

FEEDBACK TOOLKIT

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Introduction

Across the country, regardless of course or institution type of background, students have resoundingly rated assessment and feedback as the poorest area of their academic experience. Although UWS has policy for assessment and feedback, lecturers are not always following it as a quick snap-shot of 87 undergraduate and postgraduate students has shown that only 62% of those students regularly receive feedback on coursework, however only 14% said they regularly received feedback on exams. In addition the 2012 National Student Survey (NSS) results show that the lowest average score for satisfaction in assessment and feedback is 48%, with the highest average score is 87%. These results clearly show that feedback on assessments, particularly exams, must be improved. This is why we have the Feedback Campaign.

To raise awareness of the Feedback Campaign we have promoted it at this year's fresher's fayres and during induction talks. We will also be promoting the UWS Assessment Policy to staff, including support staff such as those in the Library, Effective Learning and ICT (using Moodle) to encourage staff to raise awareness when talking with students and to ensure all staff is aware of the importance of feedback.

We will also be contacting students during Christmas to remind them to ask about exam feedback and during the exam diet in January we will be actively campaigning for exam feedback in particular. After trimester 1 exams we will be monitoring the progress of the campaign to establish where any gaps lie and develop the feedback campaign to fill these gaps.

Your task as a student rep is to promote the campaign among your peers and share any experiences with us at Student Rep Councils (SRC) and Student/Staff Liaison Group (SSLG) meetings. We are also asking you to bring up feedback continuously over the year while you are in class, while with other students and at SSLG meetings by putting it on the agenda to be discussed with teaching staff.

How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help you increase assessment feedback and raise awareness of the UWS Assessment Policy (available at <http://www.uws.ac.uk/current-students/rights-and-regulations/regulatory-framework/>). It will outline the different types of assessment and feedback that may be used within UWS and will allow you to assess how well your programme meets the UWS policy; it will also give you some ideas of how you can help improve feedback for your peers on your programme.

The NUS have produced an assessment and feedback charter (see appendix 1) which outlines ten key principles for effective assessment and feedback in higher education; this can also be used as a quick reference guide to best practice and covers much of the main points of this pack.

Methods of Assessment

Assessments are the bane of most students' lives and some students can spend up to 100 hours studying for assignments and exams. So what is the real purpose of assessments and what different types of assessment are there?

Purposes of assessment:

- To prescribe a mark or grade to reflect or establish learning achieved. This can often impact on how a student progresses onto future learning or employment.
- A tool to enhance future learning outcomes and performance by providing constructive feedback (or "feed-forward") to students.
- To develop and refine key skills, such as reflective and peer assessment.
- Empowering students to become active participants in their learning journey.
- An aid allowing tutors to measure current knowledge and understanding and adjust their teaching content and methods accordingly.

Common types of assessments.....

Summative Assessment:

This is assessment *of* learning. This is the type of assessment that most students are familiar with. It is traditionally taken at the end of period of learning and intended to measure whether the student has reached the academic standard required for this part of the qualification and more generally whether they have got to grips with a particular subject area. A common example is an end of module exam or essay that results in a formal mark or a pass/fail judgement. Unlike the other forms of assessment, summative methods are usually undertaken as a finale to a period of study, meaning the act of assessment itself is purely to ascribe a value to the students achievement rather than to foster future learning.

Common summative assessment methods:

- A-levels, GCSEs.
- Graded musical performances, practical art exams.
- End of module essays and exams.

Concerns with summative assessment methods include:

- Used too frequently to the exclusion of other forms of assessment.
- Disproportionally measure how an individual has mastered the assessment technique, rather than subject understanding and knowledge.
- Can damage self-esteem and motivation.
- May not include any feedback for students to reflect upon e.g. examinations.

Formative Assessment:

This is assessment *for* learning. Whereas summative assessment aims to reflect what has been learned, formative assessments primary focus is on learning itself and providing a means by which progress can be made. Formative assessment practices are essentially similar to summative methods, including tests, projects, exhibitions, laboratory reports and essays or similar. However, crucially they differ as they are generally conducted during the learning period, rather than at the end of it. They also may not provide the student with a finite mark but rather with a framework of what needs to be done in order to progress and an explanation of where the student has gained/lost marks, alongside an explanation of why and how to improve on this.

The three characteristics of formative assessment are:

- It does not usually contribute to formal grades.
- It is an integral part of continual teaching rather than an isolated, finale event.
- It usually includes substantial and effective feedback.

Uses of formative assessment:

- Diagnose reasons for good and poor performance.
- Identify strengths and weaknesses.
- Identify problems with knowledge or skills at an early stage.
- Introduce students to assessment processes before the final summative assessment.
- Shows students where they can lose or gain marks.

- Helps students to apply the learning from one piece of work to another and their future learning.
- Improve teacher effectiveness.
- Strengthen dialogue between student and tutor.
- Examples of formative assessments include problem-solving group work, project work and presentations.

Other types of assessment that can be used.....

Reflective and Peer Assessment

Reflective and peer assessment are a distinct part of assessment *for* learning. They have become increasingly significant in recent years and commonly considered key skills for graduates. Using the assessment criteria, students are encouraged to reflect, review and assess their own work, as well as the work of their peers. They are then asked to consider and discuss why they came to the decisions they did. The act of doing this encourages students to consider different perspectives and different approaches, which both embed the learning more deeply and broaden understanding. Furthermore peer review provides the individual with numerous amounts of feedback on their work. Multiple feedback can be effective as it exposes people to differing perspectives and approaches.

The benefits of reflective and peer assessment – when you apply the assessment criteria to your own or others work:

- Self-reflection encourages you to learn more deeply about that subject area.
- Has the benefit of exchanging ideas with others – you may find a discussion with peers is more effective than just having your tutor explain something.
- When you are able to explain something to someone, the act of explaining is one of the most effective ways of learning it.
- Empowerment of the learner in a learning environment.
- Development of learner ability to self-evaluate and reflect.
- Greater understanding of what is required by tutors for assessments at degree level.
- Reflection on recently completed assessments with full explanation of the answer (improving information and understanding).
- Seeing standards set by peers as well as mistakes of others (and avoiding them in the future).
- Gaining an ability to ‘stand back’ from own work and reflect.

Diagnostic Assessment

Diagnostic assessment is another type of assessment *for* learning. Its purpose is specific; it is aimed at identifying a student’s knowledge, skill set, understanding and strengths/weaknesses prior to a period of learning, for example a course or module. This usually takes place in the form of a short test or discussion group. The subsequent information gives the tutor a greater understanding of those they are about to instruct, allowing them to adapt the curriculum, teaching methods and resources to best suit individual and group needs, encouraging greater development and learning.

Very little diagnostic assessment takes places in higher education institutions and often students are taught with the assumption they have a uniform level of understanding. Diagnostic tests are easy to administer and have the potential to contribute a great deal to ensuring all students are allowed to progress, regardless of the level at which they began.

NUS' 10 Principles of Effective Assessment Practice: What NUS say about assessment and how does UWS compare

Assessment...

1. Should be *for* learning, not simply *of* learning.

This positions assessment at the heart of learning rather than a simple add-on at the end of a learning period.

- UWS say – Assessment is an integral part of a dynamic learning and teaching process. It promotes intellectual progression and effective learning, and assists students to become reflective and independent learners.

2. Should be reliable, valid, fair and consistent.

This is crucial for staff, students and employers to have confidence in the assessment processes and their outcomes.

- UWS say – The assessment tasks will be valid, in that they must enable the effective measurement of the extent of a student's attainment in relation to the intended learning outcomes. Assessment will demonstrate clear and consistent marking according to the University's published grade related criteria (appendix 2 has a copy of the university's grading criteria). Assessment will be a fair test of the abilities of all candidates.

3. Should incorporate effective and constructive feedback.

Effective feedback on assessment is a crucial aspect of assessment processes and a key feature of enhancing the learning process.

- UWS say – Feedback will form part of continuous guided learning and an integral part of the learning experience.

