

# EXTENDING AWESOME

Final Report for CS39440 Major Project

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## Ethics Form Application Number

The Ethics Form Application Number for this project is: **1019**.

## Student Number



110059875



Many thanks to my supervisor Hannah Dee for the guidance and support throughout this project; Sandy for providing a server, and support when it went wrong; and the rest of the staff at Aberystwyth University for the countless hours they put into making it an outstanding place to study.

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## **Abstract**

The Aberystwyth Web Evaluation Of Module Experiences (AWESOME) is a tool used to evaluate the performance and quality of teaching of modules at Aberystwyth University. The aims of this project are to ensure the prototype version of AWESOME is security audited, refactored to use better programming practices, fully functioning, and is deployed to capture module evaluation data.

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# List of Acronyms

**ASTRA** Aberystwyth Student Records and Admissions

**AU** Aberystwyth University

**AWESOME** The Aberystwyth Web Evaluation Of Module Experiences

**CI** Continous Integration

**i18n** Internationalisation

**MEQ** Module Evaluation Questionnaires

**MVC** Model-view-controller

**OOP** Object-oriented programming

**SME** Student Module Evaluation

**CSV** Comma-Separated Values

**PDO** PHP Data Objects

**SQL** Structured Query Language

**RDBMS** Relational Database Management System

# 1. Background & Objectives

## 1.1. Introduction

The Aberystwyth Web Evaluation Of Module Experiences (AWESOME) is a web-based tool that enables departments to generate personalised questionnaires that get sent out to students to gather feedback about modules, lecturers, or even events such as BCS Show & Tell<sup>1</sup> and other talks.

## 1.2. Background

Departments at Aberystwyth currently have no formalised process of gathering student feedback unlike many other universities. The University of Sussex requires courses to be evaluated through their Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQ) [2] which contains seven core quantitative questions and up to ten additional questions at the school-level, module-level or a mixture of both. The University of Westminster have Student Module Evaluation (SME) [3], which is an online questionnaire containing ten questions per module sent via e-mail about modules. There are many other similar examples of module evaluation systems across UK universities, with their main features being personalised, anonymised, and incentivising completion.

At Aberystwyth, some departments such as Geography & Earth Science, and English choose to hand out paper-based questionnaires in lectures for each module a student does. Having a student take multiple questionnaires to provide essential feedback can lead to many issues due to survey fatigue. This can significantly reduce response rates and also have an impact on the answers students provide. The Computer Science department has tried many methods of collecting module feedback with varying successes which will be elaborated upon in subsection 1.2.1.

AWESOME was originally proposed and developed under the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Fund by Dr. Hannah Dee, and work on the prototype was undertaken by Keiron O'Shea. The project was selected as my dissertation project to extend and implement.

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<sup>1</sup>BCS Mid Wales Show & Tell: <http://midwales.bcs.org/show-and-tell-events>

Several meetings by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee and Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor J. Grattan took place to discuss the future of AWESOME and the need for a module evaluation system used university-wide and talks are still ongoing.

### 1.2.1. Module Evaluation Method Analysis

There are several important factors to consider when collecting module evaluation feedback. First and foremost, responses must be anonymised, secondly being able to provide incentives for completion drastically increases response rates. Being able to have students complete the survey in their own time, and also send targeted reminders to complete the survey are also important. If reminders are constantly being sent to students who have already completed the survey, they are likely to get frustrated or annoyed and are less likely to notice another survey e-mail. Consolidated surveys help with fatigue, as students only have to answer one survey. There have been several studies on how survey fatigue affects response rates and poor answer quality [4]. This consolidation only works if the surveys are personalised, as seen from Google Forms response rates in Table 1.1, students are lazy, and they will not skip over modules if asked to.

Table 1.1 shows a feature comparison of current methods of module evaluation at Aberystwyth University and corresponding response rates.

Paper based module feedback during lecture time can have effective response rates because lecture-time is set aside to complete questionnaires. However students usually have to complete one questionnaire per module which can lead to fatigue very quickly.

