



JULY 2020

How do postgraduate students perceive the admissions process at LSE?

Change Makers

Hsin-Hsin Chang; Bianca Luna Fabris; Laura Good; Emilie Jetha; Marcello Pacitti; Max Quarterman

LSE

How do postgraduate students perceive the admissions process at LSE?

This project analyses how postgraduate taught students perceive the information they were given by the LSE before their degree commenced and the extent to which it meets their needs. This is important because the information that the LSE provides helps establish students' expectations of their degree, as well as influencing student retention and academic success. In particular, the project examines:

- 1. Whether there is a difference in the experiences of international, EU and local students;**
- 2. Whether there is a difference in the experiences of students with work experience and new graduates from undergraduate programmes.**

Methodology

We adopted mixed-methods for our study. We first ran focus groups to acquire qualitative feedback to inform the quantitative survey design. Two focus groups were recruited for comparison purposes. One with 8 students from the social policy department under MSc International Social and Public Policy (ISPP) programme, which has 169 students in total; the second group was composed of 7 students from MSc Data Science at the department of statistics, which has 25 students in total. We then developed our survey based on the qualitative data from the focus group. The survey was delivered to three departments: Economics, Social Policy and Statistics. The three important time frames we investigated were students' experiences - 1. During application: clarity on admission criteria, course information, workload; 2. After receiving an offer: course selection, assessment information; 3. After enrolment: course selection, the matching of expectations and satisfaction to the overall degree.

Limitations

Although we have carried out all phases of the project as per our original plans we must acknowledge that the ongoing pandemic may have had an effect on our results. The pilot focus groups were conducted in person, the survey, however, was conducted during the lockdown. Students may have experienced recollection bias and, due to a profound shift in our priorities, it may have modified the students' perception of how they perceive the information they were given by the LSE before their degree commenced.

