



Dubai Student Survey, 2022–23, results & reflections

1. Introduction

The University of Birmingham Dubai (UoBD) relies on the Dubai Student Survey (DSS) as a key route for gathering student feedback and improving the overall student experience. This annual survey comprehensively collects feedback from all UoBD students and addresses it in an open and effective way. The inaugural DSS was conducted in 2020–21 and resulted in our first campus-wide action plan. The results of the 2021–22 DSS showed considerable improvements in overall student satisfaction and highlighted a variability between programmes which created the need, and the opportunity, to produce programme specific action plans to complement the campus-wide action plan. This evolving process had a positive influence on the university’s feedback mechanisms and the overall student satisfaction, as indicated by the year-on-year increase in response rate and overall student satisfaction, respectively. This paper aims to briefly analyse and reflect on the results of the 2022–23 DSS. It is structured as follows. In section 2, we will discuss some of the changes that were made to improve the DSS for 2022–23. In sections 3 and 4, we will analyse and discuss the results of the 2022–23 DSS. Lastly, in section 5, we will share our final reflections.

2. Changes to the survey

Our self-evaluation of the 2021–22 DSS, along with [modifications introduced to the National Student Survey \(NSS\)](#), led to changes to the questions and to the response options in 2022–23. Consequently, the DSS is now more aligned with the NSS and 24 out of the 34 questions that are in the DSS are the same as or very similar to questions in the NSS. This will allow us to benchmark our performance against the United Kingdom’s (UK) higher education sector which is very important given the lack of publicly available data in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It is worth noting that the DSS seeks feedback from all students while the NSS seeks feedback only from the final year undergraduate students. The main changes for this iteration are summarised below:

- There are 32 questions that employ a four-point scale with an additional “this does not apply to me” option. For example, students were asked to rate the clarity of marking criteria used to assess their work with the following response options: 0) this does not apply to me; 1) not at all clear; 2) not very clear; 3) clear; and 4) very clear. This scale differs from the five-point scale used in the previous years, making year-to-year comparisons challenging. We adopted the new NSS nomenclature, [the positivity measure](#), which represents the proportion of respondents who gave a positive answer (the top two of the four options, e.g. “very clear” or “clear”).
- The question about overall satisfaction uses a five-point scale with an additional “this does not apply to me” option. The response options for the question “overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the programme and overall support I have received” range from 0) “this does not apply to me” to 5) “definitively agree”. This scale remains consistent with the one used in the previous years and hence makes it possible to compare the overall student satisfaction across years. It is worth



noting that this question was removed from the set of core NSS questions in England. The overall satisfaction represents the proportion of respondents who gave a positive answer (the top two of the five options, i.e. “definitely agree” or “mostly agree”).

- The NSS and the revised DSS include one open-text question aimed at capturing students’ reflections on any particularly positive or negative aspects of their experience.

3. Summary of the results of the 2022–23 DSS

The response rate improved from 36.7% in 2021–22 to 55.3% in 2022–23. This is slightly above the target of 50% that was set in 2020–21 and is hence a significant milestone. Simultaneously, the overall student satisfaction improved from 73.4% in 2021–22 to 76.8% in 2022–23. The concurrent increase in these two metrics is noteworthy and rewarding. We remain committed to collaborating with the student community to enhance response rates and to collect feedback that accurately represents the entire student body. Table 1 shows the evolution of the response rate and overall student satisfaction between 2020–21 and 2022–23.

	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23
Response rate	22.2%	36.7%	55.3%
Overall satisfaction	61.9%	73.4%	76.8%

Table 1: Evolution of the response rate and overall student satisfaction between 2020–21 and 2022–23.

The results show that students are positive about their experience at UoBD with 100% of the questions receiving a positivity measure above 72% as shown in the histogram in figure 1. The positivity measures range from 72.5% to 91.5%, with most questions receiving a positivity measure between 82.5% and 87.5% (figure 1, appendix A).

