STUDENT SURVEYS POLICY

Queen's University Belfast

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Student Surveys Policy

1. Introduction

Student surveys are an effective way of collecting views from students about the quality of their educational experiences. This method or practice of ascertaining student feedback contributes to improvements in educational support and provision and informs dialogue and decision-making. Queen's undertakes a range of institution wide surveys to provide students with an opportunity to have their say about the student experience at the University. However, students receive other regular requests to complete surveys throughout the year making student survey fatigue an increasing concern.

This policy sets out principles and parameters for conducting surveys with students at Queen's. While it is intended to provide governance and to monitor the frequency of surveying students it will also provide advice and guidance to staff to ensure the quality of student surveys, and to encourage that timely action is taken in response to the student voice.

1.1 Policy Scope

The purpose of this policy is to set out the guidelines regarding student experience surveying at the University.

The policy aims to:

- Present a student survey framework that will provide a managed and co-ordinated approach to institution-wide surveys at Queen's

- Minimise survey fatigue among students by keeping under review the number and scope of institutional level and locally led surveys

- Protect a schedule of University supported surveys by promoting awareness of these to staff and students across the University

- Assure, where feasible, the quality and content of student experience surveys to improve the integrity of the data collected.

The policy covers:

- All institution-led student experience surveys at Queen's University

- Surveys at School level that are used to gather key information from students about specific aspects of their educational experiences

- Faculty-wide surveys or where more than one School is involved in gathering student opinions

- Individual staff or central departments that want to survey students en masse.

The policy does not cover:

- Research-led surveys which are subject to ethical approval.

- Module and Teaching Evaluation surveys at Queen's that are conducted institution wide and that determine student satisfaction at module level and support the enhancement of future provision. A separate policy exists for Module and Teaching evaluation surveys.

2.   Key Principles

This policy establishes a more co-ordinated student survey approach across the institution, and a more consistent experience for students who participate in surveys at Queen's.

The University is committed to ensuring that at institutional and local level:

- Student surveys are timely and relevant. The timing and sequencing of surveys, in particular those that are institution wide, will be managed to avoid student survey fatigue and duplication.
- Student surveys are enhancement focused, and that they also celebrate and share positive practice.
- Students are provided with a clear explanation of the purpose and benefit of each survey that they are asked to complete, and that they are encouraged to always provide honest and considerate feedback with no undue influence.
- Students will have confidence that their opinions/feedback will be treated with respect and valued. This includes the provision of clear action plans or 'closing the loop' on feedback, and that these actions are clearly communicated to students across relevant channels.
- Survey design will follow good practice principles, where appropriate.
- Survey design and methods used are accessible and inclusive for diverse cohorts of students.
- We will work together to encourage student participation and engagement. Enhanced response rates will make data that is collected more meaningful and improvements in educational provision better for all.
- Data privacy is strictly adhered to. Staff collecting and using student survey data will have to familiarise themselves with the Queen's University GDPR and data protection policy.
- A survey will only be used when other sources of feedback are not appropriate.

3.   Student Surveys Framework

3.1   University Schedule of Surveys

Over the course of an academic year students are surveyed on a range of issues. Some of these are sector wide, such as the National Student Survey (NSS) for final year undergraduates which provides an important means for the University to receive feedback and compare against the student voice in similar UK institutions. Others are internal institutional surveys such as the new QUB Student Survey (QSS) for undergraduates that will assist with service design and improvement and track the student experience ahead of the final year NSS. In 2023 this new QSS survey set (for Year 1 students and Year 2, including non-final years) will be piloted to replace the previously run First Year Experience (FYE) and Second Year Experience (SYE) surveys. These surveys are more streamlined than FYE and SYE while still enabling lead indicator metrics to benchmark with NSS.

An annual calendar of core supported institution-wide student surveys will be approved by Education Committee Student Experience (ECSE) on an annual basis. The Student Surveys Calendar included in Table 1 shows the key dates that fieldwork will be carried out during 2022 and 2023.

To protect this agreed calendar of student surveys all other non-mandatory surveys should be minimized during this fieldwork period or while these surveys are live. This includes Faculty wide surveys or where surveying students is intended across more than one School in a Faculty. It does not include School level surveys that are used as a means to gather essential student information, such as collecting data about placement student experiences.

