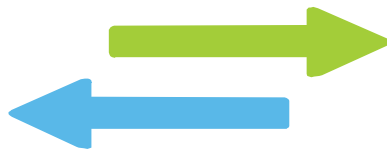
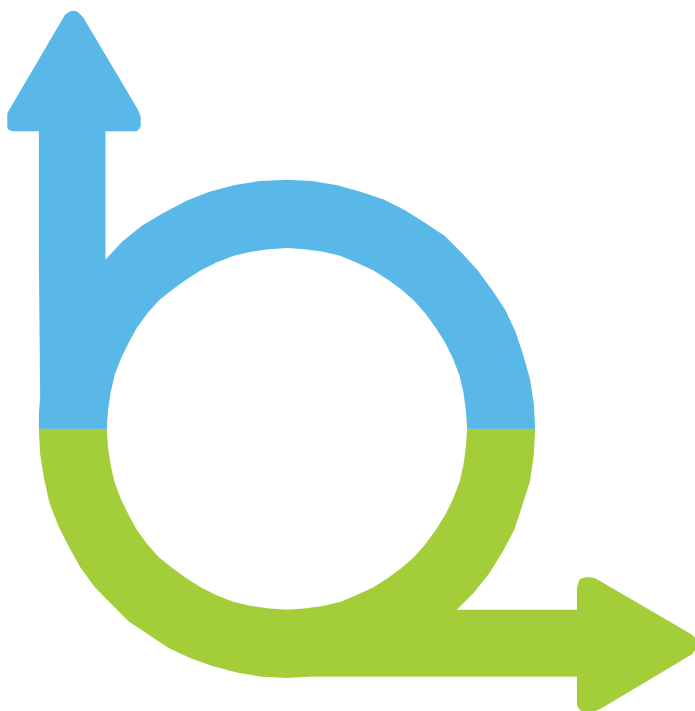


University of Hertfordshire
Faculty of Humanities, Law and Education

Feedback for Learning Project



February – April 2010

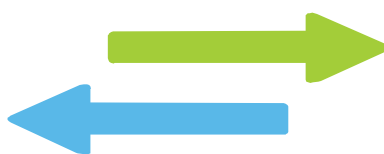


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Feedback for Learning Project

Aims of the Project

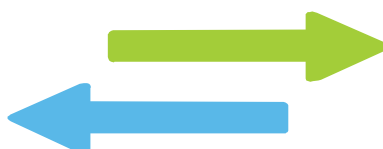
The aims of the project were:

- To enquire into students' understanding and use of feedback
- To trial and evaluate a student-staff enquiry project

Context

Feedback on student work is a national and local focus of enquiry due to its importance for learning and for students' satisfaction with their courses. The Faculty performs well in the National Student Survey but there is awareness that there is always room for improvement and that some students may not be benefiting from the feedback given and not using it effectively to develop future work.

The project aimed to gain students' perspectives on aspects of feedback and to do this through a staff-student collaborative process. The reason for this was to enable a deeper understanding of perspectives and to engage students as participants in developing educational provision.



Methods

1. The student researchers

UH SU Solutions chose six students for participation in this project based on criteria for representing all three schools and showing interest in the topic. They were paid by the hour for attending meetings and for asking identified questions of a sample of other students in the Faculty. The details of these six students were as follows: two from each School; four male, two female; four undergraduates, two postgraduates; three overseas and three home students.

(one female, home, undergraduate withdrew prior to the data collection).

2. The enquiry group process

At the first session the six students met with three members of staff to develop group cohesion, plan the project, complete Faculty ethics procedures and identify the questions to be asked of student informants. Material drawn on for this session included an HEA report on the first ESCalate Student Conference (ESCalate 2009) and adapted resources from Nash & Roberts (2000).

In order that neither staff nor students dominated the process care was taken that students outnumbered staff at all group meetings and that the importance of listening respectfully to each other was established. The Associate Dean (learning, teaching and employability) led each meeting, while other staff participated in meetings where their expertise was particularly valuable. The other members of staff were: a representative of the Faculty Learning, Teaching and Employability Group, the author of 'Supporting Students as Researchers' and a research fellow. After the first meeting five student researchers participated in the data collection and all subsequent sessions. All enquiry group members completed reflective logs during the enquiry project and brought these for discussion to each session.