Qwizdom<sup>2</sup> is a hardware-based voting system, with 'clickers' handed to students in a lecture who can then cast their votes through a powerpoint style questionnaire. Response rates for Qwizdom module evaluations are high for the same reasons as paper based forms. Students are stuck in a lecture for an hour with nothing else to do. One problem Qwizdom does give, is that answers can only be quantitative and not qualitative. Students can't easily input textual comments through Qwizdom so a lot of valuable information is not gathered from students.

Google Forms has been the standard way of running module evaluation questionnaires for the past few years in CompSci. Google Forms provides anonymous answering in the student's own time and can also provide a way of gathering valuable textual comments. One disadvantage of using Google Forms is that there is no way of knowing which modules a student

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<sup>2</sup>Qwizdom Homepage: <http://qwizdom.com/higher-education/home>

is enrolled for, so students have to skip over modules that aren't applicable. This makes the survey confusing and error prone at times and response rates suffer as a result.

AWESOME has been created from the ground-up to address all of these problems. Responses are anonymised, while retaining the ability to see who has, and has not completed the questionnaire yet. This allows for targeted reminders and incentives for completing the survey. Additionally, AWESOME imports data directly from Aberystwyth Student Records and Admissions (ASTRA) which allows all student, staff, and module data to be easily used without lots of manual data entry. This also allows for personalised surveys, asking questions only relevant to modules a particular student is enrolled for. By collecting both Quantitative and Qualitative data, AWESOME can run advanced analytics can be run on the data gathered. The questionnaires sent out are also fully responsive, working on phones to tablets, and to desktop computers by utilising Bootstrap and can be completed at any time by the student.

Method	Tailored Questions	Anonymous	Qualitative	Quantitative	Incentives for completion	Completion on own time	Targeted reminders	Responsive	Consolidated	Response Rate
Paper	✗	†	✓	‡	✓	✗	-	-	✗	75% <sup>[5]</sup>
Qwizdom	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	-	✓	✗	50% <sup>[5]</sup>
Google Forms	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	20%
AWESOME	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	TBC

† Anonymity may be compromised when completing paper-based form.

Table 1.1.: Module Evaluation methods at Aberystwyth University

‡ Manual processing is required in order to analyse the data.

<sup>2</sup>Bootstrap Homepage: <http://getbootstrap.com>

## 1.3. Objectives

The overall objective of the project is to implement AWESOME on the Aberystwyth University network and collect module feedback for the Computer Science department.

This can be broken down into four main aims:

- **Security Audit the AWESOME prototype.** This was a large issue, as there were known security flaws with the prototype and it needed to be looked at immediately before any other work took place.
- **Bring the prototype up to modern development standards.** The program was known to be written in a procedural style, and the security audit brought up the poor Internationalisation (i18n) implementation too.
- **Finish any incomplete functionality.** Many areas of the prototype were half-implemented, but not fully completed. These had to be done before it was useable by students and staff.
- **Run AWESOME on a departmental server.** The main objective was to get a survey sent out to students and collect real-world data. This is the final step in that process.



## 2. Requirements

### 2.1. Features

The following feature list is the one proposed for the AWESOME prototype. The project follows this feature set as a baseline set of requirements.

- **Automatic questionnaire generation per-student** - Generate unique questionnaires per-student, depending on their modules and lecturers.
- **The ability to generate quick mid-term questionnaires** - A one question per module survey with a one to five scale from ‘This module is going well’ to ‘This module has problems’.
- **No need to type in registration details** - Import of module registration data via ASTRA Comma-Separated Values (CSV) export.
- **Targeted follow-up reminder emails** - Only send reminder emails to respondents who have yet to complete their questionnaire.
- **Anonymous responses** - Ability to know which particular student has, or has not completed the questionnaire, but not who has said what.
- **Visually appealing analytics** - Reports available to staff on a by-module, by-department and by-scheme basis, with graphs and textual responses laid out nicely.

### 2.2. Development Practices

AWESOME should be developed using Object-oriented programming (OOP) practices if it is to be maintainable by other developers after the project is over. Internationalisation should be easily extensible and translation strings should be easy to add. Additionally, unit testing is vital if the application is going to be extended further and refactored at a later date for any reason.

