Assessment and Feedback: Update and Focus on Feedback Quality

In 2015, Senatus Learning and Teaching Committee agreed that moving forward, it would be essential to measure both feedback turnaround times and quality of feedback. A specific recommendation (LTC 14/15 5C) was that schools should identify mechanisms for testing quality of feedback through spot checks and staff and student feedback. This paper explores this point in more detail and makes a series of recommendations for implementation across all schools.

Discussion with a number of stakeholders has highlighted:

1. **Turnaround times**
   Whilst there is a feeling that in some contexts, the 15 day turnaround may have had unintended consequences e.g. compromising feedback quality on longer pieces of work, there is also frequent feedback that the mandate has been helpful in terms of consistency and both forcing baseline practice and acting as a catalyst to improve practice. As feedback has to be in time to be helpful, timeliness is also an essential contributor to feedback quality. Nevertheless, it is recognized that assessment methods and structures are extremely heterogeneous hence a ‘one-size fits all’ policy is not necessarily logical. Further discussion and exploration of a more flexible approach to granting opt-outs will take place at LTPG and SLTC.

2. **Quality**
   The challenge in measuring quality is to define criteria that are meaningful and audit processes which do not create large extra administrative burdens, ideally harnessing mechanisms which already exist. The aim should be to ensure resources are focussed on interventions which have highest likelihood of success. In discussions across colleges, there is a sense that whilst there may be a few problematic individuals, the bigger problem is with course and in particular programme ‘quality’ as it relates to a structure which permits feedback to be useful for subsequent assessments. This is entirely consistent with current thinking in the literature as reviewed by Medland (2016).

3. **Feedback more broadly**
   It is recognised that feedback may occur at times not specifically associated with an assessment event. We currently do not have a good way for students to record or reflect on this. Similarly, examples are often given across schools of excellent opportunities for students to engage in rich and dialogic feedback yet those who most need it don’t attend and indeed attendance overall can be very disappointing i.e. quality feedback is not being engaged with. This suggests a longer term need to consider mandatory engagement or other mechanisms (e.g. portfolio approach) which could also have the advantage of providing cohesion for students at a programme level.

**Quality Monitoring and Guidelines**

The proposed solutions are based on a 3-tiered model of monitoring/evaluation and associated action – individual, course and programme. Each level carries associated brief guidelines to assist schools in aligning their processes. Note that Table 1 below focuses on actions where performance is unsatisfactory but in all cases, where good practice/ case studies are identified there should be mechanisms to share this best practice.

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1. Calls for assessment to be a central aspect of curriculum design and development that is integral to teaching and learning, rather than an afterthought.
2. Advocates the coordination of assessment across programmes of study, with an emphasis on methods that encourage the students to develop as learners rather than passive memory banks.
3. Recommends that students should actively engage in assessment as collaborators in institutional enhancement, who share responsibility for shaping their own learning.
This approach is aimed at harnessing activities already in place or in the process of being rolled out (e.g. EVASYS).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guidelines</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Individual</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Programme</strong></td>
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¹Hypothesis is that good teachers are likely also to be good at feedback as part of their overall approach. Whilst it is true that NSS data often show a mismatch between the performance on teaching questions vs assessment and feedback questions, the assumption is that this is more likely to be a consequence of overall course and programs structure than a good teacher who does not know how to give good feedback.

²This will be led by the course and/ or programme director with assistance from the assistant principal (assessment and feedback), IAD, IS and College DULTs as necessary. This review and action planning will require full involvement from head of school.

**Enablers**

**Collectively building solutions**
We have much expertise within IAD, IS and colleges/ schools. The challenge with the size and scale of the University is often to bring this collective expertise together. Moving forward the suggestion is where possible to join up activities across the support services and work with schools to solve problems and enhance practice. As part of this process, the previous LEAF project update meetings have been replaced by an ‘Assessment and Feedback Enhancement Group’ with College, IAD, IS, Student Systems and EUSA representation. This group will meet quarterly and will continue to have oversight of LEAF outcome/ actions and planning but will have a broader remit around enhancing assessment and feedback more generally.

