



Thematic Subject Review

March 2026



This document is available
in English and Welsh

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About Thematic Subject Review

This is a summary report of the Thematic Subject Review (TSR) commissioned by Medr, the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research, and conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The TSR reviewed subjects across a number of institutions that required follow-up for three or more years based on low National Student Survey (NSS) satisfaction scores.

The subjects reviewed sit within Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH) subject areas:

- CAH 07 Physical sciences
- CAH 11 Computing
- CAH 25 Design, and creative and performing arts.

The TSR process was designed to be rigorous, proportionate and provide assurances that matter to students on academic standards, student outcomes and the academic experience. The outcomes of TSR do not result in formal judgements. Based on the findings of the TSR, QAA made recommendations for action on how the institution can best address low student satisfaction, identified areas of ongoing development, and identified features of good practice as commendations. Based on the findings across the different TSRs, the review team also made recommendations for Medr's consideration which are included in this report.

The outputs of TSR were:

- a confidential report tailored to each institution, shared only with the institution and Medr
- the thematic summary report identifying themes and recommendations across all of the subjects considered.

The TSR appointed a team of four reviewers. Each institutional review was conducted by three of the four reviewers, selected on the basis of subject specialism. The student reviewer participated in all reviews.

- Professor Shushma Patel (subject specialist, Computing)
- Dr Ivan Garcia (subject specialist, Design, and creative and performing arts)
- Dr Scott Cameron (subject specialist, Physical sciences)
- Mr Rory O'Neill (student reviewer).

QAA reviews are evidence-based processes. The TSR took the form of a desk-based analysis of submitted evidence and a one-day onsite visit by the review team to each participating institution. The review visits took place during March 2026 where the review team met with senior, academic, professional support staff and students.

The subjects under review were considered in line with reference points appropriate to the regulation of higher education institutions. Some reference points will be UK-wide, such as the UK Quality Code, and others will be specific to the Welsh sector.

Further details concerning the relevant baseline requirements for academic standards and quality can be found in the funding body guidance.¹

¹ [Quality Assessment Framework for Wales](#) (also available in [Welsh](#))

Recommendations for institutional and cross-sector support

The TSR identified ten recommendations for the provision of institutional and cross-sector support for subject areas that are persistently under threshold. The first five recommendations are specifically for consideration by Medr. The remaining five recommendations are for broader consideration by the sector, in conjunction with Medr, and part of that that consideration should aim to identify the most appropriate body or bodies to make progress, including use of existing networks and forums.

Medr-specific

- Clarify the primary purpose, or purposes, of follow-up action plans, align the action plan templates directly to the purpose(s), and, for the purposes of consistency, provide clarity to institutions regarding the level of detail and data required along with setting time limits and the consequences of not meeting these (paragraph 27).
- Consider whether the 5-point Likert scale is the most appropriate tool for measuring overall satisfaction and consider addressing this matter with funders and regulators in other nations (paragraph 28).
- Consider whether the continuation of follow-up action plans is appropriate for subjects that are consistently close to the 70% overall satisfaction threshold, but with consistently above benchmark scores in NSS themes (paragraph 29).
- Provide clarity to institutions about whether all courses in a CAH3 group which is below the overall satisfaction threshold are included in the action plans or only those courses that have brought down the satisfaction measure to below threshold (paragraph 32).
- Within Medr action plan templates, include a specific section for institutions to critically evaluate and report on the previous year's action plan, to include actions completed and/or rolled forward and, importantly, the impact of these actions on student satisfaction or perception (paragraph 33).

Cross-sector

- Explore opportunities for institutions to share practice on the impact of academic staff resources on student satisfaction through appropriate sectoral forums (paragraph 4).
- Consider how to assist institutions in predicting and responding to areas of expected growth (paragraph 6).
- Consider the formation of national subject groups for subjects that remain persistently below benchmark in order to share practice and experience, and formulate strategies to improve student satisfaction (paragraph 17).
- Consider the sharing of practice to increase active student engagement with formal feedback mechanisms (paragraph 22).
- Consider how to support institutions in sharing of practice and/or provision of external input to assist in dealing with challenging financial climates particularly in relation to high-cost courses (paragraph 38).

Key considerations for the sector

The TSR identified four different areas impacting student satisfaction which were observed in more than one institution in the sample. These may be reflective of common issues that all institutions may experience and therefore institutions should be cognisant of their impact on student satisfaction.

