

# Policy on Surveying and Responding to Student Opinion



## Purpose

1. The purpose of this policy is to set out Newcastle University's (the University) approach to surveying and responding to student opinion specific to the [Student Experience](#) at the University.

## Overview

2. The University is committed to providing its students with a high quality Student Experience and ensuring that staff and students work in partnership to co-create learning experiences, as outlined in the University's [Education Strategy](#). The University values and actively seeks feedback from its students with the intention of supporting openness, responsiveness and improving the Student Experience.
3. This policy establishes key principles for gathering student feedback on the Student Experience and for responding to the Student Voice. Additionally, it supports the University's key performance indicator to be in the top 20 UK institution for student satisfaction as measured by the national surveys: National Student Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), and International Student Barometer (ISB).

## Scope

4. The policy applies to the systematic gathering of online or written student feedback related to the Student Experience from any Newcastle student by the University. It also pertains to access and use of the results related to closing the student opinion feedback loop, see [Figure 1](#). This policy does not include student research projects, nor does it include surveys targeting undergraduate (UG) or postgraduate (PG) decliners, leavers (e.g., Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education) or alumni. This policy does not apply to student opinion surveys conducted by Newcastle University Students Union.

## Acronyms and Definitions and Acronyms

5. Acronyms applicable to this policy are located in [Appendix A](#), while definitions are located in [Appendix B](#).

## Policy Principles

6. Every student must have an opportunity to provide feedback on his or her experience at the University; however, participation is discretionary. According to the [Student Charter](#), "students undertake to ... participate in opportunities to develop and improve provision, such as supporting student representatives and completing feedback forms."
7. It is important to use student feedback to support the University in the assurance of academic standards, and the enhancement of the Student Experience and quality of learning opportunities. Student feedback will be used to ensure the effectiveness of programme design and delivery; enable a dialogue with students; help students reflect up their experience; identify good practice; and measure student satisfaction.

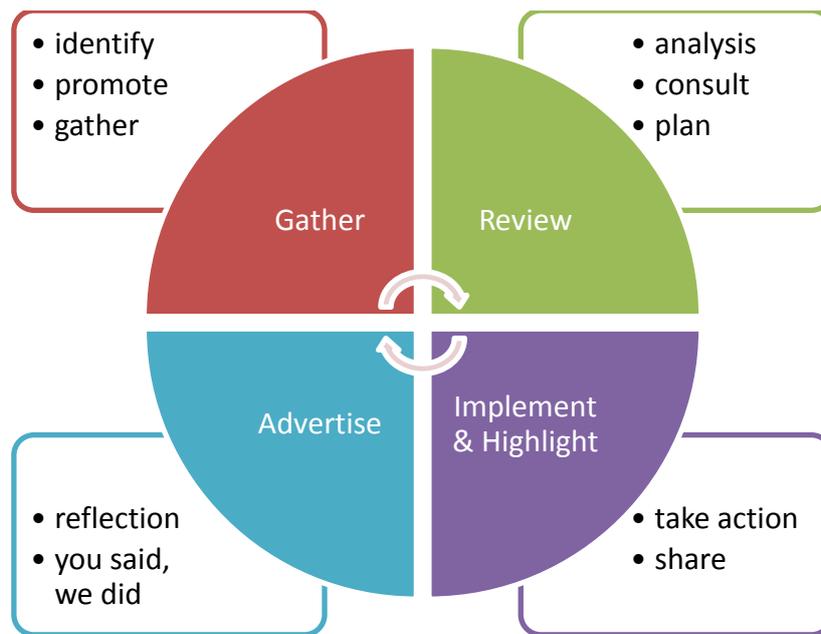


Figure 1. Student Opinion Feedback Loop for Endorsed National and Institutional Student Surveys

