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# Operationalising Pedagogical Policy Enactment to Enhance Quality Assurance and Student Satisfaction in Higher Education



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| Journal: | *Quality Assurance in Education* |
| Manuscript ID | QAE-01-2026-0048.R6 |
| Manuscript Type: | Research Article |
| Keywords: | Quality Assurance in Pedagogy, Higher Education Policy Guidelines, Teaching and Learning Frameworks, Academic Support, Student Satisfaction, National Student Survey (NSS) |
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SCHOLARONE MANUSCRIPTS

# OPERATIONALISING PEDAGOGICAL POLICY ENACTMENT TO ENHANCE QUALITY ASSURANCE AND STUDENT SATISFACTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION


## ABSTRACT

**Purpose**: This study integrates, operationalises, and evaluates previously developed pedagogical policy guidelines within an institutional Quality Assurance (QA) matrix to examine their implementation and association with student satisfaction outcomes in Higher Education (HE).

**Methodology**: A UK-based HE department was used as a longitudinal case study. Data collection involved auditing the adoption of pedagogical policy guidelines across 44 sampled modules and National Student Survey (NSS) themes, alongside analysis of corresponding NSS outcomes. Regression, thematic, and comparative analyses were conducted to examine the relative associations between policy adoption and student satisfaction.

**Findings**: Student satisfaction increased across the analysed NSS themes, alongside increased policy adoption. Pedagogical practices demonstrated positive associations with student satisfaction outcomes, while organisational elements exhibited comparatively weaker associations. The findings support a differentiated and prioritised approach to pedagogical policy enactment.

**Practical implications**: The Policy Prioritisation and Pedagogical Integration (PPPI) model provides a staged framework for prioritising and operationalising pedagogical practices within HE curriculum design and QA processes.

**Originality/value**: The study extends existing pedagogical policy literature beyond framework development towards implementation-oriented evaluation. It operationalises previously developed pedagogical policy guidelines through audit-based evaluation and examines associations between policy adoption and student satisfaction outcomes.


**Keywords**: Quality Assurance in Pedagogy, Higher Education Policy Guidelines, Teaching and Learning Frameworks, Academic Support, National Student Survey, Student Satisfaction

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Higher Education (HE) faces persistent challenges in enhancing student satisfaction while ensuring consistent, high-quality pedagogical delivery. Existing literature suggests that these challenges stem from the absence of coherent institution-wide pedagogical policy guidelines and insufficient alignment between teaching practice and evolving student expectations (Brady and Bates, 2016; Stensaker and Matear, 2025). The absence of a standardised yet adaptable approach to teaching has contributed to fragmented pedagogical practices, inconsistent student experiences, and variation in educational quality across programmes and institutions (Stukalina, 2014; Timuș et al., 2024). Although extensive research has explored diverse teaching approaches, these have often been implemented in isolation without an overarching framework for integrating best practice (Bakogiannis, 2025). HE institutions (HEIs) also operate under resource constraints, requiring strategic prioritisation of pedagogical interventions (Asiyai, 2022). Recent studies have proposed student-centred pedagogic practices and emphasised the need for HEIs to respond more effectively to diverse student needs and expectations (Kubiatko et al., 2023). However, evidence suggests that these theoretical advances are not consistently translated into practice, particularly in ways that align



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with sector-level Quality Assurance (QA) and evaluative mechanisms. This gap highlights the need for empirically supported, holistic pedagogical policy guidelines that integrate pedagogical theory with measurable QA outcomes.

Thus, this study examines associations between pedagogical policy constructs and student satisfaction outcomes and develops a prioritisation model for integrating them within HE curricula. To achieve this, the study synthesises previously developed pedagogical guidelines into a unified evaluation framework, operationalises policy adoption through an audit-based monitoring process, and examines associations between policy adoption and student satisfaction outcomes using a longitudinal case study within a School of Architecture and Built Environment (BE) in a UK HEI. In doing so, it offers a structured model for prioritising pedagogical policy within teaching, learning, and QA processes.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

QA in the current HE landscape has evolved from a predominantly compliance-driven movement to a more pedagogically oriented endeavour, reflecting broader shifts in governance and accountability (Ai Tran et al., 2025). HEIs increasingly position QA as a mechanism for continuous improvement, pedagogical innovation, and enhancing the student experience (Stensaker and Matear, 2025; Kubiatko et al., 2023). Established frameworks such as those developed by the QAA for HE emphasise principles of continuous improvement, student-centred learning, and evidence-informed practice. However, while such frameworks provide high-level guidance, the operationalisation of policy enactment within pedagogical contexts remains uneven. Despite this emphasis on pedagogic enhancement, the literature suggests that contemporary QA practices remain shaped by audit cultures and performative pressures (Stensaker and Matear, 2025). At the institutional level, internal QA frameworks typically combine policy guidelines, audit processes, and performance indicators to monitor pedagogic practice (Asiyai, 2022; Greere, 2023). However, the literature highlights the disparity between centralised QA requirements and departmental autonomy (Greere, 2023). Enhancement-led QA approaches emphasise reflective practice, developmental review, and evidence-informed improvement rather than compliance. These approaches encourage policy dialogue, peer learning, and context-sensitive interpretation of evidence. Thus, understanding how QA tools are used, interpreted, and aligned with pedagogic policy is essential for evaluating their applicability.

