

How can response rates be increased for online EvaSys surveys?

The following strategies have been adopted by Schools across the University to maximise feedback response rates for online surveys:

- 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 provide feedback. 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 and Response' document, which would be made available to students shortly after teaching had finished.
- 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. 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 helps in encouraging them to respond.
- 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 a couple of weeks after the course had finished. This gave students the opportunity to complete their survey at a more convenient time.
- 9) Online response rates are likely to improve if students are used to completing surveys online. A 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 and 3 in 2017/8 etc. This means that the incoming cohort of students knows no different.

Closing note: There is no benchmark 'ideal' response rate – while we might like to get (for example) over 80% return, not getting a high response rate should not in any way devalue the responses that are received. Indeed, dismissing a (for example) 25% response rate as 'not representative of the class' may ignore the fact that this 25% is probably representative of those students who actually have something they want to say - the others not having responded simply because they do not have any particular input or comments that they want to give.