

Academic Year
2014/15

Study-Unit Feedback Report



UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
L-Università ta' Malta

“When student evaluations are approached with the intention of improving teaching effectiveness, the focus is rightly on the students who stand to gain from the changes.

The emphasis falls not on improving one’s teaching “performance” but on making changes that will enable students to learn more effectively or efficiently.”

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Section 1: Introduction

As outlined in the [Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement](#), one of the mechanisms in place at the University of Malta intended to ensure quality in service provision, is that of seeking feedback from students on the quality of the study-units included in the programmes of study they are following.

The main objective of this exercise, which is conducted twice annually, is to provide lecturers and departments with an opportunity for self-evaluation and improvement. Study-unit evaluation and end-of-programme feedback from students, are two of the processes which feed directly into another quality assurance mechanism - the [Teaching Programme Review](#) which departments are expected to carry out periodically on all the taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes they have on offer.

This report analyzes the feedback received from students on study-units which were delivered and assessed during the academic year 2014-15, which marks the seventh year since the study-unit feedback exercise was launched.

Section 2: Overview of the Process

The study-unit evaluation exercise which is held at the end of each semester (February and June) is organized centrally and falls under the remit of the Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs. It is conducted electronically via e-SIMS (the Students' Information Management System).

Not all study-units delivered during a particular semester are included in the exercise. Study-units are selected on a cyclical basis, with the aim that over a three-to-four-year period, all study-units included in a programme would have been evaluated by students. Whilst selection of study-units is largely random, it is not uncommon for individual lecturers, or Heads of Department, to request feedback on study-units (especially new ones) on offer.

The feedback process has been designed to ensure fairness and equity throughout. Prior to commencement of each biannual feedback exercise, lecturers are informed of the study-units which have been selected for evaluation. Subsequently, students are strongly encouraged to submit their feedback through email notifications, promotional posters and various reminders. Since a section of the questionnaire is intended to gauge the validity and fairness of the assessment methods, students are asked to provide feedback after having been assessed on the unit. In order to ensure that the feedback given by students is not biased, the results of the assessment are only made available to students once feedback on the study-unit is submitted by the whole class or alternatively once the feedback session is concluded. Similarly, in order to ensure that students are not adversely affected by the feedback they submit, the result of the feedback exercise are only made available to lecturers after the assessment result for the study-unit in question has been made available to students.

The results of the feedback exercise are not only made available to the lecturer/s of the study-unit: they are also made available to the Head of Department concerned and the Dean of the respective Faculty. Boards of Studies are expected to analyse the outcomes from student feedback, among other things, and use these as a source of information about accomplishments, problem identification and assessment from both an internal and external perspective. This analysis should form part of the Annual Programme Review

which departments should conduct at the end of each academic year, in preparation for the programme review exercise which all departments are required to undertake periodically.

Any serious issues which emerge from feedback are immediately brought to the attention of the Rector and Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs who then take up these issues with heads and deans, as appropriate, in order to allow for any timely action to be taken to improve matters.

Participation in the feedback exercise is not mandatory and is completely anonymous. Unfortunately, despite the measures outlined hereunder, some students remain sceptical about the anonymity of the exercise, and consequently, the response rate for a number of study-units is sometimes too low to warrant the enforcement of remedial action.

The following procedures are in place to ensure total confidentiality:

- Students who complete the online form are not asked at any stage for their names or any other personal details which may be used to identify them.
- Although students must log onto e-SIMS to provide feedback, all student login data is kept separate from the students' feedback responses.
- Student response data is grouped together for the entire class for the purpose of data analysis. It is therefore impossible to associate comments and responses provided with any individual student.
- Lecturers receive a report which summarises all the information collated as percentage values.
- The online format adopted is more conducive to maintaining student anonymity, since traditional paper and pencil methods require open-ended comments to be handwritten. In addition to this, students are able to provide their feedback in privacy, rather than during class time and in the presence of the lecturer or other students.
- Lecturers receive the aggregate results of student feedback after they have submitted the assessment results for the study-units being reviewed. This ensures that the assessment results of students, even though not identifiable on an individual basis, are not affected as a group by the feedback submitted.

- There is no penalty of any sort for abstaining from submission of feedback, since all assessment results are published irrespective of participation or non-participation in the student feedback exercise.

