



University  
of Glasgow

# Obtaining and responding to feedback from students

University Code of Practice





# Obtaining and Responding to Feedback from Students – University Code of Practice

## 1. Introduction

The University provides a learning experience that is rewarding and challenging for its students. To help ensure this remains the case, staff engage with students with a view to listening and responding to what they say about their experience of their courses, whether individually, collectively or through their representatives.

Formal arrangements for gathering and responding to feedback from students have existed at the University for many years. This Code of Practice builds on these foundations and its purpose is to:

- freshly energise the processes for obtaining and responding to feedback from students and assist in promoting a culture where staff and students view the student feedback process as positive and dynamic;
- set out the responsibilities of staff and students;
- provide guidance on a range of feedback-gathering tools and mechanisms to assist staff to gain a better understanding of student attitudes and approaches to learning.

This Code has been developed following a review of current good practice in the University and elsewhere and has taken into account a number of other sources of guidance and advice, including:

- the University's Learning & Teaching Strategy;
- the growing partnership between the University and student representative bodies;
- the findings of the national enhancement theme, *Responding to Student Needs*
- the shift, in the University and nationally, from quality *assurance* to quality *enhancement* and the change in emphasis in quality management from teaching to student learning.

An increasingly prominent student voice in institutional quality systems is also a key feature of the national Quality Enhancement Framework. The Scottish Funding Council's current guidance to higher education institutions on quality management expresses the Council's expectation that 'students would be involved in all processes relating to quality assurance and enhancement and that students should be represented as widely as possible in each institution's consultative and decision-making forums'. It states that 'current thinking about the meaning of "student engagement" now extends into broader discussion about students' engagement with their own learning' and anticipates that 'the emphasis in future will not be on particular mechanisms by which students interact with their institution, but on the quality and

effectiveness of these interactions, and the potential to amplify the "student voice".<sup>1</sup>

The Code comprises the following sections:

- Student feedback and associated dialogue and the expectations of staff and students in respect of this
- The role of the 'student voice'
- Responding to matters raised by students in relation to learning, teaching and assessment
- Communication of responses to students - closing the loop
- Obtaining students' views on proposed new programmes and courses and proposed changes to existing programmes and courses
- Required and recommended mechanisms for collecting feedback from students
- Extending the scope of feedback-gathering to gain better understanding of student attitudes and approaches to learning and assessment
- The need for departments to employ a suitable range of methods for collecting feedback.

## **2. Student Feedback and Associated Dialogue**

It is important that both staff and students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them in matters related to feedback. The minimum expectations are as follows:

### ***Expected of Staff***

- To explain to students the purpose of collecting feedback from them, the methods that will be utilised, how the feedback will be analysed, how and when the findings will be considered and how actions taken as a result of the findings will be communicated to them;
- To encourage students to reflect on their learning experience;
- To ensure departmental feedback procedures are followed;
- To communicate responses to students and relevant staff on matters raised (see Section 5);
- To communicate matters of interest and import arising from feedback from students to Department,<sup>2</sup> Faculty and the University.

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<sup>1</sup> Council guidance to higher education institutions on quality, SFC/30/2008, 6 June 2008  
[www.sfc.ac.uk/information/info\\_circulars/sfc/2008/sfc3008/sfc3008.pdf](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/information/info_circulars/sfc/2008/sfc3008/sfc3008.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The word 'Department' refers to Department, Division, School, Section etc

## ***Expected of Students***

- To provide feedback on their learning experience and other relevant/associated matters;
- To reflect on their learning experience;
- To engage with Student Representatives;
- To check relevant websites, Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), notice boards and their University e-mail account for communications from staff and Student Representatives.

### **3. The Role of the ‘Student Voice’**

The University recognises the importance of the partnership between the University and its students. This is echoed in the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy which lists as an objective ‘To develop a student-staff partnership model that promotes student engagement with learning, and enhances student success’. Such a partnership emphasises the significance of the ‘student voice’ – both individual and collective – in enhancing the student experience of learning, teaching and assessment across the curriculum at Glasgow.

On registering at the University, students accept responsibility for, commitment to, and engagement in, their learning and in other opportunities for personal development.<sup>3</sup>

Departments are responsible for obtaining students’ views on their experience of learning, teaching and assessment.

Effective use of the ‘student voice’ may be promoted and encouraged through a variety of mechanisms.

