

# Staff guide

## Writing good assessment feedback

The main purpose of feedback is to develop critical thinking abilities including self-evaluation and reflection, a skill needed to be a lifelong learner. Students are advantaged by good quality feedback which can feedforward to future assignments, improving the quality of their work and study strategies. Feedback should encourage dialogue between students and their peers as well as between students and staff, to clarify the educational goals of the programme. This develops a learning environment where staff and students are able to understand expected standards in assessments.

### The desired outcomes of feedback can be summarised as:

- Collaborative working – peer to peer feedback promotes sustained learning and demonstrates the ability to work together, a practical skill that can be carried through to work space once education ends
- Autonomous judgement – students are able to evaluate their own learning through self-critiquing which can improve future assignments as they ‘fill in the gaps’ of their knowledge
- Beyond graduation – where students develop the ability to be independent critical thinkers, contributing to their continuing learning.

### Tips for written feedback

- Feedback should be feeding forward, not backwards looking, as it is unhelpful to address issues relating to material that will not be studied again
- Feedback should be realistic and specific in its guidance to what students need to do to target issues
- Feedback should not ask the student to do something they do not know how to do
- Feedback that is context specific and only applies to a particular assignment can be unhelpful. Instead, suggesting how to improve generic issues that are applicable across modules such as study skills will be more beneficial to students
- Feedback should be encouraging and lead to more study effort
- For effective feedback to occur, a follow up to check if students have taken any action on the feedback should be implemented.

### Additional strategies

- Language and emotional tone of feedback – feedback should be critical yet constructive. Supportive and encouraging language should be used to encourage student ‘self-efficacy’ – their belief that they are capable of doing well. (Gibbs, 2010)
- Feedback should help students to self-correct: Through using a structured feedback form, feedback can feedforward as oppose to

backwards. Focusing on what is right or wrong (backwards looking) can demotivate and discourage studying, as often the material being assessed and given feedback on will not be studied again. Instead, concentrating on how to improve the quality of work (feeding forward) for example by providing generic feedback, is more valuable to students as they can apply such advice to future work.

- Feedback strategy – informing students of when to expect feedback and how often they will receive feedback. This can also ensure that feedback is being provided in a timely manner. The shorter the space between the assignment and feedback, the more effectively students can reflect and improve on their work before the next task.
- Frequent assignments – student effort becomes distributed throughout the course, allowing for regular feedback. Regular feedback can help students self-assess their progress as they implement feedback with each new formative task, allowing room for improvement before a summative assignment. This can help students to fill in the gaps as they go along.
- Examples of work - Providing examples of work of different standards can be more useful to students than reading assessment criteria. (Gibbs, 2010) It can help them to familiarise themselves to the standard of work required.

### Tips for oral feedback or discussing feedback

Students may be unable to understand feedback as easily as tutors. Discussing the use of feedback can help develop student's ability to understand given feedback and how to implement it effectively. Oral feedback between assignments is a fast and informal method of clarifying goals. Discussions may encourage self-assessing questions such as (Gibbs, 2010):

- What did you do well in this assignment?
- What would you have needed to have done to have got a better grade?
- What can you learn from this assignment that

- could help you in your next assignment?
- What would you like feedback on next time?
- What did you do well in this assignment?
- What would you have needed to have done to have got a better grade?
- What can you learn from this assignment that could help you in your next assignment?
- What would you like feedback on next time?

### Implementing quality feedback

As institutions have come to understand the importance of feedback in students learning, detailed feedback is becoming more frequent. However, the availability of feedback does not mean that it is always taken on board, which is counterproductive. The following are potential methods of increasing academic involvement can ensure feedback is implemented:

- Responsibility for learning - requiring students to demonstrate response to feedback in subsequent assignments, for example attaching a cover sheet to explain how they have used previous feedback to tackle this assignment more effectively.
- Employability skills – incorporating employability skills in assessments can help bridge the gap between higher education and the workplace. This allows for more realistic and practical assessment practices that are relevant beyond a student's degree. Additionally, students are increasingly selecting their university courses on the basis of their employment prospects as the job market becomes increasingly competitive. Restructuring assessments to consider employment competencies may increase a response to feedback that is more visible.
- Progress review – meeting with tutors to consider what has been learnt from feedback and how this has fed into their next assignment. Doing this regularly encourages teacher and student dialogue surrounding assessments.

### REFERENCES

Gibbs, G (2010). Using assessment to support student learning. Leeds: Leeds Met Press