8. The feedback mechanisms used by the University to gather student opinion include face-to-face interaction between students, academic staff, and service providers; student surveys; student representation; and through the complaints process. This policy focuses on student surveys, and when selected to gather student opinion should not disadvantage any student from participating, thus providing equal opportunity for all students to voice their opinions and feedback on their experience. Methods used must take account of the mode of study (e.g., on-campus, eLearning, part-time etc.) and native and non-native English speakers. Student representation is encouraged across all levels of the University to help coordinate feedback from a representative student mass, see the University's [Student Representation Policy](#).
9. Where relevant, data analysis should allow for benchmarking (e.g., against previous years, other internal data, and external sector data). In addition, data interpretation must take into account other forms of feedback supplied by University staff, external examiners, and where possible, professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies.
10. In addition to the national surveys (i.e., NSS, PTES, PRES, and ISB), the University administers and endorses several institutional surveys, including module evaluations, stage evaluations, the Newcastle Student Survey (an NSS equivalent for non-UK based students), and UG and PG New Entry Surveys. See the [Implementing Student Opinion Surveys Procedures](#) for how to deliver and manage these surveys; and see Appendix C for definitions of each survey.
11. Every module must be evaluated (via an end-of-module evaluation) every time it is delivered using the compulsory set of questions detailed in the [Implementing Student Opinion Surveys Procedures](#) using the University's online survey system (see [Register of Exemptions](#)).
12. All UG stages, other than the intercalating and final stage, must be evaluated every year using the approved online stage evaluation delivery through the University's online survey system (see [Register of Exemptions](#)).
13. Survey design and implementation should safeguard against 'survey fatigue' by avoiding over-surveying students. The timing of when national surveys take place, and the results gathered through national and institutional surveys must be considered before students are asked to provide similar feedback. When additional information is required, academic units and services are encouraged to consider other

methodologies that may produce the required data (e.g., focus groups) to explore student views. Additional student surveys only should be considered when the benefits derived from them are determined to outweigh the burden of participation for students, academic units, or services. These surveys should be professional in design and, where appropriate, encourage both qualitative and quantitative feedback.

14. The University recognises that it can be beneficial to academic units to collect student feedback on specific issues via additional surveys. Any survey where the population is in a single school only needs authorisation in that school (by the Board of Studies). Surveys involving more than one school within a single Faculty requires authorisation by the Boards of Studies. The Faculty Education Committee should be asked to decide whether to authorise faculty-wide surveys. Approval from Student Experience Sub-Committee (SESC) should be sought for surveys that are intended to involve students from more than one faculty.
15. Prize Terms and Conditions must accompany any survey where an incentive or other prize is offered for participating in the survey.
16. Due care and attention must be taken when concerning the opening times and duration of surveys during examination periods and prior to assessment deadlines to avoid undue stress and to ensure students have the opportunity to participate outside of these periods.
17. Degree Programme Handbooks and Module Handbooks should include a statement about the student's responsibility to provide constructive feedback on student surveys. This statement should acknowledge that feedback may be critical; however, feedback should not breach the [Dignity at Work and Study Code of Practice](#).
18. Student surveying must be conducted within strict ethical guidelines. Integrity of student evaluation and opinion mechanisms is paramount. Data integrity must be maintained by developing systematic approaches to collection and management at all levels within the University, and should adhere to the University's [Data Protection Policy](#) and GDPR.
19. [Confidentiality](#) and [anonymity](#) of respondents must be ensured. The reporting process must not identify any individual student respondent unless their permission is explicitly sought and granted. Attention should be taken if sample sizes are very small to avoid inadvertently revealing an individual student. Students must be informed how their feedback will be used, including the level of aggregation used in analysis and reporting of results, and the possible use of anonymised quotes; see [Appendix C](#) for endorsed student opinion surveys.
20. The University will be responsible for data collected for internally endorsed surveys even when it uses third party systems to support the evaluation process. All personal and performance-related data that could identify an individual student or member of staff is likely exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Private companies holding and/or processing University data on behalf of the University are exempt from the FOIA and contractually will be subject to the University's standard terms and conditions, which require data to be handled in a secure and confidential manner.
21. If a member of staff receives feedback on a module evaluation in the form of an anonymous open comment that they believe breaches the *Dignity at Work and Study Code of Practice* and their Head of Academic Unit agrees, then the feedback will be referred to the PVC Education. If the PVC deems the feedback to breach the *Code of Practice*, then the anonymous open comment will be deleted. It is not possible to match responses to an individual student.
22. The University will ensure that students are made aware of the results of student opinion surveys and any actions to be taken based on them. This will include current students, future students, and alumni as appropriate. Summary results derived from quantitative questions on national and institutional student

surveys should be discussed at relevant Boards of Studies (BoS), Student-Staff Committees (SSC), and any other relevant School or Service bodies.