#### ***The individual perspective***

- Anonymous course/programme questionnaires (paper and/or online)
- VLE surveys/exchanges
- Moodle or other VLE Pop-up Quiz
- 1:1 formal or informal meetings with staff.

#### ***The collective perspective (where students represent the views of their peers)***

- Staff-Student Liaison Committees
- Faculty/departmental Learning and Teaching Committees (or equivalent)

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<sup>3</sup> University of Glasgow Calendar, *Sponsio Academica* (revised 2007)  
(<http://senate.gla.ac.uk/calendar/current/02-feesandgeneral.pdf>)

- Focus groups
- Representative class groups
- Discussion of Annual Monitoring Reports
- Periodic Review of Departmental Programmes of Teaching Learning and Assessment (DPTLA).

### ***The combined perspective (individual and collective)***

- Lecture/Seminar/Tutorial discussion
- Student Panels
- Student Representatives.

## **4. Responding to matters raised by students in relation to learning, teaching and assessment**

Departments have a responsibility to reflect on and respond to matters raised by students. These may take a number of forms:

- individual items that can be responded to on a one-to-one basis;
- issues that are straightforward and easily addressed to the mutual satisfaction of students and staff;
- suggestions that may require wider consultation (ie with students or staff or both) before a course of action can be determined;
- situations that may require monitoring over a period of time to determine whether action is appropriate;
- requests that are beyond the scope of the Department, School, Division and need to be passed on to appropriate people for action;
- identification of good practice that may be worthy of emulating and/or sharing.

Key actions from student feedback should be:

- passed by individual members of staff to Course Leaders and/or Departmental Quality Assurance and Enhancement Officers;
- reflected upon and reported in undergraduate course and postgraduate taught programme Annual Monitoring Reports (AMR);
- raised at relevant Learning and Teaching Committees and/or Departmental Meetings;
- considered at Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLC);
- drawn to the attention of External Examiners where appropriate;
- reported to relevant meetings when responses from people external to the Department have been received in respect of matters passed to them;

- fed back to students, and explored further where necessary.

### ***Communication of responses to students - closing the loop***

Departments have a responsibility to communicate responses to matters raised to all students and relevant staff. Student groups will include:

- those who have recently completed the course or programme and who have an interest in the outcomes of what they raised;
- those currently undertaking the course or programme;
- those who may enrol on the course or programme in the future.

Communication of responses to matters raised may take various forms and it is **recommended** that they be posted on a local website or VLE, circulated to students by e-mail, or provided in easily accessible paper format for students to consult, eg on departmental notice boards, including:

- minutes of meetings of Staff-Student Liaison Committees;
- relevant extracts of minutes of Faculty/departmental Learning and Teaching Committees or equivalent;
- summary reports of topics discussed and action taken;
- summary analyses of questionnaire outcomes from the current year and the previous 3 years.

The provision on the local website or VLE of an electronic archive of Staff-Student Liaison Committee minutes and summary reports of topics discussed and action taken is **strongly recommended** as this enables students (and staff) to identify the progress that has been made over a period of time. This can also be particularly helpful for students who are studying on a part-time basis or by distance learning, or who are temporarily away from the University.

Mechanisms should be in place to ensure that the information is accessible in an appropriate format to students with a disability (see the 'Assistive technology' section on the Student Disability Service website [www.gla.ac.uk/services/studentdisability/assistivetechonology/](http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/studentdisability/assistivetechonology/)).

## **5. Obtaining students' views on proposed new programmes and courses and proposed changes to existing programmes and courses**

The University requires departments to consult with students on major changes proposed to existing degree programmes and courses and proposed new courses and programmes, normally the group of students which is

academically closest to the proposal, and to submit a summary of the feedback to Faculty.<sup>4</sup>

Consultations may be undertaken in a variety of ways including those listed above.

## **6. Extending the scope of feedback-gathering to gain better understanding of student attitudes and approaches to learning**

It is **recommended** that departments use a variety of mechanisms for obtaining feedback from students for the following reasons:

- to promote ongoing dialogue between students and staff;
- to minimise over-reliance on one particular mechanism and the likelihood of 'questionnaire fatigue';
- to provide opportunities to receive and give rapid feedback on particular matters;
- to provide opportunities to explore issues identified through more traditional feedback routes in greater depth.

