

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

EvaSys Advisory Board

Phase 1 Report (September – December 2015)

Dr Helen Purchase, Convenor

Ms Catherine Omand, Senate Office

Executive Summary

The Policy on Course Evaluation Questionnaires came into force from September 2015, and will be reviewed after two years.

The Policy represents a significant change from current practice, which has differed widely across the University for several years. We had no expectation that adoption of the Policy would be immediate in Semester 1 of 2015/6, but hoped that most schools would demonstrate at least some understanding of the Policy, and some progress towards full adoption. Our EvaSys audit shows that, although a few Schools and Research Institutes generated no surveys at all, and only a few are fully compliant, the majority have made good progress.

The main problem we have faced has been communication across the University, both in attempting to identify the academic and administrative staff who would take responsibility for Policy implementation in each School, and in communicating the principles of a Policy that is both prescriptive and flexible. We have also had to consider issues that are unrelated to the Policy itself but interact with its implementation – for example, scholarship activities, accreditation requirements, and differences in teaching administration responsibilities across the Schools/Institutes.

We have issued one Policy amendment relating to ‘long’ courses and multiple lecturers on a course: this was well-received, since it both reduced administrative load as well as making it easier for the feedback sought to focus on particular blocks of teaching.

Administrators in all Schools and the majority of Institutes have been trained in using EvaSys in accordance with the Policy. The administrative effort at this stage of the project has been considerable, and the administrators should be commended for having worked exceptionally hard. We expect the administrative effort to be significantly reduced as questionnaires and surveys are reused, and as more schools choose to administer their surveys online.

We have devised a 4-phase plan (Appendix B). This document reports on the first part of Phase 1, and includes a list of actions arising. We request that Deans of L&T note the audit information (Appendix C), and discuss relevant aspects of this report at their College L&T Committees.

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1. Communication of the policy

The new Course Evaluation Policy was distributed to all LTC Conveners, Heads of School, Heads of College and School Administrators on April 3rd 2015.

We have found effective communication across the university to be very problematic. Despite meeting with all the College L&T Committees in March and April 2015, there are still small sections of the University that are unaware of the Policy, or think it only comes into effect from September 2016.

Due to the variety of School structures across the University, it has proven difficult to identify a single L&T Convenor in each School, responsible for ensuring that the Policy is being fully implemented. Many Schools have sub-structures, each with their own Convenor; in some cases these sub-structures appear to work so independently from each other that, while one might be actively following the Policy, another in the same school is not aware of the Policy's existence.

We will seek help in this regard from the Head of Teaching Administration in each College in Semester 2, and hope that they might be able to identify the most appropriate people in each School/School sub-structure to monitor use of the Policy.

2. Presentations and consultations

We presented the Policy at all four College L&T Committee meetings in March and April, attending both the UG and PG meetings of CoSS. Discussing the evolution and constraints of the Policy has

helped significantly in improving understanding and reducing anxiety, and, while some people we spoke to were sceptical about some aspects of the Policy, all discussions were positive and forward-looking.

All School L&T Convenors were emailed once an administrator in their School had been trained in appropriate EvaSys use, and advised to discuss implementation of the Policy with them. They were also encouraged to contact Dr Purchase or Ms Omand directly if they wanted to discuss any aspects of the Policy.

As well as the five College L&T Committee meetings, we have attended meetings for the purpose of consultation as follows:

- School of Medicine: administrators
- School of Life Sciences (4 meetings): HoS, administrators, 2 x academics
- Dentistry Education Committee
- MVLS Postgraduate Teaching Committee
- Institute of Molecular, Cell and Systems Biology: Staff Meeting
- School of Critical Studies: administrators and academics
- School of Education: HoSA and administrators
- Engineering: Dean of L&T, L&T Convenor and Teaching Administrator

We have also had extensive email and phone consultations with members of the Schools of Psychology, Mathematics and Statistics, Chemistry, and Law.

3. Adoption of the Policy: course questionnaires

Our aim for Phase 1 was that all Schools would, if not be fully compliant over all their courses, at least demonstrate that they have made significant progress by the end of Semester 1.

Our advice to all Schools has been to implement the Policy in its minimal form in the first instance, using just the five core questions. There were two reasons for this advice – for administrative expediency, but also because a key principle of the Policy is that of ‘purposeful’ questions. We wish to encourage extra questions to be added only if there is a particular purpose for doing so; that is, not *‘it will be interesting to see...’*, but *‘we need this data because...’*. Qualitative data from the survey (or from other sources, for example, staff-student meetings) will suggest what additional questions should be included the next time the course is run.

