

Policy on Surveying and Responding to Student Opinion



Purpose and Scope

1. Newcastle University is committed to ensuring that students receive the highest quality experience whilst studying here. As students are partners in their learning, their opinion of academic programmes and the wider student experience is highly valued by the institution. Surveying students is one way of eliciting student opinion and this policy sets out the scope, requirements and standards for this.
2. Newcastle University considers that the systematic gathering of student opinion is an essential component of its quality assurance and quality enhancement mechanisms and the institution therefore requires Heads of Academic Units and Heads of student-facing services to ensure that student opinion is systematically collected for the academic programme(s) or service for which they are responsible.
3. This policy applies to all internal and external surveys of student opinion. Examples of such surveys are given below. This is not an exhaustive list:
 - a. External: the National Student Survey (NSS), the International Student Barometer, Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey.
 - b. Internal: surveys at the level of the institution, the programme, the stage, or the module/course/unit.

Key Principles

4. A culture should be fostered which encourages genuine dialogue between students, academic staff and service providers. Questionnaires are only one means of gathering student opinion and they should not be overused or used to the exclusion of face-to face interaction between staff and students, which may be via student representation on University, Faculty, Academic Unit and programme committees or focus groups (see [Student Representation Policy](#)).
5. As students are partners in education at Newcastle University we must demonstrate the value that we attach to the feedback provided by the student body. Communication back to students is crucial; this means ensuring that survey data is considered, and action plans formulated and discussed with students, for example through Student-Staff Committees.
6. Change in direct response to student feedback may not always be appropriate. However, in order to maintain student engagement with the evaluation and improvement process students

should be informed of the results of surveys and any actions that are being taken. Staff should also detail why change has not been implemented in response to student opinion.

7. A range of procedures yielding information from students, staff, external examiners and, where appropriate, Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies need to be used to inform change. Since the opinion of students gathered through surveys is only one source of information on the quality of teaching provision and student services, it must be considered alongside other information and not acted upon in isolation.
8. Approaches to surveying and responding to student opinion must recognise the diversity of the programmes we offer, with respect to content, mode of delivery, campus location and level and composition of the student body.
9. Questionnaires or surveys should be professional in design and encourage qualitative as well as quantitative feedback in order to best identify areas for improvement. Advice and guidance for implementing surveys can be found at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/student/opinion/>
10. In order for data to be as useful and meaningful as possible, efforts should be made to ensure that the data collected are representative of the student cohort as a whole. Newcastle University is committed to supporting schools and faculties in the collection of valid student opinion and guidance on increasing response rates.
11. The institution recognises that survey fatigue amongst staff and students can be an issue and will endeavour not to overburden any group of students at any one time. Particular consideration will be given to examination periods, 'Do Not Disturb Weeks' and dissertation hand in periods. The institution will also avoid internal surveys of final year undergraduate students during the NSS period.

Key Principles for Module, Course and Unit Evaluations (note that for the remainder of this policy, module is used to cover modules, courses and units)

12. Each module should be evaluated every time it is delivered using the University's module evaluation system. Boards of Studies are required to ensure that this occurs. A core evaluation framework and sets of compulsory and optional questions are provided (see Appendix 1) to ensure that the University has a consistent approach to module evaluation.
13. Whilst end-of-module evaluation is the formal method of evaluation, mid-module reviews are encouraged. For further information and guidance about mid-module reviews go to <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/student/module/>
14. Students will be informed of their responsibility to provide constructive feedback. This may be critical of the module but should not breach the [Dignity at Work and Study Code of Practice](#).

