
UCD MARKETING DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

**Findings from
Students of UCD with Regards to their Attitudes,
Perceptions and Motivation for Participation in
the Student Feedback on Modules Survey**

Prepared for:

UCD Teaching & Learning

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SECTION ONE:

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction:

For the purpose of this report, the following term is defined:

- **SFM:** Student Feedback on Modules Survey

The primary objective of this project was to design and implement a marketing communications strategy in order to raise awareness and increase uptake of the student feedback on modules system.

The Marketing Development Programme undertook primary research to provide the Teaching and Learning Department with key insights and recommendations from students which would be beneficial in the creation of the communications strategy for the SFM survey.

1.1 Methodology:

In-depth interviews were carried out with undergraduate and postgraduate students in order to gain an understanding of their opinions and attitudes towards the Student Feedback on Modules survey.

Table 1: Breakdown of Sample Details for Research

Level of Study	Number Conducted
Undergraduate	10
Post Graduate	5
SFM Participation	Number Conducted
Have previously taken part in SFM	7
Have not previously taken part in SFM	8

Table 1 outlines the breakdown of students who took part in the in-depth interviews. The interviews were carried out on both Blackrock and Belfield campuses in order to gain an insight into the opinions of both postgraduate and undergraduate students. The Marketing Development Programme has made observations and recommendations based on the research conducted, which are detailed in this report

1.2 Awareness and Perceptions:

In relation to students' awareness levels of the SFM survey, all respondents had heard of it. Furthermore, they had opinions regarding what the survey aims to achieve within the college. Students believe that the University hopes to use student feedback to improve courses offered.

Students are unaware of who runs the survey within UCD. Some believe that it is run by heads of various school departments while others were of the opinion that the survey was organised by the UCD Board. Students have no knowledge of the role that the Teaching and Learning Department plays in the implementation of the survey. It is therefore recommended that students are educated about the Teaching and Learning department and their involvement in the SFM survey.

When students were asked what they think happens with the information collected, results varied across the respondents. Students were sceptical about the impact their feedback would have on modules

"Honestly, I didn't think we were going to be listened to".

Some students felt that nothing is done with the information whilst others believed it was looked at to some extent, but in no great detail. One student believed that their previous experience with the college resulted in a lack of trust in UCD staff. One suggestion to combat this would be to educate students on the process of analysing feedback.

Only 1 in 15 respondents could recall a time when "feedback collected through the survey" resulted in a change within the University. This is worrying as it shows that students are of the opinion that no changes are being implemented "as a result of feedback or that changes are not being communicated to them effectively".

A campaign outlining actions taken as a result of student feedback is recommended. This would include a poster or an email outlining the feedback received and changes implemented as a result. The importance of feedback was a recurring theme throughout the research.

Students feel a sense of responsibility in giving feedback and helping the college improve in the future. It was stated that they would like to help the University improve and make modules better for future students. However their lack of trust in the survey severely hampers their willingness to take part. There is also a degree of indifference towards the college amongst a minority of students, primarily among younger students and those completing an Arts degree.

"The med school involves and engages their students. In Arts, you are a tiny cog in a big wheel."

Lecturers should engage students in the University and, in turn, students will feel a sense of responsibility. This should increase the uptake of the SFM survey.

The majority of students agree that the survey should remain voluntary. The general perception is that a compulsory survey could lead to inaccurate results and resentment amongst some students. A small minority believe they would only do it if it was obligatory.

It is noteworthy that the majority of those who had taken part in the survey had done so because it was filled out in-class and did not impose on their free time.

Those who did not complete the survey cited that they had no belief in it. Furthermore, they thought nothing was done with the information and it was a waste of time that could have been devoted to studying for their exams.

A recommendation based on this finding is that the students are given time in-class to complete the survey. The development of an App for smart phones is an important element of this recommendation as every student may not have their laptop with them in class. However, research shows that over 90 percent of the adult population in Ireland own a smart phone.

Students recommend that an incentive be put in place to encourage participation in the survey. There is a belief that an incentivised, voluntary initiative would result in an improved response rate and better quality of information.

When asked what incentives they would like to be offered, the majority of students stated that free products would be desirable. For example, one respondent recalled a time when a lecturer brought them to a computer lab and provided sandwiches while they completed the survey. Such an incentive would have encouraged a higher number of his fellow students to participate.

Uptake of the survey could increase if students could gain 1 extra percent for completing the survey or receive their results a day earlier than planned. However it is important to note that not all students agreed with the above initiative.

