UPPSALA
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Course evaluations

and other educational evaluations

- part of quality work

Third edition

Unit for Quality and Evaluation

Uppsala University

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Preface to the third edition

According to the Uppsala University Programme for Quality Work, teachers, doctoral candidates, other employees, and students are to take an active part in reviewing and developing the quality of operations they are involved in. When it comes to developing the quality of education, this is largely through work with course evaluations and other forms of evaluations. The results of these evaluations are systematically gathered evidence of how the education works and constitute one of multiple key bases for decision-making. Other bases for decision-making include frameworks stipulated by national and local regulations, current research, both in the subject taught and in the didactics of academic teaching and learning, the competence and proven experience of teachers, and situation analysis.

Special guidelines for course evaluations in undergraduate education have been in place at Uppsala University since May 1997. These guidelines have been revised several times, in 1999, 2001, 2006, and 2010, partly at the initiative of the Uppsala Student Union and partly of the Vice-Chancellor in connection with taking inventory of how course evaluation routines are working at the University.

Problems that have arisen due to this inventory taking include unacceptably low response rates and deficiencies in the feedback to students, such as changes prompted by the course evaluations - in other words, what happens after the course evaluation is compiled. The criticism also comprises findings from a comprehensive project carried out at the division for Academic Teaching and Learning in the years 2001-2004.[1] The purpose of the project was to provide ideas for educational development, and it was performed both in form of a questionnaire and as extensive discussions with both teachers and students within various bodies of the University. This work resulted in a concretization of both obstacles and possibilities for good education, including sound routines for course evaluations. The present recommendations have been informed by that empirical work and by other research in the field.

In 2009, yet another review of guidelines and recommendations was initiated, this time in the light of the increased use of electronic course evaluations and the development of such a function within the framework of the learning management system the Student Portal.[2] Electronic handling of course evaluations impacts course evaluation work by simplifying parts of the process and offers enhanced potential for feedback of results, but it also entails risks from a privacy point of view and can have a negative effect on response rates. This review prompted the updated version of the guidelines[3] and recommendations found in this document.

The purpose of this document is to provide practical advice concerning work with course evaluations. Further, some key points of departure for work on course evaluations are briefly

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[1] Hedin, Anna (2006). *Lärande på hög nivå. Idéer från studenter, lärare och pedagogisk forskning som stöd för utveckling av universitetsundervisning.* [High-level Learning: Ideas from Students, Teachers, and Education Research as a Basis for Developing University Teaching] Division for Development of Teaching and Active Learning (UPI)

[2] The review was performed by a group consisting of Karin Apelgren, Division for Development of Teaching and Learning, Sandra Creutz, Pharmaceutical Student Union, Astrid Hoppe, Department of Medical Sciences, Mats Cullhed, Uppsala Learning Lab, Karin Hjälmeskog, Department of Education, Jukka Hohenthal, Department of Business Studies, Åsa Kettis Lindblad, Office of Quality and Evaluation (chair), Einar Lauritzen, Student Affairs and Academic Registry Division, Karin Sjöstedt, Uppsala Student Union, Bo Wennström, Office of the Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences, Maria Wolters, Office of Quality and Evaluation, Björn Victor, Department of Information Technology, and Johan Asker, Legal Affairs Division.

[3] Riktlinjer för kursvärderingar, [Guidelines for Course Evaluations] UFV 2010/307

presented. The document is structured around various questions, to enable the reader to freely access different sections. This means that anyone who reads it from cover to cover will encounter some repetition.

The target group for the material comprises teachers, course directors, directors of studies, programme coordinators, and other staff members in charge of teaching; students, and others who are in some way engaged in course evaluation work.

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Guidelines for course evaluations

1. What regulations are there for course evaluations?

Uppsala University has had guidelines for course evaluations since 1997. The current guidelines for course evaluations were adopted by the Vice-Chancellor in 2010 and cover first-, second-, and third-cycle courses. The guidelines are found in full-text version in Appendix 1.

The guidelines for course evaluations at Uppsala University are grounded in the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance. Chapter 1 of the *Higher Education Act* (1992:1434) states the following regarding student participation in quality work:

Section 4 The operations of higher education institutions shall be arranged to ensure that high standards are attained in courses and study programmes as well as in research, and artistic research and development.
The resources available shall be used effectively to sustain a high standard of operation.
Quality assurance procedures are the shared concern of staff and students at higher education institutions.
(SFS 2000:260)

Sec. 4a Students shall be entitled to exert influence over the courses and study programmes at higher education institutions. Higher education institutions shall endeavour to enable students to play an active role in the continued development of courses and study programmes. (SFS 2000:260)

Chapter 1 of the *Higher Education Ordinance* (1993:100) states the following concerning course evaluations:

Section 14 Higher education institutions shall enable students who are participating in or have completed a course to express their experiences of and views on the course through a course evaluation to be organised by the higher education institution.

The higher education institution shall collate the course evaluations and provide information about their results and any actions prompted by the course evaluations. The results shall be made available to the students. (SFS 2000:651)

It is voluntary for students to take part in course evaluations, while the higher education institution is obligated to offer them the opportunity to do so.

2. Who is responsible for carrying out course evaluations?

The Higher Education Ordinance states that the higher education institution is required to carry out course evaluations. Students must be provided with the opportunity to participate in the higher education institution's quality work and in work with developing the education. Further, under the *Uppsala University Rules of Procedure* the disciplinary domain/faculty boards are responsible for operations in their area and therefore for continuously following up work with course evaluations.

Uppsala University's *Guidelines for Course Evaluations* state that the officer or the organ determined by the disciplinary domain/faculty board is to ensure that course evaluations are carried out, compiled, and used in developmental work. It is assumed that this responsibility includes making sure that all students are stimulated to play an active role in working with course evaluations. This comprises everything from taking the student perspective into consideration in designing course evaluations, in order to make it easy for students to respond, and engaging them to follow up the results and discussing measures to be taken. Student participation must imbue course evaluation work in each individual course or programme; both student organisations and the student unions must be involved in the more strategic aspects of course evaluation work. The

disciplinary domain/faculty boards are responsible for ensuring that all students receive thorough information about the importance of course evaluation work early on in the course/programme. Such information must make it clear that those in charge of the course/programme are dependent on constructive criticism in order to be able to make continuous educational improvements.

The Uppsala University Guidelines regarding Student Working Conditions stress the importance of course evaluations and the participation of students in evaluation and developmental work:

2.2 Students must be afforded opportunities to participate in evaluation and developmental work done by departments and faculty boards. [...]

2.3 Course evaluations, which should be anonymous unless special reasons obtain, must be carried out, compiled, and used in developmental work. Students must be informed of results and of any decisions regarding measures to be taken. The University's guidelines for course evaluations must be followed.

Even though the voice of students must be strong, results of course evaluations are *one* of several bases for decision-making in developing and modifying courses (other bases may be examination results, current research, and the judgements of teachers, for instance). Following careful consideration of student viewpoints, it is the University that decides what measures are to be taken as a consequence of the results. The University is also responsible for informing students about the outcomes of earlier course evaluation(s) and about what measures, if any, were taken or are to be taken.

The Higher Education Ordinance states that the results of course evaluations must be compiled and made available to students. Under *Guidelines for Course Evaluations at Uppsala University*, the results of a course evaluation must be summarised and assessed by the course director/teacher or programme coordinator (or by another person appointed to do so) and presented in a *course report*:

The course report must contain both student and teacher viewpoints and give an account of the strengths and weaknesses of the course, along with suggestions for possible improvements. Central viewpoints from the students' own free text responses must be summarised and accounted for in the course report.

When formative course evaluations are carried out while the course is in progress, such results and any adjustments resulting from these evaluations must also be mentioned in the course report. The course report constitutes a concrete basis for course development for course directors/teachers in charge of courses, relevant directors of studies, and programme coordinators or the equivalent. Course reports make it easier for educational leaders (such as directors of studies or programme directors) to monitor courses over time, for example in terms of planned and instituted measures.

Course evaluations – part of quality work

3. Why course evaluations?

The guidelines state two main functions for course evaluations. One function is to provide a basis for quality development od development, in other words, to provide a basis on which to *improve* education. Course evaluations are *one* of the bases in continuous quality work, in which the viewpoints of students are important and necessary to consider. This entails that *constructive criticism* and *information relevant to possible measures* must be emphasised, from both the teacher and student perspectives. Relevance to possible measures means that the results should be able to serve as a relevant and concrete point of departure for improvements. An important prerequisite for the results of a course evaluation in terms of promoting quality and contributing to educational development is that the results are analysed and discussed by those in charge together with students and teachers. This is one of the reasons why a course report should be written.

