

Happy to be here

Times Higher Education's annual Student Experience Survey highlights a host of institutions bent on making the university experience first rate in every way. **Rebecca Attwood** reports

There is a joke Brian Jarvis tells about the paths that criss-cross the university campus in Loughborough.

They are split down the middle, he observes, with a sign on either side: one shows a cyclist; the other appears to be a runner.

"Walking is not an option. As you get increasingly middle-aged it does become more noticeable how many healthy young people there seem to be running around," says Jarvis, a senior lecturer in Loughborough University's department of English and drama.

Of course, if there is one thing Loughborough is famous for, it is sport. But in recent years it seems that it has become a winning university in more ways than one.

For three years in a row, it has topped *Times Higher Education's* Student Experience Survey, as well as achieving high scores in the National Student Survey (NSS) and national newspaper league tables.

A cursory glance at our survey results – presented here in full for the first time – shows that the university is not only number one for its sports facilities, but also for the environment around its campus, support and welfare, its student union, security and its social life.

"It is a bit of a strange phenomenon. After all, Loughborough is a slightly anonymous town in the centre of England," admits Alexa Hepburn, senior lecturer in social psychology, who has spent six years at the university.

But she believes that Loughborough is genuinely different from its competitors.

"It is the people and the place and the style of how things are done. I was a student at older universities and there is more of an informal atmosphere here – it is not so stuffy.

"I've worked in three other new universities but here it seems that there is more time for teaching and for thinking about teaching. We are teaching-focused but not in a 'that's all we ever do' kind of way – we also get on with our research. Our social psychology group, for example, is internationally known."

Jarvis, whose department was given a

96 per cent satisfaction rating in the most recent NSS, agrees that teaching does not play "second fiddle" to research at Loughborough.

"Almost all our modules are based on colleagues' research interests and when we get NSS scores that say lecturers are very enthusiastic, it is not rocket science. If you have lecturers, as you will do in some universities, teaching a lot of modules outside their specialism, it is going to impact on the student learning experience."

He believes that the university's sporting ethos contributes to a strong sense of community and collective identity across campus.

"In some respects it is like a North American university in that regard. I have worked in the US and sporting activities are pivotal socially," he says.

But what about students who don't care for sport at universities where it is such a prevailing influence on the ethos of the institution? At the University of Worcester, about 9 per cent of students are on sport-related courses. Speaking at a recent Association of University Administrators conference in London, John Ryan, Worcester's registrar and secretary, said this could leave some students feeling alienated.

"That does affect the culture of the institution and we find it can be quite dominant. First-year students from different backgrounds and courses do find that culture, when living in halls of residence, quite challenging sometimes," he said.

Jarvis says he has not encountered this at Loughborough, which has invested heavily in the arts in recent years.

"There are students who are less interested in the sporting side, of course – and maybe even a little resistant to it – but in our department there are all sorts of cultural activities going on and there are good links with art and design and music. So there are plenty of outlets for people who don't like wearing tracksuits."

On a practical note, he believes that Loughborough benefits from being a middle-sized campus university in a university town, a factor it has in common with other top-rated institutions in our survey.

"We are not so big that we become fractured and dispersed and not so small that we can't resource things properly."

Bill Overton, professor of literary studies at Loughborough, has seen the institution evolve over three decades, but he believes its core values have remained the same.

"One of the first things the head of department says to incoming students is 'we are all on first-name terms'. Staff are accessible. Like other institutions we have office hours, but students don't have any compunction about emailing or buttonholing you after seminars. And students reciprocate – we get very good attendance at lectures."

He says the university is also lucky to have an "excellent" students' union and "outstandingly good" administrative staff.

"It makes all the difference in the world when students know they are not going to get a dismissive response from an administrator, and the people who represent students are really high calibre."

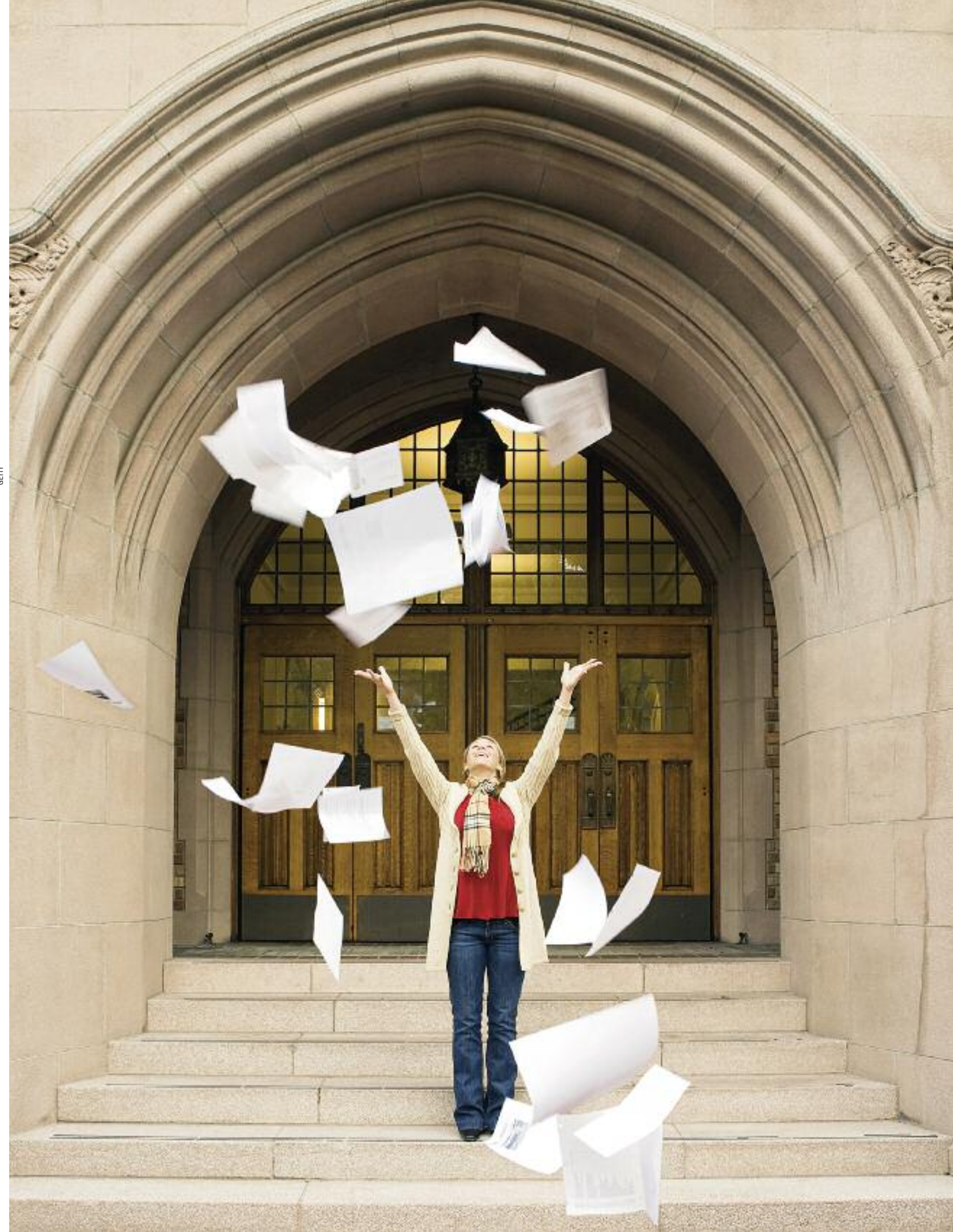
"On the whole, throughout my career it has been the kind of place I have wanted to work at. It is just the atmosphere of the place – it feels good to be here. When the students are around, you will hear a lot of laughter."