## 2.3. User Roles

The user roles in AWESOME are quite simple, there is only an admin and a respondent and each one can only do a few tasks.

- **Admin** - The person who creates the surveys, adds questions and sends them. They can also view results and see who has not yet completed the questionnaire.
- **Respondent** - The recipient of a questionnaire email who fills it in and submits answers. They can also submit feedback about AWESOME if debug mode is enabled.

### 2.3.1. Use Cases

#### Admin User Role

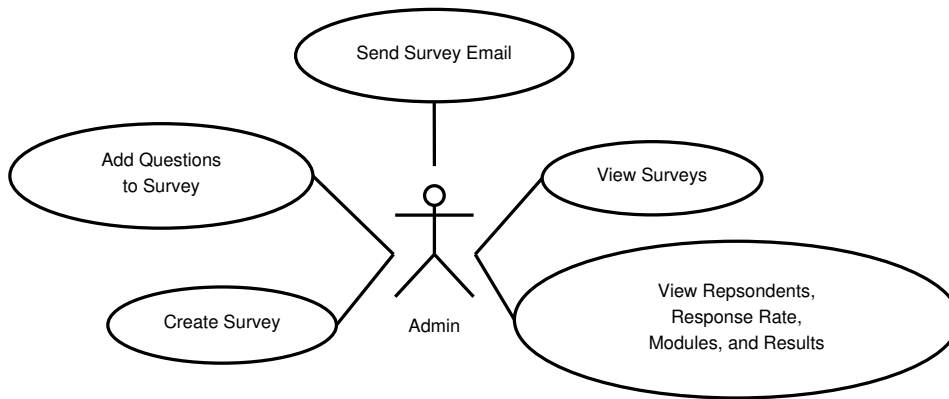


Figure 2.1.: Admin use-case diagram.

Figure 2.1 shows that admins can view surveys, create surveys, add questions to surveys, view more detail about survey such as respondents, response rate, modules, and results. They can also send an email to respondents to remind them to fill in the questionnaire.

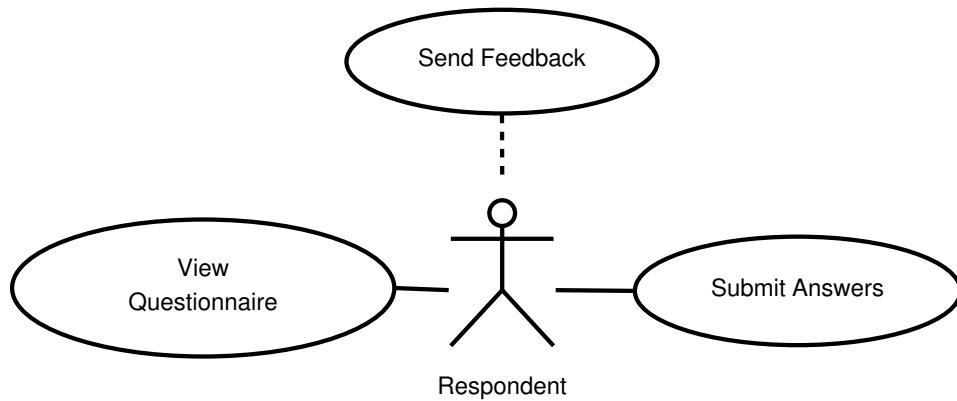
**Respondent User Role**

Figure 2.2.: Respondent use-case diagram.

section 2.3.1 shows that a respondent only has one responsibility in the system, and that is to respond to a survey through a link sent via email. They can only respond once, and submitted answers cannot be seen as it would break the irreversible anonymity of the system.

## 3. Design

After the security audit, it was apparent that the majority of the codebase needed to be refactored in order to make it object-oriented. The decision to rewrite the program was not a light one, by rewriting the program, the scope of extensions to AWESOME became much more limited via time constraints.

With the rewrite came the opportunity to utilise both a framework and a design pattern. Frameworks were ruled out under the stance that it had to be deployed on a server without shell access. However later research discovered that this is achievable in Laravel<sup>1</sup>, which would have been the framework of choice for several reasons.

