The Wisdom of Students: Monitoring Quality via Social Media and Student Reviews

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We are the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA): the independent body entrusted with monitoring, and advising on, standards and quality in UK higher education.

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What's the problem?

- Move to a more risk-based, data-driven, student-focused and low-burden oversight model.

- Data must be timely, robust, meaningful and accurate.

- Existing data collections have their limitations, including:
  - cost
  - purpose
  - organisational focus.

- Little appetite for new, burdensome data collections.

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What can be done?

- Significant volume of student feedback available from non-central sources.

- 'Wisdom of Crowds' -

  ➤ even if the majority of people within a group are not especially well-informed or rational, under the right circumstances, groups can be remarkably insightful.

- Griffiths & Leaver (2018) have shown patient feedback is an effective predictor of quality inspections of hospitals.

- Is the same true in higher education?

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Data sources

Reviews on a scale of 1* (worst) to 5* (best)

- **Whatuni** - c.120k reviews, 79 FECs and 8 APs
  Average review score 4.11.

- **Facebook** - c.75k reviews, 158 FECs and 7 APs
  Average review score 4.33. Comments needed cleaning.

- **StudentCrowd** - c.14k reviews, 2 FECs and 2 APs
  Average review score 4.08.

- **Google** - c.22k reviews, 190 FECs and 11 APs
  Average review score of 4.13.

- **Twitter** - ongoing development of machine-learning
  models to identify and score relevant tweets.

