University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Connecting, Listening, and Enhancing: Placing Student Perceptions of their Educational Experience at the Heart of Decision Making at UCC

Review of Student Surveys at UCC

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Executive Summary

Surveys are one of a range of tools used at UCC to gather feedback from the student population to provide insights on students' perceptions of their learning experience and to inform inititiatives to optimise the student experience. In 2016 it was identified that the absence of a strategy at UCC around the management of university-wide surveys may have contributed to an increased number of surveys being conducted and reduced survey response rates, which appeared to be negatively impacting the utility of survey outputs for evidence-based decision making. The following surveys are routinely administered to the UCC student population:

- The Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) is a national annual survey administered to all first and final year undergraduates, and taught postgraduate students in Irish higher education institutions. It measures student engagement i.e. the amount of time and effort that students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities, and how effectively institutions facilitate, encourage, and promote student engagement in activities that are linked to learning.
- The UCC Student Experience Survey (SES) comes in three forms; undergraduate, postgraduate taught, and postgraduate research. The Student Experience Surveys are designed to measure aspects of university life considered important for the student experience. They are administered on a biannual basis.
- Students are normally surveyed by Schools/units undergoing quality review to provide feedback for the purposes of School/unit self-evaluation. Customised surveys, specified by Schools/units are produced specifically for the purpose of each individual quality review.
- The university-wide module survey which ran from 2011-2016 provided formal feedback on modules to lecturers and Heads of School, to help facilitate ongoing improvement in the delivery of modules and the student learning experience.
- Following the suspension of this survey in the 2016/17 academic year, Schools/academic units have been free to gather student feedback on teaching and learning in a manner most suitable to them. The collection of this feedback may involve the use of surveys.
- Student services administer surveys to their users on an ad-hoc basis.
- Undergraduate and postgraduate students who are required to complete a research thesis as part of their course administer surveys to their peers utilising the UCC student Umail service.

While these surveys are valuable tools which allow the university to understand its distinctive strengths and identify aspects of the UCC student experience to be enhanced, there are several challenges facing student surveying activity within the university. Predominantly, there are issues related to:

1. A lack of oversight and clarity around the roles and responsibilities of those involved in student surveys;
2. Over-surveying of some student groups, leading to high levels of survey fatigue;
3. Low response rates;
4. Difficulties in demonstrating evidence of closing the loop;
5. Ethical concerns.

In 2017 a project to review student survey activity at UCC was undertaken, sponsored by the Office of the Vice-President for Teaching and Learning, the Quality Enhancement Unit, and the Student Experience Office. The aims of this project were to scope out possible approaches to (1) to improve the coordination of student survey practices within the university, (2) to improve the quality of surveys, and (3) to minimise frequency and redundancy of surveys. The following initiatives were undertaken to inform the review:

- Mapping of existing student surveys at UCC.
- National and international benchmarking exercises.
- A review of relevant literature.
- Internal and external consultations.

The following key recommendations arising from this scoping exercise suggest ways to develop a strategic, coordinated and consistent approach to surveying of students:

1. Create and maintain a University Student Survey Board and Student Survey Policy

In response to the current lack of clarity surrounding roles and responsibilities for student surveying at UCC, the creation of a dedicated University Student Surveys Board (USSB), as is best practice in other higher education institutions, is recommended. The USSB would serve as the university-wide body for developing policy and practices on student surveying activity, and would develop and co-ordinate UCC's student survey strategy across all organisational levels. The Board would report directly to the Senior Vice-President Academic and Registrar.

The USSB's scope of responsibility would extend to all internally and externally originating university-wide student surveys i.e. where the target survey respondents are current UCC students originating from more than an agreed number of Schools, or the survey involves university-wide activities or services. Surveys may be administered on paper, online, or by telephone.

The USSB would:

- Establish and maintain a policy, set of principles, and a Code of Practice for the conduct of student surveys.
- Establish and maintain a set of common protocols on:
  - distribution of university-wide surveys, including timings, methods and tools of distribution;
  - collection and storing of data;
  - reporting process;
  - strategy for communicating outcomes to all stakeholders, most especially students.
- Approve and disseminate an annual survey schedule.
- Identify Sponsors for each survey who will have delegated authority to oversee the proper implementation of the Code of Practice for Student Surveying as it applies to a particular survey.
- Establish working groups to which it periodically delegates policy and practice reviews and developments.

It is envisaged that the Student Surveys Policy would cite links to other relevant UCC policies e.g. Student Charter, Student Rules, Duty of Respect and Right to Dignity Policy.

2. Create and maintain a Student Survey Support Unit

While the USSB would be responsible for the academic oversight of student surveying activity at UCC, a dedicated student survey support unit would also be required. The support unit would essentially be responsible for the project management of university-wide student surveys within the university.

The support unit would:

- Act as a central point of contact for anyone interested in student surveying activity at UCC.
- Act as a "gatekeeper" to the UCC student population, assessing survey requests made by research/teaching/administrative staff within the university, students within the university, or external organisations.
- Coordinate and manage all university-wide surveys whilst live.
- Communicate with staff and students (through dedicated Student Surveys email) informing staff of institutional survey response rates, survey updates, and responding to ad-hoc queries.
- Analyse data collected by means of university-wide surveys, and produce reports.
- Disseminate results to agreed stakeholders.
- Maintain a dedicated webpage providing descriptions of univresity-wide surveys, and reports of results.
- Create and maintain an annual surveys calendar.
- Create a survey database, including data from selected surveys. This centralised source could be consulted further and analysed by interested members of University staff. The database could potentially be used to facilitate strategic planning, and may also be used to assist in external reporting requirements. The database would retain copies of survey instruments, data files, summaries of findings and analytical reports.
- Produce an annual report, providing a brief outline of surveys undertaken. This report would be appropriate for staff and students to view.
- Work closely with the USSB, the Student's Union, the particular organisational units responsible for certain stages of surveying of students (e.g. IT), and the official Sponsors of each survey.

3. Create and maintain a Student Surveys Ethics Committee

It is envisioned that the support facility would operate in tandem with a dedicated Student Surveys Ethics Committee, who would assess requests for university-wide student surveys in terms of their adherence to relevant legal and research requirements.

If approved by Academic Council, the student surveys review project leaders will take responsibility for developing an implementation plan, and identifying appropriate resources, for approval by the University Management Team (Operations).

1. Introduction

Within UCC, the views of students are central to improving teaching, research and student services, to the quality review process, and to university governance. Student surveys are an important tool to gather feedback on student's university experiences, educational quality, institutional effectiveness, and student satisfaction. They are also an important mechanism for student involvement in university management and governance. However, there are several challenges facing the coordination and oversight of surveys at UCC including survey fatigue and associated negative effects on the quality of data gathered (detailed in section 3).

A comprehensive review of student surveys at UCC has been undertaken. The aim of the review was to ensure a strategic and coordinated approach to student survey activities at UCC. The specific objectives of the review were:

- To map student survey activity at UCC.
- To identify national and international best practice for student surveying in higher education institutions.
- To develop a set of recommendations aimed at enhancing the governance of student surveys at UCC to support long-term change in this area, and to ensure a coordinated approach to surveying student opinion.

The purpose of this document is to examine how UCC might best enhance student survey practices. The report will firstly describe existing student surveys at UCC, and the challenges associated therewith. It will then provide information related to the governance of student surveys, survey tools, data analysis and dissemination, and closing the loop. Finally, this document will provide a series of recommendations for student surveying at UCC. Relevant definitions, literature review, and details of internal and external consultations are detailed in the Appendices.

2. Student Surveys at UCC

An overview of the surveys currently administered to the UCC student population is provided below. For a list of sample definitions relevant to this discussion, please see Appendix A. Surveys are described under four main categories:

- University-wide surveys.
- Student feedback on teaching and learning.
- Student-student research surveys.
- Quality review surveys.

2.1 University-wide Surveys

University-wide surveys are defined as those whose target population comprises students drawn from more than a specified number of Schools (usually one or two)/where the survey encompasses university-wide services or activities.

2.1.1 Irish Survey of Student Engagement

The Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) was introduced in 2013 following the recommendation by "The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030" (Deis, 2011) that a national student survey system be put in place and the results published. The administration of ISSE to relevant student cohorts is a requirement for all Irish higher education institutions.

The ISSE is co-sponsored by the Higher Education Authority, institutions' representative bodies, and the Union of Students in Ireland. Working groups, consisting of institutions' and students' representatives, manage the national project.

The ISSE is administered to first and final year undergraduate students, as well as to taught postgraduate students. The ISSE is designed to assess levels of student engagement across nine indices (Higher Order Learning, Reflective and Integrative Learning, Quantitative Reasoning, Learning Strategies, Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Effective Teaching Practices, Quality of Interactions, and Supportive Environment). Data collated from all participating institutions are analysed nationally and national results are published as part of a full report every year. Participating institutions are encouraged to interrogate the survey data in a way that aligns with their own priorities and strategies in order to maximise its potential. Knowing how and why students' learning and teaching needs may vary according to disciplinary difference can drive the development of evidence-based actions to enhance teaching, learning, and the student experience.

All anonymised data from UCC are sent to the Senior Vice-President Academic and Registrar. Responsibility for analysis of ISSE data lies locally with each institution. Analysis of quantitative data has been undertaken at UCC but to date, no analysis of qualitative ISSE data has been conducted. ISSE findings are disseminated among Heads of College, and Heads of Schools annually.

2.1.2 UCC Student Experience Survey

The Student Experience Survey (SES) at UCC comprises three individual surveys administered bi-annually to undergraduate students, postgraduate taught students, and postgraduate research students. The SES is sponsored by the Student Experience Office, VP Teaching & Learning, and the Students Union. The administration of the SES aligns with the mission statement of the Student Experience Office, which aims to facilitate a world class student experience for all UCC students. It comes in three forms. The undergraduate SES, is administered bi-annually and measures aspects of university life considered important for the student experience i.e. satisfaction with university life, academic confidence, satisfaction with clubs and societies, general programme satisfaction, satisfaction with lecturers, attendance at lectures, and general satisfaction with UCC.

The postgraduate research SES measures experience of academic life, supervision, academic supervisors, academic environment, research, confidence regarding research activity, satisfaction with university life, social aspects of university life, financial aspects of university life, student support services, pride in UCC, and career preparedness and expectations.

The postgraduate taught SES measures experience of academic life, academic confidence, study commitment, teaching and learning, motivation, perceived workload and assessment, good teaching, student assessment of timetable, satisfaction with university life, work placement, social aspects of university life, financial aspects of university life, student support services, skills training opportunities, and pride in UCC.

Both quantitative and qualitative data arising from the SES are analysed by members of the Student Experience Technical Working Group at UCC. Reports on the findings are available at a number of levels. Full reports for each cohort are produced, as well as College-level reports for the undergraduate cohort. The latter are shared directly with Heads of College. Full reports are made available to Academic Council, and the Governing Body are also briefed on results of the survey. In March 2016, data from the Undergraduate SES was considered at a facilitated workshop using the Delphi Consensus method. This was done to incorporate student perspectives in the formulation of actions to “close the loop” and to identify areas or themes that should be prioritised for action. These resulting recommendations were disseminated through the university committee structure for teaching and learning and College level committees, as well as through other relevant functional areas including the Student Experience Office. In 2017, students received email notification of some of the changes implemented as a result of the 2015 SES.

