

Why Student Feedback on Units Actually Matters

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June 2026

*Ask any academic whether they look forward to student feedback surveys, and you will likely get a mixed response. For some, they're a box-ticking exercise. For others, a source of anxiety. But when designed and interpreted well, **Student Feedback on Units (SFU)** surveys are one of the most valuable tools a higher education institution has - not just for quality assurance, but for genuine improvement in the classroom.*

So, what makes them useful, and how do you make the most of them?

The Value of the Student Perspective

Students occupy a unique vantage point. They experience the unit from the inside - the pace, the clarity (or lack thereof) of assessment instructions, whether the learning management system is intuitive or a maze, and whether they feel supported by their lecturer. These are things that even the most self-aware educator can struggle to see objectively.

When SFU data is reviewed carefully, it can surface issues that might otherwise go unnoticed: pacing problems, gaps in content, or assessment tasks that don't quite connect to the learning material. That feedback, taken seriously, can translate directly into a better learning experience for future cohorts.

What a Good SFU Survey Looks Like

The best SFU surveys are focused and efficient. A well-designed instrument typically contains between nine and twelve questions - enough to capture meaningful insight across key dimensions of the unit, without asking so much that students disengage before finishing.

Questions worth asking usually centre on teaching quality, unit structure, assessment design, and the lecturer's availability and approachability. A representative set might look like this -

- Is the unit well-structured on the learning management system?
- Do the assessments help students better understand the material?
- Does the lecturer demonstrate strong knowledge of the subject?
- Is the lecturer's feedback helpful and timely?
- Is the lecturer available and approachable outside of class?

One open-ended question — “Do you have any suggestions for improvement?” - rounds things out and often yields the most candid and actionable responses. Beyond twelve questions, completion rates tend to fall. Efficient is best.

Presenting the Data Clearly

Collecting feedback is only half the work. How that data is communicated to lecturers, course coordinators, and institutional stakeholders - matters enormously.

A traffic light reporting format - green, amber, red - offers an immediately legible snapshot of where a unit is performing well and where attention is needed. This simplicity is a feature, not a shortcut. It makes the data accessible to a wide range of readers without requiring statistical literacy, while still allowing deeper exploration of the underlying figures for those who want it. With the right setup, data can be filtered by individual unit or lecturer, making targeted review straightforward.

The Bottom Line

SFU surveys work when they are well-designed, kept concise, and taken seriously at all levels of an institution. They are not just an accountability mechanism - they are a feedback loop between students and educators that, when functioning well, lifts the quality of teaching and learning for everyone.

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