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Data: Volume of reviews

Count of Reviews by Year

Data: Average review score by month
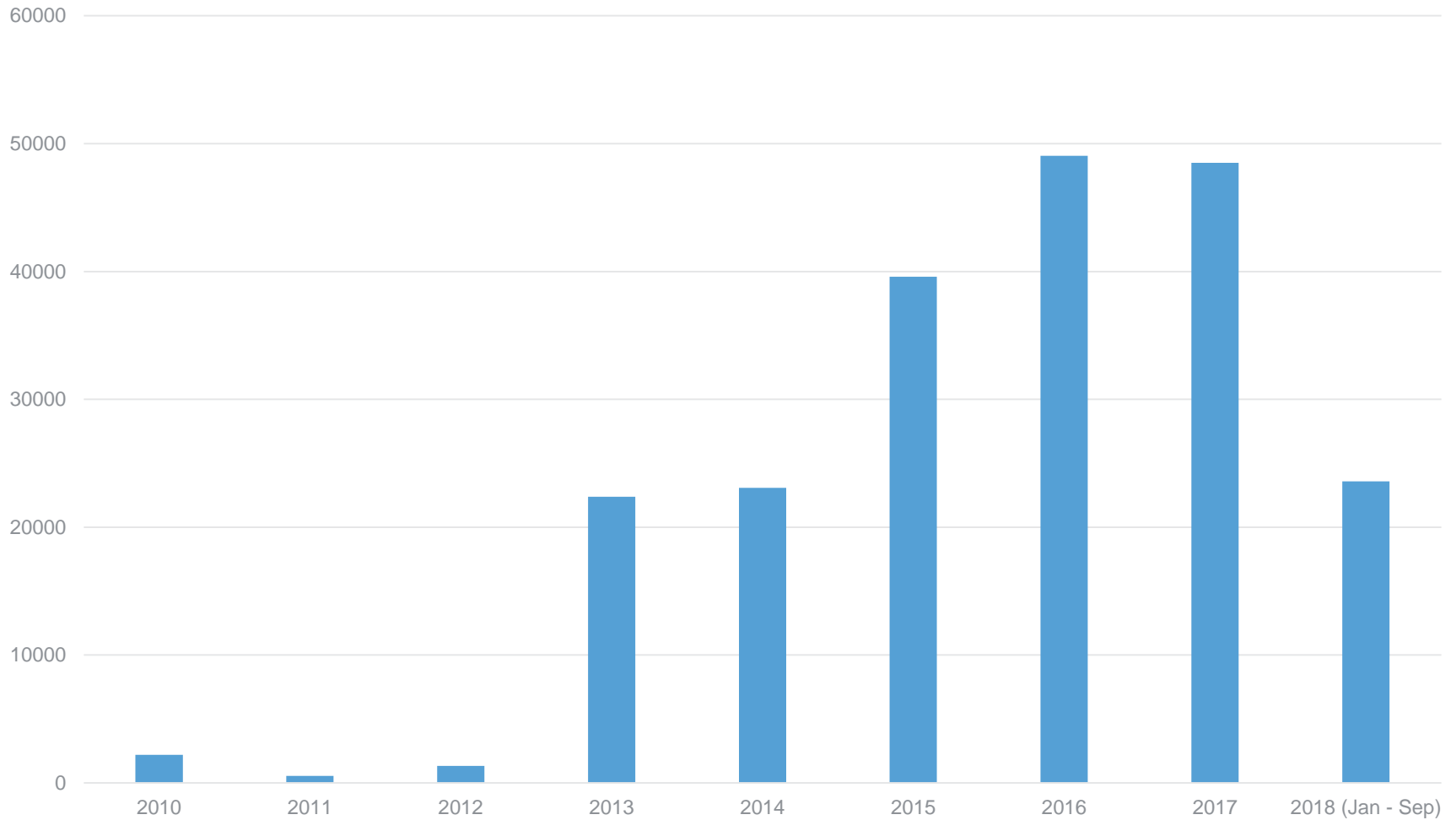
Average Review Score by Month
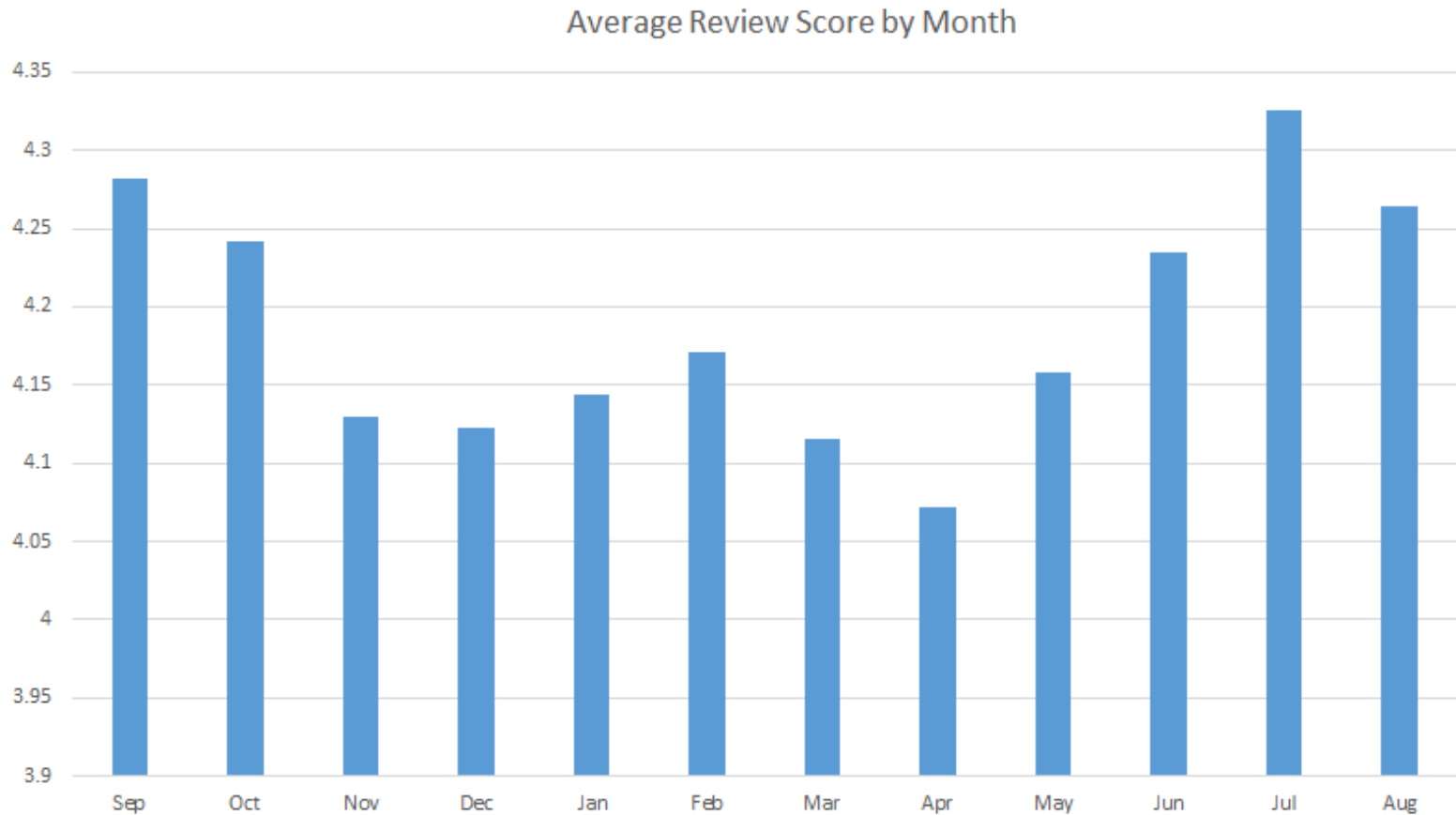
What did we do with the data?