15. If a member of staff receives a comment that they believe breaches the Dignity at Work and Study Code of Practice and their Head of Academic Unit agrees, the comment will be referred to the PVC Learning and Teaching. If the PVC deems the comment(s) to breach the Code of Practice, the entire response will be deleted from the record and the anonymous student will therefore lose their right to comment on that particular module.
16. Results of module evaluation will never be analysed in a way that could identify individual students from their responses.
17. Summary results from the quantitative questions from module evaluation surveys should be discussed at Boards of Studies and the relevant Student-Staff Committee as outlined in the Boards of Studies business schedule and Student-Staff Committee terms of reference.
18. Academic Units must respond to feedback with plans identifying any agreed actions, timescales for implementation and who is responsible for each action. Action plans should be included in the minutes of Boards of Studies and Student-Staff Committees. Module action plans 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.
19. Table 1 outlines who will have access to various parts of evaluation data as part of the process of module review. The general principle used in determining access to results of the various core and optional question sets is that those responsible for a module or for the Academic Unit are entitled to see all data, and that those who contribute to the teaching of a module see all the general data plus any scores or comments relating to themselves.
20. The results from the overall satisfaction question and the two quantitative staff specific questions will feed into the University's My Impact system. Teaching and Learning data in My Impact T will be visible to the individual, School Manager / Administrator (or nominee), Head of Academic Unit (or nominee), Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor, PDR reviewer (if not the Head of Academic Unit). Members of Faculty and University Promotions committees will see this information in the applicant's submission as part of the Personal Data Summary.
21. Results of module evaluations may be used by academic staff in building their evidence of excellence in teaching for promotion applications, PDR and internal and external prizes/awards e.g. Vice-Chancellor's Distinguished Teacher Award, UKPSF etc. Module leaders and managers may choose to discuss the results with academic staff in the context of learning and teaching quality assurance, PDR or performance management.

Table 1. Staff who are entitled to see module evaluation results as part of the module review process.

	Quantitative data/Scores (for core and optional question sets)	Free Text Comments (general)	Quantitative data/Scores (about individual staff)	Free Text Comments (about individual staff)	Rationale	Evasys role/information received	MyImpact T login (and view of data about individual staff)
Heads of Academic Unit (or nominee)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Heads of Academic Unit have line management responsibility for all teaching staff in the Unit.	No login. Academic Unit Manager/Administrator would be able to provide appropriate reports	Yes
School Admin Managers and Clerical staff	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	School admin managers and nominated clerical staff need access to this data for administrative purposes.	Subunit Administrator and Report Creator. Can see standard module reports and create reports	Yes
Degree Programme Directors	Yes	Yes	No	No	DPDs must have an overview of the module.	No Login. School Manager/Administrator would be able to provide appropriate reports or data files for manipulation	No
Module Leaders	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Module leaders need access to all data in order to monitor quality of content and teaching.	Instructor (no login). Full report for each module they lead, including all data	No
Teaching contributors	Yes	Yes	Only receive data about themselves.	Only receive data about themselves.	Teaching contributors will not see each others quantitative data/open comments.	Instructor (no login) receive personalised report showing responses to core and optional questions and those to questions about them.	Yes

22. The University will be responsible for data collected for module evaluation purposes even where the University uses third party systems to support the evaluation process. All personal and performance-related data which could identify an individual student or member of staff is likely to be exempt from disclosure under the FOI Act. Private companies holding and/or processing University data on behalf of the University are exempt from the FOI Act and contractually will be subject to the University's standard terms and conditions, which require the data to be handled in a secure and confidential manner.

Key Principles for Stage Evaluations

23. All stages other than the intercalating and final stages of undergraduate programmes should be evaluated every year. Boards of Studies are required to ensure that this occurs. A core question set and optional questions are provided (see Appendix 2) to ensure that the University takes a consistent approach to stage evaluation.

24. Schools will be permitted to add their own questions to any stage evaluation, although no questions should be asked about the individual staff teaching on programmes.

25. Services covered by questions in the stage evaluation (Library, Estates and learning resources such as VLEs and ReCap) should not issue separate questionnaires, but receive the results for the relevant questions from stage evaluations in order to improve their provision. Services are of course still able to use focus groups and mechanisms other than surveys to explore student views.

26. Students will be informed of their responsibility to provide constructive feedback. This may be critical of the programme but should not breach the Code of Practice on Dignity at Work and Study (<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/diversity/guidance/bullying.php>).