23. Quantitative and qualitative results from student opinion surveys will be circulated to Heads of Academic Unit and Services, as appropriate. As module evaluations results contain staff related data, these results will be limited to the access outlined in [Table 1](#).

*Table 1. Summary of staff who have access to module evaluation data.*

Role	Module-specific Data		Staff-specific Data		Rationale
	quantitative	qualitative	quantitative	qualitative	
Heads of Academic Unit (or nominee, e.g. Directors/Heads of Excellence in Learning and Teaching )	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Needed for line management responsibility for all teaching staff in their Unit.
School Manager and nominated clerical staff	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Needed for creating and redistributing reports.
Degree Programme Directors and Directors/Heads of Excellence in Learning and Teaching	Yes	Yes	No	No	Needed for overview of modules, and the learning and teaching experience across a programme and Unit.
Module Leaders	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Needed to monitor quality of content and teaching on a given module.
Teaching Contributors	Yes	Yes	only for themselves	only for themselves	Needed to improve and refine their teaching.
Performance and Development Review Reviewer, & members of Faculty and University Promotions committees	overall satisfaction question only	No	Yes	No	Needed to appraise performance in relationship to teaching excellence and promotion.

24. Academic Units and Services must respond to student feedback with plans that identify any agreed actions, timescales for implementation, and who is responsible for each action. Actions related to module evaluation should be restricted to responses to the scores given and comments made in relation to questions about the module overall (whether they be the core questions, optional questions or those added by the school) and should not cover any scores or comments relating to individual staff.
25. Academic Unit action plans should be received at and appear in the minutes of the relevant BoS and SSC. Relevant action points and examples of effective practice should be included in the Annual Monitoring and Review report (for taught provision) and the Annual Report (for research degree programmes). Services would report on their responses and actions in the annual Planning Update, which is presented to the SESC.
26. Performance and Development Reviewers and members of Promotions Committees should, in their considerations, refer only to the overall satisfaction score for modules and the two staff-specific questions for each module, i.e. ‘This teacher stimulated me to learn’; ‘This teacher was approachable if I needed help with this module’ (not free-text comments), irrespective of whatever access to other module evaluation data they have as individuals by virtue of fulfilling other leadership roles.

### **Closing the Feedback Loop**

27. Schools are required to provide all students with consolidated feedback on key actions taken in response to student feedback at the start of each semester. Guidance on what should be included and how the feedback should be provided is available on the [LTDS website](#) or from [ltids@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:ltids@ncl.ac.uk).

## Roles and Responsibilities

28. This policy requires involvement from
- a. staff with responsibilities for planning, delivery and/or leadership of learning and teaching in Newcastle University programmes, including casual, sessional, fixed-term and contract teaching staff;
  - b. staff with administrative responsibilities relating to learning and teaching in Newcastle University programmes;
  - c. staff with responsibilities for planning, delivery and/or leadership of student support services, including extra-curricular activities; and
  - d. students, both individually and the organisations that represent them.
29. The staff and students listed in paragraph 28 must work together to ensure the Student Opinion Feedback Loop (see [Figure 1](#)) is successfully executed.
30. Specific roles and responsibilities are outlined in the [Implementing Student Opinion Surveys Procedures](#).

