

Revitalising the Student Survey Process at Heriot-Watt University:

Closing the feedback loop and how do we know we
have made a difference?

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Contents

Overview of all Recommendations:.....	3
Background:	5
Issues identified and recommendations:.....	6
Closing the Feedback loop:	6
How do we know we have made a difference?.....	7
Response Rates:.....	8
Data Gathering:.....	9
Timing of Surveys:.....	10
Trust:.....	11
Openness to difficult discussion:	12
Confusion around surveys:	13
Create an anonymous feedback portal:.....	13
References:	14

The background research for this report and the production of the report itself were undertaken during July and August 2018 in order to progress the University Committee for Learning and Teaching's recommendations regarding student survey processes (see Appendix for Minute extract from UCLT meeting on 4 April 2018). The review was funded through the Enhancement Theme.

The purposes of the review were to re-consider the survey process at HWU and the principles underlying the process, and to assess the effectiveness of current practices within the context of two over-arching objectives related to “closing the feedback loop” and the question “How do we know if we have made a difference”. It was thereafter intended that the outcomes of the review would inform recommendations for the development and further enhancement of the University’s survey process.

Overview of all Recommendations:

Contained within the report are arguments and reasoning for the following recommendations. For ease of digest these recommendations are kept short form:

Rec Num	Theme	
1	Closing the Loop/Timing	Make it common practice that all lecturers teaching a course they taught the year before to set aside time in the introductory lecture to go over a selection of previous feedback . During this time they should comment on what they have done in response to issues. This opportunity should also be used to highlight good practice and present positive messages from lecturers i.e. that they are going to keep up the hard work
2	Closing the Loop	A short summary of feedback received and responses to be put in place could be sent out along with assessment results by schools. This would address the same general issues identified in a 'Together We Accomplished' page, but opens another way to access this information which all students would see
3	Closing the Loop	The construction and maintenance of a ' Together We Accomplished ' section on the university website, this can give university level feedback to every student
4	Closing the Loop	Schools should make better use of the school rep mechanism to disseminate information. When changes are made the relevant reps should be made aware and asked to pass on the information. It should be made clear to reps that they can use any line of communication they see fit to share this information including social media, text and face-to-face communication, this is already done in many cases but could be increased
5	How do we know we have made a difference/ Timing	Lecturers to complete course level feedback gathering practices no later than 30% of the way through their teaching run time to ensure enough time to plan, respond and close the feedback loop
6	How do we know we have made a difference	Pilot the use of 'Happyornot' like buttons (as seen in airports) after lectures. In key areas such as large class sizes
7	How do we know we have made a difference	Complete a stop, start, continue process. The feedback can be gathered through a variety of means and does not have to involve official survey questions i.e. E-mail, face-to-face, SurveyMonkey, socrative
8	How do we know we have made a difference	School specific questions should be audited by someone experienced in survey writing before they are added to the CFS to ensure high quality in the questions asked

9	Response Rates	Staff testimonials have been effective in localised areas of the university. A lecturer would at the end of one class during the survey period ask students to fill it in and explain how they use the data and why it is important to them. These testimonials could be linked into the lecture where students are asked to complete the CFS.
10	Response Rates	Guides for testimonials could be written in conjunction with lecturers who have already made use of this method so all lecturers can properly benefit from this process.
11	Response Rates	The creation of a university wide survey week running from Monday of week 10 to the following Monday. Lecturers should be encouraged to schedule in class completion times during this week.
12	Response Rates	Emails for ‘pushing’ the survey should be sent on the mornings of Monday, Wednesday, Friday (Week 10) and Monday (Week 11).
13	Response Rates	The emails could be better designed to advertise the surveys and it may therefore be useful for HWU to make use of their PR or design departments in writing these emails. One such addition could be emails contain a countdown of days remaining to answer.
14	Data Gathering	Support students to provide professional constructive feedback
15	Data Gathering	An audit to ensure the questions in the surveys are gathering useful data without overlap
16	Trust	Invite School Officers and Course Reps to participate in the anonymization and analysis of the results from the student surveys
17	Openness to Difficult Discussion	In the Together We Accomplished forums address common issues to which there is no solution .
18	Openness to Difficult Discussion	Address the above issues during welcome week or course introductory lectures.
19	Confusion around surveys	The introduction of an NSS-like survey in Dubai and Malaysia campuses
20	Confusion around surveys	The annual survey for all other modes of study must be shortened to focus only on key areas to address its principle

