The National Student Survey 2007 – Assessment and Feedback  
College of Science and Engineering

Background:
The National Student Survey (NSS) has produced mixed results for Schools in the College. In many cases, the performance in the student feedback category has been relatively poor and has had a marked adverse affect on our overall performance. The details of questions 1-9 from the survey covering teaching, assessment and feedback are shown in the accompanying document. This paper seeks to address this problem.

Observations:
The survey’s outcomes can be called into question in a number of areas; issues with the subject groupings and the analysis, presentation and sensitivity of results. Regardless of our reservations, prospective students will use the survey as a factor in their application decisions and therefore we need to address problem areas and to improve performance in the survey in many cases.

Principles:
- The College should aim to improve its performance in the NSS.
- We should identifying areas of best practice and learn from them.
- We should employ local expertise and knowledge concerning the best ways to undertake student feedback effectively.
- We should pay attention to students’ views in how to improve feedback.
- We should ensure that we communicate to students the role feedback plays within learning, the different forms it can take, and when and how it should be anticipated and then built upon.

Strategic goals:

Building better feedback in courses through the Learning and Teaching strategy
The College’s Learning and Teaching Strategy enshrines the necessity for good feedback as a core aspect of student learning. We should continue to develop this aspect within the strategy.

Creating better opportunities and incentives for staff to engage in learning about best practice in feedback provision. Whilst the College and TLA have provided workshops on feedback during the past year, these have had very limited staff participation. We need to address the issue of how to engage staff in sharing experiences and being open to listening about innovative ways of improving feedback.

More visible reward for diligence in teaching: It is appropriate that the University is primarily research focused. However we need to ensure that staff appreciate the need for good baseline standards in the quality and promptness of feedback and that poor performance in this respect will mitigate against promotion at all levels.
Short term actions *Draft guidelines for Schools:*

- It is suggested that course handbooks (or equivalent website content) should contain clear statements on assessment and feedback on assessment for all courses: These statements should cover:
  - The nature of the assessment, the weighting between components, dates for the handing-out of coursework, its submission by students and its return by staff
  - If feedback is to be generic or for groups, the mechanisms by which and times by which it will be communicated.
  - The criteria for assessment with guidance on the expectations of those delivering the course in terms of the outcomes from the assessment.
  - The principles that will underpin feedback on assessment, in particular that it will aim to build forward and that it should be legible.
  - The mechanisms for providing feedback on examinations where applicable.

- Schools should attempt to plan for, and provide timely feedback. In most circumstances it is recommended that feedback on coursework should be provided within a minimum of three weeks of submission and within a timeframe to allow for exam preparation wherever possible.

- When electronic submission for coursework is adopted, Schools should ensure that arrangements for feedback, whether manual or online, are not adversely affected.

- Schools should review existing arrangements for feedback on pre-Honours exam scripts and consider their effectiveness.

- Course teams should review feedback arrangements and effectiveness. They should consider the extent to which they communicate the nature and role of feedback to students at various points within the course, as against simply ensuring its provision.

- When problems are identified with an individual academic staff member’s approach to feedback, Schools should ensure consistent means of communicating and rectifying this, particularly as part of staff appraisal.

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