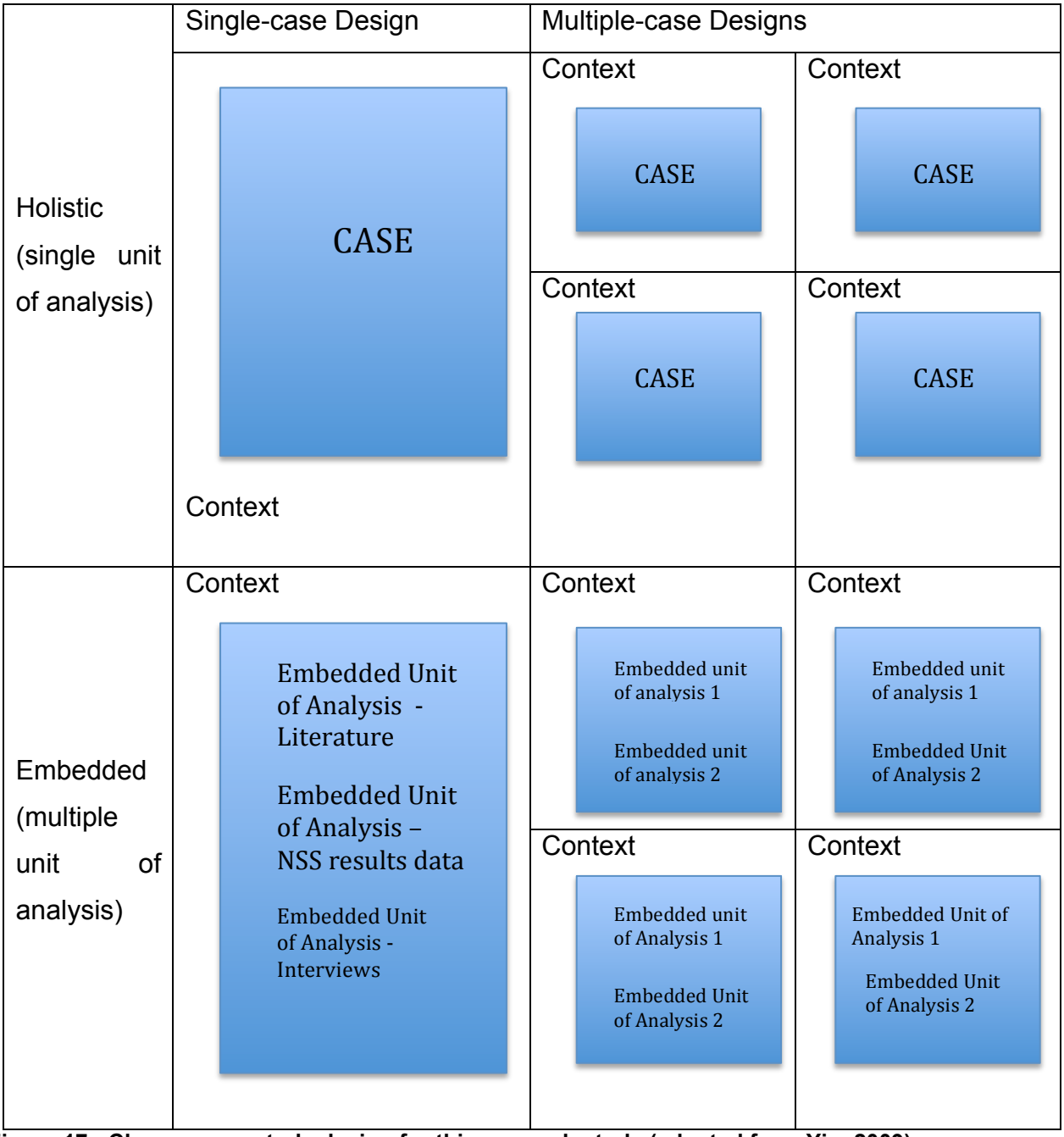


Figure 17 - Chosen case study design for this research study (adapted from Yin, 2009).

4.8.1 Data Collection Tools

Several strategies exist to facilitate the collection and investigation of data when undertaking a research project of this nature. The identification of the most appropriate method of data collection is vital due to the inevitable impact it will have on the eventual

analysis of the information collected. The research methods used will affect the results, conclusions and overall validity of the study.

To allow selection of the most appropriate methods of collecting data it was necessary to identify the key sources of evidence and the strengths and weaknesses of each method of collecting data to support the case study approach (as shown in table 6 below). This information can be used to assess the appropriate data required and the tools needed to collect the data for the subject area being researched. An assessment was undertaken of all the potential data collection methods available and it was established that a number of sources of evidence would need to be analysed to build the case study. The use of multiple sources of evidence allows the researcher to analyse a broader range of issues (Yin, 2009). Triangulation of the results of the analysis can then be undertaken to ensure the conclusions of the case study are more convincing and accurate as a piece of research. Therefore, from the evidence available the case study will be reliant upon analysis of documentary evidence in the form of a critical review of the literature and of the results of the NSS data over time, archival records, semi-structured interviews and direct observation. Semi-structured interviews are considered to be the most appropriate source of primary data collection. This method would allow the researcher to gather qualitative data that explores the issues important to each participant and the interrelationship between the identified issues.

Source of Evidence	**Strength**	**Weakness**
Documentation	• Stable-can be reviewed repeatedly • Unobtrusive-not created as a result of the case study • Exact-contains exact names, references, and details of an event • Broad coverage-long span of time, many events, and many settings	• Retrievability -can be low • biased selectivity, if collection is incomplete • reporting bias - reflects (unknown) bias of author • access – may be deliberately blocked
Archival Records	• (Same as above for documentation) • precise and quantitative	• (Same as above for documentation) • accessibility due to privacy reasons

Interviews	• targeted-focuses directly on case study topic • insightful-provides perceived causal inferences	• bias due to poorly constructed questions • response bias • inaccuracies due to poor recall • reflectivity-interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear
Direct Observations	• reality - covers events in real time • contextual – covers context of event	• time-consuming • selectivity – unless broad coverage • reflexivity – event may proceed differently because it is being observed • cost – hours needed by human observers
Participant-Observation	• (Same as above for direct observations) • insightful into interpersonal behaviour and motives	• (Same as above for direct observations) • bias due to investigator's manipulation of events
Physical Artefacts	• Insightful into cultural features • Insightful into technical operations	• Selectivity • Availability

Table 6: Six Sources of Evidences, strengths and weaknesses, Yin (2009).

4.8.2 Types of data

4.8.2.1 Quantitative Research

Quantitative research is defined as being '*objective*' in nature (Collis and Hussey, 2003) and is based on testing a theory composed of variables, rather than developing a theory (Naoum, 2002). Factual data, measured numerically, is collected and analysed, with the application of statistical tests, to study any relationship between such facts and the original theory/hypothesis. The factual data, according to Bouma & Atkinson (1995, cited Naoum, 2002) is "*hard and reliable*." Qualitative research is generally associated with positivism especially when used with predetermined and highly structured data collection methods (Saunders *et al.,* 2012). This strategy is typically associated with a

deductive approach where data is used to test theory. It is a strategy that examines relationships between variables, using numeric data collected using techniques such as experiments and surveys, which can then be subjected to detailed statistical analysis. However, it is possible to use this strategy with an inductive approach when the data is can be used by the researcher in theory building. Naoum (2002) states that quantitative research methods are best suited where facts regarding a concept are required and when factual evidence is needed to study relationships between these facts, in order to test a specific theory.

4.8.2.2 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is *'subjective'* in nature (Collis & Hussey, 2003), it emphasises meanings, experiences and description the purpose of which, according to Fellows (1997), is *"to gain understanding and collect information and data such that theories will emerge."* Naoum (2002) believes that qualitative research can be classified under two categorises; exploratory and attitudinal. The purpose of exploratory research is to diagnose a certain situation or discover new ideas, (Naoum, 2002) and is typically used when a limited amount of knowledge is held in relation to a chosen topic. The raw data that is collected will be precisely what people have to say, and will provide a clear and specific account of a distinguished problem. Attitudinal research concentrates on the opinions, views, or perceptions of a person, in relation to a particular subject.

Whereas quantitative research typically involves the statistical evaluation of numerical data, *"qualitative implies that the data are in the form of words as opposed to numbers."* (Rudestam, 1992). Qualitative research is often associated with an interpretive philosophy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) as the research undertaken attempts to make sense of the subjective and socially constructed meaning of the phenomenon under consideration. The approach is often considered as naturalistic as the researcher needs to be able to operate within a specific context *"in order to establish trust, participation, access to meanings and in-depth understanding*" (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Qualitative research is typically associated with an inductive approach where an emergent research design is used to develop a richer theoretical perspective than exists in the literature. However, as Yin (2009) contends, a qualitative research strategy can begin with a

deductive approach, to test an existing theoretical position. Qualitative research is used by the researcher to examine the meanings attributed by the participants' to the factors associated with the research study and any relationships between them to develop a conceptual framework. The data collection methods employed are often non-standard and may develop throughout the research process as the data become available. Examples of research strategies appropriate for this type of research include case study, action research, ethnography and Grounded Theory.

4.8.2.3 Multiple Methods Approach.

The philosophical position of a research study may lead the researcher to consider the use of a Multiple Methods approach to effectively address the research question. This particularly applies to two philosophical positions namely Realism and Pragmatism. The Realist believes that while there is *"an external, objective reality"* in the world we live in (Saunders *et al,* 2012); the way in which individuals interpret and understand will be affected by social conditioning at an individual level. Tashakkori and Teddlie, (2010) suggest that in order to accommodate this *'realist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, researchers may adopt a strategy of using quantitative analysis of officially published data followed by the use of qualitative research methods to explore perceptions'*. This approach has been used as the research strategy for this research study. Pragmatism may also lead to a Multiple Method approach as the pragmatist views the research question and the nature of the research study to be the driving force behind the choice of research strategy used. Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be used within the same study (Nastasi *et al,* 2010). Multiple Methods research design may be deductive or inductive in nature and may be a combination of both. A quantitative approach may be used to test a theoretical position that is then further tested using a qualitative approach.

4.8.2.4 Secondary Information

The data gathered using quantitative and qualitative methods is known as primary data, as it is collected first hand by the researcher (Naoum, 2002). Secondary data consists of information that is assembled and presented by other authors and researchers active in

the field and is used to contextualise and further analyse primary information gathered by research.

The range of research strategies available to the researcher includes experiments, surveys, case studies, action research and ethnography (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2007). Experimental research is concerned primarily with precision, survey research with generality, case study is systemic and holistic, action research considers issues related to the utilisation of knowledge and experience while ethnography considers with the character of the particular context (Gill and Johnson, 2002).

4.8.2.5 Methods of Data Collection

The decision to choose a specific research methodology should be based on its suitability to answer the research questions (Bryman, 1988). A combination of data collection methods has been used for this research as shown in Figure 18, to assist with the collection of a range of information in order to gain a deeper understanding of the context in addition to the phenomenon at the centre of the case study. The use of a number of research methods assists the researcher in gaining an insight into the whole picture, as the results from one source can be used to refine, shape, clarify and to confirm the other (Oppenheim, 1992). The use of a number of data sources and different data collection methodologies can assist with demonstrating the validity of the research finding by making it more credible and acceptable. The use of the different methods outlined produces a more robust picture of the context in which the students are reporting their satisfaction with their experience of higher education.

The data collection to contribute to the case study has a number of strands as demonstrated below:

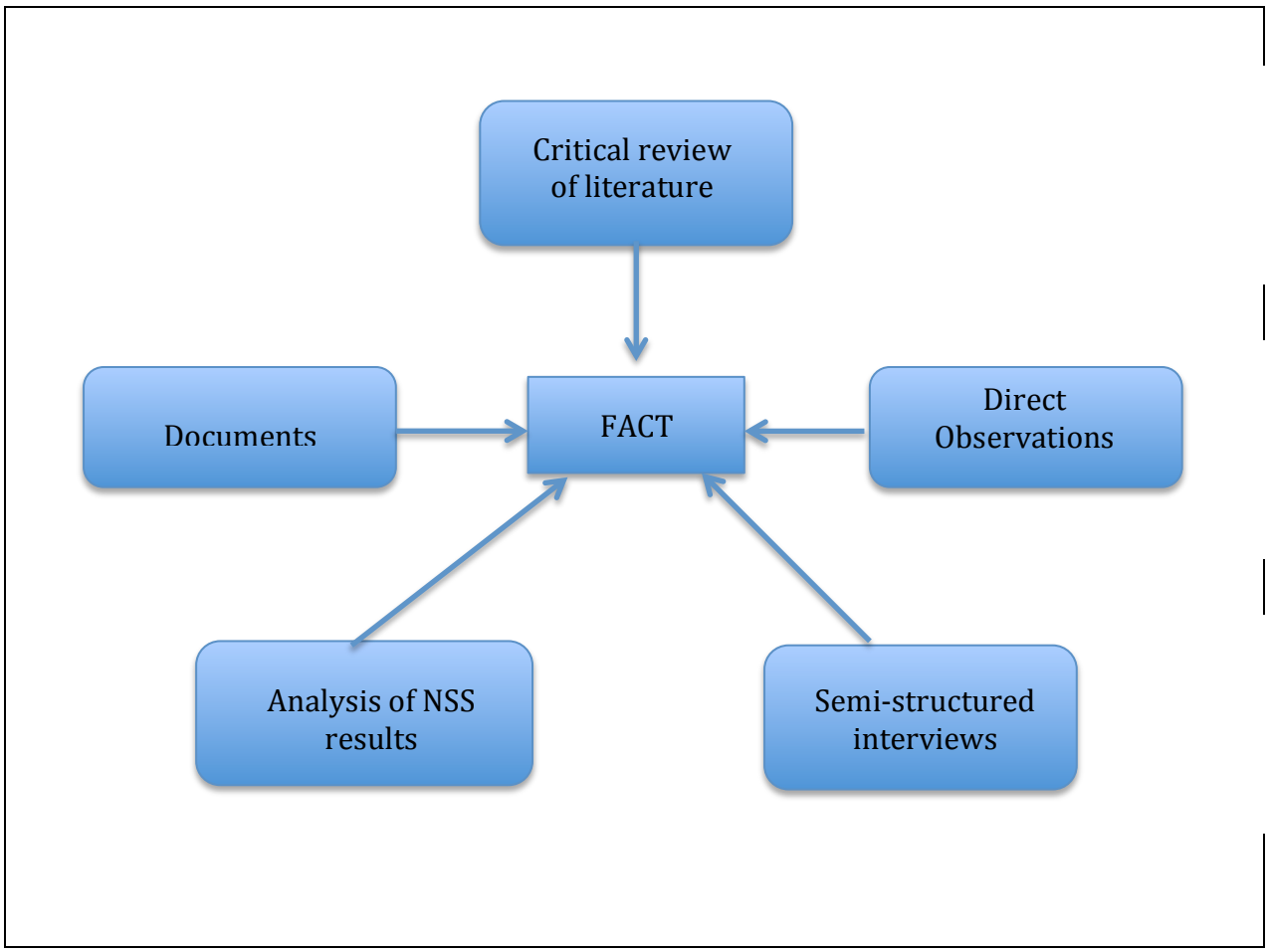


Figure 18 - Convergence of evidence for the case study based on Yin (2009).

A quantitative trend analysis of key measures of student satisfaction using published data from NSS in relation to the University of Salford and the School of the Built Environment will be undertaken to establish the performance of the university and identify any trends over time. Access to the published information does not present any problems as it is available on the University of Salford Planning and Performance website which includes detailed information regarding the overall university performance over several years in addition to the detailed information relating to each school. However, an on-going dialogue will be maintained with Planning regarding the use of data. A detailed quantitative analysis will be undertaken of the NSS results for the undergraduate cohorts within the school of Built Environment over the past seven years to establish trends in satisfaction levels, differences of satisfaction levels between cohorts of students and mode of study etc. Additionally, an analysis will be undertaken of the additional written comments the students provided to supplement the questions

on the NSS. The analysis will be undertaken using the software package Nvivo 10 in order to identify the key issues provided by the students relating to positive and negative issues which impact on their satisfaction levels.

4.8.2.6 Interview Process

Since the interview stage of the research is to form a major element of the case study, it is important to be able to collect the information required through the interview in a form that can be effectively analysed. It is evident throughout the literature on research methodology that three main methods of undertaking interviews exist, namely unstructured, semi-structured and structured. Based on the available theory, the researcher concluded that interviews using a semi-structured format would be the most appropriate method of collecting the necessary information. The justification for this approach is that the data collected using semi-structured interviews may be used to understand the relationships between the variables in the study. This is important to this case study as the perceived experience as an undergraduate student in the School of the Built Environment, is shown from the reported results of the NSS, to vary significantly and therefore the questions would need to be asked around key themes to understand why this should be so. Due to the nature of this research study, it was decided that the researcher required the ability to explore issues as they arose during the interview and to accommodate the potential divergence in knowledge and experience of the participants.

4.8.2.7 Triangulation

Triangulation of data when using multiple data collection methods allows for more credible and dependable research outcomes (Saunders *et al*., 2012; Decrop, 1999). According to Williamson (2005), the main purpose for the use of triangulation of the data when using multiple methods of data collection is to avoid possible errors and biases inherent when using any single methodology. The purpose of triangulating the data is to strengthen the confidence of the research findings (Arksey and Knight, 1999). Decrop (1999) notes that triangulation can reduce and/or eliminate personal and methodological biases and increase the probability of generalising the findings of a study as the data is gathered from different sources and by using different collection methods. Triangulation

can be used to deepen the researchers‘ understanding of the issues and maximize the researchers confidence in the findings of qualitative studies. Patton (1987) identified four types of triangulation that can be used including;

- data triangulation (gathering data from several sources),
- investigator triangulation (the use of multiple researchers to gather and interpret data),
- theoretical triangulation (the use of more than one theoretical position in interpreting data) and,
- methodological triangulation (the use of multiple methods to gather data).

Triangulation is used for the purpose of ensuring completeness, as any single methodology will have inherent flaws. The contingency rationale is about the need for insight into how and why a particular strategy is chosen and the confirmation rationale is to ensure a robust and generalisable set of findings (Adami and Kiger, 2005).

In respect of this research study, data and methodological triangulations are the major methods used to evaluate the outcome of this research. This has been accomplished through collecting data from different sources and by using multiple methods, including: critical review of the literature, semi-structured interviews, use of documentary information from the results of the NSS and by direct observation. The researcher first conducted a trend analysis of the quantitative NSS results. This was followed by an analysis of the verbatim comments and related documentation. Key themes were identified as a result of this review that formed the basis of the questions for the semi-structured interviews. The outcome of all the data collected was triangulated in order to answer the research questions and achieve the objectives. This approach is supported by Gray (2009) who notes that the use of multiple methods assists in data triangulation and is an effective way to overcome most of the weaknesses of each method used.

4.9 Case Study.

A detailed case study will be undertaken to explore the student experience in the Case Study School and to use the insights gained to produce a conceptual framework for methods the School can use to improve the student experience. As detailed in Figure 18, the case study relies on data from multiple sources to explore the phenomenon and the context of the study.

In addition to a critical review of the literature, an exploration of relevant documentation will be undertaken relating to university policy and procedure relating to teaching, learning and assessment and any policy relating to the NSS. This will explore the experiences of each school in achieving set performance targets; review any measures that have proven successful in improving NSS scores and also any perceived barriers to the policy implementation. This will be supplemented with information regarding typical cohorts of undergraduate students within Case Study School including information relating to average cohort size, age, gender, mode of study, entry grades. A trend analysis will be undertaken of the quantitative results of the NSS over a seven-year period of time for each programme within the School. This can be used to show any changes over time, any significant differences between different reporting periods and any trends. The NSS provides the students with an opportunity to include comments regarding any issue considered by the survey and these comments are provided in addition to the quantitative data. These verbatim comments provide a rich source of data relating to issues contributing to a positive or negative experience and an analysis of the comments over the seven-year period will be undertaken using the Nvivo 10 to identify key themes and issues affecting the students. This analysis will consider matters that impact positively and negatively on the student experience. The identified key themes and issues will be further investigated with students using semi-structured interviews to explore these matters in some detail. Direct observation of the environment in which the teaching, learning and assessment is taking place to further support the contextualisation of the case study will be undertaken as necessary.

4.9.1 Institutional Context

There are clear issues with trying to compare higher education institutions. Many factors such as the history and reputation of an institution, the demographics of the student body and the programmes of study offered are likely to impact on the expectations of students and the experience they receive. Many universities specialise in different fields such as medicine, business, law or arts and media. Research suggests that some students respond differently to student surveys than others (Wiers-Jenssen *et al*., 2002). Students at medical schools generally respond more positively than do students on applied art or arts subjects. Students undertaking engineering courses appear to be the most reluctant to respond. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that the means of completing the survey influences the responses in terms of levels of satisfaction and those early responders to the survey are more satisfied than later responders. (Williams & Cappuccini-Ansfield, 2007).

The original University of Salford, then called the Salford Technical Institute, was founded in 1896 to meet the demands of the thriving industries in the region at that time. The two universities finally merged into a single institution in 1996 – exactly 100 years after the formation of the original Royal Technical Institute. The University of Salford is committed to widening access to higher education for all parts of the community and is proud to be in the top 10 HE institutions for widening participation for all applicants.

Student Profile

- 51.5% female, 48.5% male.
- 22.6% of UK-based undergraduate new entrants are from black or minority ethnic backgrounds.
- 64.3% of UK-based undergraduate students are mature (over 21) on entry.
- Entry requirements are between 220 and 320 UCAS tariff points.

4.9.2 BUILT ENVIRONMENT CONTEXT

The results of the National Student Survey (NSS) reveal that the overall satisfaction levels with built environment courses are on average lower than that of other subjects

(Higher Education Academy, 2012). Built environment programmes have consistently underperformed on the National Student Survey when compared to the "all subject" results. This is of concern to institutions offering built environment programmes and to some extent to those stakeholders who rely on the university sector to provide a high quality education that meets the requirements of the industry and the professional bodies. Built Environment higher education provides the construction industry with a supply of graduates to undertake the professional roles within the sector that is increasingly important as university level programmes are becoming the norm for managerial roles and professional body recognition. In order to attract high quality applicants to built environment programmes and to the construction industry, it is important to understand the reasons for the lower satisfaction levels to ensure these issues can be addressed to produce a more positive outcome. As demonstrated in Table 7 below, built environment programmes are underperforming when compared with 'all-courses' with some significant differences between the built environment programmes available. Building Surveying has the lowest satisfaction levels of all the programmes with Real Estate producing the highest satisfaction.

	Number of courses	Sector mean	Sector min	sector max	Sector median
All courses	25,549	90.5	12	100	92
All buildings	560	82.7	42	100	85
Building Surveying	28	74.9	42	93	77.5
Quantity Surveying	28	78.4	52	92	79.5
Construction Management	37	80.5	57	94	82
Real Estate	32	81.7	63	96	83

Table 1: Comparison of sector scores for overall satisfaction with the course

Table 7: Comparison of sector scores for overall satisfaction with the course. The Higher Education Academy (2013)

The results for Built Environment programmes at the University of Salford appear to conform to the identified trend for Built Environment students reporting they are less satisfied than other students nationally (HEA, 2012) and students studying within the

same institution. The complex interaction between the identified factors that will impact on the NSS results for built environment programmes does present challenges for institutions and programme teams in their efforts to improve the student experience. The institutional context also provides an important dimension relating to all the above factors. The size of the institution, the cohort size, facilities and the demographics of the cohort etc. will impact on any measures taken to improve student satisfaction and it is unlikely that a one-size fits all approach will provide the required improvements.

Built Environment students do present particular challenges in improving satisfaction rates. The research indicates that as a subject group, Built Environment students are less satisfied that the other students on average, male students generally are less likely to report they are satisfied with the student experience (HEA, 2012), part-time students are less satisfied than full-time students and the type of institution plays a role. The results of the NSS for University of Salford Built Environment programmes compared with the average for the University and the average results for all higher education over a four-year period of time. The results paint a mixed picture with some significant fluctuations in satisfaction levels particularly relating to the Building Surveying programme. The results are interesting given some aspects of the student experience will be the same for all programmes e.g. the organisation and management, the facilities at the institution including library and I.T etc. An interesting aspect of the results relates to the differences in reported satisfaction rates given many of the modules on each programme are taught jointly with all programmes.

4.10 Semi-structured interviews

The purpose of undertaking semi-structured interviews was to allow the researcher to collect qualitative data by providing the respondents the opportunity and time to discuss their experiences and opinions relating to the identified key themes and issues affecting student experience and also provide further information that may have not been identified via the analysis of the verbatim comments. While the focus of the interview is controlled by the researcher, Bryman (2006) supports the view that semi-structured interviews are flexible in terms of the process, allowing the interviewee's own perspectives to be explored. When conducting semi-structured interviews, the

interviewer has a list of issues and questions to be discussed but has some flexibility in the order of the topics covered and can allow the interviewee to elaborate on the issues raised (Denscombe 2010). Strauss and Corbin (1998) argue that the initial interview questions may be based on prior literature or experience. For this study, the questions were based around factors affecting the perceived quality of the student experience based on matters identified in the literature and as a result of the analysis of the NSS verbatim comments. However, the original questions may be altered during the data collection process to allow emerging concepts to be pursued (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This process was followed during the study and some questions were slightly adapted.

As part of the detailed case study into the quality of experience of the case study students, 30 students from across all construction related undergraduate programmes were invited to take part to reflect the experiences of students at different levels of study rather than limit it to level 6 when the NSS takes place. This sample included students from both the full time and part time modes of study. A non-probability sampling technique was used to select students to participate in the study. In order to answer the research question it is important to undertake an in-depth study focussing on a statistically small number of participants selected for their experience and insight to the research area. As a result the samples are unlikely to be statistically representative of the total population but the will provide the depth of insight required to meet the aim. Purposive sampling using a heterogeneous sampling technique was used to select the interviewee's to participate in the research. The students were selected based on the programme of study, the mode of study and gender to ensure a representative sample to include all of the identified groups within the case study. Students at level 5 and 6 of the identified programmes were contacted by email and asked to participate in the research interview. The students at Level 6 were invited to participate but the interviews could not be conducted until after the closure of the official NSS to ensure no unintended influence could be put on the student contribution to the actual survey. An anticipated consequence of this is that it may result in low participation rates of Level 6 students due to the limited time frame for the interviews to be undertaken after the NSS closes and when the students complete their studies. However, in practice sufficient students made themselves available for the interviews.

The interview questions address the research objectives identified in Chapter 1, section 1.3 and were designed to address the specific issues relating to the reasoning and motives behind the responses to the questionnaire with in-depth discussion of the issues raised. Open-ended questions were used that defined the areas to be explored but that allowed the interviewer and/or the interviewee to deviate to allow particular issues to be explored in more detail (Saunders *et al*., 2012). Open-ended questions were considered to be the most appropriate for this study as they can initiate discussions between the researcher and the participant around the area of study. This will provide a focus for the interviews to allow an in-depth analysis of the student experience, areas of good practice, areas of concern, motivating factors for responses given etc.

The semi-structured interviews with students consisted of a total of 30 participants from across a range of construction undergraduate programmes including BSc (Hons) Quantity Surveying, BSc (Hons) Building Surveying, BSc (Hons) Construction Project Management and BSc (Hons) Architectural Design Technology from both levels 5 and 6. The total number of interview participants was reached therefore the decision to stop interviewing participants was taken when it was determined that no new themes emerged from the interviews and a state of theoretical saturation had been achieved. The participants were encouraged to highlight their own perceptions of their experience of higher education within the given context and in relation to the questions. The interviews give the researcher the opportunity to engage with the participant and explore the responses made in real time. The interviews revealed a good deal of information regarding what the students considered to be important to them and also how this related to their own personal situation, ambitions and impact of the decision to study on their own life experiences. This appeared to have an influence on the perception of their experience and it was important to a number of the participants to focus on this aspect in some depth. During the interviews the researcher reflected back on responses given to check that they had been properly understood and also to prompt more detailed responses to key issues.

4.10.1 Semi-structured interviews with Academic staff.

A non-probability sampling technique was used to select academic staff members to participate in the study. In order to answer the research question it is important to undertake an in-depth study focussing on a statistically small number of participants selected for their experience and insight to the research area. As a result the samples are unlikely to be statistically representative of the total population but the will provide the depth of insight required to meet the aim. Purposive sampling using a heterogeneous sampling technique was used to select the interviewee's to participate in the research. Eight semi-structured interviews where undertaken with staff from the Case Study School undertaking a range of roles including senior management concerned with the management and resourcing of the teaching activities, Programme Leaders involved with the direct management of the identified programmes of study and lecturers who are primarily involved in teaching. All of the staff interviewed has responsibility for the management and delivery of undergraduate modules within the school. The participants were encouraged to highlight their own perceptions of their experience within the given context and in relation to the issues identified by the analysis of the data gathered from the students. The interviews give the researcher the opportunity to engage with the participant and to explore the responses made in real time. During the interviews the researcher reflected back on responses given to check that they had been properly understood and also to prompt more detailed responses to key issues. The total number of interview participants was reached by ensuring an adequate representation from the target group of participants with due consideration of the data collected.

4.11 Data Analysis

The collection and analysis of data was undertaken in a number of phases, the first phase consisting of the trend analysis of the quantitative results of the NSS and qualitative analysis of the verbatim comments from the NSS. This was followed by the analysis of the qualitative data gathered from the semi-structured interviews. The results of the analysis from both phases are then triangulated with the other identified sources including the critical review of the literature, the review of the documentation

and the direct observation during the interpretation and discussion of results. For this study the findings from the analysis of the data was used to build the case study and the different sources of data to validate the overall conclusions of the case study.

4.11.1 Use of Nvivo 10

Nvivo 10 is a software package that is used to assist researchers to manage, organise and analyse qualitative data. It has many features to assist with the analysis of large quantities of qualitative data although the software does not perform any of the analysis. The nature of this research project with a large volume of qualitative data from seven years of NSS verbatim comments, the semi-structured interviews and relevant literature it is necessary to organise the data effectively to allow the data to be analysed. Nvivo 10 was used within this research project in the following ways;

- Literature in the form of journal papers, policy documents, book chapters and additional reference material was stored in Nvivo 10 to allow for cross-referencing of identified themes across all sources of data.
- The verbatim comments from the NSS were imported into Nvivo.
- The digital voice recordings of the semi-structured interviews were imported into Nvivo along with the transcription of the interviews.
- The project for this research project was created with a suitable node structure to manage the information and to assist with cross-referencing.
- The saved information was coded following the steps outlined by Smith and Osborn (2008). The analysis initially followed pre-established nodes based on the categories of questions in the NSS survey and to reflect ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ views from the students. New nodes were generated as the data collection and analysis progressed.
- The identified themes and concepts were analysed further using the software to highlight any relationships. These relationships were explored further to establish links between the research data and to compare and contract with the literature.
- The Modelling tools within the software were used to graphically represent the data structure and the relationships between the emerging themes.

4.11.2 Analysis of the published NSS results.

The analysis of the available data has been undertaken in several stages including a general trend analysis of the quantitative data published by IPSOS MORI relating to the University of Salford and the specific programmes offered by the School of the Built Environment. The data was gathered over a period of seven years to ensure a sufficient period of time to be confident of identifying if any trends are present and the nature of any identified trends.

The aim of the analysis of this data is to discover any patterns, concepts, themes and meanings. A qualitative computer software package, Nvivo 10, was used to organise data into manageable nodes that according to Richards (1999), helps to manage and synthesise themes from large amounts of qualitative data. A detailed analysis of the verbatim comments from the NSS for Built Environment programmes was undertaken using Nvivo 10 to identify the key themes relating to the areas covered by the survey. According to Leedy and Ormord (2001), content analysis is used to establish the presence of certain words or phrases within a wide range of texts while Krippendorff (2004) describes content analysis as a "*research technique to make replicable and valid inferences from text to a context of their use"*. The detailed verbatim comments were entered into Nvivo 10 and a process of coding the information was undertaken to reflect the nature of the comments into positive or negative comments and how they relate to the questions on the NSS in terms of the question category for example an comment could be coded as relating to 'assessment' and could also be coded as a 'positive' comment. Coding of the data can be undertaken using inductive and deductive coding (Krippendorf, 2004; Bernard, 2000; Marying, 2000) methods depending upon the source of the data. Typically, the literature is coded deductively and the primary data coded inductively. This information was then analysed separately in terms of the comment in terms of the positive perception and how that relates to the overall student experience and separately in terms of how assessment impacted on the student perception of their experience. Further analysis was then undertaken to explore the relationships between the two factors and to explore if any further links could be identified. This has been undertaken to explore the reasons behind the positive or negative perceptions of the student experience as reported by the quantitative data. The data was further integrated

using tools within the software to establish the word frequency within the verbatim comments in any given area or within the entirety of the verbatim comments. The basis of this analysis was to identify any common themes that could be further explored within the semi-structured interviews (Jackson and Trochim, 2002; Silverman, 2001).

4.11.3 Semi-Structured Interview Data Analysis

The semi-structured interviews were recorded using a digital media recorder, with the consent of each participant, with an average duration of 45 minutes. According to Saunders *et al*., (2012) there is a need "*to create a full record of the interview, including contextual data*" as soon after its occurrence as possible to control bias and to produce reliable data for analysis. The interview data was initially analysed using content analysis to assist with the organization of the data into general themes. A key aspect of the analysis of the data collected using the semi-structured interview is the ability to search for meaning through the direct interpretation of what is being observed by the researcher as well as what is experienced and reported by the participants. When using case study as the research method, Yin (2003) stresses the importance of checking the data for patterns that may explain or identify causal connection in the database. The process of data analysis begins with the open coding of the data, which is the organisation and categorization of data in search of patterns, themes and meaning that emerges from the data. Dey (1993) and Yin (2009) describe the process of generating categories and reorganizing data as the beginning of the process of engaging with the data and the commencement of the analysis. Assigning the data into categories assists the researcher in making an initial identification of any emerging patterns. This is followed by a comparison of any identified patterns and any contrasts between patterns in order to reflect on any emerging complex threads in the data in order to make sense of them.

The data collected as a result of the semi-structured interviews with students was initially analysed using content analysis in Nvivo 10 to organise the data into general themes. Open coding of the data was used to categorise the data into the identified themes and to include any emerging themes not yet identified. Coding is the process of recording the responses a particular respondent gave to a question in terms of the category

established by the researcher using a tree node and free nodes. Axial coding was then used to look for any relationships between the identified categories of data. This process is to *"explore and explain a phenomenon (a subject of your research project) by identifying what is happening and why, the environmental factors that affect this (such as economic, technological, political, legal, social and cultural ones) how it is being managed within the context being examined, and the outcome of action that has been taken"* (Saunders *et al.,* 2009). Axial coding of the data was undertaken to identify any emerging relationships between the themes. The researcher can then attempt to verify the outcomes against the actual data in order for a process of testing these relationships. The outcome of the data analysis from all identified sources will be triangulated to produce evidence that can be used to draft a final conceptual framework for the increase in reported levels of student satisfaction within the School of Built Environment.

The final phase of the process is to ensure credibility of the findings. There are three ways in which to do this; the first is by validation which is generally used for studies that take on a more deductive approach, reliability is generally used for studies that take on a more inductive approach, however, where mixed data collection techniques have been employed, triangulation can be a valuable way of ensuring validity and that the data are telling you what you think they are telling you (Saunders *et al.,* 2009). Denzin (1978) defines triangulation as '*the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomena*'. This is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analysing a research question from multiple perspectives (Guion *et al.,* 2011). The data collected from the literature, the analysis of the NSS results plus the semi-structured interviews will be triangulated by mapping across both the qualitative and quantitative findings. This in turn will assist with refinement of the framework.

4.12 Ethical Approach to the research

The guidelines on ethical approval for this research have been consulted and approval granted by the University of Salford Research Ethics Committee. All processes involved in the communication with and respondent participation were conducted adhering to the

ethics interview guidelines, as proposed by Gillham (2005), affording care and respect to all participants involved. The ethical issues central to this research include informed consent, the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of information. An additional important ethical issue with this research study was to avoid any possible influence on the students when completing the actual NSS survey. This was achieved by avoiding interviewing any Level 6 students immediately before or during the period when the NSS was open for completion. Care was also taken within the interviews to avoid discussing the NSS but rather focussing the wording of the questions to refer to the identified aspects of the student experience. Participant information sheets were provided to potential participants to explain the purpose of the research. Potential participants were also given time to decide whether they would like to participate and to seek more information regarding the research. Participants were made aware of their right to decline to respond to any question (Cooper and Schindler, 2008). Participation in the research was voluntary, with informed consent obtained by the researcher prior to commencement of the interview. Written consent was obtained from participants using a consent form that was approved by the ethics committee. According to Miller and Bell (2002) and Wright *et al*., (2004) it is increasingly important for researchers to obtain written consent from participants rather than relying on verbal consent. The anonymity of interview participants was protected, as individuals were not identified at any point in the study and interview transcripts from participants were assigned a code that was used when presenting transcript quotations in the report of findings. The researcher avoided including any personal information about participants or using any quotations that may have made them identifiable at any point in the research.

The research was undertaken in a manner that ensured that participants are able to be confident that their privacy and confidentiality would be properly protected. Data collected for the research was held in the strictest of confidence. The computer on which data were stored was password protected and paper records were kept in a locked filing cabinet. Only the researcher had access to the data. On completion of the study the data files of the recorded interviews will be deleted after a reasonable period of time. Confidentiality issues were addressed as part of the informed consent process and details of how data would be kept confidential were described on the participant information sheet, in keeping with guidelines for best practice (Oliver 2003).

4.13 Reliability and Validity

The quality of the research study may be measured by the tactics employed by the researcher to ensure the research is reliable and valid (Saunders *et al.,* 2012). Yin (2009) contends that four criteria should be used to judge the quality of the research design, namely 'construct validity', 'internal validity', 'external validity' and 'reliability'. The philosophical stance of the research also needs to be taken into account as the criteria can take on different means within different philosophical stances (Easterby-Smith *et al.,* 2008). The qualitative nature of this research that takes the form of a case study can present challenges in ensuring the research is seen as credible.

4.14 Reliability

Reliability according to Bell (1993) *"is the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions".* From perspective of the social constructivist, reliability is about showing transparency in the manner in which any 'meaning' was attributed to the analysis of the data. This can be achieved with the production of detailed information regarding the procedures undertaken by the researcher during the design and analysis of the case study. This detailed information would allow the study to be repeated without deviation from the original. A case study database can assist with ensuring reliability.

Validity as defined by Collis and Hussey (2003) as the *"extent to which the research findings accurately represent what is really happening in the situation."* Research is often concerned with the investigation of relationships between several variables, with conclusions and inferences made regarding a population, if relationships are found. The validity of the conclusions resulting from this study are dependent upon the processes that form the structure of the investigation. Individually, these processes cannot be referred to as valid, but merely leading to valid conclusions. Construct validity is concerned with establishing suitable operational measures for the research being undertaken to ensure the research actually addresses the matters being studied (Remenyi, 1998). Construct validity was achieved in this research study through a process of triangulation of research techniques and data sources. Ensuring validity

when using semi-structured interviews can be achieved if the interviews are conducted carefully ensuring time is taken to clarify questions, probe meanings and explore responses and themes (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

4.13 Summary of Chapter

This chapter has described the research methodology and methods used in achieving the objectives of this study, which employs a qualitative research strategy. The research consideration and data collection strategy has been described in detail. The use of data from a number of sources including a critical review of the literature, published information from the NSS, supporting documentation to support the contextualisation of the case study and semi-structured interviews to achieve qualitative data. The issues of reliability, validity and bias have been considered in relation to the case study design.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS) DATA 2008-2015

5.1 Introduction

The analysis of the available data has been undertaken in several stages as described in the research method namely a general trend analysis of the quantitative data published by IPSOS MORI relating to the University of Salford and the specific undergraduate courses offered by the School of the Built Environment. A detailed analysis of the verbatim comments from the NSS for Built Environment programmes has been undertaken using Nvivo 10 to identify the key themes relating to the areas covered by the survey. This has been undertaken to explore the reasons behind the positive or negative perceptions of the student experience as reported by the quantitative data and the verbatim comments. The identified themes will be further explored using semi-structured interviews with a sample of students from the School of built Environment. Semi-structured interviews will also be conducted with a sample of Programme Directors and senior management staff within the school/university to ensure the institutional and school context is considered. The aim of the thesis is to produce a conceptual framework highlighting measures to improve the student experience within the School of Built Environment taking to account student expectations, perceptions of the student experience and the institutional context.

5.2 Trend Analysis of Quantitative Data relating to University of Salford and School of the Built Environment.

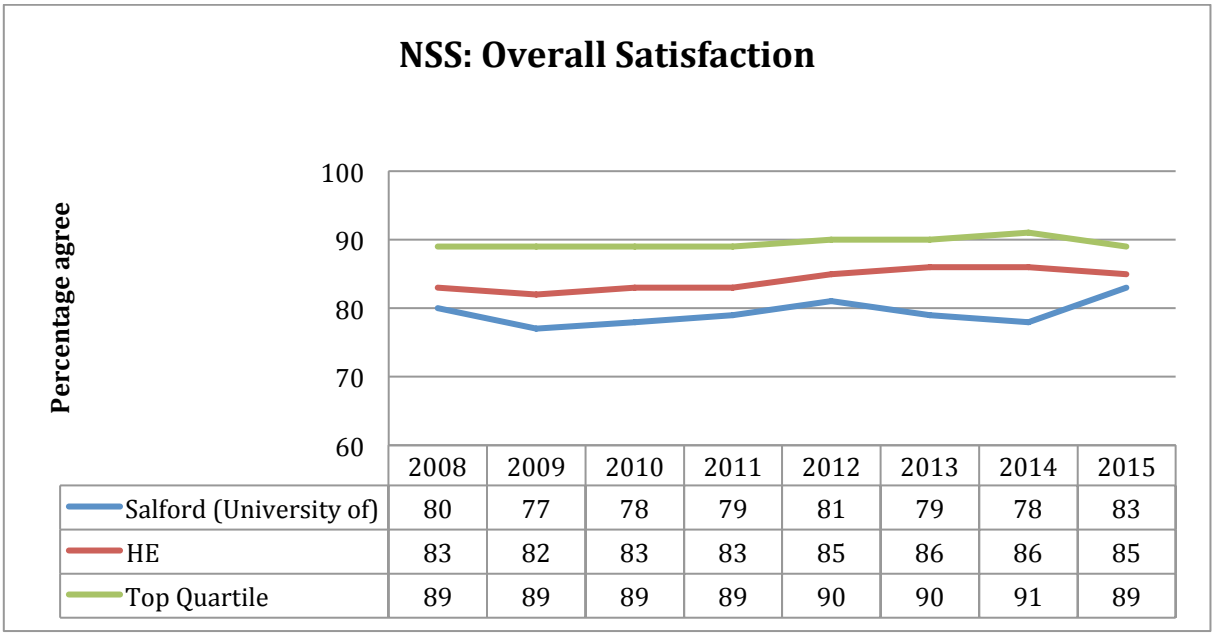
The results for the National Student Survey for the University of Salford over the period 2008 to 2015 are reported in Figures 19 – 25 below.

