**Addressing Student Satisfaction**

* **a short guide for staff on preparing for the National Student Survey**

*(Adapted from material published in ‘Making Teaching Work’ by Phil Race and Ruth Pickford, London: Sage (2007)*

The National Student Survey has been used in the UK since 2005, annually seeking feedback from final year students. The survey itself, in my opinion, is a blunt instrument, with several of the statements being ‘bipolar’ or worse, casting serious doubt over the validity of some of the findings. That said, it is a very important instrument, as despite its shortcomings in design, it does indeed gather a very significant amount of data from final year students. Moreover, the data are transformed into institutional league tables, and within institutions faculty or course tables, causing a great deal of useful discussion about how to improve various aspects of teaching, learning and assessment.

Now, in 2016 with the proposed advent of the TEF, it is likely that the NSS will increase in significance – but the survey itself is likely to continue to evolve. However, many of the statements in the NSS are likely to be similar to the present versions, so this little paper may still be of some value.

Making teaching work is about ensuring that students’ learning is successful. However, we also need students to be satisfied with their learning experience, and this satisfaction in turn plays its part in enhancing the quality of their learning.

This short paper aims to help you to address the questions:

* What can I do in my teaching to increase my students’ satisfaction with their learning?
* How can I ensure that students’ increased satisfaction will show from their evaluation responses?

All educational institutions have ways of gathering feedback from students, and in many the data arising from such feedback is analysed and monitored in some detail as a measure of the quality of teaching. Many of the student evaluation instruments cover very similar dimensions, and in this guide, we’re taking the statements in the UK’s National Student Survey as an example of the sort of feedback areas which are commonly addressed. This particular survey asks students to give their opinions on each of the statements, as follows:

For each statement, show the extent of your agreement or disagreement

5 Definitely agree

4 Mostly agree

3 Neither agree nor disagree

2 Mostly disagree

1 Definitely disagree

N/A Not applicable

The key elements of the survey consist of four statements about ‘the teaching on my course’, five about ‘assessment and feedback’, three statements each about ‘academic support’, ‘organisation and management’ and ‘learning resources’ and ‘personal development’, with a final question about the overall experience. Many other countries elicit student experience using a variety of similar instruments, and there is wide discussion about how best to elicit students’ views on their experience of higher education. We don’t however suggest that to make teaching work you need to implement *all* of our suggestions in this guide. Moreover, you are likely to be able to add your own experience of teaching in your particular discipline to fine-tune these suggestions to your own students, and indeed to add suggestions of your own which are even better than ours. This guide is meant to be a starting point, not an end in itself.

**The teaching on my course**

**1. Staff are good at explaining things.**

Explaining things to students is a central part of making teaching work. But what does ‘good at explaining things’ boil down to in practice?

We suggest:

* Accept that explaining things to students is a key part of our job. Tempting as it might be to reply ‘go and look it up’ or (more helpfully) ‘there’s a really good explanation of this on page 35 of Black and White’, it is better for us to be seen to be willing to respond immediately to any requests for explanations.
* Being patient, and willing to explain things at just about any time. While it is useful to be able to explain things to individual students, it is often better if our explaining is done to groups of students (not least as we can then help them to deepen their understanding by explaining it to each other, or applying the new knowledge together to solving problems). Explaining to individuals can take up too much time, and can advantage the students who are bold enough to ask for explanations over students who may have just as much need for explanations but who lack the confidence to ask us – or who don’t want us to know that they don’t yet understand something.
* Keep track of what needs explaining. For example, when individual students ask for particular things to be explained, after trying to explain to their own satisfaction, make a note of the topic, and build in short explanation sessions into lectures, for the benefit of others who may need the same explanation, and to help the students who sought individual explanations to feel better about the fact that these were needed, also giving them a further chance to develop their understanding of the matter being explained.
* Explaining in more than one way. For example, using face-to-face sessions to bring the many extra dimensions into play, including helping students to find out what we mean through our tone of voice, body language, facial expression, gesture, speed of speech, emphasis, and so on.
* Explaining it another way when the first way did not completely succeed. This is better than simply repeating our previous explanation.
* Responding to puzzled looks. As we explain things, watching out for the moment when students’ eyes show that we’ve lost them, and then finding out from them “what exactly is the bit that’s a problem to you here?”, and then responding to their replies.
* Explaining using more than one medium. For example, as well as explaining things face-to-face to whole groups, writing down frequently needed explanations, and making them available as handouts or web pages.
* Explaining using more than one dimension. For example, give explanations a visual dimension when possible, using pictures, cartoons, flowcharts, diagrams, mind-maps, and so on. This can help students who don’t catch on to aural explanations on their own.
* Repeatedly enquiring whether our explanations have been successful. We need to be careful about the possibility of students simply saying ‘yes’ to stop us continuing to explain to them. One of the best ways of checking that students have understood our explanations is to get them explaining it back to us – or better still to each other. The act of explaining something where the light has just dawned, is an excellent way to help students to consolidate their grasp of a new concept or idea.