It is **recommended** that departments review periodically how frequently each type of information needs to be collected and how readily outcomes can be reported back to students. In determining the most appropriate mechanism for gathering feedback, departments should consider the reason(s) for collecting it and the purpose(s) to which it will be put.

## **7. Mechanisms for collecting feedback from students: University requirements**

### ***Paper and/or on-line questionnaires***

It has been agreed that a 'standard' questionnaire<sup>5</sup> should be used throughout the University to allow for comparison on similar topics within and between departments. The questionnaire comprises:

- core questions to allow comparisons of student satisfaction within departments and across faculties;
- an opportunity for students to provide free text responses;
- a range of optional questions from which academic staff may select so as to allow individuals to tailor to their own purposes (It is

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<sup>4</sup> Programme and course approval process  
(<http://senate.gla.ac.uk/qa/approval/consultations.html>)

<sup>5</sup> Selected departments are piloting a draft 'standard' questionnaire in the first semester of Session 2008-09 with a view to implementation in Session 2009-10.

**recommended** that no more than one question be selected from each category);

- relevant equality and diversity questions.

The following may be included in the questionnaire at the discretion of the Head of Department or Course Co-ordinator, whilst ensuring that the questionnaire does not become inordinately lengthy:

- questions specific to the discipline (the number may vary but should be kept to a minimum);
- student-driven questions proposed by Student Representatives on behalf of their class and approved by the SSLC.

The 'standard' questionnaire should normally be used to obtain students' views on a course or programme and, subject to the tailoring noted above, should be the only form of questionnaire used. It is **recommended** that the frequency of issuing the questionnaire to students in any academic session is regulated to prevent 'questionnaire fatigue' amongst students - for example, if there are no changes to a course it may not be necessary to issue a course questionnaire every year. However the frequency of issue may depend on how the Department uses the data that is collected and on the other methods used to inform the Department of student views. To reduce the number of occasions on which questionnaires are issued, departments should also consider whether students' views on the quality of the contributions of individual members of staff to a course may be elicited through other mechanisms described in this document.

## ***Student Representation***

Student Representatives provide a key link between the wider student body and the Department. They are highly valuable sources of information on students' views, and help to influence departmental approaches and communicate to other students the reasons for those approaches. The University introduced a *Code of Practice on Student Representation*<sup>6</sup> in 2006-07 to re-emphasise and re-invigorate that process. A summary of key aspects of the process is provided here.

To maximise the effectiveness of the Student Representative system in departments, greater efforts may be required to support the system at Levels 1 and 2, and more particularly in the general faculties where classes are often very large and students may therefore have less of a sense of identity with a department.

Departments are required to:

- conform with the *Code of Practice on Student Representation* and follow the *Guidance on the Operation of Staff Student Liaison Committees*;<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <http://senate.gla.ac.uk/qa/studentrep/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://senate.gla.ac.uk/qa/studentrep/studentliaison/studentliaison.html>

- operate at least one Departmental Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) which should meet at least twice a year;
- invite students to have representation on the Departmental Learning and Teaching Committee or equivalent;
- encourage students to elect/appoint Student Representatives to serve on SSLCs and the Departmental Learning and Teaching Committee or equivalent;
- inform students about student representation. Resources are available on the Senate Office website to support this;
- provide the Students' Representative Council (SRC) with the details of elected/appointed Student Representatives;
- encourage Student Representatives to avail themselves of the Student Representative training provided by the SRC;
- facilitate opportunities for Student Representatives to communicate with their classmates (eg set aside time in class; provide a discussion forum for the course on Moodle);
- confirm to the Senate Office whether or not Student Representatives have completed their term of office to the satisfaction of the Department.

Faculties are required to:

- make provision for student representation on Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees.

Student Representatives are required to:

- consult with their classmates;
- attend meetings of the SSLC and/or the Faculty or Departmental Learning and Teaching Committee or equivalent;
- represent the views of their classmates at SSLCs and/or the Faculty or Departmental Learning and Teaching Committee or equivalent;
- report back to their classmates.

The University will:

- record the Student Representative Role on a student's transcript (or other official record sheet) provided s/he has fulfilled the following criteria:
  - i attended Student Representative training;
  - ii completed the term of office as a Student Representative to the satisfaction of their Department.

