

## Students and Staff Improving Feedback Together

Wednesday, 29 April 2015 - Group discussions notes

THEME 1: How do we create a comfortable environment which enables a feedback dialogue between staff and students?

*= a comfortable environment means that students feel able to approach lecturers about any aspect of the feedback they receive*

- Promote and facilitate feedback as an ongoing dialogue between staff and students
- Communicate clearly with students that it is ok to come and seek clarification on feedback you provided
- Communicate clearly with students that they can ask anything (there is no such thing as a silly or not important question)
- Ensure feedback is given within 4 working weeks (UoS policy). If this is not possible, keep students informed
- If you only give a mark, give general feedback to the class and let students know they can email/talk to you about specifics
- Communicate even more clearly with International students (use plain English, speak slowly, provide written scripts for feedback given in class, encourage all students, esp. international ones to discuss feedback as they may not be used to this)
- Use the Course Reps to identify any issue with feedback as some students may feel more able to talk to them
- Use mid-term module evaluation forms to ask your students if they are happy with their feedback
- Use the Sandwich method (improves students' confidence, motivation and morale):
- Something positive (even about weak work) + Something negative + Suggestion for improvement

Group discussion on theme 1:

1. Essential for staff to create a comfortable environment for students to receive and ask for feedback
  - Approachable: want to help and be supportive
  - Open (it's a good sign when students talk about external issues, don't shoot them down)
  - Lecturing style: relaxed, humour, sense of community. It's a lecture not a lesson but style is strongly dependent on degree program. Note that what is continuous is that University is not about hand holding but instead student led responsibility.
  - Communication is key: manage expectations of what students can expect from staff and expect discussion, advertise opening hours
  - Broadcast opportunities and foster confidence
  - Continuing support: have an induction then follow through with information and support.
  - Support is professional; every student matters as part of a team, and staff should not be afraid of harshness to improve the student. However, the 'harshness'



- should NEVER be personal, but instead explain why openness is needed to help the student improve (like a monastery not a school)
  - Confidence and communication: being assertive and understanding cultural divides.
  - Remove barriers: anonymity, use Piazza as it is faster and less formal than Email.
  - Attitude: reliable but not 'bestie', set aside energy for student meetings or postpone them, be responsive and thorough, students should understand staff are human, keep office hours?
  - Accessible f.rom the start: open doors (physically open doors)
  - Remove negative connotation and increase comfort
  - Elaborate what feedback to expect
2. Uncomfortable:
    - Pressure when students have nothing to say
    - Academic delivery of message – sometimes rude, shouldn't be
    - Set aside time for students so they don't catch you in a bad mood
  3. Asking reasons behind feedback can be tricky
    - Confidence issues
    - Specifying
    - Insular academics with a lack of social skills → aggression, pacifying something feels required. Grade are at stage
    - Too much / too little eye contact
  4. Video feedback is appreciated by students as they have time to take it in
    - Individual: screen capture as read
    - General
  5. Differences in background lead to different levels of expectations
    - Interactions
    - University is different to school: 65% in school and university differences
    - Emphasis that it is OK to ask questions
    - Feedback: understand it, not challenge it
    - Difficult to question seniority
    - Students should be made aware that staff are approachable and there is more than one right answer
  6. Staff shouldn't dismiss but be ready to answer questions. It's not complaining
    - Academics to be encouraged to respond to criticism on their feedback when being asked for clarity
  7. Class sizes make caring about all students difficult
  8. Flexibility in how feedback is given
  9. Most staff were probably high-achieving students → don't understand the importance of feedback
  10. Course reps need to be properly utilised:
    - Students need to know what course reps do and when something is an issue that can be reported to them
    - Course reps must report back to students (closing the feedback loop and publish SSLC minutes)
    - Encourage better knowledge / publicity of course reps and their remit
    - Encourage more transparency for course reps
  11. Use postgraduates as links (emphasise they are recent graduates)
  12. Tailor answers to students' level of understanding
    - Teach, don't tell
    - Make sure they understand
  13. Overlap between tutor and lecturer lead to confrontation



THEME 2: How do we educate students about feedback, the different ways in which they receive it and their role within it?