- **Staff disruption:** The impact of short notice staff absences or vacancies on student satisfaction can take several years to recover from. Recommendations were made to a number of institutions in the sample to develop and embed robust contingency arrangements to minimise the disruption to students' learning experiences arising from staff departures or extended absences, and that any in-year course changes (as a result of staff changes) are accompanied by adequate communication and support for students (paragraph 3).
- **Timetabling:** Students in all institutions reported that large gaps between learning activities during the student day has led to non-attendance and lack of engagement by some students, particularly commuter students and those with other commitments. Students commented that these absences and lack of engagement have had a resultant (negative) impact on group work and group assessment, which they perceived as unfair, particularly where the make-up of the groups was pre-determined by the course team (paragraph 11). Institutions may wish to consider this issue in the light of their own timetabling arrangements and assessment strategies.
- **Student engagement with external examiners:** Within the TSR sample there was some evidence of students meeting with external examiners, but this was generally restricted to final year presentation of work as opposed to formal engagement to discuss the student experience. A recommendation was made to all institutions in the TSR to introduce a formal opportunity for students to meet with external examiners, as part of the annual cycle, to strengthen student engagement with external quality processes and enable external examiner evidence to contribute more directly to the enhancement of the student experience (paragraph 23).
- **Capital investment and recurrent budgets:** In the sample reviewed the resolution of some of the drivers of low satisfaction required capital investment and/or increases in recurrent staff budgets, but these resources were either not made available or did not come forward quickly enough to impact positively on student satisfaction. It is difficult to see how student satisfaction in these subjects will improve without the required level of investment. Institutions should ensure that appropriate resources and infrastructure are in place to support a positive student experience as part of their decisions on what provision to offer (paragraphs 9, 36, 37).

About this report

Under the TSR, there were nine areas of consideration, which have been grouped under four headings:

Student satisfaction

- Drivers/causes of low learner satisfaction
- Themes that have continued over the years where the subjects have been in follow-up
- Any common themes across the subject areas
- What has been working well.

Engagement with students in analysing the student experience and NSS outcomes

- The extent to which institutions have worked with students, analysed NSS outcomes and used other student voice mechanisms to accurately identify the reasons for persistent low levels of satisfaction.

Efficacy of subject action plans (Medr and institution)

- The adequacy and rigour of the action plans institutions have put in place, whether the actions identified have been/are appropriate to bring about the necessary improvements, and any significant gaps in action plans.

Institutional governance and management of the quality of the student experience

- Steps, other than NSS and student voice analysis, that institutions have taken to evaluate whether the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of students
- The effectiveness of senior leaders' and governors' scrutiny of student satisfaction in these subjects, and the extent to which they have challenged underperformance and identified the underlying reasons for low student satisfaction
- Whether there is evidence to indicate that there may be systemic weaknesses in the institution's management of the quality of the student experience.

Summary of review outcomes

Student satisfaction

Drivers of low learner satisfaction

Staffing

1. From the institutions and subjects reviewed, academic staff are the single most impactful factor on student satisfaction. Other areas of the student experience may be excellent, for example learning resources, professional services, and graduate employment, but if there are capacity or capability issues in respect of academic course teams, this impacts on responses in all NSS themes and questions, except possibly learning resources.

2. All subjects and all institutions in this TSR have faced multiple staff vacancies and/or prolonged staff absences which impacted the student experience across all years of study. The institutions aimed to address this in the short-term through redeployment of staff from similar cognate subject areas and temporary appointments. However, in all cases, abnormally high workloads were experienced by the extant staff during these periods. In one subject, a common first year across several programmes was implemented as part of a longer-term solution to ongoing staff shortages. In a small number of cases, individual staff performance was cited by both students and institutions as an additional and simultaneous factor impacting negatively on the student experience. In all subject areas students commented on the variability of staff engagement or performance across different modules.

3. The review team noted that multiple staff vacancies or absences can occur at any time and at short notice, and that recovery can take several years, particularly in terms of student satisfaction and the resultant NSS scores. The review team found examples of where the staffing situation is being successfully managed through a mix of changed line management arrangements, on-boarding of new staff, and streamlining of programmes. In these cases, students spoke with clarity and enthusiasm about the improvements they were experiencing as a result of the actions taken to address the staffing situation. It is anticipated that when these students complete the NSS the scores will improve. The review teams made a recommendation to most of the institutions participating in TSR to develop and embed robust contingency arrangements to minimise the disruption to students' learning experiences arising from staff departures or extended absences, and that any in-year course changes (as a result of staff changes) are accompanied by adequate communication and support for students.

