



engag**Ed** in...

feedback and assessment



This document is designed to provide a practical guide to feedback on assessment informed by current research and best practice. At local (school, subject) level, it may seem that innovation in assessment and feedback is problematic and 'not permitted' however University regulations are not restrictive when it comes to assessment. Whilst it is not the purpose of this document to provide a holistic overview of assessment practice, a few comments are necessary to frame the subsequent discussion on feedback. We also acknowledge the fundamental importance of the local context and quote from the Universities 'Manifesto for an excellent learning and teaching experience in large classes'.

“

Successful assessment and feedback practices are negotiated among staff and students in local contexts. There is no one-size-fits-all answer.

”



Key to enhancing assessment and feedback, is the need to engage both students and staff in conversations about assessment and feedback.

Assessment *of*, *for* and *as* Learning

Assessment has traditionally been subdivided into the two (not necessarily mutually exclusive) categories of summative (assessment of learning) and formative (assessment for learning). More recently, the term 'Assessment as Learning' has been introduced.



Assessment ***of*** learning (summative assessment): focuses on evaluation of a student's performance, often at the end of a course or module. Note however that in the context of an effective programmatic approach to assessment, summative assessments can (and should) be designed to be formative and provide useful feedback for subsequent assessments.



Assessment ***for*** learning (formative assessment): assessing with the main aim of providing feedback and guidance to help students improve¹. Formative assessment often has no marks associated or may have a very small percentage.



Assessment ***as*** learning: extends the role of formative assessment by emphasising the role of students as 'active, engaged and critical assessors'². Assessment *as* learning requires support to allow students to develop the metacognitive capacity to assess both their own work and that of others^{3,4}.

Definition	Main Purpose	Decision Maker
Assessment of Learning	Ranking decisions, credentials, competence	Teacher or outside body
Assessment for Learning	Formative feedback	Teacher or peers
Assessment as Learning	Formative feedback, learning to make judgements	Student

Table 1. Key Features of the assessment categories (Adapted from Earl 2003²)



In all cases, the following key principles should apply:

1

Feedback and assessment must be integral to course design. Every course and programme should be designed to provide opportunities for students to engage with feedback on their on-going performance and achievements.

2

Assessment and feedback expectations, standards, and marking criteria should be clearly communicated to students at the start of each course. It is important that this is not only communicated through a written document articulating assessment aims, but that there are also opportunities for face-to-face discussion to help students use and understand expectations in context. This aspect links directly to the important NSS question *'The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance'*.

3

Feedback is a two-way process and a joint and shared responsibility. It thrives on interaction and *dialogue* between students and their teachers, and where there is a sense of belonging to a vibrant community of learners (see assessment for, and as, learning below). Students should be encouraged from being passive receivers of feedback to actively seeking and then utilising their feedback ^{5, 6}.

4

Opportunities for feedback and dialogue arise in all aspects of education. Thus students should be made aware that feedback is not only associated with formally assessed work, but is often available within tutorials, practicals and lectures, as well as more informally in e.g. class discussions, field trips and placements.

Practical Application

Feedback in the Context of Assessment of Learning

There may be fewer opportunities for rich feedback in association with this type of assessment, but they do exist and of course, summative marks in themselves are a form of feedback. Note however that when marks and feedback are issued together, there is evidence that students may pay less attention to the feedback⁷.

Example:

Group feedback sessions after high-stakes examinations (either as soon as marked; or as a resource for subsequent cohorts as part of assessment preparation). This approach provides a time-efficient way to highlight common misconceptions or indeed highlight good examples of responses to be shared with the class. This type of sharing and reflection can help build the metacognitive skills referred to in 'Assessment as Learning'.

Example:

Group feedback sessions immediately after summative multiple-choice question (MCQ) assessment; remaining under exam conditions. This is one solution for MCQ examinations where question security is relevant (i.e. the need to protect question banks as questions will be re-used), yet prompt feedback is still desirable.

Example:

Individual review of scripts with personal tutor or other appropriate member of staff.

Feedback in the Context of Assessment for Learning

Quality feedback should:

- Identify what the student has done well
- Identify areas for improvement with suggestions for action
- Feed-forward with action for future work on programme
- Where possible, provide an opportunity for dialogue

Feedback is often discussed as though it were a product passed from staff to students, whereas to be most effective it is better to conceptualise it as a process. In order for feedback to have an impact on students' work, they need to be actively engaged with the feedback and able to put it to use in their learning practice⁵. Course design should build in a requirement for students to engage with feedback to address the commonly reported issue of feedback not being 'collected'.

Example:

On submission of their assignment, students can be asked to identify what aspects of their assignment they would like feedback on. Would they like the marker to focus on the structure, the strength of the conclusion, the referencing, etc? This encourages students to identify strengths and weaknesses in their own work. Markers can retain the flexibility to comment on other aspects also.

Example:

Research shows that students value one to one dialogue above most other forms of feedback. The time taken to mark and provide written comments on pieces of work e.g. projects or lab books can be traded off against an individual five to ten minute conversation with each student.

After the conversation students should write their own notes and reflect on the feedback they have received. These 'feedback conversations' can be scheduled into course design from the outset.

Feedback in the Context of Assessment as Learning

An understanding of the quality of pieces of work develops over time with increased exposure to the subject area. For students, this long-term exposure to a wide-range of examples does not exist, instead they require support and activities to help them develop this metacognitive ability. Increasing attention is being given to including activities which help develop students' 'Assessment Literacy' and facilitate their understanding of good quality work ⁸.

Example:

Use examples (from previous year's work, or entirely made-up examples) to get students either in a group or individually to mark, rank and give feedback on the assignments. Then discuss as a class the actual grades and feedback that the assignments achieved.

Example:

Engage students in contributing to an assessment rubric for a given piece of work prior to it being used to assess work they produce.

Example:

Two-stage assessments. Students take an assessment individually, and immediately after, take the same test in a small group. This provides potential for rich, almost instantaneous feedback and learning from peers.

Edinburgh example: <http://edin.ac/2pNRB7k>

More information: <https://blogs.ubc.ca/eoassei/two-stage-exams/>

Assessing at Programme Level

In large institutions it is easy to think at course level, rather than programme level, however every programme will specify intended programme level outcomes. Therefore it is useful, particularly if organising core or compulsory courses on a programme, to consider the broad range of graduate attributes students are expected to develop through the programme, and consider how your course is contributing to this.

Example 1:

Find out what assessments are provided by other compulsory and optional courses on the programme to ensure that new types of assessment are not introduced late on in the degree programme e.g. in the honours years that students have not had a previous opportunity to practice and receive feedback on.

Example 2:

The Edinburgh Learning Design Roadmap (ELDeR) supports courses and programmes that are either being developed or reviewed to think about their design. It is offered as a two day workshop in which staff are provided with space and facilitation to develop their course design, learning outcomes, assessment and feedback to ensure courses are able to achieve their aims.

Example 3:

The Institute for Academic Development (IAD) provides support for course and programme design. The IAD can consult with course and programme teams or you can learn more about assessment and programme design in the Edinburgh Teaching Award and Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice.



References

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- 7 Butler R. Enhancing and undermining intrinsic motivation: the effects of task-involving and ego-involving evaluation on interest and involvement. *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 58:1–14, 1988.
- 8 A Marked Improvement - Transforming Assessment in Higher Education. Higher Education Academy 2012.

Additional Case Studies

A number of case studies relating to assessment and feedback can be found on the IAD website here:

<https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/casestudies/Assessment+and+Feedback>

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