



**Durham Students'
Union**



**Student Written Submission
to the QAA Institutional Audit
2009 of Durham University**

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1. Executive Summary

Since the beginning of 2008 I have been involved in the student written submission process. As the Education and Welfare Officer the role of the student written submission falls under my remit as I am actively involved in the teaching and learning experience at Durham as well as the student experience. This process has given me an amazing opportunity to look at what exactly Durham University does and offers students and to reflect on the student experience.

This report is based on what students really think of their experience here at Durham through surveys of the University and DSU. Overall Durham students have a positive experience during their time here and they enjoy their time both academically and non-academically. Durham is slightly different to other Higher Education Institutions and the "Durham Experience" reflects this. The Students' Union plays a role in student life from the services it offers, from societies, welfare to representation, and through working closely with the University the students opinion is always welcome and valued in order to make the student experience the best that it can be.

Although the general Durham experience is good there are several areas that can be improved. The submission reflects that these improvements need to be in feedback, a constant teaching quality etc.

Through this submission I have ensured that all Durham students are represented whether they are postgraduate, mature, international or part-time.

This process of involvement has proved extremely valuable, the report has highlighted areas that students want improving and has set officers in the right directions to achieve these aims through working with the University.

Best Wishes,



Emma Carter
Education and Welfare Officer
2007-2009

2. Glossary of Terms

This is a glossary to explain terms that are used throughout the submission.

Advice Centre

The Advice Centre is part of DSU and is independent of the University. It offers free and confidential advice on a range of different topics. It is staff by the Welfare Services Manager, Education and Welfare Officer and a part-time trainee advisor.

College

This is the community of which a student is part of. In Durham there are 16 colleges, two of which are in Queens' Campus and one of which is for postgraduates only. All colleges have accommodation, which all first years have to live in and a choice is given to all final year student to whether they wish to live in college.

Course Representative

A student chosen by other students in their department who represents the students' views and thought to the department through the SSCC.

DSU

Durham Students' Union, the Union of the students of Durham University

Education and Welfare Officer

Sabbatical officer elected by Durham Students through a cross-campus ballot to represent them on educational and welfare issues.

Education Officer

A non-sabbatical officer elected by Union Council to represent students on educational matters. The Education Officer also chairs the Education Committee.

Faculty Representative

There are three faculties in Durham, Science, Social Science & Health and Arts & Humanities, each of which has a student rep elected by Union Council to sit on the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees.

JCR

This is a Junior Common Room which is what all undergraduate members of the University are members of according to the College which they are part of.

JCR/ MCR President

The college president is the president of the JCR/ MCR, 10 are sabbaticals and 6 are non-sabbatical, they are responsible for the day to day running of the JCR and represent their college students

JCR Welfare Officer

These are students elected by the College to act as a welfare contact being able to signpost students in the right direction. They are also responsible for welfare campaigns.

Learning and Teaching Committee

The Learning and Teaching Committee of the University is responsible for all teaching and learning either strategic or policy within the University. The committee meets around twice a term to discuss a number of different issues. The Education and Welfare Officer sits on this committee.

MCR

This is the Middle Common Room (including the GCR at Ustinov College) which all postgraduate members of the University are part of according to which college they are part of

President

Sabbatical officer elected by Durham Students through a cross-campus ballot to represent all students to the University

Queens' Campus

Queens' Campus is located about 40 minutes outside of Durham City near the town of Stockton.

Senior and Junior DSU Rep

These are students elected by the colleges to represent to colleges to DSU. The Senior Rep sits on Joint Committee to discuss a number of issues within the union.

SSCC

This stands for the Staff-Student Consultative Committee. Each department has a separate committee which the course rep is part of. The committee meets once a term (minimum) to discuss matters affecting the department. This forum is used to gather student feedback, concerns and ideas.

Union Council

This is the decision making body of the Union and is a forum that meets regularly during term time to discuss a number of issues in the Union from policy to motions and election. Council is made up of Senior and Junior DSU Reps along with officers of the Unions and the associations.

3. Authorship, Acknowledgements, Endorsement and Contacts

The Education and Welfare Officer for 2007/09, Miss Emma Carter, headed up the research and response for the Student Written Submission. I would like to acknowledge the following people for their input and support during the process.

Mrs Sarah Elliott,
Miss Flo Herbert,
Mr Andrew Welch,
Mrs Laura Barley,

Ms Nicola Brennan
Mrs Carolyn Fowler
Dr Stan Taylor
Dr Richard Harrison
Mrs Bernadette Athey
Mrs Melanie King and the SPA team

Mr Aaron Porter

I am also grateful for the financial support from the University to help towards the processes involved in the writing of the student written submission.

I would like to thank all students and departments who provided information and feedback during the process.

The report received endorsement of :

Union Council Meeting on.....
Executive Committee Meeting on.....

The report has been published online and shared with the whole student population with comments widely welcome.

