

Academic Feedback to Taught Students

Policy and Guidance



For staff and students across the University involved in taught programmes of study.

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| Purpose: | - To develop a common understanding of academic feedback;
- To set out how students should use academic feedback; and
- To put forward strategies for staff and students to develop and improve practice in this area. |
| Document History: | - Version 1 - Approved by Senate June 2011;
- [Draft] Version 2 - Revised and updated October 2015 - For Senate approval. |

Executive Summary

“Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement.” [1]

The aim of this policy is to help improve student learning. It does this by setting out the obligations on staff to provide effective feedback on assessments and the responsibilities on taught students to seek out, engage with, and utilise the range of feedback they receive. It recognises the crucial role that feedback has in the learning process and seeks to ensure the partnership between staff and students enables a shared understanding of academic feedback to be developed across the University. The majority of feedback provided to students currently is timely, well thought out, and designed to help students learn. However, there is evidence that some students do not always engage with feedback effectively and that staff do not always prepare students well to use or respond to feedback. This policy aims to address this, to support enhancement of practice, and to improve student satisfaction with assessment and feedback across the University.

Improving student satisfaction will require staff to go beyond consideration of the feedback product provided to students and to work in partnership with students on the processes through which feedback is developed and utilised. Managing student expectations effectively will require staff to ensure learning activities are designed in ways that motivate students to engage with feedback, for students to develop the skills that enable them to act upon it, and for both parties to use feedback to engage in a dialogue that benefits student learning.

This will require schools to consider and, where appropriate, review and revise staff workload models to encourage and enable more flexible approaches to curriculum design. Schools will need to take a holistic approach to assessment, to ensure that there is alignment between teaching, learning and assessment, that assessment deadlines are spread out, where possible, and that the volume and balance of assessment within taught programmes of study is appropriate.

The policy is based upon the following principles:

- **Feedback supports and promotes effective learning;**
- **Feedback is a continuous process;**
- **Feedback needs to be suited to individual students’ needs.**

1) Hattie J. and Timperley H. (2007) The Power of Feedback. [Review of Educational Research](#) 77: p. 81

Under each principle, the Policy sets out a series of guidelines to stimulate effective practice. These seek to recognise the wide variety of different disciplines and learning activities that exist across the University, and the many different ways in which students receive feedback on their academic performance. Appended to the Policy are a series of suggestions for its implementation and examples of effective practice. A range of supporting materials will be made available to support implementation of the Policy.

Principle 1: Feedback supports and promotes effective learning.

- a) Feedback is timely
- b) Feedback is constructive, useful, and meaningful
- c) Assessments are designed to help students engage with feedback
- d) Feedback is appropriate for the assessment task
- e) Feedback is related to assessment criteria and intended learning outcomes

Principle 2: Feedback is a continuous process

- f) Students are assessment literate and understand the purpose and nature of feedback in higher education
- g) Feedback underpins learning and is a crucial embedded element of the student experience
- h) Feedback assists reflection and feeds forward to future tasks
- i) Feedback is provided on all assessments
- j) Students are informed of how to get feedback on exam performance

Principle 3: Feedback needs to be suited to individual students' needs

- k) Feedback is legible and clear
- l) Feedback is inclusive
- m) Feedback is unambiguous and understandable
- n) Ongoing dialogue about feedback takes place between students and staff

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1 What is Academic Feedback?

Formative Assessment and Feedback - How am I doing? - Formative assessment provides students with feedback on their performance, helps them identify how they can improve performance in future tasks, and supports their development as independent learners.

Summative Assessment and Feedback - How did I do? - Summative assessment measures student performance against learning outcomes and provides results on which decisions on progress and awards can be made. Summative assessment can have a formative function, in that both marks and comments will help inform future tasks and learning needs.

Feedback used as Feedforward - What should I do? - The feedback students receive should help them identify what they need to do to improve in future assessments. Feedback should indicate what students should seek to demonstrate in future tasks, as well as emphasising the positive aspects of the student's work and performance in that task.

