

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

EvaSys Advisory Board

Phase 2 Report (January – August 2016)

Dr Helen Purchase, Convenor

Ms Catherine Omand & Dr Richard Lowdon, Senate Office

Executive Summary

The roll out of the new Course Evaluation Policy and the EvaSys software has been exceptionally successful during Session 2015-16, with all Schools and Research Institutes becoming largely compliant with the course evaluation policy. This outstanding and rapid progress has been largely due to:

- The efforts of School EvaSys Administrators, who have been required to learn how to use new software in order to follow new processes.
- The extensive support given to these administrators by the Senate Office EvaSys Administrator, Dr Lowdon. Without this support, the practicalities of operationalising the Policy would have been extremely difficult, with likely failure.
- Face-to-face consultations between Dr Purchase and Ms Omand and School Learning and Teaching Convenors, where the essence of the policy and what it hoped to achieve was explained. These consultations resulted better awareness and academic 'buy in' to the policy.
- Valued guidance from the EvaSys Advisory Board, ensuring an academic-led and course-enhancement focus.

Key issues being addressed include online surveys, data aggregation, integration with the AMR process, and future training. A revised Project plan can be found in Appendix A.

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.

1. Consultations

We met with all L&T Convenors of all Schools (bar one) during Semester 2. These meetings were very useful for explaining the rationale behind many aspects of the Policy, for clarifying the decisions that need to be made at School level, for discussing interaction required between the L&T Convenor and the School EvaSys administrators, and for establishing a communication channel for any future queries. The emphasis of 'course enhancement' over 'performance management' in the Policy was universally welcomed, and allayed the concerns of many Convenors.

2. Policy revision

We have issued a slightly revised Policy (v1.1), effective from September 2016, based on the experiences of implementation during the 2015-16 academic year. The revision:

- clarifies ambiguities in the Policy;
- includes requirements arising from a recent PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) audit of "Student Feedback" (see section 3 below);
- incorporates the Policy amendment relating to multiple teachers on a course (distributed in November 2015);
- uses clearer terminology (in particular, uses the terms 'evaluation' and 'feedback' as contrasts to distinguish comments by students to staff, e.g. via Evasys, from comments by staff to students on their work).

There are still a few aspects of the Policy implementation that are still to be explored and implemented in year2. In particular, the use of the Teaching Quality Set for the purposes of Recognition and Reward, and the exact mechanics of data aggregation are still to be investigated. This means that there are sections of v1.1 of the Policy that we are aware will probably need further revision, but no changes have been made as yet.

3. PWC audit

Price Waterhouse Coopers undertook an audit of Student Feedback in February 2016, which included investigating the Course Evaluation Policy. The auditor reviewed compliance over four schools (Modern Languages & Culture, Law, Psychology, and Adam Smith Business School) and the Institute of Cardiovascular & Medical Sciences. They were aware that Policy had only come into force in September 2015, and that full implementation across all schools could not be expected. Their recommendations have helped in formalising some aspects of the original Policy that had been vague or overly flexible.

The recommendations from PWC are included in Appendix B. The risk associated with all these actions is specified as 'low.'

4. Adoption of the Policy: course questionnaires

The advice given to Schools has been to, at least at first, use only the Core questions, and then, based on the results elicited from these questions, to decide what additional questions might be necessary the following year – thus ensuring that additional questions are purposeful (as intended by the Policy). Most Schools, however, added questions to the Core set right from the start – 34% of all surveys conducted over the year used only the Core questions.

Anecdotal evidence has revealed:

- Students like shorter questionnaires, and take more time over them, since it is clear to them that all the questions are important and have been carefully selected as being relevant.
- Consequently, academic staff have said that the qualitative data collected is substantially richer, and more useful – students spend more time on the open questions.
- Students get very frustrated if questions are repeated within the same questionnaire, or ask for similar information.

