

2021

DIY assessment feedback: Building engagement, trust and transparency in the feedback process

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Recommended Citation

Smith, Matthew and Lowe, Cassie, DIY assessment feedback: Building engagement, trust and transparency in the feedback process, *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 18(3), 2021.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol18/iss3/09>

DIY assessment feedback: Building engagement, trust and transparency in the feedback process

Abstract

This study evaluates a novel assessment and feedback process in which students were tasked with actively engaging in the feedback process in a 'DIY' – do-it-yourself – assessment feedback workshop. The research team set out to explore how an active participation in the construction of the assessment criteria and utilisation of that co-constructed criteria would affect the students' engagement with assessing their own work. Through providing the space in which students were encouraged to use criteria to mark their own work, the research team aimed to build the students' trust and confidence in the transparency of the assessment process. The main findings of this study have shown the value of this DIY assessment feedback workshop, as it has proven to encourage a deeper level of reflection in the student participants and catalysed a greater connection between the learning process of assessment feedback with both their past and future assessments.

Keywords

assessment, feedback, reflection, higher education

Introduction

The Higher Education sector in the United Kingdom (UK) has been coping with a vast array of changes shifting the landscape from beneath its feet over the last decade. Led by governmental structures and policies, students have seen a tripling of tuition fees per year and the increased marketization of higher education, which has seen a dramatic shift in student mind-sets and expectations (King & Bunce, 2019). This set course for a consumerist model has become a powerful, and often seemingly all-encompassing, structural factor in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (Levy et al., 2011). Alongside this, the National Student Survey (NSS) plays a key role in this market-system, putting the emphasis on notions of consumer satisfaction and value-for-money (Tomlinson, 2017). The NSS, conducted at the end of the students' final year of university in the UK, asks students 27 questions about their experience of their higher education institution (HEI) (NSS, 2019). These results feed into a national league table, which ranks universities based on the different aspects of the student experience as explored in the question set, and finally on their overall satisfaction. Importantly, aspects of the NSS are used to inform 25 percent of the metrics for the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (NSS, 2019; TEF, 2019), which is a further ranking system for UK HEIs. Questions on assessment and feedback within the NSS have been the biggest sources of dissatisfaction since the NSS was launched (NSS, 2019) and in the current study, we consider a feedback approach that informs universities how they might address this challenge.

Given the prominence of the NSS in UK HE, it has become a focus for institutions sector-wide to explore the area of assessment and feedback that notably seems to be the source of the least amounts of satisfaction for students. Specifically, questions in the NSS on assessment and feedback have UK national satisfaction scores 73 percent satisfied, compared to 84 percent overall satisfaction (NSS, 2019). The UK is not alone in this assessment and feedback quandary, with Henderson et al. (2019) also highlighting multiple challenges faced by staff and students in Australian Universities to generate and receive effective feedback respectively. These challenges include understanding the perceived usefulness for future work and the personalisation of feedback and, for staff, the time required to produce effective feedback and the scalability of these approaches (Henderson et al., 2019). This aspect of the student journey is in significant need of attention and further work worldwide to more fully understand this area of dissatisfaction. This provided the first impetus for the current research, to explore ways of improving the student's experience of assessment and feedback. A further stimulus came from a query raised by an external examiner (EE) at the first author's previous institution. The EE praised the quality of feedback given to the students, but raised the question of whether the feedback was used to a) justify the grade (to the student and the external), b) facilitate improvement if the assessment was repeated, or c) improve the trajectory for the student in future assessments. The EE suggested, "It's probably a combination of all three, but how 'c' is achieved is not clear and, in my opinion, this is likely to be the most important outcome of feedback for the majority of students". Tutors will mostly agree that all three aspects are what they will be seeking to address in their feedback, but the third aspect is key when constructing feedback to ensure the students are able to utilise it for future learning.

