**Effective feedback**

Feedback is integral to the learning process and is one of the main benefits that students get from assessment, but students are often dissatisfied with the feedback they receive, despite tutors spending many hours producing it.

The National Union of Students (NUS) have produced a [Charter on Feedback and Assessment](http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/asset/news/6010/FeedbackCharter-toview.pdf) which sets out the issues and some principles for effective feedback.

Although the NUS charter has a greater emphasis on feedback processes there are some significant areas of overlap with the principles of good feedback articulated by David Nicol and Debra Macfarlane-Dick in [Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice [PDF 289.49KB]](http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/rap/docs/nicol.feedback.pdf).

**What is the purpose of feedback?**

Effective feedback helps students to develop their understanding and improve their performance in relation to the standards of the university.

As Mirabelle Walker explained when she spoke at Sussex, it is important that feedback 'bridges the gap'. Comments on work should identify the gap between the desired standards and the student's achievement - then offer guidance on how to close the gap in future. It may be more useful to think of this as providing 'feed forward' because it is the next piece of work which can be improved with effective feedback. Some detailed comments about the piece of work being marked are desirable, but more general suggestions for ways to develop and improve future work are crucial.

**What sort of feedback is useful?**

To be useful to students feedback has to be accessible.

That includes typing or printing feedback if possible or making sure that handwritten comments are legible; using language that students understand and perhaps trying alternative formats or media (see 'how should we provide feedback?' below).

Once students can access their feedback they are looking for constructive comments that they can act on. For example, a comment like 'weak introduction' identifies a deficiency, but does not help a student to strengthen the introduction in their next assignment, whereas a few words referring them to guidance on writing introductions and pointing them towards the relevant criteria can be very helpful. This can be very time consuming, but a generic feedback sheet making links to clear criteria can be a very time-efficient way of providing quality constructive feedback.

**What counts as feedback?**

We tend to think of feedback as the comments written on a piece of assessed work (essay, lab report etc.) but teachers are constantly giving students feedback on their learning in informal ways.

The way that teachers respond when students contribute in lectures, seminars and tutorials tells them something about the progress of their learning. For information about how technology can be used to give students and lecturers instant feedback on learning you can visit the [Technology Enhanced Learning](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/tel/learningtechnologies/prs) website.

But we do not need technology to provide feedback on learning in class - asking students to summarise a lecture or to compare notes or answers with the person sitting next to them are simple ways of offering some insight into their level of understanding even in large groups.

**When do students need feedback?**

Feedback should be an ongoing process, but for it to be effective, students need to be receive feedback in time to make use of it.

How quickly students need feedback will often depend on when the next piece of work is due, for example, if students are completing weekly tasks then guidance on improving performance will need to be received quickly - and this might be where peer-assessment, self-assessment against model answers or online quizzes with automated feedback might be useful.

**Who provides feedback?**

As suggested above, not all feedback has to come from the tutor or lecturer - students can gain very useful feedback from each other and through reflecting on their own learning. By providing opportunities for peer- and self-assessment you can ensure that feedback is not just something that happens at the end of a course but is an ongoing part of the learning process.

**How should we give feedback?**

Traditionally feedback on assessed work has been in the form of comments written on students' work. More recently Schools have been using feedback sheets to provide structured comments and feedback is available online through Sussex Direct.

It is clear from the responses of the students in these [short videos](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/resource_database/audioandvideo/assessment_and_feedback_student_views) produced by the Higher Education Academy (HEA), however, that different ways of receiving feedback are highly valued.

For a list of pointers for [Providing individual written feedback on formative and summative assessments](http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/resources/assessment-and-feedback/effectivefeedback/) this resource from UKCLE is very useful.

**How can we encourage students to use feedback effectively?**

The ultimate test of feedback is if students can use it to enhance their learning and performance, and that will only be possible if it includes 'feed forward' suggestions. Even then, students will sometimes need support and guidance to get the most from the feedback they receive. The [Study Success at Success (S3) website](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/s3) offers guidance to students on [using feedback](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/s3/?id=57) and there are activities that can be incorporated into assessment schemes and seminars to encourage students to make good use of feedback. For example, students could be asked to respond to feedback by writing a note saying what they will be doing differently in their next assignment, or teachers could refer back to previous feedback when marking so that students see a direct link between feedback and future performance.