University of Glasgow

Education Policy and Strategy Committee – Thursday 12th June 2014

Final Report from the Working Group on Course Feedback Questionnaires

Dr Helen Purchase (Convenor)

Brief Description of the Paper

The final report from the Working Group on Course Feedback Questionnaires makes several policy recommendations for gathering student feedback via questionnaires, covering means of collecting the feedback data, presenting it, and responding to and communicating it. Several important issues are discussed: the benefits of alternative complementary feedback methods, governance issues relating to decision making at different levels of the process, and appropriate levels of access to the data. The report includes recommendations for core and optional questions to be used in creating course feedback questionnaires.

Action Requested

EdPSC is invited to endorse the recommendations of the Working Group.

Recommended Person/s responsible for taking the action(s) forward

Clerk to EdPSC

Resource Implications (where appropriate)

Additional administrative support required in setting up questionnaire for all courses; additional academic time required in responding formally to student feedback.

Timescale for Implementation (where appropriate)

Next academic session.

Equality Implications (where appropriate)

N/A

Course Feedback Working Group: Final Report for the University of Glasgow's Education Policy and Strategy Committee

30th May 2014

Executive Summary

Building on the EvaSys pilot of 2012/13, a working group was established by the Education Policy and Strategy Committee in October 2013 to investigate how future policy should be shaped to ensure that the University is able to demonstrate that course feedback processes are auditable and operate effectively across the institution. As part of its remit, the group was tasked with considering the relationship between course feedback and the mechanisms for the recognition of teaching in the promotion and reward processes in the University, as well as devising a process for gathering course feedback via questionnaires.

The Working Group has proposed a set of five core feedback questions, supplemented by several sets of optional questions relating to different purposes for collecting evaluation data. In addition, it has made recommendations for the use of these questions in creating a course questionnaire. It has also made recommendations regarding survey frequency, responding to and acting on feedback, and the use of other forms of data collection. In considering the use of EvaSys across the university, the group makes recommendations regarding the aggregation, presentation and use of feedback data, and its access.

The Working Group is aware that its proposals represent a significant departure from current practise. We therefore welcome the proposal from the Learning and Teaching Committee (22nd May 2014) that Evasys continue to be piloted in some schools on a voluntary basis in 2014/15, and that this be used as an opportunity to pilot the questions and policies recommended in this report.

Introduction

Background

In 2012-13 a working group was established to look at the EvaSys course evaluation system. The working group was asked to recommend to the University Learning and Teaching Committee whether or not the University should proceed with wider implementation of EvaSys.

Following the report and recommendations of the EvaSys Pilot Working Group in October 2013, EdPSC established a working group on Course Feedback with the aim of developing an institutional policy on course evaluation and determining the processes needed to support it.

The Working Group Remit

The group was given the following remit:

The remit of the Working Group is necessarily broad and encompasses the full range of issues listed above. In conducting its work, the group should be mindful that course feedback questionnaires provide teaching staff with feedback to help improve their courses year on year and feedback on their teaching performance as perceived by their students.

   a) *The group will review the report of the EvaSys Working Group and address the issues raised in relation to the University policy on course feedback.*
   b) *The group will specifically consider whether the adoption of a compulsory course feedback questionnaire containing a limited set of standard questions but with the flexibility for staff to add additional questions would be an appropriate way forward for the University . If so, the group should go on to develop a suggested set of core questions.*
   c) *The group will recommend how future policy should be shaped to ensure that the University is able to demonstrate that course feedback processes are auditable and operate effectively across the institution.*
   d) *The group will consider the relationship between course feedback and the mechanisms for the recognition of teaching in the promotion and reward processes in the University. The group may wish to make specific recommendations on how course feedback could or should be used in these processes.*
   e) *The group should produce a recommended policy on course feedback for EdPSC and should report by the final meeting of EdPSC in the current session.*

In conducting its work the group should consult with the academic community as it sees fit.

EdPSC later amended the remit (23rd October 2013) to include the following directive:

   1. *All courses must compulsorily use a questionnaire on which there will be a small set of core questions that cannot be changed or removed.*
   2. *Additional questions may be added to the core set for an individual course at the discretion of the lecturer/subject area/School.*

Membership

The Working Group membership was as follows:

- Professor Jim Anderson, Professor of Veterinary Neurology and Neurosurgery, School of Veterinary Medicine
- Dr David Bain, Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities & Quality Officer, College of Arts
- Mrs Clare Barnes, Academic Policy Manager, Senate Office [Clerk]
- Mr Oliver Coombs, Vice-President Education, SRC
- Dr Alastair Gracie, Senior University Teacher, Undergraduate Medical School
- Dr David Forrest, Senior University Teacher, School of Geographical and Earth Sciences
- Dr Karen McIlvaney, Senior Administrator, School of Engineering
- Professor Ernest Metzger, Douglas Chair in Civil Law, School of Law
- Dr Anna Morgan-Thomas, Senior Lecturer, Adam Smith Business School
- Dr Eanna O'Ceallachain, Senior Lecturer, School of Modern Languages and Cultures
- Mrs Catherine Omand, Senior Academic Policy Manager, Senate Office
- Dr Helen Purchase, Senior Lecturer, School of Computing Science [Convenor]
- Dr Peter Sneddon, University Teacher, School of Physics and Astronomy

Process

The working group met 4 times between October 2013 and May 2014.