Assessment, when appropriately designed and implemented, has been widely accepted as being instrumental for student learning (Harland et al., 2015; Jessop & Maleckar, 2016; Gillet & Hammond, 2009). Equally as important in this process is the use of feedback given to students for their assessed work, as Hounsell argues, "feedback plays a decisive role in learning and development, within and beyond formal educational settings. We learn faster, and much more effectively, when we have a clear sense of how well we are doing and what we might need to do in

order to improve” (Hounsell, 2003, p. 67). Assessment feedback is an aspect of Higher Education that Sambell et al. (2013) suggest demands urgent attention, one that requires a deeper exploration into how the feedback practices are designed for the students who experience them. There is a proven deficit, as evidenced in the lower NSS scores for this area, in the students’ expectations of feedback, their perceptions of good feedback, and what is being delivered (Lizzio & Wilson, 2008; Lowe & Shaw, 2019). Furthermore, Nicol (2010) argues that the received feedback must be engaged with more actively to show its value to students, and students must be provided with a space “to analyse the message, ask questions about it, discuss it with others, connect it with prior understanding and use this to change future actions” (p. 503). Furthermore, Prince et al., (2010) suggest that without such engagement opportunities with feedback, students are not sure what to do with the feedback they receive. This is integrally linked to student feedback literacy, which denotes a student's ability to make sense of the information provided in the feedback and their capacity and disposition to make productive use of such feedback (Carless & Boud, 2018). The current study offers one such approach to work with students to improve their assessment feedback literacy, as the ‘DIY’ approach enables a greater understanding of, and appreciation for, the assessment criteria and the feedback they receive.

A didactic approach to feedback is considered to be an ineffective model for students to decode and internalise the key messages in feedback. Rather than having students being situated as passive recipients, students should instead be encouraged to construct meaning and make judgements about their own work using feedback as a guide (Sambell, 2011; Carless & Boud, 2018). Carless (2006) asserts the need for an assessment dialogue, whereby the tutor and the student meet to discuss the feedback and the grade. He argues that tutors should not assume students are on the same wavelength with regards to feedback and failing to ensure feedback is a dialogic process can consequently produce negative effects (Carless, 2006). Instead, it is considered to be the role of the tutor to ensure that students have opportunities afforded to them through curriculum design and assessment that facilitate a dialogic approach to feedback, which will, in turn, enable students to begin to develop their capacity to make informed judgements on their own academic work (Carless, 2018). One such approach to conceptualising how this might materialise in the feedback process is depicted by Carless (2018), in which he describes an effective feedback process as being a spiral – rather than a ‘loop’, explaining how “A loop implies an end-point, whereas a spiral implies something more ongoing and developmental” (p. 712). The process outlined in the current study aimed to give students greater ownership of the assessment experience, through engaging them more meaningfully in the assessment process and constructing their own feedback, which was followed by a discussion with the tutor to pull out key considerations for future assessments. It meant that the feedback they devised for themselves could be carried forward more readily through embedding in the task the developmental, reflective and ongoing nature of the feedback for future assessments. The feedback, therefore, does not have an endpoint, but is actionable and can be used to improve future work. This process also aims to develop students’ ability to evaluate more effectively their work prior to submission in future assessments.

Self-assessment, and being able to be critically reflective on one’s outputs, is a key graduate attribute for employers and should, therefore, be a developmental feature of Higher Education (Boud & Nancy, 2006). Without the space to self-reflect, students often disassociate with their work once they have handed it in and do not read back over the assessed work after receiving the mark. As such, it can often feel for students that the mark is not reflective of how they remember their work to be and can cause feelings of dismay. Managing such affective responses to assessment feedback is considered to be vital for students to engage more meaningfully with assessment feedback (Carless & Boud, 2018). To manage this response, tutors are encouraged to develop student feedback literacy, so they can feel incentivised to review the work and the feedback in relation to the

assessment criteria to better understand the judgement made in relation to the corresponding mark. Carless (2006) suggests one such way to alleviate this issue of affective response is through ‘demystifying the assessment process’ (p. 230) to reassure students of the centrality of the assessment criteria as the basis for all judgements. Dawson et al. (2018) highlighted that student perceptions of effective feedback are not as integrally linked to the assessment criteria as one might expect, which suggests there is further work to be done on evidencing the link between feedback and assessment criteria. Joughin et al. (2018) argue for the need to develop students’ “capacity to describe and appraise the quality of their work in relation to a standard or standards and to act on that appraisal to improve its quality” (p. 537). Developing students’ ability to use evaluative judgement for their own work is key to furthering student feedback literacy overall and their subsequent ability to engage with the feedback they receive from tutors (Carless & Boud, 2018). To explore this further, we sought to engage students with assessment feedback through asking students to mark their own work using the co-developed assessment criteria. Co-constructing the assessment criteria sought to attend to one of the key considerations for developing students’ evaluative judgment raised by Joughin et al., which is that when faced with an assessment criterion that they might not fully understand, they ask themselves a simpler evaluative question that does not correspond directly to the actual judgement they need to make – here referred to as “attribute substitution” (p. 542). Constructing the criteria in consultation with students ensured the clarity and accessibility of each criterion.