As demonstrated by the data shown in Figures 19 to 25, the University of Salford (CSI) is generally demonstrating a trend of increased student satisfaction levels with a

significant improvement of 5% in the 2015 survey compared with 2014, with overall satisfaction reaching 83%. As reported in the Times Higher Education Supplement (12/08/2015), the University of Salford achieved the second highest percentage points increase for overall satisfaction and is currently ranked 111th of 160 HEIs. Despite the gains made in improving levels of satisfaction, the data would suggest that the university is underperforming in levels of overall satisfaction when compared with the average results from all other Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) and is significantly underperforming when compared with HEI's in the top quartile. The levels of satisfaction also vary significantly in response to specific areas of questioning.

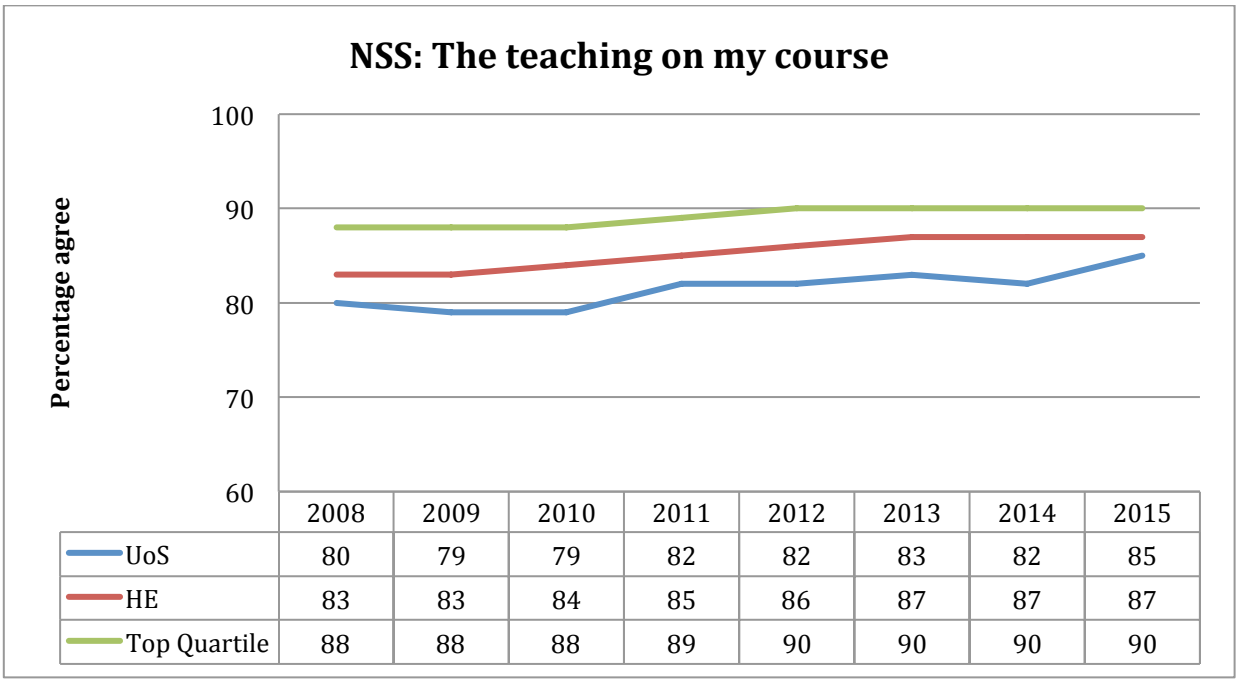
Figure 20 shows the responses for the questions relating to 'Teaching on my Course'. The results show that students at the University of Salford are reporting a lower satisfaction level when compared with the average of all HEI's and considerably lower than the top quartile universities. A general improving trend is demonstrated with the University of Salford recording levels of student satisfaction of 80% in 2008 increasing to 85% in 2015. However, the average of all HEI's is reported as 83% in 2008 improving to 87% in 2015 with the top quartile universities reporting 88% in 2008 increasing to 90% in 2015. The *'Assessment and Feedback'* category reports significantly lower levels of satisfaction across all institution groups and significantly lower than any other area of the student experience (Figure 21). The University of Salford has reported an 11 percentage point improvement from 64% in 2008 to 75% in 2015, the average of all HEI's has improved 12 percentage points from 64% in 2008 to 76% in 2015 with those institutions in the top quartile for Assessment and Feedback improving by 14 percentage points from 67% in 2008 to 81% in 2015. In relation to *'Learning Resources', 'Academic Support'* and *'Personal Development'* a steady improvement has been reported across all institutions including the University of Salford although the University of Salford lost some ground in 2011 and 2012 relating to *'Learning Resources'* but have managed to recover some ground in 2015 (Figure 24). In terms of reported rates of '*Overall Satisfaction'* the picture is mixed. The sector average has shown steady improvement from 83% in 2008 to 85% in 2015 with the top quartile consistently performing at the 89-91% level (Figure 19). The University of Salford has however experienced a fluctuating picture with a significant 3 percentage point drop in overall satisfaction levels in 2009 to

77% compared with 80% in 2008, improving to 81% in 2012 only to drop back again in 2013 to 79% with a subsequent increase to a high of 83% in 2015 (Figure 19).



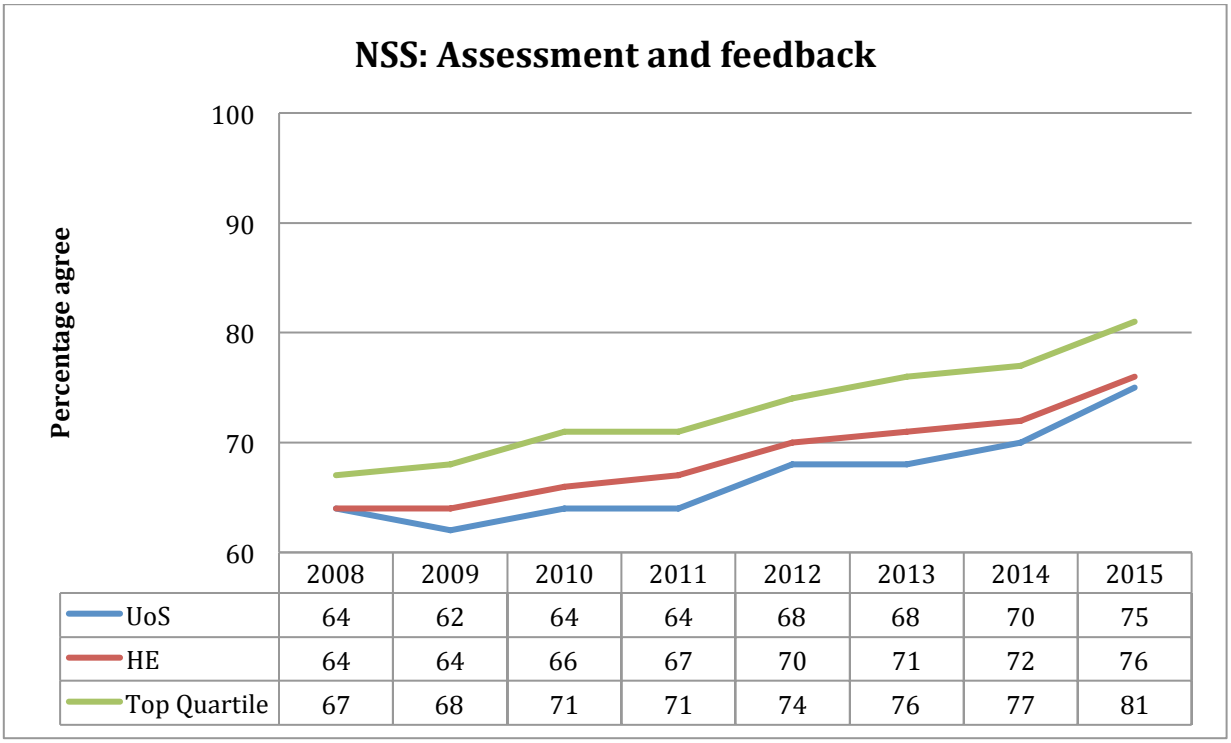
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Salford (University of)	80	77	78	79	81	79	78	83
HE	83	82	83	83	85	86	86	85
Top Quartile	89	89	89	89	90	90	91	89

Figure 19 - CSI NSS Overall Satisfaction 2008-2015



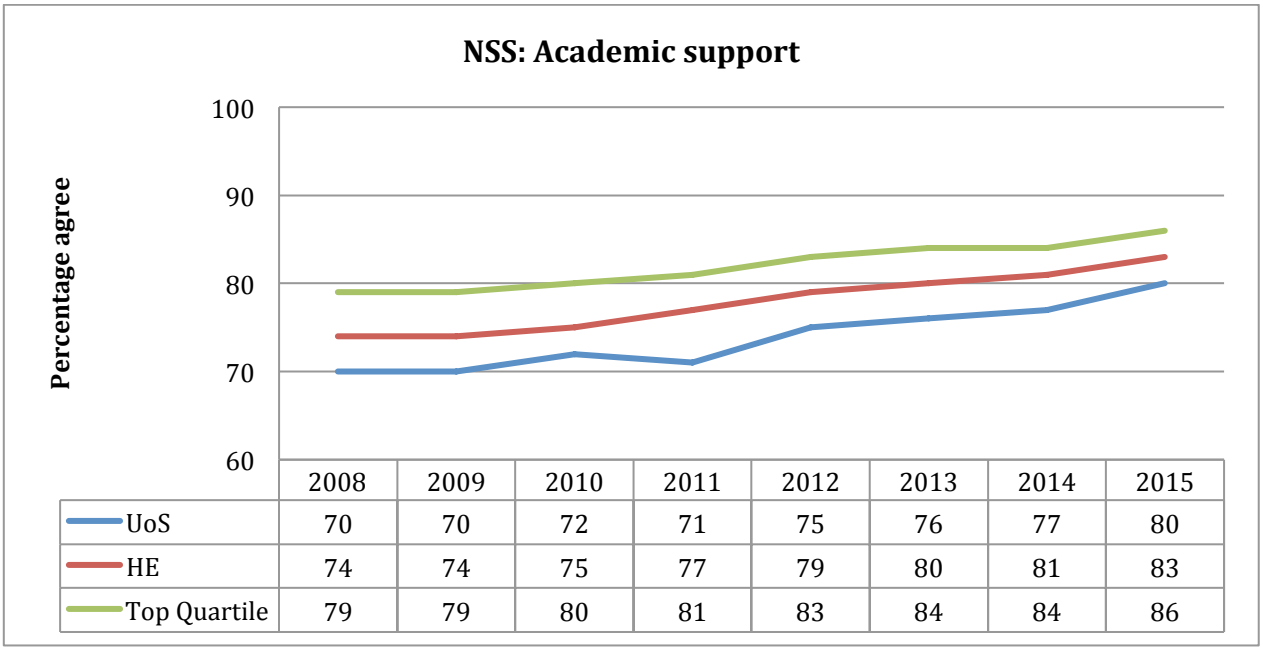
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
UoS	80	79	79	82	82	83	82	85
HE	83	83	84	85	86	87	87	87
Top Quartile	88	88	88	89	90	90	90	90

Figure 20 - CSI NSS Teaching on my Course. 2008-2015



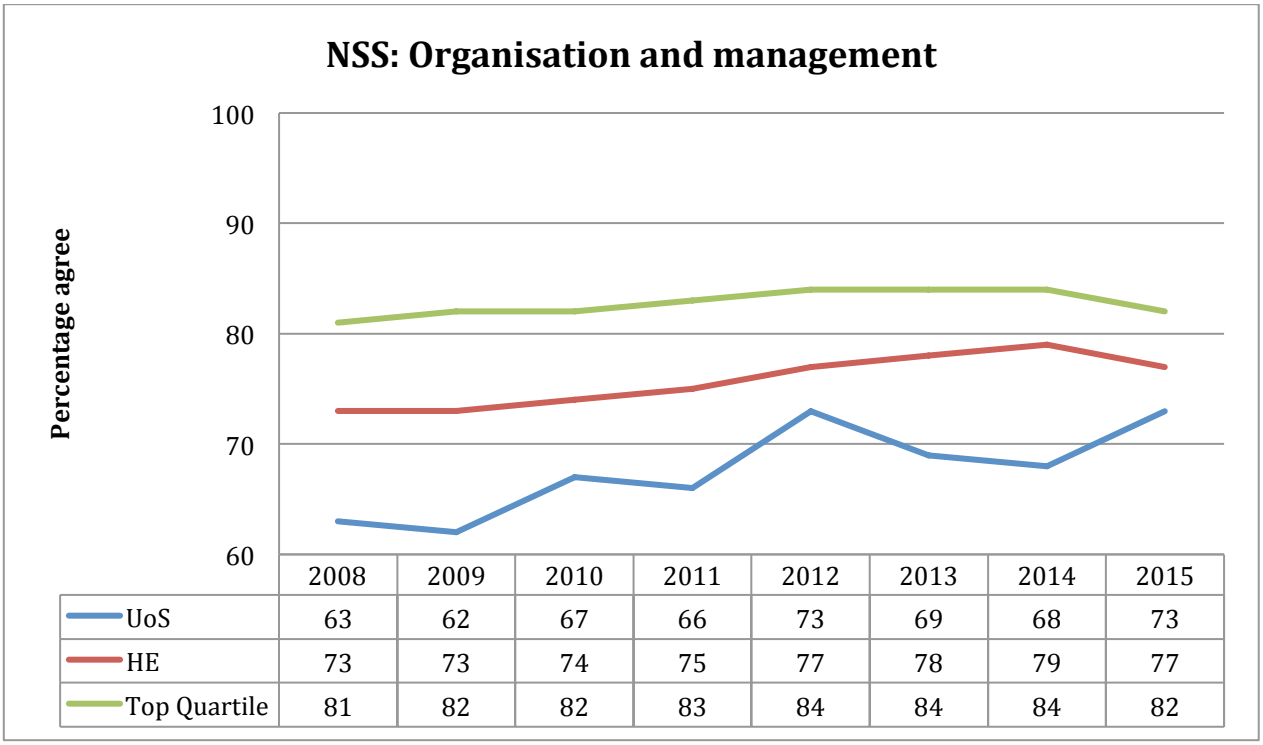
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
UoS	64	62	64	64	68	68	70	75
HE	64	64	66	67	70	71	72	76
Top Quartile	67	68	71	71	74	76	77	81

Figure 21 - CSI NSS Assessment and Feedback 2008-2015.



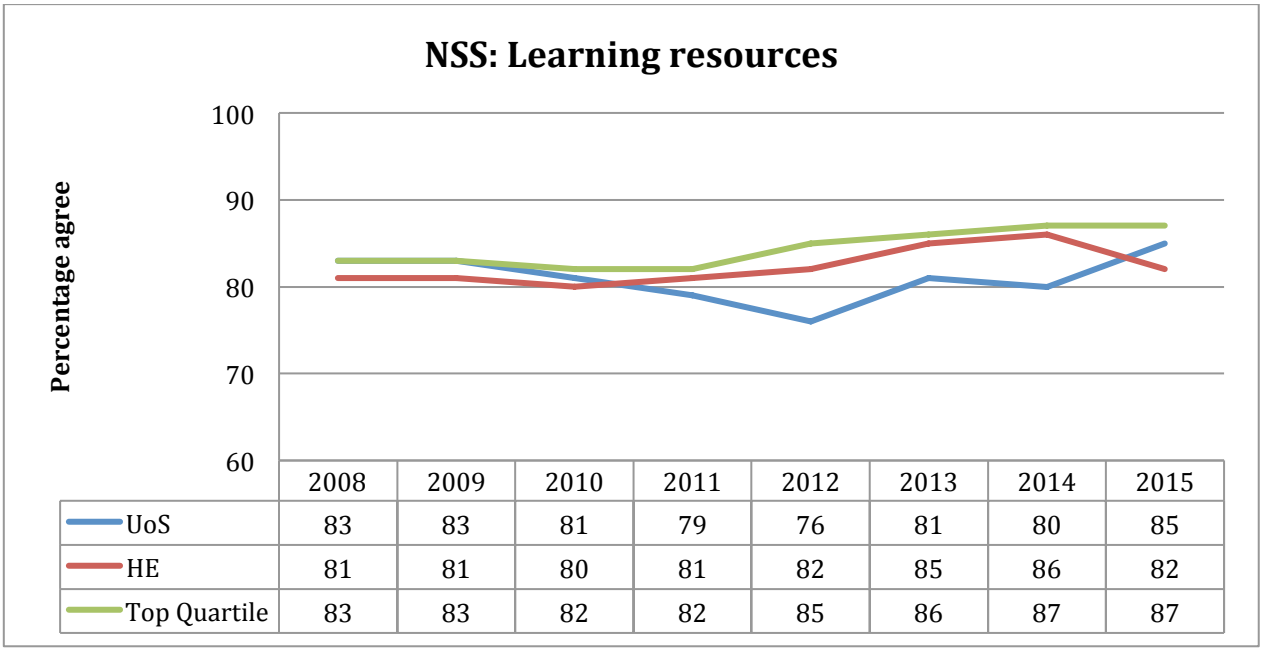
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
UoS	70	70	72	71	75	76	77	80
HE	74	74	75	77	79	80	81	83
Top Quartile	79	79	80	81	83	84	84	86

Figure 22 - CSI NSS Academic Support 2008-2015.



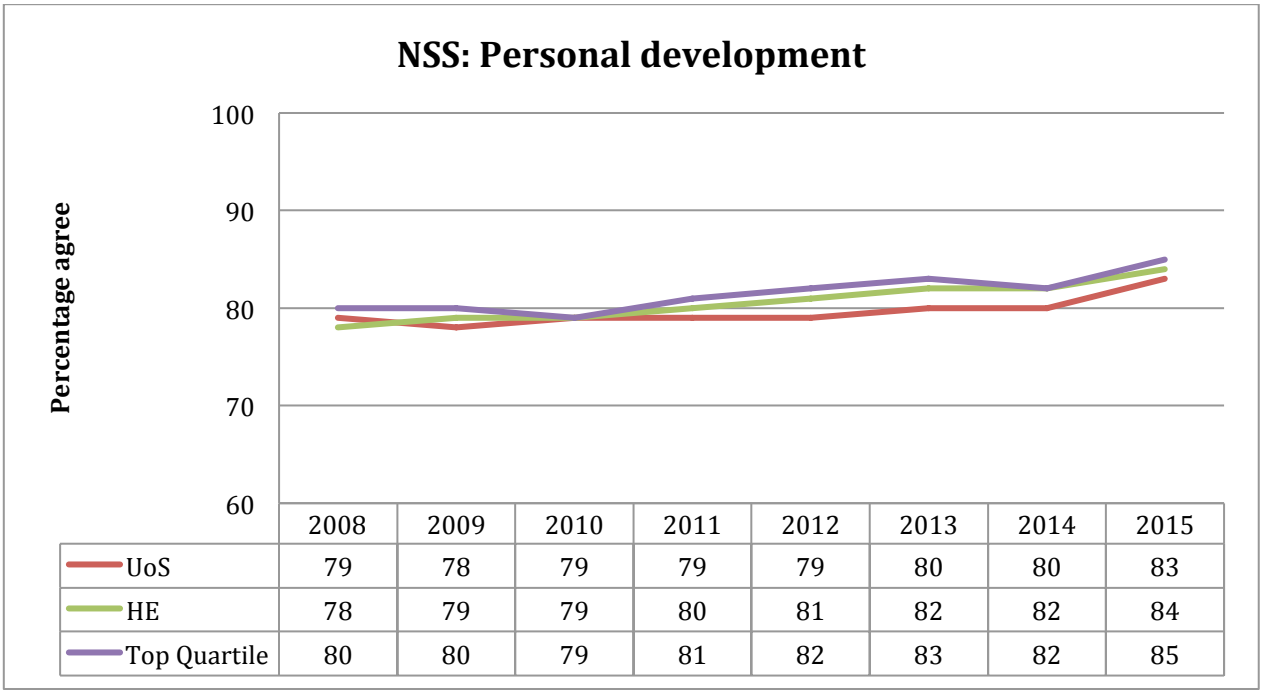
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
UoS	63	62	67	66	73	69	68	73
HE	73	73	74	75	77	78	79	77
Top Quartile	81	82	82	83	84	84	84	82

Figure 23 - CSI NSS Organisation and Management 2008 – 2015



	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
UoS	83	83	81	79	76	81	80	85
HE	81	81	80	81	82	85	86	82
Top Quartile	83	83	82	82	85	86	87	87

Figure 24 - CSI NSS Learning Resources 2008-2015



	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
UoS	79	78	79	79	79	80	80	83
HE	78	79	79	80	81	82	82	84
Top Quartile	80	80	79	81	82	83	82	85

Figure 25 - CSI NSS Personal Development 2008-2015.

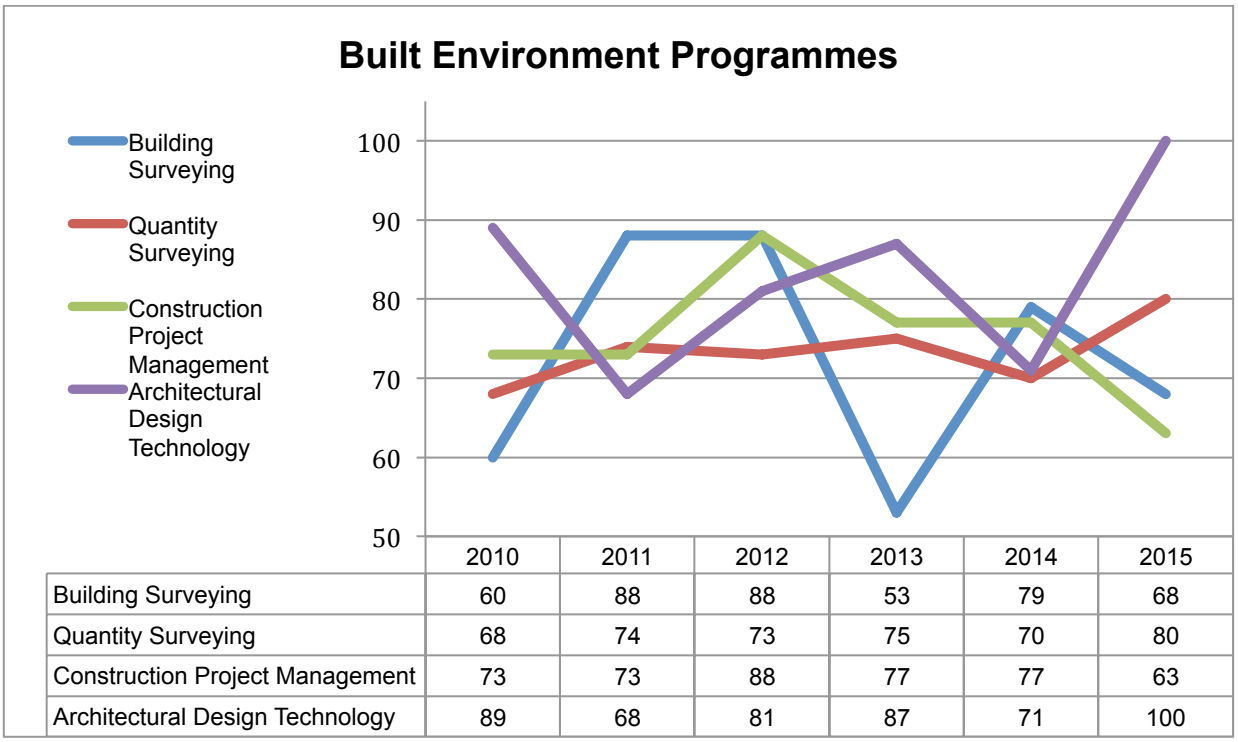
Note: Figures for HE are the average result for all HEIs in the UK.
Figures for the top quartile are the average (median) results for institutions that are in the top quartile for overall satisfaction.

5.2.1 Built Environment Programmes

Research into the results of the NSS across individual subject groups demonstrates that the results for the Built Environment subjects show lower levels of satisfaction compared to the experience of all other students responding to the NSS (HEA, 2012). This trend continues with Architecture and Building reporting lower levels of satisfaction compared with the experience of all other students in the wider subject area of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM). Within the subject grouping, many variations occur within individual programmes of study and across different institutional contexts. This general trend reflects the NSS results as reported within the School of Built Environment at the University of Salford. As demonstrated by the analysis of the NSS results from 2010 to 2015, the students report lower levels of satisfaction than in the wider university with some significant variations between programmes within the school. Given the significant variations in the reported levels of student satisfaction within the School, this research aims to understand the factors influencing the student

experience, especially as all the students experience a common Level 4 and with a minimum of 50% of level 5 and 6 modules common to all students. The differing perception of satisfaction with common facilities such as the library and IT is also of interest. The detailed results for the School of Built Environment for the period 2010 – 2015 are reported below.

As shown in Figure 26 below, the levels of satisfaction reported within the School of Built Environment for the four degree programmes varies significantly between the programmes with significant fluctuations year on year over the period from 2010. This research seeks to understand the reasons for the results profile in order to produce a conceptual framework for improving the student experience.

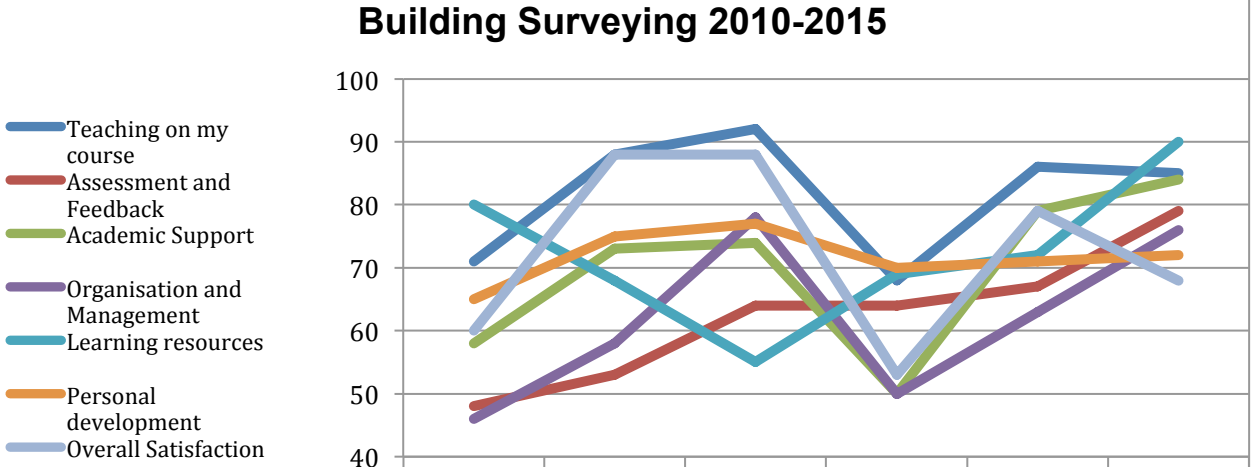


	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Building Surveying	60	88	88	53	79	68
Quantity Surveying	68	74	73	75	70	80
Construction Project Management	73	73	88	77	77	63
Architectural Design Technology	89	68	81	87	71	100

Figure 26 - NSS Overall Satisfaction Built Environment Programmes

Figure 27 – 30 below provides an overview of the results of the NSS by programme over a period of time from 2010 until 2015. Each table shows the results of each question category and the overall satisfaction.

The results for the BSc (Hons) Building Surveying (BS) programme (Table 27) show a generally improving picture until 2012 with all categories of question showing increasing levels of satisfaction except *'Learning Resources'*. The data shows the '*Teaching on my Course'* and *'Overall Satisfaction'* categories reporting results in the top quartile. However, the results for 2013 shows a complete reverse of the results until this point with *'Learning Resources'* showing improvement with all other categories show significant declines followed by an improving picture in all categories in 2014 and 2015 except for *'Overall Satisfaction'* in 2015. The decline in *'Overall Satisfaction'* for Building Surveying has resulted in a lower figure for this category when compared to the CSI (83%), the sector average (86%), and for the other programmes in the School (ADT-100%), (CPM – 93%), (QS – 82%).

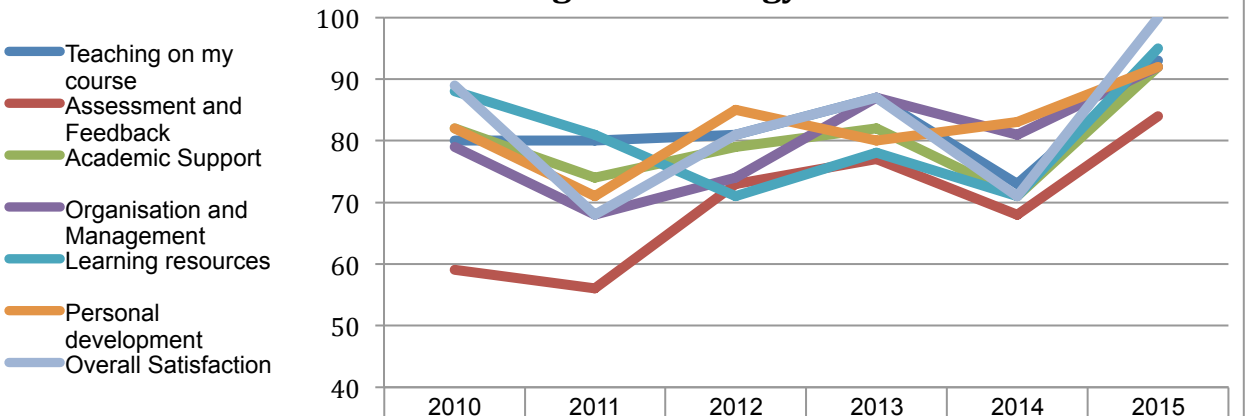


	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Teaching on my course	71	88	92	68	86	85
Assessment and Feedback	48	53	64	64	67	79
Academic Support	58	73	74	50	79	84
Organisation and Management	46	58	78	50	63	76
Learning resources	80	68	55	69	72	90
Personal development	65	75	77	70	71	72
Overall Satisfaction	60	88	88	53	79	68

Figure 27 - NSS Results - Building Surveying 2010 - 2015.

The results for BSc(Hons) Architectural Design Technology (ADT) also shows a fluctuating picture with a significant drop in satisfaction in 2011 and again in 2014 followed by a significant increase across all categories of question in 2015 with a 100%

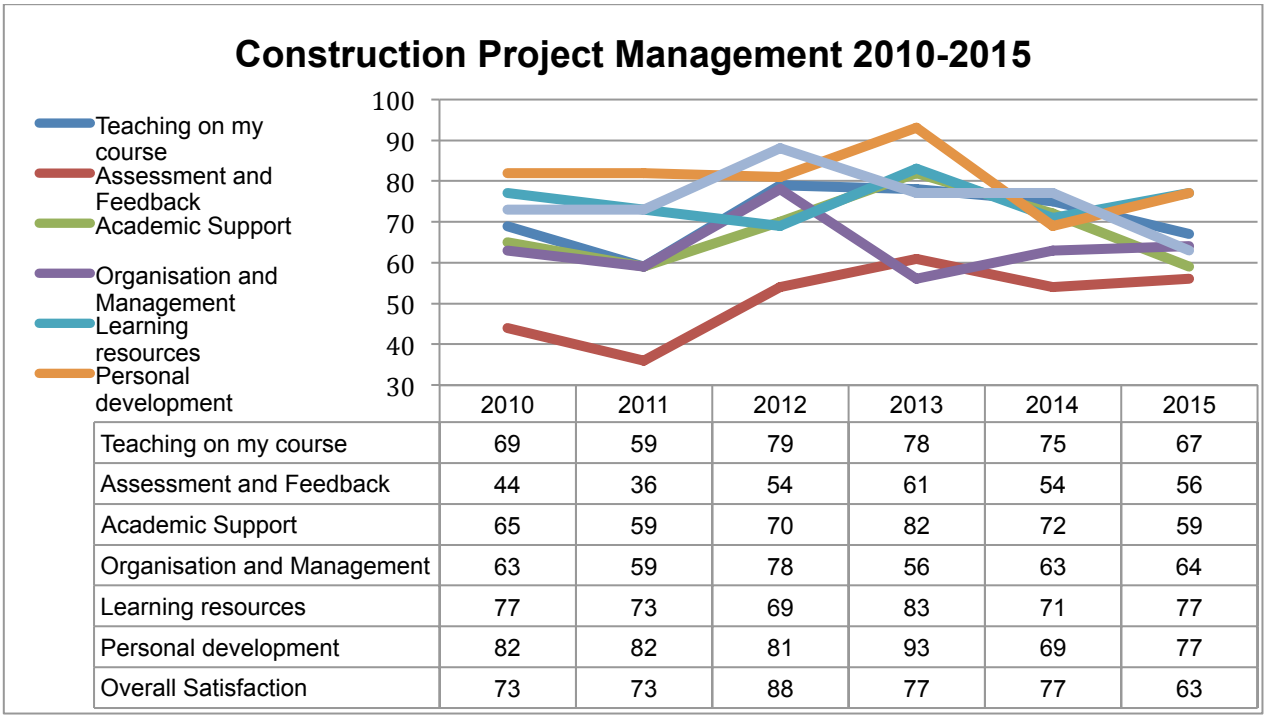
in '*Overall Satisfaction'* reported. The increase in *'Overall Satisfaction'* for Architectural Design Technology is higher than the result in this category than for CSI (83%), the sector average (86%), and for the other programmes in the School (BS - 75%), (CPM – 93%), (QS – 82%).



	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Teaching on my course	80	80	81	87	73	93
Assessment and Feedback	59	56	73	77	68	84
Academic Support	82	74	79	82	71	92
Organisation and Management	79	68	74	87	81	92
Learning resources	88	81	71	78	71	95
Personal development	82	71	85	80	83	92
Overall Satisfaction	89	68	81	87	71	100

Figure 28 - NSS Results - Architectural Design Technology 2010 - 2015.

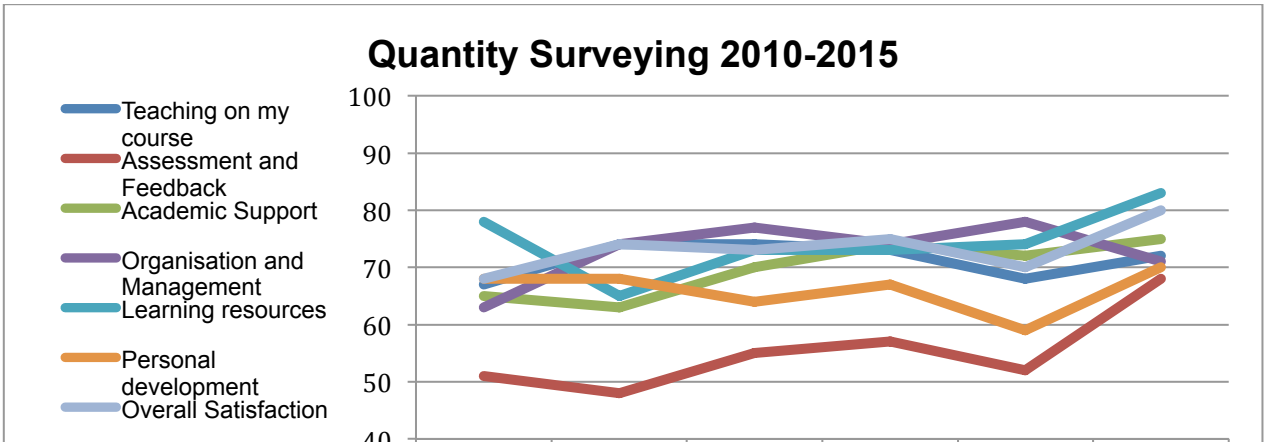
The results for the BSc(Hons) Construction Project Management (CPM) show a generally declining picture with peaks in satisfaction levels in 2012 and 2013 with a decline again in 2015 in *'Teaching on my Course', Academic Support'* and *'Overall Satisfaction*' but small improvements reported in *'Assessment and Feedback', 'Personal Development'* and *'Organisation and Management'*. The decline in *'Overall Satisfaction'* for Construction Project Management has resulted in a lower figure in this category than for CSI (83%), the sector average (86%), and for the other programmes in the School (ADT- 100%), (CPM – 93%), (QS – 82%).



	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Teaching on my course	69	59	79	78	75	67
Assessment and Feedback	44	36	54	61	54	56
Academic Support	65	59	70	82	72	59
Organisation and Management	63	59	78	56	63	64
Learning resources	77	73	69	83	71	77
Personal development	82	82	81	93	69	77
Overall Satisfaction	73	73	88	77	77	63

Figure 29 - NSS Results Construction Project Management 2010-2015

The results for the BSc (Hons) Quantity Surveying (QS) programme show an improving trend with less significant fluctuantions across the categories of question with the most improved results reported in 2015 in all but *'Organisation and Management'*. The increase in *'Overall Satisfaction'* for Quantity Surveying to 80% is still lower than the result in this category than for CSI (83%), the sector average (86%), and for the other programmes in the School (CPM – 93%), (QS – 82%) with the exception of (BS – 75%).

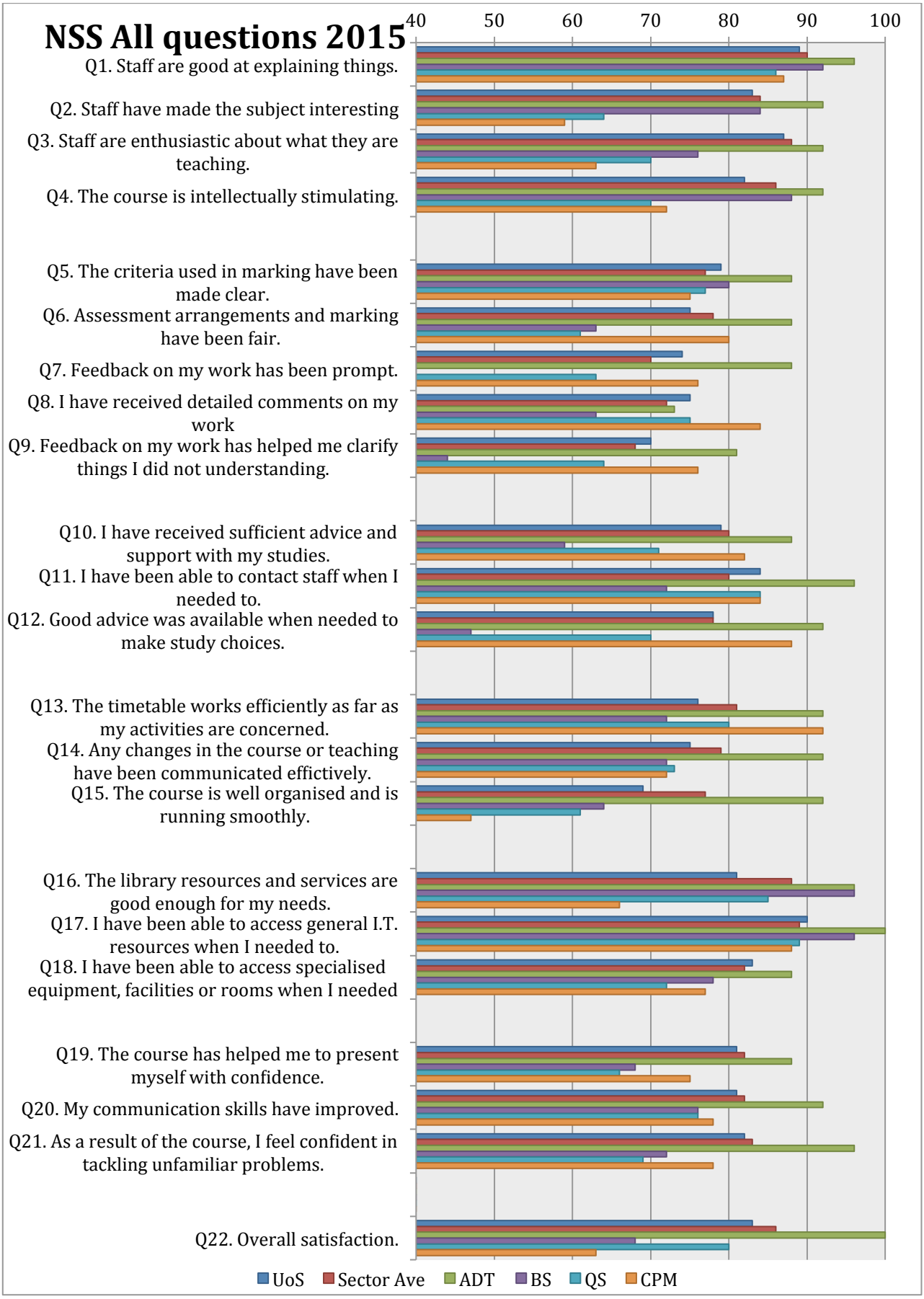


	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Teaching on my course	67	74	74	73	68	72
Assessment and Feedback	51	48	55	57	52	68
Academic Support	65	63	70	74	72	75
Organisation and Management	63	74	77	74	78	71
Learning resources	78	65	73	73	74	83
Personal development	68	68	64	67	59	70
Overall Satisfaction	68	74	73	75	70	80

Figure 30 - NSS Results Quantity Surveying 2010-2015

The published percentage for each category within the NSS survey is the average of the results from the detailed questions within each category and does demonstrate a more complex picture of what is important to the students. The picture can also vary significantly between Programme Group results and Programme results. The Programme group results include all students who complete the survey within the particular JACS code and for reasons of reliability and confidentiality, the threshold for public report ability is a response rate of 23 responses which must also represent a minimum of 50% of the eligible students. As a result, the Programme Group results include all students within that group including full time and part time students while the Programme Level results will report on students within a mode of study, typically full and/or part time students if the conditions for reporting are met. This does result in some variations in the detailed results and does demonstrate variations in student experience depending on their mode of study. For the purposes of the detailed analysis of the data for this case study the Programme level results will be used to interpret the reported experience of the student population within the School. The exact wording of all 22 statements in the survey is shown in Appendix 4 with the detail of the results across the

identified courses, the CSI and the Sector Average are shown in the Table below. The NSS asks those undertaking the survey to rate their level of agreement with 22 positive statements on a 5 point Likert Scale: definitely agree; mostly agree; neither agree nor disagree; mostly disagree; definitely disagree with the addition of 'not applicable'. The results for each question show significant variations in the perception of the students of their experience within any particular category and analysis of this data will aid understanding of what is important to students to identify measures to improve the student experience. For example, the result for *'Teaching on my Course'* for Construction Project Management at Programme Group level is 67%, however, the results for the detailed questions within the category show different levels of satisfaction, for Q1. '*Staff are good at explaining things'* is 75%, Q2. *'Staff have made the subject interesting is 59%*, Q3. *'Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching'* is 63%, Q4. *'The course is intellectually stimulating'* is 72%. The data from the results of all the questions in the survey shows that a number of question categories are not meeting the expectations of students in the same manner that other categories are meeting those expectations. Within the *'Teaching on my Course'* category, the response to Q1 is outperforming all the other questions within that category particularly Q2 and Q3. The *'Assessment and Feedback'* category shows that student satisfaction levels with all aspects of the assessment process does not meet the expectations of students although this is a common theme across the results of the NSS nationally. The results also show that student satisfaction levels for *'Academic Support'* are mixed across the four programmes with Architectural Design Technology students reporting high levels of satisfaction while Quantity Surveying students are significantly less satisfied. The *'Organisation and Management'* and *'Personal Development'* categories also show a very mixed picture with students reporting areas of dissatisfaction particularly with Quantity Surveying, Construction Project Management and Building Surveying Students. Architectural Design Technology students are reporting good levels of satisfaction in 2015 across all categories that are in sharp contrast with the other built environment programmes within the School. The levels of *'Overall Satisfaction'* for each programme tends to reflect the satisfaction or dissatisfaction reported within the question categories except for the Building Surveying programme where the satisfaction levels in each category are at higher levels than in the *'Overall Satisfaction'* category.