As part of the process, the following stakeholders were provided with an interim reports, for the purposes of consultation:
- Deans of Learning and Teaching of the four colleges
- Director of the Learning and Teaching Centre
- VP Education, SRC
- Convenor of the Quality Officers Forum

The following people were also asked to comment on specific matters:
- Ms Alison Browitt, Ms Elizabeth Gray (RIO)
- Dr Catherine Boville (Learning and Teaching Centre)
- Dr Matthew Denwood (School of Veterinary Medicine)
- Representatives from Electric Paper (the providers of EvaSys)

Scope and structure of this report

Section 1: The Working Group considered the issues listed below, based on its remit and on the course feedback policy matters raised by the EvaSys Working Group.

- The purpose of course feedback, including
    - The use of questionnaire data in performance reviews (including promotion and Teaching Excellence Awards);
    - The need to demonstrate that course feedback processes are auditable and effective.
- The nature of the feedback process, including
    - The mix between standardised and customised questions;
    - The frequency with which students are asked to complete evaluations and surveys;
    - The use of other forms of student evaluation methods;
    - Responding to student feedback.
- Administration of the feedback process, including
    - How feedback data should be aggregated and presented;
    - Who should have access to the evaluation data;
    - Whether evaluations should be administered online or by paper.

Section 2: An approach to questionnaire creation (with associated question sets) to be used by all courses, including recommendations for aggregation of quantitative data.

Section 3: Proposed sets of core and optional questions.

Section 4: Future policy issues.

Section 5: List of recommendations.

We noted that one of the recommendations from the EvaSys Working Group was: "that if the University elects to require some mandatory course evaluation questions, that EvaSys be implemented in all Schools so as to then benefit from the type of cross-institution comparison that EvaSys supports and that may be required by the ELIR and other QE&A activities. The group also recommends that Schools/Subjects/disciplines be given scope to set some of their own questions to suit their particular needs and to allow for sufficient individual lecturer or tutor specific feedback."

Given the directive of EdPSC on 23rd October 2013, our discussion therefore was based on an understanding that EvaSys would be used across the university. The Learning and Teaching Committee agreed at their meeting of 22nd May 2014 that EvaSys should continue to be piloted throughout 2014/15, and that this should be seen as an opportunity for the feedback questions proposed in this report to be piloted.

Section 1: Discussion

1.1 The purpose of course feedback.

The main purposes of course feedback were identified by the group as being:

- Summative:
    - To provide a snap-shot of the past, a description of how the course ran,
    - To highlight existing good practice,
    - To highlight exceptional quality that can be referred to in marketing and recruitment activities,
    - To recognise teaching as evidence for teaching excellence awards or promotion.
- Formative:
    - To help identify where improvements can be made, and where there are unexpected problems that need to be solved,
    - To ensure that the quality of teaching is sustained and improved,
    - To identify where teaching staff might need additional support or resources.
- To demonstrate the use of feedback practises across the university for the purposes of audit.

The use of questionnaire data in performance reviews (including promotion and Teaching Excellence Awards)

The group considered the relationship between course feedback and the mechanisms for the recognition of teaching in the promotion and reward processes. It was recognised that there is a thin line between evaluation of course content and evaluation of teaching performance. It is common for these two factors to be evaluated together and it could be difficult to separate the two (both in the minds of the students, and in the minds of those interpreting the results). It was acknowledged that, when answering questions pertaining to teaching, there were inevitably several matters outwith the control of the lecturer or course coordinator (for example, accommodation, timetabling) that would impact on students' experience and could affect their responses.

It was acknowledged that teacher specific feedback was beneficial in both enhancing and recognising individual teaching, and that such feedback should be clearly and unambiguously elicited.

However, concerns were raised that if the feedback fed into the P&DR or promotion processes, staff may be reluctant to teach certain courses that were unpopular. For example some topics are more difficult to teach, are less interesting to students but cover core topics or are mandated by governing professional bodies, are not recognised by students as important, or are research led and not valued by students. There was a concern that such courses would inevitably score poorly, and that this may reflect on the teacher if such contextual matters were not taken into account when student feedback is interpreted.

Auditability

The group recognised the importance of the university being able to demonstrate that it follows effective feedback processes across the institution. There was some concern expressed that mandating that all courses use a compulsory set of questions for the purposes of auditing ignored the fact that several schools already use highly effective alternative forms of gathering feedback from students (e.g. focus groups, interviews).   However, it should be reinforced that a course evaluation questionnaire is only one form of evaluation and other effective mechanisms should be used in parallel with the questionnaire.

1.2 The nature of the feedback process

The mix between core, optional and customized questions

Compulsory ("core") questions are those that must appear on all feedback questionnaires, *Optional* questions are those chosen from a given list (arranged in sets, as described in Section 3), *Customised* questions are those created specifically for an instance of a questionnaire.