27. If a member of staff receives a comment that they believe breaches the Code of Practice on Dignity at Work and Study and their Head of Academic Unit agrees, the comment will be referred to the PVC Learning and Teaching. If the PVC deems the comment(s) to breach the Code of Practice, the entire response will be deleted from the record and the anonymous student will therefore lose their right to comment on that particular programme.

28. Results of stage evaluations will never be analysed in such a way that could identify individual students from their responses.

29. Summary results from quantitative questions should be discussed at Boards of Studies and Student-Staff Committees.

30. Academic Units must respond to feedback with plans identifying any agreed actions, timescales for implementation and who is responsible for each action. Action plans should be included in the minutes of Boards of Studies and Student-Staff Committees.

Sharing module evaluation results between Academic Units

31. There are a number of circumstances in which it would be appropriate to share module evaluation results between Academic Units. The various types of modules for which this is the case and the level of information that should be made available are set out below.
32. Modules that are owned by one Academic Unit, and have a significant teaching contribution from a member of staff based in another Academic Unit. In this case the Academic Unit owning the module must share the results of the core quantitative questions, the overall satisfaction question and the results of the staff specific questions relating to that member of staff.
33. Service taught modules that are owned by one Academic Unit and taught as part of a degree programme based in another Academic Unit. In this case, the Academic Unit owning the module should, upon request, share the results of the core quantitative questions and the overall satisfaction question, and may share the results of the open, optional, subject specific or module specific questions. The owning Academic Unit should not share the results of the staff specific questions, or any open comments that mention individual academic staff.
34. Modules that form part of joint degree programmes. In this case, the Academic Unit owning the module should, upon request, share the results of the core quantitative questions and the overall satisfaction question, and may share the results of the open, optional, subject specific or module specific questions. The owning Academic Unit should not share the results of the staff specific questions, or any open comments that mention individual academic staff.
35. Modules that are taken by students on the Combined Honours programme. In this case the Academic Unit owning the module should, upon request, share the results of the core quantitative questions and the overall satisfaction question, and may share the results of the open, optional, subject specific or module specific questions. The owning Academic Unit should not share the results of the staff specific questions, or any open comments that mention individual academic staff.
36. Results should be shared by the owning Academic Unit as soon as is practical after a module evaluation closes.
37. It is recommended that the results are shared between School/Unit Managers/Administrators by email.

Core Questions for Module Evaluation

38. **Core and optional questions:** The appropriate set of core questions must be used for all undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes except for the clinical years of MBBS and Dentistry and clinical modules in the BSc Speech and Language Sciences. The full series of core

and optional question sets are available in Appendix 1. Appropriate sets must be used alongside the summary and staff specific questions.

39. **Summary questions:** These questions must be used in all modules apart from those listed above.
- Overall I am satisfied with this module (Likert Scale 1-5)
 - What are the best features of this module? (open)
 - How could this module be improved? (open)
40. **Staff Specific questions** (applicable for each member of staff who has a significant teaching contribution to the module): *Free text box will appear under each teaching contributor for additional student comments.* The threshold of teaching contribution will be determined at Academic Unit/School level. It is recommended that teaching contributors should be evaluated if they teach more than three sessions per module.
- This teacher stimulated me to learn.
 - This teacher was approachable if I needed help with this module.
41. **Academic Unit/Subject specific questions:** An Academic Unit or clearly defined subject area may develop an additional set of questions to be used in evaluations. The recommended limit is five **questions**. No unit or subject area may add more than seven questions to this section.
42. **Module specific questions:** Academic Units may choose to allow module leaders to add module specific questions to an evaluation. The recommended limit for each module is five questions. Module leaders may not add more than seven questions to this section.

Freedom of Information and Data Protection

43. This policy complies with the University's [Freedom of Information Policy](#) and [Data Protection Policy](#).

Appendix 1: Module Evaluations

Appendix 1a: Module Evaluation Structure

Each column shows the order in which question sets appear in an evaluation. Boxes shaded indicate compulsory set of centrally owned questions; while boxes shaded indicate optional set of centrally owned questions; and boxes shaded indicate a School can choose whether to write/allow the writing and use of these questions.

