

Title: **Standardised module evaluation for teaching excellence and enhancement: views of students and staff at a single UK higher education institution**

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- appreciate the need for accurate measures of teaching excellence given the current political and economic context;
- assess the relative merits and shortcomings of institution-wide standardization of module evaluation processes;
- consider how the mechanisms whereby teaching excellence is recognized may be enhanced in light of the findings of this study and subsequent discussion.

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

The White Paper and the new tuition fee structure, together with the National Union of Students (2011), have renewed the need for consistently high teaching quality to be one of the highest priorities of Higher Education institutions across the UK. Yet the course evaluation mechanisms by which this is conventionally measured potentially raise a number of generic problems. One recent study (Smith, Morris, and Bohms, 2011) cites these as lack of student engagement; inadequate communication to students about changes made in consequence of feedback received; the burden of survey administration and management; and the need to solicit student feedback in advance of the end of a module if timely action is to be taken.

This presentation evaluates the impact of a new procedure, implemented across a single HEI, City University London, in the past academic year which standardizes student end-of-module evaluation and links this to staff appraisal (see, for example, Quinsee, 2011). Drawing on original research conducted via interviews with University students and staff in 2012, I ask whether standardized evaluation processes necessarily provide a uniformly accurate measure of teaching excellence: on one hand, they offer a formal mechanism whereby all academic staff are evaluated in an equitable manner; on the other, they run the risk of not capturing the discipline-specific information that might facilitate teaching enhancement at a local level.

Discussion will incorporate reflection on the relative merits and shortcomings of different approaches (and perhaps even possibilities for combining them), as well as considering the most effective timeframes and administrative structures for their implementation. Delegates will be invited to share and compare current module evaluation practices at their own institutions, working towards action planning at the end of the session. In the course of discussion, I propose to explore (with reference to views garnered from student interviews) whether other measures, such as the grades awarded in a given module, might offer an alternative means for recognizing teaching excellence.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Presentation (20 minutes): to provide an outline of the context for module evaluation and the institutional change explored in this study (7 mins); findings of the student and staff interviews and assessment of the merits and shortcomings of the standardized process (9 mins); preliminary recommendations and conclusions (4 mins).

Discussion (15 minutes): led by the presenter but dividing delegates into groups, depending on numbers. Indicative questions include the following:

- (a) How has module evaluation been implemented at your institution?
- (b) Within a given module, what is the most effective timeframe for solicitation of feedback from students on teaching quality?
- (c) How might the administrative structure of student module evaluation surveys be improved?
- (d) If not through evaluation mechanisms, how might teaching quality be accurately measured and recognized?
- (e) What action planning might be considered for the future?

Review of discussion (10 minutes): Feedback from the group discussions and consideration of action planning for the future.

References

National Union of Students/HSBC (2011). 'NUS/HSBC Students Research Experience Report: Teaching and Learning'.

<http://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/4017/NUS_StudentExperienceReport.pdf>

Quinsee, S. (2011). 'Guidance for discussions with academic staff on student module evaluation'. <http://www.city.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/112919/student-module-evaluation-guidance.pdf>.

Smith, P., Morris, O., and Bohms, E. (2011). 'Effective Course Evaluation: The Future for Quality and Standards in Higher Education'. Electric Paper Ltd.