



University for the Common Good

## Student Survey Policy

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## 1. Purpose

- 1.1. The University has a commitment to student feedback as a means of ensuring an excellent student experience at Glasgow Caledonian University. We encourage students to become actively involved in providing constructive feedback about all aspects of University life. This is outlined in a number of publications, including our Student Partnership Agreement which empowers students, staff and the Students' Association to work together to enhance the student experience.
- 1.2. The University currently gathers feedback from its students via a number of centrally administered internal and sector-wide surveys. These surveys allow the University to measure student satisfaction and identify ways in which the student experience can be enhanced. Results from surveys also contribute both directly and indirectly to some key external metrics (e.g. SFC Outcome Agreement National Measures, university league tables), and to the University's performance measures.
- 1.3. Given the increasing interest in and importance of the results from these surveys, the aim of this policy is to set out the guiding principles for centrally administered student surveys. This is in relation to aspects including the administration, dissemination, promotion, reporting and responding to results from these surveys.

## 2. Coverage

- 2.1. This policy applies to all centrally administered student surveys at the University. Centrally administered surveys, referred to as 'surveys' in this policy, refer to University-wide or large-scale surveys that are focused on enhancement of learning and teaching and the student experience, and are co-ordinated and administered by the Department of Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence (SPBI), including internally developed surveys (including module surveys, which are standard practice across the sector) and sector-wide surveys, such as the National Student Survey (NSS). The University's current suite of surveys is available in Appendix 1.
- 2.1. This policy is not intended to cover other surveys that may take place across the University (e.g. student research projects, Students' Association surveys etc.).
- 2.2. Anyone wishing to conduct a University-wide survey or a survey that extends beyond one Department must submit a request for approval. Please refer to section 8 of this policy for further information about the approval process.

### **3. General principles**

- 3.1. The University encourages every student to feedback on their experience at Glasgow Caledonian, facilitated through a range of course and module-based surveys in which all students are invited to take part at least once per academic year. Participation in all surveys is optional.
- 3.2. Feedback gathered via these surveys should be used by the University to enhance the student experience through the identification of best practice and key areas for enhancement. This is in relation to aspects including, but not limited to, learning, teaching, course delivery and wider experience based-elements identified by students in this feedback.
- 3.3. It is important that students are made aware that their feedback has been considered, where relevant acted upon, and expectations managed if, for any reason, it is decided not to implement changes.
- 3.4. Gathering feedback through the surveys is a university-wide effort with academic staff and other services asked to contribute through activities that encourage students to take part. This should always be done in line with guidelines regarding inappropriate influence, with students encouraged to give their honest feedback (see section 4.3 for further guidance).
- 3.5. Student data gathered via all surveys is handled in accordance with the University's Data Protection and Privacy Policy 2018.
- 3.6. All responses are confidential, data held securely and reporting processes undertaken so that no individual student is identified. Students are always made aware of the University's basis for processing any personal data relating to surveys via the University's Student Privacy Notice. Where third party providers are administering surveys (e.g. NSS), as data processors these providers also make their own data privacy policies easily accessible to students.
- 3.7. There is a recognition that all student surveys have their benefits and limitations across content, choice of population distribution, interpretation mechanisms, usage and overlap with other surveys. Non-mandatory surveys will be reviewed Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence on a regular basis to ensure they continue to meet the needs of stakeholders; any proposed changes will be progressed for review and approval through the relevant committee structures at the University.
- 3.8. The robustness of survey results will vary, dependent on various factors e.g. response rates, survey population size etc. Therefore, the reliability of survey results should be carefully considered, particularly when planning any enhancement activities. The principal purposes for the survey should be made clear before any presentation of survey results.

