UCD TEACHING AND LEARNING/ RESOURCES

PROGRAMME DESIGN & ASSESSMENT

Programe Evaluation

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PROGRAMME/STAGE EVALUATION

(GATHERING FEEDBACK ON YOUR PROGRAMME)

Evaluation at programme (or stage level) does not necessarily equal the sum of the module evaluations and requires some special attention in order to gain the full picture, i.e. assessment overload across the full programme. In addition, although student evaluation is very common at module level, programme evaluation also requires the views of those who have done the full programme, i.e. recent graduate students, and of those who have an invested interest in the outcomes of the programme, i.e. employers/professional bodies.

Some core principles /procedures of programme evaluation

-Teaching and student learning should be evaluated as far as possible by multiple methods, i.e. student questionnaires, group discussions, interviews, peer (colleagues) evaluation, self-evaluation and self-reflection (see appendices). This increases the reliability and validity of the process.

-Programme evaluations may need to be specifically designed to accommodate each programmes teaching and learning environment. Therefore, it may or may not be appropriate to use standardised instruments.

-Assessment should be on-going and the iterative nature of the evaluation should make the process more efficient as the feedback is used to continuously improve the process.

-Cross comparisons across programmes are often less useful, than comparisons from year to year of the same programme.

 -Examples of changes made to the programme from the previous year's process should be highlighted to students.

-Care should be taken not to overload students with questionnaires/interviews/focus groups in the same week/day.

Content of student evaluations:

-What content should be put into an evaluation at programme level?

Many questionnaires and other evaluations of teaching have been criticised for their focus primarily on the delivery of teaching and not on the issue of student learning. Saroyan and

Amundsen (2001) maintained that many course evaluations focus on a very limited aspect of teaching, i.e. that of delivery of instruction and, to some extent, the planning which proceeds it and the evaluation of learning which follows it. They highlight that there is a whole range of underlying processes of teaching that are not observable that remain unexplored, i.e. to what extent are the students understanding and engaging with the information presented.

Therefore, there is a need in designing evaluations of teaching to ask questions in relation to 'student learning' to balance questions related to 'teaching performance and organisation'.

Programme evaluation should also extend beyond questions on **content and teaching/learning methods**, to include the overall culture of the learning environment. This can include areas such as **curriculum organisation/coherence, student support, learning resources, physical environment, learning resources, generic skills, staff attitudes,** etc…

Some useful areas to evaluate at programme level:

- Provision of clear goals and standards
- Coherence of programme
- Systematic organisation of course
- Workload and level of difficulty
- Interesting and relevant content
- Level at which material is pitched
- Pace at which topics are covered
- Generic skills development
- Learning resources/supports
- Quality of explanations provided
- Library support
- Use of real life illustrations
- Support for student learning
- Assignments providing choice and resources
- Level of feedback on assignments
- Assessment procedures related to programme aims
- Advice on study skills and strategies
- Preparation for practice/work (if relevant)

STANDARDISED QUESTIONNAIRES:

1. **The *Course Experience Questionnaire*** (Ramsden, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c,) is the most commonly used standardised questionnaire. It was designed and is in widespread use in Australia and the UK. It is used to measure graduate students views on the entire programmes. (See Appendix 1)

It contains the following scales:

-        Good Teaching Scale
-        Clear Goals and Standards
-        Generic Skills Scale
-        Appropriate Assessment Scale
-        Appropriate Workload
-        Scale

'*The theoretical construction and the practical application of the CEQ are not without their critics. Some argue that the focus of the CEQ is too narrow as measure of the entirety of the student experience. Since its original development as a proxy measure of quality of student learning, the CEQ has been used for a range of purposes, some very different than for what it was intended, i.e. for determining institutional funding and use by third parties to construct league tables (Niland, 1999).. There is some evidence that aspects of the CEQ may not be well suited to 'unconventional' teaching and learning environments, such as problem-based learning (Lyon & Hendry, 2002). Nevertheless, the CEQ remains a widely used measure of student quality of learning'* (see http://www.deakin.edu.au/itl/pd/tl-modules/scholarly/setu-ceq/setu-ceq-05.php)

There are various versions of the questionnaire 25 item, 37 item (see appendix 1). In addition to a likert scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree, it usually has some open ended questions.

2. *The National Student Survey (NSS)* **(see http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/nss/ and http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/) (see Appendix 2)** Surridge (2008)

'is targeted mostly at final year undergraduates in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and participating Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Scotland. In addition, from 2008 mainly final year higher education students studying at Further Education Colleges (FECs) in England will be involved in its use.

The survey provides students with an opportunity to make their opinions on their higher education student experience count at a national level. The results are analysed and used to compile a year on year comparison of data which;

a.   Helps prospective students make informed choices of where and what to study.

b.   Enables the participating institutions to identify and improve in areas where they may have let their students down'. (http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/)

The questions asked relate to the following subheadings:

1.   teaching on my course
2.   assessment and feedback
3.   academic support
4.   organisation and management
5.   learning resources
6.   personal development
7.   overall satisfaction. (http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/)

Key References:

For a comparative review of these and other standardized national tools see http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/research/National_Survey_Comparative_Review_Feb_2007.doc.