Table 1: Student Survey Calendar 2023-2024

Annual Year 2023/24	Student Groups	Live data period	Benchmarking
NSS – National Student Survey	Final year students	7 February – 30 April, 2024	Yes
QSS – QUB Student Survey	Year 1 undergraduates	8 January – 18 February 2024	No *(but informs NSS)*
QSS – QUB Student Survey	Year 2 & non-final year undergraduates	8 January – 18 February 2024	No *(but informs NSS)*
PTES – Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey	Postgraduate taught students	March – mid June 2024	Yes
PRES – Postgraduate Research Experience Survey	Postgraduate research students	March – early May, 2024	Yes
QSS PG – QUB Student Survey	All postgraduate students	August – October 2024	Yes
Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS-HESA)	All graduates 15 months after graduation	November 2023 – September 2024	Yes
Careers Registration Survey[1]	Undergraduates and postgraduates	9 September 2023 – 31 October 2023	No *(but is a lead indicator for GOS)*
External Institutional Student Surveys 2023-2024			
International Student Barometer (delivered by i-Graduate)	International students	TBC	-
[2]Cybil Survey (GTI)	Undergraduates, postgraduates, graduates	16 October 2023 – 16 January 2024	Yes
Digital Experience Insights Survey (Jisc)	Undergraduates and postgraduates	November – December 2024	Yes

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[1] Careers Registration is a widely established methodology in UK universities where 2 questions are asked each year as part of E&R to track student employability during their time in HE, to predict employment outcomes and evaluate effectiveness of interventions.

[2] Cybil is a UK wide survey administered by GTI to circa 160 UK Universities. Last year QUB had 3575 respondents and the survey explores students' career aspirations, their engagement with career activities and their thoughts about employers.

3.2 Roles and Responsibilities

3.2.1 *Education Committee Student Experience (ECSE)*

This policy outlines a student survey framework that will provide a managed and co-ordinated approach to institution-wide surveys at Queen's. Management and monitoring of the student surveys at Queen's resides with Education Committee Student Experience (ECSE) which will approve an annual Student Survey Calendar which will be reported to University Management Board for dissemination.

Education Committee Student Experience (ECSE) responsibilities include to:

- Approve an annual Survey Calendar of student surveys
- Manage the survey approval process. This includes to review requests for one-off or other surveys not included in the annual Survey Schedule.
- Review the Student Survey Policy on an annual basis, or as appropriate.

3.2.2   Directorate of Academic and Student Affairs. The Surveys Team, in Careers and Employability Services, DASA are responsible for the co-ordination, administration and analysis and reporting of the following annual surveys:

- QUB Student Survey (QSS) – an internal survey for all Year 1 students
- QUB Student Survey (QSS) – an internal survey for Year 2 and non-final year students
- PTES – Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, a national Advance HE survey for postgraduate taught students
- PRES – Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, a national Advance HE survey for postgraduate research students
- NSS – National Student Survey, a national student survey for final year students to gather students' opinions on the quality of their courses
- Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) – for all graduates 15 months after they finish their course at Queen's
- Careers Registration – a survey of all students during registration, assessing career thinking and employability activity.

This team supports the annual student survey process and have responsibility to:

- Promote relevant student engagement with surveys
- Support staff with student survey queries, such as data that is available from core student surveys
- Ensure that survey results are reported to the appropriate University committees
- Report survey findings to relevant University committees to inform, and provide an evidence base for, enhancements to learning, teaching and the wider student experience
- In conjunction with ECSE review and update this Student Surveys Policy as required.

3.3   Approval of other student surveys

This policy also covers conducting student surveys that are not mandatory or not included in the annual University schedule of supported surveys. These for example may include surveys that are run centrally by departments and by Support Services. It is intended that:

- All institutional or large-scale student surveys will be agreed/approved by Education Committee, Student Experience (ECSE). When planning a new institution wide survey seeking approval should be completed well in advance and in line with the Committee's cycles of business. To support this, a [Survey Approval Form](#) is available.
- ECSE will review a full list of these surveys on an annual basis where their value and scope will be considered as well as alignment to institutional priorities
- Other existing student surveys will be reviewed and rationalised to be conducted annually or bi-annually, or withdrawn as appropriate.

