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IMPROVING PEER REVIEW: A PILOT STUDY

Dr Stephanie Rennick & Dr Charlotte Newey

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1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION & METHODOLOGY

There is an apparent tension between the indicative workload limit for assessment and feedback (one hour per student, per module) and the diversity and quality of feedback the University aims to give. A common suggestion is to make use of peer feedback. Anecdotal evidence suggests peer feedback is positively received in some disciplines, yet underutilised or unpopular in others. This pilot study starts to explore the conditions under which peer feedback works (or doesn't), identifies some of the particular factors and circumstances affecting its reception by students, and suggests ways to remove barriers to its successful implementation. The project focussed mostly on Philosophy, but we anticipate the findings will have wider application.

The project's overarching aims were three-fold:

1. To trial different opportunities for, and kinds of, peer feedback.
2. To gather qualitative and quantitative data on the perceived usefulness of peer feedback, before, during, and after interventions (see below).
3. To improve students' ability to identify and utilise different kinds of feedback (including, but not limited to, peer feedback).

Ultimately, we wished to improve the perception of peer feedback among students by helping them to understand its usefulness, identify the conditions under which it is most valuable, and gain insight into the barriers that can hinder its success.

To achieve these outcomes, we set three specific objectives:

- a. Canvas opinion among undergraduates concerning peer feedback (gathering both qualitative and quantitative data) – see §1.1.
- b. Trial six interventions across three modules in philosophy (two undergraduate and one postgraduate module) – see §1.2.
- c. Measure the difference in perceived usefulness between the different interventions, including instances identified explicitly as constituting peer feedback versus those described merely in terms of the activity (e.g. 'a group exercise') – see §2f.

1.1 DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative data was collected from undergraduates via focus groups. Three focus groups were held. The first (FG1) took place at the start of semester, and comprised 11 randomly-selected second-year philosophy students taking at least one of the test modules (Ancient Philosophy/Modern Moral Philosophy). The second (FG2) comprised 9 of the same students from FG1, and was held at the end of semester, to capture whether attitudes had changed as a result of the interventions. Whereas continuity between FG1 and FG2 allowed for a comparison of opinions over time, the third focus group (FG3) – made up of 6 volunteers from the School of Law and Politics (LAWPL), where we were advised peer feedback is more frequently used¹ – helped us start to understand what was idiosyncratic about philosophy, and what lessons might be more generalisable. To protect the

¹ As the transcripts reveal, the particular group of students that attended FG3 were less familiar with peer feedback than we had originally anticipated – perhaps this reveals variation across different parts of the school.

anonymity of participants, we had a SOCSOI PhD student – Catt Turney – run the focus groups, and another – Wahida Kent – transcribe them and provide preliminary analysis.

In addition to the focus groups, we wanted to measure students' impressions of the usefulness of interventions (§1.2) on an ongoing basis. We did this with short electronic surveys undertaken during lectures, using Mentimeter (a polling software). Due to the unavailability of electronic 'clickers' for the length of time needed, students used their smartphones to participate.² To avoid priming and other skewing effects, not all questions referred to peer feedback – there were 'distractor' questions relating to comprehension of class content etc. In hindsight, we could have made better and increased use of these, not least because the students thoroughly enjoyed participating in this way. Nonetheless, they provide snapshots to complement the focus group findings.

Finally, we had postgraduate students in our jointly-taught MA module complete a survey at the end of semester to capture their views (for comparison with the undergraduates). Low uptake (in an already small class) affected their usefulness, and thus the subsequent analysis focuses solely on the undergraduate data. This may be a fruitful avenue for further research.

1.2 INTERVENTIONS

During the spring semester of 2016/2017, we trialled six interventions across three modules: Ancient Philosophy (second-year), Modern Moral Philosophy (second-year), and Social and Political Philosophy (MA). In the first half of semester we described activities in terms of their specific learning outcomes without identifying them explicitly as peer feedback (e.g. this is a group activity in which you'll practise reading and interpreting an ancient text); in the second half, we indicated how and why the interventions were forms of peer feedback. We wanted to discover whether the phrase 'peer feedback' put students off, and whether they were correctly identifying the various opportunities when they were receiving feedback, rather than assuming feedback was limited to comments from a staff member on written work. The interventions were as follows:

UG Module 1 (Ancient Philosophy):

- I. The students were instructed to use Learning Central's discussion forum facility to engage in ongoing dialogue. Students were required to post approximately 200 words each week in response to a set of stimuli, and comment on and critique the forum entries of others (i.e. give feedback). Participation in these forum tasks comprised 50% of the summative assessment for this module.
- II. Students undertook a time-sensitive, in-class task in small groups, and then circulated answers to a different group for immediate verbal feedback. This intervention was repeated with different tasks throughout the semester.