Our Semester 2 EvaSys audit (Appendix C) shows that all Schools and all except two Research Institutes have used EvaSys to conduct surveys. The total number of surveys has increased from 1274 in Semester 1 to 2164 in Semester 2.

63% of the Semester 2 questionnaires used are compliant with the Policy (up from 44%); 22% are 'almost correct' (down from 41%). 6% of the surveys conducted in Semester 2 contained more than the upper limit of 22 unique closed questions and four open questions. At the start of Semester 1, we will advise those Schools whose questionnaires are still not Policy compliant.

5. Adoption of the Policy: feedback to students

An important aspect of the Policy is to provide standardised feedback to students following the issues raised in course questionnaire evaluations. Most Schools adopted the practise of producing Summary & Response Documents (SRDs) readily, and saw the benefit of doing so. There was some confusion over the timing of the creation and release of the documents (due to an ambiguity in v1.0 of the Policy) and where they should be stored (deliberately flexible, and a School decision) – and guidance on both these matters has been given, as well as advice on retention periods.

A recommendation of the PWC audit is that discussion of these documents should be a standing item on all Staff-Student Liaison Committees. The SRC has been asked to include instructions to Class Representatives regarding ensuring that these documents are discussed and acted upon.

There was some concern over the fact that the template for the SRDs appears to focus only on the negative comments from students that require action or rebuttal, and that it was not clear that positive results should be included. The template has been updated in v1.1 to make it clear that the SRD should be a *summary* of the student evaluations, not simply an action plan to address negative comments.

6. Adoption of the Policy: access to report data

The Policy states that “*Automatic* access to specific course (or course-block) questionnaire data relating to an individual member of teaching staff is restricted to that individual and their line manager ... Access may also be given to the director of the associated programme (or equivalent) if the Head of School considers this necessary.” The revised Policy states that is expected that members of a course team should, as a team working on a common task, discuss the results amongst themselves, and clarifies that the ‘data’ being referred to is in the form of the pdf reports produced by EvaSys.

Many Schools have been reassured by being informed that this statement relates to *automatic* access only - staff are free to share their EvaSys pdf reports as they like, and in many Schools, it is usual for all reports to be shared. In addition, many Quality Officers and L&T Convenors recognise that the Summary & Response Documents are a very useful way of finding out what is happening across the courses in a School – and indeed, are more useful than the raw pdf documents.

So, while the data access principles are clear (data relating to individuals can be sensitive and should only automatically be made available to those with the means to effect change; the data is intended for course enhancement, not performance management; league tables and KPIs are not permitted under the policy), many Schools are adopting local practices. In most cases, these practices are within the spirit of the Policy. Schools that decide to adopt practices that are contrary to the data access principles should remember that they could be subject to legitimate challenge.

7. Issues arising

7.1 Online vs Paper

There has been much discussion regarding the decision as to whether to conduct the surveys online or using paper. The decision lies with the School. Administrators prefer the online processes since they much simpler; academics are more concerned about the consequences of a reduced response rate.

We expect that, in the long-term, all surveys will be conducted online, and students will consider this normal. We are encouraging “online-inclass” evaluations, and have provided an extensive list of tips for increasing online response rates. One School that conducted all surveys online in 15/6 (over all year levels) and which was disappointed with the response rates, will have online surveys for levels 1 and 2 in 2016/7, for levels 1-3 in 2017/8 and all levels in 2018/9 – this approach means that incoming level 1 students will not know any different.

In semester 2, 57% of all surveys across the university were conducted online. The improved response data across the university for online surveys is encouraging:

response rate: 2015/6	S1	S2
paper	64%	63%

online	31%	43%
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7.2 Data Aggregation

The Policy provides for aggregation of the quantitative data collected for each of the first three Core questions, aggregated over School and over College. We are fortunate to have direct access to the underlying EvaSys database. Staff in IT Services have undertaken to create an appropriate aggregation program, which we expect to pilot in Semester 1 2016/7. This fortunately means that this process need not be addressed by School administrative and academic staff.

