

The Combined Honours Student Experience: Survey Data and the Perceptions of Staff and Students

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Introduction

An analysis of our University Student Survey, which surveyed all non-final year students, showed significant differences between Single Honours ($N = 3257$) and Combined Honours ($N = 518$) students on TEF measures (Figure 1). In response to this we:

- (Step 1) Qualitatively analysed student feedback on the USS 2016
- (Step 2) Explored differences in engagement between CH and SH students on the United Kingdom Engagement Survey (UKES 2016)
- (Step 3) Sought further support for these findings from the Derby CH survey
- (Step 4) Conducted staff and student focus groups

Findings

USS 2016:

- Feedback revealed that CH students were less inclined to use interpersonal terms when referring to teaching delivery, preferring to use terms such as “Seminar” and “Lecture” rather than “Lecturer” and “Tutor”
- This tentatively suggested that our CH students experienced more difficulties in forming relationships with teaching staff

UKES 2016:

- CH students reported significantly less engagement on 7 items compared with SH students (Figure 2) (marginal significance on item 7)
- Crucially, most of these differences were interpersonal in nature, supporting the idea that CH students experience more social inhibition in group learning situations

Derby CH Survey 2017:

- “Overall Satisfaction” for CH students was lower than the equivalent measure on the NSS, though differences in wording of the questions may account for this (e.g., “University” is focus of Derby question whereas “Course” is focus of NSS question)
- Support was found for social inhibition in student feedback:
 - ❖ CH students referred to difficulties in making friends: this was attributed to less contact time and having fewer shared experiences with other students
 - ❖ It was suggested that SH students form cliques early on
 - ❖ Often these comments were textured with concerns of isolation and feelings of not belonging, and feeling forgotten about by teaching staff

Focus Groups

Staff Focus Groups:

- Preliminary analysis: suggests staff are familiar with, and recognise CH students’ concerns, though there was a sense that staff felt problems can only be addressed at the institutional level

Student Focus Group:

- Preliminary analysis: agreement that the CH experience is associated with difficulties in making and maintaining friendships; with feelings of isolation and not belonging; and feeling inhibited in group discussions

Figures

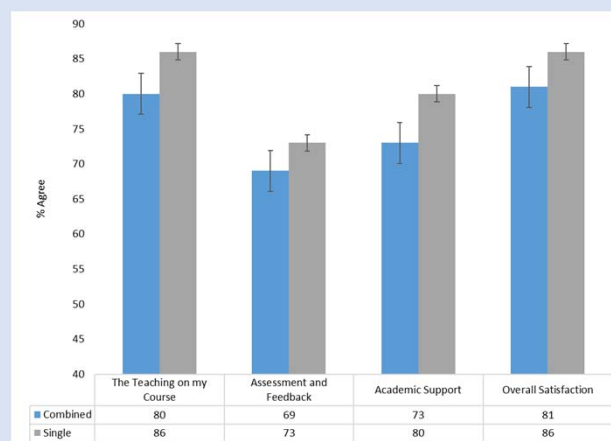


Figure 1. USS 2016 TEF Measures (% Agree)

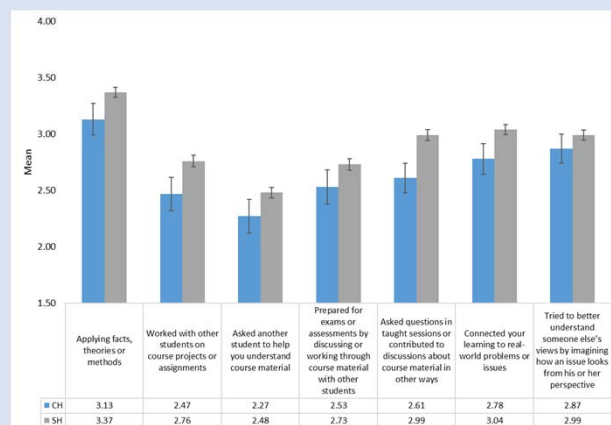


Figure 2. UKES 2016 (Mean; higher mean = more engagement)

Conclusion

CH students appear to experience more social inhibition in group learning situations; experience greater feelings of isolation and not belonging; and experience more difficulties in establishing peer/staff relationships

Future Directions:

- Design an intervention targeting CH students, with the aim of improving identified issues: e.g., belonging/isolation; encouraging friendship forming; helping staff identify CH students, etc.
- Further explore additional issues brought up in these analyses, such as CH students feeling like they have less mastery over their subject, etc.