

# How satisfied are the LSE master's students with the elective course selection process?

Isha Sharma

See this project presented by the researcher: <https://youtu.be/uXYwNk2STfA>

If this project has informed your practice, let us know at [lse.changemakers@lse.ac.uk](mailto:lse.changemakers@lse.ac.uk)

This research project explored the satisfaction levels of master's students at the LSE towards the course selection process. The survey result informs the recommendations to improve the future student experience of elective course selection.

## Background

"The course selection (CS) decisions of students are among the most defining in the success of their learning," (Howorth, 2001: 28). Emphasising the importance of having a well-formulated course selection process, a study by Ramsden suggests that "opportunities to exercise responsible choice in the method and content of study is a factor encouraging a 'deep' approach to learning" (Ramsden, 1992: 81), which is further supported by the argument that if students are not provided with appropriate, sufficient and true information, they will not be able to make the best decision (Roper, 1994).

Course selection is an important event in the academic calendar of students at the LSE as well, though the process seldom begins before Orientation Week. Minimal knowledge of course content and limited understanding of its prerequisites and relevance to the job market compound the confusion experienced by students during an otherwise challenging and stressful period of transition to campus life. The process becomes even more crucial for the international students, as they come from varied educational systems and might not have been exposed to the elective course selection previously. Given the different motivations, experience and requirements to pursue elective courses, this research project tried to determine how satisfied students are with the course selection process, as well as the topmost factors that influence decision-making.

## Methodology

Prior to Covid-19, it was determined that a mixed-method approach was the best way to answer the research question. Quantitative survey results would have been coupled with qualitative data elicited from focus group discussions with students and in-depth interviews with department managers. However, on account of the disruption, the plan was changed, and a detailed survey of 34 questions was implemented. The survey was administered online via Qualtrics, and the link was shared amongst all departments, the LSESU, LSE communications team, and student WhatsApp and Facebook groups to ensure maximum outreach and participation.

Four thematic areas (sociodemographic information, student experience and satisfaction, support from academic mentor and recommendations for improvement) guide the questionnaire design and underpin the analytical framework. Descriptive statistics are used to point out interesting trends in the data and highlight issues at the forefront of student course selection. As probability sampling was not employed, the findings are not representative of departments and therefore will not be interpreted for statistical significance.

## Data analysis and findings

### I. Sociodemographic information

We received total of 201 responses between the 23<sup>rd</sup> April and 10<sup>th</sup> May 2020. 65% of the respondents were international students and 87% of the respondents had previous experience of course selection.

### II. Student experience and satisfaction

In response to the satisfaction and experience of course selection, an average of 3 out of 5 points were given to the overall experience of course selection process. However, it is interesting to know that 2.5 points were given to departments for the support provided between the admission acceptance and welcome week, which changed to 4 points for the support during welcome week. This demonstrates the dissatisfaction among students towards the support provided until welcome week. This finding is corroborated by the fact that almost 25% of respondents “strongly disagreed” that they “were prepared/ confident enough to choose the course until the welcome week”.

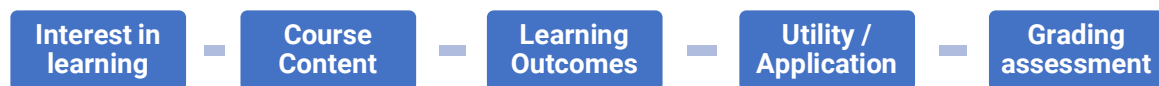
The research shows that only 47% respondents had finalised the courses before the welcome week whereas 40% of them changed their choices once the selection process started. In order to make the decision, 46% respondents spent 0-5 hours, whereas 40% dedicated 6-10 hours on the conducting the background research on their own.

The major factors that prompted dissatisfaction with the course selection process were:

- 40% responded that the “course was capped”
- 47% stated “other reasons” such as they were not familiar with the course selection process or found the platform too confusing which took time to figure out

Among the various support provided by the department, the course presentation by the professors was the most helpful tool in making the selection, as indicated by 32% of survey respondents.

The top 5 motivational factors that emerged from the research are:



### III. Support from Academic Mentor

While 78% of respondents were allocated an academic mentor before course selection began, 75% approached them for advice, which was rated 3.5 on average (out of 5) – an indication that most respondents found their mentor’s advice useful.

## Recommendations for improvement

Based on the responses and data analysis, the recommendations are formulated to strategically address the gaps at each phase of student course selection at the LSE.

Before welcome week	During welcome week	Overall
<b>LSE should start the course selection process two months prior to the welcome week</b>	LSE needs to provide information regarding the number of spots available for the students outside the capped course	There is a high need of improving the user interface of the LSE for you to support in the process
<b>LSE needs to provide better information and clear communication regarding the process to be followed</b>	LSE should ensure better coordination within and across departments to support students with a manageable timetable and preferred courses	LSE would benefit by increasing the seats or remove capping from the popular courses
<b>LSE should communicate regarding the courses withdrawn in the academic year in advance</b>	LSE should make it compulsory to provide taster sessions/ presentations by professors across all the departments	LSE needs to extend support or initiate waiting list for students who join late
<b>LSE should ensure availability of complete course syllabi and course readings, content, expected outcomes, Industry utility score, difficulty level, course and teaching quality rating to get an in-depth understanding of module</b>	LSE can plan towards providing more opportunities for students to speak with professors regarding courses (specifically the academic mentors)	LSE should plan to provide the information in multiple languages so students whose 1 <sup>st</sup> language is not English will be supported
<b>Sharing of alumni opinion and experience regarding course would be helpful</b>		The course mentor should be mandatorily allocated and made available in the first week of school across all the departments. The preference/ interest discussion/survey can be done before the welcome week
<b>Provision of course timetable before hand to get a picture of how the schedule will look like will aid towards better planning</b>		School management can draw from the results of last 5 years of TQARO score and publish a student satisfaction score for each module
<b>LSE would benefit by providing course introductory online videos soon after the acceptance of admission</b>		

## Experience shared by the students

“In terms of course selection, the process should be streamlined and we should be sent a step by step guide about how to register with information about the different sites (LSE for you etc.) in advance so we can have a look at potential courses without too much effort before we get to uni.”

“As soon as the department knows what courses are available, they should tell students whether it be before or after the welcome week. If courses are not available, they should recommend similar courses. For taking courses outside departments, they should explain the probability of acceptance and the process we should go through. The wait listing is extremely dumb. If you're going to cap it, cap it and don't let people stay for longer than one class so that those who are waiting can be sure that they can or cannot get in.”

“The course selection period was short, and the course choice was very stressful. It is conducted in a way that you feel like you are in a competition with your peers. I would suggest the whole process to start earlier and that students get more info about the course, as in what is the aim and the main topics (it was hard to figure out this info from the short abstract on the course pages).”