*= Most students only see feedback as the comments on their written assignments; they forgetting all the other ways they receive it*

- Inform students about feedback at the beginning and throughout the semester about all the ways they get feedback
- Plan a feedback induction session - what it is and their role in the process (You can use the website to support reflection)
- Say you are giving feedback when you are giving it (Tell students, include a feedback slide in your PPT, write it on the board)
- Provide assessment criteria so that students know what they're aiming for and they can tell what they're good at
- Provide examples which meet your assessment criteria and some which don't so that they can get familiar with the standards
- Departments need to promote feedback dialogue between modules so that feedback is seen as relevant from one to another
- Peer-feedback is great to educate students about marking standards as they experiencing it themselves; they are then better equipped to assess their own assignment before handing it in and compare with the lecturer's mark/comments

Group discussion on theme 2:

1. Students should be informed of all the different types of feedback available, e.g. it can be an informal discussion with members of staff.
2. Maybe there needs to be a definition of feedback as it can mean different things to different people. The meaning of it can vary amongst members of staff as well as students.
3. Staff members shouldn't impose their ideas of feedback onto students- students should be asked what they understand and expect in terms of feedback
4. Students should be educated on what they should do with feedback
5. Students should self-reflect on the piece of work they are submitting- therefore they can ask about what specific areas that they would like feedback for
6. There should be positive reinforcement at induction of a module to inform students of all the different types of feedback available throughout the module and how they can obtain it
7. The development of feedback trends through modules and assignments so members of staff can see what the biggest issues are for students (these can then be put online for students to use as a reference point for current and future students)
8. Technology and social media should be used as a forum to aid learning (e.g. Facebook pages/twitter)
9. Putting more meaning into assessment criteria, by including examples and staff members discussing with students what they expect from each grade criterion
10. Feedback lecture for all students after an assessment to discuss common trends and things that majority of students did well/didn't do well on
11. Students should be asked what specific areas they would like feedback on; they could be asked for the top 3 criteria



12. There could be an online resource called a 'feedback portfolio' where all the feedback students got throughout their course is stored. They can use this to refer back to at any time, and tutors and teachers can put their feedback on here throughout the students time at university. It can store feedback from all aspects, whether it's assessments, essays, or group work.
13. Developing a culture of self-assessment in students
14. Students need to develop critical thinking skills
15. Resources [of receiving feedback/what to do with the feedback] are available in the library
16. Positive reinforcement of feedback available throughout modules & semesters
17. Students should be educated about feedback opportunities available to them → with a link to refer back to the feedback anytime
18. Educating students on the soft skills to be gained from the modules
19. Introductory talks amongst modules to inform students about the feedback opportunities
20. Pointing out clearly that what is been talked about is feedback
21. Having a session on feedback, emphasising the difference between university and high school
22. Reflecting on transferable skills gained from modules and how they can be carried forward to future modules & life opportunities
23. Reconsidering the assessment structure → What's the point of feedback if it can't be used again?
24. Continuity between modules & assessments → Having formative assessments that are relevant to future assessments

THEME 3: If they have a role in making feedback effective, how do we engage students in the feedback process?

*= Feedback is more effective when students actively engage with it rather than receive it passively (assumes a comfortable environment)*

- 2-stage assessment: Stage 1: feedback, no mark – Stage 2: mark, no feedback = students work on feedback to improve mark
- Public feedback has greater impact than when received on your own, e.g, group presentations followed by class discussions
- Prompt feedback engages students as it is still fresh in their mind; quick & dirty feedback (1 week) is better than late & perfect:
  - Circulate model answers straight after assignments
  - Summarise good and bad points from 10 assignments and discuss them in your next lecture
  - Don't mark all assignments but give feedback instead so that students pay more attention to feedback & less to marks
- Give feedback on one assignment before students start work on the next so that they can use it to improve their work
- Detailed/specific feedback engages students better as it is easier for them to address the issues raised
- Make sure your feedback is legible – if your handwriting is difficult to read, type your comments
- Ask students to specify what exactly they want feedback on, and providing detailed feedback only on this



- Provide assessment criteria for students to check their work before & after their mark; & tune up their understanding of criteria
- Peer assessment session: anonymised marked assignments are marked by students who compare their judgement against the teacher's
- Encourage students to ask for feedback on aspects they are concerned about (could be on a separate sheet)
- Share mark averages with students; if they are below the average, they will be more likely to work on feedback

Group discussion on theme 3:

1. 'Students are a victim of feedback'
2. Feedback needs to be given in a 'conversational tone'
3. Students don't always recognise feedback
4. Feedback should be given 'drip by drip'
  - Continuous not once in a blue moon/big block
5. The terminology used to give feedback needs to be accessible to the student you are giving it to
  - Change the narrative
6. Feedback from the SSLCs needs to be passed on to students and staff
7. Getting students to think about what they have got from lectures
  - Quick fire questions
  - Did that lecture help?
  - Getting students to summarise after each lecture the learning outcomes
    - Reinforcing learning
    - Ensuring they have the right 'gist'
8. Students are not being given the tools to improve from feedback
  - Show them that feedback can be used to improve their grades.
9. Students need to want to improve and to get better
  - We cannot work things out for them
  - They need the "desire to get better"
    - "What happens if students have a 'fixed mindset' instead of the 'growth mindset'"
      - I.e. I'm already a 2:2 or 2:1 student and so what is the point in taking action on feedback
      - Need personal encouragement that they are capable of improvement
10. Teachers need to show why they teach the way they do
  - So students can help direct/channel/prepare their learning
11. Giving feedback on teacher behaviour and attitudes
12. Peer feedback is good
  - It's two-way
  - Students can feel responsible for someone else's grades
  - Know the student mentality
  - There is the competition of sharing grades and wanting to 'beat' class mates
13. Feedback should have to be used in the next assignment otherwise the next grade is capped
14. 'Appraisal' type marking
  - Student marks where they think they are
  - Lecturer grades them as to where they 'actually' are
15. Specific feedback on areas that students ask for as well as general feedback



16. Feedback based on a grade that the student says they are aiming for i.e. 2:1
  - Draft marked to this level and feedback given
    - So student can see if they are reaching it and how far into that bracket they are
  - The final feedback is just a grade
  - This could cause problems as some students might not think that they will do very well/get high grades
    - Might aim low, so always marked to this lower level
17. Public feedback
  - Encourages students to act on it
    - Creates a 'challenge/competition'
18. Feedback should be evidence-based
  - Use facts/qualitative data to back up the points that are being made
  - Develop evidence and share practices
    - Use students to share practices and to encourage progression
19. Feedback should be objective and constructive
20. It is as much the students responsibility to take feedback as it is the lecturers to give it
21. "Make students 'tougher' so they can face the real world"
  - Assessment via presentations/public speaking
    - Give feedback that will help improve skills not just that one isolated piece of work
22. Talk to students prior to giving feedback to find out what kind of feedback they would like
23. Dependent on the type of work: coursework over exams as the feedback is more useful for future development
24. Students as co-creators
  - Help make the programme/assessment types/methods
  - Ensure that other needs of the students are met that staff members might not think of
  - Student-led
25. Peer support
  - It's more relaxed and informal
  - Post graduates/PHD students could help as they are not as formal as lecturers
26. Inter-faculty feedback and help
  - You can export skills from students in one department to help with students in another
27. If no feedback is given, it encourages students to chase feedback
  - Responsibility is on the student to make sure they have the feedback they need
28. Like seminar group, you could have peer group feedback for students who don't have seminar groups to discuss problems and then feedback at the end of each session given to lecturer.
29. A problem with feedback is that it is hard to engage humanities students as their courses include mostly self-study. Not enough contact hours with lectures to get students engaged
30. 2-stage feedback
  - 1st stage: Feedback, no mark
  - 2nd stage: Mark, no feedback
  - The feedback in stage one will provide vital help to marked assessment
31. Lecturers should also try to adopt the sandwich approach when giving constructive feedback to students
32. Link engagement to employability



- Skills like essay writing would be vital to certain jobs. E.g. for maths students when trying to be an actuary
  - Reinforce that marks are important but skills are needed for employability
33. Public feedback
- What the cohort did well/not well
  - Could be presented in a recorded format
  - Could use worked examples and work together in groups to understand content
  - Part of a more specific feedback
34. Having it be known that there is a marking criteria
35. Having a look at the relevance of assessments
36. Change lectures to video transmissions and instead spend lecture hours doing problem sheets and group work.
37. Reduce summative assignments and increase formative assessments

THEME 4: How do we rethink assessment to improve feedback and promote learning?