The drive towards engaging students more deeply with their feedback, and the creation of a space in which to do this, was the underpinning purpose of this research study. To do this, the research team constructed an in-class “DIY” feedback workshop to enable students to develop their assessment literacy and evaluative judgement for their own work using the assessment criteria to make informed judgements about quality and, with the co-developed criteria framework, map their feedback onto the mark scheme. This process was therefore designed to address the issue of student dissatisfaction with the usefulness of feedback in helping them improve future work, as students are encouraged to reflect on areas they need to improve to access higher marks in future modules. This also attends to tutors’ concerns about spending considerable time on feedback, which is not acted on by students, as the focus of this approach is to encourage students to use feedback to inform future work in the spirit of the feedback spirals discussed above (Carless, 2018). Thus, the overall aim of the current study was to explore student perceptions of this feedback approach through providing them with the opportunity to use co-developed assessment criteria to mark their own work, prior to seeing the mark given by the tutor, and examine whether the approach enhanced student feedback literacy through their engagement with, confidence in, and appreciation for both assessment criteria and feedback. Scott (2017) reports on a similar research that focuses on group work self-assessment and on the quantitative data for the effects of self-assessment. Scott explored the levels of accuracy in students’ predictive self-assessment, highlighting that students who produced lower quality work tended to over-assess to a greater degree than fellow students who produced work of a higher quality. He also demonstrated the areas students focus on with their feedback, with the former type of student focusing on superficial aspects of their work and the latter critiquing more nuanced issues, such as criticality and originality. Contributing towards the high achieving student’s success in the task was their awareness of and engagement with the assessment criteria. Thus, a further aim of the current study was to build on and support the work of Scott, by offering both a qualitative and quantitative insight into the students’ perceptions and experience of self-assessment and of individual lab reports, rather than group work assessments.

Methodology

Class introduction and context

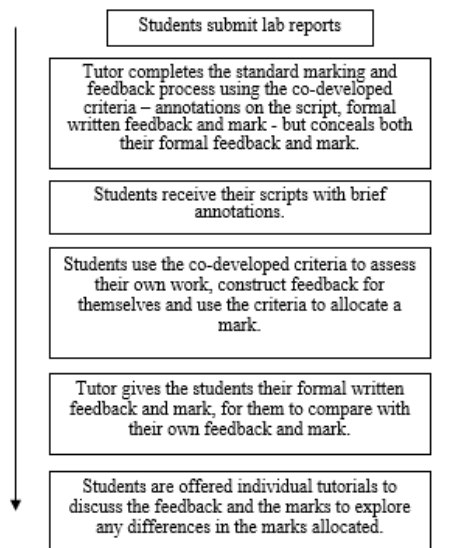
For the purposes of this study, feedback refers to the responses students receive on their assessed work, which included both written annotations in the margin and formal feedback at the end of the script. This study was conducted at a small-medium sized university in the South of England, however, fuller contextual information is not provided as this study is intended to be exploratory and inspire other educational institutions to explore this practice, rather than to advance universal claims. The feedback process detailed in this study was introduced as part of a Level 5 (second year) Social Psychology unit, which took place in the second semester of a three-year undergraduate degree course. Students participating in this study were enrolled in either a Psychology or Sport and Exercise Psychology course. Data was collected over two years, with two consecutive cohorts of students. In total, 127 students engaged in the feedback process outlined above, and thereafter completed a questionnaire to assess their thoughts on the process. The assessment completed was a qualitative lab report based around examining persuasive strategies used in advertising campaigns. In line with the research team's desire to situate students at the heart of their own assessment experience, as part of the formative work for the assessment, the module tutor worked with the students to develop criteria for what would be expected in each part of the lab report (i.e., introduction, methods, findings, discussion). These expectations provided a framework to guide the students in writing their report, as well as underpinning the self-assessment feedback sheet they would later use when reflecting on their work. The co-developed criteria can be seen in Appendix 1.