The five student researchers asked three questions of an opportunistic group of students in the Faculty over a two-week period between 22nd February and 8th March 2010 (details below). After the data collection five 2-hour group sessions were held. During these sessions the data collected from student informants were analysed. Additionally staff and students discussed their experiences of feedback, and data from these discussions were recorded in writing and details subsequently checked for accuracy with participants. The group discussed drafts of the report written by the Associate Dean and developed a presentation on the project for the UH Learning and Teaching Conference.

3. The questions

The preamble read by the student researchers to the informants explained that the project aimed to find out how students are using feedback on their work.

Q1 What do you consider to be feedback? The purpose of this question was to establish how the informant understood the term.

Q2 What was the impact of feedback? The purpose of the question was to obtain a general perspective on the effect of feedback on the individual informant.

Q3 How have you used feedback? The purpose of this question was to identify examples of specific uses of feedback.

Answers to the 3 questions were written onto a form provided, either by the informants themselves or by the student researcher.

4. The informants

The informants were an opportunistic sample consisting of:

86 students from the Faculty

(70 undergraduate, 14 postgraduate and 2 for whom their status was not recorded; 35 males, 48 females and 3 for whom their gender was not recorded)

5. The analysis

▪ Forms of data

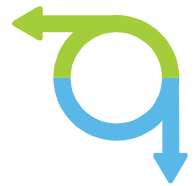
There are two forms of data. The first is the data collected from the 86 informants, which is recorded in this report in boxes. The second is the data collected from the five student researchers during group discussions, which is recorded in this report in inverted commas and italics.

▪ Process of analysis

The data were first divided into three categories derived from the questions: ***The Nature of Feedback***, from question one, ***The Impact of Feedback***, from question two and the ***Use of Feedback*** from questions two and three. These categories were subdivided into themes after repeated readings of the data. Students and staff worked in pairs/threes coding the responses to the questions in relation to these themes. After the informants' comments had been allocated to these themes, the enquiry group discussed them. Points made by the student researchers during the discussion were related to each of the themes.

▪ Reporting of findings

Findings are reported under the three category headings. They are reported in terms of student comments representing the full range of responses. Each category is reported on firstly by comments from the student informants and then by comments from the student researchers. The findings under each heading are then placed in the context of some of the literature on feedback, sourced from Higher Education Academy material and recent journals and books in the field.



6. Limitations of the study

The informants were an opportunistic sample and cannot be considered representative of the Faculty. There is some evidence that students who had done particularly badly in their Semester A assessments may not be represented. Student researchers reported peers responding to their request to answer questions on feedback by saying that they had received 'bad feedback' on their assignment and didn't want to talk about it. The issue of students not wanting to talk about work that has been evaluated by staff as poor will be discussed later.

The student researchers were not chosen as representative of particular groups. Interestingly the five students were all new to the University in September, although four had previously studied with other higher education institutions, either abroad or in the UK.



Findings

Category One: The Nature of Feedback

Informant Data

Comments were related to the following four themes:

- *who gave the feedback*
- *where the feedback was given*
- *the nature of the feedback*
- *the purposes of the feedback*

Who gave the feedback

The student informants identified that the following people gave them feedback on their work:

staff	tutors	professors	lecturers	teachers
colleagues	peers	friends		

Where the feedback was given

The student informants identified that they received feedback:

on assignment cover sheets	on written work	in class	in lectures	in seminars
in tutorials	in one to one contexts with the tutor	by email	over the phone	on StudyNet
during confidential discussions	in informal contexts			



The type of feedback

The student informants identified the type of feedback as:

responses to questions	on-line discussions	class discussions	annotations	conversations
written	verbal	comments on performance	comments on participation	corrections
grades	everything you can get from your professors	listening to others talk about their work		

The purposes of feedback

The student informants saw the purposes of feedback as:

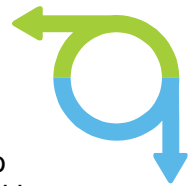
constructive criticism	advice	areas for development	areas of weakness	what I got wrong or right
a comparison of what I did with what was required	how to improve	what I did well	evaluation	identification of strengths and weaknesses
good and bad points	how well I structured my work	how well I argued my points	how I need to improve	why I got the grade
to enhance performance	to try to encourage me			

Student Researcher Data

The student researchers agreed that they received feedback in a range of contexts and in a range of ways. They did not see feedback as only written comments from staff. They reported that they identified aspects of staff behaviour, such as facial expression, tone of voice and body language as providing feedback on understanding of topics and performance in seminars, but that if they were asked about feedback 'on their work' they were most likely to report on what had been written on assignment cover sheets or annotations on their assignments.

