

Student Survey: Results

Introduction

This document provides results of a survey that was carried out on 14th January 2008, with students on the 'Introduction to Structural Design' first year module within the Civil and Building Engineering Department at Loughborough University. A total of 51 valid responses were recorded. There were 69 students in the cohort resulting in a 74% response rate. The survey was conducted on paper and the responses were manually analysed. This was the first time that the survey was conducted, and it was clear that some participants were confused by Question 4 as 25% of responses were recorded invalid. An example will be provided in the future. All other questions were answered as intended. An ethical checklist (Loughborough University, n.d.) was completed for this study and a statement was provided on the survey form.

Question 1

What is your gender?(Please tick)

N=51

Female	17.65%	Male	82.35%
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The majority (82.35%) of sample were male. It believed that this is a typical gender representation of Engineering based disciplines.

Question 2

How best describes your assessment preferences for modules within your course? (Please tick any that apply)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I like carrying out coursework on my own (N=49)	10.20%	51.02%	30.61%	8.16%	0.00%
I like carrying out group work WITHOUT a peer assessment element (N=51)	1.96%	5.88%	33.33%	37.25%	21.57%
I like carrying out group work WITH a peer assessment element (N=51)	23.53%	49.02%	17.65%	9.80%	0.00%
I like a mixture of group work (working with others) and coursework (working alone) (N=50)	30.00%	46.00%	22.00%	2.00%	0.00%
I like examinations (N=51)	3.92%	13.73%	37.25%	33.33%	11.76%

The results show that nearly two-thirds (61.22%) of respondents strongly agreed / agreed that they liked carrying out coursework on their own. Perhaps they felt that they have more control over the task compared to groupwork coursework. In terms of carrying out group work, nearly three-quarters (72.55%) of participants strongly agreed / agreed that they liked carrying out group work WITH a peer assessment element. Interestingly, one-third (33.3%) of respondents neither agreed/disagreed that they

liked carrying out group work WITHOUT a peer assessment element, however over one-half (58.82%) of participants generally disagreed. Over three-quarters (76%) of respondents generally agreed that they liked a mixture of group work and coursework. In terms of examination it was believed that because the sample were 1st year students their experience of University examinations was low. The null value was the highest chosen option, which supports this theory.

Question 3

How many times have used WebPA since you've been at University? (Please tick ONE)

N=51

Never	0%	1-2	98.04%	3-4	1.96%	5-6	0%	7+	0%
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All but one participant had used WebPA one or two times since being at University. This is no surprise as the majority of the sample were first year students.

Question 4

Please RANK the following group selection methods from 1 (most preferred) to 4 (least preferred) in terms of preference.

N=38	1	2	3	4
Random	7.89%	26.32%	13.16%	52.63%
Seeded	13.16%	36.84%	34.21%	15.79%
Mixed groups	10.53%	21.05%	42.11%	26.32%
Self-selecting	68.42%	13.16%	10.53%	7.89%

A total of 38 (75%) valid responses were recorded. Over two-thirds (68.42%) of respondents most preferred self selecting groups (where students choose their own groups). Over one-half (52.63%) least preferred random group selection. Seeded group selection (where the tutor chooses at least one strong student per group) was neither the most preferred or the least with the majority of respondents ranking it second or third.

Question 5

From your experience of self and peer assessment do you agree/disagree with following statements?; (Please tick ONE for each)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Friendship loyalties influenced some of the scores that I gave in the assessment(s) (N=49)	4.08%	38.78%	28.57%	18.37%	10.20%
I believe the mark I received reflected my contribution to the groupwork (N=51)	7.84%	68.63%	15.69%	7.84%	0.00%
I believe the assessment was fair (N=51)	7.84%	66.67%	9.80%	15.69%	0.00%
I was comfortable assessing MY own performance (N=49)	8.16%	65.31%	16.33%	8.16%	2.04%
I was comfortable assessing the performance of my TEAM MEMBERS (N=51)	9.80%	68.63%	11.76%	7.84%	1.96%
I was comfortable with TEAM MEMBERS assessing MY performance (N=51)	11.76%	68.63%	5.88%	13.73%	0.00%
I was confident that my assessment would remain anonymous (N=51)	15.69%	54.90%	21.57%	5.88%	1.96%
I was provided with an explanation as to why peer assessment was being used (N=50)	8.00%	60.00%	26.00%	6.00%	0.00%
Self and peer assessment increased my motivation to carry out the groupwork task (N=49)	6.12%	48.98%	28.57%	14.29%	2.04%
My understanding of the subject improved because of self and peer assessment (N=50)	0.00%	12.00%	40.00%	40.00%	8.00%
There was pressure/conflict amongst team members whilst completing the assessment (N=51)	0.00%	25.49%	17.65%	43.14%	13.73%

