

Student Feedback Survey Vice-Chancellor's Directive

Abstract

This Directive mandates the UTS Student Feedback Survey as the standardised evaluation instrument for collecting student feedback on subjects and teaching at UTS. This Directive outlines the agreed framework used in the regular monitoring of subject quality and the evaluation of teaching across the University, both onshore and offshore.

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	Directive amendment approved	23/12/2015
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Approved by	Vice-Chancellor	
	Latest amendment: Vice-Chancellor (see change history for details)	
Implementation Officers	Survey Coordinator, Planning and Quality Unit Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning)	
Relevant to	All staff and students	
Related documents	Academic Promotion Vice-Chancellor's Directive Academic Staff Agreement 2014 Acceptable Use of Information Technology Facilities Policy Employment of Casual Academic Staff Guidelines (HR Manual 3.6) Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants Vice-Chancellor's Directive Privacy Management Plan (PDF) Privacy Vice-Chancellor's Directive Probation — Academic Staff — Guidelines (HR Manual 6.25) Strategic Planning and Improvement Framework (restricted access) Student Feedback Survey protocols (restricted access: Staff Connect): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exemption Protocol (PDF) 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Mode Selection and Creation Protocol (PDF) • Student Comment Screening and Suppression Protocol (PDF) Student Rules UTS Email Policy UTS Key Performance Indicators UTS Student Charter
Legislation	Australian Higher Education Standards Framework Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW)
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Superseded documents	None

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1. Purpose

This Directive establishes how the UTS Student Feedback Survey (SFS) will be administered to ensure the effective gathering of regular student feedback on subjects and the teaching of subjects to support implementation of the UTS [Strategic Planning and Improvement Framework](#) as it relates to learning and teaching.

UTS values the quality of the student learning experience. The SFS offers students an opportunity to provide teaching staff, faculty and University management with constructive feedback to improve education at UTS.

Within this broad statement of purpose, the SFS has five specific goals:

- (a) to inform the improvement of the student learning experience initiated by individual academic staff or the faculty in accordance with the University's [Plan Do Review Improve \(PDRI\)](#) quality management cycle
- (b) to provide information to individual academic staff to use in and support their professional development through annual performance reviews and probation and promotion processes where relevant

- (c) to support institutional performance monitoring by tracking student perceptions of the University and each faculty, course and subject, including relevant University Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
- (d) to inform investment in internal and external benchmarking exercises and learning analytics research
- (e) to comply with the University's regulatory requirements to manage academic risk and to provide evidence of collecting, analysing and using student feedback to maintain quality.

2. Scope

This Directive applies to all faculties and academic units with a responsibility for delivering UTS undergraduate and postgraduate coursework subjects in award courses, both onshore and offshore, across all subject activities.

Delivery of non-award short courses is not within the scope of this Directive.

3. Definitions

The definitions below define terms specific to this Directive. These are in addition to terms defined in Schedule 1 of the [Student Rules](#).

Associate dean means associate dean (teaching and learning) or equivalent in each of the faculties and academic units.

Academic staff means all academic staff including casual academic staff.

Academic supervisory staff means relevant supervisors, subject coordinators, course coordinators, heads of academic units, associate deans (teaching and learning), deputy deans and deans.

Closing the loop means reporting of SFS results to staff and students, and ultimately reporting good practices highlighted and improvement actions taken in response to SFS results, ie applying the UTS [Plan Do Review Improve \(PDR\)](#) quality management cycle.

Core items are the standard evaluation items (ie questions) used in all instances of the SFS across UTS.

Data means data collected by means of the SFS including comments made by students.

Evaluation means the process of obtaining student feedback for the appraisal of subjects and teaching.

Faculty administrator means the UTS staff member within faculties and other academic units assigned responsibility for supporting local administration of the SFS.

Key Performance Indicator (KPI) means UTS key performance indicator for learning and teaching.

Learning mode is a pedagogical approach used to deliver one or more subjects, represented in the late semester SFS by a set of two items (ie questions) developed for that mode.