When educational evaluations are discussed in more general terms, for instance in connection with the Swedish Higher Education Authority's (Universitetskanslersämbetet) assessments of programmes and courses, several different purposes are put forward for evaluations. One common purpose, besides evaluations' being able to lead to the *development* of courses and programmes, is *quality control*. Course evaluations do indeed fulfil a monitoring function insofar as those being in charge of education are made aware of possible problems and deficiencies in the courses and programmes.

The second function stated in *Guidelines for Course Evaluations* is to provide students with an opportunity to reflect upon their education in a structured manner. This is also reflected in the *"Teaching and Learning at Uppsala University"* programme, where the role of students own learning is emphasised.

Teaching and Learning at Uppsala University emphasises the importance of course evaluations and of providing students with feedback from course evaluation results (see box below)[4]. The document also highlights the importance of a continuous dialogue between teachers and students in order to achieve the best possible preconditions for learning.

The role of the University	The role of students
1.3.2. During the course, the teacher will engage in structured discussion and **cooperation with the students** so as to develop the teaching and renew the education. The teacher will create conditions and learning environments in which students can express their opinions about the design of the course, the activities involved and the assessments, as well as other aspects of relevance to the teaching. *Responsibility for implementation:* Teachers *Responsibility for favourable conditions:* Course and/or programme coordinators	Students must: - Make use of opportunities to give feedback on the teaching and the learning environments and cooperate with teachers by making constructive suggestions on how the teaching can be further developed and the education renewed. - Contact the course coordinator, the director of studies or the equivalent, a study counsellor or in the last resort the head of department in cases where it may be difficult to voice negative opinions directly to the teacher. Students can also get in touch with a student representative or a students' union. *Responsibility for implementation:* The student *Responsibility for favourable conditions:* Student unions

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[4] The *Teaching and Learning at Uppsala University* programme was revised in April 2018, and this is an excerpt from the last edition of the programme.

2.1.2. Follow-up will be conducted using **course and programme evaluations** in accordance with the guidelines provided by the University. In connection with educational evaluations, *Teaching and learning at Uppsala University* can serve as a source of questions for use in following up and enhancing educational quality. *Responsibility for implementation:* Teachers, directors of studies/educational leaders, course and/or programme coordinators, course administrators, head of the Division for Quality Enhancement	Students are expected to: - Voice their opinions by responding to course evaluations so as to contribute to the development of teaching. - Draw attention in their feedback to aspects of the teaching that work well and make constructive and specific suggestions on changes to improve aspects that work less well. - Make it clear to their fellow students that it is important to respond to course evaluations. *Responsibility for implementation:* The student *Responsibility for favorable conditions:* Student unions
2.1.3. The results of course evaluations will be summarised in a **course report** that will also contain the views of the course coordinator/teacher on the course and proposals on possible measures. The report will be made available to the students and will be presented in connection with the next course introduction. Teachers and other staff responsible for the education-al programme will promote an open dialogue with students on the development and renewal of the programme. **Formative evaluations** should be used where appropriate in connection with course components as a supplement to summative course evaluations. *Responsibility for implementation:* Teachers, course and/or programme coordinators, course administrators	Students are expected to take advantage of opportunities to discuss the outcome of course evaluations with teachers and fellow students and to acquaint them-selves with the course report concerned. The student unions and student representatives should encourage students to fill in course evaluations as a means of providing constructive criticism and suggestions for improving the course or programme. *Responsibility for implementation:* The student, students' unions and student representatives.

Excerpts from Teaching and Learning at Uppsala University (UFV 2015/826) regarding course evaluations.

Under the *Programme for Quality Work at Uppsala University*, systematic follow-up is to provide objective grounds for improvements. The programme further states that the quality culture at the University is characterised by constant review and renewal in which continuous self-critical examination is included as a natural component. All quality work carried out must be documented and made visible. It is further stated:

> The involvement of employees and students is a necessary condition for well-functioning quality work, that is, it must be self-evident that teachers, doctoral candidates, other employees, and students are active in the assessment and enhancement of quality in the activities they are part of.

Course evaluations constitute examples of systematically gathered information about how students perceive their learning environment in the specific course. This information is further systematised and becomes an important feature of quality work when the viewpoints of students are evaluated and analysed, and complemented with the viewpoints of the course directors/teachers in a course report.

4. For whom?

The answer to the question "for whom?" often influences both which questions are perceived as urgent, and the design of the course evaluation. The text below describes a number of groups that have an interest in course evaluations. The legitimate interests of all these groups entail different emphases on *development* and *monitoring*, which can influence the view of the balance between standard questions and course-specific questions (see sections "8. What is important to ask about? – various question areas" and "11. Which is better – standard sets of questions or tailor-made course evaluations?").

For *students taking the course,* formative course evaluations are extra valuable, as this gives them an opportunity to exert influence over the course while it progresses. Given these results, the teachers can make certain immediate changes that will benefit current students (see section "7. Why formative course evaluations?"). Feedback on the perceptions of previous students, and not least the changes brought about (if any, or if not, the reasons why no change was made) testifies to the important role of course evaluations, and increases current students' motivation to take part in the evaluations. Of course, making the results of the course evaluation readily available for a participating student, along with the course report and any changes made, will enhance a student's motivation to continue to participate in the evaluations. Encountering occasional course-specific questions can counteract the somewhat fatiguing effect that standard questionnaires may have in the long run.

For *future students*, as for the groups below, course evaluations help ensure the maintenance of good quality in courses and contribute to developing them in the right direction.

For *teachers giving the course,* feedback from students is valuable both for its ideas for improving the course and for the professional development. Course-specific questions are often perceived as valuable.

For *course directors/teachers,* course evaluations provide information about how students perceived the course. On this basis, combined with the examination outcomes and teachers' viewpoints, course directors can make an assessment of what possible changes might be made next time the course is given. Here, too, course-specific questions are often perceived as valuable.

The director of studies or other staff responsible for study programmes are often interested in monitoring courses over time, to ensure that the department's courses maintain the highest possible quality. Evaluations can reveal the need for comprehensive development at the department but also provide a basis for the individual developmental plan that is to be in place for each teacher, to be set up together with the director of studies. For the sake of comparison, standard questions are extremely valuable.

The programme coordinator, like the director of studies, is interested in monitoring courses over time to ensure their logical progression, which means that standard questions are considered useful. For instance, he/she may wish to monitor that courses do not overlap unnecessarily within a programme. The viewpoints of programme students on both individual courses and possibly complete semesters or programmes (see section "22. Why beginner questionnaires, term evaluations, and other periodic evaluations?") can provide valuable input for quality development.

Other groups with an interest in course evaluation work are *student unions, programme committees and programme directors*, *heads of departments,* and *disciplinary domain/faculty boards* as the bodies being responsible for the quality of education in their sphere. Disciplinary domain/faculty boards are obligated to ensure that work with course evaluations is followed up annually and that the results of this follow-up are reported back to the disciplinary domain/faculty board and relevant heads of departments.

Prospective students should be aware that the results of course evaluations as such do not provide an all-inclusive and reliable source on which to base their selection of courses/programmes. Besides the fact that courses change over time, for example as a result of course evaluations, it should also be kept in mind that the students completing the course evaluation made their judgements about the course from their own viewpoint *at that time*. Sometimes the response rate is low, which means that a considerable proportion of the students do not offer their viewpoints. There is no clear connection between how satisfied students are with a course, and the quality of the course concerned. For example, a course that puts a great deal of work and responsibility in the laps of students might receive poor evaluations because students experienced it as burdening, even though it effectively contributed to student learning. However, this circumstance should not be taken as an excuse not to take student viewpoints seriously.

Keeping these reservations in mind, it can be said that course reports are probably of greater interest to prospective students rather than simple compilations of results. Course reports provide a more balanced picture of a course (containing the views of teachers/directors and any measures to be taken) and testify to a methodological approach to course development.

5. Why are ethics important?

Uppsala University has long safeguarded the privacy of employees and students in its guidelines for course evaluations:

5. The privacy of employees and students must be respected in all work with course evaluations.

Respecting the privacy of employees and students is a necessary condition for maintaining confidence in course evaluations as an instrument for course development and student influence. All course evaluation work must be characterised by mutual respect between students and teachers/other categories of employees, as well as among employees.