HEIs increasingly articulate pedagogic expectations through institution-wide policy guidelines intended to promote consistency, enhance quality, and align with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB). Educational policy frameworks rarely operate as static prescriptions; rather, they are interpreted and implemented through complex institutional practices. The literature on policy enactment in education distinguishes between policy enactment and policy implementation: policy implementation refers to the institutional introduction or rollout of pedagogical policies, while policy enactment refers to their interpretation and application within local teaching practices (Ai Tran et al., 2025; Greere, 2023). Research on policy enactment highlights that institutional guidelines are translated into practice through local contexts, disciplinary cultures, and academic decision-making processes. Policy enactment involves interpretation, negotiation, and adaptation by institutional actors (Viennet and Pont, 2017) and therefore functions not merely as a regulatory instrument but as a process that shapes how teaching practices are structured, monitored, and improved. These themes include curriculum design, assessment and feedback practices, inclusive learning, and student engagement (Singh, 2018). However, the existence of pedagogic policy guidelines does not guarantee uniform implementation across institutions (Timuș et al., 2024). This distinction presents both challenges and opportunities. While it complicates attempts to standardise pedagogic practice or directly relate policy implementation to educational outcomes (Brady and Bates, 2016; Dill, 2010), it also provides a basis for





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examining how institutional policies are enacted within local educational contexts (Asiyai, 2022; Singh, 2018). Moreover, studies highlight that formal alignment with policy guidelines may coexist with diverse teaching practices and student experiences (Timuș et al., 2024). Taken together, existing research suggests that pedagogic policy guidelines play a central role within institutional QA systems, although their effectiveness depends on how they are enacted in practice.

Student satisfaction has become a key indicator of educational quality within marketised and enhancement-driven HE systems. Engagement indicators often provide deeper insight into student learning processes than satisfaction metrics alone (Kuh, 2009). Contemporary HE research increasingly emphasises the importance of interpreting satisfaction metrics within a broader framework of student engagement and institutional learning environments. In the UK, the National Student Survey (NSS) has evolved from a feedback mechanism and glorified league table into a KPI for informing institutional review and enhancement strategies (Sulimani and Howard, 2025). While the NSS does not directly measure learning outcomes, it serves as a valuable proxy for pedagogical effectiveness by capturing students' perceptions of how teaching, support mechanisms, and course design facilitate their learning (Kanwar and Sanjeeva, 2022). These perceptions make NSS an informative, though indirect, indicator of pedagogical implementation. As such, NSS data are now deeply embedded within internal QA processes, shaping pedagogic decision-making and policy development across the HE sector. Despite its widespread use, NSS captures students' perceptions rather than direct measures of teaching effectiveness or educational gain (Kanwar and Sanjeeva, 2022). NSS data are often operationalised at both aggregate and thematic levels. While satisfaction scores are frequently emphasised, theme-level analyses of teaching quality, learning opportunities, assessment and feedback, academic support, and organisation and management are more commonly used to inform enhancement actions. Additionally, heavy reliance on NSS may encourage metric-driven enhancement, treating student satisfaction as both an indicator of experience and a proxy for pedagogical quality. From this perspective, NSS data can be invaluable for pedagogic enhancements if triangulated with other forms of evidence, such as peer review, curriculum audits, and pedagogic evaluations, rather than used in isolation (Stukalina, 2014). Accordingly, this study positions NSS as one component of a broader QA evidence base rather than a definitive measure of teaching effectiveness.

Synthesising the literature on QA, pedagogic policy enactment, and student satisfaction reveals several persistent assumptions and under-explored areas. While pedagogic policy guidelines are widely used within QA frameworks, limited empirical research examines how they are enacted, evidenced, and monitored through internal audit processes (Ai Tran et al., 2025). Much of the existing literature focuses on policy design or pedagogical principles rather than on their systematic operationalisation and evaluation within QA systems. Studies suggest that satisfaction indicators may be correlated with factors unrelated to teaching quality, including student expectations, assessment difficulty, or institutional reputation (Kanwar and Sanjeeva, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2021). Satisfaction surveys should therefore be interpreted cautiously and considered alongside other indicators of educational quality. Although prior studies have explored factors associated with student satisfaction, fewer have examined how satisfaction indicators interact with institutional policy adoption, defined as the observable extent to which enacted practices were evidenced through the audit process (Asiyai, 2022; Kubiatko et al., 2023). The literature further identifies a lack of evaluative studies examining the alignment among QA mechanisms, policy enactment, and performance indicators (Stukalina, 2014). This limits a holistic understanding of how QA functions within enhancement-led governance and shapes institutional interpretations of quality. Accordingly, there remains limited evidence on how to systematically evaluate the adoption of pedagogical policies within a single institutional QA system using longitudinal audit evidence linked to student satisfaction outcomes.