Other universities, including some of the most prestigious in the country, are taking notice of Loughborough's success.

Richard Partington, senior tutor at Churchill College, Cambridge, has observed that increasing numbers of Cambridge applicants are making Loughborough one of their top choices.

"It has got the reputation for sport obviously, but one of the things I've noticed in the 12 years I've been doing admissions in the university is that the second choice for our

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Rank	University name	Overall score	Respondents	Weighting 2								1.5							1					I would recommend my university to a friend	
				High-quality staff/lectures	Helpful/interested staff	Well-structured courses	Good social life	Good community atmosphere	Good extracurricular activities/societies	Good environment on campus/around university	High-quality facilities	Personal requirements catered for	Good student union	Good support/welfare	Good personal relationship with teaching staff	Centralised/convenient facilities	Good industry connections	Good accommodation	Good security	Cheap shop/bar/amenities	Tuition in small groups	Good library and library opening hours	Fair workload		Good sports facilities
1	Loughborough University	86.21	153	6.2	6.0	6.0	6.4	6.3	6.5	6.5	6.5	5.9	6.4	6.1	5.8	6.3	6.2	5.8	6.1	5.6	5.4	6.5	5.8	6.8	6.4
2	University of Oxford	82.53	276	6.5	6.5	6.2	5.8	6.1	6.4	6.2	6.2	6.0	4.0	5.8	6.4	5.7	5.8	5.9	5.7	4.4	6.8	6.6	4.7	5.9	6.4
3	University of Cambridge	81.72	317	6.5	6.5	6.2	5.6	6.0	6.3	6.2	6.1	5.9	4.2	5.9	6.2	5.6	6.0	5.7	4.4	6.8	6.5	4.4	5.3	6.4	
4	University of Sheffield	81.65	228	6.0	5.9	5.8	6.3	6.1	6.2	6.2	6.0	5.6	6.4	5.9	5.7	6.0	5.3	5.5	5.8	5.5	5.4	6.2	5.5	5.8	6.4
5	University of St Andrews	81.60	112	6.5	6.2	6.1	6.2	6.4	6.3	6.5	5.8	5.7	5.1	6.1	5.9	6.1	5.0	5.5	6.1	4.5	5.8	5.3	5.6	5.1	6.5
6	University of East Anglia	81.36	123	6.0	6.0	5.8	6.1	6.2	6.2	6.3	6.0	5.6	5.8	5.7	5.8	6.1	5.1	5.9	5.9	4.9	5.4	6.0	5.5	6.4	6.3
7	University of Exeter	81.05	228	6.1	6.0	5.8	6.0	6.0	6.1	6.4	6.0	5.6	5.6	5.8	5.7	6.0	5.4	5.6	5.8	5.4	5.5	6.2	5.6	5.8	6.3
8	Aberystwyth University	80.93	78	6.1	6.1	5.9	6.2	6.3	6.0	6.3	5.7	5.6	5.6	5.7	5.8	5.9	5.0	5.7	5.9	5.4	5.7	5.8	5.7	5.6	6.4
9	University of Southampton	80.90	229	6.0	5.9	5.9	6.0	5.9	6.1	6.2	6.0	5.6	5.9	5.7	5.8	5.8	5.5	5.6	5.7	5.7	5.4	6.2	5.5	6.1	6.3
10	Swansea University	80.08	77	5.9	5.9	5.8	6.2	6.3	6.0	6.2	5.7	5.6	5.6	5.7	5.5	5.9	5.2	5.4	5.6	5.7	5.4	6.3	5.6	5.9	6.4
11	University of Leeds	79.77	265	5.8	5.7	5.7	6.3	5.9	6.1	6.1	5.8	5.5	6.2	5.7	5.5	5.9	5.4	5.7	5.7	5.3	5.4	6.2	5.4	5.4	6.3
12	University of Dundee	79.73	76	6.0	6.0	5.6	6.0	5.8	5.5	6.0	5.9	5.6	6.0	5.7	5.9	6.0	5.3	5.7	5.7	5.5	5.5	6.2	5.6	5.6	6.1
13	University of Glasgow	79.65	153	6.0	5.9	5.6	6.1	5.8	5.9	6.0	5.9	5.6	5.9	5.5	5.8	5.9	5.3	5.1	5.7	5.6	5.6	6.3	5.5	5.9	6.3
14	University of Leicester	79.58	193	6.0	6.0	5.9	5.9	5.9	5.9	6.1	5.6	5.5	5.8	5.7	5.8	5.7	5.2	5.6	5.8	5.6	5.8	6.0	5.5	5.3	6.3