- A daily 365-day moving average score calculated for each provider from each data source.

- A daily 365-day 'collective-judgement' score calculated for each provider combining the data sources.

- Moving averages and collective-judgement score compared to existing measures of (or proxies for) quality.

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Results: TEF year two

Distribution of Collective-Judgement Score for TEF Ratings
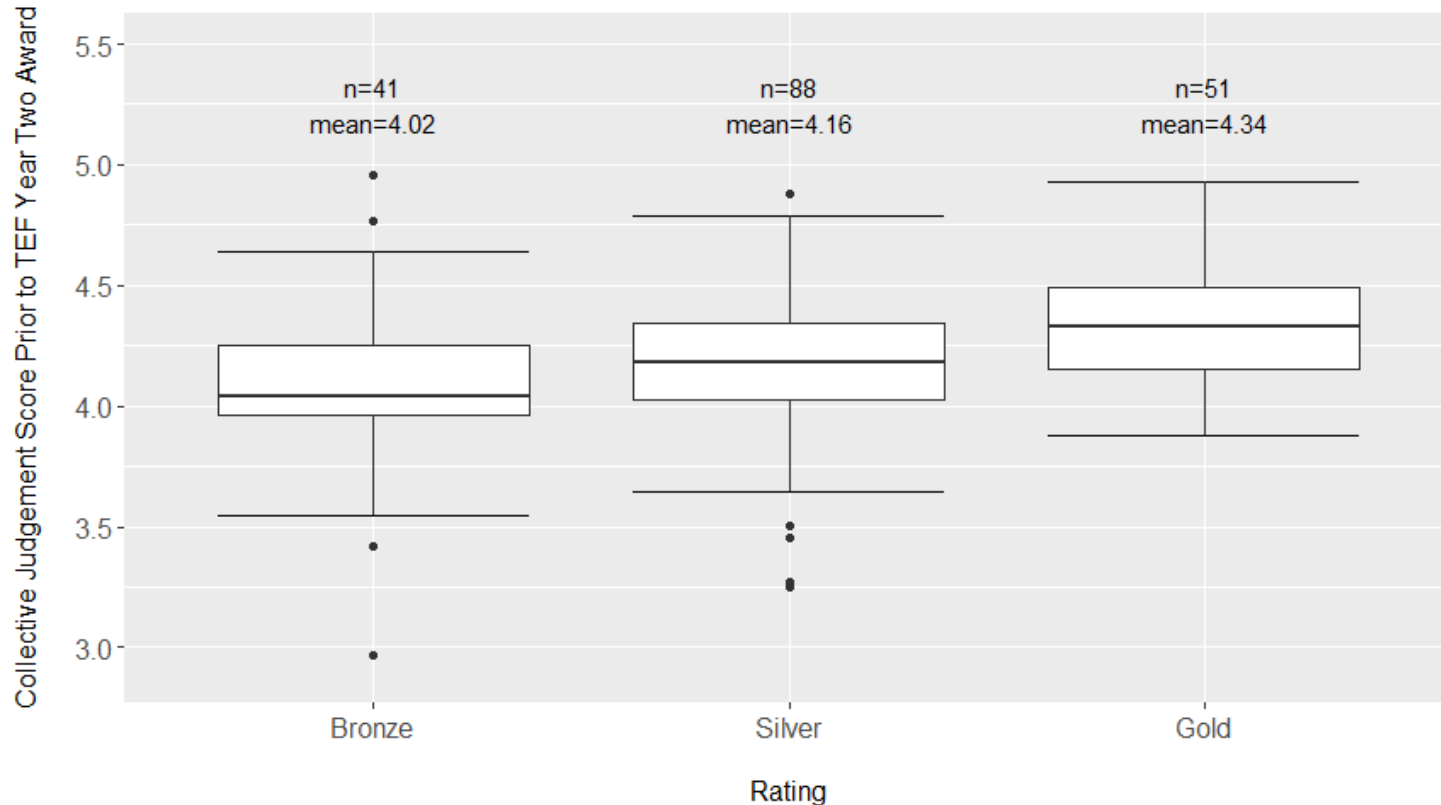
	Collective Judgement		Whatuni		Facebook		StudentCrowd		Google	
TEF Outcome	Count	Average Score	Count	Average Score	Count	Average Score	Count	Average Score	Count	Average Score
Gold	51	4.34	33	4.19	43	4.59	22	3.91	35	4.38
Silver	88	4.16	61	4.03	79	4.43	30	3.61	52	4.31
Bronze	41	4.02	18	3.99	35	4.41	9	3.57	20	4.18