UG Modules 2 (Modern Moral Philosophy):

- III. Students were asked to devise a mock exam question (individually), and construct a plan. In the following week's seminar, under the supervision of the lecturer, they swapped with students doing a different question, and provided comments on their plan.

² We had concerns that this would disenfranchise some students. Although to our knowledge that didn't occur during this pilot study, it is a consideration to keep in mind in undertaking further research.

- IV. Students were prompted to respond to each other's views in seminars.

PG Module (Social & Political Philosophy):

Students took turns to present each week – a work-in-progress, short essay on the week's reading, or comments on a chapter etc. Students were asked to circulate this work in advance of the week's class, and their peers provided feedback in two ways (on alternating weeks):

- V. In written form, in advance of the class.
VI. Verbally, as part of the seminar discussion.

2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The reception of peer feedback varied depending on a number of factors. Most strikingly, students seemed to appreciate peer feedback most when it didn't apply to a particular assessment, i.e. in the context of checking their understanding and/or skills development. While they were reluctant to have their peers mark their work, they reported significant benefits from defending their ideas, critiquing the structure of others' arguments, and comparing their understanding. Perhaps because 'assessment' and 'feedback' are so often discussed together, students didn't always recognise this non-assessment-specific feedback as 'feedback'.

The focus groups highlighted three main concerns with peer feedback:

1. What do their peers know? (the expertise of those giving feedback)
2. Do their peers care? (the attitude, investment and motivation of those giving feedback)
3. Do their peers understand the grading criteria, and would they apply it accurately and reliably?

Positively, each of these concerns was – or could be – overcome within the existing framework of interventions: by ensuring peer feedback was overseen by a staff member, incentivising investment in peer feedback exercises (e.g. the forum tasks made giving feedback part of the module's summative assessment, repeating tasks and having students observe the positive benefits etc.), and improving literacy with regards to the marking criteria (by use of exemplars, discussing plans against the criteria etc.).

There were considerable differences in attitudes between the Philosophy students (FG1/2) and their counterparts in Law (FG3), particularly in terms of how they viewed their peers (the former as collaborators, the latter as competitors – see §§3.1-3.2). In terms of diachronic comparison, students reported some change in attitudes between FG1 and FG2, particularly with regards to giving non-anonymous peer feedback (see §3.4).

Some common themes pertaining to feedback more generally emerged across the focus groups. Although these weren't specifically the focus of this study, they are noted here for interest:

- Lecturer feedback was seen as the gold standard of feedback, but not in all contexts: for philosophy students, seminar discussion, peers asking questions after presentations, the forum task feedback, exam plans, and some group work were reportedly valuable.

- Across all focus groups, staff annotations on written work were seen as one of the most helpful methods of feedback.
- For those who had experienced it (FG1 and FG2), video feedback on written work was praised highly.
- Feedback was understood as helpful when it helped students to improve their grades (particularly when it was specific and relevant to the task in question). As a result, feedback on formative written work that could be acted upon in the summative version was highly valued.
- Seminar discussions and presentations were cited as opportunities for developing employability skills.

This was a small pilot study so there were limitations on what could be achieved. As noted above, the attendees of FG3 were less acquainted with peer feedback than we had hoped – in future research, cross-school comparisons would be useful – and there is scope to gather substantially more quantitative data, as well as running focus groups with postgraduate students.

3. STUDENTS' VIEWS ON PEER FEEDBACK & THE INTERVENTIONS

The majority of data in these sections come from the focus group transcripts, with some complementary information from the in-class polls and surveys as relevant. As described in §1, FG1 and FG2 were composed of philosophy students at the beginning and end of semester respectively, while FG3 was made up of students from LAWPL.