15	Bangor University	79.31	40	6.1	6.2	5.6	5.9	6.1	5.9	6.1	5.8	5.7	5.1	5.9	6.1	5.6	5.2	5.6	5.7	5.1	5.8	5.7	6.0	5.2	6.3
16	Newcastle University	79.24	278	6.0	5.8	5.8	6.4	6.2	6.1	6.1	5.8	5.5	5.3	5.7	5.5	6.1	5.4	5.4	5.6	5.1	5.1	5.9	5.5	5.7	6.3
17	Cardiff University	79.06	173	5.9	5.8	5.6	6.2	6.0	6.0	6.1	5.7	5.4	6.0	5.7	5.5	5.9	5.4	5.7	5.6	5.6	5.3	6.0	5.3	5.3	6.3
18	University of Warwick	78.82	265	6.0	5.7	5.6	5.8	5.9	6.3	6.1	6.0	5.4	5.4	5.5	5.6	6.1	5.7	5.7	5.8	4.3	5.3	5.8	5.4	5.9	6.2
19	Durham University	78.65	281	6.0	5.8	5.7	5.9	6.2	6.2	6.1	5.8	5.6	5.0	6.0	5.4	5.6	5.2	5.7	5.7	5.5	5.4	5.5	5.4	5.5	6.3
20	Lancaster University	78.48	251	5.9	5.8	5.7	6.0	6.1	6.0	6.1	5.7	5.4	5.3	5.6	5.7	5.9	5.2	5.8	5.9	5.1	5.4	5.9	5.4	5.0	6.1
21	University of Chichester	78.42	33	5.8	6.1	5.6	5.4	6.1	5.5	6.1	5.8	5.4	5.5	5.5	6.2	5.9	5.3	5.7	5.8	5.1	5.6	5.8	5.8	5.5	6.0
22	University of Teesside	78.09	87	5.8	5.7	5.6	5.7	5.7	5.8	5.8	5.9	5.5	5.8	5.7	5.7	6.1	5.7	4.9	5.5	5.5	5.5	6.2	5.5	5.7	6.0
23	University of Central Lancashire	77.98	89	5.8	5.8	5.5	5.9	5.8	5.5	5.9	5.9	5.4	5.8	5.7	5.9	6.0	5.2	5.3	5.8	5.1	5.4	6.2	5.6	5.5	6.0
24	Heriot-Watt University	77.87	52	5.8	5.7	5.6	5.7	5.9	5.7	6.4	5.8	5.6	5.1	5.5	5.7	5.7	5.7	5.3	5.7	5.2	5.3	5.6	5.4	6.0	6.2
25	University of Liverpool	77.83	154	5.8	5.7	5.7	6.1	6.0	5.8	5.9	5.7	5.4	5.3	5.6	5.7	5.9	5.1	5.2	5.6	5.2	5.5	6.3	5.5	5.7	6.1
26	University of Strathclyde	77.71	77	6.0	5.8	5.7	5.8	5.7	5.6	5.9	5.6	5.6	5.9	5.5	5.8	5.8	5.8	5.1	5.5	5.5	5.3	5.8	5.3	5.3	6.2
27	University of Hull	77.63	60	5.9	5.9	5.7	5.9	5.9	5.8	6.1	5.6	5.5	6.0	5.5	5.6	5.8	5.1	5.1	5.2	5.7	5.3	6.0	5.5	5.4	6.1
28	The Robert Gordon University	77.33	68	6.0	5.9	5.9	5.8	5.7	5.5	5.7	5.9	5.5	5.2	5.5	5.8	5.3	5.9	5.0	5.7	5.0	5.4	5.5	5.6	6.2	6.0
29	University of Surrey	77.20	97	5.8	5.7	5.6	5.6	5.7	5.7	6.2	5.6	5.6	5.3	5.5	5.5	5.9	6.0	5.8	5.8	4.3	5.1	6.2	5.1	5.3	6.0
30	University of Stirling	77.10	39	6.0	5.9	6.0	5.6	5.9	5.9	6.4	5.8	5.5	4.5	5.7	5.6	5.9	4.9	4.3	5.6	4.4	5.7	5.3	5.7	6.2	6.1
31	University of Portsmouth	76.79	130	5.6	5.8	5.5	6.0	5.8	5.7	5.9	5.7	5.4	5.1	5.6	5.6	5.8	5.2	5.5	5.5	5.0	5.3	6.2	5.6	5.5	5.9
32	University of Bath	76.75	219	5.6	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.7	5.9	6.0	5.9	5.4	5.2	5.5	5.3	5.8	5.9	5.4	5.8	4.5	5.0	6.4	5.2	6.5	6.0
33	University of Birmingham	76.58	265	5.8	5.6	5.6	6.0	5.8	6.0	6.1	5.7	5.3	5.2	5.6	5.4	5.8	5.4	5.1	5.4	4.8	5.1	5.9	5.3	5.7	6.0
34	University of Aberdeen	76.49	101	6.1	6.0	5.9	5.9	5.8	5.8	5.9	5.7	5.4	4.0	5.5	5.8	5.8	5.5	4.9	5.6	4.5	5.6	5.7	5.6	5.3	6.1
35	University of Nottingham	76.44	277	5.8	5.7	5.6	6.1	5.7	6.0	6.2	5.7	5.3	5.1	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.4	5.5	5.3	4.6	5.0	6.0	5.2	5.4	6.1
36	University of Reading	76.40	189	5.8	5.7	5.6	5.9	5.8	5.9	6.1	5.5	5.4	5.7	5.6	5.4	5.8	5.3	5.2	5.4	4.7	5.2	5.5	5.3	5.6	6.1

students is, on the science side, now quite often Loughborough. If you go back ten years, it didn't figure. It has really moved into the consciousness of students.