Note: In the academic year 2016/2017, there was a change to the traditional format of the ISSE and SES surveys, with the exception of the Postgraduate Research SES which remained the same. This year, a pilot system of a combined SES/ISSE survey was introduced. This system was introduced by a dedicated SES/ISSE technical group consisting of university staff (management and academic), and a representative of the Students Union. This action was taken in an effort to reduce the volume of surveys administered to the student body, and to increase associated response rates. The changes made to the traditional ISSE/SES structure were as follows:

- A number of items from the Undergraduate SES were added to the ISSE and administered to first and final year undergraduate students.
- A number of items from the Postgraduate Taught SES were added to the ISSE and administered to taught postgraduate students.
- Intermediate year undergraduate students received an abridged version of the Undergraduate SES.

Analysis of the data arising from these pilot surveys is underway. Following analysis, recommendations will be made by the technical group on the structure of the ISSE and SES instruments moving forward.

2.1.3 Student services surveys

Student services (e.g. Library, accommodation) may administer surveys on an ad-hoc basis.

2.2 Student Feedback on Teaching and Learning

Between 2011 and 2016 an electronic university-wide undergraduate module feedback survey was administered at UCC by the Undergraduate Module Feedback Survey Implementation Group which reports to the Academic Council Teaching and Learning Committee and Academic Council on an annual basis. This was suspended for the 2016/17 academic year, following a proposal by the Undergraduate Module Feedback Survey Implementation Group, which was approved by Academic Council, that an alternative model using a devolved approach to gathering student feedback be implemented. The university-wide module survey was a standardised instrument containing 16 quantitative items and two open-ended questions. Likert scores were produced for the following indices: Overall Satisfaction, Teaching and Learning, Feedback and Assessment, Module Organisation and Resources, and Participation. Students were also asked to comment on aspects of the module or its delivery that they found particularly helpful, and to provide suggestions as to how the module or its delivery might be improved. The module survey did not include postgraduate modules, and was conducted in only one semester per academic year. Response rates to the survey tended to be low (e.g. 19.1% in 2015-2016).

During its lifetime, the results of the module level survey were sent to the Module Coordinator(s), who received scores on all quantitative items as well as qualitative comments from students. The Module Coordinator's Head of Department received the same reports. Each Head of Department also received an aggregated report for all modules surveyed within their department, which was also sent to the Head of School (where relevant). Each Head of School was sent an aggregated overall report for each School, which was also sent to the relevant Head of College. Each Head of College received an aggregated report for all Schools within their College. The President and the Senior Vice-President Academic and Registrar received reports containing overall aggregated results.

During the academic year 2016-2017, Schools/academic units have been free to gather student feedback on teaching and learning in a manner most suitable for them. Heads of School must verify to the relevant Head of College by a specified date that students were given an appropriate opportunity to provide feedback. They must also verify that appropriate and timely action was taken in response to any issues raised by students.

2.3 Student-student Research Surveys

Undergraduate and postgraduate students who are required to complete a research thesis as part of their course may administer a survey to their peers utilising the UCC student Umail service. Terms and conditions surrounding the use of the student Umail service are outlined in the "Governance of UCC Student Umail Service" document (UCC IT Services). Surveys are required to:

- Be part of UCC academic work.
- Have received ethical approval and be approved by an academic staff member.
- Only be sent once in an academic year.
- Include a summary of the survey and how the data will be used.
- Include the name of the student sending the survey.
- Include a link to the survey with a full URL.

UCC IT Services are responsible for the release of surveys on the student Umail server. Student surveys are administered throughout the academic year. At the start of each academic year, the student population are randomly divided into a number of equal groups, with each group containing several thousand students. Surveys from undergraduate students are sent to one of these groups, with the groups alternating systematically. This is done to minimise the survey load on individual students. Surveys from postgraduate students are sent to the entire student population. All students have the option of unsubscribing from the survey email list; information on how to do this is included in the footer of student survey emails sent to the student population. During the first 10 months of the 2016/17 academic year to date there have been 56 survey requests from UCC students.

2.4 Quality reviews of academic and support and administrative departments

Representatives from relevant student populations are asked to provide feedback for the purposes of quality reviews within UCC. In line with requirements for internal quality reviews, Schools undergoing periodic academic review are required to demonstrate how student feedback informs quality assurance and enhancement processes. To date, this has been achieved by means of specialist surveys produced specifically for the purpose of the review event, and individually according to the needs of the area under review. Student feedback is also required at the level of the programme annual report, where student feedback is formally reported on at least an annual basis.

3. Challenges Facing Student Survey Activity at UCC

There are several challenges facing the coordination and oversight of student surveys at UCC. The main challenges are:

3.1 Governance

There is a lack of oversight and clarity around the roles and responsibilities of those involved in student surveys.

3.2 Over-surveying

The over-surveying of some student groups has led to confusion and frustration on both the part of students and staff, and ultimately to a loss of goodwill. This 'survey fatigue' causes students to become disengaged and impacts negatively on survey data quality.

3.4 Low response rates

Survey response rates are often low, resulting in compromised data quality. For example, poor response rates to the ISSE have meant that it has not yet been possible to examine data at the level of individual courses. In the case of student-student researcher surveys in particular, surveys may be reissued on the Umail server in an attempt to increase response rates. This contradicts the terms and conditions outlined in the Governance of UCC Student Umail Service document, and contributes to the survey fatigue experienced by many students.

3.5 Closing the loop

There is limited evidence that the analysis of data arising from some student surveys is being fed back to relevant stakeholders. Although data may be analysed, action may not be taken to make relevant changes, and the findings may not be disseminated appropriately.

3.6 Ethical concerns

There are ethical concerns in relation to some of the surveys administered to the student body, particularly those originating from student researchers. The following is a list of issues identified in UCC:

- Many student-student surveys contain no information sheet, meaning that respondents cannot provide informed consent. Where no information sheet is provided to respondents, they may not aware of some or all of the following: how long the survey will take, whether IP addresses will be collected, who will have access to the data, how long data will be stored for, where data will be stored, what data will be used for, whether open-ended responses will be screened to ensure anonymity, whether some of the material in the instrument will be of a sensitive nature.
- Many surveys do not require the respondent to explicitly agree to consent to participate.
- Many surveys do not mention that people under 18 years of age should not participate.
- Many surveys ask personal questions (e.g. experience of domestic abuse, sexuality). Where no information sheet is provided, respondents are not given prior indication of such content. Certain individuals may be offended or upset by such questions, and should have the opportunity to decide not to participate in the survey in advance of beginning.
- Some surveys ask questions about illegal behaviours (e.g. drug use). It is questionable whether the potential consequences of collecting such data have been fully considered. For example, in a case where IP addresses have been collected and authorities request data related to an individual undergoing legal investigation.

- Appropriate referral information is often not provided for respondents who may experience distress as a result of participating in the survey e.g. where survey items are of a sensitive nature.
- Contact details for the researcher should be provided so that respondents can ask questions before participating or provide feedback after participating. Relevant contact details are not always provided.
- There are concerns about the tools used to collect and analyse survey data. For example, the commonly used software tool SurveyMonkey automatically collect IP addresses. The researcher must change the automatic settings on SurveyMonkey to turn off this automatic saving feature.

4. Oversight and Governance

4.1 Introduction

There is a lack of clarity surrounding the roles and responsibilities of those involved in student surveying at UCC. Currently, individuals and groups spread across the university bear responsibility for different aspects of student survey activity. This lack of oversight and governance feeds into the challenges described above i.e. lack of governance, over-surveying, low response rates, difficulties in closing the loop, and ethical concerns.

4.2 Review of National and International Best Practice

In order to assess how student surveys are governed in higher education institutions, a review of survey practices in local and international universities was undertaken and is reported here (see Table 1). The universities included in the review were:

- University College Dublin (UCD)
- Trinity College Dublin (TCD)
- National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG)
- University of Edinburgh
- Leiden University
- Lund University

The above universities are those which were recently agreed upon as benchmarking universities by University Management Team (Strategy) (UMTS).

Within Table 1, surveys are categorised under three headings. These are:

- Institutional surveys (the main surveys that an institution administers to the student population;
- Student feedback on teaching and learning;
- Student-student research surveys.

Table 1. *Governance of institutional surveys, student evaluations, and student-student research surveys in higher education institutions*

Institution	Institutional surveys	Student feedback on teaching and learning	Student-student research surveys
UCD	University Student Survey Board coordinates all institutional surveys. Board is an independent entity reporting to Registrar. Survey applications assessed by Office of Research Ethics in advance of application to USSB. Board maintains an annual surveys calendar.	Staff in T&L, Institutional Research, Office of the Registrar, and IT devote time to the university-wide module survey as required.	Subject to approval by the Office of Research Ethics Committee and the USSB.
TCD	No central unit responsible for institutional surveys.	Centralised support facility for the evaluation of teaching. Faculty Offices responsible for administering PGT surveys.	No central control over student-student research surveys.
NUIG	No central unit responsible for institutional surveys.	Responsibility for feedback process lies with Head of School.	No central control over student-student research surveys.
Edinburgh	“Student Surveys Team” responsible for institutional surveys. “Student Surveys Ethics Committee” assess applications for institutional surveys. Committee reports to University Research Policy Group.	Student Surveys Team.	No student is granted permission to conduct university wide surveys which extend beyond one school for the purposes of their dissertation or assignment research.
Leiden	Transitioning towards a system where student surveys are standardised at the university level. Dedicated data management division at university level will be responsible for the professional and ethical management of data derived from student surveys. University utilises a survey calendar.	Faculty Boards responsible for evaluations. Logistic support provided by the Educational Service Centre of each Faculty.	No central control over student-student research surveys.
Lund	Quality and Evaluation Office are responsible for institutional surveys.	Responsibility for evaluations lies with Faculty boards.	No central control over student-student research surveys. Surveys distributed by students are based on the judgement of the research supervisor, and are considered their responsibility.

5. Survey Tools

Survey tools used to administer student surveys include those used for institutional surveys, and those used for student feedback on teaching and learning.

5.1 Survey Tools for Institutional Level Surveys

A third party company provides the online survey system to the national partnership responsible for the ISSE.

The free LimeSurvey survey platform was utilised for the SES in 2017, 2013, and 2011. LimeSurvey software allows the SES to be hosted and administered locally. Qualtrics software was utilised for the 2015 SES. The decision to return to the use of LimeSurvey software was based on a number of factors including cost (LimeSurvey is free while Qualtrics carries a licence fee), the superior quality of data captured in LimeSurvey, and the preference to host UCC data on a local system. LimeSurvey allows for the anonymous collection of survey data. It also allows the survey respondent to save their responses and return to the survey later.

5.2 Survey Tools for Student Feedback on Teaching and Learning

Online tools provide more effective methods of gathering constructive feedback from students than traditional paper-based methods, and students can complete online surveys in a more efficient manner (Anderson et al., 2005). Furthermore, web respondents give longer answers to open-ended questions using web surveys when compared to paper modes (Smyth et al., 2009). Therefore, web surveys have a higher capacity for collecting quality open-ended responses than paper modes.

Currently, UCC is licensed for Blackboard Learn 9.1 software, and EvaSys education software. Features of these systems are reviewed below.

5.2.1 Survey Tool in Blackboard Learn 9.1

5.2.1.1 Survey design and deployment

There are two options for designing surveys in Blackboard. A lecturer can design a new survey, creating questions from 16 different question types, or they can import a questionnaire. An evaluation survey would be required for every module in Blackboard. The option to import a questionnaire allows for a generic questionnaire to be distributed to teaching staff via Schools.

Lecturers can easily make their survey available to all students enrolled on a module. The following options are available to module coordinators:

- Send an announcement promoting the survey.
- Allow students to have one or multiple attempts.
- Set the survey to ensure it is completed by the student.
- Set the survey to release and close on certain dates.
- Set a timer to allow only an allocated time for completion.
- Give feedback to inform the student they have completed the survey.
- Allow students to see the questions and responses on completion of the survey.

It is possible for the lecturer to add or change instructions to the students.

