

Providing effective cohort feedback on examinations

Centre for Education Innovation – ‘Examining our feedback practices’



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Introduction

- Managing student expectations
- Why use cohort-level generic examination feedback?
- Cardiff case example - Law and Politics
- What do others do?
- What could we do differently?

Managing expectations: a quick task

- You are a student in your first year of a course at Cardiff University.
- You have an examination in several of your modules.
- What feedback would you expect on your examinations as a student?
- What would you want to get out of that feedback?



Exam feedback and the stage of a student's course

- Would students at different stages of a course benefit from different forms of exam feedback?
- What would be of most use to a year one undergraduate?
- What would be of most use to a final year undergraduate?
- Is end-of-module feedback on exams just *too late* to be useful and valuable?



Cardiff University policy on academic feedback

Academic Feedback to Students

Policy and Guidance



For staff and students across the University involved in taught programmes of study.

- Purpose:
- To develop a common understanding of academic feedback;
 - To set out how students should use academic feedback; and
 - To put forward strategies for staff and students to develop and improve practice in this area.

Executive Summary

"Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement." [1]

The aim of this policy is to help improve student learning. It does this by setting out the obligations on staff to provide effective feedback and the responsibilities on taught students to give, engage with, and utilise the range of feedback they receive. It recognises the crucial role that feedback has in the learning process and seeks to ensure that a shared view of academic feedback is developed across the University. The majority of feedback provided to students currently is timely, well thought out, and helps student learn. There is evidence, however, that staff and students do not always share a common understanding of the role that academic feedback can play in supporting learning. This policy aims to address this and help support enhancement of practice in this area across the University.

The policy recognises that effective feedback is a core element of teaching, learning and assessment and that it takes both time and resources to be effective. This will require schools to consider and, where appropriate, review staff workload models. Schools need to take a holistic approach to assessment, to ensure that there is alignment between teaching, learning and assessment and that the volume and balance of assessment within taught programmes of study is appropriate. The policy further recognises that students need to use the range of feedback they receive to help improve their learning and academic performance and to be supported in this process.

The policy is based upon the following principles:

- Feedback supports and promotes effective learning;
- Feedback is a continuous process;
- Feedback needs to be suited to individual students' needs.

Under each principle, guidance to support the policy's implementation has been included. The guidance seeks to recognise the wide variety of different disciplines and learning activities that exist across the University, and the many different ways in which students receive feedback on their academic performance. The policy reflects much of existing practice. Through its development a number of examples of effective practice were collected. These, together with example forms and other related resources can be found at: <http://learning.cf.ac.uk/effectivefeedback>.

- Feedback is provided on all assessments
- Schools to explain to students how exam feedback will be made available
- Emphasis on 'feed forward'
- Managing expectations
- Summary written feedback to cohort within four working weeks of the examination
- Other ways to provide exam feedback
- Students who fail

The advantages of 'cohort level generic feedback'

- Quick - timely feedback to students
- Efficient for markers to prepare
- Can be tailored to each cohort – and related to previous cohorts
- Can complement and contextualise individualised feedback – e.g. in tutorials or when accessing examination scripts
- Can track access via Blackboard/Learning Central

- Adapted from Nottingham Trent University's guidance on exam feedback

What might be some of the disadvantages of providing cohort-level generic feedback?

How can you anticipate and address some of these disadvantages?



Generic exam feedback in Law and Politics – linking with other ‘feedback’

8.4 FEEDBACK ON ASSESSMENTS

You will get feedback, in a variety of forms, on every piece of work that you do.

- In the first instance, your grade is a form of feedback giving you a clear indication of your progress, especially as it is normally published along with the average (mean) grade achieved by everyone in the module.
- Written feedback will also be given on your submitted written work and should be available at the same time that your grade is published.
- Feedback may also come in conversation with your lecturer.
- You may also get feedback as a group on, for example, class tests or on your progress more generally. This may be provided verbally or in a written report.
- You may also get feedback on your performance more generally in discussion with your personal tutor.

What are staff in Politics recommended to do for exam feedback?

