2017

Assessment and Feedback Resource Pack

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Purpose of the Pack

The purpose of this resource pack is to provide specialized and localized information on assessment and feedback in higher education for academic staff in DIT. It is designed for staff new to teaching (experienced lecturers may find it useful too) and is intended to complement the largely-generic information delivered in workshops.

In relation to feedback, the aim of the pack is to position it as a practice that has a positive and sustained influence on learning, and as a fundamental part of curriculum design, not simply an episodic mechanism delivered by teachers to their students.

Introduction to Assessment

Assessment is a key task of lecturers and time spent on assessment is a significant cost to Higher Education (HE) (Nicol, 2007).

Assessment determines largely what students see as being important, how they decide to allot their time, and how in general they understand the nature of their role as students (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004).

Feedback has been demonstrated as having a major influence on the quality of student learning achieved (Black and Wiliam, 1998), student retention within the first year (Yorke & Longden, 2008) and the development of students as self-regulated learners (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006).

There are three main purposes of assessment:

Assessment of Learning: used to signify whether programme learning outcomes and/or quality standards have been attained. This generally contributes to a student’s grade, award or licence to practice.

Assessment for Learning: is intended to provide feedback to the student so that they can improve their work in the future and to the teacher so that they might adjust their teaching.

Assessment as Learning: is designed so students develop an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and can develop skills as lifelong learners and self regulated learners.

By providing quick and frequent feedback and involving students in their own and other’s (peer) assessment, can combine for and as learning.
Designing Effective Assessments

It is important that assessment measures what it sets out to measure e.g. that it is a valid assessment. 

Constructive Alignment of assessment: (Biggs, 1999) designs learning activities and assessment tasks with learning outcomes. This is based on the premise that students construct meaning from what they do to learn. 

Fit-for-purpose assessment: (Brown, 2011) Programme assessment patterns that fail have too much summative assessment for marks and too little assessment for or as learning (TESTA project). Programmes should balance the purposes of assessment as part of an assessment strategy. Students should be provided with an assessment map that shows how assessments are linked to modules and programme learning outcomes. This helps avoid clumping of assessments, over assessment of the same outcomes and demonstrates progress across levels of the programme.

Assessment Principles

REAP project (Nicol, 2004) 7 principles of assessment:
1. Clarify good performance
2. Facilitate the development of reflection and self-assessment in learning
3. Deliver high quality feedback to students
4. Encourage dialogue around learning
5. Encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem
6. Provide opportunities to act on feedback
7. Provide information that teachers can use to help shape their teaching

Assessment Literacy

For students to reach their potential and develop as self-regulated learners, they need to hold a concept of quality roughly similar to that held by the teacher (Sadler, 1989) and understand the relationship between assessment and learning as well as the nature, meaning and level of assessment criteria (Price et al., 2012). This is sometimes termed Assessment Literacy. Dialogue around assessment and feedback has been shown to be important in this regard for realising the importance of involving students in dialogue to facilitate self-judgment and self-regulatory practice (Nicol, 2008, 2009). There is a need for students to actively work with assessment standards (Rust et al., 2003). An example is Oxford Brookes University ‘Compact’ project between staff and students - with assessment as a joint responsibility.

Assessment and Feedback Toolkit

The RAFT project developed an online resource to support DIT staff in making informed choices in their assessment and feedback practice. 12 DIT RAFT Co-ordinators (3 per College) conducted a review of current assessment methods and followed up with in depth interviews. This toolkit is developed from 61 cases of real assessments developed and implemented by DIT lecturing staff.

Each section provides an overview of an assessment method, advantages and disadvantages as well as lessons learned and a contact name.

Please refer to the back page of this pack for examples from the RAFT Project.
Feedback Models

Feedback is the most powerful single influence that makes a difference to student achievement Hattie (1987). The delivery, form, and context of feedback are all important (Ellery, 2008). There is evidence throughout the research literature that students are less satisfied with assessment and feedback than other features of their courses. Therefore we need to establish for our own practice - Is it simply a matter of finding better ways of undertaking feedback, or is the notion of feedback as it is commonly used the real problem?

There are various models in use for provision of good feedback:

- The Feedback Sandwich: negative comments are sandwiched between two pieces of positive message (Molloy, 2010)
- RISE Feedback Model: Reflect; Inquire; Suggest; Elevate (Wray, 2014)
- Feedforward
- DIT’s institute-wide recommendations about the turnaround time on students’ work


Recommended Reading

Just to get you started, we have included two of the most influential articles in the field:

Feedback Types & Tools

Peer Feedback:
Nicol, D., Thomson, A., & Breslin, C. (2013). Rethinking feedback practices in higher education: a peer review perspective. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 39(1), 102-122. [The capacity to produce quality feedback is a fundamental graduate skill; this article explores the cognitive processes that are activated when students construct peer feedback reviews].

Online Feedback:

There are also voice-to-text tools like Dictanote (Chrome Extension) and Dragon Dictation (App) can help speed the feedback process.

Audio Tools:
Here is an example of sharing voice feedback with students using a mobile phone. MS Word allows audio comments to be embedded within a document. Other tools provide voice comments, such as Kaizena, which allows audio comments to be embedded in a Google Doc, and Voxer, which combines a walkie-talkie with voice mail so that "you can hear messages as people speak, or listen later if you are unavailable."

Visual Tools:
Skitch (by Evernote) and Snagit (by TechSmith) allow users to easily capture and annotate screenshots. Dynamic feedback can be offered via screencasting using tools like Jing, Screenr, or Explain Everything.

There are also some interesting examples on Pinterest:
https://www.pinterest.com/imaginationfdn/giving-feedback/

Feedback Resources

This is a great 1 page resource:
http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/ftp/resources/newlect/feedback.pdf

Lots of blogs about nowadays but this is a good one on feedback:
http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/2010/11/10/the-best-resources-for-learning-how-to-best-give-feedback-to-students/

HEA Academy Selection on Feedback:
https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/search/site/Feedback?ff[0]=im_field_theme:2782

Giving Student Feedback: 20 tips to do it right:

Optimizing Feedback:

Podcasts - Feedback on Students’ Work:
http://studentcaring.com/podcast/
In the LTTC, we continue to run workshops and consultancies in the areas of **Assessment** and **Feedback** throughout the academic year.

In addition, once annually a 5 week accredited CPD is offered: ‘Assessment & Feedback’

The role of feedback in undergraduate supervision is also explored in a 5 ECTS module ‘Supervising Undergraduate Dissertations & Projects’

Details on both modules available here: [http://www.dit.ie/lttc/programme/cpdshortcourses/](http://www.dit.ie/lttc/programme/cpdshortcourses/)

"students want feedback just for them, just in time, and just helping nudge forward."