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What Do Edinburgh Students Want?

A mixed methods analysis of NSS 2016 free text data

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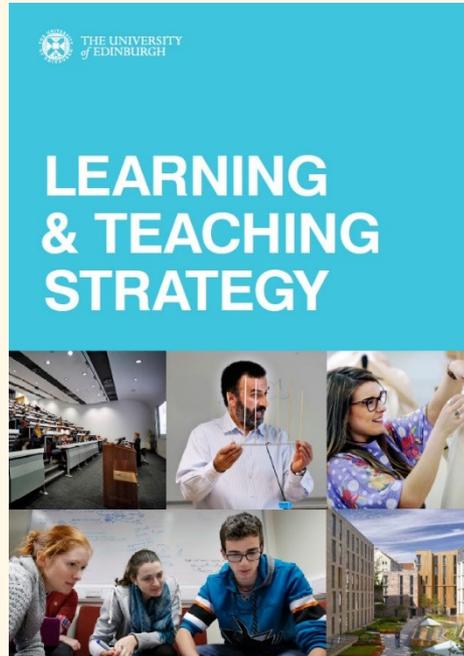
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Key Messages

- Can (and should) use a variety of approaches to make the best use of pre-existing data
- Students want to feel proud of their university
- Students want people to be proud of them
- Students desperate for a relationship with their lecturers.
 - They will align themselves with their lecturers over ‘the university’ if needed
- Students need guidance on how they’re doing (feedback)
 - Need it in time for their next high-stakes, high-pressure assessment.



Who Are We/Why are we here?



Senior Vice Principal
(Responsibility for student experience, learning and teaching across the University)

Deputy secretary
(student experience)



AP
Assessment and Feedback
(SMR)

Research fellows
(VME): JM and KH

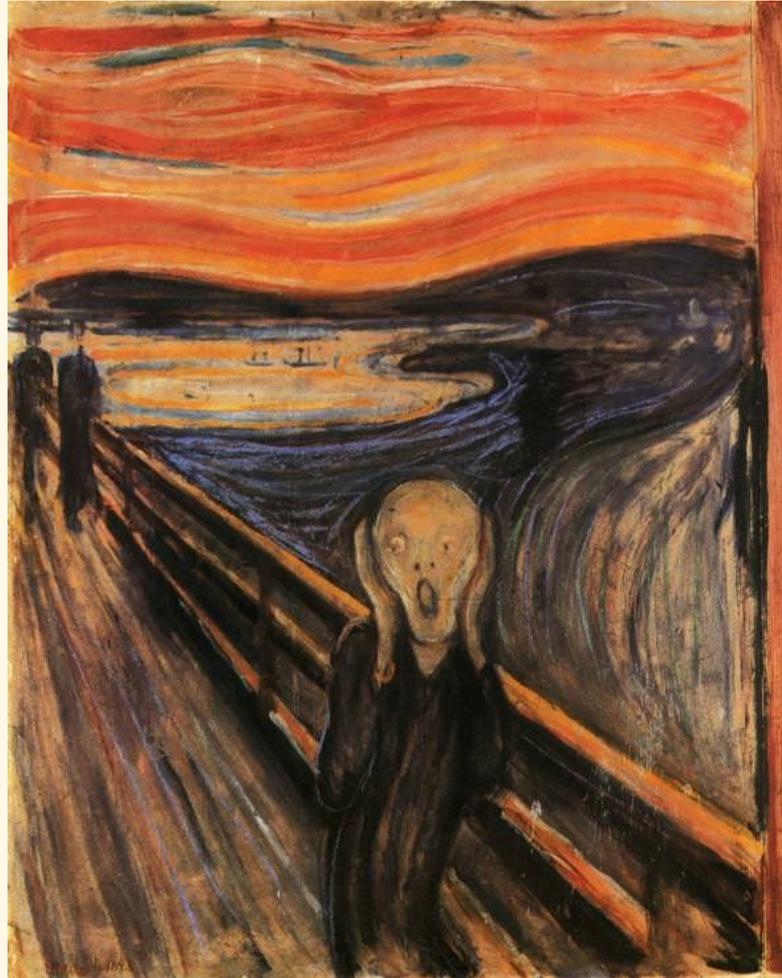
Lecturer (University Learning and Teaching)
(NL)