3.3.1   Support Services

Schools and Directorates may continue to run local surveys. This may include where students have used a service and are asked to provide feedback on their experience. However, all institution wide student surveys will need approval from ECSE.

Other local surveys such as Faculty wide surveys, or where students are contacted across more than one School must seek prior approval from ECSE.

In addition and where possible, these non-supported surveys should avoid times when the supported schedule of surveys are live.

If in doubt as to whether permission is required please email the Surveys Team surveys@qub.ac.uk.

3.3.2   Students' Union Surveys

Queen's Students' Union supports a co-ordinated student survey approach across the institution. The Union will contact students about surveys through their normal communication channels. They have their own internal processes to govern student survey activity and are mindful of the strategic importance of priority University survey activity.

4.   Student Promotion and Participation

Student surveys are a vital method of collecting and assessing feedback in order to effect positive change. When used correctly, they can be a crucial way of providing information that can improve the student experience. To support staff this policy has created a set of good practice guidelines around student promotion and enhancing participation.

4.1   Survey awareness

There should be adequate awareness of surveys that students are invited to complete.

At the start of the semester, or when it is feasible, staff should explain the surveys that students will be asked to do and outline the benefits of student feedback to improve the student experience. This **short video** created with some students provides a good resource that could be shared to drive awareness and used as part of the discussion.

Before surveying, staff should communicate the clear purpose of the questions being asked and when the survey is due to open and the close date, as appropriate.

4.2 Sharing survey access

Survey access and completion should be made easy for students. Staff are advised to limit the amount of emails sent to students reminding them to complete. Using QR codes in-class is an easy way to share the surveys and will reduce the amount of emails sent to students and confusion of what survey that they are completing.

Templates and promotional materials: To make promotion less burdensome and to provide consistency for students being surveyed, a suite of promotional resources have been developed and are made available for staff to easily access and use. These include promotional materials for core student survey templates with relevant QR codes, downloadable editable posters, general information about the surveys being undertaken etc.

4.3 Encouraging participation

Enhanced student survey response rates will provide more valuable data to the institution and will better represent the student voice. Time set aside in-class will allow students to think about their experiences and will help yield better response rates. Students will also appreciate not having to evaluate the quality of their experience in their own time. In-class shout-outs and the voice of student reps are also an important vehicle to encourage awareness and participation.

4.4 Freedom of choice

Students may not want to complete student surveys. Students should have freedom of choice of completion. This decision must be respected.

4.5 Access to Student Survey Data
There is a lot of student data that is already available at the University. A SharePoint communication site is available where staff can easily locate data from surveys, run analysis in Power Bi, find the calendar of supported surveys and see when annual surveys are live. This will be a useful resource for staff and will help to avoid replication of similar student surveys across the institution.

5. How we Listen and Act on Student Feedback

Acting on student feedback, or *closing the loop*, should be the keystone of practice when undertaking student surveys. Action plans (or 'you said, we did' campaigns and messaging) from student surveys should be communicated clearly to students, and in a timely manner. Students should be assured that their survey responses are valued, and they are being listened to, and that their voice will help influence important changes to enhance the student experience of current and future student cohorts. This in turn, may also boost or enhance student survey participation.

While feedback may not automatically always lead to change or action there should always be a response, even to explain this. For example, even if that is to communicate that actions from feedback cannot be done immediately but will be in the long term. The reliability of student survey results should be considered and reviewed. When there are low response rates findings should be shared with caution, if at all. Student survey data to be useful, must be meaningful.

6. GDPR and Data Privacy and Protection

6.1 **Data privacy** is pivotal when collecting and using student data. If staff are conducting a student survey it is essential to familiarise themselves with the Queen's University GDPR and data protection policy. It should be made clear to students that their data will be treated in accordance with Data Protection requirements.

6.2   **Anonymity** – surveys should be designed to protect student anonymity.
Students should be informed whether the survey is anonymous or confidential. Anonymous is where it is impossible for the survey responses to be linked to an individual student. Confidential is where those administering the survey can link the students' responses to individuals. If the survey is confidential, students should be assured that the results will only be published/shared on an anonymised basis.

