FACULTY OF ENGINEERING

KINGSTON UNIVERSITY

STUDENT EXPECTATION SURVEY 2008/9

Summary of Key Findings

Moving from School/College
Of the sample of 279, 65% were moving straight from school/college. Of those respondents who were not moving straight from school or college, 58% were coming from work.

Parent/guardian university attendance
Of the sample, 40% of respondents' parents/guardians had been to university meaning that 60% of the sample were first generation students.

Anxiety
Respondents were less anxious about life at university than their studies. Of the sample just under a third of respondents were anxious or very anxious about coping with the standard of work and managing their money. There was a significant correlation between first generation students and the anxiety about coping with the standard of work, getting involved in university life, and making friends compared to second generation students.

Main strengths and weaknesses
Over half of the respondents perceived their study skills to be strong or very strong.

Most important elements of Fresher's week
Getting timetables, starting lectures and making friends were the top 3 most important elements in Fresher's week for respondents.

Expectation of first year
Improving their knowledge of their subject, achieving good grades and being able to study independently were the top 3 expectations of the respondents.

Reasons for going to University
A better chance of getting a job, achieving something for myself and needing a degree for a chosen career were the top 3 reasons given by the respondents for going to university.

Reasons for choosing Kingston
The Quality of course, course content, being near home and being able to do a Foundation year were the top 4 reasons for choosing Kingston.

Income
Of the respondents, 58% expected to work throughout the year to help supplement their income. The student loan was the main source of income for 55% of respondents and 63% expected to be in debt by the end of their degree.

Why Engineering?
Of the respondents, 80% stated that they had always been interested in the subject.

FACULTY OF ENGINEERING STUDENT EXPECTATION REPORT 2008

Introduction

The student expectation questionnaire would normally be distributed pre-arrival for completion by new students. However, due to time and cost constraints, it was decided that this cohort of students would complete the questionnaire via one of the sessions during welcome and orientation week (Induction week). As a result, this may have impacted on some of the responses. This will be discussed where appropriate in the findings.

Of the 460 new Year 0 and Year 1 students in the Faculty of Engineering, 279 students completed the expectation questionnaire. This accounts for approximately 61% of the cohort. Once the data was collected it was entered into the statistical package SPSS and frequencies and chi-squares (where appropriate) were run.

Questions relating to specific year of study (year 0 or 1) and domiciled status were removed because the figures would be too small for them to be significant.

Findings

1). Are you moving straight from school/college to University?

Of the total sample of 279 respondents, 65% stated that they were moving straight from School/college to University (see figure 1).

Figure 1 Moving straight from school/college

The reasons given by those respondents who were not moving straight from school/college to university (35%) were:

- 58% had come from work
- 18% had taken a year out for personal reasons
- 15% had come from other study.

It is becoming increasingly common for students to take a year out before going to university. The Faculty of Engineering at Kingston offers many vocational degrees thus attracting students working in the field or wanting a change in career direction.

2). Has a parent or guardian been to university?
Of the total sample of 279 respondents, only 40% had a parent or guardian who had been to university (see figure 2). For an institution such as Kingston University, this figure is not unusual.

Figure 2 Has a parent/guardian been to university?

In their Barriers to PG study Report for the Higher Education Academy, Stuart, Lido, Morgan and Solomon (2008)[1] found that of the 529 students in their Kingston University sample, 37% of respondents had a male parent who had been to university. This figure was 27% when respondents were asked if a female parent had attended university. The Unite Student Living Survey 2005[2] carried out by MORI which interviewed 1007 students across 20 universities found that only 39% of their sample had a parent who had been to university.

There are a high number of first generation students within the Faculty of Engineering (60%) thus it is very important that these students, who are likely to have had little or no experience about life and study at University through parental experience, are supported. Of course, this does not take account of siblings who can impact on their experience. This information was not collected in this survey but the Unite Survey (2005) found that only 36% of their sample had a sibling who had gone to University.