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Although existing literature has examined individual dimensions of pedagogic enhancement in HE, much of this work has focused on conceptual frameworks or isolated institutional initiatives (Kahu, 2013; Viennet and Pont, 2017). Previous studies by the authors developed a series of pedagogical policy guidelines addressing pedagogical integration, assessment design, academic support, and pedagogical management, which underpin the theoretical framework for this study. Collectively, these studies established the theoretical foundations for the present research; however, they did not examine how these policy guidelines could be operationalised, monitored through institutional QA processes, or prioritised according to their observed associations with student satisfaction outcomes. The present study integrates these pedagogical principles into a unified QA evaluation framework and examines their adoption across multiple modules within an institutional context. Although existing research offers valuable insights into student success and pedagogical frameworks, it remains limited in how these guidelines are prioritised and operationalised in practice. Most existing policy frameworks implicitly assume equal significance across policy dimensions, with limited attention given to their relative association or the sequencing of their implementation. Furthermore, translating policy guidelines into concrete pedagogical strategies remains underexplored.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a pragmatic and evaluative research stance, using a case study at a UK-based HEI to evaluate the operationalisation and institutional enactment of previously developed pedagogic policy guidelines. Unlike prior studies that focused primarily on developing and validating conceptual frameworks, this study examines differential associations between policy adoption and NSS outcomes to inform their prioritisation within institutional practice. A case study approach enables in-depth investigation of complex, context-dependent phenomena within real institutional settings (Kubiatko et al., 2023). The study prioritises systematic policy evaluation through standardised application rather than causal inference or development of new policies from empirical data, aligning with evaluative approaches in pedagogic and QA research. Data were collected to operationalise, integrate and evaluate previously developed pedagogical policy guidelines within an institutional QA framework. Data collection comprised two stages: 1) auditing policy guideline adoption across selected modules; and 2) analysing NSS student satisfaction data. Using NSS-aligned themes ensures sector relevance and comparability with established national quality benchmarks. Each criterion was assessed using a standardised scoring matrix to support consistency across modules and time periods. Two audit iterations were conducted, and the resulting data were analysed to examine associations between policy guideline adoption and student satisfaction outcomes.

### 3.1 PARTICIPANTS AND MATERIALS

A BE department within a UK HEI, comprising Architecture, Construction and Civil Engineering programmes, and 10 sampled courses were selected as the case study for data collection. This included modules from HE levels 4 to 6 to represent the HE context and to address NSS parameters holistically. Two primary considerations guided module selection. First, the modules represented academic levels and subject areas holistically, ensuring coverage across all stages of the undergraduate curriculum. Second, the modules included a combination of core and elective courses delivered across multiple programmes, providing a representative sample of teaching practices within the institutional context. Within the selected courses, 46 modules were initially identified for inclusion across HE Levels 4–6 to provide representative coverage of undergraduate provision within the School of Architecture and BE. Based on a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the study required a minimum sample size of 42 modules. After screening, two modules were excluded because they represented duplicate provision and did not align with the targeted built-environment NSS cohort used in the study.





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Consequently, 44 modules were retained for analysis, exceeding the minimum required sample size. The final sample represented modules delivered across Architecture, Construction, Civil Engineering, and the combined BE subject grouping, providing broad coverage across the primary subject areas examined within the case-study institution.

To examine the association between pedagogic policy adoption and student satisfaction outcomes, a simple linear regression analysis compared departmental audit scores with corresponding NSS thematic indicators (UKPRN - educational providers). Audit scores represented the level of adoption of pedagogic policy guidelines across modules and were first aggregated at the departmental level using average module scores. Although audit data were available across 2017–2021, the 2019 dataset was selected because it provided the most complete and internally consistent module-level evidence and enabled comparison with the baseline established in 2017. The regression comprised 15 department–NSS-theme observations, representing three departments (Architecture, Construction and Civil Engineering) across five NSS themes: Teaching, Learning Opportunities, Assessment and Feedback, Academic Support, and Organisation and Management. For each department–theme combination, the corresponding policy adoption (a single independent variable) score was paired with the relevant NSS satisfaction score (a single dependent variable). The combined BE grouping was excluded from the regression because it was derived from the same departmental data and therefore did not constitute an independent observation.

Given the small, institution-specific dataset and the repeated contribution of departments across NSS themes, the regression was treated as exploratory and interpreted as evidence of association rather than causal influence or generalisable prediction. The first audit cycle, conducted during the 2017/18 academic year, established baseline levels of policy adoption and provided benchmark measurements against corresponding NSS outcomes. A second audit cycle, conducted during the 2019/20 academic year, enabled evaluation of changes in policy guideline adoption following implementation activities and provided an opportunity to examine how shifts in pedagogic implementation corresponded with subsequent NSS trends. Given the exploratory objectives of the study, no control variables were included in the regression model, as doing so would have increased analytical complexity in a relatively small institutional dataset. Similarly, the analysis was intentionally limited to BE disciplines to reduce disciplinary heterogeneity that may arise from different pedagogical models, assessment structures, and feedback practices across disciplines. Consequently, regression findings should be interpreted as indicative associations within a specific institutional context rather than evidence of causal relationships.

## 3.2 RESEARCH PROCEDURE

This study adopts a structured, longitudinal approach to examine the implementation of pedagogical policy guidelines and their relationship with student satisfaction outcomes. The theoretical framework was informed by five previously published journal articles that developed pedagogical policy guidelines aligned with the five NSS themes: Teaching on the Module, Learning Opportunities, Assessment and Feedback, Academic Support, and Organisation and Management (Gomis et al., 2021; 2022; 2023a; 2023b; 2024). These studies provide the foundation for evaluating how pedagogical policies can be operationalised within a QA context. Data were collected through document analysis in the selected case study and through statistical analysis of NSS data obtained from the Office for Students (2026) for the respective years. Document analysis comprised two iterative audits examining patterns of policy adoption across the five NSS themes within the case-study institution.