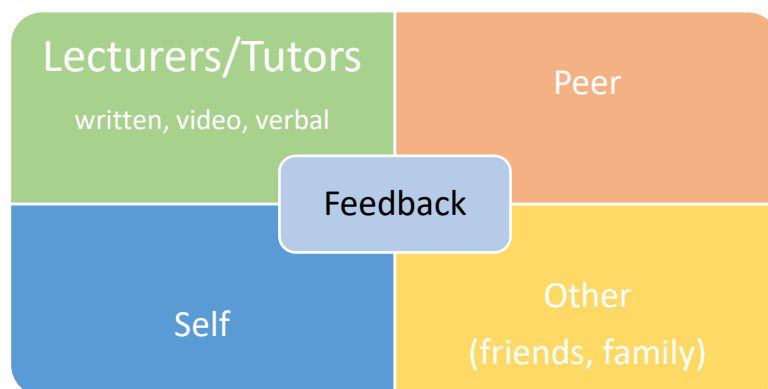
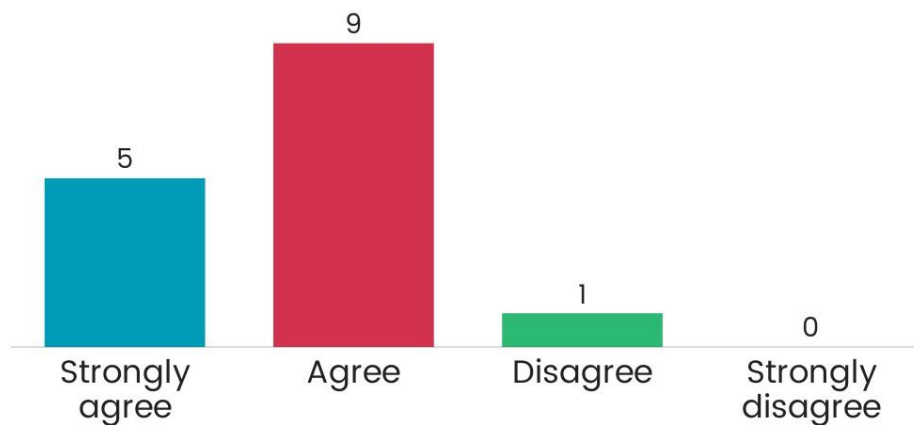


Figure 1. Types of feedback referenced by students

In general, students reported that a different perspective on their work could be very valuable, whether from a friend, peer, or parent. However, they felt most comfortable receiving feedback from their lecturers. These patterns were confirmed by in-class polls in Ancient Philosophy at the end of semester (see Figures 2 and 3).

Peer feedback (through forum discussion, in-class discussion etc) helps my understanding of the module content.

Mentimeter

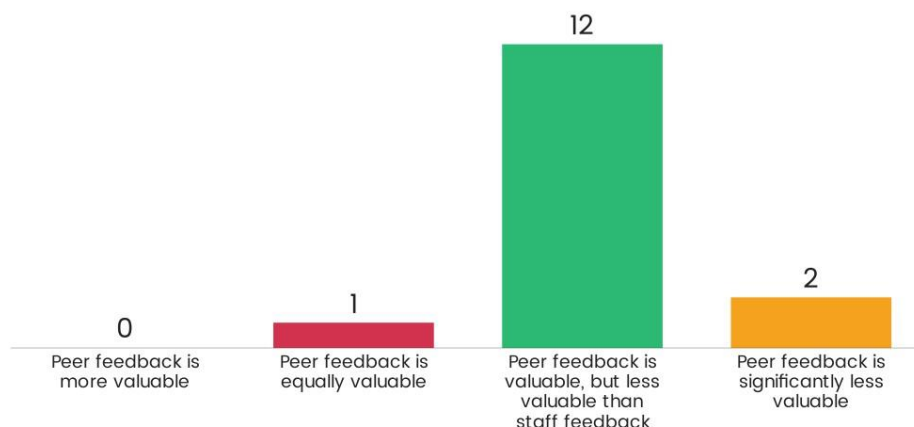


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Figure 2. Results of in-class poll on peer feedback, Ancient Philosophy Week 11

How valuable is peer feedback compared to feedback from staff?

Mentimeter



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Figure 3. Results of in-class poll on peer v staff feedback, Ancient Philosophy Week 11

Students differentiated between the benefit of feedback from others before submitting work (to identify structural or grammatical errors, for instance), or on their understanding or argument structure (through plans, seminar discussion), and feedback/marks from a lecturer on the completed piece of work:

“Peer feedback is more about your techniques rather than if you’ve got your content right. Because your lecturers are more able to tell you if you’ve really understood it. But if you have to explain something to someone else, they’re teaching you how you are laying out your argument, how you’re explaining it, rather than what you’re explaining” (FG2).

Students' primary concerns with feedback fell into three categories:

"You don't know how good they are. You don't know if they care or not. You don't know how they're going to mark it" (FG3).

§§3.1-3.3 summarise each of these in turn, along with our recommendations. §§3.4-3.6 outline the responses to our undergraduate interventions: the forum tasks, group work and seminar discussion, and exam plans respectively.

3.1 WHAT DO THEY KNOW? (PEER FEEDBACK & EXPERTISE)

The first of the main concerns students had regarding peer feedback was expertise. Not all shared this concern, e.g. from FG1:

"A fresh pair of eyes"; "They don't necessarily have to be qualified in any way".

