

Enhancing student engagement in PTES: A mixed methods study

Institute of
Psychiatry
at The Maudsley

KING'S
College
LONDON

University of London

Dr Martin Webber

Lecturer in Social Work

Siobhan Lynch

Researcher in Higher Education

Background

In 2010 the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) was administered in 76 UK higher education institutions with a response rate of just 14.8%. In 2011 80 UK higher education institutions participated in PTES, which enjoyed a marginally improved response rate of 17.8%. Although the demographic profile of PTES respondents is similar to postgraduate taught (PGT) students overall, small response rates clearly limit the utility of findings in enhancing learning and teaching.

Aims and objectives

The primary objective of this study was to explore student perceptions of the PTES in 2011 with the aim of developing an evidence based advertising/education programme for students and/or staff to increase response rates in health disciplines.

In particular, we aimed to explore:

- student perceptions of the PTES and the value of completing it
- the extent to which students find incentives enticing

Methods

We used a mixed methods approach, comprising a cross-sectional survey and focus groups. We first invited all PGT students from four health schools in King's College London to complete an online survey about how students perceive the PTES, its usefulness, reasons why they did or did not participate and their attitudes towards incentives. A £5 Amazon gift voucher was offered to all those who completed our survey. We then held two focus groups of PGT students from the participating schools to explore the survey findings in more depth. The study was approved by the KCL PNM ethics sub-committee (PNM/10/11-74).

Predictors of non-response to PTES 2011

Variable	OR (95%CI)	b	p
Belief in impact	0.91 (0.84-0.98)	-0.10	0.02
Age	1.02 (0.99-1.05)	0.02	0.29
Gender (male)	0.67 (0.39-1.15)	-0.40	0.15
Registration status (PT)	0.91 (0.50-1.65)	-0.10	0.75
Fee status:			
UK	0.80 (0.44-1.48)	-0.22	0.48
EU	0.33 (0.12-0.92)	-1.12	0.03

Results

355 PGT students participated in the survey. Most were female (69.5%) and full-time (64.2%). Their mean age was 29. 39.2% of the sample did not complete PTES in 2011.

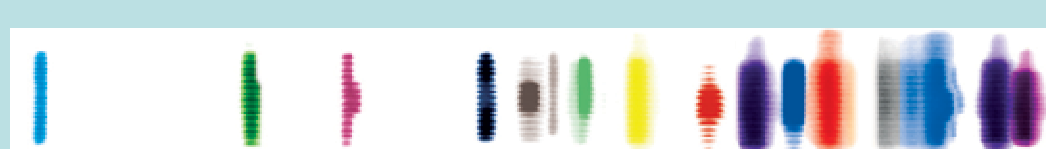
PTES responders scored higher on a measure of belief in the impact of PTES than non-responders. In contrast, there was no difference in the scores on participants' understanding of the purpose of PTES.

Belief in the impact of PTES was associated with likelihood of completion, independent of potential confounding variables (see table).

These findings were supported by qualitative responses to the questionnaire and the focus groups. Participants also stated that they would have liked more information about the purpose of PTES and its relevance to them; information about its impact on learning and teaching; assurance that action will be taken in response to their participation; and a more effective way of distributing the survey because emails are easily mislaid.

Recommendations

- Universities need to develop an internal communications strategy to disseminate the findings of PTES 2011 and the actions they have taken in response to it, in order to increase response rates to PTES 2012 and its usefulness for learning and teaching.
- Universities should explore reducing the number of circulars sent to students so that important emails about PTES are not lost and that they can find key emails when they are required.
- Individual departments should consider ways to promote participation in PTES 2012, such as allocating time for it in timetables (perhaps labelled as 'administration' to avoid concerns about coercion); providing programme leaders, administrators and personal tutors with more information about the impact of PTES to help them promote it amongst their students; or providing information about how PTES potentially impacts on each programme.



KING'S HEALTH PARTNERS

Pioneering better health for all