



UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
STUDY-UNIT FEEDBACK REPORT

ACADEMIC YEARS
2010/11 – 2013/14

March 2015

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“ *The University aims to offer the best possible environment and learning experience to encourage students to perform to their full potential.*

Students play a critical part in the evaluation, development and enhancement of the quality of this learning experience. Feedback from students allows the University to evaluate how its service provision is viewed by its most important group of stakeholders, namely its students.

The Bologna Process has put an increasing emphasis on the need for involvement of students in the quality assurance of higher education. Student involvement requires that students act as collaborators in, rather than merely passive receivers of, teaching and learning. ”

<http://www.um.edu.mt/apqru/studentfeedback>

Section 1: Introduction

The students' evaluation of their learning experience is an integral and necessary component of any quality assurance system as it allows the institution to evaluate how its service provision is viewed by its most important group of stakeholders, namely, the students themselves. Besides providing students with an opportunity to comment on the quality of their courses, it also ensures that lecturers are made aware of problems perceived or encountered by students and thus affords lecturers an opportunity for self-evaluation and improvement.

The **objectives** of the student feedback exercise are thus three-fold:

1. to provide students with the opportunity to comment on the quality of their learning experiences, as required in preparation for and as part of review processes;
2. to assess the success of academic provision in relation to the expectations of students;
3. to provide feedback to lecturers in order to improve delivery and/or content of the study-unit.

Ultimately, the study-unit feedback exercises are aimed mainly at improving the quality of service provision and hence the students' learning experience at the University of Malta.

Section 2: Overview

The current student evaluation of teaching which is performed online was launched in June 2008 and has since become a bi-annual event. The last student feedback exercise was the thirteenth review of this sort. The exercise is conducted at the end of each semester with feedback being collected after students have been assessed on a particular study-unit, but prior to publication of the assessment results. This is done in order to ensure that the assessment marks obtained by students do not impact on the response they give to the questions being asked. In turn, in an attempt to instill in students a sense of trust in the confidentiality of the review process, the results of the feedback exercise are only made known to lecturers after the assessment marks are published to students.

In order to avoid student fatigue associated with the exercise, only a selection of study-units is evaluated during any one feedback session (normally one third of the study-units on offer during the semester). However, since the exercise is cyclical in nature, the adopted system provides that all study-units which feature in a particular programme will be evaluated over a reasonably short period of time thus providing departments with data which is essential for proper periodic programme review.

Participation in the feedback exercise is not mandatory. Students are strongly encouraged to submit their feedback through email notifications, promotional posters and various reminders. This notwithstanding, the majority of students does not perceive this as an opportunity to play an active role as partners in total quality improvement. Better participation rates remain a challenge as the response rates for exercises conducted during June 2008 to date given in *Figure 1* show.