The EdPSC directive dictates that at least some questions should be compulsory at the university level; that is, across all courses.

> **Recommendation 1: All courses must use a course questionnaire as one of the methods used to solicit feedback from students.**

The group agreed that the number of compulsory ("core") questions should be small, to provide scope for optional or customised questions to be added without each questionnaire becoming too long. The principles in section 2.3 below describe how the group recommends that the small number of core questions on a questionnaire can be augmented with additional questions.

The frequency with which students are asked to provide feedback and complete surveys

The group acknowledged that students are currently asked to complete several general surveys (e.g. First year student experience survey, Student Barometer, NSS, First Year Technology Survey). Requiring that they also respond to a survey on every course that they are enrolled in will increase this burden, and may reduce participation rates. Many students (for example, level 2 Science students) study six courses per semester.

In considering this matter, the group reiterated the aim to keep the number of core questions asked of each course small, and to consider carefully the balance between open and closed question within this core set, since open questions require more time and effort to respond to effectively.

The group makes no specific recommendations as to when during a course the questionnaire should be administered, but felt that, to ensure that the process is given appropriate commitment and attention, students should be advised in advance when to expect it.

> **Recommendation 2: Students should be advised in advance when to expect the course questionnaire to be made available to them.**

The use of other forms of feedback methods

Many members of the group have experience of other very effective methods for collecting feedback from students, and were concerned that mandating a questionnaire with compulsory questions could be seen as diminishing the worth of such methods and be a disincentive for the continuation of such feedback exercises. We agreed that other forms of collecting feedback should be encouraged across the university.

For example, the use of Minute Papers, asking students what they would like to see continued, discontinued or introduced, will often result in specific and immediate action of a kind which a questionnaire, which simply measures student opinion, cannot elicit. The same is true of simply

asking students at the end of a class to provide comments on what they found most useful or most confusing, which can give lecturers quick interim feedback that they can act on immediately. An added bonus is that this method encourages students to engage with the feedback process early on, thus helping them develop appropriate critical and reflective skills which will contribute to better quality subsequent feedback.[1] In addition, methods such as these often involve reporting back to the students, and closing the feedback loop.

> **Recommendation 3: The use of alternative methods for soliciting interim feedback during a course should be actively encouraged.**

Responding to student feedback

The group was agreement that 'closing the loop' (that is, giving students a summary of the feedback that they have provided for a course) is important as a means of demonstrating to students that their feedback is taken seriously, and is being acted upon as necessary. It was also thought that doing so would motivate students to complete course feedback questionnaires, and to undertake the task seriously.

The group discussed whether summary quantitative data should be reported to students (for example, the mean of closed questions), but agreed that as this was sensitive information pertaining to individual members of staff, and contextual information is lost when only numbers are reported, this would be inappropriate.

We agreed that simply reporting a summary of the feedback would not be useful to students unless it was accompanied by proposed actions.

The group therefore proposed that (informed by both the quantitative and qualitative data) a summary of the main themes emerging from the feedback be produced as a list of issues, and that each issue should be accompanied by a proposed action. This 'Feedback Action' document will therefore comprise a 'feedback and action' two-column table. If no action is proposed for an issue, then a clear and valid explanation should be given.

> **Recommendation 4a: For each course, the data from the completed questionnaires should be summarised in a 'Feedback Action' document. This document should list the issues arising, with each issue associated with either a planned action or a valid explanation as to why no action will be taken.**

This document may also include themes emerging from other feedback elicited using other evaluation methods during the course (e.g. focus groups, minute papers).

There was some discussion on the timing and delivery of this 'Feedback Action' document. It was agreed that the means of delivery should be the medium that is most appropriate for reaching the students on the course (for example, Student Voice, Moodle, email). With regards timing, the group acknowledged that as course evaluations typically took place prior to examinations, at a busy time of year, the three week turnaround suggested by the SRC may prove problematic. It was therefore agreed that this document should be made available prior to the date of the appropriate

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[1] An idea taken from M.D. Svinicki, *Encouraging Your Students to Give Feedback*, in *Techniques and Strategies for interpreting student evaluations*, K.L. Lewis (ed.), Wiley 2001.

Examination Board for that course. It should also be made available to incoming students for the next offering of the course, and included in the papers for the next relevant SSLC meeting.

> **Recommendation 4b: The 'Feedback Action' document should be made available to students prior to the relevant Examination Board, using the medium most appropriate for reaching the students.**

> **Recommendation 4c: The 'Feedback Action' document should be made available to incoming students for the next offering of the course, using the medium most appropriate for reaching the students.**

> **Recommendation 4d: The 'Feedback Action' document should be included in the papers for the next relevant SSLC meeting.**

1.3 Administration of the feedback process

How feedback data should be aggregated and presented

There was extensive discussion on the method of aggregation of quantitative data used by EvaSys, which displays a summary of the responses to a question (or a set of questions) using a 'traffic light' system based on the mean of the responses and on a pre-defined 'quality guideline'.

