

ORIENTATION PERIOD EVALUATION 2014: SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

1. Introduction

The School's 2014-15 Orientation Period (OP) for new students took place from Monday 29 September to Friday 03 October, having been preceded by an International Students' Welcome (ISW) on Thursday 25 and Friday 26 September.

This report provides a summary of the main points from the student feedback about these activities and covers a more detailed report attached at Annex A.

2. Summary

- Response rate:
 - 37% - 233 out of a possible 636 registered students.
 - Decrease on last year's 50% response rate (311/627 students).
- Overall satisfaction:
 - Very high - average of 95% satisfaction across all survey questions combined.
 - Increase compared to last year's average of 88%.
 - All questions showed an increase compared to last year.
- Highest level of satisfaction:
 - Helpfulness of course-specific orientation activities (Q4f), with 98% (n=213).
 - This is a change from last year, when opportunities to meet other students (Q4i) showed the highest level of satisfaction (94%).
- Most improved:
 - Opportunities to meet course staff (Q4h) was up 14% on last year to 95% (n=203).
- Weakest result:
 - Usefulness of course-specific material available before the start (Q4b) – 92% satisfied; 8% dissatisfied (n=193).
 - Pre-arrival information was one of the areas for concerns over the last two years. In 2014, the question was split to distinguish between information sent out by Registry (Q4a) and course-specific information (Q4b).
- All questions scored above 92% satisfaction, so there are no areas of serious concern. Course-specific material available before the start (Q4b) may need to be considered on a course-by-course basis.
- **Key area of concern: response rate.**

3. About the survey

The survey was targeted at all newly-registered students (MSc and research degree) and was issued via an email with a link to the online questionnaire, sent out on Monday 06 October – i.e. at the start of the first week of teaching, directly after OP week. A reminder email went out on Tuesday 14 October; and the final closing date for responses was Sunday 19 October.

Changes to the survey for 2014 were:

- Splitting 2013's Q4a ('The pre-registration information I was sent or which was made available via the internet was helpful') to differentiate between information sent out by Registry (2014 Q4a 'The pre-registration information I was sent or which was made available via the internet was helpful (e.g. accommodation, cost of living etc.)') and course-specific information (2014 Q4b 'The course-specific information I was sent or which was made available via the internet before I started was helpful (e.g. reading lists etc.)')
- Adding 'If you have answered 'Do not agree' to any of the questions, please explain why below.' to More Information.
- Adding pre-arrival information to Q5 ('If you would like to, please give up to 3 suggestions for change which you feel would improve pre-arrival information, Orientation Week or International Students' Welcome (and please make clear which of these you are referring to in your comments)')
- Rewording of Q7 provided by the Head of Communications ('Finally, the School is researching how people perceive LSHTM and its work. As a new student, we would be grateful if you could describe in a few brief sentences: (1) why you chose to study at the School, for example rather than another institution, and (2) what messages you would like to see communicated about the School as a postgraduate institution?')

4. Overall interpretation of results

The results show **very strong satisfaction levels** and generally **very low levels of dissatisfaction** for all questions. Overall satisfaction rates for the ten questions fall in the range 92% - 98% (an improvement on last year's range of 80% - 94%); and dissatisfaction rates fall in the range of 2% - 8% (the same as last year's range of 2% - 8%). **These results confirm that the School's approach to orientation and induction continues to be well-received by students.**

A total of 113 students provided written comments (See Annex A for further details):

- **Q5 - 104 responses** 'If you would like to, please give up to 3 suggestions for change which you feel would improve pre-arrival information, Orientation Week or International Students' Welcome (and please make clear which of these you are referring to in your comments)'

A common theme in suggestions for improvement was communication. Students felt that the amount of information given out both pre-arrival and during orientation was overwhelming. This was not aided by multiple emails, different formats of documentation/presentation and inconsistencies/corrections.

It was suggested that all information should be available on via the LSHTM website and/or Moodle, so it is easy to refer to before, during and after orientation. Information should be accurate and up-to-date, and process diagrams, timelines and checklists should be used to summarise (e.g. issue of CAS, admissions processes).

