

The University of Glasgow
Course Evaluation Policy – Operational Guidance to Staff
Session 2016-17

This document provides some practical advice for implementing the Course Evaluation Policy. The issues covered are practical matters that have arisen from discussions with Learning and Teaching Convenors and School administrators during 2015/6.

1. Extended questionnaires

One of the principles of the Policy is ‘purposeful questioning’ – that is, seeking data when there is a particular reason for collecting it. An Extended Questionnaire (Policy v1.1 p10) allows for additional questions to be added to the Core set if there is a particular reason for doing so.

Our experience so far is that surveys that include only the Core questions give better and richer responses (and so are more useful) than extended surveys. Students tend to take more time over shorter surveys, since it is clear to them that the questions have been carefully chosen to provide necessary data.

For new courses, or for courses that have been significantly redesigned, the purposeful addition of questions addressing particular aspects of the course has been found to be useful.

Additional administrative effort is required for an extended questionnaire to be created. Schools should decide on an appropriate process for the creation of extended questionnaires based on requests from members of staff, and should set appropriate internal deadlines for such requests.

We suggest that any requests for questionnaire extensions should be submitted to the School EvaSys Administrator(s) before August 31st (for semester 1 surveys) and before 15th December (for semester 2 surveys).

2. Administration of the survey results

The Policy dictates that *automatic* access to the raw data report produced by EvaSys for a course (or for a ‘meaningful block’ within a course) should only be given to the course lecturer and associated line manager (and programme director (or equivalent) as directed by Head of School, Policy v1.1 p8). Note that this applies to *automatic* access only.

The School EvaSys administrator should email the pdf report to the course lecturer and the line manager; the latter may best be done immediately prior to the P&DR period. It is the administrator’s responsibility to ensure security of these reports (and the underlying data) within the EvaSys system.

A member of staff may choose to distribute their pdf report to other people– for example, to the School Learning and Teaching Convenor or to the Programme Director – but this is their own decision. In some Schools, it is already customary for all reports to be shared, and so asking all members of staff to forward their reports has not been difficult. Some members of staff share the report with the students themselves (or even pin it to their office door) – again, this is their choice.

In the case where the report relates to more than one lecturer, Policy V1.1 footnote 22 (p18) states: “Members of a course team, may, of necessity, see the responses to the CORE1 (teaching) question relating to other teaching members of the team; they are, of course, expected to treat this information as confidential”. If members of a teaching team are uncomfortable about this, we recommend that a copy of the report be printed for each member of the teaching team, and that an

administrator redact data (from both closed and open questions, using a black pen) relating to other members of the team before passing them on. The unredacted version of the report should be passed to the line manager(s).

Schools may also wish to implement a local policy for the redaction of comments that are irrelevant and offensive. We suggest that this be undertaken by administrators before reports are forwarded to the course lecturer(s).

3. Timing of survey distribution

The timing of surveys is not regulated by the Policy; however, students must be informed at the start of the course (or course block) as to when surveys will be distributed (Policy v1.1 p6). Co-ordination between School EvaSys administrators and academic staff in advance of the start of semester is essential, and academic staff should be informed of the timing of any online-only surveys.

4. Labelling of surveys in EvaSys

To facilitate appropriate aggregation of data, and as a requirement for university-wide audit, it is important that courses be correctly labelled. This is a new requirement for 2016/7.

- Each course must be labelled initially with the course code, including the initial text subject acronym and the four digits (e.g. MGT1003, FRENCH2103, ENG3037).
- Each course must also be labelled with the year: e.g. appropriate survey labels for the courses above would be **MGT1003(16/17)**, **FRENCH2103(16/17)**, **ENG3037(16/17)**
- If the course has been divided into blocks, then these should be indicated by a suffix (not a prefix): e.g. **COMPSCI1002-HCI(16/17)**, **COMPSCI1002-SYS(16/17)**, **COMPSCI1002-DB(16/17)**. Note that these suffixes must relate to the subject matter of the block (not the person who teaches it).
- Please make sure that the course code is complete and correctly formed, as given in the online course catalogue: CELTCIV4002 is fine, CELTCIV-4002 is not, neither is CELT4002.
- If the survey is not associated with a credit-bearing course, then 'NC' must be the first two characters of the survey, and an explanation must be given as to why this survey is necessary, and which cohort of students it is intended for (e.g: **NC-AppInterview(16/17)**). This should only be the case if the survey is clearly not associated with an educational activity that is part of the requirements of a credit-bearing course.

Most Schools already use this system or something very similar.

5. Paper vs Online vs Online-in class

The Policy does not mandate any specific means of distributing the questionnaire and collecting the data. There are always concerns about a potential low response rate for online questionnaires. Online questionnaires are significantly easier to administer.

Our experience is that, even within one year, online response rates have improved dramatically; average online response rate over the university: S1:31%; S2: 43%. The average paper response rate: S1:64%, S2: 63%

"Online-in class" – when online survey information is emailed to all students in advance of a class, and students are asked to use their mobile devices to complete the survey during a scheduled class - has proven popular in many Schools. Advice on how to improve online response rates is included in the Appendix.

