

Student-friendly Feedback: how feedback is created and used by students

Introduction

QAA Scotland has worked in collaboration with the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) to support the sector in addressing issues arising from the current cycle of Enhancement-Led Institutional Reviews (ELIR). A recurring theme has been assessment and feedback, which has also been highlighted as a challenging area in the [National Student Survey \(NSS\)](#). In response to this, the [Focus On Assessment and Feedback](#) project was launched with a scoping exercise involving all 18 Scottish institutions and students' associations to determine the areas where development activity could best be targeted. We received detailed responses from 16 institutions and 3 students' associations. This feedback identified a number of areas for cross-sector development, such as: the use of technology to support assessment and feedback; sharing institutional policy and practice in this area; and student-friendly feedback: how it is used and created by students. The purpose of this paper is to summarise findings from the student-friendly feedback strand of the project.

Scope and structure

The student-friendly feedback strand of the Focus On Assessment and Feedback project aimed to map current or recent work relating to assessment and feedback that was student-led or managed in partnership with students' associations. QAA Scotland worked with sparqs, NUS Scotland and a number of students' associations to form a clear picture of the projects that had taken (or are taking) place with a view to sharing this information across the sector. This work is intended to help the sector think imaginatively about how existing experience can inform discussions on policy, practice and the design of student-friendly feedback.

The following agencies, students' associations' and institutions' work is included within this paper: Edinburgh Napier University and Napier Students' Association (NSA); NUS Scotland; University of Dundee and Dundee University Students' Association (DUSA); University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA); University of Glasgow and Students' Representative Council (SRC); University of Stirling and Stirling Students' Union; University of Strathclyde and University of Strathclyde and Strathclyde Students' Association (USSA); University of the West of Scotland (UWS) and Students' Association of UWS (SAUWS); and sparqs.

Please note that this paper draws on work from these institutions only but it is possible that examples of other relevant work is present within other institutions.

Key Themes

QAA Scotland worked with the sector to collate a number of examples of the work that students' associations are doing in partnership with their institutions to improve feedback on assessment. This work has been categorised under the following 5 key themes:

Communication: There is a clear emphasis on communicating clearly and concisely with students and staff to ensure they understand what constitutes feedback, their roles and responsibilities and the institutional assessment and feedback policy.

Events: In partnership with their institutions, a number of students' associations have held internal conferences to give students and staff the opportunity to discuss how to improve assessment and feedback to enhance student learning.

Student Partnership Agreements (SPAs): The Scottish Government released the [Putting Learners at the Centre](#) paper proposing that institutions should implement a policy document setting out how students and their institutions should interact. In response to this, [spargs](#) worked with sector to develop the [Student Partnership Agreements \(SPA\) Implementation Guidance](#). The guidance is intended to advise universities on the development and implementation of a SPA which is a new model of agreement used to help define and develop the relationship between an institution and its students. SPAs set out 3 to 5 priority areas upon which the students' association and institution commit to working on together to improve.

Promoting Feedback as a Learning Dialogue to Enhance Learning: The sector has recognised that there is often no formal way of knowing whether or not students are engaging with or acting on feedback provided. In response to this, students' associations and their institutions have implemented a number of initiatives designed to open and promote a two-way dialogue between students and markers.

Toolkits: A number of toolkits have been developed to provide institutions and students' associations with information and guidance on how to improve their assessment and feedback practices.

Communication

This section explore initiatives that have been carried out by students' associations to improve communication around feedback on assessment.

Edinburgh Napier University and Napier Students Association (NSA): In 2015, NSA planned a campaign to increase awareness and clearly communicate how students could utilise feedback more effectively to enhance learning. NSA launched this by distributing a survey to students in an attempt to gauge student opinion on the standard of assessment and feedback. As a result, staff and student feedback information flyers were distributed throughout the campus and NSA have developed a website and communications plan to increase awareness of assessment and feedback. Resources and outputs from that work can be found below.

