

## UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

For the meeting of the Student Learning Experience and Engagement Committee to be held on 26 October 2017 in CMR 1.0, University House

**Subject** Module Evaluations

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### **Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of this paper is to seek agreement *in principle* for a revised approach to the way in which the institution invites students to feed back on their experience of modules.

### **Recommendation**

Members of SLEEC are invited to consider and approve the following recommendations so that the operational possibility of aligning processes, tools and organisation of student module evaluations can be explored:

1. The recommendation that the newly established Learning Circle on module evaluations invites academic colleagues from around the university to develop the wider academic case and report their findings to SLEEC;
2. The recommendation that the Head of Academic Technology established a small working group to report in the near future on possible ways to resolve the practical challenges set out in this paper (SLEEC.03/17-18);
3. The recommendation that a small group consisting of two academic staff, two students (SU) and one member of TQ work together on analysing which processes and procedures need to be established or connected to, to make module evaluations effective within Warwick's educational 'eco system'. This group should be chaired by a member of SLEEC and include at least one member of AQSC, to ensure alignment with that committee's brief;
4. The recommendation that the three groups report to each of the next two meetings of SLEEC (January and February), with a view to take forward proposals for implementation as soon as possible, but by April 2018 at the latest.

### **Key Points**

1. For a number of years departments at Warwick have developed a range of ways to seek feedback on taught modules by students. Use of outcomes has mostly been formative although academic staff have also used results for formal processes most notably annual module evaluation, programme evaluation and academic progression. In those cases, it has consistently been clear that full evaluation of a module consists of more than student views and normally includes and evaluation of assessment results, a staff evaluation and sometimes external examiner evaluation as well.
2. In some departments there are well established approaches to sharing module evaluation results with students, and following up on actions as a result of evaluations. There is currently no single set of questions in use across the university, nor is there a single tool (online or paper based) promoted by the university.
3. The Students' Union invites students to feedback on modules through the 'Discover my Module' system, whereby students pass on their advice and experience of studying a

particular module to future students. This is done in a deliberately constructive manner, so as to inform module choices and study behaviours.

4. A number of changes in learning and teaching policy and practice have taken place which necessitate the development of a centrally supported approach to module evaluation by students:
  - There is increasing awareness in the academic community (staff and students) that module evaluations are a source of valuable feedback and insight into the aspects of the quality of modules and the teaching, learning and assessment of these modules, and that such information can be used to inform enhancement of both learning (for instance module choice) and teaching.
  - In a context of increased transparency and external accountability, but also an ambition to excel in educational quality, gathering information concerning the student learning experience is helpful to monitor, enhance and support high quality teaching. Notably, module evaluations are well embedded across the university sector and are ubiquitous in those institutions most successful in TEF.
  - The ITLR process showed that interdisciplinary learning, joint degree programmes and elective module choices are all highly desirable elements of Warwick's educational provision. However, students consistently report that they would benefit from more coherence in the administrative processes they encounter when engaging with multiple departments. Moving towards a common approach to module evaluations would be supportive to these students, and would also allow inter-departmental evaluation of module provision and teaching quality where this is appropriate.
  - Within the sector there is ample awareness of the positive impact module evaluations can have in relation to reward and recognition of teaching excellence. Yet there is also awareness of the limitations of module evaluations, for instance in relation to interpretation of results and respondents' biases. A devolved approach to module evaluations limits the opportunity to monitor and address any biases existing small scale systems may have. Moreover, a lack of agreed policy and practice of handling module evaluation data allows for undetected inequalities between different groups of staff.
  - A good number of departments have already shown an interest in more effective ways of administering module evaluations, for instance by using digital (in class) approaches and moving away from paper based means. It is worth noting that the optical reading facility will be decommissioned in the near future.
5. It is now proposed that we modernise our efforts around module evaluations. There are three main aspects that offer opportunity for improvement. Firstly, we need to ensure our future module evaluation practices support enhancement of learning and teaching in an educationally sound manner, with due attention to equality and diversity for both staff and students. This is the **academic** case that needs to be made, and we can learn from other institutions and published research. Secondly we need to ensure that our organisation of module evaluation is effective, practical, sustainable and pays due attention to privacy, confidentiality and sound data management practices. This is the **practical** challenge that needs to be addressed. Thirdly, we need to consider what procedures are desirable to connect module evaluations appropriately to various existing processes (annual monitoring of programmes, staff support mechanisms, reward and promotion, communication with students and publication of data). This is the **procedural embedding** aspect we need to consider.
6. The academic case is already being addressed to some extent. An intern, Robert Blagov, has collated a report of existing departmental practices during the 2017 summer break. The Student Experience Network (led by Dr Rebecca Freeman) where colleagues meet informally has started to exchange experience on the use of module evaluations and are looking for opportunities to engage in further joint learning on the matter. Within WIHEA a

learning circle is being established which will undertake research into practices across the sector.

7. SLEEWG is asked to consider the **recommendation** that the newly established Learning Circle on module evaluations invites academic colleagues from around the university to develop the wider academic case and report their findings to SLEEC. Noting the importance of module evaluations to students, this learning circle should also seek involvement of well informed, elected student representatives, most likely sabbatical officers or their nominees.
8. The practical challenges in relation to the administration of centrally supported module evaluation is also partly underway. The Academic Technologies team is currently looking into digital and student database supported mechanisms to deliver module evaluations and this group could be extended to cover the wider practical challenges identified. This is likely to require involvement from the Academic Registry and the Student Personalised Information Programme.
9. SLEEC is asked to consider the **recommendation** that the Head of Academic Technology established a small working group to report in the near future on possible ways to resolve the practical challenges as set out above.
10. Procedural embedding of module evaluations is a matter that will need some level codifying of protocols and procedures, so that module evaluations and evaluation results are handled with due care and a focus on relevance. Transparency of data use and the purposes of module evaluations are key to the success of any supported scheme we may wish to develop. Both students and academic staff have an important stake in the proper running of the scheme, whilst colleagues from the Academic Registry have the skills and insights to oversee administrative and governance issues.
11. It is **recommended** that a small group consisting of two academic staff, two students (SU) and one member of TQ work together on analysing which processes and procedures need to be established or connected to, to make module evaluations effective within Warwick's educational 'eco system'. This group should be chaired by a member of SLEEC and include at least one member of AQSC, to ensure alignment with that committee's brief.
12. It is **recommended** that the three groups report to each of the next two meetings of SLEEC (January and February), with a view to take forward proposals for implementation as soon as possible, but by April 2018 at the latest.