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# The Evaluation of Student Opinion 2016/17



## Why do we Evaluate 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 student views 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 \(CMI\)](#) 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 enhance the quality of learning opportunities for students.

This guidance outlines key points of how the University gathers and responds to student opinion.



## Acronyms

Throughout this guide you will find a number of acronyms related to Quality and Standards

CIP - Continuous Improvement Plan

CMI - Continuous Monitoring & Improvement

EC - Education Committee

ISS - Internal Student Survey

NSS - National Student Survey

PARM - Programme Approval, Review and Modification

PRES - Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

SSLC - Staff-Student Liaison Committee

VLE - Virtual Learning Environment

## What is the Scope of the Evaluation?

The Education Committee (EC) is responsible for the University's strategy for obtaining and responding to student feedback, and for coordinating the translation of the results into actions to support improvements in the overall student experience.

Student Voice data, including the results of student surveys, is used in the formulation of Continuous Improvement Plans and Unit Improvement Plans.

### National Surveys

At institutional level, the University normally participates in three national surveys:

- The National Student Survey (NSS), comprising mainly final year undergraduate students;
- The International Student Barometer (ISB), comprising most International and European Union students;
- The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), comprising most postgraduate research students.

With the exception of the NSS, the University may exercise the option of participating in some of these surveys every other year.

## The Internal Student Survey

- The University also runs its own online, in-house institutional survey, the Internal Student Survey (ISS), for all enrolled students on taught campus-based programmes.
- The ISS provides us with student feedback on the individual units they have studied.
- Results are made available online to key staff at programme, department and faculty level, and centrally based staff, and selected ISS results are also made available on the CMI Data Dashboard.
- Units which have received an approved exemption from the ISS must be evaluated by an alternative method.

## Programme Approval, Review and Modification (PARM) Activity

Student consultation and opinion is an essential component of the evidence base for [PARM processes](#). Students are members of Faculty PARM panels.

## Collaborative Partners

For Manchester Met programmes delivered by collaborative partners, which are not normally included in the Internal Student Survey, programme teams must ensure that all units offered to students in each academic year are formally evaluated. Collaborative partners may use their own systems for gathering and using this data to evidence the CMI process

### Remember that...

Many programme teams are obliged to fulfil the specific requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) in gathering and responding to student opinion.

## Central Services

Central educational and support services (for example, Library Services, IT Services) carry out regular evaluations of student and user opinion. Enhancement actions taken as a result of these evaluations are fed into the University's CMI process.



## How can we Evaluate Student Opinion?

As well as the national and institutional surveys, the gathering of further student opinion may be undertaken. A range of methods is available, which may include:

- [Programme Committees](#). The membership of all Programme Committees includes student course representatives.
- Informal Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs), Student Forums or similar informal gatherings – useful in enabling students to express their views in an informal setting. There is an expectation that all programme teams will use informal SSLCs (or similar) to complement Programme Committees.
- Informal student contact with staff, for example during lectures and seminars and through appointments with staff.
- Focus groups.
- Brief 'snapshot' surveys on a particular topic.
- Online discussion fora.
- Student attendance at, and participation in, University and Faculty Learning and Teaching events.
- Student contributions to Programme Review events.



### Good Practice!

Involve students in discussions over the choice of evaluation method and in the design of the chosen method.



## Top Tips

- Avoid 'over-surveying' students and consider the timing of any local evaluation activities, avoiding in particular the national and institutional survey periods.
- Ensure that the arrangements for gathering student views are clearly communicated to students, for example in the student handbook or online student information. Emphasise how student feedback can help inform enhancements.
- Consider your student opinion data as a whole, not the results of any single student survey in isolation, in order to gain an accurate and holistic picture of student views when planning actions.
- Ensure that evaluation methods are appropriate for all groups of students, taking into consideration all protected characteristics (for example disability, gender, age and ethnicity).

