

## 4 Ways to Avoid Survey Fatigue in Higher Education

Students are asked to complete a lot of surveys. This has led to concern in most HE institutions regarding the validity and necessity of the many survey projects originating from different parts of the organisation throughout the academic year. It is not uncommon in Higher Education for students to be asked to complete between 6-10 module surveys along with other programme and organisational surveys, all in addition to the NSS. From our experience it's not necessarily that there are too many surveys, rather that there are too many poorly organised surveys that lead to survey fatigue. For this reason, it is important to develop a strategy to manage this problem in order to improve the effectiveness of strategic survey initiatives. For organisations managing surveys, I have highlighted some key points to consider below.

### 1 – Know what surveys are being run at all times

With the advent of free online surveys it is far too easy for anyone who has the desire to simply log on and create a survey. As surveys are driven by many different stakeholders within an organisation, these survey projects can originate from central administration and quality, institutional research and planning, marketing, department heads as well as the academics themselves. Without some centralised visibility to account for what surveys are being generated, there is a real possibility that students are being asked to complete far too many surveys leading to what has been described as survey fatigue. To solve this problem it makes sense to protect your students as a valuable knowledge resource and implement a common survey platform with controlled administrative access to manage and track all survey activity. With free online survey tools, it is easy to deploy a survey. Just because it is easy does not necessarily mean it is a good idea. In fact, it may negatively impact other key initiatives that matter more such as feedback on teaching and learning at course level.

### 2 – Include students as stakeholders

Student organisations have made it clear that there needs to be mechanisms in place to capture the student voice regarding teaching and learning and overall satisfaction on every course and module. This is intensified by the increase in fees and governmental focus on empowering student choice as a key driver for quality and accountability. These factors need to be taken into consideration when communicating the importance of feedback initiatives. As many organisations have found, this can be achieved by highlighting and marketing the efforts being made by the executive to address the student experience. This process can be made even more transparent by making a concerted effort to include students as stakeholders in the survey reporting process with the expectation that they too actively participate in directing the future of the institution through their feedback.

### 3 – Implement real-time feedback

One of the biggest factors of survey fatigue is the fact that students are constantly being asked to complete surveys and they never see the results or evidence of their feedback. The main reason for this breakdown is the complexity in capturing and reporting on survey feedback as many organisations are using antiquated technology or relying on manual processes for capturing and reporting. By implementing advanced real-time technology, institutions are able to gain high response rates and turn the results around quickly. The key is to complete the feedback loop and implement a programme of communicating the outcomes back to the students in an agreed upon strategy for posting results.

### 4 – Communicating the results

A good 'best practice' strategy many organisations have implemented is "You said – we did" communication. This is a vital step in the quality assurance process that leads to higher response rates and reduces survey fatigue. This is because students then understand the importance of completing the surveys they are being asked to participate in. Students are used to completing assignments they are given as long as they understand why and how it will be of benefit to them. While it is important to communicate up front the important role they have in shaping their student experience, it is vital to also provide evidence of follow up action planning based upon the results to help students better understand that

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they are active stakeholders in the process. By completing the feedback loop students are therefore more likely to actively participate adding validity to the entire survey process.

### Electric Paper

Electric Paper works with universities to capture student feedback that will help to improve the future design and delivery of their courses. We work with more than 600 education institutions worldwide through web-based data capture and student survey management solutions to drive efficiency in capturing the student voice at course level. Our flagship product **EvaSys Education Suite™** works to automate course and module evaluation and reporting, thereby saving staff time and costs, as well as generating cross-institution common best practice in assessing student feedback about their teaching and learning experience. In light of the need to place greater emphasis on the “student experience” in UK higher education, our role is increasingly significant. We also deliver surveys of alumni, employees and other members of the education community.

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