

**Discussion Paper Title:** Enhancing Student learning using on-line submission and feedback to improve first year learning experience

**Stream:** Research and reflection in practice - Effective assessment with timely feedback for large groups

**Name and Institutional affiliation of author:** Mrs Mercedes F Douglas, BA MPhil, FHEA, Senior Tutor, Department of Marketing, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

**e-mail:** mercedes.douglas@strath.ac.uk

## **Abstract**

*This paper is part on an on-going research project into assessment practices and examines the effectiveness of using an electronic template and bank of comments as a feedback strategy. The purpose of the project was to create an instrument which would help provide reliable, clear, consistent and efficient feedback. An overview of the process staff and students went through to develop explicit criteria and the bank of general and specific feedback comments is presented here. Besides dealing with some of the practical issues related to the process, the reactions of students to the feedback provided online is fully discussed. The conclusion elicited from this is that a systematic process has helped create criteria and feedback comments which are less subjective, vague and are more constructive and specific. The use of technology has offered opportunities to tailor and adapt wording and it is more efficient and readable. Our study has shown that overall the quality of the feedback provided to students in the first year is better and more accessible*

## **Introduction**

Feedback and assessment are areas of concern within the Higher Education sector in the UK. It is even more important when students numbers and classes are increasing and students do not feel that the feedback they receive helps them with their learning, has enough detail or is given promptly as expressed in the National Union of students Survey (Yorke & Longden, 2007) This paper is part of an on-going research project into assessment practices and examines the effectiveness of using an electronic template and bank of comments as a feedback strategy. The purpose of the project was to create an instrument which would help provide reliable, clear, consistent and efficient feedback. The paper presents an overview of the process staff and students went through to share in the development of criteria and of the bank of general and specific feedback comments. It also considers some of the practical issues related to the process and using this bank but above all, it concentrates on the research carried out to evaluate the reactions of students to the feedback provided online. Although this research has taken place in one department, its value and relevance can be applied to any course which is taught using lectures and written assessments for evaluation.

## **The Literature**

The role of feedback, formal or informal, to support learning and improve performance has been widely discussed by academics and there is a large body of

research which investigates this area and the problems inherent to receiving and providing feedback. Various stakeholders are interested in the outcome of assessment and the assessment process which does not only include students but also employers, university management, external examiners and quality assurance bodies (Hornby 2003) The fact that students are demanding more transparency in the assessment process as consumers and the need to avoid massification in an environment of large students numbers where personal service is difficult to be provided (Ottewill et al, 2003) also supports the need for providing more effective and personalised feedback.

#### *Concerns about feedback*

There are a number of concerns on the part of academics themselves and students about the effectiveness of feedback. It is said that assessment tends to focus on activities which are separate from learning. Assessment and feedback are more about learning outcomes measurements rather than the two-way communication in which meaningful feedback is provided with the aim of effecting changes in the learning behaviours and which results ‘in students taking action that involves – further learning’ (Gibbs & Simpson 2004).

It has also been found that students complain about the lack of adequate, timely and understandable feedback. The nature of the feedback is often regarded as one of the reasons why students do not pay attention, do not read or take heed of the advice they receive; students cannot understand it due to the jargon used and its negative rather than constructive nature (Orrell, 2006)

In addition, assessment practice, particularly summative assessment, has been widely criticised because of its lack of reliability, lack of understanding on the part of students of what is expected of them and the lack of professionalism on the part of examiners which leads to grade inconsistencies (O’Donovan et al, 2004; Elton, 1998 in Hornby, 2003)

#### *What feedback is about*

It is therefore important to emphasise that feedback should not be just a means to give student a mark or for lecturers/teachers to provide their own criticisms, advice, opinions in a one-way direction and for students to receive this in a passive manner. As feedback is a means to acquire knowledge this has to be constructed by the learner through a process of adaptation and modification (Macmillan & Maclean (2005) and therefore it requires a set of criteria agreed by the learners and by the educators. Gibbs and Simpson, (2004) found that assessment could be used to engage students in active learning. Other researchers have also shown how formative assessment and feedback might support the development of learners self-regulation (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2004; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006) and that there were large gains in learning where assessments focused on generating feedback and encouraging its application (Black and William (1998).