No-one in the group was content with this coarse method of displaying aggregated results. While it is argued that one of the advantages of red/amber/green indicators is that they are very easily interpreted 'at a glance', the group was of the view that, in the context of student feedback data, 'at a glance' interpretations were inappropriate, as important contextual information is lost.

However, the group recognised the benefits of comparison, and in doing so, agreed that it would be appropriate for institutional purposes for the quantitative data elicited from the core questions (those asked of all courses across the university) to be aggregated, but not for aggregation to be applied to any other optional or customised questions used in a questionnaire. The basis for this recommendation is that it does not make sense to compare the results of two questionnaires containing different questions, and thus, the only questions that it is appropriate to compare across courses are the core ones.

> **Recommendation 5: For institutional purposes, only the quantitative data elicited from the core questions should be aggregated.**

The traffic light system relies on thresholds set with 'quality guidelines' and the group agreed that is not currently clear who would set these guidelines and what they would be based on.

The group wished the setting of any quality guidelines to be evidence-based; that is, informed by existing data. The group felt that at least one year's worth of data from courses across the university should be collected before quality guidelines for the core questions should be determined, and that quality guidelines should not be used within the first year of EvaSys use (noting that in EvaSys, quality guidelines can be applied retrospectively). Consideration should also be given as to whether it is appropriate for the same quality guidelines to be used across all courses: if university-wide quality guidelines are proposed, a process for schools to justify the use of an alternative guideline for a specified course should be put in place.

Recommendation 6a: EvaSys quality guidelines should only be set following the first year of institutional-wide use of EvaSys, and should be evidence-based. After this, a process for schools/subjects to justify the use of an alternative guideline for a specified course should be established.

Recommendation 6b: EvaSys quality guidelines should be used for the quantitative core questions (and their aggregation). They may be used for the optional and customised questions if desired, but should not be mandatory.

In regards to the interpretation of summary data, Dr Vicky Gunn (Director Learning and Teaching Centre) highlighted the fact that the further away summary data is reported from the source and the more aggregation of data that occurs, the greater the risk that the data would be misinterpreted, as more context is lost.

In particular, the following factors were identified as being important when interpreting student feedback data, reinforcing the need for context to always be taken into account:
- Some students tend to be disinclined to rate at either of the extreme ends of a rating scale;
- Expectations of students influence the responses they give to questions; thus, the manner in which a course has been marketed may have an effect;
- Students tend to be more positive about optional courses than core or compulsory courses;
- In small cohorts, the opinion of 1 or 2 students can alter summary results substantially;
- Students may answer from limited perspective, without sufficient knowledge to understand a wider overview of their educational experience;
- Courses delivered by teams tend to receive lower ratings than those delivered by an individual teacher;
- Difficult courses often receive lower ratings than easier ones.

Representatives from Electric Paper (the company that provides EvaSys) confirmed that the summary results produced from a questionnaire could be supported by a qualitative narrative.

Recommendation 7: Staff teaching on a course should be given the opportunity to supplement the questionnaire data in EvaSys with a qualitative narrative to provide context if desired.

Further concern was expressed about the validity of the data summaries produced by EvaSys; it was highlighted that the most commonly used summary statistic for each question reported by EvaSys was a mean score, accompanied by a distribution histogram. A mean score was not a valid measure in the context of distributions that are skewed or bi-modal. It was noted that the data produced by the National Student Survey (NSS) used distribution data and reported 'percentage agreement', both at question and summary level as this measure of satisfaction was a more statistically meaningful approach.

A statistician from the School of Veterinary Medicine (Dr Matthew Denwood) was consulted in relation to our statistical concerns. He supported concerns from some members of the group who had suggested that reporting simply the mean response was unsound. There was consensus that the preferred method of summarising responses was to use response frequency rather than the mean,

particularly as this was the method used in the NSS. A representative from Electric Paper confirmed that summary data for a question (or an aggregated question set) can be presented as a frequency distribution. If using a frequency distribution rather than a mean, the quality guideline consists of a single threshold and a target for the percentage of responses greater than this threshold: if the quality guideline is met there is green light and if not it is red (there is no amber light). The working group all supported this method of presenting summary information as preferable to the mean-based three-light approach.

> **Recommendation 8: EvaSys summary data should be presented using a frequency distribution rather than a mean.**

Who should have access to the evaluation data

It was not clear to the group who would actually make use of this summary and comparative data, and there were strong concerns raised that it might be used solely for performance management purposes (and, in the extreme case, it might negatively affect the relationship between academic staff and management).

The group suggested that access to results relating to individual members of teaching staff should be restricted to the individual, their line manager (and the person who conducts their P&DR, if this is not the line manager) and, only where appropriate, the programme director.

> **Recommendation 9a: Questionnaire data relating to individual members of teaching staff should be restricted to the individual, their line manager (and the person who conducts their P&DR, if this is not the line manager) and, only where appropriate, the programme director.[2]**

> **Recommendation 9b: Data from the optional and customised questions should be made available at the School level only.**

There were also concerns expressed regarding the fact that as the data would be stored in EvaSys it might be available across the university to people without a clear right to access it. EvaSys allows for different access levels to be set, and authority must be explicitly given for individuals to be able to access data. The group were impressed with the 'Data Access Permissions' document produced by The University of Newcastle for use with EvaSys data (Appendix A), and recommended that a document similar in form (although not necessarily in content) be created for Glasgow University.

> **Recommendation 9c: Clear guidance as to who should have access to all course feedback data should be determined, and this information widely distributed.**

These recommendations do not prohibit individual staff from sharing their own course feedback as they see fit; indeed, they should be encouraged to use such feedback to support promotion or award applications.

Whether evaluations should be administered online or by paper

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[2] An exception is to be made for the questions in the **EXPECTATIONS/MARKETING SET** (defined in section 3 below), whose responses should be shared with colleagues in RIO as appropriate.

This issue was discussed only peripherally by the group, which makes no specific recommendation about whether EvaSys questionnaires should be administered online or on-paper.

The distinction between in-class surveys (when time is set aside in a class for the survey to be conducted by paper or online using wifi connections from students' own devices) and out-of-class surveys (when students complete the survey online in their own time) was made. We recognized that in-class surveys are more likely to have higher response rates; however, it was also acknowledged that the increasing use of mobile devices by students (and the increasing amount of communication from the university which is accessed by students using mobile devices) means that the barrier inhibiting high online response rates might not be as high as we think, and is likely to reduce over time.

Section 2: The questionnaire

A key part of the remit of this working group is: *"The group will specifically consider the development of a limited set of standard questions that can be supplemented with the flexibility for staff to add their own additional questions."*

2.1 The questions

The working group collected together a large number of existing student feedback questions (over 350 unique questions): from their own experience, from external surveys (e.g. the NSS), and from other universities' publically available feedback instruments. Doing so allowed us to appreciate the range and complexity of possible questions, the extent of the different topics on which questions can be asked (e.g. teaching, assessment, resources, support), and how questions seemingly asking the same thing can carry different messages depending on subtle changes in wording.

It was agreed that the wording of questions was paramount in focusing feedback to obtain meaningful results, and that vagueness and ambiguity should be carefully avoided.

A clear overriding concern of the group was the time taken for a student to complete a questionnaire – given that all students will complete (at least) the compulsory questions for all courses they are enrolled in, the group were very concerned about students having to spend excessive time completing surveys. As a rough guide, the group suggested that no questionnaire should take longer than 5 minutes to complete.

The group discussed the relative benefits of open *vs* closed questions: closed questions are easier for students to answer (and easier to summarise); open questions provide more useful feedback, contextual information relating to the closed question responses, and often highlight unknown concerns (but take longer to complete, and are harder to summarise). It was agreed that both should be used, while keeping in mind that open questions should not be unnecessarily overused, so as to ensure that completing the questionnaire does not take too long.

There was discussion about whether the closed questions should all use the same scale (for example the Likert Scale as used in the NSS survey, or the Osgood Semantic Differential Scale). While the advantages of having different types of questions were recognised (variation tends to be more engaging for the respondent), it was agreed that doing so can make completing a survey more onerous (and consequently more time-consuming), and so variation should be minimised. It was also recognised that using the identical format to the questions asked in the NSS would be advantageous, so that students are familiar with this format when completing their NSS survey.

2.2 Components of the questionnaire

The need for a set of *compulsory ("core")* questions in each questionnaire was not debatable; however, the manner in which *optional* questions could be included, and *customised* questions added[3], was considered carefully. The following particular issues were raised:

- Questions relation to the quality of teaching on a course should be clearly distinguishable from those relating to the course itself;
- There should be flexibility for any questionnaire to be customised for particular use through two means: the *selection of optional questions* and/or the *addition of customised questions*;
- Where more than one member of staff teaches on a course, separate feedback should be sought for each teacher (and this should be made explicit);
- The questionnaire used for a particular course should not necessarily be the same every year (we thus distinguish between a 'course' and a 'course offering').

Importantly, it would not be necessary for any additional optional or customised questions to be used on a questionnaire at all – the core set may stand alone.

2.2.1 Question Sets

The group proposed that to support the process of selecting optional questions, they should be divided into 'question sets' – where each set contains questions appropriate for a particular purpose.

The group devised several named question sets, as follows:

- The **CORE QUESTION SET** (3 closed questions, 2 open questions).
  To be used on all questionnaires.

- The **TEACHING QUALITY SET** (7 closed questions, 2 open questions).
  Intended to allow for more in-depth exploration of the teaching quality of a member of staff. It may be useful for a member of staff who is particularly wanting evidence of their teaching quality; for example if they are on probation, are intending to apply for a Teaching Excellence Award, or submit a promotion application. It therefore refers to a single member of staff.
  In devising these **TEACHING QUALITY SET** questions, members of the group consulted the published criteria for teaching excellence and promotion, and concluded that it was difficult to translate these criteria directly into specific questions for use within the survey, since they were not measurable by survey methods or appropriate for students to be asked to make judgments on.

- The **COURSE QUALITY SET** (9 closed questions), and its supplementary set (5 closed questions).
  Intended for use when a subject/school is interested in the quality of a course – it includes questions relevant to the content and structure of the course. It may also be useful for the first time a course is run.

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[3] *Core questions* are those that must appear on all feedback questionnaires, *Optional questions* are those chosen from a given list (arranged in 'question sets'), *Customised questions* are those created specifically for an instance of a questionnaire.

The questions cover the sub-topics of: clarity of objectives, content, resources, assessment, and feedback. Supplementary questions from the **COURSE QUALITY SUPPLEMENTARY SET** can be added in the event of seminars, practicals, tutorials, oral presentations, and group-work being used in the course delivery.

- The **PGT SET** (6 closed questions).
  Intended for Postgraduate Taught courses, focussing on the particular needs of PGT students who are new to the university, and are typically here for only one year.

- The **EXPECTATION/MARKETING SET** (5 closed questions).
  Intended for courses which play a key role in the marketing of a programme or the university. It includes questions relevant to student satisfaction and expectations that may provide useful data for marketing purposes.

- The **AD-HOC SET** (deliberately empty).
  Included simply as a place-holder to encourage the creation of customised questions. Although it might seem perverse to define an empty set of questions, the group was agreed that doing so would help in emphasising the intention that a course questionnaire should be flexible, and that creating customised questions for specific purposes is encouraged. For example, questions in this set may address issues that have arisen in the NSS, the Student Barometer, or in Staff-student Liaison meetings in previous offerings of the course so as to assess whether progress is being made.

2.2.2 The Core questions

There was consensus that there should be a small number of core questions:
  o three closed questions to cover teaching, the course, and overall satisfaction (so as to satisfy summative requirements for auditing, cross-institutional comparison, and annual course monitoring);
  o two open questions to find out what respondents thought was good about the course and how they thought it could be improved (so as to satisfy formative requirements for getting useful feedback for the purposes of improving or sustaining current practise).

Relating to the issue of courses taught by more than one teacher, or co-ordinated rather than taught (e.g. dissertations), it was agreed that the core set should be flexible enough to enable these issues to be taken into account through appropriate changes in wording.

In devising this **CORE QUESTION SET**, we distinguish between academic staff (on standard university academic contracts) and 'atypical workers' (GTAs, tutors, demonstrators, seminar facilitators):
- The **CORE QUESTION SET** relates only to the former, as it relates to an institutional requirement that all members of academic staff obtain feedback on their teaching performance.
- Collecting feedback relating to atypical workers is a subject or school responsibility, and appropriate questions can be added to any course questionnaire regarding atypical workers as necessary (in the **AD-HOC** set). Thus, questions specifically relating to atypical workers are not included in the **CORE QUESTION SET**, but this does not preclude the questions within this set also being used for gathering feedback on atypical workers.

> **Recommendation 10: Schools/subjects should be encouraged to include questions specifically for the purpose of collecting feedback on atypical workers.**

Since the core questions are the only questions that will be common to all questionnaires, they are the only ones for which the results to component questions can be quantitatively aggregated to give an overall summary score for a course. The group felt strongly that the responses to all other questions in the questionnaire (listed in the other sets below) should not be included in any overall course summary aggregation.

2.3 Using Question Sets to create a questionnaire

Initially it was proposed that a questionnaire used for a course offering be restricted to using only one question set in addition to the core set; however, consultation responses suggested that this was overly restrictive and that there would be benefit to allowing more flexibility.

In addition, the group considered whether inclusion of a set on a questionnaire should necessarily require that *all* the questions in the set should be used. Given that the sets were designed so that each set broadly covers a range of relevant topics, the group suggests that it would normally be the case that all questions in a set would be used; doing so wards against cherry-picking only those questions for which a positive response would be expected, and ensures good coverage of relevant topics. However, it is acknowledged that it might be appropriate to omit questions from a set when they are clearly inappropriate for use for a particular course.

There was much discussion on whether the group should suggest a generic approach to creating a questionnaire, based on guidelines for selecting appropriate sets – there were a wide range of opinions in the group, but we were all agreed on the following eight principles:

1. All questionnaires must include all five questions in the CORE QUESTION SET.
2. Where a course includes multiple members of staff, it should be clear which questions relate to which members of staff.
3. Normally either the TEACHING QUALITY SET or the COURSE QUALITY SET would be used (but not both)[4].
4. Staff seeking specific evidence of teaching quality (for example, for the purposes of Teaching Excellence Awards or promotion on the basis of teaching) are encouraged to use the TEACHING QUALITY SET.
5. If a question set is to be included on the questionnaire, then normally all questions in the set should be used (although questions that are clearly inappropriate for a particular course may be omitted).
6. Care should be taken that questions are not duplicated.
7. Customised questions can be added as required (referred to as the AD-HOC set).
8. The total number of questions in the entire questionnaire (including the core questions) should not exceed 22 unique closed questions, and normally not exceed four open questions.[5]

   Recommendation 11: The design of a course questionnaire should be based on the eight principles listed above.

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[4] One member of the group suggested that the TEACHING QUALITY SET be alternated with the COURSE QUALITY SET for alternate offerings of the course.
[5] The NSS has 22 closed questions and two open questions; four open questions are suggested here so as to permit two open questions from both the CORE QUESTION SET and the TEACHING QUALITY SET.

There was extensive discussion over the process of choosing questions for a particular instance of a questionnaire: who chooses which sets and which questions to include? There were strong opinions expressed that both optional questions (as represented in the question sets) and customised questions should not be included on a course questionnaire without the prior knowledge of the lecturer or course co-ordinator. The Learning and Teaching Committees of schools/subjects may wish to take a co-ordinated approach in determining which non-core questions to include in the questionnaires for all their courses; however, questions added to a course's questionnaire should be discussed with the lecturer or course co-ordinator in advance.

> **Recommendation 12: Questionnaire design is the responsibility of the lecturer or course team. Questions additional to the core set should not be added without prior discussion with the lecturer or course team.**

2.4 Questionnaire instructions

While we might assume that students know how to complete questionnaires, the group was agreed that clear, explicit guidelines should be provided at the top of each questionnaire. These may be based on the NSS survey instructions ("For each statement, show the extent of your agreement or disagreement by putting a cross in the one box which best reflects your current view of the course as a whole"), or by way of example ("In the following example, the position of the cross indicates that the student is in strong agreement with the associated statement").

> **Recommendation 13: Students should be given clear instructions on how to complete the questionnaire.**

Section 3: The Question Sets

Recommendation 14: The following question sets should be adopted:

THE CORE QUESTION SET

CORE1a. **The lecturer explained things well.** [*]
       Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

    or

CORE1b. **My project/dissertation/placement[†] supervisor was helpful.**
       Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

CORE2. **The course was intellectually stimulating.**
       Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

CORE3. **I am satisfied with the overall quality of the course.**
       Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

CORE4. **What was good about the course?**
    OPEN

CORE5. **How could this course be improved?**
    OPEN

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[*] This question to be repeated for all academic staff who delivered at least three lectures in the course, with names provided in the question as appropriate.
[†] Choose the appropriate term when this question is used for course that only entails supervision of a piece of work.

THE TEACHING QUALITY SET

TQ1. **The lecturer made the subject interesting.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

TQ2. **The lecturer was enthusiastic about the subject.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

TQ3. **The lecturer was approachable.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

TQ4. **The lecturer gave me sufficient support with my studies when necessary.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

TQ5. **I have been able to contact the lecturer when I needed to.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

TQ6. **The lecturer gave me useful feedback on my academic work.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

TQ7. **The lecturer encourages student participation.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

TQ8. **The best part of this lecturer's teaching is …**
OPEN

TQ9. **If I were the lecturer, I would teach differently by …**
OPEN

THE COURSE QUALITY SET

CQ1. **I understood what is expected of me in this course.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

CQ2. **The structure of the course helped me understand the material.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

CQ3. **The course encouraged me to work independently.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

CQ4. **Appropriate resources were provided to support my learning in this course.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

CQ5. **The methods of assessment allowed me to demonstrate my learning.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

CQ6. **The criteria used in marking have been made clear in advance.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

CQ7. **Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

CQ8. **Compared with other courses, this course was:**
Engaging □ □ □ □ □ *Dull*

CQ9. **Compared with other courses, this course was:**
Difficult □ □ □ □ □ *Easy*

THE COURSE QUALITY SUPPLEMENTARY SET

CQS1. **The seminars helped me to gain a deeper understanding of the subject.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

CQS2. **The practical sessions helped me to gain a deeper understanding of the subject.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

CQS3. **The tutorials helped me to gain a deeper understanding of the subject.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

CQS4. **The group-work exercises helped me to gain a deeper understanding of the subject.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

CQS5. **The course has helped me to give oral presentations with confidence.**
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

THE PGT SET

PGT1. I understood what was expected of me in this course.
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

PGT2. The assessment requirements for this course were clear.
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

PGT3. I received sufficient support for my studies.
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

PGT4. I received sufficient feedback on my academic work.
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

PGT5. The number of formal contact hours allocated to this course was appropriate.
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

PGT6. I found this course:
Difficult □ □ □ □ □ *Easy*

THE EXPECTATIONS/MARKETING SET

E/M1. This course has met my expectations.
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

E/M2. I would recommend this course to other students.
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

E/M3. My experience at The University of Glasgow has met my expectations.
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

E/M4. I would recommend The University of Glasgow to other potential students.
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

E/M5. The University of Glasgow is an example of my ideal higher education institution.
Strongly Agree □ □ □ □ □ *Strongly Disagree*

THE AD-HOC SET

This set is deliberately empty. Questions customised for specific purposes may be added to this set.

Section 4: Policy issues requiring further consideration

Additional resources

The group was concerned about the potential administration support that will be required at the school level in setting up a questionnaire in EvaSys for every course offering.

We also acknowledge that considerable additional time will be required of academic staff in designing the most appropriate questionnaire, and in producing the 'Feedback Action' document at the end of each course offering.

We emphasise that the five core questions can stand alone, and that inclusion of any optional or customized questions is not mandatory.

In-class vs Out-of-class

With the increased use of mobile devices by students and increasing University communication to students using mobile devices, the University should consider replacing paper based questionnaires in due course, while ensuring that no student is excluded from the feedback process.