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A structured audit matrix was developed to evaluate alignment between institutional teaching practices and established pedagogical standards. This matrix was derived from (aforementioned) published pedagogical policy guidelines, ensuring both theoretical continuity and practical applicability. Each module was assessed against a series of indicators spanning the five NSS domains. To enhance methodological rigour and minimise subjective interpretation during the audit process, several procedures were implemented to strengthen audit reliability. The audit process involved two primary reviewers supported by a validation panel consisting of a Head of School and two Associate Heads of School. Before full implementation, reviewers conducted calibration exercises using the established audit matrix and published policy guidelines. Calibration involved multiple meetings throughout the audit process, enabling reviewers to align the interpretation of scoring descriptors and evidence requirements. Cross-validation procedures were conducted on a subset of modules, with 10–20% of modules jointly reviewed during both audit cycles. Further joint reviews were undertaken when uncertainty arose regarding module performance or the interpretation of evidence. Cross-validation exercises across five jointly assessed modules (245 indicator comparisons) demonstrated an initial inter-reviewer percentage agreement of 77%, with remaining discrepancies resolved through structured consensus discussions involving reviewers and senior panel members. Where consensus could not be reached, panel members were consulted to provide additional judgment and ensure scoring consistency.

Standardised scoring descriptors, calibration exercises, cross-validation procedures, and consensus discussions collectively strengthened methodological consistency across audit iterations and reduced the likelihood of reviewer bias influencing the findings. The audit matrix operationalised policy adoption through a weighted scoring framework comprising 50 indicators distributed across the five NSS domains. Each indicator was scored using a standardised five-point scale ranging from 0 (not implemented) to 4 (very successfully implemented). Similar scoring principles were applied across indicators related to active learning, VLE integration, student-centred learning approaches, collaboration, intellectual stimulation, industry and PSRB alignment, assessment support, feedback mechanisms, pastoral support, and organisational practices, respectively, for all NSS sections. Detailed audit matrices, module-level scoring sheets, scoring descriptors, regression outputs, and additional supporting figures are provided in the Supplementary Materials available via the anonymised online repository (URL: https://1drv.ms/f/c/4d9f08c9000c6e67/IgCfiU-yjXYMR7ooXoiBjDeMAYOs7J7Z9-bPkt-LGdx3QbU?e=zIIkjc).

Following quantification of policy adoption at module and departmental levels, comparative analyses across audit iterations were undertaken and examined alongside NSS outcomes. Statistical analysis, including regression modelling, was conducted to examine the relationship between policy adoption and changes in student satisfaction scores. Given the case-study design, the analysis focused on identifying patterns of association rather than causal inference. Box plot visualisations were used to illustrate the distribution of scores across audit cycles, highlighting changes in median values, variability, and outliers. Subsequently, a cross-case thematic analysis identified recurring patterns in how specific practices (e.g., academic support, feedback mechanisms, VLE use) corresponded with observable differences in student satisfaction outcomes. Building on this, policy elements were systematically grouped into three tiers: higher-priority pedagogical practices, supporting pedagogical practices, and foundational components, based on associations and their functional role within the learning environment. The Policy Prioritisation and Pedagogical Integration (PPPI) model was developed by further refining the interdependencies among these tiers, resulting in a staged implementation logic that reflects how pedagogical practices can be prioritised and embedded within institutional contexts.

# 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## 4.1 RESULTS

Figure 1 illustrates longitudinal trends in student satisfaction across the five NSS themes, providing a basis for interpreting these trends alongside the observed extent of policy adoption recorded through the audit process. Results indicate an overall increase in student satisfaction across the five NSS themes, despite year-to-year variation. Notably, Academic Support recorded the largest increase (+10.6 percentage points (pps)), suggesting an association between incremental enhancements in support mechanisms and higher student satisfaction. Conversely, Organisation and Management showed the smallest increase (+1.2 pps), implying a weaker correspondence between changes in organisational practices and student satisfaction during the study period.

***Insert Figure 1 –*** *Audit results of Policy Adoption and Student Satisfaction Rates for all NSS themes (Source: Authors' own work)*

These longitudinal trends can be considered alongside the policy adoption outcomes summarised in Table 1, which indicate a positive association between policy adoption and NSS outcomes. Table 1 shows that mean policy adoption increased by 22.4 pps from 36.7% to 59.0%, while all quartiles increased and score variability decreased (SD 25.3% to 23.1%). The largest gains were observed in Assessment and Feedback (+35.0 pps), Teaching on my Course (+29.8 pps), and Learning Opportunities (+28.9 pps). In contrast, Academic Support (+9.9 pps) and Organisation and Management (+8.3 pps) showed more modest increases, reflecting the greater structural and resourcing demands associated with these domains. Findings suggest that practices enacted at module or individual academic level were more readily evidenced in the audits, whereas institutionally embedded practices showed more gradual adoption.