4. Introduction

Durham University is very different to many Higher Education Institutes, with the unique combination of a college system, Students' Union and excellent communication and student representation with the University.

Durham Students' Union

DSU was founded in 1965 from a collection of Senior Men and Women of the colleges. Since then DSU has progressed forward and has recently undergone a large governance change to comply with the Charities Act 2006. Our operations include support, advice, representation, societies, bars, ents and fundraising amongst other things. DSU has a large range of committees to ensure that we are representing and supporting our students as much as possible. For example we have a very active welfare committee which one member of each college sits on to ensure that all students have access and know about welfare support. We also have a range of non-sabbatical officers who are actively involved in representation from the Education Officer to the Environment & Ethics Officer.

The Collegiate System

The collegiate system is the main part of the "Durham Difference", bringing communities of students together; they offer a strong social centre and an identity that remains with Durham graduates. There are now sixteen colleges at Durham University across two campuses (fourteen in Durham City and two in Queens Campus, Stockton). Colleges have a pastoral care role not only with college staff but also with the JCR Executive Committees. Colleges provide a strong link with between the personal and academic lives of students. College JCRs work together with DSU to promote welfare, campaigns and gain opinion amongst other things.

Working with the University

There is a strong relationship between the Students' Union and the University. Student representatives are welcomed on many University committees and are respected members of these committees. With the University trying to increase student representation on many committees the relationship between students and the University is becoming stronger.

We do obviously have our differences at times but we are both working together towards a common goal to ensure that students' views are included in many decisions and to improve the student experience.

Aims of the Submission

The objective of the Student Written Submission is to provide an accurate and representative account of the student experience at Durham University. The views throughout this document are based on a wide consultation with Durham students. With this the report covers teaching & learning of both undergraduate student and postgraduate students.

All student views are represented within this report from undergraduate students to distance learners. Collaborative programme student views are not represented within this document.

5. Methodology

Various methods have been used in order to ensure that a large range and mix of students' opinions were recorded to in order to represent the student body effectively and without bias. The following surveys and methods were used/ utilised:

QAA selective student submission survey (selective survey)

This was a highly detailed survey relating to all aspects of the student experience (Appendix A). Questions were selected to cover different aspects of teaching & learning and support services. 10% of the student population were selected to take part in this survey. Students were selected at random by Student Planning and Assessment staff, based around departments e.g. 10% of each department was selected and within this 10% of each year group were selected. The figure of 10% was selected to ensure that a representative sample of the student population were selected in order to have a large enough sample size for the survey to have valid results.

Each student selected was then emailed information which included: the link to the online survey, a letter (Appendix B) and a leaflet (Appendix C). These were to inform students about the survey and the QAA process which they were part of and show them how important their opinions are. Students were also reminded again by email four weeks before the survey closed.

The survey was conducted during the Summer term to ensure that all students within the University has spent sufficient time at the institution (e.g. all first year have been at the University for two complete terms) to have formed a view on their experience.

Your Opinion Counts (UG)

This survey was open to all Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate students and primarily focused on the general student experience. The survey consisted of ten questions (Appendix D). All students received an email about the survey and how to take part during the Easter term. This survey was to ensure that all Durham students had the opportunity to make their student experiences known so that the Submission is as wide reaching and as inclusive as possible.

Your Opinion Counts (PG)

This survey was open to all Research Postgraduate students concentrating on their student experience. All postgraduate students received an email about the survey and how to take part in it during the Easter term. Research postgraduates were asked to complete a separate survey (Appendix E) to Undergraduate students due to the differences in the student experience between the two groups.

Student Forums

Around 15 students from each of the following groups were selected at random by

staff from Student Planning and Assessment:

- Science Faculty
 - Social Science & Health Faculty
 - Arts & Humanities Faculty
 - Postgraduate Students
 - Queens Campus Students
- International Students

These forums were for selected students to have the opportunity to discuss their experiences at Durham University in more detail.

The areas for the forums were selected to ensure that a sample of the majority of student groups were represented to talk in detail about their experiences and questions primarily focused around the group (e.g. international students were asked about their experience as an international student).

National Student Survey

The NSS institutional survey for 2005-8 were all analysed, the NSS captures over 50% of all final year undergraduate students. The data is captured by IPSOS-Mori which is an independent agency which ensures that the data is objective as the University is not involved in the collection of the data and set questions are asked of all final year students throughout the UK. The data across the years will show increases or decreases in certain standards that will be looked at in more detail through other methods.

International Student Barometer

The International Student Barometer is a survey that assesses the views of international students in relation to their student experience. The data for 2008 will be analysed in order to represent all international students as accurately as possible.

Strengths and Limitations of the Methodology

Each method has its own strengths and limitations to take into account. The largest advantage of using surveys' is that there is a wealth of information available and they have all been specifically designed to extrapolate specific data.