With the increasing spread of results from course evaluations owing to increased use of websites and other digital media, there is an ever-greater need to consider this aspect. Besides safeguarding the importance of course evaluations for course development, the University, as an employer and educational provider, strives to guarantee a good work environment. (See further sections "13. How are free-text responses reviewed?", "17. What should be borne in mind regarding Web-based course evaluations?" and "21. What legal aspects need to be considered in connection with course evaluations?").

Designing course evaluations

6. When should course evaluation information be gathered?

The most common practice is for students to fill out a course evaluation at the end of a course. However, in certain cases it might be suitable for students to get the written course evaluation at the beginning of the course and to fill it out continually. Otherwise, their evaluations might suffer from them not remembering the details. The ideal, besides being provided with a final course evaluation, would be for students to get opportunities to share their viewpoints during the course, to allow for adjustments and modification of the course as it progresses (see next section on formative course evaluations).

As examinations make up part of the course, it is appropriate to gather course evaluation information *after* the final exam. However, this is not always possible for practical or pedagogical reasons. In order to capture students' views on how well the exam reflects the content and aims of the course, it is also possible to give students an opportunity to state their viewpoints regarding the examination separately, for instance, in a session following up the exam.

7. Why formative course evaluations?

Formative course evaluations entail that students, *besides* being subjected to a final (summative) course evaluation, can share their views while a course is still in progress. This provides the teacher with an opportunity to find out how the learning environment works for the students during the course and to make direct modifications if possible. Formative course evaluations can also have the effect of increasing student motivation in terms of showing that the teacher is eager to provide the best possible learning environment. Results from formative course evaluations, and any modifications made as the course progresses, should be mentioned in the course report. In addition, formative course evaluations can mitigate the summative course evaluation, which can then focus on the course as a whole and how well course goals are perceived to have been fulfilled.

The simplest form of formative course evaluation is to conduct an informal but systematic dialogue with students during the course, for instance by continually taking inventory of any problems that might need to be addressed. Beyond this, there are a number of formalised ways to continuously gather information that might improve the course as it progresses. For example, formative course evaluations can provide answers to how students experienced a recently completed course component and what might be changed in terms of teaching for the rest of the course in order to facilitate learning.

Examples of concrete questions in a formative course evaluation:

- Name a few things you especially appreciated about the lecture/seminar/group work/lab, etc.

- What could be done differently to facilitate your learning as the course continues?

- How do you feel about the level of difficulty?   a) too hard b) just right c) too easy

- What do you think about the tempo?   a) too fast b) just right c) too slow

A formative "quick questionnaire" can also be designed as statements to take a stand on:

A= agree fully
B= agree to a large extent
C= agree to some extent
D= don't agree at all
E= don't know, uncertain

"I have understood most things during class."
"I already knew most of what was brought up."
"The tempo has been way too slow."
"I have questions I would like have answered."
"I would like to have more concrete examples."

Those wishing to delve deeper into how the students acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a given area can ask questions like the following:

- What do you experience as the most important message from the lecture/seminar/group work/lab, etc.?

- What is still unclear or hard to understand?

- How can this knowledge be used practically?

- What previous knowledge can this new knowledge be related to?

Formative evaluations should be designed to be responded to and reported back rapidly and can take many forms, such as:

- The teacher conducts a brief written survey to be filled out by the students at the end of class.

- The teacher can ask the students consecutive questions to be responded to by pushing buttons on a so-called mentometer/clicker, with the results shown to everyone immediately.

- The teacher sends out an open question about some aspect of the teaching by e-mail (or a Web forum) and asks students to respond.

- The teacher asks the students some questions, and students write their responses on slips of paper and thereafter discuss them in small groups. After the group discussions, the teacher collects viewpoints from the groups in a general discussion.

- The teacher asks 5–8 students in a course if they would be interested in meeting him/her regularly throughout the course to discuss how it could be improved. Other students are urged to channel suggestions and criticism through this group. The teacher sees to it that discussions in the group, and the proposals they lead to, are made known to the other students.

8. What is important to ask about? – various question areas

What should be in focus in a course evaluation can vary and is partly dependent on the answer to the question "for whom?" (see section "4. For whom?"). Course directors and teachers need to reflect upon what aspects are central to elucidate as a basis for improvements of the course concerned. One aspect that is crucial in assessing the quality of a course is to what extent it stimulated and contributed to student learning, so questions of such type should be included. Examples of factors that contribute to student learning are teaching that activates students and feedback on student achievement.

In evaluations, a distinction should be made between: (1) the preconditions for a course or programme, (2) educational/learning processes, and (3) outcomes/results. This means that it may be a matter of asking questions in these three areas and about the course as a whole in accordance with the following structure:

• *Background/preconditions for the course* (e.g. students previous knowledge and expectations)
• *Process* (such as student and teacher input, course requirements, course content, literature, forms of instruction, degree of difficulty of the course, pace, examination, study climate, links to research and working life, gender equality and equal treatment aspects, and support functions)
• *Course outcomes/results* (e.g. perceived achievement of course objectives, whether interest in and motivation for the subject have changed during the course, and the contribution of the examination to the learning process)
• *Assessment of the course as a whole* (such an overall evaluation can include students' views on how well objectives, forms of teaching and the examination tie in to each other, so-called constructive alignment/constructive linkage).

To provide concrete suggestions for course evaluation questions, a question bank is available at the Unit for Quality and Evaluation Web site (https://mp.uu.se/en/web/info/undervisa/kvalitet-och-utvardering/kursvardstod/kursvardering). The question bank is structured in accordance with the points above. There are also some examples of course evaluation questionnaires of various length.

Today the emphasis is on students' independence and their own responsibility for learning, which is highlighted in the program *Teaching and Learning at Uppsala University* and elsewhere, where the students' role in good education assumes an equally prominent role as the University's role. This development has led to a shift in the roles of students and teachers, with the focus shifting from teaching to learning, which entails that course evaluations should try to capture a picture of how the course has created favourable conditions for meaningful learning and not merely stress "what the teacher was like". A one-sided emphasis on the actions of teachers does not provide enough information to improve the conditions for students' learning and their personal responsibility. Aspects of teachers' actions that have proven to be of importance in the learning process that it is possible to ask students about are, for instance, degree of clarity and capacity to motivate and communicate with students.

As with the formulation of all questions, it is important to focus on relevance to measures. The question should be posed in such a way that the answer will provide some indication of what should be changed. For example, if students are to be asked to assess the input of teachers, it must be clear what concrete aspects are to be judged, so that students are not merely asked to "grade" their teachers. The evaluation of a teacher may partly depend on what course component he/she has taught. A lecture may be perceived as boring and difficult but may nonetheless be worthwhile and necessary. How well a teacher manages to promote students' learning, on the other hand, is central. Concrete examples of questions with *set* alternative responses regarding the input of teachers are given in the question bank mentioned above. The questions are formulated in

statement form for students to take a stand on using a five-point scale from "do not agree at all" to "agree fully":

> "The teacher(s) we have had for most of the course have been good at
> explaining things that are hard to understand in the course."

> "The teacher(s) we have had for most of the course seem to be committed to
> their teaching."

Besides specific questions with set alternative responses, *open questions* can also provide the teacher with constructive feedback that can facilitate his/her professional development. Examples of such questions are:

- What was especially good about element X?
- What was not so good?
- What could make element X better?

Moreover, general grading of named individual teachers should not be used if the results are to be widely circulated, in accordance with the guidelines, where respect for the privacy of both teachers and students is stressed. An alternative way of asking could be to ask students to assess how a certain course component contributed to their learning during the course, or have them assessing the value of a specific lecture.

Feedback to individual teachers can furthermore be strengthened by developing forms of peer supervision, for example, by having teachers observing each other's classes and providing each other with constructive comments.

Some departments, programmes, and faculties want to have some standard questions that will enable them to compare across courses and over time. In many cases, seeing to it that the relevance of the measures taken for an individual course would be as good as possible and that the questionnaire designed would be less monotonous to respond to, it would be best to strike a good balance between standard questions and course-specific ones (see further sections "10. What should be borne in mind when designing questions?", "11. Which is better – standard sets of questions or tailor-made course evaluations?", and "18. How can the response rate be increased?").

9. How can students evaluate their own input?

The Higher Education Ordinance states that, upon completion of general first and second-cycle qualifications (degrees), students shall be able to: "demonstrate the ability to identify the need for further knowledge and ongoing learning". A consequence of the emphasis on the students taking responsibility for their own learning is various forms of self-evaluation. The idea behind self-evaluations is that students should be stimulated to assume an active and responsible approach to their own knowledge, an idea that imbues the "*Teaching and Learning at Uppsala University*" programme, and is the foundation for lifelong learning.