"I think Loughborough has been extremely well managed. It has very high-achieving students because it has become, academically, an extremely good university. It is a great success story and a great lesson in what a university can achieve through a very powerful sense of mission – and although it is not on its own in that, it is really good to see."

England's oldest universities, Oxford and Cambridge, take second and third place in our poll.

Their scores are testament to the excellent teaching provided at both, with Oxford and Cambridge students alike giving high marks to the quality and helpfulness of staff, the arrangement of tuition in small groups and the library facilities.

According to Partington, an enthusiastic

advocate for this kind of teaching, the key strength of Cambridge's famous system of supervision is that it allows individually tailored learning that responds to students' interests and needs.

"With very good students you are able to push them much further to go down the road they are really interested in going down and that can make the course very exciting for them. And if you have got a student who is struggling with punctuation – and that is not an unusual occurrence, sadly, these days – we can take time to deal with that."

Partington, a historian, will typically deliver lectures to about 40 students in the history faculty. He will then see a smaller group of students every week on their own for at least an hour.

Each will be set individual work to be completed during the week. Marking takes place almost immediately, allowing the tutor to provide very detailed feedback

“It makes all the difference when students know they are not going to get a dismissive response from an administrator. Those who represent students are really high calibre”

during the next supervision session.

"Of course, it is very expensive and time-consuming, and essentially colleges pay for it through their private money – it is not funded by the taxpayer. We are very lucky that we have got the financial resources to be able to do that," he says.

Partington is disappointed with Cambridge's relatively poor rating in the *Times Higher Education* survey in the "fair workload" category, but says this is the flipside of the coin when

it comes to one-to-one supervisions.

"There is nowhere to hide. They have got to deliver the work. My guess is that students' sense of that has become more acute with the rise of the internet, because they stay in communication with their friends at other universities. Particularly in the first year, they will be very conscious that essentially they are writing two or three essays for every one essay that most of their friends in other universities are being asked to produce."

Cambridge's college structure, he thinks, helps students to make friends quickly – although Partington does note the absence of a big, central students' union building where they can socialise.

And while Cambridge's pubs are good, he says, for nightlife "it is not exactly Liverpool or Manchester".

"The perception, often, for students outside – which we worry about – is that they think Cambridge is going to be a certain sort of

social atmosphere," Partington says.

But in fact the colleges are "enormously friendly and quite relaxed".

"It is great to have our huge investment of money and time responded to by students so positively," he concludes. "I can't stress how lucky we are to work with such able, hard-working students. It is such a joy to be able to spend time every week with them – it is one of the things that keeps us going."

There are three new entries in the top ten of *Times Higher Education's* ranking: the universities of Exeter, Southampton and Swansea.

Exeter showed a remarkable rise from 21st to seventh place. The university has improved across the board on its 2008 results. Its connections to industry, course structures and efforts to meet students' requirements have seen the most noteworthy rises.

"I am really pleased to see we have scored

well on the categories that are most important to students – teaching quality and staff, extra-curricular activities, social life and community atmosphere and facilities," says Janice Kay, Exeter's deputy vice-chancellor for education and chair of the 1994 Group's student experience policy group.

"We have been doing quite a lot in the area of graduate employment. We've a whole range of initiatives and experiences for students to help them get the most out of university life," she says.

Following on from the "one-stop shop" Exeter has set up to help students find part-time work, the university has launched the Exeter Award, a framework designed to recognise students' extra-curricular activities and prepare them for employment.

Three thousand students have signed up since the scheme launched in October, and this month a further stage will be introduced via