Response rates in all surveys should be looked at carefully, as Durham does over survey people with module, and programme questionnaires, surveys on DUO, student experience survey, library survey etc. This could be seen to have a negative effect on students as they start to ignore surveys as there are so many conducted.

Comparing data from a variety of sources is a major strength to the submission as they add to the validity of the conclusions drawn. There is a disadvantage when direct comparisons may be looked at to establish patterns; questions are not asked

in the same way (even if the intention was the same) therefore there may be a varying responses.

A large weakness to all surveys is that one does not get a full answer to why the student has answered in a particular way; there is no opportunity to further examine why students may feel this way.

DSU Surveys

The surveys that DSU conducted could be seen to have a number of strengths. They are more specific to the nature of the Student Written Submission and all students have the opportunity to input into the research. Students may also feel more secure to say how they feel as DSU is independent from the University. The DSU surveys also target a wide range of students and specific students alike.

However even with these strengths there are limitations to the surveys. Due to student apathy response rates may not be high. Students may see the surveys as an opportunity to highlight the negative and not the positive. The main limitation however is that students don't have the opportunity to provide specific reasons behind their answers.

Student Forums

The limitations to the Student Forums is the amount of students who may turn up for example 15-20 students are invited to each forum and not all of these students may show up, limiting the responses and examining of some areas. However the major advantage is that students can be asked a variety of questions building on their previous answers to get a more detailed picture.

NSS Survey

The strengths behind the NSS data is that the survey is conducted by an independent body therefore limiting the opportunity for deliberate or accidental bias. All the questions are also unbiased as they are asked to all students in the UK.

There are several limitations behind the NSS data. Only final year students can reply therefore the current views of all other years are sampled. Some of the questions are also hard to interpret in a Durham context due to the college system. As a result of the numerous reminders about the survey students may highlight only the negative side to their experience.

University Surveys

All University surveys main strengths lies with them being very specific to Durham and that some surveys are targeted in a certain way.

However in some surveys not all students take part and due to the numerous surveys that students are constantly informed about, student apathy rises and the response rates are low.

6. Main Report

6.1 Academic Standards

Durham University prides itself on being a research-led institution which is reflected in the academic standards that are offered.

6.1.1 Assessments

There are University procedures and policies that each department adheres to in relation to assessment. These policies are published in the department handbooks (as seen by sampling a number of handbooks) to inform students what is expected of them and what they should expect the University to do.

During the research for the SWS questions were asked to students around assessment, to research what students were experiencing. Within the “Your Opinion Count (UG)” students were asked whether it was obvious what is expected when fulfilling summative work. Only 36.9% agreed with this statement. 33.5% of students disagreed with this statement which is a large percentage. As they survey doesn't allow for students to comment more on this; the exact reasons behind these answers are unknown. Students who took part in the selective survey were also asked the same question, 54.4% of students agreed and 24% of students disagreed. Within the selective questionnaire students were asked if they were aware of the marking criteria, 65% of students agreed that they knew about the criteria while 17.2% disagreed. While looking at a sample of 6 departmental handbooks 2 out of the 6 did not have a clear section on marking criteria. Therefore it can be seen that some departments do make marking criteria clear through the handbook while a small number do not. This is also reflected within the NSS as in 2008 Durham received a score of 3.9 for marking criteria being clear in advance.

Anonymous marking is a factor that all departments should be practising and is always carried out in exams. Within the undergraduate wide survey 67.4% of students trusted that their work was marked anonymously and only 15.8% didn't trust that their work was marked anonymously. While this is a small percentage that didn't agree, there should be policies in place in all departments to ensure codes instead of names are used to ensure that students know they are being marked only on their academic ability on paper. Students within the selective survey were asked the same question and 73.7% of students trusted that their work was marked anonymously. Within the surveys students commented:

“Work isn't marked anonymously as we write our names on the top!”

“The only time I have used my anonymous marking code was for my final year dissertation”

In the selective survey students were asked if they thought their work was always marked to the official marking criteria. 59.8% of students agreed that their work was marked to the official criteria while 8.4% of students disagreed. These responses could possibly link in with feedback if students aren't seeing clear comments to

relate them to the marking criteria.

Students were also questioned relating to if they felt that assessment procedures of assess achievement were appropriate and 63% of students agreed while 23% didn't agree or disagree. This shows that they majority of students feel the assessment procedures are appropriate. Within the 2008 NSS Durham received a score of 4 for assessment arrangements being fair.

6.1.2 Feedback

Feedback is one factor that many Durham student feel strongly about which has been seen though the surveys, NSS data and different meetings with students. While within the NSS that feedback score is not poor in comparison to other institutions, the score is generally lower than other areas in the NSS. The University has recognised that feedback needs to be looked up and set of the review of assessment group which the Education and Welfare Officer is part of; however the scores and student opinions on this area are still relatively poor.