The Importance of Qualitative Data

- QAA New Enhancement Theme running until 2020
- Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience
- What data helps us:
 - Identify what we do well
 - Prioritise interventions
 - Evaluate effectiveness



The National Student Survey

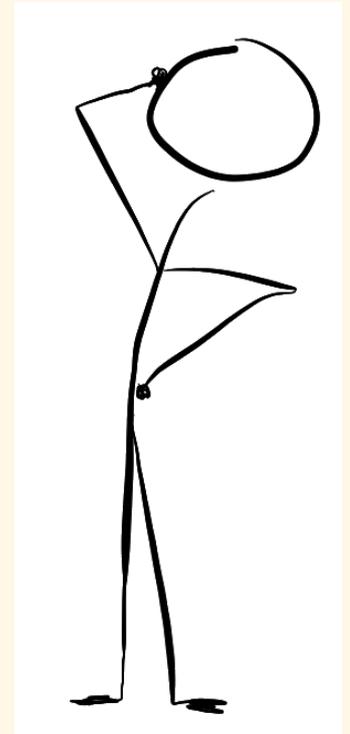


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'The Scream', 1893, Edvard Munch
Used without permission in parody

Can NSS Data Be Valuable?

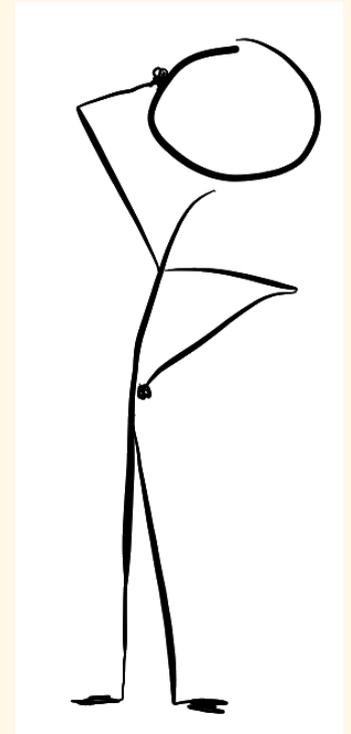
Annually administered nation-wide survey of final years



Can NSS Data Be Valuable?

Annually administered nation-wide survey of final years

Independently administered (Ipsos MORI)



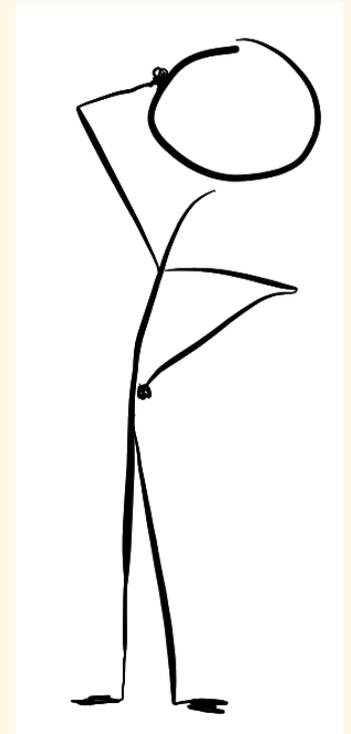
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At Edinburgh:

Approx. 3000 students take the time to write 1-3 comments about their time here



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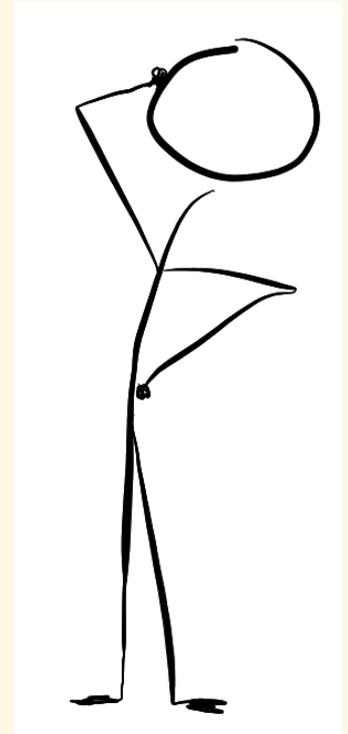
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STUDENT FEEDBACK IS VALUABLE