Apart from the unrealistic 100%, there is no benchmark for what is a “good enough” response rate. Responders are typically those who have something to say (e.g. the very angry, the very pleased, students with a need not shared by the rest of the class). Thus in all but small classes, all the important themes would typically be raised in a small (say 20% sample), and would be little different in a much larger sample. We should not, therefore, dismiss the information collected from a survey that has with low response rates: all responses are valuable!

A MyCampus query has been created for extracting student emails for a course in the form required by EvaSys for online surveys: UOG_EMAIL_LIST_COURSE_EVASYS. This query can be a significant time saver to Evasys administrators setting up a survey, and dealing with the subtask of providing a list of emails for the survey.

Surveys must be anonymous. It should not be possible to match a completed survey with a student.

6. Ownership of courses

Audit requirements are that all credit-bearing courses must be evaluated under the Policy. If a course forms part of a programme that is offered by more than one School/Institute, then a decision must be made as to which School/Institute will administer the evaluation for this course.

7. PGT programmes

A survey associated with a Masters dissertation/project course (e.g ACCFIN5008P, COMPSCI5018P) must be administered at an appropriate time at the end of the Summer. This is a good opportunity to ask important additional questions about the MSc programme as a whole.

8. The Summary & Response Document

For each survey conducted, a ‘Summary & Response’ document (SRD) must be created by the staff who teach on the course, and made available to students, normally within three weeks of the closing date of the survey. Discussion of these documents must be a standing item on all Staff Student Liaison meeting agendas (Policy V1.1 p7).

Schools need to decide on:

- Where their documents should best be placed so that they are accessible to all those students who completed the survey. Some Schools use Moodle, some Schools email the SRD to all students, some Schools use Student Voice.
- Where they should best be placed so as to be accessible to students enrolling for future offerings of the course (and when they should made available to these students). Some Schools intend to place them on the Moodle page for the next offering of the course as soon as it is created; some Schools intend to use a School-wide repository that is open to all students all the time.
- How long they should be accessible to both current and incoming students. Since these documents will be an ongoing record of student suggestions for improvements, and what actions have been taken in response, they may quickly become out of date. We suggest that they be archived after two more offerings of the course have taken place.

HCP, CO & RL 14th July 2016
(Revised November 2016)

Appendix: Advice for improving response rates for online surveys

The following strategies have been adopted by Schools across the University to maximise response rates for online surveys – these strategies have been found to add in their effectiveness, rather than being alternative to each other:

- 1) Surveys have been emailed to students a few days prior to the last lecture of a course or teaching block – usually between the penultimate and final class. At this point students were engaged with the course and were more likely to respond. Due to exams and students returning home, surveys that were sent out after teaching had finished were less likely to receive high response rates.
- 2) Members of teaching staff were well informed about the timing of when the surveys would be sent out and made a personal appeal (both in class and by email) for students to complete their course evaluation surveys. Staff also explained that comments and issues raised by students would be taken seriously and addressed in a ‘Summary & Response’ document, which would be made available to students, normally within three weeks of the close of the survey.
- 3) Members of staff warned students in advance of surveys being emailed. In the past, students have mistaken emails from EvaSys as spam and deleted/ignored them.
- 4) Members of staff gave students the opportunity to complete their course evaluation surveys on their mobile devices in class. This strategy was most effective when lecturers set aside 5 or 10 minutes at the beginning of the final or penultimate class, rather than at the end of the class. However, it is worth noting that not all teaching rooms have wifi access. Some teaching staff have also taken their students to a computer cluster to complete their surveys.
- 5) In an effort to ensure that students answered all of the questions, questionnaire lengths were kept to a minimum. Many Schools only used the 5 CORE Questions. Informing the students in advance of the number of questions in the survey also helped in encouraging them to respond to the short surveys.
- 6) Reminder emails were set up in EvaSys when the surveys were being generated. EvaSys remembers the email addresses of students who have completed a survey, so reminders are only sent to students who have not yet filled out their course evaluation questionnaire. The frequency of email reminders can also be set in EvaSys – most schools have chosen to set the frequency at about one reminder every week.
- 7) When online surveys were generated, the standard email was edited to make it more specific to students on the course. In particular, Schools have changed the ‘Sender (name)’ from ‘EvaSys Admin’ to something more relatable e.g. the lecturer’s name. Schools have also changed the ‘Reference’ and edited the text at the bottom of the email so that it includes a member of staff’s name, rather than ‘The School Course Evaluation Team’. These changes were made to the ‘Online survey reminder’ email too.
- 8) Surveys were left open for several weeks after the course had finished. This gave students the opportunity to complete their survey at a more convenient time.
- 9) Response rates improved when students got used to completing surveys online. One School which used only online surveys for all level 1 courses in 2015/6 will use only online surveys for all level 1 and level 2 courses in 2016/7, and for levels 1, 2 & 3 in 2017/8 etc. This means that the incoming cohort of students knows no different.

10) Administrative staff reminded all students who visited the Teaching Office about the need to complete the surveys.