GETTING AND USING STUDENT FEEDBACK

Student feedback plays an integral role in the continuous improvement of student learning experiences and outcomes. This document provides a brief overview of the primary ways student feedback can be used to improve teaching and learning, discusses the various types of student feedback available to staff, offers some recommendations for best practice, and raises some questions for discussion.

Uses of Student Feedback

One of the primary uses of student feedback is to support the **professional development** of teaching staff. Regular collection and evaluation of feedback is a vital component of self-reflective practice, aiding teaching staff to identify areas for improvement, as well as providing assurance of improved or continuing teaching quality. Student feedback can be used by staff to reflect on both the efficacy of their individual teaching practice, as well as the curriculum and assessment design of any courses or programs for which they may be responsible. The results of self-evaluation of student feedback can in turn be used to support applications for **promotion**, **tenure** and **teaching awards**, which generally require evidence of sustained high quality teaching practice.

From the University perspective, student feedback is also a critical factor in the process of **quality assurance and enhancement.** It is a critical factor in evaluating the overall efficacy of teaching practice, as well as curriculum, course and program design at the University. Student feedback is used in course, program and unit review processes, and informs high level decision making in a variety of ways. Externally, student feedback is also used to help the University meet external quality assurance requirements. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) regulate universities against the Higher Education Standards Framework to assure compliance. Meeting these standards necessitates the University, amongst other requirements, to include the use of regular, valid and reliable feedback from internal stakeholders (students) to improve higher education operations.

Student feedback can also be used to support **educational scholarship and research.** The Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) grant scheme offers category one funding for projects that enhance learning and teaching, and there are a wide variety of higher education research groups, conferences and journals, both generic and discipline-specific, available for staff to engage in educational research. Systematic gathering and analysis of student responses to teaching practice are important components of this type of scholarly activity.

Types of Student Feedback

Student Experience of Learning and Teaching (SELT)

SELTs are the form of student feedback most familiar to staff and students. They provide a regular indicator of student perspectives on learning and teaching practice. The University has recently introduced online SELT (eSELT) processes for the majority of courses, which means that SELTs are now centrally generated and conducted by Planning and Performance Reporting. Students are given the opportunity to provide feedback about their experience of each course in which they are enrolled.

There are **advantages** and **disadvantages** to required student evaluations such as SELTs. The standardised questions are useful in benchmarking activities, and the routine nature of the process provides a consistent measure of performance and quality. However, SELTs can also be perceived by students and staff as a bureaucratic process of limited value, and staff may have concerns about the quality of student responses gathered via SELTs (see Summary Guide, pg 3, for further discussion). The recommendations for best practice provided below discuss ways to encourage SELTs to be perceived as valuable activity by both students and staff.

Course Experience Questionnaire and the University Experience Survey

The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) is conducted by Graduate Careers Australia as part of the Australian Graduate Survey questionnaire, appearing alongside the Graduate Destination Survey. The aim of the CEQ is to determine what graduates thought of the coursework program that they recently completed, including their attitudes towards the skills they acquired, and the quality of teaching provided, during their program. The CEQ is mailed to all graduating students from the previous year, and results are made available in February the following year. Data gathered via the CEQ is available via the Planning and Performance Reporting website.

The University Experience Survey is also administered by Graduate Careers Australia in association with the Social Research Centre, and is funded by Department of Education and Training. The UES measures a small number of key aspects of students' experience at university, focusing on aspects that are measurable, linked with learning and development outcomes, and for which universities can reasonably be assumed to have responsibility. A sample of first-year and later-year students receive an invitation to participate in the UES.

Both the CEQ and UES provide valuable data to universities which can inform curriculum development initiatives and provide teachers useful insights into the needs of future students. Results from these surveys are also used to inform the national MyUniversity website.

Other Student Feedback

In addition to the mandated surveys and questionnaires conducted at both the university and national level staff have available to them alternative methods to gather and evaluate student feedback on their teaching practice.

Staff may choose to conduct **additional surveys and research** with their students. For example, they may seek formative feedback during a course to complement the summative 3 feedback gathered from SELTs, via straw polls in lectures, online questionnaires in MyUni, or inviting students to participate in focus groups. This type of feedback gathering is generally targeted and purposeful, often in support of specific learning and teaching scholarship or project goals. However, staff must be careful not to over-survey students, and should be aware of the guidelines and procedures outlined in the [Survey Framework](#), and ensure that any surveys and research have gone through the appropriate survey and ethics approval processes.

Staff also receive a variety of **unsolicited and informal feedback** from students on a regular basis, for example comments made in online forums, discussions, and emails, which can be saved for future reference. A particularly useful practice for staff is to maintain a reflective teaching journal, which not only keeps track of and reflects upon feedback from students, but also contains their own observations on student responses in classes to various teaching initiatives.

Finally, staff may also gather information on student responses to teaching via the collection and analysis of **'hard' data** in relation to student engagement and performance, e.g. assessment results, attendance, retention. The availability and usefulness of this data varies, but can be particularly informative when analysed together with other forms of feedback. For example, a teacher may have introduced a learning initiative in a course, designed to improve student learning outcomes. SELT results could indicate that the students' understanding of course content has improved since the initiative was introduced; but this result is only indicative of student perception of their own learning, and is also subject to a number of variables. However, if the positive SELT results can be correlated with an improvement in assessment results, the SELT results become more significant and a stronger case can be made for overall improvement in student learning outcomes in the course.

Best Practice

Student feedback is most valuable when both staff and students view the evaluation and feedback processes as having an integral role in improving student learning at the University. This necessitates **meaningful engagement** from staff with the required evaluations, and ideally they will use this feedback to complement other forms of feedback that they gather themselves. Staff should approach student feedback in a **purposeful manner**, whether they are evaluating the effectiveness of particular teaching innovations, gathering evidence for promotion or award applications, looking for opportunities for improvement, or simply monitoring and reflecting on their own teaching quality.

Effective use of student feedback also necessitates **closing the feedback loop**. The SELT policy states that feedback should be provided to both current and future cohorts on student evaluations, including common issues raised by students, quantitative statistical data for the Likert-scale questions and details relating to course data and teacher quality. Similarly, the results of any feedback gathered via the alternative methods discussed above should also be provided to students as soon as practicable. Providing students with feedback on their feedback helps to create a culture of quality in which students take the process more seriously because they know that their feedback is analysed and acted upon.

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