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				High-quality staff/lectures	Helpful/interested staff	Well-structured courses	Good social life	Good community atmosphere	Good extracurricular activities/societies	Good environment on campus/around university	High-quality facilities	Personal requirements catered for	Good student union	Good support/welfare	Good personal relationship with teaching staff	Centralised/convenient facilities	Good industry connections	Good accommodation	Good security	Cheap shop/bar/amenities	Tuition in small groups	Good library and library opening hours		Fair workload	Good sports facilities
37	University of Lincoln	76.30	83	5.7	5.8	5.4	5.7	5.7	5.3	6.0	5.7	5.4	5.4	5.5	5.9	6.0	5.1	5.4	5.6	5.0	5.2	5.9	5.5	5.5	5.9
38	University of Kent	76.21	108	5.8	5.7	5.7	5.7	5.8	5.8	6.1	5.6	5.2	5.2	5.5	5.6	5.8	5.0	5.3	5.8	4.3	5.2	6.1	5.5	5.5	6.0
39	University of York	76.13	114	6.1	6.1	5.8	5.6	5.9	5.9	6.1	5.1	5.6	4.4	5.6	5.8	5.7	5.0	5.4	5.5	4.3	5.8	5.7	5.5	4.8	6.1
40	University of Essex	76.08	96	5.8	5.9	5.7	5.6	5.9	5.7	6.0	5.5	5.3	5.0	5.5	5.7	5.9	4.8	5.5	5.7	4.4	5.3	6.0	5.5	5.5	5.9
41	University of Plymouth	75.77	147	5.7	5.7	5.4	5.9	5.7	5.5	5.8	5.6	5.3	5.6	5.4	5.6	5.9	5.2	5.3	5.5	5.4	5.2	6.0	5.5	4.9	5.8
42	York St John University	75.52	36	5.8	5.9	5.6	5.3	5.7	5.3	6.0	5.7	5.6	4.9	5.4	5.9	5.9	5.1	4.9	5.9	4.9	5.1	5.7	5.9	5.0	5.9
43	University of Edinburgh	75.48	227	5.8	5.6	5.4	6.0	5.5	5.9	5.7	5.7	5.3	5.5	5.3	5.2	5.7	5.2	5.2	5.3	4.9	5.2	5.8	5.3	5.9	6.1
44	Queen's University Belfast	75.38	191	5.8	5.5	5.6	5.7	5.4	5.6	5.8	5.7	5.3	5.6	5.5	5.4	5.7	5.3	5.2	5.2	4.7	5.1	6.0	5.4	6.1	5.9
45	King's College London	75.12	134	6.1	5.8	5.6	5.7	5.4	5.7	5.9	5.5	5.3	5.5	5.5	5.3	5.4	5.4	5.0	5.4	4.8	5.5	6.2	5.2	4.7	5.9
46	Nottingham Trent University	75.04	171	5.6	5.6	5.5	5.7	5.6	5.5	5.7	5.7	5.4	5.3	5.3	5.5	5.8	5.1	5.4	5.0	5.0	5.3	5.9	5.2	5.3	5.8
47	University of Bristol	74.92	261	5.9	5.7	5.7	6.2	5.7	6.0	5.9	5.5	5.4	4.3	5.5	5.5	5.2	5.5	5.5	5.4	4.4	5.1	4.8	5.3	5.5	6.3
48	University of Huddersfield	74.85	89	6.0	5.9	5.6	5.5	5.6	5.0	5.8	5.6	5.4	5.2	5.3	5.8	5.8	5.4	4.7	5.4	5.0	5.5	6.3	5.5	4.6	6.0
49	University College London	74.81	129	6.1	5.9	5.7	5.8	5.4	5.7	5.6	5.5	5.3	5.1	5.3	5.8	5.7	5.4	4.8	5.4	4.6	5.3	5.6	5.3	4.8	6.0
50	Northumbria University	74.25	132	5.5	5.5	5.4	5.7	5.6	5.3	5.8	5.6	5.3	5.4	5.3	5.4	5.7	5.3	5.0	5.4	4.9	5.1	6.2	5.3	5.3	5.8
51	University of Winchester	74.22	37	5.7	5.7	5.3	5.2	5.6	5.3	5.7	5.4	5.5	5.8	5.5	5.5	5.8	5.0	5.1	5.7	5.0	5.5	5.5	5.2	5.0	5.7
52	University of Sussex	74.22	62	5.9	5.8	5.5	5.7	5.7	5.5	6.0	5.3	5.2	4.9	5.3	5.6	5.5	4.5	5.2	5.6	4.7	5.0	6.0	5.7	5.2	5.8
53	Glasgow Caledonian University	74.13	62	5.6	5.6	5.6	5.5	5.7	5.2	5.8	5.8	5.6	4.0	5.4	5.6	5.9	5.2	5.0	5.2	4.6	5.3	6.2	5.6	5.6	6.1
54	University of Gloucestershire	74.08	63	5.7	5.8	5.5	5.6	5.7	5.0	6.1	5.7	5.4	5.4	5.3	5.7	5.2	5.1	5.3	4.7	5.2	5.9	5.5	4.8	5.7	
55	Leeds Metropolitan University	73.76	115	5.2	5.3	4.8	5.9	5.5	5.2	5.7	5.6	5.3	4.8	5.2	5.5	5.3	5.4	5.6	5.0	5.1	6.5	5.5	5.9	5.6	
56	Sheffield Hallam University	73.65	153	5.4	5.6	5.3	5.8	5.5	5.3	5.7	5.6	5.3	5.1	5.2	5.7	5.5	5.4	5.1	5.4	4.7	5.2	6.1	5.3	5.2	5.7
57	Keele University	73.50	79	5.6	5.8	5.4	5.4	6.0	5.6	6.0	5.1	5.3	5.6	5.4	5.5	5.5	4.8	5.1	5.3	4.8	5.5	4.9	5.2	4.8	5.6
58	Bournemouth University	73.32	101	5.3	5.4	5.2	5.9	5.7	5.4	5.6	5.4	5.5	5.2	5.4	5.5	5.3	5.7	5.0	5.4	4.8	5.4	5.8	5.2	5.0	5.8
59	University of Manchester	73.06	380	5.5	5.3	5.2	6.2	5.5	5.8	5.6	5.5	5.2	4.6	5.2	4.9	5.6	5.3	5.4	4.9	4.9	5.0	5.9	5.2	5.6	5.9
60	Imperial College London	72.92	164	5.9	5.5	5.7	4.8	4.8	5.8	5.3	6.0	5.3	4.3	5.1	5.2	5.9	6.1	5.2	5.5	4.4	5.1	5.9	4.4	6.0	5.8
61	Aston University	72.84	94	5.5	5.3	5.4	5.5	5.6	5.5	5.7	5.2	5.4	4.7	5.5	5.2	6.0	6.0	4.7	5.5	4.9	4.6	5.3	5.3	5.1	5.7
62	University of Glamorgan	72.78	70	5.7	5.6	5.5	5.3	5.5	5.0	5.7	5.6	5.2	4.7	5.3	5.7	5.2	5.2	5.2	4.5	5.1	5.8	5.6	5.5	5.6	
63	Royal Holloway, University of London	72.43	94	5.9	5.6	5.6	5.1	5.5	5.4	5.9	5.4	5.1	4.7	5.3	5.5	5.4	4.8	5.2	5.2	4.2	5.2	5.9	5.4	5.1	5.7
64	Manchester Metropolitan University	72.27	149	5.4	5.5	5.2	5.7	5.4	5.1	5.4	5.3	5.2	5.3	5.3	5.6	5.5	5.2	5.2	5.3	5.3	5.2	5.4	5.3	5.1	5.5
65	University of the West of England	72.17	153	5.4	5.5	5.2	5.5	5.4	5.4	5.6	5.5	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.4	5.0	5.1	5.2	4.8	5.2	6.0	5.4	5.4	5.5	
66	University of Hertfordshire	72.13	116	5.5	5.5	5.3	5.1	5.0	5.4	5.4	5.7	5.2	5.0	5.1	5.6	5.5	5.2	5.4	4.2	4.9	6.5	5.4	6.0	5.4	
67	Roehampton University	71.66	75	5.5	5.7	5.5	5.3	5.4	5.1	5.9	5.3	5.0	5.1	5.4	5.6	5.1	4.7	5.4	4.7	5.2	6.0	5.1	4.6	5.7	
68	Oxford Brookes University	71.62	177	5.6	5.6	5.5	5.5	5.4	5.1	5.5	5.4	5.2	5.1	5.2	5.5	4.9	5.2	4.9	4.6	5.0	5.5	5.3	5.2	5.7	
69	University of Chester	71.59	79	5.6	5.5	5.2	5.4	5.7	5.3	5.7	5.2	5.0	5.1	5.4	5.5	5.3	5.1	4.5	4.8	5.2	5.6	5.3	5.1	5.6	
70	University of Derby	71.14	35	5.4	5.5	5.4	5.4	5.6	5.1	5.7	4.9	5.2	5.3	5.3	5.6	5.0	5.1	5.2	4.7	5.4	5.8	4.9	4.4	5.6	
71	University of Bedfordshire	70.97	57	5.6	5.6	5.4	5.0	5.2	4.9	5.3	5.4	5.4	5.0	5.1	5.5	5.5	5.2	4.9	4.4	4.9	5.9	5.4	5.2	5.7	