Feedback should not be a postscript to teaching and learning but should be constructed as part of the overall educational process which should start with activities which come before the actual teaching takes place, with the design of tasks, criteria for assessment and content, continues after and feeds into the re design of the course. Orrell, for example, suggest a three stage approach and Gibbs & Simpson (2004) and Nicol & McFarlane (2000) have designed a number of conditions around

which effective assessment and feedback can be achieved. (See Appendix 1 for a comparison of these approaches). The aim of following a determined process is to address a number of issues which will ultimately allow students to monitor their own learning in an intelligent manner, supporting the development of their self-esteem and motivation and face future learning challenges. The response of students to feedback which goes beyond editing, criticism or justification of assessors' judgement can be deeply effective (Orrell, 2006) and crucial for student learning (Macmillan & McLean, 2005).

#### *Development and provision of criteria*

The creation of effective criteria however is problematic but it has been shown that when criteria grids and standards follow a process of development, they can have an effective role in the process of learning. This process calls for students to engage with and internalise the criteria, they must participate in creating that criteria and must engage with the feedback (Rust et al, 2005; Gibbs and Simpson, 2004) Learning has a socialising value and when students take part in creating the criteria and grade descriptors that value is supported and embedded in an informal manner which is more important than formal instruction (Bloxham & West, 2007). But this socialising process has to start with the tutors who need to be involved in the collective decision making and creation of criteria 'rather than having them given by a course or module leader' (Rust et al, 2005)

Feedback can be formal or informal, verbal or written and this variability also adds to the problems. Tools to provide written feedback vary from informal comments on assignments to standard printed proformas. Some teachers are using banks of comments to provide feedback to students in a printed format or using computerised templates, in order to address the general and standard issues, include personal comments, save time, and provide a more readable set of observations (Nicol & Milligan, 2006). The problems as these authors suggest is finding out if these comments are appropriate to the task or effective. O'Donovan et al (2000) used a criterion-referenced based assessment grid which although useful for improving the quality of work, it proved to have a number of problems related to its lack of detail, vagueness, subjectivity, imprecision and did not identified the strengths of weaknesses of the students work. Like other academics, these authors, call for a systematic process which is integrated to a course and flexible enough to retain the same wording when this is appropriate and adapt other when necessary. With a printed grids this flexibility is difficult to achieve and this is where technology could be useful.

The use of technology is not always considered as a means of supporting pedagogic practice (Ottewill et al, 2003)) and it is also evident that individualised feedback electronically is not very frequent (Hornby 2003). The potential value of using technology to support assessment and feedback processes is studied by Nicol & Milligan (2006) who advised on various tools that could be used to support each stage of the feedback process. Gibbs and Simpson (2004) argue that computer-based testing has been adopted and this provides immediate feedback, like MCQ tests.

#### *Summary of Literature*

According to various authors the nature, quality, and extent of feedback have considerable motivational impact on student learning. For this impact to be realised,

the criteria on which feedback is based has to be produced in collaboration with tutors and students in a constructive process. This process would help address the problems associated with feedback and assessment which has been a one-way process, difficult to understand, negative, unreliable, inconsistent and lacking in personal relevance for future learning. The construction of standard and specific comments may help address some of these issues and the use of computer templates may also help to reduce the burden of work on tutors and improve opportunities for personalising feedback, timeliness and clarity of writing which cannot always be encountered in handwritten comments. These are therefore the areas which this study will be considering and the sections that follow deal with the context, the project stages and methods, key findings and implications of the findings

## **The Context**

The Department of Marketing at the University of Strathclyde is taking part in a project funded by the Scottish Funding Council to reengineer assessment practices in Higher Education (REAP). The importance of assessment in determining student learning is the basis for the REAP project (see <http://www.reap.ac.uk>). The department is seeking to improve the feedback process, improve overall learning experience and reduce the administrative burden of marking submissions for a large class using new technologies (WebCT). Multiple Choice Question tests and on-line feedback using a bank of comments have been introduced

This paper is based on the use of on-line feedback comments with a first year class (Principles of Marketing) which has 533 students. The class is taught by one Lecturer, a Senior Tutor and 10 Graduate Tutors who are in charge of the 47 tutorial groups. The tutors have all experience of teaching and have also been students themselves up until recently.