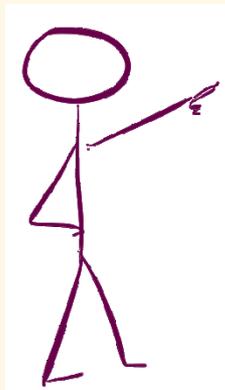
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The Free Text Questions

- Looking back on the experience, are there any particularly positive or negative aspects you would like to highlight? (Negative)
- Looking back on the experience, are there any particularly positive or negative aspects you would like to highlight? (Positive)
- What one thing would do most to improve the quality of your student experience? (University Specific Question)



Our Approaches



Robust, repeatable overviews of data via natural language processing



Broad summaries produced by Student Surveys



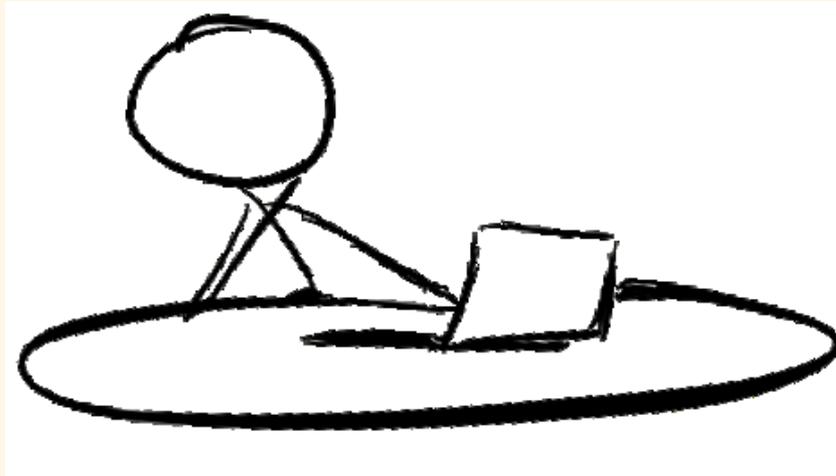
In-depth thematic analysis of the university as a whole



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Overviews With Natural Language Processing

- NLP – application of computational techniques to the analysis and synthesis of natural language and speech (thanks Wiki!)



NLP: Pros

- Cheap & fast
- R + tidytext both free.
- If done well, has good anonymity
- Reports on aggregated data – less danger of identifying a student/staff member
- Repeatable over time
 - Shareable: <https://github.com/jillymackay/NLPforNSS>



