

Feedback Policy and Guidelines

2021-22



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Committee Approval

Committee	Committee Action	Date
QAEC	Recommended approval	19 February 2020
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QAEC	Recommended approval	15 June 2021
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This Feedback Policy and Guidelines document will be reviewed annually by our Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC). Any amendments will be subject to approval by the Academic Committee.

1. Policy Overview

This policy document is intended for students and staff at Bloomsbury Institute.

Assessment and feedback are central to a student's HE experience and are key in helping students to measure and improve on their performance. Guiding Principle 6 in the QAA's Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance Assessment states that assessment and feedback should be purposeful and support the learning process:

Assessment enables students to benchmark their current level of knowledge or skills, identify areas for improvement and make judgements about the overall progress made. Feedback (including 'feed-forward') reflects attainment relevant to learning outcomes and marking criteria for the assessment task. Feedback on assessment builds on dialogue and opportunities for students to reflect on their learning. The teaching and assessment strategy progressively enhances students' assessment literacy to enable them to increasingly regulate their own learning and performance.¹

Summative assessment is a 'stressor' for students, and it is important that our approach to assessment and feedback considers the role that students' 'emotional literacy has upon their ability to process, comprehend and utilise feedback'.²

Please note: This document only covers feedback. For all matters relating to assessment, please refer to:

- Assessment Procedures: Validated Degrees
- Assessment and Feedback Policy (University of Northampton)

Both the above documents are available at our partner website: <https://www.northampton.ac.uk/>

2. Definitions

Feedback and feed-forward:

While feedback focuses on a student's current performance, and may simply justify the grade awarded, feed-forward looks ahead to subsequent assignments and offers constructive guidance on how to do better. A combination of both feedback and feed-forward helps ensure that assessment has a developmental impact on learning.³

Formative assessment:

Assessment with a developmental purpose, designed to help learners learn more effectively by giving them feedback on their performance and how it can be improved and/or maintained. Reflective practice by students sometimes contributes to formative assessment.

Summative assessment:

Used to indicate the extent of a learner's success in meeting the assessment criteria to gauge the intended learning outcomes of a module or course. Typically, within summative assessment, the marks awarded count towards the final mark of the course/module/award.⁴

¹ QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance: Assessment. p. 5. [online] QAA. Available at: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/assessment> [Accessed 12 August 2019].

² Pitt, E., (2019). Developing emotional literacy in assessment and feedback. In *Innovative Assessment in Higher Education*. Routledge. P.127.

³ Jisc, (n.d.). *The Design Studio*. (online) Jisc. Available at: <http://jiscdesignstudio.pbworks.com/w/page/52947129/Feed%20forward> [Accessed 12 August 2019]

⁴ QAA. *ibid*. p.1.

3. What is feedback?

Feedback comes in many forms and it is important to recognise all the feedback opportunities:

- Feed-forward given on work (see Student Handbook, available on Bloomsbury Institute website).
- Tutor written summative comments on an individual student's work.
- Tutor written on-script/in text comments on an individual student's work.
- Generic written or oral feedback, for example an assessor's report/summary of strengths and weaknesses of work submitted by students who completed an assignment. This can be delivered and discussed in class and/or through Canvas.
- Self-assessment/reflection tasks.
- Peer feedback.
- A discussion in class, or on Canvas or MS Teams, of model answers.
- 'Informal' feedback given during contact hours.
- Tutor oral feedback given to individual students during their office/consultation hours.
- Feedback on summative work can be delivered through Canvas in written or audio medium, and/or face to face with the marking tutor.

It is important that students are made aware of the various avenues in which feedback is given and are provided with guidance and advice in acting on feedback.

4. The value of feedback

Feedback can⁵:

- raise students' awareness of the strengths of their work
- boost students' confidence about their personal strengths and abilities
- provide students with guidance on areas for further development of their skills and enhancement of work
- enhance students' own judgement, understanding of assessment criteria and ability to self-audit their own work

However, inappropriate feedback can damage students' motivation to study or weaken their commitment to achieving personal goals.

⁵ HEA Feedback toolkit (March 2013) page 8

5. Principles

The following principles underpin our provision of feedback. Feedback should always:

1. Encourage and develop an inclusive and accessible student learning experience and support the learning experience i.e. be **for learning**, not just for the evaluation of learning
2. Build motivation and self-esteem by making students want to learn by:
 - being encouraging and supportive in tone (i.e. adhering to our Tone of Voice guidance)
 - including a focus on existing strengths and, where there are weaknesses, guidance on how to improve⁶
 - providing feedback in a clear and well-structured format in an appropriate/accessible medium
3. Be of a quantity and type appropriate to the task and its weighting
4. Enable students to assess their performance against grade criteria/LOs
5. Only relate to the work being assessed
6. Not suggest or indicate unfounded accusations regarding the authorship of the work
7. Be made available on all assessments (exams, TCAs, formative, and summative)
8. Be timely i.e. be provided within 20 working days.

6. Review of feedback

The QAA⁷ states as a common practice that:

- The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

The QAA states that to evaluate and enhance assessment policies, regulations and processes, providers should ensure that:

Assessment and feedback practices are informed by reflection, consideration of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship. Consideration is given to external examiners' reports, feedback from students, changing external factors (including requirements of PSRBs) and pedagogical developments.

Student achievement and academic standards are monitored and compared over time, and this analysis informs the evaluation and enhancement of assessment policies. When introducing changes to the regulations, degree-awarding bodies meet their contractual obligations to students⁸.

How we do this at Bloomsbury Institute is explained in our Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Procedures (available at: [Quality and Enhancement Manual](#))

⁶ Ibid. page 13

⁷ QAA reference

⁸ QAA page 11

7. Guidelines Overview

The following guidelines should be read alongside the Feedback Policy 2021-22 (see Section 1-6 above).

The principles from the Feedback Policy are reproduced below. Guidelines for each principle are then provided.

Please note: Throughout this document, when feedback is used, wherever applicable, the commentary applies to feed-forward too.

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9. Inclusivity

Inclusive feedback practices will benefit all students in terms of enhancing their learning and improving their assessment performance. Examples of inclusive practices are:

- Structuring your feedback in a succinct and logical manner
- Using clear, literal and unambiguous language
- Simplifying (vocabulary, expressions, etc) wherever possible
- Avoiding generic statements and linking your comments to specific examples within the student's work
- Phrasing your comments positively. For example, avoid comments with negatives such as "Don't simply outline the theory, consider also its application." A better way of phrasing your comment would be "You should consider also the application of the theory".

Some students (e.g. those with mental health conditions) may react anxiously to purely written feedback. Consider therefore additional methods of communication.

10. Motivation and self-esteem

Good feedback and praise motivate students and help them to see assessment as a 'positive force' in their learning. Where applicable, feedback should acknowledge interesting work e.g.:

- Thank you for a really interesting read; I learnt some new things about X from your dissertation/research project.

Feedback should identify and praise good performance, as well as areas that need further development. Additionally, it should identify how higher grades could be achieved i.e. be forward-looking. Comments which are overly focused on weaknesses rather than identifying how to improve work can be demotivating and are not helpful to a student's learning.

Feedback should always aim to be supportive, professional, empathetic, friendly and never sarcastic or patronising.

When advising students to seek academic skills/writing support, try to phrase it in a 'positive way' e.g.:

- There were some areas of your writing (e.g. paragraph structure and punctuation) that you could improve by arranging to meet with our Learning Enhancement team. You can email them on lee@bil.ac.uk

To help students access feedback quickly and effectively, it should be structured clearly (written in structured paragraphs!). Try to address each of the following in your feedback:

- What the student did well.
- What the student specifically need to do to improve the grade.
- Examples to show how to achieve expectations.

11. Quantity

It is tempting to think that the more feedback the better; however, this is not necessarily the case. Writing extensive feedback is time-consuming for staff and can be daunting for a student to process, and demotivating if most of the feedback is negative!

Feedback is more effective if focussed on particular areas of strength and weakness rather than all aspects of the work.

Guidelines regarding the quantity of feedback are:

- Summary feedback: 100-200 words depending on assignment length.
- Second marker (i.e. not moderation of the work) of major projects should also provide written feedback, but of course much briefer than first marker. Feedback such as: 'Second Marker: Grade and mark seen and agreed' is not sufficient.
- Regular, appropriate in-text comments (if these are one or two words such as 'citation error' there should then be an explanatory text in the summary feedback to explain the citation errors further and guidance for support provided).

- Summary text feedback should reflect in-text comments. So, for example, you cannot have summary comments about poor grammar/citation and not have identified any in the text.
 - F+ scripts will require clear and extensive pointers on how to achieve a pass at resubmission.

12. Learning outcomes and grade criteria

As well as commenting on students' own work, feedback should show what good performance in the assessment task would be. This can be achieved in subsequent contact hours/documents posted on Canvas through the use of model solutions or model essays discussed with the group. It can also be achieved through comments on work.

- Be very clear about the marking criteria/LOs, especially in terms of knowledge and understanding, use of spelling, grammar and punctuation. You cannot grade according to things that the Assessment Brief does not identify as being marking criteria/LOs.
- Ensure the feedback reflects the grade awarded. You cannot have a B+ with feedback which does not contain any constructive comments.
- Ensure there is sufficient commentary to show how the grade could be improved.
- Ensure the range of grades are used. An 'outstanding piece of work' should not be given an A-.

13. Focus on assessed work only

The focus should be on the work being assessed, not on the student.

Comments such as 'Not enough time and effort have gone into this piece of work' and 'It is a shame you were absent so much' are not comments on the work and cannot be included in feedback. What is more, the student may have worked hard on the work and such comments could be demotivating.

Feedback should not include commentary on:

- Effort, or perceived effort
- Attendance
- Engagement in class
- Attitude in class

Feedback should not ordinarily include commentary on any comparison with previous work, unless (for example for Research Projects/Dissertations) commentary on how feedback on a proposal/earlier draft is an assessment criterion or learning outcome.

14. Authorship

If the work has not been referred, feedback should not include any commentary about academic misconduct, e.g.:

- The similarity score is high, with 20% referring to another student's work. This looks like collusion.
- It looks like someone has helped you with this work.

If the work has been referred, the comment should be in accordance with guidance in the Assessment Procedures: Validated degrees document e.g.:

- Your grade has been temporarily withheld. Within one week [or a date] you will receive an email from our Registry team inviting you to attend a meeting with an Academic Integrity Officer to discuss your assignment.

There should be no comments about Turnitin similarity percentage e.g.:

- This similarity is too high.
- The similarity is above an acceptable level.

Any 'problems' of the similarity score should be articulated in terms of good/bad academic practice/scholarship e.g.:

- Unfortunately, there is a large section that is taken from other sources and is not correctly referenced.
- Too much of this work is cut and pasted from sources without correct citation.
- You have used too many direct quotes [nearly 30%], and as a result, nearly one third of this work is not your own.

15. All assessments

Feedback should be provided on all assessments (formative and summative, including exams and TCAs, where applicable).

For exams/TCAs, if these include free text (i.e. there are not all MCQs), students should be provided with a brief one paragraph summary and invited to come in for further feedback while looking at their exam script.

16. Timely

Feedback should be provided within 20 working days of the submission deadline. If there is going to be any delay to this deadline, an email/Canvas announcement should be sent stating how long the delay will be, and the reason for the delay. This announcement should be sent before the grade release deadline.

Any delays to provision of feedback should also be reported to Course Leaders.