Survey Policy

Responsible Officer
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students and Education)

Approved by
Vice-Chancellor

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May, 2017

Review by
May, 2020

Relevant Legislation, Ordinance, Rule and/or Governance Level Principle
Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015
Governance Level Principle 13 - Quality Management Framework

Responsible Organisational Unit
Academic Division

Contents
1 Policy Objective ......................................................................................................... 2
2 Policy Scope .............................................................................................................. 2
3 Policy Provisions ....................................................................................................... 2
3.1 Strategic Rationale for Surveying ............................................................................... 2
3.2 Guiding Principles ...................................................................................................... 3
3.3 Ethics ........................................................................................................................ 4
3.4 Coercion, Privacy, Confidentiality and Incentives ....................................................... 4
3.5 Core and Non-Core Surveys ...................................................................................... 5
3.6 Approval of Non-Core Surveys .................................................................................. 5
3.7 Exemptions from Approval (Non-Core Surveys) ........................................................ 5
3.8 Uses of Student Feedback and Reporting ................................................................. 5
4 Responsibilities .......................................................................................................... 6
4.1 Responsibilities of Students ....................................................................................... 6
4.2 Responsibilities of Teaching Staff .............................................................................. 6
4.3 Responsibilities of University Committees ................................................................. 6
4.4 Responsibilities of the University ............................................................................. 6
4.5 Responsibility for the Administration of Surveys ........................................................ 7
5 Definitions and Acronyms ........................................................................................ 7
6 Supporting Documentation ........................................................................................ 7
7 Versioning .................................................................................................................. 7
1 Objective

The objective of this Policy is to ensure that surveys conducted in the name of the University of Tasmania:

- have a clear purpose
- are of a consistently high standard
- adhere to appropriate ethical standards
- do not duplicate data collection conducted through other University surveys
- do not compromise population samples through the overlap of surveys
- do not over-survey the University’s core stakeholders
- are disseminated and utilised appropriately and are used to inform decision making, in order to enhance and improve teaching, curriculum and the student experience.

2 Scope

This Policy applies to all staff and students at the University of Tasmania.

The provisions of this Policy are limited to surveys that have a primary function of informing quality assurance and improving service at a university-wide level.

This Policy applies to University-wide surveys where the surveyed activities span a significant proportion of the student population.

Examples of these surveys may include:

- Internal quality assurance surveys (e.g. surveys conducted for quality improvement purposes, or by Colleges/Faculties/Institutes in respect of learning and teaching, or for the evaluation of student perceptions of aspects of their experience of the University).
- Surveys commissioned by government departments or peak bodies, or other external individuals or organisations.
- Internal market research surveys.
- Internal surveys of student attitudes and opinions (e.g. satisfaction surveys, climate surveys).

A University-wide survey might be, for example, a survey of all postgraduate students, international students or first year students. It could be a survey of students undertaking courses in several Colleges/Faculties/Institutes and concerning one or more specific issues or themes.

Surveys requiring ethical review and approval are outside the scope of this policy. See the Research Ethics Policy for further information. Surveys that are specifically conducted by teaching staff for the purpose of the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching are also outside the scope of this policy.

3 Policy Provisions

3.1 Strategic Rationale for Surveying

Surveying students in order to determine their levels of satisfaction is an important element of the quality assurance and quality enhancement activities of the University
and is a required activity under the national Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015.

Through its Strategic Plan for Learning and Teaching, the University expresses its commitment to listen to, consider and respond to the student voice, as expressed through surveys and other feedback mechanisms, in order to enhance the whole of the student experience.

Evidence of the quality of the student experience is recognised as a key input into decision making relating to the quality of University teaching and the ongoing planning of student-focussed services. Student and graduate feedback surveys are seen as vital sources of evidence for this purpose. Both internal and national surveys are utilised by the University.

