

Guidelines for the conduct of course evaluations and the management of free-text responses at Linköping University

1 Introduction

Linköping University (LiU) introduced in 2018 a new university-wide course evaluation system, *Evaluate*. This is one component of LiU's quality assurance of education at first-cycle and second-cycle levels.

The principal function of course evaluations at LiU is as a quality-control instrument for the relevant course or study programme, through giving the student the opportunity to reflect over, critically examine and relate to his or her education in a structured manner. Thus, course evaluations are equally in the interest of both LiU and the students, which justifies the investment of a considerable amount of work from both parties. Here, the requirement for a collation of the course evaluations should be emphasised, and the requirement to provide information to the students about the results and any actions prompted or planned as a result of the course evaluations, as specified by Chapter 1, Section 14 of the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100):

Higher education institutions shall enable students who are participating in or have completed a course to express their experiences of and views on the course through a course evaluation to be organised by the higher education institution.

The higher education institution shall collate the course evaluations and provide information about their results and any actions prompted by the course evaluations. The results shall be made available to the students.

2 General guidelines for course evaluations

2.1 Obligatory conduct of course evaluations for each course

Students who are participating in or have completed a course shall be given an opportunity to express their experiences of and views on the course through a course evaluation to be organised by the university. The timing of the course evaluation should be as close to the course as possible. At LiU, all students taking first-cycle or second-cycle courses are given the opportunity for course evaluation through the university-wide course evaluation system *Evaluate*. Teachers have the opportunity to supplement the *Evaluate* evaluation with additional or other course evaluations. In exceptional circumstances, a decision may be taken by the dean to refrain from

conducting a course evaluation using the *Evaluate* system. This decision must contain a reason for the decision and information about the alternate method by which the course evaluation is to be carried out.

2.3 Design of course evaluations

Evaluate contains several questions that are common for all courses. The faculties and the area of educational sciences have, in addition, the opportunity to add one or several specific questions. Further, it is possible to modify the course-evaluation questionnaire for a particular course, with the teacher responsible for the course or the examiner adding course-specific questions. Within the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, furthermore, the *Evaluate* system contains an adapted questionnaire that is used for courses that contain clinical training. This questionnaire consists solely of fixed questions without the possibility for adaptation to a particular course. *Evaluate* is a component of the quality-assurance work at the university and of work to improve the teaching here.

3 Making the collation of results and information about any changes available

3.1 Access to reports without free-text responses

After the end of a course, a report with a collation of the replies to all multiple-choice questions (excluding the free-text responses) will be automatically created and archived in LiUDok. The examiner and the course supervisor are given direct access to the report after the end of the course, as are the students who have been registered on the course.

In addition, all results from course evaluations (excluding free-text responses) are made available to all students and co-workers at LiU. Those teachers who are responsible for a course and who use another course evaluation system than *Evaluate*, or who use several course evaluation systems to collect student experiences, are themselves responsible for making the results from the course evaluations available in the digital course room in Lisam or an equivalent manner.

3.2 Information about any changes made

Information about any changes made or measures taken is to be passed to the students and teachers involved. Information about any changes made is to be passed in this way during the introduction to the course given to the students who are to start the course. It is to be passed to these students and to the students who have been given the opportunity to reply to the course evaluation also in the relevant course room in Lisam or an equivalent manner.

4 Management of course evaluations

4.1 Management of reports with free-text responses

After the end of a course, the director of studies or equivalent person, or another person who has been nominated to manage reports, is to examine the results from the course evaluation, including the free-text responses, after which the report is to be archived in LiUDok. All free-text responses are to be archived in LiUDok, including those that may be considered to be unsuitable when considering the work environment, and those that do not contribute to improving the course. If any free-text response contains, for example, threats or abuse that are to be reported to the police, this particular free-text response will be managed following a special procedure.¹ (More information is given below in Section 4.2.) The examination should take place within one month of the end of the course. The report including the free-text responses is then to be automatically archived in LiUDok. If more than one person has been designated by name in the roles described above, the department or faculty is to determine which person is principally responsible for managing the responses.

4.2 Management of free-text responses that contain threats, discriminatory statements, or similar

If any free-text response contains threats, discriminatory statements or descriptions of such a nature that it should be considered whether to report them to the police, the LiU security manager must be contacted for consultation and the further management of the matter, as specified in the LiU document “Handläggningsordning för hantering av misstänkta oegentligheter och brott”, (Ref. No. LiU-2016-00759). If a report to the police is made, the relevant free-text response is to be managed following a special procedure, but it is still to be present in the archive. In such cases, the identity of the student involved will be determined with the aid of the IT Division and the supplier of the questionnaire-management system.

¹ The response will be removed from the questionnaire in an appropriate manner, registered, and – either with or without a brief inquiry – constitute the basis for a report to the police.

4.3 Reports published after additional processing

The director of studies or equivalent, or the person who has been nominated to manage reports, may create additional reports for various purposes. These reports offer the possibility of, for example, omitting the free-text responses that do not contribute to course development, and replies that are considered unsuitable from considerations of the work environment. There is no requirement that reports published after additional processing be archived.

4.4 Archiving and selective deletion

LiU is a government agency, and is thus obliged to document and archive the result of course evaluations. This obligation is satisfied by archiving reports both without and with free-text responses.

The *Beslut om tillämpning av Riksarkivets gallringsföreskrifter* (Ref. No. LiU-2019-01914) states that course evaluations (the responses received) held by the central course evaluation system are to be selectively deleted 10 years after being received, on the condition that a summary of the course evaluations has been drawn up. A summary of the course evaluations from each occasion is to be preserved.

4.5 Personal data

Personal data are to be managed in accordance with currently valid legislation. The term “personal data” denotes information that directly or indirectly can be related to a physical person, such as, for example, the responses to a course evaluation. Given that LiU is obliged by the Higher Education Ordinance to conduct course evaluations and collate them, there is a legal basis for the processing of personal data (legal obligation, as specified by Article 6.1. c in the General Data Protection Regulation). LiU is to process only the personal data that are necessary to achieve the purpose of the course evaluation. *Evaluate* is a tool used for work with quality assurance at LiU, and there is a legal basis both to collect and to archive personal data in the tool. It is not possible to guarantee complete anonymity as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation for students who respond to a course evaluation. However, LiU will identify only in special circumstances students who have given responses in *Evaluate* (see above, Section 4.2).