7.3 Core Question 1

The Core Question 1 is the 'teaching' question, and has several different forms, depending on the nature of the academic leadership of the course (teaching, supervision), and on the number of members of academic staff involved. If fewer than four members of staff teach on a course (or course-block), then CORE question 1 is repeated, one for each member of the team.

Administrators have pointed out that it would be easier if CORE1(teaching) were always simply one question – either relating to an individual member of staff, or to a teaching team of two or more lecturers. However, using 'teaching team' when it is possible for students to distinguish between members of staff does not serve either academics or students well: students would have to come up with a single quantitative response that is some kind of aggregation of the (possibly very varied) quality of teaching of several members of staff, and the data collected would therefore be of little worth to the academics. This point has been clarified in v1.1 of the Policy.

7.4 Wider use of EvaSys

We have had requests for EvaSys questionnaires to be used for purposes other than for the evaluation of individual credit-bearing courses:

- Programmes with professional accreditation require that extensive surveys of all students within a year level be undertaken: we have indicated that this is acceptable use of the system, but have asked that these surveys are specifically noted in the system as not being associated with credit-bearing courses (so that it is clear that they are not subject to the policy).
- Members of staff engaged in Scholarship activity wish to conduct surveys to evaluate their educational interventions: we have created 'Scholarship' unit for scholarship activities, on the understanding that such activities have been approved by the relevant College Ethics Committee.
- Research students have requested that they use EvaSys to conduct research surveys: 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 still some old and unused EvaSys units (Library, Human Resources etc.) that will be archived. Discussions are underway as to how best to support the Learning and Teaching Centre in both evaluation of the credit-bearing courses they offer, as well as their Scholarship activities.

8. Myths and misconceptions

Our meetings with L&T Convenors have gone a long way in addressing misunderstandings. We still find, however, that there are still a few misconceptions.

Some courses are being deemed as being entirely 'not subject to the policy' and consequently use questionnaires that bear no resemblance to the Core questions at all. Reasons given are:

- A member of NHS staff teaches on the course. The course is still subject to the policy, but it is not mandatory for the NHS staff members to be evaluated personally in Core Question 1.
- The course is not 'taught', it is a series of educational activities. The course is still subject to the policy, and Core Question 1 (supervision) can be adapted to refer to co-ordination of the activities. This has been clarified in v1.1 of the Policy.

The recommendations of the PWC audit were clear that all credit-bearing courses should be evaluated, and one of the aims of the Policy is to ensure that, under audit, the university would be able to demonstrate that all its educational offerings are regularly evaluated. Labelling of the surveys by course code in the system is therefore very important, and appropriate guidance will be given to administrators.

Some non-anonymous surveys have been distributed, whereby the student can be identified: the fact that all surveys should be anonymous has been clarified in the Policy revision.

9. EvaSys training and support

At least one administrator in each School has been trained in the use of EvaSys in accordance with the requirements of the Policy. We expect that there will be a handful of new administrators who will require training at the start of 2016/7. Employee and Organisational Development will eventually take over the training process; however, the Senate Office will be working together with EOD, and will continue to provide training and support for this session.

From September 1st 2016, SupportWorks will be used for EvaSys administrators' queries – including queries that relate to both EvaSys use as well as to Policy implementation.

10. The EvaSys Advisory Board

The Board has met 3 times since January 2016 (a total of 8 times over the 2015/6 session), and welcomed three new academic members of staff. The current membership is provided in Appendix D. Now that the project is successfully underway, we anticipate that fewer meetings will be required in this coming session, and that the discussion will focus more on Policy matters rather than operational processes.

Dr Purchase gave a presentation on the Glasgow University Course Evaluation Policy at the Higher Education Academy Surveys Conference in Birmingham in July 2016. The presentation focussed on the academic-led nature of the Policy formation, and the emphasis on course enhancement, rather than performance management. The presentation was very well received, with members of the audience being particularly impressed with the way in which the policy focusses on balancing the needs and perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders.

