



University of
St Andrews

Feedback to students on assessed work

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UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS
LEARNING AND TEACHING COMMITTEE
POLICY ON FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS ON ASSESSED WORK

1. Introduction

Feedback is not simply a gloss on performance but an important part of learning, which does not occur as effectively as it could or should in the absence of feedback: this is a general principle that covers many forms of learning, not just that which occurs in formal educational settings.

Students must receive feedback on any work that they have submitted – diagnostic, formative or summative. Coursework is routinely given back to students and normal practice must be to provide direct feedback to them on that work, through written commentaries (using whatever media are appropriate) and through group and/or individual face-to-face discussion, or both. Feedback on examinations should also be available.

2. General Principles

The basic principles of feedback should be agreed by staff and students, whether via Staff-Student Consultative Committees (SSCCs), student representation on School Teaching Committees, or in the classroom itself, for individual exercises. It is understood that feedback requirements and opportunities will vary from School to School, bounded by discipline considerations: it will be possible to achieve some things in some Schools and disciplines, or at certain levels of study, that cannot be achieved realistically in or at others.

- It is important that the **pivotal role of feedback in learning** is recognized. Feedback is not simply a gloss on performance or a description of a mark or grade given to a piece of work. It is the element in teaching and learning that serves as a mechanism of both correction and advice that will guide students to improving their learning and future performance.
- Feedback includes both **written commentaries on submitted work and the discussion specifically around it**, as well as discussions in lectures, tutorials, seminars and lab classes. It includes both end-of-course feedback and that which occurs during teaching.
- There should be an explicit relationship between **feedback, assessment criteria and intended learning outcomes**.
- Feedback should involve mutual respect between staff and students and **dialogue** rather than monologue. The nature and depth of this dialogue will develop over time: effective feedback must be tailored to the level of study.
- **Staff should expect students** to understand that they have multiple pressures on their time and that they cannot deliver unrealistic volumes of feedback; and staff should be able to expect that students will collect their feedback and digest it appropriately.

- **Students should expect staff** to give time to the provision of feedback, and should be able to expect that feedback will reinforce what has been good in their work, help correct what has not been good, and feed forward into future work.
- Legitimate concerns are expressed by students about **deadlines**. It is not equitable for students to be penalized for late submissions, but for staff to deliver feedback after an agreed deadline.
- The **expectations of feedback** must be realistically managed – the feedback delivered in a module of 200 students will likely differ from that available to a group of seven; the quantity of feedback and speed-of-return need to be made explicit at the outset.
- The **timing of assessments and the timing of feedback** are important if feedback is to have feed-forward functions. If there are multiple assessments through a semester, feedback should, whenever possible, be delivered in time for students to benefit from it in their next assignment. Schools must however clearly indicate to students and staff the turnaround time for the return of coursework with feedback.
- **Generic feedback** can be of significant value, in that it can allow students to contextualize their performance in relation to that of others. However, students typically express a legitimate desire for **individually tailored feedback**.
- In order to be of maximal benefit, **feedback should be properly targeted**. Specific, concrete examples should be highlighted within the student's work to demonstrate any strengths or weaknesses referred to in feedback.
- Feedback should be **understandable** – couched in plain English or in specialist terminology appropriate to the level and discipline; **credible** – making realistic assumptions about students' performance; **sufficiently detailed**; **legible**; constructed in a way that **allows for improvement** in the next assignment; and **constructive**.
- **Access to feedback** must be considered: it is never appropriate to use a method of delivery that is inaccessible to some students. Accessibility requirements should always be borne in mind.
- There is a distinction to be drawn between **anonymisation** at the point of marking and anonymisation at the point of feedback. While Schools are required to engage as far as possible with the former, the latter is left to their discretion.
- **Face-to-face feedback** is valued by students but various **media** can be used to support good feedback – electronic, verbal, written, spoken (and electronically accessed), via Moodle, wikis or social networking sites. In many Schools, coursework is now processed through **electronic submission**. The use of on-screen reading and annotation of coursework, and its electronic return, is an effective method for delivering (and storing) targeted written feedback.