As low response rates can compromise the validity of the exercise, only those study-units which achieve a response rate of at least 30% are analysed. Study-units with an overall response rate of at least 30% which elicit 25% or more “negative”¹ responses to the 29 questions included in the questionnaire are deemed as “problematic”.

After the results of the two annual feedback sessions have been analysed, Deans are requested to inform the Rectorate of the actions taken to address perceived deficiencies. “Problematic” study-units are automatically re-assessed at first opportunity to establish whether the identified problems have been resolved or progress made.

¹ “Negative” responses are those which achieve a rating of 3 or higher on the 5-point scale where 1 indicates that the student strongly agrees and 5 indicates that the student strongly disagrees.

Section 3: Methodology

At the end of each semester, students are asked to give their views on the study-units chosen for evaluation by filling in an online questionnaire composed of 29 close-ended questions and an open-ended question which provides students with the opportunity of expressing any other concerns and/or elaborating on their previous answers. The close-ended questions are rated on a standard 5-point scale, where to each question asked

- 1 indicates that the student strongly agrees
- 2 indicates that the student agrees
- 3 indicates that the student is not sure
- 4 indicates that the student disagrees and
- 5 indicates that the student strongly disagrees.

The questions are divided into 6 sections which centre around the students' learning experience at the University. The sections deal with separate issues as follows:

1. General questions on the study-unit;
2. Study-unit description and actual delivery;
3. Lecturing methodology;
4. Lecturer;
5. Method of assessment;
6. Administration and resources.

The study-units are selected by the Academic Programmes Quality & Resources Unit following a process standardised over the last few years. In order to limit students' fatigue, approximately one third of the study-units available for feedback from each Department, Institute, Centre or School are selected for evaluation at the end of each semester. Study-units which have never been evaluated (targeting mainly new study-units) are selected for evaluation first, followed by study-units which have a large number of students registered on them. In addition, any study-units identified as "problematic" during the previous feedback exercise are also included in order to monitor progress. While the process of

selection is generally random, it also allows for the possibility of responding to concerns that may arise from time to time.

Each feedback session is open for approximately two weeks, with the possibility of an extension for those study-units for which the assessment result is not yet available for publication. The assessment results for study-units which are available by the first deadline are published even if the feedback response rate is low. Assessment results which become available during the period of extension are published immediately these become available.

An analysis of the data and findings for the feedback exercises conducted during the academic year 2014/15 follows.

Section 4: Data Analysis & Findings for the Academic Year 2014/15

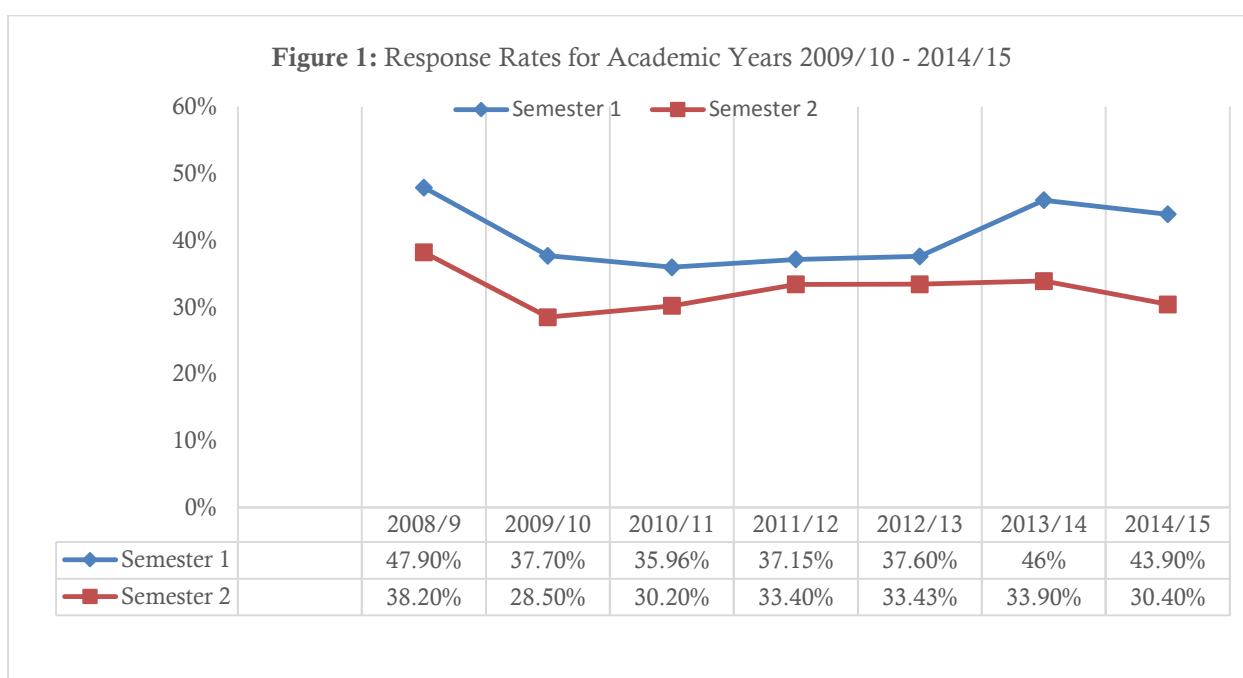
During the academic year 2014-15 a total of 1141 study-units were assessed: 531 study-units were assessed at the February session and another 610 study-units at the June session. The distribution of the study-units evaluated for each Faculty is illustrated in **Table 1** below, whilst details of all study-units included in the two exercises are available in *Appendix I* to this report.