Over three-quarters (68.63%) of respondents agreed that the mark they received reflected their contribution to group work which was encouraging. Interestingly, no respondents strongly disagreed. Over two-thirds (66.67%) of respondents agreed that they thought the assessment was fair, however, worryingly nearly one-fifth of respondents (15.69%) disagreed. In terms of participants feeling comfortable with the assessment, over two-thirds agreed that they were comfortable with assessing their team members (68.63%) and a similar proportion were comfortable with team members assessing their own performance. Interestingly, whilst below one-half of participants DISAGREED that there was conflict amongst team members whilst completing the assessment, over one-quarter of respondents AGREED that conflict had arisen. This highlights that some students may feel pressured by team members when completing the assessments. The fact that over one-quarter (38.78%) of respondents agreed that friendship loyalties influenced the mark that they gave. This demonstrates the power of peer pressure and friendship. Looking back to Question 2, one may query the preference for self selection as a method for assigning students to groups as it is likely (but not common) that friendship loyalties have an impact on the results.

Question 6

Which of the following skills has been improved due to carrying out groupwork, with a self and peer assessment element? (Please tick ONE for each)

N=51	Much improved	Improved	Unimproved	No opinion
Communication	3.92%	74.51%	13.73%	7.84%
Group dynamics e.g. working effectively together	9.80%	70.59%	15.69%	3.92%
Participation of groupwork	17.65%	64.71%	11.76%	5.88%
Peer appraisal skills	3.92%	58.82%	25.49%	11.76%
Problem solving	5.88%	50.98%	33.33%	9.80%
Self reflection/appraisal	5.88%	60.78%	17.65%	15.69%
Team working skills	17.65%	58.82%	15.69%	7.84%

It is clear that the majority respondents believed a number of skills were improved through the incorporation of a peer assessment element to groupwork. These include skills related to communication (74.51%), the dynamics of groups (70.59%), the participation of groupwork (64.71%) and self reflection/appraisal skills (60.78%). The majority of respondents (58.82%) also felt that team working skills had improved whilst nearly one-fifth (17.65%) believed that these skills were much improved. It was interesting that over one third of respondents thought that self reflection/appraisal skills had unimproved or had no opinion. Referring to the literature on peer assessment Robinson's study (2006) highlighted that two-thirds of those that completed self and peer assessments marked *themselves* at 100%. Therefore, if this is the case, there may be some correlation between those that mark themselves at 100% and those who felt that their self reflection/appraisal skills had unimproved or no opinion that they had improved/unimproved.

Question 7

From your experience(s) of using WebPA, do you agree/disagree with following statements?; (Please tick ONE for each)

N=50	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I felt that WebPA was secure	22.00%	68.00%	10.00%	0.00%	0.00%
I was provided with ENOUGH information about the assessment within the software	10.00%	72.00%	16.00%	2.00%	0.00%
There was USEFUL help within WebPA	2.00%	58.00%	36.00%	4.00%	0.00%
The WebPA software was easy to navigate	24.00%	68.00%	2.00%	6.00%	0.00%

In terms of the student experience of using WebPA the majority of respondents generally agreed that WebPA was secure (90%), that there was enough information (82%) about the assessment and that there was useful help within WebPA (60%). Also, 92% either strongly agreed or agreed that WebPA was easy to navigate.

Question 8

Did you have any issues with WebPA? Specifically in relation to; (Please tick ONE for each)

	Yes	No
The completion of the assessment(s) (N=50)	0.00%	100.00%
Group formation e.g. assigned to wrong group (N=50)	0.00%	100.00%
Logging into the software (N=50)	10.00%	90.00%
The appeals/complaints procedure (N=48)	6.25%	93.75%
Other(N=51)	9.80%	90.20%

If Other, or Yes, to any of the above, please give further details of the problem(s) encountered
"Locating the software from the university site"
"Criteria for highest & lowest scores (1-5) was far too extreme, not allowing for achieving higher assessments"
Not always easiest to locate and load
"Can't find it to log on"
"There is no box where you can tell the lecturer what a certain member did or did not do to actually see if the marks they got were fair.
"Could only access it using the web-address given, should have been on the Learn Server as well"

None of the participants had any issues with the completion of the assessment or problems associated with the group that they were allocated to. One-tenth of participants had problems logging onto the software and referring to the free text comments received, the main problem seemed to be locating the software to log on. The comments suggest that links are required to the software from the University Website and LEARN - the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Only 6.25% had issues with the appeals/complaints procedure which is typical to the small number of complaints that are received.