Laravel would have provided a complete, and mature Model-view-controller (MVC) framework, as well as an i18n framework and a solid basis for AWESOME. Ultimately, poor research into Laravel on a shell-less server resulted in an attempt to produce a bespoke MVC framework, which, unsurprisingly is harder than it first seems.

### 3.1. Programming Language

The programming language choice was fairly fixed, as it had to be easily runnable on an Aberystwyth University (AU) server. This limited the choice to PHP, but which minor version of it was only found out later in the project which is discussed further in section 4.1.

If this requirement wasn't an issue, Ruby on Rails would have been the ideal candidate for this project, as it already provides an MVC framework and gems for i18n.

### 3.2. Model-view-controller Framework

Since using a framework was ruled out, a custom-made MVC framework was written to support this project. The design of which is laid out in

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<sup>1</sup>Laravel Homepage: <http://laravel.com>

this section and is very heavily taken from the ‘Write your own PHP MVC Framework’ series of tutorials[6].

### 3.3. Internationalisation Framework

The i18n framework is a standalone OOP module which utilises JSON formatted files with strings for translation.

### 3.4. Database Schema

### 3.5. User Interface

The user interface was fairly good on the questionnaire-side in the prototype, so a lot of elements were re-used in that, with a few minor changes.

Figure 3.1 shows a comparison between the prototype version and the submitted version of AWESOME.

The admin dashboard of the prototype wasn’t very user friendly. Creating surveys, adding questions, modules, students, and staff was fairly convoluted. Results weren’t clear to look at, and took up a lot of space per-question by pie charts, which were unnecessary given the data provided.

The top image shows a prototype questionnaire page for 'CS22120: The Software Development Life Cycle'. It features a yellow header with the 'AWESOME' logo. The text explains that the survey is anonymous and that answers will be returned without identifying information. The questions are:

- I have learned a good deal from this module
- This module was well taught by Bernie Tiddeman
- This module was well taught by Chris Price
- This module was well taught by Dave Price
- What one thing would you change to improve this module, and why?

Each question is followed by a five-point Likert scale from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'.

The bottom image shows the submitted version of the questionnaire page for 'Evaluation of Semester 2 Modules y3'. It features a yellow header with the 'AWESOME' logo and a 'Feedback' button. A blue banner at the top states: 'AWESOME is currently in testing! If you encounter any problems or want to leave feedback...hit the Feedback button above.' The questions are:

- This is a new system. Do you like it?
- Frank Bott taught this module well
- Rhys Parry taught this module well
- I have learned a good deal from this module
- What one thing would you change to improve this module, and why?

Each question is followed by a five-point Likert scale from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'.

Figure 3.1.: A comparison of questionnaire pages between the prototype version and the submitted version of AWESOME