## ***Review of Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (DPTLA)***

Teaching departments are required to undergo DPTLA (internal review) on a 6-yearly cycle. The process can be summarised as follows:

- i) When a Department is about to undergo DPTLA,<sup>8</sup> the Department prepares a Self Evaluation Report (SER). The SER is central to the review process and is the key document for the Review Panel. It is **strongly recommended** that the authors of the SER consult students and staff on an early draft to seek feedback on whether or not it is a fair representation of the Department and to seek endorsement by (staff and) students before submission.
- ii) A Review Panel is appointed to undertake the review, which will include relevant University staff, an external subject specialist and a student member identified by the SRC.
- iii) Obtaining students' views is an integral part of the DPTLA process. In order to encourage participation, departments should encourage as wide as possible representation. The Department's students will be invited to meet with the Review Panel and to provide their views on their experience of learning, teaching and assessment and on their wider experience as a student of the University of Glasgow. The Panel will also be informed about student feedback through the analysis of student feedback questionnaires and copies of minutes of Staff-Student Liaison Committees.
- iv) Once the Review Panel's formal report of the DPTLA has been approved by the Academic Standards Committee and forwarded to the Department, the Department should ensure that students have access to the summary of the outcomes of the Review (e.g. via departmental website, Moodle or other VLE) and the actions arising from them should be discussed within the forum of the appropriate Staff-Student Liaison Committee.

## **8. Other ways of collecting feedback from students endorsed by the University**

The use of a range of mechanisms is **strongly recommended** and encouraged to supplement or interchange with more traditional methods of obtaining feedback from students for the reasons stated above:

The following feedback tools are **recommended**:

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<sup>8</sup> Review of Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment – Guidance Notes for Departments (<http://senate.gla.ac.uk/qa/review/index.html>)

## ***Focus Groups (representative group of students)***

A 'focus group' is a representative survey group, ie a small group of representative people who are questioned about their [and by implication, their peers'] opinions.

'Focus groups' should be interpreted to include discussions within tutorial groups, seminars, workshops or informal meetings, as well as independently led focus groups.

Focus groups can be a tool to be used for further discussion of issues raised through other feedback mechanisms, or for informal discussions during seminars or tutorials. This should allow particular issues to be discussed and dealt with by staff members, or for a thorough discussion of the learning and teaching aspects of the course.

Focus groups can:

- be a meaningful and constructive process with beneficial outcomes;
- permit engagement with students at a range of levels;
- permit follow-up and in-depth discussion of particular issues.

But do require:

- clarity of purpose;
- good management;
- students' willingness to participate;
- prior agreement about how the discussion will be recorded.

## ***Moodle (or other VLE) Pop-up Quiz***

A pop-up quiz is an informal method of obtaining feedback from students, allowing a department, course leader or tutor to 'take the temperature' of the cohort by utilising the 'quiz' function of Moodle (or another VLE). This allows information to be garnered quickly, at earlier stages of the course, focusing on relevant issues at the time of questioning.

The results of a pop-up quiz would not be statistically robust, and would not be expected to be used for Annual Monitoring Reports (AMR) or formal course evaluations, but can supplement primary feedback mechanisms and allow greater responsiveness to students' views.

This method may also be utilised by individual course contributors to obtain feedback on aspects of their teaching.

## ***Student Panel***

A Student Panel is roughly equivalent to a Citizen Panel, most commonly used by Local Authorities or Community Councils. In these panels, a

representative group is consulted on relevant issues over a period of four or five years, usually through questionnaires or focus groups. Panels may be particularly useful in fixed curriculum programmes.

A student panel allows in-depth review, acknowledging the development of understanding and differing experiences and expectations of students during their University career. It allows greater responsiveness to student views, responding to views with relevance to each year group and different student demographic groups.

Alternatively, a Student Panel might be used in Departments as an extension of the Student Representation system, with Student Representatives using the process as a means of asking specific questions of students and presenting the student viewpoint to the Department.

### ***Reflection on Assessment***

This method provides an opportunity for students to answer, on an optional basis, a reflective question(s) on the experience of undertaking a particular assessment. Forms for this purpose may be issued to students when the marked assignments are returned.

Reflection on assessment can be a very useful tool for obtaining feedback from students. It will facilitate personal development through reflective learning, encouraging students to consider how they had developed by completing the piece of assessment. It will also allow staff to review the appropriateness of the method of assessment being used and the effectiveness of the feedback that they have provided.