Our Semester 1 EvaSys audit (Appendix C) shows that 13 Schools/Research Institutes have conducted at least 30 surveys, 5 have conducted fewer than 30 surveys, and 9 have conducted none at all (of which 4 are Research Institutes). 44% of the questionnaires used are compliant with the Policy; 41% are ‘almost correct’.

Few Schools took our advice to use only the five core questions so as to ensure purposeful questioning. Many schools simply added ad-hoc questions; many chose only some questions from the Question Sets provided (although the Policy suggests that normally complete Question Sets should be used so as to avoid ‘cherry picking’); a few have included full Question Sets. Two

questionnaires contained more than the designated 22 unique closed questions and four open questions

At the start of Semester 2, we will advise those Schools whose questionnaires are not Policy compliant, and provide support to those which have not yet started to implement the Policy.

What we cannot tell from the EvaSys audit is whether **all** Semester 1 courses in a School have had a course questionnaire created, and survey conducted. Until EvaSys is integrated with other University systems that store the complete list of course codes, we will not be able to see to what extent all courses are covered by the Policy.

4. Adoption of the Policy: feedback to students

The Policy requires that the results of surveys be summarised, and fed back to students together with written responses to issues arising from the student feedback. While we have had a few enquires about the process of doing this, we are unsure about the extent to which this has been done, or is planned.

In Semester 2, we plan to, through the SRC, inform student representatives of this new Policy requirement, so that the students are aware that they ought to be getting this feedback/response.

5. Adoption of the policy: access to report data

The Policy states that EvaSys reports generated by a course survey should only be automatically made available to the staff teaching on the course, and their line managers. Since this is a process that is currently done externally to EvaSys (via email by administrators), it is impossible to monitor. In Semester 2, we will investigate whether EvaSys can be configured so that emails are sent automatically – we have some doubts that this will be possible, but we will investigate it nonetheless.

6. Issues arising

The Board's remit does not include policy revision; however, we are aware that practical implementation of a new policy (especially one that is intended to be institution-wide) may reveal aspects that make it practically infeasible. While we are reluctant amend the Policy whenever an issue arises (since this can only cause confusion), we are aware that we need to carefully consider aspects of the Policy that are causing particular concern, and possibly amend where it is deemed to be essential.

- a) **Multiple lecturers on a course.** The Policy indicates that the CORE1(teaching) question should be repeated for every member of staff teaching on a course. The Working Group wanted to ensure that teachers were evaluated individually; there was a concern that teachers who

performed well in a shared course might have their course evaluations negatively affected by other members of the teaching team.

Two things became clear early on in Phase 1:

- there are many more courses across the university taught by more than one member of staff than the Working Group had envisaged;
- if there are large numbers of lecturers on a course, it is often difficult for students to easily distinguish between them or remember them, making the validity of the data about individual staff questionable.

b) **Courses are of varying sizes.** The Policy states that each course should issue a questionnaire comprising the five CORE questions, plus supplementary questions as appropriate. Implicit in this regulation is the assumption that a course is small enough to reasonably be evaluated only once (that is, 10 or 20 credits), and that its duration is short enough (that is, not more than one semester) for students to be able to remember what happened throughout the course.

Even before the Policy came into force, we were informed of some Schools in which the majority of their courses run throughout the whole year, over both semesters.

On investigation, we discovered that:

- these courses tend to be comprised of shorter 'blocks' of teaching;
- these blocks are often taught by only a few members of staff.

Policy Amendment: As a result of these two issues, a Policy Amendment (Appendix A) was issued on 17th November 2015. The Amendment has the following implications:

- lecturers teaching in courses (or 'meaningful blocks') of five or more staff will not get individual quantitative feedback (and may get no individual feedback at all);
- the administrative effort in naming all staff in courses with five or more members of staff is removed;
- the administrative effort in creating questionnaires is reduced, since more questionnaires can be reused over several courses;
- there is more chance that students will be able to relate the relevant CORE (teaching) question to the correct lecturer;
- Schools need to decide on if it is necessary to divide their courses into 'meaningful blocks', and if so, how;
- some course codes will have several questionnaires associated with them, one for each 'meaningful block';
- the administrative effort in creating and naming questionnaires for several 'meaningful blocks' is increased.

c) **Sensitivity of information.** Some people have expressed concern about the use of CORE1 (teaching) to gather feedback on named individuals within a team (in the case of 2-4 lecturers teaching on a course), since the report will go to all people in the team. The Board's view is that, since the lecturers are working as a team on a common course, and this information is not made

public outwith the team, this ought not to be problematic. Indeed, knowing whether individual staff should be recognised for excellent performance, or offered support and guidance, is an important aspect of the Policy. The alternative for CORE1 (teaching), (that is, only having the options ‘the lecturer’ or ‘the teaching team’), would provide insufficient information on individual teachers in a small team. Furthermore, it would make it difficult for students to give meaningful feedback, since they would need to provide a single aggregate response for a set of clearly identifiable individuals.

7. Myths and misconceptions

One of the consequences of poor cross-University communication channels is the emergence and proliferation of misinformation. For example, some members of School staff are under the impression that:

- the Policy does not apply to project courses;
- the Policy does not apply to postgraduate courses;
- the Policy only comes into effect in September 2016;
- use of EvaSys is a necessary requirement for the Policy;
- the Policy requires that all questionnaires be administered online;
- other systems (e.g. SurveyMonkey) can be used to administer any number of alternative student surveys that do not comply with the Policy.

The dissemination of misinformation is a challenging issue with no easy solution. However, we continue to take an open, communicative approach, and encourage people to contact us directly if they have any queries or concerns.

8. EvaSys training

At least one administrator in each School has been trained in the use of EvaSys in accordance with the requirements of the Policy.

While we had hoped to identify one lead EvaSys administrator in each school, this proved particularly challenging, in part because of the various different ways in which schools are organised, but also because of a perception in some Schools that having a lead administrator would exclude other members of administrative staff from training. This means that in some Schools where EvaSys activity is distributed, there is no lead member of staff ensuring that all courses in the School are being covered appropriately.

We will address this in Semester 2 by ensuring that all administrators who want to be trained are done so, and by consulting with HoSAs and L&T Convenors to ensure that School evaluation activity is adequately monitored.

All trained administrators have been encouraged to contact Dr Lowdon if they have queries. Dr Lowdon has been in regular telephone contact with EvaSys users to address their technical queries.

He has also made several site visits to help administrators set up their surveys for Semester 1. Furthermore, he has offered to help some schools (especially the large ones) to set up their surveys for Semester 2.

It is clear that the administrative load in setting up EvaSys surveys for all courses has been (and will continue to be) high, especially in large Schools. Rolling over at the start of next year will be easier. Some Schools have chosen to administer all of their surveys online, so as to remove the administrative load of printing out, distributing, and scanning questionnaires.

9. Access to EvaSys

During the pilot period of introducing EvaSys to the university, any member of staff who requested an account was given one. The data restriction requirements of the Policy means that several academic staff who had been using EvaSys have had to have their access removed, since it would permit a wider scope of access to data than is allowable by the Policy. In most cases, these academic members of staff (many of whom had been conducting surveys on behalf of other people) were content with transferring the responsibility to trained administrative staff.

A couple of academics wish to continue using the system for the purposes of Learning and Teaching Scholarship activities: a new EvaSys 'Scholarship' unit has been created, and accounts will be given in this unit to academic members of staff who wish to conduct scholarship activities, on the understanding that such activities have been approved by the relevant College Ethics Committee.

We have had requests for EvaSys accounts from researchers who wish to use the system to conduct surveys for the purpose of gathering research data. We have declined these requests, while recognising that it might be reasonable to open the system up for such use in the future.

There are several existing EvaSys units that are not associated with Schools/Institutes (for example, 'Athena Swan', 'Human Resources', 'The Library'); as part of our efforts to ensure appropriate University-wide use of the system, we will assess the activity in these units in Semester 2.

Schools which used EvaSys during the pilot period were given the freedom to organise their surveys how they saw fit, with the Sub-Unit organisational unit being either a course or a member of staff. With a policy that focusses on 'course enhancement' rather than 'performance management', and which requires that questionnaires be administered by course, those Schools that previously arranged their surveys by member of staff have had their old EvaSys Sub-Units archived, and new Sub-Units created.

10. The EvaSys Advisory Board

The Board has met 5 times, and currently meets monthly. Availability has meant that attendance has been erratic, especially amongst academic staff, and we have never had a full attendance. We have invited three new academic members of staff to join the board [from Life Sciences and Psychology (both agreed); with one response pending]. The current membership is provided in Appendix D.