Malicious comments means comments made by students in their SFS responses which are abusive, offensive, vilifying, harassing, discriminatory or inappropriate about the University, a staff member of the University or another student, including

but not limited to comments related to race, ethnic or national origin, gender, marital status, sexual preference, disability, age, political conviction or religious belief (see [Student Rules 16.2.1 \(12\) and \(20\)](#)).

Online survey distribution means the distribution of the SFS via the SFS online system, where students access the SFS website to provide feedback on their subjects. This is the default distribution method.

Paper-based survey distribution means the distribution of the SFS using paper forms in limited cases where agreed to with the Planning and Quality Unit.

PQU means the Planning and Quality Unit.

SFS orders spreadsheet means a system-generated spreadsheet created for each faculty and academic unit to validate and record survey details for each instance of the SFS in that faculty or unit.

Student Feedback Survey (SFS) means a standardised instrument employed by the University to obtain student ratings and comments on subjects and teaching. The SFS instrument incorporates both early and late semester versions of the survey.

Subject activities are tutorials, lectures, practicums, professional placements, laboratories, etc.

Subject data means the information that the SFS provides about students' perception of subjects gained from questions in the survey relating to the subject (including subject ratings data and all comments provided by students to subject-related questions). Subject data incorporates subject-focused questions sponsored by both the University and the faculty.

Teaching data means the information that SFS provides about students' perception of individual teaching staff gained from questions in the SFS relating to the teacher or teaching staff (ie teaching ratings data).

4. Directive principles

4.1 UTS is committed to providing students with a quality learning and teaching experience. Gathering regular feedback from students is a critical mechanism for assessing quality in this context.

4.2 Principles that govern why and how the SFS is implemented include:

- (a) UTS is committed to maintaining a positive teaching and learning experience for students and staff, recognising good teaching practice and making improvements to subjects and teaching practice where necessary.
- (b) UTS values student feedback and considers the SFS the primary evaluation instrument for gaining regular student feedback on their learning experience and the quality of subjects. Both early and late semester feedback from students is valued to allow changes to subjects or teaching practice to be made for the benefit of current students as well as future students in each subject.
- (c) The design of the SFS recognises the three distinct staff audiences for the results: teaching staff for each subject, faculty management teams and the University's Senior Executive.
- (d) Administration of the SFS will be consistent with the [Australian Higher Education Standards Framework](#), the [Privacy and Personal Information](#)

[Protection Act 1998 \(NSW\)](#) and the current [Academic Staff Agreement](#) provisions in relation to 'Evaluation of Teaching'.

- (e) UTS preserves student confidentiality in order to comply with privacy legislation, demonstrate respect for students and to encourage them to give honest and constructive feedback. Students will be reminded that it is a breach of the [UTS Student Charter](#) and [Student Rules](#) to make offensive or malicious comments about UTS staff members or other students.
- (f) UTS promotes reporting survey results (as applicable and in accordance with this Directive) to both staff and students and following up with actions to ensure administration of the SFS leads to improvements in the student learning experience (ie 'closing the loop').

5. Directive statements

5.1 SFS administration and promotion

5.1.1 Faculties will ensure that all subjects, including those offered offshore, have been surveyed via the SFS, at least once a year and preferably in each major teaching period.

In exceptional circumstances, subjects may be granted exemption (for one semester) by the relevant associate dean (teaching and learning) in accordance with the SFS Exemption Protocol. This exemption will only be granted in a small number of cases where the associate dean considers that a suite of alternative evaluation mechanisms would be preferable to the SFS, such as in the case of a new innovative pilot subject.

In these cases alternative evaluation mechanisms must be agreed to by the subject coordinator and the associate dean, including at least one mechanism for collecting feedback from students. The subject will be surveyed using the SFS in all subsequent offerings of that subject.

5.1.2 For each subject, the SFS comprises both the early and the late semester versions of the survey. The early semester SFS incorporates questions sponsored by the University's Senior Executive, and the late semester SFS incorporates questions sponsored by each of the three staff audiences for SFS results: teaching staff for that subject, the faculty management team and the University's Senior Executive.

