Some disadvantages of questionnaires:

◆ Questionnaires, like many evaluation methods occur after the event, so participants may forget important issues.

◆ Questionnaires are standardised so it is not possible to explain any points in the questions that participants might misinterpret. This could be partially solved by piloting the questions on a small group of students or at least friends and colleagues. It is advisable to do this anyway.

◆ Open-ended questions can generate large amounts of data that can take a long time to process and analyse. One way of limiting this would be to limit the space available to students so their responses are concise or to sample the students and survey only a portion of them.

◆ Respondents may answer superficially especially if the questionnaire takes a long time to complete. The common mistake of asking too many questions should be avoided.

◆ Students may not be willing to answer the questions. They might not wish to reveal the information or they might think that they will not benefit from responding perhaps even be penalised by giving their real opinion. Students should be told why the information is being collected and how the results will be beneficial. They should be asked to reply honestly and told that if their response is negative this is just as useful as a more positive opinion. If possible the questionnaire should be anonymous.

Some advantages of questionnaires:

◆ The responses are gathered in a standardised way, so questionnaires are more objective, certainly more so than interviews.

◆ Generally it is relatively quick to collect information using a questionnaire. However in some situations they can take a long time not only to design but also to apply and analyse (see disadvantages for more information).

◆ Potentially information can be collected from a large portion of a group. This potential is not often realised, as returns from questionnaires are usually low. However return rates can be dramatically improved if the questionnaire is delivered and responded to in class time.

Further Reading

There has been a lot written about questionnaires. Listed below are some sources of information that you may find useful.

Carter, MP and Williamson, D (1996) Questionnaire Design. Staffordshire University Business School, Leek Road, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 2DF, United Kingdom http://www.staffs.ac.uk/buss/bscal/mandev/m_qm/t_que/que.htm


Oppenheim, AN (1992) Questionnaire design, interviewing and attitude measurement. Pinter, London.

Wilson, N and McClean, S (1994) Questionnaire Design: A Practical Introduction. University of Ulster. Copies available from: UCoSDA, Level Six, University House, University of Sheffield, Sheffield S10 2TN.

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