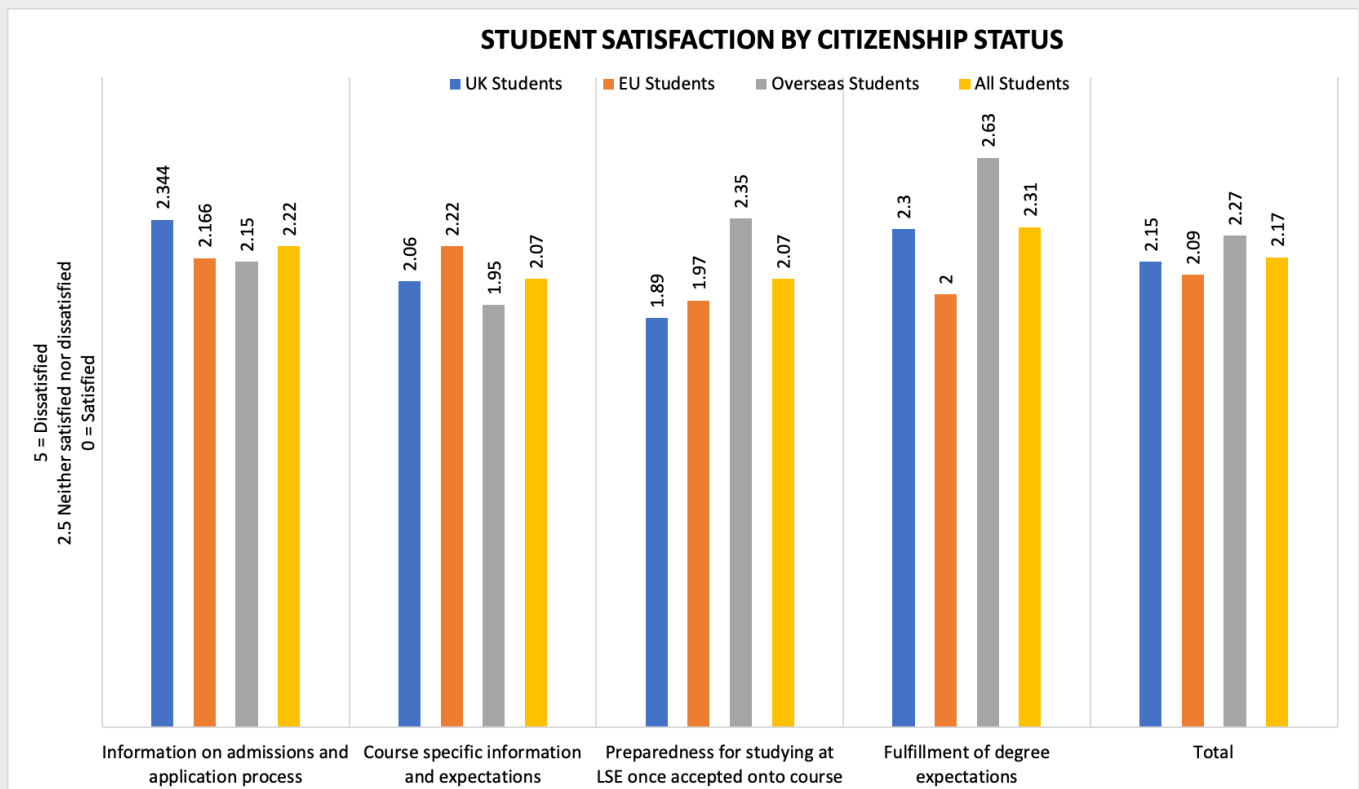
Results & Discussion

Main trends

In general, regardless of the national origin of students, their work experience or their degree, we collected more positive answers than negative ones for all the areas (during the application, after receiving the offer and after enrolment). However, the survey indicates that a significant number of students were particularly dissatisfied with some aspects of their experiences: During the application, about 20% of students were dissatisfied with the information on selection criteria and the information on the structure of the academic year. After students received their offer, more than a fifth said they didn't receive complete and clear information on the course selection process, felt somewhat unprepared to start the academic year, and didn't fully understand the practicalities of studying in the UK. The same range of students didn't find orientation week helpful. Moreover, more than a third of the respondents didn't get any personalised advice on course selection. Finally, more than 20% of the students answered that the content of their degree and the content of their courses was not what they expected. In particular, it is the fact that their degree wasn't applied enough in terms of practical skills that didn't meet their expectations.

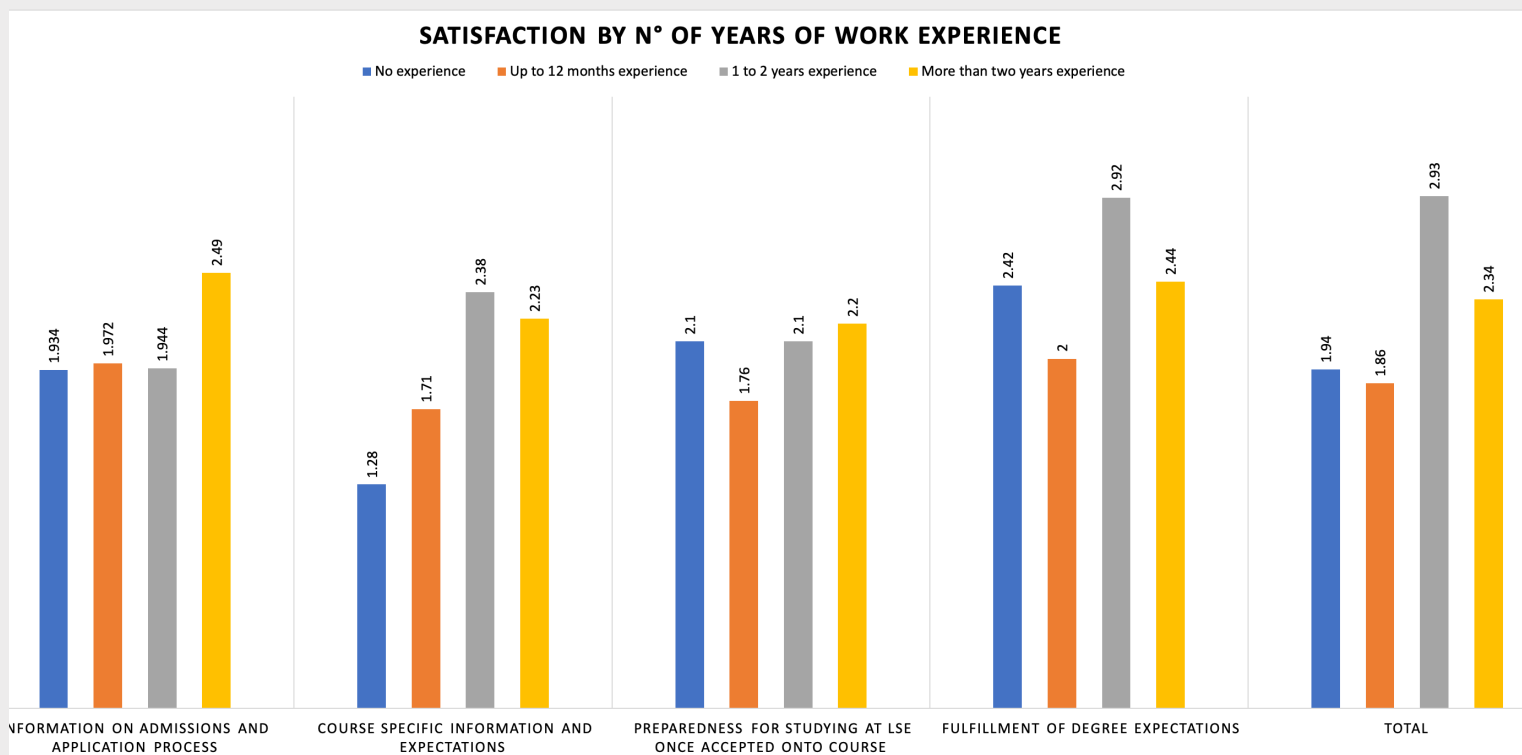
Whether there is a difference in the experience of international, EU and local students

From the questionnaire, there were no significant differences by the national origin of students in regards to satisfaction with the information provided on admissions and course-specific information prior to being enrolled. However, overseas students were significantly less satisfied with the information provided by the university on being a student at LSE and in the UK generally compared to British or European students, with this trend also replicated in terms of general reflections on whether the course and degree content matched their expectations.



Whether there is a difference in the experience of students with work experience and fresh undergraduate graduates

Despite general satisfaction among all the categories, our analysis shows that there is a clear difference between students with more than a year of work experience and students with less than a year. Students with more than a year of work experience tend to be less satisfied in all the areas of our study. This difference is particularly high when we analyse degree expectations. In this category, the majority of students that have between one and two years of work experience responded that the content of their degree and their courses is not what they expected.



<u>Student Status</u>	%	Count
UK Citizen	28.21%	11
EU Citizen	17.95%	7
Overseas	53.85%	21
<u>Full-time Status:</u>		
Full-time	89.74%	35
Part-time	10.26%	4
<u>Department:</u>		
Social Policy	82.05%	32
Statistics	15.38%	6
Economics	2.56%	1
<u>Prior Work Experience:</u>		
No	41.03%	16
Yes, up to 1 year	10.26%	4
Yes, 2 to 3 years	25.64%	10
Yes, 4 years or more	23.08%	9
<u>Total</u>	100%	39

Reccomendations

To improve satisfaction generally:

- Separate queries from the Graduate Admissions team so students are not afraid to ask questions fearing it will jeopardise their admissions chances;
- Provide more specific information on course selection after students receive their offers, including the number of recommended courses to take per term and course pathways within degrees;
- Send automated responses from the Graduate Admissions enquiry system with a timeframe estimating when a query will be responded to.

To improve satisfaction for international students:

- Provide a list of common UK university terminology, information on the structure of LSE terms, and frequently noted differences between study in the UK and other countries on the 'International students' section of the LSE website;
- Prioritise email enquiries from students in different time zones who are unable to phone or visit the LSE campus.

To improve satisfaction for students with work experience:

- Provide clearer information about prerequisites and the targeted skill level for different courses;
- Offer more courses differentiated by skill and experience level; Highlight courses and workshops that offer applied skill development.