

# Changing feedback (Panel review session)

Joint 'Transforming Assessment' & 'AHE' webinar, 5 July 2017



Chair: Sally Jordan (Open University, UK)

Host: Mathew Hillier (Monash University, Australia)

Three selected speakers from *Assessment in Higher Education* conference, 28-29 June 2017, Manchester, UK

## 1) Exploring student perceptions of effective feedback

Liz Austen, Cathy Malone  
*Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, UK*

Full abstract: This research presentation explores a sample of written summative feedback which was provided to undergraduate social science based students in 2014-2015. There were two phases of data analysis; a qualitative analysis of the content of the feedback by the research team and an exploration of feedback which students judged to be effective. This presentation focuses on the second stage of this research which builds on previous studies using alternative methodologies or targeted samples (Hyland 2001, Hyatt 2005, Weaver 2006).

A series of focus groups were facilitated where students evaluated 95 pieces of individual written feedback and discussed their findings. A criterion for this evaluation was adapted from the work of Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick (2006). The research team then compared corpora compiled of high and low ranking feedback. A contrastive analysis examined frequency counts, keyword analyses as well as concordances, collocations and semantic analyses. This analysis was supported by student annotations of their evaluations and thematic coding of the verbal discussions which took place.

This research has been able to outline the characteristics of feedback which students in this sample judged to be effective. The contrastive analysis brought the metadiscourse features strongly into focus, with distinct linguistic patterns emerging in the use of modals, personal pronouns and the mitigation of criticism. Findings confirmed the highly interpersonal nature of academic feedback and students demonstrated particular sensitivity to the tenor of the feedback and the way criticism was incorporated. There were also distinct preferences concerning the length and presentation of text, the quality of praise, the specificity of the feedback and whether it contained a forward orientation.

This research highlights the affective response of student readers to a text which writers may perceive as objective, structured and criteria based. The findings suggest that student sensitivity to the tenor and content of the feedback, rather than the process or speed by which it is disseminated, can play an important role in student satisfaction.

This research team has been disseminating the findings of this research across their own institution and discussing avenues for developing feedback CPD. To date, discussions have focused on developing small scale reflective peer reviews for personal development and styles guides for team based consistency. Interestingly, there was one approach to feedback which was consistently ranked highly by the student sample. The presenters would welcome feedback on how this research could be used to further develop practice.

## **2) Exploring the effects of radical change to assessment and feedback processes: Applying Team-based learning in a social science module**

Catherine Robinson, Judy Cohen  
*University of Kent, UK Kent, UK*

Full abstract: This paper is an evaluation of our efforts to introduce an engaging and collaborative learning environment by implementing team-based learning in a module to address core concerns about student underperformance.

It is accepted that assessment frames student learning (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004), while Boud states that 'every act of assessment gives a message to students about what they should be learning and how they should go about it' (1995 p.2). We wanted to devise an assessment and feedback regime to deliver that message to students and provide them with the tools for deep learning.

Team-based learning has been an accepted method of addressing concerns about both student performance and attendance in the US since the 1980s (Sibley & Ostafichuk 2014). Team-based learning is far more than group work; it is an intricate system involving flipped learning, individual knowledge quizzes, team-based application exercises, discussion and peer feedback. We felt that this approach incorporated many of the conditions cited by Gibbs and Simpson as supporting student learning (2004). At the same time, we anticipated that the multiple and varied opportunities for feedback provided an ongoing feedback dialogue key to student learning (Boud 2000, Carless et al 2011).

Implementing team-based learning in a traditionally taught module in traditionally designed teaching spaces was challenging. Students were provided with learning materials online ahead of the large lecture session. Lectures were used for the readiness assurance process of team-based learning (an assessment and feedback element), including mini lectures for clarification. Seminar (small group) sessions allowed teams to explore application exercises (a formative assessment/feedback element). In this way, students covered the core elements of team-based learning and received feedback from peers and academics covering individual and team performance.

Student evaluations of team-based learning are mixed, and our initial conclusion suggests improved performance contingent on student motivation. Overall metrics will be compared using a mixed methods approach. Qualitative data have been collected using feedback surveys, questionnaires and focus groups. Quantitative data on the student cohort are available from student performance and attendance records and will be interrogated using multiple regression analysis, an approach common to many educational studies in relation to attainment and student characteristics (c.f. Koljatic & Kuh, 2001).

The paper provides a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of team-based learning implementation and will give participants an opportunity to discuss the benefits and challenges of using team-based learning in their own practice.

### 3) Models of Examination Feedback:

“Not many students would admit to enjoying taking exams or writing essays, but if you want to get a degree, they're an ordeal you have to survive.” Guardian online, April 2013

Carole Sutton, Jane Collings, Joanne Sellick  
*Plymouth University, Plymouth, UK*

Full abstract: Assessment feedback is a valuable part of the student learning cycle and the quality of feedback within a module can motivate, engage and enhance a student's performance and future employability (Carless, 2014; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Written, oral and practical examinations assessing specific learning outcomes can occur mid-cycle and/or at the end of a module or period of study. Traditionally (particularly for end-of-module time limited and unseen examinations) a sole final grade, with no or little feedback, is returned to the student. There are concerns that marks for exams are generally lower than those for coursework and the implications this may have in determining degree classification, the need for exam feedback becomes critically important (Bridges et al., 2002, Simonite, 2003).

The general lack of feedback to examinations has prompted student concerns (NUS, 2009) – it creates uncertainty and limited opportunities to improve and learn, particularly for any future examination based assessment. As Scoles et al (2012) argue: ‘...while exams have long been regarded as different from other forms of assessment it is not justifiable to exempt them from the good practice that can, and does, inform other types of assessment and other areas of teaching and learning. This need is reinforced by the continuing use of exams as a significant part of course assessment strategies in many subject areas.’

This interactive workshop will report on an institutionally funded pedagogic project to enhance examination feedback through the development of a toolkit to support academic staff in the design of fair and inclusive exams that enable students to enhance engagement, learning and achievement. Using the Plymouth University toolkit delegates will explore inclusive examinations, models of feedback, and key factors in choosing a model applied to their programme(s). The session will include a case study example with outcomes, impact and student voice.

### Register for this Transforming Assessment webinar

Further information and registration  
<http://ta.vu/5jul2017>