**Anyone
can have
this!**



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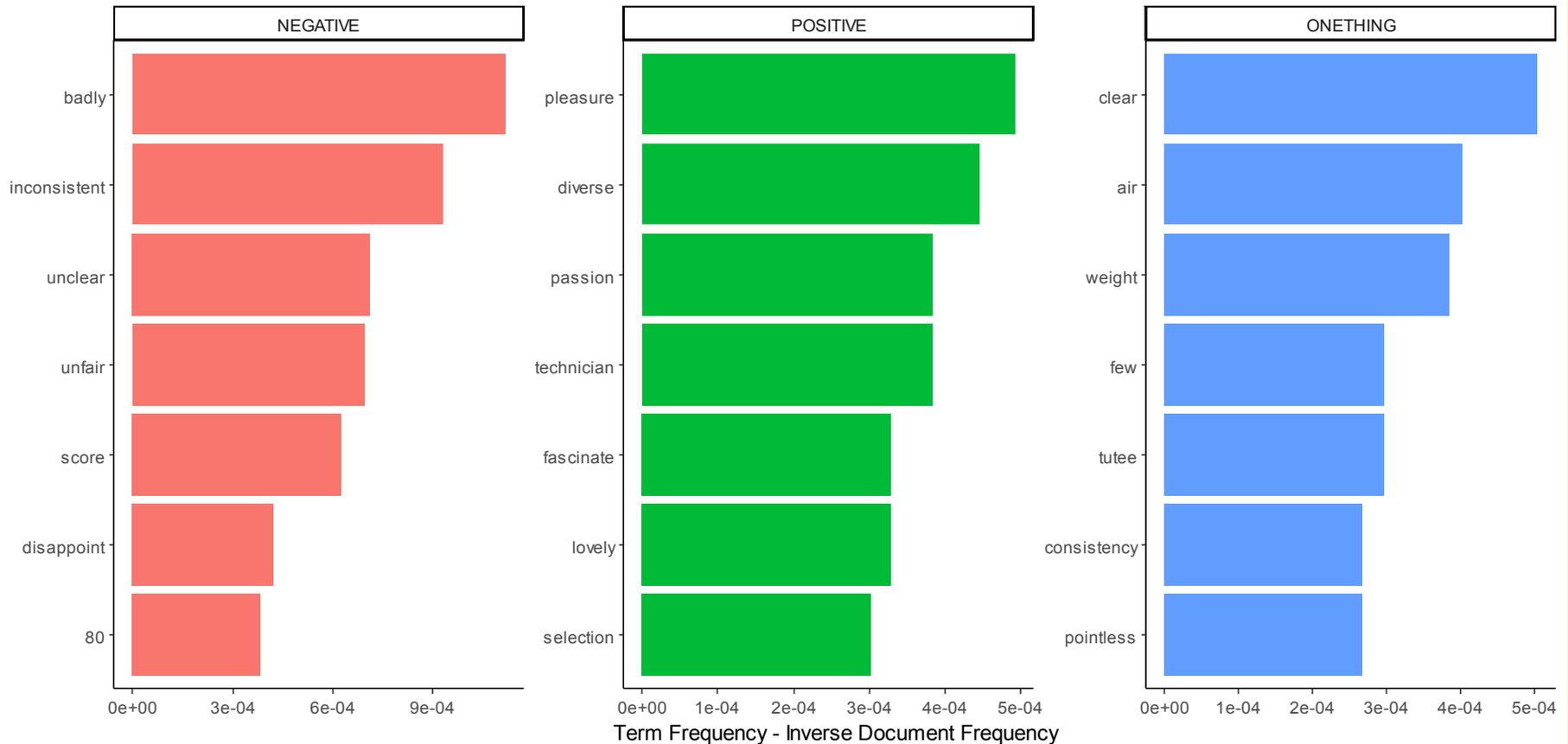
NLP: Cons

- Shareable means data more likely to be shared.
 - NSS data needs to be treated sensitively – students agree to share for benefit of institute
- Do not confuse lots of data with a deep understanding of data.
- Gives a ‘distance’ to the stories students tell you.