Background:

Heriot-Watt University (HWU) students currently take part in 6 separate institutional surveys. Surveys carried out across all campuses are the annual survey (AS), the course feedback survey (CFS), the postgraduate research experience survey (PRES), the postgraduate taught experience survey (PTES) and the welcome survey (WS). Final year students in UK campuses also complete the National Student Survey (NSS).

The AS is run for all students, except final year undergraduate students based on Scottish campuses. It is modelled after the NSS but does not use identical questions so direct comparison is not currently carried out for the entire survey. The AS is used to gauge students' overall experience at HWU throughout a given year. Currently the AS is less useful for guiding individual lecturers. The AS is better used as a yardstick for approximating future NSS scores. It can also show the top tier of management, Heads of School and DLTs if there are any overarching issues which require institutional address. On this point the Malaysian and Dubai campuses have both expressed a wish to have a NSS survey done on their campuses. Modelled exactly after the nationally run one in the UK, with the same time frame and questions.

The CFS is run at the completion of each course at the end of the semester and gathers feedback on students' experiences of individual courses. This data is used in two ways.

- **Firstly**, it is given to the lecturers of courses to aid in their continuous improvement. Lecturers have stated that they find the open comments the most useful in this endeavour.
- **Secondly**, the data is also used at a school level to assess if there are any overarching issues or if any courses/lecturers are in need of aid. In this area the Likert scale questions provide a fast, easy to digest report for management teams trying to quickly spot areas for improvement unlike the dense reading involved in open form comments.

The WS is only available for new students and is presented after freshers' week. This survey may at first appear to be of little concern due to its limited effect on the overall HWU experience. However, as it is the first interaction with the HWU survey process this survey must be done right. This is to show new students that they are listened to, and to avoid the apathy currently seen in higher year students.

The PRES and PTES are run for postgraduate students in the respective streams. The NSS is run for final year undergraduate students in Scotland. Much like the annual survey these surveys are overarching and do not address individual courses.

This report will identify shortcomings in these surveys and recommend solutions for them. It will draw upon other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and professional survey companies' ways of operating and will focus on two main themes.

- **Firstly**, closing the feedback loop. Without effective reporting back to students about the action taken on their comments, student engagement will lessen in surveys as apathy ensues.
- **Secondly**, how do we know we have made a difference? This question runs constantly throughout survey processes, but this report will also identify areas for evidencing the effects of changes.

During the construction of this report all identified stakeholders were interviewed including students, lecturers, directors for learning and teaching (DLT), senior management, registry services, administrative heads, outside universities and the student union. Information was also gathered

from the websites, blogs, vlogs and books of experts in the various areas of the survey process. Stakeholders from all campuses were consulted to ensure that recommendations would be valid across all global sites of HWU. All stakeholders were interviewed to ensure that all viewpoints were considered and to identify any breakdown in the chain of communication from senior management to students and the reverse of this. During these interviews, in addition to the above two themes, other common issues were identified. The following sections outline the issues found and proposes recommendations for addressing them.

Issues identified and recommendations:

Closing the Feedback loop:

Through interviews with lecturers and senior management, it is clear that HWU takes the results of student surveys seriously. HWU addresses issues identified and has varying degrees of success. Through interviews with students it is also clear that most students are not aware of changes that have been made or responses to their feedback. The few students who were aware of changes made had a **limited awareness**. They often attributed changes made being prompted by the University's senior management with little regard for students' views and when changes benefit students, it is more of an accident than a main concern. This **attribution error** was the root cause of many students disengagement with the survey process.

The apathy created by this disengagement is apparent in the comments from the NSS over the past years with many final year students expressing that they feel they have repeatedly made the same comments throughout their time at HWU and have seen no response. (see NSS 2017/2018)

The closure of the feedback loop is affected by all of the other issues identified. Therefore, closing the loop will be the most difficult and require the most amount of energy of any issue. However, it is essential.

It is important to note that **all feedback** must be addressed when closing the feedback loop, especially if the feedback includes issues that are **difficult to address**. For example, when discussing issues in assessment marking and feedback or lecture quality. The university is currently seen by students to address the issues it wants to address. Students made this especially clear when considering the current issue with regards assessment and feedback. Many felt that there were solutions to the issue and had suggested as much but the university was not auctioning them. This leads to students ceasing to engage as they believe that the major areas where change is needed will just be ignored.

Recommendation:

From interviews with students, various lecturers and administrators it is clear that there is **no perfect way** to communicate with every student. Therefore, to close the feedback loop it is recommended the establishment of a **multi-pronged plan** to communicate the changes made each year in direct response to student feedback. Specifically, the following are recommended:

- The construction and maintenance of a '**Together We Accomplished**' section on the university website, this can give university level feedback to every student
- Make it common practice that all lecturers teaching a course they taught the year before to set aside time in the introductory lecture to go over a **selection of previous feedback**.

During this time they should comment on what they have done in response to issues. This opportunity should also be used to **highlight good practice** and present positive messages from lecturers i.e. that they are going to keep up the hard work

- Schools should make better use of the **school rep mechanism** to disseminate information. When changes are made the relevant reps should be made aware and asked to pass on the information. It should be made clear to reps that they can use any line of communication they see fit to share this information including social media, text and face-to-face communication, this is already done in many cases but could be increased
- A short summary of feedback received and responses to be put in place could be **sent out along with assessment results** by schools. This would address the same general issues identified in a 'Together We Accomplished' page, but opens another way to access this information which all students would see

How do we know we have made a difference?

Currently the student surveys are the **only official evidence** gathered for examining the effectiveness of changes made. On an official level this constrains lecturers to knowing if their actions are making an improvement only once a semester/year. This means if a response is having negative or negligible impact they cannot correct this until weeks later. This issue of both timing and evidence is a major problem for HWU in achieving the principle of improving.

There was some suggestion of moving the CFS forward or splitting it in two so that lecturers could receive some feedback during the delivery of the course. However, this received **major push-back** during interviews as it would mean the current instrument for evidencing the overall quality of courses would be lost.

There is no support for adding another survey, nor is there support for moving the CFS forward in semester (as is the case in Abertay for example.)

Some lecturers have reported a wish to have more control over the questions contained within their own CFS which is not proposed as being a change we ought to pursue. Rather, all courses should undergo a comparable measure with lecturers empowered and encouraged to address certain areas where they see a need for targeted feedback in one or two extra questions as is currently done. It is vital that any school specific questions for surveys are well written. Without proper support the extra data gathered may not be as useful as it possibly could be.

It is vital that HWU realises that some of the evidence gathered to improve courses is **only needed at a course level**. Therefore, when gathering more evidence it is best for lecturers to carry this out at a course level. It is students and lecturers who need to know if changes they are making are working. By keeping evidence at a course level it will ensure lecturers can make **adjustments and improvements continuously**. This would also ensure lecturers understand that these measures are not being put in place as another layer of assessing their effectiveness but as a mechanism for them to improve.

Lecturers can **gather their own information** throughout teaching time without needing institutional methods. These informal practices can also aid in solving the timing issue outlined in a subsequent section. One issue that may come from these informal mechanisms is that students may give feedback on issues out with the lecturer's control, or give feedback which cannot be addressed during course time. For example, course content cannot be changed during delivery. Lecturers would have to respond to this feedback even if it is only to tell students that they cannot fix these issues.

Students could then be encouraged to feedback on areas which can be improved upon such as style and presentation. Feedback received would then be dealt with and could be addressed in the following week's lecture

The following recommendations will not fit every class. The differences in size, learning and class type will lend themselves to different versions of informal continuous feedback. Therefore the following recommendations are evidenced suggestions for how to effectively gather feedback which can be used in any combination or independently that suit a class.

Recommendation:

- Lecturers to complete course level feedback gathering practices **no later than 30%** of the way through their teaching run time to ensure enough time to plan, respond and close the feedback loop
- Pilot the use of 'Happyornot' like buttons (as seen in airports) after lectures. In key areas such as large class sizes
- Complete a stop, start, continue process. The feedback can be gathered through a variety of means and does not have to involve official survey questions i.e. E-mail, face-to-face, SurveyMonkey, Socrative
- School specific questions should be audited by someone experienced in survey writing before they are added to the CFS to ensure high quality in the questions asked

Response Rates:

Currently the sector receives low response rates to all surveys carried out electronically. This can make it difficult to tailor changes to an entire class, it also begs the question of what the other 70-80% think. Raising response rates would result in more reliable data, more data to guide changes and better evidence for the effectiveness of changes. It is possible to raise the response rates. Through interviews with lecturers it is clear that some receive CFS rates in excess of 50%. These lecturers were asked why they thought their response rate was higher. Common themes emerged and these have been built into recommendations. The most common was the **use of testimonials** during lecture time asking students to fill in the surveys and explaining how they used the feedback.

There has been some suggestion that a move back to paper may increase response rates. However, re-introduction of paper based surveys would not address the more fundamental issues behind the low response rates, such as students disengaging because they believe that their views are not being taken seriously.

The debate around digital or paper stems from the fact that response rates were higher when paper surveys were used. The argument that the difference in response rate is due to the medium a student uses is **not supported by evidence**. Although there is a host of evidence showing that paper-based surveys result in higher response rates, there is evidence (Watt et al., 2002) that these differences are due to most paper-based surveys being completed in class rather than at home as most web-based surveys are. Some students reported that they trust paper-based surveys to be better anonymised than web-based. This particular issue is discussed later as part of the trust section in this report.

The use of online surveys should continue to be endorsed as the HWU survey methodology. This is because of the **advantages that web-based surveys offer**. They are faster to answer and to analyse, resulting in a far more efficient turn around than thousands of paper-based answers would allow. If HWU succeeds in raising response rates then this increased efficiency will be required. A further major advantage of web based surveys is they allow longer open form comments. The area of CFS which most lecturers interviewed have stated as being the most useful for guiding development.

It appears that the prevailing reason for the difference in response rates is due to encouraging students to complete electronic surveys out with scheduled class time. HWU has already taken the decision to allow 15 minutes in class for CFS completion which is welcome.

Moving past the argument over paper/digital it is important to note that when attempting to increase response rate other practices have been tried and have failed. These include offering individual rewards for completion (a practice which has now stopped).

It is important to note that none of the above solutions address the root of this issue. The main reason students don't answer the surveys are they don't know why they should care. Throughout interviews with students, **the prevailing sentiment was, "why bother?"** This question links into every level of the survey process but especially closing the feedback loop. Many recommendations across the entirety of this report address will aid in answering this question but fully answering it will lead to a rise in response rates.

Closing the feedback loop is essential to answer the question of, "why bother?," HWU must show students that their feedback is valued and put to good use. Aside from mandatory feedback, closing the feedback loop is an effective way to increase response rates (Watson, 2003). By showing students that their feedback is valued and will lead to actual changes, it is likely that students will begin to **'buy-into' and trust** the system. This was especially clear in students attending public university in Singapore (National University of Singapore). There students are encouraged to engage in discourse with lecturers through various means and students report seeing changes in real time to their feedback. This led to further engagement in other areas, with students addressing the issues they found most important, coming together to form unofficial committees and then presenting the relevant staff with their issues. This led to detailed feedback and the ability for staff to speak with the students the issues raised most affected.

Aside from closing the feedback loop, there are other suggestions outlined below which may result in a boost in response rates.

Recommendation:

- **Staff testimonials** have been effective in localised areas of the university. A lecturer would at the end of one class during the survey period ask students to fill it in and explain how they use the data and why it is important to them. These testimonials could be linked into the lecture where students are asked to complete the CFS.
- **Guides for testimonials** could be written in conjunction with lecturers who have already made use of this method so all lecturers can properly benefit from this process.
- The creation of a **university wide survey week** running from Monday of week 10 to the following Monday. Lecturers should be encouraged to schedule in class completion times during this week.
- **Emails for 'pushing'** the survey should be sent on the mornings of Monday, Wednesday, Friday (Week 10) and Monday (Week 11).
- The emails could be **better designed to advertise** the surveys and it may therefore be useful for HWU to make use of their PR or design departments in writing these emails. One such addition could be emails contain a countdown of days remaining to answer.

Data Gathering:

Currently the data gathered at HWU is useful for identifying problems at course and institution level. Lecturers report that the information they are receiving is enough to guide changes. There are two

issues currently with the data gathered: the **tone of some responses** and gathering the **same data twice**.

Most lecturers report having personally received or of their colleagues receiving comments of a **personal or vindictive nature**. This issue can be doubly impactful. Personally targeted negative comments can turn lecturers off from listening to all comments. They can also damage staff morale and trust from staff towards students. Abertay University have succeeded in solving this issue by training students in good feedback practice. Taking their practice of guiding students towards constructive criticism should solve this issue.

The second issue of gathering the same data twice can create disengagement and confusion. Students may be answering one survey and believe they have already given this data. An example of this would be when completing the AS students are asked “Course is intellectually stimulating.” This same question is asked in each CFS. Students understand that each course is different in stimulation level and so provide this information. It is possible to approximate the answer in the AS by collating each CFS answer. Areas such as these should be removed from the AS which will allow the AS to be shortened and focused on what it needs to focus on.

Recommendation:

- **Support students** to provide professional constructive feedback
- An **audit** to ensure the questions in the surveys are gathering **useful data without overlap**

Timing of Surveys:

Timing is a major issue with regards HWU being able to make changes and students seeing, and caring, about those changes. Many students have already moved on to the next year or course by the time any changes can be made in response to their feedback.

As outlined in the recommendations in the ‘closing the feedback loop’ section, all courses being taught in subsequent years could **present the previous year’s feedback** with their planned solutions. This would not alleviate the issue of timing but would mean that students see that feedback is being listened to and acted upon. Students would then hopefully realise that their feedback in end of semester/year surveys are helping the next cohort just as the cohort above has helped them. This opportunity can also be used to **talk about positive feedback** and how it also effects lecturers’ work. There is some evidence in comments left in the NSS 2018 that students do sometimes see changes that have been made for the cohorts following them. These comments were all positive and show that students want to see change even if it doesn’t directly benefit them.

As outlined above the use of in-course feedback will allow lecturers to make small changes during courses and show students that their feedback is actioned. This would not remove the issue of the CFS being too late to make large changes, but HWU must recognise that lecturers do not have time to fix major problems in their course during its delivery.

All students interviewed have expressed a wish for a continuous feedback route and expressed gratitude for those lecturers who already carry out continuous feedback. One issue, raised during interviews, with the currently available continuous feedback systems is that these methods are currently not anonymous. The wish for an anonymous continuous feedback option is addressed in an entirely separate section below. However, lacking an anonymous portal, lecturers can still ask for continuous feedback through the methods suggested in the above sections.

Recommendation:

Timing will be a difficult issue to solve due to the hectic schedule of teaching and assessment. However, some workable solutions are as follows:

- Use the **previous cohorts' data** to inform the current cohort of issues identified and addressed. This opportunity must also highlight areas of positive feedback and good practice (as recommended in closing the feedback loop)
- As has been agreed by UCLT, lecturers should make use of **continuous feedback processes** as outlined in the 'How do we know we are making a difference' section.

Trust:

This has been addressed in previous sections but does warrant full consideration due to the seriousness of the issue. All but one student interviewed expressed a discomfort in giving detailed feedback on surveys as they believed themselves to not be fully anonymous. They felt that to give negative feedback they may be risking their grade being depressed. Although the surveys are fully anonymised, the fact remains there is a lack of trust. Part of this mistrust came from a misunderstanding of what actually happens to the surveys after they are completed. This is again about a communication breakdown between the university and the students.

Students commented that they left vague open comments as anything too specific may allow a lecturer to pinpoint who they are. It is not that students do not wish to give detailed feedback or lack the capacity to do so, nor is it that they do not wish to take ownership of their feedback. It is due to the **power imbalance** between HWU and its students, they feel uncomfortable standing up and risking their grades.

One possible solution to this would be to guarantee that CFS would not be shown to lecturers until after grades have already been finalised and published. However, this would only serve to worsen the timing issue HWU already faces. Further, this solution **does not address the root issue**. Students do not trust the university when it comes to providing feedback. They are afraid of the power it holds over their future.

A further **illustrative example** of this fear and mistrust comes from interviews with students when they did not wish to mention names of lecturers when they gave examples of bad practice, such as a lecturer handing out paper surveys to be filled in and signed by students completing them.

It is possible that the best possible practice for improving trust in the survey process would be to integrally involve students. This makes sense from a conceptual standpoint as the surveys are their voice and having them involved in the interpretation and response would ensure they are not just heard but understood. Secondly, it would ensure total clarity of the student survey process, including the anonymization and response pathway that HWU uses. This would also aid in the closure of the feedback loop as students would not only see the response but the process. It could also offer further evidence for the effectiveness of changes as students could comment on what worked and didn't.

School Officers and Course Reps have been involved in the survey process before. EPS reports that during the period when they used paper surveys it was trialled that Reps and Officers gathered in the paper surveys assuring the student populace of **total anonymity**. This created a lot of extra work for these positions much of which would be mitigated by the online nature of the current surveys. Course Reps and Officers are already placed in a position that would allow them to **effectively carry**

out analysis of results and comment on possible responses as they **work closer with staff** than other part of the student body. This added mechanism would not be aimed at adding in another layer of oversight which the survey process does not need. Instead it will integrate students in the process, allowing trust to be built, clarity achieved and better communication of responses to students.

Recommendation:

- **Invite School Officers and Course Reps** to participate in the anonymization and analysis of the results from the student surveys

Openness to difficult discussion:

This is an issue which seems to affect all levels of HWU. Students **repeatedly expressed a frustration** that the answer to their feedback was "I'll need to speak to someone", "We need to have a discussion", "I've passed that along", or most commonly with truly difficult issues – **silence**. These responses left students feeling as if their feedback was being filed and forgotten about. It is important to recognise that although some bigger decisions have to be made by a committee, students are not aware of these processes. At a local level in class, students must be told where their feedback is being dealt with. Staff should be asked if there are any questions they feel unable to answer so that senior management can supply answers or communicate to students individually.

As important as the above is, it is equally important to be clear when feedback will not be acted upon and why. An example of this is students commenting that they wish for exams to be removed. This can be a real issue for students and one repeated often, especially when courses are 100% exam. Exams are used for a variety of solid reasons, few of which are communicated to students. These reasons need to be passed onto students so they can understand why one course can be continuous assessment while another is fully exam based.

