

What do staff and students really think about the student course evaluation form (SCEF)?

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“ Evidence-based arguments are often influential in making things happen. In this particular case, some of the findings backed up anecdotal evidence and therefore provided concrete evidence going forward. ”

The project

The Student Course Evaluation Form (SCEF) system is a way of measuring the students' academic experience. The system was reviewed by the institutional SCEF working group as the student response rate to SCEFs is often very low. The system was reviewed to explore why students often fail to respond to the online SCEF survey. In addition, staff and student perceptions of the use and value of SCEF were also explored. As the student intern, I analysed historic SCEF data from the University's IT Services, investigated what channels other universities use to gain student feedback, researched commercial systems for student academic course (module) evaluation, and facilitated discussions with students and staff.

Benefits

The main benefits came from the focus groups, where we gained valuable qualitative information on the students' perceptions of the SCEF process, and a better understanding of what we could do to encourage students to engage with it. We also learned that the instructions given for using the system were unclear leading to some misconceptions by stakeholders.

Challenges

The major challenge was in finding ways to interrogate SCEF data from historical IT and bespoke systems.

Working with your institutional colleagues

I worked with one of our Senior eLearning Advisers and staff from the Centre for Academic Development on this project, as well as with IT staff who help with obtaining the SCEF data.

What impact has this had on the student experience?

Our student focus groups have been at the centre of the redesign of the SCEF process. Based on the findings from the focus groups, the SCEFs will be revised and there will be a set of new institutional guidelines and dedicated webpages for academics and students regarding closing the feedback loop. We expect these enhancements will result in students having more confidence in the SCEF process.

What advice/top tips would you give to others who might try something similar?

Find someone you can work with on your focus group questions, make sure your questions are effective, and be prepared for different kinds of answers. Read up on interviewing and focus groups as research methods. Make every effort to remain impartial. Make sure you raise awareness of the project across the University and sell the benefits of what you are doing, so that they are willing to make changes.