### **4. Roles & responsibilities**

- 4.1. The University's Department of Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence is responsible for the overall co-ordination and administration of all surveys. This includes, but is not limited to the following: determining survey population; survey set-up and distribution; providing response rate updates; co-ordination of survey promotion and prize draws; and reporting of results. Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence are also the main point of contact with private survey companies holding and/or processing University data for the purposes of both internal and external sector-wide surveys
- 4.2. In order to ensure survey populations are accurate, Schools and GCU London are expected to ensure that student, course, module and staff data is up-to-date in each of the relevant databases. Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence will contact relevant staff directly to advise of upcoming survey data requirements. Key survey dates are provided in Appendix 1.
- 4.3. Academic colleagues are in the best position to speak to students about the benefits and importance of surveys. They are therefore expected to encourage students to take part, in line with guidelines regarding inappropriate influence. Staff can remind eligible students to complete the survey but they have a responsibility to ensure that their students are encouraged to give their honest feedback on their student experience. Students should not feel that they are being monitored or encouraged to answer the survey in a particular way and should be left free to interpret survey questions and answer scales without any influence or instruction from staff. Further guidance on inappropriate influence is provided in Appendix 3.
- 4.4. During survey fieldwork periods, where possible, academic staff should allow time during classes for students to fill in their questionnaires (e.g. on their tablet or phone). Advice on this is made available by Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence.
- 4.5. Summary results derived from questions in student surveys should be discussed at relevant Boards, Committees, Student Partnership Forums, and any other relevant School or Service bodies. No staff or student should be identified from the survey results in these discussions.
- 4.6. Schools and GCU London are expected to ensure that students are made aware that their feedback has been considered, and where appropriate actioned at the correct level (e.g. module, course, department etc.). This should also include management of expectations in terms of student feedback that will not be actioned.

## **5. Data collection**

- 5.1. Surveys at the University incorporate questions covering a wide range of themes, primarily focussing on students' academic experience. These are regularly reviewed to ensure they meet the needs of the University.
- 5.2. All surveys are administered online and optimised to allow students to complete using desktops, laptops, tablets or other digital devices. Internal surveys are also made available to students via their GCU Learn account.

- 5.3. Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence have overall responsibility for ensuring a suitable survey system is in place for the purposes of internal surveys, working with the University's Procurement and other relevant departments to ensure this meets the University's needs and complies with relevant legal requirements.
- 5.4. The target population for the surveys range from specific student segments (e.g. based on nationality, year of study etc.) to the majority of the student population. The timings of each survey aim to ensure that the same student is not being asked to complete more than one survey at any given time, safeguarding against 'survey fatigue'. An overview of all current surveys is provided in Appendix 1.
- 5.5. Student population data for the surveys is gathered by Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence from the University's information systems. Staff data is taken from the University's information systems only for the purposes of survey awareness and providing access to survey reports to appropriate staff members.
- 5.6. Schools, GCU London and relevant support departments are expected to ensure that the University's information systems are kept up-to-date with the most recent student, staff, module and course information for the purposes set out in 5.4 above. Further information on key survey dates is provided in Appendix 1.
- 5.7. At the beginning of each survey, the reason why the University is asking for feedback is outlined to students. Students are also made aware that no individual will be identified in reporting of findings, all data collected is held securely and that participation is optional. Some student identifiers may be linked to a student's survey response (e.g. course name, school, student fee status etc.). In internal surveys respondent demographics that are considered protected characteristics are only included if a clear need and use has been determined; in some external surveys (e.g. NSS) the University is required to provide this type of data. This underlying raw data is only used for the purposes of aggregated reporting, held securely by Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence and never made available to anyone outside of the Department.
- 5.8. Prize Draw Terms and Conditions accompany any survey where an incentive or other prize is offered for participating in the survey.
- 5.9. In all internal surveys, students are advised not to identify themselves or staff members in any comments provided. They are also encouraged to ensure that comments are constructive, focus on issues rather than individuals and refrain from feedback that may be in breach of the [University's Dignity in Work & Study Policy](#) and/or [Code of Student Conduct](#). Comments of this nature will be subject to removal and may also be taken forward in line with the Code of Student Conduct.