Table 1: Total Study-Units by Faculty and Semester

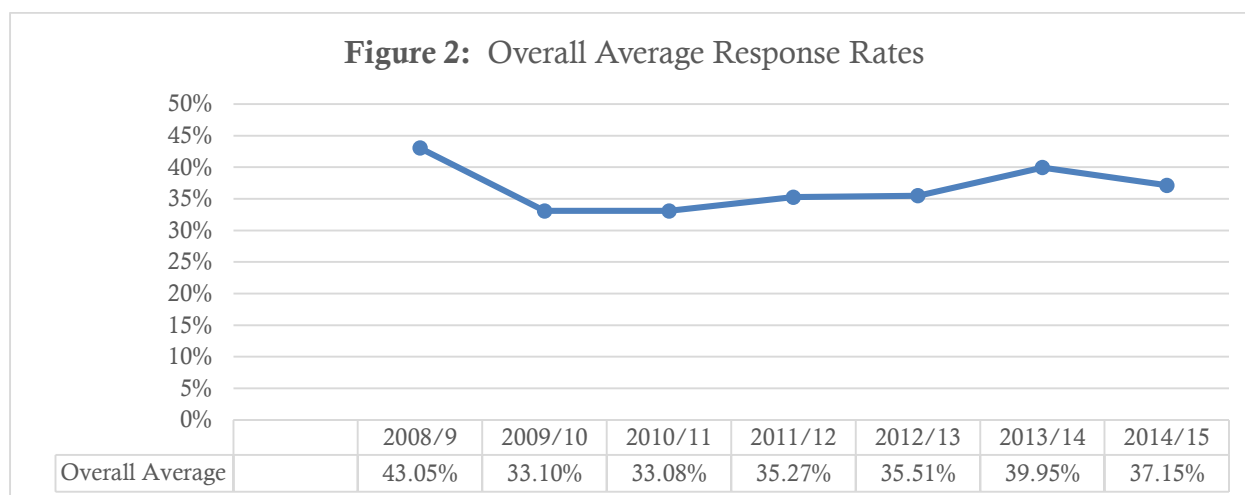
F/I/C/S	Semester 1	Semester 2	Total
Arts	81	101	182
Built Environment	19	18	37
Dental Surgery	2	5	7
Education	35	58	93
Economics, Management and Accountancy	60	63	123
Engineering	17	21	38
Health Sciences	47	62	109
Information & Communication Technology	22	20	42
Laws	26	26	52
Medicine and Surgery	46	29	75
Media and Knowledge Sciences	15	12	27
Science	23	39	62
Social Wellbeing	38	48	86
Theology	17	16	33
Baroque Studies	3	2	5
European Studies	6	4	10
Digital Games	1	1	2
Earth Systems	9	10	19
Maltese Studies	1	1	2
E de Bono Inst. for the Design & Dev of Thinking	3	4	7
Sustainable Energy	1	1	2
Linguistics	7	8	15
Public Administration and Management	1	1	2
Physical Education and Sport	3	4	7
Tourism, Travel and Culture	5	7	12
Labour Studies	4	4	8
Entrepreneurship and Business Incubation	3	0	3
Environmental Education and Research	3	3	6
English-Language Proficiency	5	4	9

Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research	0	1	1
Liberal Arts and Sciences	16	16	32
School of Performing Arts	5	6	11
Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies	2	3	5
Foundation Studies Programme	5	12	17
TOTALS FOR 2014/15	531	610	1141

As evidenced in **Figure 1** below, the overall response rates achieved at the two feedback sessions conducted in 2014/15 confirm a trend which has been consistent throughout all years: the feedback exercises held at the end of the first semester achieve a significantly higher response rate than those conducted at the end of the second semester.



The response rate achieved in June is the third lowest to date. However, notwithstanding a drop of approximately 3% from the response rates of the previous three sessions held in June, the overall response rate for February, which at 43.9% is the third highest to date, maintained the yearly average at a respectable 37.15% which, as evidenced in **Figure 2**, is incidentally the third highest overall average rate to date.



Following analysis of the feedback submitted by students using the filtering criteria indicated in Section 2 of this report, only 33 of the 1141 study-units which were evaluated during the year, (equivalent to 2.89% of the total), were identified as “problematic”. This marks a decrease of approximately 1.3% when compared to the percentage problematic study-units for 2013/14 which stood at 4.19% (45 of the total 1074 study-units evaluated). A breakdown of the number of “problematic” study-units by Faculty for 2014/15 is included in **Table 2** below.

Table 2: Breakdown of “Problematic” Study-units by Faculty

F/I/C/S	Total Study-Units Evaluated	Study-Units identified as “Problematic”
Arts	182	5
Built Environment	37	1
Education	93	2
Economics, Management and Accountancy	123	6
Engineering	38	3
Information & Communication Technology	42	4
Laws	52	2
Medicine and Surgery	75	2
Media and Knowledge Sciences	27	2
Science	62	4
Linguistics	15	1
Foundation Studies Programme	17	1
		33

A close inspection of the feedback submitted by students indicates that the main problems identified pertain to the following aspects: lecturing methodology; assessment methods; description of study-unit not being sufficiently clear; and amount of work being incompatible with credit value.

It is to be noted that none of the study-units identified as “problematic” in 2013/14 which were re-evaluated in 2014/15 appear among the “problematic” study-units referred to in **Table 2** above. Notwithstanding the fact that these study-units did not show up again as “problematic”, they were still analysed to check for progress. While the majority did register an overall improvement, some others appear to require further action.

Inspection of the feedback submitted by students, including the free-text section of all study-units evaluated for the year, indicates that students are generally satisfied with the quality of service provision and re-affirmed that in the main:

- Lectures were well-structured and delivery was stimulating
- Lecturers were knowledgeable and well-prepared
- Lecturers were helpful and dedicated

Notwithstanding the largely positive comments however, the following areas, which resonate with some of the concerns raised in relation to the problematic study-units, are indicated as requiring improvement/attention:

- The amount of work involved in the assessment and the time allowed were not fair
- The amount of work is incompatible with the assigned credit value
- Library resources are not sufficient

Section 5: Feedback Follow-up

Deans and Directors are requested to inform the Rectorate of the corrective measures taken to address “problematic” study-units. This report concludes with a list of the corrective measures taken by F/I/C/S to address concerns raised by students.

Table 3: Corrective Measures taken by F/I/C/S

Type of Action Taken	No. of Study-Units
1. Change in lecturer or discontinuation of service from lecturer employed on casual basis	6
2. Change in Study-unit Description	1
3. Change in Method of Assessment	9
4. Change in Lecturing Methodology	1
5. Restructuring/replacement of Study-unit	5
6. Introduction/increase in the number of tutorial/practical sessions	1
7. Better coordination of study-unit	2
8. Recording of lectures to allow for timely feedback to lecturers	1
9. Notes and supporting material to be given / revised	14
10. Organisation of an in-house “train the trainers” course	1
11. No further action required at this stage beyond that which has been taken internally, ranging from discussion with lecturer/s to implementation of minor corrective measures.	7