NSS All questions 2015
40
50
60
70
80
90
100
Q1. Staff are good at explaining things.
Q2. Staff have made the subject interesting
Q3. Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching.
Q4. The course is intellectually stimulating.
Q5. The criteria used in marking have been made clear.
Q6. Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair.
Q7. Feedback on my work has been prompt.
Q8. I have received detailed comments on my work
Q9. Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understanding.
Q10. I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies.
Q11. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to.
Q12. Good advice was available when needed to make study choices.
Q13. The timetable works efficiently as far as my activities are concerned.
Q14. Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effictively.
Q15. The course is well organised and is running smoothly.
Q16. The library resources and services are good enough for my needs.
Q17. I have been able to access general I.T. resources when I needed to.
Q18. I have been able to access specialised equipment, facilities or rooms when I needed
Q19. The course has helped me to present myself with confidence.
Q20. My communication skills have improved.
Q21. As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems.
Q22. Overall satisfaction.
UoS
Sector Ave
ADT
BS
QS
CPM

5.2.2 Teaching on my Course

The results of the *'Teaching on my Course'* category of questions has produced a range of results for the four programmes in the School and a significant range of responses for the questions within the category (Fig. 31). The results show that for Q1. – *'Staff are good at explaining things'* all four programmes are reporting satisfaction levels between 86% and 96% compared with the University of Salford average of 89%. However, the data shows a clear distinction between the four programmes on Q2 - *'Staff have made the subject interesting'* with the ADT programme at 92% and CPM on 59%. This wide range of satisfaction levels is also shown on question 3 and 4. As previously stated, the students are required to rate their level of agreement with 22 positive statements on a 5 point Likert Scale: definitely agree; mostly agree; neither agree nor disagree; mostly disagree; definitely disagree with the addition of 'not applicable'. The data indicating how the students on any given programme rated the statement give further insight into the reported satisfaction levels. As shown in Figure 32, ADT students have rated the statements within the *'Teaching on my Course'* category predominantly within the 'Definitely Agree' and 'Mostly Agree' scale resulting in an average for the category of 96%.

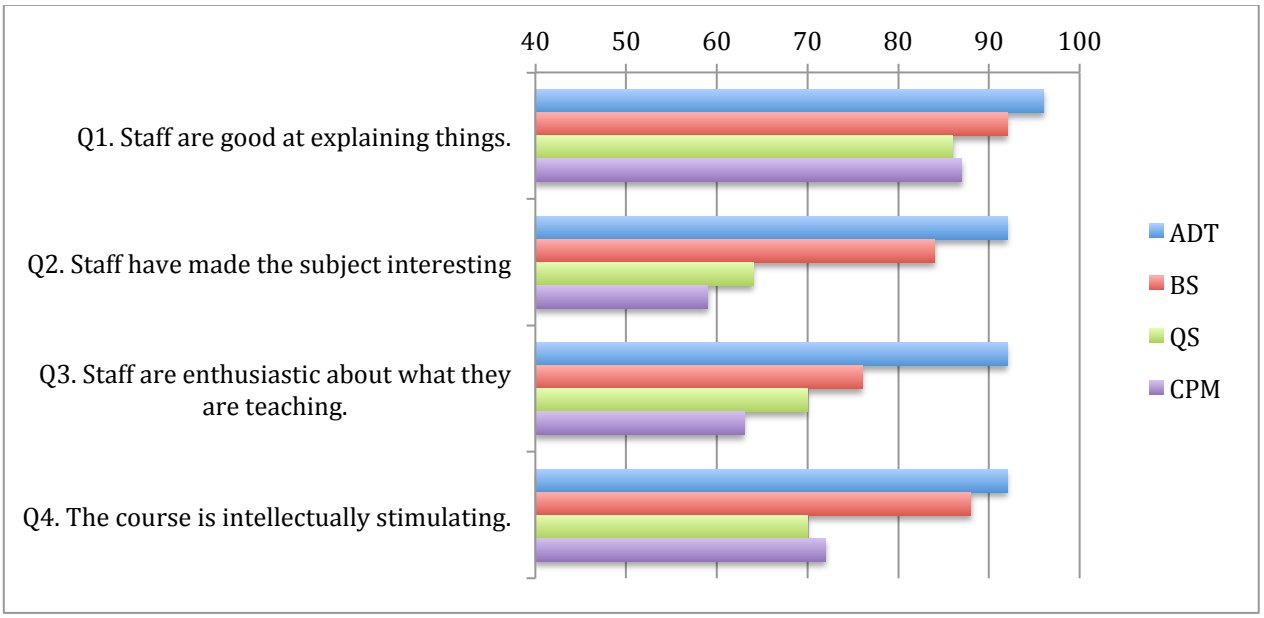


Figure 31 - NSS Results Teaching on my Course - All programmes.

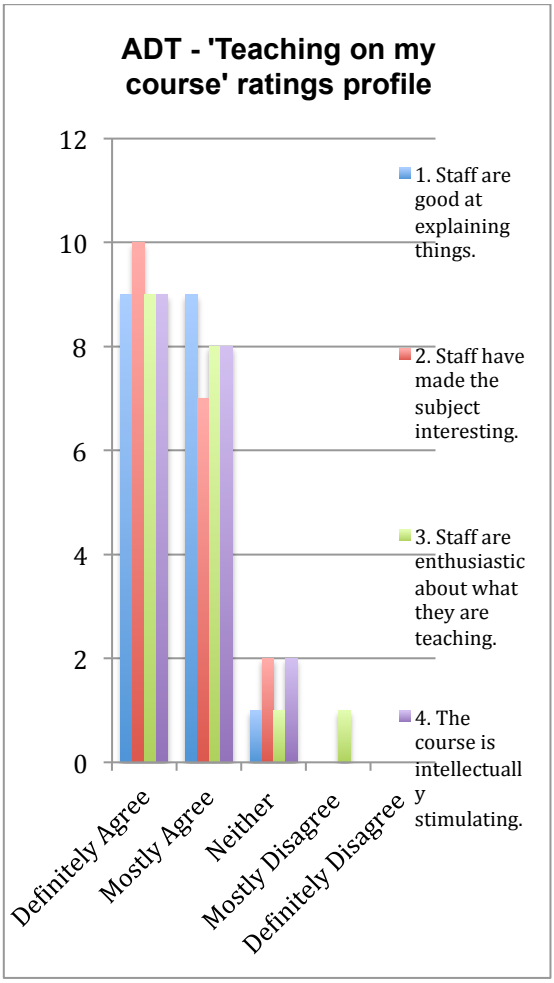


Figure 32 - ADT Teaching on my Course

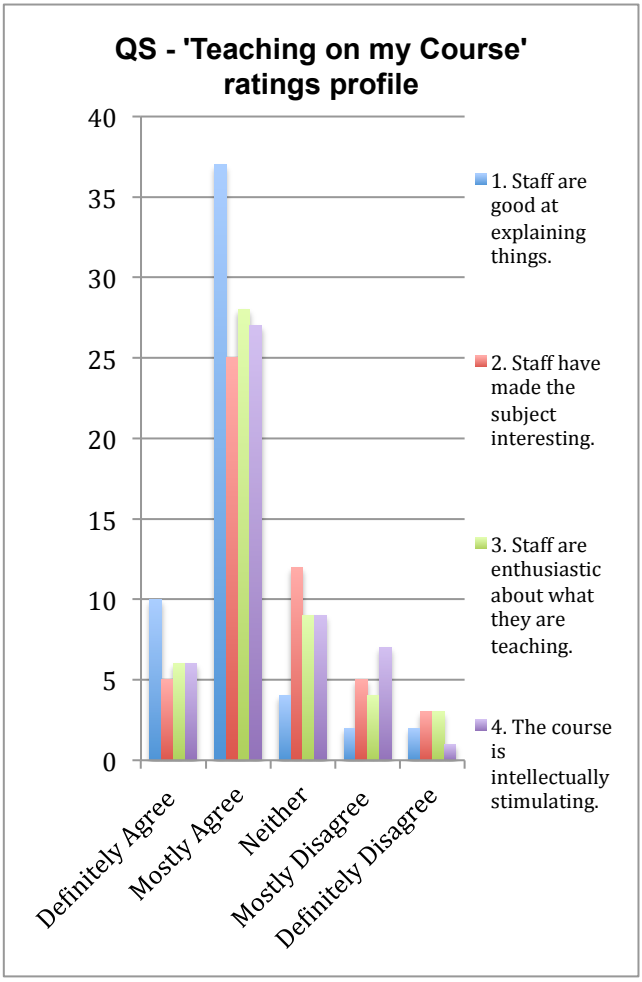


Figure 33 - QS Teaching on my Course.

The Quantity Surveying students are reporting much higher levels of dissatisfaction within the '*Teaching on my Course'* category with students recording negative ratings to the statements on the scale including the 'Mostly Disagree' and Definitely Disagree' rating.

Category	Metric	1. Staff are good at explaining things.	2. Staff have made the subject interesting.	3. Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching.	4. The course is intellectually stimulating.
QS	Definitely Agree	10	5	6	6
QS	Mostly Agree	37	25	28	27
QS	Neither	4	12	9	9
QS	Mostly Disagree	2	5	4	7
QS	Definitely Disagree	2	3	3	1

Table 8 - QS Detailed response - Teaching on my Course.

5.2.3 Assessment and Feedback

The *'Assessment and Feedback'* category is highlighting lower levels of satisfaction than other categories across all the courses within the case study. This category shows a similar trend both at university level and national across all universities.

As highlighted in Figure 34 below, particular issues are evident for the Building Surveying and Quantity Surveying students around '*Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair' and 'Feedback on my work has been prompt'*. Additionally, Building Surveying students are reporting low levels of satisfaction relating to '*Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand*'. The results are showing a very mixed picture across the undergraduate courses within the School given the level of sharing of modules across the cross the different courses. The data is suggesting that the students on the four programmes are reporting very different experiences in relation to *'Assessment and Feedback'* despite a clearly defined policy and procedure within the School regarding the management of assessment and feedback.

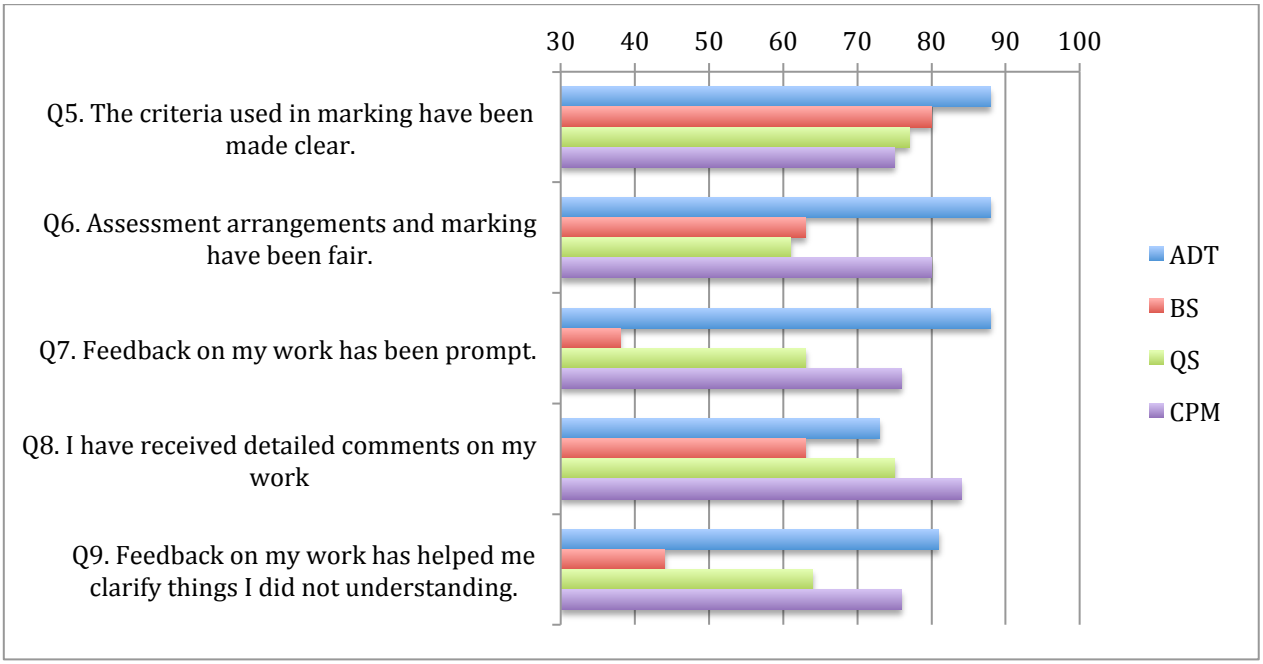


Figure 34 - Assessment and Feedback - NSS Results: All programmes.

5.2.4 Academic Support

The *'Academic Support'* category is again highlighting a very mixed experience as reported by the students with the Architectural Design technology course reporting higher levels of satisfaction when compared with the three other degree programmes. The reported levels of satisfaction in this area for Quantity Surveying, Building Surveying and Construction Project Management are also lagging behind the results for the university and the Sector average. As highlighted in Figure 35 below, the data shows students on the Building Surveying and Quantity Surveying programmes are less satisfied with the perceived quality of advice available to them related to their studies and the availability of staff. The building surveying students are reporting less satisfaction with all areas related to academic support.

The data is suggesting that the students on the four programmes are reporting very different experiences in relation to *'Academic Support'* despite a clearly defined structure within the School for providing support to students at module level, at each level of study and via the Programme Director. The data is useful in highlighting the areas that the

students are less positive about within the category of *'Academic Support'* and raises some questions regarding the expectations of the students on each programme.

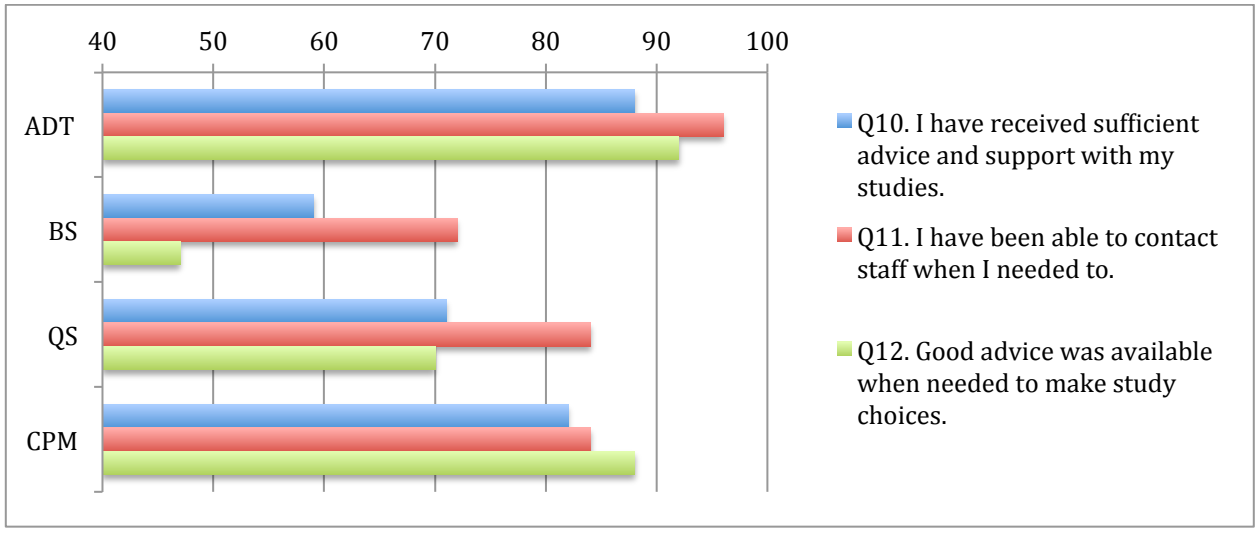


Figure 35 - Academic Support NSS Results: All Programmes

5.2.5. Organisation and Management

The 'Organisation and Management' category is again highlighting a very mixed experience as reported by the students with the Architectural Design technology course reporting higher levels of satisfaction when compared with the three other degree programmes. The reported levels of satisfaction in this area for Quantity Surveying, Building Surveying and Construction Project Management are also lagging behind the results for the university and the Sector average. As highlighted in Figure 36 below, the data shows students on the Building Surveying and Quantity Surveying programmes are less satisfied with the perceived quality of timetabling and how any changes are communicated. The area which is resulting in the least satisfaction is related to the statement '*The course is well organised and is running smoothly"* with the Construction Project Management students indicating only 47% of the students undertaking the survey agreeing with this statement. The data is suggesting that the students on the four programmes are reporting very different experiences in relation to *'Organisation and Management'* despite a clearly defined structure within the School for undertaking the timetabling and resourcing of each programme. This may be indicative of how the mode

of study affects student perception given the mix of full and part time students on the three courses with less satisfaction compared with architectural design technolgy with is mainly full time students.

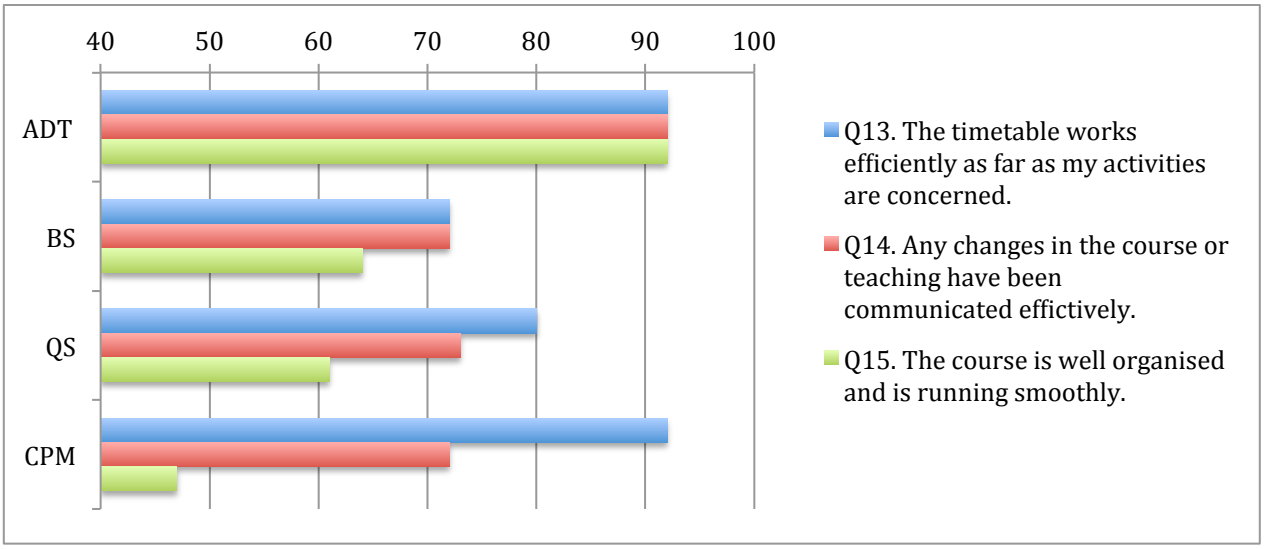


Figure 36 - Organisation and Management - NSS Results: All Programmes.

5.2.6 Learning Resources

The results of the *'Learning Resources'* category of questions has produced a range of results for the four programmes in the School and a significant range of responses for the questions within the category (Figure 37). The results show that for Q16. – *'The library resources and services are good enough for my needs''* Architectural Design Technology and Building Surveying students are reporting a high level of satisfaction with 96% agreeing with this statement and Quantity Surveying students with 85% in agreement however, Construction Project Management student somewhat less satisfied with 66% of students agreeing with this statement. Q17 *'I have been able to access general I.T resources when I needed to'* shows a similar pattern of satisfaction levels with a range of 100% satisfied on Architectural Design Technology to 88% on Construction Project Management. However, the data shows less satisfaction on all four courses with Q18 *'I have been able to access specialist equipment, facilities or rooms when I needed to'*. The data does reveal that by programme of study the Construction Project Management students are reporting the lowest levels of satisfaction with

Architectural Technology students again the most satisfied. The reported student satisfaction levels for the built environment programmes are generally in-line with the overall university results and the sector average with the exception of the Construction Project Management course.

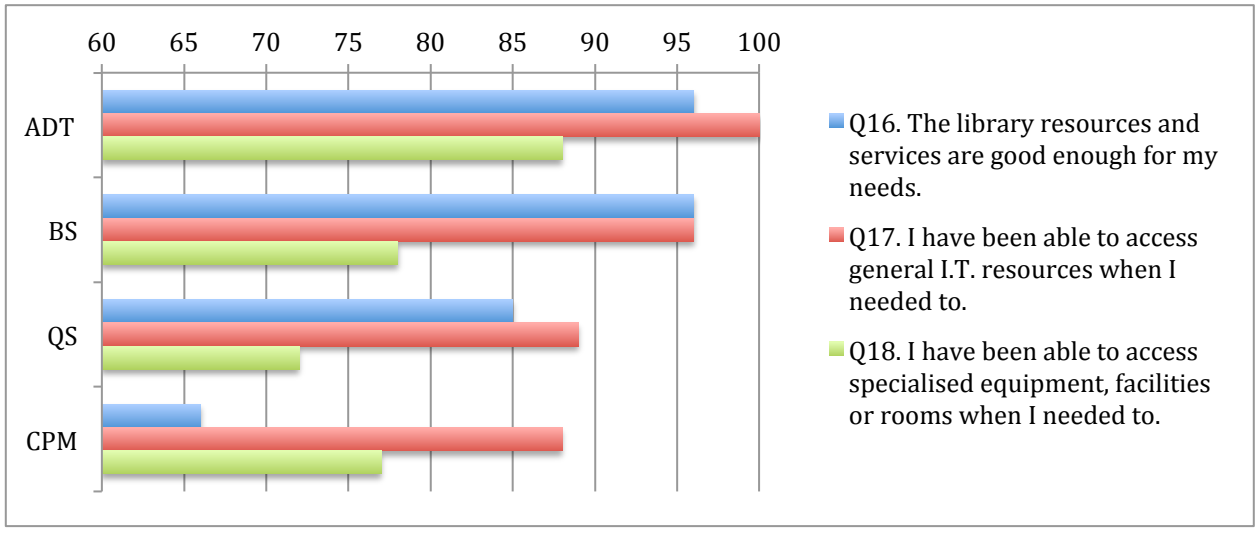


Figure 37 - Learning Resources NSS Results: All programmes

5.2.7 Personal Development

The results of the *'Personal Development'* category of questions has produced a range of results for the four programmes in the School and a significant range of responses for the questions within the category (Figure 38). The results show that for Q19. – *'The course has helped me to present myself with confidence'* all four programmes are reporting satisfaction levels in a range between 88% and 66% compared with the University of Salford average of 83%. However, the data shows a clear distinction between the four programmes with the Architectural Design Technology course reporting generally high levels of satisfaction across all statements in the category with the other programme reporting significantly lower levels of satisfaction. The student response to Q20 - *''My communication skills have improved'* shows a similar pattern to Q19 with the ADT programme at 92% the other courses reporting satisfaction levels between 76-78%. This wide range of satisfaction levels is also shown on Q21 *'As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems'* with the Architectural

Design Technology again reporting high levels of satisfaction at 96% with the other course significantly lower satisfaction levels with Building Surveying at 72%, Quantity Surveying at 69% and Construction Project Management at 78%.

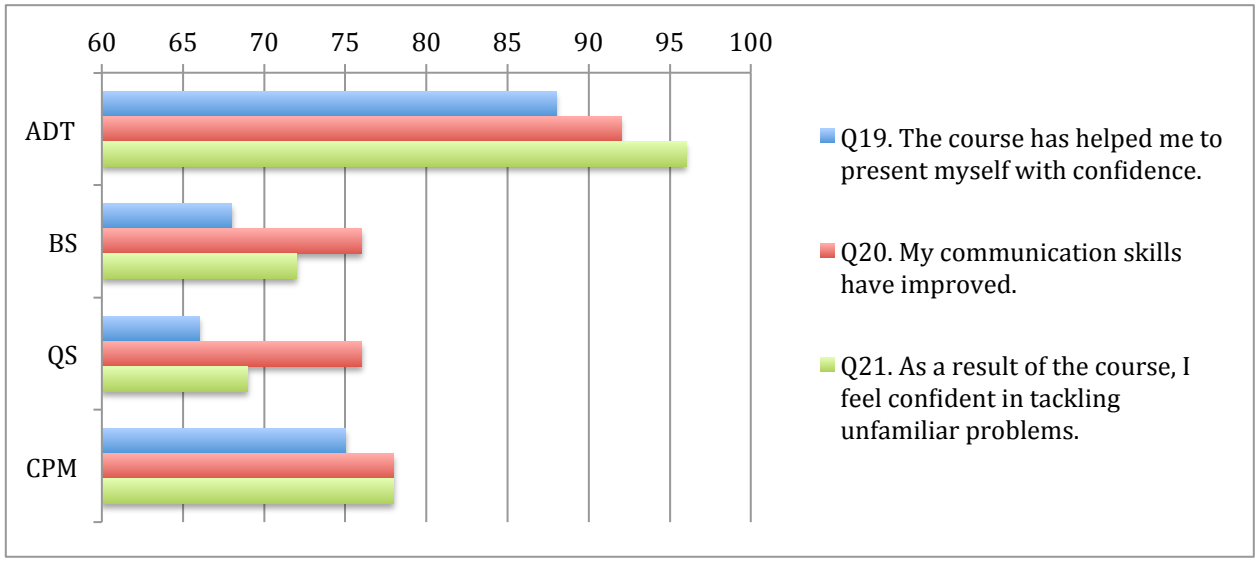


Figure 38 - Personal Development NSS Results: All Programmes.

As previously stated, the students are required to rate their level of agreement with 22 positive statements on a 5 point Likert Scale: definitely agree; mostly agree; neither agree nor disagree; mostly disagree; definitely disagree with the addition of 'not applicable'. The data indicating how the students on any given programme rated the statement provides further insight into the reported satisfaction levels. As shown in Figure 38, ADT students have rated the statements within the *'Personal Development'* category predominantly within the 'Definitely Agree' and 'Mostly Agree' scale resulting in an average for the category of 96% with the Quantity Surveyors reporting a range of responses and more negative responses.

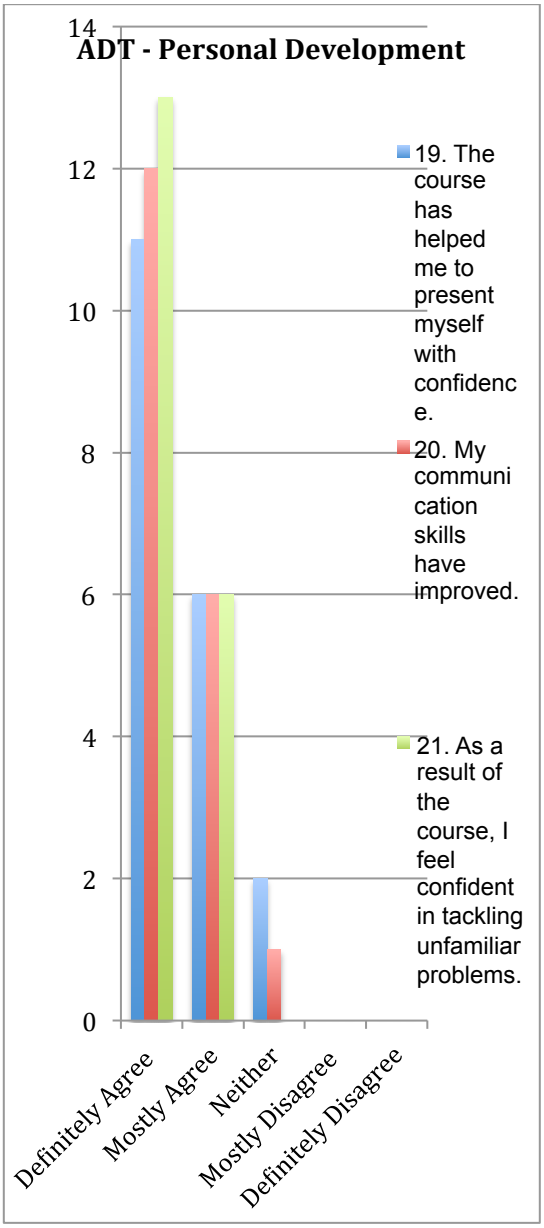


Figure 39 - ADT Personal Development

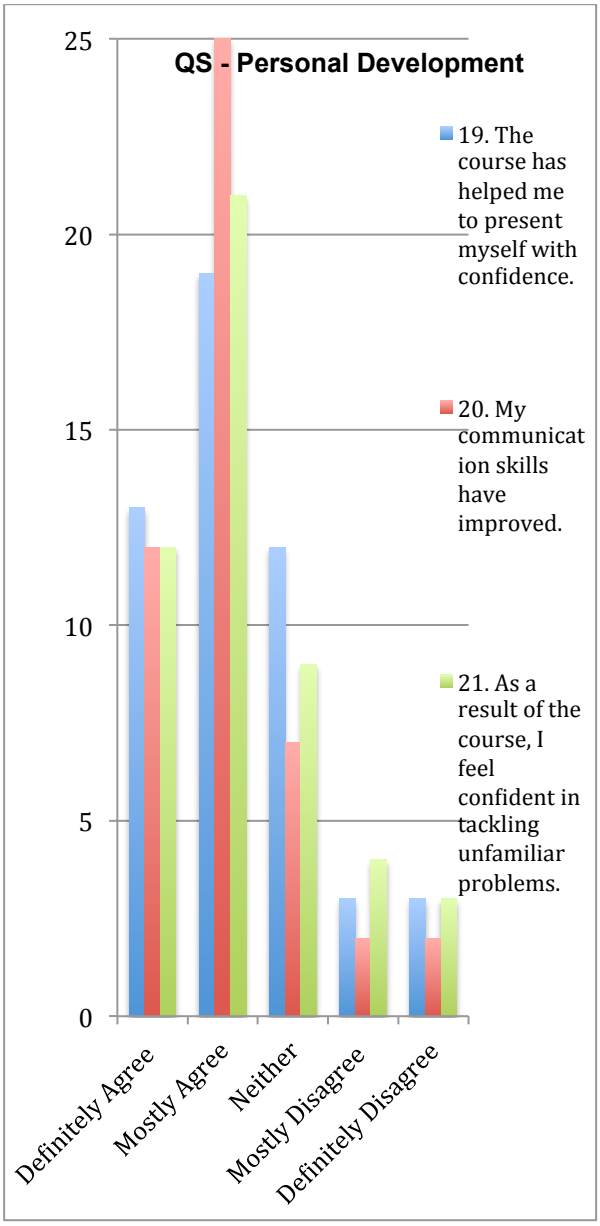


Figure 40 - QS Personal Development

5.2.8 Overall Satisfaction

The *'Overall satisfaction'* category is showing a mixed picture across the four undergraduate courses within the School. Architectural Design Technology has improved over time and is reporting 100% satisfaction in 2015. The other three courses are evidencing a fluctuating pattern of results with some evidence of an improving trend but they are still lagging behind the average for the category within the University of Salford and the sector average. This result is an important benchmark for the course of study in relation to how it is used in both internally and externally within the organisation, in national league tables, UNISTATs data and in marketing material for the School. Given how the NSS data and results are used, they are an important key performance indicator for the School and therefore how individual courses perform is vital to the reputation of the organisation. Therefore, the results of the NSS are considered to be important despite the issues around the reliability and validity of the survey, doubts surrounding how the students approach the survey, participation rates and the general quality of the information relating to how it reflects the accuracy of the quality of experience the students receive. As a result, understanding how students perceive the quality of the experience and how this can be improved in increasingly important.

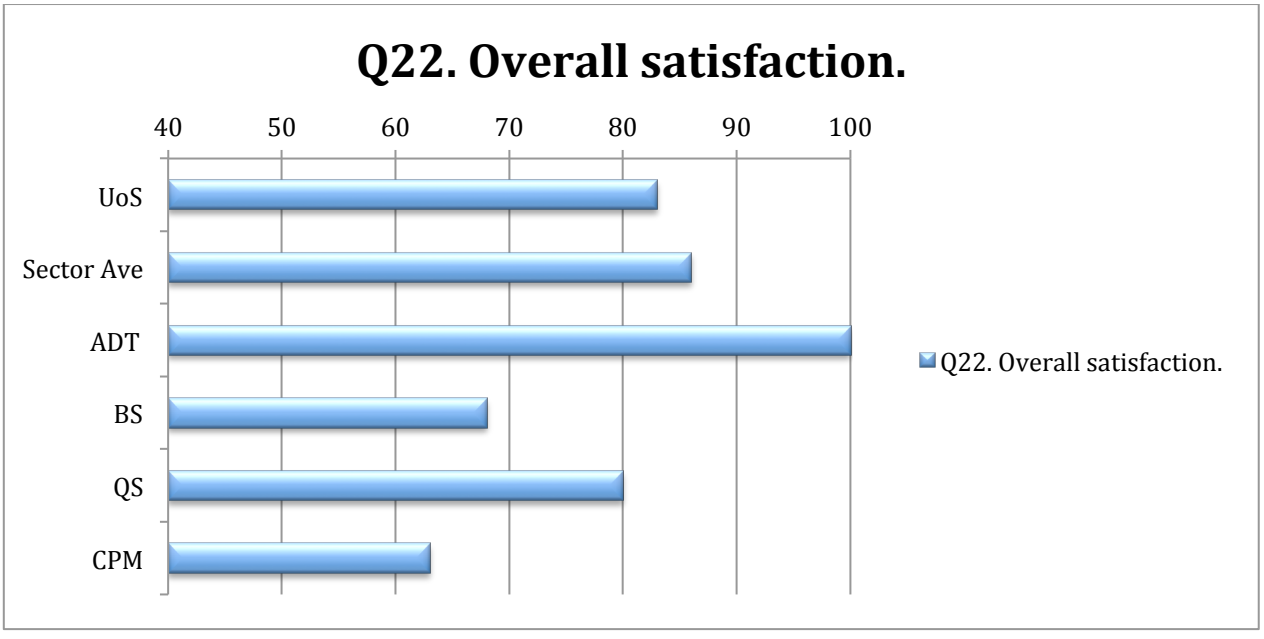


Figure 41 - Overall Satisfaction NSS Results: All programmes.

In addition to being asked to rate their agreement with the 22 statements in the survey, students are given the opportunity to add comments within the free text boxes embedded within the questionnaire. The comments provided by the students are supplied to the individual institutions in the form of verbatim comments that have all identifying information relating to specific by removing the names of staff members and/or other students. These comments provide useful feedback to the university and the school and are a useful tool in understanding some of the issues impacting on the student experience. For the purposes of this research, these comments have been analysed over an extended period of time to identify the issues important to the students.

5.3 Content Analysis of Verbatim Comments

The data analysis of the NSS verbatim comments has been undertaken using Nvivo 10 software package. The raw data from the verbatim comments from the NSS results for the years 2008 – 2015 was coded into the software package using a Thematic Coding Framework. Verbatim Comments where coded according to the link to the questions on the NSS survey as demonstrated below, the year they are associated with and to indicate if the comment was considered broadly 'positive' or 'negative'.

Academic Support
Assessment and Feedback
Experience
Negative
Positive
Learning Resources
Organisation and Management
Overall Satisfaction
Personal Development
Teaching on my course

Table 9 Nvivo Thematic Coding Framework

The aim of the data analysis of the verbatim comments is to identify key themes, enable identification of patterns in the data and to explore connections between the themes.

For each of the identified areas (Table 9), an initial word frequency search was undertaken to ascertain the 15 most frequently used words within a search criteria section relating to both positive and negative comments of words containing 5 or more letters. The selected criteria of five letters was used to exclude small, frequently used common words such as 'the', 'and', 'good', 'bad' etc. Tests of the selection criteria for the word frequency search was undertaken using a criteria of two, three and four letters to establish the most effective criteria to highlight the matters raised by the students. The search results also identify the weighted percentage for the use of the word within the section. This data was then used to undertake a text search for the identified words that indicates the context of how the word was used. This is analysis has been demonstrated using a word tree (see Appendix 3). The contextualised word frequency information was used to undertake further analysis to identify the key themes from the verbatim comments. On completion of this analysis, a further analysis of the data was undertaken to identify any patterns or connections that exist between the themes identified to inform the questions/themes for the semi-structured interviews.

5.3.1 Teaching on my Course

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Lecturers	9	218	3.96
Course	6	119	2.16
Tutors	6	86	1.56
Teaching	8	85	1.54
Staff	5	83	1.51
Modules	7	79	1.43
Interesting	11	71	1.29
Lectures	8	68	1.23
Experience	10	53	0.96
Helpful	7	53	0.96
Industry	8	49	0.89

Group	5	45	0.82
Students	8	45	0.82
Teachers	8	44	0.80
Skills	6	43	0.78

Table 10 - Word Frequency: Teaching on my Course and Positive comments.

From the data the following information can be extracted around the key areas

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage %
Lecturers, tutors, staff, teachers	431	7.83
Course, modules, lectures	266	4.82
Teaching, interesting, skills, experience, helpful, industry,	301	6.42
Group, Students	90	1.64

Table 11 - Word Frequency Results Teaching on my Course and Positive Comments.

Results of the word search resulted in a range of terms used by the students to refer to the academic staff associated with their study. As a result, the word frequency search included all of these terms to capture all of the comments and references within this category. The data indicates that the lecturers themselves are the most important aspect in delivering a **positive** perception of the student experience, closely followed by the ability of the lecturer in terms of delivery of the module content and skill in making the subject interesting. The data indicates the actual module content also plays a significant role with the students on any particular course having some influence on the overall perception of the student experience. This is further supports the evidence from the analysis of the quantitative data in terms of how the students rated each of the statements in the survey. It is evident from the data that even where the students indicated that the staff rated highly on Q1 – '*Staff are good at explaining things'* students have been less likely to agree that the *''Staff have made the subject interesting'* and provide additional comments to supplement the rating of the statements including

comments relating to staff '*just reading off PowerPoint Slides'*, '*Poor interaction with students in the class', 'staff with no industry experience' and staff with 'poor English Language skills'.*

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Lecturers	9	198	3.24
Modules	7	93	1.52
Feedback	8	90	1.47
Lectures	8	87	1.42
Teaching	8	80	1.31
Tutors	6	74	1.21
Course	6	72	1.18
Staff	5	62	1.01
Coursework	10	61	1.00
Students	8	61	1.00
Group	5	57	0.93
Understand	10	53	0.87
Teachers	8	44	0.72
Enough	6	41	0.67
Library	7	40	0.65

Table 12 - Word Frequency Teaching on my Course and Negative Comments.

From the data the following information can be extracted around the key areas

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage %
Lecturers, tutors, staff, teachers	378	6.18
Course, modules, lectures	252	5.12
Teaching, understand.	133	2.18

Coursework, feedback	151	2.47
Group, Students	118	1.93
Enough, Library	81	1.32

Table 13 - Word Frequency Results: Teaching on my Course and Negative Comments.

The data indicates that the lecturers themselves are also the most important aspect in delivering a **negative** perception of the student experience although this is less important than how it influences a positive experience. This analysis points to the content and structure of the individual modules and the overall programme of study as being a very important influencing issue for the students. The context of the courses related to the fact they are vocationally based; professionally accredited courses may influence the student perception due to this fact. The teaching and the coursework and feedback are also important in influencing how students perceive the *'Teaching on my Course'*. From the initial review of the data it appears that a larger range of factors impact on the student reporting a **negative** student experience than on a **positive** experience.

Having identified the key words in terms of frequency of use and in the weighted percentage terms, a text search was undertaken within the identified sections to establish the context of how the word was used. Establishing the context of how the word was used is important to ascertain the meaning of the comment and providing more information relating to the aspect of the given factor that influenced the students' perceptions. Examples of the results of the text search of the most frequently identified words are shown below in table 14. The results of the text search are illustrated using a word tree as shown in Appendix 3. Further search of the raw data was undertaken in order to contextualise the comments from the students.