They reported that they valued written feedback, partly because it could be returned to easily but that verbal feedback could be particularly effective. *'Discussing with tutors is the best thing.'* they noted, *'On-line I just can't get the gist.'* Some people in the group reported that it was helpful when a tutor other than their module tutor gave them feedback as that offered different perspectives; others reported that they found this confusing as what was said could be inconsistent. They also had mixed views about receiving the feedback without the grade. One person felt quite strongly that *'Not having the feedback would make me use the feedback more. I wouldn't be disheartened by the grade.'* Others reported *'mixed feelings'* about having the feedback and then the grade later as you *'could be disappointed'* with the eventual mark.

The student researchers varied in how much they valued peer feedback. While they all valued staff feedback the majority also valued feedback from their peers. These students felt that the opportunity to work in a small group of peers giving each other feedback on their assignments was more valuable than hearing generic feedback, which may or may not apply to them, given by a member of staff to the whole group. Feedback from peers, they suggested, might be given in a language that was mutually understood and therefore could be effective. Working with a small group looking at assignments was seen as useful but *'you don't get much chance to do this at uni'*. The reason given for was mainly *'lack of*



opportunities and places to communicate with people about your work. Before coming to university they had anticipated working in groups on a regular basis but felt that issues with space made that difficult. They also noted that working in the LRC was not always easy due to some students socialising rather than working.

Feedback was seen as a one-way process, from staff to students. They felt that there was limited opportunity to discuss assignment feedback or feedback on their learning during the course. When asked about the end of module student feedback questionnaire, as a way of sharing understanding of how learning was being facilitated, this was identified as *'that end of module bureaucracy'*. They said that they understood that the university was a business and had targets and this form of feedback was seen as part of that. They did not see it as useful for students as it was at the end of the module and therefore too late for anything to change. They suggested that if they had the opportunity to discuss how the module was going half way through this would be useful. They also noted that the questionnaire was about reporting back and not about discussion with staff. They suggested *'some people don't feel they have a voice.'* Interestingly only a minority of students in this group knew about, or had any dealings with, student representatives on programme committees.

Discussion

It is encouraging that students participating in this project had an understanding of feedback beyond that of written comments on summative assignments. Many clearly understood that a wide range of feedback was given in different contexts and that this could be used for learning. This points to the importance of giving many different forms of feedback opportunities, involving both staff and peers, and pointing out that this is being done. Students may miss out on feedback if they don't recognise it and may fail to understand how they can use it if this is not made explicit. Further discussion of how students saw themselves using feedback will be undertaken later in this report.

Peer feedback, and how the effectiveness of this could be developed, would be useful to explore, including ideas such as 'critical friends', 'reading/study partners' and different ways of giving and receiving feedback in seminar contexts. Methods of students working together when undertaking work outside sessions need to be set up during sessions so that the strengths, limitations, approaches and boundaries can be explored. This will involve staff discussing with students different ways of learning, approaches to studying, strategies for reading and researching topics.

Students appeared to see feedback as something that was given to them, rather than something in which they participated. Students may have few opportunities to discuss feedback given to them by staff or to share with staff how their learning is progressing on a module. Rowland (2000:33) has pointed out that systems, such as student feedback questionnaires, can be seen as 'limiting rather than enhancing communication between teachers and students.' Discussion about the effectiveness of student learning on a module needs to be ongoing and as a dialogue involving the development of a shared understanding in a context of mutual interest. This contrasts with a potentially adversarial situation that can arise when students are positioned as consumers rather than participants. Boyask (2008) argues that while learning and teaching in higher education is no longer seen as a transmission process, this is not always the case in relation to feedback.





