Guidance note on User Surveys

This Guidance note has been developed from the Report of the Working Group on User Surveys, which was approved by the University Board for Teaching and Learning during the 2005-06 academic year.

Definition

A User Survey is a survey carried out by a 'support service' (usually within one of the University's Directorates) in order to obtain the views of its users on the services and facilities which it provides. These will normally be students but may also be other users, both internal and external to the University.

Survey Design and Mechanisms

The University does not prescribe how surveys are designed or what questions should be asked, as it believes that these issues are dictated by the context and nature of both the survey and the 'support service' undertaking it. The University is developing guidance for services with regard to survey design.

The University does not also prescribe a single mechanism to be used to conduct surveys recognising that, once again, this will depend on the context and nature of the survey and the service. Practice within the University suggests an appropriate range of mechanisms are used including:

- face-to-face contact (including focus groups)

- web-based surveys;

- surveys circulated by email;

- paper surveys.

A number of electronic survey tools are currently used in the University to carry out web-based and email surveys.

Analysing and Publishing Results/Outcomes

After conducting a User Survey, the 'support service' which has undertaken it should ensure that the results are analysed and considered, with appropriate actions taken to address any issues, where relevant.

In addition, the 'support service' should ensure:

(a)   that it provides appropriate feedback to its users on the results of Surveys and in relation to the consequent actions taken; and

(b)   that the results of such surveys are widely published at appropriate times and by appropriate methods, including on the support services' website.

The University is developing an institutional User Surveys webpage, which will provide links to the results published by support services on their own webpages. This will enable users to

quickly gain an overview of institutional-wide activity and also provide easy access to particular User Surveys.

Timing of User Surveys
The University recognises that, in particular, students are asked to give their opinions on a wide range of issues including providing widespread feedback on their academic programmes, in addition to any User Surveys of 'support services'. In order to avoid 'survey fatigue' the University intends, if possible, to develop a systematic programme of User Surveys for the University, with appropriate timing so as to:

(a)   guard, in so far as was possible, against 'survey fatigue' on the part of students and other users;

(b)   establish a balanced and cyclical programme of surveys; and

(c)   to ensure that the workload of those carrying out and analysing such surveys was spread across a number of years;

Commercial Sensitivity
The University recognises that there are certain surveys carried out at the University which deal with information and produce outcomes which are likely to be commercially sensitive or personal to individuals. In such cases, results should not be published.