## 6. Data storage & processing

- 6.1. The University is responsible for data collected in all surveys even when it uses third party systems to support survey administration. All personal and performance-related data that could identify an individual student or member of staff is likely to be exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA).
- 6.2. Private companies holding and/or processing University data on behalf of the University are exempt from the FOISA and contractually will be subject to the University's standard terms and conditions, which require data to be handled in a secure and confidential manner.
- 6.3. Data Processing Agreements/contracts are in place with third party providers holding/and or processing University data on behalf of the University for the purposes of the surveys. These Data Processing Agreements/contracts set out that the third party is processing personal data on behalf of the University and as a Data Processor they will fulfil the Data Processor obligations set out in Data Protection legislation.
- 6.4. University survey data is retained (and ultimately destroyed) in accordance with the time frames set out in the University's Document Retention Schedule. A record of the personal data collected via surveys is also maintained on the University's Information Asset Register.

## 7. Survey results

- 7.1. Survey data is considered to be 'Confidential' information and should be managed in line with the University's Information Classification and Handling Policy.
- 7.2. Only Department of Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence staff have direct access to survey data, and are responsible for initial analysis and distribution of results from all surveys. Where survey results are reported, they are always aggregated, that is, individual survey results are combined together and presented as a group.
- 7.3. For internal surveys, University level summary reports and module/course specific reports are made available to relevant members of staff. These are developed for the purposes of monitoring the learning and teaching experience at appropriate micro and macro-levels across the University. Access to these reports by role is outlined in Appendix 2.
- 7.4. Response thresholds are used to help ensure that students are not identified in reporting of survey results. Internal module and/or course level reports are only made available to relevant members of staff where response thresholds have been met. Where they have, reports are sent via an email to their University staff address. Further information on survey publication thresholds and reports is provided in Appendix 2.
- 7.5. Once downloaded, each member of staff is responsible for the data protection of the report document.

- 7.6. Sector survey results by grouping (e.g. School, department, course etc.) is shared internally with relevant staff subject to publication thresholds being met. Open comments are disseminated securely to relevant staff via email.
- 7.7. All names and pronouns are removed from the NSS by the survey administrator. Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence make every effort to remove staff names and pronouns from comments in all other surveys prior to dissemination of the data. There may, however, still be instances of names in comments and it also may still be possible for staff members to identify themselves and colleagues. Staff should therefore give careful consideration before sharing students' open comments with colleagues to ensure that no breach of privacy/confidentiality occurs. Staff should also ensure that any colleague who receives such reports do not share the information further without their permission.
- 7.8. Quantitative findings from surveys are for quality enhancement purposes, and normally should not be released outwith the University. In some cases, results from surveys can be used for external-facing purposes. Press release guidelines from the survey administrator should be adhered to if doing so.
- 7.9. Due to the sensitive nature of open comments, in order to preserve the anonymity of students and staff, these cannot be released externally. In some cases, paraphrasing of open comments or focusing on general themes found in the open comments is acceptable. Care should be taken not to include any personal data or identifiable information. Guidance should be sought from the survey administrator.
- 7.10. Quantitative data from all surveys is made available via GCU DASH, subject to publication thresholds being met (see Appendix 2). GCU DASH is available to all University staff.<sup>1</sup>
- 7.11. Where possible, analysis of student data takes into account benchmarking. This could be in respect of other universities, previous years, or similar course, and assists in identifying university-specific areas of best practice or areas for enhancement.

## **8. Survey approval process**

- 8.1. Anyone wishing to conduct a University-wide student survey, or a student survey whose target population includes students enrolled in more than one academic department, and for which the target population exceeds 200 students, must submit a request for approval to administer the survey. This process is aimed at avoiding over-surveying of our students, and ensuring that surveys lead to enhancement.
- 8.2. The survey approval process is as follows:
  1. Complete the [survey approval request form](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Staff can contact Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence to request access to GCU DASH.



