Summary: Lund University survey of new students - results from 2014 and 2015

In the autumn semester 2014, a university-wide survey of new students at Lund University was conducted for the first time. In an attempt to establish the survey as part of the University’s recurrent follow-up work, the process was repeated in autumn 2015. Pursuant to a decision in the central Education Board, the survey is to be conducted every third year from then on. This means that the next survey of new students will be carried out in autumn 2018.

The survey of new students is addressed to students who are enrolled for studies at Lund University for the first time and focuses on who the new students are, why they have chosen to study at Lund University and what expectations they have of their studies. Students at the Master’s level who have never previously studied in Lund are also included in the selection group. This means that new students also comprise incoming international students who have arrived in Lund to study on a Master’s programme.

The present report illustrates the survey of new students with two aims in mind. Firstly, it aims to report on the background, implementation and establishment of a university-wide survey of new students. Secondly, the report aims to present the results of the surveys conducted in 2014 and 2015.

The new students’ survey originated from the Trackit project, a cooperation between higher education institutions in 32 European countries and conducted within the framework of the European University Association (EUA). As part of its collaboration in Trackit, Lund University carried out an inventory of how students are followed up with regard to their path to Lund University, their studies here and how they look back on their education once they have entered working life. The inventory drew attention to major differences between faculties in follow-up work. Against this background, it was proposed that Lund University should strive to set a minimum standard of follow-up which was to apply to the whole University. As part of this ambition, a university-wide survey of new students was to be established.

The task of developing a survey of new students was formulated by the Education Board and implemented by Quality and Evaluation, in collaboration with the faculties and student unions. The survey is administrated centrally by Quality and Evaluation, which is responsible for sending out the questionnaire, constructing databases and producing brief compilations of survey results. In addition, the data files are passed on to the faculties, enabling further analysis. The data files will be gradually added to as
the survey of new students is repeated, and the files will thereby expand to contain more and more survey years. The data enables several different comparisons and analyses both within and between faculties, as well as over time.

The process of establishing a university-wide survey of new students has generated several important experiences and lessons. Against this background, some future challenges have also been identified:

- If the data is to contribute to the faculties’ quality assurance work, it is important that the material be disseminated internally so as to reach the relevant units within the faculty. A central challenge therefore concerns the faculties’ work with the database and their opportunities to disseminate the results within the organisation.
- The university-wide survey of new students must be coordinated with other new student surveys conducted at Lund University. Otherwise, there is a risk that the same group of students will unwittingly be burdened with several similar surveys addressed to new students.
- For the legitimacy and usability of the survey of new students, the significance of working actively to obtain a good response rate must be underlined. The faculties and student unions have a crucial role to play in this work.
- To enable comparisons over time of the survey results, the questions and multiple choice answers must, as far as possible, be formulated in the same way from one survey to the next.

Both the 2014 and the 2015 surveys were sent to around 7000 new students at Lund University and were completed by over 2500 of them on both occasions. The rate of response amounted to 36% in 2014 and to 37% in 2015.

In the response group as a whole, almost six out of ten new students are women. The majority are enrolled on a degree programme (81%) and just under one in five respondents were studying freestanding courses. Approximately one in four respondents was an incoming student who had arrived in Sweden for the purpose of studying at university (27%). One in three incoming students was paying tuition fees to study in Lund (33%). Almost seven out of ten new students have at least one parent with higher education (68%). Just over one in ten new Swedish students has a first language other than Swedish (11%).

The students who took part in the survey were asked to state which information channels were important for them in getting an idea of Lund University at the time of their application. Among the information channels the students were invited to consider, the Lund University website was the one deemed most significant by most students. In particular, the website was of great significance to the incoming international students. Family, friends and personal contacts were also very important to new students in getting an impression of Lund University. However, different groups of students have personal networks of varying impact. For example, almost seven out of ten students with at least one university-educated parent state that family, friends and personal contacts were important information channels (68%). This applies to around half the students from homes with no higher education tradition (53%). Furthermore, Swedish students with a first language other than Swedish reported fewer opportunities to obtain information via their families, friends and personal contacts (56%) than Swedish students with Swedish as their first language (70%). Meanwhile, Swedish students with a first language other than Swedish report a higher degree of significance for formal information channels. These include the possibility of visiting Lund
University, education fairs and contacts with staff at Lund University or another educational institution.

The survey of new students includes a question on why the new students chose to study in Lund. Eight out of ten new students point out the great significance of Lund’s reputation as a student city; this applies both to Swedish and international students. A large proportion of the incoming students also state the significance of Lund University’s place in rankings of the best universities (77%) and its international study environment (84%). The Swedish students also underline the significance of the rankings (68%). In addition, for many within the group of Swedish students, it is important to get their degree from Lund University (69%).

Almost all the students emphasise the significance of the opportunity within their studies to acquire learning and specialise within their areas of interest. Obtaining an academic degree and strengthening one’s future opportunities on the labour market are also important factors for almost all new students. Significantly more students at the Master’s level than at the Bachelor’s level state the importance of their studies offering opportunities for future research. Within the Faculty of Science, the new students at the Bachelor’s level underline research opportunities to a significantly higher degree than Bachelor’s level students in the other faculties.

In general, the students are most worried about how difficult the studies are and their own ability to succeed in them. Considering the entire group, nearly half (48%) of the new students state that they are worried about the degree of difficulty of the studies and about their own study technique (47%). In general, more women than men worry. Those who tend to worry most are women from homes with no tradition of academic education, whereas men who have at least one university-educated parent appear to be the least worried group. The students in the Faculty of Social Sciences report a higher degree of worry than others at the thought of reading and understanding the course literature. The social science students also report a higher degree of worry at the prospect of writing academic texts.

A few weeks into the semester, the majority of the students report that they feel the studies they have begun are right for them. The most convinced students are those in the Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts, the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Law. Within the School of Economics and Management, the Faculties of Humanities and Theology, the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Social Sciences, as well the University’s specialised centres, one in five students or more state that they are uncertain about their choice of studies.

Considering the entire student group, the majority of new students are fairly (55%) or highly (37%) motivated about their studies. Fewer than one in ten (8%) can be described as unmotivated. The least motivated appear to be those students who feel, a few weeks into their studies, that the programme they are on is not right for them. Among these, as many as one in four students state that they feel unmotivated.

The vast majority of the new students of 2014 and 2015 state that their accommodation arrangements were complete at the time of responding to the survey (95%). This applies to a somewhat higher degree to the incoming international students than to the new Swedish students. Meanwhile, it can be noted that around thirty of the students who arrived in Lund from another country had still not managed to arrange their accommodation a few weeks into their first semester at Lund University.