7.   Survey Design

7.1   Survey Design Practice

When creating a new survey it is advisable that staff have some experience in the practical steps of designing a survey. Good survey design will help elicit feedback that is meaningful.

The following is a list of practical first steps or basics to good survey design.

- **Surveys should be purposeful:** Every question has a clear purpose and question sets are designed to contribute to reflection and continuous improvement for a better student experience. A good start is to think about the information you need.
- **Write clear questions:** Questions should be carefully designed to elicit what you want to measure. Make sure there are no leading questions and that they follow in a logical order.
- **Think about what survey scales to use**: Use appropriate rating scales for the questions being asked and choose what type of Likert scale (such as 5 or 7 point) best fits the survey questions. For consistency, use a similar format and scaling convention to University supported student surveys.
- **Question types**: Where possible student survey data should be collected through a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions. For individual questions, decide what response format best suits the question, such as multiple choice, rating survey questions, drop down list.
- **Use language that is easily understood:** The language used in survey questions should be simple, with no ambiguity and no jargon.
- **Make sure student surveys are inclusive**. For example, be thoughtful about demographic questions and use survey language that avoids idioms, and that is objective and respectful.
- **Think about the length of the survey:** When creating new surveys as far as is possible limit the questions being asked, keep it short and straightforward. A less is more approach should be adopted and assure that information gathered is used for the purposes that the data was collected.
- **Survey duration:** Provide a good estimate of how long it will take to complete the full question set. Pilot if necessary.
- **Student co-design**: Using a student co-design approach may help you shape a student survey, such as considering what specific questions to ask, and the best way to ask them. Be open-minded to include students in the survey design process.
- **Avoid replication**: There is a lot of student data that is already available at the University. Is there an existing survey collecting similar data? If you are unsure contact the Surveys Team to ascertain what information already exists at the institution. This will reduce duplication of similar surveys being conducted and will help with student survey fatigue.
- **Taking Action:** Always report survey findings to the student community. Encourage that results are shared and discussed in appropriate student-led mechanisms such as Staff-Student Committees and Student Voice Committees. Include how changes will be or have been implemented in response to the survey's findings.

8. Student Survey Tools

8.1   For Supported University Student Surveys:

Queen's University hold a license for Jisc Online Surveys (OS), a simple to use and effective survey tool. This survey tool is used for collecting undergraduate data via QUB Student Survey (QSS) (Year 1 and Year 2 and non-final year students), and for postgraduate data by the use of PRES and PTES.

8.2   For Other Student Surveys:

Microsoft Forms, part of the University supported Office 365 suite, is the preferred survey tool to conduct student surveys that are conducted centrally or locally by School or Faculty for meaningful purposes such as for placement experience. Some Schools may already use different software/tools such as SurveyMonkey or Qualtrics. If they do so they must ensure that they are GDPR compliant. While these are acceptable Microsoft Forms is still preferred.

9. Other Methods to Collect Student Feedback

Surveying students is not the only way to garner student feedback. Before you decide to survey first explore other methods that may also provide rich and suitable opinions from students. These approaches might include, e.g., the use of focus groups with students to discuss a topic, holding town hall meetings to promote student dialogue, use of student panels to discuss issues or to seek opinions, and/or via School specific channels for more targeted discussions.

Policy Approval and Amendments

Student Survey Policy Version: 1.0	
Ownership of the Student Survey Policy	DASA
Policy review cycle	There will be an annual review of the Queen's Student Survey Policy, or earlier if changes in institutional priorities indicate. An annual reminder to staff and students of the University schedule of surveys with relevant fieldwork calendar dates, will be communicated to staff by the Surveys Team, DASA.
Published location Location of supporting resources:	TBC TBC
Approved by	ECSE, 1 November 2022
Review date	January 2024
Revisions	November 2023

Please note that a number of resources will be created to support this policy.
They include:

- A short video or talking head of students/student reps on the importance of student feedback from surveys
- Promotional materials that can be easily accessed by staff. These include for example, student survey templates with QR codes/ PPT slides for use in class
- A downloadable infographic resource for staff to support survey design practice
- A Survey Approval Form