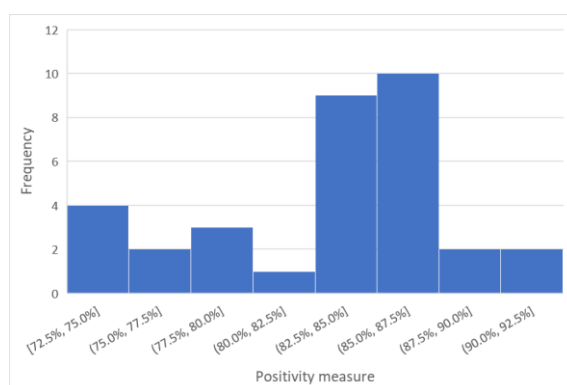


Figure 1: Histogram of the campus-wide positivity measures for all the questions in the 2022-23 DSS.

It is important to emphasize that the change in the response scale in 2022–23 means that it is only possible to have direct comparisons between 2021–22 and 2022–23 for the response rate and the overall student satisfaction. For the remaining questions, the new four-point scale, which lacks a neutral agreement option, might lead to an increase in the positivity measure that would not necessarily reflect an improved student experience. This challenge is explored further in appendix B. Additionally, some of



the questions and question groups were modified making the comparison even more challenging. Hence, table 2 shows the 2022–23 data without showing a direct comparison with the results of previous years.

The positivity measures reported in table 2 are computed at campus level. Students on 69 different programme titles completed the 2022–23 DSS (full- and part-time versions of the same programme count as two programme titles). There are 38 programmes with more than five responses, 18 out of which have an overall student satisfaction that is higher than the university’s average of 76.8%, and 20 that are lower. The histogram in figure 2 shows the overall student satisfaction for the 38 programmes that have more than five responses. The results are also shown in appendix C.

Question group	Positivity measure
Teaching on your programme	87.5%
Learning opportunities	84.6%
Assessment and feedback	81.7%
Academic support	89.2%
Organisation and management	83.9%
Learning resources	83.6%
Student voice	81.9%
Student experience, community and support	77.7%
Overall satisfaction	76.8%

Table 2: Campus-wide positivity measures across different question groups.

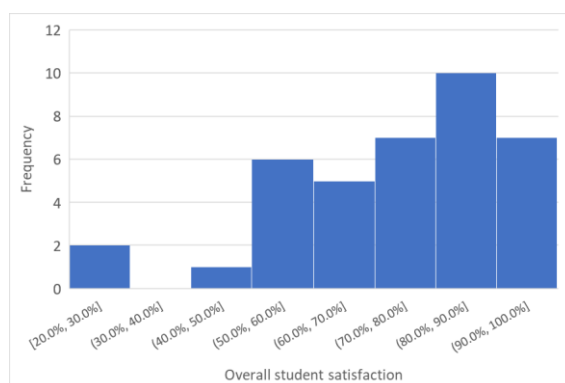


Figure 2: Histogram of the overall student satisfaction for the 38 programmes that have more than five responses.

The number of programmes on offer, the size of the student population, and the number of responses to the DSS have increased between 2020–21 and 2021–22, and again, significantly, between 2021–22 and 2022–23. We will continue adapting our response to consider these factors. For example, our action plan consisted of a single document in 2020–21, and of 17 documents in 2021–22. For 2022–23, we have made further changes, and our programme-level responses are now embedded in the annual programme review process along with the remaining student feedback mechanisms. Additionally, multiple departments were asked to, in addition to their response through the annual programme reviews, perform a deep dive and produce more comprehensive academic action plans. Furthermore, the student services departments addressed student feedback through an action plan and a “you said we did” response. These documents will be made available to students through the student staff



forums.

The data in table 3 shows that campus-wide student satisfaction in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes varies between 72.2% for first year undergraduate students and 83.2% for foundation year students. There is also a difference in the satisfaction levels of full-time and part-time postgraduate students (79.1% and 72.6%, respectively). A similar difference was observed on a comparable question, “overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course”, in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) at the university of Birmingham (Edgbaston) where the overall satisfaction was 85% for full-time students and 77% for part-time students.

Cohort	Overall satisfaction
Foundation year	83.2%
Undergraduate year 1	72.2%
Undergraduate year 2	76.8%
Undergraduate year 3	80.3%
Postgraduate full-time	79.1%
Postgraduate part-time	72.6%
All students	76.8%

Table 3: Overall student satisfaction for different cohorts.