Based on these findings it is recommended that an incentive be offered where possible.

1.3 Method of Feedback:

In relation to how feedback is conducted, the majority of students interviewed agree with the method of communication that is currently being used. They stated that it is the most effective way as a large proportion of students are online for the majority of their day, be it for social or work-related purposes. The traditional, paper feedback method is considered outdated and hard to analyse when collected.

Blackboard was initially considered to be a possible form of distribution. However, upon further reflection interviewees stated it would no longer be confidential, one of the main advantages of the survey. This is a positive finding for the Teaching and Learning Department as it validates their method of communication to UCD students and therefore should continue to be used.

Students open emails from college related addresses, however those sent from the Vice President or the President of UCD are considered generic and deleted before opened. Emails sent by influential figures in UCD such as Programme Directors or lecturers would encourage students to take notice and therefore make them more likely to complete the survey.

The Teaching and Learning Department should establish or build on existing relationships with lecturers and Programme Directors to inform them of the benefits of the survey. The majority of students stated that they are less likely to open an email if they do not recognise the sender, regardless of the subject. In general, students want to be contacted through their UCD connect email address as opposed to their personal account.

Students believe that there is one survey which encompasses feedback for all of their modules. Better education needs to be given to students about the importance of completing surveys for each module. When asked how long they would spend completing the survey, between 2 to 3 minutes was the most popular answer. Interviewees outlined they would be willing to spend up to 10 minutes completing surveys for their combined modules. UCD needs to ensure that the survey is concise in order to increase participation.

There are mixed opinions regarding the time of year the survey is distributed. Over half of the interviewees stated they were happy with the time of year it was emailed to students as long as it does not interrupt their exams.

All students were satisfied with the length of time the survey was open and felt it allowed them to take part when they had time to do so. A majority of them would be more likely to complete it if they could pause their progress and come back to finish at a later time. It was suggested by one student that it would be distributed at the start of each semester, asking students to evaluate the modules they completed during the previous period.

1.4 Relevance of the Survey:

Students are of the opinion that feedback given in these surveys is not taken on board. Previous experience with college staff left one particular student feeling that there is a culture of not taking their opinions on board within the University. For this reason, UCD need to remind them of the importance of the SFM survey. Students need to be made aware of how instrumental they are in shaping the college for the future.

Students have not noticed any changes implemented as a result of the feedback initiative. A suggestion based on this finding, is lecturers should inform students of the changes that have been made based on the feedback given in the previous year.

In order to address the low participation levels of the survey, UCD should engage with influential student figures who could use their status to change the mind-set of the student population. Possible examples could include the auditors of societies or captains of sports clubs.

Students believe they are qualified to make suggestions as to how they should be taught. One respondent stated that;

"Students might not be education experts, but if something is very wrong they'll know. They might not know how to fix it but they can identify the problems."

Students are experiencing the education system from a very different perspective to staff. Many of the students interviewed feel that some lecturers are set in their ways and would pay little attention to suggestions they make. A number of students stated that the lecturer would discard what was being proposed by them. This was attributed to the perception that lecturers believe students are not qualified to make suggestions on how the modules are taught.

Students find it hard to give feedback to lecturers who they believe will not take their suggestions on board. UCD must address this problem as students will not participate in the survey if they feel that no one is paying attention to their suggestions. It needs to be communicated to lecturers the importance of acknowledging the feedback given by their students.

Students stated that a minority may abuse the opportunity to give constructive feedback when completing the survey. Lecturers need to account for this when analysing the results. They abuse an opportunity to voice their opinion while also the wasting the time of both lecturers and the Teaching and Learning Department. A reason for counterproductive feedback may be accredited to students not seeing the importance of the survey.

The potential significance of completing the SFM survey needs to be instilled in students as part of the University culture. This can be achieved by targeting first year students who are new to the system. Those just starting UCD would then see the survey as natural and something that must be filled out after every semester.

1.5 Implementation:

It is necessary that the results of the SFM survey are communicated to students.

"Don't wait until the next round of SFM surveys to tell the students what happened in the last one."

Some students felt that they would not only like feedback on the outcomes of the initiative but they also believe that the decision process should be made more transparent.

"If my suggestion was ignored, why did that happen?"

Others believe that the feedback should be targeted. Students are only interested in hearing about changes specific to their school or course.

Some students would like to be made aware of changes even though they have left the college. They would be more likely to take part in their final year if they knew they would hear about the results later.