2. Completed request forms should be submitted to [studentsurveys@gcu.ac.uk](mailto:studentsurveys@gcu.ac.uk) at least six weeks prior to the planned survey launch date.
3. Requests will be reviewed by SPBI for a decision in the first instance, and where necessary, referred to the VP Strategy and Planning for further consideration, in consultation with University Executive Group colleagues as appropriate.
4. Applicants will be notified of a decision by email within 2 weeks.

Please note that consent to conduct a survey under this process does not imply ethical, funding or other approval.

- 8.3. This process applies to both internal and external student surveys that are focused on enhancement of learning and teaching and the student experience, and that are targeted at students in more than one academic department.
- 8.4. This process applies to targeted surveys (i.e. surveys sent to a target list of students). It does not apply to non-targeted surveys (for example, a survey distributed to students via a public web-link posted on social media). However, staff administering large-scale non-targeted student surveys are asked to refer to the University student survey timetable and avoid clashes with other large-scale student surveys.
- 8.5. This process does not apply to surveys conducted by students as part of their studies (students should contact their School for guidance), or surveys targeting students within one academic department (although, staff administering within-department student surveys are asked to refer to the University student survey timetable and avoid clashes with other large-scale student surveys).

## **9. Review and Monitoring**

- 9.1. This policy is made accessible through the University's website and is also linked in staff communications about student surveys. The policy will also be made available in alternative formats where reasonable and practicable.
- 9.2. The policy will be reviewed on an annual basis, taking into account any changes to surveys that the University chooses to develop or participate in as well as wider policy and legislation that may impact on this process. Feedback will be sought from Schools, GCU London and Professional Service departments

## Appendix 1

### Key survey dates

Survey name	Survey fieldwork timings	Frequency of survey	Survey student population data required by	Survey staff data required by	Results available to staff*	Target population*	Internal or Sector survey	Survey distribution channels
<b>New2GCU</b>	Teaching weeks 4 and 5, Trimester A	Annual	Early October	N/A	November	All UK domicile students commencing their studies at the Glasgow campus.	Internal	University email & GCU Learn
<b>International Student Barometer</b>	November/December	Annual	October	N/A	March	All non-UK students at Glasgow or London campuses	Sector	University email
<b>Student Module Surveys</b>	Teaching weeks 11 to Study Week	Each Trimester	End Teaching Week 7	End Teaching Week 7	Within 1-2 weeks of fieldwork close	All students attached to and due to complete a Glasgow Caledonian delivered module in each Trimester	Internal	University email & GCU Learn
<b>Postgraduate Research Experience Survey</b>	April/May	Biennial	Early April	N/A	July	All postgraduate research students at Glasgow or London	Sector	University email
<b>National Student Survey</b>	February to April	Annual	End October	N/A	August	All final year undergraduate students at Glasgow or London	Sector	Email, SMS, telephone
<b>Graduate Outcomes</b>	Apr. 15 months post-graduation	4 cohorts per year	Nov/Feb/May/Aug	N/A	May	All Glasgow Caledonian graduates	Sector	Email, SMS, telephone

\*Dates may be subject to change dependent on external provider timescales, internal priorities etc; \*\* starts/ends on Non-teaching week

