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Student feedback: What do students really rate when they fill out questionnaires?

Day 1 – Parallel II (14.35-15.05)

At the end of a module or programme of study students are typically asked to review their experience by giving numerical responses to questions posed in an often lengthy questionnaire. However, what do students really evaluate? This talk will describe statistical analyses performed on student feedback received from undergraduates at Cardiff School of Mathematics to try to unpick the latent factors which have motivated students to respond in the way that they did. The primary tool used is Factor Analysis. Factor analysis is a statistical method used to describe variability among observed, correlated variables in terms of a potentially lower number of unobserved variables called factors. For example, it is possible that variations in twenty questionnaire questions mainly reflect the variations in two or three unobserved variables. The module questionnaires used at Cardiff School of Mathematics are heavily based on those used for the National Student Survey (NSS). Therefore, further discussion will also be presented on how the conclusions of this work may be translated to the responses of the NSS.