

Code of Practice for the use of Student and Graduate Opinion Survey Data

Position Statement

The University of Otago has, since 1995, conducted a regular Student Opinion Survey and Graduate Opinion Survey. Information from the surveys has been used to set and measure performance targets for the institution as a whole, and to highlight areas of excellence to external groups. However, the primary purpose of the exercise has been to obtain information for use at the departmental and administrative unit level. This information is provided to help Departments and Units identify areas of strength and weakness, to stimulate brainstorming on a range of issues, and assist in the development of appropriate improvement initiatives. Additionally, comparative information gathered over time provides a valuable monitoring tool.

The Quality Advancement Committee has adopted this Code of Practice to guide users in the effective and appropriate use of information derived from the surveys.

General Guidelines for Use of Data

- Information should not be used in false, deceptive or misleading ways, either through what is stated or suggested, through what is omitted, or through the manner in which the results are presented.
- Departments and administrative units are at liberty to make whatever declaration they feel appropriate about their own statistical data, provided disclosure accords with the conditions and guidelines of this code of practice.
- Information should not be used to knowingly undermine the reputation and standing of other institutions, or of other departments or administrative units within this institution.
- Information should not be used to create 'league tables'.
- Comment on the survey data must be supported by appropriate interpretation, with attention drawn to any necessary qualifications resulting from factors such as the response rate or number of respondents.

Optimal Use of Data

Although some institutions may wish to compare their survey data against data from another institution, or against national means, such comparisons should only be made after taking into consideration the following guidelines and qualifications concerning the appropriate use of the data and its interpretation.

Particularly for the CEQ component of the surveys, the best comparisons are within an institution, for the same field of study, across several years. Where this information is supplied to departments and administrative units in the survey reports, it is this which should be given the greatest weight in any comparative analysis.

Guidelines for the Interpretation of Survey Data

Some specific points to be taken into consideration when interpreting the survey data are outlined below:

- The CEQ data are not suitable for making simplistic (*i.e.* unqualified) inter-institutional or cross-disciplinary comparisons. Institutions and disciplines can have vastly different histories, missions, geographic/socio-economic situations, enrolment profiles (including high percentages of mature-aged, part-time or pre-employed graduates) and course mixes.
- Even where comparisons are to be made between apparently comparable institutions or disciplines, considerable care should be exercised.
- An average response rate of at least 40% for students and 30% for graduates is desirable. Any data which are disclosed publicly should be accompanied by information on the number surveyed and the response rate.
- Caution should also be exercised when drawing conclusions from groups of fewer than 10 students, and this point should be noted clearly in any reference to such data.
- With respect to the current method of presenting CEQ scores on a +100 to -100 scale, 25 points, or approximately half a standard deviation, is the level at which differences in CEQ scores can be considered worthy of note.