4. Academic staff resources and the direct link to student satisfaction may be an area where institutions can share practice either internally, or externally through sectoral groups such as Universities Human Resources (UHR), the Association of Higher Education Professionals (AHEP) or possibly through mechanisms that Medr could facilitate. The review team **recommends** that the sector explores opportunities for institutions to share practice on the impact of academic staff resources on student satisfaction through appropriate sectoral forums.

Discipline-specific staffing considerations

5. In respect of staff recruitment, **Computing** courses experienced an unprecedented set of issues simultaneously. The start of the Covid-19 pandemic coincided with the national growth in Computing applications through UCAS^{2,3}, and higher education institutions were trying to expand their provision to meet the demand but were competing for a finite resource in terms of subject matter experts. Where institutions were successful in securing new staff, either from the UK or internationally, campus lockdowns meant that staff induction, observation or mentoring was not conducted face to face. As new staff were teaching on-line during the pandemic, a number of differences in relation to teaching, learning and assessment practices by new staff became apparent only when campuses started to re-open. Institutions responded appropriately to these issues as they emerged and some have taken additional action to help future-proof themselves, for example, through increasing the number of Graduate Teaching Assistants they employ and train before appointing to permanent teaching positions.

6. Horizon scanning for future growth areas either due to increasing student demand, or in line with Welsh Government priorities, may be an area in which relevant sectoral groups or networks can assist institutions to build appropriate capacity where required. The review team **recommends** that the sector considers how to assist institutions in predicting and responding to areas of expected growth.

7. Conversely, **Design, and creative and performing arts** are in a very different situation compared to Computing with a reported decline in UCAS applications⁴. A key issue for institutions is the ability to secure and maintain an appropriate breadth of subject matter experts to deliver the diverse range of knowledge and skills expected of graduates in these subject areas.

8. **Physical sciences** was considered in the TSR in one institution only and therefore cross-institution comparisons cannot be made. However, this subject also experienced staff absences and vacancies, and faced disruption due to institutional restructures, which impacted on both staff and students.

Learning resources

9. Learning resources and access to facilities has impacted student satisfaction across all participating institutions to a greater or lesser extent. The issues for students include: intermittent problems accessing on-campus subject-specific resources outside of standard teaching hours, competition for and bureaucratic obstacles to accessing resources managed by a different subject area, and a lack of access to specialist hardware and software both during and post the Covid-19 pandemic. Learning resources in Design, and creative and performing arts, are a recurrent theme with students and external examiners repeatedly reporting a lack of

2 [UK 18-year-olds make record number of applications for computing courses](#) | UCAS

3 [What lies behind the astonishing rise in Computing?](#)

4 [2026 cycle applicant figures – 14 January deadline](#) | UCAS

access to industry standard equipment and software, insufficient or inappropriate learning spaces and broken equipment leading to insufficient development of industry expected skills. These are generally issues that require capital investment and, while there has been some investment in appropriate resources, this has not been at the level or pace necessary to improve student satisfaction.

Programme coherence

10. Programme coherence was also noted as a driver of low student satisfaction and is in the most part due to the use of shared modules across different programmes. Students repeatedly reported issues of overlap of content with other modules or misconceptions on the part of academic staff about the pre-existing knowledge and skills of students from different pathways, leading to some students feeling inadequately prepared for specific modules. However, in some subject areas the shared modules were fully embraced by students who reported enjoying the different perspectives and skill sets that students from other programmes brought to their learning.

Timetabling

11. The impact of timetabling was another issue raised frequently by students during the TSR. The introduction of a new timetabling system in one institution resulted in significant timetabling errors and issues which significantly impacted on NSS scores in the year affected. However, students in all institutions reported that large gaps between learning activities during the student day has led to non-attendance and lack of engagement by some students, particularly commuter students and those with other commitments. Students felt that these absences and lack of engagement has had a resultant (negative) impact on group work and group assessment, which they perceived as unfair, particularly where the make-up of the groups was pre-determined by the course team.

Recurring themes

12. Despite ongoing issues of staff capacity, institutions and subject teams have continued to take appropriate action to address specific NSS themes. In assessment and feedback, for example, institutions have variously introduced automated assessment feedback tracking; bespoke CPD for staff; standardised assessment rubrics and feedback across modules; and the incorporation of achievement of assessment feedback timelines into staff performance reviews. In academic support, and organisation and management there are examples of new shared spaces for students and staff, with regular (daily) access for students to senior managers and improvements in virtual learning environments for both content and communication. In learning opportunities there continue to be opportunities to refresh curriculum via minor and major amendments to modules, revalidations and ongoing professional accreditations. Harnessing the full benefit of these changes, evidenced in improvements in student satisfaction, is predicated on having sufficient staff resource to deliver the outputs.

13. In relation to staffing issues, the review team cautions that institutions should not underestimate the impact of multiple staff absences or vacancies on the student experience and responsiveness to NSS feedback, or the length of time students continue to feel the impact of these absences. Institutions should ensure that they

have robust contingency plans in place to manage such unforeseen circumstances as quickly as possible.

14. From the sample reviewed it was evident that once a subject area went into follow-up, the same areas of low satisfaction occurred in subsequent NSS surveys, albeit that scores in the relevant themes might have improved. Students completing the NSS are expected to reflect on the entirety of their higher education experience and, therefore, the timing of events will influence the outcomes of the NSS survey. During the review visits students articulated issues that occurred early in their courses, such as major timetabling or staffing issues, and were expressing value judgements about the institutions and their courses on the basis of these past events, even where those issues had been resolved. The timing of the resolution of issues is therefore a factor in student satisfaction. Where students could identify progress on early issues of concern they spoke positively about the impact of the actions taken, but where they had experienced the same issues year on year (for example perceived lack of learning resources) they were far more negative.

15. This supports the need for a specific section in Medr action plans where institutions can critically report on progress on the previous year's action plan, to include actions completed and/or rolled forward and, importantly, to report on the impact actions have had on student satisfaction or perception in order to distinguish between legacy issues and issues that are genuinely recurrent and need attention (paragraph 33).

Common themes

16. From the sample reviewed it was evident that multiple institutions were tackling similar issues in similar subject areas and that, despite best efforts in action plans, the upward trajectory was not as rapid as the institutions would have expected, particularly when compared to other subject areas that had been in follow-up. This is particularly pertinent in both Computing and Design, and creative and performing arts. The institutions themselves suggested that bringing together national subject groups to share practice and experience in subjects that remain stubbornly below benchmark would be beneficial. Possible topics to explore might include entry requirements, demographics, student expectations, subject specialist learning resources and learning resources to support student learning needs.

17. The review team **recommends** that the sector considers the formation of national subject groups for subjects that remain persistently below benchmark across institutions in order to share practice and experience and formulate strategies to improve student satisfaction.

What has worked well

18. Common themes across the institutions that appear to be working well are industry and employer engagement, and professional services support. Students were generally appreciative of the industry links element of their experience. In particular students were positive about the opportunity to have industry related scenarios and/or assessments, contact with industry experts, employability modules, and the opportunity for industry placements. Professional accreditation, where

applicable, is also highly valued by students and overall students were complimentary about the support from professional services.

Engagement with students in analysing the student experience and NSS outcomes

19. All institutions have formal structures for student representation, and all have student representatives on student experience committees which consider quantitative and qualitative NSS and internally generated data.

20. Institutions reported that student engagement in student voice mechanisms is however an ongoing issue, despite campaigns to raise awareness and a range of different opportunities to engage. Throughout the TSR, students seemed generally aware of opportunities to provide feedback. Some students were aware of follow-up through “You said, we did” approaches but others were not able to identify changes that had taken place as a result of their feedback. Where feedback has not led to visible change this, may in part, contribute to decreasing engagement with feedback mechanisms. Survey fatigue was also mentioned as a possible reason why students do not engage.

21. A number of the institutions have however made progress in increasing student engagement particularly where students have been employed to act as student coaches or engagement officers. These schemes have seen a measurable increase in engagement with feedback mechanisms, faster resolution of student issues, and, in some cases, an increase in NSS scores.

22. Modules or programmes which have low response rates means there is a sparsity of evidence on which course teams can base decisions for change. Course teams would benefit from stronger student engagement with feedback mechanisms at module, programme and institutional levels. Greater participation would produce more representative student voice data and lead to more reliable programme-level improvements. This may therefore be an area where sectoral groups or networks could facilitate the sharing of practice at a national level. The review team **recommends** that the sector considers the sharing of practice to increase active student engagement with formal feedback mechanisms.

23. One potential student feedback mechanism that is seemingly overlooked in all institutions is the opportunity for students to engage with external examiners with the express purpose of giving feedback on their student experience. One institution does facilitate meetings with external examiners but the focus of this appears to be to review final year work rather than an explicit review of the student experience. A recommendation was made to all institutions in the TSR to introduce a formal opportunity for students to meet with external examiners, as part of the annual cycle, to strengthen student engagement with external quality processes and enable external examiner evidence to contribute more directly to the enhancement of the student experience.

Efficacy of subject action plans (Medr and institution)

24. The identification of the drivers of low student satisfaction is generally

articulated well in all institutional action plans and the review team found that internal action plans included a greater level of analysis in comparison to Medr action plans.

25. The review teams did not identify any significant gaps in action plans in terms of the actions identified to address low student satisfaction. However, the efficacy of both internal and external action plans could be strengthened through a small number of changes as follows.

Purpose(s) of Medr action plans

26. The efficacy of subject action plans can only be fully established if the purpose (or purposes) is clear. In the sample reviewed, institutions had interpreted and responded differently to the Medr action plan templates and therefore Medr may wish to consider providing greater clarity to institutions about the purposes of the action plans. It would be helpful for institutions to know if the purpose of an action plan is to:

- provide assurances that institutions are taking actions for underperforming subjects and that both the Governing Body and the representative student body (Students' Union or equivalent) have oversight of the action plans;
- rigorously track progress against previous action plans;
- offer supportive interventions (such as sharing practice) where there is commonality in underperformance across subjects or institutions;
- determine a time limit to improve student satisfaction to above the threshold.

27. In drafting follow-up action plan templates, there is a tension between providing the flexibility to enable institutions to present action plans in their own context and in seeking to facilitate cross-institutional comparisons or themed reviews which require greater consistency in reporting lines and data requirements. For this reason, there needs to be clarity of purpose of the Medr action plans. The review team **recommends** that, going forward, Medr clarifies the primary purpose, or purposes, of follow-up action plans, align the action plan templates directly to the purpose(s), and, for the purposes of consistency, provide clarity to institutions regarding the level of detail and data required along with setting time limits and the consequences of not meeting these.

Use of overall satisfaction to identify subjects for follow-up action plans

28. The 5-point Likert scale response for overall satisfaction was considered to have the potential to skew the data if the “middle” response (of neither agree nor disagree) is selected, resulting in lower overall satisfaction. All other questions in the NSS themes from 2023 onwards were amended to require a response using a 4-point Likert scale. In the examples reviewed, the overall satisfaction question has resulted in at least one subject appearing to be in follow-up despite the other NSS themes being above benchmark. The review team **recommends** that Medr considers whether the 5-point Likert scale is the most appropriate tool for measuring overall satisfaction and considers addressing this matter with funders and regulators in other nations.

29. In the sample reviewed there is evidence of subjects that do not quite make the 70% overall satisfaction threshold but return a figure of 69%. These can remain in

follow up even where other NSS themes are above benchmark. There are other subjects (or courses within subjects) that move either side of the 70% threshold possibly due to the disproportionate impact of small numbers (paragraph 30) and/or the 5-point Likert scale for the overall satisfaction question (paragraph 28). The review team **recommends** that Medr considers whether the continuation of follow-up action plans is appropriate for subjects that are consistently close to the 70% overall satisfaction threshold, but with consistently above benchmark scores in NSS themes.

Understanding and accounting for the impact of small student numbers

30. Small numbers of students in a single subject area can result in a small number of respondents exerting a disproportionate impact on satisfaction scores. In the sample included in the TSR, one subject area had 23 eligible students across all programmes, and not all of these responded to the survey. Where there are small numbers of students year on year, interpretation can be further impacted as individual courses may meet NSS reporting thresholds in some years, but not in others. A subject area at CAH3 level may meet the threshold for NSS reporting, while an individual course within it falls below the threshold for internal reporting. The reverse can also occur: a course may meet the internal reporting threshold, but if its students are spread across multiple CAH groups due to HECoS coding, none of those groups may individually meet the threshold for publication.

31. The inclusion of consistent time series data to enable the clear identification of trends and the direction of travel would be useful. However, it must be recognised that institutional restructures, re-classification of HECoS codes and/or changes of course titles can disrupt time series data.