the Exeter Leaders' Award for students who have taken on special challenges. "There has been a shift towards seeing the student experience as more than a degree," Kay comments. "The student experience is much broader than that, and we know that as increasing numbers of students are going into higher education, we all have a responsibility to think about how to develop them and help them to get the best out of their experiences at university, to go on to further study or the graduate workplace." Meanwhile, the three highest-ranking new universities, all of which have made it into the top 25 overall, are the University of Chichester (21st), the University of Teesside (22nd) and the University of Central Lancashire (23rd). Robin Baker, vice-chancellor of Chichester, turns to the recurring themes of strong student support and "a sense of community" to explain the success. However, he is also clear

that spending cash has played its part. "We've been putting in a lot in terms of facilities. We have a very large music cohort here and we have put a lot of money into more and better music practice rooms. We have completely upgraded our major lecture theatre and extensively refurbished the student facilities at our Bognor campus." He also links advances in the student experience ranking to a general improvement in the institution's standing. "There is a feel-good sense here. We've moved up the league tables and everything seems to be moving in the right direction, including our research assessment exercise results. The staff feel that and that gets transmitted to the students – they feel this is a place that is going forward." Other top-25 institutions that have improved their standing in this year's table include the universities of

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Leicester, Newcastle and Lancaster, which all rose by nine to ten places. Scottish and Welsh institutions scored very well, taking six of the top 15 places. For Scotland, the University of St Andrews came top (fifth overall), followed by the University of Dundee (12th) and the University of Glasgow (13th). In Wales, Aberystwyth University (eighth) led the field ahead of Swansea University (tenth) and Bangor University (15th). St Andrews came top for

institution had contributed positively and negatively to their time as a student. The results were coded and used to form a list of 21 factors, ranging from relationships with teaching staff to fair workload, cheap shops and bars, good industry connections and tuition in small groups. Each attribute was weighted, in recognition of its importance to students, by correlating it against how strongly they would recommend their university to a friend. More than 12,000 full-time undergraduates were then asked to rate their university on each of these aspects. Wes Streeting, president of the National Union of Students, said: "While some cynics may be quick to dismiss the results as 'just another league table', what makes this survey stand apart is that students themselves determine the factors

important in delivering a high-quality experience." Students' key concerns included the quality of staff and lectures and the helpfulness of staff, but also a good social life, community atmosphere and campus environment. According to the results, students think that the University of Oxford has the number-one library, Bangor University has the fairest workload, the University of Southampton and

Swansea University have the cheapest bars and shops, and students at Loughborough University and Newcastle University have the best social life. Eleanor Simmons, associate director for higher education at Opinionpanel, said: "It's fascinating to see the rise of some universities within the rankings and how others manage to consistently offer a positive experience to their students year-on-year. "What's clear is that universities are offering and students are seeking quite different types of experiences." Ben Marks, managing director of Opinionpanel, added: "We believe that the stability of the results over the past three years helps to show that the polling accurately reflects student opinion." For more details on the methodology of the survey see www.timeshigher-education.co.uk.