Category Two: The Impact of Feedback

Informant Data

Comments were related to the following two themes:

- an evaluation of the quality of the feedback
- emotional aspects of receiving feedback

Evaluation of the quality of the impact

Positive statements

Any feedback I have received has been useful	Some of it is good	Brilliant – in terms of my course work feedback has been great
It has been supportive when mistakes occur	Some points were useful	Usually reasonable and fair
Positive effect	Some of it has helped me	It was beneficial
Good	The impact of this feedback has been great	Some feedback has a positive impact
It has been helpful	Useful	

Negative statements

One of my professors just waffled	Some isn't so good	Usually unhelpful and not constructive
No impact for me	(some) I find useless	

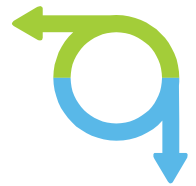
Emotional aspects of feedback

Positive emotions

Nice to know someone is reading your work	Good for confidence	It gives me confidence that people are concerned with my education
It provided me with confidence to find strength I didn't even know I had	It enthuses me to be better or to be the best	Made me much more eager to work
Made me more enthusiastic to be a better student	Motivated me to do much better	Positive – made me eager to work

Negative emotions

Feedback has annoyed me slightly because it has shown my own mistakes	Some of it is quite discouraging	If it is very critical it is discouraging
I didn't find it constructive to be honest	It is normally insulting unless it is a good essay	Written feedback can sometimes be impersonal and in some ways demeaning
One of our profs was actually rude	Panicked me as it was against my expectations	In some ways it has really affected me emotionally but it has helped me with my academic studies
It can demotivate me but generally the good or bad feedback gives me a push to keep working		



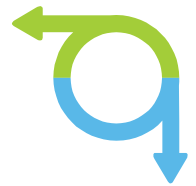
Student Researcher Data

In relation to the two themes in this section students identified staff-student relationships as key to their response to feedback. *'The more comfortable you feel the more you can take feedback on board.'* *'They [staff] don't realise the impact they have.'* *'It's their engagement with you that's important.'* Students reported that they had anticipated more frequent, informal opportunities to interact with staff, perhaps in common rooms or similar contexts, and were disappointed that this was not the case. They felt that they were lacking a shared academic environment and were missing out on how people thought, talked and worked in a university context. They felt that this was due partly to working practices and partly to their own lack of confidence in knowing how to connect with staff, *'how to gauge the situation'*, They felt that mature students would be more likely to have the confidence to talk with staff but that international students may have difficulty understanding local cultural conventions.

In addition to the context and student issues about communicating with staff, there was the perception that some staff distanced themselves from students, *'staff separate themselves'*, *'it depends how they see themselves'*. They felt that their own learning from feedback was related to their relationships with their tutors, *'Some lecturers I wouldn't approach – it's reflected in my marks- I do better in modules with approachable staff.'*

As well as identifying staff-student relationships as important, student researchers also recognised that individual students would respond differently to similar feedback and that this related to personal characteristics and prior experiences. They suggested that when first starting university the process of feedback could be *'intimidating'*. Feedback was commented upon as being in *'stereotypical language eating away at student feelings of inadequacy.'* and that *'bad feedback can wreck your foundations'* or *'tip the balance of confidence.'* Some students were able to take a more detached view of feedback and were keen to identify all the weaknesses in their own work in order to improve. They were aware that there was a balance between destroying confidence and giving honest feedback that could lead to improvement and that this was difficult for staff, *'How far can professors go?'* They appreciated that different students coped in different ways with feedback and agreed that it was important for students to know what they need to do to improve and that maybe staff could put *'negative stuff in more positive language.'*

The emotional impact of feedback was identified as one reason why some students do not collect their marked scripts if the grade is lower than they had anticipated. It takes some time to get over the shock and to go back to something negative, particularly if one is now well into another module or subject and doesn't want to lose confidence in this context. Students felt that if they had not retrieved marked assignments from the collection point and needed to go at a later date to obtain the script from a tutor they were unlikely to do this, as *'you'd have to face your paper and your tutor – a double whammy!'*



Discussion

It is encouraging to note that out of 86 student informants only 11 did not make at least one positive comment about feedback. These students valued feedback but were also aware of how it could be even more effective. Part of this was to do with the tone of the language used and the potential emotional impact of this. They were aware of individual differences in the levels of 'robustness' in peers arising from differences in prior experiences and in personalities. Work in the field of learning (e.g. Mangles et al 2006) has also indicated that students' belief about intelligence, whether it is fixed or acquirable, influences their learning success. Students who receive feedback that they see as suggesting that they are not intelligent may believe that there is nothing they can do about this and this will have an effect on how they process feedback on errors. Pitts (2005:223) notes that 'students' sensitivity to the language used to discuss their work is often highly charged...' and this can make it difficult for them to process the comments effectively in order to use them.

