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**Abstract**

In many countries the outputs from university student satisfaction surveys are used for a variety of educational management purposes. Within the United Kingdom, the main instrument employed by state authorities to measure student satisfaction is the National Student Survey (NSS). The issue investigated by the current research related to whether students with different personal characteristics might ascribe disparate meanings to the wordings of particular items designed to measure certain dimensions of the NSS (for example, what is meant by 'prompt' feedback or by 'fair' marking). A sample of 319 business studies students in a UK university completed questionnaires concerning their learning orientations, levels of engagement with their courses, study skills and family backgrounds and their interpretations of the meanings of key dimensions of the NSS. A conjoint analysis methodology was applied to identify variations in interpretations. The results suggest that students with different kinds of learning orientation and different levels of engagement may hold disparate views on the meanings of key NSS dimensions. This brings into question the utility of employing

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overall average values of students? assessments of these matters for educational management and decision-making purposes. Within the present sample, disparities between the all-sample outcomes and the results for individuals who exhibited low levels of engagement with their programmes were especially pronounced. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)