To ensure that students are satisfied with our purposeful efforts to explain things to them, it is useful to remind them of how importantly we regard this aspect of our work, and continually ask them in whole-group contexts (for example) “have my explanations of this worked for you – raise two hands if ‘completely’, one hand if ‘mostly’ and no hands if ‘not yet’” .

**2. Staff have made the subject interesting.**

This begs the question ‘what does *interesting* actually mean?’ However, if you ask lots of people, just about everything is deemed ‘interesting’ by at least some of them. If, however, you’ve got in your syllabus an area that you know is likely to be found dry – or even boring – by a significant proportion of your students, it’s worth taking purposeful steps to add some interest factors wherever possible – or at least to break up the more dreary parts with interesting diversions.

Our suggestions for helping students to feel that we’re making the subject interesting for them include:

* Legitimise some parts of the subject being less interesting than others. It’s a bad idea to pretend that the difficult bit (or the boring bit, or the routine bit) is really interesting. Then we can go on to explain why the bit concerned is useful or necessary, or how it leads on to other things which are much more interesting.
* Don’t blame students for not being interested. We sometimes need to remind ourselves that our own particular subject is actually not going to be the most interesting thing that our students are encountering in their studies. Only a few (if any) are likely to end up specialising in our own subject.
* Explain to students why they are doing the ‘less interesting’ bit. Say what they’re for, where they fit into the big picture of the course or module, and where they lead to.
* Address students’ question “what’s in it for me to master this non-interesting bit?”. Explain how it leads to marks in exams or coursework assignments, and how it will help students to be ready to go on to other important things.
* Don’t be uninteresting for too long at a time. Spice up the less interesting bits of the syllabus with diversions which regain students’ enthusiasm. Even a minute out using the odd funny slide, or humorous anecdote, can make a difference.
* Find something which *is* interesting about the less-interesting topic. It’s worth students remembering this bit even if it’s not particularly important, rather than remembering nothing.

**3. Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching.**

If we don’t come across as being enthusiastic about what we’re teaching, it’s no surprise that students notice this! More importantly perhaps, if Dr Arbuthnott comes across as passionate about the subject she’s teaching, and we’re less up-front with our enthusiasm about our bit of the syllabus, students will notice this, and this will be reflected in their feedback, and in their overall satisfaction with the learning experience on their course.

Perhaps the worst scenarios regarding staff enthusiasm is where staff are *not* enthusiastic about what they are teaching, for reasons such as:

* Enthusiasm being present for research, and teaching being seen as a bit of a chore, and this coming across to students;
* Teaching a subject not close to our own field of interest, and our indifference to that subject coming across to students;
* Having a bad day (week, year) when we’re not particularly enthusiastic about anything, and this lack of enthusiasm coming across to students in the context of a particular subject they’re trying to learn from us.
* Being new to teaching the topic concerned, and our enthusiasm about the topic being somewhat drowned in our attempts to work out how best to teach it.

So how best can we cause students to believe that we’re enthusiastic about what we’re teaching? We hope the following suggestions will help.