At the University of Tasmania, student surveys also inform a number of quality assurance processes, including course and unit review and monitoring, professional accreditation of courses, as well as academic promotion, probation and performance management processes.

3.2 Guiding Principles

Three guiding principles underlie the University’s approach to student surveys.

First, it is a requirement of the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015 and therefore of the University that:

All students have opportunities to provide feedback on their educational experiences and student feedback informs institutional monitoring, review and improvement activities (5.3.5); and

All teachers and supervisors have opportunities to review feedback on their teaching and research supervision and are supported in enhancing these activities (5.3.6).

Second, a culture of evaluation should be encouraged and explicitly articulated at the University in order that there is an expectation from enrolment that:

- Feedback is sought and given on all aspects of a student’s experience.
- This feedback is analysed and acted upon to enhance learning and teaching and the broader student experience.
- Feedback is acknowledged and responded to.
- Improvements made as a result of feedback are reported back to the wider University community.

Third, a shared understanding of the purposes of gathering feedback is adopted and articulated to the wider University community. Those purposes being:

- The continued enhancement of the student experience in all of its facets – each student’s perception of their experience is valued.
- The promotion of accountability and reputation – to our students, our alumni, employers and other stakeholders.
- Ensuring compliance – with Government regulation and the requirements of professional accreditation bodies.
3.3 Ethics

Surveys requiring ethical review and approval are outside the scope of this policy. See the Research Ethics Policy for further information.

Where survey respondents can be identified through the collection mechanism, unique demographic characteristics or identifiable content in open-ended comments, University staff will treat the survey response as confidential in accordance with the University Privacy Policy.

Although the surveys covered by the scope of this Policy do not require ethical review and approval, ethical principles must still be applied, as follows:

- Honest and ethical conduct in data gathering and dissemination and communication of results.
- Regard for the welfare, rights, beliefs, perceptions, customs and cultural heritage of individuals.
- No harm or discomfort to participants.
- Participants are provided with information about the purpose, methods, demands and possible outcomes (including use and publication of results).
- Specific agreements made with participants are fulfilled.
- Methodology and data gathering is designed by appropriately skilled staff.

If survey data is to be used in research projects, advice should be sought from the Research Integrity and Ethics Unit.

Students may lodge a complaint in accordance with Ordinance 8 – Student Complaints if they believe their survey responses have been used unethically.

3.4 Coercion, Privacy, Confidentiality and Incentives

While students may be encouraged to complete University surveys, participation is voluntary. Students declining to complete surveys must not be denied access to course materials, and must not in any other way be prejudiced with respect to unit completion. Refusal to participate, or later withdrawal, will not be questioned nor result in discrimination or penalty.

The survey design and administration process must guarantee that the privacy of any personal and other information collected is preserved in accordance with the requirements of related legislation, particularly the University Privacy Policy.

Where the survey instrument allows identification of respondents, participants must be accurately advised about the status of personal and other information collected – that it is confidential but not anonymous.

Students must be made aware of any incentive offered for participating in student surveys and evaluations. Any incentive for completion of an institutional survey must be approved by a senior University officer (e.g. Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Divisional Director, Dean of Faculty or Director of Institute).
3.5 Core and Non-Core Surveys

The University of Tasmania administers surveys of the student experience at several levels (e.g. by degree/course, by unit, by individual teacher, by service function and so on).

Core University surveys are either:

- Routine sector-wide surveys required by government or peak bodies; or
- Internal surveys initiated and approved by the Vice-Chancellor, or Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students and Education).

Non-core University surveys are any proposed survey which is not listed as a core survey in the Surveys Register. Non-core surveys are subject to an approval process, as outlined in section 3.6 below.

3.6 Approval of Non-Core Surveys

To minimise the risk of survey-fatigue, and to ensure that the University's core surveys remain a priority to students, the administration of non-core surveys requires the approval of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students and Education) or nominee.

Requests for the release and support of non-core surveys must be submitted to the Curriculum and Quality Section of the Academic Division. A form is available for this purpose on the Student Surveys webpage.