[1] Stuart M, Lido C, Morgan M, Solomon L and Akroyd K (2008) *Widening Participation to PG study* Higher Education Academy, York, HEA

[2] MORI (2005) *UNITE Student Living Survey*, UNITE in Association with HEPI. All reference to the UNITE Student Living Survey 2005 will relate to this document.

3). How anxious are you about the following statements?
Respondents were less anxious about life at university than their studies.

Of the sample, just under a third of respondents were anxious or very anxious about coping with the standard of work and managing their money (see table 1). These two issues also scored the highest on the unsure scale. These findings reflect national research. A Student Expectation study by Sussex University[3] found that the main anxiety issues for students were also managing money (42%), coping with the standard of work (32%) and making friends (31%).

Table 1 How anxious are you about the following statements?

	Anxious or very anxious	Not anxious or anxious at all	Unsure
Coping with the standard of work	**30%**	38%	**32%**
Getting involved in university life	**25%**	52%	23%
Making friends	**25%**	51%	24%
Managing your money	**29%**	42%	**29%**
Finding accommodation	20%	63%	17%
Looking after yourself	18%	66%	16%

There was a significant correlation between first generation students and the anxiety about coping with the standard of work, getting involved in university life, and making friends compared to second generation students. Again, this reflects the findings in national and international research. It is therefore important that the appropriate support mechanisms are in place within the faculty to support all students but especially first generation ones.

4). What do you regard as your main strengths and weakness?
Over half of the respondents perceived their study skills to be strong or very strong (see table 2). However, it is important to note that around one third of all respondents were unsure about their ability. It is quite common for students to overestimate their study skill ability on entry to a degree course which is why it is important for students to have access to study skill support whether embedded into a degree course or offered as extra curricula activities. Obviously, the former is preferable.

It is also recognised that students are not only entering university with a different skill base compared to 10 years ago due to the way A levels are now taught but the educational attainment of students entering university is diverse. It is important for Faculties to bridge the skills gap and identify where extra support is needed. That is not the same as saying that standards should be lowered.

[3] Morgan (2004) *Student Expectation Survey 2003*, University of Sussex All reference to the Sussex Expectation Survey will relate to this document.

Table 2 What do you regard as your main strengths and weakness?

	Strong or very strong	Weak or very weak	Unsure
Ability to assimilate ideas	**62%**	5%	33%
Organise study independently	**56%**	13%	31%
Good study skills	**52%**	11%	37%
Good knowledge of the subject being studied	**52%**	14%	34%
Good literacy sills	**61%**	10%	29%
Good numeracy skills	**57%**	9%	34%

It was reported in the Times Higher Education Supplement that a recent report by the CBI argues that of the employers questioned many were concerned about the levels of graduate literacy and numeracy with a quarter saying they were unhappy with graduates' employability skills[4].

5). What are the most important elements of Fresher's week for you?

The most important elements of Fresher's week for the respondents within the Faculty of Engineering are ranked in the table 3 below. The findings reflect other research in the field. The importance of moving into accommodation will be ranked depending on whether students are local or who have already settled into their accommodation. If the questionnaire had been completed pre-arrival, accommodation may have been ranked as a slightly more important activity during the welcome and orientation period. However, many students within the faculty do live locally hence the probable reason for its low ranking.

The induction programme for undergraduate students in Engineering already prioritises the important elements ranked by the respondents below. The induction programme is a comprehensive programme which was designed by students to meet their needs.

Table 3 What are the most important elements of Fresher's week for you?

	Important or very important	Not important or not important at all	No opinion
Moving into accommodation	31% (8)	55%	14%
Fresher's Ball	19% (9)	54%	25%
Fresher's Fair	32% (7)	32%	36%
Trips to London	15% (10)	57%	28%
Orientation	**36% (5)**	34%	30
Meet the personal tutor	**64% (4)**	9%	27%
Start lectures	**73% (2)**	8%	19%
Make friends	**72% (3)**	10%	18%
Finding a PT job	34% (6)	44%	22%
Getting timetables and reading lists	**80% (1)**	5%	15%

[4] Fearn, H (2008) *Employers still irked by lack of graduate skills* Times Higher Education Supplement, 11 September p16

6). What do you expect to gain from your first year experience?
The top 3 expectations of what the respondents expect to gain from their first year experience are course specific related (see table 4). They can be achieved through effective teaching and learning methods and good feedback.