* When you *are* already enthusiastic about what you’re teaching, let it show. Communicate your enthusiasm using tone of voice, body language, and (particularly) eye-contact with students. Sentiments such as ‘the thing that really fascinates me about this is….’ can help students to realise that the subject can indeed be found really interesting, and that the person teaching it is already enthused about it.
* Resist the temptation to let it show when you’re *not* enthused about a particular subject area. It’s OK to explain to students that something is actually quite difficult, but not so good if students pick up the message that it’s not important. If something *isn’t* important for your students to learn, it is probably better to miss it out altogether, or at least not spend too much of your valuable face-to-face time on it.

**4. The course is intellectually stimulating.**

How best can we make students feel that what they are learning is ‘intellectually stimulating’? What exactly does ‘intellectually stimulating’ mean in practice? Can *everything* be made intellectually stimulating? What about the problem that something which high fliers find intellectually stimulating may be regarded by low fliers as difficult and challenging? What about those students where ‘challenging’ is looked upon as something problematic rather than something exciting? This overlaps with the ‘enthusiasm’ agenda addressed above, but is perhaps rather more subtle. The following suggestions may help your students to gain the feeling that your part of their learning is intellectually stimulating.

* Think through the various learning outcomes making up the course elements you teach, and give them a star rating for ‘intellectual stimulus’ - e.g. three stars for the most satisfying outcomes, down to one star for ‘not really stimulating’. Then devise your own strategy to help students to see that the less-stimulating outcomes serve as a means to the end of the most stimulating outcomes being intellectually satisfying.
* Help your students take pride in their achievements, particularly when they have mastered something which could be regarded as intellectually stimulating. Help them to feel proud that they have got their heads round difficult concepts and ideas.
* Translate the intended learning outcomes around which your syllabus is based, into more-stimulating language. Use the phrase ‘what this really means is’ to justify your translation into more exciting language when appropriate.
* Get your students themselves to think about which parts they have found most ‘intellectually stimulating’. For example, ask them to write on post-its the particular elements they have so far found most stimulating in your part of their studies, and share with them the results of your survey. This may help them to gain a sense of the elements which their peers find intellectually stimulating, and at the same time increase the satisfaction of the group as a whole with this dimension of their learning experience.

**Assessment and feedback**

The results of the National Student Survey in the UK in 2005 and 2006 showed that assessment and feedback were the least satisfactory elements in terms of student satisfaction. The following suggestions against each of the five statements may help you to further increase student satisfaction with assessment and feedback.

**5. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.**

Teaching staff often reply ‘but they *were* clear in advance!’. To ensure that students are more satisfied about this, the following suggestions should help.

* Don’t just publish the assessment criteria in student handbooks or on relevant websites. Bring the benefits of tone of voice, body language, and eye contact to bear upon the clarity of the marking criteria. Explain them in lectures and tutorials, face-to-face with students. Ask students to ask you questions about how the marking criteria work in practice.
* Give students the chance to apply marking criteria. For example, get them to mark some past work in a whole-group setting such as a lecture, using the criteria, before setting out to do some similar coursework, or before they get into revising for related exam questions. In practice, students only *really* know what marking criteria mean when they have tried to make judgements themselves using the criteria.
* Get students to self-assess their own coursework at the point at which they submit it for marking, using the same criteria as will be used for tutor assessment of the work. Then give them feedback about how well their self-assessment has worked in practice, and guidance about particular criteria where there was a gap between the self-assessment and tutor assessment.

**6. Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair.**

Teaching staff often reply to criticism about this with ‘but the arrangements *were* fair – we strove to ensure this!’ Nevertheless, student opinion overall is that there is room for improvement here. The following tactics may help your students to have increased confidence in the fairness of your assessment arrangements and marking.