1. Standard Modules	2. Independent Study Modules	3. Fieldtrip Modules	4. Design/Studio /Performance Modules	5. Clinical Case Based Problem Solving (CBPS) Modules	6. Distance Learning Modules
Standard Core	Independent Study Core	Fieldtrip Core	Desing/Studio/ Performance Core	Clinical CBPS Core	Distance learning Core
School or Subject specific	Supervision focused	Supervision focused	Supervision focused	Staff specific	Supervision focused
Staff specific	Staff specific	Staff specific	Staff specific	Module specific	Staff specific
School staff specific	Module specific	Module specific	Module specific	Summary	Module specific
Seminar Core	Summary	Summary	Summary		Summary
Practical Sessions Core					
Group/ Teamwork Core					
Module specific					
Summary					

Appendix 1b: Module Evaluation Structure

Standard Core (to be used in all modules unless independent study, fieldtrip, studio/performance, clinical case based, design, or distance learning modules). These questions relate to the module, course or unit as displayed in the evaluation title.

1. The module, course or unit was well structured
2. The content was intellectually stimulating
3. I have received helpful feedback during the module, course or unit

Staff specific (to be used in all modules unless independent study, fieldtrip, studio/performance, clinical case based, design, or distance learning modules – where they are optional)

1. This teacher stimulated me to learn
2. This teacher was approachable if I needed help with this module
3. Free text box for additional comments about the teacher

Summary (to be used in all modules)

1. Overall I am satisfied with this module
2. What are the best features of this module? (open)
3. How could this module be improved? (open)

Seminar Core (optional questions to accompany standard core questions)

1. The seminars furthered my knowledge of relevant topics
2. I understood what was expected of me during seminars
3. There were adequate opportunities to interact with my fellow students
4. There were adequate opportunities to interact with the seminar leader
5. If you would like to provide some feedback any individual seminar leader please do so here (remember to include their name/s). (open)

Practical Sessions Core (optional questions to accompany standard core questions)

1. The practicals were clearly linked to the rest of the module
2. The instructions for the practicals were helpful
3. There were sufficient staff available in the practical classes
4. If you would like to provide feedback for any individual demonstrator please do so here (remember to include their name/s). (open)

Group/Teamwork Core (optional questions to accompany standard core questions)

1. The collaborative activities in this module increased my understanding and/or developed my skills
2. There were adequate opportunities to interact with supervisory staff
3. I felt supported by staff in my team work
4. The team functioned effectively to meet the requirements/objectives of the task
5. My experience of team work was positive
6. Please elaborate on your response here. (open)

Independent Study Core (may be used instead of the standard core questions for project/dissertation modules)

1. This module stimulated my interest in conducting independent work
2. This module increased my confidence in carrying out an investigation
3. This module increased my knowledge of the discipline
4. The requirements of the module were clearly explained
5. The module materials supported my study
6. The staff on the module facilitated my study
7. If you would like to provide feedback on the resources available to support your study (e.g. IT, library, lab) please do so here. (open)

Supervision focused (optional questions to accompany independent study questions)

1. The expected relationship between the supervisor and student was explained to me
2. My supervisor had relevant subject expertise to support my study
3. The support I received from my supervisor was constructive
4. My supervisor usually responded to queries in a timely manner
5. If you would like to provide feedback for your supervisor please do so here (remember to include their name). (open)

Fieldtrip Core (where the fieldtrip is the full module)

1. I was well briefed before the trip
2. The trip was well organised
3. There was a clear link between the fieldtrip and my programme
4. There were sufficient opportunities to discuss the work with academic staff during the fieldtrip
5. The fieldwork equipment and other facilities (if relevant) were satisfactory
6. I was given sufficient information about assessment
7. The accommodation and catering (if provided) were good

Design/Studio/Performance Core (may be used instead of the standard core questions for Design/studio/performance modules)

1. The module stimulated my interest in my chosen field
2. The module was well structured/organised
3. The module requirements were sufficiently challenging
4. The teaching and/or guidance I received was effective
5. The teaching and/or guidance helped me to develop my skills
6. The method of assessment was clearly explained
7. There were sufficient resources available to support my learning