Detailed analysis of the comments has been undertaken to establish the context of the results of the Word Frequency analysis. The main issues highlighted by the analysis are identified below;

Word	Positive Influencer	Negative Influencer
Lecturers, tutors, staff, teachers	• *Knowledgeable, Friendly staff.* • *Provide support.* • *Accessible* • *Enthusiastic*	• *Poor English Language and communication skills* • *Difficult to contact* • *Provide little support* • *Research students acting as lecturers*
Course, modules, lectures	• *Interesting modules* • *Challenging* • *Relevant to industry*	• *Boring* • *Not up-to-date* • *Not industry relevant*
Teaching, interesting, skills, experience, helpful, industry,	• *Staff with industry experience.* • *Helpful, supportive staff*	• *Reading off Slides.* • *Word for word reading from PowerPoint.* • *Poor interaction with students.* • *No industry experience.* • *Poor English Language skills*
Group, Students		• *Staff unable to control the class* • *Poor or No classroom management*
Coursework, feedback	• *Help and support provided* • *Feedback given*	• *Provide little or no feedback* • *No support for coursework*
Enough, Library	• *Library adequate*	• *Not enough support* • *Library poor*

Table 14 - Word Frequency Analysis contextualisation: Teaching on my Course.

5.3.2 Assessment and Feedback.

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Feedback	8	118	3.05
Lecturers	9	102	2.63

Course	6	88	2.27
Coursework	10	76	1.96
Staff	5	50	1.29
Tutors	6	49	1.27
Interesting	11	40	1.03
Assignments	11	34	0.88
Modules	7	34	0.88
Teaching	8	34	0.88
Skills	6	33	0.85
Helpful	7	32	0.83
Experience	10	29	0.75
Marking	7	29	0.75
Industry	8	28	0.72

Table 15 - Word Frequency Assessment and Feedback and Positive Comments.

From the data the following information can be extracted around the key areas

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage %
Coursework, assignments,	110	2.84
Feedback, marking	147	3.80
Lecturers, tutors, staff,	201	5.19
Course, modules,	122	3.15
Teaching, skills, interesting, experience, industry, helpful	225	5.06

Table 16 - Word Frequency Results: Assessment and Feedback and Positive Comments.

The data is suggesting that the students on the four programmes are reporting very different experiences in relation to ‘Assessment and Feedback’ despite a clearly defined policy and procedure within the School regarding the management of assessment and feedback. The quantitative data indicates that the ‘Assessment and Feedback’ category

has lower levels of satisfaction than other categories across all the courses within this case study.

As highlighted in figure 34, particular issues are evident for the Building Surveying and Quantity Surveying students around '*Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair' and 'Feedback on my work has been prompt'*. Additionally, students are reporting low levels of satisfaction relating to '*Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand*'. The data indicates that the lecturers themselves are the most important aspect in delivering a **positive** perception of the student experience relating to assessment, closely followed by the quality of the feedback and the quality of the marking. The actual assessment tasks as represented by the coursework brief are shown to be important as are the clarity of the marking criteria. The quality of the feedback in terms of a clarifying 'things the student did not understand' appears to be an important factor in how they perceive the whole assessment experience. The course and/or module content also plays a significant role with the skills of the tutors in making the subject area interesting and relating the assessment to industry having an influence on the perceptions of quality and the student experience. This is an issue identified via the verbatim comments rather than the survey statements as the statements do not directly refer to the influence of the staff on the process, how the assessment aligns with the module content and how it aligns with industry practice.

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Feedback	8	185	4.14
Coursework	10	119	2.66
Lecturers	9	82	1.83
Marking	7	56	1.25
Modules	7	48	1.07
Assignments	11	45	1.01
Lectures	8	42	0.94
Course	6	41	0.92
Library	7	40	0.89

Group	5	38	0.85
Students	8	37	0.83
Tutors	6	37	0.83
Enough	6	35	0.78
Sometimes	9	30	0.67
Staff	5	29	0.65

Table 17 - Word Frequency Assessment and Feedback and Negative Comments

From the data the following information can be extracted around the key areas

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage %
Coursework, assignments,	164	3.67
Feedback, marking	241	5.39
Lecturers, tutors, staff,	148	3.31
Course, modules, lectures, library	171	3.82
Group, Students	75	1.68
Enough, sometimes	65	1.45

Table 18 - Word Frequency Results Assessment and Feedback and Negative Comments.

Again, from the initial review of the data it appears that a larger range of factors impact on the student reporting a negative student experience than on a positive experience. The data indicates that the feedback and marking are the most significant factors in delivering a **negative** perception of the student experience relating to the assessment, closely followed by a range of additional factors including the coursework/assignments themselves, the actual structure and content and the lecturing staff. The actual assessment tasks as represented by the coursework brief are shown to be important in terms of clarity for the students and the support they receive. The course and/or module content also plays a significant role with the skills of the tutors in making the subject area interesting and relating the assessment to industry having an influence on the perceptions of quality and the student experience. The planning and scheduling of the assessment impacts on the student view in terms of a positive or negative perception of

the actual assessment and feedback. The verbatim comments also indicate that the volume of assessment impacts on the student experience in a positive or negative way. Interestingly, the students link issues such as 'Academic Support' with other specific areas such as 'Assessment and Feedback' and 'Teaching on my Course' within the verbatim comments in a manner that widens how they process their experience and indicates students interpret their experience outside the narrow confirms of the survey.

Further analysis of the comments has been undertaken to establish the context of the results of the Word Frequency analysis. The main issues highlighted by the analysis are identified below;

Word	Positive Influencer	Negative Influencer
Good	• *Good Feedback* • *Good coursework*	• *Feedback not good*
Coursework, assignments, work	• *Good coursework, interesting*	• *Too much coursework* • *Poor timing* • *Very poor coursework* • *Unequally planned* • *Poorly managed* • *Poor criteria* • *Unclear*
Feedback	• *Timely comments* • *Returned on time* • *Relevant* • *Helpful, very good*	• *Unfair marking* • *Very poor quality* • *Slow/Late feedback* • *Generally useless* • *Unclear* • *Vague and inconsistent* • *Lacking in detail*
Lecturers, tutors, staff,	• *Certain tutors are excellent* • *Good standard of knowledge*	• *Lecturers do not give feedback* • *Lecturers not accessible* • *Poor communication skills*
Course, modules,	• *Demanding but enjoyable* • *Course runs smoothly*	• *Modules not specific* • *Irrelevant subject material*

Teaching, skills, interesting	• *Some interesting coursework* • *Relevance to industry and career*	• *Many cancelled classes* • *Tutors poor communication skills* • *Tutors cannot communicate properly* • *Lack of industry relevance*

Table 19 - Word Frequency Assessment and Feedback Contextualised Results.

Examples of the results of the text search of the most frequently identified words are shown below. The results of the text search are illustrated using a word tree. Further search of the raw data was undertaken in order to contextualise the comments from the students.

5.3.3 Learning Resources

Learning resources within the context of the NSS applies to the provision of such support facilities such as the library, the use of the university Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), the general estate facilities such as the quality of the classrooms, study space and computing facilities. The provision of these facilities is generally controlled and maintained centrally by the university although students do not typically distinguish between those facilities controlled on a School basis and those provided by the university centrally.

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Library	7	51	10.92
Resources	9	23	4.93
Books	5	21	4.50
Facilities	10	18	3.85
Available	9	16	3.43
Blackboard	10	14	3.00
Enough	6	12	2.57

Lecture	7	10	2.14
Difficult	9	5	1.07
Computer	8	4	0.86
Great	5	4	0.86
Rooms	5	4	0.86
Theatres	8	4	0.86
Construction	12	3	0.64
Course	6	3	0.64

Table 20 - Word Frequency: Learning Resources.

From the data the following information can be extracted around the key areas

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage %
Library, Books, available, enough	100	21.42
Computer	4	0.86
Resources, facilities	41	8.78
Theatres, rooms, lecture	18	3.86
Blackboard	14	3.00
Course, construction, great, difficult	15	3.21

Table 21 - Word Frequency Results: Learning Resources.

The data indicates that the library is the most important aspect in the perception of the student experience relating to the learning resources. The interesting evidence from the initial data is the response referring to the computing facilities although the use of Blackboard VLE is important to the students. The general facilities including the university estate in terms of lecture rooms are a consideration but more analysis is required to establish if it is the facilities or how they are used.

Further analysis of the comments has been undertaken to establish the context of the results of the Word Frequency analysis. The main issues highlighted by the analysis are identified below;

Word	Positive Influencer	Negative Influencer
Library, Books, available, enough	• *Open 24 hours*	• *Lack of books* • *Out of date material* • *Poor range of books* • *Available books rarely available* • *'Awful'*
Computer	• *Good availability of computers* • *Good facilities*	• *Availability of computers with specialist software*
Resources, facilities	• *Overall resources very good* • *Good facilities*	• *Poor resources*
Theatres, rooms, lecture		• *Crowded classrooms*
Blackboard	• *Excellent when staff use it* • *Notes and lecture slides available*	• *Some information not available or after the lecture*
Course, construction, great, difficult	•	• *Lack of construction materials* • *Difficult to find books* • *Lack of books specified on the course*

Table 22 - Word Frequency Learning Resources: Contextualised Results.

5.3.4 Academic Support

The quantitative data for the 'Academic Support' category is again highlighting a very mixed experience as reported by the students within the school. As highlighted in Table 23, the data shows students on the Architectural Design Technology course are generally satisfied with the academic support they receive while the Building Surveying and Quantity Surveying students are less satisfied with the perceived quality of advice available to them related to their studies and the availability of staff.

The data is suggesting that the students on the four programmes are reporting very different experiences in relation to 'Academic Support' despite a clearly defined structure within the School for providing support to students at module level, at each level of study and via the Programme Director. The data is useful in highlighting the areas that the students are less positive about within the category of 'Academic Support' and raises some questions regarding the expectations of the students on each programme.

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Lecturers	9	49	5.84
Staff	5	35	4.17
Tutors	6	35	4.17
Helpful	7	24	2.86
Support	7	20	2.38
Students	8	14	1.67
Always	6	12	1.43
Available	9	11	1.31
Communication	13	11	1.31
Course	6	11	1.31
Advice	6	9	1.07
Emails	6	8	0.95
Excellent	9	8	0.95
Friendly	8	8	0.95
Teachers	8	8	0.95

Table 23 - Word Frequency Academic Support.

From the data the following information can be extracted around the key areas;

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage %
Lecturers, staff, tutors, teachers	127	15.13
Helpful, support, always, available, friendly, Excellent	83	9.05
Communication, advice, emails	28	3.33
Course	11	1.31
Students	14	1.67

Table 24 - Word Frequency results: Academic Support.

The data indicates that the lecturers themselves are the most significant factor relating to the student experience relating to academic support as may be expected. All the comments indicating a positive experience relate to staff that appear to be providing excellent support in a friendly, enthusiastic manner and are accessible to those students seeks support. The negative influencers within the verbatim comments are centred on academic staff that are not accessible, have poor language skills or do not provide the support the students expect. The availability of staff via face-to face contact and by email plus the quality of that interaction with staff is shown to be important to the students and is a key influencer in a positive or negative manner.

Further analysis of the comments has been undertaken to establish the context of the results of the Word Frequency analysis. The main issues highlighted by the analysis are identified below;

Word	Positive Influencer	Negative Influencer
Lecturers, staff, tutors, teachers	• *Knowledgeable, Friendly staff.* • *Provide support.* • *Accessible staff* • *Enthusiastic*	• *Poor English Language and communication skills* • *Difficult to contact* • *Provide little support* • *Research students*
Helpful, support, always, available, friendly, Excellent	• *Some helpful lecturers* • *Friendly staff* • *Some staff excellent* • *Staff are willing to support*	• *Some staff not very helpful* • *Staff not available* • *Not supportive* • *No support*
Communication, advice, emails	• *Usually respond to emails* • *Usually quick to respond to email* • *Provide useful advice*	• *No support – no/slow response to emails* • *Staff reluctant to respond to emails*
Course	• *Course leaders listens to students* • *Lots of advice available regarding the course*	• *Course leaders never available*

Students	• *Good support for students* • *Excellent support for students*	• *No real help for students* • *Lecturers do not check which students are on support plans*

Table 25 - Word Frequency Academic Support: Contextualised Results.

5.3.5 Organisation and Management

The 'Organisation and Management' category is again highlighting a very mixed experience as reported by the students in both the quantitative data and within the verbatim comments. Architectural Design Technology students are reporting higher levels of satisfaction when compared with the three other degree programmes. As highlighted in Table 26, the data shows students on the Building Surveying and Quantity Surveying programmes are less satisfied with the perceived quality of timetabling and how any changes are communicated. The area which is resulting in the least satisfaction is related to the statement '*The course is well organised and is running smoothly*" with the Construction Project Management students indicating only 47% of the students undertaking the survey agreeing with this statement. Again it is apparent from the analysis of the verbatim comments that the students are concerned with the quality of the teaching rooms, the proximity to each other of the space they occupy for lectures and the size of the class in terms of the number of students within the room. There is also some evidence from the analysis that students link the timetable, the class size and environment with the amount of support they receive with assessments.

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Timetable	9	26	3.95
Course	6	20	3.03
Rooms	5	14	2.12
Lectures	8	13	1.97
Timetables	10	12	1.82
Lecture	7	11	1.67

Changes	7	9	1.37
Class	5	9	1.37
Organised	9	9	1.37
Students	8	9	1.37
Organisation	12	8	1.21
Module	6	7	1.06
Sizes	5	7	1.06
Timetabling	11	7	1.06
Coursework	10	6	0.91

Table 26 - Word Frequency Organisation and Management,

From the data the following information can be extracted around the key areas

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage %
Timetable, timetabling, timetables, changes	54	8.2
Rooms, sizes	21	3.18
Lectures, lecture, class	33	5.01
Course, module, coursework	33	5.0
Organised, Organisation	17	2.58
Students	9	1.37

Table 27 - Word Frequency Results: Organisation and Management.

The analysis of the verbatim comments indicates that the timetables are the most important aspect in the students' perception of how their programme of study is organised and managed. Student comments indicate that some students consider their timetable to be well organised and that the school has responded to there concerns while others are very dissatisfied complaining of '*Too many gaps in the timetable', 'Rooms all over the campus' and 'Rooms unsuitable for the class'.*

The lectures and where the lectures take place are shown to be significant for many students and are clearly linked in the mind of the students with the structure of their degree programme, the modules and the procedure relating to the coursework.

Further analysis of the comments has been undertaken to establish the context of the results of the Word Frequency analysis. The main issues highlighted by the analysis are identified below;

Word	Positive Influencer	Negative Influencer
Timetable, timetabling, timetables, changes	• *Easy timetable* • *Staff listened to student concerns regarding the timetable* • *Timetable arrangements have been good* • *Layout has been good*	• *Too many gaps in the timetable* • *Poor timetable* • *Rooms all over the campus* • *Timetable is 'a bit stuffed'.* • *Not well structured* • *Disjointed with large gaps* • *Long day – 9 – 5.*
Rooms, sizes, lecture, class		• *Allocation of rooms disorganised* • *Rooms unsuitable for the class* • *Rooms too small* • *All over the campus* • *Changed without notification* • *People sitting on the floor.*
Course, module, coursework	• *Good support with coursework* • *Good module tutors* • *Good support from module tutors*	• *Course poorly organised* • *No support with coursework in some modules*
Organised, Organisation		• *Poorly organised*
Students	• *Staff always willing to help students*	

Table 28 - Word Frequency Organisation and Management: Contextualised Results.

5.3.6 Personal Development

The results of the analysis of the 'Personal Development' category of questions has produced a range of results for the four programmes in the School and a significant range of responses for the questions within the category (Table 29). The results show that for Q19. – *'The course has helped me to present myself with confidence'* all four courses are reporting satisfaction levels in a range between 88% and 66% compared with the University of Salford average of 83%. However, the data shows a clear distinction between the four programmes with the Architectural Design Technology course reporting generally high levels of satisfaction across all statements in the category with the other programme reporting significantly lower levels of satisfaction.

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Skills	6	29	4.11
Course	6	24	3.40
Industry	8	14	1.98
Confidence	10	10	1.42
Improved	8	10	1.42
Placement	9	9	1.27
Construction	12	8	1.13
Helped	6	8	1.13
Placements	10	8	1.13
Career	6	7	0.99
Communication	13	7	0.99
Experience	10	7	0.99
Working	7	7	0.99
Environment	11	6	0.85
Group	5	6	0.85

Table 29 - Word Frequency: Personal Development

From the data the following information can be extracted around the key areas;

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage %
Skills, communication, confidence,	46	7.52
Industry, Placement, Placements, experience, career, working, construction,	60	8.48
Course	24	3.40
Improved, helped, environment, group	30	4.25

Table 30 - Word Frequency Results: Personal Development.

The analysis of the verbatim comments shows that students who provided comments state that the course has provided them with opportunities to develop their presentation skills and skills related to their chosen profession. The largest volume of comments relate to a positive experience for the students in developing communication skills, the ability to develop team working skills and the confidence to use these skills to improve their career prospects. The data indicates that the link to the construction industry in the form of placements, employability and general career awareness is high on the agenda for students in terms of skills development. However, for some students there is a perceived lack of this link with industry and this is shown to be a significant negative influencer for the students particularly relating to the construction-based professions. The programme of study and the perception of the module content and how this relates to the students expectations of their career development once working in the construction industry is shown to be a significant factor. The development of soft/transferrable skills is also important to the students. There is some concern evident from the verbatim comments that the students do not feel prepared to undertake a professional role within the construction industry immediately following completion of their studies.

Further analysis of the comments has been undertaken to establish the context of the results of the Word Frequency analysis. The main issues highlighted by the analysis are identified below;

Word	Positive Influencer	Negative Influencer
Skills, communication, confidence,	• *Good skills development in group situations* • *Improved presentation skills* • *Gradual improvement in communication and analytical skills* • *Meeting and presentation skills* • *Team building and team working skills* • *Improved my confidence* • *Content is geared towards developing skills* • *Development of professional skills* • *Gained new skills* • *Gained transferrable skills*	
Industry, Placement, Placements, experience, career, working, construction,	• *Placements allow invaluable exposure to industry* • *Placement Fairs* • *Enhances employment opportunities* • *Placement opportunities available* • *Presentations provide insight into Construction Industry* • *Good opportunity for work placement*	• *More information regarding work placement* • *Placements should be part of the course.*
Course	• *The course has improved my skills* • *Course has stretched me intellectually* • *Taught me new skills* • *Gives you good employability* • *Represents industry standards and develops skills* • *Gained a lot of confidence since starting the course.*	• *More industry involvement in course* • *Course not directly linked to industry* • *Feel totally unprepared for career*

Table 31 - Word Frequency Personal Development: Contextualised Results.

5.3.7 Overall Satisfaction

The data indicates that the programme of study and its perceived relevance to the student's future career is the most significant factor for the student when reporting their perception of the quality of experience within the overall satisfaction section of the NSS survey. The lecturers themselves are also an important aspect in delivering a **positive** perception of the student experience.

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Course	6	55	7.20
Knowledge	9	13	1.70
Interesting	11	12	1.57
University	10	12	1.57
Industry	8	11	1.44
Lecturers	9	10	1.31
Construction	12	9	1.18
Experience	10	9	1.18
Modules	7	9	1.18
Content	7	8	1.05
Overall	7	7	0.92
Relevant	8	7	0.92
Salford	7	7	0.92
Students	8	7	0.92
Working	7	6	0.79

Table 32 - Word Frequency Overall Satisfaction.

From the data the following information can be extracted around the key areas

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage %
Course, modules, knowledge, content, interesting, relevant	114	13.62
Lecturers, students	17	2.23
University, Salford	19	2.49
Industry, construction, working	26	3.41
Experience, overall	16	2.1

Table 33 - Word Frequency Results: Overall Satisfaction.

Further analysis of the comments has been undertaken to establish the context of the results of the Word Frequency analysis. The main issues highlighted by the analysis are identified below;

Word	Positive Influencer	Negative Influencer
Course, modules, knowledge, content, interesting, relevant	• *The course has improved my skills* • *Course has stretched me intellectually* • *Taught me new skills* • *Gives you good employability* • *Represents industry standards and develops skills* • *Gained a lot of confidence since starting the course.* • *Learning new skills and knowledge* • *Foundation on which to build knowledge* • *I have gained great knowledge* • *Broadened my knowledge* • *Good standard of lecturers knowledge*	
University, Salford	• *A successful time studying at university* • *Positive experience of studying at Salford* • *More help than at John Moore's University* • *Very satisfied with the university* • *Has surpassed my expectations*	• *Communication between the university and students has not been very good.*
Experience, overall	• *Great tutors and enjoyed the experience* • *Teachers has vast experience* • *Teaching staff who have good experience in industry* • *Has been a good experience*	• *Need tutors with experience rather than with PhD's*

Table 34 - Word Frequency Overall Satisfaction: Contextualised Results.

5.3.8 Outcomes of the initial data analysis

The initial analysis of the data supports the evidence in the literature and from other research studies (HEA, 2012) that demonstrate that the results for built environment subjects show lower levels of satisfaction compared to the experience of many other students responding to the NSS. This trend continues with Architecture and Building reporting lower levels of satisfaction compared with the experience of all other students in the wider subject area of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Within the subject grouping, many variations occur within individual programmes of study and across different institutional contexts. As demonstrated by the analysis of the NSS results from 2010 to 2015, built environment students generally report lower levels of satisfaction than in the wider university with some significant variations between programmes within the school.

The data appears to suggest that some student groups within the School are reporting a very different experience to other student groups within the School. This is interesting given the different programmes of study have a significant amount of commonality in terms of the staff and the modules undertaken. This commonality also extends to the organisation and management of the programmes and the resources available. The data for the individual programmes indicates that the perceptions of the student experience can vary significantly between programmes and also fluctuate significantly from one year to the next. Background information from the School indicates that during the period under review, the programmes of study have not changed significantly as the Periodic Review of programmes as part of the university quality assurance processes occurs on a 5 year cycle which had been completed in 2010 and is due to be undertaken in 2015. Therefore a generally stable position in terms of the course structure and content is evident and is unlikely to be responsible for the fluctuating student experience. The School invested heavily in staffing to support the programmes in January 2010 with the recruitment of ten staff, many with industry experience.

An investigation surrounding the individual programmes to establish if any factors may be influencing the significant fluctuations over the period 2010 – 2015 was undertaken using a review of documentation from the School. Reports from the School seem to

indicate that the significant influencer is related to changes in staff associated with the programmes as highlighted below:

Building Surveying shows a significant improvement in reported levels of student satisfaction between 2010 and 2011 that is maintained until 2013 when a significant drop to from 88% to 53% is recorded. The improvement coincides with the influx of staff in January 2010 and the drop reported in 2013 coincides with two Building Surveying staff leaving the School including the Programme Director. The drop in *'Overall Satisfaction'* levels also mirrors a significant drop in the '*Teaching on my Course'*, '*Academic Support'* and '*Organisation and Management'* categories.

The Quantity Surveying programme shows an improvement in satisfaction levels between 2010 and 2011 that also coincided with the appointment of new lecturers with significant industrial experience. The levels of satisfaction have continued to fluctuate although an underlying improving trend is evident. The Quantity Surveying programme has significant numbers of part-time day release students who consistently report lower levels of satisfaction than all other student groups within the school and within the Quantity Surveying programme.

The Construction Project Management programme has maintained a fairly static level of satisfaction with the exception of 2012 when a significant improvement was recorded. Interestingly, this coincided with a change in Programme Director for that year with a change again in 2013. The levels of satisfaction have continued to fluctuate although an underlying improving trend is evident.

The Architectural Design Technology programme generally has consistently high levels of satisfaction over the period in question with a sudden drop in 2011 that again coincides with a change in Programme Director. However, the improving trend has continued with 100% *'Overall Satisfaction'* reported in 2015.

From the analysis of the Verbatim Comments, the impact of the student perception of the teaching staff is significant not only in '*Teaching on my Course'* but is also relating to *'Assessment and Feedback', 'Academic Support'* and *'Overall Satisfaction'*. Further

investigation of the impact of changes to the Programme Director is required to assess if this is significant or a coincidence.

The analysis of the Verbatim Comments demonstrates that the educational background and industry experience of the teaching staff does impact greatly on levels of student satisfaction. Students appear to value staff with some industry experience, friendly approachable staff and staff that can provide a good experience in the classroom. Negative influencers appear to be related to a perceived poor experience in the classroom due to problems with communication, 'just reading' from the PowerPoint slides, lack of industry experience that is evident in delivering the module content. Other significant factors relate to the enthusiasm of staff for their subject area, quality of the interaction with students and if the member of staff is approachable and accessible to the students. Evidence from the literature (Gibbs 2004) suggests that the personal interaction between the lecturer and the students is a major factor in the student's perceptions of the teaching, the assessment and general satisfaction with their experience of higher education. Further investigation is required to explore the factors influencing the perception of the teaching and the lecturing staff and how this relates to their student expectations.

This 'local' experience also seems to have the largest impact on how the student reports their perception of services that are provided centrally by the university rather than the School itself. This is demonstrated in matters such as the quality of the university estate in terms of teaching rooms, catering facilities, car parking availability and charges, the library and availability of space to work outside of the scheduled teaching sessions.

5.4 Identification of Key themes

The analysis of the NSS results and the verbatim comments indicates that the following factors need further investigation using semi-structured interviews with a range of students from the school and with staff associated with teaching, programme management and senior management;

- The student experience of teaching and learning.

- The relationship with the teaching staff and engagement in the classroom.
- Assessment and Feedback.
- Academic support with the assessment process.
- Academic support.
- The expectations of the links with industry in the form of experienced teaching staff with construction industry experience and the involvement of the construction industry with the programmes of study.

5.5 Chapter summary

As stated in the research method, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with a sample of School of Built Environment students to explore the expectations and the key issues as highlighted above. As the aim of the research is to propose a conceptual framework for improving the student experience, a further series of semi-structured interviews has been undertaken with key staff to explore the identified areas indicated as important to students and to contextualise the issues in terms of local school level factors that could be reviewed to improve the experience for the student's.

CHAPTER SIX Analysis of the semi-structured interviews

6.1 Introduction

Semi structured interviews were carried out with students to further explore the areas identified through the analysis of the quantitative data from the NSS results from 2008 – 2015 and the analysis of the verbatim comments for the same period. The identified issues were further explored through discussion of the factors that would provide a positive experience and the factors that would impact negatively on their experience. This approach was taken as the overall aim of the research is to develop a conceptual framework for improving the student experience which requires understanding the reasons behind the responses to the statements on the NSS rather than responding to the survey only. The reported variation in the experience of the students within the same School suggests that other factors are also influencing the perceptions of individual students other that the services provided by the School. The analysis of the verbatim comments demonstrates that while some student's report that they are very satisfied with the teaching, the lecturers and academic support they receive, others report being very dissatisfied with the same service. The interviews explored with the students, their expectations in relation to the area identified on the survey, the background to the experiences they are reporting, both positive and negative including the 'as-lived' experience. It is important to focus on the positive factors influencing their experience in addition to the negative to ensure an holistic view of the factors are gained in order to understand the complete picture. On completion of the analysis of the data collected via the interviews with students, semi-structured interviews were conducted with academic staff in the School. The identified factors from the interviews with the students were used as the basis of the questions/statements in the interviews with staff. The interviews explored the factors identified by the students to gain an insight on those factors from the staff perspective. The staff were encouraged to comment on the identified areas in the context of the their own professional and personal perspective. The complexity of delivering professionally accredited, vocationally based programmes of study that are industry relevant and up-to-date while ensuring they are pedagogically appropriate is challenging. Additionally, the balance of skills required of teaching staff in

relation to teaching and research while also having the industry knowledge and experience is challenging both for the individual staff member and the School. Understanding the perspective of the School in ensuring it meets its own Key Performance Indicators within the larger organisation is important, as is an appreciation of the organisational requirements and pressures faced by the university. The aim was to capture organisational matters that the students would not necessarily have any understanding of and how this may impact on any of the matters identified by the students. The analysis of the data from the various sources is triangulated with the literature to gain an insight on all aspects of the identified issues.

6.2 The experience in the classroom.

It is evident from the analysis of the data from the NSS for the '*Teaching on my Course'* that even where the students indicated that the staff rated highly on Q1 – '*Staff are good at explaining things'* students have been less likely to agree that the *''Staff have made the subject interesting'*, *'Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching'* or *'that the course is intellectually stimulating'*. The statements provided within the verbatim comments included comments relating to staff *'just reading off PowerPoint Slides',* '*Poor interaction with students in the class', 'staff with no industry experience' and staff with 'poor English Language skills'.* The data from the survey results shows that the students are reporting some dissatisfaction with the experience within the classroom. The analysis of the data from the semi-structured interviews supported the data from the survey in that the experience within the classroom was a cause of dissatisfaction amongst the student population. However, the students reported a mixed picture with some very positive teaching experiences alongside some very negative experiences. The data indicates that although only a relatively small number of factors are influencing the student experience, it is the same factors that will have either a positive or negative impact. The data also suggests clear links between the identified factors. For example, if students are reporting a negative experience in the classroom due to the teaching methodology employed, they will also report negative experiences for similar reasons relating to assessment and feedback and academic support. The evidence from the semi-structured interviews with students shows the factors impacting on the student experience fall within five main areas for both positive and negative experiences

including, the teaching methods employed, staff engagement with the student group, assessment procedure and support, industry relevance and the organisation of the teaching sessions.

6.2.1 Teaching methods

The overwhelming negative influencer for students is linked to the use of PowerPoint as the only method of delivery within the classroom. Students are reporting they are experiencing teaching sessions that are dominated by the lecturer reading verbatim from the PowerPoint slides. S05 comments that '*If I didn't get the right lecture delivery it would be a waste of time…if you come in and sit there sometimes you can actually see the lecturer fumbling…you sometimes think that I could do better"*. Given the majority of scheduled teaching sessions are for four hours, it is a major issue for the students when this is happening. The student's further report that as they have access to all the lecture materials on the BlackBoard virtual learning environment, they expect that the timetabled sessions will be used to add value to the materials they have. For example, S03 reports that they are often faced with "*Staff just reading off slides, not enthusiastic and not engaging with the students in the room…it's like we are not even in the room".* This is further supported by S20 who remarks on the factors that would make a negative experience in the classroom *'When the lecturers just talk and talk and talk…and there have been lecturers that you cannot understand them either… so that makes you just doubly switch off'.* The lack of any interactive study within the sessions is something the students express dissatisfaction with and indicate that lack of this type of teaching hinders their learning process. A repeated theme from the student interviews is that they are hoping for some interaction with the lecturer and the subject area within the session in the form of group exercises, discussions and use of other media to engage with the subject area. When asked about what would result in a positive experience in the classroom, the most common response from the students included *"Interactive study is one of the main things".* Many educational theorists including Bloom *et al*, (1956), Kolb, (1984) would support the concerns expressed by the student body as suggested in the published theories related to how students learn and teaching strategies to support the learning. Observation evidence suggests the School has some awareness of the issues from data collected a number of quality

control mechanism including Module Evaluation Questionnaires, Staff-Student committee meetings, from student representatives and has taken a number of steps to attempt to improve the situation including requiring new lecturing staff to undertake a teaching qualification, requiring all staff to engage with the peer observation of teaching scheme and to participate in regular training related to teaching, learning and assessment practice. The data also indicates that the scheduling of four hour long sessions for each module is proving problematic for some students and teaching staff and that the issue of the organisation of the teaching sessions is linked with the poor staff engagement with the students. The interviews with staff from the school reveal some contrasting views on the use of four hour teaching sessions. 60% of the respondents expressed concern with the practice commenting *"I think it is difficult when you have a 4 hour block to keep the students engaged…you can break the session up with different activities but there is no definition between what is a lecture and a tutorial. The other issue is that the classes can contain anywhere between 80-160 students in one room" (LECT01).* Another view suggests the problem is with the teach practice of individual staff members "*I don't think 4 hour blocks of teaching are inherently wrong, it does impose obligations on the member of staff to manage that…I have just come out of a 4 hour session and I think the experience was overwhelmingly positive. The interaction I had with the students throughout was positive, it was well attended but it requires a certain amount of engagement with the students…It is a problem with particular members of staff" (LECT03).* The data highlights an number of matters that could be contributing to this practice that fall into two categories including the physical factors impacting on the teaching any given module and matters related to the teaching staff. The physical factors relate to the numbers of students in the session, the room size and layout, the timing of the sessions and the available facilities.

6.2.2 Organisation of teaching sessions

The four main undergraduate courses in the study are closely linked and as a result typically have 50% commonality within the programme structure As a result, the common modules across all programmes will typically have 280 students registered on the module, with other modules shared across 2 or 3 programmes resulting in 60-150 students on the module and typically in the same four-hour session. The evidence from

the students shows they expected to have large lectures as a part of their studies but they indicate they also expected to have smaller, programme focused group tutorials. Although the sessions are shown on the timetable as lectures and tutorials, in fact many of the tutorial sessions are timetabled to include the same students as in the lecture and within the same lecture theatre. The students report that they consider the size and length of the teaching session to be the primary reason for the over reliance of PowerPoint in the class and for some staff just reading from the slides. The teaching staff interviewed considered the lack of small group sessions a barrier to engaging the students in activities other than formal lecture format due to the physical limitations as a result of the numbers in the session and the room allocation as a result. LECT01 reports *"It can be difficult to bring other activities into the teaching sessions due to the room selection - if you have a particularly large group and are given a tiered lecture theatre it can be difficult to do activities such as group exercises with the students".*

Other reported consequences of the size of the class on the learning experience for students are highlighted by a number of students *"from my perspective I am inclined to ask more questions when it's a smaller class because I feel more comfortable to do that whereas if it's a big class I feel a bit… kind of more wary and even intimidated to ask questions* (STU001).

The School has put mechanisms in place to ensure the allocation of the teaching activities and the timetables are produced many months before the new academic year to avoid teaching staff being required to pick up modules with little time for preparation or subject areas they are unfamiliar with. There has been increased consistency in terms of the modules that the staff are required to deliver to avoid staff coming to the module with very little notice. As a result, "*there is more time for the lecturers to be planning and preparing the materials and not just picking up the slides from the lecturer who taught it previously. So they should not be picking up material that they are not so confident with – that has been cited as a reason for why that may be happening"* (LECT04). There is some discussion within the senior management of the school to consider the issue of the smaller group tutorials. The major issue for the School is the appropriate use of resources to support the teaching and to ensure the other activities such as research and enterprise are resourced. The issue of the teaching methods

employed has resulted in a larger discussion of the best way to deliver the programmes using a more blended approach to support the students inside and outside the classroom and to ensure they have the best possible learning experience. One such initiative is to develop learning packages to support the learning in order to get staff to think about other ways of delivering some of the content and bring other activities into the classroom. The hope expressed by the staff interviewed is that *"the development of learning packages and the use of other media, such as videos, apps etc. to try to make the learning more interesting for the students and to assist staff to moving away from using the slides as a crutch"* (LECT 02).

The allocated teaching spaces can also have a negative impact on the student learning experience. In addition to the concern regarding the four-hour sessions with large numbers of students, it is evident from the data collected from staff and students that the actual physical environment of the room can be problematic. STU006 reports *"Some of the classes have all the students in but the room is ok because it is big enough but some are so small we are crammed in…you cannot breathe never mind concentrate. There is no air conditioning either so it is just awful… you literally find yourself going to sleep because there is no air".* The observational evidence suggests that some students are not attending the timetabled sessions due to the issues described and as a consequence are not able to take advantage of the learning experience planned for he modules. This poor attendance can also be linked to students reporting they are not interacting with module tutors, level tutors or other students and as a result are becoming isolated during their studies, this is supported by the following comment from STU006, "*When you have a class on a Friday afternoon, in a rubbish room...it was so hot and no breaks just the lecturer going on and on…no interaction with the class...terrible. It was so boring…literally I just had to go early. It was due to being talked at and nothing else…all they say is we have loads to get through so you have to wait…bit you think you may have loads to go through but I'm not going to listen…you can see as the semester passes less and less people turn up but there is still no interaction even with the smaller class*". Evidence from the School supports the fact that attendance in some modules is falling significantly as the semester progresses with some module attendances as low as 25% of the expected numbers in attendance. It is well documented in the literature (Newman-Ford *et al.,* 2008; Carini *et al.,* 2000) that a

positive correlation between attendance in class and a successful outcome of the module in terms of the assessment exists. The suitability of the type of room allocated in terms of the size and layout is also cited as having a negative impact on the ability of the staff to provide an interesting and interactive teaching session. Teaching staff report problems in attempting tutorial activities in tiered lecture theatre's, problems with adequately generating discussion in the room and having adequate physical resources within the environment to accommodate some planned activities.

6.2.3 Staffing issues and engagement

The staffing issues identified by the data analysis include lack of engagement with students, subject specific knowledge and skill of the lecturers, inexperienced teaching staff, lack of adequate preparation for the sessions, lack of motivation to engage with teaching activities and poor academic practice.

The main area of concern from the student perspective is the lack of engagement in the lectures and also a perceived the lack of interest in the progress of the student. The analysis of the data highlights the students view the interaction they have with the staff from a very personal perspective. They are keen to report that a positive influencer on their experience is when the staff member takes the time to engage with them as part of the teaching session and also outside of that environment. Many of the comments around the positive experiences they have had are related to this engagement as noted in many of the interviews with students, for example, *"It is nice when staff know who you are and who are interested in you doing well"* (STU05), *"the module tutor was great…he knew my name"* (STU012). The lack of any engagement is a significant negative influencer on the student experience and appears to be linked strongly linked with many of the issues identified by the students such lack of academic support, assessment and feedback, organisation and management. As STU008 reports *"When I first started my course the staff where great, really interested in the students…they knew who you are…but now I don't think that is the case. Some are interested but more and more are really not interested in any of the students in the class or how they are getting on".* An emerging feature of the data is how the students perceive the experience from a personal perspective. This is understandable, as any experience will be judged through

the individual students background, life experiences and expectations. It is apparent that the 'as lived' experience of the students is highly influential on how they view the experience while at university and recognising the relationship between actions taken by the School and individual staff members will have on the perception of the students. During the interviews, students often expressed their experience of the issues from a very personal perspective. For example, STU013 recounts "*I put my two children into child care at the cost of £40 for the day so I could attend the lectures, struggled in on the train…for the lecturer to read the slides word-for-word for 40 minutes…then finished the class 3 hours early…what was the point, I had access to the notes at home so I effectively wasted my time and money"*. This pattern of relating the response to the questions to a particularly personal experience is repeated often throughout the interviews. Demographically, the population of the undergraduate programmes has large numbers of mature students and part-time students in addition to the traditional student entering higher education at 18 years old following completion of A levels. The School also has a significant proportion of students entering via the clearing process who are not high achieving academically. The expectations of these students and how they relate it to their own experience is significant in how satisfied they are with the service they receive during their time at the university. It is interesting that no students commented upon the cost associated with undertaking the degree but it was evident that they are very focused on the expected output of this investment.

The knowledge and skill of the lecturer also appeared to be closely linked with how students experience the teaching sessions. The experience of lecturers just reading from slides was strongly linked with the perceived background experience of the lecturer and was interpreted as either a lack of industry experience, a lack of interest or both by many of the students. This is demonstrated by the following sample of comments, "*You can tell when they (the lecturer) knows what they are talking about, when they have worked in industry in the past…when they are teaching something, you can tell they actually know what they are telling you rather than just reading off the presentation*" (STU005), and '*I feel at times we are getting taught too much out of a textbook and I feel that it is not enough. I am going into industry in a month's time and I do not feel like I am ready. I feel some of the modules are not relevant"* (STU010).

"*The interaction is the most important bit of what happens in class. You can tell if the lecturer enjoys teaching because it comes across and you like listening to them more…they try to make it more interesting. It is obvious if they have some experience of what they are talking about…sometime it sounds like they have just read a book*" (STU007) and "*If the lecturer can do good presentations and if they can give examples from their own experience of working in the industry then the modules are much better"* (STU016). It is evident that the students particularly value lecturers who have some professional experience of the subject area they are teaching but there is no evidence that industry experience is the only indicator of good teaching practice. It is a complex issue and the skill set of the staff members is relevant to the experience in the classroom. The complexity of the issue was underlined by Lect04 who states, "*A lot of the lack of engagement from staff comes from staff that are not comfortable with the subject area of the module…they also need to be enthusiastic about the subject. That enables more connection with the cohort and then that passion for the subject area will come through to the students. In a way it is like performing, having that ability to perform and not just convey knowledge but to engage with the students, bring in humour and having a presence in the classroom, being able to control the class and gain that respect…when you think about the skill set required it is huge*". As mentioned, the skill set required to deliver high quality, industry relevant lectures in a large lecture theatre is considerable and will require a complex mix of knowledge and skills. The range of knowledge required will include academic knowledge as a basic requirement and if this can be supplemented by professional knowledge this is shown to be a valued addition but often this is not a requirement for the appointment of academic staff. The ability to communicate effectively in the classroom is often only a skill that is acquired through experience so to some extent it is likely that a mix of abilities will be evident in any academic department. Many onlookers to higher education are surprised that a teaching qualification is not a requirement to be appointed to teach in a higher education environment and that many academic staff will not have any formal teacher training. It is increasingly becoming a requirement to engage with some formal teaching qualification within the academic community or to gain recognition of teaching practice via the Higher Education Academy (HEA) as the higher education sector looks to improve standards. However, often the most valued skill in the sector is the ability to contribute to the research activity of the institution and is often the critical factor in the recruitment of

academic staff. Due to the mix of activities associated with the higher education sector in terms of research, teaching and enterprise it is to be expected that a range of teaching abilities are to be expected amongst the staff employed to deliver this range of activities.