Table 4 What do you expect to gain from your first year experience?

	Important or very important	Not important or not important at all	No opinion
Confidence	70%	10%	20%
New perspectives	**74% (4)**	5%	21%
Travel during the vacations	24%	43%	33%
Making friends	**71% (5)**	8%	21%
Achieving good grades	**89% (2)**	3%	8%
Gain better IT skills	63%	14%	23%
Study more independently	**77% (3)**	10%	13%
Work experience	65%	15%	20%
Start new hobbies	47%	21%	32%
Knowledge of my subject	**93% (1)**	2%	5%

The UNITE Student Living Survey 2007 [5], which interviewed 1600 students across 20 universities, found that the top three best life experiences of university were improving their career prospects (59%) meeting and making friends(59%) and learning more about their subject (48%).

7). What are your reasons for going to University?
The reasons given by respondents in the Faculty of Engineering for going to University are listed in table 5 below.

Table 5 What are your reasons for going to University?

	Important or very important	Not important or not important at all	No opinion
More time to think about a career	31%	39%	30%
Parent expectations- they went to university	***12%***	65%	23%
Parent expectations- they haven't been to university	***22%***	55%	23%

[5] MORI (2007) *UNITE Student Living Survey*, UNITE in Association with HEPI. All reference to the UNITE Student Living Survey 2007 will relate to this document.

I need a degree for the career I want to go into to	**84% (3)**	4%	22%
It will give me a better chance of getting a job	**89% (1)**	2%	9%
Interest in my degree subject and love of studying	78%	4%	18%
Want to achieve something for myself	**87% (2)**	2%	9%
Overall self development	81%	3%	16%
Chance to try a new subject	44%	2%	54%

It is also important to note that the expectations of parents who haven't been to university but expected their son or daughter to go to university is almost double of that of parents who did go to university. This can increase pressure on first generation students and their fear of failing. National and international research shows that this is a common fear especially amongst international students. Students from backgrounds where parents have been to university are less likely to feel anxious about going to university.

Parental input is increasing in terms of encouraging their son or daughter to attend university as well as helping them in terms of choosing a place to study and helping them fund their degree. The "helicopter parent" was defined by Cline and Fay in the 1990's and used to describe a parent who pays extremely close attention to his or her child's or children's experiences and problems whilst at university. The UNITE Student Living Survey 2007 found that 51% of respondents stated that their parents had exerted significant influence in them going to university. The survey also found that 93% of parents had made some form of contribution to the cost of their son or daughter's study although they had little influence on the choice of course and university. With the increase in study fee's, more students living at home whilst studying , the economic downturn and more students returning to live at home post study, it is hardly surprising that parental and guardian input has increased throughout the lifecycle of a student.

Recent research is highlighting that the reasons students give for going to university may be becoming more "outcome" focused. This is reflected in these findings. The UNITE Student Living Survey of 2007 found that the top reasons for going to university was to gain the necessary qualifications (73%), improve their chances of getting a job (65%) and to increase their earning potential (44%). The same report found that 94% of the sample felt that University was a worthwhile investment.

Anecdotal evidence from across the sector suggests that students are becoming more strategic when dealing with progression issues.

8). What are your reasons for choosing to study at Kingston University?
Respondents were asked to rank their top 5 reasons for coming to Kingston University. There were 22 options from which to choose and ranged from meeting staff at open days, to course content to research interests to entry grades to league table results.

Table 6 What are your reasons for choosing to study at Kingston University?

