Revision of the Student Feedback system:
Interim report of the Task Team
28 April 2015

1. Background

At a meeting on 17 January 2013, the Vice Rector (Learning and Teaching) requested that an electronic student feedback system be developed in order to collect all student feedback in electronic format in future. This request co-incided with the revision of the Student Feedback Policy which was due within the general policy lifetime cycle of five years, as is the case at Stellenbosch University (SU). A task team was appointed and mandated to manage this revision process. The Centre for Teaching and Learning remains responsible for the administration of this system, maintenance of the student feedback questionnaires, processing and storage of the data, as well as the compilation and distribution of student feedback reports to faculties.

2. Reasons for revision of the system

A key priority of the process is to develop an information producing system that will focus on aspects of teaching that are closely linked with improved learning. In this way the new questionnaires should provide both lecturers and students with the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations to work towards effective, quality teaching.

Moving towards an electronic system will also create the opportunity for a more flexible system which could contribute to such conversations. It will allow lecturers greater access to formative feedback possibilities and enable them to easily develop their own customised feedback instruments. In this regard, student feedback can thus play a bigger role in the enhancement of the quality of modules, programmes and teaching. Reports could also be made available quicker, so as to enable lecturers to respond to feedback, if necessary. Students will also be able to experience the outcomes of their feedback.

The electronic system should thus focus on delivering an effective service known for the optimal use of available resources and technology, the fast and effective processing of data and the timely distribution of results. An automated system should create the space to achieve this.

3. The activities and recommendations of the task team

The task team dealt with this revision process within three working groups, with Ms Melanie Petersen (Centre for Teaching and Learning) as convenor of the task team and member of all working groups:

- Work group: Policy
  Dr Hanelie Adendorff (Centre for Teaching and Learning)
  Prof Hansie Knoetze (Faculty of Engineering)
  Ms Babette Rabie (School for Public Leadership)

- Work group: Questionnaires
  Prof Peter Beets (Faculty of Education)
  Prof Anton Basson (Faculty of Engineering)
  Ms Juanita Bester (Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences)

- Work group: Operational aspects – electronic system
  Ms Marinda van Rooyen (IT)
  Ms Loumarie Kistner (Consultant)
  Mr Thys Murray (Centre for Learning Technologies)

Furthermore, two advisory groups were consulted in the initial stages in order to get both lecturers' and students' perspectives. Some of the suggestions made by these advisory groups included that:

- the feedback questionnaires be shortened;
- students provide feedback about modules and teaching on a single questionnaire;
- students still have the opportunity to provide comments in an open section;
- faculties should be able to adapt the questionnaires to the needs of the particular modules and that an application be developed for students to access the questionnaires via their cellphones;
- the current mechanism for determining a general impression mark be replaced by a more statistical calculation of such a mark;
- research be done on the possible impact of the electronic system on the quality and content of the feedback data.

3.1 Work group: Policy

The activities of this group culminated in the drafting of a Rules of Procedure document (see Addendum A). This serves as a management document containing the rules regarding the collection and use of student feedback. Adherence to these rules is compulsory.

3.2 Work group: Questionnaires

The activities of this group culminated in the drafting of a single questionnaire for modules and lecturers. The theoretical framework underpinning this draft questionnaire is referred to as "Productive Pedagogies" (Hayes et al., 2006), which describes the kinds of teaching practices and organisational processes that make a difference to the academic and social learning of students. The framework within which questions are to be posed to students is constituted by three dimensions of quality teaching and learning, i.e. intellectual quality, establishing a quality learning environment and the significance of what is learnt. The identification of these dimensions and elements of quality teaching are also informed by research work conducted by the Danielson Group (http://danielsongroup.org/framework/).

The points of departure regarding the use of the questionnaire are:

- That the insights gained from students' feedback be used formatively in order to support professional development, and as one of various sources of information about teaching[1] when considering staff's teaching during performance reviews;
- That the particular elements in the questionnaire be considered and interpreted in the context of teaching on both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, since the question items are generic and representative of both undergraduate and postgraduate teaching;
- That the questionnaire should be suitable for use as widely as possible, i.e. in most modules, including where a particular lecturer has taught only part of a

[1] This could include: peer evaluations, curriculum design, involvement in departemental or faculty programmes to improve teaching, administration of modules and professional development.

module (it could be completed by the students when that lecturer has completed his/her part of the module).

