



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 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 data collection, storage and processing, survey promotion, and survey results dissemination.

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 and sector-wide surveys, such as the National Student Survey (NSS). Information about the University's current suite of surveys is available on the [student surveys webpages on the University website](#).
- 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 the procedures for survey approval outlined in Appendix 2.

3. General principles

- 3.1. The University encourages every student to feedback on their experience at Glasgow Caledonian, facilitated through a range of surveys in which all students are invited to take part. Student 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 4.2 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.

4. Roles and responsibilities

- 4.1. The University's Department of Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence is responsible for the overall co-ordination and administration of the surveys covered by this policy. 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. For any questions about this policy, please contact studentsurveys@gcu.ac.uk.
- 4.2. 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. This must be done in line with guidelines regarding inappropriate influence. Further guidance on inappropriate influence is provided in Appendix 1.

5. Data collection, storage and processing

- 5.1. Student population data for the surveys is obtained 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.

- 5.2. 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.
- 5.3. Prize Draw Terms and Conditions accompany any survey where an incentive or other prize is offered for participating in the survey.
- 5.4. 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.
- 5.5. 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).
- 5.6. 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.
- 5.7. 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.
- 5.8. University survey data that is held centrally by Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence 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 centrally by Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence via surveys is also maintained on the University's Information Asset Register.

6. Survey results

- 6.1. Survey data is considered to be 'Confidential' information and should be managed in line with the University's Information Classification and Handling Policy.
- 6.2. 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.
- 6.3. Response thresholds are used to help ensure that students are not identified in reporting of survey results. University level results, as well as results by grouping (e.g. by programme, department, School etc.) are made available to relevant members of staff subject to response thresholds being met. Each member of staff is responsible for the data protection of the results to which they are given access.
- 6.4. All names and pronouns are removed from the qualitative NSS results by Ipsos, 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.
- 6.5. 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.
- 6.6. 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. Review and monitoring

- 7.1. This policy is made accessible through the University's website. The policy will also be made available in alternative formats where reasonable and practicable.
- 7.2. The policy will be reviewed on an annual basis by Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence.

Appendix 1: 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 students are encouraged to give their honest feedback on their student experience. Staff **must not**:

- Explicitly instruct students on how to complete any survey, such as explaining the meanings of questions or response scales. The questions and scales 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 a '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. Survey completion, 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.

Appendix 2: Procedures for survey approval

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.

The survey approval process is as follows:

1. Complete the [survey approval request form](#).
2. Completed request forms should be submitted to 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.

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.

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.

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).