

CPHC LDG workshop: 13<sup>th</sup> January 2012  
Sally Fincher

# NSS Day



# Open & useful

- Today is meant to encourage free discussion.
- This involves a certain degree of trust.
- We will operate today under the Chatham House Rule

# Chatham House Rule



- "When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed"

# What this means

- You may:
  - speak as an individual
  - express views that may not be those of your organization
- After today you may:
  - report/use anything that was presented or said
- After today you may not:
  - identify—either explicitly or implicitly—who said what.
  - circulate a list of attendees

# NSS: issues & thoughts



## New for us

- “ ... in the UK and Europe national control of academic institutions and degrees prevented the proliferation of universities and historically dampened or controlled competition among them.”
- “This traditional difference between the structure of the US system of higher education and other national systems is fast disappearing. Under the combined pressures of massification and globalization most national governments are introducing market competition into their university systems.”

(Convergence & Diversity: The Role & Influence of University Rankings, David Dill, 2006)

# NSS: policy framework

- The National Student Survey (NSS) forms part of the revised quality assurance framework (QAF) for higher education (HE). The aim of the survey is to gather feedback on the quality of students' courses in order to contribute to public accountability as well as to help inform the choices of future applicants to HE.

<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/nss/>

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# NSS: language of the market

- So, the instrument that is the NSS may be thought of as doing one of two things (possibly, of course, both)
- Providing material for comparison (and hence “rankings”)
  - ... *contribute to public accountability*
- Evaluating student “satisfaction”
  - ... *help inform the choices of future applicants*

# Ranking: observable consequences

Michael Sauder and Wendy Espeland

*The Discipline of Rankings: Tight Coupling and Organizational Change*

American Sociological Review 2009 vol 74  
(February pp 63-82)

# Ranking: observable consequences

- Rankings create a public, stable system of stratification comprised of unstable positions.

<http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk>

CUG Rank		University Name	Entry Standards	Student Satisfaction		Research Assessment		Graduate Prospects		Overall Score
2012	2011									
1	2	<a href="#">Cambridge</a>	★★★★★ 559	★★★★★ 4.1	★★★★★ 2.98	★★★★★ 85.5	★★★★★ 1000			
2	1	<a href="#">Oxford</a>	★★★★★ 536	★★★★★ 4.2	★★★★★ 2.96	★★★★★ 85.0	★★★★★ 992			
3	3	<a href="#">Imperial College London</a>	★★★★★ 519	★★★ 3.8	★★★★★ 2.94	★★★★★ 86.7	★★★★★ 940			
4	5	<a href="#">London School of Economics</a>	★★★★★ 513	★★★ 3.9	★★★★★ 2.96	★★★★★ 84.1	★★★★★ 928			
5	4	<a href="#">Durham</a>	★★★★★ 487	★★★★★ 4.0	★★★★★ 2.72	★★★★★ 80.4	★★★★★ 890			
6	6	<a href="#">St Andrews</a>	★★★★★ 485	★★★★★ 4.1	★★★★★ 2.72	★★★★★ 76.3	★★★★★ 854			
7	9	<a href="#">University College London</a>	★★★★★ 477	★★★★ 4.0	★★★★★ 2.84	★★★★★ 81.1	★★★★★ 842			
8	7	<a href="#">Warwick</a>	★★★★★ 480	★★★★ 4.0	★★★★★ 2.80	★★★★★ 72.5	★★★★★ 822			
9	8	<a href="#">Lancaster</a>	★★★★ 407	★★★★ 4.0	★★★★★ 2.71	★★★★★ 71.8	★★★★★ 820			
10	12	<a href="#">Bath</a>	★★★★★ 459	★★★★★ 4.0	★★★★★ 2.71	★★★★★ 77.9	★★★★★ 800			
11	16	<a href="#">Bristol</a>	★★★★★ 467	★★★ 3.9	★★★★★ 2.72	★★★★★ 77.7	★★★★★ 794			
12	10	<a href="#">York</a>	★★★★★ 437	★★★★★ 4.1	★★★★★ 2.78	★★★★ 68.2	★★★★★ 790			
13	11	<a href="#">Edinburgh</a>	★★★★★ 442	★★★ 3.8	★★★★★ 2.75	★★★★★ 72.4	★★★★★ 782			
14	14	<a href="#">Southampton</a>	★★★★★ 427	★★★ 3.9	★★★★★ 2.72	★★★★ 70.8	★★★★★ 779			
15	24	<a href="#">Exeter</a>	★★★★★ 439	★★★★★ 4.1	★★★★ 2.62	★★★★ 70.3	★★★★★ 768			