- 1.1 Academic feedback plays a crucial role in supporting learning at University and is a key element of the student learning experience. It is provided to students in a variety of different ways and learning situations. Students need to be informed of assessment deadlines and feedback return dates and made aware of the different ways in which feedback is made available within their programme of study. Depending on the subject being studied feedback may include:
- Written comments on assessments;
 - Oral feedback in lectures, seminars, and tutorials;
 - Oral feedback in laboratories or while on placement (e.g. in clinical situations);
 - Recorded feedback (video / oral) on assessments;
 - Electronic feedback on IT-based tests and quizzes;
 - Sample / model answers, for example, on end of module examinations;
 - Whole-class feedback in lectures or via email / Learning Central;
 - Peer feedback, either formally as part of an assessment task or informally outside of the classroom;
 - Discussion at meetings with personal and/or academic tutors.
- 1.2 Academic feedback is part of the ongoing conversation that takes place between students and academic staff. To be most useful and effective, students need to use the range of feedback they receive to reflect on their learning and performance, and identify what they need to do to improve. Feedback is provided to help guide learning, and should be seen and used by students as a valued and essential element that helps support their development and improvement.
- 1.3 Academic feedback is not solely concerned with the identification of errors or gaps evident in students' knowledge and understanding. It can help show where students have exceeded the learning outcomes and produced excellent work. Feedback needs to provide students with the intellectual challenge and insight they need to enable them to fulfil their potential.

2. Context

“Feedback can have extraordinarily large and consistently positive effects on learning.” [2]

- 2.1 The University is committed to educating “students to the very highest standards and support them through the transition to independent learning” [3]. This requires that taught students receive high quality feedback on their academic performance as they progress. It also requires staff and students to work together in partnership to recognise that feedback is a key element of the ongoing dialogue that supports learning, for it to become an embedded part of the learning process, and for education across the University to be student-centred, motivational, and a guided process in which all parties work together. Feedback is a key component of the educational philosophy that defines the Cardiff student learning experience.
- 2.2 Students receive a range of feedback on their academic performance. This plays a crucial role in learning, in students’ development as independent learners, and, ultimately, in making Cardiff graduates more employable. Students that do not know how to use or act upon the feedback they receive will find it difficult to identify how they can improve their future learning and performance and will not develop the self-evaluation skills relevant to career development.
- 2.3 Academic feedback is the element of the learning experience that students are least satisfied with [4]. This is, in part, a consequence of the different expectations and understanding that staff and students have of what constitutes good feedback. It is also a result of the examples that students have reported of receiving poor feedback [5].
- 2.4 The University will continue to support staff and students to enhance academic feedback and the use made of this. This will include the support provided to Schools and Colleges to review and audit current provision and practices, staff-development activities and events to share effective practice, and by enhancing the information made available to students about assessment and feedback in their programme of study.
- 2.5 Schools should ensure that staff continue to develop and update their skills in giving feedback. By doing so, staff will be better able to demonstrate the professional approach to supporting learning required in the ‘UK Professional Standards for Teaching and Supporting Learning’ [6].
- 2.6 Effective feedback requires academic programmes to be designed so that the volume of assessment is manageable, to ensure that students encounter an appropriate mix of formative and summative assessment tasks, and to enable students to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes through

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- 2) O’Donovan B, Rust C. and Price M. (2015) A scholarly approach to solving the feedback dilemma in practice. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* DOI: 10.1080/02602938.2015.1052774
 - 3) Cardiff University (2012) The Way Forward 2012-2017: Education [WWW] <<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/thewayforward/our-focus/education>> [Accessed 09/07/15]
 - 4) Assessment and Feedback has consistently received the lowest scores in the ‘National Student Survey’ across the UK higher education sector.
 - 5) The QAA Institutional Review Report published in 2014, noted that “Students who met with reviewers reported that feedback dates were not routinely set out in programme handbooks and that feedback turnaround times varied from next day to two months.”
 - 6) Higher Education Academy (2011) UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education [WWW] <<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/professional-recognition/uk-professional-standards-framework-ukpsf>> [Accessed 10/07/15]

those summative assessment tasks. This requires assessment to be an integral part of programme design. It also needs adequate time to be made available for staff to provide and facilitate dialogue with students on their feedback and for students to reflect on and utilise this.