BY THE STUDENTS, FOR THE STUDENTS: THE SURVEY'S METHODOLOGY

Rank	University name	Overall score	Respondents	Weighting 2									1.5						1					I would recommend my university to a friend	
				High-quality staff/lectures	Helpful/interested staff	Well structured courses	Good social life	Good community atmosphere	Good extracurricular activities/societies	Good environment on campus/around university	High-quality facilities	Personal requirements catered for	Good student union	Good support/welfare	Good personal relationship with teaching staff	Centralized/convenient facilities	Good industry connections	Good accommodation	Good security	Cheap shop/bar/amenities	Tuition in small groups	Good library and library opening hour	Fair workload		Good sports facilities
72	Southampton Solent University	70.85	42	5.2	5.5	5.0	5.6	5.5	5.3	5.4	5.2	5.3	4.6	5.2	5.5	5.6	4.9	4.9	5.4	5.0	5.2	5.8	5.4	4.5	5.0
73	Staffordshire University	70.83	92	5.4	5.5	5.3	4.9	5.2	5.0	5.5	5.3	5.2	5.1	5.2	5.7	5.4	5.1	5.0	5.1	4.9	5.4	6.0	5.3	5.0	5.4
74	Bath Spa University	70.53	54	5.9	5.7	5.5	5.2	5.6	4.5	6.1	5.0	5.1	4.7	5.2	5.7	4.5	4.9	5.1	5.3	4.8	5.4	5.6	5.5	3.2	5.7
75	Brunel University	70.16	37	5.0	5.1	5.2	5.3	4.9	5.6	5.5	5.6	4.8	5.2	5.1	5.1	5.9	5.4	5.2	4.9	4.5	4.2	5.4	5.1	6.1	5.3
76	De Montfort University	70.03	72	5.4	5.4	5.4	5.3	5.1	5.0	5.2	5.3	5.1	4.9	5.1	5.4	5.4	5.3	5.2	5.0	4.2	5.0	6.2	5.1	4.8	5.3
77	University of Ulster	69.96	67	5.8	5.4	5.4	4.8	5.1	4.9	5.5	5.3	5.1	4.5	5.3	5.6	5.2	5.1	4.5	5.5	4.6	4.7	6.0	5.3	5.4	5.7
78	Coventry University	69.75	92	5.3	5.3	5.1	5.2	5.1	5.1	5.6	5.2	5.2	4.3	5.2	5.4	5.7	5.2	5.0	5.3	4.4	4.8	6.1	5.1	5.2	5.3
79	Liverpool John Moores University	69.53	118	5.4	5.4	5.1	5.3	5.1	4.8	5.3	5.2	5.1	5.0	5.0	5.3	5.1	5.1	5.2	5.4	4.8	5.0	6.0	5.2	4.7	5.4
80	University of Salford	69.40	43	5.6	5.5	5.4	5.3	4.7	4.9	5.5	5.1	5.2	5.0	5.0	5.4	5.3	5.1	4.5	4.9	4.4	5.3	5.6	5.4	5.1	5.4
81	University of Wolverhampton	69.37	84	5.3	5.4	5.0	5.2	5.2	5.0	5.4	5.4	5.1	4.8	5.2	5.5	5.3	5.0	4.9	5.1	4.6	4.8	5.8	5.2	5.2	5.3
82	Queen Mary, University of London	69.30	96	5.5	5.4	5.3	5.2	5.2	5.3	5.4	5.1	5.0	4.4	5.1	5.4	5.2	4.9	5.6	5.3	3.8	5.1	5.9	5.2	4.2	5.4
83	Kingston University	68.95	168	5.5	5.5	5.4	5.1	5.1	4.9	5.2	5.4	4.9	4.5	4.9	5.5	5.0	4.9	4.9	5.3	4.5	4.9	6.0	5.4	4.5	5.2
84	Edge Hill University	68.88	36	5.4	5.4	5.0	5.0	5.4	4.8	5.7	5.4	4.9	4.4	5.1	5.5	5.4	4.7	4.6	5.2	4.4	5.0	5.7	4.4	5.7	5.6
85	University of Bradford	68.48	40	5.4	5.3	5.3	4.8	5.0	5.0	5.2	5.1	5.0	5.0	5.3	5.5	5.5	5.2	4.3	5.2	4.9	4.6	6.0	5.2	4.8	5.3
86	University of Sunderland	68.42	52	5.3	5.3	5.2	5.3	5.0	5.1	5.5	5.0	5.1	4.3	5.0	5.5	5.0	4.9	5.1	5.4	4.1	4.9	6.0	5.3	4.7	5.3
87	London School of Economics and Political Science	68.41	73	5.2	5.1	5.3	4.8	4.7	5.2	5.1	5.2	5.1	5.0	5.0	4.9	5.8	6.3	5.1	5.2	4.8	4.9	5.9	4.6	3.6	5.5
88	Royal Veterinary College	67.81	36	6.3	6.0	5.5	5.0	5.2	5.0	5.3	5.3	4.6	4.0	5.0	4.9	4.3	5.1	5.1	5.5	3.5	4.9	5.8	4.5	4.0	5.7
89	University of Brighton	67.38	86	5.5	5.6	5.3	5.3	5.0	4.8	5.2	5.2	4.8	4.4	5.1	5.5	4.6	4.8	4.5	5.1	3.9	5.2	5.4	5.2	4.9	5.4
90	Canterbury Christ Church University	66.12	71	5.3	5.5	4.9	4.8	5.2	4.3	5.5	5.0	4.9	4.6	4.9	5.4	5.1	4.7	4.8	5.2	4.4	5.1	5.1	4.9	4.3	5.0
91	Goldsmiths, University of London	65.20	35	5.4	5.1	5.0	4.8	5.0	4.9	5.1	4.8	4.5	4.7	5.0	5.1	5.0	4.5	4.4	4.9	4.4	4.6	5.8	5.2	4.8	5.3
92	Anglia Ruskin University	65.12	58	5.2	5.2	5.0	4.6	4.7	4.6	5.1	4.7	4.7	4.8	4.7	5.4	5.0	4.6	4.6	5.3	4.8	5.0	6.0	5.1	4.4	4.9
93	Napier University	65.10	82	5.2	5.4	5.1	4.8	4.9	4.7	5.3	5.0	5.0	3.8	5.0	5.4	4.8	5.0	4.0	5.2	4.3	4.8	5.3	5.3	4.3	5.4
94	London South Bank University	64.54	64	5.2	5.1	5.0	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.7	5.1	4.9	3.8	4.6	5.5	5.4	5.1	4.8	5.6	3.9	4.6	5.6	5.4	4.9	5.0
95	City University London	64.45	56	5.4	5.0	5.4	4.8	4.8	4.5	4.9	5.0	5.1	3.9	4.9	5.0	5.0	5.6	4.3	5.0	4.0	4.3	5.1	5.1	4.2	5.3
96	University of Greenwich	63.97	86	5.2	5.4	5.2	4.3	4.6	4.2	5.3	5.1	4.8	3.9	4.8	5.4	4.7	4.7	4.6	5.0	4.0	5.1	5.7	5.1	4.3	4.9
97	Birmingham City University	63.92	60	5.4	5.3	5.3	4.8	4.8	4.2	4.9	4.8	4.9	4.3	4.7	5.5	4.4	5.0	4.7	5.0	3.8	4.6	5.8	5.1	3.5	5.0
98	Middlesex University	60.66	113	5.3	5.3	4.8	4.3	4.6	4.2	4.8	4.6	4.6	4.1	4.6	5.4	4.6	4.6	4.1	4.5	3.6	4.8	4.9	5.2	4.3	4.6
99	London Metropolitan University	59.05	78	4.9	5.1	4.9	4.3	4.2	4.4	4.1	4.5	4.4	4.1	4.4	5.0	4.8	4.4	3.7	5.2	3.7	4.8	4.9	5.2	4.4	4.1
100	University of Westminster	57.89	87	4.9	4.9	4.8	4.1	4.1	3.9	4.5	4.5	4.2	4.1	4.5	4.9	4.6	4.4	4.4	4.9	3.9	4.6	5.4	4.6	4.0	4.4
101	University of East London	52.30	54	4.3	4.5	4.2	3.7	4.0	3.8	4.4	4.0	4.0	3.6	3.9	4.9	4.0	4.3	4.5	3.5	3.8	4.3	5.7	4.7	3.0	3.7
	Total	73.54	12,098	5.7	5.6	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.4	5.7	5.5	5.3	5.0	5.3	5.5	5.5	5.2	5.1	5.4	4.7	5.2	5.8	5.3	5.2	5.7