Students used to receive feedback by means of a standard proforma which had been designed by the class coordinator, tutors and an academic practice member of staff and had been in use for 10 years. The electronic feedback at Strathclyde uses an in-house developed template employing Visual Basics Software and is used in combination with traditional class methods (lectures and tutorials) and seeks to improve its quantity, quality and timing. The electronic template contains general explicit comments which are used to generate a Word document which tutors are able edit and personalise.

## **Criteria Development Process**

The process (see table 1) was based on the two-level model (student/staff interaction) with 8 stages suggested by Rust et al (2005, pp 237-238) which involves the shared opportunity to create and discuss criteria by staff, discussing this with the students, applying it and then obtaining evaluation to feed into the improvement of the criteria. The Department already had explicit printed criteria of a shopping-list type with boxes for tutors to write comments and was used for every class. For this project this list of criteria which included areas such as overall content, presentation standards, research, citation, content specific areas, conclusions and recommendations was reviewed.

In our process there is an additional stages involving the generation of the bank of comments on and uploading them onto the computerised template. Due to time constraints the bank of comments was not discussed with students and when marks and feedback were discussed for the first assignment, informal reports indicated that some students were unhappy with the feedback as it was considered to be too general and the tutors also thought that they reflected the course coordinator perspective.

**Table 1: Feedback development process**

<b>Stages</b>	<b>Assignment 1 (report)</b>	<b>Assignment 2 (essay)</b>
<b>1. Assessment design &amp; Development of criteria</b>	Criteria already exists in printed proforma -	Criteria already exists in printed proforma -
<b>2. Tutor discussion of criteria and assessment guidance to staff</b>	Review of the existing criteria by tutors and class coordinator: content specific and general criteria (structure, referencing, etc)	Review of the existing criteria taking into consideration tutors and students concerns raised in the discussion of first assignment
<b>3. Creation of bank of comments and uploading online</b>	Class coordinator uses the revised criteria to write the bank of feedback comments to be put on to electronic template	Reviewed criteria is used to write the bank of feedback comments to be put on to electronic template
<b>4. Students engagement with criteria</b>	Discussion of new improved explicit criteria with students during tutorial sessions when the tasks were being discussed  Example of report uploaded online (implicit criteria)	Discussion of new improved criteria with students during tutorial sessions when the tasks were being discussed
<b>5. Completion and submission of work</b>	Students submit assignment online	Students submit assignment online
<b>6. Marking and moderation</b>	Tutors mark and use bank of comments to produce a Word template with general and specific feedback Class coordinator second marks a sample of reports	Tutors mark and use bank of comments to produce a Word template with general and specific feedback Class coordinator second marks a sample of reports
<b>7 Active engagement with feedback</b>	Tutors return feedback and marks to students online(weeks)  Discussion of feedback and comments and peer discussion in tutorial Informal research on areas of students concerns	Tutors return feedback and marks to students online(weeks )  Discussion of feedback and comments and peer discussion in tutorial
<b>8. Formal research</b>	Qualitative and Quantitative: Focus group and Questionnaire after students receive marks for first Assignment	Qualitative: discussion in tutorials after students receive marks for second assignment

Source: adapted from Rust et al, 2005

For the second assignment tutors provided their own views about the comments and these were changed. For example

You have had nearly three months to write this essay. It doesn't look as if you made the best use of this time. Most likely, this outcome is a result of disorganisation and poor forward planning – break this habit now before it causes significant damage to your progress. In the years to come, you will have significantly less time to prepare more challenging assessments, and a lot more work to do overall – a failure to organise yourself properly will make your life miserable.

This comment for a report that failed was considered to be too negative and personal which did not indicate what areas the student could have got wrong in terms of content. For the essay it was changed to the following:

*This is a poor essay. You have had nearly three months to write it and have also received feedback from your report which you should have taken into consideration to plan and work on your essay. Your essay is weak in theory and company and marketing mix information. It is possible that this outcome may be the result of disorganisation and poor forward planning so you need to organise yourself properly. On the other hand you may have had problems understanding the question, the theory or both. If this is the case you should seek advice from your tutor or class coordinator.*

Another example from the same template for a failed report repeats the negative points given at the Overall section in the Conclusions and Recommendations section and says very little in terms of constructive action to take:

You have had many weeks to prepare this report. Despite this, your poor effort looks as if you have spent very little time in preparation. Most likely, this outcome is a result of disorganisation and poor forward planning – break this habit now before it causes significant damage to your progress through your first year  
You haven't done this at all well and this robs your report of much of its impact – you have lost marks over this.

