

Enhancing Teaching & Learning

Focus on: Feedback on Assessment

Naomi Winstone, of the University of Surrey, shared in an interview some of her work on Feedback to Students on their learning.

Why Focus on Feedback?

Feedback on learning is something that can cause anxiety for students and staff. Staff spend significant time crafting feedback to students on their learning, and it can be frustrating when it appears that students are not reading or acting on this feedback. Students receiving feedback don't necessarily have the emotional and strategic skills to process and implement the feedback to develop their learning.

Barriers to Engaging with Feedback

Through a Higher Education Academy funded project, Naomi and colleague, Robert Nash (Aston University) explored, via focus groups, students perceptions of feedback, what works or does not work with respect to feedback. From this work, they identified 4 barriers to engaging with feedback:

- **awareness** : students don't always know what the feedback means and what is its purpose;
- **cognisance**: students don't always have strategies for putting feedback into use;
- **agency**: students can have an emotional barrier which prevents them implementing those strategies;
- **volition**: to engage with and use feedback.

Solutions

A [Developing Engagement with Feedback Toolkit \(DEFT\)](#) was developed to offer supports and resources to students and staff, in encouraging engagement with feedback. It was recognised that overcoming each of the identified barriers comes with responsibilities for both the students and academic staff.

The toolkit contains:

- a feedback guide, including a feedback glossary (e.g. what does 'be more specific' really mean?), a simple and clear flowchart guiding students in how they can implement feedback;

- a workshop skeleton that staff can use to help students build skills in using feedback, reflect on emotional barriers, and how to see feedback from the side of the reviewer;
- a portfolio tool, allowing students to gather feedback across all programme coursework, reflect on it and combine it into a plan of action.

What else can we do?

Some simple strategies to increase impact of feedback, without increasing the amount of feedback we give:

- Direct feedback to both module and programme outcomes – helping students see the usefulness of feedback across modules;
- Encourage dialogue with students around feedback – think about ‘what is said versus what is heard’;
- Think about what we as academics can learn from giving feedback – what does it say about our assessment design; can we better understand what students are not understanding;
- Develop a feedback glossary (involve the students);
- Encourage students to consider how they can use feedback in future work;
- Remember, the first response to feedback is often emotional;
- Think about assessment and feedback that is developmental in nature

More information

The DEFT toolkit and associated resources are freely available from <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/developing-engagement-feedback-toolkit-deft>

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