The perceived lack of engagement of some staff with the students may be linked to a range of issues, some may be due to lack of experience or not being comfortable with the subject area but may also be linked with other issues. The issues identified by the staff interviewed to explain the lack of engagement with the students relates to the expectations of the employer to engage with activities other than teaching, the recruitment and selection of staff and the promotion and reward structures. One of the key themes emerging from the interviews with staff is related to the value the employer places on teaching and the perceived benefit of investing the amount of time to produce high quality lectures and spend the additional time engaging with students. This is demonstrated by the comments from the interviews *"If one wants to do well as an academic then one has to do well at the research and the research has to address the expectations of higher education rather than the expectations of the professions and the students. There is no real career benefit of from spending time on professional relevant subjects or on teaching. The way to address the issues of lack of engagement from some staff is to somehow change the reward structure and the promotion criteria".* Other comments in support of this view include "*Promotion will not come from teaching it will only come from research. If the employer does not value teaching then it is particularly difficult. It is particularly apparent for vocational courses as there is no direct link between the research we do and the teaching".*

"The students expectations are that they will gain knowledge which will help them with their future careers and that will not come from research so the staff who are recruited from industry are always welcomed by the students but they will struggle to progress their career because of the lack of research outputs".

The view that teaching is not as valued by the employer as research and that time spent on developing teaching will be detrimental to career progression is significant in the efforts of the school to introduce measures to improve the experience of students. This view may impact on the motivation of teaching staff to spend time preparing lectures,

tutorial activities and developing skills to improve performance in the classroom. This point is emphasised by the comment *"I am very teaching focused and I sometimes wonder if that work is as recognized as someone who is writing papers and going to conferences all the time. I think there should be more of a teaching focus in the school so it is at least on a par with the research"* (Lect02).

Measures have been taken by the School to address a number of the issues highlighted including a review of the practice and procedures associated with these activities. The school has introduced comprehensive documentation to support academic staff in meeting the role requirements for module tutors in the form of the module Tutors Handbook and further supporting documentation available on the staff intranet. This has been further supplemented with training and development activities provided both centrally in the university and within the School. A three-day scholarship event is held on an annual basis for staff to discuss issues arising and for the development activities to support the teaching, learning and assessment. The general view is that while these initiatives are useful the fundamental motivating factor is still linked to career progression and reward. This is further emphasised by the following comments from staff "*It's not about procedures because it comes from within. It is an HR issue regarding the reward structures. It cannot be right can it that someone who has worked for 20 years in the industry, who then decides at that stage in their career to give something back through education and decides to continue their career in HE, is then judged on the same criteria as someone who has never been near industry and has therefore built up a portfolio of publications. You then tell the person from industry that you cannot be considered for promotion because they don't have the publications…its just not right but that is what is happening. There needs to be a value placed on industrial experience and what that can bring to the educational experience"* (Lect03) and *"We need appropriately experienced staff to make it work and they need to be fully motivated to engage with this, working at the university that does not appear to value the teaching then it will be difficult for staff to fully engage with it"* (Lect04).

Analysis of the data reveals a number of underlying contributing factors to the issues reported both within the NSS and the semi-structured interviews with students and academic staff as shown in Figure 42. The experience of the students in the classroom

is reliant upon the knowledge and skill of the lecturer to be able to enthuse the students within the room. Many factors may be at work in why for a number of modules this is not producing a satisfactory result. While the students will report the symptoms of the problem in terms of poor teaching methods, lack of engagement and a lack of an industry focus, the cause of the problem was alluded to within the interviews with academic staff. The underlying issues are related to the knowledge, skills and experience of the academic staff with regard to teaching practice and/or issues around the subject areas the academic staff are being asked to deliver. Lack of skills in teaching practice and academic subject knowledge is likely to result in a lack of confidence and an over reliance on reading from the PowerPoint slides with a reluctance to engage or interact with the students. Another possible cause of the poor performance and lack of engagement with students is a lack of enthusiasm and motivation of academic staff. The identified issues may be related to the policy and processes concerned with the recruitment, selection and appointment of academic staff. The training and development of existing staff members may also need to be considered to develop the skills necessary to deliver the quality of learning experience required by students and the institution. The academic staff interviewed also highlights issues surrounding the promotion and career development opportunities for existing staff members.

The issues identified in the data relating to the lack of small group tutorials, the timetabling of four-hour lectures and the poor physical environment or poor room selection is related to the organisation and management of the programmes of study. Issues related to how the workload is managed and the policy and procedures relating to timetabling. The roles and responsibilities of academic staff and the support mechanisms to support the staff in undertaking the roles is also an underlying factor related to performance. A high proportion of the academic staff interviewed commented upon the poor team working within the school related to teaching activities and the management of the individual programmes of study.

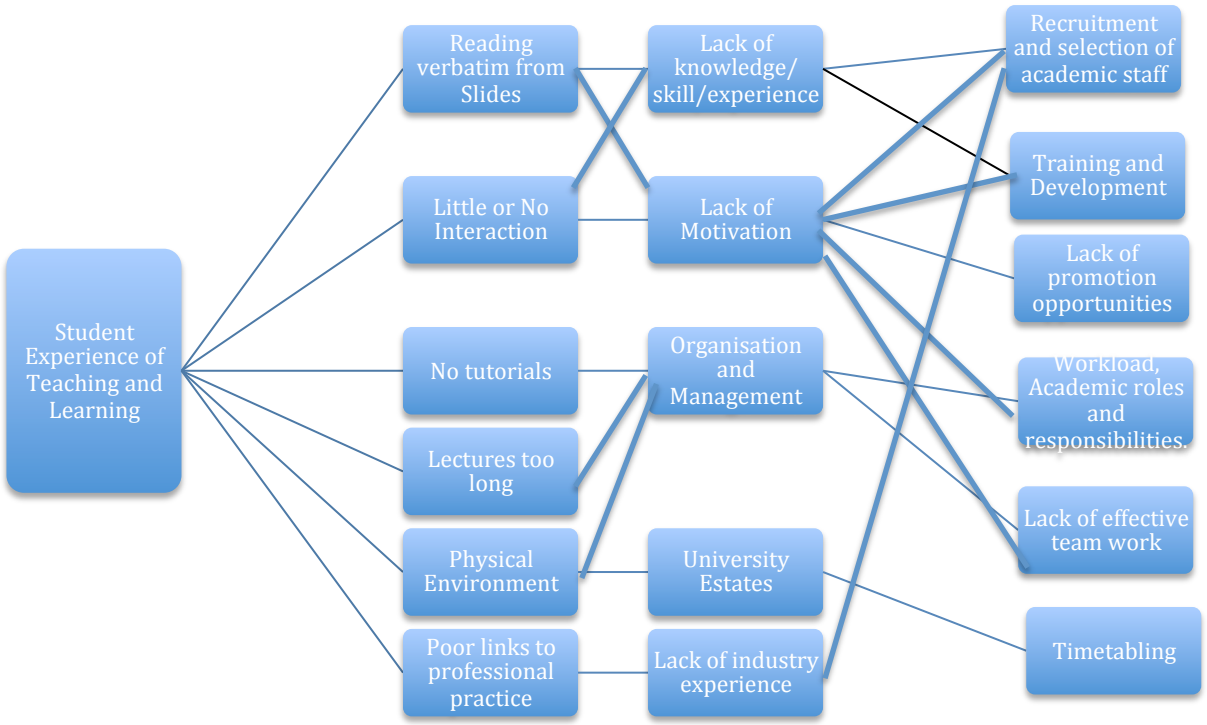


Figure 42 - Factors impacting on the student experience of teaching and learning.

6.3 Assessment and feedback.

Assessment and feedback is the category on the NSS that is consistently lower than all other categories across all institutions. This is perhaps due the importance that students place on the output of their time at university and assessment is the tool that measures this. It is clear from the data collected from the interviews that students are very focused on the assessment. As previously stated, the students interviewed did not comment on the costs associated with undertaking a degree even when mentioning issues they are less than satisfied with. It appears that the fees are now the accepted norm but the students are expecting the greatest possible return on the investment made. It is therefore only natural that students focus on the assessment as the primary method of maximising that return. The initial evidence to support this view is the comments made by students regarding how the subject matter of the lectures relates to the assessment and how some view the wider subject area and context to be irrelevant. It is a common complaint that the lecture content does not relate to the assessment brief. The analysis

of the data reveals four main areas of concern relating to the assessment and feedback within the School namely a) relating to the delivery of information relevant to the assessment brief, b) the practice and procedure surrounding the assessment, c) academic support for assessment and d) the formative and summative feedback.

The issue of how the curriculum is delivered within the module and how it relates to the assessment is often a cause of concern for students. A typical comment from the students interviewed include "*It is when they are just reading off PowerPoint, there is far too much information without any further explanation of the concepts and it is not directly relevant to either the coursework or the exams* (STU017). The timing of the assessment related to the information gained is also of concern to students. It is a unavoidable consequence of semester based modules that some time needs to be spent in the classroom delivering the curriculum content so ensure students have time to digest the principles and concepts of the subject area so they are able to undertake the assessment. However, this then is linked to the delivery in the classroom and how that relates to the assessment requirements. Students are particularly unhappy when they feel that the assessment is required to be submitted very early in this process as underlined by the following comment "*Some (assessments) are too soon…last semester was ridiculous. For example, in the Technology 2 module we were literally learning while we were doing the assignment, which is right to a point but we had an assignment due on the 31st October which was too soon given we only started classes on the 1st of October and it was just ridiculous. The lecturers reduced what was required in the end…they took out a lot of the drawings out. The semester was too crammed"* (STU016). Then this matter was considered by the teaching staff they accept that a natural tension exists between the expectations of the students and the wider academic view that in higher education we are wanting the students to be able to undertake further reading and research around the subject area and to consider a broader view of the principles and context of the material. It is generally not accepted by academics that they are expected to teach to the assignment and not meet the wider academic aims. The teaching staff do appreciate the pressures on the students as recognized in the following comment "*I think the student comments regarding academics not teaching to the assessment comes down to the change in the way students approach university – they are more outcome focussed that perhaps students were in the past. They may look*

back at the relevance of the broader subject area other than just what is required for their assessment once they have been in practice for a few years" (Lect02).

The practice and procedures surrounding the assessments is an area that is consistently raised as an issue by the students and is reflected in the results of the NSS and the verbatim comments. Several matters are of particular concern including the bunching of submission dates and changes to the published submission dates late in the process. The following comments illustrate the issues the students are experiencing, "*This year, the way it has worked has not been great. I think with the options I have chosen all the assessment seem to be within days of each other – even the exams. I think for the last exam there should be a two-week gap after submitting all the coursework so you have that time to prepare. I feel the majority of people are last minute with the dissertation so it only gives them four days to revise for the exam. I know it is about time management but it is the final exam"* (STU010*).*

Additionally, "*we had our assessments submission dates put back sometimes which is annoying because if you have set out your time to get it done then its moved can be demotivating because you think I don't want to do that one now…"* (STU006). Many of the academics interviewed, find it surprising that students are referring to this type of issue citing the efforts made by the school to address some of the issues raised. The process in the School to manage the setting of the submission dates is to require the Programme Directors to produce a draft assessment schedule that includes all the assessment requirements for the programme for the whole academic year. The module tutors are then consulted to ensure it meets with the requirements of the module. Final levelling of the workload is conducted before it is signed off by each of the module tutors and the Programme Directors to ensure all the assessment submission dates are adequately spaced to avoid bunching. This process is undertaken well in advance of the start of the academic year and is published before the students begin Semester 1. As the submission dates are agreed for the year, the expectation is that they should remain as agreed except in exceptional circumstances such as, for example, disruption to the module delivery due to staff illness. The analysis of the staff response to the issues raised by the students reveals a number of potential reasons for these problems to be continuing despite the efforts of the School. A possible reason for the perception of

bunching of the assessment by students is due to the natural consequence of the concentration of assessment towards the end of the semester coupled with a lack of time management on the part of the students who leave everything until the last minute. Another area identified is module tutors not following the assessment requirements as described on the module specifications in terms of the number of assessment points and the amount of assessment in terms of the word count. This was highlighted by Lect 01 who comments "*I have come across where the module specification says 1 assessment for the module but the students have been asked to do 2 or even 3 assessments. The additional assessment was not showing on the Assessment Schedule and so I can see why there would be some bunching of assessment'.* The reasons why module tutors should engage with changes of this sort this is further explained by Lect 04 who states *"There can be issues around what some staff expect from students and what is on the module specification. Sometimes, lecturers try to break it down into smaller components to help the students but then this is not represented on the assessment schedule and students complain. The other issue is when the word limit for the assessment is too high and that causes issues for the students in terms of workload and the time management in completing all the assessment'*. The data is highlighting two distinct issues associated with this student concern. The first is concerned with lecturers who are attempting to help the students by breaking down the assessment into smaller parts. This becomes a problem as it will not be represented on the Assessment Schedule and therefore it is possible that it will then clash with other assessment submission dates. Often it is only at that point that the additional assessment submission becomes known to the Programme Directors and the perception of the student is that it is due to lack of planning in the School. The other issue of the assessment requirements not matching the module specification is as a result of the module tutor not adhering to the requirements of the programme. As previously stated, the School has put in place a raft of policies and procedures to attempt ensure this does not happen and the view of Lect03 is "*I don't think there is anything more the Schools management can do to micro-manage how staff conduct their assessment, it is about the professionalism or lack of professionalism of the staff who are acting in this manner "*.

The issue stated by the students regarding the requirements of the assessment and the perception that this can change is concerning for the management in the School. The

quality assurance mechanisms of the university and within the School are clear in the terms of the process and the procedure for administrating the assessment. The assessment for each module is required to be produced by the module tutor before the beginning of the semester and will be subject to a process of internal and external verification. During the verification process, both the internal verifier and external verifier can suggest amendments to ensure the requirements of the assessment meet with the module specification, is of the correct academic level and is clear and appropriate. Having been subjected to this process, the assessment should not be changed. The concerns of the students identified in the interviews seem to indicate that in some cases this process is either not being adhered to or flaws in the process are resulting in the process not working as efficiently as expected. A selection of the comments from students is included to demonstrate the concerns they are expressing; "*The criteria in the design modules are very vague so the students often don't really know what they have to do and its pot-luck if they get a good design and a good mark. The assessment brief does not make it clear what is expected*" (STU014). Similarly, STU011 indicates "*Most of the lecturers this year have been willing to help but the biggest problem is the response if you do ask questions. Some of them change the advice on what they want from week to week and that is the most confusing thing*" and STU020 "*It is a problem when the criteria keeps changing and you don't really know what the lecturers want*".

From the analysis of all the comments relating to this concern, it is apparent that there is an element of confusion regarding what the students refer to as assessment criteria and the interpretation from the module tutors as to what they are expecting the students to submit. The advice given to the students as they prepare for the assessment submission is crucial to many students in interpreting the requirements of the assessment. As previously discussed, the students seem to be very output driven and this is evidenced through the intense focus placed on the assessment. Therefore, the advice offered by the module tutor will be taken very seriously, so for the advice to change or to be unclear would result in real issues for the students. There is no documentary evidence within the School to indicate the actual assessment criteria as shown on the written assessment brief had been subject to change. The analysis of the data indicates that the root of the problem may be with the advice provided by the module tutors in terms of what the expectations are of the module tutor for what should

be submitted. This is demonstrated with the comment from STU005 "*I think also that sometime the lecturer themselves are confused about what the marking criteria is. The assessment brief sets out the criteria but sometimes you go to the lecturer and they say 'no, no, that is not what I want' so it can be very confusing for the student".* With the focus of the students on getting the very best outcome they are often insecure around the assessment. The concerns expressed by the students in relation to this matter, were discussed with the staff members during the interviews and this matter produced a very strong response. Lect02 states *"I find it astounding that lecturers would change the marking criteria and expectations because once you have set the assessment in week one there is no reason why the criteria should change. I think if you are setting a question for the students and you cannot explain what you require them to do, then there is a fundamental problem with the question".* Lect04 goes further commenting *"Its about the professionalism of the academics, if you care about your job and the progress of the students, then it is pointless in writing assessment briefs that you are not sure what you want from the students. It's about being professional about all the requirements of your job and not focusing only on the bit that will progress your career".* Indications from the data point towards similar issues identified with the lack of engagement of some staff with students and with the poor teaching practice.

Another matter that students are reporting can be unsatisfactory is concerned with the issue of feedback and timing of return of the marks. The data again points to a mixed picture within the School with some examples of excellent practice. The students interviewed are keen to stress that it is a mixed picture and to some extent that is part of the problem. The students are often confused about what they can expect from individual module tutors in terms of formative and summative feedback. The whole area of assessment and feedback is another area that the School has worked hard to develop robust procedures coupled with mandatory training and development for staff to take advantage of. The Module tutors guide is made available to all staff and contains detailed information relating the practice and procedures connected to assessment and feedback. The university has also introduced a policy of requiring module tutors to provide the marks and feedback to students within 15 working days of the submission date. Compliance with the policy to return the marks and feedback is monitored in the School and a review of the documentary information connected with the monitoring

shows that on average 95% of the modules are returned within the 15 days. This does not match the perception reported by some students that they are not receiving the marks back within the 15 days. Possible reasons for this could be connected with the expectations of students and the fact that the policy specifically refers to working days that students often misinterpret and feel the work is returned late. The data shows that 75% of the students interviewed report that they usually receive the marks back in line with the university policy of 15 working days except in exceptional circumstances such as staff illness. The other 25% of students are reporting a very different experience that is contrary to the monitoring data collected within the school and the experience of the other students. The longitudinal analysis of the NSS reveals the issue of prompt return of work reports low levels of satisfaction with the analysis of the verbatim comments also providing evidence to support this. Figure 43 below shows the 2015 NSS results for 'Assessment and Feedback' also demonstrates the mixed picture for all areas connected with assessment and feedback and a particular issue on the Building Surveying course that shows only 38% indicating they are satisfied.

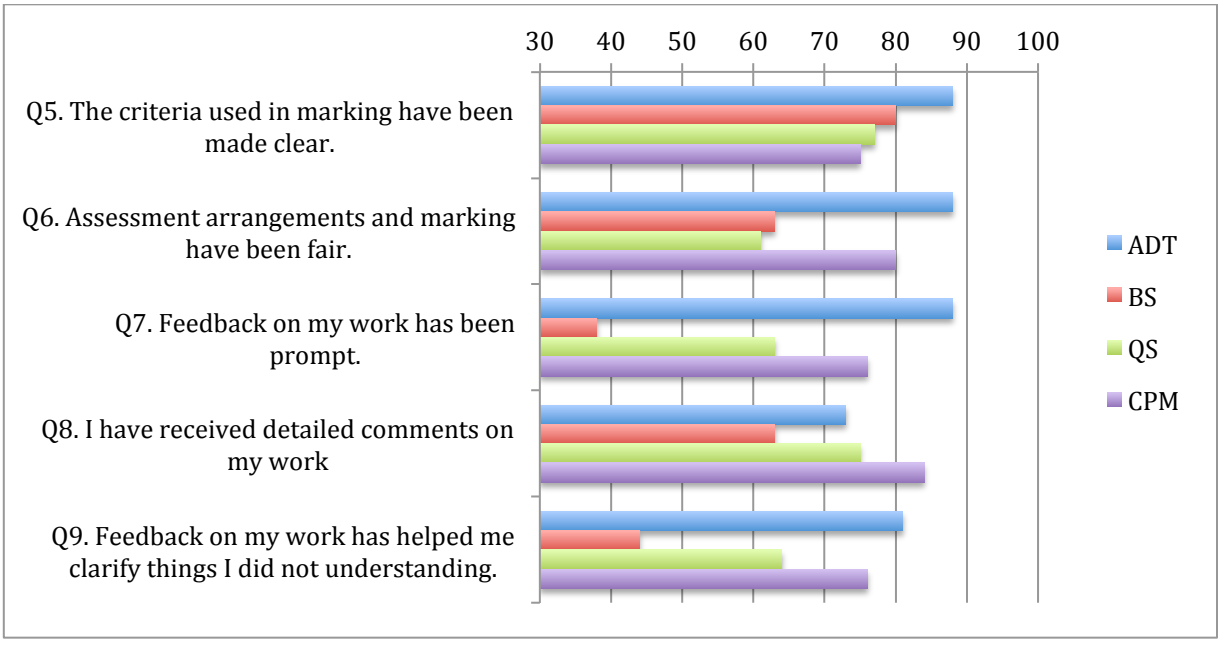


Figure 43 - NSS Results: Assessment and Feedback.

The typical comments from the students are similar to those of STU001 who *states "The marks are usually not back within the 15 days the university says they should be back*"

and those of STU004 who comments that *"you rarely get your marks back within the 15 days and that is for exams also. From my point of view, if you are not going to meet it then don't write the 15 days on the university spec… change it"*.

This issue is proving to be perplexing to the staff interviewed. The programme management teams review the monitoring data on a regular basis and cannot understand why the students are still so unsatisfied with the timing of the return of marks and feedback. A typical response from the interviewed staff is "*The marks not being received back in 15 days is a concern but it could be due to staff illness. It could be just the perception of the students as the school does monitor this and it is not an issue if you look at the stats*" (Lect02).

The analysis of the data relating to feedback was undertaken in several steps firstly a review of the formative feedback and the summative feedback separately then an analysis of the whole issue to establish the root causes of the issue.

6.3.1 Formative feedback

Formative feedback is a valuable aspect of the learning process and is described by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) as;

> *"Formative assessment has a developmental purpose and is designed to help learners learn more effectively by giving them feedback on their performance and on how it can be improved and/or maintained* " (QAA, 2006, p35).

Central to formative feedback is the feedback given to learners and as Sadler, 1989 states *"Feedback…is usually defined in terms of information about how successfully something has been or is being done*". This view is further supported by Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, (2006) who purports that "*Good feedback practice is…anything that might strengthen the student's capacity to self-regulate their own performance".* Given the importance to the learning experience, the School encourages teaching staff to provide formative feedback to those students who want it. The School is not prescriptive on how this should be undertaken due to the range of modules and teaching methods

across all of the programmes in the School but expects this to be managed by individual module tutors.

Analysis of the data collected from student's points to a number of issues in relation to formative feedback. Firstly, students are reporting that some tutors are unwilling or unable to provide formative feedback as commented upon by STU08 who states "*Most lecturers are prepared to help you out but some say they don't have time when you are available. Its not as good as it used to be, I don't feel like anyone is interested in how I am getting on individually. I got good support generally...it was only a couple of tutors who did not give you support if you needed it"*. It is evident from the data that this applies to a minority of staff but the impact on students appears to be substantial if the student is has the module tutors concerned. Lect02 comments "*Its disappointing to learn that students feel there is a lack of support for formative feedback, certainly it is something the School encourages all academics to provide"*.

The more typical concerns are regarding the quality of the formative feedback and to some extent this issue is linked with the issue of staff changing what they expect from the students in fulfilment of the assessment criteria. It often relates to the willingness of the module tutor to review a draft of the assessment produced by the individual students. This is highlighted by STU010 when asked to comment on the support for the assessment, comment's "*It varied…and that was a lot to do with the lecturers willingness to review a draft of the course work. Some tutors will only answer specific questions but sometimes you want them to look at the draft as you need more detail or more advice".* This issue relates to student expectations and how the module tutors involved can adequately satisfy the expectations. Observational evidence from within the School points to module tutor workload and the time requirements to provide feedback to large groups of students in any meaningful way. Module tutors report students emailing draft work at the last minute and expecting written feedback at that point. If the module is delivered to a large group of up to 260 students then this is likely to be problematic to manage. The larger modules often have two or three tutors allocated to the module that does reduce the workload but it is still significant. Lect03 supports this viewpoint to some extent, "*I think it is important to manage the expectations of the students regarding the feedback they will receive both in terms of formative and summative feedback.*

There can be incredible pressure on staff to meet the deadlines for returning marks and feedback due to the large numbers in the module. It's about having that dialogue and connection with the students so they can get more interaction and feedback on a regular basis…it comes down to the motivation of the staff". As it is only a minority of module tutors who are unable to meet the requirements to provide formative feedback it is perhaps other matters that are also impacting on the issue. The issue of managing student expectations may be made more difficult by the inconsistency of approach from different lecturers as STU001 explains, "*Each tutor is different in the level of support they provide for each module. The other problem is when the module tutors tell you different things or just don't respond to questions".*

Lect03 indicates that it may be an issue of motivation for the module tutor who is not providing the feedback rather than trying other methods to address the issue. Management of the student expectations and finding ways to meet the expectation is a fundamental responsibility of the module tutor and is closely linked to the previously identified issue of the willingness of some members of staff to engage with the students. The expectations of students is highlighted by STU005 "*I think a problem is the support you get from lecturers when it come to the assessment, when students approach them with drafts and expect them to give a grade based on the draft and some lecturers give in to this. So when the students give in the submission, the students get disappointed when they get the mark back because the lecturer has previously told them it was good*". The issue of students expecting to be told a likely mark based on the draft can prove to be problematic and documentary evidence from the School suggests it can lead to some student complaints. Students want to understand what the likely outcome is of the assessment based on the draft submission and due to the feedback given by the module tutor misunderstandings often result. The university has formalised both the marking bands to be used when marking and the corresponding description in terms of the language that is to be used within the Academic Regulations (2014-15) as shown below.

At Undergraduate Level 4, 5 and 6 the following marking scale shall be used:

Outstanding	90% – 100%

Excellent	80% – 89%
Very good	70% – 79%
Good	60% – 69%
Fair	50% – 59%
Adequate	40% – 49%
Unsatisfactory	30% – 39%
Poor	20% – 29%
Very poor	10% – 19%
Extremely poor	0% – 9%

Some evidence is growing that students are challenging the summative feedback and marks based on the language used as part of the formative feedback. For example, a student who as been told their draft assessment was 'good' is expecting that means the work falls within the marking band of 60%-69% as stated in the Academic Regulations. If they then receive summative feedback and a mark below this band, then the student often appeals the mark on the basis they were mislead by the member of staff. To some extent this is a training and development issue but is also proving to be a barrier for those module tutors who are reluctant to provide formative feedback. Lect01 proposes "*I think this could be managed better if we had smaller tutorial groups because if students think they can ask questions in smaller groups it will encourage them to work better as a cohort or group when you are giving them exercises to do to support the assignment. I think if students are more confident about what they have to put in the assignment and have the required knowledge and skills… you can be more confident about asking them to do further research to support their work and they will be more confident and they can develop as independent thinkers. If you do that in smaller groups then the students respond to that better."*

6.3.2 Summative Feedback

Summative feedback is a valuable aspect of the learning process and is described by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) as;

"Summative assessment is used to indicate the extent of a learner's success in meeting the assessment criteria used to gauge the intended learning outcomes of a module or programme" (QAA, 2006, p36)

The satisfaction levels with the summative feedback are very mixed within the School. Figure 34 demonstrates that the student agreement with the statements within the 'Assessment and Feedback' category varies considerably with the responses for Q.8 'I have received detailed comments on my work' ranging from 63%-84% and Q.9 'Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand' ranging from 44%-81%. From the results of the NSS (2015) it is clear that mixed practice is present in the School given the range of results indicated. Undergraduate students are often concerned with understanding 'how their work can be improved' or 'how the structure could be improved' to improve their marks. Another major concern is related to understanding the progress on the module before the examinations so they can prepare adequately. These concerns are echoed in the interviews with student at all levels within the School for example, STU004 comment's, "*It varies so much, there are so different methods tutor use. Some tutors write on feedback sheets so you get a breakdown of the marks against the criteria and in some, you just get little comments. In others, you have the Quickmark section as well… I quite like that because you can refer it to a specific part of your assignment. If you got that and a summary that would be great in my opinion as you would be able to relate in back to your work and not make the same mistakes"* while STU010 states "*Some of the feedback is good but some of it is quite frustrating because you can have done a really good piece of work according to the comments but you only get a 65% for it which makes you wonder what you needed to do to improve but the feedback doesn't tell you".*

The comments highlight a number of issues to related to the feedback and how that is presented to the student. Feedback and marks that refers to the 'marking criteria' is valued by the students but in order for this to be effective the student must have a clear understanding of the criteria in use (Ferguson, 2011). Gibbs (2007) suggests that working with students early in the process to fully understand the criteria will result in students who have a better understanding of the requirements and a better standard of work. This approach would assist the module tutor in providing effective formative and

summative assessment. It is interesting that a significant number of the students indicate their interest in the feedback is linked to the mark they receive. For example, STU07 "*It (feedback) is very mixed…some is good and relevant to your work, some is just a one liner. I am only really interested in the feedback if I get a lower mark than I was expecting because I want to know where I went wrong...if they are good marks I would be quite happy not to get any feedback – a simple comment would do".*

The evidence would further support the view that students are mark orientated and concerned with how the marks relate to the expected output of their studies. Students who are motivated to gain the best classification as possible are often the students who are interested in the feedback so they can improve going forward. For some students the feedback and how it relates to the marking criteria is very important while others are only concerned with the marks. Evidence of this is clear from the statistics for the numbers of students who access the feedback through the Blackboard VLE. The university virtual learning environment is used to administer the electronic submission, marking and feedback of student work and is a useful tool for both module tutors and students in providing detailed feedback using Turnitin. Evidence from the interviews suggests if module tutors use the electronic marking tools it does provide some useful feedback as confirmed by STU09, "*The feedback that was done in Turnitin where it actually showed you within the work where you had gone wrong was the most helpful, it was really good because I could learn from that"*. However, the other issue described by the students relates to the quality of the feedback and the amount of individual feedback the students receive as STU09 states, "*Some of the feedback was quite helpful but some was just plain and not particularly referring to my work…it was more to the class in general*". A number of students have commented that a standard template for providing feedback would help them to understand what they can expect from module tutors and provide a more consistent approach. The staff interviewed reports contrasting views on this suggestion, Lect01 agrees and state's "*A standard template in the school would be a good idea. Students also value it if you offer them time to get feedback from the lecturer directly – often it is the students who get the better marks. It is time consuming but it does encourage that interaction with the students*" whereas Lect03 suggests, "*It is better in my view to tailor the feedback to the individual assessment".*

Observational evidence from the School supports the fact that the School has put significant resources into improving the feedback through training and staff development activities. This is supported with documentation produced within the School to assist module tutors in producing high quality feedback. The improvements with the feedback have been noted by the External Examiners as noted by Lect02, "*The External Examiners have commented on how the feedback has improved and is continuing to improve so it is surprising that students continue with this perception. Overall the feedback we get from the External Examiners on this issue is that it is for the most part of good quality".*

The initiative from the university to standardise the marking bands and the language used to describe the work within these bands, is well received by the students but less so by some lecturing staff who find it restrictive. This maybe due to long established ways of working being will entrenched but some staff worry that it is too restrictive and is not effective in achieving the improvements the university is aiming at. Lect03 comment's that "*The university policy on the type of words you can use to give feedback – it impacts negatively on those staff who are acting professionally and has no impact to improve matters with those staff who are not*". The timing of some of the feedback is also of a concern for some of the students in terms of how it relates to other assessment for the same module. Many of the undergraduate modules have multiple assessment points on each module typically two. A number of students have commented on the fact that although they may get the marks and feedback from the first assessment within the 15 days standard turnaround deadlines, this could be too late to get feedback in sufficient time for them to prepare for any examinations. STU007 comments, "*It would be good would to know your coursework results before you take any exams – that is a big issue for me as I need to understand how I need to perform in the exam*".

Analysis of the data reveals a number of underlying contributing factors to the issues reported both within the NSS and the semi-structured interviews with students and academic staff as shown in Figure 44. The experience of the students with the assessment process is reliant upon the knowledge and skill of the lecturer to be able to motivate and guide the students in completing the assessment tasks successfully. Many

factors may be at work in why, for a number of modules, this process is not matching the student expectations and is resulting in dissatisfaction within the student cohort. While the students will report the symptoms of the problem in terms of poor application of the procedures relating to assessment, lack of formative and summative feedback and a lack of support, the causes of the problems was alluded to within the interviews with academic staff. The underlying issues are related to the knowledge, skills and experience of the academic staff with regard to teaching practice and/or issues around the subject areas the academic staff are being asked to deliver. Lack of skills in teaching practice and possibly academic subject knowledge is likely to result in a lack of confidence and some mixed messages regarding how the students should approach the assessment tasks. This may also be a factor in the reluctance to engage or interact with the students. Another possible cause of the poor performance and lack of engagement with students is a lack of enthusiasm and motivation of academic staff. The identified issues may be related to the policy and processes concerned with the recruitment, selection and appointment of academic staff. The training and development of existing staff members may also need to be considered to develop the skills necessary to deliver the quality of learning experience required by students and the institution. The academic staff interviewed also highlights issues surrounding the promotion and career development opportunities for existing staff members. The issues identified in the data relating to changes to submission dates may be related to the organisation and management of the Assessment Schedules and possibly some response to unforeseen circumstances. A number of the issues related to the management of providing academic support and feedback may be related to how the workload is managed and the policy and procedures relating to timetabling. The roles and responsibilities of academic staff and the support mechanisms to support the staff in undertaking the roles is also an underlying factor related to performance.

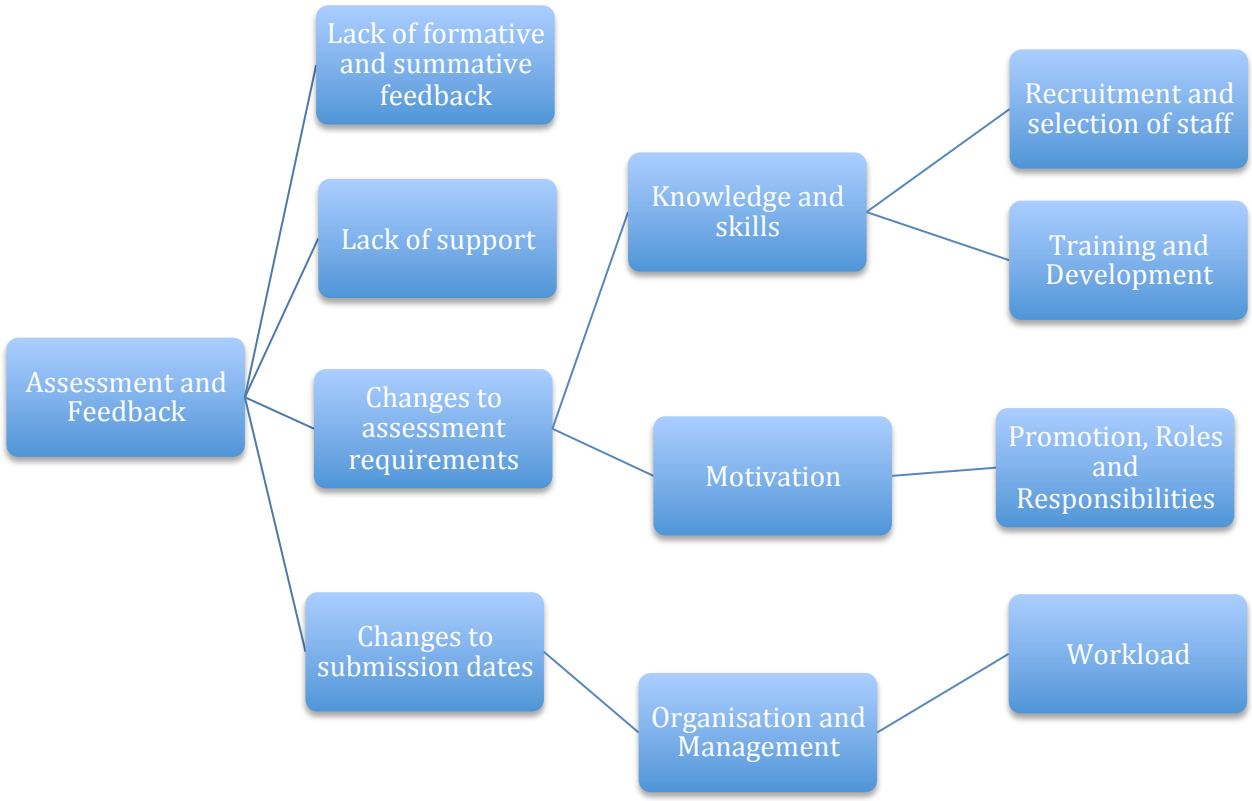


Figure 44 - Factors impacting on the student experience of Assessment and Feedback.

6.4 Academic support

The matter of academic support is considered to be important by the School as demonstrated by the significant resources invested, through the staff workload, in providing a number of sources of support for students. The typical support mechanisms for each programme of study for undergraduate students is demonstrated in Figure 45 below;

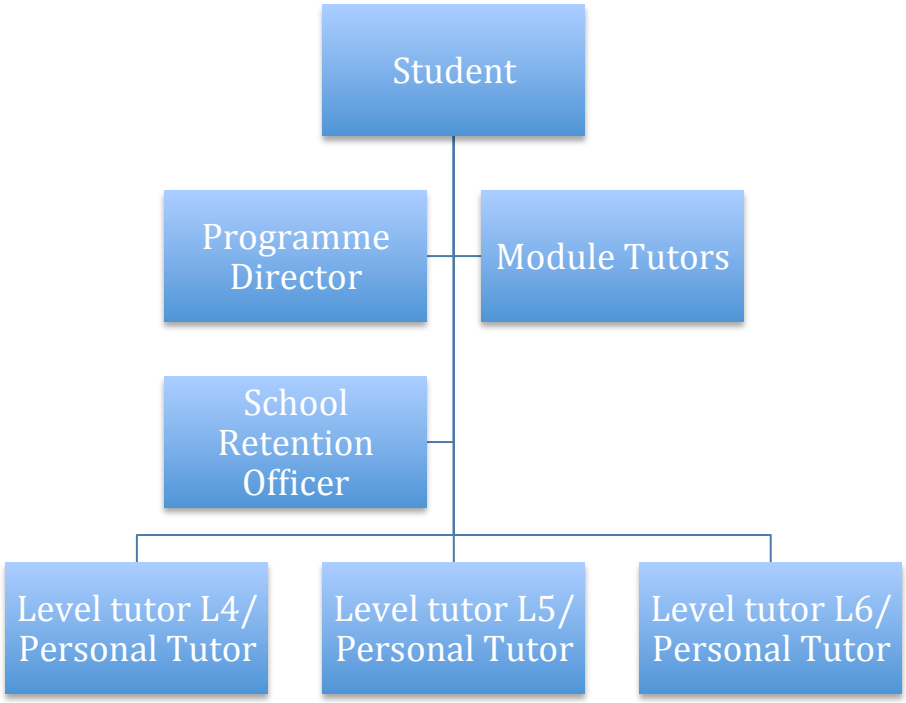


Figure 45 - Academic Support structure.

As the structure describes, students have access to multiple layers of support provided by the School to ensure students have a range of academic and professional services staff that can offer support for both academic and pastoral support. This School based structure is further supported by a university wide based structure to offer support for everything from study skills to health and wellbeing services. The support systems that are in place are communicated to students in several ways including during induction activities, communications from the Programme Director, supporting documentation available on the School intranet, the university website and from timetabled sessions relating to support for study skills. Documentary and observational evidence from the Schools indicates that training and development activities have been introduced by the Associate Dean Academic (ADA) to support the academic and professional service staff involved with any support activities with students. The provision of a Retention Officer based in each School is an initiative introduced by the Dean of Students. The role of the Retention Officer is to undertake some of the monitoring activities such as attendance monitoring, identifying students who are not submitting assessment or generally not engaging to ensure these students are identified early so additional support can be offered. The Retention Officer also acts as a conduit between the student and the

academic staff to ensure the tutor has all the necessary information to assist the student.

The NSS results for the 'Academic Support' category again shows a very mixed picture of the student's experience of the academic support they can access and also the quality of the academic support they receive. The responses to the statements of the survey show a wide range in the number of students who agree with the statements as shown in Figure 46. For example, in response to the statement Q.12 'Good advice was available when needed I needed to make study choices' only 47% of the Building Surveying students agreed while 92% of the Architectural Design Technology students agreed with that statement. A similar pattern is evident for all the statements within this section.

The response from students in the semi-structured interviews also reveals a mixed picture of the experience relating to academic support with a number of students satisfied with the support they received while others have a more negative perception. The interviews reveal that a significant number of the students are unaware of the support mechanisms the School has put into place to support their studies. The interviews also reveal the informal support mechanisms the students access for themselves when they cannot or do not access the formal structure.

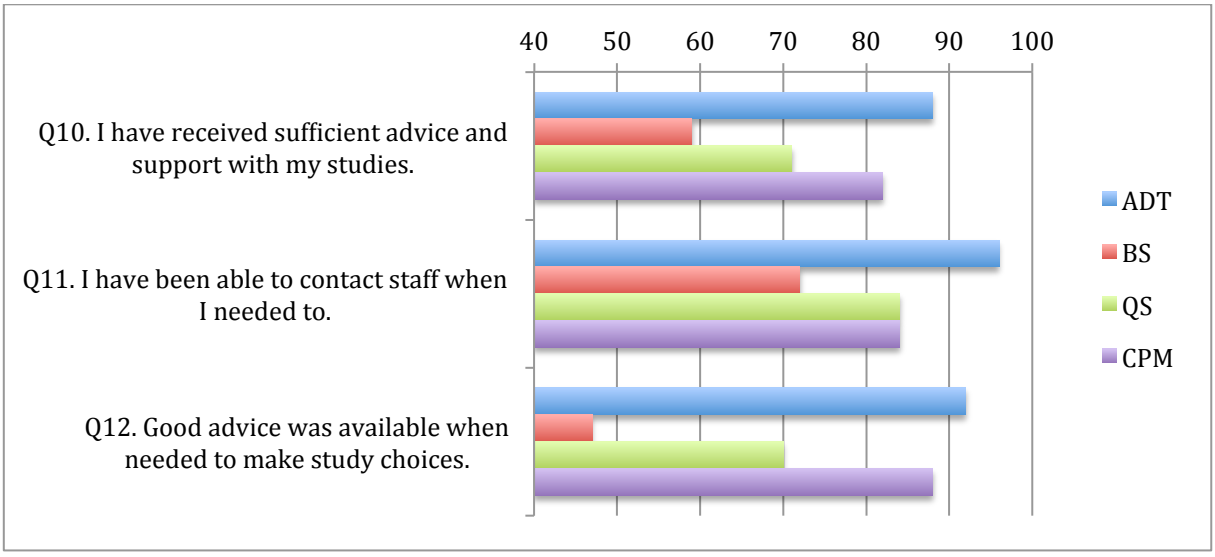


Figure 46 - Academic Support NSS Results: All programmes.

The analysis of the data reveals a number of matters relating to academic support, including awareness of the support structures in place and the decision making process on who they would contact.