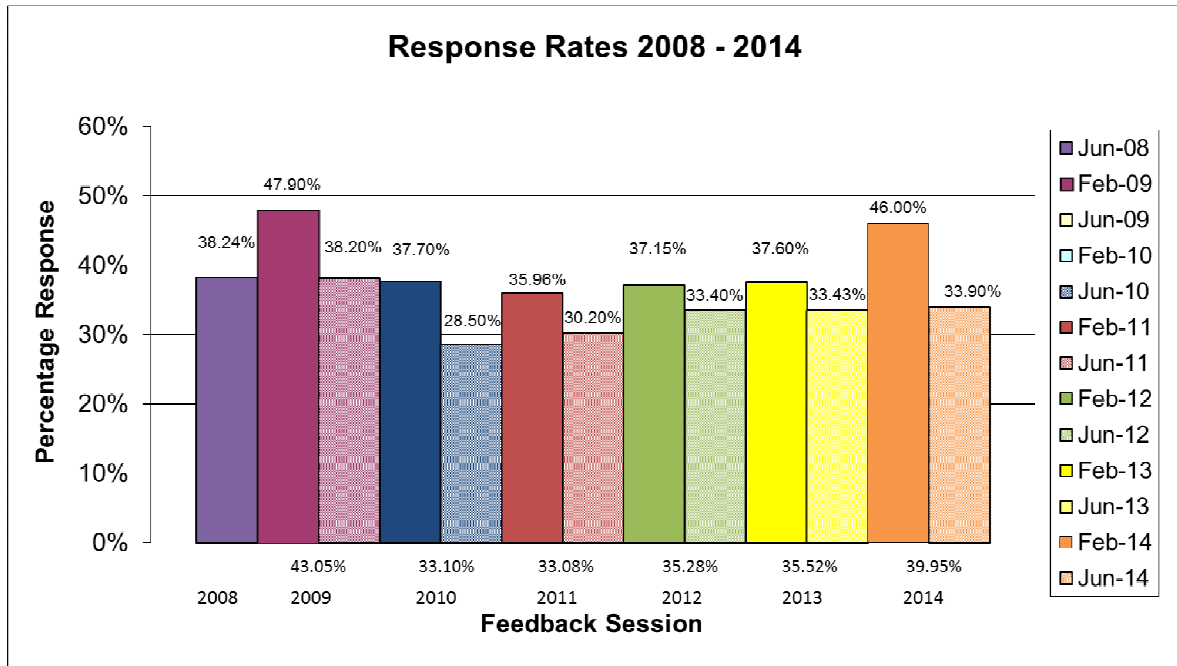


Figure 1: Response Rates Years 2008 - 2014

The highest average annual response rate was that achieved during the first full year of operations (43.05% for academic year 2008/09), with the responses received during the following two academic years (2009/10 and 2010/11) being the lowest to date (approximately 33%). The response rate achieved over the academic years 2011/12 and 2012/13 increased slightly to an annual average of approximately 35%. A further increase in participation rate was noted during the past academic year 2013/14 when it reached an annual average of 39.95%.

Figure 1 also reveals a trend which appears to be consistent over all years – 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.

Although the average response rate (just over 36%) compares favourably with that in other higher education institutions, our aim is to increase and maintain a healthy response rate as this will provide a clearer indication of what students expect and need from their university experience.

Students’ participation in the exercise, or the lack of it, is likely due to a number of factors, thus:

- (a) student fatigue associated with the exercise;
- (b) the results of feedback not being made known to the students;
- (c) lack of visibility (by students) of any corrective action intended to remedy problematic situations; and
- (d) perception that exercise is not anonymous.

In actual fact, feedback from students is being taken into consideration and cases worthy of ongoing monitoring are being followed up by departments. This report addresses issue (b) and documentation of corrective action taken to address the more serious concerns will, going forward, also address issue (c).

On the other hand, with regards to issue (d), despite the fact that anonymity has always been guaranteed and rigorously ensured, some students remain apprehensive of consequences following a negative review. This apprehension is totally unwarranted as lecturers only have access to a report which summarises all the information collated as percentage values (as can be verified by clicking on the screenshot of the feedback questionnaire available at <http://www.um.edu.mt/apqru/studentfeedback>).

Section 3: Methodology

During every feedback session students are asked to give their views on the study-units chosen for evaluation by submitting their response to 29 close-ended questions by rating these on a standard 5-point scale, where to each question asked, response

- 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 asked are divided into 6 sections which are about 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 questionnaire also includes an open-ended question which provides students with the opportunity of articulating in writing any other concerns and/or elaborating on their previous answers.

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.

After the feedback session for a particular semester is ended, the results are communicated to the lecturer/s of the study-units reviewed; thus providing lecturers with an opportunity for self-reflection and improvement. Heads of Department, Deans of Faculty, and Directors of Institutes, Centres and Schools also receive a copy of the results for all evaluated study-units offered by their entity. This allows for detection and consideration of any emergent trends. It is the responsibility of Heads of Department to ensure that any issues arising from study-unit feedback are discussed and addressed by the relevant Board of Studies.

The Rector and Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs are alerted to any serious issues which emerge from feedback: such issues are discussed with heads and deans, as appropriate, in order to allow for any timely action to be taken to improve matters.

Section 4: Summary of Results & General Findings – Results for Academic Years 2010/11 to 2013/14

This section presents an analysis of the results obtained from feedback conducted during the academic years 2010/11 to 2013/14. *Table 1* shows the number of study-units reviewed in each semester during this period.

Academic Year	Period	No. of Study-Units Reviewed
2010/11	Sem 1	297
	Sem 2	149
2011/12	Sem 1	392
	Sem 2	521
2012/13	Sem 1	413
	Sem 2	536
2013/14	Sem 1	488
	Sem 2	586

Table 1: Number of study-units reviewed during Academic Years 2010/11 to 2013/14

A full list of study-units evaluated during each of these feedback sessions can be found in *Appendix I*; the study-units are categorized according to the department responsible for them.

As shown in *Table 2* below, the majority of respondents provided *positive feedback* on the study-units which were evaluated during this period.

Academic Year	2010/11		2011/12		2012/13		2013/14	
	SEM 1	SEM2	SEM 1	SEM2	SEM 1	SEM2	SEM 1	SEM2
Total Study-units Assessed	297	149	392	521	413	536	488	586
No. of study-units with positive replies	289	142	376	497	402	519	462	565
No. of study-units with >=30% Response rate and >=25% negative comments	8	7	16	24	11	17	26	21
	2.7%	4.7%	4.1%	4.6%	2.7%	3.2%	5.3%	3.6%

Table 2: Positive & Negative replies (Percentages above express the percentage with respect to the total study-units evaluated).