**LEAF**
The LEAF project has been very helpful in identifying problem areas and providing suggestions on enhancements for schools and course/ programme teams to consider. Colleges have found the process helpful and there is growing evidence of impact and developments emerging from the recommendations. In collaboration with College Deans of Learning and Teaching, the following strategy is proposed.

1) Develop a modified version which schools could run internally (with external facilitation of focus groups) – ‘Leaf-Lite’
2) Continue to offer the full LEAF audit to programmes in consultation with college deans. This may be particularly helpful e.g. in advance of TPR or to inform curriculum/ assessment review.

**Assessment (and Feedback) Literacy – Staff and Students**
Many of the suggested interventions at course level (Appendix B) focus on enabling students to engage more fully with standards and in turn, feedback, by developing their own assessment literacy. Peer assessment is an essential element of building these skills and students will need support in developing both their appreciation of standards but also in their own abilities to give constructive feedback. Likewise staff may also need support in this area which will have implications for courses offered by IAD, support offered by IS and the AP (Assessment and Feedback).

**Action Requested**

SLTC is asked to consider the paper and whether it is supportive of:

- a) the proposed 3 tiered quality monitoring model
- b) the proposed future of the LEAF project
- c) the proposed focus on developing staff and student assessment (and feedback) literacy

_Susan Rhind, 13/05/16_

**Appendices**

**Appendix A (from LTC 14/15 5 C):**

Feedback content: written feedback should be concise and useful. The four areas below are a guide although may not be appropriate for all instances:

- Identify what the student has done well
- Identify areas for improvement with suggestions for action
- There should be feed-forward for action for future work on programme
- Opportunity for student to reflect and contact marker

**Appendix B (table below)**

**Appendix C Programme Level Assessment and Feedback Guidelines**

Programme Directors should work with individual course organisers to ensure there is a coherent structure across the programme that is transparent to students and provides opportunities for feedback to be useful in the context of subsequent courses. Assessment needs to be coordinated across programmes prospectively.

In combined degree programmes, the Programme Director should ensure that essential content is delivered in the courses that are compulsory for all students, both single and combined honours. [Note: Assistance with course and programme design/ redesign is available from IAD and in particular engagement with the Edinburgh Learning Design Roadmap (ELDeR) is encouraged.](http://www.ed.ac.uk/is/learning-design) *ELDeR focusses on the design of student learning experiences, where student feedback and assessment literacies are given top priority]*
**Appendix B: Quality Guidelines**

**Quality within Courses [To include links to exemplars]**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment type</th>
<th>Minimum – Pre (Assessment literacy)</th>
<th>Enhancement examples</th>
<th>Minimum - Post</th>
<th>Enhancement examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Choice</td>
<td>Practice MCQs</td>
<td>Peerwise to practice authoring and answering</td>
<td>Whole class review/ class discussion</td>
<td>Question banking giving feedback on relative performance across topics. Immediate feedback to whole class before marks released. '2-stage exam model'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short answer</td>
<td>Range of exemplars of different quality and outline answers/ mark schedule</td>
<td>Marking exemplars or previous students work</td>
<td>Comments on failed questions. Review script via PT or marker*</td>
<td>Whole class review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>Range of exemplars of different quality and outline answers/ marking guidance</td>
<td>Peer assessment of exemplars</td>
<td>Review script via PT or marker*</td>
<td>Whole class review Annotated electronic file/ audiofeedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research report</td>
<td>Exemplars</td>
<td>Allow submission of draft for feedback/interim feedback on report plan</td>
<td>Individual written or oral feedback</td>
<td>Peer review e.g. feedback from more than one source/marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Assessment (physical task)</td>
<td>Opportunities for practice and remediation</td>
<td>Videos of tasks</td>
<td>Access to mark sheet/ proforma</td>
<td>Chance to review and revisit areas of weakness following feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Assessment e.g. language-based</td>
<td>Provide exemplars and clear marking guidance (grade descriptors)</td>
<td>Peer assessment of exemplars</td>
<td>Access to mark sheet/ written or oral feedback</td>
<td>Chance to review and revisit areas of weakness following feedback</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Ideally person who marked but may also be facilitated by in some schools by the course organiser or personal tutor with access to outline answer.*