Clinical Case Based Problem Solving (CBPS) Core (may be used instead of the standard core questions for Clinical case based modules)

1. The module was well structured
2. There was sufficient library resource to support my learning on this module
3. My learning was enhanced by the materials available to me on Blackboard or LSE

4. The collaborative activities in this module increased my understanding and/or developed my skills
5. I felt supported by staff in my group work
6. The group functioned effectively to meet the requirements/objectives of the task
7. Please elaborate on your response to question 6 here (open)
8. I have received helpful feedback, both written and verbal, on group work during the module

Distance Learning Core (may be used instead of the standard core questions for Distance Learning modules)

1. I understood the aims and requirements of the module from the introductory materials
2. The content was intellectually stimulating
3. The topics were presented in an appropriate order
4. The materials were easy to navigate
5. The materials supported my learning
6. I have received timely feedback during the module
7. The level of feedback was sufficient
8. I was given sufficient instructions concerning assessment
9. I was able to access technical support if I needed it
10. I was able to access sufficient online library resources
11. There were adequate opportunities for collaborative work within the module
12. The collaborative activities in this module increased my understanding of the subject area
13. Collaborative groups were the right size for the task
14. I felt supported by staff in the collaborative activities
15. My experience of collaboration was positive
16. Please elaborate on your response here

Appendix 2: Stage Evaluations

Appendix 2a: Core Question Set

Number and Question Text	Response Format
1. Curriculum	
<i>Introductory Text:</i> This section is about the structure of your degree programme and how well it works for you. Try to think about the whole of your programme rather than any specific part of it when responding to the statements/questions.	
1.1 This academic year, the different modules/courses/units which made up my programme worked well together as a whole.	Likert
1.2 Please comment on whether you feel the different parts of your programme worked well together as a whole.	Open
1.3 During this stage of my programme, my confidence in my work has generally improved	Likert
<i>Introductory Text:</i> Comment on this year's study in relation to the year before (different questions for stages 1 and 2 (e.g., 1.4 to 1.6), a further set can be added for 4 year programmes)	
stage 1	
1.4 My A-levels (or equivalent prior education) provided a good foundation for stage 1	Likert
1.5 Stage 1 developed my abilities to a higher level than my previous education	Likert
1.6 Please comment on the transition from your previous education into the first year of university	Open
stage 2	
1.4 Stage 1 provided a good foundation for stage 2	Likert
1.5 Stage 2 developed my abilities to a higher level than stage 1	Likert
1.6 Please comment on the progression between stage 1 and stage 2 of your degree	Open
all stages	
1.7 How much do you enjoy your programme? (range - Not at all to Very much)	Likert
1.8 Say briefly what you enjoy about your programme	Open
1.9 Say briefly what could be better about your programme	Open
2. Feedback	
<i>Introductory Text:</i> This section is about the feedback you are given on your academic work.	
2.1 In this stage, the feedback I have been given through the year has been helpful for improving the quality of my academic work	Likert
2.2 What types of feedback have you received during this stage of your programme: a) Written feedback (after coursework) b) Written feedback (after exams) c) Face-to-face oral feedback d) Audio (recorded) feedback e) Other (please specify)	Multiple choice