Within the Undergraduate survey 43.1% of students disagreed that they get appropriate feedback compared to 30.5% who agreed that they got appropriate feedback. This figure is extremely large and a concern that even though the University is undertaking work in this area, students are still feeling that they are receiving poor feedback.

Within the selective survey students were asked if feedback helps to improve academic work and 65% agree that it does. Firstly this shows how important feedback is to progress academically. Secondly this figure should be much higher as feedback should be constructive to highlight problems in knowledge or structure that a student can work on to improve.

Students feel very strongly around the topic of feedback and below are a selection of comments that students made in the surveys:

"Feedback is often confusing, misleading and appears unfounded"

"Expected a lot quicker feedback – one instance took 3 months for a piece of work to be handed back to us"

"Feedback is often generalised"

"Feedback is utterly dire. The department now has a "marking matrix" which is supposed to provide a "minimum marking standard" – this is used as an excuse to fill in that only and nothing more and something even this isn't completed"

"Feedback I receive is consistently poor"

"I have no idea whether I am failing the course or flying through the year and everyone feels the same. Essays take up to two months to get back and the feedback is poor and not constructive"

However some students also comment positively on feedback as their departments

“We have had lots of opportunities for feedback”

The 2008 NSS data shows that prompt feedback is still relatively poor with an average of 3.4 and that feedback helping understanding is also poor with an average of 3.5. While Durham has improved by an average of 0.1 for prompt feedback and improved by 0.2 for feedback helping a students understanding the figures are still low compared to other parts of the NSS. This is reflected in current students' views.

6.1.3 World class staff

Having staff of a high standard is the link of having high academic standards. The staff are the key to the success of many students throughout the years whether this is from teaching to the support that they give. Students commented in the surveys:

“The staff are welcoming and encouraging”

“Staff have been extremely supportive”

“Staff are very approachable and always willing to support and help me”

The NSS data for 2008 reflects this with an average of 4.3 for staff being enthusiastic about what they are teaching,

6.1.4 Skills development

Students develop many skills while at University from both the academic side of life and the social aspects. Modules ensure that knowledge and academic skills are continually developing. Roles such as course reps offer a range of new skills for students as well as many college activities. 74% of course reps surveyed last academic year felt that their skills had improved through the role.

The 2008 data for the NSS gave an average of 4.1 for improvement of communication skills and while personal development as a whole received an average of 4 the results could be affected as the survey is about academic life whereas at Durham skills are also gained through colleges and societies which the survey does not take into account.

6.2. Teaching and Learning

Teaching and Learning are a major part of the student experience at Durham. Having a high standard of teaching throughout the University is needed to ensure that students are getting the most out of their time in Durham.

6.2.1 Quality of Teaching

Durham prides itself on being a research-led institution, offering a high standard of teaching throughout the institution. Staff engaged by Durham University are often at the top of their field offering their knowledge and experience to the students.

Durham students achieve high grades with the majority being 1 class or higher 2nd class degrees. With this goes a high quality of teaching so students can achieve these grades. Within the selective survey, 72.8% of students agreed that a high quality of teaching was delivered in lectures. 65% of students agreed that there is a high quality of teaching in tutorials and 66% agreed that there was a high quality of teaching in practicals/ labs and 68% of students agreed that there was a high quality of teaching in seminars.

Through the surveys students have made the following comments:

"I am really happy with how my course is going and with lectures and tutorials. There's the option to try new areas of Maths, but also the flexibility to keep doing this that I know I like."

"The level of teaching and staff knowledge within the school of education is second to none."

This is reflected through the 2008 NSS results where Durham received an average of 4.2 for teaching on courses.

6.2.2 Teaching hours

Teaching hours vary from department to department with the Faculty of Science generally having more teaching hours in total.

Within the other two faculties teaching hours is a subject that is continually brought to DSU's attention by students who only receive a small number of teaching hours. Taking into account all three faculties 75.6% of students in the selective survey agree that they receive appropriate teaching hours however 62.8% of students also agree that they would benefit from more contact hours with staff. When this is analysed in more detail it can be seen that 30% of students in Arts & Humanities and Social Science & Health disagree with the statement that they receive enough teaching hours. There is however no pattern when data is analysed by department. Within the "Your Opinion Counts (UG)" Survey 70.9% of students agreed that they would benefit from more contact hours.

The following comments have been made through the surveys:

“An increase in tutorial hours would greatly improve the philosophy course, particularly as it is through discussion that you are fully able to engage with the subject and this is not possible in lectures”

“Insufficient contact hours - some modules have only a one hour lecture per week, and 2 - 3 tutorials each academic year.”

While in general students believe they are receiving enough contact hours, the majority agree that more contact hours would be beneficial.

6.2.3 Development

Through various teaching methods on courses students develop a wide range of skills from communication to team work. Within the selective survey 58.1% of students agree that they are encouraged to pursue areas of interest to them, helping students to develop a different range of skills. 89.8% of students surveyed feel that their degree challenges them academically.