* Explain to your students the efforts which go into making assessment arrangements and marking as fair as possible. Explain that draft exam questions (for example) are discussed by committees or assessment boards and refined and clarified before being set to students. Explain the role of external examiners or moderators, in getting the questions right beyond doubt before students meet the questions. A lot of work goes on behind the scenes in making assessment fair, but students often have no idea about how much is done to the questions and marking schemes before they meet the questions.
* Put yourself into your students’ position. Imagine you got a poor mark of grade, and felt ‘this isn’t fair’. Students who feel disappointed with their assessment results may think ‘it isn’t fair’, and this thinking may continue to colour their feelings about assessment and marking overall. The way round this is to make sure that students know exactly *why* they were awarded low marks or grades, and (more importantly) get advice about how to improve on these grades in their next piece of work. Feed-forward is particularly important here, not just feedback.

**7. Feedback on my work has been prompt.**

Getting feedback to students promptly has become more of a problem as class sizes have increased. Also, with modular programmes, it is often the case that even two or three weeks’ delay in getting feedback to students is too much, as they will have moved on to other aspects of their studies before the feedback reaches them, and will therefore take little or no notice of the feedback. The following suggestions may help you not only to get feedback to your students more rapidly, but also to increase your students’ satisfaction with the speed of your feedback.

* Try giving quite a lot of feedback to your students at the point of them submitting their work for assessment, even before you have started to mark their work.
* Make sure students know they are getting feedback. We may know that we are giving them feedback, but it is useful to actually say so to them at the time.
* Where possible, reduce the size of the pieces of work you will mark, for example by setting tight word limits on assignments. Rather than saddle yourself with a pile of 3000 word essays or reports to mark, consider having 300 word critical arguments or ‘interpretations’. This also helps to ensure that assessment links to higher-level thinking skills, rather than routine writing skills.

**8. I have received detailed comments on my work.**

Overall, students are not of the opinion that they have received detailed comments on their work. But often in practice, they have received detailed comments, but not actually made good use of them. The following suggestions may both help your students to feel that they have received detailed comments *and* ensure that your students make use of these comments.

* Where possible, separate the mark or grade from the feedback comments. For example, give back students’ work with feedback comments but no mark, and ask students to work out their mark using the feedback comments to help them. This at least ensures that students do read the feedback comments. Where students then correctly work out their mark or grade (within a reasonable tolerance limit), congratulate them, and (more importantly) find time to discuss with students who underestimate or overestimate the value of their work, so that they know what went wrong with their self-assessment of it.
* Use technology to get more feedback comments to large-groups of students. For example, give students a considerable quantity of *generic* feedback at the point at which they submit their work for marking. Then use some of the time you save (not now having to write similar comments about common mistakes repeatedly on different students’ work) to give each student *specific* useful feedback about their own particular work.
* Use face-to-face contexts such as whole-class lectures to give students feedback, bringing the additional dimensions of tone-of-voice, body language and so on to bear on increasing students’ feeling that they have indeed got detailed comments on at least some aspects of their work. Remember to remind them that ‘this is feedback’.

**9. Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand.**

The previous two statements are about whether students feel they are getting enough feedback, quickly enough. This statement is about whether the feedback is really working for them. Our suggestions for the previous two statements should also help to make sure that students are benefiting from our feedback, and the following further suggestions add to these.

* Keep asking students about how your feedback is helping them. For example, if you are using a self-assessment pro-forma to get your students to reflect on their course work at the point at which they submit it, you could include a question or two along the lines ‘Which part of my feedback on your last assignment helped you most to understand something which you had not quite mastered at that point?’ and ‘What feedback would you particularly find useful on your present assignment?’ or ‘Which part of this assignment was least clear to you?’
* Use whole-group sessions to find out exactly what your students don’t yet understand. For example, ask them to write their responses on post-its to the starter ‘The most important thing I don’t yet understand is….’ Then analyse what the most frequently occurring responses are, and go over these aspects with the whole class. Then when marking their related work, make sure that you include feedback comments which relate to any remaining problems with these aspects of the syllabus.

**Academic support**

The statements in this section relate to student support in general, rather than specific feedback as discussed in the previous section. In some institutions, this means that the support may come from other people as well as subject teachers, in particular study-skills support which may be available from a Student Services section. However, it is likely that students responding to this kind of questionnaire will have uppermost in their minds the support they receive from their teachers, so it is worth setting out to address the agendas underpinning these statements as part of your own efforts to make your teaching work well for your students.

