

Driving Standards, Supporting Outcomes

How Can We Enhance
Teaching Effectiveness
And Optimise The
Student Experience?

Strategic Insights from HE Leaders in France



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents strategic insights from leaders across French higher education institutions on enhancing teaching effectiveness and optimising the student experience. Drawing on extensive interviews conducted in spring 2025, the discussion highlights how universities, business schools, and other specialist institutes are embedding student feedback into institutional decision-making, curriculum development, and quality assurance practices.

Key themes include:

- Strategic drivers: Internal goals like continuous improvement and pedagogical innovation intersect with external pressures such as national regulatory standards, accreditation requirements, and global rankings. Institutions are increasingly aligning educational quality with student outcomes.
- Student voice and feedback: French institutions are making deliberate efforts to embed student perspectives into program design, teaching evaluation, and governance structures. Participatory practices, such as surveys, focus groups, and councils, are central mechanisms for fostering engagement and quality dialogue.
- Quality assurance and accreditation: Evaluations are evolving beyond compliance tools to become instruments for continuous improvement. French universities are using feedback to inform curriculum reform, teaching practices, and to meet stringent demands from HCERES and other bodies.



- Challenges in feedback systems: While the ecosystem of surveys is robust, institutions face hurdles with low response rates, student and faculty engagement, and closing the feedback loop. Concerns about survey fatigue also persist.
- Technological integration: French institutions are beginning to leverage AI and data analytics tools to process qualitative feedback more efficiently and uncover actionable insights. However, disparities remain in the consistency and depth of analysis.
- Closing the feedback loop: Effective practices involve timely communication of results, engaging faculty in reflective practice, and visibly linking student input to institutional change. Yet, many institutions struggle to ensure students feel their voices make a tangible impact.
- Towards a culture of continuous improvement: Exemplars demonstrate how feedback, when systemically integrated, supports iterative improvements in teaching, learning environments, and student support. Success depends on strong leadership, co-designed systems, and a clear institutional commitment to listening and acting.



The report concludes that while challenges remain, French higher education institutions are making significant strides in using feedback as a lever for transformation, including using products such as Explorance Blue and Explorance MLY. The findings underscore the importance of transparent, data-informed, and participatory approaches to elevate teaching standards and enhance the student experience.



INTRODUCTION

France, as a nation, has long been admired for its intellectual legacy, cultural heritage, and commitment to public education. its higher education system, in particular, reflects the country’s historical dedication to academic excellence. From the grandeur of grandes écoles to the dynamic student populations in public universities, and technical and specialist institutes, the French HE sector is diverse and multifaceted.

However, in a world where knowledge economies evolve rapidly, and where global competitiveness, digital innovation, and social equity become increasingly central to educational missions, France’s HE landscape finds itself at a critical juncture. Across all tiers and institutions, common challenges emerge, including: accessibility and equity, overcrowding in public institutions, limited funding, high drop-out rates, and international competition. On the global stage, French institutions struggle to maintain their rankings and recognition. While elite schools remain internationally respected, most public universities lag behind counterparts in the USA, UK, Germany, and China. The reasons are multifaceted, such as limited international collaboration, fewer citations per faculty, insufficient research funding, and a traditionally inward-looking academic culture.

Nevertheless, there have been important institutional reforms aimed at strengthening academic quality and accountability. The establishment of the High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) marks a significant step toward rigorous institutional evaluation. French universities are increasingly incorporating student feedback mechanisms, pedagogical innovation, and faculty development programs to improve teaching quality. Projects under initiatives like Investissements d’Avenir, as one example, demonstrate a growing recognition of the need to support innovation in teaching and learning. The slow pace of digital transformation presents another challenge. While the Covid-19 pandemic forced institutions to adapt to online learning, the experience exposed the inadequacies of digital infrastructure and the need for comprehensive training of both faculty and students in digital tools and methodologies. In a post-pandemic world, digital competency is no longer optional – it is integral to future-ready education systems.

Despite these challenges, the resilience and adaptability of France’s higher education system remain evident. Many institutions are taking bold steps to reform curricula, strengthen accreditation systems, promote student-centred learning, and expand global engagement. Business schools continue to seek and achieve triple accreditation (AACSB, AMBA, EQUIS), demonstrating their commitment to international standards of excellence. The alignment with European frameworks such as the Bologna Process and ENQA – the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education further reflects a willingness to modernise and harmonise with broader academic standards.

Specifically with course evaluation practices in France, we have observed the following trends:

- Student feedback mechanisms: There is an increasing trend in the use of course evaluations and student feedback mechanisms to ensure the quality of teaching. Many universities have implemented regular surveys where students assess their courses, instructors, and overall learning experience. The feedback from these evaluations is used to refine course content, teaching methods, and overall program design.
- Consistency and formality: Despite progress, there is still inconsistency across institutions regarding how course evaluations are conducted and how the feedback is utilised. While grandes écoles and some universities have formalised course evaluation systems, other public universities still lag in consistently using student evaluations for course improvement.
- Accreditation influence: The requirements from accrediting bodies, such as HCERES, have pushed institutions to incorporate quality control mechanisms, including mandatory course evaluations. These external evaluations encourage institutions to be accountable for their teaching practices and continually improve based on student and faculty feedback.

Whether termed a listening strategy or a feedback strategy, every institution should have a proven framework for asking and acting on comments from students (and staff, alumni, government, and industry where appropriate). There are opportunities for universities to take a holistic approach to listening, from course evaluation to the total experience, and through Explorance this supports teaching effectiveness, learning excellence and student experience in HE, and staff engagement in HR. It is vital to listen to demographic insights, behavioural insights and feedback insights, and then act on it.

However, we also know why students do not complete surveys. 45% say they do not see that their feedback really changes anything, 43% say they never see the results from the survey (28% only see certain results from the survey), and 21% say they never ask the right questions. A recent study from Inside Higher Ed revealed that 79% of students do not speak about issues of importance of them. But when they do, they write more than ever. Many studies demonstrate that online methods increase the word counts in comments by four to seven times. They express it differently, and are doing so more frequently, more widely, and providing richer insights. The opportunity for analysis of open-ended feedback, is, therefore significant as well more traditional quantitative surveys.

Together, by asking, acting and listening, we can build a braver future wltH feedback. The importance of creating safe spaces, including how to give feedback and how to receive feedback, and psychological safety, must underpin everything. Feedback should feel safe, and should be needed, rewarded, and transformational.

In this report, Driving standards, supporting outcomes: How can we enhance teaching effectiveness and optimise the student experience?, we gather strategic insights from HE leaders in France who are tasked with this agenda.

We explore a number of key themes, including:

- Student success and teaching quality.
- The power of feedback to impact on the quality of teaching, evolution of learning, and the overall student experience.
- Leveraging technology, including advanced feedback management platforms, to ensure student retention and success.
- Utilising student data to effectively develop learning and teaching strategies, leading to institutional improvement.
- Presenting solutions to improve teaching effectiveness and student experience.

In the context of a challenging external environment for higher education, institutions are now choosing to be supported in their work to deliver continuous insights which leads to effective transformation and supports institutional success. I hope this report is of interest to universities, business schools, and other technical and specialist institutes in France, and would personally like to thank the Explorance partner and non-partner institutions who have given their time freely to contribute to it.

