School Response to the National Student Survey, the Student Satisfaction Survey and the Postgraduate Taught Student Survey
Vikki-Jo Porteous Butler/Prof Jo Jackson, December 2011

Each year, the University conducts a survey of its students to establish how satisfied they are with the programmes they are studying. There are three such surveys. For undergraduates there are the Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS), completed by 1st and 2nd year students, and the National Student Survey (NSS) completed by final year students; for Postgraduates there is the Postgraduate Taught Experience Satisfaction Survey (PTES) which ran for the first time in 2010. Areas covered include the quality of the teaching on the programme, the assessment and feedback arrangements, academic support, organisation and management, learning resources and personal development.

We review the School's outcomes, comparing ourselves with the University as a whole but in particular within our Faculty, of Science and Engineering.

Response Rates
The response rates for this year’s surveys were disappointing. It has been noted where response rates decrease, negative responses to questions increase. This is particularly notable in the Post Graduate Taught Experience Survey, where our response rate was 12.3%. Development work is being done at the university level to increase response rates and to support smoother collection of data from the surveys. We will also be looking at ways to increase our departmental response rate to the surveys.

Overall Results
The university continues to score well in the surveys in relation to overall satisfaction. In the PTES survey (for Post Graduate Students only) the university has increased its overall satisfaction in all areas. The School of Health and Human Sciences (SHHS) continues to score well in comparison to other departments in relation to degree content, teaching quality, academic support, personal development and overall satisfaction. Staff are praised for their ability to support students and make subjects interesting. We have improved in all areas from previous the year’s National Student Satisfaction Survey results, apart from Learning resources.

From The NSS, SSS and PTES surveys, areas where we do not do so well in comparison to other departments/ university/ national average are;

- Assessment and Feedback
- Learning Resources.

Assessment and Feedback
The School of Health and Human Sciences scores above the university and faculty average in relation assessment and feedback in the SSS, and in most areas of the NSS. We have improved in relation to making marking criteria clear in advance. This will be further enhanced as we are currently piloting a new marking system which gives clear description of how the standard of achievement required can be demonstrated through the assessment tasks set.

In the NSS we do not score well in comparison to others in relation to the promptness of feedback. From this academic year we have decreased the turn around time for feedback, which is now set at 4 weeks. The date by which feedback on summative work will be given is to be published in module guides, so students will know when they can expect feedback on their work. Module leaders have also been asked to review the timing and volume of assignments so that sufficient time is given between students receiving feedback and further assessments being due.
Learning Resources
This is an area we have struggled with in the past, and from this year’s surveys continues to be an area where students are less satisfied. In particular it is notable in the SSS that students based at the Southend campus are dissatisfied with the learning resources available.

Developments to the library resources based at Southend campus are well under way. You can find out more about this on the link below; http://www.essex.ac.uk/news/event.aspx?e_id=3296

It is acknowledged that because of the nature of many of our courses in the School of Health and Human Sciences, our students may spend proportionally more time off campus (as they attend placements or are working alongside their studies), and need to access resources outside of normal library opening hours, (due to shift work and timing of module delivery over the standard university holiday period). There are a range of learning resources available online for students and the survey results point to us needing to do some more work with students on accessing these and using them to their full potential. Staff have been asked to consider ways in which a library/accessing on-line learning resources activity can be built into or expanded upon in their course. Current examples of this within SHHS courses are; library tours, literature search tutorials and exercises, use of the Virtual Training Suite, (http://www.vtstutorials.co.uk/), and the ‘Study Skills for Health and Human Sciences Students’ Moodle site.

Placements
In the NSS additional questions are asked regarding placement experience. The survey shows an improved satisfaction in relation to adequate supervision, being valued as a member of the team and being allocated suitable placements for their course. Preparatory information in relation placements did not score so well this year. We are reliant on placement providers giving us up to date information about the placement environment and opportunities available. Provision of this information remains patchy. We have established in the last year an on-line database for students, placement providers and supervisors so that information is more readily available. We will be working with placement providers over the coming months to encourage provision of information so that students can prepare themselves better for placement experiences.

For a number of our courses, where placements play a major part (e.g. nursing) there have been several curriculum developments over recent years, some as a result of student and staff feedback and some due to professional regulatory body requirements. We also have more than one University accessing the same placements in the region which may result in confusion for some placement supervisors. This may have influenced the slight decrease in satisfaction in relation to practice supervisors understanding how placements relate to the broader requirements of a course. A number of events have been held over recent months with placement providers and supervisors to update and remind them of the curriculum developments and requirements for our courses.

Conclusion
As a university, faculty and department we continue to show an overall improvement in satisfaction. There are areas where student feedback highlights areas for improvement, and specific actions to address these have been put into place. We would like to increase our response rate to these surveys and are always keen to hear students views as this has a direct impact on what developments are planned.