4. Analysis of the results of the 2022–23 DSS

The discussion below is based on the campus-wide results presented above and shown in appendix A, and on the qualitative feedback extracted from the responses to the open-text question.

Teaching on your programme: In the evaluation of teaching quality, the question “how good are teaching staff at explaining things?” received the highest positivity measure in the survey at 91.5%. Students also found their programme to be intellectually stimulating (87.3%) and suitably pitched in terms of challenging them to achieve their best work (86.1%). Additionally, students were positive about teaching staff making the subject engaging (85.2%). While students were as positive in the open-text comments and commended many lecturers for their engagement, support and expertise, there were also constructive comments about the teaching style and quality. These comments were analysed through deep dive analysis and were responded to in the programme specific action plans. Students also mentioned a preference for more structured and teacher-led learning in some areas.

Learning opportunities: Regarding learning opportunities, students expressed a high level of positivity. The questions “to what extent have you had the chance to explore ideas and concepts in depth?” and “how well does your programme introduce subjects and skills in a way that builds on what you have already learned?” both received positivity measures of 86.1%. Furthermore, students reported having opportunities to bring together information and ideas across different topics to a large extent (86.4%). Students were very positive about research-informed teaching on their programme (89.3%). Moreover, the question “how well has your programme developed your knowledge and skills that you think you will need for your future?” achieved a positivity measure of 83.5%. Students also felt that their programme has the right balance of directed and independent study (82.9%). Workload continues to be an area of concern with one of the lowest positivity measures in this section (77.9%). Students have expressed different views about overall workload, with some feeling overwhelmed and others sharing positive opinions. It is worth noting that there is no clear link between student age, number of years



spent at university, and the feeling that the workload is manageable.

Assessment and feedback: Students were generally positive about the clarity of the assessments marking criteria (84.8%). The question "how well have assessments allowed you to demonstrate what you have learned?" achieved a positivity measure of 84.5%. Students were also positive about feedback helping to improve their work (82.9%). However, satisfaction with assessment feedback timing with the question "how often have you received assessment feedback on time (within 15 working days)?" was at 74.6%. While this seems relatively positive, it suggests there is still room for considerable improvement in returning feedback to students in a timely manner. Some students raised concerns about the timing, quality, and clarity of feedback in the open-text question. Students also highlighted challenges related to the timing, length, and weighting of assessments. Many students commented on the need to provide past papers and sample assessments.

Academic support: The second highest positivity measure achieved was on the question "how well have teaching staff supported your learning?" with 90.7%. Students also found it easy to contact teaching staff when needed (87.7%). This positive rating for academic support was also evident in the open-text comments where multiple students expressed satisfaction with the support provided by teaching staff during the academic year. However, it is worth noting that multiple final year students mentioned a lack of adequate support for their dissertations.

Organisation and management: On the organisation and management of the programmes, the question "how well were any changes to teaching on your programme communicated?" received a positivity measure of 87.4% and "how well organised is your programme?" received a positivity measure of 80.4%. These results suggest that the programme management is effective in terms of communication and overall organisation, which contributes to the positive learning experience of students.

Learning resources: Students reported positive satisfaction with IT resources and facilities (83.8%) as well as library resources (82.9%) in relation to how these have supported their learning. Moreover, students were happy with the ease of accessing subject specific resources (84.2%). Students' satisfaction with the learning resources was reiterated in positive open-text comments on library services. However, students were dissatisfied with the library's study environment and commented that the open space was conducive to high levels of noise and that the quiet study spaces were limited. Students also emphasised the need for a larger and more diverse collection of physical books in the library.

Student voice: Students were pleased with the feedback loop as they expressed satisfaction with their opportunities to provide feedback on their programme (86.8%), and felt that their opinions were valued by staff (86.3%). Students also felt well represented by the student representatives (82.6%) but slightly less well represented by the student leaders (78.9%). The extent to which feedback led to action had a lower positivity measure (74.9%), although, in the open-text comments, some students acknowledged that their feedback was considered and worked on.

