Quality teaching involves a dialogue with students about good teaching and learning, of which surveys, including the opportunities for ‘closing the loop’ are one part. However, survey results should only be interpreted based on an understanding of students and the interaction between students and teachers.

This understanding can be gained by being attentive to students’ responses in classes and discussing teaching with them. In large courses where lecturers do not take tutorials, it is difficult for lecturers to discuss their teaching with students. One solution to this is for lecturers to encourage comments from tutors who have more opportunity to discuss the course with students.

Surveys provide the perspective of individual students, who rarely have the opportunity to discuss the quality of teaching collectively. Students may respond to the surveys in terms of how the teaching meets subjective desires and interests, rather than reflect on what good teaching (and learning) should be and whether their experience meets those standards. In smaller classes, it is possible for teachers to engage with the class as a group. For larger groups, sessions in which students can discuss teaching with staff may be useful. In this spirit, the Faculty of Arts held a feedback forum this week for staff and students to discuss the 2009 SCEQ results.

Student from the Faculty also created a blog to discuss teaching and learning issues. In August, the ITL invited student reps from across the university to attend one of two sessions held to discuss surveys and student feedback. Following this meeting some of the comments on the arts student blog were about the USE, the timing of surveys, and the importance of transparency and actually using student feedback. Students clearly wanted to see UoS coordinators engage in serious interpretation and use of feedback, particularly when issues are relevant to the whole school or Faculty.

Please contact the ITL to explore how your faculty is responding to feedback or discuss strategies for seeking student feedback.