

GATHERING STUDENT VOICES THROUGH COURSE-LEVEL QUESTIONNAIRES: FINDINGS FROM A STUDENT ADVISORY GROUP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By Alan Donnelly and
the Student Advisory
Group

Gathering Student Voices through Course-Level Questionnaires: Findings from a Student Advisory Group

1. Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the 17 student representatives in the student advisory group who gave up their time to report their experiences and insights. The members of the advisory group who wished to be named on this summary report are: Maham Akbar, Aaron Baker, Ece Dagtekin, Chloe Hinchliffe, Georgie Lee, Abi Marchant, Mohammed Al Mohamedi, Sophia Oghenedoro, Abe Rickhuss, Sofia Robertson, Joshua Tann, Summer Vernon, and Cong Quyen.

2. Introduction

Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQs) have previously been administered at the end of modules at the University. However, challenges relating to poor response rates and a lack of clarity about their purpose meant that the approach struggled to meet its intended goals. This prompted a consideration of alternative approaches to gathering student voices. Course-Level Evaluation Questionnaires (CLEQ), which allow students to provide feedback at the end of each semester/trimester, were piloted as a replacement for MEQs in three Schools and Institutes in the 2025/26 academic year.

CLEQs achieved an overall response rate of 11% in semester/trimester one and 13% in semester/trimester two¹. The response rates in two Schools and Institutes were broadly similar to those that they had obtained in MEQs in the previous academic year (2024/25), while one School/Institute had a lower CLEQ response rate.

This brief report summarises findings from one key component of a wider evaluation of the implementation and outcomes of CLEQs. This component involved establishing a student advisory group, who were supported and paid to contribute to the evaluation. The findings of the overall evaluation of CLEQs will be reported separately.

3. Methodology

Student representatives, who held either course representative or School/Institute lead representative roles, in the three Schools and Institutes were initially invited to submit an expression of interest to join the advisory group. A total of 17 student representatives from a range of courses and levels of study were selected and paid (in gift vouchers equivalent to an hourly wage of a Student Researcher at the University) for up to five and a half hours work each. The student advisory group undertook the following tasks:

- Contributed to online meetings and reflective activities to help shape the overall evaluation, share evidence and ideas, and reflect on findings and recommendations.

¹ Two of the three Schools and Institutes excluded postgraduate students from their sample in semester/trimester two to prioritise participation in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES).

- Participated in cognitive interviews to explore how students interpreted questionnaire items and response options, and to assess the extent to which these interpretations aligned with their intended meaning.

4. Findings

a. Awareness of the questionnaire

Awareness of CLEQs among members of the advisory group was very low, despite the majority responding to the questionnaire in semester/trimester one. Several reasons were attributed to this, for example, the belief that it was difficult to distinguish CLEQs from other student voice requests and a perceived overreliance on email communication from central teams or staff in Schools/Institutes. Despite a wider communication strategy being implemented in semester/trimester two, most of the promotion that the advisory group recalled were still via emails.

There was evidence that CLEQs had been promoted or embedded within lectures or seminars on a small number of courses (those involved in the pilot), but the student advisory group had no recollection of this happening specifically on their courses.

b. Perceptions of the questionnaire as a student voice approach

While there was acceptance that questionnaire-based approaches had a role in quality assurance, the student advisory group described them as often lacking purpose and being too impersonal and rigid to fully capture students' experiences. Other student voice mechanisms were preferred that were more dialogue-based, purposeful and timely, such as mid-module review practices, course representative systems and in-class feedback approaches. These were viewed as more authentic representations of students' voices and effective for informing changes to courses.

c. Interpretations of questionnaire items

Findings from the cognitive testing activity indicated that three of the five closed-ended questionnaire items were interpreted in a broadly consistent manner and were well understood by participants, indicating that they did not require modifications. These questions were: 'How often does feedback help you to improve your work?'; 'How often do teaching staff make the subject engaging?'; and 'How well have teaching staff supported your learning?'.

The closed-ended question 'How well have assessments allowed you to demonstrate what you have learned?' was tested. The term 'assessments' was most strongly associated with summative assessments rather than formative tasks, highlighting that minor revisions could improve the clarity of the question.

Responses to the question 'How well organised is your course?' demonstrated that it was problematic. The broadness and multi-faceted nature of the term 'organisation' meant that students focused on different aspects of the course. Although aligned to the National Student Survey (NSS), responses indicated that the question would be better replaced with more specific questions.

5. Recommendations

The findings from the student advisory group, in conjunction with evidence from the wider evaluation, informed decisions about the future approach to gathering student voices at the University. Following this review, University leadership decided to move away from centralised and formal student voice questionnaires, such as MEQs and CLEQs. In 2026/27, Schools and Institutes will have autonomy to further design and deliver student voice approaches that are connected to strategic university priorities and aligned with the needs of their courses and students.

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