Issues raised in other areas (e.g. confusion over documentation for registry, the location of sessions and LSHTM facilities, processes around opening bank accounts) may be improved by easier access to accurate information.

Students also raised issues with the amount of repetition across sessions and the amount of free time between sessions.

- **Q6 - 35 responses** - 'If you would like to, please give any further comments, including on any of the items mentioned above'

Many of the responses were positive, and highlighted the welcome from staff, good atmosphere, and opportunities to meet staff and other students.

Issues raised in Q5 were elaborated on, including free time between sessions.

Issues with Registry (application tracking, queuing at the registration event, time spent waiting for documents and CAS) were also mentioned.

Suggestions for the campus tour (smaller groups, earlier in the week) were also raised.

- **Q7 - 164 responses** – 'Finally, the School is researching how people perceive LSHTM and its work. As a new student, we would be grateful if you could describe in a few brief sentences: (1) why you chose to study at the School, for example rather than another institution, and (2) what messages you would like to see communicated about the School as a postgraduate institution?'

These comments have been sent to the Head of Communications for detailed analysis, but common themes were:

- Global outlook
- Professional reputation
- Personal recommendation/link with previous institution
- Specialist postgraduate institution
- Research diversity
- London location
- Diversity of staff and students
- Networking/professional links
- Course content/reputation

Full-time and Part-time students

- Response rates were slightly higher for full-time students (37% 209/558) than part-time students (31% 24/78). This was down slightly on last year (48% and 44%).
- There was little difference in the range of satisfaction rates between modes of study (91-97% full-time; 91-100% part-time).
- Satisfaction rates were higher than last year for all questions for full-time students.
- Part-time students were less satisfied with School-wide activities (Q4e down 5%) and course content (Q4g down 3%), but more satisfied with all other areas (particularly staff contact - Q4h and Q4i up 29 and 19% respectively)

MSc and Research Degree students

- Response rates similar for MSc (37% 219/599 students) and Research Degree students (38% 14/37 students).

- While satisfaction rates were up across all questions for MSc students (92-99%), Research students' responses were more varied (75-100%).
- Drop in Research Degree students' satisfaction with the International Students Orientation (Q4c – 75%, down 14%), School-wide orientation activities (Q4e – 75%, down 4%) and course-specific orientation activities (Q4f – 85%, down 4%).
- Satisfaction rates for other questions increased, although it should be noted that pre-arrival course specific information (Q4b) was only 88%.

Actions and next steps

The following areas should be reviewed and developed, based on the student comments above:

- Response rate
- Communication methods
- Website – to contain all pre-arrival and orientation week information, as well as supporting students and managing expectation e.g. timelines for arrival, registration, bank letter with explanations.
- Session content (especially repetition) and timetabling.
- Formal registration.

Otherwise, no further specific actions are suggested. However, all relevant staff are encouraged to consider survey comments, many of which suggest small areas for potential improvement; as well as to continue the excellent work done to achieve such continuing high levels of general satisfaction.

Dissemination of results

- A full set of comments received will be circulated to Faculty Taught Course Directors after and other members of the Teaching Management Group.
- Results and comments for individual MSc courses will be distributed to MSc Course Directors (CDs), for dissemination to or discussion by Course Committees. CDs are encouraged to give course representatives visibility of results.
- Research Degrees-specific results will be distributed to members of the Research Degrees Committee (RDC), including student representatives, for discussion at the December meeting. A full set of RD comments will be circulated to Faculty Research Degrees Directors and Administrators.
- External Relations have been given student comments received under Q.7, and will consider these further.
- Students will be emailed to thank them for participating in the survey.
- Quantitative survey results plus this report and the questionnaire will be available on the web at www.lshtm.ac.uk/edu/taughtcourses/quality/opeval.html