Some students are aware of the support mechanisms and are confident they can access support if necessary. The evidence for this is expressed by STU015 who states *"I am aware of who I should go to if I needed support in terms of the programme director…not so much about the level tutor but I would probably send an email…it would be good if we had more interaction with staff and knew more tutors so we have a bigger group of tutors who could help if we needed it".* This view is in the minority with the students interviewed for this research study.

Some students are aware of the support mechanisms but experience difficulty in accessing them. This issue is demonstrated by the comments of STU007 who states, *"I am aware of who my programme director is but it seems to depend upon what mood they are in if they can be bothered with you. I was aware that we had a level tutor but have not really had any contact with them – I'm not sure what they are supposed to do"*. The issue of the availability of tutors to provide support does appear to be an issue for a proportion of students. The data provides some evidence that this is a particular issue for part-time students who attend one day per week. This appears to be exacerbated by the fact that the part-time students are schedules for teaching sessions from 9:00 until 18:00 with a one-hour lunch break. This leaves very little time during the day to arrange support from staff and does pose problems with the availability of teaching staff at the exact time when the students are free on that particular day of attendance.

Some students have a partial awareness of the range of support available. When asked which staff they would contact for academic support, STU004 explained *"The module tutor and the Programme Director. I went to see the Programme Director when I had a particular problem with a module and he was quite helpful. I heard we had a personal tutor but I am not sure who that is and as a result cannot get support from them".* STU002 has a different perspective and state's *"I don't have a clue who I should go to or who my programme leader is or anything. I usually just contact my module tutor and to be fair they have always tried to help if they could. I have often sent them an email and they have got back to me with a time I could meet them. As I mentioned before, I am not*

aware of who my Programme Director is or my level tutor". STU006 further supports this view and states, *"I am not totally sure who my programme director is and I was not aware we could go to see them for anything…to be fair I haven't needed to see anyone other than my module tutor".* The structure put in place within the School includes a system of Level tutors to provide an additional level of support at each year or level that the student is studying at. The reasoning behind this is to provide the students with an additional identified member of staff who is connected with their programme and is familiar with the level of study of students on any given programme. Documentary evidence from the School indicates that it was considered important that the Programme director should be supported by a tutor at each level of study from the same discipline. The aim was to build a team around the programme who could support the students academically and provide career development advice at all stages of their studies. The analysis of the data from the NSS and from the interviews with students would suggest that the level tutor system is less effective in delivering the support that was envisaged. This is also a concern expressed by the staff interviewed. Lect04 comment's *"The level tutor system is vital to the success of the programmes but it appears not be working. I don't feel that we have effectively functioning teams to support the programme director and for supporting the students. The level tutor system is vital in engaging with the students and getting to know them. The people who are level tutors need to be fully committed to the role and have the personality to undertake the role. There also seems to be an expectation with some staff that they only need to engage with the students during timetabled sessions and do not attempt to arrange to meet with them outside this time"*. This idea of the level tutors needing to demonstrate the commitment to undertake the role, coupled with the personal skills to be effective in the role, is seen as important with the staff interviewed from Senior Management and those responsible for managing the programmes of study. Lect03 goes further in expressing the view that "*The problem could be linked with the general lack of engagement…it is important to build that cohort identity so that the students get to know each other and the academic staff that helps to breakdown barriers"*. The theme of lack of engagement is considered by Lect03 who also identifies the lack of engagement with the process from the student cohort and comment "I think it comes back to this idea again of professionalism. The reality is that students don't engage with their personal tutor until there is a problem – it the problem of lack of engagement". The data analysis has highlighted a number of

operational issues for the teaching staff that may be influencing the levels of engagement with students.

Other lecturers express a different view regarding the engagement with the process and when this should occur. Lecturers in the role of Level tutors identify perceived barriers in undertaking the role. Lect01 typify this and state's "*From my own experience, I am a level tutor but I don't have regular contact with that group until semester 2. So even though I will go to speak to them it is not the best situation because it is always in another lecture and you are conscious that you are taking time and they have turned up expecting a lecture. Also, often the lectures have all the students in rather than just the group I want to speak to. It feels like it's a strained relationship and taking time at the start of the class does not allow the students to relax and any rapport to develop…you don't really get time to get to know them".* The data indicates that the issue of the time available to support students and when this should happen is an issue for some teaching staff despite that fact that it is a role that attracts workload and represents a part of the agreed duties allocated to the member of staff. This idea that it is a workload issue is dismissed by managers within the School and as Lect03 comments "*If you have staff who act professionally and are committed they will find a way to support the students regardless of the support network put in place by the schoo*l". The focus of most support is likely to sit with the module tutor's and this is often the area that is the most contentious for the student. This is evident from comments from students including STU009 who state's *"Most are prepared to help you out but some say they don't have time when you are available. I got good support generally…it was only a couple of tutors who did not give you support if you needed it".* The analysis of the data indicates that many of the issues with academic support are very closely linked with the issues discussed within the area of assessment and feedback.

An area of concern is the perceived lack of effective programme teams to support the Programme Director and the role of the Level and module tutors. Lect04 believes that in order for the lecturers to fully engage with supporting the students, staff must *"feel like they have a vested interest in the success of the students and the course. The school operates on a module level really so staff really only have a link with the course via a module so often do not take an interest other than that module".* Another concern is the role of the Programme Director. The feeling is that the programme leaders have a lot of

responsibility placed on them but the authority to control the issues that affect the operation of the programme is extremely limited. The management of the programme in terms of influencing who delivers the modules, the timetabling and to some extent the strategic development of the programmes of study.

Some students are unaware of the formal support mechanisms in the School and develop informal mechanisms as a substitute. Many of the students interviewed describe the mechanism they use to get support for their studies outside of the formal structure. STU005 is typical of a number of students *"I talk to everybody…I think the support is generally good…I have approached many staff as I know how to put my hand up when I need help".* In terms of what encourages students to approach some lecturers rather than others tends to relate to a number of matters such as those highlighted by STU006 who typifies students who gravitate to staff members they have an existing relationship from an experience on another module, "*I just tend to come to you because I know you and I know you will help. I go to who I know – you interviewed me for my HND so I still tend to come to you. You need to know and trust someone to go to them for help on a more personal matter so you do tend to just go to that person for you"*. Other students will gravitate to those staff who they feel with be prepared to spend the time with them and help if possible. STU010 typifies this view "*Probably the tutor who was most approachable and would make the time to see me*". When asked who they would approach for academic support STU014 comments that although they are aware of the structures in place, who they would contact would "*depend on who the tutor is – it is the support on offer rather than who we are told to. I think it is really important to have that relationship with the lecturer and to feel like they know who you are, what class you are from or even what course you are on…does make the whole experience easier because you can get help and support if needed…it makes the student feel valued"*. The informal networks are widely acknowledged by the tutors as an inevitable and valuable aspect of any environment that is people centred. People, students or not, will naturally gravitate to those who they identify with and who are willing to support them. The data suggests the importance the individual student places on the relationships they build with some lecturing staff and the impact that can have on their experience. STU008 identifies the personal relationship with developed with staff as one of the most important factors in influencing their experience in a positive way and

comment's *"it makes you feel more part of it… because if you do have any problems you know who to go to straight away especially if are in class a lot on the days you are in and have limited time to go to see the lecturers"*. This sentiment is a common theme amongst the students interviewed. STU009 comments that the personal relationship with the lecturers *"makes you feel more secure…because if you do have any problems you know who to go to straight away".*

The dilemma for the School in trying to improve the academic support for all students is how to engender the relationships developed informally through a structured mechanism. As Lect02 state's *"It's a difficult one because I am aware of students who seem to identify with particular academic staff…maybe because they taught them at some point or they help them with an issue, and that student tends to just engage with that member of staff. Typically the issue then gets resolved that way…the issue is getting the message across to students…certainly they get the information in induction but it seems to get lost once the semester starts".* The ability to build those relationships initially and to communicate the support mechanisms as part of this process is recognised by a number of staff interviewed. Lect04 comment's "*The first four or five weeks at the start of any academic year are fundamental in building those relationships for the rest of the year because they can be already feeling overwhelmed by it and if they are not sure who to turn to, it can be very detrimental for their experience. Especially if they feel like they are one in a million in the lectures and they are experiencing issues that could be of a personal nature, then they start to drifting off".*

Direct observation within the School reveals that although there is recognition by staff that the initial contact with the students is vital in building relationships, one of the crucial activities at the start of the academic year is very poorly attended. The induction activities arranged within the School seek to begin the relationship building process between the lecturers and the student cohort and are one of the primary methods of communicating the structures and support mechanisms to the students. The appointment of the new progression assistant is seen as a positive development to provide another layer of support for the students and will be a useful support for the staff.

The relationship with part-time students is an issue that presents particular problems due to the limited attendance at the university resulting in less time to provide the face-to-face support and the particular nature of the relationship of these students with the School. To a large extent the expectations of part-time students are different from full-time students due to the background and experience of students that are employed on a full time basis within the profession they are studying. Many of the part-time students will express the enormous pressure they feel due to the expectations of their employers who are sponsoring their studies and the on-going workload while in the work place. This pressure will naturally influence the expectations of the students in terms of how they relate to the School and how they report their experience. This is demonstrated in the levels of satisfaction with all aspects of their studies reported in the NSS that is lower than for the full-time students over the period of the data analysis for this research. The issues raised on all aspects of the teaching, learning and assessment appear to be closely linked to issues of the delivery methods, staff engagement with students and student support. The issues highlighted become exaggerated for part-time students who attend for one day per week for two four-hour teaching sessions for the two modules they undertake per semester. The timetabling arrangements for part-time students can result in an unsatisfactory experience with little time to engage with staff outside of the eight-hour day scheduled for teaching sessions. Analysis of the data reveals a number of underlying contributing factors to the issues reported both within the NSS and the semi-structured interviews with students and academic staff as shown in Figure 47. The experience of the students in relation to academic support in the School is mixed with students reporting bypassing the formal structures and developing informal support mechanisms to compensate. Again this is an issue heavily influenced by the willingness of the academic staff to engage with students to provide the necessary support and to meet the student expectations. Many factors may be at work in why the students are not receiving the academic support they expect. Many students will readily agree that they do not engage with the formal support mechanisms unless they are experiencing problems and the support is needed. The problem will arise if such a problem arises and the student is not aware of the support structures or cannot access them. While the students will report the symptoms of the problem in terms of pockets of poor academic support and lack of engagement, the cause of the problem was alluded to within the interviews with academic staff. The underlying issues are related to the knowledge,

skills and experience of the academic staff with regard to teaching practice and/or issues around the subject areas the academic staff are being asked to deliver. Another possible cause of the poor performance and lack of engagement with students is a lack of enthusiasm and motivation of academic staff. The identified issues may be related to the training and development of existing staff members may also need to be considered to develop the skills necessary to deliver the quality of learning experience required by students and the institution. The academic staff interviewed also highlights issues surrounding the promotion and career development opportunities for existing staff members impacting on motivation.

Issues related to how the workload is managed and the policy and procedures relating to academic support. The roles and responsibilities of academic staff and the support mechanisms to support the staff in undertaking the roles is also an underlying factor related to performance. A high proportion of the academic staff interviewed commented upon the poor team working within the school related to teaching activities and the management of the individual programmes of study.

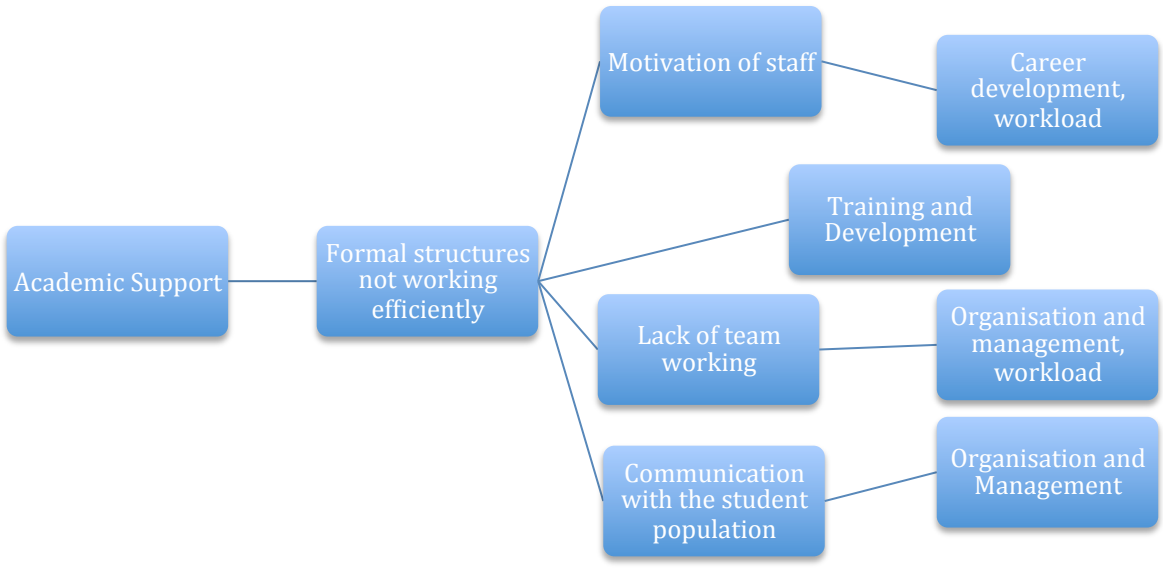


Figure 47 - Factors impacting on the student experience related to Academic Support.

6.5 Organisation and Management

The analysis of the data reveals that the students are relatively content with the organisation of the timetable. Over the period of the analysis of the verbatim comments, it is apparent that the timetables were a significant cause of dissatisfaction for the student from 2008-2013. The main issue with the organisation of the timetables surrounded the scheduling of rooms across many different buildings around the campus resulting in students having to move buildings often at considerable distance apart. Documentary evidence from the School shows the school management made considerable efforts to address the problem. . As a result, the timetabling procedure was updated and the work to generate the timetables was undertaken considerably earlier in the academic cycle. This has resulted in a much more coherent use of teaching space and improved levels of satisfaction with the timetables. This is supported by STU005, "*For the first semester the timetable was an issue but the school did try to sort things out. I think in the second semester there were still a few hiccups but there was improvement, a really visible improvement. We are not running from one place to the other, like we was doing at the beginning. Most of are lectures this year are close to each other and this is really commendable"* and STU003 who state's *"The timetable was quite good in the last semester because lectures were at the same times on the three days we needed to attend so you could almost get yourself into a routine…The timetables have improved significantly for our cohort compared to what it was for the years above me – after speaking to some of those students".*

There does however seem to be a persistent issue, as evidenced in the verbatim comments and the semi-structured interviews, where students report they are dissatisfied when a four-hour teaching session finishes significantly early resulting in a large gap in the day before the next session begins. The students report that this is relatively common with some modules and complain about the perceived waste of time. This is an issue that appears to impact on the students in different ways and is related to the student's own personal circumstances. While a proportion of students report they are dissatisfied with the situation, they are generally accepting of it and make use of the time in other ways. Other students, typically mature and part-time students report significant dissatisfaction when this happens. Often this is due to the pressures they

feel from other commitments they have such as their employment or family commitments. For example, STU004 reports *"On more than one occasion, I have had to put my children into childcare, at a significant cost and struggled in on the train to attend the lecture…for it to finish after one hour. The class is then expected to wait from 10am until 2pm for the next session to begin. It is completely unacceptable".* The personal impact of such an issue will colour the student perceptions of the levels of satisfaction with the organisation and management of the timetables. This issue of the 'as-lived' experience for a significant proportion of the students in the School who have work and/or family commitments is revealing itself as having a negative impact on the student experience. While the analysis of the data indicates that the cost of undertaking a degree is becoming the accepted 'norm' and students are not commenting upon this and how it relates to their experience, their expectations are heightened in terms of the management and organisation of their studies. It also relates to the earlier described 'as-lived' experience of the teaching and assessment related issues and how this impacts on the student perception of their experience. The general view of the staff interviewed is that this practice should not be routinely occurring due to the impact on students and expressed by LECT02, *"It shouldn't be happening but if staff are going to persist in finishing early they we need to look at what is happening and maybe adjust the timetable to ensure the impact is limited".*

An operational issue raised by a significant proportion of students relates to the lack of small group tutorial sessions within the scheduled teaching. Students are vocal in expressing their concern with the lack of tutorials and relate this to a number of identified issues causing dissatisfaction such as the predominance of scheduling four-hour teaching sessions that accommodate large groups of students, lack of academic support with assessment, lack of formative feedback and lack of cohort identity. STU017 comments, *"The timetable is generally fine although it would be good if it could be broken up more rather than doing a straight 4 hours for one module then another straight 4 hours for the other module. We don't really have tutorials so it may not make much difference in terms of how it could be broken up…Sometimes it does drag on when you have the same subject for 4 hours".* STU015 also supports this view and simply comments*, "The classes are too long and we only have lectures no tutorials".*

The lecturers interviewed are happy to concede that the organisation of the undergraduate programmes could be reviewed to take into consideration the views of the students and the potential positive impact on the student experience. Lect01 agrees with the students and views the *"Lack of tutorial time built into the timetable"* as problematic and states *"the School should be providing smaller time slots for lectures and tutorials to allow for timetabled extra activities to support the student journey".* Lect04 comment's *"The idea of splitting up the day to 2x 2 hour lectures and 2x 2 hour tutorials would help resolve many of the issues the students are not happy with. It's not good for the staff member to have a 4 hour block".* Lect04 raises an important issue in highlighting the impact of teaching large groups for four-hour sessions on the teaching staff. Many lecturers will comment on the effort required in terms of preparation, the skill, knowledge and stamina required to deliver a four-hour session. The negative impact such sessions can have on the student cohort may also be reflected by the teaching staff in terms of the negative impact felt by those delivering the sessions. The main reason given for the scheduling of four-hour teaching sessions is to maximise the teaching resources and free up time during the week for other activities. The introduction of small group tutorials will impact significantly on the resources required to deliver the curriculum in terms of the teaching commitment from tutors, on room requirements and the impact on other activities such as research and enterprise. Another consideration within the School is the fact that a substantial numbers of staff members want all their teaching in one semester to allow a period of time within the academic year to concentrate on research activities. Traditionally, the school has attempted to accommodate such requests if possible and allowed the individual member of staff to manage their workload in relation to teaching, assessment and academic support. The concentration of the teaching workload into one semester can significantly add to the workload in relation to marking and feedback. It may also impact negatively on the ability of the lecturer to effectively engage with the students and provide them with the support for the assessment they may be expecting. Lect04 comment's *"The expectations of staff wishing to load all of their teaching into one semester so they can concentrate on research may need to be managed more effectively by the School given the feedback from students".*

An issue described as problematic by the lecturing staff interviewed relates to the university policy not to permit the timetabling of any activity that is not credit bearing. The result is that many activities to support the students and to engage with the cohort either do not take place or are included within time scheduled for the delivery of modules. For many staff, most notably Programme Directors and Level tutors, this creates barriers to engaging with students. It can be difficult to arrange to meet with students outside of the timetabled sessions because the students are often unaware of events not showing on the timetable. Direct observation and data relating to student engagement points to a significant proportion of students not using their university email account, not accessing information from Blackboard or engaging with student support activities. As a result, these students can miss important information and access to additional support, activities and opportunities to engage with their tutors. LECT01 explains, *"The inability to put any extra hours on the timetable for support is detrimental to some of the initiatives we try to support the students. Even one hour per week, if it was timetabled on a day of attendance, would make a big difference".*

The analysis of all the data from the NSS and the semi-structured interviews indicates that the use of unsuitable or poor rooms for teaching activities can impact significantly on the student experience. Students often complain of being cramped into rooms with very little seating space, poor heating, lighting and ventilation and poor acoustic quality. LECT04 comments, *"Poor quality rooms is a big issue. Many of the rooms are so inflexible that it is difficult to use them to undertake some of the group activities that you may want to do".* Research (Barrett, 2015) points to the impact the learning environment can have on the achievements of students and the overall experience. The university has made a significant policy decision to improve the quality of the estate to upgrade the building and IT infrastructure. The university has made significant investment in the New Adelphi Building, new student accommodation, the Media City Campus, the upgrading of Chapman Building, the Library and many more building refurbishments resulting in much improved teaching space and facilities. The School is currently engaged in a process to ensure the room allocation matches the teaching requirements more closely and to ensure the size of the room is adequate to accommodate the student numbers on the module. Many of the students are very aware of there facilities available on campus and express that *"it is very important to the*

younger students how the campus is run, how they use their time, how sophisticated the campus is…the facilities, the Wi-Fi etc. and it should not be taken for granted" (Lect07). The issue of a base room associated with the individual programme cohorts has been identified as by students as a potential improvement to give them a 'home' within the university. STU006 comments' *"A base room to work in, only for construction that would be good. It would be good for weekends so you could meet up with other students and tutors that would be good. It would have been good when you were in first and second year to talk to students further on the course than you. Students don't really know each other – only people you have known from the start"*. The significant improvement in the NSS results in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 also coincides with the provision of a studio space dedicated for the use of the Architectural Design Technology students. The direct link been between the NSS results and the provision of the studio has not been proven but the studio space has provided a focal point for students to meet and work as STU014 comments "*Having the studio as a base helps because you all get to know each other so when it comes to getting through the course you start to rely on each other for support. The ADT studio has a great atmosphere, the students spend time in there and the students on different years all mix as well".*

The organisation and management of the degree programmes for part-time students and the impact on the student experience is a concern for the programme leaders. As previously mentioned, the NSS results for part-time students are lower than for the full-time students. The main causes of dissatisfaction within the part-time group relates to the organisation of the lectures in terms of the four-hour sessions, the problems accessing support from lecturers on the day of attendance, the content of the modules in terms of industry relevance and the problems of classroom management in some sessions. Many part-time students complain that in some modules they have a base layer of knowledge and skills that is much more advanced than the full-time students and that they are not stretched in the classroom as the lecturer has to concentrate on the full-time students. This is partially the reason for part-time students wanting to be taught as a separate group for some of the sessions. As STU001 explains "*This is just from my perspective, as a part-time student I would prefer to be taught in a group of just part-time students, I know its never going to happen but I would prefer it to be only part-time students rather than mixing them with full-time students. This is because they are*

more interested and I think we are possibly more advanced… we could ask more questions that are relevant to us if we were all part-time students together". A significant issue for the part-time students is the ability to access support from staff on the day of attendance. As previously stated, the part-time students have eight hours of class contact timetabled with a one-hour break for lunch. This leaves very little time during the day to seek support elsewhere either in the School or within the wider university. Many part-time students undertake assessment work during evenings and weekends when the lecturing and support staff are not generally available. As STU007 state's *"Most lecturers are prepared to help you out but some say they don't have time when you are available. Its not as good as it used to be but that might be due to being part time and only in for one day and in lectures for the whole of the day".*

Part-time students often experience significant difficulties in trying to balance working full-time and studying. They will relate significant pressure from work due to the expectations from their employers relating to their performance and output at work. Some students relate the expectation of their employer for them to catch up with work they have missed on the day they attend university. This often coincides with pressures of supporting a family. As Lect04 explains *"As far a part-time students go, they do need to be managed differently from full time students because they have different expectations and many of them are under a great deal of pressure from their employers. They are on a steep learning curve in the workplace and also at university and it is not always appreciated how much pressure they are under. As a school we need to recognise this fact and deal with these students in a completely different way".* The way in which part-time students engage with the School and the university is potentially affecting the perception of their experience as STU006 describes *"As a part-time student I generally don't engage with the school except for coming in for lectures…As a part-time student you don't really have time to be part of the School".*

6.6 Positive feedback from Students

One area that students are generally positive about is the facilities provided by the university. The library is often a focus of discontent due to the perceived lack of books for some of the larger modules. The use of e-books by the university goes some way to

resolve the issue and the ability to access the information off-campus is a much-appreciated feature. The extended opening hours to 24 hour access during term time is seen as a very positive development as is the provision of I.T suites within the library some of which have access to specialist software required for construction students. The computer suites within the School are widely used and the School has ensured that for the most part the rooms are open access. The School has also expanded its technician support for I.T. and use of specialist software packages. This is one area that students are particularly satisfied with as becoming familiar with the software is often as much as a challenge as gaining the knowledge and skills associated with the programme of study. STU002 comments *"One positive is that I have never though there is an issue with the resources at the university. The library always has what I need and I can get access when I need it"*.

One area students report as a positive aspect of studying in the School is the multi-disciplinary approach to the teaching and learning. The students are taught in modules with students from other programmes of study and a number of modules require the students to work in a multi-disciplinary team to reflect the experience in practice. It provides students with an experience of working with other discipline areas within the design team and allows them to develop a range of knowledge and skills. It is considered a vital part of their education to develop group working, communication and project management skills. The analysis of the data contains a range of positive and negative comments from students related to this module mainly related to the challenges of group working and the experience of relying on other team members to produce assessment work. Students often complain bitterly of the problems of group work but do recognise the benefits once the experience is finished.

A number of students report that they are generally satisfied with their choice to study at the University of Salford and describe their experience, as *"It has been a friendly atmosphere for me with staff and students. I think Salford is a good place to study… it is really good"* (STU005).

6.7 Lack of personal engagement with academic staff

A reoccurring theme with the students interviewed is a lack of personal engagement with the staff in the School. As with many issues discussed, a variety of practice is evident within the School with students reporting very good relationships with some staff while a very poor experience with others. The sentiment of many students is expressed by STU014 *"I think it is really important to have that relationship with the lecturer and to feel like they know who you are, what class you are from or even what course you are on…it does make the whole experience easier because you can get help and support if needed…it makes the student feel valued".* This issue is different from the issue of academic support but does influence the perception of many aspects of the student experience related to teaching, learning and assessment in a positive or negative manner. Students expect that the academic staff in the School know who they are individually and are interested in their progress on the course. STU010 explains, "*Staff should know the students. It is nice when staff know who you are and who are interested in you doing well."* The analysis of the data shows that lack of personal engagement with academic staff influences the student perception of many of the issues mentioned. The students appear to be more forgiving of any of the problems highlighted in the data if they have a good relationship with the module tutor while any issue is exacerbated if they have a poor relationship with the module tutor. The personal relationship with academic staff is very apparent when students relate their 'as-lived' experience and how the teaching, assessment and organisation of their programme are affected by problems. When students relate the sacrifices they are making to engage with higher education whether it is financial or related to their personal and family relationships, they are very aware of any lack of interest from staff members. To a large extent student expectation is linked to what they are 'giving' to come to university and in some cases it is heightening their expectations. Lect02 confirms this view from their interaction with students and state's "*Personal engagement and issues about caring about them is coming out more than other issues. We need to be careful about what we say we do compared with what we actually do and to manage student expectations".* The matter of student expectations is a very complex issue and as identified within the literature review is a very personal one. The expectations of students will be influenced by age,

gender, background, personal experiences, financial status, family and personal situation resulting in a wide variety of expectations from those with very few to those who have very heightened expectations. This is evident from the analysis of the data in terms of expectations of some mature students and those who are part-time and some of the full-time younger students.

6.8 Course content and Industry Engagement

Built environment degree programmes at the University of Salford are professionally accredited, vocational based courses and it is this aspect that attracts students to study in the School. The expectation of students is strongly linked to this aspect of the courses and as a result the students expect the courses to be closely linked with their profession. The issue is even more apparent with part-time students who are employed full-time in the industry and often are very experienced practitioners. The industry relevance of the course content is being compared with practice often on a weekly basis as is the knowledge and skills of the lecturing staff. As STU004 state's "*One of the things I find is that the QS degree is based on if you are a PQS and we don't cover hardly anything to do with contractors QS work. Last year we had a lecture on our MDP module and one of the full time students asked if that what I do at work and I said no…and I had to tell her what I do at work and they didn't have a clue what a Contractors QS does and she was doing a QS degree".* The area of practice the part-time students work in will clearly influence their perspective on the content as will the industry experience of the module tutor. Students are very vocal about the expectation that teaching staff are both academically qualified but also have some professional experience in industry. The students often associate those staff that have professional experience as being better module tutors and are able to convey the module content and assessment requirements in a better way. STU003 comments: *"It would be good as a Quantity Surveying student to have easily identifiable staff who are Quantity Surveyors who have some experience that could act as a mentor especially in project modules – just someone who we could use as a sounding board".*

A reoccurring theme with some students is that they want more site visits and guest speakers from industry as shown by the comment from STU001 *"Each year we have*

been told we would go on a site visit but it has never happened. I am part-time and work on site but it would still be nice to visit other sites and go and see then on an academic basis". The lecturing staff will readily agree this is an important aspect of the programme and observational evidence from the School shows that site visits are arranged on a regular basis but many are very poorly attended by the students. It can be a problem for part-time students as their attendance is limited and operational issues related to health and safety can result in site visits being arranged on other days rather than the day of attendance. The relationship and engagement with the professional bodies is again an area of concern for students. Programme Directors arrange for professional bodies to attend the university during induction and at other events rather than during timetabled teaching sessions. Programme Directors point to the problems in arranging and timetabling additional activities due to the inability to include such activities on the timetable.

The view from employers that recruit graduates supports the view of students and academic staff relating to the importance of the course content being up-to-date and industry relevant. As demonstrated from documentary evidence from within the school, employers are very satisfied with the quality of the graduates but go on to suggest;

"I find the knowledge of the graduates to be very "textbook" and they struggle to apply it to real life situations. As a former student, I realise that this is because many of the tutors have little or no industry experience. The methods and process, which have been taught, are also quite outdated. As an aside, I know of a student who graduated in Construction Project Management this year who is unable to produce a construction programme. That student may have learnt other things but cannot carry out the biggest and most basic duty of his role. The module/topics need to be prioritised to suit the current industry". (PPRR Employers Consultation, 2015).

6.9 Summary

This Chapter empirically analysed the data collected from semi-structured interviews with students and academic staff to explore the key themes identified from the theme and content analysis of the longitudinal data from the NSS verbatim comments. In this

chapter, the identified themes were explored with both staff and students to gain an insight into the reasons behind the student's response to key aspects of their experience while studying within the School of the Built Environment to enable the recommendations to be made for improving the experience. The next chapter provides the overall analysis and discussion of this research based upon the theoretical evidence from the literature review and on the empirical evidence from the analysis of the NSS results (Chapter 5), the analysis of the semi-structured interviews with the students and academic staff (Chapter 6).

CHAPTER SEVEN DISCUSSION OF THE DATA ANALYSIS

7.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 presents the overall data analysis based on the longitudinal analysis of the NSS results and verbatim comments as detailed in Chapter 5 and the analysis of the interviews with students and academic staff in Chapter 6. The literature review as reported in Chapter 2 will also be considered as a method of triangulating the results.

The data analysis reveals the issues impacting on the student experience are varied and complex with a good deal of overlap between the identified issues. In addition, the data analysis reveals the focus of the NSS does not cover all the matters raised by the students and staff interviewed and as a result some of the emerging themes from the research are not measured using this mechanism. The areas of concern for built environment students are influenced by the fact that the degree programmes are vocationally based and professionally accredited with clear links to the construction industry professions. Many of the concerns expressed by students relate to the quality of the teaching experience, how the delivery is organised, management of assessment and feedback and academic support. The data reveals that many of the issues raised by students do not relate to the whole experience with some examples of excellent practice in addition to the areas they feel are negatively impacting on their experience. Analysis of the data collected from interviews with academic staff members reveals that a number of the issues of concern for students are symptoms of factors associated with the motivation and engagement of some academic staff members. The issue of engagement and interaction between academic staff and students is a recurring theme through each issue raised. The review of the literature reveals a paucity of research has been undertaken to explore the issues raised in the context of built environment students and the impact of the diverse demographics of the undergraduate population, the mix of modes of study, the impact of providing professionally accredited vocationally based programmes on the expectations of students and how they perceive their experience of higher education. Many of the issues identified are explored in the literature, often in isolation from the context or with little consideration of the interaction between a range of factors.

In this context, the research findings discussed in this chapter are structured around the themes emerging from the data and are arranged to reflect the student journey.

1. Discussion of student satisfaction including the purpose and mechanisms for measurement.
2. Analysis of the factors influencing the expectations of built environment students.
3. Analysis of the critical areas for built environment students related to teaching, assessment and feedback, academic support and organisation and management.
4. Analysis of the issues related to the engagement of academic staff members.
5. Student expectations regarding degree outcomes and employability.

7.2 Discussion of student satisfaction including the purpose and mechanisms for measurement.

The School of the Built Environment at the University of Salford was chosen for the case study, as it is representative of a typical built environment school in terms of the undergraduate programmes of study and the modes of study available. The School has a very successful research profile and is world renown for research into built environment subject groupings. The School, as discussed in chapter 4, has a diverse demographic in terms of the student population as shown below;

MALE	82%	FEMALE	18%
18-21yrs on entry	59%	Mature students - 22years + on entry	41%
Full time	60%	Part time	40%
From Northwest England	77.5%	Other home/EU International	16.5% 6%

Figure 48 - Built Environment student demographic.

The data suggests that the diverse mix of students in terms of the age, gender, age and mode of study has an impact on the expectations of the students within the School and as a result has an impact on the reported satisfaction levels.

The analysis of the data from the NSS verbatim comments and the semi-structured interviews reveal a mixed picture in terms of satisfaction levels. It is notable that this mixed picture reflects the national picture of student satisfaction that shows approximately 60% of students express dissatisfaction with some element of their higher education experience (HEPI-HEA, 2016; BIS 2015). In the case study school, the results show a wide range of overall satisfaction levels in 2015 from between 75% and 100% with similar ranges for the four identified critical areas of the NSS discussed in Section 7.4. The detailed analysis of the case study data is highlighted in Chapter 5 and 6 respectively. The analysis reveals a significant difference in the satisfaction levels of groups of students on the same programme but on a different mode of study. It is interesting that for example, Quantity Surveying students on the full time mode report satisfaction level significantly higher than the part time students despite the fact that both groups of students experience the same lecture programme, in the same classroom environment and with the same member of teaching staff. This pattern of part-time students reporting lower levels of satisfaction is consistent with all other degree programmes in the School. Evidence from the literature confirms this to be a feature of part-time students generally (Butcher, 2015) and also for part-time students participating in higher education (HEA, 2011) and points to other issues influencing the levels of satisfaction with the experience in addition to the actual formal mechanisms of engagement with the student cohort.

Measurement of student satisfaction has been clearly linked throughout the literature with the developments in government policy related to higher education. Student satisfaction is clearly linked with the quality of provision following the introduction of the student funding mechanisms that transferred the cost of higher education from the state to the individual participant (Jones, 2010; Zhang *et al*., Alves and Raposo, 2007) although other research suggests this is less of an issue (Bates and Kaye, 2014). The National Student Survey (NSS) was introduced as a mechanism of obtaining feedback from students as they complete their studies regarding their whole experience of higher education. The data collected is used for a variety of purposes including as an indicator of quality, to inform prospective students of the student view of any given course of study and is also used to inform national league tables. The policy aims to incentivise individual institutions to improve the experience of students by the use of the information

collected to inform KIS data, UNISTATS data and national league tables. The policy development described in Section 2.2 of Chapter 2 relating to the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) represents a clear signal from government regarding the importance it attaches to the quality of experience for undergraduate students (Crisp *et al*., 2009; Marshall & Linder 2005; Gedye *et al.,* 2004; Longden 2006).

The initial data analysis has revealed the critical issues for students as identified by the NSS to be related to 'Teaching on my Course', 'Assessment and Feedback', Academic Support' and Organisation and Management'. The detailed analysis of each of area will be discussed in Section 7.4. The analysis of the data has identified additional critical areas influencing student perceptions of their experience not measured by the NSS. The identified issues include the amount and quality of the engagement with academic staff members, the link with the construction industry, staff motivation and issues of engagement of academic staff and students at a programme level. These are discussed in detail in section 7.5.

7.3 Analysis of the factors influencing the expectations of built environment students.

The analysis of the data points to a range of factors contributing to the perception of the experience of students within the School linked to a) student expectations regarding higher education and their programme of study before they begin, b) expectations related to the outcome of their studies and c) expectations related to future or current employability.

The literature supports the fact that students from a diverse range of backgrounds are likely to enter the higher education system with differing expectations (Ramsden, 2013; Marcus, 2008; Longdon, 2006). Students who are part-time are shown to have expectations related to their own employment (Butcher, 2015) that influences their expectations of what to expect from the teaching and learning, assessment and also of the staff who are teaching them. There is also an expectation that the degree programmes in terms of the curricula and academic staff members will be very industry focussed and that this will be evidenced by the background and experience of the

teaching staff. The data demonstrates (see chapter 6) that built environment students have strong expectations that the time spent in higher education will enable them to gain graduate level employment within their chosen profession and improve their employability. This link is key for students who require an accredited degree to meet the academic requirements to begin the process of gaining professional accreditation necessary to progress within the profession. As a result, students are very conscious of the investment they are making in order to gain a professionally accredited degree and as a result are very outcome focussed throughout their studies (Ramsden, 2013).

It is clear from the interview data (see chapter 6) that the issue of tuition fees appears to have become the accepted norm as no students raised the subject of fees, however the comments highlight that this acceptance comes with certain expectations. From the data it is evident that students are less likely to view going to university as a life experience in the same way as student perhaps would have done in the past when attending university was seen as being part of a much bigger process tied up with issues of learning to live independently in addition to reading for a degree. To some extent with the demographic mix of the students in the case study, the element of the first experience of living independently is not a factor in the process given the numbers of mature and part-time students. Additionally, built environment students undertake their students with very clear career expectations and career path (see section 2.4.7 and chapter 6). This can also be linked to the number of students who have expectations regarding their performance placed upon them by their employers or family. Evidence to support this view was provided by the number of students who, during the interviews, related their experience very much as an ‘as-lived’ experience with a clear understanding of how what happens in the classroom, during assessment processes etc. impacts on the expectations placed on them by themselves or others. Many of the students also talk about the pressure they feel due to the support they receive from close family and the pressure on family due to their studies. This can be financial pressures or in terms of increased responsibilities placed on their spouse or partner and other extend family members. Part-time students are often placed under significant pressure within the workplace and many are expected to ‘catch-up’ on work/time missed due to attending the university. Increasingly this type of pressure surrounding participation in higher education is not only experienced by those studying on a part-time

basis but it can also impact on full-time students in a variety of ways. The demographics of the of the School as shown in figure 48 shows that 41% of undergraduate students are considered to be mature students, many with family responsibilities. 77.5% of students in the School are from the local region in which the university is based and live at the family or parental home.

The analysis of the data demonstrates that the expectation felt by students does heighten the pressure on them to perform well and can therefore be a defining factor in how they view their experience and as a result, how satisfied they feel. During the interviews, a number of students openly admit they have clear expectations regarding what classification of degree they want and that they are only interested in the mark received for each assessment. They consider the mark received to be the most important aspect of the experience.

The data also suggests there is a need to work more closely with students about their understanding and expectations of the teaching and learning experience. Students are right to expect high-quality contact hours but as higher education is characterised by independent learning (Barnett, 2009) the student has to understand the nature of the engagement they can reasonably expect. Helping students to learn independently, through directed independent learning, is critical to their future success and importantly for built environment students, which employers greatly value this type of learning, and the skills that come with it. It is also incumbent on the sector to help students to become effective lifelong learners, and independent learning is a crucial part of that. The literature highlights that students associate the number of contact hours with value (HEPI-HEA, 2015; 2016) and as such it is a factor for consideration along side many of the other issues raised by the students in surveys and in the interviews.

As discussed, the diverse range of students within the case study school as a result of the policy developments to widen-participation and as a result of those the subject area is likely to attract, can result in a very challenging set of diverse student expectations.

7.4 Analysis of the four critical factors related to teaching quality, assessment and feedback, academic support and organisation and management.

7.4.1 Teaching quality

The main issues identified by students as a cause of dissatisfaction relate to the lack of high quality teaching by some academic members of staff who rely on reading verbatim from PowerPoint slides for long periods of time. The detailed evidence of this is presented in Section 5.2.4 and 6.2.1. While students expect to attend large lectures in tiered lecture theatres, many express dissatisfaction with this as the predominant method of module delivery. The literature would support the view that predominant use of this method of delivery is likely to have a negative impact on the learning that takes place and the student experience (Gibbs *et al;* Fearnley, 1995; Lucas *et al.,* 1996; Gibbs and Jenkins, 1996). Lack of small group tutorials within subject groups is of concern to those students interviewed (see sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2). Much of the dissatisfaction also relates to the fact that many of the modules are timetabled as four-hour continuous blocks, often in large groups of 100+ students in a lecture theatre. This negative experience is exacerbated in the minds of the students as a result of little to no interaction with the module tutor within the four-hour session. The evidence also points to a certain discontent amongst some academic staff with the organisation of the timetable in this way (section 6.2.2). The data suggests that to some extent a number of the issues identified by students as resulting in a negative experience maybe as a result of some structural organisation of the teaching. Four-hour long teaching sessions with very large groups of students may be problematic for teaching staff that are not sufficiently trained or experienced to perform effectively in this situation. Lack of confidence to deal with the challenges this situation presents is likely to result in the academic member of staff reverting back to over reliance on PowerPoint and little to no interaction with the student group. The actual students within the group, if they consist students with a significant proportion of mature and/or part-time students this may also result in confidence issues with some staff members. Students who are in essence experience professionals working four days per week in the construction industry can be intimidating for those academic staff members who have no industry experience. Part-

time students are likely to expect the curriculum to be made relevant to their current experience within the industry and will actively seek to explore the module in that context. This can be a difficult experience for less experienced academic staff hence the building of barriers between themselves and the student group. The lack of engagement between the students and some academic staff members also impacts on other aspects of the student experience including relating to assessment, academic support in relation to assessment and on a more general level. This impact of this issue is discussed further in Sections 7.4.2 and Sections 7.4.3 below. The lack of engagement of some academic staff is also a matter of concern for those staff members concerned with the management of the programmes and the overall undergraduate provision and is further discussed in Section 7.5.

7.4.2 Assessment and Feedback

The analysis of the data revealed a number of areas of concern from students resulting in some dissatisfaction with their experience. The data shows that students are particularly assessment orientated as it is the clearest link to the output of their studies in terms of degree classification and is evidenced by the focus on the assessment process section 5.2.3 and section 6.3). The focus on the output of their studies is linked to the expectations as discussed in Section 7.6. The higher expectations coupled with the additional pressures felt by a significant percentage with the cohort can have the effect of heightening sensitivity to any factors than will impact negatively on the outcome of the assessment (Bates and Kaye, 2013; Bloxham and Boyd, 2007). The importance of assessment as a driver in the learning process is supported within the literature (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004) with some evidence to suggest this is of particular concern to built environment students (Scott and Fortune, 2013).

