RCSI Quality Enhancement Office (QEO) Data Processing Policy

The role of the QEO

The RCSI Quality Enhancement Office's role is to collect, process, report and store survey data from a variety of stakeholders – students, staff, surgical trainees, healthcare professionals etc. in order to provide a platform to share feedback and to support informed decision-making. As an independent department the QEO serves as a gatekeeper to access the student population and a neutral data processor and handler for RCSI.

Data collection platform

The QEO collects survey data using the Survey Monkey platform, that offers a user-friendly and robust survey service. Respondents' email addresses are uploaded to the platform and email invitations are sent directly from Survey Monkey using the research.net domain. Respondents' email addresses are deleted from the platform after data collection is completed, however if a respondent decides to opt-out from receiving the surveys, their email addresses is retained in the database to prevent from sending further survey invitations.

Data processing steps

The QEO Analyst monitors the data collection process by checking the response rate and sending reminders to those who haven't responded. When data collection is finished the link to the survey is closed preventing any further responses to be collected. Survey raw data file (in Excel) is downloaded from the Survey Monkey platform and is used for processing. Data is processed using the R Studio platform. A template with pre-defined code is used to extract the data, the code is broken down into a series of check-points.

An important step is to process free-text responses. Since respondents often mentioned specific people by name, the QEO checks all open-ended comments and replaces names of individuals with a <Name Removed> tag. This is a semi-automatic process with some manual handling required, a separate piece of R code, checks the accuracy of name detection and can flag the names that were missed. The free text comments are divided into two groups – unfiltered, that contain full names of individuals and filtered, where the names were removed – these are collated in two separate reports. A standard report contains a summary of key findings, a summary of the most positive and most negative ratings. Quantitative responses are presented in charts and free-text comments in tables. A full list of questions is available in an appendix.

Data distribution

The QEO generates three versions of each report – unfiltered, filtered and quantitative (just ratings, no free-text comments). The unfiltered report is intended for a limited circulation, this report is sent to a Head of School, Programme Director, Year Lead or a nominee. The QEO advises that the report is not circulated further, however this is at the discretion of the Head of School. It is also recommended that feedback related to a named individual is discussed with this individual only and treated as an opportunity to enhance the teaching practices. Filtered reports are intended for a wider circulation. Detailed Module-based reports are provided to the Year Directors/ nominees and these reports can be distributed to all staff involved in running an individual Module. A version of the report with just quantitative responses with no free-text comments is also provided and this version is also uploaded to the QEO Moodle page where it can be downloaded. It is important to inform students about the key findings from the survey and changes and modifications planned as a result.

Data storage

The QEO is committed to storing the data safely. Data is downloaded from the Survey Monkey platform and prepared for analysis. In most cases data is anonymous or is anonymised or pseudonymised by the QEO. Survey data is stored on a secured drive and processed reports are stored in a separate folder in the same location. Periodically, survey reports are copied to the QEO servers and stored there indefinitely (in case of end of Semester feedback reports) or in case of research data, stored according to the periods specified in the research ethics documentation.

QEO, September 2024