

A web-based real-time feedback system for the evaluation and fine-tuning of training courses

Cameron AR (1), Madin B (1), Hutchison JM (1), Sergeant ESG (1)

(1) AusVet Animal Health Services, Brisbane, Australia

The evaluation by participants of training courses has become a routine tool to provide important information for improving future training and contributing to overall project assessments for employers or funding bodies. Traditionally, these evaluations take the form of a short written questionnaire delivered at the end of the course or module. In our experience, this approach suffers from a number of drawbacks: the paper-based responses are often laborious to compile, analyse and report on; and, due to the time required for these tasks, the results are available too late to be of any value to the participants themselves.

This paper describes a simple web-based evaluation system designed to overcome these problems. The system consists of two parts: an administration module for the use of the course presenters, and the evaluation module for participants using classroom-based computers.

The administration module allows for the creation of different course evaluations, and provides for multiple questionnaires within each course. An extensive bank of questions can be developed allowing for either specific questions pertinent to a particular course, or the re-use of more generic questions relevant to any course. A variety of question types are available including a five point Lickert scale, yes/no responses and free text response to open questions. For Lickert scale responses, the course presenter may optionally request free text explanations for any negative responses. For example, if a participant indicated that they disagree with the statement "The classroom facilities were appropriate", a text box appears inviting them to provide further details.

Access to the evaluation module is controlled by password to ensure the integrity of participant responses. Each participant must first register with the system and choose a password. This process enables the automated creation of a participant contact list, and keeps track of who has completed their evaluation. Once logged in, participants can complete the electronic evaluation forms quickly and simply.

The complete anonymous results of the evaluation are instantly available for projection and discussion, including appropriate summary analysis for the different question types (e.g. bar graphs or percentages). The full text of any responses to open questions is listed.

The system has been used to provide daily or more frequent feedback on all aspects of training courses, allowing presenters to address problems, respond to criticisms or review poorly understood topics. The quality of the responses is generally high, as participants quickly realise, by viewing and discussing the results, that their input is both valued and is having a direct impact on improving or guiding the training.

The system, built with open-source software, is freely available on the internet or can be run on a single host computer or a USB drive within a local area network.