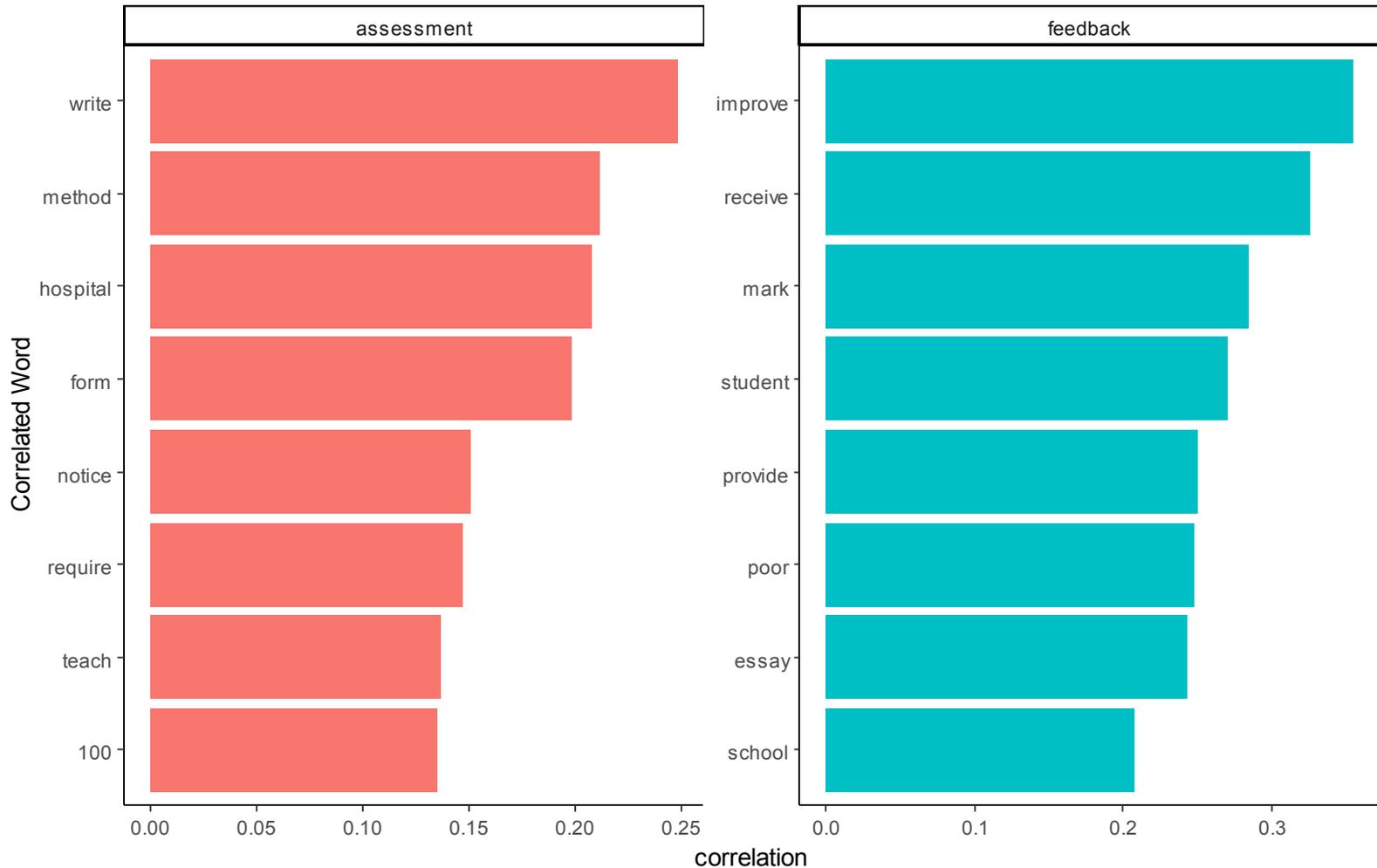
What Do Students Say By Comment?

Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequencies of Free Text Comments by Question



What do Students Say About Topics?

Correlations with given words across university in negative NSS free text comments



Broad Summaries from Student Surveys

- Student Surveys pay for a service to do a broad coding of free-text data
- This coding is also done for CEQ data
- Can provide a quick window into your free text data.
- Comparable to other datasets, e.g. CEQ



A Deep Exploration of NSS Data

- In the beginning . . .
- 3 schools' data explored by JM, HM, KH and NL
- All 4 researchers independently coded same 20 responses to identify themes and establish consistency

- Schools then divided between KH, HM and JM
- Each school coded by a single researcher
- New themes could be generated



Overview of Themes

Table 1: *Seven broad themes extracted from the NSS 2016 responses and some of their sub-themes*

Theme	Sub-Themes
Organisation	Good and bad organisation
Community and Alienation	Student feedback not valued
Facilities	
Student Concerns and Self-Development	Confidence, enjoyment of materials, help with living in Edinburgh
Learning and Teaching	Language skills (staff), consistency of teaching
Assessment and Feedback	Exam timetabling, assessments not fitting course, assessments too challenging, grade bands confusing, marking inconsistent, feedback late, no feed-forward
Staff Have Research Focus	The staff were considered experts in their field, or may prefer research to teaching.