Samer Saab, Founder & CEO, Explorance

STRATEGIC DRIVERS

Evaluating and Enhancing Teaching Quality

Key questions explored:

- What are your institution's key strategic objectives for enhancing teaching effectiveness and student experience?
- What are the internal drivers for these e.g. program development, quality assurance, continuous improvement.
- What are the external drivers for these e.g. national regulatory standards, accreditations, quality benchmarks?

In the evolving landscape of higher education, the pursuit of quality teaching and a meaningful student experience is a cornerstone of institutional strategy. Across France, grandes écoles, universities and other institutions are placing increasing emphasis on student feedback, program evaluation, and pedagogical innovation – not only to improve internal practices but also to satisfy external accreditation requirements.

Student voice as a driver of quality

For many institutions, ensuring students have a meaningful voice in shaping their education is both a pedagogical goal and a regulatory necessity. This commitment to student input is echoed by interviewees, including at EFREI Paris where a shift towards participatory communication has transformed the institutional culture.

“Our mission is to make sure our 5,000 students are prepared to embark on successful careers in the world of digital technologies, while enjoying a fulfilling student experience and discovering their professional identity,”

reflects **Anne Edvire, Director of Student Experience at EFREI**. “The school has achieved significant advancement, especially in the field of pedagogy. We have transitioned from a traditional top-down communication model with minimum interaction, to a more collaborative and dialogic approach, fostering meaningful discussions with students. It is important to cultivate a culture of quality in the school and I am proud to say that we succeed in that challenge.”

“My role, and that of my team, is centred on listening to students and ensuring that their perspectives are considered. To achieve this we conduct satisfaction surveys, including course-specific evaluations and

broader assessments. Additionally, I organise focus groups to gather more qualitative information, and commission projects aimed at enhancing processes or other critical aspects of the institution. We are subject to rigorous compliance scrutiny, and I am pleased to note our significant progress in this area. For instance, during the last accreditation review we were required to achieve a 75% response rate. Remarkably, we surpassed this, attaining a response rate of 87%.”



Lounis Journée, Student Surveys Technician at Nantes Université, also explains the strategic drivers for enhancing teaching effectiveness and student experience at his institution:

“Our goal, through our work within the University’s Steering, Evaluation and Quality Department, is to improve the quality of courses and give students the chance to express themselves; attracting and retaining students.

Institutionally, we have a student development council in each program that brings together students, faculty, and administrative staff. Our colleagues have developed support guides for these councils because discussions about how to improve programs are often based on teaching evaluations, whether the approach we propose or those conducted by the faculties themselves.”

Quality assurance as continuous improvement

Across the board, there is consensus that evaluations are not merely about compliance – they are central to a culture of continuous improvement.

Bernard Teissier, Head of Library and Digital Learning Resources at ENTPE, outlines a structural approach to program enhancement:

“Our strategic objectives are to establish a body of teacher-researchers as a characteristic of ENTPE: teaching was only provided by researchers or professionals, to formalise teaching agreements with research laboratories, and to strengthen the role of the training department in managing programs and the role of heads of teaching units in place of the former heads of department.

We are carrying out a gradual reform of the engineering curriculum over three years, by establishing a program-specific advisory board, by systematically emphasising continuous improvement (evaluation of all courses), and by conducting an annual review of training processes (internal quality assurance).”



Similarly, **Laurence Besançon, Head of the Student Life Observatory** (DIRFOR – Planning and Evaluation Division) at Aix-Marseille Université, highlights the integration of quality assurance into institutional planning:

“Our goal is to improve the quality of courses, following their evaluation, and to work on new teaching practices. Quality assurance is our objective, with the aim of continuous improvement, and we have a department to which we belong – the Department of Steering and Evaluation – whose driving forces revolve around measurement, because we are asked for indicators at the level of the

Ministry of National Education. French universities must produce indicators every four years to support the reaccreditation of training courses. Each course must prove that it is of high quality, that students are satisfied with it, that it has achieved a certain rate of professional integration, and so on. We have very strict national regulatory standards and quality criteria that we must meet to be eligible for new budgets.”

The role of accreditation and regulatory frameworks

External evaluations and accreditations are powerful forces shaping institutional behaviour. The High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) and other accrediting bodies impose rigorous standards.

“We have several levers to develop pedagogical effectiveness and the student experience,” says **Thibault Nélias**, **Head of the Pilot Support Service at Le Mans Université** (and previously Head of the Evaluation, Quality and Continuous Improvement Department at Nantes Université, until January 2025). “Today, we are in a French education system where all higher education institutions are partly driven by indicators of success and professional integration. Success in three years for a bachelor’s degree and in two years for a master’s degree are our key performance indicators that the state imposes on us, and behind this, each institution sets itself objectives for pedagogical effectiveness. Effective teaching contributes to success. We also embrace a

very consumer-driven approach to education, with students no longer coming solely to earn a degree but increasingly interested in a life experience and thus developing a sense of belonging. Externally, we are evaluated by HCERES, which evaluates programs every five years, providing a form of quality assurance and accreditation.”



Lounis Journé adds: “There are many regulatory obligations to comply with, and HCERES sends evaluators to evaluate each university and program to check whether they are meeting certain commitments and indicators. If HCERES issues unfavourable opinions following their visit, it can withdraw accreditations and budgetary aid.”

For business schools like Clermont School of Business, the pressure is even greater due to multiple national and international accreditors. **Pascale Borel, Professor of Marketing and a member of the Quality Services project team**, notes:

“We find that in every institution, we have roughly the same concerns, but we must recognise that what is really driving the formalisation of evaluations are the requirements of accreditations. One of the particularities of the French education system is the grandes écoles are much more advanced than universities in terms of evaluation. There are sometimes a few universities that are pioneers and a few schools that are lagging behind, but in general, the culture of evaluation is more present in the grandes écoles, particularly in business schools. This is precisely because the grandes écoles have been under greater pressure to provide evidence to accreditors, including public accreditors, such as the Ministry of Higher Education and Research (MESR), which authorises us to award bachelor’s and

master’s degrees. There are other reputable quality assurance and accreditation bodies, such as AACSB, AFMD, AMBA, or EQUIS, which also require teaching evaluations.



“Clermont School of Business has had a teaching evaluation system in place for over 20 years. The school wants to evolve its programs and improve the student experience. Evaluation is one aspect of this, but behind that, evaluation is also there to meet the needs of accreditors. This need is legitimate in some respects. I am not minimising this at all, but I think the accreditors’ requirements sometimes stray a little too far from the objective. The systematic and sometimes exclusive use of quantitative evaluations has limitations and does not always allow for an objective and complete approach to the object that one wishes to study.”

This tension between compliance and meaningful evaluation is a recurring theme: institutions must navigate accreditation demands while striving to maintain educational authenticity and responsiveness.

“External drivers are the attractiveness of the school and its programs in a competitive environment, the evaluation of the institution by HCERES, and the accreditation of degrees by the CTI: Commission for the Title of Engineer,” adds ENTPE’s Bernard Teissier.”

Curriculum reform and pedagogical innovation

French institutions are undergoing a profound pedagogical shift – from knowledge transmission to skills acquisition. Thibault Nélias points to this systemic transformation.