***Insert Table 1 –*** *Policy Guideline Adoption for all NSS themes (Source: Authors' own work)*

The exploratory regression analysis (Table 2), based on the 2019 department–NSS-theme dataset, identified a positive association between policy guideline adoption and NSS outcomes ($R = 0.3563$, $R^2 = 0.1269$, $p = 0.1925$). The $R^2$ value indicates that approximately 12.69% of the observed variation in NSS scores was associated with policy guideline adoption within the fitted model. Given the small, single-institution dataset and the repeated representation of departments across NSS themes, the regression should be interpreted as exploratory evidence of an observed association rather than as evidence of causal influence or generalisable prediction. The findings therefore provide contextual support for examining the applicability and prioritisation of the pedagogic policy framework, while recognising that student satisfaction likely reflects multiple institutional and contextual factors discussed in Section 4.2.

***Insert Table 2 –*** *Regression Analysis for Policy Guideline Adoption (Source: Authors' own work)*

### 4.1.1 EFFECTIVENESS IN TEACHING

Student satisfaction within this pedagogic theme increased by 6.2 pps, from 85.5% to 91.7% (Supplementary Figure 1), alongside a policy adoption rate of 69.6% (Supplementary Table 1). This represents a 29.8 pps increase in policy adoption since the first audit and corresponded with higher student perceptions of teaching. At the departmental level, Construction achieved the highest adoption rate (77.3%, +36.8 pps), corresponding to the highest NSS score and student satisfaction (96.7%, +7.8 pps). Civil Engineering and Architecture indicated comparable adoption levels (64.8% and 66.7%, respectively), suggesting that similar NSS outcomes may be observed where core pedagogic practices are implemented consistently, even when overall adoption levels differ. Median policy adoption

increased from 38.7% to 73.4% (Supplementary Figure 2), while reduced variability across departments suggests a shift towards more consistent pedagogic delivery. This convergence aligns with enhancement-led QA approaches that emphasise consistency over compliance.

Departments achieving similar NSS outcomes despite differing adoption rates shared consistent implementation in key areas, including academic support, VLE management, assessment design, and student–tutor engagement. These practices reflect established principles of student-centred learning, constructive alignment, and dialogic feedback. The first audit highlighted weaknesses in HEI-verified teaching structures, PSRB alignment, assessment support, career development integration, and the clarity of learning outcomes (particularly within apprenticeship provision), alongside lower NSS outcomes in the early period. In the subsequent audit, greater curriculum coherence and more purposeful use of VLEs were observed alongside changes in teaching-related outcomes and the clarity of student learning expectations. Nonetheless, residual challenges in course organisation suggest further scope for pedagogic refinement.

### 4.1.2 PROVIDING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Student satisfaction within the Learning Opportunities increased by 5.7 pps, from 83.7% to 89.4% (Supplementary Figure 3), alongside a policy adoption rate of 90.2% (Supplementary Table 2). This represents a 28.9 pps increase from the first audit, indicating substantial institutional uptake of pedagogic guidelines in this domain. At a departmental level, Construction achieved the highest adoption rate (94.1%, +31.8 pps), followed by Civil Engineering (90.7%, +29.9 pps) and Architecture (85.8%, +25.0 pps). These adoption patterns corresponded with strong NSS outcomes across all departments, with Construction recording the highest satisfaction score (91.3%), and Civil Engineering and Architecture achieving 88.9% and 88.0%, respectively. Median policy adoption increased from 61.3% to 91.9% (Supplementary Figure 4), while variability decreased (SD 24.2% to 9.7%), indicating greater consistency across departments. This convergence reflects a mature enhancement-led QA approach characterised by shared pedagogic practice rather than isolated innovation.

Departments that showed clearer articulation of module content, alignment of learning outcomes, and cross-module coherence achieved stronger NSS outcomes. In particular, the Construction and Civil Engineering departments adopted similar approaches to contextualising technically complex content, accompanied by comparable student satisfaction scores. In contrast, Architecture showed relatively lower adoption and satisfaction, reflecting ongoing challenges in aligning disciplinary knowledge with PSRB requirements and industry expectations. The first audit identified effective signposting of learning resources and academic support but revealed gaps in embedding professional standards and industry relevance within module design. The second audit indicated higher alignment between learning outcomes, professional competencies, and apprenticeship provision. These findings highlight the importance of structured pedagogic policy in corresponding with more positive student experience outcomes.

### 4.1.3 ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

Student satisfaction for Assessment and Feedback increased by 7.7 pps, from 72.2% to 79.9% (Supplementary Figure 5), alongside a policy adoption rate of 47.9% (Supplementary Table 3). This represents a 35.0 pps increase from the first audit, although adoption remained lower than in other pedagogic domains. Departmental variation was observed: Architecture achieved the highest adoption rate (57.0%, +42.5 pps), followed by Construction (49.8%, +36.2 pps) and Civil Engineering (36.9%, +26.3 pps). Architecture also recorded the highest NSS score (87.8%; +22.0 pps), suggesting that targeted assessment and feedback practices correspond with gains in student satisfaction despite moderate adoption. This theme exhibited the weakest baseline, with a median adoption of only 14.0% in the first audit (Supplementary





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Figure 6). Although adoption increased to 45.6%, the wider interquartile range and higher dispersion (SD 4.1% to 9.8%) indicate uneven implementation across departments. This variability likely reflects the resource-intensive nature of assessment and feedback practices, particularly differences in staff–student ratios and disciplinary norms.