It is therefore recommended that a record of all changes be kept in order to implement a communications strategy which is aimed at informing the students of the results of the survey. Three suggestions per school should be communicated to students via email or advertisements around the campus. Posters outlining some of the most dramatic or positive changes should be positioned around campus in the following semester in order to close the feedback loop.

A popular suggestion was the use of face-to-face promotion, with SU representatives going around the campus and telling the students what had happened as a result of their feedback.

APPENDIX ONE:

ASSIGNMENT BRIEF

Background to the Project

Semester one 2010-11 saw the first university-wide implementation of the Student Feedback on Modules system following a pilot [project](#) involving over 7000 students and over 200 modules in the previous academic year. The online survey gives students a chance to provide feedback on their modules and staff the opportunity to use the feedback to improve module design and delivery. The response rate for the semester one survey was 30% (this is the percentage of module surveys completed). The semester two response rate was 22%. The university system was not rolled out for the summer 2011 term as further developments will be needed to cater for the non-traditional delivery of summer modules.

As UCD enters the second year of the SFM System a student-focused marketing and re-branding exercise is necessary. In tandem with the UCD Student Feedback on Modules, Marketing & Re-branding Project communications to [staff](#) will be further developed with a particular focus on closing the feedback loop.

Key Goals

The key goals of the UCD Student Feedback on Modules Marketing and Re-branding Project are to

1. Improve student understanding of the purpose and importance of completing the SFM surveys
2. Gain a better understanding of the reasons behind the decisions that students take with respect to completing or not completing module feedback surveys
3. Create a shift in culture amongst students to develop a sense of shared responsibility with staff for improving UCD's educational offerings
4. Promote a sense of student community which will lead students to find the prospect of other students benefitting from their feedback desirable. (Initial UCD research indicates that some students believe this puts them at a competitive disadvantage.)
5. Rebrand the UCD SFM surveys in a way that is more appealing to students by developing a marketing campaign with an attractive brand for use across a range of media, (posters, website, e-card, Facebook, video, et cetera)
6. Improve the response rate
7. Ensure that the marketing campaign is professionally conducted with respect and sensitivity for the concerns of students (particularly anonymity) and staff (particularly confidentiality).

APPENDIX TWO:

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

SFM Topic Guide

Name of Researcher: _____

Interviewer Name: _____

Belfield	
Carysfort	

Post graduate	
Undergraduate	
Finished studies	

Have taken part in the survey	
Have not taken part in the survey	

Respondent's Name: _____

Course attended at UCD: _____

Contact Number: _____

Date Interview Conducted: _____

Opening to Interview: Speaker Introduction

Hello my name is _____ from the Marketing Development Programme in UCD Michael Smurfit Graduate Business School. I am conducting research today on the Student Feedback on Modules Survey. Thank you for taking the time to help with our research on why people choose to take part in the survey, or not.

Section One: Introduction

1 minute

Explain the Purpose of the Research:

- The research today will take the form of a general discussion, focusing on your participation in SFM after each semester.

Advise of Recording and Ensure Confidentiality:

- The discussion today will be recorded to allow for your comments to be transcribed later. These recordings will be used for data analysis after the discussion. Rest assured that your participation in this research is completely confidential and anonymous, and your personal information will not be passed on to any third party.

Section Two: Awareness and Participation

5 minutes

Firstly, we are going to talk about the SFM survey, and what it involves.

- May I ask, are you aware of the Student feedback on modules survey?
- What do you think it aims to achieve within the college?
- Who do you think runs the survey?
- What do you think is done with the information that is collected?
- Can you think of a time when information that was collected actually resulted in a change within the college?
- Why did you decide to take part (or not) in the survey?
- Do you believe that students should have a responsibility in giving feedback/improving the university?
 - Do you agree with leaving the survey as a voluntary initiative?

Section Three: Method of Feedback
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5 minutes

In relation to -how the feedback is conducted

- The feedback is conducted by filling out a form online; do you think this is the best way to communicate with the student population?
- Do you think there is a better method?
 - Traditional, paper-feedback
 - Through Blackboard
 - Link added to Facebook page
- In the past, have you opened an email that has been sent to you by UCD administration?
 - What kind of subject heading would encourage you to open such an email?
 - Which email address would you prefer to be contacted through, personal or college
- What length of time are you willing to give to answer questions on such a survey?
 - Would you be more likely to fill in the survey if you could pause your progress and come back to it later on?
- Do you agree with the time of year that the survey takes place?
 - Should the survey be open for more or less time?
 - Earlier or later in the semester?

