P6. FEEDBACK ON ASSESSED WORK

For students on programmes and awards validated by the University of Plymouth this section of the CAPR has been agreed by the University (as the awarding institution) as meeting its requirements for academic assessment. The shaded sections below form GSM London regulatory and policy framework as applied to Plymouth University and GSM awards.

Related guidance and codes of practice can also be found at the QAA Code of Practice, Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality: Chapter B4 Enabling Student Development and Achievement and Chapter B6, 'Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning').

Purpose and scope

6.1   This section of the Consolidated Academic Policies and Regulations (CAPR) explains what feedback is, and what the College's approach is to giving feedback to its students.

Definitions

6.2   'Feedback' means any comments (both written and verbal) on an assigned task. This can be formative or summative. Formative feedback does not contribute to a formalised, recorded mark and is normally used as an ongoing way of helping students to improve and progress.

6.3   Examples of the way in which formative feedback might be given are:

(a)   Written feedback.

(b)   Oral feedback in class.

(c)   Online assessment exercises.

(d)   Computer-generated audio feedback.

(e)   Peer feedback.

(f)   Self-assessment.

(g)   Feedback from personal tutors.

6.4   Summative feedback is given in an assessment that usually occurs at the end of a module or award and is normally formalised and recorded. Feedback is an important and integral part of the ongoing student learning process. Although feedback is given on an assessed task, it is a key way of informing future learning and motivating students to continue learning.

6.5   To be meaningful, feedback is:

(a)   provided in a timescale that can help students produce better assessments;

(b)   closely linked to the specified learning outcomes and assessment criteria;

(c)   used to identify areas for improvement; and

(d) provided in a format that is appropriate for the assessment and in line with discipline-specific ways of teaching.

6.6 Feedback should:

(a) clarify how good performance is recognised, through clear description of the goals of assessment, the criteria used to evaluate it and differential standards of achievement;

(b) foster the development of reflection and self-assessment in learning;

(c) encourage dialogue about learning (peer and tutor-student);

(d) act as a motivation to learn, helping students to develop self-esteem and get a clear appraisal of how they can improve;

(e) provide opportunities for feedback to be acted on, enabling students to develop; and

(f) provide information that tutors can use to help shape their teaching and the further guidance they offer students.

6.7 At the start of each award, and then periodically thereafter, students are reminded about the importance of feedback to their learning. Reflective behaviour is encouraged in students so that they can make the most of the feedback to inform their subsequent learning.

Procedures

Content of feedback

6.8 The College accepts that each subject gives feedback in a way that is appropriate for its area. But the College expects all staff who give feedback on assessments to observe the following precepts :

(a) Feedback is sufficiently detailed to inform future learning and development. As a result, unsubstantiated single-word judgements (e.g. 'poor' 'weak', 'promising' or 'excellent') are be avoided.

(b) Formalised feedback is provided as agreed by each subject area or award and aligned to generic marking criteria.

(c) To manage expectations, if staff within subject areas intend to annotate scripts in addition to completing feedback forms, they should communicate this to students before the assessment starts.

(d) Summative feedback must directly relate to the intended learning outcomes for a module so that the student can be given confirmation as to whether or not each of these has been met.

(e) Wherever possible, feedback includes information about the positive aspects of students' work, as well as the areas for development.

(f) Although feedback to students does not have to be in an electronic format, it must be legible.

(g) In addition to individual feedback, wherever possible generic feedback is provided to students. This is in the format of a summarised commentary, highlighting the key strengths and weaknesses

apparent from the marking of all students' work. In addition, suggested strategies for improvement are also given in order to support students' ongoing learning and development.

Timing of feedback

6.09   In the scheduling of assessments within all awards, appropriate timescales for providing feedback are incorporated. These timescales are planned knowing the nature of the assessment task, the volume expected and the moderation processes needed.

(a)   All students are informed about the assessment and feedback schedule. They are normally told through module or programme handbooks.

(b)   As part of an agreed service standard, all feedback on summative assessments is normally given to students within three (3) working weeks.

(c)   Generic feedback on all formative assessments is normally given within two (2) working weeks

Feedback on examinations

6.10   In line with the College's commitment to enhance the learning experience of students, it provides feedback on examinations. Getting detailed post-exam feedback contributes significantly to students' ongoing learning.