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Results: Annual provider review

Distribution of Collective-Judgement Score for APR Ratings
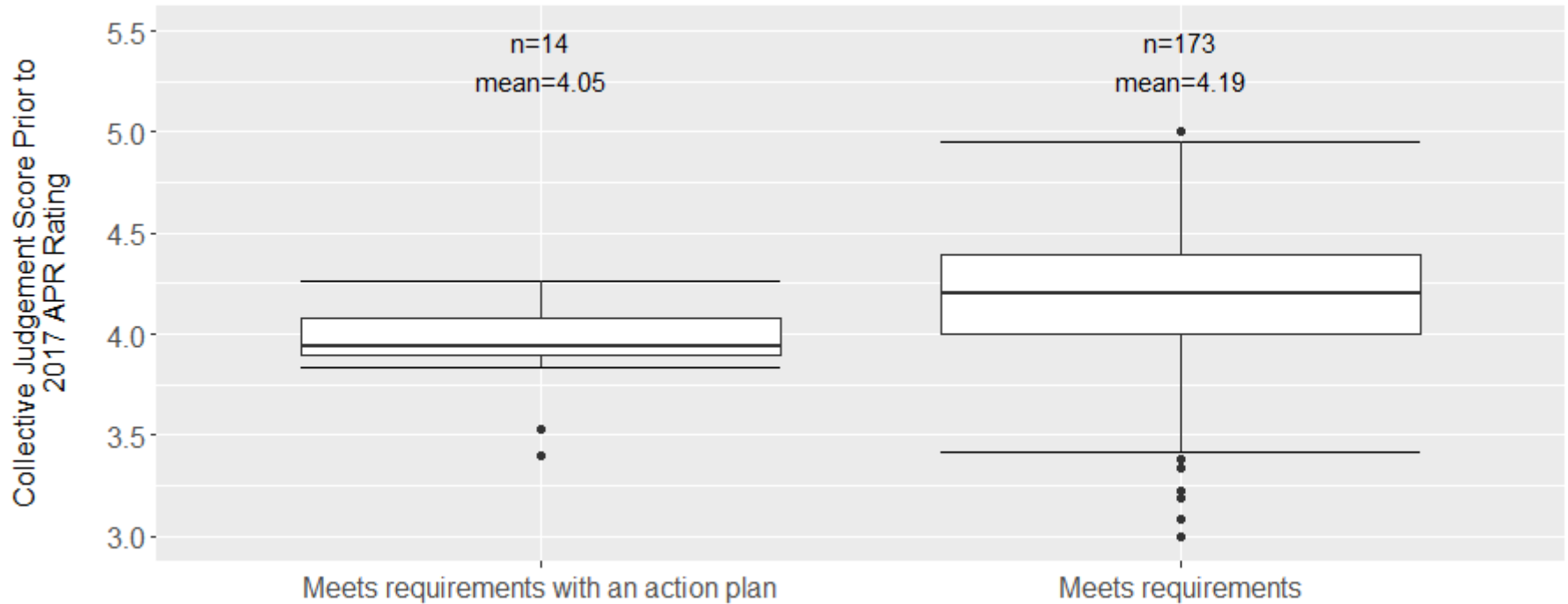
Rating	Collective Judgement		Whatuni		Facebook		StudentCrowd	
APR Outcome	Count	Average Score	Count	Average Score	Count	Average Score	Count	Average Score
Meets requirements	210	4.14	91	4.19	154	4.36	42	4.09
Meets requirements with an action plan	15	3.83	6	4.13	14	4.23	4	3.08

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Results: NSS (2015-17)

Distribution of Collective-Judgement Score for NSS Taught Satisfaction Scores

Distribution of Collective-Judgement Score for the Difference Between Each Provider's NSS Taught Satisfaction and Benchmarked (Expected) Scores
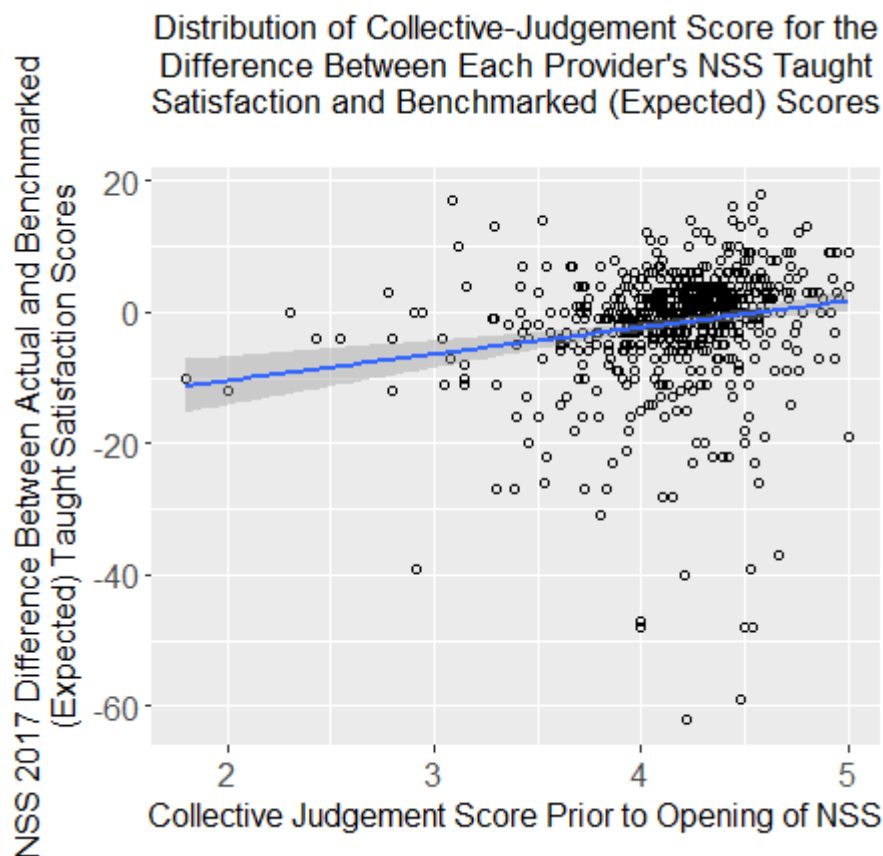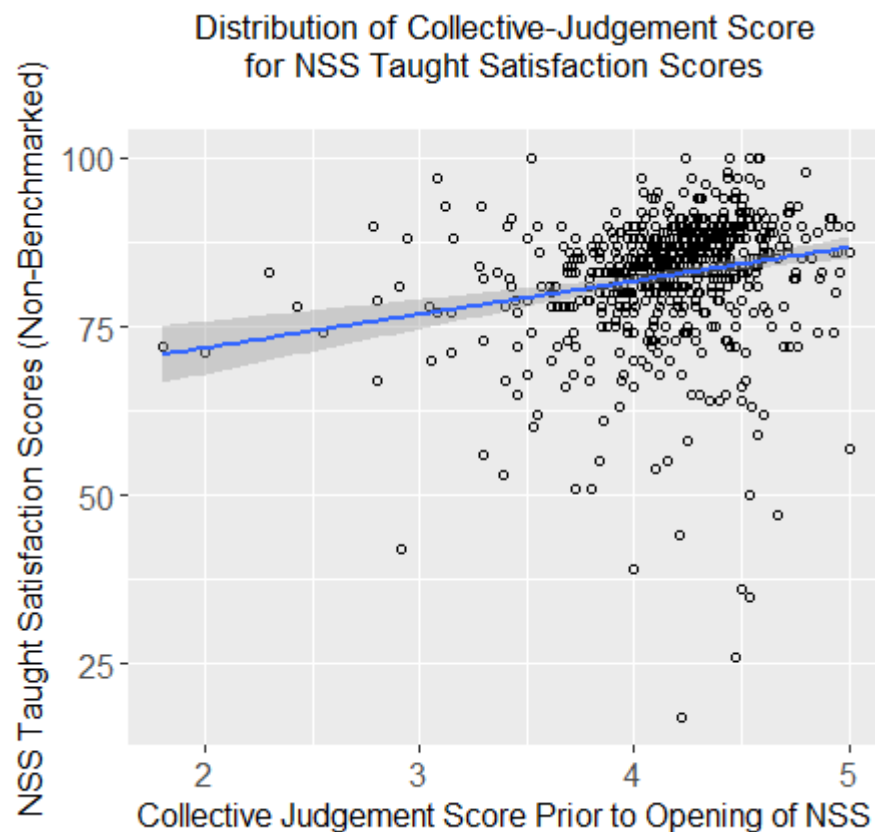
Year	Collective Judgement			Whatuni			Facebook			StudentCrowd			Google		
	n	Corr (non bmrk)	Corr (bmrk)	n	Corr (non bmrk)	Corr (bmrk)	n	Corr (non bmrk)	Corr (bmrk)	n	Corr (non bmrk)	Corr (bmrk)	n	Corr (non bmrk)	Corr (bmrk)
2015-17	682	0.21	0.18	327	0.46	0.41	563	0.21	0.18	164	0.41	0.28	225	0.40	0.31