Feedback on Examination Performance

The question of feedback to students on examination performance is bound by four important issues:

1. Feedback on summative assessment should have value to students in developing their understanding of the material under examination and their practical skills in relation to examinations.
2. Feedback should reflect the fact that there must be clarity in the relationships between course aims and objectives; the delivery of teaching; the setting of examinations that match aims, objectives and delivery; and the marking of examinations in a way that is guided by published principles (grade descriptors) and is as objective as possible. Of particular importance is that feedback must be well aligned with grade descriptors, which themselves must be sufficiently detailed to be helpful and appropriate both for the level of study and for the type of assessment.
3. Feedback on examination scripts is an instance where transparency, fairness and propriety must apply – in an age of freedom of information it is inappropriate to be secretive about how students are being graded.
4. All feedback (whether on coursework or examinations) should be efficient and effective – it should not over burden staff and it should help students.

Two forms of feedback can be identified: that given to a class as a whole (generic feedback) and that given to a specific student (individual feedback). These two forms are independent: it is obviously possible to deliver both.

Generic Feedback

Generic feedback – with no individual names present – on examination performance can be given to a class as a whole. For very factual material this might include statements as to what the answers were; for descriptive essays it might include a statement of what an expected answer might have been (not necessarily a model answer) and what typical problems with the answers were. Generic feedback might incorporate statistical information, most likely grade distributions (although means, medians, modes, the range and variance estimates could also be used) allowing individual students to understand their position in class.

Individual Feedback

Through use of a standard sheet – an exam paper or essay cover sheet – on which brief notes are presented by the marker outlining the strengths and weaknesses of the essay (couched in terms of the grade descriptors used). (Such information also has value to external examiners.) Alternatively, more detailed written and/or verbal feedback could be given, though this is only achieved at the cost of increased staff time.

Allowing students to see their own exam scripts in a controlled setting, to have discussions of individual performances with appropriate staff (normally the member of staff who marked the work). Specific times can be set aside for this

during the first two weeks of a semester during which students can book individual (or if the students wish, group) time with a member of staff.

Outright return of the exam script. Because return of the exam script itself leaves a School/Department without any record, the student should only be given a photocopy of it. Return of the photocopied exam script would be unhelpful if the copy was difficult to read, staff comments illegible, and, as in many cases, extremely slight. However, it is expected that only a small proportion of students will want to take away photocopies of their exam scripts; students are responsible for the legibility of their own scripts; and internal examiners' marks should be legible for the sake of external examiners. If a student makes a formal written request to the School/Department for a photocopy of their exam script, it should be on the following terms:

- It must be on receipt of a fee set at the University level of £10 (per examination script).
- The request must be made by the end of week 3 of the semester following the exam diet.
- The return of the photocopied exam script is not in itself intended as formal feedback on examination performance, which should follow existing best practice.
- The process will be kept under review by the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching)

Note that it would not be good practice to allow students to complete multiple choice questions by marking a script with the questions on it. Such a script could legitimately be requested by a student, which would put the MCQs into the public domain, eliminating them from any question bank being maintained. MCQs should be completed on machine-readable forms.

Schools must determine how best to deliver feedback on their examinations – the decision will necessarily be bound up with the nature of the material being examined. However, the size of the class should not be a determining factor in any decisions made about feedback on examination performance. The Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching) and the Academic Monitoring Group will continue to monitor the position regarding feedback of examination scripts and will disseminate best practice as and when they can.

Version number	Purpose / changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and school / unit	Date
01	Updates to clarify that 1) Students must receive feedback on any work that they have submitted. 2) Schools must clearly indicate to students and staff the turnaround time for the return of coursework and feedback.	Approved	-	September 2011, June 2015
2	Changes to titles/contact details to reflect decanal restructuring	Approved	-	Feb 2021