Facing the dilemma in providing effective student feedback

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Effective feedback in Higher Education

- What is it?
One definition of feedback in HE

- Information provided to students in order to help them improve the quality of their work, their learning and consequently their academic achievements.

- *Information provided staff to help them adjust their teaching.*
HEA 7 principles

- Facilitates the development of self assessment (reflection)
- Encourages teacher and peer dialogue
- Helps clarifies what good performance is
- Provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance
- Delivers high quality information to students about their learning
- Encourages positive motivational beliefs and self esteem
- Provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape their teaching

- Enhancing student learning through effective formative feedback, HEA generic centre, 2004
What is the issue then?

- NSS and internal university surveys tell us students are not satisfied with the feedback they receive on their work.

  Vs

- The steady increase in the number of good degrees suggests that students are achieving despite being dissatisfied with the feedback they receive.

- So it a real issue?
Implications

- League tables!
  - NSS
  - Good honours

- Differences in Departmental practice
  - Formative assessment → summative assessment
    - Practice exercises
    - Exemplars
    - Mark work twice
  - Exam topics – feed forward

- Standards?
Actions

- Introduction of learning, teaching & assessment policies
- Seminars /workshops/ guidance manuals
- Course level LTA strategies
- Annual monitoring/ External Examiners
- More surveys/ focus groups…..
The Solent way

- Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy
- Assessment policy
- Guidance
- Teaching and Learning Fellows
- External examiners
- Research projects
  - On-line marking/recorded feedback
- Internal workshops for staff
- Formative feedback strategy for each unit
- Question on unit questionnaire
- Information to students
  - Handbooks,
  - Pamphlets
  - Tell them when giving verbal feedback
View from a Head of an Academic Department
Feedback Drivers

• Improving:
  ◦ student success
  ◦ student experience
  ◦ key indicators (e.g. Value added, classification)
  ◦ Improving course desirability
  ◦ NSS scores, especially feedback
What do students want from feedback?

- Why they got a mark and how they could of improved on this (summative)?
- What to do to get the best mark on an assessment (formative)?
- Question – is summative feedback too late to be useful?
Types of feedback

- Summative
  - To understand reasons for mark and how it could have been improved
  - To improve performance in future assessment

- Formative
  - To enhance learning
  - On summative assessment, to improve final summative mark
A Feedback Model

1. STUDENTS’ PRIOR EXPERIENCES OF ASSESSMENTS IN THE SUBJECT/UNIT

2. PRELIMINARY GUIDANCE ABOUT EXPECTATIONS & REQUIREMENTS
   - coursework e.g. written/oral guidelines about assignment requirements, access to past examples of completed assignments
   - exams & tests e.g. written/oral guidelines about exam/test requirements, access to model answers/past exam questions

3. ONGOING CLARIFICATION OF EXPECTATIONS
   - coursework e.g. specific queries addressed in tutorial/practically by email
   - exams & tests e.g. opportunities to gain practice in tackling tasks of the kind on which assessments will be based

4. FEEDBACK ON PERFORMANCE/ACHIEVEMENT
   - coursework e.g. individualised written comments/breakdown of marks linked to the assessment criteria or specific components of the set task
   - exams & tests e.g. whole class oral feedback on own and other small groups' answers to the problems set and addressed in class

5. SUPPLEMENTARY SUPPORT
   - coursework e.g. follow-up referral to remedial resource materials, and/or individualised guidance on areas of difficulty
   - exams & tests e.g. anticipatory feedback, i.e. access to past exam questions with lecturer’s commentary (or for instance ‘traps for the unwary’)

6. FEED-FORWARD (i.e. DEPLOYMENT OF ENHANCED UNDERSTANDING AND/OR SKILLS IN SUBSEQUENT ASSESSMENTS)

The guidance and feedback loop

feed-forward into next assignment/assessment

review feedback

submit assignment

embark on assignment
Concerns with formative feedback on summative assessment

- Academic staff resources/time
- Academic staff attitudes
- Is the work still the student’s own?
- Are students being taught to pass assessment rather than learning?
- Accusations of ‘spoon feeding’
- Academics may feel they are blamed for poor mark
- Grade inflation
The Portsmouth Way

- Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy
- Assessment policy
- Guidance
- External examiners
- Research projects
  - On-line marking/ recorded feedback pilot
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Outcomes

- Not working consistently
  - Variable NSS outcomes
  - Variable degree classification

- Research shows
  - More active learning activities... more engagement .... better understanding of requirements ... higher levels of performance.

- Where does this leave us in terms of standards?
In conclusion:

_Damned in you do,
....Damned in you don’t_
Discussion points

• What are the implications for standards?

• Is this dilemma really caused by UK media?

• W & how can Institutional research contribute?