“For the past ten years, we have been experiencing a shift from the transmission of knowledge to the acquisition of skills, which was supported by the State,” he says. “This forces, in a way, institutions to engage in a transformation of teaching that aims to emphasise skills rather than traditional lecture-style teaching. These teaching methods tend to disappear in favour of more practical, more operational teaching.”

This evolution aligns with broader strategic priorities. At EDHEC Business School, the Generations 2050 strategy places innovation at the forefront. **Claudia Carrone, Digital Learning Deputy Manager**, shares:

“One of the key priorities of this strategy is to empower students to drive transformation in society, with student success and outcomes at its core. From my perspective within the Pedagogical Innovation Department, part of the Student Experience Unit, we rely heavily on student surveys and are always looking for ways to improve how we collect and use this feedback.

As a triple accredited business school, we must demonstrate the quality of our teaching and learning, meet the expectations of international rankings –

such as student satisfaction, employment outcomes, and innovative pedagogy – and comply with rigorous national and European educational regulations. Whenever we are audited, my department is often asked how we are delivering on pedagogical innovation.”



Meeting stakeholder expectations

Ultimately, educational programs must meet the expectations of diverse stakeholders – from ministries and industry to students themselves. At Clermont, Pascale Borel describes this balance: “Our ambition is to develop programs aligned with our environment, which meet the expectations of our stakeholders, whether institutions like MESR, businesses, or our students. Our reflection on the continuous improvement of our programs has led us to question how we can meet the needs of all our stakeholders and the changes in our environment.”

Offering a perspective from Belgium’s largest French-speaking university, **Françoise Docq, Director of the Quality Support Service for Academic Programs at UCLouvain**, says: “Our internal quality assurance system is based on a series of interrelated processes at the four levels of implementation of the teaching mission: institutional, faculty, program, and teaching. The system is linked to the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as a quality benchmark. These include consideration of student feedback in managing the quality of educational programs.

“The institution provides resources and services to support quality management, which aim to encourage and support a culture of continuous quality improvement. A high degree of autonomy is granted to faculties, teaching teams, and teachers, based on the principle of subsidiarity and academic freedom. Commitment to the teaching mission is taken into account throughout the career stages of academics, who must report on their efforts to ensure quality.

“Externally, AEQES, the quality agency for higher education funded by the government of the French Community of Belgium, conducts external evaluations of programs and institutions every six years. These evaluations are for educational purposes, not accreditation. The goal is to encourage teaching teams to continuously improve quality. Each evaluation results in an action plan, the implementation of which is also monitored by the agency. The agency uses the ESG as its quality benchmark, including around the use of student feedback.”



INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES

The Practice and Challenges of Student Feedback Systems

Key questions explored:

- To inform and help to deliver your institutional objectives, what opportunities do you give students to provide feedback?
- What do you feel is working especially well from these evaluation practices, and your approach to student feedback?
- What challenges are you experiencing e.g. response rates, Faculty/student engagement, speed/quality of analysis?

Student feedback mechanisms are increasingly integral to academic quality assurance, course development, and institutional improvement strategies across French higher education institutions. However, despite clear consensus on their importance, institutions face persistent challenges in implementation, interpretation, and actioning the insights these tools generate.

A complex ecosystem of surveys

Most institutions deploy a suite of surveys aimed at capturing the student voice across the educational journey – from onboarding to graduation. At EDHEC Business School, Claudia Carrone describes a rigorous approach to inform and help deliver their strategic objectives:

“In terms of how we gather student feedback, we have a strong commitment to the importance of student voice. We use several approaches to capture it, including shadow committees where students are invited to share their experiences, alongside data from our LMS to understand how they are connecting and engaging with technology and digital tools. The student barometer surveys we send out, by programme and by campus, measure, for example, onboarding, digital experience, student life, campus experience, and other variables. We try to cover the full journey – from arrival, until they leave and join the workforce –identifying issues and acting on them. We also have a bespoke course evaluation survey with four core questions, including two open-ended ones that provide insight into course content and learning experience. We currently use both manual and AI-supported analysis of these responses. While manual review remains important, AI tools are helping us process the data more efficiently and identify key themes without having to scan through massive Excel files.”



Others echo this holistic approach, including EFREI Paris. “We conduct two major surveys each academic year: a back-to-school survey, conducted annually in September/October, focusing on the initial experiences of students as they begin the academic year, and an annual survey, held in April, covering campus life and broader student experiences,” details Anne Edvire. “As well as internship surveys, administered when students complete their internships to evaluate their experiences; international mobility surveys, conducted after students return from international programs to gather feedback on their experiences abroad; and course evaluations, distributed at the conclusion of each course, with mandatory participation tied to access to grades. Year after year, we receive increasingly positive feedback, reflecting the progress made. However, we remain committed to analysing thoroughly the feedback and use it as the basis for actions aimed at continuous improvement.”



At UCLouvain, Françoise Docq acknowledges their own robust feedback infrastructure, but highlights the persistent concern over declining participation:

“Each student has the opportunity to respond to course evaluation surveys, which are organised twice a year at the end of each semester. In addition, students who are about to complete a program are invited to express their opinion through a program evaluation survey. Student representatives (for each program) also meet with the academic coordinators of their program once a year to verbally discuss any issues requiring adjustment. A large number of surveys are organised; students who wish to do so have the opportunity to express themselves on numerous occasions throughout their program, anonymously. Faculty members are eager to receive the survey reports; they are frustrated when participation rates are low. Student feedback is taken into account during academic career stages and promotion. However, the response rates are disappointing and undermine the validity of the feedback collected.

“Yet, significant efforts are devoted to raising student awareness and encouraging participation: explanatory videos, twice-yearly communication campaigns (email, social media, posters, etc),

and prizes to be won by random draws among respondents. These response rates are decreasing year after year, so the established validity thresholds are rarely met. Therefore, we vacillate between not releasing the results reports or releasing them anyway but drawing attention to the fact that the data cannot be considered representative. Neither approach is satisfactory. Also, GDPR requires precautions to be taken when releasing survey results. In particular, a student should not be identifiable from the comments they write. This risk is particularly present when there are a small number of responses. The need to protect the anonymity of respondents calls into question the fact of conducting surveys for small classes, but also for medium-sized classes because, due to small response rate, it is very possible that there would be less than 10 responses say 50 people are questioned. How can data be collected validly and used while preserving anonymity under these conditions?”

Participation, representation, and response rates

Across institutions, response rate remains an ongoing challenge. While some have made participation mandatory to ensure high coverage, this raises concerns over the sincerity and quality of feedback.

“Certain challenges warrant attention. One is the mandatory nature of the evaluations, which can lead some students to provide perfunctory or insincere responses, potentially introducing bias,” Anne Edvire warns.

In detailing the approach at Clermont School of Business, Pascale Borel also guards against coercive participation models: “Across the school, we have developed an assessment system that meets our goals and the way we want to work. The idea is to have an end-of-module assessment, using a standardised questionnaire that we have pre-established, supported by a tool that allows professors to add questions they want to integrate in order to have a more detailed approach to the specifics of their teaching. We first ask program managers to select the modules to be assessed over the semester, based on predefined criteria. This choice was made to avoid overwhelming students with too many questionnaires. Trying to assess everything risks demotivating students, who end up filling out questionnaires out of obligation.