5.2.1.2 Survey results

Lecturers who are enrolled on the module as an instructor have access to survey results. Those with access to the results have two options:

1. Attempt statistics: displays a percentage breakdown of responses to each question.
2. Download results: facilitates the downloading or export of results to an Excel table delimited file or a CSV file format. Each row in Excel represents a response by a student.

5.2.2 EvaSys Education Software

UCC owns a hybrid campus licence for EvaSys software, allowing the university to run an unlimited number of surveys. Additional features of EvaSys are detailed in Appendix C.

5.2.2.1 Survey design and deployment

A wide range of question types are available including single choice, multiple choice, scaled and open questions. Users can customise forms by adding colour, logos and other images. To accelerate design, questions can be imported into the integrated question library and simply added to the questionnaire in one step. Users have the opportunity to customise the look and feel of certain elements of the product. The online survey templates can be customised to mimic the University website and the PDF reports and emails can also be edited and configured to reflect University branding and functional requirements.

Surveys are deployed easily to designated students via email or can be linked to the VLE making it available there.

5.2.2.2 Survey results

For every module survey, EvaSys generates a PDF report which can be emailed to a specified user (e.g. module coordinator) as soon as the survey closes. The reports can also be made available for each user in their Engagement Portal.

Raw data can be exported at any time for a single survey or a group of surveys. Output formats can include CSV and SAV which are supported by statistical programmes such as MS Excel and SPSS. External reporting tools or Business Intelligence (BI) systems can access the results in real time and display them in dashboards etc.

Reports contain a clear, graphically enhanced representation of results and can include features such as histograms, bar charts, pie charts, line graphs, donut graphs, overall indicators, norming, crosstabs and open question responses. In addition to the analysis of each question, comparative profile lines highlight strongly positive and negative responses, as well as trend data.

In addition to the instant reports that are created for every survey or course evaluated, various other reports and sub-group reports can be generated.

5.2.2.3 Data security, data protection and encryption

The EvaSys Education Suite can be hosted by the client, so all data remains within the organisation. Alternatively, it is also possible to outsource the hosting and survey maintenance.

5.2.3 Concluding comments

The survey tool in Blackboard does not offer the seamless collection of data available in EvaSys. Whilst Blackboard does allow for the importation of a survey tool, distribution to students, and collection of data, its lack of data analysis features is a notable pitfall. The use of Blackboard as a tool for student feedback on teaching and learning, on a university-wide level at least, would result in a need for huge resources dedicated to manual data analysis. The additional features of EvaSys available through the QMIhub (see Appendix C) also offer a multitude of potential benefits (e.g. closing the loop, VLE integration, text analytics), although their additional cost may be a significant strain on available resources.

6. Data Analysis and Dissemination

The analysis and dissemination of student survey data may be considered at the levels of the university, and the academic unit.

6.1 University Level

6.1.1 Data analysis

The analyses conducted on institutional survey data can be customised to suit the individual culture and needs of the institution. Additionally, the level of data analysis required will vary according to the individual survey and number of survey responses. In the UCC context, both the ISSE and SES have the potential for extensive quantitative and qualitative analyses. Response numbers to each of these will determine the level of analysis which can be conducted for both surveys e.g. ISSE analysis at the level of the wider institution vs course level. As described in Appendix J, the best approach to analysing large volumes of data arising from the ISSE or SES may be to analyse smaller portions of the data in greater detail. Which portions of the data should be analysed in great detail would require consultation between those responsible for data analysis and management staff within the university.

It should be acknowledged that other methods of acquiring student feedback may be utilised to complement data gathered through surveys. Where results need clarification or themes significant to the university have been identified, staff may be encouraged to utilise other methods of student feedback (e.g. focus groups) to engage with the student body. Online resources could be made available which would outline potential methods of student feedback. Staff may utilise these resources at their discretion.

6.1.2 Data dissemination

The following is an overview of how UCD, TCD, and NUIG disseminated and used ISSE data gathered in 2013/2014. The analysis and dissemination of data at programme level in UCD is notable. To date, response numbers to the ISSE at UCC have not permitted analyses at the programme level.

UCD

Analysis of the ISSE data was undertaken at University and Field of Study levels. Programme level analysis was conducted where results were statistically representative. Presentations of ISSE data were made to the University Management Team, within College Executive meetings, and the University Sub-committee for Student Experience. The Teaching and Learning Centre used the data at university level and with individual schools to aid curriculum planning and in their staff training programmes. Information packs were produced to include customised reports, a copy of the published national report, and university designed infographics highlighting the main themes emerging. The information packs were issued to each College and unit to coincide with promotion of the survey the following year.

TCD

The ISSE results were presented and discussed at various committees including the Quality Committee, Undergraduate Studies, and Graduate Studies Committees and Council. TCD results on each of the indices were compared with other Irish universities, and provided a breakdown by each cohort, as well as an analysis of the free text data.

Faculties were provided with faculty specific reports. Faculty reports included a comparison of the ISSE index scores across faculties, with a breakdown by cohort, by gender, and by free text comments. ISSE data was also shared with key stakeholders across the university with responsibility for implementation of strategic plan initiatives. The data was thus used to inform institutional planning.

NUIG

Briefing sessions on the ISSE report were provided to all senior leaders and members of student services, and results were presented to Academic Council. The ISSE results also featured in discussions with staff in relation to the transition of new students to the university.

6.2 Academic Unit Level

6.2.1 Data analysis

The literature indicates that there is no threshold response rate that is deemed acceptable for student surveys designed to gather feedback on teaching and learning, and suggestions for adequate response rates vary widely (e.g. 50% proposed by Richardson, 2005; 70% proposed by the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee & Graduate Careers Council of Australia, 2001). Brennan and Williams (2004) proposed that a 60% response rate should be the target rate, whilst below 30% the survey results should be treated with extreme caution. The number of respondents and knowledge of their representativeness are both important considerations in deciding how to deal with low response rates. For example, a 50% response from a class of 100 arguably provides more useful information that a 50% response from a class of four. As a general rule, the literature recommends that small sample size data should be used for training or awareness purposes only i.e. not for promotion and pay decisions. In relation to adequacy of response rates, Nulty (2008) proposed a formula for establishing statistical validity based on the number of responses received as a percentage of total population.

Additionally, when considering analysis of data arising from student feedback on teaching and learning, it is essential to be clear about the purpose of all types of data collected. For example, even though it is possible to develop a comprehensive evaluation system that serves formative and summative purposes, it is important to separate the two purposes conceptually and in practice. While quantitative data may be analysed for the purpose of summative evaluation, analysis of qualitative data may be more useful for formative purposes. Indeed, formative feedback should allow for the exploration of innovative techniques without the threat of failure. Similarly, any comparisons that are made between modules/courses/Schools should be performed against similar modules/courses/Schools.

Finally, when analysing survey data arising from student feedback on teaching and learning, it is important to acknowledge that it captures information on classroom teaching only, which may constitute just a small part of a teacher's educational activities. Thus, a key to effective teaching evaluation is to collect data from multiple sources (triangulation), making sure that all education-related activities are rated by the people best qualified to rate them. For triangulation to be most effective, data from different sources should overlap to the greatest extent possible. For example, items on student rating surveys related to aspects of teaching that both students and peers are equipped to evaluate (e.g., the instructor's preparedness, clarity, responsiveness to questions, and respect for students) should parallel items in peer review checklists (Felder & Brent, 2004).

6.2.2 Data dissemination

How teaching staff, managers, and administrators respond to feedback from student feedback on teaching and learning is linked to the guidance available to those parties on how feedback may be interrogated and interpreted. Richardson (2010) suggested that a lack of guidance is one of the main reasons that attention is often not paid to student feedback. Without such guidance, there is little scope for meaningful discussion about the findings. Potential users of student feedback need to be assisted in understanding and contextualising the results (Neumann, 2000). As such, when teaching weaknesses are identified, teaching staff should be provided with support on how to improve. Palermo (2004) also argues that there is a need to facilitate the interpretation of feedback, as well as providing staff with assistance in working through any particularly negative comments from students. This requires resources at a local level e.g. “internal consultants” who are available to assist staff. Again, Palermo (2004) argues it is essential that results are discussed and contextualised, so that professional development activities can be targeted appropriately and opportunities for improvement identified in the results.

Finally, particularly critical to effective teaching evaluation is maintaining an ongoing cycle of training emphasising the correct interpretation and appropriate use of the evaluation data. Given widespread misuse of this type of data and misunderstanding about its interpretation, this can be the most important aspect of day-to-day practice.

7. Closing the Loop

Closing the feedback loop may be considered at the levels of the institution, the academic unit, and the individual student researcher.

7.1 Institutional level

The literature on student feedback systems consistently states that in order to make an effective contribution to internal improvement processes, views of students need to be integrated into a regular and continuous cycle of analysis, reporting, action, and feedback. Institutions vary considerably in the degree to which they make survey findings public and produce reports for students outlining actions that have resulted from surveys (Harvey, 2003).

Arguably, the best style of presentation and issues that should be presented depends upon an institution's size, students, the facilities available, and the courses and aspects of student experiences that were surveyed. An institution with a large number of faculties and a diverse student body should use a range of methods to ensure that as many students as possible are aware of the results and actions of the survey (Watson, 2003). Naturally, the timing of the survey, report and feedback will affect whether institutions can report on what has happened as a result of the survey (Watson, 2003).

Some commonly used methods of reporting back to students, as outlined by Watson (2003) are:

- Leaflets, newsletters e.g. Sheffield Hallam University.
- Inclusion in student prospectus' (e.g. 'We listen, and act, on what students say').
- Internet e.g. University of Portsmouth. Leaflets and newsletters may be made available online, or feedback may be included on the "What's New" section of an appropriate homepage. Batched emails containing results and actions (or portions thereof) may be sent to all student email accounts. Full reports may also be made available for download on the university website.
- Posters e.g. University of Plymouth, where posters are displayed within faculties during the start of the academic year induction period, drawing students' attention to the action taken in response to a key issue identified for each faculty.
- Virtual learning environments e.g. Blackboard.
- Direct communication with groups of students e.g. the University of Portsmouth used the Student Representative Forum to disseminate information; Lincoln University forwarded survey reports and resulting memos to the students' association and other bodies e.g. (University Council and Academic Board), on which students are represented.
- Staff announcements e.g. the University of Technology Sydney asked all staff to announce in the first class of the new semester what they had found out last semester, and what they were doing about it.

The Center for Postsecondary Research, Indiana University School of Education has noted some essential lessons for the effective use of survey data. These include:

- The importance of reporting results in small, digestible bites to targeted audiences;

- Reporting first what is working well and then focusing on areas for improvement by connecting results to topics that already hold relevance for particular audiences;
- Positioning the opportunity to share survey results not as a reporting requirement but as an occasion to bring staff and students into a conversation about university quality and topics of concern and, most importantly, to close the session with considerations for “What do we want to do with and about these results?” And, even better, “What’s next?”

7.2 Academic Unit Level

The time at which student feedback on teaching and learning is gathered (often at the end of a semester/academic year) can make the process of closing the feedback loop more difficult. In order to identify best practice for closing the feedback loop on student’s feedback on teaching and learning, feedback practices were examined in UCC’s six benchmarking universities. Table 2 outlines how each of the institutions feeds back to students, what level of reporting occurs to Heads of School and other management in the university, and how these data are included in other processes within the university i.e. quality assurance and teaching promotion.

