1 The current situation

At present, our “Quality Model” (official statement to Faculty of what we do regarding TQA) states, under Elicitation of Feedback from Students:

“Each course has an elected student representative, who is a full member of the Teaching Committee.

The exact details of further feedback methods are left to the discretion of Course Organisers. They are expected to make an appropriate selection, for their course, of the following procedures:

- Election of class representatives for each course module.
- A feedback questionnaire for the course as a whole.
- A feedback questionnaire for each module within the course.
- Formation of a course staff-student committee, with regular meetings.
- Informal end-of-course feedback discussion meetings with students.
- Online mechanisms for informal discussion of course-related issues, opinions and problems.”

Broadly speaking, the first of these (module reps) is used only within the School of AI. The two variants of meetings with students are used mainly within the Schools of CS and CogSci, but not much in the School of AI. Questionnaires are used patchily across the Division.

2 Reasons to change

The individual methods have their own strengths and weaknesses. The overall current situation is rather untidy, as it can be hard to keep track of the feedback for different courses (something that the ITO has to do for TQA reasons) and the current statement allows either for excessive demands for feedback from students
(e.g. having to complete a plethora of questionnaires, which is counter-productive) or inadequate feedback happening (e.g. relying on module reps, who fail to report or even fail to be elected).

We have put ourselves in a position where all our feedback becomes part of our formal TQA commitment, but where it is so varied and involves so many people that it is hard to keep track of or to ensure that it happens.

It would be better to have a reduced core of obligatory feedback, which we commit to soliciting and which is simple enough to ensure that it happens and can be recorded, and to allow ourselves freedom to also have optional feedback which can be used where we need it but which we are not compelled to carry out universally.

3 A proposal for simplification

I suggest a simplified scheme as follows.

1. The only feedback which we regard as obligatory and which we commit ourselves to in the “quality model” is at course level, not module level.

2. This feedback is the responsibility of the Course Organiser.

3. For the purposes of checking (e.g. for Teaching Programme Reviews, QAA reviews, etc.), the ITO will check that course-level feedback takes place/has taken place for all the courses.

4. Feedback can be sought at the module level, but this is optional, and at the discretion of the module lecturer. (For example, if a lecturer has revised a syllabus, it may be useful to use an ad hoc questionnaire to explore the effects.) This can even be via a module representative if the lecturer thinks that is a particularly appropriate method.

5. The module lecturer is not obliged to file module-level feedback with the ITO, though they are encouraged to communicate relevant findings to the course organiser and anyone else to whom they may be of interest.

6. Course-level feedback can be done via questionnaires, staff-student liaison committees, or both. Holding a single end-of-course meeting with students can be regarded as a particular form of a staff-student committee, and there is no need to continue distinguishing these variants.
7. Where a meeting or meetings are used, a written minute should be kept.

8. Written results of all course-level feedback should be filed with the ITO.

The advantages of this scheme are:

1. It allows module lecturers freedom to seek specific feedback without the need for it to become part of a complex bureaucratic exercise.

2. It avoids dependence on “module reps”, as these are sometimes hard to find, and sometimes fail to report.

3. It simplifies the TQA function of keeping track of the feedback system, since there must be “official” feedback for each course, but not for each module.

4. It clarifies the responsibility for the collection of “official” feedback: the course organiser is responsible both for delivering it and for collecting it, without being overly dependent on module lecturers.

4 Revisions to Quality Model

The Quality Model text would then read:

Each course has an elected student representative, who is a full member of the Teaching Committee.

The exact details of further feedback methods are left to the discretion of Course Organisers. They are expected to use either of the following procedures (or both):

- A feedback questionnaire for the course as a whole.
- Meetings of a course staff-student committee

Written records of such feedback are filed with the Informatics Teaching Office. Individual module lecturers are encouraged to use further feedback methods (e.g. online mechanisms for informal discussion of course-related issues, opinions and problems) to keep in touch with their classes, but these are not part of our formal TQA model.

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