Resources

[NSA feedback flyer](#)

[NSA examinations feedback survey results](#)

[NSA feedback survey comments summary](#)

[NSA feedback survey results evaluation summary](#)

Students' Association University of the West of Scotland (SAUWS): SAUWS launched a feedback survey at the institution's Hamilton campus in 2014 to enable students to communicate their thoughts on the quality of the feedback they had received on their assessed work and examinations. The survey questions used in that campaign can be

accessed below. SAUWS intends to analyse the results and put measures in place to address the findings in academic year 2015-16.

SAUWS also conducted the GOAT (Go Out And Talk) campaign in 2011 which contributed to the University's assessment and feedback toolkit produced in 2011. This was designed to improve awareness and enhance practice in this area. Resources and outputs from that work can be found below.

Resources

[SAUWS example of feedback survey \(Hamilton campus\)](#)

[SAUWS GOATing survey questions](#)

[SAUWS GOATing survey results](#)

Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA): EUSA's School of Chemistry student representatives recognised a need to clearly communicate what constitutes feedback and how students can utilise feedback to enhance their learning. As a result, the student representatives produced a feedback handbook to help chemistry student understand feedback, how to engage with it and where to get further information.

Resources

[EUSA School of Chemistry handbook](#)

University of Glasgow and the Student Representative Council (SRC): SRC has prioritised examination feedback and intends to ensure that University of Glasgow students receive generic feedback on what constitutes each examination grade. In 2013, SRC proposed the University's Learning and Teaching Committee should establish a working group to consider examination feedback. As a result of its initiative, the group was implemented and tasked with developing a University policy on embedding examination feedback as a mechanism to support student learning and success. The Feedback for Summative Examinations policy has since been put in place and can be accessed below.

Resources

[University of Glasgow Feedback for summative Examinations policy](#)

University of Stirling Students' Association (USSA): In 2015, USSA encouraged the University of Stirling to review its assessment and feedback policy to increase student engagement with feedback and to understand why feedback is important. To support this, USSA produced a briefing paper setting key priorities to address and encouraged the University establish a working group, comprising staff and student representatives. The purpose of this group is to review the current policy and condense this down into two sides of A4 paper to ensure it is accessible to both staff and students.

Resources

[USSA assessment and feedback briefing paper](#)

[USSA feedforward policy draft](#)

Events

University of Strathclyde and University of Strathclyde Students' Association: In order to disseminate good practice and approaches to assessment feedback, the University of Strathclyde worked in collaboration with the students' association to organise the Education@Strathclyde Day on 22 and 23 April 2014. A number of speakers were invited to present on a variety of themes with the aim of inspiring staff to be innovative with their learning and teaching methods. This event provided a wealth of material that has helped inform the development of new guidance related to assessment and feedback.

Resources

[University of Strathclyde Assessment event information and programme](#)

University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA): The University of Edinburgh and EUSA hosted a full day conference called, 'Partnership in Assessment and Feedback' on Thursday 3 April 2014. The conference explored a variety of topics, such as: shared assessment and feedback literacy and understanding for staff and students; designing assessment and feedback with students as active agents and partners; and improving student experience through sharing good practice across boundaries. Presentations, images, and outputs from the conference are available on the [University's website](#).

Student Partnership Agreements (SPA)

This section details the institutions that have a SPA in place, many of which have prioritised assessment and feedback development within in their institution:

| Institution | Link to SPA |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Queen Margaret University | <u>http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/institute-academic-development/learning-teaching/staff/courses-events/assessment-feedback</u> |
| SRUC | <u>http://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/20008/education/1452/student_partnership_agreement_spa</u> |
| University of Aberdeen | <u>http://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/documents/Partnership_Agreement.pdf</u> |
| University of Abertay | <u>http://www.uadsa.com/main-menu/about-us/student-partnership</u> |
| University of Dundee | <u>http://www.dundee.ac.uk/media/dundeewebsite/gef/documents/studentpartnershipagreement/Signed%20SPA-2014.pdf</u> |
| University of the Highlands and Islands | <u>http://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/students/student-life/student-partnership-agreement</u> |

Promoting Feedback as a Learning Dialogue

Glasgow Caledonian University and GCU Students' Association: The [Feedback for Future Learning](#) campaign was launched in 2010. This campaign encouraged students to engage with feedback through various workshops run by the University and Students' Association. Part of this work included setting out 8 principles of feedback, summarised below:

Feedback should be:

- a dialogue
- supportive of future learning
- timely
- related to clear criteria
- accessible to students
- a continuous process
- Available on all forms of assessment
- Flexible and suited to students' needs

This campaign also generated a wide range of [resources](#) designed to help students understand what feedback is, how it benefits them and ways in which they can effectively utilise this feedback. In addition, information and activities were designed for staff to enhance the quality of feedback that is provided to students, whether formative or summative, verbal, written or electronic in order to enhance their future learning. [Resources](#) include feedback templates, online learning units and staff videos.