5.1.3 In determining subjects to be surveyed via the SFS, faculties will take into account the following requirements for student evaluation of teaching by academic staff:

- (a) As part of the probation process, staff will be required to undertake student evaluations of all the subjects in which they have major teaching duties in each teaching session, and to provide copies of such evaluation reports as required in the probation process.
- (b) All other staff are required to undertake at least one student evaluation of their major teaching duties for each teaching session.

Such student evaluations of teaching will be undertaken with the SFS. Staff may also undertake evaluation of teaching through additional mechanisms as agreed between an individual staff member and their supervisor.

5.1.4 In conjunction with faculties, PQU will coordinate the distribution and collection of the SFS using online survey distribution and provide the analysis and reporting of results. All students enrolled in a subject at the time of survey preparation or within the survey period will be invited to participate in the SFS. The distribution of the SFS will take into account the following requirements.

- (a) Faculties are responsible for checking and providing the correct class and subject information (including teaching staff details) to PQU and assigning learning modes to each subject for each late semester instance of the SFS in accordance with the Learning Mode Selection and Creation Protocol. All academic staff members participating in the SFS share responsibility for checking their survey and teaching information before each survey period begins, where the online system automatically activates each instance of the SFS.
- (b) Faculties must use online survey distribution as the default method for all subjects. Only under special circumstances, where an online SFS cannot be used, can faculties request paper-based distribution (eg when students have not been allocated to a class, or for offshore subjects where the required subject and/or student information is not available on the official UTS central enrolment system). A poor response rate in a prior online SFS instance is not considered a valid reason for paper-based distribution.
- (c) Faculties are responsible for monitoring and encouraging student participation in the SFS, noting that participation can be strongly encouraged but not mandated. No students should be discouraged from participating in the SFS.
- (d) Academic staff are encouraged to monitor SFS response rates for their subject and class(es), for reminding students of the importance and benefits of participating and for advising students of changes to subjects and teaching practice made in response to prior student feedback.

5.1.5 PQU coordinates general promotion of the SFS to students through mechanisms including, but not limited to, emails, posters, computer screens, videos, the University's learning management system and promotional materials prepared for academic staff to use. Promotion may incorporate the use of University-wide and faculty incentives to encourage student participation.

To assist promotion of the SFS the early and late semester versions may be marketed to students and/or staff under titles other than "SFS" or "Student Feedback Survey".

5.2 Reporting SFS results to staff

5.2.1 Data collected is analysed by PQU and reports are made available to each faculty's dean, deputy dean (where applicable) and associate dean at the end of each semester in the following form:

- (a) teaching ratings data
- (b) subject ratings data
- (c) subject open-ended comments
- (d) aggregated teaching and subject ratings data by subject, course, faculty and University, incorporating analysis of subjects performing both strongly and poorly.

5.2.2 Summaries and trend analysis of University-level ratings data may be made available to the Provost, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) and the

Chair of the Teaching and Learning Committee of Academic Board. These summaries may include de-identified example student comments and/or thematic analysis of student comments.

5.2.3 Faculties will use the data collected for the regular and systematic evaluations of all subjects in accordance with the [Strategic Planning and Improvement Framework](#) as applied to teaching and learning, as referred to below in section 5.2.4 and subject to the faculty's procedure for the use of SFS data as specified in section 5.2.6.

5.2.4 Teaching and subject ratings data will also be used by PQU to support the University's quality management processes including, but not limited to, course and subject performance reporting, student pathway and cohort tracking and University and faculty KPI reporting.

5.2.5 Centrally coordinated access to SFS results for individual subjects will be guided by the following requirements.

- (a) Early semester SFS results will be released to subject coordinators as soon as is practicable after survey closure, and late semester SFS results to academic staff as soon as is practicable after examination results have been released to students.
- (b) SFS results will be released to teaching staff before academic supervisory staff to provide an opportunity for identification of any reporting errors not corrected according to section 5.1.4(a) and for requests for comment suppression according to section 5.2.6(d).
- (c) Any SFS reports required to be changed as a result of section 5.2.6(d) will be reissued to relevant teaching and academic supervisory staff by PQU.
- (d) Aggregated late semester SFS results will only be released to students after release to all staff is complete and in accordance with section 5.3.

