

# THE EVALUATION OF STUDENT OPINION

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## **THE EVALUATION OF STUDENT OPINION**

The active participation of students in the University's quality assurance and enhancement processes is an essential and valuable component in maintaining and improving the quality of learning opportunities. The evaluation of student opinion and appropriate response to the results is a key indicator in the University's processes for the assurance and enhancement of academic quality and is a required element of the evidence base for the Continuous Monitoring and Improvement process and for periodic review.

Both at the institutional and local level, the University and the Students' Union work in close partnership in all aspects of evaluating and responding to student opinion, recognising that such active collaboration is fundamental to our joint commitment to improve the quality of learning opportunities for students.

### **1. The scope of the evaluation of student opinion**

- 1.1 At institutional level, the University participates in at least four national surveys: the National Student Survey, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, and the Student Barometer.
- 1.2 At faculty/campus level, the evaluation of student opinion normally takes place by unit and by programme and/or level of study. All units offered to students in each academic year must be formally evaluated, and programmes feed the findings from such surveys into formal unit reports, in accordance with the requirements of the University's Continuous Monitoring and Improvement process, as published in the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook.
- 1.3 Student consultation and opinion is an essential component of the evidence base for programme approval, review and modification processes.
- 1.4 Since 2007, the University has made available on an optional basis a standard unit evaluation questionnaire as one example of good practice, which programme teams may use or adapt. The questionnaire is available as one of the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook Appendices on the CASQE website.
- 1.5 Central educational and support services (for example, Library Services, ICTS, Student Services) carry out regular evaluations of student and user opinion, some of which may be concerned with non-academic aspects of the student experience. The results of these evaluations are fed into the University's Continuous Monitoring and Improvement process.
- 1.6 Many programme teams are obliged to gather and respond to student opinion in order to fulfil the specific requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs).

### **2. Methods of obtaining student opinion**

- 2.1 The gathering of student opinion should be undertaken in a variety of ways, both formal and informal. A range of methods is available, which may include the following:
  - Paper questionnaires

- Online questionnaires
  - Informal contact with staff, for example during lectures and seminars and through appointments with staff
  - Focus groups – support in facilitating these is offered by the Centre for Learning and Teaching
  - Brief ‘snapshot’ surveys, for example distributing ‘post-it’ notes in classes and inviting views on a particular topic, with the results being reviewed and discussed, with the aim of responding to these views as soon as possible and before the formal end of unit evaluation
  - National Student Survey
  - Programme Committees
  - Staff-Student Liaison Committees
  - Online discussion fora
  - Inviting student attendance at, and participation in, University and Faculty
    - Learning and Teaching events
- 2.2 It is good practice to involve students in discussions over the choice of evaluation method and in the design of the chosen method, for example in designing the questions to be included in a questionnaire.
- 2.3 It is **required** that programme teams ensure that the arrangements for gathering student views, both formal and informal, are clearly communicated to students, for example in the student handbook or online student information. Clear communication should take place with students, in order to emphasise the value of their participation in evaluation activities, and the benefits of this participation in informing improvements in the service provided to students.
- 2.4 It is **required** that programme teams consider the results of their local evaluations alongside other institutional and national surveys, such as the National Student Survey, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey and the Student Barometer, in order to gain as accurate and holistic a view as possible of student views when planning actions.
- 2.5 It is **required** that programme teams ensure that evaluation methods are appropriate for students in all equality groups (disability, gender, age and ethnicity), and review the appropriateness of evaluation methods with students at least once in every periodic review cycle, making adjustments as necessary.

### 3. Non-campus based students

- 3.1 It is **required** that programme teams ensure that students who are not required to attend regular campus-based classes, for example distance and e-learning students, have an appropriate means of making their views known at the same time as campus-based students; for example, the facility to email responses and comments to a nominated member of staff, who will then be responsible for ensuring that these views are addressed and that actions taken are reported back to students at the same time as to campus-based students.
- 3.2 It is **required** that collaborative link tutors ensure that students in partner colleges have an appropriate means of making their views known at the same time as campus-based students, so that their experiences may be compared with those of campus-based students to ensure a consistent learning

experience for all. It is **required** that link tutors and staff in partner colleges share good practice in the development of student feedback mechanisms.

- 3.3 Recent graduates comprise the only student constituency in a position to offer a comprehensive opinion on the effectiveness of the complete cycle of a programme, from pre-entry to employability. As such a potentially useful and significant evidence base, it is **required** that surveys of graduate opinion of the quality of their programme are undertaken regularly; as a minimum, the views of recent graduates should be fed into the periodic review process.