The following are examples of questions that might be asked;<sup>9</sup>

**STUDENT COMMENTS ON THE ASSIGNMENT** (optional – for your continued academic and personal development you are encouraged to review your achievement and reflect on your progress in your studies)

- What did you do well?
- What could you have done better?
- What would have enabled you to do it better?
- If applicable, how have you used feedback from previous assignments?
- How useful did you find the feedback provided to you on this assignment?

**STUDENT COMMENTS ON COURSEWORK** (optional – for your continued academic and personal development you are encouraged to review your achievement and reflect on your progress in your studies)

- What did you find most satisfying in doing this coursework?
- What challenges or difficulties did you experience in doing this coursework?

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<sup>9</sup> Based on examples used at the University of Hertfordshire

***Informal methods***, for example

i) Show of hands

Giving the teacher a rough indication of support for a particular activity or issue.

ii) Electronic voting

Using infrared wireless clickers, students can answer questions and record their responses with a simple click of a button on keypads. The system has two key advantages:

- It actively engages students during lectures/tutorials as they are required to answer questions.
- The lecturer receives instant feedback as to how well the students understand the subject.

For more comprehensive information and access to the on-line booking form for the system please refer to the Learning & Teaching Centre website.<sup>10</sup>

iii) Nominal group technique (Manwaring (1998)<sup>11</sup>)

This method is **recommended** for smaller classes where everyone's views may be considered.

Method:

- Individual students reflect on question(s) such as 'What are the three best and the three worst aspects of this course?'
- The facilitator/tutor goes round the group asking for a single comment and records this.
- After everyone has made one response, the students then offer a second comment, and so on.
- The process continues until comments are exhausted.
- Each student has six votes to allocate between items in any way he/she sees fit – all for a single item, one vote for each of six, etc.
- The facilitator/tutor identifies items with collective high and low scores, which may then be open for discussion.

See Manwaring, *ibid* for variations on the process.

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<sup>10</sup>

[www.gla.ac.uk/services/learningteaching/goodpracticeresources/electronicvotingsystemsandinteractivelectures/](http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/learningteaching/goodpracticeresources/electronicvotingsystemsandinteractivelectures/)

<sup>11</sup> Manwaring G (1998), Nominal group technique;. in J Harvey (ed), *Evaluation cookbook*, (Herriot-Watt University: Learning & Teaching Dissemination Initiative): 44-45

- iv) Post-its/postcards/notes (Brown and Race (2002);<sup>12</sup> Kember and McNaught (2007)<sup>13</sup>)
- a) Method 1 (Brown and Race (2002)):
- Give students three 'post-its'.
  - Ask them to use one to say what they would like you to *start* doing, one for something they would like you to *stop* doing, and one they would like you to *continue* doing.
- b) Method 2 (Kember and McNaught (2007)):
- Give students three 'post-its'.
  - Ask them to write down three things that they learned or 3 things that they still don't understand.
- v) Chain notes (Angelo and Cross (1993)<sup>14</sup>)
- Students are issued with index cards at the start of the lecture.
  - At the end, students pass round a large envelope on which the lecturer has written a question about the class.
  - Students write a *brief* response on their index card and put it in the envelope.
  - Could limit to one sentence, ten words, etc.
- vi) Peer letters (Morss and Murray (2005)<sup>15</sup>)
- Get students to write a letter/note to a friend, giving him/her what they think of your lectures/the course.
- vii) Student-led feedback session
- Ask the students to design/run a feedback session. This helps encourage student engagement.
- viii) Suggestion box
- Provide a suggestion box in the teaching room or other agreed location for students to leave comments and ensure that it is checked frequently.

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<sup>12</sup> Brown S and Race P (2002), *Lecturing: a practical guide* (London: Kogan Page): 168-78

<sup>13</sup> Kember D and McNaught C (2007), *Enhancing university teaching* (Abingdon: Routledge): 142-9

