# **Annex G: Guidance on student consultation**

## **What is ‘student consultation’?**

It is good practice to draw on student feedback, whether collected formally and/or informally, to inform ongoing course developments; this might, for example, take the form of mid- or end-of-term evaluation activities. Student consultation has two primary purposes in the course approvals process, as follows: to drive enhancement and to support the justification for change.

Student consultation, in which students can feedback in a timely manner on a proposed change(s) to a course, **must** be undertaken for **all new course proposals.** For major changes, the timing, type and amount of student consultation, and the expected engagement of students, will depend on the type of change(s) being proposed and the date of implementation. If a decision is taken not consult with students as part of the process for a major change proposal, the reasons for this must be recorded.

## **Why do we undertake student consultation?**

The [**Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)**](https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/consumer-protection-compliance) requires all students to be provided with key information prior to them commencing their studies; this is known as the **‘core material information’**. Where a proposed change to a course might affect this core material information, students should be given the opportunity to comment on these proposed changes. The documented student consultation information is used, alongside other internal/external consultation data (as appropriate), to inform the course approvals process.

## **Which students need to be consulted?**

**All on-course students** that would be affected by a course change(s) should be given the opportunity to comment on the changes being proposed. This includes students who would be impacted by the change in their next or subsequent years of study and students who have suspended their studies. It does not apply to students who have withdrawn.

If the proposed change is not consistent with how the course has been advertised, applicants (including those who have started an application but not yet submitted it) and offer-holders should be informed, as a minimum, **once the change has been approved** to allow students the opportunity to withdraw. Depending on the type of change(s) being proposed and the timescale for implementation, a department should also consider the benefit of consulting applicants and offer-holders on the proposed changes.

Where a change will not affect on-course students or current year applicants, i.e. it is a change for a future intake for which advertising has not yet started or where the change will be consistent with current advertising, it is good practice to gather student feedback as part of the development of proposals for consideration. Consultation of this nature may be conducted through (Graduate) Joint Consultative Committees ((G)JCCs) or other consultative fora.

## **What methods can be used for student consultation?**

The approach(es) used for student consultation will depend on several factors, including the type of course, the nature/timing of the proposed change(s) and their likely impact on students, as well as the study location of the students (see **Table 1** for examples).

* Due to challenges of survey fatigue and potential accessibility issues with in-person feedback opportunities for students at Oxford, it is suggested that **departments and faculties utilise more than one approach to collecting student feedback on the proposed change(s);** this may be more relevant where student numbers are large and where there might be greater potential for a lower response rate.
* **Using more than one approach to engage students in the consultation process might also be useful where it is considered that the proposed change(s) may have more significant impacts on students.**
* **Regardless of the method(s) you choose to consult with students, you should report back to them what you learned from their feedback and the changes, if any, that you have made in response.** Closing the feedback loop in this way ensures that students have greater confidence that their input is not only heard but acted upon, thus fostering an environment of mutual respect and continued student engagement.
* As part of the course approvals process, you should provide a summary of the Department/Faculty response to the student consultation undertaken (see **Form 1**).

Further information is also available in the [Policy and guidance on student engagement and representation](https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/student-engagement-and-representation) and in the University’s [Student-Staff Partnerships Toolkit](https://www.ctl.ox.ac.uk/student-staff-partnerships-toolkit).

## **How much consultation do we need to do?**

As a minimum, for the course approvals process departments/faculties should:

i) be able to demonstrate that all students affected by the change(s) have been contacted and that they have been provided with a period of time, commensurate with the timing, nature and likely impact of the proposed change(s), in which to submit their feedback;

ii) provide opportunity for discussion of the major changes/new course proposals at the relevant student representation panel(s).

In practical terms this means that, **as a minimum**, the department/faculty should for all types of major change and for new course proposals:

**1. Table all major changes/new course proposals on the agenda for discussion at the relevant student representation panel(s) (JCC/GJCC).** Items should set out what the change is, why it is being proposed, and the input from students being requested. Where changes are made to proposals either in response to student feedback or for other reasons, revised proposals should be considered again at relevant student representation panels.

In addition, if the proposed change will have a direct impact on students, the department/faculty should:

**2. Send an email to all students affected to inform them of the proposed change(s) and outlining opportunities for students to provide their feedback.** This should be sent to the students’ University of Oxford email address. The email should clearly set out the proposed change(s) with the associated rationale and outline the option(s) for students to provide their feedback within a reasonable and clearly specified timeframe.

Despite staff and student efforts, it can be challenging to get a representative sample of student responses to a call for feedback on a proposed major course change(s) or feedback on new course proposals. Departments/faculties may therefore find it helpful to use their initial email contact with students to state that “*if no response is received by [insert a clearly specified date/time], it will be interpreted as you [the student] being in support of the proposed course change(s)*.”

However, where an academic judgement is made that a change is likely to be particularly impactful, including for the change to be considered as having a negative, departments/faculties should take **additional steps** to encourage student engagement with the consultation process. For example:

* + Sending a reminder email(s) to all affected students to offer the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed course change(s); it may be necessary to extend the deadline for receiving feedback
  + Using other method(s) to collate student feedback (see Table 1)

**3. If changes are made to course change proposals following a first round of student consultations, a second round of emails should be sent to all students.** For example, if course change proposals are modified in light of negative student feedback but it is still desirable or necessary for a change to be made.