Section Four: Relevance	5 minutes
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I now want to talk to about the impact of the survey and whether you think it is relevant to you.

- Do you think what you say will be taken on board?
 - Why do you think that?
- Have you noticed any change, as a result of the feedback you provided?
- Do you feel that you are qualified to make suggestions on how students should be taught?
- Do you feel that your opinion ties in with the general representation of the student population?
- Do students abuse the opportunity to give constructive feedback by simply giving out about how hard a lecture or exam was?
- Do you/people think it is worthwhile giving feedback on a module when you/they will never benefit from the changes made?

Section Five: Implementation	5 minutes
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Now we would like to discuss the results of the survey with you

- Would you be more likely to take part in such an initiative if:
 - It was publicly guaranteed that changes would be implemented?
 - At the very least a transparent process of consideration by UCD?
- Would you like to be made more aware of the changes that occur as a result of UCD taking feedback on board?
 - How would you like to be made aware?
- If you were to receive feedback, what form would you expect this feedback to come in?
 - Publicity around campus
 - E-mail
 - UCD website
 - Blackboard

- What would you believe are the advantages/disadvantages to giving such feedback?

Probe throughout regarding:

- Confidentiality, unnecessary, no feeling of responsibility, happy with modules, only one voice.
- What do you think needs to be done to ensure that the majority of students partake in such an initiative? (*Probe with regard to using print, online, face to face promotion of SFM*)

Section Seven: Conclusion

2 minutes

This will provide an opportunity for the respondents to voice any opinions which have not been covered during the interview.

We are now coming to the end of the interview. I would like to give you the opportunity to mention anything else that was not discussed or if you would like to elaborate on any point that was made.

*****So that concludes this interview. I would like to thank you for being so co-operative.*****

APPENDIX THREE:

SFM ARTWORK

Poster, placed in key locations around campus and provided to all schools:

UCD DUBLIN

**YOUR
FEEDBACK
YOUR
FUTURE**

survey goes live

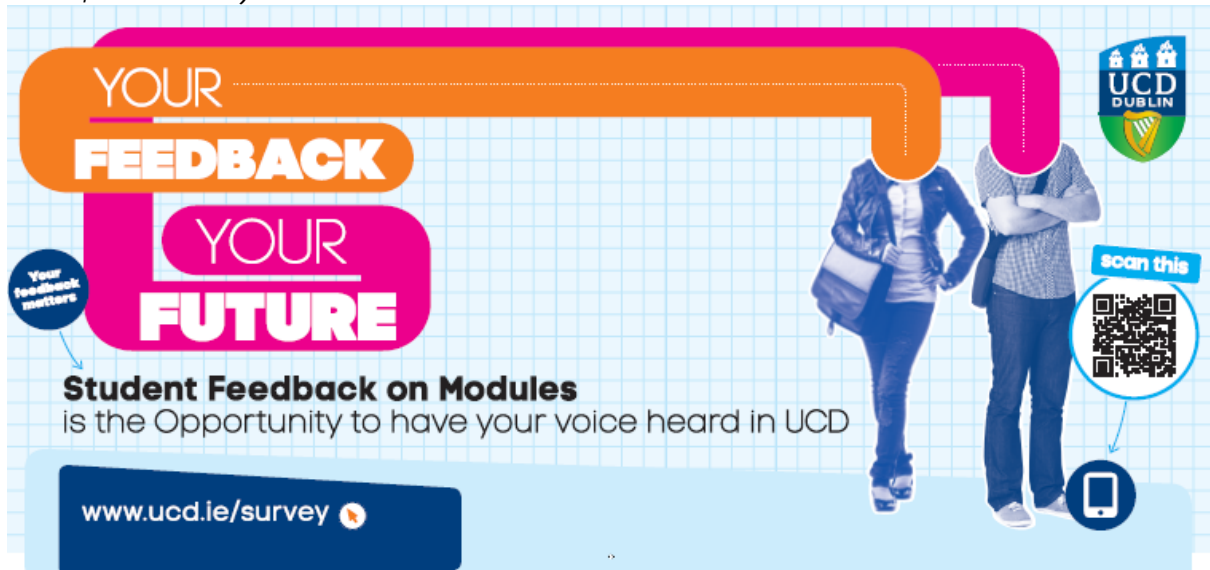
**21st
nov**

scan this

Student Feedback on Modules
is the Opportunity to have your
voice heard in UCD

www.ucd.ie/survey

Banner hung above the walkway outside James Joyce Library building (two – sided, 16ft x 7ft):