Feedback strategy and self-assessment tasks

Students submitted a hard copy of their lab report and the tutor completed the standard practice of annotations on the written document feeding back on their assessment. The tutor then marked the work in line with the co-developed criteria. Such a system was designed to provide students with brief feedback when reading back their report, and in-text annotations involving a series of ticks (i.e., one or two ticks to indicate well written passages), and brief words and phrases to indicate aspects of written work that could be improved. There was also more guiding feedback given by the tutor, in line with the criteria previously discussed with the students. This feedback was broken down into the four sections of the report (i.e., introduction, methods, results, discussion) and due to the distinctiveness of each section, an individual mark was given for each of these sections. This was then combined for the total mark. Once the module tutor had completed this marking and feedback process, the annotated scripts were handed back to the students in seminar sessions. This was done before the numerical marks (Honours Degree Classification Grade) and formal written feedback was made available to the students. A diagram of this process can be seen below in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Assessment feedback workshop process



At the start of these sessions, the tutor explained the process they were about to undertake with the students and what this new method hoped to achieve. The tutor started by discussing the issue of students engaging with their assessment feedback and alluded to previous student responses in the National Student Survey. The tutor raised student concerns, as reported in the NSS, which call for more detailed, thorough feedback to be provided, and to have feedback that can feed forward to help them improve future work. The students were then given their own feedback sheet (see Appendix 1), which was structured around the criteria previously discussed, and were asked to read back through their own work. They were asked to complete this feedback sheet, using their evaluative judgement to consider the strengths and weaknesses of their own work against the agreed criteria (with prompts provided by the brief tutor annotations). They were told they could do this on their own, or, if they wanted, to work with a partner to discuss their assessment. The tutor allowed students to ask questions to clarify the annotations or concerning any other aspect of their work. The students were also asked to consider what mark they would give themselves for each of the four sections of the report, and finished by identifying at least three action points, aspects of their work they need to improve in future comparable assessments. Following the seminar sessions where this self-assessment process took place, the marks and formal written feedback were released. Students were encouraged to compare their own feedback (generated through self-assessment) and marks, to the feedback provided by the tutor. To complete the process, they were encouraged to further consider their action points and edit these as appropriate after engaging with the tutor's feedback. Students were offered tutorial support if they wanted to discuss any further aspect of their work, with a focus on feedback they received by the tutor or by themselves and their future assessments.

The following week, the students were asked to provide feedback on the process, as part of the overall end-of-semester module feedback. Four quantitative questions were asked, which included: i) "How useful was the session in making you aware of the feedback and allowing you to more fully understand the feedback provided concerning the quality of your work?"; ii) "How useful was the session in terms of getting you yourself to see how you can improve your work for the future?"; iii)

“Are you likely to refer to this work/feedback when preparing a similar assignment in the future?”; and iv) “Would you recommend this lab report feedback session was continued in the module next year?” For the first three questions, participants were asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all useful/likely) to 5 (very useful/likely). For the fourth question, participants responded either ‘Yes, definitely’, ‘maybe’, or ‘definitely not’. The students were also given the opportunity to provide qualitative comments to supplement these responses and further explain their thoughts. An inductive thematic analysis of these qualitative comments was conducted.

Results

Overall, the responses to the quantitative questions provided strong evidence of the students’ positive perceptions of the feedback task. 77 students (61%) reported that the session was very useful in terms of making them aware of the processes of constructing feedback and allowing them to understand more fully the feedback provided concerning the quality of their work. 41 students (32%) found this fairly useful, and 9 (7%) were less positive (‘A little useful’ = 4%; ‘not very useful’ = 2%; ‘Not at all useful’ = 1%). 81 students (64%) reported that the session was very useful in terms of getting them to see how they can improve their work for the future. 36 students (28%) found this fairly useful, and 10 (8%) were less positive (‘A little useful’ = 4%; ‘not very useful’ = 2%; ‘Not at all useful’ = 2%). 73 students (57%) reported being ‘very likely’ to refer to this work/feedback when preparing a similar assignment in the future. 36 students (28%) reported being ‘fairly likely’ to look back at the work, and 18 (14%) were less positive about doing this (‘Maybe’ = 11%; ‘not very likely’ = 3%). Finally, when asked whether they would recommend the tutor continue this lab report feedback session in the module the following year, 105 students (83%) said ‘yes, definitely’, 20 students (15%) said ‘maybe’, and 2 students (2%) said ‘definitely not’.