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Oversight and QA tool

Benefits:

- agreement with existing quality measures
- ongoing, near real-time feedback, focusing on what the student body finds important
- no additional burden
- providers not involved in the collection of the data
- can explore regional or sector-wide issues
- can monitor sudden changes in quality or track improvements.

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Oversight and QA tool

Wider issues and future research

- Defining what is relevant to 'quality'

- Are we replicating flawed measures?

- Goodhart's law

- Ethical and privacy concerns

- Perception/acceptance by students, staff and providers

- Additional data sources

- More granular quality measures.

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Any questions?

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Feedback examples

'Excellent college with professional and competent staff. The International Office is very specialist and available with student. Very good experience. Thank you!!'

'My overall uni experience is an bad one, I thought I would really enjoy uni and [provider redacted] really stood out and was bigged up to me but since being there, it's been awful! Not one good thing I could say about the place!'

'Terrible. Really, don't go to [provider redacted], don't do it! You are wasting so much money just for being in a nice building. 'Nice' until you find that having class in an open space along with 2 other courses is a hell. No skilled people, no real teaching, low level of competence. Don't do that! Just go on the website and think why there are no details about the courses: it's because they don't have a structure!'

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Feedback examples

'… Teachers are not skilled, and I wonder how the uni is allowed to provide MSc title. They shouldn't as I (undergrad) have more tech skills than the tutors. Really: don't do that. Unless you are a very beginner, do not expect any serious quality of things in that place. You application will be accepted regardless of your background: the result is that no-one in my course have any experience in this filed other than me and I'm basically doing nothing while they discover the basics of the field….'

'The last year I was there I loved it with great staff and fun in the courses but this year it's fallen because since staff have left the new staff just expect students to get on when they don't even know what they're doing, plus the courses mostly have exams now too, whereas before it was just done on work and talent.'

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Word clouds

One-star reviews

Five-star reviews

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