# Computer Science

 [Print table](#) » [New search](#)

CUG Rank		University Name	Student Satisfaction	Entry Standards	Research Assessment	Graduate Prospects	Overall Score
2012	2011						
1	1	<a href="#">Cambridge</a>	 4.1	 581	 3.35	 95.0	100.0
2	2	<a href="#">Oxford</a>	 4.2	 526	 3.15	 92.0	97.0
3	3	<a href="#">Imperial College London</a>	 4.1	 506	 3.20	 91.0	95.7
4	8	<a href="#">University College London</a>		 421	 3.15	 88.0	95.1
5	4	<a href="#">Bristol</a>	 4.1	 492	 2.95	 89.0	94.2
6	5	<a href="#">Southampton</a>	 3.9	 459	 3.20	 85.0	92.0
7	15	<a href="#">St Andrews</a>	 4.3	 449	 2.70	 85.0	91.7
8	7	<a href="#">York</a>	 4.0	 471	 2.95	 84.0	91.3
9	9	<a href="#">Warwick</a>	 3.9	 485	 2.75	 87.0	91.2
10	10	<a href="#">Bath</a>	 4.0	 404	 2.95	 89.0	90.1
11	6	<a href="#">Edinburgh</a>	 3.8	 437	 3.20	 81.0	89.7
12	13	<a href="#">Glasgow</a>	 4.1	 381	 3.10	 77.0	88.4
13	18	<a href="#">Nottingham</a>	 4.0	 354	 3.10	 83.0	87.8
14	11	<a href="#">Durham</a>	 3.9	 429	 2.80	 78.0	87.6
15	17	<a href="#">Manchester</a>	 3.9	 401	 3.15	 76.0	87.6
16	18	<a href="#">Newcastle</a>	 3.9	 357	 2.90	 86.0	87.5
17	24	<a href="#">Birmingham</a>	 4.1	 403	 3.00	 71.0	87.4

# Ranking: observable consequences

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- Rankings create a public, stable system of stratification comprised of unstable positions. The result is a social structure exquisitely suited for generating anxiety, uncertainty, meticulous monitoring, and discipline. Processes of normalisation and surveillance change how members make sense of their organisations, their work and their relations to peers.

## Is that true?

- I joined the head of dept and a group of colleagues for a pre-meeting about the five-yearly programme review and then we went on to the meeting proper, where we were questioned by a ten-strong panel for three hours (with no break) about the programmes we offer, our responses to issues with our NSS scores, and so forth. (SP217)

## Is that true?

- “I happened to see my head of department across the library floor, so went over to tell her about the [research council] success.

'Oh good', she said, not the slightest bit interested: 'look', she added, anxiously, pointing at the latest e-mail on her screen, 'the NSS results are in'. ”

(SP217)

# The Dark Side of Ranking: “reactivity”

- A self-fulfilling prophecy “an expectation, once defined as real, amplifies or confirms its effect ...rankings create expectations ... and people change their behaviour accordingly” (Espeland & Sauder, 2007)
- NSS results in redistribution of resources
  - Budget, time, attention
- NSS results in redefinition of *work*:
  - Associate Dean for Students
  - Associate Head for Learning & Students
  - Director for Student Engagement
  - *Assistant* Director for Student Engagement

# Ranking “for public accountability”

- Clearly, we act as if rankings are “true” and important.
- And adapt our internal behaviours to maximise our institutional position.

# Survey to inform choice?

- “Such measures [as NSS] currently mediate access to a broad array of institutions and professions. They diminish the salience of local knowledge and professional autonomy, they absorb vast resources, and they insinuate and extend market logic (e.g., by treating students as consumers evaluating alternative products)”

(Sauder & Espeland 2009)

## Is that true?

- “ ... *diminish the salience of local knowledge and professional autonomy ...*”
- Teaching? None yesterday. But the corporate meeting was all about student experience—what we need to do to improve NSS scores. Interesting that as far as I could tell there were no "teaching" academics round the table (SP12)

## Is that true?

- “ ... *extend market logic by treating students as consumers ...*”
- "One student told me, 'The NSS gave me an idea of what I should be getting.' It reinforces the idea that students should be getting something, instead of participating."