Student experience, community, and support: Students found the support and advice provided by their personal academic tutors particularly helpful (86.3%). Students were also positive about the help and advice offered by wellbeing services (78.9%) despite some open-text comments noting a difficulty in reaching the wellbeing service. The help and advice offered by careers services received a positivity

We advance

We activate



measure of 76.0%. Students positively noted in the open-text comments the increased engagement from the careers department. However, some comments suggested that the university could further enhance career support by organising career fairs, facilitating alumni meetups for networking, and providing more opportunities for internships and placements. A career expo was organised on the 4th of May 2023 and was attended by 181 students. However, it is worth noting that by that date 97% of the survey responses were already completed which could partially explain the students' feedback. The help and advice offered by student services received a positivity measure of 74.8%. Students raised concerns related to the responsiveness and efficiency of student services, including administrative, visa, and general student support. Students expressed frustration over the difficulty of reaching out to these services, citing slow response times and a lack of clear and timely communication. A strategy for improving responsiveness of the services has been included in the student services action plan. Students' feelings of being part of a community of students and staff received the lowest positivity measure in the survey (72.5%). These results highlight the importance of personal academic tutors and wellbeing services in providing valuable support to students, while also indicating room for improvement in fostering a stronger sense of community within and across programmes. The introduction of the Dubai Winter Festival is one of the many steps that should help increase the sense of community between UoBD students and staff.

Other comments: Students raised many concerns in the open-text section related to the catering and finance services. Several students expressed concerns about the high prices in the Atrium Food Hall. Students also raised issues about the quality and freshness of the food items. Students further shared that they would like to see more variety and options in terms of food and beverage outlets on campus. This feedback was followed by the contracting of a new service provider for the food hall. Several students expressed a sense of dissatisfaction with the finance services, citing issues related to communication, responsiveness, and incorrect invoices. A recurring issue that students have raised is the absence of a dedicated finance department on campus, leading to difficulties in managing their payments and financial queries. Students highlighted the need for improved support and clearer communication regarding financial matters.

5. Final reflections

The results of the 2022–23 survey show a considerable improvement in the involvement of UoBD's students in one of the university's main feedback mechanisms, and, simultaneously, a small but non-negligible improvement in the overall student satisfaction. The latter is important given that the reported satisfaction level now represents more than half of the student body.

The question on overall satisfaction was dropped from the NSS in England but was maintained in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. The overall student satisfaction at our Dubai campus (76.8%) is similar to the average overall student satisfaction in the aforementioned countries (79.7%, 77.1%, and 75.2%, respectively).

The change from five- to four-point scale for all but one of the questions means that it is not possible to compare year-on-year results at question level. Nonetheless, it is possible to perform this comparison across institutions, and such a comparison reveals that the student satisfaction in UoDB is higher than



in the Edgbaston campus on 20 out of the 23 common quantitative questions, and slightly lower on the three questions relating to learning resources (IT, library, and subject specific resources). Similarly, the student satisfaction in UoBD is better than the average of the UK’s higher education sector for 19 out of the 23 common quantitative questions. It is worth noting that there are several questions where the student satisfaction in UoBD is considerably higher than in Edgbaston and/or in the UK in general, some examples are shown in table 4.

	University of Birmingham (Dubai)	University of Birmingham (Edgbaston)	Average of the UK’s higher education sector
How often does feedback help you to improve your work?	82.9%	58.3%	72.2%
To what extent are students’ opinions about the programme valued by staff?	86.3%	67.3%	74.4%
How clear is it that students’ feedback on the programme is acted on?	74.9%	51.7%	60.9%

Table 4: Comparison of the positivity measures for a selected set of questions between the University of Birmingham (Dubai), The University of Birmingham (Edgbaston), and the higher education sector in the UK.

The comparisons discussed above are positive despite one important difference between the DSS and the NSS, as the former seeks input from all students and the latter seeks input from final year undergraduate students only. As shown in table 3, at UoBD, third year undergraduate students have a higher satisfaction rate (80.3%) than the campus-wide average (76.8%).