“Student participation is an important issue. We are therefore obliged to have systems and tools that are as efficient as possible. We cannot afford to interview

a student for no reason. However, today, the response rate is a challenge for all institutions. I know that some organisations have implemented a policy that if there is no answer, there is no grade. I have always refused this type of system: a person under duress does not respond sincerely and objectively. I find it dangerous to force students to respond to evaluations because it is people, and more specifically professors, who are being evaluated. The evaluation system must be developed with respect for people. More than coercion, the challenge is to involve and engage students and teaching teams in the process by relying on an evaluation system that is satisfactory for everyone. There is also often confusion between the evaluation of teaching and the evaluation of a program or a student experience. “A program cannot be evaluated simply through module evaluations. There are choices in the construction of programs: course sequences, internship periods, rhythms, timetable choices, etc not related to teaching.”

Thibault Nélias challenges the overemphasis on response rates themselves, advocating for cultural change – embedding student feedback into everyday academic practice and creating a feedback loop that goes beyond data collection.

“Our goal at Le Mans Université is to include the student voice in the decision-making process. In other words, the results of a student feedback mechanism should feed into certain indicators, including measuring the perceived effect of the



training. It is really about making sure that the programs are designed to fulfil their mission and we can see that partly through the various student surveys that are done. At my former institution, Nantes Université, the whole approach we had to developing, considering, and adopting the results of the student voice was at one point to ensure that teaching teams agreed to survey their students.

“However, just because you only got a 30% response rate in the first year does not mean you should not consider it. You know very well that the first students who complain are the ones who will give you the 30% response rate, and you will have elements to correct and elements to highlight. And so, you see, it is all this acceptability work. For me, the sacred return rate is one of the biggest talking points. What I always say very provocatively when I am asked to talk about return rates and the return rate that we observe, is that I always answer: ‘Between 0 and 100%’. I always give the same answer because, in fact, these return rates do not mean anything. It is sold as an argument, almost as a marketing tool. To say, we are going to increase return rates. We see it, and we exchange on this very regularly. When we say that a technical solution will increase return rates. Yes, potentially, but it only does half the job if we do not have that trigger, that kick-off given by the teacher who will encourage



and explain what they expect from the students’ responses.

“Yes, we can go from 0% to 5%, or from 10% to 20%, but is that really the important element? 100% is unrealistic, unless it is subject to a contract, but then we can question the quality of the response. We always end up with people who want to be the ones who increase the average rate from 20 to 30%, from 30 to 40%, who increased it to more than 50%. But in reality, these are not the people who advance feedback and reflection. Student feedback is a legal obligation. In French state-accredited higher education institutions, it is part of our regulations. When you get into truly systemic mechanisms, you have a first level with student feedback, then you have pedagogical observations, then peer counselling, and you enter into more or less structured feedback loops like that, but we are very far from that.”

System design and communication

The design of feedback tools and the way results are communicated to stakeholders is equally critical. Laurence Besançon of Aix-Marseille Université notes that the success of their program evaluations depends largely on clear governance and institutional buy-in.

“We have created our own comprehensive program evaluation system,” she says. “For the past three years, this evaluation has been systematic and mandatory throughout the University. Previously, these surveys were only conducted upon request. Indeed, some programs are part of a quality approach and are required to have these evaluations, otherwise their certification cannot be renewed. This is far from the case for all, but they comply with this exercise and use the results as part of what are called ‘improvement councils’. These include contributions from program directors, university governance, and students, who are asked, for example, ‘Do you think the program is sufficiently professional? By what means? Do you think the teaching is effective?’ These comprehensive surveys are sent out at



the end of the academic year. In addition to the mandatory program evaluation survey, we have course questionnaires that can be added later in the year. In this case, we ask students about the quality of teaching: ‘Were the materials interesting and accurate? Did they have sufficient prior knowledge?’ These surveys are conducted on demand; attitudes are evolving, and more and more instructors want their courses evaluated. In some programs, they are offered automatically because they are part of the documents requested as part of audits (quality processes). These course-based surveys are sent out twice a year. We have a well-oiled system with a functioning tool that allows us to obtain feedback and process the related data.

“What works particularly well is that our university governance is a driving force. In fact, when the system works well, we have a high response rate, and we believe this is linked to the fact that courses are required to provide data.”

For others, complementarity between digital survey tools and face-to-face feedback mechanisms is of importance, with many institutions noting the value of qualitative dialogue in contextualising quantitative feedback.

ENTPE’s Bernard Teissier shares: “Students can give their opinion via course questionnaires, during

teaching unit councils where the evaluation summary is discussed, during the three bodies in which they are represented, but also during the annual training evaluation. The complementarity between surveys via our survey management tool and physical exchange times during teaching unit councils, once the analysis report has been established, works well even if this practice is not yet systematic. ENTPE courses may begin or even end without data on the course, teachers, or enrolled students being properly consolidated into the student information system, and we want to manage this to provide accurate and timely data to our survey management tool.”

The interplay between program and course evaluation

Several respondents caution against conflating course-level evaluations with broader assessments of academic programs.

As Pascale Borel explains: “At one point in my career, I was in charge of internal surveys at the school. We conducted surveys for both teaching and program evaluation. These surveys served two different purposes and were highly complementary. Reducing the evaluation of a program and the student experience to the evaluation of modules is, in my opinion, a mistake. However, the priority for institutions is often to implement teaching evaluation, because there are very high expectations from our stakeholders, and this in a context of over-solicitation of our students while fewer and fewer students, like the rest of the population, agree to respond to surveys. The system we have put in place works well and perfectly meets the requirements of accrediting bodies. And I think we are fully fulfilling this mission. On the other hand, I do not think we are fully meeting the expectations of teachers, who would like to be able to rely on systems that are as qualitative as they are quantitative.”

This view is echoed by Lounis Journé at Nantes Université, who emphasises the difference in scope between program-level and course-level data:

“Our teaching evaluation was developed and

implemented by colleagues, and we were able to do this mainly thanks to the survey management system we have here. It is not systematic across the institution, but rather at the request of the faculties, so some courses start, others stop, and still others no longer need it. However, with all the Ministry of Education's requirements for evaluation, we have to manage this. Generally, we help with our department when asked, but there are many professors who do it themselves, they evaluate their teaching, and sometimes it is not very formal. In other cases, systems are in place and someone works within the faculty to carry out these evaluations.

“But after a while, it takes too long, and that is when we are there to help them. I try to show them the benefits of using our teaching evaluation because it is formalised, it allows them to meet their regulatory obligations and have evaluations that work well, and it saves them a lot of time. We also conduct an annual survey of all students, across all faculties, which sometimes overlaps with teaching evaluation, but also asks questions about university life. And a program survey with very detailed topics on pedagogy and course evaluation. There is an evaluation aspect to both teaching and the broader student experience, and showing that we conduct evaluations is a good point for fulfilling an indicator required by HCERES.”

Towards meaningful student engagement

Underlying all these strategies is the shared understanding that student engagement must be meaningful, not mechanical. Whether through inclusive governance structures or by empowering faculty to take ownership of their feedback tools, institutions are moving towards models that prioritise trust, transparency, and collaboration.

While survey tools remain foundational, institutions recognise that the future of student feedback lies not just in data collection but in cultivating a culture of mutual respect and shared responsibility. As Bernard Teissier notes: “We want to increase the response rate by encouraging each feedback to be ‘constructive’ and by changing the view of some teachers on the value of surveys to systematise dialogue in teaching unit councils, and manage the tension between the repetitive nature of questionnaires for students, adaptation to the specific evaluation needs for certain courses, and the automated deployment of the system.”

Looking forward, Anne Edvire adds: “Another area for improvement lies in communication regarding the actions taken because of these surveys. While these outcomes are shared during the School Council meetings, attendance is limited to a small group of students – typically around 20-30 – who serve as representatives of their respective classes or groups. Although their perspectives are valuable, the reach of these discussions remains limited. As such, my primary objective for the year ahead is to enhance communication efforts, ensuring that students are more comprehensively informed about the initiatives and improvements undertaken based on their feedback.”



EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP

Navigating the Complex Landscape Around Engagement

Key questions explored:

- How do you seek to engage Faculty/students in supporting course evaluations and other formal evaluations of teaching effectiveness and student experience?
- How easy do you find it to get students to complete such surveys, and how do you ensure you get constructive/useful feedback?
- How does the system contribute to a dialogue, and effective partnership, between Faculty and students?

Student course evaluations have become a cornerstone of institutional quality assurance in higher education. Yet their purpose, implementation, and impact remain points of debate and divergence across a wide range of French institutions.

Institutional roles, responsibilities, and culture

Student evaluations operate within broader institutional cultures that shape their effectiveness – and when embedded and used consistency the evaluation of teaching and learning is not only a route administrative function but a meaningful lever of pedagogical innovation.

“During the last class of the module, we set aside time for students to complete their course teaching evaluations (currently anonymously), which requires full commitment from professors,” states Pascale Borel from Clermont School of Business. “But even then, some students claim to have completed the evaluation, only to find out later that they have not. This demonstrates how complicated it is today to convince students of the value of these systems. The first thing to do is to ask professors to be active in this evaluation and to explain to students why it is important and what it is used for. Now, it is also essential that this be communicated at the institutional level. Programs must also convey the message to class council representatives and the ‘super-representatives’ who are part of the Student Advisory Council. Students must be informed from the beginning of the semester about how the system works, how it will be implemented, and why it is important.”

For Aix-Marseille Université, Laurence Besançon outlines their general approach to engagement, noting operational challenges and the tension between large-scale implementation and meaningful interpretation:

“We communicate at the beginning of the academic year, explaining to everyone – students, professors, department heads – that there will be evaluations and their purpose. We have a webpage with all the results, where everything is accessible and transparent for everyone, and we present them as often as possible, for example when we are invited to internal training meetings, so that teachers can see the added value of this type of study. For students, once the year is over, we send them a summary of their training indicators. We also conduct several other surveys that directly affect students and about which we communicate widely: mobility, housing, health, living conditions, and professional integration (concerning only graduates).

“Generally speaking, we encounter difficulties with response rates for training and teaching evaluations. Considering that a student takes about 15 courses per semester, it is difficult to evaluate everything all the time; it loses its meaning, and students end up answering anything to get the questions over with. We have 70,000 students and over 300 courses. To improve efficiency, we are working on automating evaluations (for example, a quarter of the courses every year, so that after four years, the length of an institution’s contract, everything has been evaluated). Teachers are not always enthusiastic about being evaluated at any level. They may fear that these evaluations will have an impact on their careers, but that is not the case. On the other hand, many of them understand that it is part of a ‘necessary evil’, as some call it, and that they need to evolve in order to improve. In my experience, it is the same everywhere else in France.”

Engaging stakeholders through co-design and communication

Effective evaluations are not just about systems – they are about relationships. Thibault Nélias from Le Mans Université highlights the importance of co-construction and purpose-driven design for effectively engaging student and staff.

“Engagement comes from participation and a shared vision, rather than a top-down approach,” he says. “Why do you want to do an evaluation, for what purpose, what kind of information or signals are you looking to obtain? From there, we develop your questionnaire, and from your questionnaire, we develop how we process the data in reports and how we share, cross-reference, and analyse the information. For me, this is key to how we involve teaching teams, and we always work on collective projects where each step is an approach. At Nantes Université, we had almost two years of action research, to develop a method of supporting the design and implementation of evaluation processes from start to finish. I worked a lot with colleagues, especially educational advisors, and we always had a head of the teaching team as a co-facilitator. We explained to the teachers that they had to involve their students, make them actors, and we can find ways to condition certain information so that they react. We can set up campaigns where we draw three students at the end of the year and they win an iPad. That is not complicated. So, to the question, is it easy to encourage students? Yes. Should we do it? Yes. How do we ensure that we get constructive and useful feedback? So, it is the teachers who, once again, explicitly tell their students they must respond, they must be involved, and when a certain question is asked, this is the type of information they expect. So, ‘don’t tell me my style is bad, tell me what I can improve’.”



Bernard Tessier agrees: “We are seeking to increase opportunities and venues for exchange to fully involve teachers and students in the co-construction of ENTPE training and the continuous improvement system. Response rates still need to be improved. The most effective method is for the teacher to invite students to respond during the last session of the course to be evaluated, but not all teachers are convinced to devote the necessary time. Teaching unit councils are designed as the main forum for dialogue on course content and teaching methods. Less formally, teachers generally remain accessible to students. The training management and the heads of the engineering and bachelor’s programs play an important role in facilitating and moderating the dialogue.”

At Nantes Université, Lounis Journée details a comprehensive approach to communications, through multiple channels, and learnings:

“We have a communications campaign for our teaching evaluation, which includes emails to all students, posters on social media, and promotion on the student intranet. We aim to engage everyone as much as possible, so we start with faculty directors and program leaders before the launch. This works well in some departments because they are very responsive, and I liaise with quality managers who work to get good response rates and measure them for each program. In others, we do not even get a 10% response rate, which I think is because professors are not very involved. Another aspect that works is that I train administrators within departments to plan and manage the evaluations, and these are the people who take the initiative and create a real discussion with the teaching staff. It is essential to involve them. We have to try to convince them that it is beneficial for them, that it improves teaching and gives students a voice. The response rate to our annual survey, which includes questions about health services, catering, and student living conditions, could be better. Last year, we were almost at 20%, and this year, we are at 10%. Even though we are working hard to communicate with the entire community, it is not taking off as much as we would like.”

Creating feedback loops and demonstrating impact

At the heart of successful teaching evaluation systems lies the ability to transform student feedback into actionable insights, and one way to counter student disengagement is to clearly show the consequences of their feedback.

For EDHEC, Claudia Carrone captures this well: “We always aim to integrate student voice into decision-making – turning what they are saying into what we are doing. When a pain point emerges through course evaluations, for example, we can meet with the professor involved to collaboratively explore their teaching strategy, course delivery, and possible improvements. We are then able to see the results of what we have put in place. This is a positive process, where we move towards improvement, and in general, we find that faculty are open to feedback and willing to evolve their way of teaching. With students, we try to communicate clearly, especially before doing the evaluations, explaining that their responses are going to be useful for future cohorts, for the people coming after them. During focus groups, we directly communicate to the students, ‘Hey, this is what we got from you, this is what we are going to do next. Your contribution was really useful’. It is important to have multiple feedback channels, so our approach is to collect insights not only from professors and students, but also from programme assistants. One reason our course evaluation only has three or four questions is that focusing on a smaller number of key items helps us get more responses and better insights. We have response rate targets across programs, but it is still a challenge to consistently obtain meaningful feedback from students.”

Anne Edvire also points to successes as developments are made at EFREI Paris. “The annual survey and back-to-school survey serve as the key tools for sharing outcomes with students, allowing us to review the previous

year by highlighting successes, addressing shortcomings, and presenting plans for the year ahead,” she says. “Student representative meetings further contribute to engagement, providing a platform to gather feedback and convey that it will be considered for subsequent semesters or academic years. From a staff perspective, the integration of feedback has been a transformative experience. I am quite proud to note that a recent HR staff survey revealed that student satisfaction has emerged as the top priority for staff, signalling a significant cultural shift. This evolution reflects both remarkable progress and a notable achievement.”

Rethinking evaluation logics

As Pascale Borel reflects on next steps at Clermont, student feedback mechanisms can be seen as instruments of control than tools for dialogue:

“Students must be informed at the beginning of the semester about how the system works, how it will be implemented, and its importance. This requires us to be clear about what we do with the evaluations, their impacts. This is what I am trying to examine at the moment. What we have implemented is clearly a control evaluation. It can also be seen not as an evaluation of the student’s experience, but rather as an evaluation of their satisfaction. It is more about that, and therefore, given that we focus on this outcome, we are not in a dialogue. We still have students who say to themselves, ‘It doesn’t bring me anything, so I won’t do it’. It is true that, objectively, they are right, because it is not them who benefit from it, it is the institution and the students who will take the course the following year.

“So, I would not call it a dialogue. But do teachers rely on this dialogue? Yes, I think they do. Even if the reports do not fully meet teachers’ expectations, they are still interested in the evaluations. This is because student comments, whether positive or negative, challenge them and force them to reflect on their practice. In this sense, they are always useful. Furthermore, the vast majority of teachers take advantage of this evaluation period to continue a dialogue with students. I do not know a single teacher who is not keen to improve their practice.”

‘Over-surveying’ and institutional fatigue

The case of UCLouvain, as described by Françoise Docq, offers a cautionary note on how the overuse of surveys can dilute their effectiveness, underlining the need for strategic planning and co-ordination in deploying evaluations:

“The institutional policy regarding surveys places responsibility for survey planning (i.e. deciding which surveys should be conducted when) on Deans. In practice, Deans ask faculty members if they would like to conduct a survey for one of their courses, but they also decide to schedule surveys themselves even if the instructor does not request it, for example, for new courses or for academics who are being promoted. Thus, some surveys are conducted even though the instructor has not requested them, and some instructors request the same surveys every year, even though they have no intention of changing their teaching methods, for example, because surveys from previous years show that they are satisfactory.

“There is a kind of survey frenzy: ‘the more surveys, the better’; the logic of responding to a need for information seems to have been lost.”

UTILISING THE DATA

‘Closing the Feedback Loop’: Acting on Student Input

Key questions explored:

- How do you interpret and analyse both quantitative and qualitative feedback derived from course evaluations and other formal evaluations of teaching effectiveness and student experience?
- What is your approach for acting on the feedback, and closing the loop?
- How do you know it is clear that students’ feedback has been listened to?

French higher education institutions have wholly emphasised the increasing value of student feedback in driving pedagogical improvement and enhancing the overall learning experience. However, despite the availability of evaluation tools, analytics platforms, and the requirements of accreditation frameworks, many universities and other schools continue to struggle with one crucial element: closing the feedback loop.

Gaps between data collection and action

Across institutions, the collection of student feedback – often both quantitative and qualitative – is widespread. Yet, as Laurence Besançon at Aix-Marseille Université highlights, resource limitations can hinder deeper engagement with the data.

“We have a lot of evaluation reports, but we do not have time to process them all,” she says. “For quantitative data, we do a very simple descriptive statistical analysis and analyse changes over four years. However, without an AI tool, we do not do qualitative analysis. Our questionnaires systematically include open-ended questions, but we do not process them at all, so for now, we let the recipients read their full documents. We have a department at the university called the Center for Educational Innovation. It offers teachers help in reading this report, gives them techniques for improvement, and so on. This service is ultimately little used, and we do little work with them. It is obviously an area that needs to be developed. With students, there is really work to be done to close the loop, in the sense that it also stops when the evaluation reports are sent. From our perspective, the challenge is to improve student success. We are currently trying to incorporate into our course evaluation questionnaire a block of questions on student success regarding the difficulties encountered on a personal level in their training, and we hope this will be useful.”

Similarly, Françoise Docq of UCLouvain points to the blind spot in understanding the impact of evaluations: “We have no way of knowing, at institutional level, if student feedback is taken into account. We do not know if instructors make changes to their teaching based on student feedback. Informal feedback seems to indicate this is not always the case. Instructors readily come up with arguments to explain why they cannot or will not consider suggestions for change: constraints (timetable, premises, resources, etc), pedagogical reasons for organising the course in a certain way, etc. But we also hear from many instructors who are prompted by student feedback to reflect on their teaching. Some go on to adjust their courses accordingly, while others choose not to but take the time to better explain to students the pedagogical reasoning behind the course structure.”

The role of institutional support and automation

Institutions that have invested in centralised processing and support mechanisms are taking incremental steps toward actionable feedback. Le Mans Université’s Thibault Nélias describes his efforts to automate data processing, and at his previous institution Nantes Université, directly engaging instructors through reflective questions and follow-up processes.

“Everything I can automate in terms of processing and analysis, I will then pass on to the teachers so all they have to do is read, decide, and act,” he comments. “Regarding feedback tracking and closing the loop, this is work I started at Nantes before moving to Le Mans. The idea was to increasingly push teaching teams to report on what they were doing with the results. We started with a survey of teachers, asking them the question: ‘What did you do with the results? What positive points emerged? What are the main points for improvement? What did you do with them? How did you address them? What actions did you implement?’ Then we reflected. We also asked them what they would like to see evolve in the system. By closing the loop, I think we have achieved this overall.

“On a more micro scale, we were not quite there yet. However, we always organised a final regulation session, at the end of which we reviewed with them what had gone well. Would you like us to review the results together? This part was handled more by my teaching colleagues than by me, but there was always this more collective aspect. So, how do you know that the students’ comments were taken into account? Well, it is all of that. And knowing that this last loop is of interest because, behind it, you also use it in a way as a communication argument for your next campaign. I move a slider, I adjust something, and the following year, I say: ‘Your colleagues (20%) told us this, so we did that’. The following year, I might get 30%, even 40%.”

Emerging use of technology and AI

One area of promise lies in the use of technology to analyse quantitative and qualitative feedback. Anne Edvire from EFREI Paris is exploring generative AI to process open-ended survey responses, citing the potential for insights:

“We utilise a comprehensive dashboard for course evaluations, which provides access to a range of summary reports shared with various stakeholders. Additionally, we use a PowerBI-based solution for our annual survey, enabling the communication of detailed results for the School Council. These results are subsequently shared with students to maintain transparency and engagement. One ongoing challenge is the analysis of anonymous open-ended comments, as this task currently falls under my responsibility. To address this, we are exploring the use of generative AI, ensuring that data protection remains a top priority.”

At the same time, EDHEC Business School’s Claudia Carrone warns of the complexity that comes with growing data flows, and the changing nature of student feedback:

“One of the main challenges we face from a pedagogical perspective is that the students who respond are often those who are dissatisfied. It is actually really hard to separate actionable feedback from information that is just complaining. We produce reports on student voice that that are shared with all relevant teams. The Student Experience Unit regularly reviews these reports, with particular attention to data broken down by programme and by campus, and this is really important for us. We all want the student experience to be the best it can possibly be.

“A major challenge we face now is the disruption caused by AI – it is impacting everything we do. That is why data is so important. We need simple, clear insights into how students are behaving so we can better support their learning experience.”

Accreditation and quality assurance: Structuring the loop

For some institutions, external accreditation has catalysed the development of feedback structures. Pascale Borel from Clermont School of Business notes that the AACSB framework requires more than metrics, whilst also acknowledging the limits of current systems.

“We have the reports that our evaluation tool allows us to generate, which are then shared with teachers and the academic administration, linked to program management or quality,” she reveals. “I do not know if it is the reports we distribute that create the dialogue or what happens in the classroom or in teaching meetings. In any case, these results are always useful when they are interpreted and used properly. The first international accreditation we obtained at the school was AACSB. What I have always liked about this accreditation is it does not just make us fill out standardised forms; it asks us how we do what we do, how far we go, and how we improve things. It is the famous feedback loop. So it is something I keep in mind constantly, because otherwise, the evaluations would be useless.” For Clermont the goal is not just to analyse data but to foster sustained, meaningful dialogue among students, faculty, and administration. “The challenge today is to gather and cross-reference all the more qualitative evaluations and feedback provided by students, professors, and teaching staff,” Pascale observes. “There are many places and opportunities for dialogue between these stakeholders that escape any analysis. Not limiting ourselves to quantitative evaluations and managing to create an ongoing dialogue between these stakeholders would allow us to close the loop, because I am not sure that this is fully the case today.”

Local leadership, and transparent responsiveness

In some cases, the responsibility for acting on feedback is delegated to local academic leaders. Bernard Teissier describes ENTPE’s model.

“Detailed analysis and consideration at the course level remain primarily the responsibility of teaching unit managers,” he explains. “At the higher level, it is mainly a matter of detecting alerts via the overall satisfaction rate. We want to continue to promote the new role of teaching unit managers. For the continuous improvement of training, centralised management is in place with the student dialogue bodies, the professional development councils (employers), and the annual process review by the training managers committee. We act on feedback via written reports from the teaching unit councils or, when these are not taken into account, via feedback from student representatives.”

Nantes Université’s Lounis Journée also reflects on the challenge of monitoring outcomes: “When it comes to a large survey, or a large panel of respondents and numerous comments, I conduct the analysis and identify emerging themes. Typically, the instructor receives the report and examines the figures and key trends. The graphs give them a general visual idea of overall satisfaction on different themes, and then they scan the comments to see if there is anything very important or serious that requires changes. I think they do this because there is no other way. There are also other treatments, such as aggregating data from all courses in a department to generate broader statistics. This helps the department head or academic coordinator compare and make decisions at a macro level. After the evaluations, I believe the loop should be closed, meaning that instructors should give formal feedback to students. However, I do not know who does what with an evaluation. Perhaps some teachers do this themselves, taking the time to discuss and debate the results, but I do not know if student representatives participate in this dialogue or not.”

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Embedding Student Voice in Institutional Enhancement

Key questions explored:

- What examples can you point to where student feedback from course evaluations, and other formal evaluations of teaching effectiveness and student experience, has enhanced your institution’s practice?
- How does this support external requirements around national regulatory standards, accreditations etc, and drive a culture of continuous improvement?
- With data-led enhancement in mind, what other support do you need to increase the speed of the ‘insight to action’ cycle?

Across the French higher education sector, institutions acknowledge the strategic importance of student feedback – not simply as a metric for satisfaction, but as a driver of teaching enhancement and institutional development. However, the journey from listening to students to implementing meaningful change is complex, non-linear, and often systemic in nature.

Cultivating a culture of listening, a driver for change

Anne Edvire at EFREI Paris illustrates how institutional culture can evolve through strategic leadership and intentional action, reporting:

“Our leadership team initiated the strategic decision to embed a culture of student satisfaction within the institution. As a result, students have gained a clearer understanding of how their feedback is considered and acted upon – a key indicator that we monitor closely. Four or five years ago, the indicator measuring students’ perceptions of how effectively

the school listens to their needs was relatively low, standing at approximately 65%. However, we are observing consistent improvement, with projections indicating a rise to around 75% this year. This upward trend reflects our commitment to continuous improvement and the importance of maintaining open dialogue with students.”

EDHEC Business School’s Claudia Carrone stresses the strategic role of data in enhancing student engagement highlighting the dual function of feedback: improving the learning journey while reinforcing institutional accountability to learners. “Data is really important, and it can help us engage students,” she says. “You come to a higher education institution because you want to learn, and then apply your learning. Using data to make the student experience a better one is critical. Through our surveys, we found, for example, that the onboarding process regarding the digital tools was somewhat difficult for some students because they did not feel fully guided through the process. When we saw that, we implemented workshops before their arrival. We are a very action-oriented business school, so when we identify an issue, we try to act on it. Going back to the pedagogical side, we are especially focused on active and experiential learning, and on delivering a continuously improving student experience.”

Laurence Besançon from Aix-Marseille Université points to another key role of student feedback: supporting institutional decision-making.

“We are never entirely sure of the impact of our surveys on university policy development. What we do see is that feedback has helped justify investments in student services that had already been considered and to commit to these developments. Student feedback meets the requirements of regulatory standards and accreditation, and fosters a culture of improvement. Every topic that could be debated is always the subject of feedback. Whether it is course evaluation, career placement, registrations, applications, etc, thanks to our dashboards called business intelligence systems, all of this is transparent and accessible only to teachers, of course. Students do not have access to it.”

A tool for iterative improvement

For Bernard Teissier, student feedback is integral to the iterative refinement of curriculum.

“ENTPE launched a cycle of teaching units on ecological transition with a strong interdisciplinary dimension requiring significant teacher coordination and specific teaching methods,” he reveals. “The ‘ACE’ was used to make the necessary adjustments to this cycle in subsequent iterations, particularly regarding the format and repetitions with other disciplinary courses. The feedback is also used to evolve the knowledge and skills assessment methods, which are adjusted at the beginning of each year. We do not yet have any concrete examples of student success. The CTI requirement is a systematic evaluation of all courses with a minimum response rate, which we have not yet met. However, during the upcoming CTI evaluation, we will highlight the significant progress made compared to the previous assessment. The challenge is to combine this quantified requirement with a practice of continuous improvement that makes sense for both faculty and students. We are not there yet. Our institution recognises that the cycle of continuous improvement is necessarily quite long in our context (at least one year to complete).”

Some institutions demonstrate a more agile approach to feedback. At Nantes Université, Lounis Journé, shares how evaluations are rapidly deployed to capture actionable insights:

“Based on teaching evaluations, we can modify courses. For example, in response to ‘too much practical work, not enough theory’, or ‘exams aren’t given at the best time; they should be spaced out further due to students’ schedules’. Things like this come up again, so we can say there is continuous improvement. Similarly, the large survey of all students at our university yields similar developments. Again, this is not systematic, but in some faculties, changes have been made in response to feedback, and the same is true for the student experience. When someone comes up with the idea, I have enough flexibility in my schedule to set up a new teaching evaluation very quickly, in less than two weeks. In fact, sometimes even in less than a week. It depends on the course being evaluated. If there are 900 students, it requires a little more work, but generally, it is quite quick.”



Feedback as part of a holistic teaching system

Thibault Nélías at Le Mans Université cautions against oversimplifying the cause-effect relationship between student feedback and teaching effectiveness. Rather than treating feedback as an isolated input, Thibault advocates for a more interconnected approach.

“I am not sure today that there is a direct observation of the cause-effect link between how student feedback has contributed to improving teaching effectiveness,” he says. “I think the approach is systemic, that is, at a certain point, a training that moves away from its dogma of knowledge and begins to care about what students think, increases the chances of being more effective in teaching and improving the student experience and success. However, I think it is a little more global than that. It goes beyond the student feedback indicator. It is a complete vision, between attendance, exam success, learning paths, all of that. It must be seen as part of a holistic model, a 360° approach, but I do not think we can consider student feedback as an objective in itself. All the support engineering we have put in place aims to free up time so that those who need to think and act can do so. In fact, all we ask is that you explain to your students why you need their feedback. Then we will give you the results to analyse. Cross-diagnosis based on the different vectors and factors you have chosen. And if you do not feel comfortable and need an outside perspective, we will offer it. So, I think the best lever to accelerate the speed of the idea-to-action cycle is support, support, support, and making sure the teacher focuses only on reading and acting.”



Clermont School of Business’ Pascale Borel adds an important nuance – teaching improvement does not rely solely on evaluations: “Can I testify, at my level, that in our school, assessments – regardless of the format – contribute to improving teaching effectiveness? The answer is yes. The monitoring assessments were designed based on the requirements of accrediting bodies. But we already had this culture of continuous improvement. It is not something new. I am in a school that encourages pedagogical innovation. We are constantly developing new programs. We are not a stagnant organisation. So, yes, continuous improvement is part of our way of operating. We are fortunate to be in an organisation that encourages innovation, and then we control the process through our teaching evaluation system. But it is not the one that brings out the ideas, not in the way we do it today. This does not mean that ideas do not come from dialogue with students – quite the opposite, but in forms other than through our teaching evaluation system.”

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this report, Driving standards, supporting outcomes: How can we enhance teaching effectiveness and optimise the student experience?, French higher education institutions have shared valuable practical insights (and lessons learned) on their approaches to capturing, and responding to, student feedback. They outline current practices, identify shared barriers, and highlight innovative solutions.

Across France’s diverse HE landscape, institutions are embracing evaluation, quality assurance, and student feedback as tools for transformation. While driven in part by regulatory frameworks and accreditation bodies, including HCERES, these efforts are also fuelled by a deeper commitment to student success and pedagogical excellence. Interviewees express a shared understanding: that quality teaching is not a static benchmark but an ongoing process – one rooted in listening, measuring, and evolving.

What consistently emerges from the grandes écoles, universities, business schools, and other technical and specialist institutes in France which have contributed to this report, is that while student evaluations are widely implemented, their effectiveness varies greatly depending on institutional strategy, communication, and culture. Simply collecting data is not enough. To foster genuine improvement, evaluations must be part of a participatory process where faculty, students, and administrative staff share responsibility and understand the intended outcome. Institutions should invest in clarity, context, co-design, and communication – the cornerstones of a system that not only listens to the student voice, but acts on it.

Despite the diversity of contexts and practices described, a common theme emerges: while student feedback mechanisms are widely implemented, systematic practices for interpretation, action, and communication remain inconsistent. Institutional culture, staff capacity, and the availability of technological tools all shape the effectiveness of feedback loops. As higher education continues to evolve, institutions must move beyond simple data collection, and turn information into improvement.

5 Key Take-aways

1. Student feedback is transitioning from a compliance tool to a strategic asset for institutional improvement.

French higher education institutions are moving beyond viewing evaluations as regulatory checkboxes and are increasingly embedding student feedback into curriculum design, teaching practice, and broader institutional strategy. However, the extent to which this shift is systematised and effectively resourced varies significantly between institutions, with many still grappling with implementation challenges.

2. Response rate fixation can undermine the purpose of evaluation systems.

While institutions have made progress in deploying comprehensive survey tools, overemphasis on response rates risks eclipsing the goal of actionable feedback. Some leaders argue that even feedback from smaller cohorts can yield meaningful insights, especially if engagement is embedded in teaching culture. Moving away from numeric targets towards genuine dialogue is seen as a more sustainable approach.



3. Closing the feedback loop remains a critical weakness in many systems.

Despite broad efforts to gather student feedback, most institutions struggle to demonstrate how student input translates into institutional change. The absence of consistent follow-through and communication back to students contributes to disengagement. Strengthening this loop – through transparent reporting, faculty development, and visible change – is essential to reinforcing trust and participation.

4 Institutional culture and leadership significantly shape the success of feedback systems.

Where student feedback is most impactful, it is supported by strategic leadership, clear governance structures, and co-designed practices. Engagement from faculty, integration with institutional planning, and the presence of enabling technologies (e.g. dashboards, AI tools) all play a role in accelerating the cycle from insight to action.

5. A more holistic, dialogic, and adaptive model of evaluation is emerging.

Institutions in France (and beyond) are recognising that teaching effectiveness and student experience cannot be improved through surveys alone. Complementary mechanisms such as focus groups, staff-student councils and committees, and feedback-driven curriculum review are being used to foster a culture of continuous improvement. Future progress will depend on balancing quantitative data with rich qualitative insights and aligning feedback systems with institutional missions and student expectations.

A market-leading solution

To support their mission around teaching effectiveness and optimising the student experience, French higher education institutions are engaging specialist feedback software solutions to capture those all-important data-driven insights.

Explorance Blue, a fully integrated platform that helps institutions automate the collection, analysis, and distribution of insights from their feedback initiatives of today and tomorrow, is being widely adopted in France. Explorance MLY, which uses purpose-built, industry-leading AI technology to empower organisations and their leaders with a deeper understanding of student or employee needs and expectations, can support French universities' needs around analysing qualitative student feedback. Both Blue and MLY seamlessly integrate with institutions' existing learning management systems.

Aligning teaching, student experience, and institutional outcomes under a unified strategic framework, underpinned by smart technologies, is a powerful and forward-thinking approach.

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Explorance partners with leading institutions, including universities, business schools and other specialist and technical institutes in France, to transform how feedback strengthens teaching, learning, and the student experience. Serving over 30% of the world's top-ranked universities, Explorance delivers scalable solutions for course evaluation, qualitative analysis, and institutional improvement. Its platforms – Blue, MLY, Metrics That Matter, and BlueX – empower academic leaders to elevate teaching effectiveness, amplify student voice, and drive evidence-based decision-making. Supported by expert services, Explorance enables long-term transformation grounded in trust and engagement. With 25+ million users and over two billion feedback data points, Explorance helps institutions turn feedback into a foundation for academic quality and continuous improvement.





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