Overall, these results are supportive of the effectiveness of the feedback activity. 41 students also provided qualitative comments concerning the session both on the open-text comment box in the survey and in emails following the session. Where the comments provided have been in emails following the event, these are noted below. The majority of the qualitative comments were positive, and thus, reinforced the quantitative findings. The positive comments were organised into four themes: identifying areas to improve; facilitating engagement; detail/breakdown of feedback; and general positive comments.

Identifying areas to improve

In terms of considering how the process was helpful in identifying areas to improve, one student commented, “feedback was precise and informative, it allowed me to put into perspective which sections I could improve and why”. In line with this, another student also commented;

I have since gone home and been really critical with myself and it has really helped to know exactly what I did badly and where I need to improve. I've also compared it to any other grades from other modules that I haven't been happy about and it has really helped to pinpoint my mistakes. This is definitely a session which I think you should keep next year if you're still doing the module as I'm sure it's helpful for anyone that wants to improve their grades.

This comment evidences how the process opened up a more dialogic approach to the students’ engagement with assessment feedback and suggests the effective use of the feedback spiral, whereby the students were able to reflect on and translate the feedback from the lab report to previously

assessed works and use this for future learning. There is a sense in this comment that the feedback spoke to not only that single assessment, but also to other assessments and allowed the student to better understand feedback they had previously received. It also showed explicitly where the areas were that the student needed to work on in future assessments. Whilst the element of transferability to feedback is a common practice amongst most tutors, highlighting this through ensuring the students are engaged with the feedback and marking process provided a platform for them to engage more deeply with this aspect of feedback. The lasting effects of the DIY assessment feedback activity has been a recurring theme in the student responses, where they have alluded to taking the feedback away in their thoughts and considered how this could be applied to their previous assessments. This activity shows an impactful and transformative learning process, whereby the students have been given the method to be able to engage with and reflect on their assessment feedback in a more meaningful way, one that provides a foundation on which to build their future assessments. Whilst the tools, the assessment criteria, have always been there, the activity demonstrated how an application of the tools using this in-class methodology will enable them to use their feedback to learn and feedforward into future assessments.

Facilitating engagement

A number of the students commented that the session created greater awareness of the usefulness and integral nature of engaging with feedback. At the start of the session the tutor discussed with the students the reality that once students have received their mark for an assessment, it reduces their motivation to consider the written feedback in detail. Students agreed with this proposition and one student responded by saying, "I thought it was very useful and as you said, I probably wouldn't have looked at the feedback on the hard copy otherwise - now I will definitely do so in future". This process also emphasised the importance of developing evaluative judgement and criticality with regards to one's own writing, one student noted that "It was the most I have ever used feedback and criticised my own work". Another student commented further, "Regarding the session, I thought it was a great idea to allow us to engage in the feedback that you provided as this can be taken into our [Independent Projects] next year". It is interesting to note here the specific language used in this remark that the student felt the DIY feedback activity *allowed* them to engage with their feedback, implying that the time and space provided in the session was what was needed to permit engagement with feedback.

Detail/ breakdown of feedback

Students noted that they found the breakdown of marks useful for improving their work in future assessments, with one student stating, "Was good to grade each section separately to see where the biggest improvement is needed". Another student supported this notion by highlighting, "The session was useful, as it definitely made you think about splitting each section down and not looking at the essay completely as a whole". This approach seems to have worked effectively in encouraging students to work on specific areas for their future assessments, allowing for a greater "feed forward" aspect to the feedback. This notion of breaking down assessment feedback into congruent parts could be an aspect that works well with this type of assessment specifically, but perhaps the approach - allowing students to see how separate elements of the assessment contribute to the whole mark - could be an assessment strategy to be adapted to respond to various assessment forms.