Self-evaluation means that the student reflects upon what he/she has learnt and what needs to be developed further. Self-evaluation is included as an integral part of certain teaching and learning activities, such as problem-based learning, but can be used in combination with any other teaching and learning activity. A course evaluation is an excellent occasion to provide students with an opportunity to reflect upon their own efforts during the course. In its simplest form this information can be acquired by an open question in the course evaluation about what the students have learnt and what they need to develop further, but more specific questions can also be used

where the students take a stand on their own learning input. Concrete suggestions of such questions can be found in the "question bank" at the Unit for Quality and Evaluation (https://mp.uu.se/en/web/info/undervisa/kvalitet-och-utvardering/kursvardstod/kursvardering). Here are some examples of questions with a set of five alternative responses from "to very little extent" to "to great extent":

> "To what extent have you made an effort to profit from the course content?"

> "To what extent have you made an effort to be active in the various elements of the course?"

> "To what extent have you reflected upon your own study habits and study methods?"

> "To what extent have you actively participated in group work?"

Besides elements of self-evaluation in course evaluations, another way is to make use of so-called "reflective portfolios". These are examples of tools for students to evaluate their own knowledge development throughout their education as a whole. A portfolio can contain examples of different kinds of work, such as assignments and reports that can be used to illustrate the student's development over time. Moreover, students are asked to find words to describe their knowledge development in each course and during the entire programme, respectively. In this way students are stimulated to actively synthesize knowledge from different parts of their education. The teacher can benefit from reflective portfolios in that they provide good insight into students' learning processes. For instance, what makes a certain course difficult to understand, and how can this be remedied? This also provides useful insights into students' attitudes to and feelings about their learning. In some places students are encouraged to create CV-like portfolios whose primary purpose is to pave the way for a future professional career and to enhance students' employability/usefulness.

10. What should be borne in mind when designing questions?

In brief, it can be said that formulating questions is an art and "your responses reflect what you asked". The quality of questions is important for the *validity* (that we are actually measuring what we intend to measure) of the course evaluation. For example, questions need to be comprehensible, about one thing at a time, and not "leading" (that is, hint at the "desired" response), and the alternative responses have to be mutually exclusive. Therefore, it is a good idea to conduct pilot runs of new course evaluation questionnaires by asking a few students from the target group to "think out loud" when they fill out the questionnaire and to express their views about the questions. This provides an idea of how the questions are interpreted and helps to ensure that they are relevant and clear, and that they cover the most important aspects.

> *Concrete suggestions for course evaluation questions are gathered in a "question bank" on the Unit for Quality and Evaluation home page (https://mp.uu.se/en/web/info/undervisa/kvalitet-och-utvardering/kursvardstod/kursvardering).*

It is important to limit the number of questions in order to avoid an overly comprehensive course evaluation. In what respects is it most vital to get student viewpoints? It should be avoided to simply ask routine questions; instead, the emphasis should be on questions that can provide a basis on which to improve the course, that is, questions that can be categorized as *relevant to measures*. Discussions with student representatives and the body of teachers make it easier to set priorities regarding the focus of course evaluations. It should also be considered whether some

answers could be gathered from alternative sources (such as course syllabi) in order not to burden the questionnaire and the students more than necessary.

Questions can be posed in various ways. One simple and commonly used way is to ask respondents to take a stand regarding to what extent they agree with a statement instead of answering explicit questions. A matter that is often discussed in the literature about constructing questionnaires is whether the response scale should have an even or an odd number of steps. No general recommendation can be made regarding which is better; this needs to be determined from one case to another and is sometimes more a matter of "taste". Odd numbers of steps enable respondents to select the middle option, whereas even numbers "force" respondents to take a stand in one direction or another.

Some *general viewpoints*: when using questions with fixed responsive options it is important for students to have the opportunity to:
• comment on and explain their answers, that is, space should be provided for this in connection with questions where appropriate.
• give constructive suggestions for improvements,
• state that they "don't know" or "can't take a stand" in relevant cases, and
• finally, state their own views on matters not taken up by the questions in the questionnaire, for example under the heading of "other viewpoints".

In some courses there may be groups of students who are not comfortable with raising points of critcism concerning the teachers. Extra care needs to be taken in formulating and analysing questions to minimize the risk of overestimating students' satisfaction. It is important for the teacher to stress that constructive criticism is desirable and that it will not affect the assessment of student achievement. A question like "Give some advice to me as a teacher about what I should bear in mind for my next course" can be very useful in its simplicity, as it also signals that this is a way for students to support their teacher.

11. Which is better – standard sets of questions or tailor-made course evaluations?

Some departments and programmes have created one or more standard sets of questions for course evaluations. Sometimes these questionnaires are offered to those who do not wish to design a tailor-made course evaluation; sometimes a particular questionnaire is prescribed for use.

Standard questionnaires facilitate the ongoing work with course evaluations, and *well-designed* standard sets of questions often provide a sufficient base for renewal of teaching and learning in ongoing course evaluation work. What is more, standard questionnaires facilitate follow-up of responses to questions over time and increase the comparability of courses. A drawback with standard sets of questions is that they can lead to fatigue among students, who encounter the same questions in course after course, with varying relevance to each specific course.

Making use of course-specific questions would also be appropriate and to the point. It might be important for an individual teacher to design specific questions to capture viewpoints that are directly relevant to a particular course. Furthermore, tailor-made questions can increase the likelihood of students being willing to participate in the evaluation, as they testify to an active interest taken on the part of teachers and others running the course to find out what students think.

In many cases a good balance between standard and course-specific questions is preferable.

When more comprehensive changes are being considered in courses and programmes, or with new programmes, tailor-made course evaluations are preferable. In these situations it can be important to hear what students have to say about certain specific questions. In such cases there are probably reasons to ask students to express their views about the programme in a more comprehensive questionnaire than is routinely used for established courses or to use other forms of follow-up, such as focus groups, which can be defined as systematic group interviews on certain given themes. (See section "19. Do course evaluations have to be in writing?")

Course evaluations may also need to be custom-tailored in courses that rely on the principles of problem-based learning (PBL), as this mode of working entails successive evaluations of the process. Further examples are when a course is given in the form of distance teaching and/or as a part-time course or if detailed viewpoints are needed regarding a practicum period or concerning supervision and support in working with a degree project.

Analysing course evaluation results

12. How do we analyse quantitative data?

If an electronic course evaluation system is used, the processing of quantitative data is usually done automatically and presented in the form of a report. Bar charts are often displayed to show the percentage of various responses to each question. If the statistical processing is not done automatically, Excel or a statistics programme is normally used.

Course evaluations generally require only simple descriptive analyses such as percentage distribution of responses. However, with questionnaires it is quite common to report mean values and measures of the spread among responses. Opinion is divided on this issue. Questionnaire questions are usually designed for responses along an ordinal scale (where you can place the response categories in order of magnitude from "little" to "a great deal," for instance) or on a nominal scale (different response categories which cannot be ranked, for instance apples and oranges), and these scales do not allow for the calculation of a mean value. In the former case this is because it cannot be assumed that the distance between the various responses is equally great, and in the latter case for obvious reasons (it is difficult to determine a mean value of apples and oranges). Therefore, the precision down to the decimal that is associated with a calculated mean is misleading. What should be reported instead is the percentage distribution of responses and the median (the value in the middle). It is commonly thought, however, that a median, in the form of a whole integer, is too coarse and blunt a value to be useful, so a mean value is nevertheless often calculated.

One way to create a good overview and good comparability without using averages is to report the *proportion* of the two responses indicating the most agreement with the statement on a five-degree scale from "don't agree at all" to "agree fully". Depending on what the distribution of responses looks like, it may sometimes be suitable to report the proportion selecting the two responses indicating the least agreement. This makes it easy to compare results for different questions and over time instead of using an average. Of cardinal importance, of course, is that course evaluation results are in fact *considered* and *used* in course development, which is why there should be scope for different ways of reporting results, depending on local traditions and preferences. The main thing is to avoid a one-sided focus on averages and to always look at what the actual distribution of responses looks like.

When reference is made to quantitative results, the scale should be shown, to make it clear, for instance, that it is a five-degree scale where 1 = don't agree at all and 5 = agree fully (also applies when reference is made to a median and, if applicable, to a mean) or that such and such a proportion of respondents have stated that they are "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied".

Of course, it is important to know how the question was formulated when quantitative and qualitative results are presented, since it is that particular formulation that was presented to the students and that they have taken a stand on (and nothing else).

In interpreting quantitative data, one should also be aware that the choice of a particular number of scale steps *may* influence both the analysis and the results. Even numbers of steps can facilitate analysis by making it possible to pool alternative responses and dichotomize the outcome if so desired. However, it should be borne in mind that the lack of a middle alternative "forces" respondents to choose sides, unlike the case with a five-degree scale, for instance, that allows them to select the "middle" and thereby indicate that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

If the response rate is low, the results of the quantitative analysis should be interpreted with caution, although it is neither possible nor desirable to set an exact limit for an acceptable response rate. It should be borne in mind, however, that a high rate of non-responses *may* affect the reliability of the results. How misleading the results are as a consequence of the non-responses depends entirely on whether those who responded differ from those who did not respond in some way that could affect the results. The main thing is to always state the response rate. A response rate below one half can be regarded as a sign that measures need to be taken to improve this rate and to find complementary ways to capture student viewpoints (see sections "7. Why formative course evaluations?" and "19. Do course evaluations have to be in writing?").

13. How are free-text responses reviewed?

For course evaluations to function optimally and contribute to course development work, it is important that all work with course evaluations should be characterised by mutual respect between teachers and students. *Guidelines for Course Evaluations* states:

5. The privacy of employees and students must be respected in all work with course evaluations.

Part of being a teacher is to be evaluated. It is an integral part of practising the profession to be able to accept constructive criticism and in this way to constantly improve. This is emphasised in the University's *Programme for Quality Work*:

The involvement and professional approach of employees, including continuous self-critical review of their own work, must constitute a central component of the culture of quality.

Objective feedback adds to a teacher's potential to develop, whereas personal and insulting criticism is hurtful and can constitute a direct problem in the workplace environment. Such criticism counteracts to the purpose of course evaluations to contribute to course development, and it lessens a teacher's motivation to work actively with course evaluations and benefit from criticism.

Equally important as safeguarding the privacy of teachers and other employees, such as course administrators, is to take care to protect the privacy of students. The legal aspects of this are discussed in more detail under the second point in section "21. What legal aspects need to be considered in connection with course evaluations?".

Free-text responses must therefore always be reviewed before the results are distributed (see also section "17. What should be borne in mind regarding Web-based course evaluations?"). Normally only the director of studies, the course director, the course representative, and possibly the course-evaluation officer should have access to unedited free-text responses. The guidelines make it clear that central viewpoints from students' free-text responses are to be summarised and reported in the course report.

Review of free-text responses is not merely a matter of removing names; care must be taken to eliminate other ways in which an individual might be identified. For instance, if a course administrator mentioned is the only person in this category at the department, then he or she is easily identifiable, as are other small personnel groups, like student advisers. During review any insulting comments should be reformulated into objective criticism, without losing sight of the message. It is important to make it clear what is a direct quotation and what has been reformulated. For example:

Student comments	Reviewed comment
"The teacher is totally worthless and should be replaced—and you should see what he looks like… What's more he never gives us feedback on what we're doing and seems to be generally uninterested."	[the student states that the teacher is lacking in terms of involvement and providing feedback to students about their achievement]
"The course administrator is not the least bit interested in his work and is moreover generally hopeless. You never get the timetable on time. He's a real bastard—I think he hates students."	[the student levels criticism against the course administrator and would like to have time-tables made available on time, among other things]
"The student adviser could be better, for example by showing more involvement and being more helpful and not working so sluggishly (really hard to get answers to e-mails)."	Student advising "could be better [...]" [the student would appreciate more rapid replies to e-mail, for example]

If multiple students point out the same problem, this can be dealt with in the following way in the course report:

> "Comments indicate that some students feel certain teachers' commitment is lacking and that there is insufficient feedback to students regarding their achievement. Some express that some personnel need to improve their manner with students. Some students would like to see improvement in getting the timetable ready on time, and one student would like to have e-mails answered more promptly.
>
> *Measure*: The director of studies will see to it that this is investigated further and will take relevant measures to alleviate these problems ahead of coming courses."

(For more information about how to write a course report, see section "15. How do you write a course report?".)

14. How do we analyse free-text responses?

Students' free-text responses are to be dealt with and considered just like quantitative results, as is stated in *Guidelines for Course Evaluations*. It says there that central viewpoints from students' free-text responses must be summarised and stated in the course report. To make it possible for them to lead to measures, they must be summed up at some stage in the process. This is done by reading through all free-text responses and identifying recurrent themes.

In concrete terms this can be done as follows. The first time a certain type of response occurs in the reading, a heading can be created to give the gist of the comment, for instance:

> "Literature too difficult"

> "Parts of the course content overlaps with course X."

In further reading more responses will occur that fit in under the headings created. All of this results in a number of themes. When these themes are presented, the headings can be stated and the contents of the responses under each heading can be summed up briefly.
There is software available, such as NVivo, that can facilitate the processing of free-text responses considerably if there are a great number of them.

Summaries of central themes are to be provided in the course report and can be elucidated with illustrative quotations. For example:

Parts of the *course content overlaps with course X*. This is above all the case with component Y, which was virtually duplicated. Several students suggested that it should be eliminated and replaced with a short review. One student suggested instead that component Y could be expanded, since it seemed important and was hurried through. Someone felt the course directors could coordinate their courses better:

> "I'm getting tired of all the overlapping – we've already gone through Y. Would like to see that teachers had a better overview of what gets covered in different courses. This is not making the most efficient use of our time."

The caution required in interpreting results when response rates are low is not as relevant for free-text responses as for quantitative data. A free-text response can be just as interesting if only one person has expressed an opinion. Say a student has submitted a creative piece of advice about how a component could be improved. This comment is useful, even if only a third of all course participants responded to the questionnaire. In a similar way, a single negative comment can contribute to an understanding of how something was perceived. Free-text responses give us access to spontaneous opinions that exist within the group of students, although they do not say anything about how common the opinions are.

15. How should a course report be written?

Course evaluation results are *one* of many bases for decision-making in developing and modifying courses. If a course evaluation is to offer a constructive contribution to improving a course, the views of students have to be put in a context and followed up with discussions of results between teachers and students, and for example, between the course director and course representatives. The experiences and perspectives must be factored in when analysing course evaluation results, whereby the response rate and examination outcomes, for instance, as well as more long-term perspectives are to be considered, in order to ensure that any changes that are made are well founded.

Therefore, according to the University's *Guidelines for Course Evaluations*, the results of a course evaluation must be compiled and assessed, normally by the course director/teacher in charge of the course (or someone else appointed to do so) in a course report. The report must give an account of the strengths and weaknesses of the course and any measures that should be taken. The course director/teacher in charge of the course should comment on proposals regarding the timing and responsibility for implementing measures, or, if it is either impossible or undesirable to implement the measures proposed, then reasons for this should be stated. Central viewpoints from students' free-text responses must also be evident in the course report, where selected free-text responses can be an excellent way to illustrate the summary (see section "27. Examples of course reports"). The course report should also mention results from formative course evaluations and any changes made when the course was in progress. Recipients of the course report are, besides the course director/teacher in charge of the course, other teachers on the course, the director of studies, the programme director or the equivalent, other staff members responsible for study programmes at a higher level, and students.

A course report does not need to be either long or especially detailed. What it does is to make it evident *that* the results are being considered and *what* is going to be done next time around. Besides the fact that feedback (what is going to happen?) becomes clearer, it can help ensure that the course director's/teachers' ideas are not forgotten and can make it easier for those in charge of teaching to monitor courses over time. The course report is a means to bring to light and advance the process so that it does not end with the results of the course evaluation, but rather that they are being considered and analysed in order to lead to course *development*.

Systematic review of course reports can uncover patterns of strength and weakness within a programme. In cases where there are deficiencies in several courses in a programme, measures may be called for at the programme, department, or faculty level. Major measures should be addressed in operational planning and then followed up in annual operational reports at relevant levels.

16. What happens next? – feedback.

It is vital to involve students in various ways in the course evaluation process, and also that they are able to find out about any changes brought about by course evaluation results, through the availability of course reports, for instance. Their right to have access to the compilation of a course evaluation they have individually taken part in, as well as to any decisions made on any measure taken, is stated in the Higher Education Ordinance, as mentioned above. The guidelines stress that students are to be informed early on in a course about what previous course evaluations have shown and led to. Feedback to students is important for multiple reasons: for instance, it enhances students' motivation to become involved in course evaluation work. When students perceive that their viewpoints actually mean something to their teachers, there are usually many positive effects, such as higher response rates for course evaluations.