11. Actions arising

Aside from the tasks already planned for the remainder of Phase 1, the following actions are required:

- advise those Schools with incorrectly configured Semester 1 questionnaires on correct application of the Policy (Richard Lowdon);
- establish appropriate channels of communication, so as to identify the L&T Convenors who are responsible for Policy implementation in each School/School sub-structure (Catherine Omand, with the help of Deans of L&T, and College Teaching Administrators);
- liaise with the SRC regarding informing student representatives of the feedback requirements of the new Policy (Catherine Omand and Gemma Gratton);
- audit of EvaSys use by non-School units (Richard Lowdon);
- investigate automatic email distribution of reports in EvaSys (Richard Lowdon).

We would also request that Deans of L&T note the audit information (Appendix C), and discuss relevant aspects of this report at their College L&T Committees.

Appendix A: Policy amendment

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

EvaSys Advisory Board

Multiple teachers on a course: Course Evaluation Policy Amendment 1

1. The CORE policy relating to the evaluation of teaching

The first CORE question to be used on all course questionnaires focusses on teaching:

CORE1 (teaching)	The lecturer explained things well. (Scale)
<i>or</i>	
CORE1 (supervision).	My project/dissertation/placement supervisor was helpful. (Scale)

The policy states that (1.1) “*CORE1 (teaching) should be repeated for all academic staff who delivered at least three lectures in the course, with names provided: for example: The lecturer (HP) explained things well.*”

In addition, the policy states that (3.1) “The *Core Question Set* relates only to academic staff (on standard university academic contracts).”

In devising these sections of the policy, the Course Evaluation Working Group recognised that (a) the standard of teaching may vary between different members of a teaching team; that (b) teaching only one or two classes is insufficient exposure for a reasonable assessment of a lecturer’s teaching quality to be made; and that (c) the formal institutional requirements relate only to academic staff members.

Following feedback from several schools in Semester 1 2015/6, and the discovery that courses taught by multiple lecturers are more common than had originally been recognised by the Course Evaluation Working Group, the following Policy Amendment has been approved by the EvaSys Advisory Board.

2. Amendment to the policy with respect to multiple teachers on a course

The following situations may arise:

- **If no member of staff teaching on a course teaches three or more lectures**, then amendment 1 below should be used.
- The policy specifies that “all courses must use a course questionnaire as one of the methods used to solicit feedback from students.” Implicit in this is the definition of a course being associated with a single course code. **If a single course is taught in 'meaningful blocks' with a different set of teaching staff in each block**, then it may be appropriate to use a questionnaire at the end of each block. This is particularly useful if the course lasts over two semesters, or over a whole year.
In this case, it is particularly important that the questionnaires be kept short, and we would advise using only the five core questions.
- Students are unlikely to be able to remember individual lecturers if there are more than four of them. **If there are five or more members of staff teaching on a course or in a block**, then amendment 1 below may be used.

Policy Amendment 1.

- CORE1 (teaching) should be adapted to read “Teaching staff explained things well.”
- An additional open CORE6 question should be included: “Please provide feedback on the teaching abilities of individual staff teaching on this course here.”

EvaSys Policy Amendment 1

17th November 2015

Appendix B: Project Plan

The University of Glasgow
EvaSys Advisory Board
**University-wide use of EvaSys for Course Evaluation:
Implementation Plan¹**

This document outlines the current two-year plan for rolling out the use of EvaSys for Course Evaluation across the university; as with all plans, it is subject to change. In particular, it is expected that the tasks specified to be undertaken in Phases 3 & 4 will become more detailed as a result of the experiences of the early phases.

Phase 1: September 2015-April 2016

- Lead administrators will be identified in each School (or subject) and enrolled as EvaSys SubUnit Administrators.
- All lead administrators will be trained in:
 - EvaSys use, sufficient for policy implementation
 - Course Evaluation Policy
 - Data Access principles
- All schools will use at least the minimal version of policy: some schools or lecturers may expand their questionnaires, and this will be done by the administrators.
- School LTC convenors will be advised on policy and responsibility, and on mechanisms for feedback to students.
- Quantitative data will not be aggregated: at this stage, there will be no information flow upwards, only downwards.
- Feedback will be given to students.
- Training materials will be prepared by SDS.

Phase 2: January 2016-June 2016

- Co-opted administrators will be trained to the same level as Phase 1 training.
- Administrators will be trained in how to give access to academic staff.
- Academic staff will be able to extend their own questionnaires, while retaining the CORE questions.
- School LTC convenors will be advised on policy, responsibility and allowable questionnaire extensions.
- Training materials will be prepared by SDS.