See also Surridge, P (2008) The National Student Survey 2005-2007: Findings and Trends A Report to the Higher Education Funding Council for England http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2006/rd22_06/

NON-STANDARDISED QUESTIONNAIRES:

There are many non-standardised questionnaires at programme level, a few of the more well known are:

1.   *Student Perception Questionnaire* (University of Central England, in Birmingham: See appendix 3).

This questionnaire used to compare across programmes includes areas such as:

- Communication of Information
- Course Organisation
- Workload and Assessment
- Learning
- Practical Sessions
- Teaching
- Work experience (if appropriate)
- Library services

2. Student Satisfaction Questionnaire: **(Bolton Institute, UK: Appendix 4)**

Similar to the standardised *Course Experience Questionnaire* this non-standardised questionnaire has a series of closed Likert scale questions, in addition to three open-ended questions. It is designed to explore students views on the whole programme. Its contents areas are very similar to that used above in the University of Central England, and include:

- Programme Information
- Learning and Teaching
- Assessment
- Student Support
- Programme Organisation
- Learning Resources
- General Satisfaction

3. *A Checklist for Evaluating Teaching at Department Level* **(Roe & McDonald, 1983). Appendix 5**

This tool is more appropriately completed by either the staff involved in the programme or by disciplinary colleagues. Although the areas in this evaluation are similar to the two

above, they have a yes/no checklist response. It does however have some research on its use (Roe & McDonald, 1983). The areas that are evaluated are:

- Learning Objectives
- Content
- Teaching and Learning Strategies and Assessment
- Resources
- Quality Improvement

More Qualitative Methods of Programme Evaluation

Interviews

An interview can be defined as a "conversation with a purpose" (Dexter 1970 p136). There are many different forms but the most important distinction for evaluation is between 'structured' or 'focussed' interviews and 'unstructured' or 'exploratory' interviews.

In a structured interview, the questions are set in advance and the interviewer does not usually deviate from these. The interviewer may ask for clarification or elaboration but, otherwise, remains 'objective' in the sense of not trying to influence what the respondent says.

Similarly, in a structured interview, the respondent is expected to answer within the terms reference laid down by the interviewer. In a series of interviews, all respondents will be asked the same questions - the results thus being open to statistical analysis. Value consensus is assumed and little or no consideration is given for multiple world-views. In its purest form, the structured interview can be regarded as an oral questionnaire.

As a general rule, structured interviewing should only be carried out in situations where the respondents' range of replies is predictable but there is a need to gauge the strength of each shade of opinion. For example, they are useful for finding out how many students feel that the lecturer speaks clearly, gives useful feedback or is easily approachable outside of the classroom.

An unstructured interview is a spontaneous or free-flowing conversation rather than a specific set of questions asked in a predetermined order. Questions are adjusted according to how the respondent is reacting. Consequently, in a series of interviews, respondents might be asked very different things. The unstructured interview is most useful when the nature of what is not known needs to be explored or in qualitative evaluation when a 'grounded' or 'illuminative' approach is adopted.

A 'half-way-house' is the semi-structured interview where the general content and order of questions is pre-determined but deviations for additional exploration is allowed. This form of interview is particularly useful in situations where there is a broad consensus over the nature of the key issues to be investigated but less certainty about the possible range of respondents' reactions.

Focus Groups

A focus group is an organised discussion guided by a "moderator" where the participants comment on set questions or defined topics. Data is derived from the interactions and exchanges within the group. The main purpose is to draw out the attitudes, feelings and experiences of the respondents in a more comprehensive way than is possible through questionnaires.

Focus groups are particularly useful for obtaining insights into the different perspectives held by students, observing how students are influenced by their peer group, exploring the degree of consensus on a given topic, gathering opinions on potential or recent changes, generating suggestions for improvements, generating hypotheses about phenomena that seem to have no explanation, generating possible solutions to problems - especially those that seem particularly intractable

As with all interviews, however, it is important to remember that respondents are speaking in a specific context within a specific culture.

Focus groups probably work best with between six and ten participants. With large groups, parallel groups can be established.

In order for focus groups to function effectively, they need to have a skilful and effective 'moderator'. The moderator is responsible for ensuring everyone understands the purpose and goals of the group, putting people at their ease and encouraging effective interaction between group members.

Throughout the meeting moderators should promote debate by:

- asking open questions
- asking for clarification regarding particular contributions
- asking for details or examples
- moving things on when the conversation gets stuck or drifts
- keeping the discussion focussed
- ensuring everybody speaks

On the other hand, moderators must remain broadly neutral so as not to steer the group to a predetermined end.

Structured Discussions

Structured discussions involve a group of students discussing aspects of their learning experience. A structure is needed in order to:

- ensure that student reactions are screened by a process of having to explain and defend their statements in front of peers
- ensure that all students get an equal chance to put forward their views
- ensure that people have time to think through their comments
  * enable people to respond to, and learn from, the comments of others
- prevent the more articulate or more aggressive students from dominating proceedings
- prevent minority or extreme views dominating the discussion

Two the most useful formats for structured discussions are:

-Structured Group Feedback Meetings, and

-Nominal Group Technique.

