Strategies to maximise survey response rates

Universities participating in the Teaching Cultures Survey should aim for survey response rates of at least 30% of the university's academic population. Institutions with response rates below 15% will not be included in the amalgamated data set of findings from all participating universities. The vast majority (over 80%) of responses to the survey are posted in the first few hours after the survey invitation or reminder emails, so we will know very quickly if there are any issues and will inform you straight away.

Drawing upon experience of conducting the survey in 2019 (in which 21 universities took part), the 'lessons learnt' for maximising response rates are summarised below:

- **response rates are maximised if dedicated invitations are sent by prominent university leaders:** survey response numbers are significantly higher where (i) the initial invitation email is sent by a university President or Vice-President for Education, in a message that emphasises the importance of the survey findings to the university's future plans; and (ii) two dedicated reminder email are sent, one from Deans/Department Heads to academics in their discipline and one from the university leader who sent the original invitation. Please note that, to be effective, the leader's name must appear as the email 'sender', and not simply appear as a signatory to a message emailed by another individual.

- **inclusion of the 'consent button' reduces response numbers:** survey response rates are considerably lower (up to 20% lower) amongst the universities that include a 'consent button' at the top of the survey when compared to those that do not include the consent button. Where university ethics approval (or equivalent) allows, universities should consider not including this button.

- **the timing of the emails matters:** the vast majority (typically over 90%) of respondents participate in the survey in the two hours following receipt of the survey invitation or reminder emails, so making sure that these emails are received when academics are at work and most receptive to requests makes a huge difference – we have found that the best times are mid-week and during the working day (Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday, after 9:30am and before 1pm). If there is a delay, it is preferable to wait until the following working day to send these emails, rather than send them after the end of the working day. The final reminder should be sent around 48 hours before the survey deadline – this final reminder makes a huge difference to response rates. The two-week 'live' period of the survey should not coincide with exam periods, vacations or other staff surveys.

- **errors or omissions in the survey can have a significant impact:** prior experience suggests that participants who abandoned the survey in response to an error (such as the omission of their role or discipline in the response options provided in the first two questions) are unlikely to subsequently return and complete the survey, even if they knew that error had been rectified.

- **dedicated email invitation/reminders are crucial:** reminders included within newsletters or in emails containing other requests/information are helpful but translate to <u>much</u> lower numbers of responses when compared to dedicated email invitations/reminders focused solely on the survey. It is the dedicated emails from well-recognised senior figures at either the university level or the disciplinary level that have yielded the vast majority of responses for all surveys to date.

- **emails to under-represented groups also help:** targeted invitations to groups that may otherwise have felt that the survey was not intended for them (researchers, PhD students, casual lecturers, part-time staff, academics in Faculties based away from the main campus etc.) have also been very effective, particularly where they emphasise that the university is keen to hear and act upon their feedback.

To allow your response rates to be calculated accurately, please ensure that the headline figure provided for your total academic population covers all relevant departments and roles, but does not contain any 'double-counting' or groups that are not part of the academic population.