However, there was general agreement that feedback from lecturers or other members of staff (e.g. PhD tutors) was more reliable:

"someone... who's got more experience and judgement" (FG1); *"I'd rather have [feedback] from the lecturer who very likely will be marking it, so they know what they think is the right direction"* (FG2); *"Someone with a PhD"* (FG3); *"We just want feedback from people who have the necessary qualification"* (FG3).

Two common problems raised were the possibility of getting inaccurate or unreliable feedback, and the possibility of conflicting feedback from different sources. However, respondents from FG2 identified how these might be overcome: by ensuring staff oversee peer feedback, and intervene when necessary.

"I prefer it when the lecturer is not necessarily there but can at least supervise it"; "foster peer feedback by making sure it's all relevant and accurate, whilst at the same time giving us rein to come up with our own ideas"; "it gives you more confidence, because you feel like you're not taking false feedback" (FG2).

Recommendations: ensure that peer feedback opportunities are overseen by staff, and provide opportunities for students to practise giving feedback, thereby increasing their confidence and critical faculties.

3.2 DO THEY CARE? (MOTIVATION & INVESTMENT)

The philosophy students (FG1 and FG2) were less worried by this problem than the law students (FG3) – as seen in §§3.4, 3.5 and 4.2, the former were more likely to see their peers as there to help, and view criticism as constructive. Indeed, at the start of semester, FG1 respondents expressed concern that their peers wouldn't be critical enough:

"I personally find negative feedback more useful than positive feedback... And I feel that the lecturers are a lot more willing to criticise than your peers, and are able to give more detailed and valuable criticism"; "students feel nervous about giving negative feedback"; "You don't want to, like, slag somebody off"; "You're going to be in the same position, and you don't want people to, you know, criticise you too much" (FG1).

These worries weren't repeated in FG2, which may suggest that the increased opportunities for peer feedback in this group allayed concerns. Comments from FG3, by contrast, included:

"In our subject in particular, we're really competitive. I wouldn't feel comfortable about someone who I don't know reading over my work"; "They basically just criticised everything"; "I think sometimes there's quite a few people on our course who think they're really smart, and if they get a look at your essay, they will pick it apart and focus on the bad points"; "I don't think most people would take it that seriously... They may just take 5 minutes to look at it"; "You don't feel the same about your own work as you do about someone else's. As Law students, we don't have a lot of spare time, so I personally wouldn't want to give someone feedback when I don't have the time"; "It could get really nasty".³

However, the philosophy students did note the difference between 'off-the-cuff' comments in seminars (which can still be useful – see §3.5), and taking the time to deliberate over feedback:

"The fact that someone's actually sat down and [considered] my work... given it a lot of attention, feels like they are actually a bit more sure... as opposed to someone making blasé comments" (FG2).

At least one student raised the possibility of plagiarism or using similar content as a danger of sharing complete assessments before submission.

Recommendations: there are no doubt many ways to overcome this problem, but as evidenced by the positive feedback regarding some of the interventions (outlined below), here are two suggestions: 1. Incentivise giving good feedback (e.g. by making it assessable, or otherwise rewarding it); 2. Foster an environment where students see each other as collaborators, rather than competitors (e.g. through constructive discussion).

3.3 ABILITY TO USE MARKING CRITERIA

The final concern students raised about peer feedback was the ability of their peers to interpret and apply the grading criteria accurately and reliably.

"I kind of struggle with the marking scheme it seems kind of abstract... it's hard to relate it to what you've done... The differences between a first and a 2:1 is just some wording..." (FG1).

FG3 highlighted this as a problem with self-feedback as well:

"I'm really rubbish at self-assessment"; "I can't really mark my own stuff."; "I don't have the confidence to self-assess".

One way of overcoming this, identified by the philosophy students, was the use of exemplars:

"In 6th form... they would give it to you and say, 'this person has literally ticked every single box'... I found that really useful" (FG1); "I think it would be useful to look at other people's assessments. If it's a really good essay, you can see how it was structured and things" (FG2).

³ The difference between attitudes of the philosophy students (see for instance §3.4) regarding peer interaction and those exhibited here is striking, especially for two courses that concentrate on building and defending arguments. It may be worth those more involved in LAWPL investigating whether the views of FG3 are anomalous within the cohort, and if not, how this compares across universities.

Some had participated in an exercise in a previous semester where they marked three samples of work, and found that helpful:

"[A lecturer] gave us a great essay, a poor essay, and an in-between essay that had been written by the past students. I did think that was very helpful" (FG1); "It was useful. I think most people undergraded them, and afterwards [the lecturer] was like, 'actually these people got this mark' so we were like, really? It made it feel more...achievable" (FG1); "Some people are overgenerous, whereas some people are too harsh...that was helpful for us knowing what standard...things are... It's difficult to know if people have the capacity to judge it right" (FG2).