Politics staff are recommended to provide feedback of 3-4 bullet points on each question asked in the examination paper to include:

- common characteristics of good answers
- common problems and mistakes
- a 'feed forward' element – e.g. how to address mistakes



We are going to quickly explore some examples!

Identify for each example two positive qualities and one suggestion for improvement

LAWPL example of generic points for exam feedback

- Politics module
- Feed forward – how to use the feedback in Spring semester
- Use of module materials
- Significant omissions
- Qualities of ‘firsts’
- Qualities of ‘fails’
- Answering the question
- Defining key terms

Examination Feedback, January 2016

Introduction to Government, PL9199

The following generic points can be made and can feed forward into exam preparation in the Spring semester:

1. The most striking point: A significant number of students used neither lecture materials nor text-book materials to answer the questions they responded to. This was rarely conducive to good or even adequate answers being given.
2. Question 1 (“Do parties matter”) was the most popular question. It was frequently answered without reference to the first lecture which specifically addressed this issue. There are alternative ways of answering the question, but failing to refer to policy impacts (the lecture focus) at all is a significant omission.
3. “Firsts” tended to be given to students who demonstrated understanding of the question; provided an answer using the relevant, core political science concepts; showed knowledge and understanding, and demonstrated that they had read and understood the lecture materials, core text and other materials.
4. Fail marks for questions resulted from short answers and/or failure to answer the question.
5. Some students’ revision strategies apparently led them, given the set of questions they confronted, to have to answer questions they had not prepared for, using materials that related to a different topic. Sometimes this material was used sufficiently well to get a good mark. Other times, it was not.
6. The failure to define key terms prevented better marks being given to otherwise good answers.
7. Several answers were undermined by generalisations drawn from the UK, or the UK & USA, which are inaccurate in a comparative context. The module specifies the need for wider knowledge of European parliamentary democracies to avoid such error.

LAWPL example of group feedback on each question asked

- Specific questions
- *Feedback* on past performance
- Positive - 'answers that did well...'
- Some feed *forward* qualities too – use of arguments and examples
- Emphasis on 'alternative' answers to question

3. Which aspects of electoral regulation are the most significant, and why?

Most answers identified district magnitude or the electoral formula as the most significant aspect of electoral regulation, reflecting arguments made by social scientists. Others identified both these features, and others, like ballot structure and various electoral laws e.g. re voting age, who is entitled to vote etc., as "most significant". In all cases, the best answers made arguments and gave examples, often showing good historical knowledge. Blaise and Massicotte's typology (from the lecture) often helped provide a framework for answers

4. Are parliaments in decline?

A popular approach to this question is to focus on functions, and whether they have declined. Answers showing awareness of different views of which functions are most important did well, especially those that demonstrated understanding that it arguably makes little sense to see parliaments as in decline because executives have grown in strength in systems of parliamentary government.

5. Is public administration the real heart of government?

Answers that did well here identified service provision via public administration as the core of the answer, perhaps linking ideas of the welfare state to the notion of 'real' i.e. effective democratic government in terms of outputs/services, not just electoral procedures. Alternative views stressed the promotion of economic competitiveness via government services, whether they be education, health services, communication infrastructure or specific forms of business advice (marketing, management, investment etc.).

Example from Social Sciences

Introductory module

- Statistical profile
- General observations
- Summary of points by question

Statistical information

- Spread of marks
- Mean, maximum, minimum marks
- Standard deviation
- For exam or for each question

SI0066 Social Theory 2013-14

Exam Feedback

Distribution of Marks

Marking band	Number of scripts in band (%)
90-100	0
80-89	6 (4.5%)
70-79	19 (14%)
60-69	40 (30%)
50-59	30 (22.5%)
40-49	18 (13.5%)
30-39	14 (10.5%)
20-29	3 (2.25%)
10-19	1 (0.75%)
0-9	2 (1.5%)

General Observations

The first thing that stood out, marking the scripts, was the range of ability in this year's cohort. There were some outstanding answers at the top of the marking scale, but a lot of students seem to have struggled with the material. The most common reasons for weak performance in the exam fall into three categories:

1. Students who rehearsed an answer, and then failed to modify their script so they actually answered the question. This occurred most frequently with question A1, on Durkheim's concept of 'anomie'. Many students had prepared an answer on 'suicide', and failed to concentrate on those aspects of the relevant texts which touched directly (or indirectly) on Durkheim's theory of anomie. Students who did well on this question often drew intelligently on their lecture notes and other texts from this seminar, as well as the passages in *Suicide* where Durkheim talks about appetites, the moral regulation of desire, and different manifestations of anomie (chronic and acute, economic and domestic). Further feedback on how this question was tackled appears below.
2. Students who only referred to one text in their answer (the questions always asked them to draw on a minimum of two readings). A few students even tried to answer the questions without referring to any readings, which obviously resulted in a fail mark.

Example from social sciences

2. Drawing on a minimum of two readings from the first seminar, critically explore Durkheim's theory of '*homo duplex*' and his understanding of the relationship between the individual and society.

One thoughtful and well-written answer included no discuss of the 'dualism of human nature' essay, which was obviously critical to this question, concentrating instead on the concept of anomie and the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity. The same student answered question 5 on 'value-freedom', but showed no acquaintance with the content of the readings that were relevant to this question.

One excellent answer ended with: 'how can the individual be pre-social if it is the individual's egoistic, individual wants that constitute the very need for morals created by society'. Actually, the egoistic individual whose desires constitute the very need for society to morally regulate them, *is the pre-social individual*.

One outstanding answer to this question was followed by a frustratingly short answer on Weber's doctrine of value-freedom. This student still ended up with a first class mark, but it could have been a lot higher.

- Detailed summary of issues in each answer
- Approaching individual feedback...
- Practice abandoned in favour of individual feedback...a good use of resources?

Newcastle University example

- Basic statistical information
- Linking exam performance with attendance data
- 3-4 pages of generic feedback

Marine Science and Technology Exam Feedback Sheet					
Module: MST2006			Semester/Year: Semester 1 & 2 2012/13		
Mean Mark: 52.3%		Maximum Mark: 70.5%		Minimum Mark: 18%	
Grade Distribution:		1 st 1.6%	2.1 19%	2.2 47%	3 25%
Fail 7.8%					
Average Attendance Across the Module: 72% class mean attendance rate ; mean attendance rate of students who failed exam = 55%					
Feedback on Exam Strategies:					
Part A Question 1			Number of Attempts:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Write short notes on the movement of sediment in sand dune systems</i> <p>The question required you to present notes on the movement of sediment IN sand dune systems. The majority of you wrote good notes on the movement of sediment into the system with regards to accretion and movement of sediment out of the system in terms of erosion. In addition lots of answers covered succession and detailed different types of dune within the system. Unfortunately, this did not address the question, which required you to detail how sediment is moved (saltation, creeping etc). You were also expected to comment on the factors responsible for the movement of sediment in the system. The number of answers that used the term Aeolian was very disappointing. You are now at Stage 2 and should be using the scientific terms rather than generic terms.</p>					

Northumbria University example

- Detailed statistics – of value to students?
- Negative tone – emphasis on weaknesses, omissions etc; lack of positives or feedback on ‘how’ to remedy weaknesses
- ‘Surprising...that some got it wrong’, ‘lots of regurgitated stuff’

Question 1

Formulate proposals for the installation of a Quality Improvement system in a construction company based on “continuous improvement” principles.

Average Mark	Standard Deviation	Highest mark	Lowest mark	Number of answers
11.6	4.6	22	3	31/47

Too much on "history" - not focussing on the question. Producing the drawing then not explaining what it was about. Learning by "rote" and not indicating understanding. Confusion between TQ and QA - auditors + checking prominent.

Question 2

Define the key issues involved in the Correction/Revision and review of construction programmes.

Average Mark	Standard Deviation	Highest mark	Lowest mark	Number of answers
11.8	4.2	22	5	31/47

Surprising, given the answer is clearly given in the workbook that a few got it wrong. Some tried to explain the planning process and some tried to repeat everything in the workbook - even the irrelevant bits.