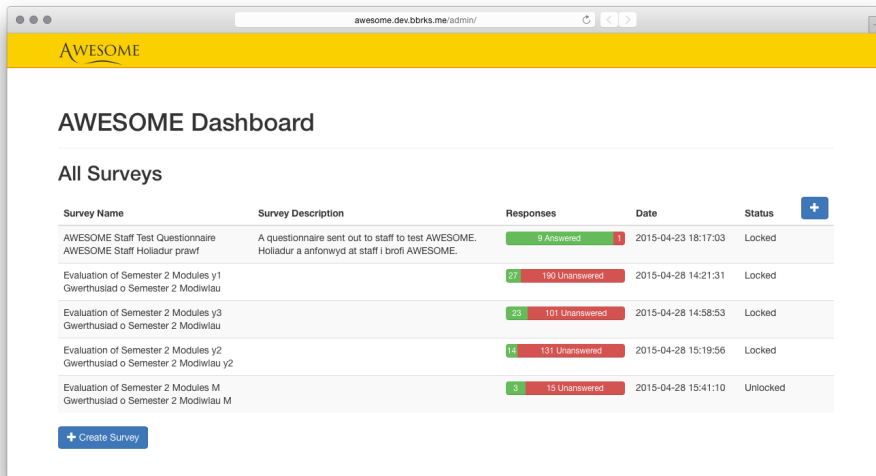
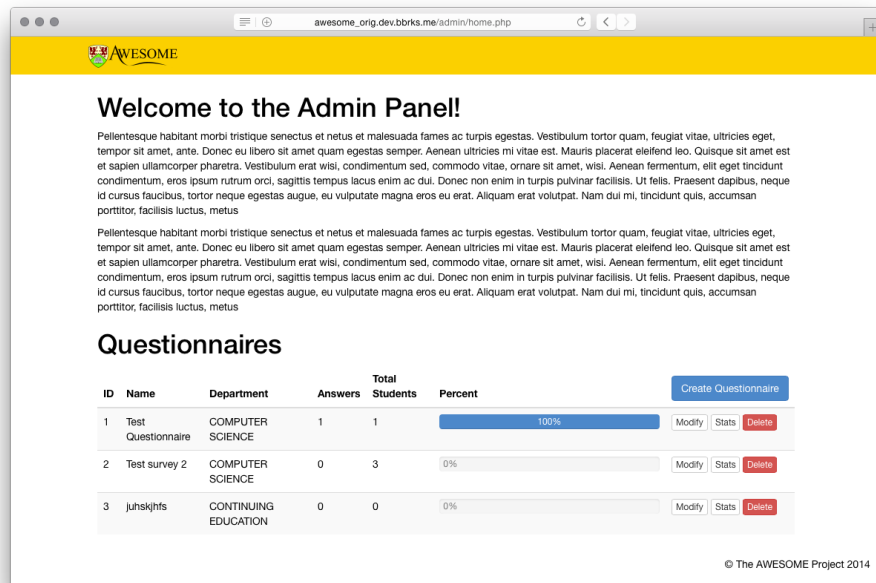


Figure 3.2.: A comparison of surveys view between the prototype version and the submitted version of AWESOME