A summary of the methods used to engage students in the consultation process and the student response rate should be included as part of the course approvals documentation (see Form 1). **This means that even if student response rates to the consultation are low, there is a clear record that attempts have been made by the Department/Faculty to engage students in the process, as commensurate with the nature of the proposed course change(s)**.

### Table 1: Examples of Student Consultation Methods

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| **Student Consultation Method** | **Benefits** | **Challenges** |
| **Online surveys**  Digital questionnaires to collect feedback on the proposed changes | * Efficient for quickly gathering data from large groups, including students based overseas * **Can be embedded within the email informing all affected students of the proposed change(s)** * Anonymous responses can encourage honesty | * Survey and e-mail fatigue often leads to low survey response rates at Oxford * May lack the depth of response in comparison face-to-face feedback * Takes time to analyse student feedback |
| **In-class group discussions**  Session(s) where students discuss the proposed change(s) and/or an overview of proposed change(s) in small pairs or groups in class, with opportunities for students to feedback in different formats (including anonymously) | * Encourages reflexive discussions, with opportunities for students to ask questions * In-class consultation provides opportunities to capture a range of student feedback across different formats, e.g. using online polling | * Discussions can go ‘off-topic’ * Dominant personalities can overshadow quieter students * Takes time to analyse student feedback |
| **Focus groups**  Session(s) where a group of students discuss the proposed changes with a nominated member of staff as facilitator | * Encourages reflexive discussions, with opportunities for students to ask questions * Ability to recruit students from specific demographic(s) * Generates instant verbal feedback that staff can make notes on and take forward | * Takes time to organise and co-ordinate * May require incentives (e.g. honorariums, meals) to encourage student attendance |
| **Student representative panels, e.g. Student-Staff Liaison Committees or Joint Consultative Committees**  Minuted meetings where student course representatives give feedback on proposed course changes on behalf of the student body | * Provides a platform for anonymous student voices * Gives students a chance to ask questions * Can highlight collectively identified issues or successes | * Student representatives may struggle to represent all student perspectives * Student representatives may not feel able to convey honest views * Takes time to organise and co-ordinate |
| **Pop-up feedback events**  Informal opportunities for students to give immediate feedback on proposed change(s) to staff, e.g. at an ‘information table’, ideally located in an area with high student footfall | * Encourages spontaneous, candid feedback * Can be engaging and fun for students, especially if offered as a chance to vote on options * Gives students a chance to ask questions | * May not capture comprehensive or reflective feedback * Takes time to set up and physically resource the information table * May take time to analyse student feedback |
| **Student feedback forums/Town Hall meetings**  Structured meetings where any student can voice concerns and suggestions regarding proposed change(s) to faculty and administration in an open forum | * Fosters transparency and community engagement * Allows for a wide range of issues relevant to the proposed change(s) to be discussed * Gives students a chance to ask questions | * Requires time and resource to advertise and mediate a large event * Risk of focusing on grievances over constructive feedback on proposed change(s) |

### Form 1: Summary of the departmental/faculty response to student consultation[[1]](#footnote-1)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **SECTION A: STUDENT CONSULTATION**  Consultation with students should be undertaken for all new programmes and most major changes to existing programmes. | |
| 1. **Title of the existing course undergoing a major change(s) OR title of the proposed new course** | |
|  | |
| 1. **Methods of student consultation**   Please list all the method(s) used to engage students in the consultation process | |
|  | |
| 1. **Date(s) of student consultation opportunities**   Please give the dates of all student consultation activities undertaken, including date(s) of emails sent to all students affected by the proposed change(s) and the timeframe students were given to respond. | |
|  | |
| 1. **What was the response rate?**   Please indicate the response rate for each method of student consultation undertaken. | |
|  | |
| 1. **Number of students contacted**   Please give details of the number of students contacted and their respective year(s) of study. No actual student names should be provided. | |
|  | |
| 1. **What questions did you ask students in the consultation?**   Please provide a link to any survey(s) used and/or a summary of the consultation questions you asked students (e.g. questions embedded with the department/faculty email sent to all affected students). | |
|  | |
| 1. **What issue(s) was raised by students and how you have responded to their feedback?**   Please provide a summary of the students’ feedback and outline how you have responded to any negative feedback during your student consultation. | |
|  | |
| 1. **How and when have you fed back to the students the way(s) in which you have used their feedback to inform the proposed course change(s)/new course development?**   Please outline briefly the way(s) in which you have informed students of the outcome of the consultation process. | |
|  | |
| **SECTION B: CONFIRMATION** | |
| **Template completed by:** |  |
| **Position:** |  |
| **Date:** |  |

**Please attach the completed report as an appendix to the major change proposal/new course proposal documentation.**

1. Adapted from the University of Bristol template as an example: [Bristol\_Student Consultation form.docx](https://unioxfordnexus.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/EducationPolicySupport-EPS/Shared%20Documents/Course%20approval/CTL-EPS%20programme%20approval%20development/Examples%20Course%20Approval%20Templates%20Across%20Sector/Bristol_Student%20Consultation%20form.docx?d=wc6635f32db8f4db898acf71f5af9f60a&csf=1&web=1&e=xRleDv) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)