Question 3

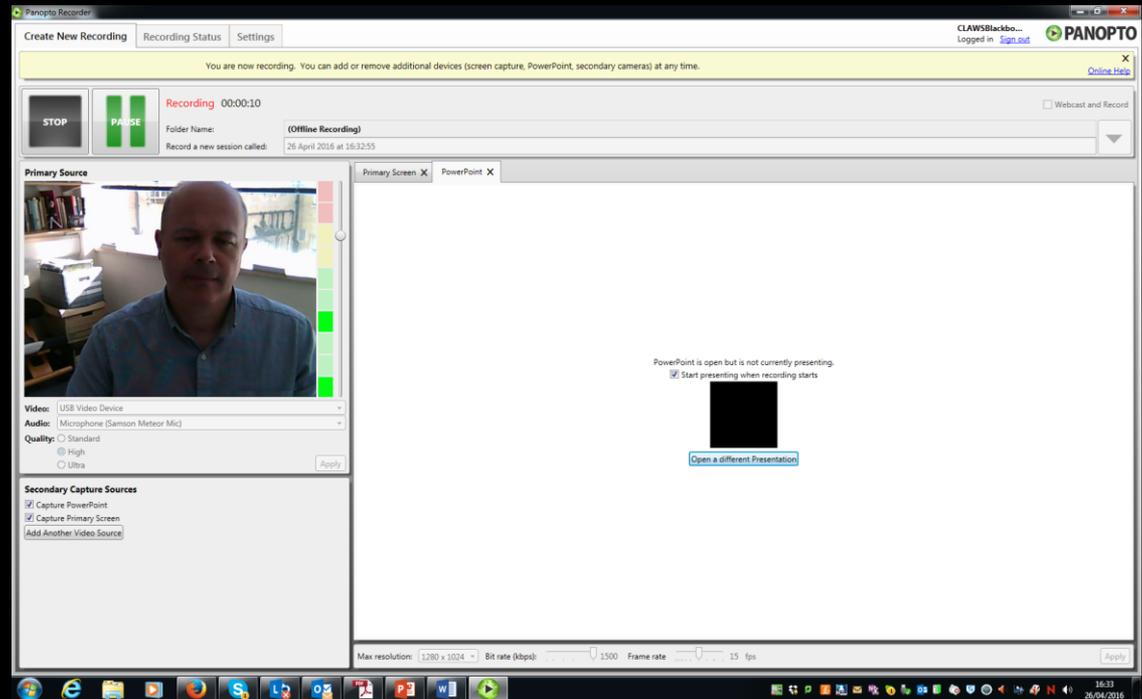
Summarise the issues that affect the Pre Tender and Pre Start periods for contractors by proposing techniques and strategies to ensure that they are managed effectively.

Average Mark	Standard Deviation	Highest mark	Lowest mark	Number of answers
14.3	4.6	23	6	44/47

The most popular question and generally good marks. Many covered the strategic period in too much detail - it only needed mentioning for context. Lots of regurgitated stuff - you are meant to demonstrate you understand not that you can learn the workbook off by heart. Some confusion over what the pre-tender period is - it includes right up to the tender submission.

Alternative formats for delivery of generic exam feedback?

- Text
- Statistics
- Podcast
- Screencast
- Scheduled session in class
- Annotated scripts for excellent work
- 'Model' or indicative answers
- Online discussion forums straight after exam
- Student or peer feedback on exams



What happens to this generic or cohort feedback?

- Emailed to students
- Posted in Learning Central
- Personal tutorials
- Module sessions in-class
- Inserted in examination scripts for viewing
- Used with next year's students
- Bank of exam questions and feedback



Using **generic feedback** effectively



...here's how you do it

1

- When assessment of the cohort is complete, describe the overall strengths and weaknesses of your students' work, highlighting what was done well and what needs to be improved. Provide this feedback to your students both orally and in writing, and allow them to ask questions.

2

- Ask your students to evaluate their own work in the light of the generic feedback, and so write a self-assessment with action points for future work.

3

- Provide individual feedback to your students which builds on the earlier generic feedback.

Thank you for listening....



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