## List of Appendices

31. Appendices that accompany this policy include:
- Appendix A: [List of Acronyms](#)
  - Appendix B: [Definitions](#)
  - Appendix C: [University Endorsed Survey Summaries](#)

Policy approved by ULTSEC Jan 2018.	
Policy last modified by Learning and Teaching Development Service (LTDS) August 2018.	
Intended for use by:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All academic staff</li> <li>• Academic Deans</li> <li>• Boards of Studies</li> <li>• Degree Programme Director</li> <li>• DELT/HELT</li> <li>• Heads of Academic Units</li> <li>• Heads of Services</li> <li>• Module Leaders</li> <li>• Professional Service Staff</li> <li>• Student Experience Sub-Committee</li> <li>• Student Reps</li> <li>• Survey Champions (national surveys)</li> </ul>
Contact (for queries about this document):	<a href="mailto:ltlds@ncl.ac.uk">ltlds@ncl.ac.uk</a> #83978

## **Appendix A: List of Acronyms**

BoS	Board of Studies
CPD	continued professional development
DELT	Director of Excellence in Teaching
DPD	Degree Programme Director
EU	European Union
FT	full-time
HELT	Head of Excellence in Teaching
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
ISB	International Student Barometer
NSS	National Student Survey
NUIS	Newcastle University International Singapore
NUL	Newcastle University London
NUMed	Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia
OfS	Office for Students
PDR	Performance and Development Review
PG	postgraduate
PGT	postgraduate taught
PRES	Postgraduate Research Experience Survey
PT	part-time
PTES	Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
SESC	Student Experience Sub-Committee
SSC	Student-Staff Committee
UG	undergraduate

## Appendix B: Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, the following definitions apply:

**Anonymous:** having an unknown or acknowledged name assigned to a response.

**Closing the feedback loop:** the process of letting students know how their responses have been or will be used by the University.

**Confidential:** results will be considered in such a way to maintain the confidentiality of participant data.

**eLearners:** term also used to mean distance learners, refers to online programmes that offers the student the flexibility to study wherever they are physically located and, to some extent, to complete work at their own pace.

**EvaSys:** EvaSys is an automation software, owned by Electric Paper, Ltd, use to construct, administer, and analyse module and stage evaluations and the Newcastle Student Survey; see <http://www.evasys.co.uk/>.

**HESA:** is a charitable company that collects a range of UK-wide data from universities, higher education colleges and other differently funded providers of higher education. These data are then provided to UK governments and higher education funding bodies to support their work in regulating and funding higher education providers. In addition, information derived from the data is published as official statistics and in many accessible formats for use by a wide range of organisations and individuals for a variety of purposes, including HE providers, academic researchers, students, prospective students, private companies, professional bodies and the press and media. See <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/>.

**i-graduate:** an independent company that administers the ISB, including analysis; see <http://www.i-graduate.org/> for further information.

**Intercalating:** normally refers to the time away from University study for a) medical/dental students to pursue a one-year research degree in a related field and then return to their main degree course, or b) students to gain work experience, or experience in industry on a placement, or study abroad (i.e., 'year abroad') at a different University.

**Incentive/Reward:** any benefit offered to respondents to encourage participation.

**Ipsos MORI:** an independent market research company that administers the NSS, including analysis; see [www.ipsos-mori.com](http://www.ipsos-mori.com) for further information.

**JACS:** Joint Academic Coding System – subject grouping codes provided by OfS/HESA; category used to publish NSS results.

**OfS:** funds and regulates universities and colleges in England. See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/>.

**Respondents:** any individual from or about whom data are collected as part of gather student feedback.

**Response rate:** the number of eligible students who have answered the survey divided by the number of people in the target population.

**Student experience:** means student engagement, perception, and satisfaction levels primarily in relation to learning, teaching, and postgraduate research.

**Student feedback:** means solicited evaluation by students on any aspect of the student experience.

**Student survey:** includes questionnaires and evaluations where qualitative and/or quantitative data are systematically collected online or in writing targeting an identified cohort of students.

**Student Voice:** is the individual and collective perspective and actions of students within the context of learning and education at Newcastle University.

**Target list:** the list of students to be included in a given survey. For the NSS, the target list is extracted from the University's student return.

**Target population:** all students eligible to participate in a given survey; this is a direct corollary to the target list.

