



Code of Practice for Surveying University of Bristol Students

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1. Context, purpose and coverage

- 1.1. The University is committed to partnership between staff and students to form a community in which we learn and research; one feature of that partnership is listening to our students and one way of achieving this is through the practice of surveying. Student feedback plays an integral role in quality assurance and enhancement; the University is committed to providing effective structures for gathering student feedback to help identify what works well and what could be improved in order to better support the student journey, enable academic endeavour, increase student satisfaction and develop strong academic communities. Partnering with taught and research students to build understanding of their diverse needs and co-create their high-quality university experience, is part of the University of Bristol's University's Vision and Strategy 2030.
- 1.2. The purpose of this Code of Practice ('the Code') is to outline the principles and processes that ensure that the University takes a strategic and consistent approach to any large scale surveying of our students.
- 1.3. The Code is for University staff and designed to establish the framework within which large scale student surveys should operate to ensure that they are run efficiently using effective practices, that the results are used to maximum effect and students are not over-surveyed.
- 1.4. This Code applies to all large-scale surveys of registered students. This encompasses surveys which include students from more than one school/department from initial University registration until graduation. All large scale surveys need approval and requesters should review this Code and submit a Student Survey Request for each occasion a survey is run.
- 1.5. Large scale surveys covered by this Code encompass:
 - 1.5.1. Surveys conducted by or with external organisations (including if Bristol SU is commissioned to undertake a survey by the University) ¹.
 - 1.5.2. Surveys of students from more than one school.
 - 1.5.3. Professional services surveys of students on the services they provide, *(for example IT Services or Campus Division surveys carried out with all the students receiving the service)*.
- 1.6. This Code does not cover the following:
 - 1.6.1. Surveys undertaken of students from within one school or department; permission for these should be given through internal school mechanisms, *(for example Library Services surveying to inform library refurbishments for one particular school/subject)*.
 - 1.6.2. Feedback gathered on specific events, courses or workshops attended, *(for example surveys issued to those students who attended a particular IT or Careers workshop)*.
 - 1.6.3. Small-scale in-person survey sampling on a particular issue or service, *(for example market research in person surveys)*.

2. Principles

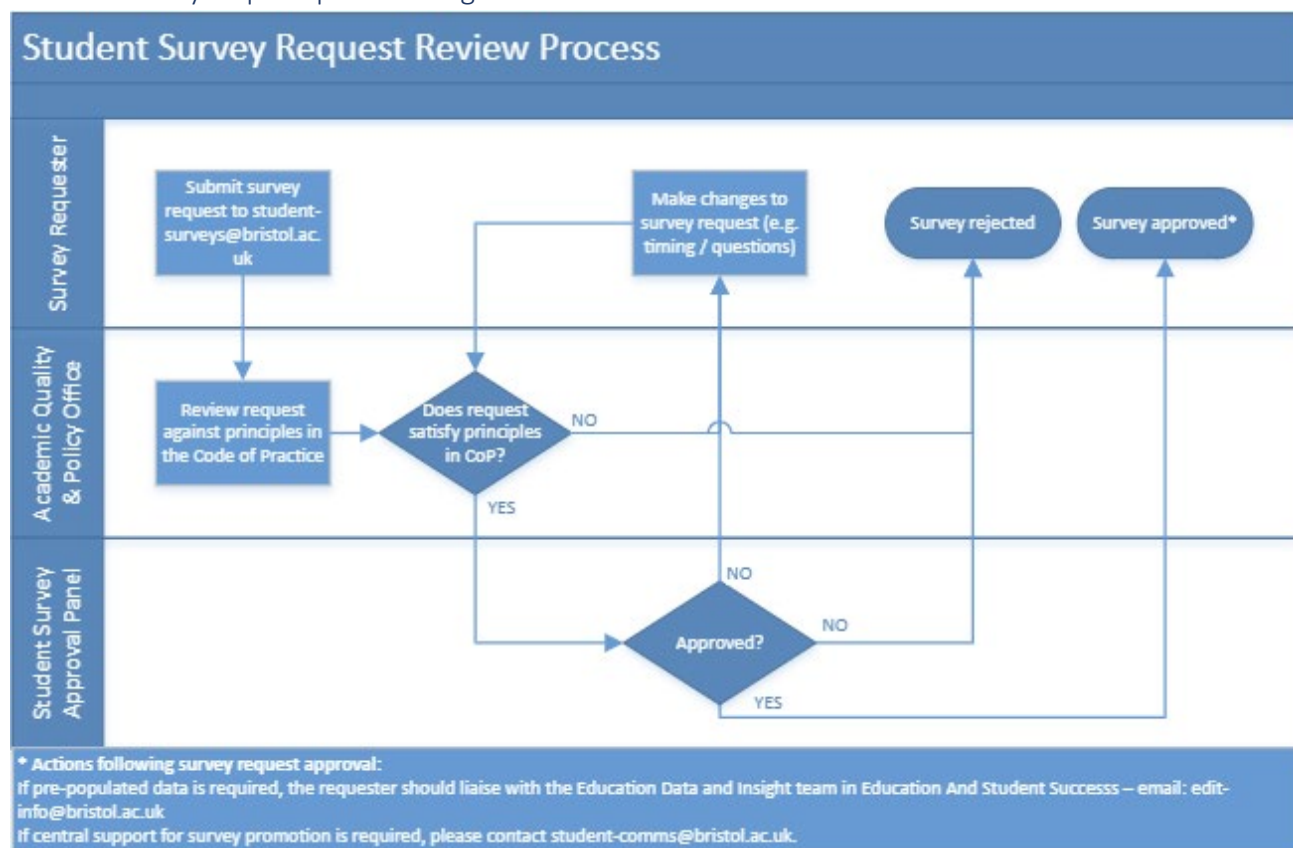
A set of principles and commitments underpins the University's approach to the surveying of our students, these guide the student survey request process as to whether to approve a survey as the best mechanism for gathering student feedback.