Appendix A: Revised Project Plan

This document outlines the draft plan for the remainder of the two-year project for rolling out the use of EvaSys for Course Evaluation across the university, building on the successes of the first year (phases 1 and 2). In particular, it is expected that the later tasks will become more detailed as a result of the experiences of the early phases.

Phase 3: June 2016 – August 2016

- A training package will be prepared. [RL]
- A revised Policy document will be created, including:[HP/CO]
 - amendments required by auditors;
 - incorporation of the policy amendment of 17th November 2015;
 - clarification of terminology and ambiguities.
- An Operational Guidance document will be created, giving advice to Schools on operational aspects of the policy. These Guidelines will not form part of the Policy, but will simply assist Schools in making operational decisions that were deliberately left open in the Policy so as to allow for flexibility. [HP/CO]
- An Administrators' Guidance document will be created, highlighting the actions that administrators must take in preparation for the new session. [HP/RL]
- All the online resources on the Senate Office website will be revisited to ensure that they are up-to-date. [RL]
- An audit of all Semester 2 activity will be undertaken, and feedback and advice given to Schools as appropriate. [RL]
- College and School webpage administrators will be asked to create appropriate links to the Senate Office Course Evaluation webpage. [RL]
- Processes for aggregating data will be investigated by ITS. [SO/HP]

Phase 4: September 2016 – December 2016

- Further training will be done as necessary by SDS. In particular, training will be offered to administrators in those Schools where there is currently only one trained EvaSys administrator. [RL]
- Data will be aggregated at school/subject level, and fed upwards to college and university LTCs. [ITS/SO]
- Student representatives will be advised as to their responsibilities with respect to monitoring the production, distribution and discussion of Response Forms. [SRC – Bob Hay to be advised]
- A process for using SupportWorks for queries will be piloted. [ITS/SO]

Phase 5: January 2017 – June 2017.

- Potential links with the Annual Monitoring and Periodic Subject Review processes will be explored with the Senate Office. [SO]
- Particular requirements for off-campus and distance learning evaluation will be explored. [Advisory Board]
- Staff and students will be asked to comment on their experiences of course questionnaire evaluation over the prior two years; individual schools/lecturers asked to provide input about boundary cases as necessary.[RL]

Phase 6: May 2017 – June 2017.

- A final report will be produced for presentation to the University L&T committee, and EdPSC.

HCP&CHO 03/06/2016

Appendix B Summary of draft PWC Internal Audit – Student Feedback

Findings relating to the Course Evaluation Policy.

The list of good practices identified by the auditors includes the “strong governance of Course Evaluation Questionnaire Policy and EvaSys implementation by the EvaSys Advisory Board”.

Agreed actions: Course Evaluation Questionnaire Policy Amendments: Target date September 2016

- Significant amendments to the Course Evaluation Questionnaire Policy should be made on a timely basis. Management will consider producing a revised version of the Policy for the 2016-17 academic year, to include the November 2015 amendment and the suggestions from this audit.
- Schools should be asked to publicise the timing of questionnaires in advance, for example, in the Course Handbook, on the Course Intranet site on Moodle, and through communication to students in advance (such as at the start of the session and towards the end of the course); this should hopefully improve response rates. This may not be possible in some cases, for example, if a new course is being taught or a new lecturer takes over an existing course, since the course may not progress as originally intended.
- While Schools must be free to administer the questionnaire at a time that they deem most appropriate, the Policy should set out guidelines for the period within which feedback on the survey results should be given to students after the end of the course.
- SSLC agendas are to include course evaluations as a standing agenda point and guidance documents updated for requirements for monitoring the feedback on the survey results that is given to students. The SSLC and Class representative should be made aware of their role in ensuring that the information from the evaluations addressed.
- Response Forms templates should be reviewed to include clarity around the action, action owner and date of delivery. Progress against responses should be monitored at the SSLC.