Barnett (2007:7) argues that this issue of paying attention to the emotional needs of students is important not because it is about being nice or kind to students, but because it is the emotion – the will to learn- that drives student achievement and that this can be fragile. He argues that in a complex and uncertain world students need to develop dispositions to learn, which they can build on throughout their lives. Part of the role of university education is to nurture these dispositions including '...a readiness to keep going, a willingness to open oneself to new experiences, and a propensity critically to be honest with oneself and critically to interrogate oneself.' A measure of confidence is necessary if the student is to begin to do this and therefore the impact of feedback on this confidence is significant. Mann (2001:15) argues that the results of assessment tell the students about themselves, their success and 'their worth in relation to others'. If this is perceived as negative it can contribute to a 'feeling of alienation' that can result in students choosing to disconnect themselves from the process and adopt 'an alienated stance as a means of survival'. Students in this state would be unlikely to collect feedback or to be able to use it for self-assessment and development.

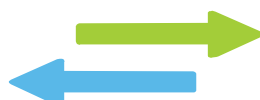
As individuals will respond to feedback differently, awareness on the part of those giving feedback, staff or peers, of the importance of the language used in feedback and its potential effects is clearly important. Some form of preparation of students for receiving feedback is also key, particularly in the first year as this lays the foundation for future learning (Johnston, 2010). Staff can talk with students about their own experience of receiving negative feedback on drafts of work for publication, for example, and how they dealt with this. This empathy, and making links between student and staff experiences, can help to lessen the separation between staff and students and develop the relationships that are identified as important for the effective use of feedback.

Projects undertaken at different universities have also identified the importance of staff-student and student-student relationships in feedback contexts. Data collected in these projects echo those found in our own study. Pokorny and Pickford (2010:26), for example, looking at feedback in two universities, found that students saw that giving feedback could be difficult for staff as there were large numbers of students but that they perceived the issue as being less about numbers than staff attitude. As one student in that project commented 'it's just sometimes more or less how comfortable the tutor makes you feel'. The authors identify power, distance, alienation, fear, embarrassment and lack of understanding of academic norms as issues for students, with rapport building as the most important factor in



building effective feedback relationships. They also found that first year students wanted help to develop peer working and feedback contexts. The students themselves acknowledged that this was not always easy as students could be resistant and find it difficult, so persistent and structured approaches to making this happen were important.

Boyask (2008:142), exploring factors affecting the formative feedback processes in a faculty, identified staff-student relationships as 'a significant strand for this project'. They identified opportunities for staff and students to work together in contexts such as workshops, studios and more informal situations as conducive for fostering these relationships. In programmes where these opportunities do not arise naturally it would seem to be important to create them.



Category 3 The Use of Feedback

Informant Data

Comments were related to the following three themes:

- general uses of feedback
 1. for understanding expectations,
 2. for identifying strengths and weaknesses
 3. for improving future work/actions
- specific uses of feedback
- issues with using feedback
 1. not using/not received
 2. difficulty understanding
 3. difficulty acting on

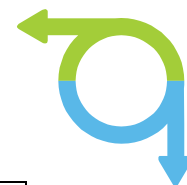
General uses of Feedback

1 Expectations

Allows me to see where I'm at	I can identify my level
Helped me to know what my professors were expecting of me	Good to know I am going in the right direction
It has given me a clearer understanding of what examiners require in an answer	

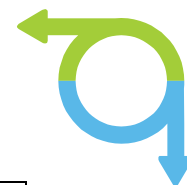
2 Strengths and Weaknesses

See where I'm going wrong	Helped me to know my strong and weak points
I can identify areas of strength and weakness	Useful for someone else to spot an improvement I may not have noticed
I know I should read more and be more analytical	Feedback has been quite powerful and has shown the same things in nearly every essay