Duna Sabri, quoted in *NSS scores are a 'weak basis' for policymaking*,  
Times Higher, 3 November 2011

# HEFCE NSS review 2010

- “The research identifies the key pieces of information that prospective and current students deem important as being primarily related to course satisfaction, employability and costs. It found that when students searched for this information they could generally find it.

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# HEFCE NSS review 2010

- “The research identifies the key pieces of information that prospective and current students deem important as being primarily related to course satisfaction, employability and costs. It found that when students searched for this information they could generally find it. However, only a minority were found to actively search for such information. The report recommends that the way that students are made aware of information therefore needs to change, and the profile of the information should be raised, particularly at schools and colleges”.

# Key Information Sets

- “The KIS will contain areas of information that students have identified as useful. These areas are:
  - student satisfaction
  - course information
  - employment and salary data
  - accommodation costs
  - financial information, such as fees
  - students' union information”

## Mock KIS: how the KIS might be presented



BSc Health Studies (B900)



[Guidelines for interpreting this data](#)

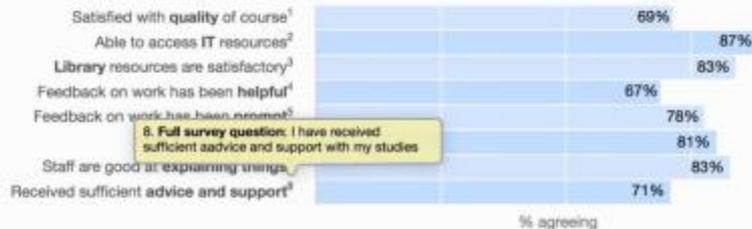
Due to a small number of students, some data presented here have been aggregated with similar courses. These are indicated by a 

### STUDENT SATISFACTION

69%

### Overall student satisfaction

 Aggregated data: data are for all Health courses at Newtown University



#### Sections

- Student Satisfaction
- Graduate Employment
- Financial
- Learning & Assessment

 Print

#### Download

- PDF (212kb)
- Raw data (.csv 75kb)

#### Share



#### Widget

Add a KIS widget for this course to your site

## NSS: a very *partial* survey

- Whether useful or not, the NSS takes a very specific view.
- Asks *NO* questions about learning:
  - Except, arguably, *The course is intellectually stimulating.*
- Asks *NO* questions about students engaging with:
  - Their discipline
  - Other students
  - Non-academic input (placements etc.)
- It might be argued that these are important things for student satisfaction in Computing

## **It does not, of course, have to be like this**

- USA: National Survey of Student Experience
- Australia: Australian Survey of Student Experience
- Holland: National Student Survey

<http://nsse.iub.edu/>

- Student engagement represents two critical features of collegiate quality.
- The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities.
- The second is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum and other learning opportunities to get students to participate in activities that decades of research studies show are linked to student learning.

# <http://nsse.iub.edu/>

- Voluntary
- Anonymous – if an institution chooses
- Paid for
- Normally administered in first year & final year
- Institutions get their own data: NSSE may report it in aggregate
- May be complemented with:
  - Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) – expectations on entry.
  - Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) – staff perceptions of student engagement

## It does not, of course, have to be like this

- CPHC LDG could lead (design/administer) a “Computing Student Survey”.
- Perhaps focussing more appropriately on “engagement” than “satisfaction”.
- Perhaps providing a useful disciplinary antidote to the institutional-level NSS.
- NSS will be reviewed in 2015.
- It may be beneficial to have a piloted alternative.



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# The Campus Squirrel Listings

- Reports, Rankings and Fascinating Lore From Colleges Far and Near
- The quality of an institution of higher learning can often be determined by the size, health and behavior of the squirrel population on campus. This site documents the critter quality at schools throughout the United States and beyond!

<http://www.gottshall.com/squirrels/campsq.htm>

# The Campus Squirrel Listings

- Rating scale

worst



best



# A more UK-centric measure

- The problem ... Universities these days are subject to many tests, ratings and measurements ... REFs, NSS ... all of these leave out one vital factor, in fact the one most important measure of the quality of a university. What is this elusive measure?

# DuckDensity

- That's right, the ultimate mark of a university's prowess and brilliance is its Duck Density. In recognition of this fact, DuckDensity.org.uk has been set up so that those who have the dilemma of where to spend the next three or four years of their life can be truly informed ...

University	Duck Density
<a href="#">York</a>	12.5
<a href="#">Warwick</a>	4.6
<a href="#">Huddersfield</a>	3.6
<a href="#">East Anglia</a>	1.7
<a href="#">Birmingham</a>	1.2