You should have considered what recommendation you would make much more carefully, basing your points on the most important items from a SWOT analysis.

What was the rationale for your decision? It wasn't clear.

Again it was changed for the essay to be more specific and less negative:

*The idea behind the marketing mix is that the four elements are made to work together in a coherent system related to target segments and the competition. Your conclusions were adequate as you have considered some of the alternatives related to marketing mix strategies but could have been much improved by drawing together the four elements of the PS3 marketing mix and commenting on how well they work together. To this, you could have added more thoughts on the alternatives for the future of the PS3 range.*

This whole process indicates that the generation and proper articulation of feedback comments is difficult and resource-intensive. It could be said that even those changed comments may still be unclear and vague. The class coordinator, students and tutors all participated at one stage or another in the process but the comments were not fully discussed with students so it was important to gain insights into their views and this was part of the research undertaken as will be seen in the following sections.

## **The Study Method**

The REAP group is evaluating the whole research project using qualitative and quantitative tools: semi-structured questionnaires and focus groups with all the participating institutions

This paper uses the qualitative data from the comments which students added in the questionnaires, discussions in a focus group and those comments collected by tutors during tutorials, The REAP questionnaire included three open-ended questions to look into the best and worst aspects of the assessment and feedback and any adjustments done to teaching practices. The discussions in the tutorials aimed to collect the reaction of students to the bank of comments and the use of WebCt and the Word document. The data covered the nature of feedback comments, the usefulness of feedback for clarifying strengths and weaknesses, usefulness for future assignments, whether students had read the comments and their attitudes to the use of WebCT.

The electronic template and bank of comments was piloted during session 2005-2006 In discussion with tutors it was found that they recognised that the level of detail and opportunity to customise comments were valuable aspects of the template. The quantity of feedback could not have been provided manually without a significant increase in workload. As explained previously, the comments for the first assignment however, tended to reflect the coordinator's perspective.

During session 2006-07, the use of the template and comments was rolled out to the whole class. After students received feedback for their first assignment, anecdotal information indicated that they also found that comments were too generic. This was addressed in the second template. In addition, once some of them noticed that they were receiving standard comments they did not feel motivated to read them all.

Staff members also identified some technical difficulties as WebCt is very slow but in spite of the time taken to download the assignments and customise the feedback form, the overall process of marking and returning feedback to students took as long as when it was done manually.

Collection of data was done at two different stages.

### Stage I: Data collected after the first assignment feedback

The focus group was conducted by independent interviewers on 8 March 2007 in order to gain qualitative data on students' experiences of the course in general, with particular attention given to the use and introduction of new technologies such as generic feedback. 8 students participated in the focus group, and were compensated for their time with a £15 voucher from a large chain music store. It was difficult to get students to go to the focus group so we may have ended up with an unrepresentative group of students.

In the questionnaire, designed by the REAP team, which was delivered one week after the focus group, three open questions were included to look into the best and worst aspects of the assessment and feedback and any adjustments done to teaching practices. There were in total 135 positive comments for best aspects, and 77 for worst aspects. 53 of the positive and 22 of the negative comments were related to feedback itself. Students also took the opportunity to voice opinions not only on feedback and assessment but also on other teaching aspects such as the tutorials, use of WebCT, the Multiple choice tests and other issues.

### Stage Two: Data collected after the second assignment

Students' reactions were collected by tutors during tutorials after the second assignment was delivered – information has been submitted by 8 tutors covering about 18 groups. Specific comments from 7 groups (where students wrote down their views) and general comments from 11 groups were obtained. These have been analysed together with the comments which students filled in answer to three open questions in the questionnaire. There were 113 positive comments regarding usefulness of the feedback and online submission. 23 students found comments generic.