4. Should be innovative and have the capacity to inspire and motivate.

Formative assessment practices have the potential to inspire and motivate and this aspect can be captured by innovative approaches such as with the use of technology.

- UWS say – Innovation and variety in assessment practices are encouraged within the framework of a coherent assessment strategy.

5. Should measure understanding and application, rather than technique and memory.

Assessments need to have a holistic approach that transcends the particular method being used; only this will truly test and reflect levels of learning.

- UWS say – Assessment will be integrated into curriculum design across a programme.

6. Should be conducted throughout the course, not simply positioned as a finale event.

Positioning assessment as an integral part of the course to facilitate learning throughout the course.

- UWS say – Each module will provide an appropriate balance between formative and summative assessment.

7. Should develop key skills such as peer and reflective assessment.

Not only do these mechanisms allow the student to receive extra feedback on work beyond that of their tutor, it also develops the key skills of self-reflection.

- UWS say – Each module will provide feedback on formative and summative assessment, giving consideration to alternative forms of feedback, for example, self-reflection and peer assessed activities.

8. Should be central to staff development and teaching strategies, and frequently reviewed.

Assessment processes need to be innovative and responsive to learner needs, as such they need to be central to staff development and teaching strategies.

- UWS say – Staff development will be provided to ensure staff are competent and aware of their roles with regard to assessment design and practice.

9. Should be of a manageable amount for both tutors and students.

While assessment should be placed as a central role to learning, a level of balance is required for it to be effective. Over burdening the tutor or the student is not conducive to this.

- UWS say – Design, choice and timing of assessment instruments should take account of the workload for staff and students.

10. Should encourage dialogue between students and their tutors, and students and their peers.

It is important that students and staff share the same definitions and ideas around standards and this can be fostered by increased dialogue and engagements.

- UWS say – Accurate, unambiguous and timely information will be provided to students on the nature of the assessment task, its link to the intended learning outcome and the criteria by which the task is being assessed.

Forms of Feedback

Regardless of institution, background or course, students have always been significantly less satisfied about the feedback they receive on their work compared to other elements of their learning experience.

Feedback can take the form of **summative feedback**, where a summative assessment has been used; and **formative feedback**, where a formative assessment has been used. As outlined above, formative assessment differs from summative assessment because it aims to be an assessment for learning and is usually made up of small tasks during the course which helps tutors to ascertain which areas a student may need additional support with. By ensuring students has access to formative feedback, the university is ensuring that students are equipped with the tools and knowledge in order to progress and develop within themselves and their work.

So why is feedback so important?

Often provided in the form of a grade or a percentage mark and usually at the end of a course or a period of learning, feedback is used as an evaluative tool to represent a pre-determined standard of achievement. However, feedback can take a wide variety of forms and need not simply be a reflection of achievement. Common agreement concludes that effective feedback can:

- Promote an individual's learning journey and encourage greater achievement.
- Enable students to reflect and develop on their strengths and weaknesses.
- Foster greater levels of self-esteem and motivation which, in turn, can result in greater progress.
- Enable tutors to realign their teaching content and teaching methods in response to learners' needs.
- Encourage a more effective dialogue between teachers and students.
- Develop core skills around self-assessment and peer-to-peer evaluation.

Common Complaints about Assessment Feedback

Whilst some experiences of assessment feedback can be transformative and motivating, others can confuse and cause distress. There are numerous reasons influencing this and five common criticisms worth highlighting are:

- **Ambiguity** - Comments such as 'poor effort' and 'could do better' are examples of indistinct feedback that fail to offer advice about where improvements could be made and learning enhanced. If feedback is vague this can lead to students having no real understanding of where they went wrong and how they can improve.
- **Lateness** - Students need time to reflect on comments made in feedback for them to improve the standard of their work and develop their learning through the duration of the course. Returning work late, in some cases after the module has been completed can render the feedback too late to be useful and greatly diminishes the learning experience.
- **Miscommunication** - If feedback takes the form of a one-way transmission of opinion from the tutor to the student, in a feedback sheet for instance, it leaves little room to ensure the student actually understands what the tutor is trying to communicate. Another frequent complaint is that handwritten feedback is illegible, rendering it almost useless.
- **Negativity** - Overly critical comments offering no constructive insight can have a hugely negative impact on a student's progression. Not only does this fail to offer anything beneficial in terms of progression it can also, particularly when there is no option of resubmission, result in a detrimental effect on the student's self esteem.
- **Uncertainty** - It is widely agreed that students can only achieve a learning goal if they understand that goal, assume some ownership of it, and can assess progress. It is not uncommon for lecturers and students to unintentionally have differing interpretations of the goals and criteria of an assignment. This lack of clarity results in confusion and misinterpretation that ultimately leaves the student penalised for possessing a different outlook on an assignment than the tutor.

Feedback on Exams

It is apparent that across many institutions, regardless of mission, league table position or research specialism that it has become general practice to treat feedback on exams differently to feedback on other forms of assessment. There appears to be a general consensus that providing feedback on this type of assessment method is not assumed as standard practice. We firmly believe that the role of feedback as something that is not simply a measure of performance, but also a tool to aid future learning, is equally applicable to exam assessments as to any other type of assessment. As such, an institution's failure to provide this to students is unacceptable.

So what does exam feedback look like?

All too often exam feedback falls short of students' needs and expectations and only provides students with a numeric grade or mark. This is a missed opportunity to aid the learning of students and improve future work. Exam feedback can be delivered through numerous mechanisms, and it is important that the characteristics of individual courses and departments are taken into consideration when choosing which method is most appropriate. Feedback mechanisms you could suggest for your module or programme and at SSLG meetings can include:

- **Model answers:** the provision of model answers can be useful as they allow students to understand marking schemes.
- **Generic feedback to all students:** this could take the form of lecturers providing written or verbal account of common mistakes in exams and what can be done to rectify this. This is obviously not a substitute for individual feedback but can be a positive compliment to additional feedback mechanisms.
- **Optional seminars to discuss recent exams:** this can be an efficient way for lecturers to provide verbal feedback and enable students to ask questions and discuss solutions with their peers.
- **Individual one to one feedback on request:** while this is often criticised for being an unrealistic demand on lecturers time, it is anticipated that if other forms of feedback are provided in effective ways that not all students will opt for one to one feedback meaning there are less time demands on tutors.
- **The provision of exam scripts with comment sheets:** this personalised feedback allows students to reflect on their answers and consider what they did well and not so well.

NUS' 10 Principles of Good Feedback Practice: What NUS say about feedback and how does UWS compare

Feedback.....

1. Should be *for* learning, not just *of* learning

Feedback should be primarily used as a learning tool and therefore positioned for learning rather than as a measure of learning. Feedback is often given at the end of an assignment to simply record a student's achievement and may not provide any developmental advice which will allow a student to progress. Ideally feedback should only consist of constructive comments with marks or grades; particularly for any that counts towards a summative end of course assessment. Feedback where the grade replaces constructive comments has been shown to have a negative effect on the self-esteem on low ability students.

- The UWS policy on feedback states that where grades are involved, feedback should clarify why that grade was given (a copy of the UWS grades criteria is attached in appendix 2).

2. Should be a continuous process

Rather than a one-off event after assessment, feedback should be part of continuous guided learning and an integral part of the learning experience. Assessment practices need to be designed to allow students to receive feedback on their progress which they can use to aid their progression. More often than not, simple mistakes, particularly concerning referencing, can be tackled if a student's progression is under constant feedback.

- The UWS policy on feedback suggests that sufficient written feedback should be provided both in terms of frequency and detail.

3. Should be timely

A timely turnover in feedback is essential if a student is to fully understand the guidance offered and how they are able to apply this to future learning and assessments. If feedback is returned in an untimely fashion, particularly after submission dates of subsequent assignments, students are prevented from fully developing and progressing in their learning.

- The UWS policy on timing of feedback states that it should be returned within four weeks of submission and certainly before submission of the next assignment, where this is not possible students should be informed of when they should expect feedback.

4. Should relate to clear criteria

Objectives for assessment and grade criteria need to be clearly communicated to students and fully understood. Recent research on assessment feedback has indicated that it is common that tutors and students have differing impressions about what is expected from assessments and how a student can achieve a high mark. These differences can arise when standards are based or interpreted on tacit knowledge and assumptions; these often being difficult to articulate and communicate. Therefore it is crucial that these issues are overcome and there is a clear and common understanding between staff and students about the meanings behind the criteria. It is important that the subsequent feedback is provided primarily in relation to the agreed and fully understood criteria and no other. It also needs to be clearly communicated to the student what they did well against the assessment criteria and what they did less well.

- The UWS policy suggests that students can be consulted when drawing up assessment and grade criteria, this can aid understanding of what is required or expected.

5. Should be constructive

If feedback is to be constructive it needs to be concise, focused and meaningful, highlighting what is going well and what can be improved. Vague comments such as 'could do better', without explaining how they could actually do so, are not productive forms of feedback. It is also important that comments are not overly negative, this can serve to damage motivation and self-esteem while doing little to help actual learning. Feedback should be designed to encourage progress through constructive criticism. To do this the feedback should highlight both what went well in the work and prioritise what needs to be improved to do better next time.

- The UWS policy suggests that feedback should identify clearly where student work needs to be improved, and where and how students can assist themselves to do so.

6. Should be legible and clear

Feedback should be written in plain language so it can be easily understood by all students, enabling them to engage with it and support future learning. There should be little use of jargon or acronyms that some students may struggle to understand, this is of particular importance for students whose first language may not be English. A common complaint of feedback is that hand-writing can often be illegible, some students do misinterpret comments and suggestions and fail to understand potentially valuable points.

- The UWS has a grades section on Blackboard with scope to provide both a grade as well as written feedback, students should encourage lecturers to use this facility.

7. Should be provided on exams

Exams make up a high proportion of assessment in higher education and students invest a lot of time in their completion, they are stressful and can place students under a lot of pressure to perform. As such they should receive feedback on how well they did and importantly, how they could improve for the next time. Under the Freedom of Information Act (2000) students have a right to access examiners comments on their scripts. For institutions to avoid being inundated with requests, they should follow the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) good practise and be 'open, transparent and accountable', giving students confidence that their examination processes are fair and consistent.

- The UWS policy suggests that feedback should be given on exams, if you want exam feedback speak to your lecturers and put it on the agenda at your next SSLG meeting. If your request is refused you can submit a Freedom of Information form to access your script.

8. Should include self-assessment and peer-to-peer feedback

Feedback from peers and self-assessment practices can play a powerful role in learning by encouraging reassessment of personal beliefs and interpretations. Enabling students to assess their own learning or other students' learning can be a powerful aid to development and should help foster mutual progression. When done correctly, feedback from peers and self-assessment practices can positively challenge students by encouraging them to reassess their knowledge and beliefs, therefore playing a powerful role in learning. This type of feedback allows students to discuss their interpretation of the learning objectives and look at how they approached the assignment compared to others.

- At UWS peer feedback and self reflection are recognised as being useful tools in aiding learning, particularly if tutor feedback is delayed.

9. Should be accessible to all students

Not all students are full-time, campus based and so universities should utilise different technologies to ensure all students have easy access to their feedback. The proportion of students who are full time

campus-based is decreasing, while there is a corresponding increase of those working full-time/studying part-time. There has also been a rise in students who have disabilities or are carers. Therefore the common requirement of students to physically pick up written feedback or visit a tutor within an allotted timeframe is not always realistic. For that reason more flexible mechanisms through which to disseminate feedback should be explored.

- The UWS has many means of ensuring students get feedback; this can include hand written feedback forms, emails, the grades facility on Blackboard, podcasts and face to face discussion.

10. Should be flexible and suited to students' needs

All students are different and learn in different ways, therefore feedback is not 'one size fits all'. One student might benefit more from receiving a written script while another would get most out of a peer review session. Within reason students should be able to request feedback in various formats depending on their needs. This would be optimum in an environment where there was positive and frequent peer to tutor dialogue.

- The UWS feedback policy suggests that, where possible, students should be invited to specify which features of an assignment they wish to have feedback on (appendix 4 has student feedback coversheet which can be used for this purpose).

What next?

Campaign for better feedback

If you think feedback could be better why not speak to your lecturer or programme leader and suggest how you think feedback could be delivered more effectively. As a student rep you are perfectly placed to consult both your peers and teaching staff to make positive changes to the student experience, not only for you and your peers but potentially for future students.

In appendix 3 of this toolkit we have included the NUS 'student feedback coversheet' which can be downloaded and distributed to students on your course. It will give your lecturer a better idea of the kind of feedback individual students would benefit from and allows the student to self-reflect on their own work.

During the exam diets the Students Association will be actively campaigning for better feedback on exams using these stickers, why not get involved by handing them out too and encouraging your peers to ask for exam feedback. By campaigning for examination scripts to be returned students have the opportunity to read comments by the marker and understand what was actually written during those nervous and stressful few hours giving you greater knowledge of how you perform under pressure.



Other ways to get feedback

If you are studying a course which has definitive answers such as working with facts and figures (for example in law, medical or biological terminology, accounting etc) the university have 'clickers' which can be used to test the knowledge of the class before and after learning, this can be a great way to gain instant feedback using formative assessment tools.

If you are studying a course which uses theory or creative ideas such as in politics, social science and creative industries it may be more appropriate to ask for model answers to essays or even request a mini mock essay. This will allow students to gain an understanding of the basic requirements of any essay at that level of study and can give the lecturer an understanding of the level of knowledge and innovation within that group of students.

If you are studying a course where group- or team-working is important such as in business, sports and some creative industries, it is important to balance individual effort with group achievement. Here, peer- and self-reflective feedback may be beneficial as it will allow all group members to have a say on how they felt individual members contributed and then how effective the group worked as a whole, it will also allow individuals to reflect on how they contributed.

Which ever course you are studying, the university's Effective Learning Tutors can also assist students with the development of a wide range of academic skills and give feedback on academic writing, referencing, critical analysis, studying and exam techniques, presentation skills and Personal Development Planning (PDP). They can provide one-to-one and group assistance and can be found on Moodle or on the UWS website (available at <http://www.uws.ac.uk/current-students/study/skills-for-effective-learning/>).

Student rep participation in assessment and feedback development

Student reps can get involved with assessment and feedback design and development by undertaking research into the views of their peers, why not set up a survey monkey questionnaire to find out:

- the most effective forms of assessment for your module or programme i.e. think about both summative and formative methods of assessment,
- what students benefit from most in terms of marking criteria and feedback i.e. is the marking criteria suitable for the assignment, was feedback given within 4 weeks of submission and was it appropriate for the assessment, and
- the timing of exams, coursework or practical's i.e. are you given enough time to complete individual assignments, are coursework submission dates too close together.

The results of your survey can then be fed back to the university through Student/Staff Liaison Groups. As well as this, student representatives who wish to further participate in curriculum design and development within their subject area can nominate themselves or be nominated at their SSLG to attend meetings of the Subject Development Groups (SDG) and Faculty Groups (FG) for more information on these please contact either the Chair of your SSLG or the Student Rep Co-ordinator on src@sauws.org.uk.

Conclusion

This toolkit has outlined the different methods of assessment that can be used within UWS and the different forms feedback can take. We have outlined NUS' 10 principles of assessment and feedback and compared these to the UWS policy. We have also suggested ways in which you, as a student rep, can get involved with the design and development of assessment and feedback within UWS and how you can improve feedback for your peers and within your programme.

As we have shown, the UWS policy is very much in alignment with that of NUS and good practice guidelines. However as we mentioned at the start of this toolkit, there is a need for more feedback and in particular exam feedback.

It is now over to you to make it happen! We hope that the information provided in this pack has given you some ideas of how you can help improve feedback for your peers on your programme.

Remember to tell us your successes and any barriers you have faced, we can then build our campaign to overcome these barriers and use your successes to promote best practice when getting feedback on assessments.

Bibliography

National Union of Students (NUS) – Feedback and Assessment Campaign Toolkit (FACT) (2010)

University of the West of Scotland – Regulation 7: Regulations for the assessment of students of taught programmes, 2010/11 Edition (2010)

University of the West of Scotland – Assessment Policy and Procedure (2010)

Student Learning, Enhancement and Engagement Committee (SLEEC) Toolkit (2010)

Useful links

NUS connect – www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/learning-and-teaching-hub – This is the new National Union of Students learning and teaching hub. Here you will find a range of resources focusing on learning and teaching and specifically assessment and feedback.

QAA – <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/default.asp> – Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education ensures that universities are meeting requirements with regards to academic standards and quality, their Codes of practice are intended to help higher education institutions to meet these responsibilities.

HEA - <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/scotland/ourwork/thematicareas> - The Higher Education Academy support universities and colleges to provide an excellent student experience, their thematic areas include assessment and feedback best practice guides.

Enhancement themes – <http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/default.asp> – The Scottish higher education Enhancement Themes aim to enhance the student learning experience through identifying specific areas for development, Enhancement Themes are used to encourage academic and support staff, and students collectively to share current good practice and to generate ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching.



national union of students

Charter on...

Feedback and Assessment

1. Formative assessment and feedback should be used throughout the programme

Assessment should be used as part of the learning process, as well as a tool to measure understanding and application. Formative assessment and feedback is critical to the development of learning and should be integrated into the curriculum in a strategic way. You should consider how to capture and formalise ongoing feedback in practical courses such as art and design. Wherever appropriate, there should be formative feedback before the assessment deadline for taught postgraduate students and for undergraduate dissertations.

2. Students should have access to face-to-face feedback for at least the first piece of assessment each academic year

For most students, a discussion about their work is the most productive form of feedback they can receive. At the start of each academic year, it is crucial that students are given an opportunity to discuss their work with a tutor to enable them to set goals for the coming year. As well as helping students to develop their learning, this can act as a progression monitoring tool for the institution. If face-to-face feedback is impossible (e.g. due to distance or part-time learning), technology can be used to facilitate a discussion between tutor and student.

3. Receiving feedback should not be exclusive to certain forms of assessment

Traditionally, summative feedback is usually only given on written essays and some forms of practical work. But students need feedback on all forms of assessment they come across in order to develop their learning. In the recent NUS/HSBC Student Experience Report, 90 per cent of students say they would like feedback on exams, compared to only 12 per cent who currently receive written comments and 9 per cent who receive verbal feedback. Most courses rely on exams as the summative assessment – it is therefore important that students receive feedback on these, especially in exams prior to finals.

4) Feedback should be timely

Timely feedback is a key concern of students, with the NUS/HSBC Student Experience Report showing that almost a quarter of students have to wait more than five weeks to receive feedback. Students should usually receive personalised feedback within three weeks of the assessment submission deadline. There could also be generalised group feedback on the key learning areas that affect most students within one week of the assessment.

5) Students should be provided with a variety of assessment methods

In many courses there is too much reliance on exams or long essays as the sole form of assessment. There should be greater innovation in assessment, including the use of technology, and students should be involved in helping to design their own assessment. Similarly, not all subject disciplines use peer and self-reflective feedback – these methods should also be encouraged.

6. There should be anonymous marking for all summative assessment

NUS research shows that where anonymous marking has been introduced there has been an improvement in the marks of women, black and Asian students and among some other student groups. Anonymous marking provides reassurance for students and staff against the perception of discrimination. Where anonymous marking is not possible, especially in the arts, there should be stringent measures to blind double mark, or use external examiners.

7. Students should be able to submit assessment electronically

Many students believe that they should be able to submit their assessments electronically. While this will not be possible in every case, this increased flexibility will support part-time and distance learners as well as other non-traditional students, such as those with caring responsibilities or those who commute to university. Ultimately, the flexibility of electronic submission will benefit all students and will help to ensure that assessment methods respond to the changing expectations of digitally-literate students.

8) Students should be supported to critique their own work

Students should not be overly reliant on feedback from tutors. One of the key skills developed in higher education is the ability to critique, and students should be supported to be able to review their own work and that of fellow students. Developing students' abilities to peer review and self reflect is an important skill for future employment, as well as deepening their own learning.

9. Programme induction should include information on assessment practices and understanding marking criteria

Assessment standards and marking criteria are not readily understood by students. Students should be given an induction on what is expected of them academically on their course, in order for them to produce high-quality work. Some students can be unwittingly engaged in academic misconduct, or plagiarism, through simple misunderstandings of what is expected, and how to reference properly. Good inductions and study skills sessions prior to major assessment would aid students' understanding of these issues. Academic misconduct guidelines could also be translated into the languages of any large student groups at an institution.

10. Students should be given the choice of format for feedback

Students want feedback in a variety of formats, including verbal, written and electronic. At the start of the year students should also be able to state their preferred form of summative feedback. This provides a useful focus for a meeting with a personal tutor, while giving students a choice in the form of feedback; and making the feedback more physically accessible to them. This approach should ensure that all students, no matter whether they are full-time, part-time or distance learners, will have easy access to their feedback. Regardless of format, the feedback should always be written in plain English, and be legible and clear.

Appendix 2 UWS' Marking and Grading Scheme

All student work that contributes to a module mark and grade is assessed according to the following standard marking and grading scheme:

Grade	Numerical range (%)	Definition	Descriptor
A	70-100	Excellent Outstanding	Student work very much exceeds the threshold standard. It displays a consistently thorough, deep and/or extensive knowledge and understanding; originality and/or very high ability in analysis, evaluation, problem solving or other process skills; very high ability in professional practice skills (where relevant) including evidence of high degree of autonomy and independent judgement relative to threshold expectations.
B1	60-69	Very good Commendable	Student work is well above the threshold standard. It displays a consistently very good level of knowledge and understanding; high ability in analysis, evaluation, problem solving or other process skills; high ability in professional practice skills (where relevant) including exercise of significant independent judgement relative to threshold expectations.
B2	50-59	Good Highly competent	Student work is clearly above the threshold standard. It displays generally good knowledge and understanding; good ability in analysis, evaluation, problem solving or other process skills; evidences highly competent performance of professional practice skills (where relevant).
C	40-49	Satisfactory Competent	Student work is at the threshold standard. It displays generally satisfactory knowledge and understanding in most key respects; competence in analysis and most other process skills; evidences competent performance of professional practice skills (where relevant).
D	30-39	Unsatisfactory	Student work is marginally below the threshold standard. It displays some knowledge and understanding but this is incomplete or partial; limited ability in analysis and other process skills; evidences lack of or partial competence in professional practice skills (where relevant).
E	0-29	Very unsatisfactory	Student work is well below the threshold standard. It displays very limited knowledge and understanding; evidences very limited or no analytical or other process skills; very limited competence over the range of professional practice skills.

The following grades are used in exceptional circumstances where required by professional bodies:

Grade	Definition	Descriptor
Pass	Pass	Student has met the criteria for 'pass' as specifically defined in the module descriptor
Fail	Fail	Student has not met the criteria for 'pass' as specifically defined in the module descriptor

Student Feedback Coversheet



national union of students

This coversheet has been designed to give you the opportunity to suggest the feedback you would like to receive on this assignment, as well as helping you to positively reflect on this piece of work. If the marker understands your perspective on your work, then he/she is able to give you more precise and detailed feedback which will be meaningful to you. This should help you to improve in your future assignments.

Don't be afraid to be honest on this sheet, the more honest you are, the more helpful the feedback will be.

Student ID:

Module title:

Due Date: / / Word Count:

To be marked by:

Assignment name:

I feel the strengths of this assignment are...

I feel its weaknesses are...

I would most like more help with/feedback on...

After looking at the marking criteria I feel this assignment deserves.....% because...

Ideally I would like my feedback (please number in order of preference):

Handwritten Typed Verbally Pod/vodcast Electronically sent