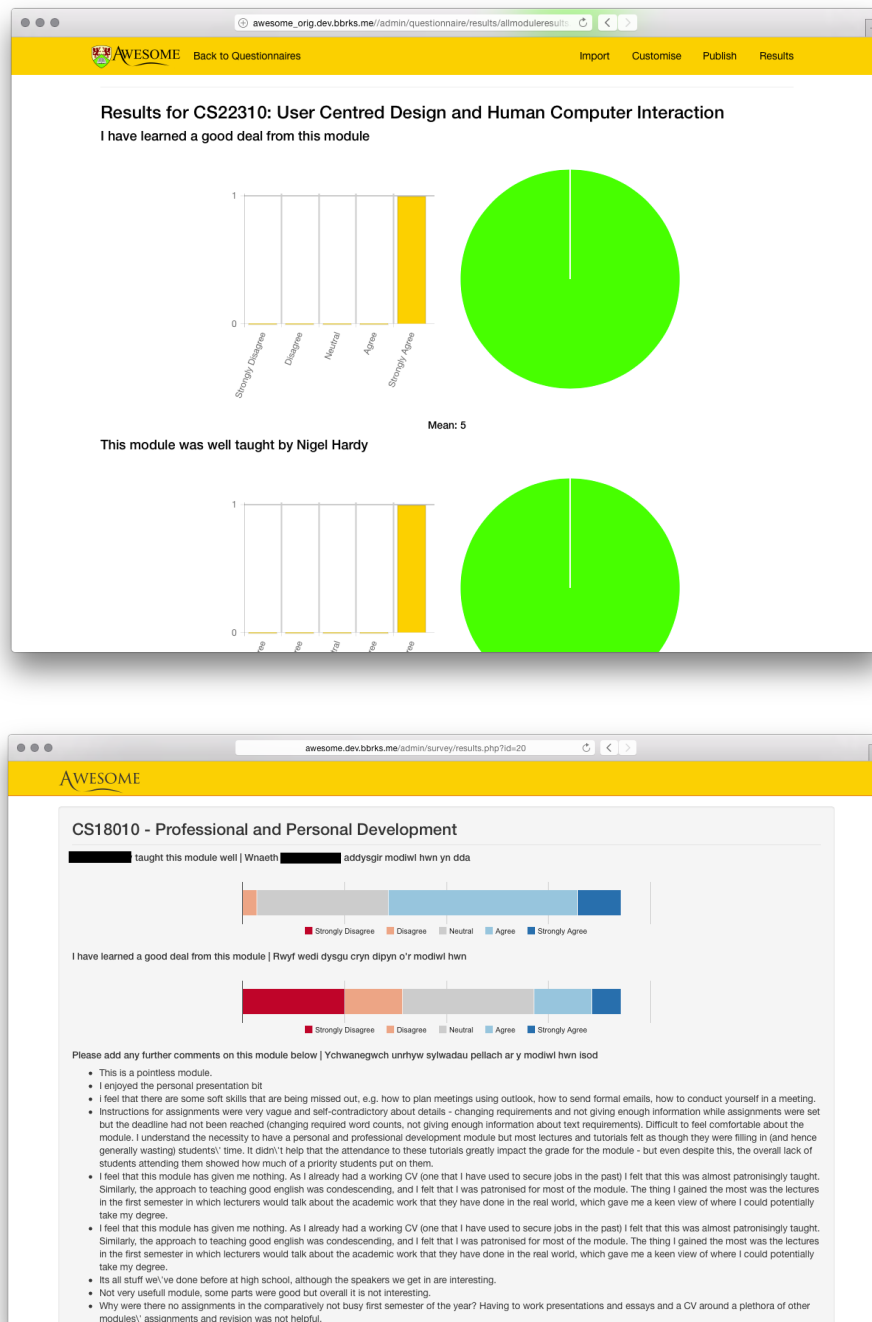


Figure 3.3.: A comparison of results between the prototype version and the submitted version of AWESOME