Reason 1	Reason 2	Reason 3	Reason 4	Reason 5
Quality of course 25.8%	Course content 11%	Quality of course 9.7%	Employability 12.2%	Course accred 7.2%
Course content 14%	Quality of course 10.4%	Course content 9%	Quality of course 7.5%	Cutting edge tech 6.1%
Near home 8%	Cutting edge tech 9%	Employability 6.8%	Near home 6.5%	Employability 6.1%
Foundation year 6.5%	Near home 7.2%	Near home 6.1%	Course accred 5.7%	Near home 6.1%

Respondents were very clear as to why they chose to come to Kingston as table 6 above shows. Employability is becoming more of an important factor for students today. Engineering departments nationally and internationally are struggling to recruit students so it is important to ensure engineering degrees retain their quality, are cutting edge and fulfil the needs of industry.

In the UNITE Student Living Survey 2007, respondents stated that the top three reasons for choosing to study at a particular university were overall reputation (51%), Academic reputation (49%) and the quality of teaching (41%).

9). Do you expect to work to supplement your income whilst at University?
Of the 279 respondents, 58% of all respondents expected to work throughout the year to help supplement their income with 21% stating that they only intended working during the vacation periods (see figure 3).

Figure 3 Work expectations

Research has shown that if the same cohort of respondents are asked about what work they have actually undertook at the end of the academic year, more often than not a significantly lower number of respondents actually worked throughout the year with most only working during the vacation periods (Morgan, 2004 and UNITE 2005) . The experience questionnaire due to be undertaken in April will explore this issue with students studying in the Faculty of Engineering at Kingston.

The UNITE Student Living Survey found that only 38% of Engineering respondents worked during the year compared to 49% of Art and design and 29% of medicine and dentistry students. It is not surprising that students studying in the high contact subjects may work less during their study.

The Natwest Survey 2003[6] found 43% of students in part-time work had missed lectures in order to undertake paid employment.

10). What are you main sources of income whilst at University?
Respondents ranked their main sources of income. These can be found in figure 4.

Figure 4 Main sources of income

Similar findings were also found in the Sussex Expectation Survey where the top three sources of income were the student loan (56%) part-time work (26%) and parents (18%).

[6] National Westminster Bank (2003) *Student Money Matters Survey* Natwest

11). Do you expect to be in debt at the end of your degree?
Of the 279 respondents, 63% expected to be in debt and 29% free of debt by the end of their degree. Of the 63% who expected to be in debt, 30% expected to be in debt in excess of £11K and 23% in debt of between £6-10K (see figure 5).

Figure 5 Anticipated debt

In 2004, Barclays Student Survey [7]reported that the average national debt for a student upon graduation was around £12K if you lived in the North and £15K if you lived in the South. National research shows that the debt on graduation is higher for lower socio-economic groups. The introduction of bursaries has not altered the financial situation of students from lower socio-economic groups as had been hoped according to research by Professor Claire Callender of Birkbeck University[8].

Debt is also linked to the ability to undertake paid employment which can be subject related. It would be logical to surmise that a student not able to undertake paid work throughout the year but only during the vacation period would be more likely to have accrued more debt as a result of going to university.

12). Do you have career aims?
Of the 279 respondents, 52% already had career aims but 33% were unsure. How can the Faculty assist those who are unclear about future career aims? Government policy is to increase students undertaking postgraduate study. How can the Faculty of Engineering actively participate in encouraging students unclear on a career path?

[7] Barlcays Bank (2005) *Barclays Student Survey 2004* Barclays Bank
[8] Callender C (2008) Association of University Administrators London Conference on the Student Experience (AUA), *Student Bursaries* Lecture, 12 November, London: Birkbeck

13). Why have you chosen to do Engineering at Kingston?
Of the 279 respondents, 80% stated that they have always been interested in the subject. Only 9.3% stated that they didn't know much about the subject but it looked interesting (see figure 6).

Figure 6 Why Engineering?

Conclusions
The results of the Engineering Student Expectation Survey mirror external research. There are no surprises within the data. There are a range of national and international initiatives to support students which the Faculty of Engineering could adopt to improve the experience of students within the faculty.

The Faculty is already delivers a comprehensive induction and re-induction programme. It is currently developing OUTduction initiatives.

Shell Morgan
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