While scores on the NSS seem relatively low compared to various activities and opportunities offered at Durham, this has been commented possibly to be due to the fact the NSS focuses on departmental issues and colleges offer a great degree of developmental opportunities.

Students who took part in the selective survey were also asked if they feel their skills have developed through their degree and 73.5% agreed with this.

6.3 Role of Students in Quality Assurance

6.3.1 Committees

Students are represented on the majority of University Committees relating to Learning and Teaching. This opportunity for input is appreciated and welcomed especially as student members are always a valued member of the committee. There is student representation from high level committees such as Senate, Council and LTC to committees such as Review of Assessment, Enhancement-Led Reviews and Ethics Advisory to departmental and college level committees such as SSCCs and College Councils.

While many students within the University don't see this in detail, the student union sabbatical officers are confident that students are represented a great deal within the university and more importantly that students views are listened to and acted upon and not just put to the bottom of the pile. Senior members of the University (e.g. Vice-chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Learning & Teaching), Academic Registrar, Deputy Warden) meet with the DSU Sabbatical team on a regular basis. Their willingness to meet and talk with the sabbatical team is indicative of a positive relationship between the union and university.

However, lately there has been a tendency for university working groups to be set up without the inclusion of any student representatives, although the group's recommendations then have to pass through the formal committee structures which do have student representatives. Students should be represented at these committees from the beginning to ensure that the student view is heard by the original group. The University has generally always added student representatives to these groups when asked.

6.3.2 Course Reps

The course rep system in Durham is slightly different to other Universities that have been looked at for best practice where the students union has ownership over the system whereas in Durham the system is the Universities. While the students union doesn't believe that this should change as students feel more like they are having an input to university processes there are many factors that still need addressing so that all students can see that they are listened to and valued within the department etc.

While every department within the University have course reps, there is a large degree of variability within departments which needs to be changed so that there is a level playing field for students gaining student feedback in each department. Currently some departments let students speak in core lectures and send blanket emails out while other student reps in other departments cannot. Without a University policy this is hard to overcome.

It has taken a large push from the students' union to make a change to the current system to ensure that students know what their role is on the committee and empowering them to get student feedback to present to the University.

The course rep system is a great way for student involvement within the University. Last academic year (07/08) all course reps were surveyed, 90% stated that they felt like a valued member of the committee and 94% stated that they felt that they thought the department was listening to student concerns. This shows the success of the system.

Some Course Representatives have commented:

“Education at Stockton pays great attention to student reps”

“My department it is friendly and acceptant of its mistakes, any requests and improvements put forward by myself and my peers are taken seriously and acted upon when seen as beneficial”

“In general the staff are very good at acting on student concerns, with some staff providing excellent help”

“Usually there are a number of staff who do listen and take the issues on board and try to do something about it, but major changes were wriggled out of or shied away from.”

“Very impressed with how the comments are actually listened to and acted on!”

The course reps have been generally positive about the action that departments take when issues are raised.

6.3.3 Student Opinion

Students involved in the processes are assured that their views are taken seriously by the University. The wider student population however do not necessarily see this and only 33.1% of those surveyed as part of the “Your Opinion Counts (UG)” survey agreed that their department listens to and acts upon student concerns and 23.5% disagreed with this. The majority (43.5%) did not agree or disagree possibly showing some knowledge but departments need to publicise the things that they do as a result of feedback to all of their students. These results were very similar to the selective survey that was conducted confirming the trend.

6.4 Resources for Learning

Durham prides itself on being a world class institute and offers its students a variety of high standard learning facilities.

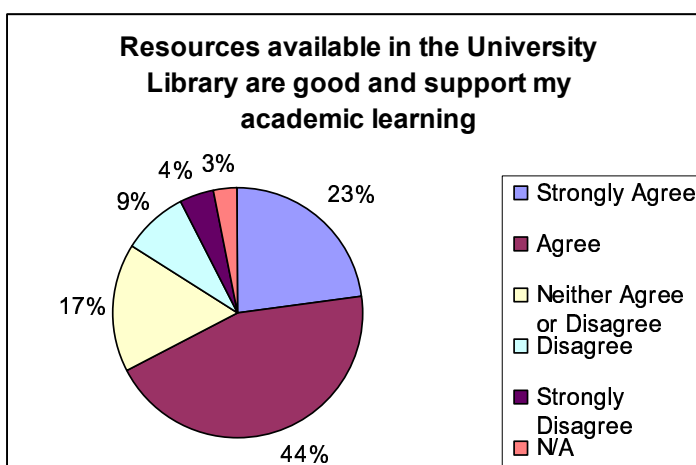
6.4.1 Library

Durham University has four library sites, three in Durham and one at Queens Campus. While the main library is primarily used in Durham the other libraries have a more specific purpose e.g. The Education Library has specialised material for education. The library provides an extensive range of items from book, journals, e-journals etc.