Table 2. *Methods for closing the loop on student feedback on teaching and learning in higher education institutions*

Institution	Closing the loop to students	Reporting to Heads of School and beyond	Inclusion of data in other processes
UCD	Teaching staff have access to online resources which outline different methods of closing the loop on student feedback on teaching and learning e.g. emails to students, feedback to staff/student committees, follow-up meetings, Blackboard announcements.	Module Coordinator views full results for their own modules, including completion rates, a mean (Likert) score for questions and all qualitative responses. The Head of School and Heads of Subejct view completion rates and mean (Likert) score for core questions 1-5 for each module in their school. Qualitative responses are not included in the Head of School/Subject Report. An overall mean (Likert) score for core questions 1 to 5 for all modules surveyed in their school is also included in the Head of School report. Module Coordinators and Heads of School use the feedback to enhance and further develop modules. School and subject level discussions around themes emerging from feedback take place. Reports also sent to those in Teaching and Learning leadership roles in Colleges and Schools and to those in senior management roles in the university.	Data from student feedback on teaching and learning may also be included in applications for teaching promotions. Quantitative data from core questions 1-5 from the last 5 years are automatically collated into a report and made available to the applicant for inclusion as part of the online promotions application. Whilst applicants are encouraged to include this report, they is no compulsion. There is no facility to manually upload any other form of student feedback. The university are moving towards a system whereby applicants will be able to provide commentary on the feedback provided by students. UCD's Quality Office advises Schools to student feedback information as part of review documentation. .
TCD	Communication to students can be through staff/student meetings, course/schools email lists, and notice boards or through the College student representation system. Feedback must be timely, appropriate and meaningful.	Directors of Teaching & Learning, Module and Course Coordinators receive copies of the student feedback reports conducted in their School. Schools are asked to report annually to the Faculty Executive, and the report includes: (a) Confirmation that student evaluation of all modules delivered in the School in the academic year was carried out; (b) method of evaluation used; (c) key issues identified by students, without reference to lecturer(s), and how these were, or will be, addressed; (d) how students were, or will be, informed of the outcome of the evaluation.	Faculty Executives report on an annual basis regarding student module evaluation to the Quality Committee. This report includes a composite overview of the modules reviewed as well as actions taken to remedy any shortcomings in the module content and/or delivery. Data from student feedback on teaching and learning are not included in applications for teaching promotion.
NUIG	A simple list of issues identified and actions to be taken should be communicated back to students even if this data has been obtained only at the end of a module or course. Options	Feedback from students in each module is made available to the Head of School (and, in cases where there is a separate Programme Director, to that person also). In schools where the practice is to openly share feedback with colleagues or via a teaching or course committee, this	Summary reports of feedback are appended to existing annual reports and made available for quality reviews, operational planning and other appropriate purposes.

Institution	Closing the loop to students	Reporting to Heads of School and beyond	Inclusion of data in other processes
	for this include responding in person in lectures or tutorials, via email, or Blackboard. Indicating to incoming student groups what changes have been made in the light of past feedback is also deemed worthwhile and indicates strongly the value in participating in such evaluations.	takes place. Similarly, for those schools which currently assign the collation of feedback to an administrator. A summary report of feedback obtained and resulting actions is produced annually in each School and collated at College level. The lecturer responsible for each module is also given an opportunity to provide feedback on issues that arose during the teaching of the module in order to facilitate more complete evaluation than is possible with student feedback alone. This brief note is submitted to the Head of School and Programme Director.	Brief notes from lecturers are made available for Quality Reviews, programme boards, and other appropriate processes
Edinburgh	Individual Schools make quantitative data available to students. Free text comments are made available to students at the discretion of the School.	Staff data is for use by the member of staff named in the report, their line manager (or peer reviewer for annual review), the Course Organiser, and the Head of School and/or nominee. The data gathered from student feedback is considered in a number of areas, including the student staff liaison committee and the School Teaching Committee. These committees make annual reports to the college committee responsible for quality assurance. The college committees report in turn to Senate Quality Assurance Committee.	Annual course monitoring feedback is used in internal University reviews of the quality of teaching in a subject area: Teaching Programme Reviews or Postgraduate Programme Reviews. This student feedback is also used in reviews by professional, statutory and regulatory body visits or accreditation exercises. Student feedback data may also be used by academic staff for promotional applications.
Leiden	Resource limitations are a significant factor in a lack of follow up actions. Best results have been attained when reports are published on Blackboard together with a concise commentary on how to interpret the results.	Every programme has to report on a yearly basis to the Faculty Board on a number of themes (prescribed in a concise report format, the 'Programme Card'). Quality of education/improvement initiatives based on course/programme evaluation is one of the themes. The data is mainly used for formulating improvement initiatives and measuring their effectiveness after implementation.	The data of course evaluations is used in the yearly evaluation of a teacher's performance, but they are of limited weight.
Lund	A course evaluation report is produced, and fed back to students and teaching staff. The report includes any decisions regarding measures to be taken. The report is also presented at the start of the course for the subsequent course group.	Course evaluations are collated and commented upon in a comprehensive course evaluation report. Course evaluations reports involve not only the students’ experiences of the course, but also those of the teaching staff. Exam results and their fluctuations over the semesters can also contribute to the overall course evaluation report.	Course evaluations are considered an integral aspect of the university’s quality assurance processes.

7.3 Individual Student Researcher Level

While the guidelines outlined in section 7.1 may be relevant to closing the loop on survey data collected at the levels of the institution or academic unit, these guidelines may not be applicable to research students aiming to close the loop on a smaller scale. Data gathered by means of student-student research surveying may form the basis of published works e.g. journal articles, conference presentations. However, there is often little in the way of direct feedback to survey respondents. Occasionally, some research students may ask respondents to provide their email addresses, if they wish to receive a copy of the results. The timing of project completion (often towards the end of the academic year) may pose challenges for communication with respondents, as graduates have competing priorities such as securing employment. A lack of resources on the part of the student researcher may also impact on their ability to communicate results to relevant stakeholders.

8. Recommendations

Recommendations aimed at improving student survey practices at UCC are presented here. These recommendations are the result of the benchmarking exercises and literature reviews reported in the main body of this document, as well as literature reviewed and consultations/visits described in the Appendices of the document. Main considerations are the following:

8.1 Key Recommendations

- **Create and maintain a University Student Survey Board and Student Survey Policy**

In response to the current lack of clarity surrounding roles and responsibilities for student surveying at UCC, the creation of a dedicated University Student Surveys Board (USSB), as is best practice in other higher education institutions, is recommended. The USSB would serve as the university-wide body for developing policy and practices on student surveying activity, and would develop and co-ordinate UCC's student survey strategy across all organisational levels. The Board would report directly to the Senior Vice-President Academic and Registrar.

The USSB's scope of responsibility would extend to all internally and externally originating university-wide student surveys i.e. where the target survey respondents are current UCC students originating from more than an agreed number of Schools, or the survey involves university-wide activities or services. Surveys may be administered on paper, online, or by telephone.

The USSB would:

- Establish and maintain a policy, set of principles, and a Code of Practice for the conducting of student surveys.
- Establish and maintain a set of common protocols on:
  - distribution of university-wide surveys, including timings, methods and tools of distribution;
  - collection and storing of data;
  - reporting process;
  - strategy for communicating outcomes to all stakeholders, most especially students.
- Approve and disseminate an annual survey schedule.
- Identify Sponsors for each survey who will have delegated authority to oversee the proper implementation of the Code of Practice for Student Surveying as it applies to a particular survey.
- Establish working groups to which it periodically delegates policy and practice reviews and developments.

It is envisaged that the Student Surveys Policy would cite links to other relevant UCC policies e.g. Student Charter, Student Rules, Duty of Respect and Right to Dignity Policy.

- **Create and maintain a Student Survey Support Unit**

While the USSB would be responsible for the academic oversight of student surveying activity at UCC, a dedicated student survey support unit would also be required. The student survey support unit would essentially be responsible for the project management of student surveys within the university.

The support unit would:

- Act as a central point of contact for anyone interested in student surveying activity at UCC.
- Act as a "gatekeeper" to the UCC student population, assessing survey requests made by research/teaching/administrative staff within the university, students within the university, or external organisations.
- Coordinate and manage all university-wide surveys whilst live.
- Communicate with staff and students (through dedicated Student Surveys email) informing staff of institutional survey response rates, survey updates, and responding to ad-hoc queries.
- Analyse data collected by means of institutional surveys, and produce reports.
- Disseminate results to agreed stakeholders.
- Maintain a dedicated webpage providing descriptions of institutional surveys, and reports of results.
- Create and maintain an annual surveys calendar.
- Create a survey database, including data from selected surveys. This centralised source could be consulted further and analysed by interested members of University staff. The database could potentially be used to facilitate strategic planning, and may also be used to assist in external reporting requirements. The database would retain copies of survey instruments, data files, summaries of findings and analytical reports.
- Produce an annual report, providing a brief outline of surveys undertaken. This report would be appropriate for staff and students to view. This would help to increase transparency surrounding surveys undertaken within the university.
- Work closely with the USSB, the Student's Union, the particular organisational units responsible for certain stages of surveying of students (e.g. IT), and the official Sponsors of each survey.

- **Create and maintain a Student Surveys Ethics Committee**

It is envisioned that the support facility would operate in tandem with a dedicated Student Surveys Ethics Committee, who would assess requests for university-wide student surveys in terms of their adherence to relevant legal and research requirements.

8.2 Issues for Further Consideration

The recommendations outlined above are central to UCC's transition towards a more coordinated and systematic student surveying system. Beyond those key recommendations, several issues for further consideration are presented. These emerged from the literature review, institutional benchmarking and expert interviews undertaken during the data gathering phase. A consideration of these issues may serve to further enhance student surveying activity within UCC, and inform the work of the USSB and support unit, if these entities are to be established.

- **Establish the purpose and users of evaluations**

Across all levels of surveying activity, it is important to identify what is important, and what should and will be evaluated. Furthermore, it is essential to establish what kinds of data will be collected, who will provide the data, how they will be analysed, whether all data will have equal weight, how the data will be assembled for users, and how data will be used in decision making.

- **Provide clear information about the evaluation criteria, process, and procedures.**

As part of the *a priori* decision-making process and after such decisions are made, the intent, purposes, and process of evaluation should be publicised, emphasizing its potential to support improvement. An institution-wide communications campaign should be rolled out with UCC's institutional surveys. The campaign should focus on developing a student culture of giving constructive feedback, particularly at a first-year level. The campaign should encourage that students take a more proactive approach to their education.

- **Establish clear lines of responsibility/reporting for those who administer the system.**

Who is responsible for various aspects of the UCC student surveying system should be clear from the outset e.g. administration, report creation, dissemination of results.

- **Attempt to balance individual and institutional needs**

Evaluation must serve both institutional and individual needs. It is possible to create complete systems for both evaluation and development, and such systems benefit staff, students, and institutions as they ultimately support better teaching and learning.

Within the UCC context, it is essential to consider how student survey data may be incorporated in the accreditation processes of certain Schools. There are a number of Schools within UCC providing courses which are accredited by external bodies. In certain instances, the accrediting bodies require evidence of student feedback in the form of survey data. Whatever processes are established for student feedback on teaching and learning will need to ensure that Schools have the flexibility needed to fulfil accreditation requirements.

- **Train evaluators to evaluate**

If students are to be an integral part of the university's evaluation system, they should be trained to evaluate. This may, for example, take place during an introductory first year seminar. Instructors could discuss the meaning of student rating items with the students and practice rating various case studies.

- **Create and maintain appropriate student survey branding**

Student survey activity needs to be appropriately branded. In the UCC context, a dedicated webpage hosting information related to the student survey support unit may be most suitable. Information on the services provided by the support unit could be explicitly stated there, as well as links to associated resources e.g. application forms, guidelines, student surveys policy document, etc. In addition, a dedicated webpage could provide overviews of the scope of each of the university surveys, outlining information on:

- What does this survey ask about?
- How do I take part?
- What happens to my responses?
- Why should I take part?
- What happens afterwards?