E-card issued on 21st November:

An e-card for the student feedback survey. It features the same "YOUR FEEDBACK YOUR FUTURE" graphic as the banner. Below the graphic, it says "Student Feedback on Modules is the Opportunity to have your voice heard in UCD" and "www.ucd.ie/survey". A QR code with the text "scan this" and an illustration of two students are on the right. The UCD Dublin logo is in the top right corner. A small circular icon with the text "Your feedback matters" is on the left. Below the main text, there is a section titled "Student Module Feedback gives you, the student, the ability to shape the way modules are conducted in the future. You now have the opportunity to give your feedback on the modules you took this semester. This can include how a module was taught, the approach of the lecturer to the module and the teaching methods used. Feedback can also be given on how a module was assessed up until now." and another section titled "Giving feedback helps to shape the direction each module takes in future and this in turn will benefit the student body as a whole. Every piece of feedback is taken into consideration. The onus is on you, the student, if you feel changes need to be made then let your voice be heard. It is equally important to say when something works well." Below these sections, there is a "Play video" button and a link to "See how students have already helped change modules within UCD." At the bottom, there is a circular icon with the text "The Survey is Open Now" and a graphic with the text "Your feedback will shape your future so make sure you give yours!". The UCD Dublin logo is in the bottom right corner.


UCD Students

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UCD Registry Student Webpage:


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University College Dublin
An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath


SEARCH UCD
Enter word
Advanced Search

• Welcome • Student Support • Assessment • Registration • Course search • Term Dates • Contact UCD



YOUR FEEDBACK YOUR FUTURE
Your feedback matters

Student Feedback on Modules
Is the Opportunity to have your voice heard in UCD



YOUR FEEDBACK YOUR FUTURE
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Is the Opportunity to have your voice heard in UCD

www.ucd.ie/survey

Your Feedback
Your Future

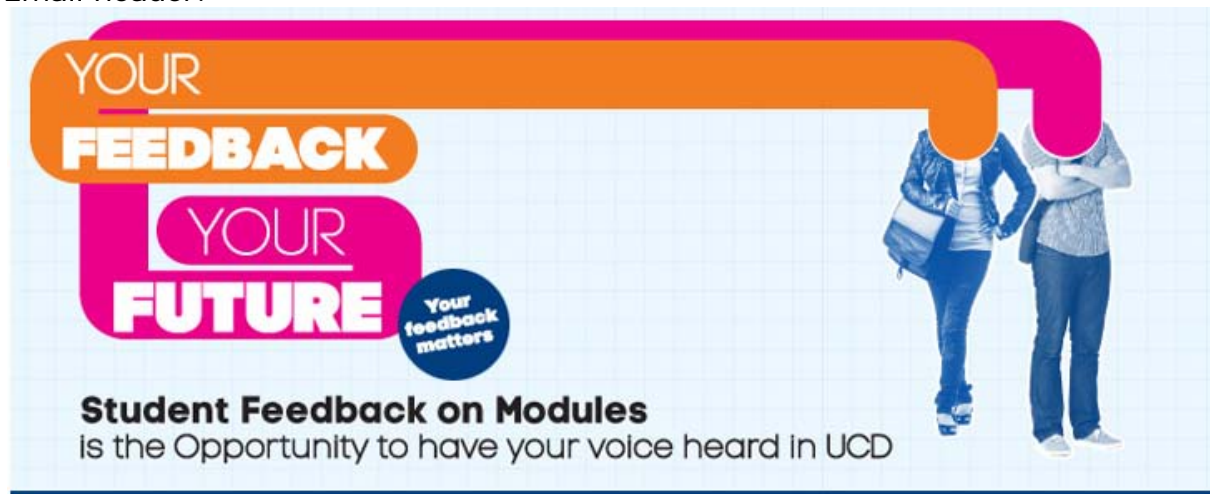
Sidebar:

- SIS Student Web
- Student desk
- Programme Offices
- Graduate Schools
- Student Advisors

FAQs:

- Q What is the survey for?
- Q Why should I complete the survey?
- Q When do I have to do it by?
- Q Will the module coordinator know what I have said?
- Q Who will see my responses and when will they see them?
- Q How will my responses be used?
- Q Where do I access the survey?
- Q How long does the survey take?
- Q I am having difficulty logging into SISweb directly what should I do?
- Q I am having difficulty logging into UCD Connect what should I do?

Email header:



Email footer:



Facebook Graphic:

