CLOSING THE STUDENT FEEDBACK LOOP

Suggestions for Schools and course teams

New questions which will be included in the National Student Survey from 2017 were recently tested with NTU first- and second-year students. During this exercise, the question “It is clear how students’ feedback on the course has been acted on” received only 50% satisfaction. Despite the considerable work undertaken across the institution to act on student feedback, it would seem that NTU students are not fully aware of the changes that their feedback helps to bring about. This resource provides suggestions for colleagues in Schools and course teams looking to close the feedback loop.

50%
Percentage of student respondents who felt that “it is clear how students’ feedback on the course has been acted on”

Breaks in the feedback loop—NTU student Academic Representatives have commented that:

- There is no platform for students to provide regular feedback or ideas for improvement
- There is no platform for representatives to generate feedback from their peers (online or in person)
- As course committee meetings are held only once a term, a lot of time can elapse before students receive a response on the feedback they have provided
- There is little or no opportunity for representatives to take this information back to students or collect follow-up feedback
- Students fill out EvaSys but do not receive information on what has been changed as a result.

Shah and Nair (2013) point out that informing students of the changes made due to their feedback—closing the feedback loop—encourages them to take part in future surveys. In contrast, the points raised by student representatives (above) may leave students feeling disempowered and potentially disinclined to take responsibility for improving the provision made for their learning.
Transparency and Communication

No single approach can be considered the most effective way to close the feedback loop (Watson 2003; Electric Paper Ltd n.d.). Contextual factors will shape appropriate solutions: Watson (2003) notes that what is ‘best’ will depend on an institution's size, students, and facilities, as well as the courses and aspects of student experience that are surveyed.

Whatever approaches are taken to close the student feedback loop, transparency and communication are likely to be important considerations. Shah and Nair (2013) found that institutions are moving away from the ‘you said, we did’ approach to one that is more about partnership and dialogue. They identify a tension between the ‘perceived consumerist tone’ of ‘you said, we did’ on the one hand, and on the other ‘the increasingly widespread sense that students are partners in the educational process, and that genuine dialogue is more appropriate than responding to demands’.

Several institutions have produced guides for staff emphasising the importance of closing the feedback loop, and proposing useful approaches by which to inform students of the actions that have taken place as a result of their feedback. See for example Birmingham University (n.d.).

Multiple Approaches

It would seem sensible to complement NTU’s current ‘you said, we did’ campaign with other, multiple strategies, as proposed by Watson (2003). Actions need to be taken at School, course and module level in order to close the feedback loop and to clearly show how feedback is being acted upon in order to improve students’ academic experience.

The suggestions which follow include ideas already in use by colleagues at NTU and across the sector as well as tips from the literature. As a rule of thumb, students should be informed which elements of their feedback will be acted upon and how; and which elements will not be acted upon and why.

When feedback is generated, students should receive a response that informs them:

- which elements will be acted upon and how
- which elements will not be acted upon and the reasons for this.
Closing the feedback loop—what can make a difference?

Ideas generated from colleagues at NTU and from the literature:

- At the end/start of a lecture or seminar, staff or student reps provide information verbally to students, updating them on the work that the School/course team is doing.

- In group tutorial sessions, tutors elicit feedback and discuss actions.

- Students can be tasked with finding out how feedback is being used and communicating this to their peers. This could be incorporated into induction or tutorial activities.

- Before a lecture, theatre screens display information on how feedback is being used.

- Onscreen pop-ups (on NOW or NTU computers) display information with an option for students to click and find out how their feedback is being used.

- A course-level learning room or similar student hub can be used for academic representatives to post updates, and for students on the course to post comments and questions.

- Twitter, Facebook groups and other social media platforms can be used to elicit feedback and provide information on how it is being acted upon.

- Course committee meetings could be broadcast live via webcast, or live blogged on social media, so that students not attending can contribute to the discussion.

- Regular meetings with staff can keep course representatives up-to-date on work that the School is doing, so that they can pass this information to their course peers.

- Summaries of actions taken due to academic representatives’ feedback can be generated from School and course meeting minutes, and posted on NOW.

- In-person and/or online real-time Q&A sessions allow students to give feedback on their School/course/university academic experience and receive a response.

- An existing School/course newsletter can be a useful place to provide information on student-driven changes. This could be co-written by staff and students.

- The course prospectus can include information on how student feedback is collected and examples of relevant actions taken.

- Notices on public screens or boards can display information on student-driven changes.

- Information on how feedback is being acted on can be disseminated in School or course-level emails.

Many thanks to Magda Marzec for compiling this resource. Please contact Ellie Kennedy in CADQ (ellie.kennedy@ntu.ac.uk) for further information.
References


