

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

**INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROVISION
OF FEEDBACK ON ASSESSMENT****Introduction**

Learning cannot occur without feedback. The standard of work that we expect from our students has to be very clear, so that they can make progress through their studies. It follows that we must be explicit to students about the assessment criteria that we are going to apply to each individual piece of work, and what we expect from students. After that our feedback must be clear, full and helpful. If we pay attention to these points, then our students will know how they are doing and how to improve. Effective feedback is crucial to improving student performance and to sustaining student morale. Increasingly, we are using feedback in a dynamic way. This involves asking students to engage and interact with feedback, so that it becomes embedded in teaching and learning activities.

Key Principles: Students need feedback that it is timely, rewards effort, is understandable, relevant, constructive and supportive

Feedback: Getting it right for students

As academics, we want to get feedback right for each of our students, since each assessment/feedback cycle often represents a unique and precious learning opportunity. Also, we should be mindful that the issue of our feedback deservedly features prominently in students' own feedback (e.g. in SCEFs, SSLCs and NSS).

It is recommended that when providing feedback on assessments, the following guiding principles should be used:

1. **Feedback has to be recognised to be effective:** Students may sometimes need to be reminded what feedback is, and how it can be used. This recognition and increased awareness should be built into the teaching. Students could be reminded that peer review is an essential component of all academic work.
2. **Feedback as an entitlement:** Students have the right to receive feedback on all their work, including coursework and (on request) exam answers, so that they understand clearly how well they have done and how to enhance their future achievement. Feedback should provide context for the corresponding grade. Feedback is also important in formative work, and can form part of a student's preparation for summative assessments.
3. **Feedback and assessment:** The type of feedback required will be partly a function of the assessment itself. Feedback might have a more formative role in 'assessment for learning'. In 'assessment as learning', the emphasis might be on peer review. In 'assessment of learning', feedback might primarily be used to explain a grade in a summative piece of work.
4. **Feedback timing:** Feedback on all assessment should be timely and *normally* provided within a maximum of three working weeks (excluding vacation periods) following the deadline for submission of the assessment. Feedback should be provided in time to inform subsequent and related assessments, and also exams. Students should be made clearly aware of the date by which they can expect to receive their feedback. There may be a trade-off between providing rapid but possibly superficial feedback (including generic class feedback) or, in contrast, time-demanding detailed feedback (such as highly individualised comments).
5. **Feedback as a formative process:** Feedback should be supportive and meaningful, indicating clearly the strengths and weaknesses of a submission, so that students are clear as to their level of achievement in relation to required standards and how they can improve their future performance. Feedback is important to **all** students who wish to improve, including those who already doing well but wish to consolidate their current standard of work. In this sense, comments on work can be considered to be feedforward. Utilising this can contribute to the acquisition of graduate attributes.
6. **Feedback as a dynamic process:** Feedback can be part of a meaningful engagement with students. This can, within practical limits, include dialogue to help ensure that feedback has been understood and valued. In this interactive process, staff can gain a better understanding of how their feedback has been used. This can encourage staff to invest in the provision of high quality feedback.

7. **Feedback options:** Feedback may be provided in a variety of ways, depending on the type of assessment, the level of the cohort, and the needs of individual students. This flexibility is a recognition of student diversity. Examples of types of feedback from teachers include: written, oral or, increasingly, electronic comments via online comments, e-mail, video, audio, use of feedback software. Feedback can take place in different arenas, including classroom, office hours, or online. Peer feedback can also be used.
8. **Feedback as a student responsibility:** Students should be encouraged to act on feedback from staff and peers by applying feedback both within and across courses. Assessments can be designed to recognise this. Cumulative, iterative improvement in a student's grades may reflect and reinforce the value of feedback.

Feedback to students should:

1. Inform students explicitly how well they have met specific assessment criteria.
2. Describe how students could have improved the current piece of work and/or how they could improve future work.
3. Improve students' understanding of the topic of the coursework, particularly highlighting areas where misunderstanding is evident.
4. Provide comments on technique as well as content.
5. Encourage students to reflect critically on their work and motivate students to seek to improve performance.
6. Act as a form of dialogue between teacher and student.

Timely and effective feedback plays a very positive role in supporting our learning and teaching objectives and so should be highly valued.

This updated document was prepared by the *Feedback & Assessment Task Group* (December 2017)

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