Consistency and/or clarity in the granularity of reporting

32. From the sample reviewed, data is reported interchangeably at individual course level, CAH1, CAH3, NSS themes and individual NSS questions, and with every permutation and combination of these. There is also some confusion about whether all courses in a CAH3 group which is below the 70% overall satisfaction threshold for follow-up should be included in the action plans or only those courses that have brought the satisfaction down to below the 70%. However, it should be noted that the ability of institutions to report at specific levels of granularity is dependent on the size of the student cohort (paragraph 30). The review team **recommends** that Medr provides clarity to institutions about whether all courses in a CAH3 group which is below the overall satisfaction threshold are included in the action plans or only those courses that have brought down the satisfaction to below threshold.

Use of SMART objectives

33. The quality of institutional internal action plans has improved steadily over the reporting period and there is more evidence of the use of SMART objectives, with regular progress check points throughout the year. There is also more recent evidence of institutions reporting critically on the previous year's action plans and, where necessary, rolling forward actions and targets that have not been fully achieved; this could usefully be incorporated in Medr action plans. The level of critical self-analysis and the full disclosure of student satisfaction data in reports at all levels, including up to Board of Governors is to be commended. However, there are examples of where updates to action plans report on actions completed, or where

actions are ongoing, but not on whether the actions have changed or improved student satisfaction or perception. Tracking the completion of activities as opposed to changes in student outcomes limits the ability of governance structures to determine whether action plans are effective and this is an area that institutions could improve upon. The review team **recommends** that, within the Medr action plan templates, Medr includes a specific section for institutions to critically evaluate and report on the previous year's action plan, to include actions completed and/or rolled forward and, importantly, the impact actions have had on student satisfaction or perception.

Institutional governance and management of the quality of the student experience

34. The evidence reviewed indicates that all institutions make use of external examiners, external subject matter experts on validation panels, and professional body accreditations to provide further assurance that provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of students.

35. The evidence reviewed also indicates that for all institutions the results and analysis of NSS outcomes, along with Medr and internal action plans, are presented to, and signed off by, the governing body and the Students' Union. By the time these action plans are presented to governing bodies they have progressed through the institutions' academic quality committee structures. Institutions also have student experience committees (or equivalent) where the results and action plans resulting from NSS and internal surveys are reviewed. One institution has introduced a dedicated committee to review and improve the design of, and engagement with, student surveys, and a number of institutions present NSS reports and action plans to their audit and risk committees. The effectiveness of senior leaders' and governors' scrutiny of student satisfaction in specific subjects is difficult to identify from minutes of meetings, partly due to the nature of committee minutes, and partly due to the activity that takes place outside of formal committees. All institutions reported that NSS outcomes and the accompanying institutional analysis are circulated to the governing body following the annual publication date, from which further discussion and challenge is generated, and there was evidence of dedicated time for NSS discussions in governing body away days.

36. Course teams, schools, faculties and professional services can only contribute to the formulation and execution of action plans within their respective spheres of influence. Such actions, where executed well, can impact positively on the student experience. Examples include changes in assessments, standardisation of module and programme information on the virtual learning environment, revalidation of programmes, improved timetabling, increased or different types of student support, and increased industry engagement. However, in the sample reviewed the resolution of some of the drivers of low satisfaction have required capital investment and/or increases in recurrent staff budgets, neither of which are necessarily within the gift of course teams, schools, faculties, or professional services. In the subject areas which continue to persistently underperform, these resources have either not been made available or have not come forward quickly enough to positively impact student satisfaction. It is difficult to see how student satisfaction in these subjects will

improve without the required level of investment. The issue therefore is not in senior managers' or governing bodies' understanding of the drivers of persistent low student satisfaction but in the decisions that are made to address these drivers, and where responsibility and accountability lies for those decisions.

37. When considering how judgements about resources are made it is important to consider the context in which institutions are working, particularly as the TSR is based on a small number of subject areas and small sample. One institution in the sample reported a reduction in the number of subject areas in Medr follow-up following agreement by the governing body for a significant investment in student satisfaction initiatives, over a period of several years. However not all institutions are in a financial position to make such investments. Another institution had put forward bids for external funding for capital projects, but these were unsuccessful and the level of student satisfaction in the physical infrastructure remains low.

38. Managing student satisfaction in the current financial climate is challenging but particularly so for institutions with high-cost courses combined with small and/or declining student registrations. This is becoming a pressing strategic issue for some institutions. This may therefore be an area where sectoral groups or networks could facilitate the sharing of practice at a national level and/or external input would be beneficial to institutions. The review team **recommends** that the sector considers how to support institutions in sharing of practice, and/or provision of external input to assist in dealing with challenging financial climates particularly in relation to high-cost courses.

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