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Collecting student feedback: a whole-school approach

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Collecting student feedback: a whole school approach

What problem was addressed?

Feedback from medical students is used to understand how students experience teaching, learning and the environments in which these take place. It is a key driver for course improvement and a core indicator of quality within higher education (1).

Historically, within our institution feedback collection has been ad hoc, disjointed and methodologically unsound; driven by a range of factors (including individual scholarship or developmental interests) and obscured by requests to students for information from multiple 'other sources'.

What was tried?

Working in partnership with students, a Feedback Working Group addressed feedback by creating a whole-school conceptual model comprising 3 interrelated levels: 'broad sweep', 'mid-range' and 'individual'.

'Broad sweep' feedback provides a generalisable overview of students' perceptions of their course. Undertaken annually and with an emphasis on a high response rates, the broad sweep survey provides an indication of students' perceptions of each key aspect of the course 'year on year' and highlights areas for further exploration.

Results are reported to all staff.

Mid-range feedback 'goes deeper'. Here, module teams develop bespoke methods of data collection suited to their teaching and learning settings. Alongside this, a committee meets termly to hear (and field) comments about course progress from representatives nominated by the student community.

Individual feedback refers to students' unsolicited comments. Students can provide feedback at any time via a feedback button on their digital learning environment (DLE), a form at reception, or via email. Individual feedback is handled by an administrator who acts as gatekeeper, anonymises comments, ensures that the relevant team receives the feedback and guarantees that students receive a response within 28 days.

What lessons were learned?

The system has enabled us to explore the extent to which student views are generalizable and to gain a deeper insight into why aspects of the course may be perceived as problematic. Our system has highlighted for us the diversity of views held between and within cohorts of students. In addition the system has enabled us to test the effectiveness of our responses to student feedback.

By rationalizing feedback collection within the school (by providing a frame of reference and a shared language through which we can organise our feedback work), our practices are now more 'joined up'. This clarity has fostered a culture where students feel empowered to provide feedback. In partnership with students we have created a 'you said we did' area on our DLE that catalogues the schools' responses to student feedback. We have also developed a 'Your Voice' app so feedback can be gathered swiftly at either midrange or individual level.

Other lessons include the importance of 'system maintenance' through meeting regularly as a Feedback Working Group and the value of applying knowledge about research methods to the problem of feedback.

Students say routinely that they feel listened to and involved. Whilst processes continue to be developed, we are encouraged that our feedback practices have been commended by the GMC and the university is now rolling out 'individual feedback' across its faculties.

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Reference: Ellis R. Quality assurance for university teaching. Bristol UK: Taylor and Francis: 2010.