IVE Quality Assurance Sub-committee
Student Feedback Questionnaire (SFQ) Survey
Guidelines for Using Part I Results

The Objectives

1. The SFQ survey is designed to help evaluate and improve the module, the course and campus services. Results are used to improve the quality of the teaching and learning in the module and the course as well as the standard of the services provided on-campus.

The SFQ Survey

2. The survey consists of 3 parts:
   - Part I - Module Experience
   - Part II - Course Experience
   - Part III - On-Campus Experience

3. If a module is taught by two teachers then the Part I SFQ is done as if these were two different modules taught by two different teachers. If a module is taught by three or more teachers then the Part I survey will be done only once and these teachers will be considered as a group.

Types of Reports

4. Reports are generated and published in the VTC intranet for each part of the survey. Where appropriate the reports are available at 6 levels:
   - Level 1. IVE
   - Level 2. Discipline
   - Level 3. Campus
   - Level 4. Department
   - Level 5. Course
   - Level 6. Module

Access Authority

5. All staff with VTC email accounts are allowed to read reports at levels 1 to 5. A teacher is allowed access to level 6 results of his/her modules. If a module is taught by two teachers then each teacher is allowed access to his/her own level 6 results, but not the results of his/her partner. If a module is taught by three or more teachers then level 6 results are accessible to all teachers in the group but individual teachers will not be identified.
6. HoDs (including the officers in charge of LCs) and course leaders are allowed access to level 6 results of modules under their purview. Campus Principals are allowed access to level 6 results within their own campus. Nexus P and VP are allowed access to level 6 results within the Nexus. DED(OP) has the access right to all reports at all levels.

Response Rate, Standard Deviation and Accuracy

7. There are always statistical errors in the results of a survey where the sample size or the response rate is not 100%. Therefore the SFQ results should be used with caution. The results represent only the opinions of the students who have responded. Those who have not responded may have different views.

8. The standard deviation shows the degree of variability of the students’ responses to that particular item. A high standard deviation means that the students vary widely in their opinion, and a low standard deviation means that there is a high level of agreement among students in their views on the particular item.

9. Students’ responses to the open-ended questions are not susceptible to statistical analysis. Each remark made by a student answering an open-ended question is treated as an independent entry in the results. If there are 10 students making the same remark there will be 10 entries in the results. Thus a remark will carry with it a weight dependent on the number of occurrences.

10. Because of the inherent errors and other factors it is suggested that SFQ results should be used as an indicator only, serving the purpose of highlighting possible strengths and weaknesses. The reader must not jump to conclusions using purely SFQ results.

11. The reader may consult the VTC Statistics Section for more technical analysis of SFQ results. For example it is possible to test whether the sample mean is significantly the same as the population mean with a 90% confidence level.

Interpreting Results of SFQ Part I (About the Module)

12. It should be remembered that the ratings in the report indicate the general reactions of the student to the subject/teaching. They are not absolute or precise measures of the teaching effectiveness of the teacher/teaching, and thus should never be treated as such. The results need to be interpreted with great caution, and some differences in the results for different staff members can be expected as a result of factors that are beyond their control.

13. Student feedback should be interpreted in context: the teaching context must be considered
when feedback from a particular group of students is reviewed; for example, class size, level and year of study, nature of the subject (e.g. theoretical vs. applied), nature of the teaching format (e.g. lecture vs. tutorial or practical sessions), background of students, etc. Such factors are often beyond the control of the staff member but nonetheless influence the student feedback of a particular class. As the classes taught by individual staff members are quite different, it is not very useful to crudely compare the ratings of one staff member with those of another without considering the different contexts.

14. The numbers and figures should not be seen as an absolute measure of the teaching performance of the staff member. Small differences in the student ratings may not have any statistical or practical significance at all.

15. The SFQ results are best regarded as a rough indicator of students’ experience of learning rather than an indicator of the teaching performance of a staff member. A low rating on a particular scale or item signals the need for further investigation rather than hasty judgment and action. Very often, improvements require a coordinated effort by several staff; changing the context may be as important as changing the behaviour of the individual staff member.

16. For developmental purposes, the most appropriate way of using the student ratings is to make a trend analysis of a teacher’s ratings over time, to identify aspects which are causing increasing satisfaction or concern to students so that improvements can be made.

**Using the SFQ Average Scores (AvS) for Comparison**

17. An ‘Average Score’ (AvS) is an average of ratings derived by including in its computation a large number of cases in a specified reference group. AvSs are derived by taking the average of a large number of class-sets of student ratings on the SFQ. Separate AvSs are also developed for different comparison groups from different mode, level, course, department, campus, nexus, and discipline. There are questions that students will traditionally give higher scores, and questions that students will traditionally give lower scores. This implies that a high absolute score in a question does not necessarily imply a strength, and a low absolute score does not necessarily imply a weakness. A more reliable means for identifying strengths or weaknesses would be to use a relevant AvS as reference. Thus if the absolute score is substantially higher than the AvS it is likely to be a strength, and if the absolute score is substantially below the AvS it is likely to be a weakness.