security and performed highly on campus environment and community atmosphere.

The phrase “the student experience” has become something of a mantra for the higher education sector in recent years, and there has been a sharp increase in the number of pro vice-chancellors and other staff whose roles are dedicated to improving it.

When St Andrews created a Student Experience Office, Chris Lusk, director of student services, was confronted with the task of trying to pin down what the student experience was.

The university had been achieving high scores in student surveys, but did not want to be complacent.

“We wanted to be sure that we knew what it was that was so good about the student experience, because if we didn’t know that, we couldn’t protect it. I could see it everywhere I went, but it was like trying to define and point out what air is: it is everywhere and is something that is vital

to the oxygen of the university,” she says.

Every year, in addition to picking apart student surveys and the narratives the university asks students to send in when they graduate, Lusk’s office highlights 14 areas where there is room for improvement and visits other universities to see what they’ve achieved.

Projects have ranged from setting up a social group for the university’s “commuter” students, along with small perks for them such as cheaper coffee on campus, to turning freshers’ week, known as “orientation” at St Andrews, into a nine-day event.

“We used to do all-singing, all-dancing orientation for international students and the home students arrived two days later. Then someone said, ‘How come we teach international students to ceilidh dance? I don’t know how to ceilidh dance and I come from Blackpool.’ We decided that if we were doing it for international students, how dare we not do it for home students too.”

Lusk says students pick a university because of “something they connect with” – and that is something more than an institution’s academic prowess.

“Students tell us, ‘Of course St Andrews has excellent teaching, but we expected it to have excellent teaching’. For one student it is the fact we’ve got a beach, for another it is a club he or she is interested in, for another it’s the guarantee of a hall of residence. One student said she went round lots of open days but St Andrews was the only one she kept photographs of because it looked pretty. I think we can underestimate how important these things are for people.”

In her quest to discover more about the St Andrews experience, Lusk launched the Student Experience Week.

For seven days, a team of 50 “hijacked” half of every student society and club meeting to find out first hand from students why they came to the university, how they would describe their student experience and what they

“That is what the student experience is – it is celebrating the development of people, talents, skills and achievements that goes far beyond the academic”

thought St Andrews should look like in ten years. Several hundred students were consulted face to face, and 7,000 students and 12,000 alumni were asked for their views via email.

But the week was also designed to celebrate the student experience. A student from every country represented at the university was invited to a special event that saw guests don national costumes, meet local dignitaries and have their photograph taken by the local press.

On the final day, St Andrews students were asked to nominate someone who had made their experience of being a student better –

from academic staff to cleaners, departmental secretaries and townspeople.

Those chosen were invited to attend the grand finale, an evening celebration where students offered dance, fencing and musical performances for their guests.

“It was a chance for students to say ‘thank you for making our student experience such a good experience’,” Lusk says.

“Staff who would normally go home at five o’clock at night said they had no idea so many societies were here – the Medieval Historic Embattlement Society and the Tae Kwon Do Society were working out on the lawn together, with the Dance Society in the middle trying to do ballet. There was a wonderful atmosphere.”

“Coming in as an East End Glaswegian lassie, I look at this and think there seems to be an acceptance and a tolerance – you can be what you want to be. There isn’t a template of what a St Andrews student is. It is a very diverse community,” Lusk says.

One of the things that matters most, she believes, is that staff at all levels have a sense of pride in their students’ achievements.

“It is not just the 2:1s and the firsts. In terms of talents and skills I am stunned by these young people. I think that, to me, is what the student experience is – it is celebrating the development of people, talents, skills and achievements that goes far beyond the academic.”

Despite it being the title of her office, Lusk confesses that she is not too fond of the phrase “the student experience”.

“It is such a naff term – but I can’t come up with anything better. There is a danger it is rhetoric. I worry that in some places they are trying to reduce it to ticking boxes and define it to the extent where we squeeze the life out of it.”

“We must not use it as an empty label on things or hit people round the head with it. But at St Andrews, you can feel it and breathe it as you walk along the street.” ●