Assessment & Feedback Working Group

Return of Marked Work

Introduction
The timely provision of constructive feedback on student work is recognised throughout the HE sector as being a key element in supporting teaching and learning. Through surveys such as the National Student Survey, however, it is also clear that there is often a mis-match between the expectations of students regarding the quality, timing and utility of the feedback they receive and their experience. In the last two such Surveys, the University has seen a net decline in the ratings on assessment and feedback and this has also had impact on our overall league table positions.

Much of the dissatisfaction still results from three causes:

1. Delays in the return of work/provision of feedback;
2. Lack of information regarding the proposed turn-round time;
3. Feedback that is poorly drafted and which does not provide constructive guidance to the students as to how to improve the quality of their work;
4. Lack of explicit statements when feedback is being provided – especially for oral feedback

The University has adopted a policy regarding the turn-round time for marking students’ work which is 21 calendar days for campus-based and 28 calendar days for DL programmes (See Policy Statement, below). It is important that departments continue to work to improve the quality of the feedback that is provided. It is, however, also essential for the University to work to support this policy through departments if it is to be implemented successfully.

Following the outcome of the 2014 NSS, all departments were asked to reflect on the quantitative results, recent trends and the open comments written by the respondents for their subject areas. On the basis of these reflections they were asked to identify action points for implementation during the coming year.

The responses were reviewed by a working group which requested that the College Academic Committees should monitor the implementation of the action points and report back to Academic Policy Committee through the Annual Developmental Reviews. Departments are also asked to share their action points with their Student-Staff Committees.

In addition to the departmental-specific actions, generic action points were approved by Senate at its meeting of 12th November 2014 for adoption by all departments:

a. Each module should have a published calendar of marking for circulation to all staff involved in marking prior to the onset of the semester. This should include the submission date of coursework assignments and the associated deadlines for receipt of marked scripts. Staff should be encouraged to block out time for marking in advance.

b. Student expectation should be managed effectively, e.g. by notifying the students of expected return dates for work and/or dates for feedback provision.

c. As far as possible, departments should utilise a system of receipts for the submission of work and for its return (in the case of hardcopy items).
d. The timing of the return of work, or other provision of feedback, should be monitored by departments and Heads of Department should take action where these exceed the agreed turn-round times without there having been prior consultation with the students.

e. Departments should, as far as appropriate, utilise standard forms for the provision of feedback that require markers to provide constructive feedback comments.

f. Departments should adopt procedures for the provision of feedback opportunities following the examinations (in particular the 1st semester examinations).

g. Academic staff should make it very clear to students when feedback is being provided, in particular when this is being given orally.

Departments are also encouraged to ensure that marking time is included in all departmental work-load models, and this should be weighted based on the numbers of students and the scale of the assessment. Also, where a small number of staff are responsible for coursework assessments in large modules, departments should consider distributing the work more widely amongst departmental staff in order to enable the work to be marked within the prescribed period.
Policy Statement on Return of Marked Coursework

Coursework Assignments

1. Feedback and provisional grading on coursework for undergraduate and taught postgraduate students will be returned within 21 days of the submission date for campus-based programmes; 28 days for distance learning and approved programmes*.

2. Professional doctorate students should be provided with a provisional mark and associated feedback on submitted assessed components (excluding the thesis) within twenty-eight days from the date that the assessed component was submitted (DSocSci, EdD, and EngD degree programmes) or within forty-two days from the date that the assessed component was submitted (DClinPsy degree programme).

3. In exceptional circumstances where this is not possible, the following actions should be taken:
   a. Students should be notified in advance of the expected return date and the reasons for the longer turn-round time
   b. Where possible, staff should provide some interim feedback: for example in the form of generic feedback to the class regarding common errors and potential areas for improvement

4. Students should be notified early in each module, through module handbooks or their equivalent, of both the submission date and the return date for all coursework.