Phase 3: September 2016 – June 2017

- Further training will be done, as necessary, by SDS.
- Data will be aggregated at school/subject level, and fed upwards to college and university LTC.
- Most schools will move to online forms (in or out of class)
- Issues arising from experiences so far will be collated, and individual schools/lecturers asked to provide input about boundary cases as necessary.

Phase 4: From September 2017

- Staff and students will be asked to comment on their experiences over the prior two years.
- Consideration will be given to off-campus and distance learning evaluation, as appropriate
- The policy will be reviewed and amended in the light of experiences, and of staff and student comments.

HCP & CMO, 10/09/15

¹ Approved by the Board with minor amendments, 30/09/15

Appendix C: Audit for Semester 1, 2015/6 (as of 20th December 2015)

Some schools' surveys are not represented in this audit, since they only started their scanning of questionnaires at the start of Semester 2.

EvaSys use: Semester 1, 2015/6	number of surveys	number of surveys(paper)	number of surveys(online)	number of questionnaires	correct CORE questions (%questionnaires)	almost correct CORE questions (%questionnaires)	absent/ incorrect CORE questions (%questionnaires)	Questionnaires unrelated to courses (%questionnaires)
	1250	763	487	338	44.2	41.1	14.1	0.6
Adam Smith Business School	307	279	28	11	56.35	34.53	4.89	4.23
Chemistry	1	0	1	1	100	0	0	0
Computing Science	30	30	0	30	100	0	0	0
Critical Studies	46	22	24	41	28.26	65.22	4.35	2.17
Culture and Creative Arts	0							
Dentistry (*) (**)	0							
Education (*)	60	0	60	48	15	85	0	0
Engineering	192	160	32	3	0	100	0	0
Geographical and Earth Sciences	26	25	1	24	65.38	15.38	19.23	0
Humanities	112	112	0	78	36.61	27.68	35.71	0
Institute of Biodiversity, Animal Health and Comparative Medicine	0							
Institute of Cancer Sciences	0							
Institute of Cardiovascular and Medical Sciences <i>Institute of Health and Wellbeing (***)</i>	2	1	1	2	100	0	0	0
Institute of Infection, Immunity and Inflammation	0							
Institute of Molecular, Cell and Systems Biology <i>Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology (***)</i>	0							
Interdisciplinary Studies	0							
Law	11	0	11	11	54.55	45.45	0	0
Mathematics and Statistics (*)	57	26	31	8	0	100	0	0
Medical School	101	22	79	27	0	6.93	89.1	3.96
Modern Languages and Cultures	8	8	0	2	0	0	100	0
Nursing and Health Care (**)	0							
Open Studies (**)	62	0	62	2	0	100	0	0
Physics and Astronomy	49	0	49	1	0	100	0	0
Psychology	30	0	30	30	96.67	3.33	0	0
Life Sciences	61	25	36	2	100	0	0	0
Social and Political Sciences	95	53	42	17	43.16	55.79	1.05	0
Veterinary Medicine	0							
Proportion of surveys generated online across the University:	35.60%							
Proportion of surveys generated on paper across the University:	64.40%							
(*) These schools have contacted us about their readiness to conform to policy in Semester 2.								
(**) Although not separate Schools/Institutes, these units have their own EvaSys SubUnits.								
(***) These institutes do not have EvaSys SubUnits and do not have trained EvaSys administrators								

Appendix D: EvaSys Advisory Board Membership

Dr Helen Purchase	Convener	Computing Science
Ms Catherine Omand	Senate Office	
Dr Richard Lowdon (clerk)	Senate Office	
Ms Susan Howel	Arts - administration	Culture and Creative Arts
Dr Alison Wiggins	Arts - academic	Critical Studies
Dr David Forrest	Science and Engineering - academic	Geographical and Earth Sciences
Dr Steve Draper	Science and Engineering - academic	Psychology
Ms Tracy Maxwell	Social Sciences - administration	Adam Smith Business School
Professor Nicki Hedge	Social Sciences - academic	Education
Ms Eunice Duncan	Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences - administration	Medicine
Dr Alistair Gracie	Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences - academic	Life Sciences
Dr Joseph Gray	Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences - academic	Life Sciences
Ms Gemma Gratton	SRC (VP Education)	
Ms Anna Phelan	ITS	
Ms Monica Smith	Employee and Organisational Development	