5.2.6 Access to the SFS data at faculty level must be determined in accordance with each faculty's procedure for the use of SFS data and in accordance with section 5.2.5 of this Directive. Such procedures must reflect the following principles.

- (a) Late semester teaching ratings data is the information that SFS reports provide about individual staff performance, and because of its sensitivity, access to this information **must be restricted** to those concerned with:
 - the development and supervision of the staff concerned
 - the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning
 - the annual staff performance management process
 - teaching allocations
 - staff probation
 - staff progression and promotion.

Academic supervisory staff and the relevant staff member must be among the staff authorised to have access to the teaching data and information provided from the SFS teaching evaluations.

- (b) Late semester subject ratings data and comments relating to the quality of teaching and learning in subjects, courses or the programs of faculties must be made available to those concerned with the design, management, delivery and review of those subjects, courses or the programs of faculties.

- (c) Early semester subject ratings data and comments relating to the quality of teaching and learning in subjects, courses or the programs of faculties is collected primarily to support improvement in the learning experience of students, so is made available to subject coordinators as soon as is practical. To support faculty-wide improvement initiatives, early semester subject ratings data and comments for each faculty are subsequently made available to the associate dean (teaching and learning).
- (d) For both the early and late semester versions of the SFS, PQU institutes automated screening of offensive language appearing in student comments to the extent that this is feasible, and oversees a process whereby teaching staff can request suppression of individual comments they consider to be malicious. Student feedback which is negative but not malicious is not eligible for removal after publication. These processes are undertaken in accordance with the [SFS Student Comment Screening and Suppression Protocol](#) (PDF) (restricted access: Staff Connect).

Academic supervisory staff should make all attempts to ensure that comments of a potentially malicious nature relating to individual staff members are not circulated to other faculty staff either electronically or in paper form.

5.2.7 Each faculty dean, associate dean, and other staff (if authorised in accordance with section 5.2.6) shall use SFS data to identify strategies to:

- (a) improve, as appropriate, the quality of teaching and learning in all subjects in their faculty
- (b) acknowledge, and where necessary, develop and improve the performance of individual staff in their faculty in relation to the quality of teaching and learning, and
- (c) inform, as one of a range of sources, the assessment of academic staff in processes such as:
 - i. academic progression/promotions
 - ii. academic management for performance and development
 - iii. academic probation
 - iv. providing evidence of excellence (eg learning and teaching awards)
 - v. such other related policies adopted by the University.

5.3 Reporting SFS results and follow-up actions to students

5.3.1 Only aggregated ratings data from the subject-focused items in the late semester SFS will be reported to students.

5.3.2 To protect individual teaching staff confidentiality, at the start of the survey period, teaching staff have the option to withhold reporting of aggregated subject ratings data from students if they are the sole teacher of that subject.

5.3.3 Subject to section 5.3.2, PQU will, at the University's discretion, provide SFS subject ratings data to students enrolled in that subject at the time of survey preparation or within the survey period.

5.3.4 Faculties are encouraged to inform students of how their feedback will be used to improve the quality of subjects, courses and programs. Faculties and/or PQU will identify planned improvements and communicate these to students through communication mechanisms agreed to by faculties and PQU.

5.3.5 Subject to section 5.3.2, PQU may provide authorised representatives of the UTS Students' Association with aggregated late semester subject and teaching

ratings data and University and faculty actions to give them the opportunity to provide feedback to student groups.

5.4 Reporting SFS results publicly and to other organisations

5.4.1 Aggregated subject and teaching ratings data derived from the SFS (at the University, faculty or field of education level, but not subject level) may be given to other Australian tertiary institutions for the purpose of joint benchmarking projects.

5.4.2 Subject to section 5.3.2, aggregated subject and teaching ratings data derived from the SFS may be reported publically or to UTS subsidiaries or external organisations such as regulatory bodies for improvement or compliance purposes.

5.5 Privacy considerations

5.5.1 All personal information entered into the SFS online system administered by PQU is stored securely, not kept longer than necessary, and protected from: loss, unauthorised access, use or disclosure in accordance with the [Privacy Vice-Chancellor's Directive](#).