Online courses

The question sets proposed do not consider online course delivery: it may prove appropriate for a new ONLINE COURSE QUESTION SET to be developed, which would include optional questions appropriate for online delivery.

Review process

The group is very aware that the outcome of their work represents a significant change to current practice. On adopting policies arising from this report, a process for regular review should be put into place.

Section 5: Recommendations Summary

Collecting feedback

o **Recommendation 1:** All courses must use a course questionnaire as one of the methods used to solicit feedback from students.
o **Recommendation 2:** Students should be advised in advance when to expect the course questionnaire to be made available to them.
o **Recommendation 3:** The use of alternative methods for soliciting interim feedback during a course should be actively encouraged.
o **Recommendation 13:** Students should be given clear instructions on how to complete the questionnaire.

Acting on feedback

o **Recommendation 4a:** For each course, the data from the completed questionnaires should be summarised in a 'Feedback Action' document. This document should list the issues arising, with each issue associated with either a planned action or a valid explanation as to why no action will be taken.
o **Recommendation 4b**: The 'Feedback Action' document should be made available to students prior to the relevant Examination Board, using the medium most appropriate for reaching the students.
o **Recommendation 4c**: The 'Feedback Action' document should be made available to incoming students for the next offering of the course, using the medium most appropriate for reaching the students.
o **Recommendation 4d:** The 'Feedback Action' document should be included in the papers for the next relevant SSLC meeting.

Presentation of EvaSys data

o **Recommendation 5**: For institutional purposes, only the quantitative data elicited from the core questions should be aggregated.
o **Recommendation 6a:** EvaSys quality guidelines should only be set following the first year of institutional-wide use of EvaSys, and should be evidence-based. After this, a process for schools/subjects to justify the use of an alternative guideline for a specified course should be established.
o **Recommendation 6b:** EvaSys quality guidelines should be used for the quantitative core questions (and their aggregation). They may be used for the optional and customised questions if desired, but should not be mandatory.
o **Recommendation 7**: Staff teaching on a course should be given the opportunity to supplement the questionnaire data with a qualitative narrative to provide context if desired.
o **Recommendation 8**: EvaSys summary data should be presented using a frequency distribution rather than a mean.

Access to EvaSys data

- o **Recommendation 9a:** Questionnaire data relating to individual members of teaching staff should be restricted to the individual, their line manager (and the person who conducts their P&DR, if this is not the line manager) and, only where appropriate, the programme director.
- o **Recommendation 9b:** Data from the optional and customised questions should be made available at the School level only.
- o **Recommendation 9c**: Clear guidance as to who should have access to all feedback data should be determined, and this information widely distributed.

Devising questionnaires

- o **Recommendation 10:** Schools/subjects should be encouraged to include questions specifically for the purpose of collecting feedback on atypical workers.
- o **Recommendation 11**: The design of a course questionnaire should be based on the eight principles listed in Section 2.3 above.
- o **Recommendation 12:** Questionnaire design is the responsibility of the lecturer or course team. Questions additional to the core set should not be added without prior discussion with the lecturer or course team.
- o **Recommendation 14**: The question sets listed in Section 3 above should be adopted.

Appendix A: EvaSys data permissions table, Newcastle University

From: "Policy on Surveying and Responding to Student Opinion", Newcastle University (http://www.ncl.ac.uk/quilt/assets/documents/qsh-studentopinion-pol.pdf, last modified, August 2013).

"The general principle used in determining access to results of the various core and optional question sets is that those responsible for a module or for the Academic Unit are entitled to see all data, and that those who contribute to the teaching of a module see all the general data plus any scores or comments relating to themselves."

'My Impact T' refers to EvaSys data about a member of staff's teaching.

	Questionnaire data/Scores (for core and optional question sets)	Free Text Comments (general)	Questionnaire data/Scores (about individual staff)	Free Text Comments (about individual staff)	Rationale	EvaSys role/information received	MyImpact T login (and view of data about individual staff)
Heads of Academic Unit (or nominee)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Heads of Academic Unit have line management responsibility for all teaching staff in the Unit.	No login. Academic Unit Manager/Administrator would be able to provide appropriate reports.	Yes
School Admin Managers and Clerical staff	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	School admin managers and nominated clerical staff need access to this date for administrative purposes.	Subunit Administrator and Report Creator. Can see standard module reports and create reports.	Yes
Degree Programme Directors	Yes	Yes	No	No	DPDs must have an overview of the module.	No login. School Manager/Administrator would be able to provide appropriate reports or data files for manipulation.	No
Module Leaders	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Module leaders need access to all data in order to monitor quality of content and teaching.	Instructor (no login). Full report for each module they lead, including all data.	No
Teaching contributors	Yes	Yes	Only receive data about themselves.	Only receive data about themselves.	Teaching contributors will not see each other's quantitative data/open comments	Instructor (no login) receive personalised report showing responses to core and optional questions and those to questions about them.	Yes

Staff who are entitled to see module evaluation results as part of the module review process (Newcastle University)