The Architecture department's improvement was associated with extensive verbal and one-to-one feedback practices observed during the second audit. While effective in small cohorts, such approaches present scalability challenges in larger programmes. The first audit identified significant gaps, including limited formative feedback, generic assessment design, and weak alignment between feedback and learning outcomes. Although the second audit indicated further alignment, the use of formative assessment, rubrics, and digital feedback remained underdeveloped. While these practices may represent one possible explanation for the higher NSS outcomes, the exploratory design does not permit causal attribution.

#### 4.1.4 PROVIDING ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Student satisfaction for Academic Support increased by 10.6 pps, from 78.8% to 89.4% (Supplementary Figure 7), despite relatively low policy adoption of 28.4% (Supplementary Table 4). The observed increase in NSS scores coincided with relatively limited growth in policy adoption (+9.9 pps) from the first audit, indicating that improvements in student satisfaction were observed alongside partial adoption of the relevant guidelines. Across departments, Construction recorded the highest adoption rate (31.1%, +11.9 pps) and achieved the strongest NSS outcome (91.1%, +8.4 pps). Civil Engineering and Architecture reported adoption rates of 28.3% and 25.8%, with NSS scores of 89.4% (+11.2 pps) and 87.7% (+12.2 pps), respectively. Adoption showed moderate consolidation, with the median increasing from 14.5% to 46.2% (Supplementary Figure 8). However, the rise in dispersion (standard deviation increasing from 8.1% to 18.4%) indicates uneven integration across departments, likely reflecting differences in resourcing, staff engagement, and central support services. Nevertheless, the upward trend suggests increasing integration of structured academic guidance.

All departments prioritised clearer signposting of academic support and greater integration of VLE-based support tools. This was associated with more consistent access to guidance and greater engagement with support services. Limited variation suggests a shared understanding of core support expectations despite relatively low implementation. The first audit highlighted underutilised VLEs, limited academic support resources, and insufficient industry engagement through guest lectures and site visits. The second audit indicated greater VLE utilisation following the pandemic-related digital transition and clearer integration of academic support. Opportunities remain to support industry engagement and co-curricular support as policy adoption matures.

#### 4.1.5 ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

Policy Adoption for Organisation and Management increased by 8.3 pps, from 50.8% to 59.1% (Supplementary Table 5), whereas student satisfaction corresponded with a marginal increase of 83.1% (+1.2 pps) from 81.9% (Supplementary Figure 9). Year-on-year analysis for the Construction department indicates a 1.8 pps decline in student satisfaction, accompanied by an NSS score of 82.2%. These findings suggest that organisational practices do not necessarily correspond with immediate gains in student satisfaction, particularly where implementation remains uneven or external factors influence delivery. Architecture recorded a policy adoption (63.6%) and the highest NSS score (89.3%; +17.3 pps). Construction and Civil Engineering recorded adoption rates of 66.4% and 47.3%, respectively, but experienced declines in student satisfaction (–1.8 pps and –11.9 pps). This divergence highlights the complexity of organisational practices, where communication quality and structural coherence may be more closely associated with student satisfaction than policy adoption alone.





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Policy adoption showed modest consolidation, with the median increasing from 53.2% to 59.8% (Supplementary Figure 10). However, the relatively high standard deviation, despite declining from 30.6% to 23.3%, indicates continued variation across programmes. Nevertheless, upward shifts across all quartiles indicate gradual increases in planning, communication, and coordination practices. All departments prioritised VLEs to organise module content, increase accessibility, and reinforce communication. Although these practices coincided with relatively stable satisfaction levels, lower NSS outcomes in 2020 suggest that the rapid pandemic-driven digital transition exposed weaknesses in institutional infrastructure and staff preparedness. The first audit identified strengths in course communication but limited mechanisms for incorporating student voice. The second audit indicated greater use and integration of student-engagement platforms to support communication and module organisation. However, limited integration of module-level feedback into institutional decision-making constrained wider enhancement.

## 4.2 DISCUSSION

The findings provide convergent descriptive and exploratory evidence regarding the applicability of the pedagogical policy guidelines within the case-study institution. Across the NSS themes, improvements in student satisfaction were observed alongside increased levels of policy adoption. The exploratory regression identified a positive (statistically non-significant) association between policy adoption and NSS outcomes. These findings should therefore be interpreted as evidence of correspondence within the institutional dataset rather than statistical confirmation or causal evidence. The results nevertheless provide a basis for examining how different policy dimensions may be prioritised within enhancement-led QA practice.

A key finding is the differential association of policy dimensions with student satisfaction outcomes; academic support emerged as the strongest observed association for student satisfaction, while areas such as organisation and management showed comparatively weaker associations (Kahu, 2013). This variation reflects the immediacy and visibility of interventions within the student experience. Academic support, through clear assessment guidance, accessible feedback, and structured learning resources, is more visible within students' day-to-day learning and therefore more readily recognised (Bakogiannis, 2025; Nguyen et al., 2021). In contrast, organisational processes tend to operate in the background and become salient primarily when deficiencies arise (Singh, 2018; Timuș et al., 2024). This highlights feedback quality, clarity of expectations, and access to support as factors associated with student satisfaction, reinforcing the need to prioritise pedagogically embedded practices over administrative enhancements.