5.5.2 Each student's feedback must be able to remain confidential in order to mitigate the risk of positive or negative influence on future evaluations of their academic performance, whether formal (eg grading) or informal.

This provision should not be construed to limit PQU's record-keeping to monitor whether that student's SFS responses were submitted. To protect the anonymity of students, individual class results with fewer than five responses will not be published. These measures will encourage constructive evaluation of each subject and the teaching of those subjects.

5.5.3 The University's collection and analysis of data under this Directive is subject to the provisions of the Privacy Vice-Chancellor's Directive and the principles of confidentiality. All UTS staff receiving SFS data are required to treat the reports in strict confidence. Any unauthorised attempt by a staff member to identify a respondent to the SFS for any purpose may constitute a breach of the Privacy Vice-Chancellor's Directive and may result in disciplinary action by the University.

5.5.4 Exceptions to section 5.5.3 may apply in cases where a student has clearly breached the UTS Student Charter or Student Rules by making malicious comments about staff or other students in their open-ended comments. In these cases UTS has the authority to identify the student in question and pursue appropriate action as an authorised exemption for the use of personal information under the Privacy Vice-Chancellor's Directive and [Privacy Management Plan](#) (PDF).

5.5.5 Collection of personal information of students must comply with the Privacy Vice-Chancellor's Directive in terms of, but not limited to, inclusion of a privacy notice in invitations for students to participate in the SFS (see section 4.3.1 of the Privacy Management Plan).

5.5.6 Staff information or details are also subject to the provisions of the Privacy Vice-Chancellor's Directive and the principles of confidentiality. Staff members may disclose their own SFS results to other parties or use summary data, including comments, in analytical and scholarly studies which may be published, provided that the anonymity of respondents is maintained and the provisions of the [Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants Vice-Chancellor's Directive](#) regarding teaching and learning evaluation activities are followed.

5.5.7 PQU will make clear statements to students and staff regarding the security of the SFS process through the [UTS website](#) and [Staff Connect](#) (restricted access) respectively. All SFS communication will include UTS contact information to use in the event of a problem or concern.

5.5.8 Subject and teaching data collected from the SFS may be used by PQU, or other UTS staff or contractors authorised by PQU, to carry out analysis into variations in SFS results across student entry pathways and cohorts and to provide data for evaluation/quality assurance and teaching and learning research approved in accordance with the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants Vice-Chancellor's Directive. No individual students will be identified in any reports related to these analyses in accordance with the privacy considerations in section 5.5.2.

6. Roles and responsibilities

Accountable Officer: the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) has overall accountability for communicating and enforcing this Directive and dealing with breaches.

Implementation Officers

Survey Coordinator, Planning and Quality Unit has overall responsibility for the implementation of this Directive.

Survey Officer, Planning and Quality Unit has operational responsibility for administration of the SFS online survey system.

Director, Planning and Quality Unit has responsibility for:

- approving PQU protocols developed to support implementation of this Directive
- identifying a student in clear breach of the UTS Student Charter or Student Rules (section 5.5.4)
- authorising contractors to access SFS data (section 5.5.8)
- authorising transfer of data from the SFS system to other UTS systems.

Associate deans (teaching and learning) are responsible for ensuring compliance with this Directive at the faculty or academic unit level, including:

- assigning learning modes to each subject
- undertaking analysis and reporting of SFS results to staff within the faculty or unit in a timely manner after PQU releases results to individual staff members
- liaising with individual heads of school/discipline/program, subject coordinators and academic supervisory staff as required regarding results.

Acknowledgement of staff achieving excellent SFS results is an important part of the role, as is ensuring that information regarding the SFS is incorporated into induction and training material for new and existing staff. Associate deans are also responsible for approving any local exemptions to undertaking the SFS for one semester in accordance with the [SFS Exemption Protocol](#) (PDF) (restricted access: Staff Connect).

Other positions and committees

The **Provost** is responsible for approving any changes to the core items of the SFS recommended by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) following consultation with associate deans. Aggregated SFS results form part of the University's core data set for tracking implementation of the UTS Strategic Plan, which is overseen by the Provost.