Although both activities took place after the students received feedback for their first assignment, by the time the questionnaire was delivered some students had started to receive their feedback for the second assignment so it was expected that there would be some differences in their perceptions

### **Research Findings**

This analysis focuses on the findings of the student focus group; the comments which students added in the questionnaires and those comments collected by tutors during tutorials after students received their second assignment. The dimensions covered here are attitudes to the nature of feedback comments, the usefulness of feedback for clarifying strengths and weaknesses, usefulness for future assignments, whether students had read the comments and their attitudes to the use of WebCT

#### *Nature of Feedback/Comments*

The findings of the focus group with students dealt mainly with the generic nature of the feedback and indicated the negative view of the comments received by students which regarded them as generic and impersonal. When discovering that the feedback was almost identical to that of his peers the student felt it was not 'genuine'. A couple of the students felt the standardised feedback did not assist them in understanding where they lost marks or how to improve future assessments. There was also the impression that the comments had been written by someone who had not even seen a report and as soon as students recognise that there is a bank of comments then they lose confidence in these:



*You wouldn't use it because it's standardised. It's just, it's useless because it's something someone's written without actually having a report.*

These views were also reflected in some of the comments given by students in the questionnaire (16 out of 42 comments) :

*'Often feedback from the computerised marking system is generic and not always accurately represents what is being marked. This in truth means overall feedback is disregarded as students feel it is not based on their own work'*

It is evident that students do not trust the use of standard comments and this may be due to the fact that they were not given an explanation of the context in which this type of feedback is used and the process tutors follow to generate them. In this case students had not participated and this adds to the negative perception. In fact one of the tutors, when she realised the attitude toward standard comments, asked students to think if those comments did or did not apply to their particular work. When students reflected on this they realised that the comment did in fact apply and their attitude changed.

Apart from the generic nature of feedback, other negative comments in the questionnaire however reflected a number of issues, such as vagueness of the feedback (8): *comments too vague,*

Imprecise:

*'It just says, when you've got a mark between 60 and 70, obviously you've got a good understanding of the marketing mix, so the feedback says 'you have a very good understanding of the marketing mix'. You can't really use that.*

Or not enough (6): *I did not feel I received enough feedback help on how I improved my work.* The implications here are that comments require to be designed in a manner more appropriate to the task.

Most of the questionnaire comments however were positive indicating that a large number of students found the feedback specific and personal in nature contradicting the findings of the focus group and which may reflect the changes made to the comments for the second assignment: *'the feedback was fairly detailed and prompt', 'it was detailed', 'feedback from tutors is personal and tailored to me, rather than just an overall review. This helped me to understand what I was doing right or wrong, but also made me feel more like a student who was appreciated'*

The comments received by tutors during the tutorials also indicated a more positive attitude. Only a few student (23) found them totally generic: *'Generic, as most of my friends had the same comments eg: superficial report, but useful'* Most of them however found them to be a mixture:

*'Some were a little generic, but overall they were a good help in improving my essay'* This indicates that a large number of students are able to discern the value of the standard comments and how they complement specific ones. They also noticed the difference between feedback for the first and second assignment:

*They were all helpful and showed me how I could improve my essay. The comments were pretty useful, I don't think they were too generic as they were a lot better than the report feedback comments as they were very generic.*

Students also showed their appreciation for personalised comments: *'I found that the feedback was quite vague at bits but it did have the personalised feedback at the end, it would be better if feedback was personal throughout'*. One of the tutors also commented on this: *'most students tended to devote most of their attention to the Additional Comments section, which had more relevance to them'*

All these observations serve to support the principle of the importance of engaging tutors and learners in generating and improving feedback.

### *Usefulness*

The discussion in tutorials also covered other areas which were not included in the focus group or questionnaire and looked into whether students had actually read the comments, if they found them useful for clarifying issues or for future assignments. There is no doubt that a large majority of students had actually read the comments as only a handful mentioned they hadn't: one said *'I didn't read them all, I was preoccupied with my mark'* and another: *'Did not read feedback because was satisfied with my grade'*

The majority found feedback useful: *'After reading the feedback form I can say it was useful, as it gives feedback which applies to your own essay. They weren't generic and hence I found them useful, they were catered for my essay and therefore useful to me to improve in the future.'* There were 34 comments about usefulness and another 20 indicating that they had used the feedback from the first assignment to improve the second one: *'yes, I think that is why I got a higher mark, I took some of the useful comments and tips and applied them to my essay'*.

