

Looking good on paper

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Why should anyone be surprised by the efforts at [London Metropolitan University](#) to encourage students to provide good National Student Survey ratings ("Probe ordered into 'manipulation'", 28 February)? This is just a rather unsubtle form of a widespread practice. Rumours have been rife, for example, of similar and successful practices at an institution at the other end of the UK.

Other practices, for example, include institutions adopting the NSS questions in the first and second years as a means of identifying issues that can be used to get better scores in the final year. This is irrespective of, or at the price of, any real improvement in the student learning experience. The concern is with league position, despite the meaninglessness of the tables. Improvement is ignored in most institutions, not least because the survey's generic questions suit no specific context, and the survey is a hopelessly inadequate improvement tool.

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