



Student Views on Assessment Feedback



Bristol SU

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BILT

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Introduction

In collaboration with Joe Gould (Bristol Institute for Learning and Teaching) and Mia Stevens (Undergraduate Education Officer), Bristol SU ran three focus groups in November with 18 undergraduate students from a range of demographics, faculties, and courses. The research focused on student experiences of assessment feedback, how this correlates with knowledge of marking criteria and student opinions around different formats for presenting feedback.

Key Takeaways

The level of detail in feedback

Students often felt that the feedback they received **wasn't detailed or personal enough**, and seemed too generic. They also noticed there wasn't clear advice on **how to improve their grades**, which meant they had to ask for one-on-one meetings to get better guidance. However, setting up these meetings could be tough because of limited time and resources during office hours.

Consistency in marking and feedback

Students noted the importance of receiving and going over marking criteria, but often felt the **link between marking criteria and the feedback they receive is vague**, does not relate well or lacks consistency across assessments and markers.

Different feedback formats

Students generally liked getting feedback in different formats like **voice notes, videos, screen sharing, and peer marking**. However, opinions about using AI to help create feedback were mixed, with most feeling negative about it. They were worried that AI feedback might lose important details and accuracy.

Recommendations

1. Assessment feedback should be as detailed and personalised as possible for each student.
2. Feedback given should clearly explain the grade by directly linking it to the marking criteria and give specific steps on how to improve or get higher grades.
3. Considerations should be made to provide feedback in different formats, like voice notes or videos, to make it more engaging and helpful.

Level of detail in feedback

- Although some students had received detailed feedback, others felt it was often **lacking detail and depth**. Or, that the feedback was **not specific or personal enough and was too generic**.
- They explained that often the feedback demonstrates what is wrong, but **not how to improve or achieve the top grades**.
- Students also felt the feedback was sometimes **vague, confusing and doesn't make sense** or does not specifically relate back to the marking criteria.
- They noted the only way to receive more detailed feedback was to **request more information via email or arrange a meeting** to discuss their feedback with the teacher.

"It feels, because we've got such a large cohort across engineering, that they've copy-and-pasted feedback and just altered the words slightly. ... So, it doesn't feel specific."

"...they're good at saying how, like how it's wrong, but they're not necessarily explaining why it's wrong and what you can do to improve it."

"Even in instances where they put a lot of comments, they don't really make sense when you just try to judge them individually."

"We have specific meetings with our tutors to explain our feedback to us because our feedback is so convoluted and weirdly worded."

Importance of marking criteria

- Some students found their feedback was consistent with the marking criteria but again highlighted a **lack of detail in the link**.
- The **link between feedback and marking criteria is often vague**. Some found having a unit wide marking criteria was not specific or adaptable enough to different assessment types, and marks received did not relate back to this.
- Students valued activities which directly connected marking criteria with assessment planning. Students empathised the importance of having a clear understanding of marking criteria and intended learning outcomes at the beginning of the module, to know what is expected of them. They found having **feedback that matched grade descriptors useful**.

"A lot of lecturers will give you a marking criteria. In general the little feedback we get does correlate quite well, but it's sort of surface level, they only give more details on your work if you ask."

"What you have to demonstrate is not clear, particularly if you're coding."

"Feedback is vague, as well as criteria. Vague between the ranges of marks."

"We had a 'demystifying assessment' session, which was really helpful"

Consistency across feedback and grading

- Students felt that there was often a **lack of consistency in feedback and grading** across different assessments and between staff, partly due to different markers having different styles. Some students felt that there was a disconnect between the amount of effort they put it, and the mark they receive, with markers often **failing to justify why students have received a particular mark over another** and relating this back to marking criteria.
- Students said they sometimes **do not use their feedback**, partly because they start working on their next assessments before they receive it, which can take a long time. There was also a tension between using module specific feedback and transferable feedback, with some students explaining it is more useful to use their friends' feedback for modules they are yet to take, due to feedback being too module specific.

“But for some things, you get a much higher mark than expected; for some things, I got much lower marks than expected. But you don't really get why.”

“I only got one comment that said ‘good’, but my mark ended up being a low 2.1. So, is that everything? What do you mean by good? Why didn't I get a first if it was so good?”

“Even the teacher is not in sync with the lecturer - like, the lecturer doesn't know why the teacher has given it a particular mark. The staff are not connected in their opinions of marking.”

“I use other people's feedback [as] I find it more aspirational.”

Requesting additional feedback

- Students felt there was often a lack of feedback and direction on how to improve and explained the best way to receive more detailed feedback was to **arrange one-to-ones with staff**.
- Overall, **this process was perceived to be fairly challenging**, partly due to limited time slots for large cohorts. One student remarked there were seven slots available for around 200 students. Experiences for those who had one-to-ones varied, with some finding them more helpful than others.

“I got one sentence of feedback. ... There was quite lot of comments but it wasn't enough”

“but [feedback] is sort of surface level they only give more details on your work if you ask”

“I did go and ask for more feedback, it just requires a bit of a push from the students, ... humanize examiners, makes sense to go after and get feedback.”

Opinions on different feedback formats

- Some students felt that written feedback was the most effective form of feedback, provided it is clear and detailed. However, students were also **open to using more innovative methods**, sharing experiences and opinions of using different formats to present feedback.
- One student had received a **five-minute video** to accompany written feedback about a technical report, which had been helpful. Similarly, some students explained that **teachers sharing their screens** or creating a shared document while providing feedback was useful, and could allow for questions to be asked on the spot.
- Some engineering students suggested that for assessments involving drawings, having **feedback annotations and specific labels on images would be useful**.
- A few students explained that peer marking and feedback had been useful. Another explained weekly quizzes in one of their modules was a good way of learning. Most students were also **open to the idea of recorded voice notes** to help personalise and humanise feedback, as long as they are kept short.
- Some felt one-to-one feedback was helpful and more informative than written feedback.
- Students were mostly apathetic about tone of voice in assessment feedback, as long as it is constructive and not intentionally unpleasant.

“The last formative we had, the feedback they gave was very well structured. It was written feedback in a separate document and also a video accompanying it.”

“Um I mean it’s really helpful to share screen when going over a document like a video analysis.”

“... especially with the coursework stuff, like we do a lot of drawing and then CAD and stuff. If they were to have the image and then draw over the submission, label stuff, that would be more helpful.”

“Written feedback just feels like words on a screen sometimes.”

“I went to an office hour the other day to go through all of my formative feedback, and I had lost all hope. She was like, ‘No, no, go again, go again.’ And it was that reassuring tone that I needed, which I didn’t get from the written feedback.”

Using generative AI to co-produce feedback

- Some points raised about feedback being co-produced using AI were positive. For example, a few students did feel AI could **improve accessibility and clarity of feedback**, so long as it was clearly specified, double checked and only used to help frame and display feedback.
- However, **opinions were fairly negative on the whole due to concerns over loss of nuance and accuracy in written feedback**, and AI producing the same feedback and sets of phrases for every student, making it even more generic.
- It was clarified that the question/topic referred to AI only in relation to feedback, but many **students were concerned that AI would be used to mark their work**. This link suggests it may be difficult to separate the feedback process from marking when considering perceptions around using AI.
- Students also expressed concern for a **loss of authenticity in relationships**, pointing out irony in using a computer to help make something more human. There was also discontent around **paying expensive fees for the University to cut corners and staff by using AI**. Some also suggested that if students are not permitted to use AI then neither should the University.

“Good idea, as long as it’s checked afterwards to see it makes sense. As long as the key ideas are there, it would put it across more clearly.”

“As long as it’s only used to display feedback for students then it’s a good idea, but you can’t have AI marking your work.”

“I am against this. I feel AI can’t replace professors’ personal feedback, the person who marks should give feedback.”

“It would be an excuse for the Uni to cut staff - I don’t think anyone would like it”

“Like please put in more effort”