Interestingly another student saw the usefulness of both types of general and specific feedback: *'Although the feedback we received was pulled from a bank of comments, I still feel what I received helped me to understand what elements I had to work on. The 'additional comments' box was more specific to each individual, which also helped greatly'*

### *Using WebCt*

The discussion above concentrated on the feedback itself, but as explained, students received this by means of WebCt and a few have commented on its usefulness. One student appreciated receiving it at times outside the tutorials, suitable to them:

*'It was much easier to receive the marks through WebCT as it wasn't necessary to arrange a time to go and pick it up and we did not have a tutorial at either of the times the marks were returned. It was also good to get the feedback in the same place the essay was because I was able to look at my essay and the comments together'*.

WebCt was also good because students could always have access to their work and marks on their own time and also avoiding unwanted scrutiny from other students:

*'I found the grades submitted over WebCt very good as grades are private and no pressure to reveal these marks to peers. Submitting the information was easy and convenient'*

#### *Other issues*

Finally, on the negative side, a number of students commented on the lack of discussion in tutorials: *'there is not enough time in tutorials to personally discuss our results and feedback with tutors or as a class'* or *'there was no chance to discuss feedback with my tutor'* This may be evidence that there was a degree of variability in the way tutors have handled the feedback as one of the tutorials in each semester was specifically allocated for discussion of feedback and a number of students commented on this: *'in our tutorial our tutor explained what was required of us for the report which was really helpful, The same was done for the essay and presentation'*

Overall however there are indications that the students' experience has been positive and this was expressed by one of them in this manner:

*'Standard feedback and the additional comments were very good. Additional comments at the end of the feedback were essential in providing specific points to be improved. Prefer using the online submission and also preferred having marks online too. The WebCt feedback can be printed out and brought to tutorial if there are any further questions.'*

### **Implications**

There are implications concerning the generation of comments, the process to do this and the use of WebCt to deliver feedback.

In terms of the value and effectiveness of the specific and standard comments the research showed that feedback comments were found to be useful in helping students understand their learning particularly when these were personalised. It is however obvious that some students still feel resentful and do not trust standard comments unless they can understand how they are created. Tutors need to explain that standard comments are used to provide relevant feedback when there are common issues which may apply to a large number of assignments. As long as students understand this and can recognise that general comments also apply to their own work then they will be able to see it as tool which can support their learning and strengthen their capacity for self-assessment (Nicol & Milligan, 2006).

There was also evidence that if language used is not carefully considered it may confuse the learners. Although this was addressed on time for the second assignment, students still found some of the comments vague and impersonal and will require further action. There are two separate issues here. The criteria for assessment and the bank of comments are two separate documents and although the criteria were discussed during tutorials, there was no opportunity to look at the bank of comments

so the new challenge is to relate and convert the criteria into relevant comments. There are time and other constraints to be considered such as the number of tutorials that can be offered by the Department, but this study has shown that an experienced body of graduate tutors can act as a filter and proxy to students as they have been students themselves. This has been supported in the research, because their specific comments are appreciated by students and the generic comments which they helped change for the second task was more positively received.

The fact that there was variability in the discussion of criteria for the assessment may yet indicate that the process is still not fully open to the tutors. They may not have been properly trained or that like the students, they had not fully participated in the generation of the criteria and feedback comments.

As far as the overall process, the findings of the research indicate that the arguments developed in the literature for following a constructive process for creation of criteria for feedback are indeed valid. It has to be produced in collaboration with tutors and students. The role of the tutors has been invaluable in the improvement of the criteria and comments. But as the previous discussion shows, the problem is finding the opportunity and time to fully engage tutors and students. The added element to the Rust et al (2005) model to include the creation of the bank of comments and uploading these to the computer system, besides requiring further discussion opportunities, has practical implications, and it requires more time for planning the stages and when they should take place.

Finally, the Word feedback document produced and delivered online on WebCt has been a success in terms of flexibility, readability and facilitating timeliness. Communication on the outcome of the assignments was prompt and reached students before the tutorial where the feedback was discussed. This should add to the opportunity for reflection and learning. Tutors were able to add and adapt the comments to make these more appropriate in terms of subject and personal content. There have also been added benefits which had not been expected: the opportunity to receive the marks in their private time and space was valuable to students as this does not expose them to unwanted scrutiny from their peers and does not undermine their self-esteem, particularly if results were not good or what they expected. Thanks to technology, the Department has now all the assignments and specific comments provided by all tutors which could be used for further reflection and improvements. There is still a lot to be learned in this respect as providing feedback remains a time-consuming and labour-intensive process.