Over the past year the library has taken many steps to accommodate students' opinions to improve the service through meeting with student representatives from DSU to the student forum that is held. After extensive consultation with the students union opening hours were extended to accommodate more students in the times that they want to work and assess material.

Many colleges also have their own libraries on site with core literature for students to access. Although the material in these libraries is small compared to the University libraries, they are appreciated by the students.

Students in the selective survey were asked if resources in the library aided their academic learning, 67.2% agreed while only 13% disagreed. When these figures are broken down into campus the results are similar.



From the surveys students commented:

“The range of books in the library is often good”

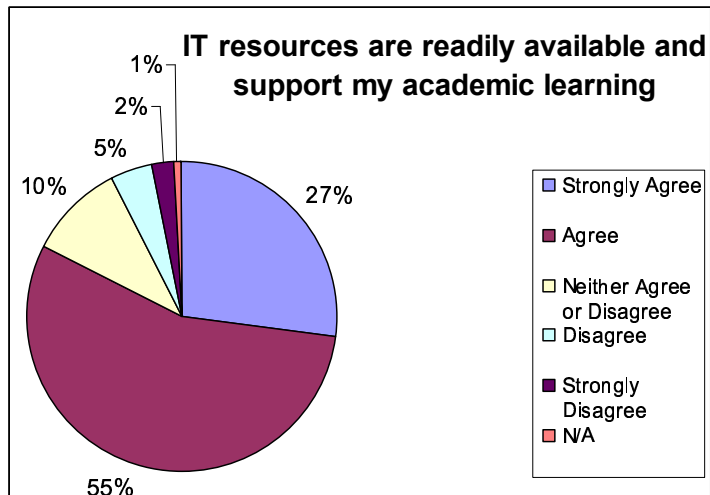
“There was only one copy from the main course reading list available in the library”

However negative comments are in the minority and may be linked to a lack of communication when new books are added to reading lists between departments and the library.

6.4.2 IT

Durham University offers a wide range of IT facilities throughout both campuses. The main library is fitted with a large range of computers to aid learning. DUO is

also provided for all students as part of their learning experience. Lecture notes and assignments can be uploaded for students to access when needed. However DUO is not used by all departments and there is a difference in what lecturers do and do not use DUO for. The ITS Helpdesk also provides support to students on a range of issues. 81.4% of students surveyed in the selective survey agreed that resources are readily and available to support their academic learning.



All student bedrooms in all colleges are fitted with network points to ensure that students can access files and the internet when the need to. Most colleges also have a small IT facility within the colleges for students to access. The majority of lecture theatres are also fitted with a range of IT equipment. There are also a large number of rest areas (including the Students' Union) that have functioning Wi-Fi that is supplied by the University.

6.5 Student Support

Student support lies at the heart of the Durham experience with a large range of services provided for all students and staff. All students have access to all the support services available.

6.5.1 Academic Support

Academic support is provided throughout all University departments in a variety of different ways depending on the department. Departments have different approaches some having a year tutor and others allocating a small group of students a personal tutor. Other members of departmental staff also play a role in supporting students in different ways e.g. administrators supporting students with medical problems etc.

Recently a course rep commented about the difference in levels of academic support in each department some providing a different and what is seen as a lower level of support. These differences are a level of concern as there should be a minimum standard of what should be provided and this level should be as high as possible. The same course rep commented that he didn't understand why a student in a different department had a personal academic tutor.

Within the selective survey students were asked to rate support services between 1 and 5 with 1 being excellent and 5 poor, 84% of the students rated departmental staff about 3 showing that the support within departments is present to a high standard.

6.5.2 Pastoral Support

Pastoral support is the second key support function within the University and this primarily takes place in colleges. Each college has a Senior Tutor and a pastoral tutor system.

While there is a difference in the way tutorial system works in each college, some of which having a very high standard however, this is not equitable across the sixteen colleges. This is a factor that the University has examined via the "College Tutor Review". Although this originally caused uproar with students and could have been handled better by the University, students were eventually consulted and their views taken into account (as well as Senior Tutors) and acted upon to ensure that pastoral care was not lost within colleges.

The support that is offered in colleges is key and offers student support at a more holistic level with their senior tutor and college tutor. Students can approach them for advice both academic and personal. 77.1% of student surveyed as part of the selective survey rated college staff above 3 (on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being excellent and 5 being poor).

When postgraduate students were asked if they know where to access pastoral support only 45.3% agreed from the postgraduate student survey. This is a

progressive problem that has been looked at by the Advice Centre as many postgraduate students comment they didn't know what was offered or that the advice centre existed. A large percentage (just over 28%) of these students knowing is alarming, as students may be keeping problems to themselves as they don't know what support exists. When the results of this were analysed more deeply into Students College and knowing what pastoral support is available a patten could be seen. When Ustinov is removed from the picture the remaining colleges have on average 1 students not knowing about pastoral support (equally very few student from other colleges answered the survey). Ustinov however has the largest number of student not knowing about pastoral support. 28% of Ustinov students who completed the survey stated that they did not know about pastoral support while 36% did know, leaving the other students not agreeing or disagreeing.