#### 4. Anonymity

- 4.1 It is **required** that programme teams and central support services ensure that anonymity and confidentiality are a feature of evaluation mechanisms, and where necessary they should include students in discussions over the best way for this to be **assured**. For example, e-learning students may be invited to email their views to a student representative, who will then submit an anonymised summary of these views to the programme team.
- 4.2 Exceptionally, if for any reason it is not possible to guarantee full anonymity in an evaluation mechanism, it is **required** that the programme team or support service should make this clear to students in advance and that students are able to opt out of participating if they so wish.

#### 5. Closing the feedback loop

- 5.1 Programme teams should involve students in discussions over the results of evaluations and how those results should be addressed, for example in the prioritisation of proposed actions in response to evaluation results.
- 5.2 At least once in every academic year, programme teams and central support services are **required** to report to students the actions taken in response to student views, including those taken in response to the National Student Survey, in order to 'close the feedback loop' and to summarise the improvements which have resulted from student participation in evaluation activities. If it has not been possible to take actions in respect of some stated student views, it is **required** that the reasons for this should be clearly explained to students.
- 5.3 Faculty/campuses may choose to ask programme teams to report actions taken to a single faculty/campus officer, who then reports these actions to students on behalf of all programme teams. If this method is preferred, it is essential that students receive the same level of detail as they would have received directly from the programme team.
- 5.4 It is good practice for programme teams to arrange for student opinion gathered informally (for example, during lectures and seminars) to be reported to programme committees, so that there is a minuted response to any issues raised informally. Programme teams may choose to arrange for informal student opinion to be gathered for this purpose by a nominated member of staff.
- 5.5 In addition to reporting to students the actions taken in response to student views, all staff in the area covered by the evaluation (department, faculty/campus, central support service etc) should also be kept fully and

regularly informed of these actions or of the reasons why it has not been possible to take actions in respect of some student views. This may avoid the possible duplication of staff effort in addressing the results of evaluations.

5.6 A range of methods, both formal and informal, may be used to close the feedback loop. The method chosen should be appropriate to the students concerned. Examples include:

- Websites
- Emails
- Notices on student and staff notice boards
- Electronic notice boards
- Posters
- Programme Committee minutes through student representatives
- Informal reporting by staff, for example announcements in lectures and seminars

## **6. Dissemination of good practice**

6.1 Staff should disseminate examples of particularly successful and innovative evaluation practice on the academic practice database maintained by the Centre for Learning and Teaching.

## **7. National Student Survey**

7.1 Final year undergraduates are surveyed through the National Student Survey, the results of which appear on the Unistats website. Programmes are expected to address relevant issues arising from the NSS survey as part of the required evidence base for the Continuous Monitoring and Improvement process.

7.2 The management of the NSS is coordinated jointly by CASQE and PMI, the latter being primarily responsible for the integrity of the student sample, the provision of appropriate statistical information and for the technical aspects of the survey.

7.3 The University and the Students' Union work in close partnership in managing all aspects of the survey. Good practice includes the following:

### Maximising participation

- The University and the Students' Union agree a schedule of activities on an annual basis, which are aimed at encouraging student participation in the NSS
- These activities are evaluated each year and sectoral good practice is incorporated into the University's procedures wherever appropriate
- The University provides clear information to students and staff on the survey and its format, timing and importance
- Response rates are monitored centrally and regular updates provided to faculties throughout the survey
- An embargo on other surveys of final year undergraduates for the opening weeks of the survey

### Results information

- The University arranges to receive results by subject, department and by individual programme
- PMI arranges on an annual basis for NSS results to be made accessible online to all staff, and provides further analyses as required
- Free text comments are made available to Deans, for further distribution as they judge to be appropriate
- CeLT provides support to departments, faculties and campuses in responding to the NSS results, including guidance notes posted on the CeLT website
- Programme teams are required to comment in the Continuous Monitoring and Improvement process on actions taken in response to the results of the survey

## **8. Student Barometer, Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey**

8.1 Subject to collation of the results by external surveying organisations, the results of the above surveys are considered and analysed centrally alongside those from the National Student Survey, and information on issues arising from the three surveys is made available to University staff and the Students' Union. Programme teams are **required** to comment in the Continuous Monitoring and Improvement process on actions taken in response to the results of these surveys.