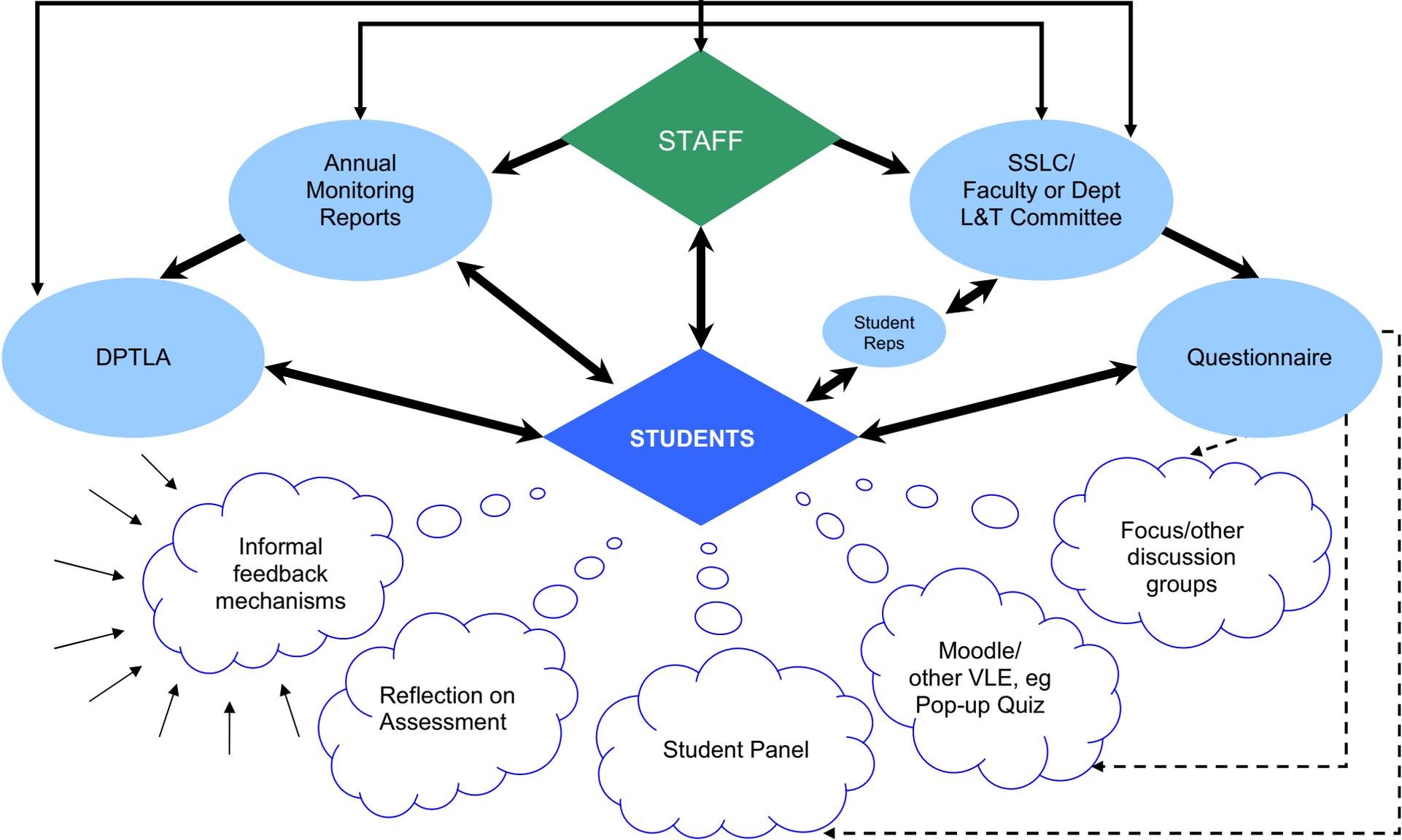
<sup>14</sup> Angelo T and Cross P (1993), *Classroom Assessment Techniques* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass)

<sup>15</sup> Morss K and Murray R (2005), *Teaching at university: a guide for postgraduates and researchers* (London: Sage): 48.

## **9. Workshops/Seminars/Information Sessions to support staff in utilising new methods for obtaining feedback from students**

Staff are encouraged to attend the workshops, seminars and information sessions on methods for obtaining feedback from students which will be offered by the Learning and Teaching Centre from time to time.

# University of Glasgow Mechanisms for Obtaining and Responding to Feedback from Students



**Key:**

Key central feedback mechanisms required by the University are represented as oval shapes;  
 Other feedback mechanisms recommended by the University to supplement and enhance the  
 feedback obtained from required means are represented as 'cloud callout' shapes;  
 Arrows pointing to 'Informal feedback mechanisms' indicate that a number of methods are possible.

DPTLA = Review of Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment  
 SSLC = Staff-Student Liaison Committee  
 VLE = Virtual Learning Environment