One student also noted their use of the marking criteria in 'self-feedback':

"They give us all the marking criteria... you can evaluate yourself before you hand it in. And with the forum task you are meant to follow the same criteria... So that's been really helpful...Sitting back and looking at what you are doing right and what you are doing wrong – working it out yourself" (FG2).

This suggests the value of teaching students how to interpret the criteria, both to increase trust in peer feedback, and improve self-evaluation.

Recommendations: provide opportunities to develop criteria literacy – rather than just distributing copies of the marking criteria, have the students mark exemplars, and encourage them to evaluate their drafts in accordance with the criteria.⁴

3.4 FORUM TASKS

In Ancient Philosophy, students were required to post regularly in the Learning Central discussion forum, and give feedback on the entries of others. Participation comprised 50% of the summative assessment for this module. FG2 respondents spoke highly of the task as a positive example of peer feedback, and suggested their views had changed over the semester:

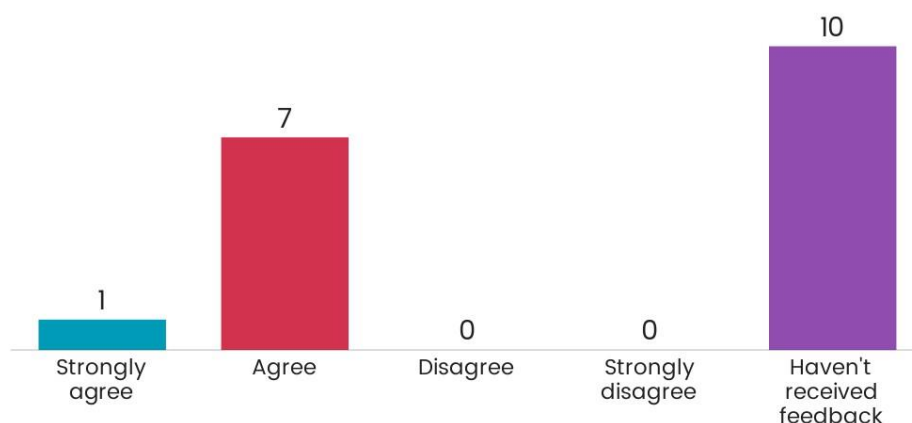
"Part of the criteria was that you had to read someone else's and... that counts as groupwork in the sense that you have to communicate with others. And I actually found that was far more useful than any other group work that I've done, cause I actually felt I had time to respond, cause sometimes if someone like, not rejects my idea, but someone completely disagrees with me, I can't gather my thoughts immediately and respond. Whereas when I've got more time to read what they said I can formulate a much better response which I found so much more helpful"; "definitely helps to put together a better argument. I was really reluctant to do it, I thought it was going to be really hard. When I actually got into it I was like, 'This is ok! I can do this'; "I'd appreciate doing that forum task in the 3rd year, I'd happily do it again. But I wouldn't want, like, peer feedback over lecturer feedback"; "I don't think I feel so strongly against peer feedback... I feel like it's changed a lot, cause I really found the group feedback really helpful for the posts...cause I was so against it to start with, now I'm like 'I don't mind'"; "I think my communicative skills have improved because of the forum tasks, mainly. Cause you just like have to be looking at your ideas and critically evaluating others' ideas. That's really helped this semester."

⁴ Although not listed as an explicit intervention in this project (as it concentrates on peer rather than self-feedback), some philosophy modules make use of self-evaluation forms submitted with assessments. These can help staff identify whether students are on-track in their interpretation and application of the criteria (and inform feedback accordingly).

Figure 4 shows the results of an in-class poll from the first half of semester. All students who had received peer feedback on their posts up to that point either agreed or strongly agreed that it had been useful.

Feedback on my forum posts from other students has been useful.

Mentimeter



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Figure 4. Results from in-class poll on forum feedback, Ancient Philosophy Week 5

Because the peer feedback was overseen (and marked) by the module leader, this task was thought to avoid the problem of expertise (§3.1):

“even though [staff member] doesn’t usually intervene or put herself in there, there’s always the constant sense that it will be looked at later on” (FG2).

And, students reported that peer feedback in this context was less prone to the problem of motivation/investment (§3.2):

“With our forum tasks, I do feel it’s more like feedback rather than a seminar based discussion. They’ve taken the time... then post it only when you are properly sure.”; “[the forum task is] something where you’ve got... a more solid piece of reliable feedback, cause...that’s actually being assessed, so they think about it”; “You’re not randomly going to launch into someone. You think about it, and if it can be justified to make a point” (FG2).

The general consensus was that the forum task being assessed was positive, as it made people participate and take it seriously. There was some early anxiety about the lack of anonymity of the forum posts (both the main posts and peer feedback was labelled with the students’ names, due to technical limitations of the software used). By the end of semester, two students expressed that they would still prefer it to be anonymous,

“because I feel a bit awkward...giving feedback to people, because sometimes I’m a bit worried that they think I’m disagreeing with their opinion” (FG2).

But the majority noted benefits:

"It does encourage you to think before you speak. If you don't want someone to think you are being mean to them, then maybe it's your responsibility to make sure you're being charitable"; "[at] our age people ideally wouldn't be mean anyway. They would be mature enough to think through their answer"; "We all talk in the seminars, so I wouldn't be that bothered about adding my name to something that was written, because if I'm happy to say it, then I should be happy to write it"; "It feels more comfortable now, as we've got to know each other. At first we were all a bit tentative... But everyone just got on with it, and now its fine"; "It helps people. If you come with a criticism and you respond to that, then it helps their grade too. So you are helping them. So if I post something, I do want people to comment on it, even if they're against me. So I think there's a mutual feeling that you're all helping each other out" (FG2).

The final comment highlights the additional value of giving peer-feedback as well as receiving it. For any discipline which, like Philosophy, includes critical evaluation or assessment as a learning outcome, incorporating peer-feedback can support the constructive alignment of learning outcomes, course content, and assessment and feedback.

3.5 GROUP WORK & SEMINAR DISCUSSIONS⁵

Philosophy students had generally positive feedback about the usefulness of group work:

"I enjoyed group work generally in seminars... I like the group environment because it helps you to see other people's arguments and point of view"; "when you're working through questions in a seminar, working in a group was really useful because you learn more when you are trying to explain something to someone else as well"; "You've thought about stuff by yourself but it's good to consolidate what you teach other people and other people teach you that you don't understand"; "[I] found all group work was really useful in varying degrees" (FG1).

"It's one of the best ways of learning... It's this having to teach it to someone else."; "[Re quizzes] you can all work together for knowledge to increase. It's also not quite so daunting to do it in a group... You don't feel so isolated" (FG2).

Although, as noted,

"sometimes it only works out if everyone's prepared" (FG2).

Group work and seminar discussions were also repeatedly flagged as beneficial from an employability perspective:

"it's useful to practice holding my ground in an argument"; "I suppose just being able to stand up for something you're arguing for. Not being submissive and going along with what everyone else says"; "Seminar discussions...get you used to have more structured conversations...and just being able to communicate, and being able to disagree with someone and not attack them as a person in your argument. It's quite a difficult skill as you need to be able to say in a business meeting – 'I don't think that's going to work' without making them feel offended"; "I feel the groupwork, especially, has been very productive" (FG2).

However, there was some disagreement about whether such activities count as feedback:

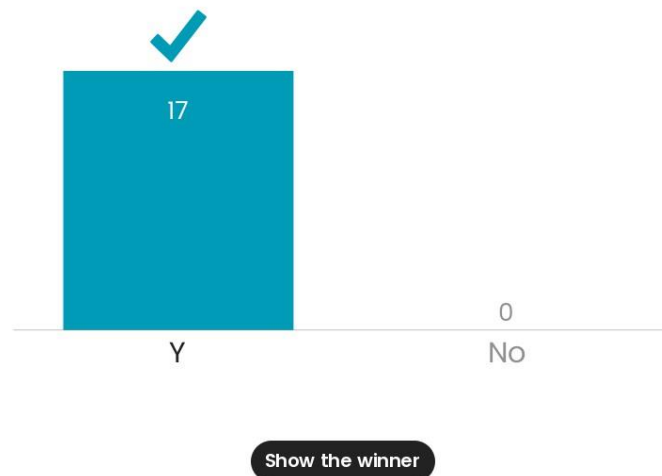
⁵ NB. Students' views pertaining to both the group work and seminar discussion interventions appear in this section for two reasons: the focus group responses largely overlap, and both incorporated verbal feedback.

“Well just when you say something in a discussion and how people respond to it and give feedback. Whether they will agree with you or if you are way off!” (FG1); “Obviously you get feedback from talking to people...” (FG2); “I see seminars as an opportunity to debate. It’s good for teaching you how to stand up for an argument... But I wouldn’t count it as feedback” (FG2); “It’s more of a discussion” (FG2); “I enjoy seminar feedback as a way of gauging... how my argument weighs up against other people’s opinions” (FG2).

The majority of students in FG2 said that they didn’t think of seminar discussion as feedback, when asked explicitly. However, when the Ancient Philosophy class was polled in Week 5, all students in attendance reported that in-class discussion did count as feedback (Figure 5). In a Week 3 poll, all students either agreed (29%) or strongly agreed (71%) that in-class discussion strengthened their understanding of module content.