- 2.1. Student surveys will only be carried out when there is a cogent plan to analyse and utilise the results and that a survey is the best method for gathering the data.
- 2.2. Student surveys will only be carried out when it is shown that similar (and if necessary up to date) data does not already exist.
- 2.3. Student surveys will not offer a completion incentive (the exceptions to this are the strategically important NSS, PTES and PRES).
- 2.4. Students will normally only be asked to respond to one large scale survey at any one time to minimise survey fatigue.
- 2.5. Individual respondents will not be identified in any reporting.

¹ However for the purposes of this Code this does **not** include academic student societies or the medical academics

3. Survey request and review

Student survey request process diagram



Considerations when making a survey request

- 3.1. The Student Survey Approval Panel (SSAP) is responsible for overseeing University participation in all large scale internal and external surveys of our registered students as defined in this Code. The Student Survey Approval Panel are:
 - Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students)
 - Executive Director for Education and Students
 - Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education Quality & Standards)
 - Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) and/or Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (PGR) (depending on the survey request)
- 3.2. SSAP is advised by staff from the Academic Quality and Policy Office who also annually review the Code, contact student-surveys@bristol.ac.uk with any queries.
- 3.3. Before submitting a [Student Survey Request Form](#) consideration should be given as to whether the information expected to be collected already exists elsewhere and whether a survey is the best way of collecting that information.
- 3.4. When completing a [Student Survey Request Form](#) it is expected that applicants will have already considered and be able to confirm the following:
 - 3.4.1. Surveying is the most appropriate way of data gathering. Alternative approaches been considered e.g. sampling, focus groups, consultation through student reps rather than surveying students en masse.
 - 3.4.2. The proposed survey cohort has been identified.
 - 3.4.3. The timing of the survey is appropriate. The survey is not scheduled at the same time as another large scale survey e.g. NSS, see Annex for timeline of large scale surveys running.
 - 3.4.4. The frequency of the survey is appropriate. If the survey has run previously, when was the last time, when would be an appropriate time to ask again, does it need to be annual, could it be biennial?