Furthermore, faculties should note that the aim of the questionnaire is to obtain broad feedback on the key areas in teaching which contribute to the stated attributes of the Stellenbosch University graduate. A generally used questionnaire, which must be brief enough so that students can be asked to complete it in every module, cannot diagnose specific problems or challenges, but can identify aspects that require further investigation to enhance learning.

Faculties will also have the opportunity to add faculty-specific questions to this standard questionnaire, provided that these questions have been approved by the appropriate faculty board and the Committee for Learning and Teaching (CLT). However, caution should be taken regarding making the questionnaire too long, since this could have a negative impact on response rates in the electronic system.

3.3 Work group: Operational aspects

It is this group's task to develop an electronic Student Feedback system within SUNLearn, the current institutional learning management system. Although electronic feedback can already be collected via SUNLearn, more development is necessary at the front and back-end of the student feedback process in terms of the revised rules and questionnaires. This feedback will be used to inform the training of the Student Feedback Office staff as well as to clarify issues emerging within the system and the process.

ADDENDUM A

Stellenbosch University

Draft Rules for obtaining and utilising student feedback about programmes, modules and teaching

28 April 2015

1. Introduction

Student feedback is an important institutional process aimed at the support and promotion of quality teaching at Stellenbosch University (SU). This document provides the detailed regulations with regard to obtaining and utilising student feedback. This is linked to the strategic priority of SU to maintain excellence in the learning and teaching environment.

2. Terminology

2.1 Student FEEDBACK

Information provided by students about their teaching and learning experiences within modules and programmes

2.2 Formative FEEDBACK

Student feedback obtained <u>during</u> the teaching process within the module or programme to contribute to teaching and staff development.

2.3 Summative FEEDBACK

Student feedback obtained <u>upon completion</u> of the teaching process within the module or programme to serve as a source of information regarding the effectiveness of teaching on module, programme or institutional level....

3. PRINCIPLES

The following points of departure form the basis for obtaining and utilising student feedback at the University.

3.1 The use of student feedback should firstly aim to empower individual lecturers to improve the quality of their teaching. Only thereafter should feedback be used for any other purpose, and then with circumspection. In view of this, it is assumed that:

3.1.1 it may be necessary to support lecturers (especially inexperienced lecturers) with interpreting and utilising student feedback results in order to optimise the role that feedback could play in the development of individual teaching;

3.1.2 student feedback data could be useful when drawing up suitable staff development plans for teaching staff. However, it is essential to handle the data in context and to use data in conjunction with other data sources;

3.1.3 within the appraisal of teaching performance, student feedback should never be used as the only source of information or without considering the teaching and learning context.

3.2 As students give feedback anonymously, the feedback system allows students to express their opinions freely, without fear of retribution or the risk of misrepresentation of the results.

3.3 Lecturers should also have the opportunity to provide feedback about their own teaching experiences, in order to provide a more complete representation of the context.

3.4 Each faculty and department is responsible for obtaining student feedback.

4. DETAILED REGULATION WITH REGARD TO OBTAINING AND UTILISING STUDENT FEEDBACK

4.1 Electronic collection of student feedback

The use of electronic feedback is strongly recommended and will be the default option for the institutional system. Electronic feedback allows not only for greater flexibility, but also costs less to administer and can be processed and distributed more quickly.

4.2 Stipulations with regard to the **frequency** of student feedback

Student feedback is obtained at the following frequencies:

4.2.1 The line function management in a particular environment ensures that summative student feedback on all modules and lecturers is obtained at least once every two years. Further to this, formative student feedback could also be collected on more than one occasion within the duration of the module in order for students to experience the effects of their own feedback. Caution must however be taken with regard to the excessive use of questionnaires which could lead to questionnaire fatigue.

4.2.2 Student feedback on learning and teaching programmes (excluding the mainly research-based programmes at M and D level) is obtained annually at the end of the final academic year of the programme. Final-year students participate in the survey. Programme committees and coordinators are responsible for overseeing this feedback process. In the case of structured M-programmes, the feedback should be obtained at the end of the structured part of the programme.

4.3 Stipulations for **requesting** student feedback

4.3.1 Before lecturers request feedback about their teaching and modules, they should first complete the online lecturer feedback form. Lecturers' own feedback could help to contextualise the feedback received from the students.