**You Said, We Did process:** a formal means of closing the student opinion feedback loop, where students can easily access information regarding whether their issues have been addressed and resolved or whether the issue is still in the process of being resolved.

## Appendix C: Endorsed Student Opinion Survey Summaries

Survey Name	Target Population Parameters	Purpose/Use <sup>3</sup>	Survey Provider	Fieldwork
International Student Barometer (ISB) <sup>2</sup>	All part-time (PT) and full-time (FT) EU and international undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students at Newcastle main campus and Newcastle University London (NUL) students, including study abroad and exchange students. It excludes Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia (NUMed), Newcastle University International Singapore (NUIS) students, all eLearners regardless of whether they are UK-based, and INTO pre-session English course students.	To make informed decisions to enhance the international student experience and drive successful recruitment and marketing strategies.	i-graduate	October-November
National Student Survey (NSS) <sup>2</sup>	All PT and FT UK, EU, and international UG students in their final year of study at Newcastle main campus and NUL, including eLearning students based in the UK. Non-UK based eLearning students should be excluded as well as incoming and exchange students. HESA generates the initial NSS target lists created from the return made by the University for the preceding year, Academic Units have a short window of time to adjust the list in late September/ early October.	To contribute to public accountability, help inform the choices of prospective students and provide data that allows informed decisions to be made to enhance the UG student experience.	Ipsos MORI	February - April
Newcastle Student Survey <sup>2</sup>	All PT and FT UK, EU, and international UG students in their final year of study at NUMed or NUIS, or registered as a non-UK based eLearning student.	Same as for the NSS.	EvaSys, Electric Paper, Ltd.	same as the NSS
Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) <sup>2</sup>	All PT and FT UK, EU, and international postgraduate research (PGR) students (including e.g., IPhDs, DocClinPsych, EngDs) at all campuses (e.g., Newcastle main campus, NUMed, NUIS, and NUL).	To make informed decisions to enhance the PGR student experience and drive recruitment and marketing strategies.	Bristol Online Survey	March – May (biennially)
Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey <sup>2</sup>	Most PT and all FT UK, EU, and international post-graduate taught (PGT) students studying a programme of at least 60 credits, the greater part of which is at M level at all campuses (Newcastle main campus, NUMed, NUIS, and NUL), including eLearning, study abroad, and exchange students. All first year PT students are excluded, except when they are on a PGT programme that is one year PT only (e.g., PG Certificates). Also	To make informed decisions to enhance the PGT student experience and drive recruitment and marketing strategies.	Bristol Online Survey	April – June (annually)

Survey Name	Target Population Parameters	Purpose/Use <sup>3</sup>	Survey Provider	Fieldwork
	excluded are PGT students who are studying a single module only, such as CPD and occasional students.			
Module Evaluation <sup>3</sup>	All PT and FT UK, EU, and international UG and PGT students on taught modules delivered at Newcastle main campus, NUMed, NUIS, NUL, or through eLearning.	To make informed decisions to enhance the taught student experience and the quality of taught provision. Additionally, it is used to document teaching, which is used as part of the PDR and promotions.	EvaSys, Electric Paper, Ltd.	each time a module is delivered; to be confirmed by the academic unit
Stage Evaluation <sup>4</sup>	All PT and FT UK, EU, and international UG students, except intercalating and final stage, at Newcastle main campus, NUMed, NUIS, NUL, or through eLearning.	To make informed decisions to enhance the UG postgraduate research student experience	EvaSys, Electric Paper, Ltd.	every year; to be confirmed by the academic unit

<sup>1</sup> anonymised quotes may be used from these surveys to support the stated purpose/use of a given survey.

<sup>2</sup> all results will be aggregated by a range of categories (i.e., programme, subject area, School, Faculty, University), where 10 students respond and 50% of the reporting category respondents participate; otherwise, results will be reported at the next higher level of aggregation.

<sup>3</sup> aggregation will occur at the module level, where qualitative feedback is provided to a limited number of individuals according to [Table 1](#).

<sup>4</sup> aggregation will occur at the programme level, where qualitative feedback is anonymised.