One student commented:

“The collegiate structure truly enables to receive a high quality of pastoral care, and provides a community of friends who aren't based on academic department.”

6.5.3 International Student Support

The International Students' Office is the source of support for all international students and with the rise in numbers of international student the office offers invaluable support especially around specific areas such as immigration. This specialised support is needed for international students as it is hard to find elsewhere.

Within the selective student survey all international students were asked to rate the support given in the international office in the same way as they rates academic support. 83% rated the service 3 and above. These results are reflected in the International Student Barometer where in the summer 2008 data the international office received an average of 3 (out of 4) for overall satisfaction.

6.5.4 Support Services (DUSSD, Counselling, Careers Advisory Service)

The University also offers a wide range of specialist services for students to access. These are the Counselling Service, DUSSD, and the Careers Advisory Service. Each service publicises themselves to students and then students can make an appointment to see an advisor. The majority of the services publicity is from the University website.

The services are rated in the following way by the students selected in the selective survey who have used the services:

	1	2	3	4	5
Counselling	20%	31%	33%	12%	4%
DUSSD	17%	27%	43%	9%	4%
Careers	17%	36%	30%	11%	6%

6.5.5 Complaints and appeals

Students have a wide range of support for complaints and appeals. Through the University, senior tutors and college tutors are available as are academic staff in departments. There are also points of contact that are independent from the University so that students can get independent advice e.g. Students' Union Advice Centre.

The procedures are published in a number of locations mainly the student survival guide and the learning and teaching handbook.

During the student forum for science students each student present stated that they knew where to find information on the guidelines for appeals and complaints. However the language used within the University procedures and documents is not easily understood by students, due to the complexity of the documents and process. Over the past year many students have approached the Education and Welfare Officer for advice on how the process works as documents have been confusing.

6.5.6 Communication of Information

Through speaking with the colleges it is clear that in college talks some information may be omitted. For example each college induction is generally in the form of a number of talks. These talks include the Principle of the College, the Senior Tutor, College JCR Exec, Nightline, Chaplain, Police etc however some of the core services are missed out from this induction e.g. the Counselling Service are not part of these talks.

DUSSD operates in a slightly different way, contacting students who have declared a disability on their UCAS forms to ensure they are aware of the service and any action they may need to take. However DUSSD are not part of the college induction process to inform other students of the benefits of the service and to inform the students who have not declared their disability the process of concessions etc for examinations, which may relieve some of the problems as the exam season approaches.

In the majority of colleges the tutor system is promoted well, although this is not complete across the board which has been noted by the tutor review. However academic support communication is much more diverse. Although students most likely know that they can approach staff the departmental tutor system communication is not the same across the board. While it is departmental policy, therefore different departments act differently, information is not always conveyed to students. For example in a recent DSU Education Committee these inconsistencies were raised especially relating to not knowing who specific tutors were, showing that this information is not communicated efficiently.

6.6 Postgraduate Research Students

Postgraduate Research students are different to Undergraduate students and Taught Postgraduate students and their experience reflects this. This section deals with issues that are specific to postgraduate research student. Postgraduate opinions are also represented through other parts of the submission.

6.6.1 Student Representation

Postgraduate students have the same representation as all other students and this is reflected through the department committees and Graduate School. 43.4% of the students who completed the postgraduate survey thought that the department acts on student concerns.

6.6.2 Inductions

All new research postgraduates have to attend induction events which cover key procedures. Students also receive the postgraduate student handbook, which the students union has an input into the relevant sections. Departments also provide an induction for students.

Current postgraduates that have been spoken to have stated that there is generally an overload of information to take on board in the small time slots allocated. Continuing students have commented that generally the inductions are not very useful as most factors have already been learnt during their undergraduate degree. A balance needs to be found between information that continuing students need to attend.

6.6.3 Supervision

60.4% of all postgraduates surveyed stated that they received high quality supervision during their research projects. When data is analysed in detail there are not patterns in answers depending on departments.

Students have commented that they regularly meet with their supervisors and receive support that is needed.

6.6.7 Facilities

Research students have access to a number of facilities to aid their research whether this is access to a lab, computers or the library. 50.5% of students who completed the postgraduate survey agreed that the facilities were excellent while only 21.4% disagreed. When these figures are looked at in detail and by faculty patterns do emerge. In the Faculty of Science 54.3% agreed that facilities were excellent and 32.6% neither agree nor disagree, leaving 7% to disagree (NB some students didn't answer this question). It is in the Faculty of Arts & Humanities and the Faculty of Social Science & Health that the larger percentage of students disagree with the statement that academic facilities are excellent, with an average of 30% disagreeing.

