NUS Assessment and Feedback Benchmarking Tool

UCL Guidance for Staff

This guidance document provides advice on reviewing and enhancing departmental approaches to student assessment and feedback, in line with steps agreed by UCL’s Quality Review Sub-Committee (Sept 2015). Departments are asked to use the attached NUS Assessment and Feedback Benchmarking Tool to identify areas for development, and to report back to UCL as part of the Annual Student Experience Review (ASER) process. Specific guidance on using the NUS resource to map current provision can be found in its ‘How to use the tool’ section. The guidance describes immediate action that can be taken to improve assessment and feedback, especially for final year students. On completing this benchmarking activity and the ASER implementation plan, departments need to decide how they will monitor the planned actions and ensure that any urgent changes are made as soon as possible.

# Implementing Change

It is important that departments monitor students’ satisfaction with assessment and feedback throughout the year and focus especially on final year undergraduate students’ satisfaction in the first term, as they will be completing the NSS in the second term. Many of the changes to assessment practice and feedback that will make a big difference to students can be implemented without excessive bureaucracy; the suggestions and guidance offered in this document are designed specially to give ideas for change and improvement that can be implemented straight away.

To monitor student satisfaction, an NSS Assessment and Feedback Taskforce (composed of academics, administrators and students) could be established to investigate issues such as feedback turnaround times, assessment bunching and quality of feedback (see principles below). The Taskforce would be responsible for devising ways to communicate with staff and students (e.g. focus groups, informal gatherings, online complaints board, surveys)in order to detect problems **at an early stage and quickly address them**. Communication is important; we need to demonstrate to students that we listen to their feedback and will act quickly to improve practices where necessary. The Taskforce would ensure students are aware of how the department has responded to problems.

## Improving Assessment Practices

The most important principles for improving student satisfaction are:

### Principle 2 Assessment Criteria

* Ensure clear assessment criteria exist for every module and that these are prominently posted on Moodle and available in student handbooks. An Illustrative Guide to Assessment Criteria is attached. It is not enough to give students assessment criteria; the department needs to ensure that students, and staff (including Teaching Assistants), understand the criteria. This can be done through guided marking. In guided marking, students read a range of peers’ assignments (anonymised and from a previous year with authors’ permission) at the beginning of the module, comment on the assignments and agree a grade. The assignment is similar to the module assignment and helps students understand what they need to do to be successful on this module. Guided marking can be organised online or in a seminar or lecture. Students discuss comments and grades and have an opportunity to question the teacher, checking their understanding of assessment criteria.

### Principle 4 Workload Distribution

* Distribute assessment across the academic year so students (and staff) are not overburdened. Check for assessment bunching e.g. by using the Map My Programme tool (<https://sites.google.com/site/mapmyprogramme/home> ).
* If you find that there is bunching, create a long window of opportunity for submitting written work rather than one specific deadline, i.e. ‘please submit this work between … and …(and provide a week or ten day window for submissions)’.

### Principle 6 Marking Consistency and Distribution

* Ensure all markers are thoroughly prepared for their role. Organise harmonisation meetings for all staff, especially those new to marking. Ensure marking is moderated (see <http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Guidance/Moderation_Guidance.pdf> for useful guidance on moderation).
* Post example assignments and feedback comments and grades online so both markers and students can check marking standards.

### Principles 7 and 8 Feedback Timeliness and Quality

* Publish submission dates and feedback return dates.
* Ensure students know what kind of feedback they will get and when. Feedback is timely when students receive it before they move on to their next assignment.
* Use a proforma to help staff give quick, structured, good quality feedback with suggestions for improvement. (The Centre for Advancing Learning and Teaching, CALT, can give guidance).
* Encourage lecturers to give brief oral feedback to the group in a lecture or seminar on strengths and common errors and supplement with generic group feedback in writing via Moodle or email; this can be done after skimming around 20 assignments.
* Involve students in giving feedback through formative peer review (see Richard Milne’s work <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/case-studies-news/assessment-feedback/peer-review-of-virology-essays> ).
* Develop a database of feedback comments to assist quicker and more consistent marking (see **Daven Armoogum’s work**  <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/case-studies-news/assessment-feedback/daven-armoogum-feedback-assessment-innovation> ).

### Principles 9 and 10 Formative Assessment and Feedback and Self-reflection and Peer Learning

* Too much summative assessment burdens staff and students. Using Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment, TESTA ([www.testa.ac.uk](http://www.testa.ac.uk) ), will help identify and address over-assessment. For help with TESTA, contact CALT.
* More formative tasks, which do not contribute to final marks, enhance learning. Students can help design formative tasks, self-assess and review their peers’ work. These activities help develop assessment literacy. When students are clear about assessment standards and expectations they are better able to assess their peers’ and their own work and advise on ways of improving (see Richard Milne’s work <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/case-studies-news/assessment-feedback/peer-review-of-virology-essays> ).

**For help with using the NUS Assessment and Feedback Benchmarking Tool or to discuss changes to assessment and feedback, contact the Centre for Advancing Learning and Teaching (CALT)** [**http://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/support/CALT**](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/support/CALT)