

Overview

The following paper details responses to the Wonkhe Non-continuation survey and compares City, University of London (City) Students responses to the national data. There were 7,273 national responses from 121 providers. The national data highlights how students regard this term (Sep 20-Dec 20) as 'antisocial education.' with the lack of social interaction as part of their academic experience and wider student experience. This is in addition to negative perceptions of a student staff community, heightened loneliness and an increased risk of dropping out.

City Survey Results

The City survey results are mostly on trend with the national quantitative data bringing up issues of social contact and the poor access and quality of online teaching. 78 students responded making up roughly 1% of the national survey respondents, a relatively small sample of City students. Of the respondents 45% of those were first years providing some interesting insights into first years' sense of community, loneliness and understanding of the processes in place to complain. The sample size was too small to conduct school by school analysis and comparison. However, the themes recurring in the City data reflect the narrative seen in previous City Students' Union research- 'Entering the Year: A School-Based View of the Student Experience at City in Term.'

Question 1: I am satisfied with the academic experience so far this term

For this question City students' responses track the national data with both showing just over a quarter of students dissatisfied with their academic experience.

The qualitative data from city students follows the national trends. **Positive responses focused on:** appreciating the efforts of academic staff. **Negative responses focused on:** the lack of social interaction, technology issues and difficulty accessing material and placements not being provided.

Students, generally, appreciate the efforts of academics to deliver teaching balanced against difficulty accessing online teaching. From the qualitative responses, it is significant to note the concern regarding placements not being provided despite being needed as part of the qualification, [part of a growing national issue](#).

Question 2: I am satisfied with the wider student experience so far this term

City student satisfaction with wider student experience tracks the national data again with only 32.9% satisfied with the offering. Satisfaction was low across first, second and final year students with only 27% of first year students' respondents satisfied with the wider student experience.

The positive qualitative data focused on: the helpfulness of societies, the increase in online activity and the opportunities to provide feedback. **The negative responses focused on:** the difficulty meeting new people and peers and a general lack of opportunities and student experience

The responses from City students illustrate the impact of reduced on campus activity because of the pandemic. This is particularly significant amongst first year students with the lack of opportunities to meet peers.

Question 3: How often do you consider dropping out of university?

City again follows the national data trend with a majority of students (65.8%) not considering dropping out. A slightly larger proportion of City students consider dropping out weekly at 12.3% in comparison to 8.9% nationally. The data suggests a significant number (over 10%) of students surveyed consider dropping out either daily or weekly.

It is significant to note, out of the proportion of students feeling lonely daily or weekly, 23% of those considered dropping out of university daily or weekly. This highlights that whilst students may be feeling lonely a larger proportion many would not deem that reason to drop out. The qualitative data highlights an anxiety towards quitting and the need to complete a degree/want to graduate contrasted with a dissatisfaction of student experience.

Question 4: I feel part of a community of staff and students

The City data illustrates a slightly more positive picture amongst students towards being part of an academic community than the national data. Over half (53%) of City students feel part of a community in comparison to 50% nationally. However, it is significant that just 47% of City students do not or neither agree nor disagree. This is most clear amongst first year students with 48.5% of the first years sampled not feeling part of an academic community.

It is also significant to note this question reflects Q.21 from the National Students' Survey of which City, University of London has a historical lower than benchmark score. This highlights that whilst the impact of restrictions, as a result of the pandemic, have likely impacted a sense of community amongst students, particularly first years, it is a previously established trend.

Question 5: How often, if ever, do you feel lonely?

The City students' responses to feeling lonely present some distinct divergences from the national data. A significantly higher proportion of City students (34%) never feel lonely in comparison to only 18.6% of students nationally. An almost identical proportion of City students (18.1%) felt lonely daily in comparison to the national 18.3%. It is significant to note the relatively high levels of loneliness considering the small sample size. The City data reflects the national trends of loneliness from a lack of social contact.

Question 6: I understand my rights and entitlements as a student and how to complain if unhappy

The City data is again reflective of the national trends regarding knowledge of rights and entitlements. Significantly, over a third of students (36%) did not agree that they understood their rights or how to complain. Importantly, 36% of first year students did not agree that they understood their rights and how to complain in comparison to second and final year students who proportionally had a higher understanding.

The positive qualitative responses focused on: clear understanding of processes. **The negative qualitative responses focused on:** lack of general understanding of the process, not feeling heard and a lack of good faith in the system.

The quantitative and qualitative data suggests more could be done to increase knowledge in the process of complaining and alter perception of the process to ensure credibility. This provides space for City Students' Union to continue the education work already recognised in the data.

Question 7: Do you have any advice for your university or the students' union?

The free text advice for the university or students' union provides suggestions that relate to the themes previously mentioned. **The most frequent responses focused on:** increasing the number of activities both in person and virtually. This highlights a strong desire to increase the amount of social interaction between students both as part of their academic experience and wider student experience. Emphasis is placed by the students surveyed on the Students' Union to organise the events that provide the wider student experience.

Final comments

City students clearly feel that the academic experience is let down by a lack of social contact and difficulty accessing online teaching. The wider experience is also negatively impacted because of restrictions and subsequent lack of contact.

City Students' Union, alongside colleagues at the university, should continue to create more virtual opportunities for students to meet in both academic and social spaces. These actions should seek to address the number of students feeling lonely and subsequently considering dropping out. The City student data does not suggest an imminent 'non-continuation crisis,' however, it highlights key risk areas in student mental health and wellbeing as a result of a lack of social contact. Whilst it is important to recognise the small sample size, the trends generally fit the national picture facing students.