It is important to recognise that as long as these issues exist it is likely that lecturers will hear the same concerns expressed every year. This could become tiresome but it is important to realise that this is the first time the students of that year are encountering these issues. There may be a temptation therefore to build FAQs to which students could be signposted. FAQs are useful mechanisms for answering such common concerns but staff should also be encouraged to **engage in discourse** with students. Shutting down communication with a link to an FAQ only serves to further widen the divide between staff and student whereas open dialogue will close it. It may be beneficial to address these common issues during welcome week or introductory lectures to prepare new students for these common issues.

In more general terms, discussions around difficult issues can be of particular use to organisations. If HWU cannot give a clear, reasonable answer for why something is not going to change, then that is probably the best indication of something that must be changed.

Recommendation:

- In the Together We Accomplished forums address common issues to which there is no solution.
- Address the same issues during welcome week or course introductory lectures.

Confusion around surveys:

The variety of surveys at HWU can lead to some confusion from students and some staff as to their use. Some are obvious such as the WS and the CFS. Both of these have clearly defined goals, being to improve either the welcome experience or individual programmes. The NSS, PTES and PRES are clear in that they are used to compare experiences across universities and courses. Slightly less clear is the point of the AS. Aside from possibly predicting the future of the NSS the AS does little to aid in the improvement of individual courses. It can hint at larger overarching institutional issues but again the NSS fulfils this role.

This confusion can be addressed by a revisiting of the survey principles. The CFS is used to improve individual courses. The WS improves your welcome week experience. The AS gives a perspective on all other students populations that the NSS misses. However, it is unclear how the AS is a driver for improvement. As mentioned in the ‘data gathering’ section some of the data gathered in the AS is also gathered in a far more specific way in the CFS.

Dubai and Malaysia have expressed a wish that the AS for final year students in non-UK campuses be made to mirror exactly, in terms of timing and content, the NSS here in the UK. In this way all campuses in HWU would be able to be compared on a level footing.

As for the Annual survey at all other levels, its purpose and use needs to be refined and widely publicised.

Recommendation:

Aside from the updated survey principles there are other steps that must be taken so that the principles of the survey process are clear at HWU.

- The introduction of an **NSS-like survey** in Dubai and Malaysia campuses
- The annual survey for all other modes of study must be shortened to focus only on key areas to **address its principle**

Create an anonymous feedback portal:

Some of the above sections have large overlap and often have knock on effects. The final recommendation of this report is to create an anonymous feedback portal which will be contained in each courses’ Vision webpage.

There are many ways for lecturers to gather continuous feedback. For example, lecturers could ask for feedback in class. Unfortunately, this method generally leads to skewed results with more confident students willing to speak and any very negative feedback being silenced due to social pressure.

Another option is to ask for written comments on for example post-its. This approach can work and there are some lecturers who report using it to great effect. It allows everyone to write in private thus encouraging some of the shyer students to engage. However, there are shortfalls in this process – staff cannot answer individual feedback, it is very labour intensive and entirely ignores the technology HWU has at its disposal.

It is recommended that HWU utilises this technology by creating a portal on each courses’ Vision. Accessible by each student through a tab labelled ‘Feedback.’ Here students can access a window to give long form comments throughout a course from week 1 to the end of the course. These comments would be anonymous. At this point this portal offers no advantages over paper post-its

aside from lighten some of the workload, it would also incur many of the disadvantages that the current surveys encounter such as a lack of trust in the anonymity process.

However, the reason why this portal could be incredibly useful is that inside the portal could be build an individual response area. When a student leaves an anonymous comment, they could be assigned a tag. Lecturers can respond to the student without knowing who the student is. In this way personal issues can be dealt with privately and confidentiality. These anonymous discussions will allow closure of the feedback loop on a personal impactful level.

The opportunity to segment and speak to groups of students where issues will resonate will mean not all students will receive blanket emails which can lead to disengagement. Only those who need to hear a response will hear a response.

By encouraging continuous personal development and by creating targeted groups for whom issues will resonance with, HWU can close the feedback loop, allow the gathering of evidence and encourage student engagement in all student survey infrastructure.

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