Is in-class discussion a form of feedback?

Mentimeter



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Figure 5. Results from in-class poll on discussion, Ancient Philosophy Week 5

Students in Modern Moral Philosophy were asked to rank options based on what best aids their understanding, at both the beginning and end of semester. In both cases, seminars ranked the highest (Figures 6 and 7).



Figure 6. Response from in-class poll on what best aids students' understanding of philosophy, Modern Moral Philosophy, first half of semester.

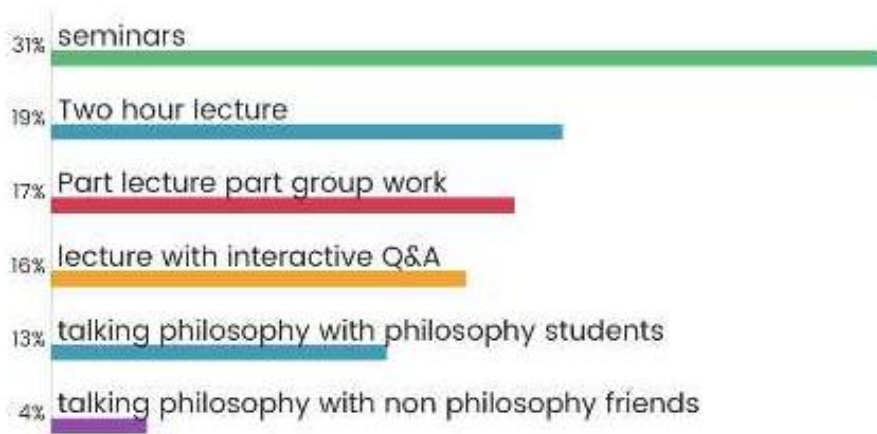


Figure 7. Response from in-class poll on what best aids students' understanding of philosophy, Modern Moral Philosophy, second half of semester.

The problem of expertise (§3.1) was raised in FG1: the lecturer overseeing and being involved to bring the discussion back on-track or correct errors was seen as important. Students also favoured group work being part of the formative, rather than summative, assessment:

"I don't like doing group work where it's marked... Cause if I'm in a group with someone who doesn't pull their weight, or even if you're marked individually, I find it really difficult... I don't want them to impact my own work ethic" (FG1).

FG3 reported a general lack of group work in their modules, and painted a much more negative picture regarding the usefulness of their seminars and the feedback received within:

"I think our tutorials are quite unsociable as well compared to other courses, where there's question and answer and talking"; "because we don't know each other I always feel apprehensive about talking to the person next to me"; "we have such a lack of connection with each other"; "I like to be in control of my own work"; "I think it would be useful...to revise... You can bounce ideas off each other."; "Most tutorials are just about facts and right or wrong answers" (FG3).

3.6 EXAM PLANS

In Modern Moral Philosophy, students were asked to individually devise a mock exam question, and then construct a plan in response. They then swapped with students doing a different question, and provided comments on each other's plans. As with many forms of feedback, the problem of expertise was raised (as was the problem of investment, in that only 'reliable' students came prepared with a plan):

"I kinda disagree that that's feedback, cause if you've prepared different questions, then you could get something completely wrong, and they wouldn't be able to tell" (FG2).

As flagged above, this can be overcome if the feedback process is overseen by a lecturer. Nonetheless, there were several interesting observations about the kind of feedback even less expert peers could provide:

"Even if you're not convincing, it's still good to know"; "they can still comment on the actual argument itself... have you structured it properly, does your argument make any sense. Because, maybe in the sense that they aren't as aware as you are in terms of the content of your question, they're in a better position to actually look at your argument" (FG2).

This echoes a theme that appears throughout the transcripts: while they might not always label it 'feedback', students are more likely to accept and value peer feedback when it doesn't relate to their mark or a particular assessment, but to their understanding or skills more generally (e.g. how they've structured or defended an argument, whether they've understood a key concept, whether they've communicated clearly):

"I do enjoy... getting the feedback [in seminars]... but in terms of not being to do with my assessment... I want to be able to talk to [my peers] and see how my ideas measure up" (FG2).

We tend to put 'assessment' and 'feedback' together, but this fails to make transparent that some feedback isn't specific to an assessment, and thus students don't always recognise feedback as feedback.

4. STUDENTS' VIEWS ON OTHER ASPECTS OF ASSESSMENT & FEEDBACK

Although they weren't the explicit focus of our study, some interesting observations came out of the focus groups on three topics: what makes helpful feedback, presentations, and self-feedback. Due to project limitations, these weren't analysed in any depth, but the relevant transcript excerpts are provided in §§4.1-4.3.