- 2.7 The ways in which feedback is made available to students will depend on a number of factors. These include: the discipline being studied, the nature of the learning activities, the intended learning outcomes, the resources available to complete this task, the assessment method(s) being employed, the size of the class, and the needs of individual students. Staff should be encouraged to work with students to be flexible and adopt different strategies and ways of providing feedback, depending on the assessment context, and by taking due regard of the motivations and expectations of students.
- 2.8 The policy has been informed both by relevant parts of the QAA Quality Code [7], by the NUS Ten Principles of Effective Feedback [8] and by relevant educational research [9]. It sets out the roles and responsibilities on students and staff in this area. It has been designed to help ensure that continuous improvement takes place. Schools should ensure that they review their practice and adapt and adopt examples of effective practice.
- 2.9 The policy has been approved by the University's Academic Standards and Quality Committee and Senate. Its implementation will be monitored through the University's academic quality infrastructure. Schools shall consider how they meet the principles in the policy through their engagement with these processes. The Policy will continue to be subject to ongoing review and evaluation.
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- 7) Quality Assurance Agency (2013) The Quality Code for Higher Education Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education - Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning [WWW] <<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code>> [Accessed 10/07/15]
- 8) National Union of Students [n.d] Feedback: What you can expect [WWW] <<http://www.nus.org.uk/en/advice/course-reps/feedback-what-you-can-expect->> [Accessed 10/07/15]
- 9) See for example, ASKe (2015) What makes good feedback good? [WWW] <<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/goodfeedback/>> [Accessed 10/07/15]

3 Roles and Responsibilities

In meeting the expectations set out in the policy students have a responsibility to:

- Use the feedback they receive to help them identify how they can improve their academic performance;
- Participate fully in discussions about their learning and progression;
- Engage with exercises that utilise peer feedback and use such opportunities to engage in dialogue with fellow students to promote learning;
- Support their peers in making the best use of feedback provided;
- Work constructively with academic staff to improve the effectiveness of feedback arrangements;
- Develop assessment literacy skills and the independent and reflective learning skills needed to make the most effective use of feedback.

In meeting the expectations set out in the policy staff involved in teaching have a responsibility to:

- Ensure they meet the principles set out in this Policy and take appropriate note of the guidance it contains;
- Share with students knowledge and understanding of assessment criteria, standards, and marking processes;
- Provide clear information to students about the nature of the feedback they will receive on particular assignments and appropriate guidance on how they can make best use of this;
- Engage in a dialogue with students that requires them to use feedback to support reflection and future action planning;
- Review and evaluate their practice in this area and make improvements to feedback arrangements where needed;
- Utilise scholarship, research, and professional activities in developing their practice.

In meeting the expectations set out in the policy Schools, Colleges, and Professional Service departments responsible for taught programmes have a responsibility to:

- Adapt and adopt examples of effective practice within programmes of study;
 - Provide appropriate and relevant staff development and continuing professional development opportunities in this area;
 - Consider the volume and nature of assessment in the context of enhanced feedback;
 - Apply workload models that ensure that strategies adopted to provide feedback are sustainable;
 - Ensure that programme information makes explicit the role of, and type of, feedback that students will receive in order to manage student expectations;
 - Provide information to students on the deadlines for the receipt and return of assessed work;
 - Design and review curricula to ensure that assessment and feedback arrangements are considered explicitly in programme design and align with the academic philosophy of the University;
 - Monitor implementation of the policy through their engagement with the University's Academic Quality processes evidenced by the application of suitable performance measures.
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4 Policy and Guidance

4.1 Principle: Feedback supports and promotes effective learning.
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a) Feedback is timely.