General positive comments

There were several further general positive comments, with students commenting how "helpful" and "useful" the session was. One student noting that it was the "Best feedback I have received as we discussed the marking criteria in seminar". Whilst the researchers assume that tutors from other

modules are also providing comparable feedback for assessments, it is the process through which the student has been engaging with the feedback that has given it the perceived strength that the student has noted here. A student confirmed a generally positive experience, with some additional comments to improve the activity for future use, writing,

I thought the session was good actually, though I think quite a few people found it daunting initially! I think it did help once you got into it, especially because it helps us to see where the marks are allocated, as to some (myself included) it's a bit unknown. I think it would have really helped if you'd given us some tips on what to look for specifically when marking, from your own experiences, so that we have a greater idea of the specifics that an examiner looks for.

Reflecting on this comment, it is worthwhile noting that the experience was not wholly positive for every participant and a small number of negative comments were also made alongside suggestions to improve the session. These generally centred on the anxiety by a small number of students when considering their work and not knowing the mark. For example, one student highlighted their feelings; “I felt very anxious and stressed in the feedback session as we had to read our comments without the mark, and then waited 3 hours after to receive results”. Another student suggested how this could be addressed; “while the session was highly helpful, it would have been good to get marks during lesson as to reduce unnecessary anxiety about [the] mark”. To mitigate this potential discomfort, tutors could consider having the mark revealed and only the tutor feedback hidden, however, this could impact upon the student’s engagement with the feedback.

Discussion

Many comments in the evaluations evidenced findings that the research team hoped the students would experience (e.g., reading of comments in depth, consideration of how they would improve). Through this approach to assessment feedback, the students were given the opportunity to use their evaluative judgement to engage more critically with their own work and consider the value of the feedback from the tutor. Students were also able to see the direct link between the tutor’s feedback and the grade they had received, through being more critical of their own work in line with the assessment criteria. In contrast to the research team’s expectations, the qualitative findings do not show any explicit references to criteria being recognised as being the cornerstone on which the assessment feedback and mark is given. However, there were references to seeing ‘where marks are allocated’ and an understanding that the ‘splitting’ of where marks were allocated also showed where the areas of improvements were required, which can be inferred to be with reference to the co-designed assessment criteria. Most comments, however, were about the students’ relationship with the feedback and how these would help them with future work. Whilst this has always been the case, an exercise such as this provides evidence for and highlights the value and utility of assessment feedback, in a way students may not have previously considered. It suggests the task has improved student feedback literacy overall, as defined by Carless and Boud (2018) as being a student who is able to “appreciate their own active role in feedback processes; are continuously developing capacities in making sound judgements about academic work and manage affect in positive ways.” (p. 1318). This process also provided the tutor with the opportunity to embellish on feedback comments in subsequent tutorials and clarify any areas of ambiguity. This prompted the tutor to also be self-reflective on the feedback given and see where they could improve to make things more accessible to students – ‘feedback on feedback’. Seeing the benefits this had for students and being provided with comments that evidence this has been encouraging for the researchers, who can see

the benefits to the activity for the students and showed how valuable their feedback could be once students had engaged with it.

With students highlighting how the benefits of this approach were such that its focus was on improvement, it is interesting to reflect on motivation theory to understand further their responses, and specifically achievement goal theory (AGT). Nicholls (1989) proposes that people behave in a way to demonstrate high competence, by referring to either one's own past performance (task goals) or comparing ability relative to others (ego goals). In the context of the current study, task goals, which reflect a 'mastery' climate, mean the focus for students is on personal improvement. In contrast, ego goals, which reflect a 'performance' climate, mean students are more focused on results (i.e., their mark) and how this compares to the results of other students. In the sport psychology literature, much evidence has accrued to suggest a mastery climate predicts a number of positive psychological and behavioural responses, including increased perceived competence, self-esteem, and intrinsic motivation (for a review, see Harwood et al., 2015). This links with Dweck's (2006) theorising on a growth mindset, and the positive outcomes concerning motivation if students are encouraged to focus on effort and improvement over results. This theorising supports our approach and suggests that when considering strategies to engage students with assessment and feedback, lecturers should encourage student focus on mastery and personal improvement, over and above the mark received. This links into the feedback 'literate' student who is able to appreciate the feedback, make judgements about their work, manage the affective response to feedback and use this to motivate themselves to take action (Carless & Boud, 2018).

