

'Extending an Audio-feedback Tool into New contexts: student and staff experiences'

**Final report
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The aim of this project was :

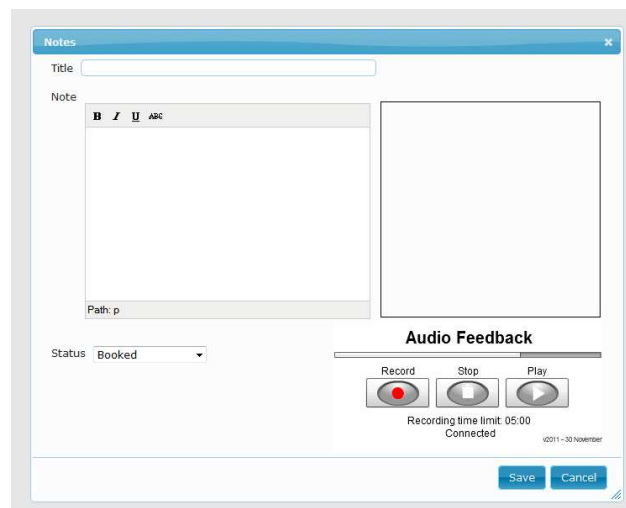
'... to explore the use of audio-feedback in different contexts across the BVM&S curriculum. This will be a key component of our new personal tutor system which is being developed as part of the University wide changes to student support.'

A few months into the project, it became apparent that the technical solution to the project was not capable of being scalable to the extent required hence the scope of the project was amended after liaison with colleagues in IAD.

The remainder of this report deals with the outputs that we managed to achieve from the amended project and some reflections on the lessons learned through the duration of the project and beyond.

Technical Work and Issues

Based on the success of the embedded tool for delivering audio-feedback (Rhind et al, 2013)¹ the tool was amended and imported into the new personal tutor section within our bespoke VLE, EEVeC (See screenshot below). Delivery of the tool took longer than expected due to technical issues however resulting in a loss of a key window for its use around the first PT meetings. Initial testing however was favourable. A screen shot of the interface developed is shown below. Users can use text and audio or select just text or just audio.



Despite the initial attractiveness of the tool, further technical issues led to a switch to individual recording of audio files (using the free software 'Audacity') for our other audio

feedback purposes. This solution would clearly be impractical for the PT meeting recording as it loses the benefit of tying all information relating the tutor/ tutee interaction together. We therefore took the decision to close the project but evaluate those parts which we could do i.e. gathering data from those staff who had used the tool; before it became non-functional.

Staff Reflections were gathered by asking for written reflections after using the tool guided by some trigger questions. Data below represents key themes identified.

Advantages

Ease of Use and Time economy

'In the past I have jotted down hand-written notes during the meeting and expanded on this after the meeting – all hand written. The audio was easy to use. The time limit was helpful as focussed the summary. It didn't really take any longer to do than writing notes for myself but resulted in a record for both me and for the student at the same time.'

Better for Students

'I hope students found that the summary helped them remember all that was said in the meeting. I am not sure they do when they have no record and it was all un-recorded verbal meeting.'

'I felt I was able to leave a much more personal reflection using the audio tool than if I was making notes as a record – the notes would tend to be very dry and factual; the audio in a sense was more informal'

Disadvantages

More difficult to retrieve

'It may take me longer to find the specific audio and listen through it rather than quickly scan my notes on an individual meeting if I am just wanting to 'look something up' quickly.

Induction into Something New

'I put off making the recordings after my first few meetings as I thought it would take some time, have to re-record, unsure how it worked etc.'

Unease with audio

'I can see it works well for many people it just doesn't suit me'
'Didn't like listening back and hearing myself'

Other Themes

Still require written notes

I found I did need the brief bullet points I noted down in meeting to record an effective audio summary. I couldn't do it without that.

Technical/ System Issues

It would be nice to have a way of recording a summary of any meeting with tutee and not rely on accessing facility via a booked slot on PT appointments only. I.e – when student just drops in, not a regular meeting but one arranged outside these and not done via PT appointment.

Reflecting on these comments it is evident that using audio is a very personal choice that individual staff need to have freedom to make. It is clear that asking all staff to use such a tool could lead to unease although it could be argued that the more people were to use such a tool, the more familiar and comfortable they would become with it. Similar to our findings in our earlier audio feedback project, the main advantages were the ability to leave more nuanced and personal comments and the practical one of time saving. Again however this was not consistent between users as some staff found it took longer due to wanting to make a written record first.

Lessons Learned

The issue which prevented this project being seen through to completion was the lack of ability to create a suitable technical solution. This problem was not foreseen given the success of the earlier audio feedback project

During the lifetime of this project, the additional factor that has been increasingly recognised in the need to consider feedback as dialogue and the flawed nature of simply developing more and more innovative ways of 'dangling data' (ref. Sadler) for students – whether on specific assessment performance or more generally on their progress. Any new exploration of this type of approach within the context of the personal tutor system should have at its heart a mechanism to ensure students as a minimum reflect and respond to the commentary, this would add even more to the technical requirements of any solution.

We still believe the idea behind this project is sound and worth investigating however are not aware of any technical solution that will make it feasible without being prohibitively expensive. We hope this summary is still a useful reflection not only on the specific area we aimed explore but also on the more general aspects of the fundamental importance of robust technical solutions.

Although a specific research paper output has not been produced from the project due to insufficient evaluation data being able to be gathered, I continue to draw on these experiences and reflections and capture them in some of the more general presentations I have given on feedback and assessment more broadly.^{2,3}

1. Rhind, S. M., Pettigrew, G. W., Spiller, J. & Pearson, G. (2013) Student Experiences with Audio Feedback in a Veterinary Curriculum. *Journal of Veterinary Medical Education*. 40, 1, p. 12
2. Rhind, S. M., Pettigrew, G. W., Spiller, J. Audio-feedback: Student Experiences Across Courses and Contexts. Association for Medical Education in Europe Conference; Prague 2013
3. Rhind, S.M. Assessment Literacy: Research, Reflection and Action. VETED Annual Symposium. Bristol 2014.