**10. I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies.**

Probably the best way to help your students feel positive about the quantity of advice and support they receive is to build it directly into your teaching as a matter of course. For example:

* In each teaching session, don’t just concentrate on *what* your students are intended to learn, but offer advice regarding *how best* you advise them to go about their learning. For example, don’t just suggest ‘read Chapter 4 of the textbook’ and instead suggest ‘Use Chapter 4 of the textbook to find out answers to the 25 short questions on the blue handout sheet’.
* Keep enquiring in whole-group sessions to find out which parts of your syllabus are causing your students most difficulty. For example, give your students a post-it exercise, asking them to complete the starter ‘The piece of advice I most need at the moment is…’. Don’t worry that you will get some spurious responses; the real advice agenda for at least some students will become clearer. When possible, address these difficulties in whole-class sessions.

**11. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to.**

Now that in many parts of the world, students are paying towards the cost of their post-compulsory education, it is not surprising that they can feel short-changed if they find staff difficult to contact when they have questions or worries. However, many of their teachers may in fact be part-time, and others may be heavily involved in research activities during their non-teaching time. The following suggestions may help you to give your students the feeling that you are as readily available as possible to help them.

* Advertise ‘office hours’ when they can guarantee to find you. If demand is high, post a ‘sign your own appointment’ sheet on your door, so they can ‘book’ an appointment of five or ten minutes with you. It is usually better to offer quite short appointments, not least so students don’t feel intimidated at the prospect of having to talk to you for too long at a time, but also to help those students who may have many questions to ask to prioritise their needs in advance. In practice, you can always arrange a longer 2nd appointment with those students who really needs some extra time from you. If working in a busy shared office, it can be worth booking a classroom or meeting room for these appointments – you can always take some work of your own there to do between appointments. Announce your scheduled office hours during each whole-group session – students then have no excuse for not knowing how, where and when to find you.
* Encourage emails from students. Set some groundrules for help enquiries, for example ‘short, specific questions please’, and agree a timescale in which you will respond to emails. Rather than just reply individually to students, it can be worth posting replies to frequently-asked questions on a discussion board in your institution’s virtual learning environment, and replying to the questioner with details of where your response is lodged. This makes sure that students who ask a lot of questions (for example about standards of forthcoming exam questions) aren’t advantaged over those who aren’t so forthcoming in their questions.
* Explain to your students that you’re not automatically free to talk to them every time they happen to see you in a corridor or refectory, and that you really want to be helpful to them by giving their needs your full attention, and can do this all the better when they can give you advanced notice of what exactly they want to discuss with you and, for example, you can have appropriate ‘helpsheets’ ready for them when you know what their problems are.

**12. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices.**

For all sorts of reasons, significant numbers of students end up choosing modules which with hindsight they wished they had not chosen. Sometimes they find that what they believed to be a manageable module turns out to take them out of their depth. Increasing student satisfaction with this aspect of advice is probably something you can not achieve on your own. The following suggestions may help you to work with others to achieve student satisfaction with study-choice guidance.

* As far as you can, make the intended learning outcomes of your modules as transparent as possible, so that students know in advance exactly what is covered, and gain a good idea of the depth and levels concerned. Spell out prerequisites clearly, so that students who need to do some further learning before embarking on your particular module are alerted accordingly.
* Consider bringing in a few students who have already succeeded with your module, to advise potential recruits to the module exactly what it takes to succeed. Some institutions organise a ‘module fair’ where potential students can find out from staff and past students quite a lot of useful ‘between the lines’ information about particular choices they may make.
* Ask your existing students to write on post-its ‘things I wished I’d known before starting on this module’ and gather together their responses into a short, sharp guide to the module.

**Organisation and management**

This section of the UK National Student Survey is particularly vague! It then becomes only too easy to pass on the blame for any student dissatisfaction. However, the following suggestions aim to help you to address what you yourself can do to ensure that your students are as satisfied as possible with the issues behind each of the statements in the section.