Schools need to ensure that feedback is provided sufficiently in advance of subsequent assessment tasks to enable students to utilise this. Feedback on assessed work shall be made available to students no later than four working weeks of the assessment deadline. In exceptional cases, where this is not possible, staff must notify students when they will receive feedback and give clear reasons for the delay. Deadlines for submission and return of assessed work shall be made available to students through programme information.

b) Feedback is constructive, useful, and meaningful.

Schools shall adopt strategies to provide students with feedback that supports learning and ensure that students can engage with and act upon it. Feedback should focus on things that students have done well, and indicate where the learning outcomes have been exceeded, in addition to highlighting errors and areas in which a student's performance can improve. Staff must avoid the use of derogatory language, sarcasm, or innuendo, in line with the principles set out in the University's Dignity at Work and Study Policy [10].

c) Assessments are designed to help students engage with feedback.

Schools should employ assessment strategies that motivate and allow students to use feedback and demonstrate that they have applied it to future tasks. Where appropriate, staff should consider issuing feedback to students on assessments in advance of the release of marks, or providing feedback without marks on purely formative tasks. This can help ensure that students take proper note of feedback, particularly when students are required to acknowledge and address specific issues as a precursor to the release of marks, or to the submission of a final draft for summative assessment.

d) Feedback is appropriate for the assessment task.

Staff shall ensure that the strategies adopted when providing feedback are fit for purpose and relevant to the learning activities. Staff shall discuss with students and make clear the nature of the feedback that will be provided on individual tasks, detail how it will be given, and set out why it is appropriate for that task. Students shall be prepared and supported to use different types of feedback. Ensuring students clearly understand the nature and purpose of feedback in different contexts will help ensure shared expectations can be developed.

10) Cardiff University (2006) Dignity At Work And Study Policy [WWW]
<<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/govrn/cocom/equalityanddiversity/dignityatwork/index.html>> [Accessed 02/12/10]

- e) Feedback is related to assessment criteria and intended learning outcomes.

Giving feedback based on the intended learning outcomes and specific assessment criteria enables students to see how learning has progressed, understand what they need to do to improve, and identify gaps in knowledge or understanding. It can also help students better understand the mark they were awarded in specific assignments. Where appropriate, feedback should cover any unintended learning outcomes as well as those set down in task and/or module descriptions.

4.2 Principle Feedback is a continuous process

- f) Students are assessment literate and understand the purpose and nature of feedback in higher education.

Students' experience of feedback prior to University may be very different from those provided in their programme of study. Consequently, schools need to ensure that student transition to higher education at Cardiff is supported effectively, that students understand the academic feedback they will receive, and that students know how to utilise this effectively. Staff need to ensure students understand their responsibilities as learners, the role that feedback plays in this, and the need to take responsibility for their own learning.

- g) Feedback underpins learning and is a crucial embedded element of the student experience.

Schools need to ensure that the benefits of effective feedback are understood by staff and students. Regular conversations between staff and students will ensure students understand the ways in which feedback can assist their development and progression. Students need to be made aware of the different types of feedback they will receive as they encounter them, and staff should advise students of how this information should be used. Having a conversation with students at different progression points will help ensure that students can be supported in a manner appropriate to their academic level and development. It will also help students to better recognise feedback when they receive it and improve their understanding of academic standards.

- h) Feedback assists reflection and feeds forward to future tasks.