These consistent patterns suggest greater pedagogical alignment rather than fragmented practice, further supporting the emphasis on pedagogic clarity, coherence, and consistency within HE-QA (Ai Tran et al., 2025; Brady and Bates, 2016). In particular, using VLEs as active pedagogical tools rather than passive repositories emerged as an important factor associated with student engagement and satisfaction. However, assessment practices remain an area for further development, as the limited embedding of formative assessment, rubrics, and diversified feedback mechanisms indicates that assessment literacy is not yet fully institutionalised (Gomis et al., 2023a; Hattie and Timperley, 2007). The findings should be interpreted in light of contextual factors, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, which coincided with the study period (Kundu and Bej, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2021). The rapid shift to online and blended learning environments coincided with increased digital adoption and pedagogical innovation, which may have influenced student satisfaction captured through NSS (Nguyen et al., 2021). While this context may have contributed to observed patterns, it also underscores the importance of adaptable and resilient pedagogical frameworks. The findings should therefore be understood as indicative of an association rather than definitive causation,





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reinforcing the importance of contextualising quantitative results within broader institutional and temporal dynamics.

Building on these insights, the study proposes a Policy Prioritisation and Pedagogical Integration (PPPI) model (Figure 2), which translates empirical findings into a structured implementation framework. The model conceptualises pedagogical policy as a three-tier hierarchy, in which Higher-priority pedagogical practices (academic support, assessment clarity, feedback practices, and accessible digital environments) are prioritised because they indicated stronger associations with student satisfaction. Supporting pedagogical practices, such as student engagement, collaborative learning, and applied teaching approaches, complement and extend these core practices. Foundational elements, including course organisation, active learning, and student wellbeing, provide the conditions supporting the above tiers and sustained implementation.

***Insert Figure 2 -*** *Policy Prioritisation and Pedagogical Integration (PPPI) Model (Source: Authors' own work)*

The PPPI model complements rather than replaces existing enhancement-led QA frameworks. Whereas frameworks such as institutional QA models and enhancement-led approaches primarily establish principles and standards to ensure educational quality, PPPI prioritises implementation. Specifically, it provides an evidence-informed structure for sequencing pedagogical interventions according to their observed associations with student satisfaction within an institutional context. In doing so, the model extends existing literature by offering a practical mechanism for operationalising, monitoring, and progressively embedding previously developed pedagogical policies within institutional practice.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study advances pedagogical policy research by integrating, operationalising, and institutionally evaluating previously developed pedagogical policy guidelines within a QA framework. Drawing on empirical analysis, the study suggests that pedagogical policy guidelines exhibit varying associations with student satisfaction outcomes, supporting the case for strategic prioritisation rather than uniform implementation. By evaluating policy adoption aligned with NSS outcomes across multiple departments, the study provides empirical evidence of how policy can be operationalised through audit-based QA processes. The findings indicate that increases in policy adoption coincided with higher student satisfaction across the NSS themes examined, although the magnitude and statistical strength of these associations varied across domains.

The principal contribution of this study is the development of the PPPI model as an evidence-informed framework for prioritising and integrating previously developed pedagogical policy guidelines. The model comprises three interrelated tiers: higher-priority pedagogical practices, supporting pedagogical practices, and the foundational tier. Higher-priority pedagogical practices, such as academic support, assessment clarity, and effective feedback, demonstrated comparatively stronger associations with the student learning experience and should be prioritised within curriculum design and delivery. Supporting pedagogical practices, including student engagement, collaborative learning, and applied, context-based teaching, complement and extend these higher-priority practices. Foundational elements, such as course organisation, use of virtual learning environments, and student wellbeing, provide the structural conditions for sustained pedagogical enactment. This shifts the focus from identifying "what matters" to determining "what to prioritise, how to enact, and in what sequence."

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to QA and pedagogical policy literature by proposing a dynamic, evidence-informed model of policy enactment. The PPPI



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model offers a conceptual bridge between policy formulation and classroom practice, advancing understanding of how institutional strategies correspond with student-centred outcomes. From a practical standpoint, the findings provide HEIs with a scalable and resource-sensitive framework for quality enhancement. The staged approach enables institutions to focus on pedagogical domains indicated to have stronger associations with student satisfaction outcomes (particularly academic support and feedback) before progressively integrating enabling and foundational practices. This provides a basis for more efficient resource allocation and effective curriculum design while aligning teaching practices with student experience metrics. The study recommends that institutions adopt a phased approach, prioritising pedagogical practices as areas for quality enhancement within QA cycles. Future research should examine the PPPI model's applicability across diverse institutional and disciplinary contexts using larger and more diverse datasets.

These findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the study is based on a single-institution case, which limits generalisability to other disciplinary or institutional contexts with different pedagogical and assessment structures. Second, the regression analysis is based on 15 department–NSS-theme observations and does not include control variables. Therefore, findings should be interpreted as exploratory associations rather than causal or predictive relationships. Unobserved factors such as leadership changes, cohort effects, and institutional contexts may also influence the results. Third, the study relies partly on NSS perception data, which may be shaped by contextual factors beyond pedagogical enactment, including cohort variation, institutional change, and pandemic-related disruptions. Accordingly, the results should be interpreted as evidence of correspondence rather than direct attribution. Despite these limitations, the study provides evidence that prioritised pedagogical policy enactment is associated with variation in student satisfaction outcomes and offers a potentially transferable model for evidence-informed QA in HE.