**13. The timetable works efficiently as far as my activities are concerned.**

* From time to time, do a whole class exercise, asking your students to jot down any particular timetabling problems they are experiencing in the context of the parts of the syllabus you are teaching. You won’t be able to address all of the responses you may get, but at least you will be able to identify whether there are some timetabling matters which are affecting a significant number of your students adversely, and may perhaps be able to make some adjustments to help them.
* When students have particular problems with timetabling, ask them directly and individually ‘what may I be able to do to help you with this?’. They may have at least some ideas which you can follow through – or at least pass into the system which oversees timetabling in your institution for future reference. And even when you can’t help directly, your students may understand why the changes they would like could not be achieved in the short term.

**14. Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively.**

This is a dimension of student satisfaction you can address more directly. For example:

* Make sure that any changes in your own parts of their studies are communicated by all possible means, including announcements in whole-group lectures, accompanied by something visual like a slide or overhead for those who respond better to visual stimuli, and a slip of paper given out as a handout for those who will need reminding of what they have heard or seen.
* Also include details of any changes on the VLE in a ‘changes’ or ‘announcements’ section, so that students who aren’t present at the relevant whole-group sessions are informed. Make it a groundrule that all students have the responsibility to look at this section of the VLE at least weekly, for example.
* For anything particularly important, it can be worth sending all your students a short email, with a well-chosen message title to ensure that they are going to get the gist of the message before they delete it.

**15. The course is well organised and is running smoothly.**

The opportunity for the buck to be passed seems endless here! However, there are indeed some things you can do to ensure that your students feel that their overall course is well organised and runs smoothly, including:

* Make *your* bits of the course well organised and smoothly run. This is at least partly about giving the impression that *you* are well organised yourself – for example being punctual at lectures, tutorials and other teaching-learning sessions, and always knowing where you left off at a previous session, and so on.
* Don’t grumble to students about others not being as well organised as you are, and refrain from empathising with students who may complain that others aren’t as helpful as you are (even if secretly to sympathise a lot with your students’ grumbles).
* Make your good organisation *visible.* For example, use handouts and bulletin boards to document your efforts to keep the course running smoothly.

**Learning resources**

At first sight, it can be tempting to say ‘not my responsibility’ when students express dissatisfaction with the three statements in this section of the survey. However, as an individual teacher, there are indeed things which you can do to lead towards greater student satisfaction with these aspects of their learning experience.

**16. The library resources and services are good enough for my needs.**

* Make sure that you know well in advance exactly what library resources and services your students will need in connection with your parts of the syllabus, and give your library or learning resource centre staff really good notice of your students’ requirements. Ask them to assure you that the provision will be in place, and to advise you straightaway if there will be any shortfall, so that you can plan round the situation.
* Where there is a risk that large numbers of students will attempt to borrow particular resources, leading to none being available for others, arrange with your library staff for there to be a ‘desk collection’ of resources which can not be borrowed for a particular period.
* Give your students clear advance briefings about the books, articles and resources you expect them to use, so that they don’t waste their time looking for them, and remind your library or resource centre staff of the expected timing of the demand for these resources.
* Help your students to use the resources really efficiently, by giving really clear briefings about exactly what they should try to do when they use them, rather than have them drifting aimlessly and slowly through the resource materials.

**17. I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to.**

This may of course be a matter of institutional policy, and some institutions are much better equipped than others. In particular, smaller colleges may not have the range of IT facilities than larger institutions. So what can you do, as an individual teacher, to address student satisfaction in this area?

* Maximise the efficiency with which your students use the IT resources. You can do this partly by demonstrating in large-group sessions how you expect them to go about particular tasks, and providing clear written step-by-step instructions so that limited resources go further.
* If particular resources are limited, check out whether you will be able to secure some related availability in other places, for example local public libraries or in collaboration with local larger higher education institutions. If necessary, make arrangements which simplify the processes of your own students being admitted to the use of these alternative IT resources.
* Consider the possibility of staggering the demand. For example, give a large class three IT resource-based tasks using different resources, with a suggested timetable indicating in which order different students should undertake the respective tasks.