Before proceeding, some limitations of the study should be acknowledged. This study is localised and the findings, therefore, can be seen to be context specific. However, this study offers a possible methodological approach to engage students with assessment feedback and understanding the relationship between feedback and the assessment criteria, one that can be adopted and adapted to suit individual cohort requirements. It is also worthwhile noting the class size for this activity, over 60 students, and as such a tailored co-design approach to assessment criteria would be more difficult with larger cohorts of students. Furthermore, the time required to complete this exercise was labour intensive. Co-constructing the criteria for the assessment took longer than if the tutor had devised the criteria without student involvement. It also took time out of the teaching for one seminar to conduct the activity and provide students with the time to re-read their assessments in line with the criteria, mark their own work and thereafter read their feedback. However, the feed forward sessions provided the tutor with the ability to go through both sets of feedback in relation to the assessment criteria and the overall mark provided, so, whilst time consuming, it was a hugely valuable process. Overall, this approach was time intensive, but the students were able to get more from the exercise than if they were given the feedback in isolation.

Reflections for future

From undertaking this study there are a few key reflections that the researchers can offer from their experience. Firstly, it is important that the tutor conducting this session is confident in their familiarity with, and strict adherence to, the assessment criteria for marking and feedback. This is key as the students are being provided with an open platform to challenge and request justification for the mark awarded, in a way that they might not have experienced before. This was purposefully instigated, and even encouraged, as the research team hoped that this would positively affect their conceptions of the marking and feedback process, as it sought reassure them of the transparency and

trustworthiness of feedback from their tutors through their own engagement with using the assessment criteria. This process, however, did offer the tutor an opportunity to be self-reflective on their approach to assessment feedback, as it highlighted where communication in the comments could be clearer to students and this approach changed the tutor's practice for the future. In line with the notion of clarity in communication, any criteria given to students needs to be explicit in its expectations from students and understandable to them, so that they may engage with each criterion and work towards improving their work. An aspect that came out from conversations with students was how valuable they found this process for feeding into their future work, as it outlined specific areas for them to improve that they highlighted for themselves through completing the self-assessment exercise. To improve this process in the future, lecturers should explain the research-backed underpinnings to this approach to provide a rationale to students on how it can improve their experience of assessment feedback. In addition, students might be given further opportunities to reflect on their learning beyond a single piece of assessed work, with this feedback approach potentially extended by being integrated into formative assessment or through being included in self-assessment in future modules. In this way, students would be encouraged to return to this self-assessment and re-reflect on the feedback when they come to do similar future work.

Equally important to the success of this approach to assessment feedback, was the nature of the assessment being undertaken by the students. The lab report offers a very defined set of expectations from its structure and, therefore, it lends itself to the co-creation of explicit assessment criteria. However, this is not to suggest other forms of assessment could not adapt this approach and work with students to co-create accessible and explicit criteria for self-assessment. In line with these considerations for the format of the assessment, recent educational changes due to the global pandemic have brought to attention the need for some element of portability in teaching practice, processes and assessment. In light of this, and reflecting on the shifting educational environment to an online format, the researchers have considered how this might be an effective practice in a virtual classroom setting. The initial discussion and construction of the assessment criteria would be best reflected in a synchronous virtual classroom, to enable the engagement from students in a collaborative and discursive setting. The tutor would then provide published in-text comments for the individual students through the Virtual Learning Environment grading system. A mark would be given to the piece but not published, so the students would not be able to see this before completing the self-assessment task. The students could then annotate their own scripts and provide a mark for themselves through an anonymous survey system, such as Microsoft Forms, before having the marks published by the tutor. Further one-to-one, or small-group tutorials might follow the release of the assessment marks, through an online video calling software, which would allow students the opportunity to clarify feedback with the tutor, and ask any further questions.