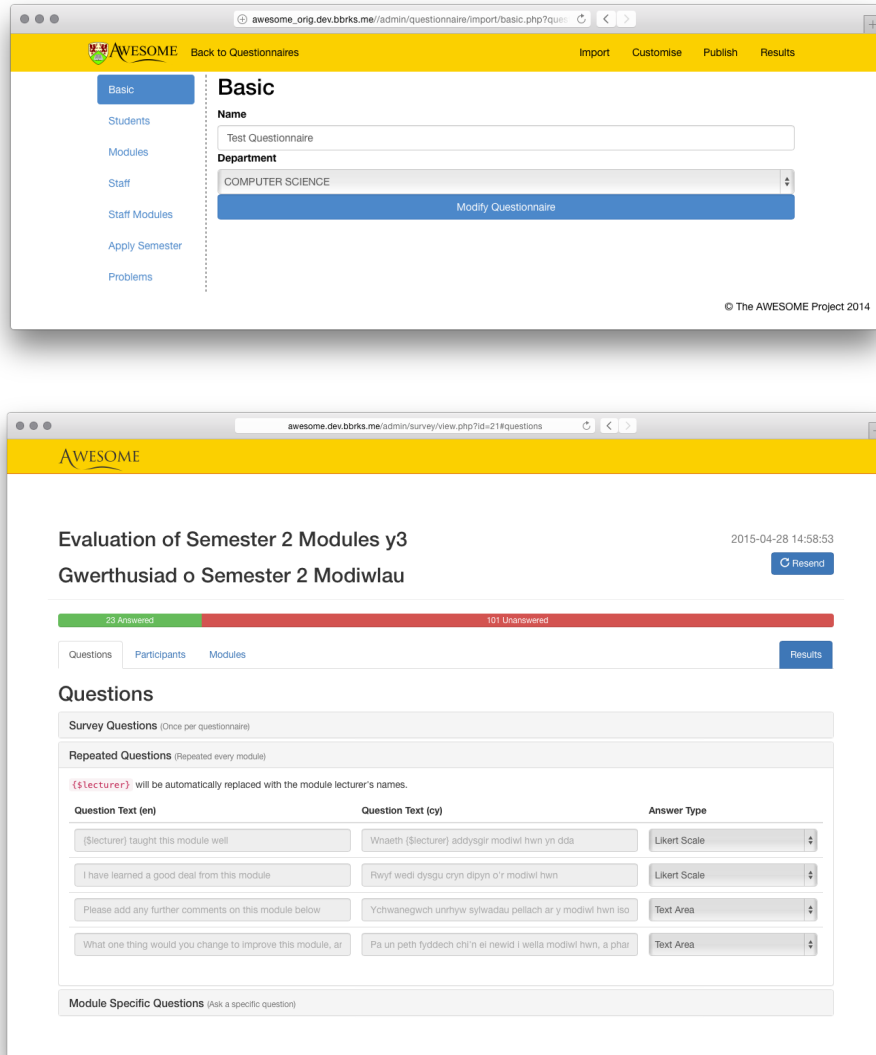


Figure 3.4.: A comparison of survey view between the prototype version and the submitted version of AWESOME

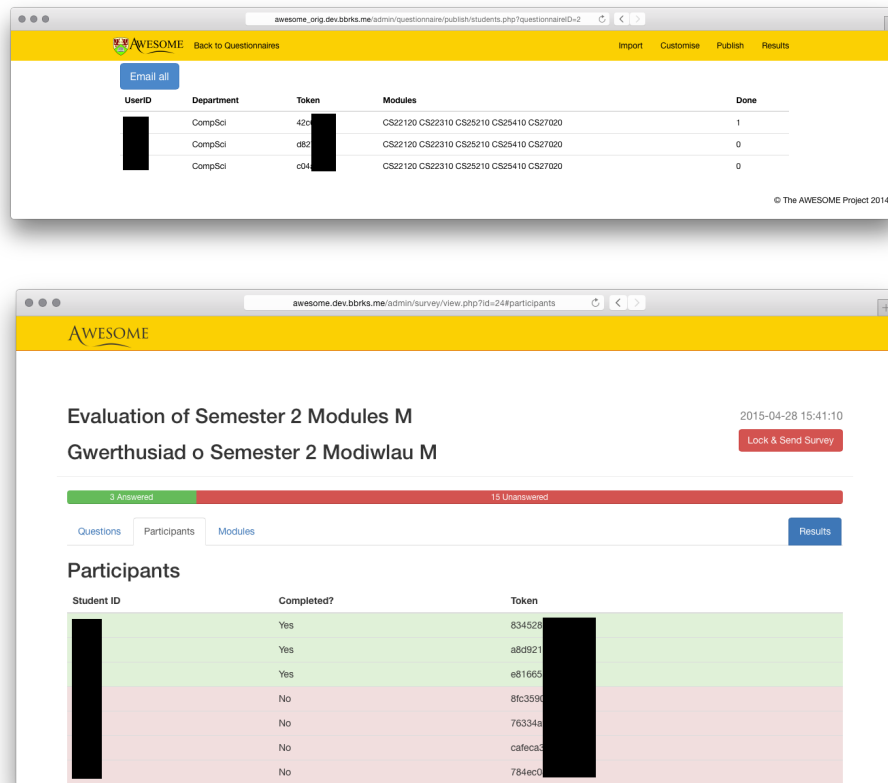


Figure 3.5.: A comparison of respondents between the prototype version and the submitted version of AWESOME

## **4. Implementation**

### **4.1. Implementation**

## 5. Testing

### 5.1. Automated Testing

For this project, a Continuous Integration (CI) platform was chosen to be used in order to facilitate automated unit tests. By using CI ensured that every time code was committed with unit tests, the suite was ran and results were instantly available. Any test failures resulted in a notification email being sent to identify when and where a problem had occurred.

After seeing fellow classmates use TravisCI<sup>1</sup> on previous projects, and reviewing the features it provides, I decided to utilise it in this project. Travis offered testing across multiple PHP versions, which proved helpful when trying to provision a server on the university network.

This was indispensable mid-way through the project, when functionality in the i18n framework needed to be changed and tests started to fail. I wouldn't have noticed any errors when manually testing, but the unit tests brought up edge cases which were then dealt with.

### 5.2. User Testing

User testing was carried out by creating a survey and entering volunteer's AU usernames in the student CSV data along with sample modules. The first real test through the AU servers was sent to staff. This uncovered many issues with the setup of AWESOME on the AU server, which took some time to fix. After these issues were resolved, an end-of-semester questionnaire was sent out to the vast majority of students in the Computer Science department. From first years, to masters students.