The **Planning and Quality Unit (PQU)** is responsible for coordinating the distribution and collection of the SFS and providing the analysis and reporting of the results to faculties and students as specified in this Directive.

For each faculty, faculty reports, including results for all subjects, are made available to the dean, deputy dean (where applicable) and associate dean.

For each subject, subject and teaching reports are made available to the subject coordinator and to all individual teachers (including casual staff).

The unit is also responsible for authorising staff and student access to reports within the SFS system.

The **Institute for Interactive Media and Learning (IML)** is responsible for providing support to and resources for teaching staff to assist them in interpreting SFS results and to improving teaching practice.

IML faculty liaison staff have responsibility for supporting implementation of the SFS Exemption Protocol.

The **Information Technology Division (ITD)** is responsible for the physical and environmental security of the SFS online system, provision of regular data backup and implementation of security controls.

Deans are responsible for ensuring students are informed as to how SFS results will be used to improve the quality of their learning experience, in accordance with faculty procedures on the use of SFS data. Deans are encouraged to regularly read SFS results for their faculty.

Academic supervisors are responsible for discussing results with individual teaching staff members and, where necessary, for assisting staff to improve the quality of their teaching, and for ensuring that probationary staff participate in the evaluation process for all of their major teaching duties in each teaching session. For all evaluations undertaken by casual academic staff, supervisors must provide the opportunity to discuss the teaching evaluation outcomes with the casual academic staff member.

Faculty administrators are responsible for:

- validating and recording the details of each ordered survey and submitting a completed SFS orders spreadsheet to PQU as requested by PQU. The SFS orders spreadsheet must incorporate:
 - subject coordinator and teaching staff details
 - faculty-preferred survey periods
 - learning modes assigned to each subject
 - confirmation of the faculty's non-core survey items.
- checking that each subject is being surveyed at least once per academic year

- ensuring that any instances where student subject activity allocations on central systems are inconsistent with actual class allocations are brought to the attention of PQU, the relevant academic staff and the associate dean.

Academic staff, including both subject coordinators and teaching staff, are responsible for:

- checking that details of their teaching activities (such as lectures, seminars, laboratories and tutorials) submitted by their faculty administrative staff are accurate (eg student count, subject name)
- promoting completion of early and late semester versions of the SFS to the students they teach
- if the sole teacher in a subject, deciding whether to withhold reporting of late semester subject ratings data from students
- acting on the results in terms of instigating necessary improvements and communicating these improvements to students
- adhering to the provisions of the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants Vice-Chancellor's Directive regarding teaching and learning evaluation and research activities if they wish to publish SFS results.

7. Acknowledgements

UTS acknowledges Queensland University of Technology's permission to incorporate adaptations of relevant sections of the document titled *Protocols: Reframe: QUT's Evaluation Framework, January-December 2015* into this Directive and supporting Protocols.

8. Version control and change history

Date	Version	Approved by (date)	Amendment
29/08/2007	2	Vice-Chancellor	Amendments to ensure consistency with Academic Staff Agreement 2006 and adopt changes in titles of relevant senior staff.
24/12/2009 (effective date)	3	Vice-Chancellor (24/12/2009)	Amendments due to implementation of new SFS online system and changes to methods of survey administration and reporting.
03/08/2013 (effective date)	4	Vice-Chancellor (18/07/2013)	Amendments to broaden purpose, update Implementation Officer, clarify offshore arrangements, authorise student cohort analysis, update privacy provisions, authorise external release of aggregated SFS results, clarify authority for amending core items of

Date	Version	Approved by (date)	Amendment
			the SFS, and specify roles of IML, Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning), Deans and faculty staff.
11/02/2015 (effective date)	4.1	Director, Governance Support Unit (GSU) (11/12/2014)	Changes (approved under Delegation 3.17) to implement 2014 Senior Executive restructure.
26/02/2016 (effective date)	4.2	Vice-Chancellor (23/12/2015)	Amendments to refine purpose, strengthen privacy provisions, distinguish between early and late semester versions of the SFS, refer to three supporting protocols and alter order in which SFS results are released to staff.