Feedback should be designed to help students engage in reflection and assist future planning. Helping to develop reflective skills will ensure students become more independent in their learning over time. The personal tutor system and student engagement with personal and professional development planning provide ideal opportunities for students to identify ways of improving their knowledge and skills. Providing feedback through personal tutors can help ensure that student reflections are not task specific and that any lessons learned can be utilised and fed forward into future tasks. In tasks where this would be appropriate, staff should encourage students to identify and communicate the specific criteria on which they would most welcome feedback.

i) Feedback is provided on all assessments.

The purpose of formative assessment is to provide feedback to students on their progress. Students can expect feedback on formative assessments to be detailed and to help them identify what they need to do to improve and demonstrate their full potential in summative assessments. Feedback also needs to be provided on summative assessments to help students make the connection between different tasks and modules to ensure students can improve as they progress to more complex tasks. Staff need to consider the range of tools and techniques that can be used to provide feedback on summative assessments and should, where possible, ensure that such feedback is provided to individual learners. However feedback is delivered, it should be clearly identified as feedback and set out how it can be used by students to support future learning.

j) Students are informed of how to get feedback on exam performance.

Schools shall provide feedback on exam performance, give students information of the ways in which this will be made available, and set out how their approach is best suited to the discipline and exam formats used by the School. They should adopt strategies that feed forward and help guide future learning and performance, and ensure that students' expectations are managed effectively. As a minimum, Schools should provide summary written feedback to the whole cohort within 4 working weeks of the Examination. Other ways in which exam feedback could be made available include:

- written feedback for individual students on exams completed at the end of the first semester;
- opportunities for immediate post-exam discussion on exam papers with whole cohorts;
- the provision of model answers and/or marking schemes, and;
- structured discussion with personal tutors to review and reflect on academic performance and future learning plans.

Where students have failed assessments they shall have the opportunity to receive one-to-one support. Schools shall inform students of the ways in which students can view completed exam scripts in accordance with the Regulations and Guidance in section 7.8 of Senate Assessment Regulations. Schools should seek to adopt practices that can facilitate this.

4.3 Principle Feedback needs to be suited to individual students' needs
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k) Feedback is legible and clear.

Where possible, feedback should be provided electronically, to ensure that it is accessible to students and can be converted into other formats when required. In tasks where written feedback is given and it is not possible or appropriate to provide typed feedback, staff must ensure that written feedback is legible and clear, and ensure that it is accessible to all students. Where staff give feedback orally through electronic media, staff should seek to ensure that their comments are clear and are not open to different interpretations.

l) Feedback is inclusive.

Staff must ensure that they make adjustments according to the needs of individual students and adapt the ways in which feedback is delivered as appropriate. Feedback shall be in the language of the assessment and must be inclusive and non-discriminatory. This will ensure that feedback meets individual needs, is non-discriminatory, and is accessible to all.

m) Feedback is unambiguous and understandable.

Staff need to ensure that feedback can be understood clearly by students. Staff should avoid 'jargon', symbols and acronyms that may be unfamiliar to students. Staff should also avoid ambiguous phrases, ticks and/or one-word judgements or punctuation marks that could be open to different interpretation. This does not mean that feedback should avoid technical terms that are a key part of particular assessments as this will be need to be included to assist students further develop their understanding within their discipline. Students are often interested in knowing how their performance relates to other members of their cohort. Providing this information can help re-assure students of their progress. It is important, however, that students are encouraged to go beyond this and to ensure they utilise feedback to ensure they reach their potential.

n) Ongoing dialogue about feedback takes place between students and staff.

Opportunities need to be provided for students to contact and/or meet with staff to explore feedback that they do not understand. However good feedback is, there will always be occasions where students have misunderstood or misinterpreted comments received. Creating such opportunities will help ensure that feedback is seen by students as part of an ongoing dialogue, part of their development as learners, and not just a one-off process. Staff shall consider resource efficient ways of achieving this, for example, through use of technology or via the personal tutor system.

5. Further information

Help and guidance on ways of implementing this policy is available from Andy Lloyd in Registry, tel. ext. 76979, email LloydA@Cardiff.ac.uk.