## Appendix 2

### Survey results reporting and publication thresholds

Student Module Surveys				
Reports	Report details	Role access	Dissemination method	Publication threshold
<b>Individual module level reports</b>	Module level scores and open comments	MLs; HODs; LTAs; ADLTQs; AHLTQs; Deans; Vice Deans; PVC L&T, and equivalent roles at GCU London	Personalised link to report(s) sent via email	Minimum of 2 invitations and 1 response
<b>Course level reports</b>	Scores aggregated at course level; scores by module and by level; and open comments	PLs; HODs; LTAs; ADLTQs; AHLTQs; Deans; Vice Deans; PVC L&T, and equivalent roles at GCU London	Personalised link to report(s) sent via email	5 or more responses for course (minimum of 2 responses for module level scores)
<b>Department reports</b>	Scores aggregated at department level; scores by module and by level; and open comments	HODs; LTAs; ADLTQs; AHLTQs; Deans; Vice Deans; PVC L&T, and equivalent roles at GCU London	Personalised link to report(s) sent via email	5 or more responses (minimum of 2 responses for module level scores)
<b>School/Area reports</b>	Scores aggregated at School, Department and Level.	ADLTQs; AHLTQs; Deans; Vice Deans; PVC L&T, and equivalent roles at GCU London	Personalised link to report(s) sent via email	5 or more responses (minimum of 2 responses for module level scores)
<b>GCU DASH</b>	Staff can access module survey scores via GCU DASH	All staff	GCU DASH	10 or more responses per grouping (module, course, dept, School etc.)

Survey	Quantitative results	Qualitative results	Thresholds
<b>New2GCU survey</b>	GCU DASH	Programme quant and qual reports shared with PLs, ADLTQs, Deans, Vice Deans; Department quant and qual reports shared with HODs, LTAs, ADLTQs, Deans, Vice Deans; School quant reports shared with ADLTQs, Deans, Vice Deans, and London equivalents.	5 or more responses per grouping

<b>International Student Barometer (ISB)</b>	GCU DASH	Course level open comment reports shared via email with relevant PLs, HoDs, LTAs, Deans, Vice Deans, ADLTQs, AHLTQs, ADIs, Director and Deputy Director of Graduate School, and London equivalents.  Open comments shared with relevant Professional Services areas.	5 or more responses per grouping
<b>National Student Survey (NSS)</b>	GCU DASH	Open comment reports shared via email with relevant PLs, HoDs, LTAs, Deans, Vice Deans, ADLTQs, AHLTQs, and PVC L&T, and Professional Services.  Open comments shared with relevant Professional Services areas.	NSS results are published for programmes courses with 10 or more responses and 50% response rate
<b>Graduate Outcomes</b>	GCU DASH	n/a	Internal reporting threshold: 5 or more responses per programme  GCU DASH: 10 or more responses per grouping  External reporting threshold: 23 or more responses per grouping
<b>Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)</b>	GCU DASH	School reports shared with ADLTQs, ADRs, Deans, Vice Deans, and Graduate School, and London equivalents.	5 or more responses per grouping

## Appendix 3

### Survey promotion principles for staff

Academic colleagues will be in the best position to speak to students about the benefits and importance of the surveys and should encourage students to take part.

All those involved in the promotion of the surveys should be aware of the guidelines regarding inappropriate influence. Staff can remind eligible students to complete the survey but they have a responsibility to ensure that their students are encouraged to give their honest feedback on their student experience. Staff **must not** (adapted from NSS guidance):

- Explicitly instruct students on how to complete any survey, such as explaining the meanings of questions or response scales. The questions and scale are self-explanatory and students should be left to interpret these in a way they see fit. Staff should not recommend that students respond in a certain way, e.g. 'I recommend that you select agree or mostly agree', or misrepresent the scale to students, e.g. defining the 'neither agree nor disagree' as a negative response.
- Link the NSS to league tables, job prospects and the perceived value of students' degrees. Staff should not tell students that if their courses do not achieve good satisfaction scores, this will make their degrees look bad to future employers.
- Arrange compulsory sessions for students to complete student surveys. Completion of any of the surveys, while beneficial to the University, is completely voluntary for students. While arranging completion sessions is allowed, staff should not enforce them nor make students feel there may be consequences should they not attend.
- Take students through the survey on an individual basis. Staff should not stand or sit beside students when they are completing the survey, or take them through their responses question-by-question. Students should be given due privacy so they can respond with honesty and not feel that they are being monitored or encouraged to answer the survey in a particular way.
- Look over students' shoulders when they complete the survey.
- Require students to provide evidence that they have completed the survey.
- Complete the survey on behalf of students.