Table 3 displays the number and percentage of negative and positive replies of the study-units having response rate of greater than or equal to 30%.

Academic Year	2010/11		2011/12		2012/13		2013/14									
	SEM 1	SEM2	SEM 1	SEM2	SEM 1	SEM2	SEM 1	SEM2								
Total Study-units Assessed	297		392		413		488									
Study-units with >=30% response rate	58	19.5%	34	22.8%	95	24.2%	131	25.1%	105	25.4%	142	26.5%	363	74.4%	369	63.0%
No. of study-units with >=30% Response rate and >= 25% negative comments	8	13.8%	7	20.6%	16	16.8%	24	18.3%	11	10.5%	17	12.0%	26	7.2%	21	5.7%
No. of study-units with positive replies	50	86.2%	27	79.4%	376	83.2%	107	81.7%	94	89.5%	125	88.0%	337	92.8%	348	94.3%

As a percentage of total study-units evaluated

As a percentage of total study-units with >= 30% response rate

Table 3: Percentage of negative and positive replies of units with >=30% response rate

The most positive aspects were the following:

- Lecturer appeared to be knowledgeable about the subject
- Lecturer's attendance was regular
- The study-unit was clearly indicated as part of the programme on the students' notice board and/or university's website

Despite the fact that the feedback provided was largely positive, there were some instances where the following areas were identified as requiring remedial action:

- Lectures did not encourage student participation
- Lectures were not understandable and stimulating
- The amount of work involved was not compatible with the credit value assigned
- The library resources available were not sufficient to carry out the studies

In order not to compromise the validity of the exercise for the purpose of identifying possible problem areas, only those study-units which elicited a response rate $\geq 30\%$ were considered. Of these study-units those which had an overall negative response rate $\geq 25\%$ to the questions asked were identified as "problematic" study-units. Responses that were deemed to be "negative" were those that achieved a rating of 3 or lower on the 5-point scale. These study-units are re-assessed in the next feedback

session. *Table 4* gives the total number of study-units identified as “problematic” during the academic years 2010/11 – 2013/14, on a Faculty basis.

Total number of "problematic" study-units per Faculty								
Faculty /Institute / Centre	2011		2012		2013		2014	
	Total Assessed	Problematic	Total Assessed	Problematic	Total Assessed	Problematic	Total Assessed	Problematic
Faculty of Arts	65	1	161	4	167	4	200	5
Faculty for The Built Environment	21	0	27	1	26	1	34	2
Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy	39	3	90	2	102	6	110	7
Faculty of Education	27	0	80	3	83	0	83	3
Faculty of Engineering	17	0	38	2	21	3	45	5
Faculty of Health Science	45	1	89	5	105	1	96	3
Faculty of Information and Communication Technology	22	1	43	3	43	2	42	3
Faculty of Laws	19	0	50	1	39	1	49	1
Faculty of Media & Knowledge Science	1	0	18	1	31	0	30	1
Faculty of Medicine & Surgery	32	0	41	3	41	2	64	5
Faculty of Science	34	3	55	9	62	4	64	4
Faculty for Social Wellbeing	29	2	66	1	74	2	72	0
Institute of Earth Systems	6	0	15	3	17	0	23	3
Edward de Bono Institute for the Design & Development of Thinking	7	0	6	1	4	1	5	0
Institute for European Studies	7	1	11	0	10	0	9	1
Institute of Linguistics	8	1	15	0	15	1	13	0
Institute for Sustainable Energy	3	1	2	0	4	0	3	0
Institute for Tourism, Travel & Culture	13	0	19	0	24	0	11	1
School of Performing Arts	9	0	7	1	14	0	14	1
Centre for Labour Studies	2	1	6	0	8	1	7	0

Table 4: Total number of “problematic” study-units per Faculty for period 2011-2014

Section 5: Feedback follow-up

For academic year 2013/14, Deans and Directors were provided by the Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs with a list of “problematic” study-units identified in their faculties/institutes and were asked to provide information regarding any follow-up action. The result of such follow-up is shown in Table 5.

Type of Action Taken	No. of Study-Units
1. 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.	12
2. Change in lecturer or discontinuation of service from teacher employed on casual basis	5
3. Change in study-unit description	2
4. Change in Method of Assessment	2
5. Change in Lecturing Methodology	2
6. Restructuring/replacement of Study-unit	11
7. Increase in the number of tutorial/practical sessions	5
8. Better coordination of study-unit	2
9. Strong recommendation to re-evaluate study-unit	3
10. Lecturer issues escalated to involve dean and pro-rector	1

Table 5: Details of follow-up action