4.1 What makes helpful feedback?

Students from FG1 and FG2 spoke particularly highly about annotations on their work, and video feedback (particularly the combination of audio (with tone of voice) + screen capture). Students also reported liking individual exam feedback (this isn't standard in philosophy, but they experienced it in several modules the previous semester). More generally,

FG1: *"It's important for a lecturer to tell you when are just wrong about something"; "Something you can build on"; "Good feedback tells you where you are going wrong and how to improve"; "Thorough"; "It can't be like 'good' – why is it good?"; "We would rather wait longer and get better feedback"; "Constructive criticism... saying what's wrong with it and also telling you how you can change it"; "Yeah this tells me how to improve this essay, but how, what do you think I should do to improve all my essays"; if the feedback doesn't have any way for you to improve, it's just pointless."*

FG2: *"Obviously you get feedback from talking to people... you can't refer back to that, later. You can't remember how the conversation went, so it's quite nice to have solid feedback."*

The Law students showed a preference for individually-tailored written feedback, and face-to-face feedback with tutors. They reported inconsistency across modules, and seemed to have lower expectations with regards to feedback than their philosophy counterparts. In response to the question, 'What is good feedback?' they responded:

FG3: *"It's the grade"; "grade"; "yeah, grade. It's clear"; "I don't think a grade on its own is useful because you don't know here you are sitting in that grade. Whether it's an upper boundary... you need some comments."*

4.2 Presentations

Presentations seemed to affect how students viewed their peers – i.e. as collaborators – and responses from the latter were seen as feedback:

"They assess your ability for people to ask you questions and how you respond. So it's kinda making sure you comprehend that other people are there to help you"; "I feel [questions asked after presentations] can be [a form of feedback]"; "It's at type of feedback, because it's pointing out things from a fresh perspective. It gets you to look at things differently" (FG1).

When FG1 were asked whether it was more helpful to be asked post-presentation questions by the lecturer or other students, the respondents were divided 50/50. When asked why they valued questions from their peers, responses included:

"Because you get a better understanding; because you are teaching them the thing... if they don't understand well then you feel like, 'Ah, I didn't really do that"; "In essays, they say 'imagine you are explaining this to someone who isn't an expert' so you need to be able to kind of convey it in a way that, you know, would actually be inclusive" (FG1).

FG3 reported a lack of presentations in Law, but students would like to have them:

"Generally it's a life skill to be able to speak in public" (FG3).

The transcript seems to show a similar split as FG1 in terms of valuing staff versus student questions, but as one respondent notes,

"we don't know, because we haven't done it. So this is all theoretical" (FG3).

4.3 SELF-FEEDBACK

See also §3.3

FG1: *"I think it's possible but not valuable"; "I'm so dyslexic, I wouldn't know what words are correct and with structure – I wouldn't know where to start."; "I think part of the process...for a degree like ours, the whole process itself is feedback.... You're editing your own work...it's my own version of feedback."*

FG2: *"They give us all the marking criteria... you can evaluate yourself before you hand it in. And with the forum task you are meant to follow the same criteria... So that's been really helpful...Sitting back and looking at what you are doing right and what you are doing wrong – working it out yourself".*

FG3: *"I'm really rubbish at self-assessment"; "It's not right for everyone"; "I think someone's second opinion is much better... I can't really mark my own stuff."; "I don't have the confidence to self-assess."*

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the beginning of the project, we hypothesised that a better understanding of student perceptions regarding feedback would help us to improve our teaching and feedback practices. Identifying the three main concerns students have with peer feedback – the expertise of their peers, their motivation and investment, and their ability to interpret and apply grading criteria – is a promising step forward. As outlined in §3.1-3.3, to overcome these problems and improve the effectiveness and reception of peer feedback, we recommend:

- Ensuring that exercises involving peer feedback are overseen by staff.
- Providing opportunities for students to practise giving feedback, increasing their confidence in themselves and each other.
- Incentivising giving helpful feedback.
- Fostering an environment where students see each other as collaborators, rather than competitors.
- Developing students' literacy in interpreting grading criteria by having them apply them, rather than merely distributing copies of the criteria.
- Not limiting discussions of feedback to discussions of assessments, i.e. highlighting the diversity of opportunities for, and benefits of, feedback.

However, the benefits of this project go beyond peer feedback: even where the feedback provided is excellent, this can be overlooked if students are unaware that it includes more than just the written comments they receive from a lecturer on their summative work. Educating students on the diversity of feedback, and how to make use of it, is an important step in improving not only the students' work, but NSS scores too.

The benefits of this also extend beyond Philosophy. Not only are the interventions we trialled transferable to all Schools with seminar discussion and written assessments, the broader lessons about educating students to identify and utilise their feedback have university-wide application.