Finally, given the size of our current and ever-growing student community, and the increase in the number of programmes and in the response rate, we have made a substantial effort to integrate the DSS in our annual review processes. The integration is systematic, and resulted in, in addition to this document, more than 30 DSS action plans embedded in annual programme reviews, multiple additional academic deep dives, and one action plan from the student services departments. We hope that this effort will lead to a continued improvement of student satisfaction, and equally importantly, the continued trust of our students in our feedback mechanisms, and in their ability to influence their university experience.

6th of October 2023

Olivia Goncalves, Senior Tutor, University of Birmingham Dubai
Dr Mohamad Zalzale, Head of Education, University of Birmingham Dubai



Appendix A. Results of the 2022–23 Dubai Student Survey, University of Birmingham Dubai. The positivity and overall satisfaction measures are computed at campus level.

Question	Positivity measure
How good are teaching staff at explaining things?	91.5%
How often do teaching staff make the subject engaging?	85.2%
How often is the programme intellectually stimulating?	87.3%
How often does your programme challenge you to achieve your best work?	86.1%
To what extent have you had the chance to explore ideas and concepts in depth?	86.1%
How well does your programme introduce subjects and skills in a way that builds on what you have already learned?	86.1%
To what extent have you had the chance to bring together information and ideas from different topics?	86.4%
To what extent is teaching on your programme informed by current research?	89.3%
How manageable is the workload on your programme?	77.9%
To what extent does your programme have the right balance of directed and independent study?	82.9%
How well has your programme developed your knowledge and skills that you think you will need for your future?	83.5%
How clear were the marking criteria used to assess your work?	84.8%
How well have assessments allowed you to demonstrate what you have learned?	84.5%
How often have you received assessment feedback on time (within 15 working days)?	74.6%
How often does feedback help you to improve your work?	82.9%
How easy was it to contact teaching staff when you needed to?	87.7%
How well have teaching staff supported your learning?	90.7%
How well organised is your programme?	80.4%
How well were any changes to teaching on your programme communicated?	87.4%
How well have the IT resources and facilities supported your learning?	83.8%
How well have the library resources (e.g., books, online services and learning spaces) supported your learning?	82.9%
How easy is it to access subject specific resources (e.g., equipment, facilities, software) when you need them?	84.2%
To what extent do you get the right opportunities to give feedback on your programme?	86.8%
To what extent are students' opinions about the programme valued by staff?	86.3%
How clear is it that students' feedback on the programme is acted on?	74.9%
How well do the student leaders represent students' interests?	78.9%
How well do the student representatives represent students' academic interests?	82.6%
To what extent do you feel part of a community of students and staff?	72.5%
When needed, how helpful was the information and advice offered by your personal academic tutor?	86.3%
When needed, how helpful was the information and advice offered by wellbeing services?	78.9%
When needed, how helpful was the information and advice offered by careers services?	76.0%
When needed, how helpful was the information and advice offered by student services?	74.8%
Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the programme and overall support I have received.	76.8%



Appendix B. On the challenges of comparing 2022–23 and 2021–22 results.

There are several reasons why it is not possible to meaningfully compare results between 2021–22 and 2022–23 for most of the questions even when they appear to be similar.

First, the questions are worded differently. For example, the question that seeks to quantify the ability of academic staff to explain things changed from “the lecturers on my programme were good at explaining things” to “how good are teaching staff at explaining things?”. The corresponding response options also changed with, for example, the most positive response being “strongly agree” in 2021–22 and “very good” in 2022–23. More importantly, the number of response options was reduced from five in 2021–22 to four in 2022–23. This was achieved by removing the middle option that allowed students to “neither agree nor disagree”. The changes are illustrated in figure B.1.

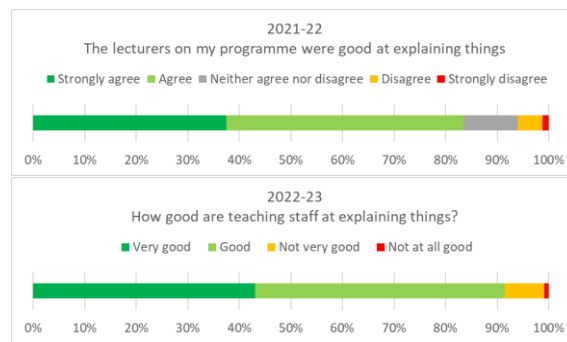


Figure B.1: Illustration of the changes in the question, response options, and students’ responses between 2021–22 and 2022–23 for the question that seeks to quantify the ability of academic staff to explain things.