3 Improvement

It means the next one can be better	Helps me to get my grade higher	Sets me on the correct path
The one that I have used was very helpful – helps me now when doing essays	Despite not looking at it often, when I do look at it I take note of it to read my mistakes – substantially my results have started to improve	When you get constructive advice it helps to improve your essay
Helps you to know what to do next time	Helps to see what you need to develop	Taking on board advice and using it for the next assignment
It has sometimes changed my thinking or the way I do an assignment	I keep it in mind in order to avoid any other mistakes and to enhance my work	You are aware of what you are doing and this enables you to correct your mistakes
It has been an aid to me throughout my studies, especially when looking at essays	I have taken into consideration what my professors have said so as to use it for future assignments	Have read feedback to improve my essays and seminar discussion
Used it to make the correct changes in order to get a higher grade next time	To change and adapt myself in and out of UH	I have used this feedback to improve my performance in writing in general and in academic research in particular
I used it a lot in my second assignment	I will look back over feedback I have had before my exams to make sure I improve	To better myself as a student
I use it all the time – it's a starting point for a new essay	To improve my work and behaviour	It has made me do better work
Used Sem A feedback for Sem B work	When feedback has been constructive and detailed I have used it in a positive manner towards other assignments	



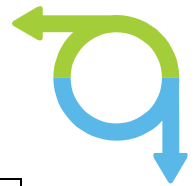
Specific uses of feedback

I've been more analytical with my work – including essays and how I present myself	I didn't know how to do a bibliography and it was wonderful to learn it when I got my feedback	I have done more revision and practice essays
Made me more involved with my seminar	Made me think about trying harder	It has changed the way I work
I have become more dedicated	Reread critiques and analysed my essays in relation to the current one	I've broadened my reading
I've looked at certain aspects of my writing	Within seminars 'speaking up'	Used it as a confidence booster and as a method of reassurance
Perhaps adopted a more historical look at my work	I make sure I have an introduction, conclusion and so on. This has helped me get better results	I'll try hard to be brief and to the point just to pass and get my degree
I'll use legal resources and I know how to find them	I'll change my style in future assignments	I'll try now to pay attention to using a variety of resources
Spending more time on revision	I am trying to focus more on analysis and criticism	I'll use more legal terminology
Changed my learning style	I've altered my revision technique	How to answer an essay question properly

Issues with using feedback

1 Not using/not received

To be fair I don't usually look at feedback	I have rarely received feedback on work I've handed in so can't comment	We don't receive all our homework back to receive feedback
Haven't had much of an impact as not much has been given	I read it but I don't use it as much as I should I guess	Don't really use it. If I have passed I don't really care
Please ask uni if they are going to make you do extra work to give you feedback on it or it's a waste of time		



2 Difficulty understanding

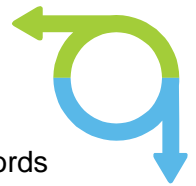
The most unhelpful thing is when a professor says 'expand this'. This is very unhelpful and you get it a lot	Impact is often limited by the poor handwriting of the lecturers	One of my essays 'disintegrated as it went through'. I didn't think his was the best form of criticism
Sometimes with face to face feedback it is a lot easier to understand but then some tutors don't always show their true feelings	Feedback isn't as good as it should be – instead of written it should be face to face	I try to use it as positively as I can but a lot of the comments are just not helpful
Could not understand what they meant until I spoke to them		

3 Difficulty acting on

Feedback is not clear – it's not about what I have done wrong or not	It is not particularly constructive	There is a grid, which shows criteria – this is not marked – it if was marked it would be easier for the student to see where they are in each area. This would highlight where to improve
It is good but I hoped that our tutors would correct our assignment	I have acted on the comments but not felt able to discuss any point I would like clarity on	Not really used it much as I didn't find it relevant to my next assignment

Student Researcher Data

Two areas of focus emerged from the student researchers' discussion in relation to the use of feedback: language and timeliness. In relation to language a key issue was the perception that it was not explicit and therefore needed interpreting by the student. *'You kind of know it's for improvement but it's kind of implicit. This is how academic processes work.'* They saw this as an issue in relation to the feedback process in general and to individual comments on scripts, *'They put 'think about this' rather than rectifying points.'* *'They put 'this happens' not 'this happens and this is what you can do about it.'* *'You get sentences saying 'you need to do this' but not why or how it needs to be done.'*



Student researchers also identified issues around understanding academic language; words such as 'analysis', 'argument', 'reference' and 'criticism' were seen as difficult to understand and there was a perception that this could be particularly problematic for international students. Explanations without examples in the context of students' own work were difficult to apply. It was suggested that a reason why some students did not collect their work was that they did not understand what was written and did not see how to use it for future work.