18. However, it must be stressed that the primary purpose of these AvS comparisons is not to pass judgment on the staff members but rather, to give them reference figures for their self-reflection and development. As a matter of fact, there are some problems with using AvS comparisons and so, extra caution should be taken in interpreting the results.
19. By the very nature of AvS, about half of the staff members are ‘below average’ in any reference group. That means, even a highly effective staff member may have a lower relative standing if other staff members in the reference group are highly rated by the students. In other words, a ‘lower than average’ rating does not necessarily mean that the staff member is ineffective or incompetent.

20. The appropriateness of the reference group used for comparison is another problem. Students’ ratings are often affected by factors outside the control of the staff member such as class size, level of study, and nature of the subject, etc. It would be futile to compare ratings between staff members teaching in completely different contexts. The following points should be considered when making AvS comparisons:

- Avoid treating the AvS as an absolute standard. AvS should never be viewed as a line of demarcation between ‘pass’ and ‘fail’ in teaching performance.

- It is normal to expect variations in the student ratings among staff members. Unless the ratings are significantly higher or lower than the ‘averages’ (for example, when the score is more than 1 standard deviation above or below the AvS, they may not have any statistical or practical significance.

- Choose an appropriate AvS for comparison. As far as possible, compare the ratings of a specific class-set with the AvS or reference group with matching class size, level of study, or nature of subject.

- It is more useful to use AvS comparisons to reveal the relative strengths and weaknesses of the individual staff members, and to identify possible areas for improvement.

What Should the Teacher Do Next for Improving Teaching?

21. Collecting student feedback is the very first step in improving teaching. However, the feedback results will not automatically lead to improvement unless the staff members concerned follow it up with plans for development or improvements. This may involve discussing and sharing of experience and insights with other colleagues, and developing an action plan for improvement. Very often, improvements require a coordinated effort by several staff, and require changes in curriculum and learning systems. The support and encouragement from the department is critical in such attempts.
22. The teacher may wish to consider the following steps in planning teaching improvements:

a. *Interpreting your SFQ scores* - Study your Part I SFQ results and compare your ratings with the appropriate AvS to identify:
   - the relative strengths and weaknesses of your teaching,
   - the aspects of teaching which are causing most concern to your students.

b. *Finding out more about your students’ views* from the answers to the open-ended questions in order to understand more about:
   - the aspects of your teaching that your students found most helpful to their learning,
   - what changes in your teaching your students think may help them learn better, and
   - other comments or suggestions made by your students.

c. *Finding out more about your areas for improvement in teaching* from sources other than the SFQ, such as:
   - Peer review
   - Class observation by HoD, other supervisors, or TLC staff
   - Discussion with students

d. *Developing an action plan for improvements* - While your teaching per se may affect students’ learning and generate some of their comments, other concerns may be the result of the design of the course, or modules — or other factors that are beyond your classroom teaching. Some of these factors may be outside your own control. Discussions with colleagues and students may help to clarify some of this, and suggest plans for development.

e. You may find it helpful to discuss your plan with colleagues, your HoD or other supervisors, or any TLC staff member.

f. *Implementing the plan* - It is important to monitor the effects of any changes you make by collecting student (and colleague) feedback. As the changes you make may involve or affect other members of the department, it is important to talk with them about the plans, and their outcomes.

**What Should the HoD and Course Leader Do with Part I SFQ Results?**

23. The HoDs and the Course Leader should use SFQ results as one of the many ways to help identify the strengths and weaknesses of a teacher. Other ways may include reviewing the teaching portfolio, meetings with students and class observation.
24. HoDs and Course Leaders must not quote SFQ data in staff appraisal reports.

**How the TLC Can Help**

25. The TLC is given the responsibility to support and assist staff in teaching improvements. Teaching staff or HoDs may ask for the following TLC services if needed:

- help in interpretation of the SFQ results,
- assistance in other forms of collecting student feedback or evaluation,
- advice and consultation on teaching improvement/enhancement, curriculum development and learning systems design,
- help in producing learning resources (print-based, multimedia, or Internet-based) to support teaching and learning,
- advice and consultation on action learning projects on teaching improvement, etc.

26. In addition, the TLC offers a number of short courses, workshops and seminars on teaching. It also has a collection of practical books, guides, and reference materials on teaching. These may provide useful ideas for improving teaching.

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