

HEIR Conference 2016 :

*Metrics that Matter: future directions for qualitative and quantitative
institutional research*

Learning from the Best: Identifying the bright spots in university teaching

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Introduction

- A student's evaluation of their experience is already critical for attracting prospective students, and is about to become a metric linked directly to student funding via the new Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).
- Institutions are looking afresh for ways of improving student satisfaction.
- Drawing on module evaluation data, this research uses the 'Bright Spots' approach to identify and disseminate good practice across Coventry University.
- The goal is to use the insights uncovered to engage staff in future development work, led by the academics themselves.

What do we mean by bright spots?



Bright Spots is a problem solving technique which focuses on discovering 'successful efforts worth emulating' (Heath & Heath 2010)



Methodology

- Qualitative feedback from classes with consistently strong satisfaction levels was analysed to reveal the ‘bright spots’ *as perceived by students*.
- 36 modules which scored 98-100% in both the 2014/15 and the 2015/16 academic years for questions directly relating to ‘teaching’ and ‘overall satisfaction’ were identified and their comments transcribed.
- Nvivo was then used to organise and analyse the comments according to the main points raised.

	Good	Improve
Total comments	572	154
% of all comments	79%	21%

	3 things students like		3 things students would like to see changed		
	Total Refs	% of 'good' comments	Total Refs	% of 'improve' comments	
Interesting Module	95	17	45	29	Module Structure
Teaching Methods (General)	64	11	21	14	Resources
Staff Enthusiasm	51	9	14	9	Assignment Guidance & Feedback
Tutor and General Staff	50	9	12	8	Teaching Methods (General)
Module Content	42	7	11	7	Clarity
Interaction	37	6	10	6	Learning Environment
Resources	34	6	10	6	Module Content
Support	32	6	6	4	Interaction
External Links	27	5	5	3	Time Pressures
Clarity	26	5	4	3	External Links
Module Structure	24	4	3	2	Fieldtrips

Further analysis enabled us to cluster all the comments into four key themes:

- Staff-student interaction
- Approaches to teaching
- Coursework and assessment
- Resources

Staff-Student Interaction

Students really appreciated tutors who:

- Came across as friendly and approachable.
- Had regular and reliable times that they could be contacted.
- Responded to emails promptly.
- Regularly asked for students' opinions and feedback both formally and informally.
- Responded to student feedback by explaining any changes that have or could happen as a result.

Approaches to Teaching

Many of the comments referred to approaches to teaching. More specifically, students appeared to be more motivated to learn when their tutors:

- Demonstrated a knowledge and enthusiasm for their modules.
- Ensured their lectures and PowerPoint slides were clear and easy to follow.
- Always started and ended sessions promptly.
- Directed students to specific, focussed reading materials prior to teaching sessions.
- Maintained students' interest levels.

Approaches to Teaching

Suggestions for maintaining students' interest:

- Highlighting the importance of the module for students' future employment/study
- Incorporating real life examples and case studies into teaching
- Inviting external speakers to deliver talks/workshops
- Varying lecture/tutorial content on a session by session basis
- Employing interactive learning in the classroom
- Arranging fieldtrips

Coursework and Assessment

Students appeared to get the most benefit from coursework and assessments when:

- The aims and objectives for the work were clearly and unambiguously defined.
- They were able to start the coursework as soon as possible.
- The coursework submission dates were appropriately timed to complement students' other modules.
- Students were given as much freedom as possible regarding the topics and approaches to use for their coursework.

Resources

Access to suitable resources was important to students when working at the University. To ensure students make the best use of resources, students suggested that:

- Appropriate guidance should be given to ensure students are aware of the resources available and how best to use them.
- Tutors should ensure their Moodle sites are kept up to date with current slides, links and guidance.
- The University should try and ensure resources are available at the times and locations required.
- Tutors should ensure their rooms are suitable for the sessions they are intending to run.
- Ensure the library is informed of the essential texts.

Discussion

- MEQ scores and NSS scores measure students' 'perceptions' but:
 - Are students best placed to judge teaching excellence?
 - How realistic are students' expectations?
- We need to acknowledge limitations but accept that student satisfaction is a key measure for the TEF and the University's future rating.
- Students perceptions are relevant and should be used as a starting point to work from but expectations should be managed.

Next steps

- Conduct interviews with tutors receiving good feedback for their insights into ‘bright spots’.
- Work with those tutors and student experience leads on sharing those insights with other colleagues interested in improving MEQ ratings.

Thank you for listening

Any Questions?

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Key literature:

Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2010). *Switch: How to change things when change is hard*. New York: Broadway Books.

Morgan, M. (2012). The Student Experience Practitioner Model. In M. Morgan (Ed.), *Improving the Student Experience: A practical guide for universities and colleges*. Abingdon, United Kingdom, Abingdon; New York: Routledge.