It is worth noting that the positivity measure is computed by calculating the proportion of respondents who selected one of the two most positive options, regardless of whether there are four or five available options. Hence, the removal of the middle option is expected to artificially inflate the positivity measure. Table B.1 shows the positivity measure (the proportion of respondents who selected one of the two most positive options), the neutrality measure (the proportion of respondents who selected the middle neutral option, when available), and the negativity measure (the proportion of respondents who selected one of the two least positive options) for 2021–22 and 2022–23. The data shows an increase of the positivity measure from 83.5% to 91.5% and of the negativity measure from 6.0% to 8.5%. This suggests that the increase in the positivity measure cannot be solely attributed to an increase in student satisfaction and must be at least partially attributed to changes in the response options of the survey.

	Positivity measure	Neutrality measure	Negativity measure
2021–22	83.5%	10.5%	6.0%
2022–23	91.5%	Not available	8.5%

Table B.1: Comparison of the positivity, neutrality, and negativity measures between 2021–22 and 2022–23 for the question that seeks to quantify the ability of academic staff to explain things.

The differences in the response options also explains, at least partially, why the average of the positivity measures for the first 32 questions shown in appendix A is 83.3%, higher than the overall satisfaction rate which is 76.8%.



Appendix C. Results of the 2022–23 Dubai Student Survey, University of Birmingham Dubai. The overall satisfaction is computed at programme level and is only shown for programmes with more than five responses. The results are shown in alphabetical order.

Programme	Overall satisfaction
BEng Mechanical Eng FT (Dubai)	84.6%
BIA Engin Phys Sci 43m Jan Dub	71.4%
BIA Engin Phys Sci 4Yr (Dubai)	93.8%
BIA Soc Sci Bus La 43M Jan Dub	87.5%
BIA Soc Sci Bus Law 4Yr (Dubai)	79.2%
BSc Account + Fin (Dubai) FT	84.2%
BSc Art Int + Com Sci FT Dubai	50.0%
BSc Biomedical Science FT Dub	57.1%
BSc Bus Man w Econo (Dubai) FT	55.6%
BSc Bus Man w Finan (Dubai) FT	84.6%
BSc Bus Man w Mark Y Ind Dub	66.7%
BSc Bus Man w Market Dubai	81.8%
BSc Business Manage FT (Dubai)	100.0%
BSc Computer Sci FT (Dubai)	75.0%
BSc Economics FT (Dubai)	56.0%
BSc Money Bank + Fin (Dub) FT	84.2%
BSc Psychology (Dubai)	66.7%
Fdn Med, Life and Geos (Dubai)	78.9%
LLM (Intern Comm Law) FT (Dub)	71.4%
LLM (Intern Comm Law) PT (Dub)	85.7%
MA Education (Leader) PT Dubai	71.4%
Master of Public Health Dub FT	57.1%
MEng Comp Sci Sof En FT (Dub)	63.6%
MSc Art Int + Comp Sc FT (Dub)	55.6%
MSc Art Int + Comp Sc PT (Dub)	20.0%
MSc Bioinformatics FT (Dubai)	25.0%
MSc Computer Science FT (Dubai)	100.0%
MSc Constructio Man FT (Dubai)	66.7%
MSc Financial Managem FT (Dub)	92.3%
MSc Financial Managem PT (Dub)	100.0%
MSc Human Res Manag FT (Dubai)	100.0%
MSc Intern Business FT (Dubai)	77.8%
MSc Intern Business PT (Dubai)	60.0%
MSc Urban Planning FT Dub Blen	92.9%
MSc Urban Planning PT Dub Blen	90.0%
PGCE (Int) (PGCEi) Dubai PT	80.8%
PGCE Prim Educ FT w iQTS (Dub)	84.2%
PGCert Ed (Inc&Sp Ed Ne) Dub	70.0%