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# **Obtaining and Responding to Feedback from Students - Code of Practice**

# Obtaining and Responding to Feedback from Students- Code of Practice

## 1. Introduction

**IEC provides a learning experience that is rewarding and challenging for its students. To help ensure this remains the case, staff engage with students with a view to listening and responding to what they say about their experience of their courses, whether individually, collectively or through their representatives.**

**Formal arrangements for gathering and responding to feedback from students have existed at IEC for many years. This Code of Practice builds on these foundations and its purpose is to:**

- freshly energise the processes for obtaining and responding to feedback from students and assist in promoting a culture where staff and students view the student feedback process as positive and dynamic;
- set out the responsibilities of staff and students;
- provide guidance on a range of feedback-gathering tools and mechanisms to assist staff to gain a better understanding of student attitudes and approaches to learning.

This Code has been developed following a review of current good practice in the University and elsewhere and has taken into account a number of other sources of guidance and advice, including:

- IEC's Learning & Teaching Strategy;
- The growing partnership between IEC and students;
- The findings of the national enhancement theme, Responding to Student Needs;
- The shift, in IEC and nationally, from quality assurance to quality enhancement and the change in emphasis in quality management from teaching to student learning..

An increasingly prominent student voice in institutional quality systems is also a key feature of the national Quality Enhancement Framework. Current thinking about the meaning of "student engagement" now extends into broader discussion about students' engagement with their own learning' and anticipates that 'the emphasis in future will not be on particular mechanisms by which students interact with their institution, but on the quality and effectiveness of these interactions, and the potential to amplify the "student voice"'.

The Code comprises the following sections:

- Students feedback and associated dialogue and the expectations of staff and students in respect of this
- The role of the ‘student voice’
- Responding to matters raised by students in relation to learning, teaching and assessment
- Communication of responses to students – closing the loop
- Obtaining students’ views on proposed new programmes and courses and proposed changes to existing programmes and courses
- Required and recommended mechanisms for collecting feedback from students
- Extending the scope of feedback-gathering to gain better understanding of student attitudes and approaches to learning and assessment
- This need for departments to employ a suitable range of methods for collecting feedback.

## **2. Student Feedback and Associated Dialogue**

It is important that both staff and students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them in matters related to feedback. The minimum expectations are as follows:

### **Expected to Staff**

- To explain to students the purpose of collecting feedback from them, the methods that will be utilized, how the feedback will be analysed, how and when the findings will be considered and how actions taken as a result of the findings will be communicated to them;
- To encourage students to reflect on their learning experience;
- To ensure departmental feedback procedures are followed;
- To communicate responses to students and relevant staff on matters raised;
- To communicate matters of interest and import arising from feedback from students to Department, Faculty and IEC as an institution.

## **Expected of Students**

- To provide feedback on their learning experience and other relevant/associated matters;
- To reflect on their learning experience;
- To engage with Student Representatives;
- To check relevant websites, Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), notice boards and their Institutional e-mail account for communications from staff and Student Representatives.

### **3. The Role of the ‘Student Voice’**

The University recognizes the importance of the partnership between the University and its students. This is echoed in the University’s Learning and Teaching Strategy which lists as an objective ‘To develop a student-staff partnership model that promotes student engagement with learning, and enhances student success’. Such a partnership emphasizes the significance of the ‘student voice’- both individual and collective – in enhancing the student experience of learning, teaching and assessment across the curriculum at IEC.

On registering at IEC, students accept responsibility for, commitment to, and engagement in, their learning and in other opportunities for personal development.

Department are responsible for obtaining students’ views on their experience of learning, teaching and assessment.

Effective use of the ‘student voice’ may be promoted and encouraged through a variety of mechanisms.

#### **The individual perspective**

- Anonymous course/programme questionnaires
- 1:1 formal or informal meetings with staff.

#### **The collective perspective (where students represent the views of their peers)**

- Staff-Student Liaison Committees
- Faculty/ Departmental Learning and Teaching Committees (or equivalent)
- Focus groups

- Representative class groups
- Discussion of Annual Monitoring Reports
- Periodic Review of Departmental Programmes of Teaching Learning and Assessment (DPTLA).