The full implications of the study will be considered once the analysis of the findings of the quantitative research is completed.

## **Conclusions**

The development of effective assessment criteria and meaningful feedback requires engagement of all people concerned. This is a complex and dynamic process which requires support at all levels. A systematic process which is embedded in the course and teaching plan should help create criteria and feedback comments which are less

subjective, vague and are more constructive and specific. The use of technology can offer opportunities to tailor and adapt wording and it is more efficient and readable. Our study has shown that overall the quality of the feedback provided to students in the first year is better and more accessible but opportunities to actively engage tutors and students in the creative socialisation process of the learning cycle are not fully used. Simple improvements such as meetings with tutors to discuss changes and using time in tutorials to explain and improve the feedback wording need to be made. The challenges for the future include the development of a culture of feedback in the Department so that we can address the changed expectations of those students who will proceed to the second year, as they have had a different experience from those in previous years and for those in subsequent years.

## References

1. Black, P and William, D (1998) Assessment and classroom learning, *Assessment in Education*, 5(1), pp 7-74
2. Bloxham, Sue and West, Amanda (2007) Learning to write in higher education: students' perceptions of an intervention in developing understanding of assessment criteria, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 12 (1), 77-89
3. Gibbs, G and Simpson, C (2004) Conditions under which assessment supports students' learning, *Learning and teaching in Higher Education*, 1, pp3-31
4. Hornby, Win (2003) Maintaining Standards? An analysis of Assessment Practices in a Business School, *the International Journal of Management Education*, 3 (3), 3-17
5. Macmillan, John & Mclean, Monica J (2005) Making first-year tutorials count, Operationalizing the assessment-learning connection, *Active learning in higher education*, 6(2), 94-105
6. Nicol, D & Milligan, C (2006) Rethinking technology-supported assessment practices in relation to the seven principles of good feedback practice, In C Bryan and K Clegg (Eds) *Innovative Assessment in Higher Education*, Taylor and Francis Group Ltd, London
7. Nicol, D & Macfarlane-Dick, D (2006) Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: a model and seven principles of good feedback practice *Studies in Higher Education*, 31, 119-218
8. Price, M & Rust, C (1999) The Experience of introducing a common criteria assessment grid across an academic department, *Quality in Higher Education*, 5, (2), 133-144
9. O'Donovan, B; Price, M & Rust, C (2000) The Student Experience of Criterion-Referenced Assessment (Through the Introduction of a Common

Criteria Assessment Grid), *Innovation in Education and Teaching International*, 38, (1), 74-85

10. Orrell, Janice (2006) Feedback on Learning Achievement: Rhetoric and Reality, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 11 (4), October, 441-456
11. Ottewill, Roger & Macfarlane, Bruce (2003) Pedagogic Challenges Facing Business and Management Educators: Assessing the evidence, *The International Journal of Management Education*, 3, (3), 33-41
12. REAP (2007), Reengineering Assessment Practices in Scottish Higher Education, <http://www.reap.ac.uk>
13. Rust, C, O'Donovan, B & Price, M (2005) A social constructivist assessment process model: how the research literature shows us this could be best practice, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 30, (3), June, 231-240
14. Yorke, Mants & Longden, Bernard (2007) *The first year experience in higher education in the UK*, Higher Education Academy, February

## Appendix 1

### Feedback Models

<b>Rust et al, 2005</b>	<b>Gibbs &amp; Simpson (2004)</b>	<b>Nicol &amp; Macfarlane-Dick (2004)</b>
Staff: Assessment design & development of explicit criteria	Sufficient feedback is provided: often and detailed enough	Clear understanding of goals and criteria
Tutor discussion of criteria	Focuses on performance, learning and actions under students' control – not on the students characteristics	Facilitates the development of reflection and self-assessment
Assessment guidance to staff	Timely	Delivers high quality information to students about their learning
Marking and moderation	Appropriate for the task and the criteria for success	Encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning
Creating explicit criteria	Appropriate to students' understanding of what they should be doing	Encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem
Active engagement with criteria	Feedback is received and attended to	Provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance
Completion of submission of work	Feedback is acted upon	Provides information that can help shape teaching
Active engagement with feedback		