= *How can we encourage assessment for learning as opposed to learning for assessment since it invariably improves student performance?*

- Is assessment always designed to support student learning and achievement or is there too much emphasis on measurement?
- Consider redesigning the sequence of assignments and introduce linked assignments (assignment 1 feeds into 2 which feeds into 3 and then assignment 4 pulls them all together):
  - Feedback works better in linked assignments (at each stage feedback helps students to tackle the next thing they do)
  - Feedback works less in 'one cycle' assignments (e.g. a single essay with nothing linked to it before or afterwards - students might not care about the feedback as they won't do the same assignment again)
- Shift from summative to formative assessment: 2-stage assessment: Stage 1: feedback, no mark – Stage 2: mark, no feedback
- Involve students in self & peer assessment to enable them to take control of their learning rather than depending on others to evaluate their learning
- Peer assessment session: anonymised marked assignments are marked by students who compare their judgement against the teacher's
- Consider programme-level assessment to encourage coherence and progression between modules' content and feedback provided; this will make students better aware of their own progression and the relevance of feedback from one module to another

Group discussion on theme 4:

#### Session 1

1. Is enough info provided early enough about assessment?
2. Lectures providing assessment information – these can be missed and this can be problematic.
3. Students won't do something if it's not marked? Is this true or not?!
4. Peer assessment – use example essays to calibrate peer assessment and provide the 'official' mark after everyone has tried to mark.



5. 'Gut feeling' from staff when marking doesn't help students develop their ability to reflect on work if mark schemes aren't available to them.
6. Linked assignments:
  - Can be tricky!
  - Meeting programme outcomes is still a concern.
  - Redesigning modules operates on a long (yearly) cycle – ideas like this can be lost.
7. Get students to provide context to lower-year modules to help encourage student engagement (i.e. why is this assessment important? Why should students care?)
8. Involve alumni in providing context around assessment and its importance?
9. Design programmes with a 'flow' through year to year, i.e. material covered in one year is then practically used the next.
10. Have students attach feedback from other previous/relevant work to their hand-ins.
11. Submit plans for assignments in advance – can get students thinking about assignments in advance, before there is real pressure to turn things in.
12. Potential for higher performance as a result of techniques such as having students 'plan' things in advance of actually doing them, allows time for students to be critical and evaluate their own work.

### Session 2

13. Project-based learning approach (i.e. learning is assessed by frequent and substantial project work):
  - In groups? Allows peer feedback, in addition to general feedback on the groups' outputs.
  - Lone working allows time management skills to develop.
14. Assessment is usually designed in such a way that eventually a 'module mark' is worked up to. This is also used to measure staff performance!
15. Assessment could be only undertaken at the programme-level.
  - The "1950s model" of higher education.
  - Less choice from student perspective, but more detailed feedback and cohesive programme design?
16. Markers have certain responsibilities in how they mark assessment.
17. Undergraduate and postgraduate assessments are radically different.
18. Class sizes can be a limiting factor in how assessments are designed and delivered.
19. Peer assessment:
  - Have students submit work with an evaluation of their own work and justification for why they feel it deserves a certain mark; this can be done against a sample piece of work or alternatively a mark scheme.

### Session 3

20. Assessment is required to uphold standards, and therefore requires measurement in a quantitative manner.
21. To what degree will students actually do work without the 'carrot' of marks?
22. Programme-level assessment right at the end of a degree can be demoralising and students may struggle and be forced to repeat, etc.
23. Verbal assessment? Should wider assessment methods be considered beyond our standard paradigms?
24. Modularity can be problematic – what if instead students complete a portfolio? Professional expectation of how our programmes are designed may not gel with this in some disciplines?
25. Modules that link together to develop skills i.e. boat work followed by data analysis followed by reporting skills. Interesting paradigm!



26. Students taking personal ownership of learning is key. Rethinking assessment can only go so far!
27. Dissertations can be considered a pseudo-portfolio in that often they test the full range of skills that students acquire while at University.
28. PSRBs can be limiting to a great degree in some disciplines – i.e. STEM
29. Encouraging students to behave introspectively is key to rethinking assessment.
30. Student psychology – what are students thinking?!
31. Unexpected outcomes sometimes emerge from radical assessment techniques, can leave students disadvantaged.

#### Session 4

32. Emphasis on feedback over marks is key.
33. “Ticking the boxes”-style assessment (i.e. being assessed in small chunks) can be demoralising in some ways.
34. PSRBs can act as restraints and limit the University’s options when delivering programmes.
35. Demonstrating learning is a requirement – we can’t simply do without assessment.
36. Shift from summative to formative can reap great benefits in student engagement.
37. Learning styles – students aren’t a cohesive mass and don’t have homogenous learning techniques and preferences.
38. Graduate/human attributes – as an institution, we aren’t simply trying to ensure that we cover content (which is important!) but that we equally expose students to key skills and situations that they need to experience! Assessment like group work are sometimes unpopular but do encourage teamwork and leadership attributes in our students.