### **The combined perspective (individual and collective)**

- Lecture/ Seminar/ Tutorial discussion
- Student Panels
- Student Representatives

## **4. Responding to matters raised by students in relation to learning, teaching and assessment**

Departments have a responsibility to reflect on and respond to matters raised by students. These may take a number of forms:

- individual items that can be responded to on a one-to-one basis;
- issues that are straightforward and easily addressed to the mutual satisfaction of students and staff;
- suggestions that may require wider consultation (i.e. with students or staff or both) before a course of action can be determined;
- situations that may require monitoring over a period of time to determine whether action is appropriate;
- requests that are beyond the scope of the Department, School, Division and need to be passed on to appropriate people for action;
- identification of good practice that may be worthy of emulating and/or sharing.

Key actions from student feedback should be:

- passed by individual members of staff to Course Leaders and/or Departmental Quality Assurance Officer

- reflected upon and reported in undergraduate course and postgraduate programme;
- raised at relevant Learning and Teaching Committees and/or Departmental Meetings;
- considered at Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLC);
- drawn to the attention of External Examiners where appropriate;
- reported to relevant meetings when responses from people external to the Department have been received in respect of matters passed to them;
- fed back to students, and explored further where necessary.

### **Communication of responses to students – closing the loop**

Department have a responsibility to communicate responses to matters raised to all students and relevant staff. Student groups will include:

- those who have recently completed the course or programme and who have an interest in the outcomes of what they raised;
- those currently undertaking the course or programme;
- those who may enroll on the course or programme in the future.

Communication of responses to matters raised may take various forms and it is recommended that they be circulated to students by e-mail, or provided in easily accessible paper format for students to consult, e.g. on departmental notice boards, including;

- minutes of meetings of Staff-Student Liaison Committees;
- relevant extracts of minutes of Faculty/ departmental learning and Teaching Committees or equivalent;
- summary reports of topics discussed and action taken;

### **5. Obtaining students' views on proposed new programmes and courses and proposed changes to existing programmes and courses**

IEC requires departments to consult with students on major changes proposed to existing degree programmes and courses and proposed new courses and programmes, normally the

group of students which is closest to the proposal, and to submit a summary of the feedback to Faculty.

5.

## **6. Extending the scope of feedback-gathering to gain better understanding of student attitudes and approaches to learning**

It is recommended that departments use a variety of mechanisms for obtaining feedback from students for the following reasons:

- to promote ongoing dialogue between students and staff;
- to minimize over-reliance on one particular mechanism and the likelihood of ‘questionnaire fatigue’;
- to provide opportunities to receive and give rapid feedback on particular matters;
- to provide opportunities to explore issues identified through more traditional feedback routes in greater depth.

It is recommended that departments review periodically how frequently each type of information needs to be collected to how readily outcomes can be reported back to students. In determining the most appropriate mechanism for gathering feedback, departments should consider the reason(s) for collecting it and the purpose(s) to which it will be put.

## **7. Mechanisms for collecting feedback from students: IEC requirements**

It has been agreed that a ‘standard’ questionnaire should be used throughout to allow for comparison on similar topics within and between departments. The questionnaire comprises:

- core questions to allow comparisons of student satisfaction within departments and across faculties;
- an opportunity for students to provide free text responses;
- a range of optional questions from which academic staff may select so as to allow individuals to tailor to their own purposes (it is recommended that no more than one question be selected from each category);

The following may be included in the questionnaires at the discretion of the Head of Department or Course Co-ordinator, whilst ensuring that the questionnaire does not become inordinately lengthy:

- questions specific to the discipline (the number may vary but should be kept to a minimum);
- student-driven questions proposed by Student Representatives on behalf of their class.

The 'standard' questionnaire should normally be used to obtain students' views on a course or programme and, subject to the tailoring noted above, should be the only form of questionnaire used.

## **Student Representation**

Student Representatives provide a key link between students and the Department. They are highly valuable sources of information on students' views, and help to influence departmental approaches and communicate to other students the reasons for those approaches.

### **Departments are required to:**

- invite students to have representation on the Departmental Learning and Teaching Committee or equivalent;
- facilitate opportunities for Student Representatives to communicate with their classmates (e.g. set aside time in class; provide a discussion forum for the course on Moodle);

### **Faculties are required to:**

- make provision for student representation on Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees.