Another effect of students' having access to previous course reports for a specific course is that they can help follow up whether the measures displayed in those reports have actually been implemented.

The importance of feedback to students is stated in *Guidelines for Course Evaluations*:

8. Students must be informed early in the course about the outcome of previous course evaluation(s) and about what measures, if any, have been taken or will be taken.

Other questions about course evaluations

17. What should be borne in mind regarding Web-based course evaluations?

If students are asked to complete course evaluations via the Web, privacy issues must be considered especially carefully. The reason is that the distribution effect is substantially greater on the Web than on paper. Special precautions must be taken in regard to free-text responses. While it is obvious that free-text responses are to be *analysed* and *considered* in the course report, it is less evident that free-text responses should be published in full-text version on the Web. Like quantitative data, they can be compiled at the group level before being presented in the course report, if not earlier.

Guidelines for Course Evaluations at Uppsala University states:

5. The privacy of employees and students must be respected in all work with course evaluations.

6. If the free text responses of students are published on a Web site or in any other way, this must be preceded by a review of privacy considerations and be approved by the University officer in charge (not a paid student).

The publication of free-text responses with insulting assessments of employees or students thus counteracts to the guidelines. There are many reasons for these points in the guidelines. For example, publication is clearly inappropriate both for reasons of pedagogy and for work environment reasons (see further section "21. What legal aspects need to be considered in connection with course evaluations?"). Formulations that are available to the public must be objective and relevant to measures that might be taken, which of course applies to all publication, not only digital. What are of interest to students (and to teaching staff and management) are primarily *measures* prompted by the course evaluation results, or the reasoning behind a decision not to take measures. Examples of how insulting comments can be reformulated into objective comments, without losing sight of the message, are given in section "13. How are free-text responses reviewed?".

If the free-text responses of students are published on a Web site or in any other way, this must be preceded by a review of privacy considerations and be approved by the University officer in charge (not a paid student). Experience shows that reviewing free-text responses requires both experience and good judgement. It is not merely a matter of removing names but also being sensitive to other ways in which an individual can be identified. If a student adviser is mentioned, and there is only one such person in that category at the department, then the individual can readily be identified, for instance. Therefore, if a student is in charge of compiling and reviewing course evaluations, their publication must receive the approval of the officer in charge at the University. In practice, how this is dealt with may vary across departments and faculties, for instance everything from all course directors being assigned this responsibility to one or more specially appointed employee at the department to fulfil this function.

While restraint should be observed in the publication of free-text responses, it is important that course reports not be abstracted to the point where they seem to be "watered down". Selected free-text responses can be an excellent way to illustrate what is summarised in the course report. Moreover, it is very important that the unreviewed free-text responses reach the director of studies or course director (or some other individual in charge) as a safeguard against any loss of information in the summary.

18. How can the response rate be increased?

It is a common perception among teachers that response rates have declined further in connection with the introduction of electronic course evaluations. At the same time, electronic course evaluations have so many advantages, in the form of automated response compilation and the ability to readily do follow-ups over time, for instance, that it can hardly be regarded as an option to abandon them.

There are various strategies for increasing the response rate. One of them is to make clear from the very outset of the course that course evaluations are valuable instruments for course and programme development. To obtain support from students in this work in terms of increasing the response rate is also valuable. There are examples of student associations that have found creative solutions to this problem.

On top of this, there are a number of concrete ways to increase the response rate regardless of whether the questionnaire is distributed in paper form or electronically. These include avoiding long questionnaires and asking only relevant questions. (See section "10. What should be borne in mind when designing questions?".)

Concrete structural measures that facilitate responding are also important. This can involve the scheduling of time to fill out the course evaluation in connection with obligatory components, even if this is done electronically, and having well-designed reminder systems if students fail to respond.

The importance of providing students with feedback on course evaluation results and the measures taken afterwards cannot be overemphasised. Students often testify to the fact that feedback is the key to their motivation when it comes to the teacher showing in various ways that student viewpoints make a difference in terms of enthusing students into responding individually. Experience shows that involved teachers tend to get higher response rates on their course evaluations.

Another way would be to incorporate evaluative elements into teaching or examination, given the background of Chapter 1 of the Higher Education Act (1992:1434):

8 § First-cycle courses and study programmes shall develop the ability of students to make independent and critical assessments, [...]

Developing the capacity of students to make critical assessments of the teaching they are exposed to can be seen as a contribution to developing their ability to make independent and critical assessments. For the critical assessment of teaching to be regarded as part of that very learning, however, it must be integrated in that teaching and be of good educational quality. One way can be to integrate this into work with reflective portfolios (see section "9. How can students evaluate their own input").

If the above measures have been taken and the response rates remain low, it is important not to simply accept this fact. One way is to use a combined form, with electronic course evaluations combined with those on paper. It may entail additional work in terms of typing in information from paper questionnaires, but in some cases it can be the only way to ensure good response rates. One problem can be to check that each individual has answered only once. Another strategy is to complement electronic course evaluations with other efforts in order to obtain the base data necessary for continuous quality work (see next section and section "7. Why formative course evaluations?" for tips).

Regardless of response rates, it is important to make the best use of whatever student involvement exists. Low response rates must not turn into an argument for ignoring viewpoints expressed via course evaluations, because then we run the risk at having even fewer students at hand who are willing to share their opinions. Choosing not to listen to the group that expresses viewpoints because they are too few also indirectly amounts to giving greater influence to those not bothering to engage. Further, the necessary care taken in interpreting quantitative data when response rates are low is not called for in the same sense when it comes to free-text responses. The latter may be of great value regardless of the response rate (see section "14. How do we analyse free-text responses?").

19. Do course evaluations have to be in writing?

Guidelines for Course Evaluations at Uppsala University states that course evaluations should "normally be in written form" and may be completed without the students stating their names. However, questionnaires may be a less suitable method for certain courses. If the student group is sufficiently small, it may be reasonable to arrange an oral discussion and to write down viewpoints. If this is done, then it must be arranged in such a way that students' honest opinions are put forward. The grading function of the teacher *may* constitute an obstacle to such frank communication. This can be circumvented by having a more independent person carry out the oral evaluation without the grading teacher being present, or by having the evaluation take place after the grading has been completed. An oral course evaluation should also be summarized and assessed in the form of a course report.

A combination of oral and written evaluation is often suitable. While the written course evaluation provides the individual with an opportunity to express his or her views anonymously, which moreover will be documented verbatim, the oral course evaluation has other advantages. Oral course evaluations provide scope for a direct dialogue between teachers and students. If the climate is good, this direct dialogue facilitates mutual understanding, the conveyance of constructive criticism, and the identification of suitable measures. One way to get all students involved in oral evaluations is to ask them to discuss the pertinent questions in buzz groups and then follow this up with a plenary discussion where all viewpoints can be voiced.

The choice of method may also be contingent on what kind of information is being sought and what kind of student group is involved. In introducing new courses and programmes, more in-depth interviews in small focus groups can be a good tool for a thorough follow-up in the implementation phase. Sometimes it is a good idea to have the focus group interviews conducted by more independent people than those in charge of the education, so students feel freer to voice their opinions. But there are advantages to having those in charge of the programme run the interviews, as they are in a better position to follow up on questions. First-hand information also gives them a better sense of what the students think, which can directly lead to certain measures.

20. How are course evaluations carried out in connection with degree projects?

Course evaluations of degree projects, like evaluations of third-cycle courses, tend to be less systematic than those for other courses. As these courses often have fewer participants, the form of the course evaluation may need to be modified or adapted (see section "19. Do course evaluations have to be in writing?").

There are reasons for arranging overarching evaluations at the faculty level, for example, to identify strengths and weaknesses regarding the delivery of degree projects. Such overarching questionnaires can provide general information about the quality of supervision, for example, which can be difficult to gather otherwise in courses with few students whose viewpoints are hard to elicit anonymously.

21. What legal aspects need to be considered in connection with course evaluations?

At the time this document goes to press, the following applies:

- It is not permissible to use course evaluations as a condition for something else, such as not handing out certain material unless a course evaluation is submitted, given the fact that it is voluntary for students to fill out course evaluations. Under the Higher Education Ordinance, students must be given the opportunity to submit a course evaluation, but they are not obligated to do so.

- Any publication of free-text responses must be done with discretion. Injurious written comments about an identifiable individual are in violation of the protection provided by legislation on the work environment. Under the Personal Data Act, personal information, such as an individual's political opinions or religious convictions, may not be published.