6.11   Due to the variety of subject areas and the wide range in the size of student cohorts, post-exam feedback takes several forms. As a minimum, generic feedback is made available to all students who take written exams in the form of an internal examiner report.

6.12   Post-exam feedback is given in a timely way so as to help students do better in resits and subsequent exams. How this is done can be decided by the academic staff in subject teams. This is made explicit at the start of every academic year, and communicated to students for the sake of transparency.

6.13   Exams are the formal, summative assessments that normally occur at the end of a module or an award. In most cases they are time-limited written exams.

6.14   In line with Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts, students do not have a legal right to see their exam scripts, although discretion can be used. Exam scripts remain College property, and, if seen by students after an exam for the purpose of feedback, must be collected in immediately afterwards.

6.15   Students do, however, have a right to view any comments recorded about them by an examiner (internal or external). This can be facilitated by making a subject access request using the Data Protection policy.

6.16   If it is intended that written feedback from an exam is to be communicated to, and retained by, a student, then staff comments should be recorded on a separate cover sheet to allow the College to keep the original script.

6.17   Post-exam feedback is guaranteed in all areas that use this method of summative assessment. But it takes several formats and may be generic or personalised, depending on the strategies agreed by each subject area. This decision depends on several factors including the nature of the subject, the nature of the exam, student needs and the number of students in each cohort.

6.18   As part of the annual process of curriculum planning, subject areas select the method of post-exam feedback. Examples of how this feedback might be provided are:

(a)   post-exam tutor-led workshops, allowing students to have access to their own individual scripts and relevant examiner/marker comments;

(b)   post-exam workshops whereby tutors provide generic commentary on common mistakes and key learning points on each question;

(c)   individual feedback sheets for each student, providing detailed comments on the strengths and areas for development on the specific questions;

(d)   access to model answers for all questions, giving specific details of the marking scheme adopted;

(e)   opportunity to request individualised face-to-face feedback from the marking tutors for each student;

(f)   generic feedback provided through the virtual learning environment, which may or may not be time-limited.

Holistic models of feedback

6.19   In preparing students to use feedback productively, staff should make them aware of occasions when they may be receiving feedback without these necessarily being signalled as such. For example, a tutor and other students may respond to a presentation, or comments may be made in interactive lectures or through exchanges during online conversations.

6.20   Staff should also tell students about generic feedback, for example, feedback given to a whole group of students about the handling of a topic, as well as bits of advice given in passing, say in response to something said in a seminar. Spotting when feedback is being given and making the best use of it is a skill in itself, which it is useful to foster in students.

6.21   Ideally, feedback should be fairly continuous and be perceived as such by students, and received as honest, constructive and always supportive, so that it is never taken as personal criticism and enables them to identify what to do next. Students need to become aware that feedback can be written or spoken, formal or informal, face-to-face or online; that it can come from tutors, lecturers, workplace mentors, supervisors or other students; that it can be as much a result of self-assessment and peer-assessment as tutor-assessment; that it can provoke a whole range of emotions (some more positive than others), but that it should always be understood as a means of developing and moving forwards.

6.22   In short, this awareness that feedback is continuous needs to be balanced by the sense that it is, above all, useful and should be accompanied by guidance on how best to make use of it. Rather than

making students feel they are under continuous scrutiny, feedback should make them feel they are being continuously supported to develop. (For helpful advice, see the University of Ulster's assessment and feedback cards.)

6.23   An important principle, of which most tutors will be well aware, is that students will respond best where honest criticism is accompanied, or better still, preceded by, an identification of the strengths of what has been said, written or contributed. Students also need to be made aware of this when they are called on to give feedback to other students, or simply when they respond to work or interventions made by other students.

6.24   This means there is a virtue in training students to do peer-mentoring or peer-evaluation, or simply in how to respond in seminars. Useful information on peer assessment or review and feedback can be found on the Education Development Unit pages on GSM Learn.