## Working with your Course Reps

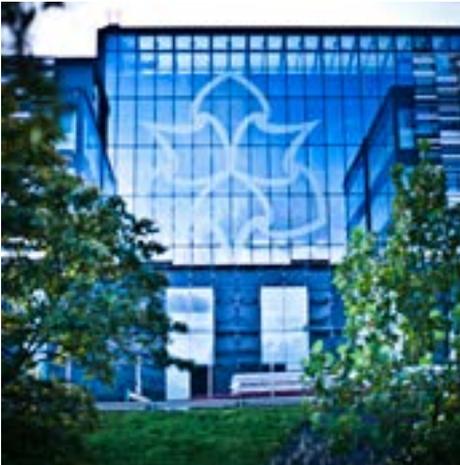
- The role and active contribution of the student course representative (course rep) is of paramount importance in enabling the Student Voice to be heard, and in using student opinion to maintain and enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities.
- In formal settings, for example committee meetings, and informal gatherings such as SSLCs (or similar), the course rep is in an ideal position to communicate the views of students and to work in partnership with programme teams to formulate actions.
- The Students' Union provides [training](#) for course reps, with support from professional services staff, and comprehensive guidance for course reps is available on the Students' Union website.

## How can we Evaluate the Opinion of Students who are not based on campus?

- For students who are not required to attend campus-based classes, such as distance and e-learning students, programme teams should ensure students have an appropriate means of making their views known, for example, the facility to email responses and comments to a nominated member of staff.
- Manchester Met Collaborative Link Tutors should ensure that students in partner organisations have an appropriate means of making their views known. Manchester Met Link Tutors and staff in partner organisations should share good practice in the development of student feedback mechanisms.

## Don't Forget About...

Recent graduates! They 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 a potentially useful evidence base, programme teams should seek to obtain the views of recent graduates and feed these into the periodic review process.



- In the ISB, comments are only distributed to departments if they have met a minimum threshold participation rate, and a process of redaction of the comments takes place before they are distributed.
- In the case of the NSS, the redaction is carried out by Texunatech before the comments are received by the University.
- If for any reason it is not possible to guarantee anonymity in an evaluation mechanism, this must be made clear to students in advance and students must be offered the opportunity to opt out of participating if they so wish.

## How do we Ensure Anonymity?

- The University, programme teams and central support services should 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, a programme team may invite e-learning students to email their views to a student course representative, who will then submit an anonymised summary of these views to the programme team.
- In the national and institutional surveys, students are advised not to make comments which might enable them to be identified.
- In the ISS, faculty-based staff are responsible for the appropriate redaction of student comments before they are made widely available.



## How can we respond to students' views?

### Step 1: Review the Data Analysis

In order to support the effective use of student survey results data to inform enhancement actions, the University works to the guiding principle of transparency and accessibility of this data, subject to the rules of the surveys and the constraints

of any minimum participation thresholds. Central analysis of the results aims to provide the data in a user-friendly format and places it within the institutional, and where possible the sectoral, context.

### Step 2: Implement Enhancements and Highlight Good Practice

#### Local Enhancements

Where appropriate programme teams should include within the programme-level CIP specific actions in response to the results of student surveys and other student views. Good practice should be clearly highlighted in the CIP so this can be shared at faculty-level where appropriate.

Programme Committees should involve students in discussions over the results of evaluations and how those results should be addressed in the CIP, for example in the prioritisation of proposed actions.

#### Institutional Enhancements

If programme teams identify issues which require action at institutional level, they should record on the CIP the details of the referral of the issue to the appropriate central department. This information is available for inclusion in the Annual

Overview Report of Quality and Standards, where appropriate.

Action-planning workshops are organised as required to support staff in responding to the results of recent student surveys, with bespoke support for faculties available on request.



### Step 3: Let Students and Staff Know about Actions Taken

This is commonly referred to as 'closing the feedback loop'.

Students should receive regular information on how actions have been taken to address areas in need of improvement and how good practice has been shared and celebrated.

Students should be informed of the reasons if why it has not been possible to carry out some actions in response to their views.

This demonstrates to students that they are being listened to and that the University is acting on their views, and helps to encourage continued participation in student surveys and other Student Voice activities.



#### Closing the Feedback Loop about Institutional Issues

In the Autumn Term Marketing and Communications submits a surveys communications strategy to the Education Committee, including posters focusing on recent enhancements. This information is posted on the University website.