User testing revealed some useful information via the feedback form, as well as through a question in the survey which was asked about how easy AWESOME was to use.

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<sup>1</sup>TravisCI Homepage: <http://travis-ci.com>

### 5.3. Acceptance Testing

Acceptance testing was carried out on the submitted version of AWESOME and results in test tables can be found in Appendix A with 16/18 (89%) of tests passing. More detail of the two failing tests can be found in the appendix entry.

## **6. Evaluation**

**6.1. Process**

**6.2. Development Environment**

**6.3. Project Stages**

**6.4. Blog**

**6.5. Degree**

**6.6. Upper Management**

**6.7. Time Management**

**6.8. Future Scope**

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## A. Test Tables

These tests were carried out as part of acceptance testing using the submitted version of AWESOME. Results are listed below.

- Test D8 fails as there is currently no safeguard in place for incorrect CSV format.
- Test D12 fails as questionnaire respondent tokens aren't created until the moment of sending.

Both of these issues a quick fixes, but are unable to be implemented in time for the dissertation hand-in. They will be fixed in a future version.



ID	Requirement	Input	Expected Output	Actual Output	Pass
D1	Admin Dashboard sits behind a login	Go to <b>awesome.url/admin</b>	Login form pops up	Login form pops up	✓
D2	Admin Dashboard login accepts correct username and password	Enter correct credentials into login form	Redirected to admin dashboard	Redirected to admin dashboard	✓
D3	Admin Dashboard login refuses incorrect username	Enter incorrect username and correct password	Login fails	Login Fails	✓
D4	Admin Dashboard login refuses incorrect password	Enter correct username and incorrect password	Login fails	Login Fails	✓
D5	Create Survey button starts the creation of survey wizard	Click 'Create Survey' button	Taken to screen asking for titles, description and CSV data	Taken to screen asking for titles, description and CSV data	✓
D6	Survey must have a title	Enter no title and press 'create' button	Message pops up disallowing action	Message pops up disallowing action	✓
D7	Survey must have CSV data	Enter no CSV data and press 'create' button	Message pops up disallowing action	Message pops up disallowing action	✓
D8	Must check CSV data for formatting issues	Enter incorrect CSV data and press 'create' button	Message pops up informing of CSV formatting error	Taken to survey page without any errors	✗
D9	Unlocked survey page allows entry of question text and type	Type a question title and select an answer type for a question	Able to enter text in question text and select an answer type	Able to enter text in question text and select an answer type	✓
D10	Able to add a new question	Click add question button	A new question text and answer type row appears	A new question text and answer type row appears	✓
D11	Able to delete an existing question	Click the delete question button next to a question	The question is removed and deleted on save	The question is removed and deleted on save	✓
D12	Be able view participants in a survey before sending	Click 'Participants' tab in a survey page	Respondents should be listed	Respondent list is empty	✗
D13	Be able to send a survey	Click the 'Send' button in a survey page	A message displaying how many people the survey was sent to	A message displaying how many people the survey was sent to	✓

Table A.1.: Acceptance testing table of AWESOME's Admin Dashboard

ID	Requirement	Input	Expected Output	Actual Output	Pass
Q1	Students receive an email with a link to personalised questionnaire	Check email inbox	See an email with unique link	See an email with unique link	✓
Q2	Questionnaire can be viewed correctly	Click link in email	See questionnaire displayed	See questionnaire displayed	✓
Q3	Answers can be selected or filled in	Click on a Likert rating or type in a text box	See answer selected or text typed in	See answer selected or text typed in	✓
Q4	Answers can be submitted	Select or type some answers and press the send button	Page redirected with a message informing of completion	Page redirected with a message informing of completion	✓
Q5	Questionnaire can't be completed twice	Re-visit the unique link and try to complete the survey again	Receive an error message informing that the questionnaire has already been completed	Receive an error message informing that the questionnaire has already been completed	✓

Table A.2.: Acceptance testing of AWESOME's Questionnaire