

**Suggested distribution**

Education officers,
education
research staff

Action

For information

Executive Summary

Information Paul Ramsden's report to John Denham on Teaching and the student experience.

NEC Contact

Aaron Porter

aaron.porter@
nus.org.uk

Staff Contact

Mark Leach

mark.leach@
nus.org.uk

11th December 2008

EI/08/048

The Future of Higher Education: Teaching and the student experience

Summary

1. This *Education Information* provides information about Paul Ramsden's report to John Denham on Teaching and the student experience.

Background

2. John Denham, the Secretary of State for Universities and Skills, earlier this year tasked several experts to report to him on key issues facing the UK HE system over the next two decades.
3. Paul Ramsden, in his role as Chief Executive of the Higher Education, was asked to look into teaching and quality issues, evolving student expectations and the student experience over the next ten to fifteen years.
4. His final report was published earlier in November and relates to the whole of the UK, although recognises distinctive approaches in some areas by England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

Key changes

5. Prof. Ramsden initially notes some of the key changes to Higher Education that have occurred in recent years, and are important to set the context of his recommendations. He notes how demographics have changed leading to a sector that is no longer dominated by 18-21 year olds.
6. Prof. Ramsden notes how HEIs have worked hard to professionalise teaching standards and as a result, feedback suggest that students are broadly satisfied with their experience of Higher Education.

Challenges for the future

7. Prof. Ramsden identifies several key challenges for the future that will be faced by higher education:
 - Resources and infrastructure – maintaining facilities and learning spaces that are fit for purpose and meet students' expectations.
 - The quality of teaching and professional support staff.
 - Finding the necessary funding to support the above, which will mean exploring alternative funding streams.
 - Flexibility of offer - ensuring that learning opportunities are adaptable the lives of students which face increasingly complicated and conflicting demands. This means embedding ICT, more flexibility in timetabling and building in a broader range of options into the curriculum.
 - Increasing competition for international students, and ensuring that the international student experience meets their needs.

- Maintaining and enhancing student engagement in the shaping of their educational opportunities.
- Ensuring effective quality enhancement of Postgraduate courses.
- Information, Advice and Guidance and preparing students better for their Higher Education Experience.
- Reforming the degree classification system to ensure that the broad range of student achievement is recognised and recorded.

Meeting the Challenges

8. Prof. Ramsden summarises three key ways in which the challenges outlined in his report can be met:

- Reforming curriculum and assessment
- Developing a more flexible workforce
- Rethinking quality and engaging students in a responsible partnership

9. Some of the most important specific changes to rethinking quality that Prof. Ramsden makes in his report include:

- Accelerating the current movement towards enhancement-led quality assurance
- Strengthening 'causes for complaint' procedures and being more vigorous in following through the consequences of any breaches of quality or standards in an institution
- Developing published measures of institutional commitment to teaching and the student experience. It has been suggested that one of these might consist of the proportion of academic staff who hold Fellowships of the Higher Education Academy
- Reviewing institutional policies and procedures for the recruitment and assessment of international students
- Ensuring that learning hours and contact hours are decided upon as part of a rational system linked to an explicit evidence base. However, there should also be a clear national statement to the effect that there is no evidence to support a causal relationship between the number of class contact hours and student learning outcomes
- A systematic review of institutional systems for collecting and using student feedback and peer observation of teaching

10. On engaging students, Prof. Ramsden wrote "Student involvement in quality processes should start from the idea of building learning communities. Practically speaking, this involves shaping student expectations of their role as responsible partners who are able to take ownership of quality enhancement with staff and engage with them in dialogue about improving assessment, curriculum and teaching." This has been a view which NUS has been articulating for some time, and it is hoped that this report will push the Higher Education Sector to adopt this approach.

Further information:

Read the full report and all its findings here:

http://www.dius.gov.uk/policy/teaching_and_student_exp.html

The Higher Education Academy:

<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/>

NUS Student Experience Policy Corner:

<http://stage.officeronline.co.uk//education/articles/275565.aspx>