- Regulations for archiving stipulate that the individual questionnaire responses are to be kept for two years and the compilations of student responses and the course report are to be kept without any time limit.

- A course report, when completed, becomes a public document. Questionnaire responses are also to be regarded as official documents and should be presumed to be public. What is in focus here is the right of individuals to gain access to a requested document.

Forms of education evaluations other than course evaluations

22. Why beginner questionnaires, term evaluations, and other periodic evaluations?

Sometimes there are reasons to conduct evaluations that target something other than an individual course. This can happen each term, through term evaluations, or per academic year. An educational evaluation on term-basis entails that students on a programme, for instance, are asked at the end of the term to respond to a questionnaire designed to capture aspects of the programme other than those emerging from evaluations of individual courses. An educational evaluation on term-basis can yield an overall picture of student perceptions of the term gone by, in terms of the study climate, the structure and content of the term, links to working life, skills training, student counselling and other study support, as well as teaching related aspects of equality and equal treatment. Certain questions that are otherwise asked in course evaluations can be lifted over to term evaluations, thus alleviating some of the burden of course evaluations.

An example of a term evaluation can be found on the Unit for Quality and Evaluation home page (https://mp.uu.se/sv/web/info/undervisa/kvalitet-och-utvardering/kursvardstod/kursvardering).

Some programmes carry out beginner questionnaires to gather information about new students, such as the level of their upper-secondary school classes in the subject, familiarity with software and reading English texts, which clarifies what needs there might be for support.

It can also be of interest to compare cohorts of students over time, for example in following up a recently instituted programme, or in cases where there is a high dropout rate or a large number of transfers to other programmes in the course of the programme.

It may also be appropriate, with focus being put on student learning, to elucidate diversity and equal treatment, for example. For privacy reasons, such studies are more suitable for large student bodies, that is, at the level of the department, programme, faculty, or disciplinary domain. In such cases, it cannot be taken for granted that a questionnaire is the best method. Focus group interviews may be preferable if the aim is to obtain an in-depth understanding of obstacles and opportunities as well as suggestions for improvements. The interest to study this should of course be combined with a well-anchored interest in discussions and reform measures.

23. Why evaluate entire study programmes?

What has been written thus far has had to do with evaluations of courses or other components of a programme. Sometimes it is interesting to perform a summative *evaluation of an entire study programme* in direct connection with the granting of degrees. Questions will often be more general in character, and in written evaluations, the questionnaire will be more comprehensive. The advantage of programme evaluations, in comparison with alumni studies (see next section), is that they are carried out with new graduates who still have fresh memories from the programme. The downside is that it is not possible to obtain much information about how the programme content relates to the demands of working life, or about what jobs the graduates obtained.

24. Why alumni studies?

Since 2000, the Unit for Quality and Evaluation has been conducting alumni studies in the form of questionnaires targeting previous students with general degrees or professional degrees from Uppsala University. They have been carried out ahead of quality assessments of subjects and programmes under the auspices of the National Agency for Higher Education. The aim has been to contribute to quality assurance and quality development and to provide up-to-date material for the self-evaluations that are performed in advance of these assessments. The questions has covered perceptions of the programme and its goal fulfilment under the Higher Education Act, present occupation, salary level, the demands of the workplace regarding skills, and the relevance of the programme to actual work assignments. Alumnae are normally asked two or three years after graduation, so they have had a chance to get a foothold in their occupation but still have relatively fresh memories of their studies.

A total of 120 subject/programme-specific reports have been compiled and delivered to the relevant departments. Any measures decided upon by those in charge are reported and followed up in the regular process for operational planning and follow-up. When the first cycle of alumni studies (2001-2006) had been completed, interviews were conducted to determine how valuable departments and programmes judged continued alumni studies to be. These interviews indicated that the reports were considered as being of great value in working with the self-evaluations and the Bologna Process in terms of putting important issues on the agenda, with measures most frequently being taken. In light of this, a second cycle of alumni studied was initiated, which will provide opportunities for comparisons over time.

25. How are programmes evaluated at the third-cycle (doctoral) of education?

At Uppsala University, evaluation of third-cycle programmes takes place mainly through following up individual study plans in combination with pan-University investigations of doctoral candidates, which enables problems at both the individual and structural levels to be addressed and remedied. It should be stressed that the requirements laid down in the Higher Education Ordinance, namely that higher education institutions must provide students with an opportunity to share their perceptions of and voice their opinions on completed courses, also apply to third-cycle courses. However, as these courses often have fewer participants, the forms for course evaluation may be in need of modification. (See sections "19. Do course evaluations have to be in writing?" and "7. Why formative course evaluations?").

Following up individual study plans is the most important quality-assurance instrument at the individual level in the third cycle. The annual follow-up of the plan put together by the supervisor and the doctoral candidate is reviewed by the faculty board, or by the officer to whom the board has delegated the matter, such as the head of department. The relevant supervisor will be contacted if any issues are identified. A matter of concern might be the annual developmental follow-up not being held, for instance, or the time plan not being realistic enough.

The above follow-up and evaluations at the individual level are complemented by pan-University surveys of doctoral candidates, which the Unit for Quality and Evaluation has carried out in 2002 and 2008. This has been done in the form of questionnaires targeting all active doctoral candidates, containing questions about matters such as the study environment, satisfaction with supervision and third-cycle courses, and their expectations of the future. Planned measures prompted by these surveys have been reported in operational planning and followed up in annual operational reports.

Conclusion

26. Some overall pieces of advice for making course evaluations effective as tools for development

Focus on the purpose.
- The corps of teachers and officers in charge of education must focus on the purpose of course evaluations
- Convey commitment to students and show by your actions that course evaluation results play a role
- Do not allow the process to become too routine
- Keep ethics in mind and safeguard the privacy of employees and students
- Do not let course evaluations become an empty bureaucratic ritual

It does make a difference.
- Stress to students the value of course evaluations for developing course/programmes
- Analyse the results and identify measures—account for them in the course report
- Make course evaluations accessible
- Provide oral feedback to the students in every course about the results of earlier course evaluations and measures taken (or explain why no measures have been taken)
- Consider creating extra incentives for filling out course evaluations

Involve the students.
- Carry on a continuous informal dialogue about the course content and structure as the course progresses
- Conduct formative course evaluations during the course
- Analyse the results and identify measures together with the students
- Ask the students for suggestions about how to increase the response rate
- Let students' viewpoints help determine the design of course evaluations

Inform the students.
- Tell students that course evaluations are a key part of the University's quality work
- That all responses are important (even if the students are largely satisfied), as a high response rate affects the probability that measures will be taken
- That both positive and negative opinions are valuable and that criticism should be constructive and objective

Make measure-relevant course evaluations.
- Ask questions relevant to possible measures, meaning that the results should be able to lead to concrete ideas
- Keep the course evaluation as brief as possible
- Leave room for free-text responses
- Ask for suggestions for improvements
- Maintain a good balance between standard questions and course-specific questions
- Vary the questions somewhat between courses to keep evaluations from becoming too routine and to make it more enjoyable to respond

Raise the response rate.
- Observe the points above
- Remind students often and personally
- Reserve a room for filling out course evaluations in connection with obligatory teaching sessions (computer room if the course evaluation is electronic)
- Carry out oral course evaluations in connection with obligatory teaching sessions

Do not fixate *too much* on response rates.
- A low response rate entails that it is difficult to determine the representativeness and that certain viewpoints are not expressed. But the views that are expressed must nevertheless be considered
- Make use of students' free-text responses regardless of the response rate—even one single free-text response can provide ideas for improvements

Do not forget the students' own input.
- Have the students evaluate their own input during the course

Do not wait until the final course evaluation.
- Complement written summative course evaluations with other efforts, such as formative course evaluations while the course is in progress and oral evaluations—give an account of them in the course report

27. *Examples of course reports*

COURSE REPORT Example 1

1. Course, teaching component, term
Course evaluations as a developmental instrument, 7.5 credits, autumn term 2010

2. Number of students
30

3. Response rate
20/30=66%

4. Examination outcomes
Number examined: 28
Fail   4 (14%)
Pass   18 (64%)
Pass with distinction   6 (21%)

5. Brief summary of students' viewpoints and suggestions *(based on both quantitative results and central viewpoints from students' free-text responses)*

- "Strengths" according to students

- The students were predominantly satisfied with the course (median=4 on a scale from 1=highly dissatisfied to 5=highly satisfied). The degree of goal fulfilment was high for virtually all course goals (see quantitative compilation).