### **Student Representatives are required to:**

- consult with their classmates;
- attend meetings of the Faculty or Departmental Learning and Teaching Committee or equivalent;
- represent the views of their classmates at the Faculty or Departmental Learning and Teaching Committee or equivalent;
- report back to their classmates.

### **IEC will:**

- record the Student Representative Role on a student's transcript (or other official record sheet) provided she/he has fulfilled the following criteria



- i attended Student Representative training;
- ii completed the term of office as a Student Representative to the satisfaction of their Department.

## **Review of Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (DPTLA)**

Teaching departments are required to undergo DPTLA (internal review) on a 6-yearly cycle. The process can be summarized as follows:

- i) When a Department is about to undergo DPTLA the Department prepares a Self Evaluation Report (SER). The SER is central to the review process and is the key document for the Review Panel. It is **strongly recommended** that the authors of the SER consult students and staff on an early draft to seek feedback on whether or not it is a fair representation of the Department and to seek endorsement by (staff and) students before submission.
- ii) A Review Panel is appointed to undertake the review, which will include relevant University staff, an external subject specialist and a student member identified by the SRC.
- iii) Obtaining students' views is an integral part of the DPTLA process. In order to encourage participation, departments should encourage as wide as possible representation. The Department's students will be invited to meet with the Review Panel and to provide their views on their experience of learning, teaching and assessment and on their wider experience as a student IEC. The Panel will also be informed about student feedback through the analysis of student feedback questionnaires and copies of minutes of Staff-Student Liaison Committees.
- iv) Once the Review Panel's formal report of the DPTLA has been approved by the Academic Standards Committee and forwarded to the Department, the Department should ensure that students have access to the summary of the outcomes of the Review and the actions arising from them should be discussed within the forum of the appropriate Staff-Student Liaison Committee.

### **8. Other ways of collecting feedback from Students endorsed by IEC**

The use of a range of mechanisms is strongly recommended and encouraged to supplement or interchange with more traditional methods of obtaining feedback from students for the reasons stated above:

The following feedback tools are **recommended**:

Focus Groups (representative group of students)

A 'focus group' is a representative survey group, i.e. a small of representative people who are questioned about their (and by implication, their peers') opinions.

'Focus groups' should be interpreted to include discussions within tutorial groups, seminars, workshops or informal meetings, as well as independently led focus groups.

Focus groups can:

- Be a meaningful and constructive process with beneficial outcomes;
- Permit engagement with students at a range of levels;
- Permit follow-up and in-depth discussion of particular issues.

But do require:

- Clarity of purpose;
- Good management;
- Students' willingness to participate;
- Prior agreement about how the discussion will be recorded.

## **Reflection on Assessment**

This method provides an opportunity for students to answer, on an optional basis, a reflective question(s) on the experience of undertaking a particular assessment. Forms for this purpose may be issued to students when the marked assignments are returned.

Reflection on assessment can be a very useful tool for obtaining feedback from students. It will facilitate personal development through reflective learning, encouraging students to consider how they had developed by completing the piece of assessment. It will also allow staff to review the appropriateness of the method of assessment being used and the effectiveness of the feedback that they have provided.

The following are examples of questions that might be asked:

**STUDENT COMMENTS ON THE ASSIGNMENT** (optional – for your continued academic and personal development you are encouraged to review your achievement and reflect on your progress in your studies)

- What did you do well?

- What could you have done better?
- What would have enabled you to do it better?
- If applicable, how have you used feedback from previous assignments?
- How useful did you find the feedback provided to you on this assignment?

**STUDENT COMMENTS ON COURSEWORK** (optional- for your continued academic and personal development you are encouraged to review your achievement and reflect on your progress in your studies)

- What did you find most satisfying in doing this coursework?
- What challenges or difficulties did you experience in doing this coursework?

**9. Workshops/Seminars/Information Sessions to support staff in utilizing new methods for obtaining feedback from students**

Staff are encouraged to attend the workshops, seminars and information sessions on methods for obtaining feedback from students which will be offered by the Learning and Teaching Centre from time to time.