Agreed actions: Monitoring completeness of the Course Evaluation Questionnaire Policy: Target date June 2017

- Management should review how the system could provide clarity over courses to be governed by the Policy.
- Management should consider engaging with the Planning and Business Intelligence teams to review alternative data sources on live courses and cross reference information with EvaSys to monitor progress of the implementation of the Policy.
- Management should consider the annual random audit of Schools to test compliance with the policy; or consider a compliance review as part of the Periodic Subject Review (PSR) cycle.

Appendix C: Audit for Semester 2, 2015/6 (as of 18th August 2016)

EvaSys use: Semester 2, 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 not used on credit-bearing courses (%questionnaires)	Mean response rate (Online)	Mean response rate (Paper)
	2164	924	1240	766	63.2	21.8	9.4	5.6	43.34%	63.29%
Adam Smith Business School	294	243	51	12	37.76	55.1	0.34	6.8	60.35	67.6
Chemistry	34	0	34	17	91.18	8.82	0	0	31.03	N/A
Computing Science	47	3	44	47	97.87	2.13	0	0	62.94	76.33
Critical Studies	80	1	79	74	65	33.75	1.25	0	42.79	N/A
Culture and Creative Arts	59	22	37	12	59.32	32.2	6.78	1.69	38.09	39.17
Dentistry (*)	10	0	10	10	60	20	0	20	44.38	N/A
Education	108	0	108	85	52.78	42.59	4.63	0	23.63	N/A
Engineering	184	121	63	18	0	89.13	10.87	0	39.02	60.2
Geographical and Earth Sciences	46	20	26	39	43.48	32.61	21.74	2.17	54.16	56.89
Humanities	133	129	4	97	75.19	22.56	1.5	0.75	54.33	68.47
Inst. Biodiversity, Animal Health, Comp. Med.	5	0	5	3	60	0	0	40	7.67	N/A
Inst. Cancer Sciences	0									
Inst. Cardiovascular and Medical Sciences	36	2	34	36	58.33	33.33	5.56	2.78	60.64	N/A
Inst. Health and Wellbeing	13	2	11	12	15.38	0	84.62	0	57.9	N/A
Inst. Infection, Immunity and Inflammation	11	0	11	10	72.73	18.18	0	9.09	31.82	N/A
Inst.Molecular, Cell and Systems Biology	12	0	12	1	100	0	0	0	58.33	N/A
Inst. Neuroscience and Psychology	0									
Interdisciplinary Studies	103	101	2	54	68.93	22.33	2.91	5.83	N/A	N/A
Law	71	0	71	71	98.59	0	0	1.41	25.4	N/A
Mathematics and Statistics	64	38	26	18	0	96.88	1.56	1.56	30.88	41.18
Medical School	117	12	105	50	14.53	6.84	56.41	22.22	40.91	N/A
Modern Languages and Cultures	235	74	161	18	68.94	0.85	0	30.21	58	70.21
Nursing and Health Care (*)	25	0	25	22	84	16	0	0	37.95	N/A
Open Studies (*)	215	0	215	1	100	0	0	0	39.37	N/A
Physics and Astronomy	14	0	14	1	100	0	0	0	26.43	N/A
Psychology	29	0	29	29	82.76	17.24	0	0	43.76	N/A
Life Sciences	75	28	47	1	100	0	0	0	34.74	68.07
Social and Political Sciences	134	118	16	18	35.82	16.42	47.01	0.75	88.33	77.46
Veterinary Medicine	10	10	0	10	10	90	0	0	N/A	70.6
Proportion of surveys generated online across the University: 57.30%										
Proportion of surveys generated on paper across the University: 42.70%										

(*) Although not separate Schools/Institutes, these units have their own EvaSys SubUnits.

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	Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences - administration	MVLS
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 Kate Powell	SRC (VP Education)	
Ms Alison Harper	IT Services	
Ms Monica Smith	Employee and Organisational Development	