ANNEX A

Student comments

Main points raised in Q5 and Q6

- General communication
 - The number of emails and updates/corrections made it difficult to keep track of information. All pre-arrival and orientation period information should be on the website/Moodle, to make it easy to refer back to.
 - Process diagrams, timelines and checklists should be used to summarise (e.g. issue of CAS, admissions processes).
 - Response to emails slow.
- Pre-arrival information
 - More information about accommodation needed.
 - Networking between course students should be enhanced (and not on Facebook).
- Website
 - ‘New student’ section should be revised and updated.
 - Links should take you to specific/relevant information rather than just another page.
- Registry/Registration
 - There was confusion about documents needed, copies with etc.
 - Tuition fee payments should be confirmed ASAP.
 - Queue management needs to be improved e.g. staggering queue for larger courses, registration before induction week over a few days.
 - Online registration or pre-filling information.
 - International students should be able to register early so they can open bank accounts etc.
- International Students
 - Reduce overlap with main orientation week.
 - All information presented should be on website/on Moodle/in the handbook to refer to.
 - Record the presentations for students who cannot attend.
- Orientation Week
 - Reduce repetition across sessions.
 - Comments varied about the timetabling, but it was generally felt it could be condensed to 2-3 days or half day sessions, without large gaps between sessions.
 - Student presentation should focus on student concerns.
 - Finding the different rooms/buildings was problematic and not expected - walking tour should have been earlier in the week to help and include all buildings being used.

- Make sure timetables are checked – changes, mistakes and late confirmations caused confusion.
- Staff need to be consistent with instructions.
- Part-time students
 - Clarification needed about orientation week programme.
 - Misinformation given about course requirements and module choices – mentor/specific guidance would be helpful.
- Joint courses
 - Clash with RVC first week of teaching.
 - Problems with timetabling.
- Course-specific
 - Course welcome lunch/networking.
 - More time to talk to module staff before choosing.
- General
 - Processes need to be joined up e.g. it takes time for international students to open a bank account, but TSO will not accept cash for discounted books.
 - Tours should include communal areas e.g. bike storage.
 - Provide locker access earlier.
 - Add prayer room to location map.
 - More school-wide social events.
 - Better overview of School and courses offered, current research etc.

Results for MSc courses

- MSc Students achieved a response rate of 37% (n=219), the same as the School-wide average.
- But this overall figure masks significant variations between courses:
 - The following all achieved response rates of 60% or above: Control of Infectious Diseases (n=20), Nutrition for Global Health (n=17).
 - The following all achieved response rates of 30% or below: Global Mental Health (n=3), Immunology of Infectious Diseases (n=3), One Health (n=2), Veterinary Epidemiology (n=1), Molecular Biology of Infectious Diseases (n=1), Demography & Health (n=6), Public Health in Developing Countries (n=11).
- The following courses had satisfaction of 50% or less for selected questions (please note the low number of responses for these questions):
 - Global Mental health – pre-arrival information from Registry (Q4a, n=2)
 - Immunology of Infectious Diseases – course-specific pre-arrival information (Q4b, n=2)
 - One Health – all questions (n=1 or n=2)
 - Molecular Biology of Infectious Diseases – course-specific orientation activities (Q4f, n=1)

Research Degree students

Research Degree Students achieved a response rate of 38% (n=14), lower than last year's response rate of 70% (n=37) and very slightly higher than the School-wide average of 37%.

This overall response rate masked significant differences between Faculties: PHP research students achieved a 30% response rate whereas ITD and EPH research students achieved response rates of 57% and 64% respectively.

- **Whilst the overall rate of satisfaction increased from last year (averaging 88% compared to 84%), this masks some large variations in responses to some questions (75-100%).**
- The lowest satisfaction rates also showed drops in satisfaction compared to last year: International Students Orientation (Q4c – 75%, down 14%), School-wide orientation activities (Q4e – 75%, down 4%) and course-specific orientation activities (Q4f – 85%, down 4%).
- Satisfaction rates for other questions increased, especially in relation to opportunities to meet staff (Q4h – 100%, up 18%).
- Pre-registration information, last year's key area from consideration, was improved for both information from registry (Q4a - 91%, up 17%) and course-specific (Q4b – 88%, up 14%)
- Comments included

Key areas for consideration are the response rate, International Students Orientation, School-wide orientation activities and course-specific orientation activities.