4.4 Stipulations for **obtaining** and **handling** student feedback

4.4.1 The University distinguishes between student feedback obtained upon completion of the teaching process in the module or programme (summative feedback) and student feedback obtained during the teaching process (formative feedback). In the case of formative student feedback, the results are made available only to the lecturer involved and not to the line function management, unless otherwise requested.

4.4.2 The official system at SU makes use of three types of questionnaires for obtaining summative feedback:

i. Student feedback questionnaire
ii. Questionnaire for Learning and Teaching Programmes
iii. Lecturer feedback form

The Student feedback and Programme feedback questionnaires are completed by students, whilst lecturers provide feedback about their own experiences of the teaching situation (within the particular module) on the Lecturer feedback form.

In exceptional cases where the summative use of the university-wide Student feedback questionnaire remains largely inappropriate, faculties may use a customised questionnaire, provided that these questionnaires are recommended by the appropriate faculty board and approved by the Committee for Learning and Teaching.

The Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) can also assist with developing other formative methods of obtaining student feedback.

Please note: The CTL is in no way directly involved in the evaluation of the quality of teaching, modules or programmes.

4.4.3 Academic staff should never be involved in the collection of summative feedback on a module which he/she teaches.

4.4.4 Student feedback is handled confidentially by the departmental staff who distribute the questionnaires as well as the CTL, which is responsible for the processing of the data. Electronic questionnaires will be dealt with anonymously and lecturers will have no access to any information or data that could compromise the identity of students. This implies that:

a. the results of summative student feedback on lecturers and modules are made available to the lecturer involved, the dean or vice dean (teaching) (where applicable) and the departmental/ module chairperson (and, where applicable, divisional heads);
b. the results of student feedback on modules may also also be made available to programme coordinators, provided that there are sufficient measures in place to protect confidential information;
c. the results of student feedback on learning and teaching programmes are made available to the dean or vice dean (teaching) (where applicable) and the programme coordinator;
d. at his/her discretion the dean may, via the departmental or module chairperson and the programme coordinator (in the case of learning and teaching programmes):
    i. provide the students and other stakeholders with the relevant information in a suitable manner,
    ii. make effective use of class representatives in order to make relevant student feedback information available to students; and

iii. where necessary, launch appropriate follow-up actions;

e. the identity of students who participate in the student feedback process, remain undisclosed.

4.4.5 It is also important that lecturers inform students about the role that student feedback plays within the particular teaching and learning situation. This could help to encourage students to approach the feedback process with greater integrity.

4.5 Stipulations for the use of student feedback data for **research** purposes

The primary aim of the student feedback process is to contribute to the development of teaching and staff. Student feedback data can also make a contribution to institutional learning with a view to enhancing teaching efficacy at either module, programme or institutional level. Only aggregated student feedback data may be used for this purpose, on condition that information regarding response rates, reliability, validity and time when the feedback was collected, be supplied at all times. Under no circumstances may the protection of the identity of students and lecturers be compromised by the use or publication of student feedback data.

The following criteria apply to both the internal and external use of student feedback data for research projects such as postgraduate studies, conference presentations and publications:

4.5.1 In the case of postgraduate studies, a research protocol must be approved by the applicable faculty. The research protocol must also indicate which security mechanisms will be used in order to protect the confidentiality of data;

4.5.2 Full ethical clearance for the research project must be obtained via the appropriate committee(s);

4.5.3 Approval for the use of the University's databases must be obtained via the Division Institutional Research and Planning.

4.6 Governance over these rules

4.6.1 Responsibilities

a. The owner of this document is the Vice Rector (Learning and Teaching) as line manager for the quality assurance function of the University and he/she is responsible that the document exists, is updated and implemented and that a curator and relevant structures and roles are identified and function effectively.

b. The curator of this document is the Senior Director: Learning and Teaching Enhancement and he/she is responsible for the formulation, approval, revision, communication and distribution of this document. The curator periodically, as deemed necessary, calls together a task team for the revision of this document.

4.6.2 Monitoring and reporting

a. The owner of this document is accountable and the curator is responsible for establishing the necessary control mechanisms for monitoring and reporting regarding this document and to report to the Rector's management team on an annual basis.

b. In cases of non-compliance with these rules, normal line management practices will be applicable.