- 3.4.5. The survey design includes careful consideration of the phrasing of questions and statements to avoid leading or biased questions, or weighted statements. Appropriate wording and types of questions are used in order to ensure respondents understand the survey question; a useful article on survey question design can be found here: [10 Key Things To Consider When Designing Surveys \(alchemer.com\)](https://www.alchemer.com/blog/10-key-things-to-consider-when-designing-surveys/).
- 3.4.6. Whether the survey will use pre-populated student data, will ask demographic questions or will be anonymous. Using pre-populated data allows the results to be linked to other student survey results or data already held about the student, whilst reporting can still be anonymous. The questions being asked may influence which option is chosen. An Annex contains information on student demographic categories which may be useful to consider.²
- 3.4.7. The intended use (and possible future uses) of the data is made clear in the data protection statement (see Annex for example statements).
- 3.4.8. A suitable survey tool has been identified.
- 3.4.9. The resources required to run the survey (including promotion, analysis, reporting) can be covered by the survey requester.
- 3.5. It is advisable to give as much notice as possible when requesting a survey, time may be required for:
 - 3.5.1. The review process, which can lead to additional questions or recommendations about survey design.
 - 3.5.2. If using pre-populated student data, there may be a minimum three-week lead time on data requests made to the Education Data and Insight team: Education and Student Success (edit-info@bristol.ac.uk).
 - 3.5.3. Liaison with the central student communications team about suitable survey promotion (student-comms@bristol.ac.uk).

4. Responsibilities

Survey Requester

- Complete and submit Student Survey Request Form
- Design and set up survey
- Promote survey participation
- Analyse survey data
- Review, report recommend action/s

Education and Student Success

- Academic Quality & Policy Office (AQPO) – maintain operation of the Code of Practice, review survey requests, liaising with SSAP and survey requesters as necessary.
- Education Data & Insight Team (EDIT) – if requested provide pre-population data file for survey requester.

Marketing and Communications Office (Student Communications team)

- Provide advice on survey promotion using existing communication channels.

Student Survey Approval Panel

- Review requests and provide guidance for survey requests as appropriate.

5. Good practice: operation and reporting

Survey promotion

- 5.1. The Communications and Marketing team student-comms@bristol.ac.uk can advise on communications with students:
 - appropriate channels to promote your survey to students;
 - promotional materials, ensuring that they align with the brand guidelines and visual identity of the University;

² based on guidance provided by the Equality Challenge Unit, [Monitoring questions | Advance HE \(advance-he.ac.uk\)](https://www.equalitychallenge.ac.uk/monitoring-questions/)

- appropriate use of emails to communicate with your survey cohort.
- 5.2. The following methods are useful to help promote surveys, depending on who your survey cohort includes (e.g. all undergraduate or postgraduate students, first year undergraduate students) different channels may be appropriate:
- Digital screens
 - Blackboard
 - Printed material – posters and flyers
 - social media
 - student newsletter
 - Bristol Students' Union (their student media where appropriate)
- 5.3. When considering how best to promote the survey, think about the survey cohort, if for example they are in their first year it may help to engage the assistance of the University residences in helping promote the survey.
- 5.4. Survey promotion should be targeted equally to all those within the survey cohort.

Results and analysis

- 5.5. It is the responsibility of the survey owner to ensure they have arranged for the resource to carry out the analysis of the survey results.
- 5.6. Factors to consider when analysing the results include:
- 5.6.1. Trends over time (if applicable), this would also give a sense of whether a survey needs to be run every year (for example if the results are consistent over time the survey could be run less frequently).
 - 5.6.2. Correlation between the responses to any two questions (do people answering x in a particular way also seem to answer y similarly).
 - 5.6.3. Applying statistical tests to the results (if appropriate), for example to determine whether differences in responses are statistically significant.
- 5.7. When handling large data files containing potentially sensitive information, the following should be considered:
- 5.7.1. The University's information security procedures www.bristol.ac.uk/infosec (e.g. password protection and secure sharing methods).
 - 5.7.2. Compliance with the data protection statement used by the survey (see Annexes).
 - 5.7.3. Redacting free text comments which may identify individuals if data is to be published (internally or externally).
- 5.8. For purposes of protecting individual anonymity and ensuring any inferences from the data are robust, it is recommended that reporting should only be done on groups of students with five or more respondents (e.g. if broken down by a student characteristic).
- 5.9. Where practical and appropriate the survey owner should consider involving students in reviewing the survey results and helping develop recommendations.
- 5.10. Where practical and appropriate key messages should be fed back to the student involved in the survey, as well as any recommendations/actions planned in response to the survey results.

Annexes

- Student Survey Request Form
- Timeline of large scale student surveys
- Categories of student characteristics to be considered for inclusion
- Example Data Protection statements

Document History:

- Approved by University Education Committee, June 2015
- Minor amendments approved by Student Survey Strategy Group, June 2016
- Minor amendments approved by Student Survey Approval Panel, March 2018
- Minor amendments, July 2021, June 2024