6.7 Published Information

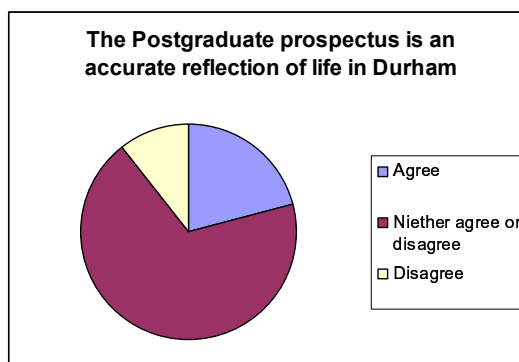
The University produces a wide range of information for both students and prospective students alike that are used throughout a student's academic career. It is important that this information is as accurate as possible so that students know what to expect. The quality of material that Durham University produces is extremely high and widely used.

6.7.1 University Prospectus

While the prospectus is for potential students the information needs to be as accurate as possible as students use this as a guide to what life would be like at the institution. 83% of students surveyed in the selective survey agreed that the prospectus was an accurate representation of their course and 73% of these students then agreed that their expectations of studying in Durham have been met. A high number of students feel the information is accurate the other students sampled did not. This may be down to the time cycle in the production of the prospectus and the fast changing environment of the University.

After discussions with course reps in Queens Campus however they disagreed that at the time of their entry the prospectus was accurate. They felt that the difference in the student experience wasn't as clear as it could have been. They felt that the divide between the campuses had been ignored and this divide is a factor that prospective students should be aware of. However the information in the prospectus relating to courses is seen as accurate as the majority of students from Queens Campus who took part in the selective survey stated.

The University also produces a prospectus for potential postgraduate students. However the information that is published in this isn't seen as an entirely accurate representation of life at Durham by some postgraduate students. Out of the students surveyed in the postgraduate survey only 21% agreed that this was an accurate representation, this is a completely different figure to what undergraduate students. However while only 10.5% disagree, the majority (68.6%) don't agree or disagree possibly showing that this may need to be looked at in the future.



6.7.2 Student Survival Guide

While the student survival guide is a document that needs to be more welcoming for students to read upon their arrival and easier to read (this has been noted by University staff and committees and action is being taken), there is a vast array of information within it. All the information that students need to know is in one place for example how academic appeals and complaints work as well as support services available.

6.7.3 Departmental Handbooks

Each department produces a departmental handbook each year for the students. These handbooks all include information on how the department works, assessment, appeals etc (noted through analysing a number of departmental handbooks). Students all either receive a hardcopy or are directed to an online version. 75% of students surveyed in the selective survey agreed that their department handbook is an accurate reflection of the department that they are part of, showing that the information produced is as accurate as possible.

6.7.4 Website

The website is a useful tool for both current students and potential students. The website hosts the most up to date information about both the University as a whole and departments and colleges. All information which is found in the prospectus is available on the University website. Due to the cycles that the prospectus is published within college and department information is more up to date.

7. Conclusions

7.1 How accurate is the information that the institution publishes about itself, such as prospectuses, programme descriptors and advertisements?

Key points from research:

- Undergraduate students feel that the prospectus in general is an accurate representation of their course.
- Only a small percentage of postgraduates feel that the prospectus is an accurate representation.
- From the surveys conducted Queens' Campus students felt that the information in the prospectus was accurate about the course however after speaking to students they feel other information is lacking.
- While the student survival guide hosts a range of information the format is not accessible.

Departmental handbooks are seen as an accurate representation of the student experience.

7.2 Do students know what is expected of them in order to be successful?

Key points from research:

- A small percentage of students agree that they know what is expected of them while completing summative assessments however a larger percentage of students understood the marking criteria
- There is not a uniform layout for departmental handbook and some do not included a full marking criteria within them.
- Feedback is a factor that Durham students feel very strongly about. Within the NSS Durham's scores relating to feed back are low compared to other areas and within the surveys a small percentage agreed that they receive appropriate feedback.

While appeals and complaints procedure are published in a number of locations they are hard to understand.

7.3 What is the student experience as a learner like, including teaching and learning opportunities, support received and access to learning facilities?

Key points from research:

- Students feel resources are of a high standard.
- Durham offers a wide range of support for students within the college, departments and centrally.
- Information needs to be communicated more clearly around support services during student inductions.

Durham offers a wide range of opportunities to students to improve skills from departmental representation to activities within the colleges.

7.4 Do students have a voice in the institution and is it listened to?

Key points from research:

- Students are represented on the majority of committees relating to Teaching and Learning.
- Course reps feel that the departments are listening to their views.
- Students do not feel they are represented within the University possibly due to the lack of information communicated about the levels of students representation.

If you have any questions on the content of this report or would like it in an alternative format please contact Emma Carter, Education and Welfare Officer via email (dsu.welfare@durham.ac.uk) or phone 0191 335 1775