Student researchers suggested that they would like '*a detailed analysis that can actually direct work.*' They discussed recommendations that they found from another university, which advised that feedback should be: 'specific, immediate, personal and sincere'. They saw the 'specific' as important in relation to issues around language, and the 'personal' and 'sincere' as important for recognising the person (both student and member of staff) in the work. They liked scripts, for example, when the annotations appeared to be talking to them personally, sometimes by name but always by showing that the member of staff had the best interests of the student at heart. During a discussion session the student researchers generated their own words to guide the giving of feedback in addition to those identified above which were: focussed, detailed, clear, constructive, motivating, direct but polite, individual, explanatory, positive, respectful, diplomatic and useful.

In relation to the timing of feedback students recognised that 'immediate' feedback was possible in some contexts, such as in seminars, but that receiving most forms of feedback would take place over a longer time period. They appreciated that some types of assessment, such as multiple-choice questions, could lead to quick feedback whereas long essays, for example, would take time to mark. They were less interested in the notion of promptness than in that of 'timeliness' (the term used in the UH strategic plan). '*It's difficult to know where you are heading if feedback isn't given earlier.*' They identified that feedback given after the end of the module clearly did not help with work in that module and that it was difficult to see how to apply it to the next module, particularly if this was a different subject or involved a different form of assessment. They saw some students' failure to collect work as related to issues of how to connect feedback given in one context to work done in another. A minority of the students in the group recognised the term 'formative assessment', although this does not mean, necessarily, that they had not been engaged in formative assessment activities in sessions. In discussions they said that they thought formative assessment during the module would have a positive effect on their end of module assignment and that ongoing feedback had the most effect on their learning. Timing of formative assessment in relation to the programme, rather than just in an individual module, needed to be considered, however, to prevent student overload at particular times.

Discussion

As in our project research focusing on one institution or on cross-institution comparisons, identified the language and timing of feedback as significant in relation to its effectiveness. Mutch (2003:32) examined 122 feedback summary sheets and analysed the language used by staff. One type of comment used by staff was 'implied developmental', where students may, or may not, infer what they needed to do to improve. Students could see, for example, positive statements, such as 'evidence of using some good, basic sources', as 'closed' and not requiring further action. Negative comments such as 'Too much of your word count was used on descriptive content' may appear to offer advice, but the implications may not be perceived.



Vardi (2009:354) undertook a detailed study of feedback on the work of final year undergraduate students where one piece of written work was submitted three times during a semester, with a proportion of the marks allocated for each submission. This process allowed her to see the effect of the written feedback on the revisions and subsequent submissions of the piece. She found that some types of feedback were more effective in helping students to improve their work. A key finding was that global feedback that could be used to improve work generally was best understood if local examples were given. For example, explaining how the student could demonstrate the analysis of a topic by restructuring a specific part of a text led to significant change throughout the text. Giving both an example, and the general implication, helped to improve the specific part of the text and allowed the student to interpret the more general statement. Feedback given only in general terms, such as 'poor analysis' did not lead to change in the context of this study. Another finding was that if too much attention was given to surface features, such as grammar and referencing conventions, the feedback related to deeper aspects such as structure, argument and so on could be lost.

As Roland (2000:110) notes: '...fundamental ideas about teaching and learning are culturally informed'. Students coming new to a higher education context will be entering a culture that is more or less familiar depending on a whole range of factors. Assessment and feedback processes are part of this culture. Coming to understand a culture, particularly the tacit dimensions, have traditionally depended on 'complex socialisation processes based on practice, imitation, feedback and discussion...' (Rust et al 2003:162). These authors argue that it can be difficult to share these cultural understandings due to large numbers of students and limited staff-student contact time. Strategies such as organising students to work in groups assessing examples of assignments and then seeing and hearing a member of staff mark the same piece, giving explanations and the reasoning behind the marking, is one way of helping to make the implicit more explicit.

Gibbs and Dunbat-Goddet (2007) recognise this issue in their study of different types of university in the UK and their related assessment and feedback processes. They argue that in institutions with short modules with an emphasis on end of module summative assessment it is difficult for students to transfer their learning from feedback between modules, particularly if modules are very different, if students are moving between disciplines and if forms of assessment vary considerably. Different forms of assessment may be important for a developing a range of skills and for building on different student strengths but may not enhance learning if feedback focuses on features of the assessment type rather than on the underlying way of thinking in a discipline or profession.

