

GUIDANCE FOR DEPARTMENTS ON PROVIDING ACADEMIC FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS AND PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

This guidance has been produced by a working group of the Quality and Standards Committee following consideration of the Quality Assurance Agency's Code of Practice Section 6, covering the assessment of students, and in response to common issues identified through internal teaching quality review and the external Subject Review process. Section 6 of the QAA Code of Practice is available online at:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/default.asp>

1. Principles

This guidance has been formulated with reference to Precept 12 of section 6 of the Code, which states that:

'Institutions should ensure that appropriate feedback is provided to students on assessed work in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvement.'

The purpose of this guidance is to establish further principles and suggestions for good practice to assist departments in providing appropriate feedback in order to meet the expectations of the Code of Practice. The guidance addresses feedback resulting from both formative assessment (which is conducted to generate feedback on progress but the outcomes of which do not contribute to the award of credit) and summative assessment (which is conducted to judge whether the intended learning outcomes have been achieved, on which basis the award of credit is decided). However, it is recognised that summative assessment can also provide an important source of feedback on performance which can promote continuing progress and the guidance therefore encourages departments to enhance the formative potential of summative assessment as far as possible.

The effectiveness of departmental assessment procedures, including arrangements for providing feedback, will be evaluated periodically via the University's Independent Evaluation of Teaching with reference to this and other associated assessment guidance. A wide range of assessment practices are in use across the institution, reflecting the diversity of subject pedagogies, and every attempt has been made to accommodate this diversity in the guidance. It is expected that departments will apply this guidance in a way which is most appropriate to the nature of their assessment strategies and it is therefore recognised that departments may demonstrate alternative practices in some respects which are better suited to their subject pedagogy, in order to meet the principles outlined in the guidance.

2. Guidance

2.1 Timeliness of feedback

- I Departments should establish and publicise reasonable timescales for providing feedback to students following assessment and make every effort to ensure that these expectations can be met through the planning of the scheduling and volume of assessment. Departments should also monitor the provision of feedback to ensure that agreed timescales are being adhered to.
- II Providing opportunities for students to gain formative feedback on their learning during a module (or similar block of learning in the case of non-modular programmes) is

encouraged to prepare students for summative assessment. Examples of ways in which this might be achieved include:

- Enabling students to gain feedback on their understanding of a topic through discussion with peers, e.g. in seminar groups.
- Making arrangements for students to discuss essay/project plans or submit draft work within reasonable boundaries and at the department's discretion.
- Providing self-assessment tasks. Some departments have made good use of MOLE in this respect and further information can be obtained from LeTS.
- Encouraging peer assessment, for example, following student presentations. Where students are invited to provide feedback on the performance of others, they should first receive guidance on appropriate techniques for this activity.

III When designing opportunities for formative feedback, departments should ensure that the academic standards of summative assessment are not compromised, i.e. that students are able to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes independently within appropriate levels of support from academic staff.

2.2 Format of feedback

I Feedback provided to students via the assessment process should:

- Enable the student to evaluate their progress towards achieving the intended learning outcomes for the programme of study.
- Identify a student's strengths and comment constructively on their weakness in order to support continuing improvement.
- Promote an understanding of how a particular mark/grade has been arrived at.

II Departments should establish and publicise a minimum standard of feedback that students can expect to receive in accordance with the assessment method. In order to promote a consistent standard of feedback across a department, the use of a pro-forma is recommended for providing written feedback.

III Where applicable, feedback (especially in written form) should relate to the relevant published assessment criteria. The purpose of this is to evaluate the student's performance in relation to the expected standards described in the criteria, thus identifying how the performance might be improved in future. For further guidance on the use of assessment criteria, see the University's *Guidance for Departments on the Internal Moderation of Summative Assessment Tasks and Assessed Work*.

IV Where a large number of students are being assessed, it may not be practical to provide feedback to them all on an individual basis. However, where feasible individual feedback should be provided to students who request it with good reason, for example where their performance is unsatisfactory or borderline. Generic feedback for large cohorts could be provided through one or a combination of the following methods:

- Preparation of a general commentary on the standards achieved by students, identifying common strengths and weakness. For ease of publication, this might be made available via the departmental website.

- Publication of model answers or good examples of past student work (these should only be used with the student's consent in accordance with the University's *Guidelines for the Retention of Assessed Work*).
 - In the case of assessment testing factual recall, such as multiple choice examinations, publication of the correct responses.
- V In the case of invigilated examinations, it is not University policy to return the examination scripts to students and under the 1998 Data Protection Act, students do not have the right to request access to the script. However, students do have a right to see any examiners' comments made in relation to the script (actual or in summary form) via a formal 'Data Subject Access Request' to the University and payment of a £10 administration fee. For further information on the University's approach to the Data Protection Act in relation to examination scripts, please refer to <http://www.shef.ac.uk/cics/dataprotection/dataprot.html>
- VI When notifying marks/grades to students as part of the feedback process, it should be made clear that these are provisional until formally approved by the Faculty and Senate. The display of results lists on departmental notice boards is permissible under the Data Protection Act and students may be identified by name on these lists. However, individual students must be removed from these lists if they so request.
- VII Students' perceptions of the effectiveness of a Department's procedures for providing feedback and the quality of the feedback received should be monitored through the student evaluation process.

2.3 Preparation for providing feedback

- I Departments are responsible for ensuring that all staff involved in marking and providing feedback to students are adequately prepared for this activity, particularly those with less experience or who are new to the department.
- II A number of resources on assessment are available through the Staff Development Unit's SOLAR centre (www.shef.ac.uk/stdu/SOLAR/index.html). The Staff Development Unit can also arrange tailored workshops to meet a department's needs in this area, such as the 'Assessment Health Check',
- III Attention is also drawn to the Learning and Teaching Support Network's Assessment Series, which provides a great deal of valuable guidance on the assessment process. This can either be downloaded from their website or purchased in hard copy (see the LTSN Generic Centre web pages for more information under 'Resources'-<http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/resources/assessment/series.html>).
- IV The role of feedback in the learning process can be further enhanced through the development of reflective skills in the curriculum so that students are themselves well prepared and motivated to make effective use of the feedback which is available. These skills could be developed through the personal tutor system. The use of progress logs or self-appraisals is also an example of good practice in developing reflective skills.

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