- The teachers' commitment received high grades (median=5 on a scale from 1=highly dissatisfied to 5=highly satisfied). According to several free-text responses the teachers evinced a genuine interest in the subject and really did their utmost to enable the students to get the most out of the course.

- The course component "The Course Evaluation: Nuts & Bolts and Instructions for Assembly" was highly appreciated (87% agreed either fully or to a great extent). According to free-text responses it provided an opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge and led to good insights into everything that needs to be considered to make course evaluations as useful as possible. Some respondents highlighted the ongoing feedback they received about their work from other group members and teachers.

> "This was the first time I've attended a course where I truly got an idea of how to use the knowledge in working life in the future. It was lots of fun and incredibly enlightening!"

- "Weaknesses" according to the students

- The degree of perceived goal fulfilment was relatively low for the course goal "The course has contributed to the development of skills in oral presentation" (see quantitative compilation).

- The majority of course participants thought the timetable was too crammed (see quantitative compilation). Above all, there was too little time for the course component "The Course Evaluation: Nuts & Bolts…". Some felt that other components could be eliminated to expand

this component. Still others thought that the component could be reduced to create time for more lectures.

> "Such an intensive schedule means you don't have time to reflect, simple to produce. We had to hurry through the development of the questionnaire—and that's the very phase that requires the most reflection."

This viewpoint came up in the formative course evaluation, so some adjustments were made during the course. This was not sufficient, however.

- A large portion (78%) were dissatisfied with the section on questionnaire methodology. According to many free-text responses it was too general and was largely a repeat of earlier methodology courses. It provided too little knowledge about what should be specifically borne in mind in the context of course evaluations.

> "The component was too basic, and it was hard to relate to examples about customer satisfaction in the automobile industry."

6. Comments from the course director/teachers about the execution of the course and results—including changes implemented while the course was in progress owing to formative course evaluations

The course went well in general. The students were active and tackled the component "Nuts and Bolts …" wholeheartedly. However, there was too little time for the developmental—couldn't squeeze in three feedback rounds. After the formative evaluation a round was eliminated, but this left the developmental phase somewhat abruptly truncated. The component about questionnaire methodology was not very successful either owing to poor instructions given to the guest lecturer. The section on alternative forms for eliciting students' points of view is a bit thin—especially the part about formative course evaluations—which is not covered in the literature either. The element of training in oral presentation should perhaps be strengthened.

7. Proposed changes/comments/measures
- The possibility of reinforcing the element of training in oral presentation should be considered. The component "Nuts & Bolts…" could perhaps culminate in brief presentations in mixed groups.
  Comment: Will try this out starting next term if it turns out that closely related courses do not feature, or plan to feature, such training opportunities.

- More time will be devoted to "Nuts & Bolts…". Time will be taken from the analysis part. Implemented starting next term.
  Comment: The course director estimates that the timetable should be acceptable following this adjustment. If participants say the timetable is too full anyway next term, then the matter will be revisited.

- The course director needs to provide the guest lecturer on questionnaire methodology with better information about the students' previous knowledge and convey requests that the examples given should be about course evaluations.
  Comment: To be implemented starting next term.

- New course reading, with more about formative course evaluations, should be considered.
  Comment: The students feel that the current reading is good. The course director will nevertheless look into what literature exists ahead of next term.

8. Signed   Course director/other appointed person and course representatives

Anna Andersson   Brita Bengtsson   Carl Carlsson
Course director   Course representative   Course representative

Appendix 1: Course syllabus
Appendix 2: Quantitative compilation of the course evaluation

COURSE REPORT Example 2

1. Course, teaching component, term
Project leadership, 7.5 credits, autumn term 2010

2. Number of students
70

3. Response rate
20/70=28% (Please note)

4. Examination outcomes

Number examined:	67
Fail	8 (12%)
Pass	47 (70%)
Pass with distinction	12 (18%)

5. Brief summary of the students' viewpoints and suggestions *(based on both quantitative results and central viewpoints from students' free-text responses)*

- "Strengths" according to students
- Students approved of the course as a whole. The degree of goal fulfilment was satisfactory for all course goals (see quantitative compilation).

- The course content received very high grades (see quantitative compilation) and several free-text responses stressed the relevance of the content to future working life.

- "Weaknesses" according to students
- Several free-text responses showed that the students thought there could be clearer links to working life. The oral course evaluation, which almost all students took part in, also confirmed this.

6. Comments from the course director/teachers about the execution of the course and results—including changes implemented while the course was in progress owing to formative course evaluations
The course worked satisfactorily in terms of theoretical content, but the lack of a "mini-internship" element in the project leadership assignment made it less appreciated than it usually is. The reason this field trip was not carried out was that the company could not host the students this time around.

7. Proposed changes/comments/measures
- Next time contacts for "mini-internships" will be made in plenty of time and with several companies.
  Comment: The course director will see to it that these contacts are made.

8. Signed   Course director/other appointed person and course representatives

Lena Larsson	Göran Göransson	Nils Nilsson
Course director	Course representative	Course representative

Appendix 1: Course syllabus
Appendix 2: Quantitative compilation of course evaluation

Appendix 1.

Guidelines for course evaluations

The University is responsible for developing and renewing of its educational offerings. Course evaluations offers students an important opportunity to contribute to this quality work.

Course evaluations fulfils two main functions, in that:

- students have the opportunity to reflect upon their education in a structured manner and
- they provide a foundation for course development.

The Higher Education Ordinance (SFS 1993:100) Ch. 1, Sec. 14, states the following:

> Higher education institutions shall enable students who are participating in or have completed a course to express their experiences of and views on the course through a course evaluation to be organised by the higher education institution. The higher education institution shall collate the course evaluations and provide information about their results and any actions prompted by the course evaluations. The results shall be made available to the students.

Faculty boards are the bodies responsible for research and education in their respective domains. Faculty boards decide about responsibilities and routines for the implementation of course evaluations. The present pan-University guidelines provide direction for work with course evaluations and target courses in the first (undergraduate), second (advanced) and third (doctoral) cycles.

In connection with the Ordinance text quoted above, the Vice Chancellor therefore issues the following guidelines:

1. Course evaluations must be carried out at, or close to, the end of the course and should normally be in written form. Course evaluations must also be performed in courses involving essay and thesis writing. Course evaluations should also be implemented following course components constituting six higher education credits or more.

2. Responding to a course evaluation is voluntary for students. For this reason it is important that course evaluations be carried out in such a way as to promote a high response rate.

3. Course evaluations should be anonymous unless there are special circumstances. In this context anonymity means that names and the equivalent are not used in the course evaluation.

4. Course evaluations must be designed in such a way that assessments address factual matters, e.g. achievement of course objectives, how the course was implemented and organised, and the input of teachers and students. Students should also have opportunities to comment on the course, e.g. by offering concrete suggestions for improvement.

5. The privacy of employees and students must be respected in all work with course evaluations.

6. If the free text responses of students are published on a Web site or in any other way, this must be preceded by a review of privacy considerations and be approved by the University officer in charge (not a paid student).

7. Course evaluations are to be used by the responsible bodies and decision-makers in the continuous development of education. Compilations of student responses must be summarised and evaluated within the framework of a course report from the teacher responsible for the course or another individual appointed to do so. The course report must contain both student and teacher viewpoints and give an account of the strengths and weaknesses of the course, along with suggestions for possible improvements. Central viewpoints from the students' own free text responses must be summarised and accounted for in the course report.

Unit for Quality and Evaluation, Uppsala University (2011)

The course report should be one of several bases for decisions in the development and revision of courses.

8.   Students must be informed early in the course about the outcome of previous course evaluation(s) and about what measures, if any, have been taken or will be taken.

9.   The person in charge or the body that the faculty board has appointed to be responsible shall ensure:
– that course evaluations are performed, compiled, and used in developmental work,
– that a course report is compiled as promptly as possible in order to provide a foundation for revisions of courses to come, normally within two months following the end of the course,
– that a course report and compilations of student responses are readily available to teachers and students,
– that a course report and compilations of student responses are archived indefinitely in a suitable form,
– that students' individual questionnaire responses are archived for two years after being summarised (applies also to electronically gathered information in the form of raw data).

10.   The faculty board must annually ensure that work with course evaluations is followed up in its domain and that the results of the follow-up are channeled back to the faculty board and the department heads involved. If it is deemed appropriate or necessary, the respective faculty boards are responsible for issuing supplementary guidelines.