

Developing Departmental Assessment & Feedback Practices

Assessment & Feedback Working Group (Revised October 2013)

- Feedback is still an issue for the University to address effectively
- These points are suggestions for quick improvements you can make to assessment and feedback in your department.
- The principle is not to make assessment and feedback more onerous for you or your students, rather to help you work more effectively.
- The working group would very much like to help you develop your work: please tell us what you are doing, and let us help.

1. Timing assessments & scheduling marking

Departments should:

- (i) publish the dates of submission and return of assessments at the start of each semester for both staff and students;
- (ii) think about the timing of coursework assessments, particularly if it is possible to bring more assessments earlier in modules. It is very tempting to set work for the last week of term, and so use the vacation to buy extra marking time. Educationally, this is not good practice, especially if there is no further teaching for that module in the next term. Support for learning is much more effective if it is given during the course of a module, rather than at a point when the student is unlikely incorporate it in the flow of learning. Low-stakes, formative assessments early in a programme are often very beneficial.
- (iii) inform academic staff when assessments are due and schedule marking time, as would be the case for exams. Advance scheduling ensures that the time is available and the marking can be done quickly and efficiently.

2. Management of expectation and consistency of practice

Both research and anecdotal evidence point to the importance of setting expectations.

Wherever possible, the marking criteria should be made clear to the students before they undertake the assessment. It should also be made clear in the marking, how the piece of work matches up to those criteria.



Departments should tell students when they can expect their work back and adhere to that, bearing in mind that the University's policy is three weeks for campus-based programmes and four weeks for DL.

(i) Students don't just want quick feedback, but realistic expectations of when feedback will emerge. If students know feedback will come in three weeks rather than two they will accept it. The key is that students should be aware of when the feedback will be returned and it should be on schedule.

(ii) If, due to some eventuality, work is going to take longer than predicted to turn round, then the students should be informed as soon as possible.

3. Writing style of comments and specific 'feedforward'

A number of departments have developed systems to improve feedback practice, but unhelpful ways of operating still include:

(i) Feedback sheets returned to students with no comment on them or unhelpful generic comments such as 'good', 'needs more analysis' or 'poor structure' etc.

Feedback comments should be concrete in

- a. telling students what they should carry on doing
- b. what they are doing well, as well as...
- c. what should be changed and how.

(ii) We can give too much feedback: more is not necessarily better. One useful rule of thumb is to give a maximum of three areas to work on.

4. Discussing feedback with personal tutors

As part of the programme of personal tutor meetings, students should bring examples of their feedback in order to give more focus for discussions on academic progress. Discussing feedback with personal tutors can help provide valuable guidance about generic issues, particularly when a student is making the same error in different assignments. Tutees should also be encouraged to approach the marker or module convenor if there are subject-specific areas of misunderstanding.



5. Encouraging students to reflect on previous feedback

When students submit a piece of written work they could include, at the end of the assignment, a piece of feedback given in relation to a previous piece of work accompanied by a few sentences (max 100 words) about how they have responded to this feedback. This reflective paragraph can be allocated some marks: say 5 or 10%. The marker can comment specifically on whether the previous point has been addressed effectively.

6. Induction for students & explanation of role of assessment & feedback

Introduce a session on the use of feedback into a first year module. The main foci of effort here are to:

- (i) get students to recognise feedback in all its different forms (not just written comments on a script) and appreciate its importance for their learning, even if this means flagging it up fairly crudely;
- (ii) increase engagement with feedback, see also points 2, 5 & 6 above;
- (iii) develop students' appreciation that feedback is transferable and that engagement with feedback requires work on their part as well as ours;
- (iv) manage students' expectations of feedback provision from the outset of the programme.