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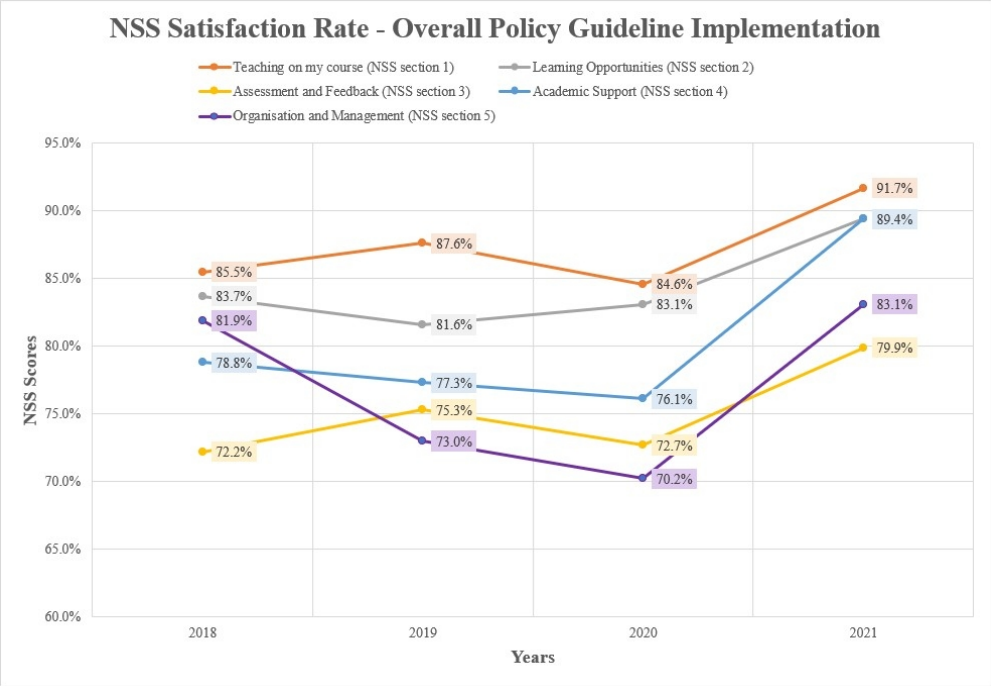



Figure 1 – Audit results of Policy Adoption and Student Satisfaction Rates for all NSS themes

174x121mm (144 x 144 DPI)

| Average % of Policy Guideline Adoption | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **NSS Sections** | **NSS Themes** | **1st Audit** | **2nd Audit** | **Increase (Percentage Points)** |
| Section 01 | Teaching on my course | 39.8% | 69.6% | 29.8 |
| Section 02 | Learning Opportunities | 61.3% | 90.2% | 28.9 |
| Section 03 | Assessment and Feedback | 12.9% | 47.9% | 35.0 |
| Section 04 | Academic Support | 18.5% | 28.4% | 9.9 |
| Section 05 | Organisation and Management | 50.8% | 59.1% | 8.3 |

Table 1 - Policy Guideline Adoption for All NSS Themes

284x86mm (96 x 96 DPI)

| *Regression Statistics* | |
|---|---|
| Multiple R | 0.3563 |
| R Square | 0.1269 |
| Adjusted R Square | 0.0598 |
| Standard Error | 0.0584 |
| P-value | 0.1925 |
| Observations | 15 |

Table 2 - Regression Analysis for Policy Guideline Adoption

384x162mm (96 x 96 DPI)

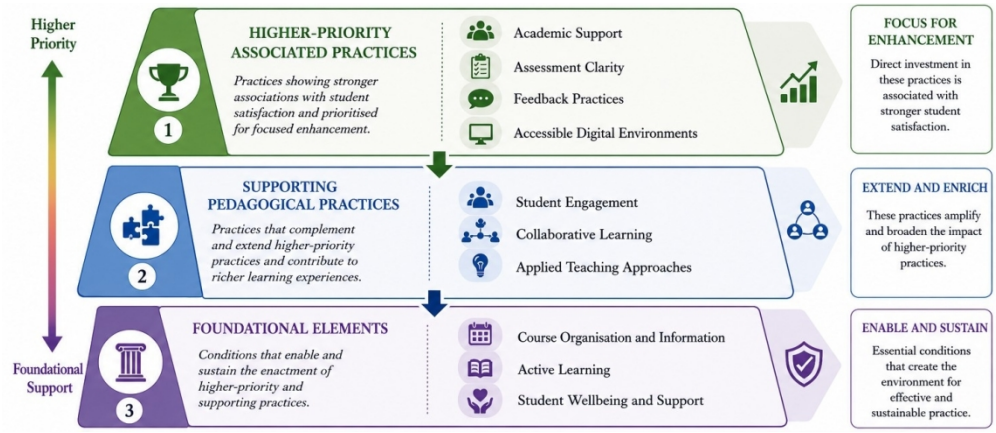



Figure 2 - Policy Prioritisation and Pedagogical Integration (PPPI) Model

392x168mm (96 x 96 DPI)