Interestingly, a number of the issues described by the students as being problematic are not supported by documentary evidence from the School. An example of this relates to the 15 working day turnaround time for returning marks and feedback to students. Students repeatedly state in the NSS data and interviews that this target is routinely missed and a number go as far as to comment that they have never experienced receiving marks back within this time. This target is however monitored by the

professional services staff within the School on each module with a record kept of the due date for return and the actual. Records show that the target was met on average 94% of the time across the three years this monitoring has taken place. The predominant reason for this not being met was due to exceptional circumstances such as staff illness.

The academic staff members interviewed, are particularly concerned and disappointed with some aspects of the feedback from students regarding the assessment and feedback (section 6.3). The academic staff interviewed expressed the view that they are hoping to provide students with a broader educational experience than the purely transactional approach surrounding the assessment process. They are particularly disappointed to hear of students telling of instances of module tutors appearing to change the assessment requirements after the assessment brief was issued. Also, reports of module tutors not providing academic support for the assessment, not providing formative feedback and to some lesser extent not providing detailed summative feedback. Documentary and observational evidence demonstrates that the School has provided regular training and development, developed on-line packages of information to support the assessment process to assist academic staff in providing high quality support and feedback to students. Documentary evidence from external examiners demonstrates that summative feedback has improved significantly. The academic staff interviewed support the student view that it is likely to be pockets of poor practice rather than a widespread issue and are likely to be associated with the poor engagement of some staff with teaching and assessment related activities. It is reassuring to those academic staff managing the undergraduate programmes that students have not expressed any perceived issues with the standard and quality of the marking. It is the process that is the major factor in causing dissatisfaction.

7.4.3 Academic Support

Many of the issues relating to academic support including problems with the assessment criteria, lack of engagement from some module tutors and lack of formative feedback have been discussed in section 5.2.4 and 5.3.4. The issue of lack of engagement and interaction between some academic staff and the undergraduate student body is

consistently demonstrated within the data to be a significant factor with any dissatisfaction with the academic support available and is discussed in detail in section 5.3.4 and 6.4.

The data reveals that the formal academic support mechanisms put in place by the school are in part not effective in providing the intended support. A significant proportion of the students interviewed claim they are unaware of who their Level Tutor is but are more engaged with their Programme Director. Students rely on support from the module tutor as it is at module level where they typically need the support. The students also indicate that they are comfortable in putting in place informal support mechanisms using academic staff that they have an established relationship with to provide any additional support required. Students cite the fact that they would only seek support of a personal nature from those staff members they trust rather than a nominated academic.

7.4.4 Organisation and Management

The main concerns for students relate to the organisation and management of the teaching sessions due to the practice of scheduling four-hour long blocks of delivery and the lack of small group tutorials (see section 5.2.5 and 5.3.5). Student repeatedly stress they want to engage with the teaching and would like to have high quality interactive sessions that can relate the theory with practice. The indicate they would welcome more than just reading from the slides including discussions, opportunities for Q&A and to get some practical experience of the subject of the modules (section 5.3.5 and section 6.5).

A number of the part-time students indicate they would like to be taught separately from the full-time students for some of the teaching. Many of the part-time students indicate they do not feel like the are stretched in some modules especially those that have a more practical application of theory due to the time it takes for full-time students to grasp the concepts and theories in the module (section 6.5). The lack of small group tutorials are of concern to the students as they feel that it becomes a very impersonal experience and that it is a barrier to interaction with the module tutor and hinders the learning experience. To some extent this issue is an extension of the issues raised within the discussion of teaching and learning and academic support linked to the pedagogy and

academic support mechanisms. (Gibbs *et al;* Fearnley, 1995; Lucas *et al.,* 1996; Gibbs and Jenkins, 1996)

Some students report feeling dis-connected between the organisation and management of their programme of study and the needs of the student. The perception is that the organisation and management is staff centred rather than student centred (section 6.5). Four-hour blocks of teaching for each module are perceived as being convenient for the academic staff rather than addressing the needs of the group. This is also reflected in the student perception of the timetabling of large groups of students in each session and the lack of small group tutorials. The timetabling is viewed as being convenient for the academic staff in that they can use minimal resources to deliver the programme.

The policy within the School has been to support academic staff in meeting their research targets by concentrating teaching activities into one semester to facilitate research at other times of the year. This is seen as a positive strategy but can also present academics with some problems in terms of the amount of time available to adequately support students and to effectively mange their workload. Those academic staff with a concentration of teaching activity in one semester of often faced with overwhelming workload related to marking of student work especially in modules with large groups. Some staff could have three modules in a semester with each module having over between 70-260 students registered to it. With most modules having two assessment points it is clear to see the effect on the ability of the individual member of staff to support the students and complete the marking within the allocated timescales. This may also impact on the ability to provide detailed, quality formative and summative feedback (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004; Scott and Fortune, 2013).

7.5 Analysis of the issues related to the engagement of academic staff.

Analysis of the data reveals the importance of the academic staff on the student experience. Data from the NSS verbatim comments shown in Sections 5.3.1; 5.3.2 and 5.3.3 highlights that the interaction with academic staff can result in the lecturers being cited as either a positive or negative influencer on their experience. The interviews with students reveal students having a good relationship with academic staff, plenty of

interaction within some lecturers with good support outside the classroom. All the students interviewed express the view that this interaction has a very positive effect on their experience of higher education. However, where this interaction is poor or does not happen then it does have a significant negative impact on their experience. It is the most frequently cited issue in terms of teaching quality, in relation to assessment and academic support (see 6.2.1; 6.3 and 6.4). Students are indicating lectures where they experience very little interaction from the module tutor is linked with poor teaching quality. The data also indicates students link the lack of engagement of some staff as an issue of inexperienced, poorly trained, uninterested academic staff that are not interested in their success on the course. This in turn leads to some students considering the investment they are making to engage with higher education when the perception is that some staff are not supportive of them in their studies. Students also link lack of engagement with academic staff to problems with assessment and feedback (Section 6.4) and report issues of poor management of the assessment process, academics appearing to be unsure of what the requirements are for the assessment and lack of support during or after submission (Section 6.4).

The perception by student's of pockets of academic staff who are unengaged and unmotivated with their roles and responsibilities in relation to undergraduate teaching, learning and assessment is mirrored by those academic staff who took part in the interviews. The data reveals a lack of motivation for some academics to engage with teaching and teaching related activities. The roles and responsibilities of academic staff, the reward and recognition processes and lack of promotion opportunities are often given as the reason and are seen as a key source of dissatisfaction amongst some academic staff (BIS/Johnson, 2015; Gunn and Fisk, 2013; Land and Gordon, 2013; 2015). A significant factor highlighted by the data concerns the lack of feeling part of a team and a feeling of isolation by some members of academic staff. The data reveals that some academics feel the management of the degree programmes is module based rather than related to the programme as a whole and as a result not only is the delivery disjointed but also creates barriers for academics in providing the quality of experience required. The perception of any team working is based on personal relationships with colleagues and although the School has taken steps to facilitate the development of

programme teams, this is significantly negatively impacted upon by the lack of engagement of a number of colleagues.

All universities need to engage with research to build and maintain a research reputation. In the UK, the research output of higher education institutions is assessed as part of the Research Excellence Framework (REF), the result of which is crucial for attracting research funding and high quality academic staff. The assessment of research quality impacts on an institutions reputation and is used to inform league tables and global positioning within the academic community. This process is vital for any higher education institution and is often reflected in the policy to recruit staff that can contribute to this process and is often reflected in the reward and recognition for staff policies and often related to the workload for individual staff members (Locke, 2015). It is clear from the analysis of the data that while students value those academic staff that have some experience within the construction industry rather than a purely research background this may not be aligned with the priorities of the institution. Those academic staff members who have significant professional experience within the industry often find that career progression within an academic setting is barred due to lack of a research background (Gale, 2011; Cheng (2014). This is a source of dissatisfaction amongst those staff affected but can also be problematic in terms of what is seen to be important. The data reveals that the policy for promotion is reliant upon having an extensive research profile and therefore influences the aspects of the role that student's value. There is a feeling that if the reward mechanisms concentrate upon research output then what is the motivation to allocate your efforts into improving the teaching when it not valued by the employer (HEA 2009; Cashmore and Ramsden 2009).

The analysis of the data also reveals that to some extent the issue with the perceived poor teaching practice, lack of engagement with teaching activities and issues with assessment practice is not just an issue of motivation. The data reveals that some of the issues raised are perceived by academic staff to be linked with a lack of professionalism, concentration of effort linked with individual career development to the expense of the student group and regardless of the negative impact on colleagues. The perceived inability or unwillingness of the senior management or human resources to tackle the root cause of some of the issues raised by students is of considerable

concern to other academic staff. The data reveals academic staff are aware of the issues and are often required to backfill any emerging issues with students to compensate for academic staff who do not fully engage with the teaching activities. This is a factor in on-going demotivation of those who wish to improve the student experience. Academic staff report having to undertake extra activities with students to provide them with the help and support required due to other staff members not engaging with students. Reports of those staff then being rewarded and promoted is a significant source of dissatisfaction amongst those staff members supporting students rather than spending time engaged in research activities.

It is a complex issue for those higher education providers who are faced with an increased diversity of academic subject areas, policy decisions to widen participation resulting in a diverse demographic mix of students, pressures to increase flexibility within the modes of delivery in addition to maintaining a high quality research profile. The senior management of each individual institution has to respond the challenges faced to the identified factors with evidence of a range of approaches taken to balance the needs of the student with the needs of the institution. Many institutions have staff recruitment policies that result in only those applicants with a PhD and a substantial research profile meeting the requirements to be interviewed for an academic post. Other higher education providers have recognised that those with a substantial professional background have a contribution to make and have introduced routes to employment and promotion opportunities based on the contribution to activities other than just research. Subject areas that are vocationally based have particular issues with the recruitment and retention of suitably qualified staff that can engage with the profession and the students. Some subject area such as those allied with the health professions are required to engage academic staff that are professionally qualified in addition to academically qualified by the professional bodies and the funders. To the extent that in some instances, the academic staff are required to work in a practice setting within their discipline area for a minimum number of hours per week to maintain currency of knowledge and skills. The complexity of the challenge and the response by the individual institutions will have an impact on those subject areas that are vocationally based, professionally accredited discipline areas such as built environment. This is due to the increase expectations of students and employers in terms of the currency and

industry relevance of the curriculum and those academics engaged in the delivery of the courses. Those institutions that are willing to employ those with a professional background then face the challenges of retaining and motivating these staff due to the requirements for a research profile to be promoted. Many academic staff that have an industry background find themselves in a situation of not meeting the requirements for promotion due to the lack of research and struggling to understand the lack of importance attached to teaching activity. The government policy development that links student satisfaction with their experience of higher education with the quality of education provided is significant issue for those providers of built environment education (Rothwell and Rothwell 2014). The expectations of built environment students relating to industry relevance of the courses and of those delivering the programmes of study can be misaligned with the research focus of many institutions. The introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) may be a factor in driving change but it is likely to take some time to become established and for any impact to be understood.

7.6 Analysis of the influence of student expectations regarding degree outcomes and employability on student satisfaction levels.

As previously discussed, the data reveals many built environment students enter higher education with very specific goals regarding their degree outcomes linked with issues of employability and the requirement by all the main professional bodies within the sector to obtain an accredited degree in order to begin the process of becoming a Chartered professional. Part-time students are particularly conscious of this requirement and this is often the motivating factor for the employer to invest the time and cost of them attending university. So for this group of students it becomes an expectation as part of their employment to succeed and is therefore a very powerful motivator. Those students who undertake a year out placement often have their expectations raised by the experience as they become aware of the opportunities available to them on graduation and the requirements to gain the best graduate positions. A clear indicator of how the enhanced expectations of part-time students influences the perception of their experience is demonstrated in the results of the NSS (see section 5.2.2 and 6.2.1), for part-time students verses fulltime students with the part-time students reporting being

significantly less satisfied than the full-time group despite experiencing the exact same lectures, assessment and academic support.

The data shows the dissatisfaction occurs when students consider the lectures, assessment and the academic support is, in their opinion, hindering them achieving the best result possible. As shown in section 6.3, during the interviews students expressed the fact that they are more focused on the marks they receive rather than the broader experience and would accept poor module delivery etc. if they received high marks. Academic staff members often become aware of this expectation when they are put under significant pressure to provide inappropriate assistance during assessment and pressure to increase marks from students who have set themselves target marks. It is noticeable that all the academic staff interviewed state they have been put under pressure by students to increase the marks awarded. Some report students threatening to complain about the member of staff or provide negative feedback on Module Evaluation Forms (MEQ) if marks are not increased. Observational evidence reveals that some students can be so focussed on the marks that they will initiate formal appeal procedures based on comments they receive as part of their formative feedback on draft assessment submissions. For example, students who have received feedback that their work is generally good, link that directly to the marking structure published in the Academic Regulations as shown in Section 6.3.1, and the use of the word good results in an expectation that they will be guaranteed a mark between 60-69 in the final submission. Although it appears to be a simple matter to overcome, some academic staff feel that providing formative feedback is becoming a minefield and this may account for the reluctance to provide detailed formative feedback.

The goal for many students is to achieve a good degree in order for them to gain a graduate position in their chosen field and begin their Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) training as soon as possible. As the analysis of the data has demonstrated, built environment students often enter university with very high expectations of what they need to succeed in industry and view all the subsequent time spent at university through this lens, resulting in a mismatch between the stated purpose of higher education (Newman 1852; Barnett 1990) and the specific requirements of a particular profession.

7.7 Summary of Chapter

The analysis of the identified issues has revealed a complex set of interactions contributing to the matter of built environment student satisfaction with their experience of higher education. The data reveals that built environment as a subject area attracts a diverse range of students many with specific and often enhanced expectations of their experience of higher education. The enhanced expectations are clearly linked to their expectations of employability and career advancement and that many students view the process as transactional in nature. The expectation may also be magnified by the diverse demographics in the School with the numbers of part-time and mature students. Students report feeling under significant pressure to obtain certain outcomes in terms of degree classification from their employers, from family and often from the pressure they put on themselves as they perceive the sacrifices being made for them to take the opportunity to advance their career prospects. The data also reveals issues around the expectations of academic staff related to their own roles and responsibilities, career progression and enhancement.

The relationship between those teaching on and managing the undergraduate programmes of study and the students is shown to have a significant impact on the levels of student satisfaction.

CHAPTER EIGHT RESEARCH FINDINGS.

8.1 Introduction

This Chapter presents the overall results from the data analysis covered in chapters 5-7 of the thesis. The key findings from the various stages of the research are presented. The findings provide a description of the factors impacting both positively and negatively on the student experience, the challenges faced by providers of built environment higher education in meeting the expectations of a diverse student population, identifying the critical factors in providing a positive experience for built environment students and how they can be used to enhance the overall student experience. It is important to note that the discussions in this chapter are based on the results from all identified sources of data analysed including the NSS results, NSS verbatim comments, and semi-structured interviews with students and academic staff. The research questions will be answered and an explanation provided. The finalised conceptual framework is presented supported by guidelines and areas providers of built environment higher education need to focus on to improve the student experience.

8.2 Re-addressing the Research Questions

This section provides answers to the two research questions that were raised by the researcher in Chapter one of this study. This section re-examines the research questions and provides answers according to the findings of the research. The two research questions are:

1. To what extent does the expectations of students undertaking vocational based, professionally accredited built environment degree programmes influence the perception of the student experience?
2. What aspects of the student experience are critical for enhancing built environment student satisfaction rates?

8.2.1 Research question 1:

The first research question – *'to what extent do the expectations of students undertaking vocational based, professionally accredited built environment degree programmes influence the perception of the student experience?*' - has been answered in the research findings in Chapter 5, 6 and 7. The development in government policy toward higher education over the past two decades has resulted in a number of substantial changes in higher education in terms of access through the widening participation agenda to the introduction of student fees culminating in the introduction of fees up to £9000 per annum. With the increased fee levels it could be reasonable to also expect some increase in expectations (Jones 2010) although it should also be recognised that student expectations may be based on a very limited view on what they can reasonably expect (Ramsden, 2013). The widening participation agenda has resulted in a diverse mix of students many of whom are mature or fully employed and studying on a part-time basis, increasing participation from students who are the first in their family to participate in higher education and those who are returning to education following a long period outside the formal education system. This diverse mix of students can result in a diverse range of expectations of what they can reasonably expect from the institution, the programme of study and the role of the academic staff (Bates and Kaye, 2013). The data suggests that the expectations of students undertaking vocationally based degree programmes including built environment subject areas have a significant influence on the perceptions of their experience of higher education. The findings indicate expectations linked to employability and career enhancement are particularly key to the student cohort. When the expectations are linked to employment they may be significantly enhanced due to the economic climate and the competition for graduate roles coupled with the significantly higher fees (Gedye *et al*., 2004). The link to industry impacts on the student perception of the content of the programme and individual modules but also impacts on the perception of the ability of the academic staff to deliver the content and show the link between theory and practice. An additional issue impacting on many areas of higher education is related to the advances in technology and the accelerated pace of interaction now expected. Those wishing to engage in higher education and participants, have access to many sources of information that is available almost instantaneously and reflects developments within a subject area at a

speed that large organisations cannot compete with. This is also evident with the use of social media in the communication between the institution and between individual students. Many participants of higher education expect immediate access to information, instant responses to queries and to academic staff when required. The result of the advances in technology especially cloud based technologies will have the effect of raising expectations further and is likely to prove challenging to many organisations in terms of how they respond.

8.2.2 RQ2:

What aspects of the student experience are critical for enhancing built student satisfaction rates?

How a individual student perceives an experience is very personal to that individual based on many factors such as the socio-economic background of that individual, previous experience of the educational system, age, gender, family and work responsibilities, work and life experience and importantly the expectations of that individual. The complexity of the factors at an individual level will be replicated in some mix within the whole cohort of students. The complexity of expectations and diversity of students attracted to built environment study presents any organization with a difficult task in successfully providing a satisfactory experience for all students at the levels considered to be acceptable within the sector. The measurement of student satisfaction levels as an indicator of quality has put increased responsibility on those academics involved in the delivery and management of higher education to understand the issues important to students and develop strategies to improve the experience and increase levels of satisfaction.

The requirement for institutions to enhance the experience of students has been a key driver in the on-going policy development in higher education as described in the literature (BIS 2016). The policy development continues going forward with the proposed introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). Against this continued policy development, a better understanding of the factors important to the students in providing an enhanced experience of higher education and to meet the

expectations. The critical issues for built environment students in providing an enhanced student experience were explored through open-ended questions. Various viewpoints related to the experience emerged from the analysis of the data as discussed in chapters 5, 6, and 7. The themes that emerged from the data analysis are summerised below:

(a) Engagement of academic staff

The results from the analysis suggest that the academic staff are a critical factor in the students either reporting a positive experience or a negative experience. The analysis of the data from the NSS verbatim comments shows academic staff to be a positive influencer or a negative influencer. The students consistently report that lack of engagement or interaction with academic staff members during the timetabled sessions and outside the scheduled sessions is a significant cause of dissatisfaction amongst the student cohort. This is an issue reported in other national surveys of student satisfaction and is shown to be a critical factor for students generally (HEPI-HEA, 2015). The inability or unwillingness of some academic staff members to interact with students is perceived very negatively and is linked in the minds of students with staff who are not interested in their progress, as poorly trained, inexperienced and lacking in any professional background. This issue influences the student perception across the whole range of activities including teaching, assessment and feedback, academic support, organization and management and personal development. One of the key areas this lack of engagement influences is the overall satisfaction question on the NSS. The data reveals instances where the student's respond to the individual categories on the NSS in a more positive way than they respond to the question regarding overall satisfaction. On exploring this issue with students during the interviews, a number of students report they feel disconnected from the School, as some staff members are not interested in them or their success. The motivation of some academic staff to engage with teaching activities has been shown to be an issue. The greater value the institution places on research activities related to the lesser value attached to teaching may have the result of lowering the motivation for staff to commit the time required to fully engage with the students and in preparing high quality interactive lectures. The issue is a complex one connected to the motivations and expectations of academic staff and of the needs of the institution.

The policy and procedures related to the recruitment of academic staff and the reward and recognition policy reflects the strategy of the university in meeting its Key Performance Indicators. Traditionally, academic institutions have focused predominantly on research activities and this is especially true of the School of Built Environment at the University of Salford. The School has a national and international reputation for the quality of the research undertaken and as a result attracts many academics that wish to focus on research activities. At undergraduate level the students tend to focus on the industry and career development within that industry environment rather than considering the benefits and impact of research. The evidence has shown that students value those academic staff that have professional experience in the construction industry and can relate the theory to practice. The academic staff members that have the professional experience are less likely to have a research profile and therefore often find they unable to progress their career in line with expectations as a result. The data reveals some evidence that this is proving to be a demotivating factor related to teaching activities with some doubts apparent as to the benefits for individuals in committing the resources necessary to engage with teaching and the associated training and development. It is clear from the findings that the academic staff can have a significant impact on the student experience and the policy and procedures related to the recruitment of staff and on-going training and development, reward and recognition policies contribute to the motivation to engage with undergraduate students to ensure they have a positive experience. Managing academic staff expectations relating to their roles and responsibilities is a significant factor in enhancing the student experience.

(b) Managing expectations

The result of the analysis indicates managing expectations of all stakeholders in higher education to be an important factor in enhancing the student experience. It was evident from the responses that the expectations of students, academic staff, the institution, and the construction industry employers are significant for student satisfaction and in a number of areas are miss-aligned. The evidence suggests students have heightened expectations as a result of the introduction of student fees (Jones, 2010) and due to the vocationally based nature of the courses. The data reveals students have strong expectations of the links to the profession being embedded within the programme of

study, to be taught by academic staff that have professional experience within the construction industry and significantly many enter the higher education environment with clear expectations of the outcome of their studies in terms of degree classification. The expectation of some students that the experience of higher education is transactional in nature and the evidence reveals this can negatively impact on the student perception of all aspects of their experience including teaching, assessment, academic support and organization and management. The data reveals that students have strong expectations of the links to the professions in relation to the content of the programme, the academic staff delivering and managing their modules and also in terms of the direct engagement with construction professionals and professional bodies. Managing the expectations of students of a diverse student cohort also presents challenges for those engaged with built environment higher education. Part-time students represent a significant proportion of the student cohort and as the evidence suggests many of them feel pressure from the workplace in terms of the volume and type of work they are required to undertake and the burden of expectation of the employers. For part-time students often have the performance in their studies linked to their employment resulting in heightened expectations and pressure to succeed.

(c) Organisation and Management

The results from the analysis indicate the strategy for the organization and management of the teaching, assessment and academic support is having a negative impact on the student experience. While the majority of respondents acknowledge the School has made significant improvements in the timetabling in terms of the location of teaching space and the reduced need to move around the campus to attend lectures, the organization of the actual teaching sessions is proving problematic. The evidence reveals students to be critical of four-hour long lectures in large groups. The lack of interaction in a significant number of these sessions with reports of academic staff reading verbatim from the PowerPoint slides and adding little value is negatively impacting on the student experience. The evidence also suggests that more small group tutorial sessions would improve the student experience and potentially improve the interaction with all module tutors. The data suggests that the organization of the

formal structures to facilitate academic support for students is not working efficiently and that a more effective solution would enhance the student experience.

(d) Industry focus

By their very nature, built environment degree programmes are intrinsically linked with the professions. As the data shows, built environment students expect the course content to be industry relevant and that those teaching them are experienced professionals. These expectations are also apparent with professional bodies and employers of part-time students and those employers who offer graduate employment. Any higher education provider of vocationally based degree programmes will encounter similar expectations and will need to balance the strategic requirements of the institution with the expectations of those engaging in the process of higher education. As previously considered, the expectations of academic staff members in terms of reward and recognition and responsibilities will also need to be managed effectively to ensure effective engagement with the process.

8.3 Conceptual Framework

This chapter presents the finalized conceptual framework. The development of the conceptual framework is based on the literature review, the quantitative and qualitative data from the NSS and from the semi-structured interviews with students and academic staff members.

8.3.1 Aim of the conceptual framework

Figure 49 presents the conceptual framework for enhancing the student experience for built environment students. It aims to provide a set of useful and practical actions that can help providers of built environment higher education meet the expectations of students and therefore enhance the overall student experience. It seeks to offer a pragmatic, holistic approach to the subject area based on the understanding gained from the wider context of issues related to student experience and teaching theory and

practice. The main purpose of the framework is to provide senior academic managers and academic teaching staff with a guide to use in the planning and delivery of built environment programmes of study. Additionally, it seeks to highlight key factors that need to be taken into account at a strategic policy level within an HEI and when evaluating the effectiveness of existing policy and procedure for provision of vocationally based subject areas such as built environment. To successfully enhance the experience for built environment students, senior academic managers need to focus on the key areas of managing expectations, people, organization and management and the link to the construction industry, as shown in the Figure 9.1. The focus areas were derived from the results obtained from the data analysis that was then developed into a set of guidelines.

8.4 Expectations

As demonstrated by the analysis of the data, the expectations of participants and stakeholders of higher education can have a considerable effect on the perception of the quality of the experience and as a result, it is an important consideration for providers of built environment higher education how expectations can be managed both at a strategic and operational level. The following areas need to be taken into consideration when managing the expectations of students and other stakeholders.

8.4.1 Marketing.

It is important for providers of built environment higher education to consider the impact on the expectations of students and other stakeholders as a result of the marketing materials used to attract participants to the programme of study. Marketing materials used to recruit potential students should accurately portray the reality of the experience the students are likely to encounter during the course. Exaggerated claims related to the classroom experience, the teaching staff and the links to industry can lead to heightened expectations which cannot be met, resulting in unnecessary dissatisfaction with the experience. Robust procedures should be put in place for effective marketing of programmes without overselling the likely experience the students will receive.

8.4.2 Independent Learning

The research has demonstrated the extent to which students are likely to come from a wide-ranging and diverse background within the built environment subject grouping as a result of the success of the widening participation policy. As the research has demonstrated, students often begin their higher education journey with little experience of the nature of higher education or understand how it is different from the other forms of education they have experience of. The concept of being an independent learner with the academic member of staff facilitating the learning process is often an alien concept. The research has demonstrated how some students perceive their experience in terms of the relevance of the teaching and learning to the assessment and ultimately with the output of their investment. Throughout the interviews students repeatedly refer to being dissatisfied with the teaching if it does not directly address the assessment with little understanding of the expectations on them to undertake further reading and research outside of the scheduled timetable. Therefore, the way in which providers of higher education prepare students for the experience through induction sessions and study skills support in the early stages of the degree need to be carefully coordinated and planned. Transferring and communicating best practices can be undertaken by developing tailored support procedures for students to aid them in the transition to higher education, supported by targeted training and development activities for academic staff.

8.4.3 Employability and interaction with industry

As highlighted by the data, the vocational nature of the built environment courses and the understanding that gaining an accredited first degree is the first step in the process of becoming a Chartered professional, naturally results in a focus on employment opportunities and can lead to heightened expectations amongst the student cohort. The expectations regarding employability are also often heightened for part-time and mature students who are undertaking a degree programme with specific career development goals in mind. A clear recognition by providers of built environment education of the expectations of the student cohort in order to work with students to understand the career paths available to them and the role of the university in that process. Support for

students in understanding the professional standards required within the industry alongside the general careers support is crucial in managing the expectations of students and driving a successful outcome for the student in their career development. The importance of providing a strong link with the construction industry and contextualizing theory with practice is highlighted within the data as a central issue for students. The data also shows that the concerns of students become increasingly more important as students progress through the degree programme and are faced with the prospect of entering the workforce. Targeted career support to address the concerns of students during their final year of their course would go some way to address the concerns of students and improve their experience of higher education. The issue of employability and the expectations of students are also linked to other key issues such as providing a relevant industry focus, organization and management and the recruitment and progression of the academic staff members.

8.4.4 The role of employers

Employers, especially of part-time students and to a lesser extent, those who rely on graduates to fill roles within their organization have a significant impact on the expectations of built environment students. The data indicates that many part-time students have a narrow view of the role of higher education and often view it as training rather than the broader context of education. Students report considering the content of the modules in the context of their particular job role and have expectations that the course will reflect their experiences. The data also highlights the pressures students face from their employers relating to their studies in terms of how successful progression is linked to their continued employment, the need to 'make up' time to mitigate the time spent at university and also the expectations of employers related to the knowledge and skills of the students as they progress through the course. Many part-time students report being placed under significant workload pressures within the workplace in addition to the workload from their studies. As shown often this pressure is further compounded by financial and family responsibilities. The data suggests that close interaction with employers is required to help shape the courses and content in order to maintain currency but also to manage the expectations of employers on what to reasonably expect.

8.5 Industry focus.

The importance of the link to the relevant sections of the industry is highlighted repeated within the data. Students have high expectations that the programme of study will demonstrate currency and have relevance on a regional, national, and international level given the global nature of the industry. Given the focus on employability (see section 8.4.3) and the fast paced development of the construction industry in many areas such as law, procurement, management practice, technology, BIM and subject specific knowledge and skills, industry relevance is a crucial factor in the provision of high quality built environment education. The diverse mix of students that participate in built environment education results in student cohorts that are very aware of developments in the areas described. The large numbers of part-time students results in cohorts of students that are employed within the industry and judge the quality of the information presented within lectures against current practice. The challenge for academic staff in maintaining currency of practice in addition to developments in theory is considerable and is reliant to a large extent on developing the links to industry professionals that can contribute to the modules as required.

8.5.1 Develop the link

In order to meet the expectations of students and the various stakeholders of built environment higher education, it is necessary to develop links with the construction industry in a variety of ways to reflect the complexity of expectations and knowledge and skills. Students expect explicit reference to current practice within the modules they are undertaking and some contextualization of the theory to current practice. The data shows student particularly value academic staff that are experienced professionals, have teaching qualifications and/or continuous on going training to update teaching skills. This can prove to be problematic for higher education providers that rely on academic staff to engage with research rather than professional (industry) activities. Providers of built environment higher education may need to review the recruitment policies; reward and recognition policies and on-going training requirements to ensure the knowledge and skills are available within the teaching staff to meet with the expectations of the various stakeholders. Recruiting professionally qualified academic staff also provides an advantage to the employer in that it is a requirement of the

professional body for those holding such qualifications to engage in set levels of approved CPD. Providing academic staff members with sufficient support for engaging with research and enterprise activities also provides opportunities to develop links with industry. Strong links with industry also provides opportunities to industry professionals to participate in teaching and assessment activities, provides opportunities for placements and graduate employment and helps the school to maintain currency within its academic programmes.

8.6 Organisation and Management

In order to improve the student experience it is necessary to develop the pedagogical approaches to the teaching and learning. The data highlights the dissatisfaction with the reliance on traditional lectures within the delivery of the modules. The use of technology to support the teaching process should be considered as appropriate and is in the process of development within the school in the form of learning packages to support the delivery of the modules. The issue of the manner in which technology can be used and the resultant expectations of students in terms of the speed of access to information and staff needs some consideration in terms of providing sufficient infrastructure, equipment and training to academic staff. Technology is a useful tool for teaching activities and providing academic support for students and also to support the academic teams. Information technology can be used as a communication technology, providing information to students and in bringing together various members of the Programme/module team to collaborate on teaching activities. Technology can be viewed as an essential enabler in the teaching, learning and assessment process particularly in meeting student expectations for instant access to information 24/7 on and off campus. There is a need to focus on collaborative technologies that embody a range of techniques that facilitate person-to-person collaboration given the views expressed by students and academic staff regarding the desire for more interaction between students/lecturing staff and within the Programme/module teams. The analysis of the data suggests that students particularly value the opportunity to interact and engage with academic staff both inside and outside the scheduled sessions. To implement the required mechanisms, it is necessary to review the scheduling and structure of the teaching and provide the appropriate resources to support the activities.

The issue of the diverse cohorts of students needs some consideration to ensure the range of expectations, knowledge, and skills can be catered to within the delivery of the curricula. This may require part-time students to have a proportion of the scheduled sessions to be delivered separately and will have implications for the knowledge, skills, and experience of the academic staff. The literature provides much evidence of the expectations of part-time and/or mature students but is lacking in research outcomes related to managing a very diverse cohort of students. The data from this research provides evidence that some dissatisfaction is apparent amongst part-time students with attending classes with full-time students. This is an issue that needs to be addressed either by taking appropriate measures to teach the groups separately for a proportion of the class contact or to actively manage the expectations of those students. Additionally, appropriate formal mechanisms for providing support for students need to be created with sufficient targeted training and resources for academic staff to support this activity.

8.7 Academic Staff

The contribution of the academic staff members is shown by the data to be the most significant factor in the quality of the student experience and is therefore central to the measures required to improve the experience for students. In order to satisfy the expectations of students and other stakeholders, it is necessary to build an effective team of academic staff with the knowledge, skills and experience to deliver the range of programmes within the built environment subject area and additional deliver the institutional strategic targets for research and enterprise. The literature has shown (see chapter 2) this can prove to be challenging for institutions and also for those wishing to build and sustain an academic career particularly within vocationally based subject areas. To effectively improve the student experience it is necessary to improve the experience for academic staff members using a variety mechanisms including;

(a) Institution's may need to review the policies and procedures related to the recruitment and selection of academic staff to ensure sufficient professional knowledge and skills are available within the team to deliver the modules effectively. Those institutions that have policies that favour those applicants with a pure research background may encounter some of the issues raised by students.

(b) Review of policies and procedures should also extend to the recognition and reward mechanisms for those staff that are primarily involved in teaching and academic

management activities. The literature points to several approaches developing within the higher education sector relating to how individual institutions respond to the tensions between the need to resource high quality research and deliver the government policy developments related to improving the student experience. A number of the strategies used have been shown to provide a two-tier approach that is less than satisfactory for those without a pure research background developing a satisfactory and rewarding career. The impact on vocationally based subject areas is perhaps more pronounced that in other areas but has a significant impact for those students engaged within these areas.

(c) It is also necessary to manage the expectations of those seeking to develop an academic career to understand the nature and purpose of higher education and the strategic goal of institutions in successfully accomplishing this purpose. Research is a critical factor in higher education and therefore is a requirement of those engaged within the sector. Many entrants to higher education from a commercial/industry background often struggle to reconcile the tension between the need to produce research outputs and the requirement to deliver high quality, industry focused teaching. Managing the expectations of academic staff members while implementing effective recruitment and recognition policies in order to avoid disenfranchising some academic staff is central to improving the student experience. Providing clear guidance on career development and progression opportunities will also improve the retention of staff.

(d) The evidence from the literature and from the data collected for this study highlights the value students place on those academic staff that have teaching qualifications and that engage with continuing development of their skills through training and development opportunities. Targeted mandatory training and development related to teaching, learning and assessment should be implemented to improve the quality of the classroom experience for students and to ensure assessment is a positive development tool for students. Initiative's such as requiring all academic staff to undertake teaching qualifications or gain membership of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) may also raise the profile of teaching and serve as a mechanism for providing excellence.

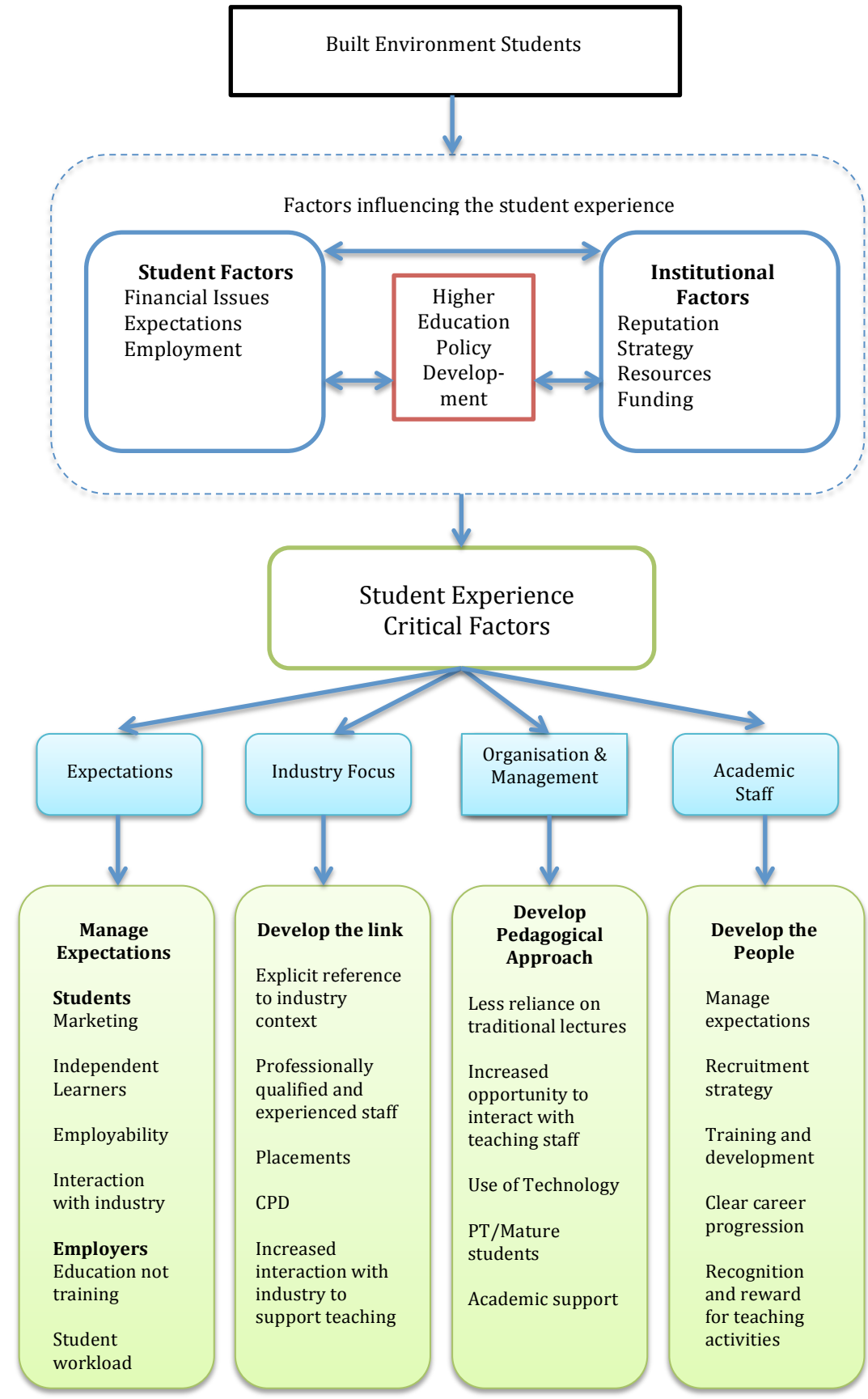


Figure 49- Conceptual Framework

8.4 Outcomes from the Framework

To deliver measurable improvements to the quality of the student experience, all those responsible for the management and delivery of built environment higher education need to focus on the key areas of expectations, industry focus, organisation and management and academic staff as shown in Figure 49. The research suggests that a multi-layered response including all levels of institutional management and teaching staff as highlighted in 8.4.1 – 8.7 and in the table below;

Identified Critical Factors	**Proposals/ Actions**
Manage Expectations of students	*Marketing and programme information should reflect a realistic picture of the content and activity associated with the programme of study to avoid generating unrealistic expectations.* **Action:** Marketing strategy must be aligned to the needs of individual Schools. **Action:** Develop and implement appropriate mechanisms for production and monitoring of marketing materials. *Programme teams to manage expectations of students in relation to course content, assessment and feedback and interaction with construction professions.* **Action:** Effective programme leadership to support the development of a strong programme team. **Action:** Provide targeted training and development activities for academic staff. **Action:** Develop standard processes for effective communication with the student cohort. **Action:** Develop effective induction programmes and support student

	learning with targeted study skills support. **Action:** Produce standard processes to support the academic and personal development of the student body to develop students as independent learners. **Action:** Provide targeted career support to address the concerns of students during their final year of their course would go some way to address the concerns of students and improve their experience of higher education. **Action:** Develop standard protocols to encourage close interaction with construction professionals and employers in order to maintain currency and to manage the expectations of employers. **Action:** Develop and communicate clear expectations related to the levels of engagement required of students and responsibility for own learning.
Industry focus	*Students expect explicit reference to current practice within the modules they are undertaking and some contextualization of the theory to current practice.* **Action:** Review the staff recruitment policy to ensure it adequately supports the key business of the institution and implement any identified improvements. **Action:** Review the staff reward and recognition policy to ensure it adequately supports the key business of the institution and implement any identified improvements. **Action:** Support on-going staff development via targeted and structure training programmes.
Organisation and Management	*In order to improve the student experience it is necessary to develop the pedagogical approaches to the teaching and learning.* **Action:** Develop an effective teaching, learning and assessment strategy institutionally and at school level. **Action:** Review the pedagogical approach used within the School

	and identify key areas for improvement. **Action:** Strong leadership to be provided by Senior management of the School to support teaching activities. **Action:** Support on-going staff development via targeted and structure training programmes. **Action:** Implement an effective Peer Observation process. **Action:** Provide targeted support for new staff or those undertaking new roles/duties. **Action:** Develop appropriate formal mechanisms for providing support for students with sufficient targeted training and resources for academic staff to support this activity. **Action:** Develop robust mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of the scheduling and structure of the teaching and teaching related activities and provide the appropriate resources to support these activities.
Academic Staff	*The contribution of the academic staff members is shown by the data to be the most significant factor in the quality of the student experience and is therefore central to measures required to improve the experience for students.* **Action:** Review the policies and procedures related to the recruitment and selection of academic staff to ensure sufficient professional knowledge and skills are available within the team to deliver the modules effectively. **Action:** Review of policies and procedures should also extend to the recognition and reward mechanisms for those staff that are primarily involved in teaching and academic management activities. **Action:** Actively manage the expectations of staff as to the strategic goals of the institution while providing clear guidance on career development and progression opportunities. **Action:** Targeted mandatory training and development related to teaching, learning and assessment should be implemented to

	improve the quality of the classroom experience for students and to ensure assessment is a positive development tool for students. **Action:** Expect all academic staff to undertake teaching qualifications or gain membership of the Higher Education Academy (HEA).