Conclusion

Tutors hope that students look through their feedback in detail and use this to consider how they might improve future work. The reality for many students, as shown in the qualitative comments from students in this study, is that if they are focussed on the mark they are unlikely to read the comments and not many will use them in line with assessment criteria to consider why the mark was given. This study provided students with the opportunity to engage with feedback to allow them to consider how they can use it in their future learning and assessment (Prince et al., 2010). This was adopted as a practice with the idea that it would enable students to move forward and become active participants in the feedback process and encourage them to make evaluative judgments about how they can improve their own work (Sambell, 2011; Carless & Boud, 2018). With a focus on improvement, this addressed the call from the external examiner who encouraged us to use feedback

to “improve the trajectory for the student in future assessments”. Finally, the positive response of the students to our approach suggests that if similar methods were adopted more widely, then scores on assessment and feedback within the NSS would be much more positive. Thus, this paper provides universities with a selection of ideas on how to address this area. Reflecting on the whole experience, it has been a wholly insightful, productive and beneficial to all involved. It also gave a central prominence to the importance of assessment criteria and highlighted to students how to use these to improve their future assessments.

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Appendix

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|--|---|
| <p>Abstract and Introduction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you summarise the key aspects of the study (one sentence for the rationale, method, and key findings) concisely and well (in the abstract)? - Do you explain the aims/rationale of the study clearly? - Does the introduction flow appropriately, starting broad, then narrow down to specific purpose of research? - Do you define key terms accurately and clearly (if needed)? - Do you make appropriate reference to practical application of research (if relevant)? - Do you outline key underpinning theory effectively (and link this back to the research question/topic)? - <i>Higher level skill</i> – when you explain theory and research, is it linked to the research question? - Do you summarise previously research effectively (providing a synthesis of relevant research and appropriately providing details of key preceding research)? - Do you articulate a clear research question? - Overall, does this section clearly set up your lab report? | <p>23/35 = 70%; 20/35 = 60%; 17/35 = 50%</p> |
| <p>Predicted introduction mark - (out of 35) 14/35 = 40%</p> | |
| <p>Method:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you explain the procedure clearly so it could be replicated? - Do you clearly explain your analysis strategy (i.e., how you are coding and organising the data in the results)? | <p>7/10 = 70%; 6/10 = 60%; 5/10 = 50%;</p> |
| <p>Predicted Method mark - (out of 10) 4/10 = 40%</p> | |
| <p>Results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you present a clear table/tally chart of results (if appropriate)? - Do you organise your results appropriately? - Do you provide appropriate examples to illustrate the themes clearly and fully to the reader? - Do you focus on 'why' certain elements were persuasive? | <p>17.5/25 = 70%; 15/25 = 60%; 12.5/25 = 50%;</p> |
| <p>Predicted Results mark - (out of 25) 10/25 = 40%</p> | |
| <p>Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you provide an accurate, concise summary of key findings? - Do you say if your findings support previous research? - Do you provide an explanation for findings (in light of previous theory and research)? - <i>Higher level skill</i> – how thoroughly do you consider your findings in light of relevant literature? - <i>Higher level skill</i> – do you think 'outside the box' using theory and research to explain unexpected findings? - Do you effectively consider limitations (and strengths) of the study? - Do you provide examples and details of possible future research that could be conducted in the area? - Do you consider the implications of your findings in the real world? - <i>Higher level skill</i> – do you show originality of thinking when considering the last three points? | <p>21/30 = 70%; 18/30 = 60%; 15/30 = 50%;</p> |
| <p>Predicted Discussion mark - (out of 30) 12/30 = 40%</p> | |

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| <p>Other higher-level skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Do you write in a good, clear academic style, with appropriate sentence structure?- Do you use paragraphs to organise writing (with different ideas organised well in different paragraphs)?- Is your writing easy to read? Does it follow on and flow in a logical order with points building on from one another?- Is your report concisely written with no irrelevant info?- Does your writing demonstrate your own independent reading/research around the area?- Is there appropriate critiquing of research (your own and others). | |
|--|--|

Key strengths identified in your work?

- i)
- ii)
- iii)

Key areas identified you need to consider to improve work in the future?

- i)
- ii)
- iii)

Overall Mark Prediction

Above 70% = 1st 60-69% = 2:1 50-59% = 2:2 40-49% = 3rd Below 40% = Fail