

QUICK GUIDE FOR STAFF

Maximising Course and Teaching Evaluation Response Rates

Background

Achieving satisfactory response rates from evaluations conducted online is a recognised problem across the international tertiary education sector. There is some research to support the fact that the *ratings* or *results* of online evaluations with low response rates are in fact very similar to comparable evaluations (usually delivered in other formats) with higher response rates.¹ However, many academics would tend to question the usefulness or credibility of any individual evaluation with a very low response rate.

Practical strategies for maximising response rates

The following list of possible strategies to maximise response rates has been developed from recent research literature on the subject, feedback from TLQC representatives (in a 2012 exercise on response rates), a survey of practice in the Australian Go8 universities, and Academic Quality Office experience in maximising response rates for the online Learning and Teaching Survey.

University-level strategies

- A centrally organised campaign to maximise response rates, prior to and during the main evaluation periods. A co-ordinated campaign can have a significant impact on results to individual evaluation surveys in a department.²
- The Academic Quality office provides resources for teachers to publicise evaluations in class (guidance documentation, PowerPoint slides, information for staff on students on using mobile devices in class); and organises digital signage across the University to promote the evaluation period. We also use global announcements in Canvas, emails to students (including reminders to non-respondents), social media, and we work with the AUSA and the class representative system to employ 'student ambassadors' to promote the evaluation period.
- Providing information for staff and students on understanding evaluation questions and interpreting evaluation responses.
- Providing guidance and templates for staff on how to provide feedback to students.

¹ See Stowell, J. R. *et al*, 'Comparison of online and classroom-based student evaluations of instruction', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 37 (2012) , pp. 465-473, particularly literature review on p. 466. Spooen, P., *et al*, 'On the validity of Student Evaluation of Teaching: the state of the art', *Review of Educational Research*, 83, 4, 2013, p. 625.

² See case-study discussed in Bennett, L. and Nair, C. S., 'A Recipe for Effective Participation Rates for Web-Based Surveys' *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 35 (2010) p.357-365

Faculty / Departmental / School strategies

- Using staff meetings to discuss effective evaluation techniques, and to highlight the evaluation period and the importance of communicating to students.
- Provision of staff outside the course team to explain the process in greater depth to student classes.
- Discussion of evaluation techniques and innovations in academic committees.
- Discussion of overall evaluation results and follow-up actions, and how these are reported back to students.

Individual teacher strategies

- Personal communication in class to students that the evaluation is taken seriously.
- Monitoring response rates during the evaluation period.
- Reporting the results/outcomes of previous evaluations to students, an integral component of an effective evaluation process that can help raise the credibility of questionnaires with students.³
- Using the strong interpersonal relationships between staff and students in small classes can lead to particularly good responses (going some way to compensate for the low numbers)
- Engagement with class representatives
- Reminders in class or through Canvas to students to complete the evaluations.
- Taking advantage of IT already used in the course - a high level of online conversation between students and the course team can carry over into a strong evaluation response rate which would be treated as 'another conversation'.
- Completing surveys in class (students may complete on mobile devices)
- Using formative evaluation techniques during the course can help students to understand that their constructive feedback is important, and is acted upon. This in turn can help to maximise response rates for summative evaluation.

³ See further discussion of the feedback process for evaluation in Stein *et al.*, 'Using student evaluations to enhance teaching practice: Closing the loop – Summary Guide', especially p. 6, available online at <http://akoaootearoa.ac.nz/download/ng/file/group-3987/using-student-evaluations-to-enhance-teaching-practice-closing-the-loop.pdf>.