

## **SES Advisory Group**

### **Guidelines in Interpretation of SES Data**

#### **Preamble**

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Quality of Teaching and Learning – Subject Review Procedure, which can be found in the Policy Library at: <https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1198>.

The aim of the Subject Experience Survey (SES) is to monitor student perceptions of their teaching and learning experiences. The SES has two purposes:

- to offer students the opportunity to provide feedback on their learning, with the aim of improving the quality of subject offerings and teaching; and
- at department, faculty and institutional level, to monitor the quality of the University's subject and course offerings and student learning.

The SES are 'blunt' indicators of student perceptions of their teaching and learning experiences in subjects. They should be used to:

- Assess whether individual subjects are perceived as 'better' or 'worse' on various dimensions than other subjects;
- Assess whether such perceptions are changing over time;
- Identify areas of concern on the part of students, which require additional attention as a means to improve subject quality.

SES data are not of themselves diagnostic tools for subject improvement, nor measures of teaching performance. The limitations of the SES data should be recognised and additional sources of data used to diagnose subjects and to assess staff teaching performance.

#### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality of student responses is absolutely crucial to the integrity of the SES. Regardless of how the data are being used, student confidentiality must be protected. In order to protect the integrity of the system, users of the data are asked to take a number of steps as a matter of course.

- All users of SES data must observe the procedures set out in the University's *Quality of Teaching and Learning – Subject Review Procedure*. In particular
  - Heads of Department should under no circumstances release the data to subject coordinators before subject results have been released to students;
  - Open-ended comments from students are to be seen only by Heads of Department and subject coordinator and under no circumstances are they to be made public;

- For subjects with low enrolments, Heads must exercise judgement in terms of releasing comments to subject coordinators where there is deemed to be a risk of individual students being identified on the basis of their comments.

### **Faculties/Graduate Schools**

Deans, Associate Deans, Program Director, Subject Unit Chairs and Subject Advisory Boards may consider SES data when assessing the quality of subjects. This is best done by comparing data for individual subjects to University or Faculty/School average scores or past scores for the subjects. Examination of mean scores for items within the SES is not of itself a very useful indicator of subject quality, and the data should be used as a point of comparison with data for other subjects or other deliveries of the same subject.

### **Department/School Level**

Heads of Department may use the SES data in the same way as noted above. In addition, they should discuss the data with individual subject coordinators, both as a means to develop and improve subjects and to assist staff to ensure that subject quality is maintained or improved. Heads are discouraged from using mean scores on items from the survey as proxy measures for staff performance. If such data are used in evaluating staff performance for purposes of confirmation, promotion, the PDF or performance improvement, they should always be used in conjunction with other data on teaching performance and should be treated as at best a partial indicator.

### **Teaching Staff**

Subject coordinators and teaching staff may wish to use SES data for their own professional development and to assist in subject development and this is to be encouraged. They may also wish to use the data when making a case for confirmation, promotion, etc. This is an appropriate use of the data, but scores on SES items represent very limited indicators of overall teaching performance. Moreover, mean scores may not be particularly illuminating as a relatively small number of outliers can skew results significantly. For these reasons staff should (a) utilise additional information on teaching performance, eg. peer reviews and (b) present frequency distributions for SES items rather than mean scores.