5. Staff engaged in marking should be notified, well in advance, of the marking schedules, in particular the submission and return dates for each piece of work for which they will be responsible so they can plan their diaries accordingly.

6. Submission and return of assignments within a module should normally be scheduled such that students receive feedback on one assignment before completion of a further assignment of a similar format.

7. If the assessment design for a programme comprises single, summative module assignments that are to be submitted around the same time, then there should be provision of an element of formative feedback prior to submission.

8. Where there are co-requisite modules that are taken in parallel within a programme, there should be co-ordination between module convenors such that students receive feedback on one assignment before completion of a further assignment of a similar format.

9. Where possible, end of term/semester submission dates should be avoided in respect of marking and return of hard-copy submissions in order to avoid lengthy delays between the marking of the work and its collection due to intervening vacations. Note that where work is being marked on-line or posted back to students these constraints need not apply.

10. The returned work should incorporate appropriate feedback guidance to enable the students to identify both where they have demonstrated particular strengths and how to improve their performance in future assignments. Further guidance regarding the provision of feedback is provided on the University website.

11. It is recognised that some very large scale pieces of work, such as dissertations, may not be returned within the 21 days. In such cases, staging points should be scheduled when effective feedback on progress can be provided.
12. Consistency of implementation and management of expectation are essential. Heads of Department (or their delegated representatives) should therefore monitor and take responsibility for the turn-round time of coursework and provision of feedback for all their modules. Departments will be asked to comment in their Annual Development Reviews on any exceptions to the turn-round policy.

13. Departments should regularly review their methods of marking and assessment design, incorporating a range of approaches as appropriate.

*The periods of 21 and 28 days are defined as 21/28 calendar days from the published submission date of the piece of work, excepting when this period includes public holidays and days when the University is officially closed, these days of closure being added into the total. There are certain campus-based programmes for which, for professional reasons, large numbers of external experts are involved in marking. Subject to approval, these will also be permitted the longer turn-round time of 28 days.

Examinations

1. Following the approval of the provisional results by examination boards, departments should make the results available to students within 14 days. Where appropriate this should include a breakdown at the level of the examination and coursework.

2. Departments should arrange for feedback on examination performance to be provided. This can take the form of one of the proposed feedback schemes based on the pilot exercise undertaken in January 2014. The proposed schemes are set out below but departments are also encouraged to adopt other schemes, as appropriate.

3. Students should have the opportunity to discuss their results with their personal tutor or adviser.

Feedback on Examinations: Scheme 1

Students are invited to attend sessions when they will have the opportunity to view their scripts and, following that, can complete a request form to meet with a personal tutor/module convenor to talk through any specific question(s) where they feel they need further explanation.

It is explicitly stated that this is not an opportunity to challenge the marks awarded. The viewing session is to be monitored by ‘invigilators’ and the students are not allowed to write on or remove any paper, or to take any photographic record etc. If sufficient numbers of departments participate in this scheme it is proposed that this could be managed centrally in terms of organisation of venue and monitors.

Nationally, this is the most commonly applied scheme. The pilot results indicate that the numbers of students availing themselves of this opportunity are low.

Scheme 2

Generic feedback is written regarding overall performance on each paper, along with median marks, so students can see how they were placed in relation to the cohort. For essay papers, this includes the median marks awarded for each question and a brief commentary on common strengths and weaknesses. For SAQ papers this could take the form of a note of the question topic (not the full question) and the median marks along with identification of any specific common errors.

The feedback can be provided either in a lecture session or be posted on BlackBoard.
Scheme 3

The exam scripts are distributed to the personal tutors and the tutees are invited to attend a routine tutor meeting to discuss their performance.

Scheme 4

A short, generic checkbox template is drafted which can be completed for each question: this is probably most applicable to essay papers. As the marker undertakes the marking of each essay s/he can fill in the template which can be returned to the student. This template could take the form of 5 or 6 features of the essay, each of which would be scored on a 5 point scale. Example indicators are shown below:

Student No.:

Paper:

Q. No.:

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