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Theme: Community & Alienation

- Students wanted to feel as though they were a valued member of their academic community.

For four years I have been treated like a second-class citizen compared to the postgraduate research students. – CSE

Undergraduates are not important. Research students and research projects are the priority. – CAHSS



Theme: Student Concerns & Self-Development

[What one thing...] Not being made technically homeless.

- CAHSS

[My] supervisor was very supportive and understood my needs as a mentally ill student. He/She also gives very fair and useful feedback and is very approachable and friendly. He/She explains difficult concepts very well.

- CAHSS

Money to buy food. Money to buy a new laptop. Money to buy clothes. Money to buy books. – CAHSS



Theme: Learning & Teaching

The staff are often really good, however some just don't care about teaching. Great teachers should be rewarded more.

- CSE

Staff are academic and more concerned with their own personal interests. This often makes their lectures irrelevant. It seems they would rather not be teaching and that can be confidence-knocking for us.

- CMVM

Edinburgh lives off the fact that it's Edinburgh. So don't invest in their lecturers, I've been taught by my retired teachers who have no enthusiasm for their course anymore and the department has failed to tackle the issue.

- CSE



Theme: Staff Have Research Focus

Maybe the biggest positive aspect is the reputation of the university as a whole and in the field. There are a lot of extremely smart lecturers, highly competent in their field.

- CAHSS

Lecturers seem to be more interested in their research than their teaching skills – some have no desire to make the course interesting. This has got a lot better by the later years in the degree but certainly; in 1st and 2nd year, the teaching quality was poor.

- CSE



Research Focus vs Community

The research focus is only a problem when it excludes the students from participating in that community!



Theme: Assessment & Feedback

While some courses give detailed feedback on where to improve in assignments and reports, most courses have not done that. This makes it significantly harder to strive to improve. Maybe a sample type of report done by an upper year should be provided as a reference to show students what exactly markers are looking for. Also the criteria for marking are extremely vague (have mentioned this a few times in the past, please elaborate so students know what is required of them).

- CSE

Moreover in certain situations, markers graded in vastly different ways, so the difference between the grades of any two students was more dependent on who the marker is, rather than anything else

- CAHSS



Assessment & Community

*The unfair marking attitude.
Lecturers seem to pride
themselves on not awarding high
firsts/any firsts.*

- CSE

*It feels like I am getting
my degree in spite of the
department, instead of
with help from.*