8.5 Chapter summary

This chapter provides answers to the research questions outlined in chapter one. The questions have been used to guide the study process. This section has revisited the research questions and provided answers according to the findings of the research.

The results of the study reveal that the issue of student satisfaction is complex and the perception of the experience is highly personal in nature. The research reveals that the students often view the experience at university from an 'as-lived' perspective and that this can exaggerate the perception of the experience from a very personal viewpoint. The expectations associated with vocationally based, professionally accredited subject areas coupled with the impact of the diverse demographics and modes of study has been shown to create a challenging environment to meet the heightened expectations and provide a satisfactory response to the very individual expectations. The research findings suggest that the expectations of academic staff is also highly influential in providing a satisfactory experience for the students and that the interaction between the academic staff and the students is one of the most significant in providing a positive or negative experience. The research suggests that for vocationally based subject areas such as built environment there is a need to consider the policy and procedures around the recruitment of staff, the reward and recognition for academic staff members from a professional rather than a research background and the mechanisms for addressing poor performance. The findings also indicate there is a need to invest in training in teaching, learning and assessment practices to improve the experience for students. By incorporating both formal and informal training programmes plus enhanced programme team working, academic staff will have the opportunity to reflect on certain issues of teaching, assessment, academic support along with the organization and management to improve practice and provide a support network for academic staff.

CHAPTER NINE CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

9.1 Introduction

The aim of this research, as stated in Chapter 1 (Section 1.2), is to develop a conceptual framework for enhancing the student experience for built environment students in England. This chapter presents the key research findings and a summary of the aim and objectives. The main conclusions from the results of the analysis of the NSS data and the semi-structured interviews are presented with the recommendations. The limitations of the research are documented along with a description of the contribution to the current body of knowledge. Finally, the chapter concludes with recommendations for further research.

9.2 Main Findings

Having thoroughly explored and identified the main factors impacting on the student experience for built environment subject areas, this section presents the main findings from the research.

1. By undertaking a literature review, the study gathered empirical evidence from previous research studies into the identification of the factors impacting on the perception of the quality of the student experience. The subsequent results from this study revealed that the quality of the interaction between academic staff and students, managing the expectations of all parties involved in the process, the organization and management and the link to the professions within the construction industry to be the most important factors in enhancing the student experience.

2. The findings from this study indicate that the quality of the interaction between academic staff and students is a significant factor in the perception of the experience for students and can have a very positive or a very negative impact. The research data demonstrates that the professional experience and background of academic staff members, the motivation and roles and responsibilities of those engaged in teaching undergraduate students plays a significant role in the student experience. Also, the

findings suggest that higher education providers need to identify and understand the factors facilitating and inhibiting academic staff motivation and engagement with students, so the appropriate measures could be put in place to enhance the facilitating factors and suppress the inhibiting factors to promote high quality engagement with students with the ultimate purpose of achieving performance improvement.

3. The findings from the study also indicate that the nature of built environment degree programmes and the intrinsic link with the construction industry are significant factors in influencing the student expectations. The diverse student population typically found within built environment schools also contributes to the challenges faced by any institution in providing built environment education. The heightened expectations of part-time and mature students coupled with the expectations of full-time students create a challenging environment to understand and provide an educational experience for this student cohort.

4. This study also reveals that the organization and management of the teaching, assessment and academic support mechanisms impact significantly on the quality of the student experience and are closely relate to the student expectations. The data reveals that while the cost of tuition fees has become the accepted norm amongst the student cohort, the evidence suggest students have become very output focused and this is evident in how they view the teaching, assessment and academic support. The study identifies and examines the importance of understanding the student expectations and the relationship between the expectations and the 'as-lived' experience of the student group. This relationship is significant in terms of how it can provide a lens that all interactions with the university are viewed through and the ability of the higher education provider to identify and respond appropriately is important in enhancing the student experience.

5. The study offers a holistic way to examine the factors impacting on the built environment student experience by developing a conceptual framework that focused on the antecedents of the built environment student experience. This study used a systematic methodology that incorporated a longitudinal trend analysis on the NSS quantitative data, content and theme analysis of the verbatim comments over a period of

eight years followed by analysis of semi-structured interviews with students and academic staff members to produce a framework with a set of factors and their effect on the student experience (see chapter 5, 6 & 7).

9.3 The research conclusions

This section presents the conclusions from the research study while reviewing how well the aim and objectives, set out in chapter 1 (section 1.2 and 1.3), have been achieved.

(a) The research aim.

To propose a conceptual framework for the delivery of improved student satisfaction for built environment students. The framework will provide guidelines relating to developments in pedagogy, measures to improve student satisfaction with the management and organisation of their studies and employability. The framework was developed, detailed in Figure 49, from the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data collected. The framework identifies the significant factors impacting on the student experience and provides a set of actions that can be adopted to enhance the built environment student experience.

(b) Research Objectives

The main conclusions drawn from the research study are presented based on the following objectives as highlighted in chapter 1 (section 1.3).

Objective 1: To document the extant literature on the stated purpose of higher education and the developments in government higher education policy.

Objective 1 was explored through an in-depth review of the existing literature relating the stated purpose of higher education as detailed in chapter 2. As described in the literature higher education is characterised by certain key distinguishing features that must be maintained during the delivery of a wide range of subject areas. The

government policy developments including those to widen participation and to remove the traditional structure of universities and polytechnic's, has resulted in a much wider offer of subjects areas being introduced to the higher education sector with a greater diversity of student demographics participating in higher education. The literature documents the challenges faced by higher education providers in ensuring the distinguishing features of an experience of higher education are maintained in the context of the on-going policy developments.

Objective 2: To investigate and document the extant literature on the concept of student satisfaction in higher education and the purpose and the primary mechanism for measurement in England.

This objective was explored through an in-depth review of the existing literature on the concept of student satisfaction generally and for built environment subject areas. The literature review revealed that the policy developments in higher education over the past two decades has had major impact on those participants of higher education and as a result, has heightened expectations of the experience itself and the output in terms of degree classification and employability. The literature highlighted the policy drivers for the measurement of the student experience as an indicator of quality as detailed in Chapter 2. The literature review provided a foundation for understanding the nature of the built environment subject area and the close association with the professional industry context. The expectations of the differing stakeholders in built environment higher education were explored to provide a basis for interpreting some of the expectations and constraints within this context.

Objective 3: To explore and document the concept of student satisfaction for built environment subject areas and the role of the National Student Survey in measuring satisfaction levels.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the growing emphasis on the 'student experience' linked to government higher education policy development has been highlighted in the literature and is also evident in this research. The literature reveals that the concept of the student experience as an entity that has become a management function within HEI's is

relatively recent and the on-going development is closely linked to the introduction of measures of student satisfaction such as the National Student Survey. The literature has revealed gaps in the knowledge relating to the student experience for built environment students. Although some studies have focussed on elements of the experience for built environment students, the experience of the range of students participating in built environment is not fully documented. The analysis of the qualitative data has revealed the wide-ranging expectations of the students particularly with the part-time and mature students compared with the traditional full-time entrant. The literature reveals that many of the issues relating to the distinct groups of participants in higher education are considered in isolation with focus for example on part-time students or mature students but little literature is available considering the expectations, issues etc. of the students as a cohort or within the subject area especially given the vocationally based nature of built environment and the expectations associated with it. The literature also reveals the gap in the data relating to mature students identified by HEFCE (2015) resulting in the proposed changes to the NSS to capture this data.

Objective 4: To explore the critical factors in promoting a satisfactory experience of higher education for built environment students.

The critical factors in promoting a satisfactory experience of higher education for built environment students are highlighted in detail in Chapter 6 and 7. The results of the research indicate that student expectations are wide-ranging and are often linked with perceived future employment needs. Part-time and mature students are very influenced by they expectations of their employers and the need to achieve in their studies to maintain their employment. This adds to the pressure of the expectations as it can impact on personal and family commitments heightening the perceptions of their experience of higher education. The data also reveals that academic staff teaching the students a significant impact on the student experience resulting in a very positive or very negative experience. Student expectations of the link to the construction industry impacts on their expectations of the qualifications and experience of academics with clear evidence demonstrated of the value students attached to those who demonstrate evidence of this experience. The data reveals that the ability to teach with evidence of professional industry experience is valued by students significantly more than research

output. The findings also demonstrate that the quality of the interaction between students and academic staff members in all teaching related activities is a significant factor for students. The research also reveals the issues faced by academic staff in building and maintaining a rewarding career impacts on the motivation for some staff in engaging in teaching given the emphasis and value placed on research by academic institution's. The pedagogical practice surrounding the teaching of practical based subject areas along with the organisation and management of the teaching activities is shown to have a significant impact on the student experience.

Objective 5: To explore the challenges associated with promoting a satisfactory experience of higher education for built environment students.

The literature review (see Chapter 2) identified the key developments in government higher education policy resulting in the growing emphasis on the student experience and the measurement of student satisfaction with their experience. The main factors measured as impacting on the student experience generally and those particularly important for built environment students were highlighted in the analysis of the NSS data and the semi-structured interviews detailed in Chapter 7 are: the academic staff, the link with the construction industry, the wide-ranging and varied expectations of students and the organization and management of teaching activities.

The results from the research suggest that the influence of the academic staff in providing a positive student experience is significant. However, a strong perception exists that teaching activities are not valued within the higher education sector resulting in a focus on research as a means of career progression has an impact on the motivation of some academic staff to engage with these activities. The challenge faced by academic institutions in meeting the complex mix of competing strategic objectives related to research objectives and the growing emphasis on the student experience is significant as it relates to the recruitment and retention of suitably qualified and experienced staff. The lack of commitment to teaching has been shown to be a constraint to enhancing the student experience and the institutional response to these issues will impact on the reported satisfaction with the experience of higher education.

The government policy development surrounding higher education relating to funding and widening participation has resulted in heightened student expectations as discussed in Chapter 2. The policy development has also resulted in a diverse range of students engaging in higher education resulting in wide-ranging expectations that is significant for built environment education given the range of students, the numbers of part-time and mature students and the expectations for employability. The ability of providers of built environment higher education to recognize and manage the expectations of students and academic staff will support any initiatives to improve the student experience. Organisational processes and procedures can facilitate improvements in the student experience by ensuring the students expectations are managed, the academic staff are valued and rewarded for teaching related activities alongside research output and due consideration is paid to the organization and management of the teaching.

Objective 6: To develop a conceptual framework to influence measures taken to improve the student experience for built environment students and as a result, increased student satisfaction rates as measured by the National Student Survey.

A conceptual framework was developed and presented in Figure 49. The framework identifies the critical factors for positively impacting on the student experience and measures required to improve satisfaction levels in the identified areas of the National Student Survey including 'Teaching on my Course', 'Assessment and Feedback', 'Academic Support' and 'Organisation and Management'.

9.4 Research Contribution to Knowledge

The research objectives are rigorously explored and all the research questions satisfactorily resolved. The challenges in adapting to the on-going higher education policy development and meeting the varied expectations of students were explored in Chapters 2, 6, and 7. Following the exploration of issues, the critical factors impacting on the student experience for built environment students were identified and the reasons why the factors were important were noted in Chapter 7 and 8. This study contributes to a greater understanding of the impact of the government policy developments on the

student expectations and the role of higher education providers in adapting to the changing landscape of the student population, the expectations of students related to their significant financial investment and the expectations for employability. As the research has demonstrated, across higher education in England, there is a knowledge gap around the experiences of, and barriers faced, by part-time mature students in higher education that is particularly evident with the built environment sector.

This research also helps fill gaps that exist in our understanding of the complex issues facing higher education providers and the ways in which the "as-lived" experience of students impacts on the perception of the experience. The findings highlight the need to listen to the experiences of the typically diverse built environment student population and provide ways in which the needs and aspirations of learners in this sector can be properly considered. The growing importance of the student experience and the increasing need for this to be considered as a management issue at an institutional level, in order to meet the expectations of students thus satisfying the requirements of the on-going government higher education policy developments particularly surrounding the needs of built environment students, is not matched by the empirical research in this area. The research demonstrates that there is a paucity of research considering the needs of the diverse population of built environment students and how to address these needs as a heterogeneous group.

Consequently, the outcome of this research study adds to the body of knowledge in the area of built environment student experience. It will provide a better understanding of the key factors that impact on the built environment student experience and providers of built environment higher education will be able to identify the extent to which the identified factors are present and take appropriate measures to resolve the issues.

Finally, this research has proposed a conceptual framework identifying the key factors important in providing a satisfactory student experience for built environment students taking into account the particular needs of this group of students. The framework recognizes the fact that a 'one-size fits all' approach is ineffective as the student population become more diverse especially as student expectations become heightened as a result of government policy for higher education. The conceptual framework has

added a new insight through which providers of built environment higher education can understand the main factors influencing the student experience.

9.5 Recommendations for providers of built environment higher education.

The research recommendations on how providers of higher education institutions can improve the student experience are presented below:

1. Undertake an assessment of the organisational structure and culture to explore and manage any barriers to providing a high quality student experience. This should include a review of the behaviours expected of staff along side key competencies.

2. The institutional level marketing strategy must be aligned to the needs of individual Schools with robust mechanisms introduced for the production and monitoring of high quality, appropriate marketing materials.

3. Invest in infrastructure (buildings, technology, IT) to support the student experience and consider strategies to ensure the most effective use of the available resources.

4. Review the role and responsibilities of key academic staff in providing effective management of teaching, learning and assessment.

5. Develop and communicate clear expectations related to the levels of engagement required of students and responsibility for own learning.

6. Review the staff recruitment policy to ensure it adequately supports the key business of the institution and implement any identified improvements. This process should also consider the staff reward and recognition policy to ensure it adequately supports the key business and employees of the institution.

7. Targeted mandatory training and development related to teaching, learning and assessment should be implemented to improve the quality of the classroom

experience for students and to enhance the employability of students.

8. Introduce policies that actively encourage all academic staff to undertake teaching qualifications AND gain appropriate membership of the Higher Education Academy (HEA).

9. Provide leadership at all levels of the institution to encourage academic staff members to explore new learning opportunities, through both formal and informal mechanisms and to view their colleagues as a resource for learning.

9.6 Research Limitation

Although this research has achieved its aim and all the research questions were adequately met, there were some unavoidable limitations. In order to increase the generalizability of the findings, future research should repeat the methodology with larger samples and in a range of providers of built environment higher education. The methodology used was based on a single case study to understand the institutional factors contributing to the student experience and therefore may not be applicable within a different institutional setting without a detailed critical analysis. Future research should replicate the methodology used in this study to identify additional factors associated with the student experience in the context of this study.

9.7 Recommendations for Further Research

It is evident from the research findings that a number of factors are critically important in providing a satisfactory student experience for built environment students. However, further research is recommended to further explore the factors impacting on the student experience and the interplay between the identified factors particularly for built environment students to aid understanding and to develop a more detailed framework for higher education providers to follow. The recommendations for future research include:

1. Investigating the role and responsibilities of academic staff members in light of the on-going higher education policy development and the institutional response to the emphasis on the student experience.

2. Further research should be conducted to investigate the expectations and experience of part-time and mature students within the built environment sector given the reported differences in satisfaction levels.

3. Further research should be undertaken to investigate the relationship between industry and higher education providers to assess the expectations, benefits and limitations of the interaction to maximize the potential impacts.

4. Further research should be conducted to investigate whether the findings of this study are supported by a wider survey of built environment academics and students.

5. Finally, further research is required to test the application of the framework with providers of built environment higher education.

9.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations of the research findings. It has highlighted the purpose of the research study and reviewed the research objectives. The final conceptual framework was presented and suggestions for further research.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Interview Participant Documents and Questions.

Participant Information Sheet

Study Title - ***A framework for improving student satisfaction levels as measured by the National Student Survey within University of Salford Built Environment programmes.***

Invitation to participate in a research study

I would like to invite you to take part in an interview as part of a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Please take time to decide whether or not to take part.

The aim of the doctoral research is to propose a framework for the delivery of improved student satisfaction rates within University of Salford. The framework will provide guidelines relating to developments in pedagogy, measures to improve student satisfaction with the management and organisation of their studies, and employability. This will be achieved through critically analysing the appropriate literature, undertaking an analysis of the National Student Survey (NSS) results for the University of Salford over a five year period, and through undertaking a series of semi-structured interviews with university management and students. The analysis resulting from these three strands of research will then be triangulated to establish common themes and issues, and to form recommendations going forward. This invitation relates specifically to the latter strand of the research, the semi-structured interviews.

The main purpose of the study is essentially academic, as part of my PhD, being undertaken with the University of Salford.

Why have you been invited?

You have been invited to participate, as I understand that you have had substantial experience as either a senior manager within the University of Salford or you are currently an Undergraduate student at University of Salford. I hope to interview approximately 50 participants in total, all of whom should have a similar level of experience as you either as a senior manager or student of the University of Salford.

Do you have to take part?

Taking part in the research is entirely voluntary. It is up to you to decide. I will describe the study and go through the information sheet in detail. I will then ask you to sign a consent form

to show that you agreed to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

What will happen if you take part?

If you agree to participate, we will arrange to meet at a convenient location and time, to undertake an interview that I anticipate lasting approximately 30 minutes. The interview will be of a semi-structured nature. This means that I will seek your input to a set of consistent, structured questions that will be posed to all participants, as well as exploring any topic areas that develop during the course of our discussion. If you consent, I would also like to record our discussion (audio only), to ease transcription and ensure accuracy. However, I am perfectly happy to just take notes. Either way I will transcribe and share any such notes with you for your comment, prior to using them further in the study. All recordings and notes will be held either on an encrypted hard-drive, or stored on the Universities secure file storage. You will not be identified personally in any way. Further details regarding confidentiality are given below.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The timing and location of the interview will be arranged to minimise any inconvenience to you. Your anonymity is assured throughout the process, and any of your input used in the study will not be attributable to you personally, nor to any organisation that you may be associated with.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

I cannot promise that taking part will help or benefit you personally, but the information I get from the study will help increase the understanding of the issues relating to improving the student experience at University of Salford, which may in turn have longer term benefits.

What if there is a problem?

If you experience any problems, or have any complaints regarding this study, please address them to me in the first instance, or if that is not appropriate, to my Supervisor at the University of Salford, Professor Les Ruddock.

Will taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All information, which is collected, about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential, and any information about you which leaves your organisation will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised.

All information that is collected either about you or from you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential, and your name and any other details about you will be removed so that you cannot be identified.

- The data will be collected during the interview using hand-written notes and / or audio recording in an MP3 format.
- The data will be stored safely, for example:

    - Hard-copy paper data will be stored in a locked cabinet, within a locked office, accessed only by researcher
    - Electronic data will be stored on a password protected encrypted hard-drive known only by researcher, or on the University's encrypted file store, again password-protected with the password known only to the researcher.
- The data gathered will only be used for this specific study, and no other.
- Only myself or my Supervisor will have access to identifiable data.
- The data will be retained for a minimum of three years, and no longer than five years, after which it will be disposed of securely.

What happens if you don't carry on with the study?

If you withdraw from the study, all the information and data collected from you, to date, will be destroyed and your name removed from all the study files.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the study will form part of my PhD thesis, which is due for submission in May 2016. If you wish, I will send you a pdf electronic copy of the final thesis. Prior to that, and as already mentioned, you will be provided with a copy of the notes or transcript of our discussion prior to its use in the research. You will not be identified in the research, unless you have given your specific consent, though I do not foresee circumstances in which it would be beneficial to identify a participant.

Who is organising or sponsoring the research?

This study is being organised as part of my PhD, through the University of Salford.

Further information and contact details:

For further information, please contact myself, Julie Cross, at j.cross@salford.ac.uk

Julie Cross
Maxwell Building 435,
School of the Built Environment
University of Salford
Salford.
M5 4WT.

Interview Questions – Students

1. **Thinking about your experiences while at university, how would you describe your experience in the classroom?**

Further questions to include:

- Expectations – number of hours per week, number of weeks, class size, class time, delivery etc.
- Can you give an example of a Positive experience? What 2 aspects where most important in making it a positive experience?
- Negative experience. What 2 aspects where most important in making it a Negative experience?
- Do you have any suggestion for how your experience in the classroom could be improved?

2. **Thinking about the academic staff associated with your programme of study, could you describe the qualities associated with staff who provide a**
    - Positive experience?
    - Poor experience?

3. **Thinking about the assessment and feedback you received as part of your modules, how would you describe your experience in relation to:**
    - The range of assessments used?
    - The timing of the assessments?
    - The timing of the marks and feedback?
    - The quality of the feedback?
        i. How could this be improved?

ii. What would you consider to be most important, a quick return of marks and feedback or the quality of the feedback?

- Do you feel that the amount of support you received to undertake your assessment was adequate? Did this meet with your expectations?

4. Thinking about how your programme of study was organised in terms of your timetable, location of lectures etc., did this meet with your expectations of study at university?

5. Thinking about the academic support you received during your studies, who did you seek support from if needed

    - The module tutor?
    - Your personal tutor?
    - Your Programme Director?
    - Other – please explain

6. When seeking support from academic staff, what influenced your decision on who to seek assistance from?

    - How did you contact the member of staff?
    - Was this effective?
    - Could any aspect be improved?

7. When thinking about your experience at university, can you identify

    - Three of the most important factors in you having a positive experience?
    - Three factors which would result in a negative experience?

8. What would you wish to change/improve?

Interview Questions – Academic Staff

Staff interviews – Areas for discussion.

The research is primarily concerned with improving the student experience. From initial analysis of the interviews with students, the main matters concerning students fall into 5 broad areas identified below. For each area could you comment on if you feel the comments are justified, steps the school has taken to address the issues and if anything further the school or university could take to address the issues.

1. **Teaching on my Course.**

- Lecturers reading verbatim from slides
- 4 hour blocks of teaching
- Large lecture groups for a large part of the contact time
- Lack of tutorial time in smaller, programme focused groups.
- Content of modules not relevant to assessment criteria.
- Lack of classroom management – other student chatting in class

2. **Assessment and feedback.**

- Bunched submission dates
- Changes to the published submission dates
- Lecturers changing the marking criteria or what they expect to be submitted often or at the last minute
- Information provided late in the semester that is relevant to the assignment
- Lack of support in terms of formative feedback
- Lack of summative feedback – no consistency of approach – lack of standard template.
- Marks not received back in 15 days.

3. **Academic support**

- Students reporting lack of contact with Programme team
- Very little awareness of level tutors – who they are and role as personal tutor.
- PT students reporting problems contacting staff on day of attendance
- Students seem to build own support mechanisms with staff that they relate to rather than the school driven structures.

4. **Organisation and management**

- Timetables not problematic but staff finishing a class early and leaving large gaps in the day is.

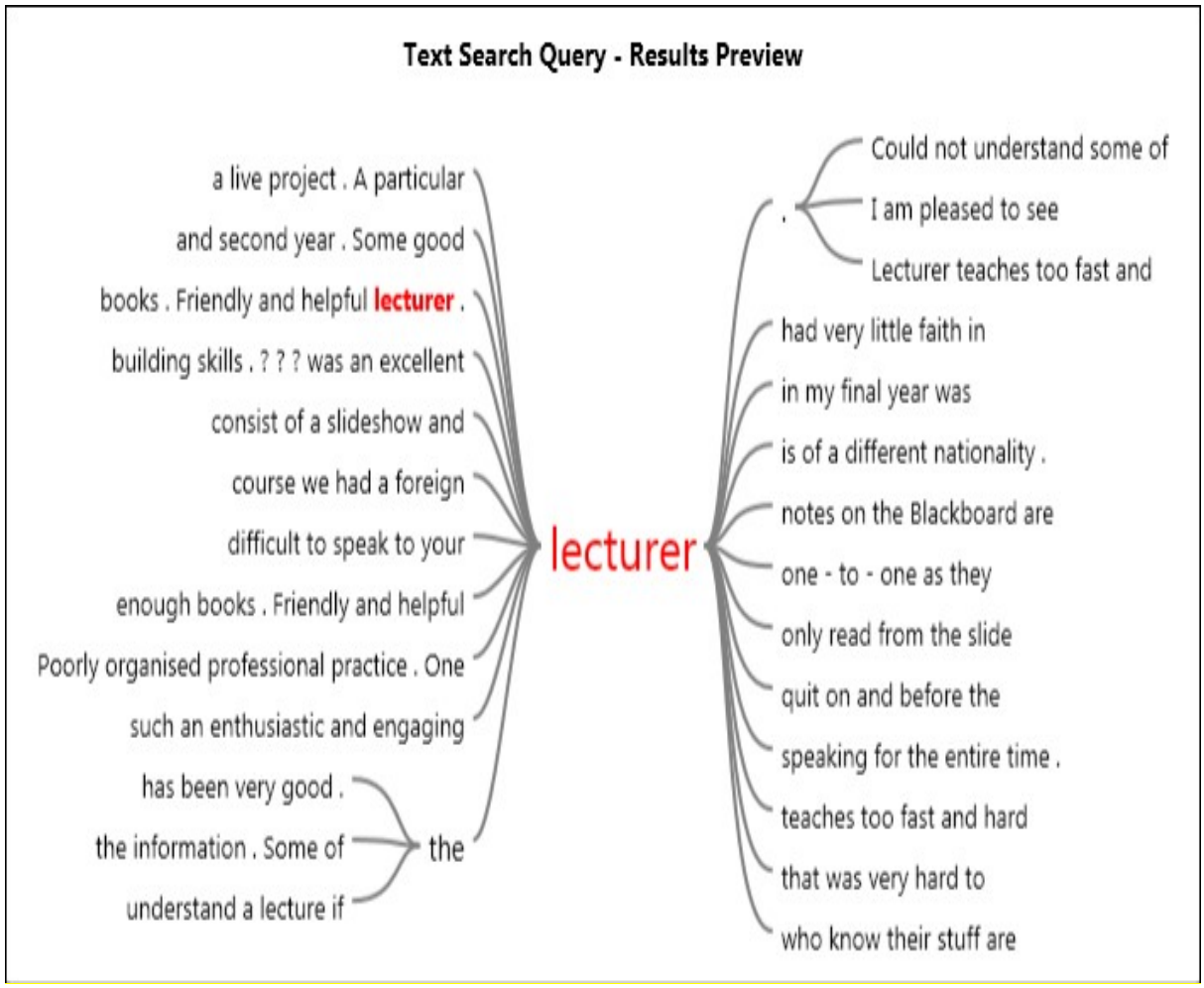
- Poor rooms
- Lack of a base room in the university to work like ADT students.

5. Other issues

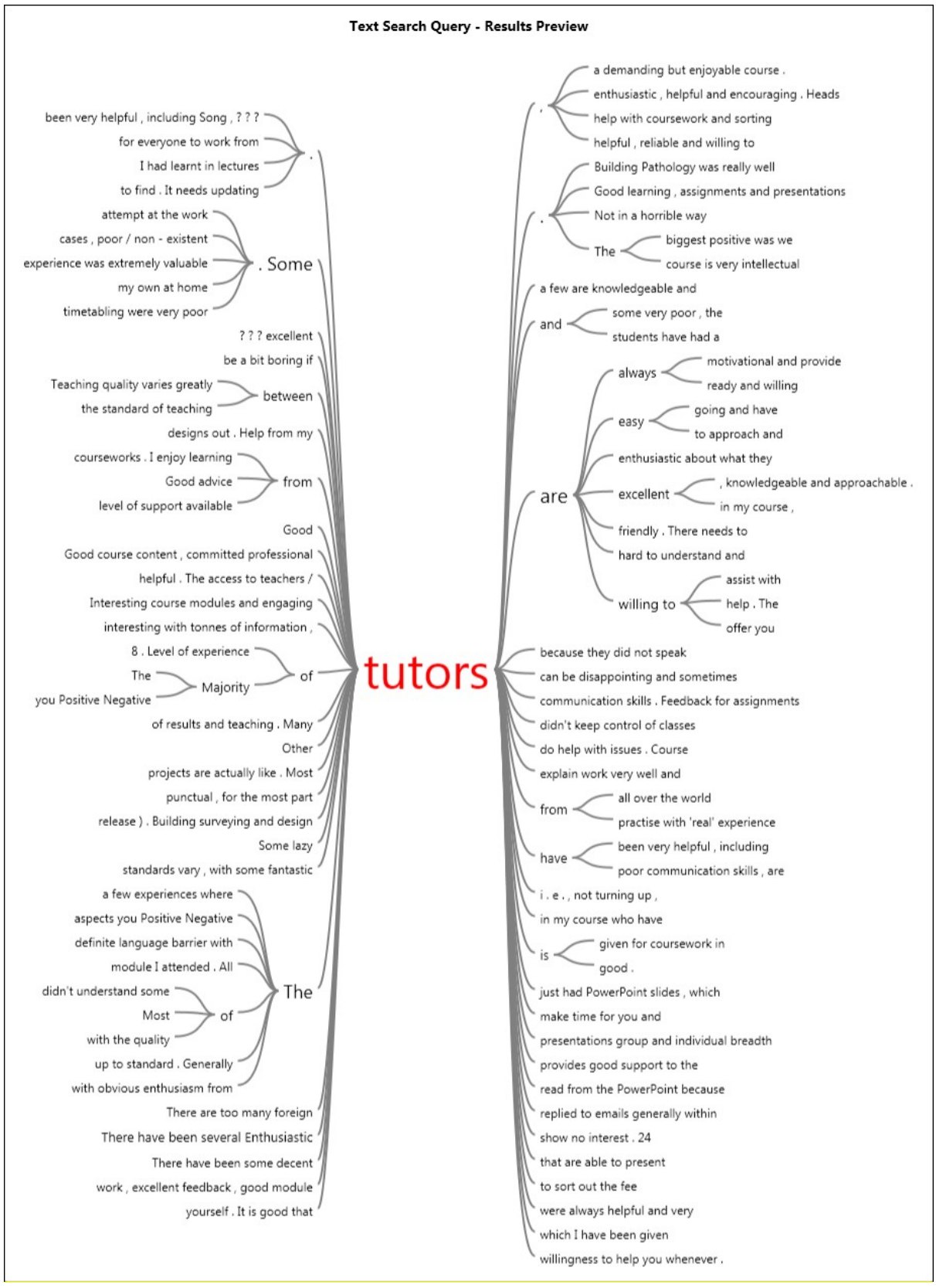
- Lack of personal engagement with academic staff
- Students often feel staff do not know who they are or even recognise them
- Students feel there is a disconnect between what is provided by lecturers and what they expect – they don't feel like they are considered in how the modules are delivered.
- 'As lived' experience is very important to students – impact on them personally if classes cancelled etc.
- Students are reporting pressure on them to succeed either from family, friends, employers and this seems to be impacting how they view the experience they have while at university.

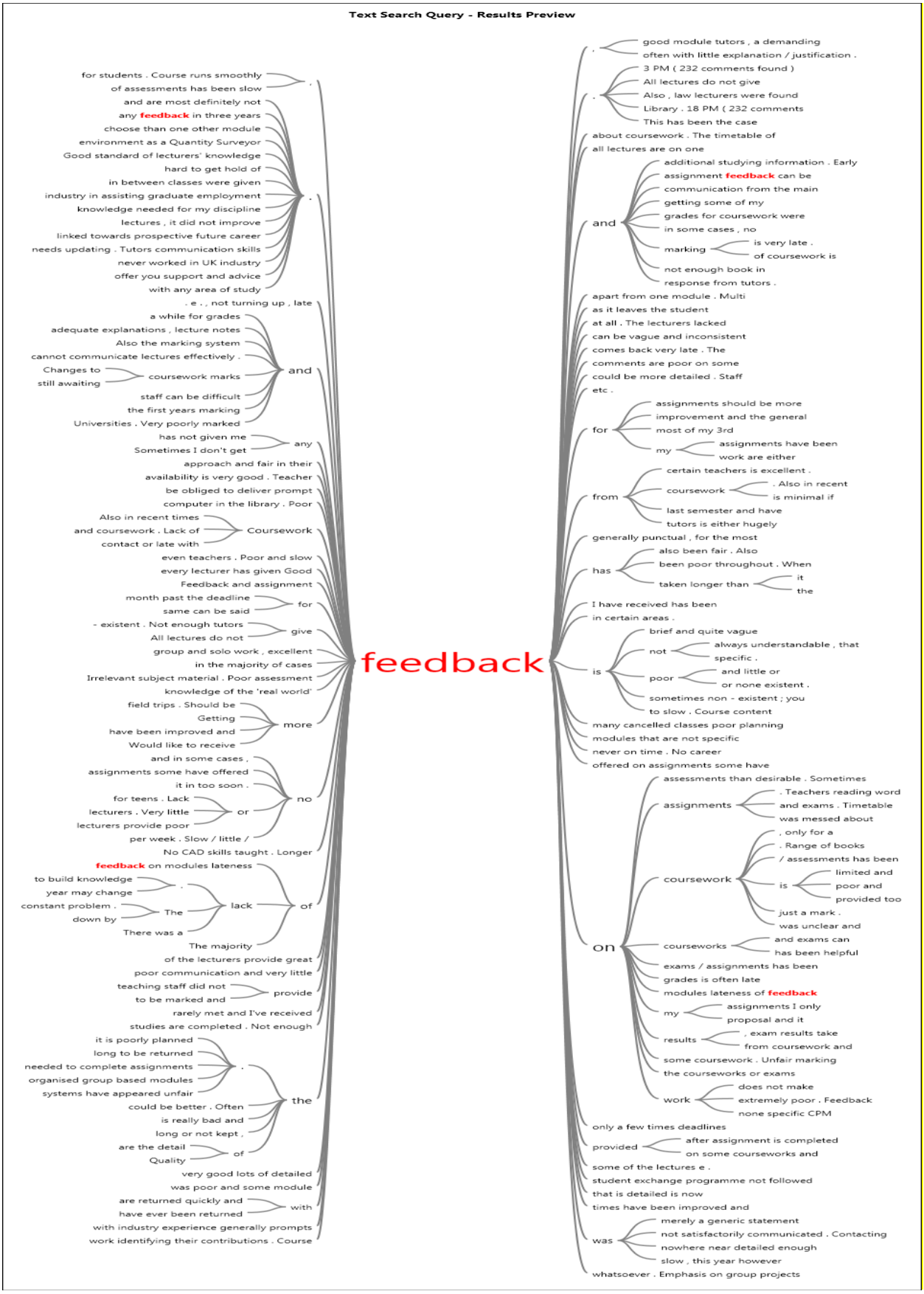
Appendix 2 Text Search Results

Lecturer, Staff, Tutors and Teaching Staff.




Text Search Query - Results Preview
staff
, good modules .
Interesting lessons .
The course needs to have
We have been on many
Well structured coursework . Good communication
ability .
good mix of module
module leaders . The library
the facilities .
difficult to understand in
enthusiastic and friendly . I
extremely
enthusiastic . Module topics
supportive and flexible
friendly , helpful and informative .
generally good at encouraging
helpful
, easy to approach
and are mostly
keen to provide a
not good at English
quite enthusiastic about the
usually very good at
approachable . The system
helpful in every
passionate about their
prompt in replying
willing to assist with
available if I need them .
do it , it makes it
excellent , especially those
helpful
. Communication with
when assistance
prompt in providing
well informed and
communicated effectively . Realistic scenarios .
exceptional knowledge of the
good knowledge and advice
industry experience , which gives
poor communication due to
help students realise / appreciate what
in the university . Relevant work
leading to boredom . Poor value
members were poor at teaching
on the course .
over the years and some
particularly in the Dept of
seemed to have no answers
teaching only their core disciplines
unable to teach .
has good experience in
make me feel that
great experience . Good range
industry experience generally prompts
Blackboard facility is quite useful
the success of the university
University , which I previously attended
various forms of built environment
by reading off PowerPoint
care about our studies
staff hard to contact
modules are well covered
Organisation of the lecturers
bad lecture rooms , and Certain
doing . The very best lecturing
Enthusiastic and well - informed
excellent and down to earth
is lots of
smoothly , and good
Support and help
generally , a number of overseas
Good
It's a good career choice
Knowledgeable
lectures . School of Built Environment
Most of The
taught by quality
to understand some
support offered by the support
Great facilities , generally good
lecture materials available . Knowledgeable
Some very bad
and large enough
implement in employment
that I want
Some
that many
Positive aspects are
you Positive Negative
as another large coursework
to learn from mistakes
satisfied with the university ,
The majority of the university
to specialisms . Knowledge of specialist
to use new CAD programmes
told to not plagiarise , when
Very well , run course , experienced


Text Search Query - Results Preview
tutors
been very helpful , including Song , ? ? ?
for everyone to work from
I had learnt in lectures
to find . It needs updating
.
attempt at the work
cases , poor / non - existent
experience was extremely valuable
my own at home
timetabling were very poor
. Some
? ? ? excellent
be a bit boring if
Teaching quality varies greatly
the standard of teaching
between
designs out . Help from my
courseworks . I enjoy learning
Good advice
level of support available
from
Good
Good course content , committed professional
helpful . The access to teachers /
Interesting course modules and engaging
interesting with tonnes of information ,
8 . Level of experience
The
you Positive Negative
Majority
of
of results and teaching . Many
Other
projects are actually like . Most
punctual , for the most part
release) . Building surveying and design
Some lazy
standards vary , with some fantastic
a few experiences where
aspects you Positive Negative
definite language barrier with
module I attended . All
didn't understand some
Most
with the quality
of
up to standard . Generally
with obvious enthusiasm from
The
There are too many foreign
There have been several Enthusiastic
There have been some decent
work , excellent feedback , good module
yourself . It is good that
,
a demanding but enjoyable course .
enthusiastic , helpful and encouraging . Heads
help with coursework and sorting
helpful , reliable and willing to
.
Building Pathology was really well
Good learning , assignments and presentations
Not in a horrible way
The
biggest positive was we
course is very intellectual
a few are knowledgeable and
and
some very poor , the
students have had a
are
always
motivational and provide
ready and willing
easy
going and have
to approach and
enthusiastic about what they
excellent
, knowledgeable and approachable .
in my course ,
friendly . There needs to
hard to understand and
willing to
assist with
help . The
offer you
because they did not speak
can be disappointing and sometimes
communication skills . Feedback for assignments
didn't keep control of classes
do help with issues . Course
explain work very well and
from
all over the world
practise with 'real' experience
have
been very helpful , including
poor communication skills , are
i . e . , not turning up ,
in my course who have
is
given for coursework in
good .
just had PowerPoint slides , which
make time for you and
presentations group and individual breadth
provides good support to the
read from the PowerPoint because
replied to emails generally within
show no interest . 24
that are able to present
to sort out the fee
were always helpful and very
which I have been given
willingness to help you whenever .


Text Search Query - Results Preview
feedback
. good module tutors , a demanding
often with little explanation / justification .
. 3 PM (232 comments found)
All lectures do not give
Also , law lecturers were found
Library . 18 PM (232 comments
This has been the case
about coursework . The timetable of
all lectures are on one
and additional studying information . Early
assignment feedback can be
communication from the main
getting some of my
grades for coursework were
in some cases , no
marking is very late .
of coursework is
not enough book in
response from tutors .
apart from one module . Multi
as it leaves the student
at all . The lecturers lacked
can be vague and inconsistent
comes back very late . The
comments are poor on some
could be more detailed . Staff
etc .
for assignments should be more
improvement and the general
most of my 3rd
my assignments have been
work are either
from certain teachers is excellent .
coursework . Also in recent
is minimal if
last semester and have
tutors is either hugely
generally punctual , for the most
has also been fair . Also
been poor throughout . When
taken longer than it
the
I have received has been
in certain areas .
is brief and quite vague
not always understandable , that
specific .
poor and little or
or none existent .
sometimes non - existent ; you
to slow . Course content
many cancelled classes poor planning
modules that are not specific
never on time . No career
offered on assignments some have
on assessments than desirable . Sometimes
assignments . Teachers reading word
and exams . Timetable
was messed about
coursework , only for a
. Range of books
/ assessments has been
is limited and
poor and
provided too
just a mark .
was unclear and
courseworks and exams can
has been helpful
exams / assignments has been
grades is often late
modules lateness of feedback
my assignments I only
proposal and it
results , exam results take
from coursework and
some coursework . Unfair marking
the courseworks or exams
work does not make
extremely poor . Feedback
none specific CPM
only a few times deadlines
provided after assignment is completed
on some courseworks and
some of the lectures e .
student exchange programme not followed
that is detailed is now
times have been improved and
was merely a generic statement
not satisfactorily communicated . Contacting
nowhere near detailed enough
slow , this year however
whatsoever . Emphasis on group projects
for students . Course runs smoothly
of assessments has been slow
. and are most definitely not
any feedback in three years
choose than one other module
environment as a Quantity Surveyor
Good standard of lecturers' knowledge
hard to get hold of
in between classes were given
industry in assisting graduate employment
knowledge needed for my discipline
lectures , it did not improve
linked towards prospective future career
needs updating . Tutors communication skills
never worked in UK industry
offer you support and advice
with any area of study
. e . , not turning up , late
and a while for grades
adequate explanations , lecture notes
Also the marking system
cannot communicate lectures effectively .
Changes to coursework marks
still awaiting
staff can be difficult
the first years marking
Universities . Very poorly marked
any has not given me
Sometimes I don't get
approach and fair in their
availability is very good . Teacher
be obliged to deliver prompt
computer in the library . Poor
Coursework Also in recent times
and coursework . Lack of
contact or late with
even teachers . Poor and slow
every lecturer has given Good
Feedback and assignment
for month past the deadline
same can be said
give - existent . Not enough tutors
All lectures do not
group and solo work , excellent
in the majority of cases
Irrelevant subject material . Poor assessment
knowledge of the 'real world'
more field trips . Should be
Getting
have been improved and
Would like to receive
no and in some cases ,
assignments some have offered
it in too soon .
or for teens . Lack
lecturers . Very little
lecturers provide poor
per week . Slow / little /
No CAD skills taught . Longer
of feedback on modules lateness
lack . to build knowledge
year may change
The constant problem .
down by
There was a
The majority
of the lecturers provide great
poor communication and very little
provide teaching staff did not
to be marked and
rarely met and I've received
studies are completed . Not enough
the . it is poorly planned
long to be returned
needed to complete assignments
organised group based modules
systems have appeared unfair
could be better . Often
is really bad and
long or not kept ,
of are the detail
Quality
very good lots of detailed
was poor and some module
with are returned quickly and
have ever been returned
with industry experience generally prompts
work identifying their contributions . Course

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