Question 8

9.a. We are continuously making improvements to WebPA in relation to the feedback that we receive. What changes (if any) to WebPA would you like to see?; (Please tick ANY that apply)

Provide textual feedback to justify the score(s) that you gave YOURSELF	37.25%	Provide textual feedback to justify the score(s) that you gave OTHERS	54.9%
WebPA linked to student learning environment (LEARN)	37.25%	More help options within WebPA	3.92%
Other	1.96%		

If Other, please state
"Provide textual feedback that others gave me. Be able to decide whether to appeal or not"

Over one-half (54.9%) wanted to be able to provide textual feedback to justify the scores that they gave to OTHERS and over one-third (37.25%) wanted to justify the scores they gave themselves.

9.b. If you WOULD like to justify the score(s) that you gave OTHERS would you like?; (Please tick ONE)
N=51

Other members in the group to see these comments (and your name)	9.8%	Other members in the group to see these comments (anonymously)	31.37%
Only the tutor to see these comments	45.1%	Other	0%

Nearly half of respondents (45.1%) wanted to only the tutor to see the free comments that they made in relation to justifying the assessment scores that they gave others. It was clear that respondents felt that an opportunity to justify their scores would be welcomed but not always wanted their peers to see them. At this point we must iterate that any feedback given to students must be carried out by the tutor (either through the system or dependently) and that it is up to their discretion as to what feedback is given.

Question 10

Would you request the use of WebPA in any other courses or modules that you undertake?
(Please tick)

N=51

Yes	26.67%	No	73.33%
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If Yes, please state which module(s)
"All courses and modules undertaken with groupwork"
"Construction team management coursework"
"Any modules with group work"
"All modules that include group work"

Only just over one-quarter of respondents would request WebPA to be used in another module. The free text comments suggest that some respondents wanted WebPA to be used in all modules that involve group work.

Question 11

Please give any other comments you have about WebPA and peer assessment.

N=51

Number of responses = 4 (7.84%)

"I felt more questions and resulting more specific answers are needed to assess peers correctly"
"Assessing the contribution of each team member"
"Good to see who did work in groups"
"Good for those people who put effort in. It's a good confidence boost when you receive a good result, knowing that your group members feel you deserve it"

Only 4 comments were recorded and therefore were not split into different themes. It was encouraging to see that one participant felt that it was a good confidence boost, especially in the 1st year of university.

Question 11

If you like to become a part of a WebPA student user group please provide your details below. This would involve being invited to attend a couple of focus groups to discuss your experiences of WebPA and peer assessment with other students and the WebPA team. (*Please provide your details*)

N=51

Number of responses = 3 (5.88%)

Three responses were recorded and these will be contacted in the near future with the intension of setting up a regular WebPA student user group.

Conclusion

The sample size response rate was pleasing and has produced some fascinating results. The preference for self selected groups (where students are allowed to choose their own groups) was unsurprising as was the lack of preference for random group selection. It was encouraging that the majority of respondents were comfortable assessing their own performance and that of their peers. It was good to see the majority believing that the assessment was fair. A worrying concern was that over one-quarter of respondents believing that there was conflict between team members and pressure amongst their peers when completing the assessment. It is unclear, however, the impact of this pressure and conflict on the actual scores, which could be a future area of work.

The majority of respondents believed that a number of skills were improved due to a peer assessment element of groupwork. This builds upon the employability literature that exists in relation to peer assessment. Further work could be done in this area specifically in relation to the improvement self appraisal skills if a high proportion of students give themselves full marks. However, it must be noted that within WebPA, if every student in the group marks themselves at 100% then they are more likely to get a more average score due to the way that the algorithm works. In this instance, only the peer marks would determine the scores received. It is unclear why a large proportion of respondents would not request the use of WebPA in other modules, again, prompting further investigation.

Should this survey be carried out again, (which is very likely), some of the questions could be worded differently or amended. Specifically, question 4 would require an example to improve the number of valid responses recorded. It would be interesting to carry out this survey with other students who had used WebPA in other disciplines and/or were in different year groups. Also, how would these results compare should the survey be carried out at another institution? This is one of many considerations for the future.

References

Loughborough University, (n.d). Ethical Advisory Committee. Available online at;
(www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/checklist2.doc/)

Robinson, C. L. (2006). Self and peer assessment in group work. *the SEFI MWG Seminar*, Kongsberg.