Gibbs and Dunbat-Goddet suggest that institutions can afford either high levels of formative and low levels of summative assessment or vice versa. Our institution has high investment in terms of staff and student effort in end of module assessment. This is given status by focussed marking weeks and allocated time frames and procedures, a status that is not given to formative assessment. It could be argued that summative assessment can be used formatively. This could be the case if it were written in a way that was designed to do this. This would imply that staff would not be marking an example of performance but would be using feedback to teach. As Hounsell (2007: 104) notes feedback on summative assessment (sometimes known as high-stakes assessment as opposed to low-stakes formative assessment) can only 'feedforward' to future work ' if that immediate assignment or assessment is imminently to be repeated, forms part of a linked chain of assessments within



a module or course unit, or enhances students' evolving grasp of a core component...of a wider programme of study.' This would involve cross programme links between module assessments, staff discussions about forms of feedback and explicit processes for students to link feedback from one context to another. Strategies for helping students to self-assess could be embedded into feedback approaches, for as been noted earlier, this is a key ability for people to function in life beyond university. Indeed Hounsell (2007:110) argues that expertise in giving and using feedback should 'become an outcome of higher education.' If this were seen as the case then the approach taken to feedback in universities would be revolutionised.



Action Points

Some key points for practice development can be derived from the findings of our small-scale project. Under the headings below are some suggestions of what could be done, with spaces for colleagues to continue this thinking and to develop a dialogue within the Faculty. Many of these ideas will be already in use and examples of excellent feedback approaches can be collated and shared across the University.

Opportunities to continue to build learning relationships between students and staff

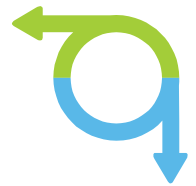
- programme teams identify opportunities for staff and students to share ideas informally, perhaps around a text, film, quotation, case, or example of practice
- ...
- ...

Ways of developing shared understanding about forms and functions of feedback

- programme and module staff identify sessions which will include a staff–student discussion of feedback
- ...
- ...

Strategies for developing students' abilities to use and give feedback

- module staff identify ways in which students can be coached to give feedback to peers
- ...
- ...



Approaches to developing staff skills in using feedback for teaching

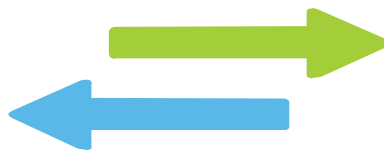
- programme teams identify effective feedback approaches that will allow feedforward between modules
- ...
- ...

Ways of expanding the use of formative assessment within modules

- colleagues within a School share ideas for effective formative assessment approaches
- ...
- ...

Methods of building programme/course assessment structures

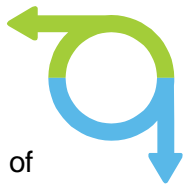
- programme teams develop a map showing connections and progression between summative and formative assessment across their programmes
- ...
- ...



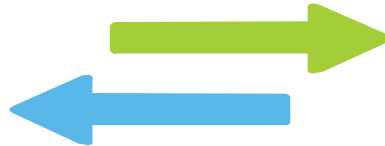
Evaluation of the Process

This joint student-staff enquiry project demonstrated that participants could work together effectively and develop a more informed understanding of the focus of enquiry through dialogue. Discussions were undertaken in a professional way, with care taken with respect to confidentiality; no individual students, staff or programmes were identified. All participants undertook work between sessions and engaged actively in the process. It was identified that building a trusting and collaborative context where participants could talk honestly was essential. As a participant noted *'if we don't talk with each other in an open way how do we know where we are?'*

Participants all felt that they had gained in understanding about the process of enquiry, including the collection and analysis of data, team working and communication skills. They all felt a commitment to the Faculty and to supporting the development of learning within this context. They identified that the process of staff and students working collaboratively together had the potential to lead to improved practice. Students who will be continuing at the University next year have already identified projects they would like to participate in, or lead. One of these is the development of a student - to - student resource for first year students on how to use feedback effectively.



Students are involved in working as participants, not merely as informants, in a range of projects in relation to the development of learning, teaching and curriculum design across the higher education sector (e.g. Campbell, et al 2009). We need to explore how we can use this process within the Faculty to the best effect.



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