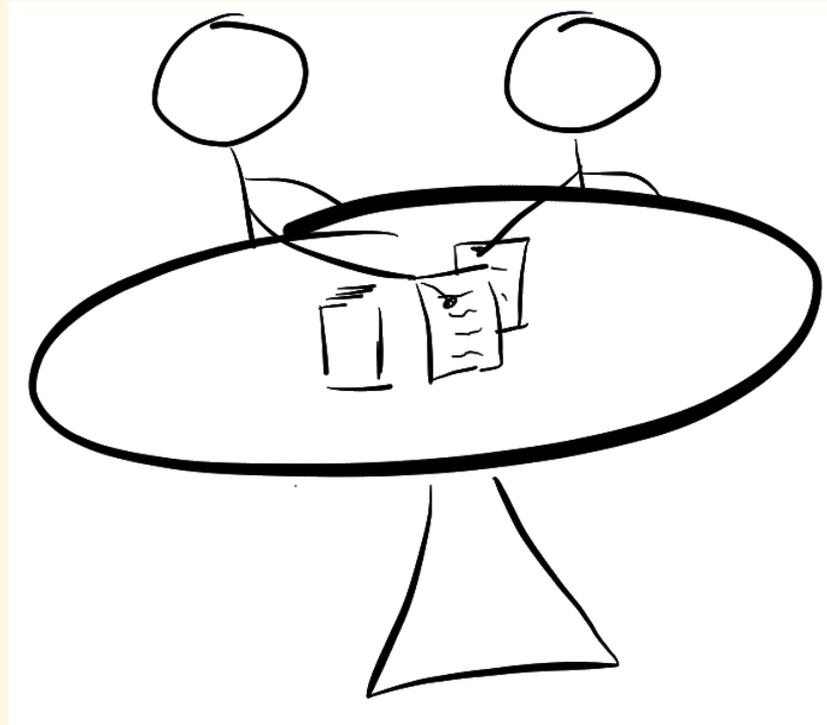
-CSE

*Edinburgh marks its students very harshly
and also makes them do harder, longer,
and more essays than other universities.
Edinburgh is also less flexibly in its
marking. At other universities if you query
a mark the lecturer will look at it again,
this is not the case at Edinburgh. Recently a
survey came out saying Edinburgh is
receiving higher numbers of students
seeking counselling for mental health. I
believe the two are related.*

- CAHSS



Feedback As A Dialogue



University-Wide Feedback Challenges

1. Feedback not arriving when expected
 - i. *Disrupts student's plans*
 - ii. *Students penalised for late submissions but staff not?*
2. Feedback not being available prior to the next piece of assessment
3. Feedback no longer being relevant to the next piece of assessment
4. Feedback not being recognised as feedback (e.g. verbal feedback not being signposted)
5. Inconsistency in staff marking of assignments
 - i. *Feedback becomes inherently unreliable*
 - ii. *Across courses – feedback no longer useful*



From Diagnosis to Action: Local

- Local good practice exists:
 - LLC – School of Literature, Language and Culture course for students on assessment and feedback literacy including a feedback portfolio
 - Vet school – assessment literacy training; students marking work, standard setting exam questions, giving feedback
 - Global Academy of Agriculture - ELDER – 4 New BScs have programme level approach to course design and assessment.

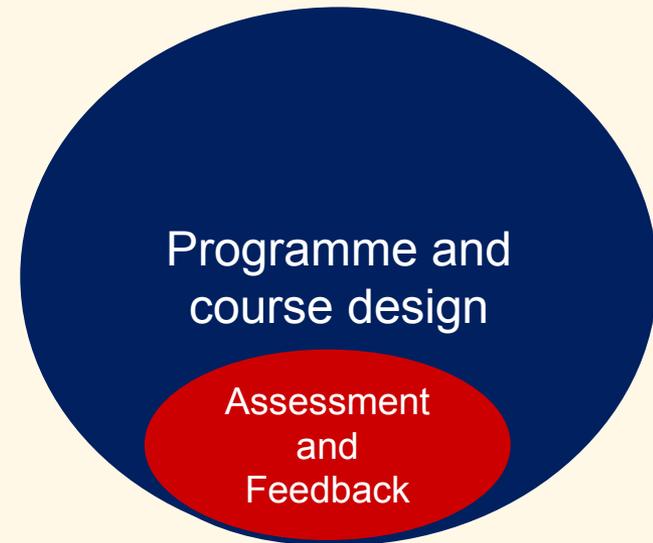


From Diagnosis to Action: University

- Institutional level
 - Focus on Course and Programme Design
 - Assessment literacy

“.... assessment to be a central aspect of curriculum design and development that is integral to teaching and learning, rather than an afterthought”. (Medland, 2016)

“Assessment should be placed at the centre of subject and programme design” (Boud, 2010)



Assessment Literacy: Helping students become self-regulated learners

1. Students need to understand the **purpose** of assessment and how it connects with their learning trajectory.
2. Students need to be aware of the **processes** of assessment and how they might affect students' capacity to submit responses that are on-task, on-time and completed with appropriate academic integrity.
3. Students need opportunities to **practise judging** their own responses to assessment tasks so they can learn to identify what is good about their work and what could be improved.



Engaged in guides...



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<http://bit.ly/2Bi5Swd>

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Thank you for listening.

Any questions?