Reports arising from university surveys could also be made available online.

Extending beyond dedicated websites, other relevant methods of communication may be utilised by the support unit. As mentioned previously, survey results may be disseminated in a myriad of ways including posters, pop up booths, student prospectus', etc. Dedicated purpose social media accounts would likely be necessary for the support facility, which would allow for communication regarding all aspects of student survey activity e.g. pre-warnings of survey launches, reminders once live, links to survey reports, etc.

- **Ensure that survey data are reliable and valid**

Analyses of the reliability and validity of data will inform subsequent analyses conducted on survey data. Professional judgement may need to be utilised in instances of modest response numbers.

- **Produce reports that can be understood easily and accurately**

Reports arising from student surveys should be accurate and meaningful, and produced in such a way that they are easily understood.

- **Educate the users of ratings results to avoid misuse and misinterpretation**

Particularly critical to effective evaluation is maintaining an ongoing cycle of training emphasising the correct interpretation and appropriate use of the evaluation data. Given widespread misuse of data and misunderstanding about its interpretation, this can be the most important aspect of day-to-day practice.

- **Use multiple sources of data where necessary**

Surveys designed gather student feedback on teaching and learning may provide a useful indicator of teaching effectiveness. However, as mentioned previously, surveys cannot provide a comprehensive overview of all the teaching related activities a member of teaching staff may be engaged in. As such, multiple sources of data should be utilised to create a more complete overview.

- **Include both closed-ended and open-ended questions in instruments designed to gather student feedback on teaching and learning**

Written comments allow students to explain the scores that they assign for closed-ended items and to draw attention to topics that were not addressed in closed-ended items (Nasser & Fresco, 2009).

- **Keep formative evaluation confidential and separate from summative decision making**

Even though it is possible to develop a comprehensive system that serves formative and summative purposes, it is critical to separate the two purposes conceptually and in practice. Formative evaluation should allow for the exploration of innovative techniques without the threat of failure. Formative data is useful for classroom assessment and research, but should not be used to make personnel or program decisions without prior agreement about what kinds of data are appropriate and how such data should be used.

- **Make only relevant comparisons between modules/courses/schools**

Any comparisons that are made between modules/courses/Schools should be performed against similar modules/courses/Schools.

- **Include resources for improvement and support of teaching and teachers**

This is part of a complete system and cannot be omitted, as evaluation without may be perceived as punitive. Evaluation accompanied by visible and effective development becomes a valued component of teaching and learning and the process of personnel decision making. One of the major factors in creating a campus culture and climate that support teaching is to have an established centre for teaching and learning with qualified staff to provide assistance in instructional design, development, and evaluation. Simply sending a computer printout to a teacher does little to help that teacher understand the results or to improve teaching. Commitment to and support for teaching from the highest levels of the institution are required if the evaluation process it to be perceived as useful and nonthreatening.

- **Ensure that the survey system is flexible**

Survey flexibility is most important in the context of student feedback on teaching and learning. Many institutions adopt standardised surveys and provide for flexibility through encouraging staff to add self-developed questions.

Additionally, teaching staff may be encouraged to utilise additional means of feedback, where appropriate. For example, although a university-wide module survey may be mandatory, teaching staff should have the flexibility to collect supplementary feedback as desired. For example, issues flagged in survey feedback may be explored further through a focus group, or informal discussion with students.

- **Invest in a superior evaluation system and evaluate it regularly**

Conditions change, and the evaluation system must change to adapt to new conditions. Regular evaluation of the performance of the evaluation system is necessary to ensure that it is accurate, timely, efficient, and effective and that policies and processes are appropriate and being adhered to. When institutional or programmatic changes are made, the evaluation system should be reviewed and adapted as needed. Expert advice and assistance should be sought when necessary.

- **Establish a process for grievances**

Without guarantees of protection from mistakes or misuse, staff and the institution are at risk.

- **Ensure that necessary resources are sustained over time**

Resources for implementation of a student feedback system will need to be continuous.

- **Conduct a review of student-student research surveys**

The volume of student-student research surveys is a significant aspect of UCC's survey culture. It is acknowledged that the conducting of student-student research surveys form a significant aspect of the research training received by social science students. However, student-student surveys are a major contributor to the survey fatigue experienced by the student body, and have the effect of diluting important messages sent to student's Umail accounts. It is thought that if student-student research surveys remain unaddressed, other changes made to other aspects of student surveying may be of limited effectiveness.

In light of this, a review of student-student research surveys is needed, in order to ascertain the boundaries of such surveys. Essentially, a cost-benefit analysis should be undertaken, weighing the cost of disruption to the wider student population against the benefit to a smaller number of students. Within this review, alternatives for student research may be discussed. This review would require consultation between university management and relevant Heads of School.

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11. Appendices

Appendix A

Sample Definitions

Student feedback

'Feedback' generally refers to "the expressed opinions of students about the service they receive as students. This may include perceptions about learning and teaching, the learning support facilities (such as libraries, computer facilities), the learning environment (lecture rooms, laboratories, social space and university buildings), support facilities (refectories, student accommodation, health facilities, student services), and external aspects of being a student (such as finance, transport infrastructure)" (Harvey, 2003).

Student engagement

Student engagement is commonly defined as the investment of time, effort, and other relevant resources by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students, and the performance and reputation of the institution (Trowler & Trowler, 2011).

Student experience

Student experience may be defined as the totality of a student's interaction with the institution (Temple, Callender, Grove, & Kersh, 2014). According to UCC's Strategic Plan for Student Experience 2013-2017, "the core of the student experience will be a student's chosen course of study, supported by a range of services, characterised by rigorously high standards, an emphasis on independent learning and encouragement to challenge received ideas, and top quality pastoral care. In addition however, and as importantly, the experience of a community environment and hospitable and inviting campus, and the opportunities which UCC provides in music and the arts, on the sports field, in special interest activities and in volunteering form a key part of student life at UCC" (p. 3).

Student feedback on teaching and learning

Student feedback on teaching and learning is gathered in almost every institution of higher education throughout the world (Zabaleta, 2007). In most institutions, this feedback is used for formative purposes (as feedback for the improvement of teaching) as well as for summative purposes (e.g. mapping teaching competence for administrative decision-making and institutional audits) (Spooren, Brockx, & Mortelmans, 2013).

Closing the loop

Closing the loop is a two-part process: student feedback must be translated into action, and relevant stakeholders must be informed of changes made. The process of "closing the loop" is considered the most demanding aspect of seeking student feedback (Centre for Research into Quality, 2001).

Survey fatigue

Survey fatigue occurs when individuals respond to survey questions but do not provide truthful or consistent responses, in order to reduce the perceived burden of answering survey questions (Lavrakas, 2008). Survey fatigue is particularly likely to occur when populations are required to complete multiple surveys in a given time period.

Appendix B

Overview of Literature on Student Feedback on Teaching and Learning

The following is an overview of literature relevant to student feedback on teaching and learning. Critical themes within the literature which are relevant to the UCC context are included.

Purpose of Student Feedback on Teaching and Learning

Penny described the collection and use of student feedback on teaching and learning data as "one of the most sensitive, divisive, and political [issues] in education" (2003). She identifies the "unresolved tension" between the purposes of collecting student feedback as the main source of disagreement.

The Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) at Iowa State University Faculty argue that administrators should develop an explicit and shared understanding of how student feedback is used and its purpose at the institution. Penny (2003) identifies the three main audiences that student feedback on teaching and learning provide information to: (a) teachers, who can use the information to improve their teaching; (b) managers, who can use the information for accountability and in promotion decisions; (c) students, who can use the information when choosing modules and courses. Ideally, an instrument would meet the needs of each of these. In reality, the demands of accountability and of improvement often conflict. Student feedback is commonly used for either formative or summative evaluations. Formative evaluations provide feedback to teaching staff on strengths and weaknesses that can be used to improve teaching. Summative evaluations are used as indicators of teaching performance used in administrative decisions e.g. promotion. Additionally, summative evaluations can provide course information for students who wish to select modules based on teaching quality.

Mid-term and End-Term Evaluations

It is possible to request that students provide feedback at any stage of a teaching cycle, although mid and end-term evaluations are most common. End of term evaluations are most commonly used for summative purposes. If mid-term evaluations are utilised, it is important that this feedback is confidential and is only used for formative purposes. Mid-term evaluations have been found to have a small but significant effect on improving final evaluations (Cohen, 1980). This is important as teaching staff may never have received formal training in pedagogy when first starting their teaching career.

It is important to note that students may experience increased survey fatigue if asked to provide feedback at both mid-term and end-term points. However, this effect is likely to be lessened if mid-term feedback is responded to promptly, and students are made aware of changes implemented. Where unfeasible suggestions for change have been made by students, discussion between the teaching staff and students should focus on why desired changes cannot or will not be made. Additionally, as Emery, Kramer, and Tian (2003) state, if there is an element of formative feedback, it is logical to ask students to provide feedback every semester.

Evaluation Items

There is debate as to whether instruments should contain global or specific items, or a combination of both. Many instruments designed to gather student feedback on teaching and learning include a combination of both. Specific items ask low inference questions about the course or instructor. Global or general ratings provide a more general indicator of the course or instructor e.g. "rate this course (or instructor) overall". Instruments containing global items comparable across modules may be best used for summative purposes, while specific items may provide more appropriate information for improving teaching (Russell & Marincovich, 2012). Importantly, there is a great consensus in the literature that students cannot judge all aspects of teaching performance, and should not be required to infer beyond their background and experience (Seldin, 1993).

Feedback instruments often include both closed and open-ended questions (see e.g. Hanover Research Council, 2009), and this has been identified as a feature of best practice (Iowa State University). Closed-ended global questions are thought more reliable and beneficial for summative evaluation. However, open-ended comments may be particularly useful for formative evaluation (Emery, Kramer, & Tian, 2003). The inclusion of qualitative items may also allow students the flexibility to comment freely on aspects of innovative and beneficial teaching they have identified in their teacher's practice. For example, although students may give a high ranking to quantitative questions, this does not imply that they consider those factors important. When given the flexibility of semi-structured responses, research has indicated that there is much greater emphasis on fewer issues (Huxham, Laybourn, Cairncross, Gray, Brown, Goldfinch, & Earl, 2008). This information is valuable, as it provides teachers with more focussed guidance which they may use to improve their teaching. As the analysis of open-ended items is particularly resource intensive, the time and resources available to process the results should be considered when selecting the number of open-ended questions to include in an instrument. Instruments should be brief enough that they can be completed thoughtfully within 10 to 15 minutes (Iowa State University).

There are methods which may serve to improve the feedback provided by students. For example, Curtin's University's online eVALUate system provides students with a brief explanation of the question being asked and the type of information being sought. Research by Smyth, Dillman, Christian, and McBride (2009) indicated that the provision of clarifying and motivating instructions, was effective at improving the response quality of respondents. The findings indicated that incorporating an introduction that emphasises the importance of responses increased response length, number of themes, elaboration, and response time.

Use of Data

Possible sources of bias in student's feedback on teaching and learning have been the topic of extensive investigation. There are many commonly held misconception about bias in student's feedback on teaching and learning. Common misconceptions include: students are not able to make accurate judgements until several years after the course; feedback is based on the popularity of a teacher rather than the quality of instruction; feedback does not measure what a student learned; student feedback does not help to improve instruction; student feedback has resulted in grade inflation; and student feedback is unreliable and invalid. However, none of these claims are consistently supported by research (see Benton & Cashin, 2012 and Theall & Franklin, 2001 for full overviews).

Indeed, student feedback data have been consistently shown to provide data that is valid, reliable, and useful in the higher education context. However, the main challenge facing the use of student feedback on teaching and learning remains conducting an analysis that is not flawed or misguiding (Theall, 2010). Lack of knowledge surrounding the use and interpretation of student feedback on teaching and learning has been shown to be positively correlated with a negative perspective on the value of student feedback (Franklin & Theall, 1989).

Maximising Response Rates

Research has indicated that higher online response rates may be achieved by ensuring student confidentiality, monitoring response rates, encouraging instructor follow-up, sending reminders, acknowledging and rewarding high response rates, and integrating the process into the campus culture. A range of incentives may also be offered to promote student participation e.g. raffles (Hanover Research Council). The Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at Iowa State University argue that module coordinators (or those overseeing the unit of evaluation) should share with students the significance of their participation, and explicitly state how the information will be used. A useful strategy may be to include some examples of how feedback is used on the instrument (CELT, Iowa State University). Examples of how student feedback is used may also be included in module handbooks, course overviews, orientation booklets, or other relevant institutional documentation.

Research has indicated that student's most attractive outcome of an evaluation system is improving their teacher's teaching, while improving the course is the second strongest outcome. Thus, students who believe that their feedback will actually improve teaching or the course or both should be motivated to provide feedback. Using student feedback for a teacher's promotion and salary rise decisions, and making the results available for students' decisions on course and instructor selection were less important from the students' standpoint. Students' motivation to provide feedback was also impacted significantly by their expectation that they will be able to provide meaningful feedback (Chen & Hoshower, 2003).

Academic Buy-in

Research by Sid Nair and Adams (2009) outlined some of the reasons university staff did not support module feedback questionnaires. These included: many of the questions were subjective and therefore responses may be influenced by personal prejudice; many of the questions were not relevant to the delivery of the module and also covered items outside the control of the module leader (e.g. textbook availability in the library); the questionnaires were open to abuse by respondents, who would deliberately give low ratings for all questions as an act of 'revenge' (e.g. for poor assignment or examination marks); finally, the validity and reliability of such surveys was questioned. As an example, in many cases where modules contained no coursework element in their assessment, when asked whether coursework had been returned in reasonable time a large proportion of students offered answers covering the full range of responses on a 1–5 Likert scale, thus calling their ability to offer useful feedback into question. This example points to the need to construct an instrument that avoids or at least minimizes these potential pitfalls. It also points to the need to embed student feedback on teaching and learning within a framework of professional development e.g. offering resources which will support teaching staff in their responses to and interpretation of feedback, and teaching improvement.

Another consistent theme in the literature is that student feedback surveys should form just one aspect of more comprehensive evaluation system. Such a system should deliver fair and equitable evaluation and allow for professional development (Theall & Feldman, 2007). Guidelines produced by the Centre of Excellence in Learning and Teaching at Iowa State University propose that student feedback on teaching and learning should be part of an overall strategy for improving student learning. Other assessment methods (e.g. mid-semester feedback, peer observation, teaching observations) should be used in conjunction with student feedback (Algozzine et al., 2004).

Appendix C

EvaSys QMI Hub: Additional Features

EvaSys offers several additional features, available within their "QMIhub". The QMIhub is a cloud-based platform that brings together a range of additional software applications under one umbrella. The features of the QMIhub are available at additional cost, although discounts are available when features are bought together. Features of the QMIhub are:

VLE integration

This provides the ability to publish online surveys unique to each student in the VLE. Students can be provided with a list of open online surveys they can directly take part in (and that are relevant to each student). This may help the institution in increasing the response rate for online surveys. Integrating with the VLE also means an easy access point to surveys for students, so this process could be facilitated in-class. This feature has a once off licence cost of £1,995.00, plus £399.00 annual support.

Engagement portal

Once surveys go live, an instructor, a student representative, or designated department/school staff can track response rates in real time for their modules, making it possible to target and encourage participation. The Engagement Portal enables email reminders to be sent quickly and easily to participants in class, whilst at the same time tracking response rates. This feature has a once off licence cost of £3,150.00, plus £630.00 annual support.

Text analytics

Word clouds and text analytics can be accessed to analyse open comments, making it is easy to identify trends and common themes for larger survey responses. A customised dictionary can be created to utilise word clouds and visualise the commonality of thousands of responses so that they can be better understood and reported. This feature has a once off licence cost (per 30,000 comments) of £5,795.00.

Closing the loop reporting

A specially created 'Student Report' can be sent by email (or posted in the VLE) to all of those who participated in an evaluation, giving students the chance to access a summary of the chosen quantitative module evaluation results. Academics can also provide commentary on the feedback they have received from their module evaluations, which can be automatically sent to the students and senior stakeholders. This feature has a once off licence cost of £2995.00, plus £599.00 annual support.

Insight dashboards

The Insight Dashboard is an interactive reporting app which gives users a range of visual reporting options for its institution. Using data collected for course and module evaluations, institutions can use the Insight Dashboards to access a deeper level analysis through a range of drill down graphical tools to present chosen KPIs visually and numerically so that they are easier to understand. This can help measure and display performance against departmental and organisational performance such as overall student satisfaction, trending response rates, or overall module scores. This feature has a once off licence cost of £3500.00, plus £700.00 annual support.

The Student Portal

The Student Portal allows students to log in to a portal with their student ID through the QMIhub to access surveys specific to their modules. It is possible for an instructor or student rep to facilitate the process in class to highlight its importance. Response rates can be tracked real time in the QMIhub engagement portal and reminders can be sent via email/SMS or through notifications in the university app to any student struggling to remember their ID. This feature has a once off licence cost of £995.00, plus £199.00 annual support.

Data bridge integration

The Data Bridge offers a way to clean and manage data regardless of where it comes from. Rather than emailing numerous spreadsheets, it is possible to upload the data centrally and provide access to assigned users for cross-checking before uploading to EvaSys. With the Data Bridge, users can access easy-to-view tables allowing them to edit, add and remove data with minimum technical skills or training. It is also possible to automate live feeds from databases, improving workflow and reducing the need for manual data imports, improves data quality overall. This feature has a once off licence cost of £3,995.00, plus £799.00 annual support.

Archiving

Course and module evaluations can create vast amounts of data, which can impact on IT systems and infrastructure. With the Archiving app, data from historical surveys can be moved dynamically from EvaSys to the QMIhub allowing the data on EvaSys to be kept clean. Any data that is transferred to the QMIhub can be accessed instantly in its raw form or in PDF reports as and when it is required for use in trend analysis and reports. This feature has a once off licence cost of £4,995.00, plus £999.00 annual support.

MBE Module Benchmarking™

MBE Module Benchmarking™ allows HEIs to drill down from a programme to a modular level in order to compare and benchmark their performance against the EvaSys community (mostly UK universities). With the MBE, universities and other higher education (HE) providers can compare their own course and module performance with their counterparts across the sector, as well as using data to benchmark internally for improving outcomes. This feature has a once off licence cost of £3,600.00.

Appendix D
Visit to Dublin City University (DCU)

In order to examine best practice in student feedback at a national level (i.e. ISSE), Laura Lee visited Dublin City University (DCU) in April 2017. The interview schedule included in Appendix E was used to lead the discussion during this visit.

Overview

Laura Lee met with Aisling McKenna, Director of Quality Promotion and Institutional Research at DCU.

DCU has a staff population of 863 and a total student population of 9,610 (undergraduate 84%, postgraduate 16%.) It was ranked 380th in the QS World Rankings for 2016-2017. The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2016-2017 ranked UCD as 202nd in Europe and between 401st - 500th in the world.

DCU's response rate to the ISSE was 32% in 2016. This was the highest response rate of the participating universities.

Overview of the ISSE at DCU

DCU view the technical rigour of the ISSE (reliability, validity) as a strong benefit thereof.

Academic staff have reported that ISSE data at the programme level is a useful source of information.

Since the introduction of the ISSE, DCU has made a conscious effort to reduce the number of surveys administered to the student population. Specifically, surveys which are deemed to duplicate the feedback gathered through the ISSE are not administered within DCU. There has also been a notable decrease in the amount of student-student research surveys in recent years.

DCU conduct a bi-annual student experience survey for 1st year undergraduate students. The theme of the survey varies over time e.g. focus on transition issues, sense of belonging, orientation. An attempt is made not to cover themes which are included in the ISSE.

Use of incentives

The ISSE is incentivised within the university. Students are offered the chance of winning 10 €50 All4One vouchers. Chances to win these vouchers are spread across the three-week responding window. There is one larger prize of an iPad. Social media is also utilised to promote participation; in 2016, a number of gym passes were eligible to be won by ISSE respondents who were required to take a screenshot of the final page of the survey (thank you page) and post it to social media tagging a number of people in the post. The winners of each of these draws are posted on DCU Loop (online teaching environment). The Student's Union are also responsible for making promotional videos.

Dissemination of ISSE data

In order to investigate ISSE results at the programme level, 3 years of DCU ISSE data are aggregated. This ensures a minimum number of 100 responses for each individual programme.

All academic staff have access to the reports from other Schools. This is enabled through an online system.

ISSE results are shared with the Students Union Representative Councils, and various academic committees.

Qualitative ISSE comments are sent to associate Deans for Teaching and Learning. The comments are interpreted and shared as appropriate. Qualitative feedback is also examined in faculty teaching meetings. To date, sentiment analysis has been undertaken on qualitative ISSE comments. Sentiment analysis is the process of determining whether a piece of writing is positive, negative, or neutral. It is commonly used to discover how people feel about a topic.

Inclusion of ISSE data in other processes

It is a requirement of both annual and periodic quality review processes that some indicator of student feedback is included. As such, results of ISSE may be incorporated into the Quality Review process. To facilitate this, ISSE results are made available to Programme Chairpersons who coordinate the programmes of study offered by DCU.

Resources associated with ISSE

Responsibility for the analysis and distribution of the ISSE data lies with Institutional Research and Analysis.

Approximately 10 weeks of the academic year are devoted to management of ISSE. Four are devoted to planning, communication, and the management and promotion of the survey when it is live. The remaining six weeks are spread across the academic year and are devoted to analysis, communication, presentations to relevant committees.

Suggestions on Student Feedback at the National Level

The following suggestions were made during the consultation:

- A maximum of 2-3 university-wide surveys should be conducted annually.
- It is important to utilise other methods of student feedback e.g. targeted focus groups. Surveys should not be considered as the only means of gathering student feedback. Although they are convenient, respect for the student body should be paramount.
- ISSE data is most interesting at the level of the individual discipline. Efforts should be made to increase response numbers that enable analysis at that level.
- Academic staff may be encouraged to promote the survey through recognition of the value of analysis at programme level (which may only be achieved when there is are high response numbers).
- Academic staff should be given advance notice of the survey launch.
- Engagement with the Students Union is critical in order to promote ISSE participation from the student body.
- Big and small incentives are useful for increasing response rates. It is a good idea to include a larger number of smaller prizes, thus increasing a student's chances of winning a prize through participation.
- All relevant outlets should be utilised to promote participation in the survey e.g. digital noticeboards, pop-up booths, etc.
- If the university wishes to utilise charitable donations as an incentive, it could be beneficial to give students a choice about which charity the money goes to. The university could offer a certain amount of money per completed survey, up to the value of a decided total.
- A dedicated website closing the loop for students and staff is ideal.

- A student feedback “expert” within the university would be ideal. This individual could project manage the ISSE and other university-wide surveys.
- Considerations around the use of ISSE data are crucial. It is ideal to consider a multitude of ways in which ISSE data could be utilised e.g. how can the data be used to serve a variety of purposes? How can ISSE data be utilised to its maximum capacity? Where can the data go?

Appendix E
Interview Schedule for Visit to DCU

Bullet pointed items are prompts.

Engagement with the survey

1. How are such response rates being achieved?
    - Advertising?
    - Communication?
    - Rewards?

Analysis of data

1. Who is responsible for the analysis of ISSE data?
2. How is qualitative data analysed?
3. What are the resources (staff, time) associated with the analysis?
4. What software is used?
5. What kinds of reports are produced?
    - What levels are these reports at e.g. programme, School?

Distribution

1. How are results, both qualitative and quantitative, distributed?
2. Who is responsible for the distribution of ISSE data?

Impact

1. How is ISSE data used internally?
2. Who is responsible for closing the loop on ISSE data?

Appendix F
Visit to UCD

In order to examine best practice in student feedback at the module level within the Irish higher education system, and to assess how challenges facing UCC might be overcome, Laura Lee and Elizabeth Noonan visited University College Dublin (UCD) in April 2017. The interview schedule in Appendix G was used to lead the discussion during this visit. The specific focus of this consultation was student feedback systems at the module level.

Overview

The UCC team met with Aine Galvin, Director of Teaching and Learning; Maura McGinn, Director of Institutional Research; and Elizabeth Crean, Programme Assistant, Office of the Registrar.

UCD has a staff population of over 1,429 and a total student population of 19,540 (76% undergraduate, 24% postgraduate). It was ranked 176th in the QS World Rankings for 2016-2017. The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2016-2017 ranked UCD as 100th in Europe and between 201st - 250th in the world.

Module feedback at UCD

UCD introduced a university-wide online system for student feedback at the module level in 2009.

UCD students are asked to provide feedback on 6 modules in semester 1 and 6 in semester 2. Only students who take modules running in the summer months complete semester 3 feedback. Students receive an initial scheduled email per semester requesting their participation in the student module survey, following by periodic reminder emails targeted at those who have not submitted their feedback. These emails are issued centrally.

Modules are required to have 5+ enrolled students to be included in the module feedback system.

Response rates for the module survey are usually between 25-30%, although there is variation between modules.

The survey consists of five core likert scale questions plus two open-ended questions. Although the option is there for staff to add additional questions to the module survey, many choose to just use the core questions.

UCD are hoping to move towards a fully mobile system that will allow students to easily complete the survey on tablets, mobile phones, or any device of their choosing.

Promotion of the module survey

While the survey is still open, Heads of Schools receive an email with the response rates of their students outlined. A comparison is made to the previous year's response rate. Heads of Schools are asked to promote student engagement with the survey as required.

Communications advertising the survey occur across a variety of platforms. For students: a message appears on the current student's web page, containing a link to the survey; a Blackboard announcement contains a link to survey; a branded reminder slide with a link to the survey appears on television display screens; students receive emails at designated time points. For staff: module coordinators receive emails with e-poster and PowerPoint slides at times when the survey is open to staff to be edited, and when the survey is open to students

It is possible for the UCD team to track the number of views/downloads of the results within the module feedback system. This gives an indication of engagement with the data by module coordinators, Heads of Schools, Heads of Subject.

Dissemination of results

"Module enhancement reports" are available to module coordinators and Heads of School/Subject on InfoHub, UCD's dedicated services and information portal for staff. These reports detail the characteristics of the module in terms of profile student enrollments, grade distribution data, module feedback response rates and results of core questions 1-5. Heads of School see information for all modules in the School, and individual module coordinators only see information pertaining to modules for which they are responsible.

UCD does not utilise a system of "cut off points" for Likert scale questions e.g. 4.5/5 is "excellent teaching".

Inclusion of student feedback in other processes

Student module feedback may be included as a part of applications for faculty promotion. The online faculty promotions system draw relevant data from a variety of sources including HR, Research Management System, Curriculum Management System and Student Feedback on Modules, for inclusion in the promotions application. Quantitative data from core questions 1-5 from the last 5 years are automatically collated into a report and made available to the applicant for inclusion. Qualitative comments are excluded. Whilst applicants are encouraged to include this report, they is no compulsion. There is no facility to manually upload any other form of student feedback. The university are moving towards a system whereby applicants will be able to provide commentary on the feedback provided by students.

UCD's Quality Office advises Schools to student feedback information as part of review documentation.

Resources associated with the module survey

The software used by UCD for the student module survey was developed in-house.

Due to the length of operation time, UCD's system can be described as mature. The management of the module survey requires less resources now than it did in the first 3-4 years of operation. Per semester, approximately eight days are devoted to the module survey by staff in the Office of the Registrar, Institutional Research, and Teaching and Learning. A specialist contact is also available in IT as required.

Suggestions for Student Feedback at the Module Level

The following suggestions were made during the consultation:

- An explicit definition of the purpose of feedback is essential. In particular, two decisions need to be made:
  a) At what level will feedback be sought i.e. programme/module?
  b) What is actually being evaluated i.e. the student's overall experience of the module/programme or the quality of the teacher(s)/teaching?

- Issues of ownership and responsibility are crucial e.g. who is responsible for responding to academic queries? Institutional commitment to the process is key.
- Deliberations about where the system should sit should be grounded in considerations surrounding the driver(s) of the process e.g. why are we collecting this data and how will it be used? To drive teaching and learning/quality assurance/institutional research?
- Decisions must be made about who has access to the data arising from student feedback systems e.g. who has access to qualitative comments?
- It is essential to consider how student feedback may be incorporated into applications for teaching promotions. This ties into considerations about the purpose of feedback – if data are reflective of the student's general experience of the module, how much does that tell us about the quality of teaching? An explicit statement is required that details how student feedback data will be utilised.
- A dedicated member of staff should be available to discuss results at the level of individual Schools.
- A beneficial use of student module feedback is to examine the performance of individual modules year on year and on foot of new developments.
- It is possible to use student feedback data in a variety of ways, and analysis can be conducted at a variety of levels e.g. at the level of individual student groups. Suggestions for tailored analyses included: to explore student feedback over the lifetime of a student, links to Frist Destinations Reports, links to career choices of graduates.
- A review of student feedback systems at the module level is required every few years.
- Continued resource investment is required to maximise the potential use of module feedback data.

Appendix G
Interview Schedule for Visit to UCD

Bullet pointed items are prompts.

Governance

1. Who is responsible for the module feedback system?
    - Are there resources contained within a number of offices?
2. How were questions contained in the survey arrived at?
    - Pilot study?

Logistics

1. What software is used?
2. How is the survey set up?
3. How are results analysed?
    - Both quantitative and qualitative.
4. What reporting facilities are available?
5. How are results distributed within the university to staff and students?
6. How much time/resources are devoted to the module survey?

Engagement with the survey

1. How do students engage?
    - Response rates?
2. Do PG students complete the survey?
3. How do Heads of School engage with the survey?

Closing the loop

1. How has the module feedback impacted on teaching and learning?
    - How is data used?
2. Who is responsible for making sure data is responded to?
    - Are there particular benefits to having both quantitative and qualitative items?
    - Are these data used in different ways?

Bigger picture

1. What are the main benefits associated with the system?
2. Are there pitfalls within the system?
3. If starting from scratch, what advice would you give about running a module-wide survey?
4. How are results used in the context of quality reviews of academic units?
5. How are results used in the context of teaching promotion?
    - Are other evaluations of teaching used?
6. Is the module survey system viewed as being formative or summative in nature?

Appendix H
Consultation with Professor Alan Davidson

A consultation with Professor Alan Davidson, Dean for the Enhancement of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment at The Robert Gordon University Aberdeen, was undertaken by Laura Lee in April 2017. Professor Davidson has had extensive involvements in quality assurance and enhancement at the national and international levels. The purpose of this consultation was to draw on Professor Davidson's sectoral and institutional knowledge of Teaching and Learning/Quality aspects of student feedback systems.

Having been presented with an overview of the challenges facing UCC in terms of student feedback, Professor Davidson acknowledged the frequency of such challenges within universities, as well as their complexity.

Local and National Surveys

When considering the positioning/significance of internal (e.g. SES) and external (ISSE) surveys within the university, the following points were highlighted:

- The perceived importance of league tables/university rankings in Ireland is an important factor in determining the relative importance of internal and external surveys.
- It is pragmatic for UCC to continue engaging with the ISSE.
- A position statement on the university's approach to ISSE may be beneficial. The position statement could outline how the ISSE relates to the SES. Equally critical is to outline how the surveys differ. The statement could acknowledge that internal and external surveys have different foci – the internal survey is more aligned with UCC culture and context. It is crucial to state that the internal survey allows us to examine what is working well, what is not working so well, and to take action on the feedback. The internal survey may be positioned as allowing more frank/critical feedback.
- There is an option to use identical forms of the external survey for all other years (e.g. intermediary year undergraduates). This can be seriously confounded if students do not see desired changes being made, when they are providing annual feedback on the same items.
- A key point is to determine who is responsible for taking action for both surveys. This question can only be answered in light of the individual university's culture.
- Universities must control their desire to over survey students and over complicate the surveys (e.g. asking questions at every possible level – institution, programme, module, etc).

Student-student Research Surveys

- The presence of large number of student-student surveys represents a significant cultural aspect of UCC.
- Future management of student-student surveys requires discussions between the President, Quality Review personnel, and relevant Heads of Schools. The purpose of these discussions should be to ascertain the boundaries of student-student research surveys, with a view to drastically reducing/banning student-student research surveys.
- Alternative options for student research should be discussed with relevant stakeholders. As an end-goal, it would be ideal to discourage student-student surveys.
- *If student-student research surveys are not addressed, any other changes to student feedback systems will be of limited effectiveness.*

- Although a discouragement of student-student surveys would inhibit the practice of the Schools concerned, it would be ideal for Heads of School to be an active part of the move in a new direction.
- The fact that students do not have automatic access to the All Student email server is a benefit – there is a mechanism to reduce/stop the flow of student-student research survey requests.

Student Feedback on Teaching and Learning

- It is critical to decide whether or not some element of a module/course level feedback system should be standardised. Not having a standardised aspect leaves a noticeable gap in the quality review process.
- If a standardised element is to be incorporated into a module/course level feedback system, it is idea to include short questions.
- The inclusion of qualitative questions is optimal. Options for open-ended questions include:
    - What has been good about this module?
    - What would you change about this module?
- It is not useful to explicitly ask for negative aspects of a module/course. When the characteristics of effective feedback are considered, we see a need to provide suggestions for change as opposed to merely outlining what went wrong.
- Is it good practice to position student surveys as only one of a multitude of approaches to gathering student feedback.
- Teaching staff should be encouraged to use non-formal methods to keep in touch with their students. Teachers should be encouraged to engage in discussion with their students. An emphasis on alternative methods of feedback (e.g. focus groups, formal and informal discussion) is an option to reduce the volume and detail of module level surveys.
- There are considerations around when module/course level feedback should be collected. For modules, there are options to collect feedback at the end of each semester, or at the end of the academic year. When data are collected at the end of the academic year, there is a concern that students may have forgotten important aspects of their semester one module experiences. Course feedback may be gathered once or more during the course.
- It is common practice to include student feedback in applications for teaching promotions. Some form of quantitative comment on teacher's performance is common practice.
- The complexity of ratings of teaching effectiveness should be acknowledged, and student feedback should be viewed as an indicator of teaching performance.
- It would be ideal to allow teaching staff an opportunity to comment on student feedback in their promotion application. Teachers could present their perspective on the feedback, and critically reflect on actions taken to reflect student views. Critically, where actions have not been taken in light of student feedback, teaching staff can provide explanation of their decisions. Such a system will allow highly responsive teachers to present that dimension of their teaching practice.

Framing Feedback as a Process within the University

- Framing feedback as a process within the university requires a multi-pronged approach.
- A critical, short message should be relayed to students outlining the following:
    - What changes to student feedback have been made.
    - What students will be asked to do.
    - What can be expected.
- This message should come from a number of critical figures within the university. These are:
    - The President.

  - The Students Union (who will use their own words to relay required messages).
  - Key academic staff e.g. Heads of School.
- UK Students Union campaigns may be useful examples in this regard. All available methods of disseminating this message should be utilised i.e. pop up booths, display boards, etc.

Reducing the Volume of Student Surveys: A Possible System

- Professor Davidson spoke of a bespoke survey system which had been implemented in two universities he had worked in. This system was implemented with the intention of reducing the number of internal surveys administered to the student body. Within this system, a bespoke questionnaire was created for each student. The student logged into the online system with their student ID number. The system automatically produced a bespoke survey for each individual student based on student records (e.g. modules on which student was registered). The first level of the survey was related to general institutional experience e.g. experience of services. The second level of the survey was module specific.
- A critical part of this system was a protocol that stated that the university would not abuse the potential to identify students. Any attempt from staff to identify students would constitute a serious ethical breach and would be recognised as an extremely serious staff discipline issue. Additionally, the Students Unions within the universities were given the opportunity to audit the internal systems. The Students Union were also offered the responsibility of investigating any complaints that arose regarding suspected breaches of confidentiality.
- This system proved extremely beneficial for examining the experience of particular groups of students i.e. students with disabilities.

Appendix I
Using ISSE to enhance Teaching and Learning

Laura Lee attended a workshop in Dublin on the 10th of May 2017. The workshop was entitled: "Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE)…supporting the enhancement of Teaching and Learning within disciplines", and was co-sponsored by ISSE and the National Forum. A number of topics were covered, and highlights of the workshop are included here.

General

It was acknowledged that full integration of the ISSE into Irish higher education institutions will be a lengthy process.

The ISSE aspires to be so useful to Irish institutions that they voluntarily reduce the number of surveys they are administering to their students.

It is important to acknowledge the student-institution partnership perspective adopted by the ISSE. This is in contrast to the satisfaction focus of the UK based NSS.

An ISSE instrument for research postgraduate students will be in development soon. It will also be possible for institutions to add a certain number of additional questions from an item bank in the future.

Promotion of the ISSE

The use of incentives has been a controversial topic in the history of the ISSE. Institutions need to consider how the incentivisation of one survey and not others within the university may place relative value on the incentivised survey.

Seeing the feedback loop being closed is arguably the best incentive for students.

At its core, ISSE is about the interactions that students have with the staff that they see regularly. As such, it is these staff that may be most effective in promoting the survey. Communications from other staff within the university may not have the same impact as those staff who are known to students.

Examples of how other Irish institutions have promoted the ISSE were noted:

- Athlone IT have incorporated ISSE data into their programmatic review system, thus encouraging academic staff to promote student response to the survey.
- Blanchardstown IT set up tables with computers in the student restaurant on campus. Staff manned these tables and encouraged students to complete the survey as they entered and left the restaurant.
- In TCD, when one faculty experienced very high numbers of responses, the Quality Office produced examples of reports which were only able to be produced due to the high number of responses. This encouraged other faculties to promote the survey among their students.

Data analysis/use of ISSE data

The most interesting and meaningful variations in ISSE data arise within institutions, rather than between.

How the ISSE will be resourced internally is the decision of the individual university. There is value in a dedicated person/team responsible for data analysis.

There are many ways of utilising the data gathered from the ISSE e.g. enhancing teaching and learning, quality assurance/enhancement processes, managing resources, guiding staff development activities, marketing to prospective students, etc.

The volume of data produced by the ISSE is enormous. It is advisable to take a portion of the data that is most meaningful to the institution and analyse this in-depth. This can be achieved in a number of ways. For example, if a particular theme is topical at a given point within the university, data which is most closely aligned with that theme may be extracted from the ISSE and analysed in-depth. Alternatively, preliminary analysis of the entire ISSE dataset may indicate certain areas of interest, which may be explored in more detail. The example of the “Looking Deeper” section (Chapter 5) of the 2016 ISSE results publication available on the studentsurvey.ie website was used as an example of this process. This approach is arguably more beneficial than engaging in such extensive and lengthy data analysis of the entire which leaves no time to actually address identified issues or to discuss results with the student body. This process will also allow for the identification of themes which can be further examined through an analysis of corresponding qualitative data.

If something stands out as peculiar in the data analysis, the best approach is to discuss this finding with students. It is essential to apply professional judgement to response numbers to ascertain what level of inference can be made from student feedback.

Although there have been recent changes to the ISSE item bank, approximately two thirds of the current items have been in the survey since its introduction. This allows for the comparison of scores on these items across years. It also allows for a collation of data from particular ISSE items across a number of years. This has the potential to allow data analysis at finer levels e.g. School/course level. Dependent on items of interest, we currently have access to either 2 or 5 years of data to examine.

The potential value of the national dataset should be acknowledged. This dataset allows an institution to look at their results in context. For example, how do results of students engaged in Arts and Humanities studies compare against those contained within the national database?

Dissemination of the ISSE data/closing the feedback loop

As the ISSE results are available to institutions in early May, it is ideal to provide students with some class of ISSE feedback before the end of the academic year. This may be the result of a very preliminary analysis of the data, and may only serve to highlight one headline issue. At this point, feedback could take the form of a very brief email with the message “You have an issue with X and we plan to address that”. Total silence for 11 months does not present students with a positive message.

It is essential to take the results of ISSE to Colleges, Schools, etc. An ISSE centred dialogue needs to take place within institutions.

Simply disseminating ISSE data without accompanying explanation is potentially dangerous; issues may be perceived where there are no meaningful problems.

Appendix J
Visit to UCC by Dr Ian Pickup

Dr Ian Pickup, Director of Academic Services at SOAS University of London visited UCC in March 2017. Dr Pickup presented on the Teaching Excellence Framework implemented in the UK, and highlighted implications of such a system in the Irish context. The highlights of Dr Pickup's presentation included:

- Before requesting feedback from students on teaching quality, it is essential to define teaching excellence in a given university context.
- What is the pedagogy of UCC, and how can we communicate this to external bodies?
- There is a danger that unique, culture-bound messages from a particular university are lost within national level surveys. An internal survey that captures student experience has the potential to capture what it is that makes a university unique i.e. level of diversity within student body, perceived inclusivity of the student body, disability support, etc.
- Methods of external communication should be considered.
- Other methods of collecting student feedback should be considered. These methods may augment that collected through statutory means.
- Expertise and institutional capacity to understand and work with statutory and non-statutory data should be developed.
- Commitment to student engagement should be maintained, no matter how challenging that may be.

Consultation with Dr Ian Pickup

Laura Lee met with Dr Pickup on a one-to-one basis during his visit to UCC. The purpose of the consultation was to draw on Dr Pickup's institutional experience with student experience systems. The take-home messages from that consultation were:

- The retention of an internal survey which captures unique experience of the UCC student body was deemed ideal.
- The idea of an improved internal communications system (e.g. student Intranet) was deemed ideal.
- Continuous investment in resources is required to ensure that all university-wide surveys remain operational and essential elements of the feedback cycle are ensured e.g. closing the loop.
- Ethical considerations around the volume of surveys administered to the student body are crucial. Students should not be in a position where they feel they have no choice but to participate in surveys.
- Student involvement in all survey activity was thought to be crucial i.e. involvement of Students Union representatives in decision making around survey activity directed at the student body.

Appendix K
Consultation with UCC Students' Union

Laura Lee met with Mr Eolann Sheehan, the UCC Students' Union President, and Mr Ian Hutchinson, the UCC Students Union Education Officer in May 2017. The purpose of this consultation was to ascertain the perspective of the student's union, as representatives of the wider student body, on various levels of student feedback systems. The opinions of the Student's Union representatives were sought on a number of aspects relevant to student feedback at UCC e.g. the positioning of local and national surveys, student feedback on teaching and learning, student-student research surveys, promotion of university-wide surveys. Highlights of the consultation are included below, divided by theme.

Local and National Level Surveys

- The SES was acknowledged as an important contributor to knowledge surrounding the experience of UCC students at a local level. The SES is perceived as a more personalised survey than the ISSE, which provides useful data related to aspects of UCC specific experience e.g. engagement and satisfaction with student services.
- It was thought that separate branding of the SES and ISSE would not be ideal. It was acknowledged that the wider student body are more concerned with seeing appropriates actions being taken as a result of their feedback, rather than the separate positioning and branding of internal and external surveys. It was also recognised that students may be confused by separate positioning of ISSE and SES, despite proposed clear statements about the purpose and scope of each.
- The name of the 2017 student survey was noted as being an important aspect of branding. It was felt that the "UCC Student Survey" was not particularly catchy, and failed to capture the attention of the student body. "The Big Student Survey" was noted as an alternative. The need for an obvious indication of sponsorship of the survey was also noted i.e. who is responsible for making sure that our feedback is actioned?
- It was acknowledged that the need for ISSE respondents to input their student identification numbers could be potentially problematic. This effect may be different across different cohorts i.e. final year students may be more aware of/concerned by the potential for breaches of confidentiality.
- The timing of university wide surveys was noted as a significant factor affecting response rates. RAG week was noted as being a problematic period for survey release.

Student Feedback on Teaching and Learning

- It was deemed essential to determine the purpose of student feedback on teaching and learning.
- It was thought critical that feedback be disseminated to relevant management e.g. Heads of School, Heads of College.
- It was acknowledged that the collection of bespoke student feedback at a local School level could have ethical ramifications if students felt obliged to give direct feedback to their lecturers. It was acknowledged that students may be fearful of providing feedback directly to their School, without the involvement of a third party (i.e. university wide module feedback system). As such, the benefits of a semi-standardised system (which would allow module coordinators to add additional questions) were acknowledged. If student feedback was used

for the purpose of teaching promotion applications, it was felt that teaching staff should be allowed a space in which to comment on the feedback provided from their students.

- A system which allowed for the collection of both formative and summative feedback was deemed ideal.
- It was noted that course level evaluations may be particularly important for interdisciplinary courses. It was suggested that a brief course level survey could be integrated with module level feedback for final year undergraduate students and taught postgraduate students.

Student-student Research Surveys

- Student-student research surveys were acknowledged as being a significant contributor to the survey fatigue experienced by the student body. It was suggested that a cost-benefit analysis of student-student research surveys be conducted, whereby the benefits to a small number of the student population are weighed against the disruption caused to the wider student population. It was acknowledged that a dramatic reduction in the number of student-student research surveys would be ideal.

University-wide Surveys: Increasing Response Rates and Closing the Loop

- Closing the loop was deemed to be the biggest challenge facing student feedback systems at UCC. The potential disparity between ownership of and responsibility for student surveys were noted. Identifying who is responsible for taking action on feedback is crucial.
- In terms of promoting university-wide surveys and closing the loop for them, it was noted that students need to be targeted mainly where the student body are i.e. on social media. Promotional videos featuring relevant management/academic staff and representatives from the Student's Union was noted as a potentially successful method of promotion and closing the loop. Additionally, the benefits of "on the ground" contact with students in lectures was noted.
- The "You Said, We Did" campaign launched this year in relation to results of the 2015 SES was acknowledged as being an effective means of closing the loop with the student body. Increased marketing of this campaign in future years could be useful for closing the loop, and further increasing response rates.
- Novel methods of closing the loop were also noted. For example, in recent years, students requested access to greater numbers of electrical sockets in the library. Branded stickers could be attached to a number of sockets outlining that this change was a result of feedback given through student surveys.
- The idea of one survey which would target different levels of student feedback (such as that discussed in consultation with Professor Alan Davidson) was warmly received by the Students Union representatives. It was acknowledged that the ownership of different levels of feedback would need to be explicitly stated from the outset.