#### Closing the Feedback Loop about Local Issues

The Programme Committee should consider the arrangements for reporting to students and staff the actions taken in response to student opinion, and should satisfy itself that programme teams are communicating this information regularly. Programme teams should use information from the Continuous Improvement Plan as the basis for the reporting of progress, and the Programme Leader is responsible for ensuring that the Plan is accessible to students, staff and External Examiners. In closing the feedback loop, the programme team should communicate:

#### Remember that...

It is particularly important to provide students with feedback as soon as possible after programme teams have received survey results, so students can see that their participation in the surveys has resulted in actions.



- The source of the issue for improvement or example of good practice raised by students.
- The action taken by the programme team to resolve the issue, or to share the good practice.
- The reasons why some actions may not yet have been possible, and how these actions are currently being pursued.

## Some options for programme teams to close the feedback loop

### Report Back to Students in Person

- Summarise progress at the beginning or end of classes. Personal communication enables you to demonstrate action regarding student comments and offers an opportunity for students to comment further on the issues they have raised.
- If you use Moodle (see next section) to report progress you could complement this with face to face communication in class, and let students know that this online information is available.
- Provide information to students on Powerpoint slides at the end of appropriate lectures.

#### Good Practice!

Monthly 'town hall'-style meetings with the programme leader. Fifteen minutes is taken at the end of core unit lectures for students to raise any issues with the programme leader, who undertakes to report back to them on progress at the same time the following week.



## Using Moodle

Moodle may offer an effective means of communicating to students and staff the actions taken in response to student feedback, particularly when it is used to complement face-to-face communication. It is a useful means of communicating information to students who may be studying by distance/e-learning or part-time. Moodle, or other VLE, may be useful for communicating to collaborative partner students.

- Programme teams may choose to post their progress reports on one or more of the following Moodle areas: Unit area, Programme area, Department area or Faculty area.
- The progress report on actions taken may be posted in the chosen Moodle area within a 'topic.' eg 'keeping you informed - recent improvement actions'
- Options for uploading information include as a Word document, plain text within Moodle and podcast, amongst others.
- You can set up separate 'topics' for students in specific years, therefore removing the need to use specific Moodle 'Announcements' relating to each year of study, which should be avoided due to generating unnecessary email notifications.

See guidance on using [Moodle](#) for more advice. You can also find this guide in the Technology Enhanced Learning: Guides and Training area. If necessary, staff can seek additional advice from their Technology Enhanced Learning Advisor.

#### Good Practice!

- Posting a quarterly staff/student newsletter on Moodle, which includes a progress report on actions taken and not yet taken.
- Posting of Powerpoint slides on Moodle to convey the information required.



## Staff-Student Liaison Committees/ Student Forums

[SSLCs](#) or similar equivalent informal meetings provide an additional opportunity to report back to students on progress made towards actions.

## The use of Faculty/Department Webpages

Faculty/Department websites may represent a convenient and accessible central location to feed back to both students and staff on recent actions taken and progress in response to student views. [Manchester Met Library Services](#) makes use of its website to feed back to students on actions taken in response to student views.

## Communicating to Student Course Representatives

Whichever methods programme teams use to report back to students, it is important to ensure that student course representatives have this information at the earliest opportunity in order to carry out their role effectively.



### Remember that...

You need to close the feedback loop to staff too, as they need to know which actions have been successful in improving the student experience. It is important that they receive regular information regarding these actions, as well as the reasons why some actions may not yet have been possible. Good communication in this respect can prevent duplication of staff effort in addressing issues which have already been dealt with.

## Share your Good Practice!

Programme teams should disseminate examples of particularly successful and innovative evaluation practice through their Continuous Improvement Plans, Faculty Education Committee and via the [Good Practice Exchange](#).

## Any questions? Contact us

CASQE is responsible for managing the University's Student Voice activities, and works closely with faculty and centrally-based staff and the Students' Union over different aspects of this remit. Contact person is Rob Baker [r.baker@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:r.baker@mmu.ac.uk).