**18. I have been able to access specialised equipment, facilities, or rooms when I needed to.**

The suggestions for the previous two statements continue to apply to student satisfaction with specialised equipment and facilities. However, you can do your own part to minimise problems by considering one or more of the following:

* Make sure that any specialised equipment is really needed by your students, and that it is not just ‘icing on the cake’ for them. In other words, the use of specialised equipment or facilities should relate very strongly to your students’ achievement of one or more particular intended learning outcomes.
* Devise relevant alternative tasks for your students to do at times when they are waiting for their turn to use the specialised equipment or facilities, so that they do not feel that their time is being wasted.
* With larger groups of students, you could consider turning the use of the specialised equipment and facilities into small-group activities, so that the availability of resources will stretch further with your students. This would mean ensuring with those in charge of the resources that group activity would be practicable, and would not disturb other users of the facilities.

**Personal development**

The statements collected together under this broad heading tend to relate to students’ feelings about their overall personal development as a result of their broad experience during the various elements making up their course, and necessarily some of these personal qualities will be developed further in some course elements more than in others, depending on the particular nature of the curriculum of individual course components.

Therefore, in the suggestions which follow each of the statements in this final part of the UK National Student Survey, we concentrate on what *you* can do to ensure that your own contributions to your students’ learning experience play their part in developing their overall personal attributes appropriately.

**19. The course has helped me to present myself with confidence.**

**20. My communication skills have improved.**

These two statements overlap so much in practice, that we have provided below some overall suggestions which impact on both confidence and communication skills.

* Where possible, include solo or group presentations as part of the overall assessment of the course. When presentations are assessed, students often put a great deal into preparing and giving them, and though they may find this somewhat stressful at the time, they are usually quick to recognise that their confidence has increased as a result of the process.
* Build in informal rehearsals for presentations, before students undertake assessed ones. These can be as short as five minutes, but can still cause students to move forward on their communication skills development.
* Make small-group teaching really participative for students, so that sessions are dominated by their own contributions, in contexts where they don’t feel threatened or embarrassed.
* Give students feedback not just on their mastery of the subject, but on the levels of oral and written communication skills which they use in the various contexts where they demonstrate their subject knowledge. In particular, focus on feed-forward, helping students to take specific and manageable steps to improve their communication skills from one task to another.

**21. As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems.**

Problem-solving skills are highly valued in employment, and increasing students’ confidence in tackling unfamiliar problems prepares them well for future lifelong learning and continuous professional development. Ways of helping students to feel that they are developing such competence include:

* Build short group problem-solving exercises into students’ everyday experience. Students can learn a lot from each other about how to go about solving problems, and their confidence increases particularly when the problem-solving is a learning experience for them rather than in an assessment-related context.
* Even in whole-class sections, intersperse your curriculum delivery with short unfamiliar problem-solving tasks for students to do in buzz-groups, followed by quick debriefing so that students who were not successful in solving the problems don’t have long to wait before finding out what they could have done to solve them.
* Now and then, set an informal (non-mandatory) homework exercise consisting of a few unfamiliar problems for students to have a go at solving, perhaps with a small prize for whoever gets the best solutions to you by a given date. Then debrief the exercise, for example with a prepared handout sheet illustrating solutions to all the problems, while at the same time congratulating those students who found particularly interesting solutions of their own.

**22. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of this course.**

The suggestions we have already given should lead to improved overall satisfaction, and should help you keep track of students’ satisfaction ratings on an ongoing basis through all stages of your teaching.

Naturally, it gives us pleasure to know that our students are satisfied with their learning experience, and the quality of our teaching. However, it is also useful for us to be able to continuously monitor student satisfaction, not least so that we can do something about at least some of the areas where they express dissatisfaction. Moreover, there are always other people who are interested in data pertaining to student satisfaction, often staff whose work embraces quality assurance, and it is in our own interests not only to make our teaching work, but to work towards students *saying* that our teaching is working well for them.