A variety of methods of providing feedback can be used: for example, formal feedback does not necessarily have to be written, but could be recorded. There are said to be numerous advantages to this, which were captured by a University of Liverpool project: the feedback was perceived as more personal; it was more in-depth; it required less time to provide it and there was a considerable increase in the amount provided; it was better able to convey the meanings and discourses that characterise a discipline; and it was more intelligible and more accessible, and could be revisited easily by the students. Staff did have concerns about providing this form of feedback, but it is worth considering these different strategies and approaches. Inclusive approach

6.25   The College aims to practise an inclusive approach in supporting students with disabilities/ specific learning difficulties. This approach focuses on the College's capacity to understand and respond to individual learners' needs and not to locate the difficulty or deficit within the student. In this way we move away from 'labelling' students and towards creating an appropriate learning environment for all. In consultation between the student and disability advisors, a learning support agreement will be drawn up and shared with Faculties.

Coursework

6.26   All information including submission dates and coursework questions will be released to students at the start of each semester in the module guide, accessible to students via the module's virtual learning environment. All reasonable adjustments are therefore built into this process for all students, ensuring adequate opportunity to explore taught material before assessment.

Communication to students

6.27   To manage expectations, information about the nature and extent of feedback and the timescale for this to occur must be made available to all students. This is normally done through module handbooks.

6.28   Before starting an assessment, students are made aware of assessment criteria, marking schemes, the content and structure of agreed feedback templates.

6.29   The planned schedule of assessment and feedback is explicitly communicated to students. This is normally done via module/programme handbooks issued to students at the start of the academic year. Tutors must signpost students to where this information is available (electronic and, where appropriate, in hard copy).

6.30   Any unforeseen changes to the method and timing of feedback must be communicated to students at the earliest opportunity. In all cases, this must be before an assessment is taken.

Evaluation

6.31   Within each subject area, the keeping to agreed timescales for giving feedback is monitored. This information is used to evaluate the level of service and further improve this for current and future cohorts.

6.32   As part of the annual monitoring process, the views of students on the methods, content and timing of feedback are gathered. These views are considered, and, wherever possible, used to further inform the feedback regime in each area.

Ensuring the quality of feedback

6.33   Leaders of all subject areas are responsible for ensuring that their teams feel competent to provide feedback to students in the required way.

6.34   Wherever appropriate, updates on how to provide effective feedback are made available to staff.

6.35   If a student complaint about the nature, content or timing of feedback is upheld, appropriate staff development should be provided to ensure that the standard of service returns to the acceptable level.

6.36   Staff who are new to assessing and providing feedback will be given appropriate support and development so that the quality of service can be maintained. Where appropriate, mentoring support is provided.

Advice and support

6.37   Advice for students on assessment and examination principles, and the associated lower-level College rules, is available from their programme leader or Head of Department. More complex queries may be referred to appropriate individuals.

6.38   Advice for staff on assessment and examination principles is available from their nominated Academic Policy Partner or Head of Department.

6.39   If any staff development needs are identified, these may be discussed with members of the Staff and Educational Development Team.

Fees

6.40   A fee may be charged for risk assessments of student events as set out in the College's list of charges.

6.41   The College is not liable for financial or other consequences arising from action under these regulations.

Legal and regulatory context

6.42   The policy is informed by, and is consistent with, the Expectation and Indicators of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

6.43   The College may not be bound by the principles in paragraph 6.43 and this policy alone may not provide the procedure to meet all of these principles, some of which may be met by other College policies and procedures. It uses the principles as guidance only, to help it deal soundly with these matters.

Enforcement, monitoring and review

6.44   If any person or body in the College refuses to comply with a request or decision made to enforce this policy, their refusal must be reported to the Academic Registrar, who will take such action to enforce this policy as they think necessary.

6.45   Each year, the College must receive a report that enables it to monitor, identify and act on any shortfalls in how this policy is interpreted and applied.

6.46   Every two (2) years, the College must review this policy to ensure that:

(a)   it remains up to date and continues to meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code, applicable legislation or guidance;

(b)   areas of improvement, or any concerns, raised by students, external examiners, or professional bodies have been addressed; and

(c)   opportunities to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy have been taken.

Schedule (not part of the policies or regulations):

Responsible Officer: Provost

Approved by: Board of Directors and Academic Board

Version: 2.0

Date: June 2017

Monitoring and Review Body: Academic Regulations and Awards Committee

Effective From: July 2017

Next Scheduled Review: April 2018