Structured Group Feedback Meetings of between 30 and 90 minutes give students the opportunity to think through their views before sharing them. A second "sharing" stage puts extreme and minority views to the test. The teacher adopts "neutral" role and ensures that the outcome is recorded.

The recommended structure is:

Stage 1: Working alone, students make individual responses to questions about their course. Questions are best structured into a simple pro-forma as in examples A) and B) below:

Structured Group Feedback Pro-Forma: Example A:

	Good Points	Bad Points
About the course		
About the teaching		
About us, the students		

Structured Group Feedback Pro-Forma: Example B:

Things about the course that I would like to see:		
Stopped	Started	Continue

Stage 2: Working in groups of about 4, students record those comments which receive majority support within the group. No comment may be recorded which does not receive majority support.

Stage 3: In plenary, the teacher takes, in turn, one point under each of the headings form each of the groups. If a majority of the whole group agrees with the statement it is recorded. If it fails to receive majority support it is discarded. The process is repeated until all comments from all groups have been exhausted. The whole group is then invited to make adjustments to the overall picture that has emerged.

Nominal Group Technique

Nominal group technique is a highly structured process for identifying and ranking the major problems or issues that a group feels need to be addressed. It is particularly useful for making explicit the feelings and experiences of a student group. It can also be used by groups of academics wishing to identify the major strengths of a department or School. Its great strength is that it provides each participant with an equal voice and has a focus on remedial action.

Steps for Conducting the Nominal Group Technique:

1. Students are presented with a question. This can be general or specific. Alternatively, participants can be asked to state the problem or issue they feel is most important.
2. Each individual member of the group is asked to write down their own response to the set question. If they have more than one response then they should be asked to rank them in order of importance. Discussion is not permitted at this stage - which should last for about 10 minutes.
3. Participants form groups of 6 - 10 and elect a leader. Alternatively, a leader may be chosen by the teacher and may be an 'outsider'. These groups pool their responses to form a composite list. At this stage there is still no discussion and responses must not be criticised or edited in any way. Individuals may make additional responses but this must not be allowed to develop into a discussion. The aim is to compile as large a list if possible. This stage is likely to take at least 45 minutes.

4. In the same groups, the leader takes the group through its list of responses making sure that everyone understands what they all mean. Again, no discussion is allowed but the list may be altered for the sake of clarity.
5. In the same groups, each participant ranks the top five problems or issues by assigning 5 points to their most important perceived problem and 1 point the least important of their top five.
6. In the same groups, the results are tallied by adding the points for each problem or issue. The problem or issue with the highest number is the most important one for that group.
7. The same groups discuss the results and generate a final ranked list of five responses which will be reported to plenary.
8. In plenary, the groups come together and the ranked lists of responses are pooled. Overlapping items can be combined or composited. A second 5 point voting system is operated. The outcome is an overall ranking of issues / responses which reflects the concerns of the whole group.
9. Participants are asked to brainstorm possible future actions (e.g. changes in the course) that should follow. These are recorded and forwarded to the decision makers. It might prove necessary to vote on some of the suggestions for change to gauge the level of support.

STAGE (YEAR) EVALUATION

An interim approach to programme and module evaluation is Stage (end of year) evaluation. Most of the standardised and non-standardised questionnaires above are designed for the full programme and not for one year of the programme, however *The Structured Group Feedback Meetings* (Gibbs et al, 1988) and *The Nominal Group Techniques* along with other more qualitative methods could be used for Stage evaluation.

Appendix 7 highlights a structured discussion approach that could be used at a programme or a stage evaluation. This has been compiled by the Chelsea College of Art and Design. The process describes how the results are recorded in a *Course Monitoring Log* (appendix 7).

Another approach that can be useful at evaluation at Stage level, is the use of some questionnaires that compare across modules. Appendix 8 is an example of one that can be used to assess workloads levels across modules. This approach is more useful than asking students individually about workload in each module.

Appendices /Links 1-7

1= The Course Experience Questionnaire;
http://www.deakin.edu.au/itl/pd/tl-modules/scholarly/setu-ceq/setu-ceq-05.php

2= The National Student Survey;
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/nss/

3= Course Organisation and Assessment: University of Central England in Birmingham.
http://www0.bcu.ac.uk/crq/publications/studentfeedback.pdf

4= Student Satisfaction Inventory

http://www2.eou.edu/ssi/WhatSSI.dwt

http://www.emeraldinsight.com/Insight/ViewContentServlet;jsessionid=6EE87A
C9AF7CB01F5ECF08AA22532D3E?Filename=Published/EmeraldFullTextArticle/
Pdf/1200020102.pdf

5= A Checklist for Evaluating Teaching at Department Level (Moore & Panter, 2006)
http://www.aishe.org/readings/2006-1/eval-dept-checklist.html#x17-88000D

6= 'More Qualitative Methods'
For document contact Geraldine.m.oneill@ucd.ie

7= http://www.chelsea.arts.ac.uk/courses.htm

8 & 9 & 10 = For examples of 'Comparative Questionnaires', contact Geraldine.m.oneill@ucd.ie

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