3.7 Exemptions from Approval (Non-Core Surveys)

The following types of non-core surveys are exempt from approval under this Policy:

- Surveys conducted by individual academic staff with students enrolled in their courses as part of learning and teaching quality assurance processes; and
- Basic feedback surveys intended for quality assurance and improvement of administrative processes.

3.8 Uses of Student Feedback and Reporting

University executives, University committees, Colleges/Faculties/Institutes, teaching staff and service divisions use student feedback as one of the sources of data to:

- Improve the quality of courses, units and programs.
- Improve the quality of the student experience.
- Inform professional development programs.
- Improve the provision of learning resources and support services.

Teaching staff may use student feedback as one of the sources of evidence of teaching quality for the purposes of appointment, promotion and teaching awards.
Student survey response rates and results outcomes are reported by the Academic Division as appropriate to:

- Academic staff
- Immediate supervisors
- Unit, course and discipline coordinators
- College/Faculty/Institute executive groups
- University committees, particularly Academic Senate and its sub-committees
- Other stakeholders.

4 Responsibilities

4.1 Responsibilities of Students

Students have a responsibility to:

- Contribute constructive, honest and thoughtful feedback.
- Provide feedback that is not derogatory or vindictive.
- Recognise their important role in contributing to improvements in learning, teaching and the broader student experience.

4.2 Responsibilities of Teaching Staff

Teaching staff have a responsibility to:

- Encourage students to participate in feedback processes.
- Engage with student feedback and actively respond, where possible, to improve the quality of learning and teaching.
- Maintain their own personal records of feedback, with due regard for the confidentiality of the data.
- Ensure that confidentiality and ethical procedures are upheld.
- Reflect upon student feedback to provide information, guidance and support to students to enhance their learning.

4.3 Responsibilities of University Committees

Academic Senate is delegated responsibility for advising Council and the Vice-Chancellor on academic matters, including providing advice on means of achieving and maintaining excellence in academic activities. Sub-committees of Academic Senate therefore play an important role in overseeing institutional student surveys.

4.4 Responsibilities of the University

The University has a responsibility to:

- Make the existence and timing of feedback mechanisms known to students in a timely fashion.
- Actively promote core and summative surveys to engage students in the feedback process.
- Ensure ethical procedures and confidentiality are upheld and regularly assessed.
• Maintain all survey data in a manner that is compliant with relevant legislation and survey methodology.
• Maintain a register of approved surveys.
• Provide information, guidance and support to both staff and students when required.

4.5 Responsibility for the Administration of Surveys

The Academic Division is responsible for:

• Administering and reporting on the University's core institutional surveys.
• Undertaking analysis of survey data and developing reports to support the University's planning and quality improvement processes.
• Providing advice to the University community on student survey design, methodology, protocols, administration and interpretation of results.
• Investigating career and further study activities of recent graduates.
• Coordinating University reporting on survey results.
• Benchmarking of results, through customised trend analysis of data to compare against other institutions.
• Maintaining the University Survey Register.

5 Definitions and Acronyms

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term/Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>When participation is anonymous, it is impossible to know whether an individual participated and, therefore, there is no way to determine the connection between individual participants and the results. In the case of a survey for example, this would mean that the responses cannot be linked in any way to the participant.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benchmark</td>
<td>Evaluate (something) by comparison with a standard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confidential</td>
<td>Participation in an activity such as a survey is confidential if the connection between the participants and the results is known, but the terms of the confidentiality agreement limit those who will know of this connection.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incentive</td>
<td>Something used (such as the chance to win a prize) to encourage participation.</td>
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6 Supporting Documentation

• University of Tasmania Strategic Plan for Learning and Teaching
• Privacy Policy
• Quality Management Policy

7 Versioning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Version(s)</th>
<th>Version 1 – Student Survey Policy (revoked) 11 May 2017</th>
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