

Student Satisfaction At Crisis Point?

Contributed by B2B International
Friday, 31 July 2009
Last Updated Friday, 31 July 2009

Market research specialist B2B International believes that current student dissatisfaction can be used to enhance educational experience in the future

The current climate of student protests about minimal contact time, poor tutor feedback and shoddy lectures (whoever would have thought it!) raises questions about the shift in students' attitudes and behaviours related to their educational experience.

Much of this current unrest could be attributed to the requirement for students to pay higher fees. Â

This has prompted discussions within the sector about the positioning of the student as a 'customer' or a 'consumer'.

It has been argued that the term 'customer' is not appropriate for the field of education as the relationship is completely different to that of the conventional commercial buyer/seller experience; yet students do purchase and experience education.

Carol-Ann Morgan is head of the specialist education unit of market research consultancy B2B International. Â
"Whether or not we agree that an educational qualification can ever be thought of as a 'purchased' product given the nature of the necessary relationship between the parties involved, the student protestations serve to remind us of two things.Â Firstly, the importance and power of the voice of the customer, consumer or service user (by whatever name we choose to use), and secondly, the perceived value for money of the product.Â

The recent students' action was an open demonstration that their expectations are not being met as far as the delivery of courses is concerned, and that they would like to place the issue on the management radar screen.Â In a similar situation, customers in commercial markets may simply switch to use competitor suppliers.Â

Such comments come from first-hand knowledge of the sector. Â

B2B International has more than a decade's experience in conducting bespoke student satisfaction studies amongst Britain's leading educational establishments, working with organisations within the education and training sector " schools and colleges for 14-19 year olds, universities and HE, and awarding bodies.

B2B International has also been approved as one of a small number of preferred suppliers to conduct research for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

Morgan continues:

"Higher education has undergone significant changes in recent years.Â It is globally more competitive than it has ever been.Â Educational establishments are under closer scrutiny than ever before, budgets are tight, and students are becoming increasingly discerning in the establishments and courses they choose.Â

Against this backdrop, it is inevitable that higher education establishments are under ever-increasing pressure to raise student satisfaction levels with a view to improving their overall offerings and attracting a greater number and higher calibre of students.Â

In answer to demand from the HE sector and drawing on years of experience conducting student satisfaction studies, B2B International has developed its Independent Student Experience Programme (INSTEP), an independent, off-the-shelf, student e-survey package which complements the National Student Survey perfectly. Â

This technologically advanced programme delivers understanding of student perception, overall satisfaction levels across the institution, identification of areas of strength and weakness, priorities for improvement, and potential for ongoing tracking of changes in satisfaction.

Morgan feels that the recent student protests have vindicated the need for a simple and cost-effective product such as INSTEP, the demonstrations having served to underline the obligation of educational institutions to take student satisfaction seriously: Â

"Whether a huge multinational, an up-and-coming SME or an educational institution, taking care of our customers not only enables us to respond with offers and services which meet current and future needs, it also serves to protect our reputation by ensuring we have a loyal base of advocates willing to spread the word " a valuable source of free PR.Â

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About B2B International

B2B International is a specialist business-to-business market research consultancy that has grown through bringing together the skills of leading practitioners in the field.

We believe that this focus gives us a real edge in designing and carrying out market research worldwide for businesses, government department, educational institutions, and medical specialists alike.

B2B International's specialisation is borne out of 30 years' experience in business-to-business market research.

From our European headquarters in the UK, our Asian base in China and our office in USA, our wealth of industry expertise means that we have managed over 1,000 custom-designed market research projects covering all different industry sectors throughout the world.

Highly skilled in data-collection, analysis and reporting, B2B help clients enter a new market, build position in a market, create a new brand, find out how satisfied customers or employees are, target markets more efficiently, develop a new product, or test the effectiveness of an advertising campaign.

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July 2009