Number and Question Text	Response Format
2.3 Please give your views on the feedback you have received. How could it have been made more helpful to you?	Open
3. Assessment	
<i>Introductory Text:</i> This section is about how you are assessed on the work you do on your programme.	
3.1 In this stage, the balance between types of assessment on my programme (coursework, oral presentations, exams etc.) has been useful for helping me learn.	Likert
3.2 If you would like the balance between types of assessment on your programme to be different (e.g. more/less coursework in relation to exams), say briefly how you would change it.	Open
3.3 Throughout this stage the spread of hand-in dates for my coursework and assessments has been reasonably manageable.	Likert
3.4 Say more about the spread of hand-in dates if you wish	Open
4. Access to Resources	
<i>Introductory Text:</i> Please respond to the following statements about learning resources.	
4.1 In this stage I have normally been able to access the on-campus IT facilities needed for my programme	Likert
4.2 In this stage the physical resources (books, dvds, photocopiers etc.) available through the Library were sufficient for the needs of my programme	Likert
4.3 In this stage the electronic resources (e-journals, e-books etc.) available through the Library were sufficient for the needs of my programme	Likert
4.4 Comment on these resources (in questions 4.1 to 4.3) if you wish	Open
4.5 In this stage has ReCap been available to access lecture content?	Yes/No
4.6 If you used ReCap in this stage, under what circumstances has it been most useful to you	Open
4.7 Was the VLE (Blackboard/LSE) a useful part of your learning in this stage?	Yes/No
4.8 If you have views on the VLE, or suggestions as to how it could be made more useful, please note them here.	Open
5. Tutorial and Pastoral Support and Student Mentoring (stage 1)	
<i>Introductory text:</i> This section is about the mechanisms of support for students in ways connected to, but sometimes apart from, study and academic contexts. It begins with questions about the personal tutor system then moves onto other areas.	
5.1 In this stage, my personal tutor has been responsive if I have contacted them.	Likert
5.2 In this stage, my personal tutor has been a good source of guidance.	Likert
5.3 In this stage, my personal tutor has been useful as a guide to services available for advice and support.	Likert
5.4 If you have comments on how the personal tutor system has worked for you please include them here (note that you should not include the name of your tutor).	Open
5.5 Stage 1 students are allocated a student mentor. Respond to this statement: My student mentor has been helpful to me:	Likert

Number and Question Text	Response Format
5.6 If you have comments on how the student mentor system has worked for you, please include them here.	Open
6. Representation and Academic Community	
Introductory Text: This section refers to the representation system which is supposed to allow students to communicate with university staff on academic and teaching issues. It is <i>not</i> about student-social organisations.	
6.1 I am aware of the system of student representation and I know who my course reps are.	Likert
6.2 I feel that student feedback on the positive and negative aspects of the course (given through the representation system) is listened to	Likert
6.3 If you have views on how the system of student representation could be made more effective, please include them here	Open
6.4 Within my subject area, I feel that I am part of an <i>academic</i> community	Likert
6.5 In relation to the experience of shared academic life and communal learning (rather than student social life more generally), can you think of ways in which the student experience at the University could be improved?	Open
7. Estates	
Introductory Text: This section is about the physical space and organisation of the University.	
7.1 The lecture theatres / seminar rooms / labs / other rooms in which I am taught are of good quality	Likert
7.2 Please indicate how you think these rooms could be improved, if at all	Open
7.3 Which places do you use for independent study (multiple choice) a) Home b) Library c) Subject area building d) Student Union building e) Other (please specify)	Multiple choice
7.4 Comment on the sufficiency of these independent study spaces if you wish	Open
7.5 Have there been any problems with your timetable this year	Open
7.6 Do you have views to share on the University campus? Which parts of the campus do you like or dislike? What changes to the campus would you like, if any?	Open

Appendix 2a: Optional Questions

Number and Question Text	Response Format
1. Workload	
<i>Introductory Text:</i> Can you estimate, for this academic year, how many hours you have normally studied in addition to timetabled hours.	
1.1 In routine study, outside of examination / assessment periods: 0-10 hours per week 11-20 hours per week 21-30 hours per week 31+ hours per week	single option
1.2 At busy times, during examination / assessment periods 0-10 hours per week 11-20 hours per week 21-30 hours per week 31+ hours per week	single option
2. Other Issues	
<i>Introductory Text:</i> Are there any other issues that have affected your studies this year?	
2.1 Please write here about anything which has affected your studies positively this year	Open
2.2 Please write here about anything which has affected your studies negatively this year	Open
3. Additional pastoral support questions	
3.1 In this stage have you needed some kind of advice or support from the University (outside the personal tutoring system)	Yes/No
3.2 If yes, what sources of advice/support have you used.	Open
3.3 Comment on whether this advice/support was sufficient to meet your needs	Open

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