University of Glasgow and University of Glasgow Student Representative Council (SRC): The SRC began a research project into audio feedback (sending students a recording of the marker marking) with a view to promoting feedback as a learning dialogue. Outputs from this work will be available in academic year 2015/16.

Toolkits

NUS: In 2010, NUS launched a Feedback and Assessment Campaign Toolkit (F.A.C.T). Since then, NUS published an assessment and feedback benchmarking toolkit to support students' associations in mapping their institutions' practice and prompts them to consider areas for improvement. Most recently, NUS began conducting workshops and having conversations with students' associations around the purpose of assessment and why assessment is needed or what it should contribute in the learning experience. Power Point slides from those workshops and 'Assessment and Feedback Benchmarking Tool' can be found below.

Resources

[NUS assessment and feedback benchmarking toolkit](#)
[NUS assessment and feedback presentation](#)

University of Dundee, Dundee University Students' Association (DUSA) and sparqs: University of Dundee and DUSA developed a feedback on assessment toolkit with support from sparqs. It outlines ways in which staff and students can work together, in school/department levels, to explore how feedback on assessment can effectively lead to an enhanced learning.

The main download is the original toolkit created in 2011 and piloted within three schools of the university. Following feedback from Schools a second version of the toolkit was reorganised into four sections enabling Schools to select and tailor activities to their specific contextualised development needs. Individual sections can form the basis for focussed workshops or the Toolkit as a whole can form the structure for a series of interrelated development opportunities. The activities within the second version are variations on those within the first, allowing schools or programme teams to return to topics previously investigated to re-examine issues and reflect on progress. Participation of students as part of workshops is fundamental to the successful application of the Toolkit, generating more meaningful discussions and concrete action points than when applied with staff groups on their own.

Resources

[University of Dundee, DUSA and sparqs presentation](#)

Students' Association, University of the West of Scotland (SAUWS): SAUWS developed a toolkit in 2013 to support students in utilising feedback more effectively and to raise awareness of the University's assessment policy. It outlined the different types of assessment and feedback and allowed you to assess how well the programme meet the UWS assessment policy.

Resources

[UWS and SAUWS feedback toolkit](#)

5 Principles of Student-friendly Feedback

The 'Student-friendly Feedback' work was presented at the sparqs national conference 2015 exploring partnership working. During the workshop delegates were asked to discuss what they consider to be the main principles of student-friendly feedback. As a result, they agreed the following 5 principles ensure student-friendly feedback: Clear, Useful, Timely, Accessible and Fair.



Fig 1. 5 principles of student-friendly feedback

The above diagram illustrates that the 5 principles of student-friendly feedback are based on good communication as this is essential to clear, accessible, fair, timely and useful feedback. QAA Scotland then analysed the delegates' discussions and defined the principles as follows:

Clear

Students need to know:

- what will happen
- when will it happen
- what is expected of us
- what we did well
- what we did not do so well
- where we need to improve
- how we need to improve
- what to do next

Useful

Feedback should:

- help us to improve
- help us to become better learners
- link very clearly to the rest of our course
- inspire us
- motivate us
- value us

Timely

Time is important because:

- feedback should be in time to use for the next assignment
- we need to know when our feedback will arrive
- we need to be updated if that changes
- it allows us to work with our feedback as part of our learning

Accessible

Feedback should be:

- available to everyone
- easy to find
- provided in different formats if needed (e.g. written or spoken)
- clear and easily understood

Fair

Feedback should be:

- free from potential, even if unintended, prejudice through double marking and anonymous marking
- be guided by clear criteria
- be consistent

Further Information

More information about this work can be found on the enhancement themes website:
<http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk>