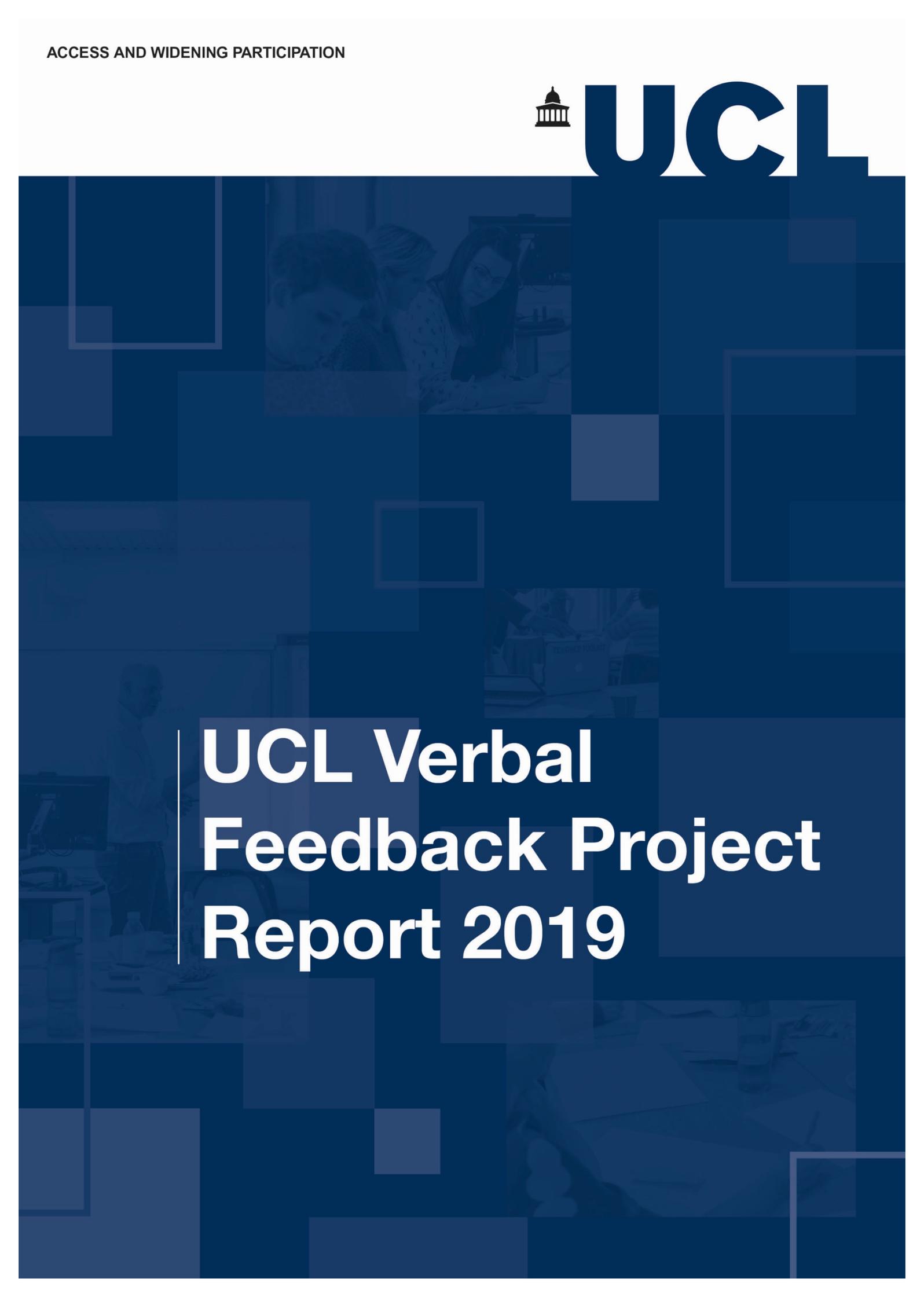




**UCL**

The background of the cover is a dark blue collage of various photographs showing students in different settings: some are looking at laptops, others are in discussion, and some are in a library or study area. The photos are semi-transparent and arranged in a grid-like pattern.

**UCL Verbal  
Feedback Project  
Report 2019**

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# Verbal Feedback Project Foreword: UCL Access and Widening Participation Office

UCL has one of the largest Widening Participation teams in the country, working with prospective students, parents and education professionals. Our work is ambitious in scope and evidence-informed to ensure that activity, policy and practice can effectively support students from economically disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds into and through higher education.

Engaging in research and supporting sector-wide initiatives is crucial in helping us deploy our funding and support effectively, enabling us to contribute to the national picture around university access and student participation. As one of the world's leading research institutions we are committed to sharing our knowledge, expertise and resources with our colleagues in schools, identifying effective practice and how it can help to close the attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their peers.

At UCL we recognise the wide range of barriers to accessing Higher Education, and have begun to explore how we can approach these barriers through action-research programmes, like the Verbal Feedback project. This strand of our activity focuses not only on generating evidence but also on sharing key recommendations for teachers and school leaders, and creating resources to support classroom activities. Our collaboration with the UCL London Centre for Leadership in Learning and Ross McGill from @Teacher Toolkit exemplifies this approach, offering teachers the opportunity to learn more about the research and development process and also develop expertise in terms of verbal feedback techniques.

The Verbal Feedback project has worked with 13 teachers from 8 schools across England, specifically focusing on the impact of verbal feedback on disadvantaged students at Key Stage 3. This evaluation and the accompanying Toolkit outline the interventions used and highlight what we believe to be the key impacts on both teachers and their students.

UCL gratefully acknowledges the commitment of the teachers involved in the project from the following schools:

- Batley Girls High School, West Yorkshire
- London Nautical School, Lambeth
- Oakgrove School, Milton Keynes
- Ranelagh School, Berkshire
- Reigate School, Surrey
- Trinity Catholic School, Warwickshire
- Westminster City School, London
- 

We hope that you find this report, and the accompanying Verbal Feedback Toolkit useful in planning teaching and learning activities in your school, for further information about UCL's Teacher and Professional Engagement work, or our Widening Participation activities for students please visit

[www.ucl.ac.uk/wp](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/wp)

**UCL Access and Widening Participation Office  
August 2019**

# Rationale for the Project – Ross McGill

In my opinion, the perception that ‘written feedback is king’ and that it is a mark of hard work is something that needs to be questioned and put to bed.

For many years, schools have worked hard to construct checklists for observations and work scrutiny in their bid to evaluate consistency and standards, often missing the mark – particularly in large schools and colleges where students experience of teaching, learning and assessment is delivered in a wide variety of formats.

In 2016 The Education Endowment Foundation published a major report, ‘A Marked Improvement?’ (Elliott et al, 2016), reviewing the evidence on written marking. It found that the typical teacher spends nine hours marking pupils’ work each week, but there is little evidence to show which strategies will have a positive effect on their pupils’ progress and which will not. More recently, research conducted by TeacherTapp suggested that 54% of teachers spend over three hours and up to eight hours marking outside the classroom per week.

Whilst travelling across the UK, my own polling of teachers has confirmed a ‘marking burden’ time and time again, in a wide variety of settings. Given this context, perhaps speaking to students using high quality and actionable feedback, may also reduce the marking burden for teachers and increase student outcomes. Katie Kerr’s research shows that, ‘students perceived verbal feedback as a form of focused conversation, different to normal classroom dialogue, identifiable by signals such as personal and task goals’ (Kerr, 2017).

Evidencing verbal feedback is difficult for Ofsted and senior leaders to do; we know this because a sophisticated conversation in class with students cannot be captured at the point of a work scrutiny or a school inspection – much of it is achieved without the observer present. Students may or may not act on feedback given in class, but it will not be evident to external scrutiny the moment after it happens. Of course, there are possibilities: students making progress and evidence of knowledge and skills being developed in class, but only when it is observed. This does not address the issue of whether verbal or written feedback is better, particularly when we want to address challenges around teacher workload and how far students are responding to teacher instruction.

In 2016/17, I started to conduct action research in my own school, evaluating feedback in a wide variety of subjects with 110 teachers; part of this process involved critiquing current processes, road testing new templates with colleagues and then analysing the results in a bid to evaluate any reliable and valid information. Time and time again, whatever process or person was used, the system kept on forcing teachers to align, rather than the system meeting the needs of teachers. I grew increasingly frustrated and took to social media with the idea of sharing my action research on Twitter via the @TeacherToolkit website, which at the time had over 180,000 followers.

From May 2017, I asked for a number of schools to conduct action research in their classrooms to alleviate teacher workload and raise the profile of verbal feedback. This original study aimed to publish a clear framework and common vernacular for teachers and schools to use, as well as publish data from schools participating in the pilot, with a view to:

- dramatically reduce the quantity of written feedback and instead, provide instant verbal feedback in lessons
- develop an ethos in which teachers can focus on the learning of the pupils
- create an environment where teachers can spend their working time dedicated to developing technological feedback strategies
- foster targeted talk about knowledge and skills
- encourage pupils to think about where they’re going, how well they are getting on and what’s next.

In November 2017 when I launched the original Verbal Feedback Project, 119 schools in six countries signed up with a potential impact on 99,500 students. I had every intention of coordinating participants, samples and documents, publishing the findings and also sharing the results with Ofsted and the Department for Education in England.

Within three months I soon realised I had bitten off more than I could chew, exposing my research methods and the wide data-collection which made it impossible to conduct any reliable research. However, I was committed to seeing this through and was delighted when the UCL Access and Widening Participation Office expressed a formal interest in the project and suggested taking it forward in partnership with Mark Quinn at the UCL London Centre for Leadership in Learning, with a specific focus on improving outcomes for students from backgrounds under-represented in higher education.

This report and the accompanying Toolkit for teachers will explore in more detail some of the verbal feedback strategies used on the project, and offer practical advice for teachers and senior leaders seeking to develop their current practice or re-design feedback policies.

**Ross McGill**  
**July 2019**

# Verbal Feedback Project Report – Mark Quinn

## Introduction

On behalf of the UCL London Centre for Leadership in Learning (LCLL), I led the ‘Research and Development’ (R&D) element of the Verbal Feedback project. This comprised four face-to-face sessions between January and July 2019. The R&D sessions ran alongside the CPD programme, which was led by Ross McGill. All teachers on the programme were expected to attend every taught session and to commit to applying verbal feedback principles to their selected teaching groups throughout the duration. They were obliged to collect evidence of change in their own practice and in outcomes for their students, to maintain a reflective journal, and to submit this and a poster to the report author. The reflective journals and poster are the main sources of evidence for this report.

The programme was funded by the UCL Access and Widening Participation Office and was therefore free to those schools who applied successfully. Schools were selected using analytics available to UCL Access and Widening Participation to determine those schools likely to be serving disadvantaged students.

Two teachers were admitted on to the programme from each of the participating schools:

- Reigate School, Reigate, Surrey
- Oakgrove School, Milton Keynes
- The London Nautical School, London
- Trinity Catholic School, Warwickshire
- Ranelagh School, Bracknell, Berkshire
- Westminster City School, London
- Batley Girls High School, Batley, West Yorkshire.

One teacher left the programme after the first R&D session. The remaining 13 teachers completed the full programme and submitted their findings for this report.

Participants on LCLL programmes are encouraged to focus on questions which are meaningful to their contexts and which are likely to make a difference to their leadership or pedagogical practice, and, through that, a difference in outcomes for their learners. They are encouraged to seek out relevant research literature and also to develop tools to help them collect and understand the evidence that arises in their classrooms. They do this as systematically as they can, mindful of the busy jobs they already do. R&D programmes with LCLL aim to enhance the criticality of teachers in relation to research and evidence, and to build the capacity for evidence-informed leadership in their schools.

## Summary of Findings

The participating teachers summarised their findings as ‘headline claims’ on their posters; they supported these claims in their reflective journals with some detailed analyses of the evidence they collected.

Through applying a range of verbal feedback methods, *by comparison with a predominantly written feedback approach*, they had the following effects:

Impact	As seen by	Number of teachers (out of 13)
No detrimental effect on disadvantaged or other students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attainment</li> <li>- Progress</li> <li>- Engagement</li> </ul>	7
Improved engagement of disadvantaged students (for some or all)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improved attendance</li> <li>- Asking and answering questions</li> <li>- Class conversations</li> <li>- Written responses</li> <li>- Quality of written and oral responses</li> <li>- Teacher-student and student-student relations</li> </ul>	10
Improved progress of disadvantaged students (for some or all)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improved understanding of themselves as learners</li> <li>- Improvement of grades against benchmarks</li> <li>- Overall attainment and progress</li> </ul>	7
Gains for teacher wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reduction to workload outside lessons</li> <li>- Time savings</li> <li>- Capacity to plan better lessons</li> </ul>	4

Verbal feedback, when accompanied by a reduction or removal of written forms of feedback, does not negatively affect either the engagement or attainment of students. This is true for disadvantaged students and all students. Furthermore, in most cases, clear improvements in the engagement of disadvantaged students were seen, and this was accompanied in a large number of examples by gains in progress or attainment. Impacts on teacher wellbeing was a supplementary focus of enquiry for some and, in these cases, gains were found there also. In every case, time saved on marking outside the lesson was ‘reinvested’ in lesson planning to better suit the range of needs of students.

Verbal feedback is not a single intervention; it is better defined as a complex series of refinements to practice. Very many of the participating teachers reflected on the challenges of ‘unlearning’ their usual approaches and implementing verbal forms of feedback which were novel to them. For that reason teachers, departments and schools that are inclined to move over to verbal feedback ought first to consider the professional development implications of such a move.

# R&D Programme Content

## Research parameters

Through the Verbal Feedback R&D programme, the UCL Access and Widening Participation Office were looking to find out whether the verbal feedback approach had an impact on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. By outcomes, they were looking at factors which may contribute to the likelihood of progression to higher education. These may include improved attainment, attendance and wellbeing. The central question was shaped by these research parameters and was devised and agreed by the participating teachers collectively during their first R&D session.

The UCL Access and Widening Participation Office shared their definition of 'disadvantaged students' as: pupils from groups that are under-represented in higher education, those from lower income and lower socio-economic backgrounds, Black African and Caribbean pupils, disabled pupils, care-experienced pupils, young carers, pupils from Gypsy, Roma or Traveller backgrounds, refugees or forced migrants, pupils with specific learning difficulties and mental health problems.'

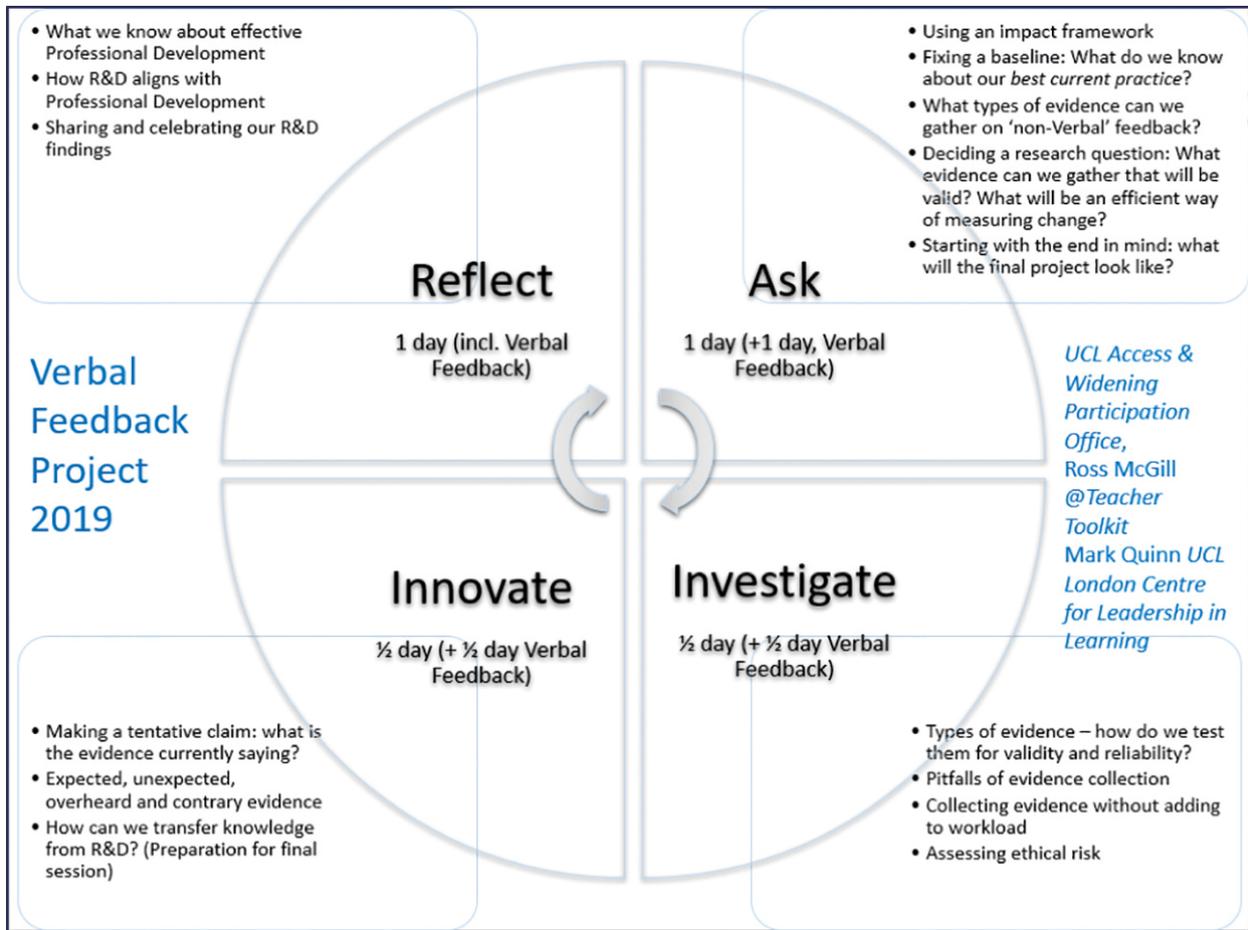
Within the confines of the central research question, the participating teachers were free to select their favoured approaches to verbal feedback, to determine the specific outcomes they would seek evidence for, and to focus on the sub-groups of disadvantaged students most pertinent to their own school contexts. They could also decide upon their own evidence-collection methods. These 'freedoms' were agreed within the protocols of the programme. The participants were, first and foremost, teachers rather than researchers: their primary duty remained to their students. Although their head teachers had agreed their involvement and understood that it would entail innovations likely to diverge from the schools' assessment and feedback policies, the teachers remained subject to these policies. In some cases, the teachers held positions of responsibility meaning that they were obliged to oversee implementation of assessment practices contrary to those recommended in the programme.

The participating schools had differing histories, social and economic demographics and Ofsted ratings; the teachers themselves occupied different roles, taught different subjects and had varying degrees of classroom experience; some teachers and schools had experimented more than others with novel feedback practices. Most importantly it was understood that at all times the teachers themselves had to determine the extent to which they would innovate their practice, making their own judgements about what was best for their students: they would implement only those aspects of verbal feedback that they felt comfortable with.

Therefore, designed into the programme was the understanding that implementation of verbal feedback was peculiar to each participating teacher. These peculiarities were explicitly expressed within each reflective journal. The aim of this report is to identify what common approaches to verbal feedback led to positive outcomes for disadvantaged students.

# The Structured Research and Development Programme

The LCLL's Ask – Investigate – Innovate – Reflect cycle guides participants so that they can generate meaningful research questions, decide appropriate methods of evidence-collection, implement and track the effects of an innovation, then reflect upon and share the learning from the process.



## Baseline Practice

In order to evaluate the differences, if any, made to students' outcomes and the extent to which this could be said to be down to verbal feedback, we attempted to collect data about the teachers' practice before the start of the programme. Below are the instructions they received in a pre-programme pack:

We want to know what *changes* when teachers do less written feedback and talk more to their students about their work. The sessions with Ross will equip you with the skills to adopt verbal feedback strategies in your classes. Mark will share and develop tools with you to gather evidence of change – changes in your practice and workload, and changes in your students' learning and attitudes. To appreciate change we need to know where we started: we call this the 'baseline'. We want to be able to compare Verbal feedback with *the best of your current practice*.

From the time you are accepted on to the project until the date of the first session in January, we need you to gather baseline data.

### **What you do**

You will already be giving verbal feedback some of the time. Try to estimate: How much of the time? Do you do it with some classes, or some students, more than others?

Your school will have policies on marking and feedback – perhaps the style of it, or the frequency of it – and will probably conduct internal reviews to monitor teachers' compliance with the policies. Perhaps you have personally received feedback on the quality of your feedback?

### **The effects it has**

Do your school's internal reviews – learning walks, book looks, formal or informal observations – shed any light on the impact current marking and feedback practices have on your students? Are your students expected to respond to feedback? Do they do it? Do some do it better than others?

Thinking about what you do now, would you say that it gives you important information to inform your teaching? Do you feel that some feedback approaches are better for this than others, or do some approaches work better for some students? How much time – and energy – do you typically spend on marking? Is this time and energy well spent – what are you *not* doing, because you *are* marking?

### **How you know**

Look first at the data that you or your school already collect. This data might relate to progress, or it might be for behaviour, attendance, effort, etc. Other evidence might be incidental, such as letters from parents or comments from students.

In your first session with Mark you will be given time to write your baseline statement. You can draft it beforehand if you wish. Try to be precise: keep narrative to a minimum.

The teachers created their baseline statements during the first R & D session using this template:

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## Baseline statement

What you do

Your current best practice


---

- What range of feedback approaches do you use?
- How much time you spend on each?

The effects this has

On your students... on you...


---

- Are your students responding to feedback? Are they progressing?
- Is it informing your teaching? Are there 'opportunity costs'?

How you know

What evidence is telling you


---

- Quantitative – numerical data
- Qualitative – affective data

## Generating and Refining a Collective Research Question

As noted above, all participating teachers operated within the research parameters in determining their particular desired outcomes and target students. They worked collaboratively in the first session to generate a single research question. This was:

*To what extent does Verbal Feedback implemented over two terms improve engagement among disadvantaged students in Years 7 and 8?*

They undertook an exercise in groups to vision what might be the 'expected impacts' of verbal feedback, if engagement were to be improved; and what might be the symptoms of these changed behaviours in their classrooms. An explanation of any acronyms used can be found in the glossary.

Impact on...	As seen by...
Responding to feedback	Less repetition of instruction
Confidence	Answering more questions in tests Feeling safe Leading their learning Sharing their ideas

	Empathy
Being more independent	Fewer hands up Less asking 'what do I do now?' Less spoon-feeding Asking higher level questions Supporting each other
Self-regulation	Curiosity: asking questions to further understanding Talking to each other about the work Looking for their own answers C3B4Me - more resilient Doing extra work, and sharing it Being confident about what they need to do Risk-taking Feeling safe Contributing responses/having discussions not worried by accuracy
'Engagement'	'Where did that hour go?'  Keen to respond in class 'Is that the end of the lesson?' Responding to genuine praise Students actively questioning
Listening	Listening to each other, not repeating Building on peer responses
Academic progress	Using academic language in class talk Accepting challenge Greater depth in written work Asking questions about the subject Completing homework Completing written work  Responding to Verbal Feedback Do they pick my subject for GCSE?
Feeling happy and proud	'I'm good at this' Positive body language Participating in group work Improved attendance Arriving punctually Enthusiastic to learn

Legible handwriting  
Using a pen  
Presentation  
Eye contact with teacher  
Decreasing low level misbehaviour

The group then agreed that they would require a tighter definition of 'engagement'. In the second R&D session they decided that this could be:

*'Engagement is: the written, verbal and non-verbal responses that demonstrate active involvement in their learning'.*

They said that engagement may also be seen in 'the desire to be involved in the learning process; confidence; participation and active involvement.'

In short, 'engagement' was a shorthand for those desirable qualities, often difficult to quantify, but which are nonetheless deemed essential if students are to be ready to learn.

## Collecting evidence systematically and sustainably

In the first and second R&D sessions the teachers considered evidence in relation to bias, validity and sufficiency. They understood that, where they collected evidence in other teachers' classrooms, it would be made clear that this was for research not accountability purposes.

They undertook a thought experiment into their own unconscious biases, as per the following:  
Potential biases

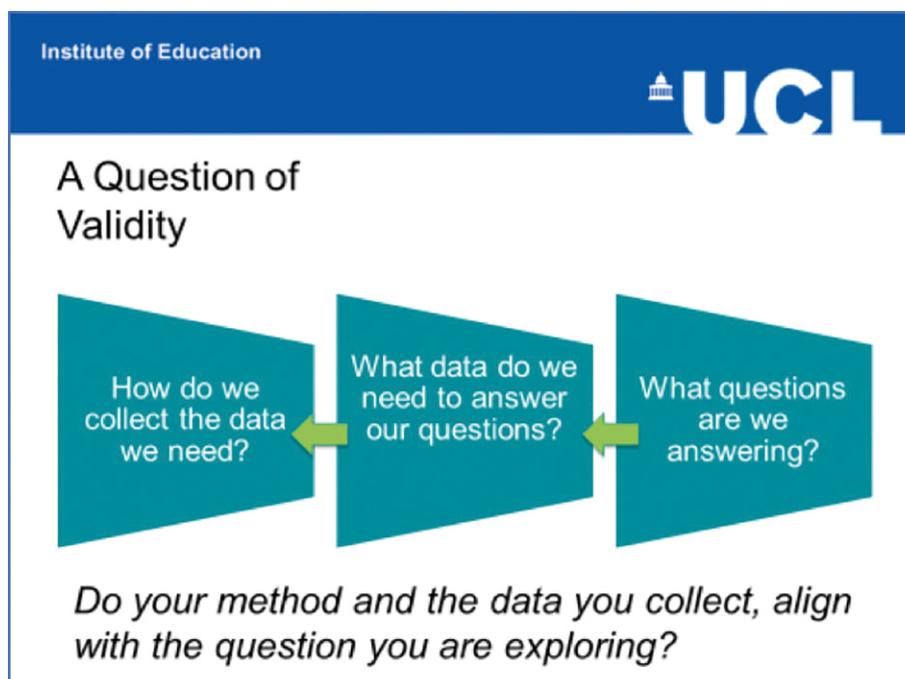
*I believe that Verbal Feedback works  
I am part of a research project with Ross McGill and UCL  
I have put a lot of effort into this and told all my colleagues about it  
My instinct tells me that Verbal Feedback is better than all that marking*

They then agreed these possible mitigations:

- Deliberately seeking counter-evidence
- Appointing someone to be devil's advocate
- Asking, 'What would a neutral expert observer say about this?'
- Asking, 'How sure am I that I am seeing what I think I am?'

The overriding mitigation was an undertaking to honestly report on the outcomes of their enquiries, even when those outcomes might only reveal small positive change, no change, or change for the worse.

They engaged in an activity to help them understand when data collection is, and is not, valid.



The teachers began 'at the end', asking what questions (the central research- and any sub-questions) they wanted answers to. They then considered what data would be required in order to answer those questions. Finally, they were invited to decide what methods would be feasible and appropriate for collecting that data.

The decision had been made pre-programme to direct the research at students in Years 7 and 8. It was considered less likely that teachers, and their head teachers, would wish to risk innovations to their feedback practice with older students. Some teachers in the group chose to apply the verbal feedback strategies to all of their students, some to all of their Year 7 and 8 classes, and some to a smaller selection of classes within Key Stage 3. This choice was left to them. They could also decide for themselves the quantity of data they collected and the methods of data collection. In the second R&D session they did some critical analysis of a variety of methods, including student questionnaires, structured and semi-structured interviews, analysis of progress and attainment data, sampling students' work and observing teaching and learning.

## An Ethical Risk Assessment

The students in the focus classes were not research subjects in the traditional sense; this was primarily a professional development programme in which the teachers systematically collected data relevant to the issue (engagement arising from verbal feedback) they were interested in. Consequently, there was no established process for informing the students or their parents that their teachers were conducting these enquiries. However, they were asked, in the second R&D session, to undertake an 'ethical risk assessment'. They were to consider any hazards arising from the project as they related to students, themselves and their colleagues, and their schools more generally. They then undertook a standard severity – likelihood – mitigation assessment.

The potential hazards they identified could be categorised thus:

Risks to students: verbal feedback may have a negative or no impact on the disadvantaged students; it may undermine students' self-esteem or do them psychological harm by singling them out; they may neglect the non-disadvantaged students; Pygmalion Effect, whereby the students' performance may be inadvertently affected due to their being targeted.

Risks to their own status: the project may conflict with other approaches in the school; there may be conflicts with external agencies; threats to their professional credibility; there may be complaints from students or parents; they may become overburdened and not have time to complete the project, or forget to collect data at the important points; bias may creep into their enquiry.

They perceived other potential risks concerning safeguarding and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

## Understanding Active Ingredients. Or, what is Verbal Feedback?

As explained above, the participating teachers were free to explore for themselves the verbal feedback approaches shared with them during the CPD sessions: different approaches would better suit different teaching styles and school contexts. However, as verbal feedback could mean different things to different people, it was important for the teachers to clarify as precisely as they could what it was they were doing. They were tasked with identifying the active ingredients in their new approaches to giving feedback.

Active ingredients of Verbal Feedback: What is your *definition* of Verbal Feedback? (refer back to your notes with Ross)  
What are the elements of Verbal Feedback which are now most prevalent in your own practice?  
What aspects of your teaching from before are you now not doing, or doing much less of?

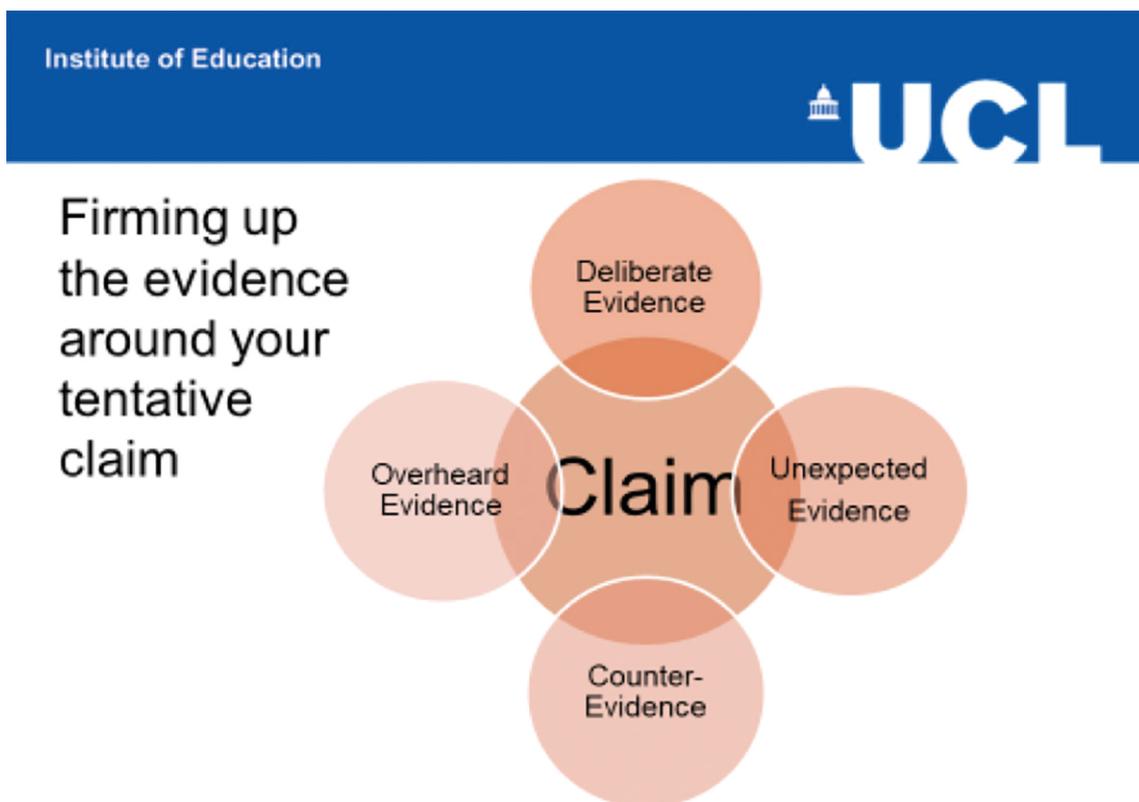
A more detailed summary follows below. A few quotations from their responses will give some idea about how they understood verbal feedback in their own classrooms:

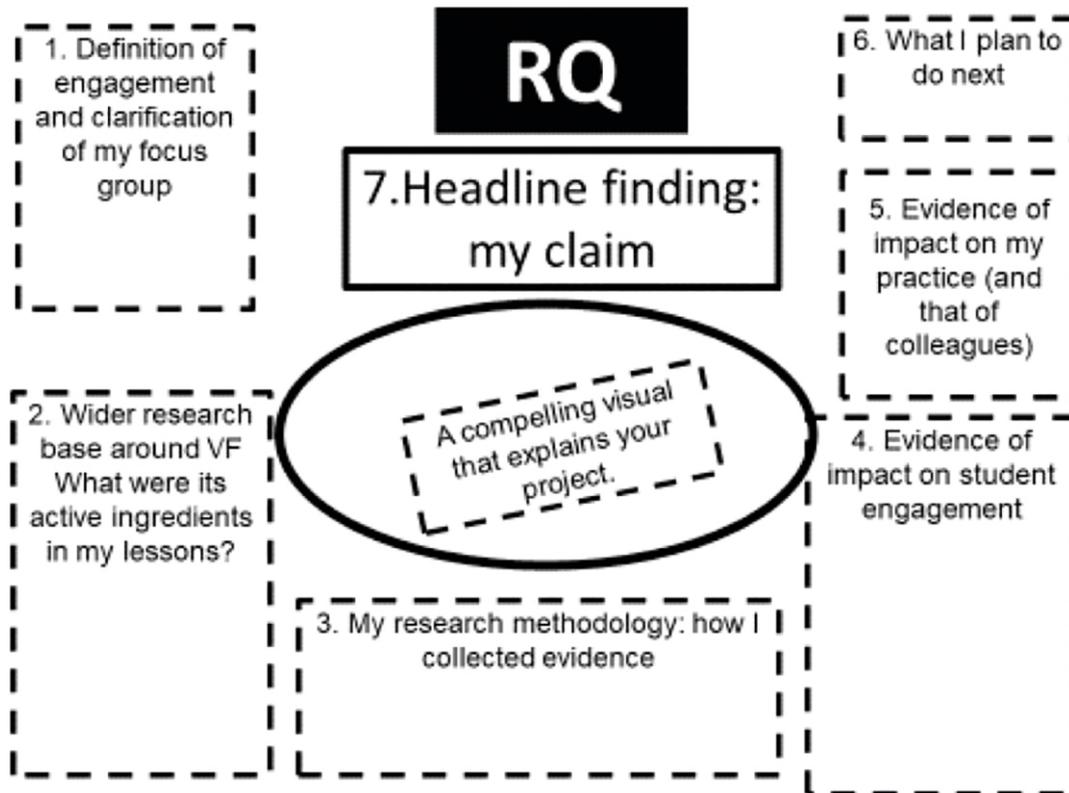
- 'Any interaction with the students which causes thinking on their part'
- 'It's providing "in the moment" and "instant" feedback on individual work'
- 'It can also involve unspoken cues such as body language, routines and the climate in the classroom'

- 'I am circulating more and discussing work that students have already completed and what they will do next'
- '...the active engagement with your students in the lesson, in which students have the opportunity to further question, and teachers have the chance to push for further development'
- 'Looking in books but not marking, and picking out misconceptions. Using this as a starter for the next lesson to verbally correct the whole class'
- 'Individualised conversations with more praise'
- 'I'm amending lessons so the students have more opportunity to discuss with one another and also make myself build activities so I can give verbal feedback on written answers within the lessons'
- 'I don't write 'what went well' and 'even better if' comments in their books'
- 'I'm not writing feedback but I am creating resources to help students self-assess'

## Marshalling evidence in support of claims

The teachers on the programme were not seasoned researchers and few of them had had experience of systematic practitioner enquiry. During the third and fourth R&D sessions we explored tools designed to help them make explicit their emergent findings.





With the first, the teachers were asked to make an interim, tentative claim: this was the boldest statement of impact that they believed their evidence could support. 'Deliberate Evidence' was the data which they had collected systematically: it was likely to be their strongest, most reliable data. 'Overheard Evidence' described those scraps of data that a teacher-researcher, embedded in their classroom and staffroom, may be privileged to witness: the comments that colleagues let slip, the smile from a student who never smiles. Verbal feedback (and, with it, the conscious reduction or elimination of written feedback) may have outcomes far beyond engagement for disadvantaged students, and the teachers were asked to consider these as 'Unexpected Evidence'. Finally, 'Counter-Evidence' was the catch-all for data that may have disproved their hypothesis, for example if they found evidence of verbal feedback doing harm to the progress of disadvantaged or other students.

The second tool was the poster template. All participants had to use this as the principal, structured capture of their innovation and its outcomes. In the final session, they used this template both to share insights with each other and to offer constructive challenge.

## Research Methods

The central research question was ‘To what extent does Verbal Feedback implemented over two terms improve engagement among disadvantaged students in Years 7 and 8?’

Disadvantage was defined as ‘pupils from groups that are under-represented in higher education, those from lower income and lower socio-economic backgrounds, Black African and Caribbean pupils, disabled pupils, care-experienced pupils, young carers, pupils from Gypsy, Roma or Traveller backgrounds, refugees or forced migrants, pupils with specific learning difficulties and mental health problems.’

Engagement was defined as ‘the written, verbal and non-verbal responses that demonstrate active involvement in their learning’.

The two terms during which verbal feedback was implemented were the Spring and Summer terms of 2019.

### Verbal Feedback Approaches

One participating teacher defined verbal feedback in this way:

*Verbal feedback involves teachers engaging and interacting more with their students on both a one-to-one and whole-class level. It allows teachers to give and students to receive immediate feedback that is meaningful. It allows teachers to identify, quickly, common misconceptions either by circulating or through the one-to-one conversations had. These misconceptions can then be addressed as a class so that all students can continue making progress.*

As explained above, the participating teachers were free to use whichever forms of verbal feedback they wished, consistent with their professional judgements of the requirements of their subjects and needs of their students. So that others may learn from their experiences, they were asked to make explicit the ‘active ingredients’ in their new approaches to feedback. This would include all of the new practices they had introduced, as well as those parts of their previous practice that they had dropped or reduced.

The table here summarises those practices to which the teachers made specific reference in their posters. A short glossary of the terms of verbal feedback techniques and abbreviations can be found at the end of this report.

Verbal Feedback Approach	Number of mentions
Questioning techniques. (Included cold-calling; Pose, pause, pounce, bounce; ABC; no hands.)	7
Live marking ‘in the moment’ (including 4 using a visualiser)	8
Verbal Feedback while circulating the room. Increased 1:1 interaction	7
Modelling of student or ideal responses (including 5 using a visualiser)	6
Whole class feedback (often using a template)	5
Peer- and/ or self-assessment	3
Use of praise, measures to boost esteem and positive behaviour	7
Reduction in written feedback (eg Zonal marking; dots, ticks, symbols; activities based on discussion not writing; self-assessment aids; written feedback for assessments only)	8
Three were already giving no written feedback on classwork or homework	

The author analysed the teachers' reflective journals for comments about how their practice, in regard to verbal feedback, evolved over the course of the programme. They shed light upon the many challenges they faced, often to do with acclimatising their students to the new approaches.

## Early stages

In the early phase of the programme, several teachers were already trying out a variety of verbal feedback strategies.

Michelle in February: 'The use of pose, pause, pounce, bounce gave a great pace and opportunities for all to contribute. It also drew out correct vocabulary and clear responses. I could use mini whiteboards to gain even greater understanding of the whole class.'

Later the same month she described a group activity on fraction problem solving. 'Learning Objective was to represent maths in a variety of ways and work as a team. Groups chosen by students but I ensured the Pupil Premium students were mixed up. I encouraged students to use diagrams to support answers and circulated so that I could pay close attention to their explanations and their understanding as a whole group.' She then questions herself: 'Did I facilitate or did I give too many prompts? I had to intervene to ensure that all members of the group contributed and understood.' But she concludes, 'I was able to give feedback to every student and saw independent use of diagrams by the end of it. Questions were then live marked using the visualiser and I chose one student's book to model the answers.'

Nadia in February: '[I] persevered with pose, pause, pounce, bounce and it is getting better.' Later in the month she said: '[I] managed to get round most pupils giving them Verbal Feedback on their posters and giving explicit information on misconceptions and ways to improve by using zonal marking. Managed to motivate by giving stamps and verbally developing confidence.'

Sarah L had not been giving written feedback for about a year before the start of this enquiry, and was therefore confident in adopting a range of strategies early on. In January she noted in her reflective journal: 'Verbal feedback given after my mixed ability year 8 geography class had had their end of topic test returned to them. Codes only were written next to their longer answers and a verbal feedback sheet explaining each code was displayed on the board... I went through each code, explaining them. Students wrote out the comments that applied to them on their work. Model answers and the mark scheme were shown and discussed. DIRT was spent improving their answers.'

Lisa was one teacher who early on expressed self-doubt about the effective use of verbal feedback: 'I have sometimes felt I wanted to write a positive comment about their work in their books in case I forget to tell them verbally or don't end up having time in class to let them know.'

## Mid-phase

In the mid-phase of the programme, all of the teachers were applying their verbal feedback approaches but several were also noting barriers. These included lack of practice with using the techniques, resistance from some of their students, and their own confidence that they were doing the right thing in not giving so much written feedback to their students.

Cat said in April: 'Students were given books back after a piece of work had been marked by me with targets to do to improve. Lots of hands went up – students needed support reading feedback and having it explained to them... As a lesson it is very busy for me: having to answer questions and walk around to help individuals...'

Amy wrote in May: '[I] used cold calling today as it was an introductory lesson about the history of the local area... Found it difficult to keep track of who I had and hadn't asked questions of in a large class. It was useful to give them time to consider the question first as then lots of them could answer with something rather than panicking under the pressure.'

Deborah was worried in March that she 'could only maintain the pose, pause, pounce, bounce during the starter as this is a technique that is new and is not yet embedding into every day practice.'

Later she added: '[I] need to find a way to deal with how feedback is going to be given to pupils who are absent for the feedback lesson. This is hindering student progress significantly and is proving to be a real weakness of the whole-class feedback strategy.' 'There are 8 target pupils in the class. I need to be more consistent in applying the focus techniques equally to all focus students. This is proving to be difficult, as is the monitoring of the impact on the individual target pupils.'

Anonymous reported in April the observations of some of her colleagues: 'Other teachers in my department have indicated that certain students are missing written feedback, but this seems to be mostly the highest attaining students who want more validation for their hard work and evidence that their work is successful, whereas students who need to improve more have not seemed to miss the written comments. One of my colleagues has found it very difficult to stop writing comments entirely as she feels she is not doing her job properly unless she is writing in students' books, and like me has found it almost impossible to make time during the lesson for students to write in their sketchbooks and ensure that all students have done so.'

Jenni, in March, also had concerns: 'I gave verbal feedback on a homework task... I like the idea of this as it's personal but I'm not too sure how this would work with a bigger class of 30... Also I think some students won't remember our discussions, so not having anything written down may not have been that effective.'

However, by April, she was noting a marked difference in her workload: 'I marked the groups' assessments this week. Instead of taking 2.5 hours, as my other group did... it only took me about an hour to mark them. I wrote barely anything on the tests – only when I thought it was absolutely necessary, and even then it was only basic. Instead I wrote out a list of targets for each question which we then spent about 15 minutes of the following lesson looking through.'

Nadia also noticed that she was saving time on feedback, and that she was putting the saved time to better use: 'Managing to devise better lessons appropriate to their ability (amending department's Scheme of Work) as the time I would normally spend marking books is spent planning lessons. This desperately needed to be done as a lot of the content was not accessible to the pupils due to learning difficulties.'

In this mid-phase, several of the teachers were noting encouraging changes to the engagement of their focus groups of disadvantaged students. Natasha – whose main verbal feedback approaches at this time were displaying success criteria for expected learning behaviour, heavy use of targeted praise, and one-to-one time with students to counter misconceptions – collected careful notes on the responses of her focus students:

Student 1 participated willingly for the first time since January this lesson. She received a Confidence merit and was really pleased. She also liked the verbal praise given.

Student 2 corrected her work for the first time since January and knew that the reason she was awarded a 'G' was due to her lack of participation. She too was pleased with the merit she was awarded and the praise she was given.

Students 4 and 5 both responded positively to their "post-its" and acted on verbal feedback, writing sentences they found tricky last lesson, using the differentiated support to help them.

Students 6 and 7 participated really well all lesson and were keen to "please".

Rebecca noted similar responses from her focus group of disadvantaged students in April and May. She trialled the use of marking codes as a method to develop their engagement with key components of extended writing structure. She deployed a feedback grid, adapted from her A Level teaching. She put 2–3 codes on each student's work based on their response to the essay question.

#### Marking Grid for piracy assessment

Use these codes to understand the feedback you have been given by your teacher. These may be used throughout the essay or as an overall improvement you need to respond to. All codes must be acknowledged using green pen.

<p><b>A</b> = you have not clearly described the location of piracy in your opening paragraph, adding detail by using geographic terminology.</p> <p><u>Action:</u> redraft and add detail to your description, being specific and accurate with your location. You may need to redraft the whole paragraph.</p>	<p><b>B</b> = you haven't clearly explained how your pointlinks to your overall argument (e.g. supports one side or the other)</p> <p><u>Action:</u> redraft and add new explanation to the paragraph. You may need to redraft the whole paragraph.</p>	<p><b>C</b> = inaccurate use of terminology and concepts (e.g. used in the wrong context or wrongly explained).</p> <p><u>Action:</u> correct the mistakes wherever the letter 'C' has been written</p>	<p><b>D</b> = poor choice and unspecific use of examples (e.g. it does not support the point your trying to make or overall argument)</p> <p><u>Action:</u> correct the mistakes wherever the letter 'D' has been written and add new evidence where necessary</p>
<p><b>E</b> = you haven't counter-argues your main argument(s).</p> <p><u>Action:</u> go back through your essay and add counter-arguments at the end of paragraphs or after a key section of explanation/evidence.</p>	<p><b>F</b> = you haven't completed a final conclusion.</p> <p><u>Action:</u> add a final conclusion that clearly makes a judgement and suggests what would happen to piracy in the future.</p>	<p><b>G</b> = your argument is unbalanced and you've considered one side more than the other.</p> <p><u>Action:</u> write a new paragraph or extend your other side of the argument in existing paragraph.</p>	<p><b>H</b> = more specific evidence from examples is needed to support explanation.</p> <p><u>Action:</u> go back through essay and add specific evidence where necessary.</p>
<p><b>I</b> = you have not explained why piracy has grown in the area.</p> <p><u>Action:</u> redraft and add explanation to your paragraph giving more than one well-explained reason why piracy has grown. You may need to redraft the whole paragraph.</p>	<p><b>J</b> = you have not clearly categorised the impacts into SEEP.</p> <p><u>Action:</u> where you have described impacts, make sure you have categorised it into social, economic or environmental – add this in.</p>	<p><b>K</b> = you haven't made clear judgements throughout to assess.</p> <p><u>Action:</u> where you see the letter 'K' write an assessing/judgement comment considering the significance (importance) of the impacts you have described.</p>	<p><b>L</b> = you have not offered management solutions.</p> <p><u>Action:</u> redraft and add detail to your paragraph, making sure you give management solutions and justify why it's hard to manage.</p>
<p><b>M</b> = you have not provided a wide range of impacts.</p> <p><u>Action:</u> redraft/add a new paragraph which describes a new impact of piracy that you have not already considered. Use the PEEL paragraph structure to help.</p>		<p><b>N</b> = you have not written a clear conclusion/your conclusion doesn't have a clear judgement.</p> <p><u>Action:</u> write/redraft a conclusion and improve it to ensure you are not just summarising the assessment question. You need to have a clear overall point and remarks on significance.</p>	

Literacy codes: spelling = sp      punctuation=P      grammar = GR      capital letter = CL      rephrase= RP      // = new paragraph

How did her students respond?

"I think this is much more detailed"

"Yeah Miss I really like this"

"I know what you want me to work on"

"I do understand the letters"

"How many do I need to complete as I did this one but properly in detail – is this okay?"

By May, Rebecca and her colleague Jennie could say: 'We have both found that the time we are spending marking has reduced and provided more opportunities to develop our lessons. This is really effective for stretching our students because we can build on previous lessons and rectify any issues with their knowledge and skills much more quickly than if we were waiting to mark books to find this out.'

## Towards the end

In the period June to July, all the teachers were confidently applying their repertoire of verbal feedback strategies. They noted improvements in their focus students' engagement, although some added the caveat that these behaviours were also subject to other factors such as changes to conditions at home and whether or not the students connected well with the content of the lesson.

Michelle reported on her focus students in June: 'What was really interesting today was that the students who offered the most contributions to the discussions were some of the Pupil Premium students. And amongst students who weren't as engaged were two girls who had recently moved to my class. Such was the level of contribution and expert language used, that I gave the Pupil Premium students achievement points and praised them after class. I also took books in and made the following observations:

50% of the Pupil Premium students now regularly make useful comments alongside their work that will help progress their learning.

50% of the Pupil Premium students do not make corrections following whole class live feedback.

100% of the Pupil Premium students correct their work following 1:1 feedback.'

In July, in Rebecca's end of year assessment, she tried a more 'verbal approach' including general observations from whole-class efforts. Students were then guided through their exams and, using green pens, were able to develop and improve their responses based on the feedback given. By targeting the whole class and getting them to move through the exam together, it gave her more time to walk round the room and individually speak to students regarding key areas of their exam. She offered this commentary on one of her focus students, 'Student 5':

'With an end of year 8 target grade of a 3D, at the start of the year Student 5's current attainment was a 2M (two sub-tiers away from target grade)

Prior to the project, in the first initial stages, Student 5 rarely engaged with existing feedback in books and completed any reflections to a poor-satisfactory standard. Participation in class discussions was low, with the student rarely offering any contributions or ideas, unless prompted – even then this was not a confident response.

Having observed Student 5 in lessons, I felt the current seating plan was not working as it became apparent he had less engagement or motivation sat near a higher ability student; letting his peer take the lead in discussions, looking at their work for clarification, completing work at a slow pace and to the bare minimum. As a result I decided to swap the seating plan around and have Student 5 as the 'stronger/lead' of the pairing to see the impact this had on engagement and confidence. I chose to seat him next to a weaker, but able student (Student 1).

Initially a bit chatty, Student 5's engagement improved, but did require intervention from myself to keep on task.

However, having reflected from the two weeks of lessons, I have been really impressed with the change. The student is now leading conversations and applying himself to the task at a faster rate. Body language is more positive with less leaning back in his seat, but instead making eye contact and leaning into his work and taking notes during discussions. I was very surprised to hear him say this week, "please go back I haven't finished my sentence"!

More importantly the dynamic has shifted. Unlike previous ideas of putting two disadvantaged students together, I did just this and surprisingly the pairing has worked incredibly well. The student in question is now taking the lead and using verbal feedback effectively in discussions:

"Yeah but you did it here but you haven't continued to do it here so I gave you that tier instead", "oi - make sure you underline that" "Don't look at my notes, do it yourself" "Did you put that as both or just social?"

Verbal feedback, in my opinion, has improved the engagement of this particular student. Written feedback did not, and is still an area of concern with this student, as they rarely engage with comments.

## Evidence Collection

All participating teachers used their reflective journal as the main way to record what they were doing and the effects this was having on their focus students. This allowed them to note *in fine detail* the small changes, both in their own practices and the learning behaviours of their students. It is important to restate here that, in this project, verbal feedback was not a single intervention. It is better defined as a complex series of refinements to practice, unique to each teacher. The reflective journals allowed the teachers to be explicit about their own approaches, and about the changes – sometimes minor, provisional, temporary; sometimes substantial and sustained – in the outcomes and engagement of their students.

Several teachers conducted repeating interviews or surveys of their focus students, enquiring into their attitudes to various forms of feedback. Many of the teachers were formally observed during the two terms of the programme – by colleagues, senior leaders, governors – and they included the observation feedback in their reflective journals. As the programme recruited pairs of teachers, in many cases they observed each other; again, they appended reports on this in their journals. Nearly all the teachers made critical use of school data: these tracked attainment, progress, behaviour points, effort and attendance. In a few cases, participating teachers submitted before-and-after samples of student work or screenshots of their markbooks.

## Research Findings

There are two categories of findings here:

1. The impacts of verbal feedback upon the engagement of students (in particular the disadvantaged);
2. The changes to the practice and attitudes of the teachers (and often their other colleagues).  
It should be noted, the second appears to be having an enhancing effect upon the first.

### What impact did verbal feedback, applied over two terms, have upon the engagement of disadvantaged students in years 7 and 8 in the participating schools?

The teachers reported on this in their posters and in their reflective journals.

The rates at which teachers reported on features of engagement in their posters:

Feature	As seen by	Number of teachers (out of 13)
Improved 'Engagement'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Involvement in lessons, homework, discussions and practical work</li> <li>- Attitude to Learning grades</li> <li>- Effort grades</li> <li>- Self-regulation, being responsible for own learning</li> <li>- On task</li> <li>- More active in lessons</li> <li>- Enthusiasm</li> <li>- Independence and resilience</li> <li>- Raising his hand</li> </ul>	13  (3 said they were not able to claim that gains in engagement were consistent)
Improvements in Attainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attainment grades improving across the year</li> <li>- Achieving at or above their Fisher Family Trust targets</li> <li>- Meeting SISRA progress targets</li> <li>- Responding to feedback (in green pen, or in DIRT)</li> <li>- Expanding their areas of knowledge</li> <li>- No detrimental effect on progress</li> <li>- Better quality work</li> <li>- Choosing the subject at GCSE</li> </ul>	12
Increased Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students said they were more confident</li> <li>- Reported in lesson observations</li> <li>- Willingness to join in discussion</li> <li>- Regularly volunteering</li> </ul>	4
Improved Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overall average improvement in attendance</li> <li>- (In their journals, several teachers reported erratic attendance among their focus students, regardless of their reactions to verbal feedback.)</li> </ul>	1

Better Completion of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improved completion in lessons</li> <li>- Better presentation</li> <li>- More writing in assessments</li> <li>- More willing to stick at tasks</li> </ul>	4
Improved Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Higher level of participation in group discussion</li> <li>- Listening to others</li> <li>- Student/teacher relations</li> <li>- Peer to peer relations</li> <li>- Having a sense of community</li> </ul>	5

In their reflective journals, the teachers presented a more granular picture, often noting that progress or improvements were partial or temporary, but overall concluding that engagement had indeed got better for their disadvantaged students.

Anonymous demonstrated the effect verbal feedback had upon the quality of work of disadvantaged students in her art class by including a sample of before-and-after work.

Sarah O provided a summary grid of how she had tracked changes to the engagement of her five focus students:

Pupil	At the start	During	Now
1	Rarely participated in class discussions, often caught with his book or head on desk.	Sometimes gives answers and can be guided to correct if incorrect but often shouts out and doesn't listen to others.	Excellent – will volunteer regularly, working on not shouting out (sometimes still a problem), listens to everyone and expands/corrects when prompted.
2	Participates but fails to listen to others responses.	Will offer good answers to the class which show he is listening but often shouts out.	Excellent – will volunteer regularly, listens to everyone and expands/corrects when promoted.
3	Rarely participates in class discussions, often with head on desk.	Will contribute but often repeats other pupils which shows he is not always listening to the whole class.	Improved- can be guided to correct but still doesn't listen to others.
4	Sometimes participated but answers were poor quality and often distracted.	Poor – struggled to concentrate and paid little attention during group discussions.	Excellent – will volunteer regularly to answer stretch questions or will ask his own contextual questions, listens to everyone and expands/corrects when prompted.
5	Never participated.	Will answer if selected – he is listening but will not volunteer.	Occasionally volunteers – these reflect his engagement as he builds on others responses.

In her reflective journal she had frequently recorded her observations of these five against criteria such as their book work, their verbal contributions and their behaviour points, which allowed her to produce this confident summary.

Jenni reported in a similar fashion:

Participation and engagement			
Student profile	January-March	April-May	June-July
1	<b>Medium-high:</b> Offers contributions to discussions, more specific with use of evidence. Work completed to a good standard with improved use of vocabulary.	<b>Medium-high:</b> Offers contributions to discussions, more specific with use of evidence. Work completed to a good standard with improved use of vocabulary.	<b>High:</b> Peer-to-peer feedback consistently referring to vocabulary in written and verbal responses. Uses tier systems to give feedback on skill development. Work completed to good-high standard with regular access to challenge tasks.
2	<b>Low:</b> Little engagement with class discussions, completes work to a poor-satisfactory standard. Needs verbal reminder to start task. Lacks confidence and does not use key vocabulary.	<b>Low-medium:</b> Some contributions with class discussions but not volunteered. Completes work to a satisfactory standard but does not push himself in tasks. Conversations off topic with little use of key vocabulary.	<b>Low-medium:</b> Some contributions with class discussions but not volunteered. Completes work to a satisfactory standard but does not push himself in tasks. Conversations off topic with little use of key vocabulary.
3	<b>Low:</b> Little engagement with class discussions, completes work to a poor-satisfactory standard. Needs verbal reminder to start task. Lacks confidence and does not use key vocabulary.	<b>Low-medium:</b> Some contributions with class discussions but not volunteered. Completes work to a satisfactory standard but does not push herself in tasks. Conversations off topic with little use of key vocabulary.	<b>Medium:</b> Improvement in standard of written responses, greater use of key vocabulary. Greater evidence of reaching challenge activities. Peer-to-peer feedback is developing, but still requires encouragement.

In May, Michelle did an interesting comparison of her own and her target students' perceptions of their engagement in Maths, between the Autumn and Summer terms. Her own remarks are in blue.

Student	Autumn Term	Summer Term
1	<i>Dominates chat, not always on task.</i>	<i>I feel the same. Regularly on task for the majority of the lesson. Does not dominate chat but now waits and listens to others.</i>
2	<i>Does not engage in chat with peers. Never volunteers answers and often expresses her dislike of maths.</i>	<i>'I raise my hand more and contribute in discussions. I feel more confident because I can see how I am making progress.'</i>
3	<i>Good with partner and keen to share with class.</i>	<i>'I feel more willing to contribute in discussions with my teacher and peers. I feel confident because of my</i>

		<i>teacher's questioning (pose, pause, pounce, bounce). I like that my teacher asks those who don't have hands up.'</i>
4	<i>Always keen to verbally share with teacher but not so much with partner.</i>	<i>'I am more willing to give verbal contributions and talk to my partner because I feel confident amongst my peers.'</i>
5	<i>Quiet student but works well with partner.</i>	<i>'I feel more independent and engaged with the lesson and what I am doing. I am more willing to talk to my partner and provide input into class discussion. I am more willing to ask for help because I now feel comfortable amongst my peers.'</i>
6	<i>Always keen to verbally share with teacher but not so much with partner.</i>	<i>'I am more willing to talk to my partner and get involved with discussions as a whole class. I feel this way because of my teacher's questioning (pose, pause, pounce, bounce). I like that my teacher asks those who don't have hands up - it gives everyone a chance to contribute.'</i>

In July, Deborah recorded in her journal the impact of verbal feedback on the progress of her target group of disadvantaged students:

Data analysed suggests that 6 of the focus students' attainment has improved since the project started.

1 student was working below their target pathway and is now above.

3 students were working below their target pathway and are now working at their target pathway

2 students were working at their target pathway and are now working above their target pathway.

Of the other six students there has been no improvement to their attainment since the project started, but there has also been no decline in their attainment and progress.

2 students are still working at their target pathway.

2 students are still working above their target pathway.

1 student is still working below their target pathway.

Rebecca also offered a qualitative commentary upon her 5 target students, focusing mainly on the improvements to attainment as a consequence of verbal feedback:

**Student 1:** Clear jump in attainment between HT3 and HT6, primarily due to improved focus and participation in lesson content.

**Student 2:** Improved written responses has ensured target grade is met, however decline in behaviour due to lack of focus and engagement (observed whole-school), therefore not forthcoming in engaging with feedback in latter stages of year.

**Student 3:** Steady improvement throughout the year, with consistent approach and attitude to learning. Evidence that verbal feedback alone does not have a detrimental impact on student attainment.

**Student 4:** Jump from HT3-HT6 in terms of attainment seen as a result of improved awareness of skills through peer-to-peer feedback as discussions in participation still requires consistency and accuracy. Improved vocabulary has enabled student to access higher skills and ultimately higher tiers.

**Student 5:** Steady improvement in attainment, with greatest impact seen in engagement with homework and participation, with student developing in confidence and taking the lead in peer-to-peer feedback. Presentation of classwork has improved, and effort in homework, due to improved awareness of skills, has also contributed.

## What impact did involvement in the verbal feedback project have on the participating teachers?

Rates at which teachers reported on specific changes to their practice or attitudes in their posters

<b>Feature of practice</b>	<b>As seen by</b>	<b>Number of teachers (out of 13)</b>
Improved lesson planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Building in time to give verbal feedback</li> <li>- More time available to plan</li> <li>- Better quality, more creative, more engaging, more focused on the needs of the students</li> </ul>	8
More confident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knowing the 'trajectory' the teacher needs to take with her students</li> <li>- Enjoying teaching as she is not worried about the quantity of marking</li> <li>- Confidence in the students' ability to improve</li> <li>- Encouraged to engage in further research</li> </ul>	4
Sharing findings with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sharing at Inset days</li> <li>- Volunteering to be observed</li> <li>- Whole-school and departmental twilights</li> <li>- Writing articles for the trust's learning journal</li> </ul>	6
Reduced workload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Less time on marking</li> <li>- (eg 26 books in under 30 minutes)</li> <li>- 'marking time has more than halved'.</li> <li>- Saved time is 'significant'</li> </ul>	10
'Better' teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being more reactive and flexible</li> <li>- Knowing their students better</li> <li>- Better relations with students</li> <li>- Better mental health</li> <li>- More focused on 'the enjoyment of learning'</li> <li>- Increased classroom presence</li> <li>- As a result of this project the quality of my teaching has improved.</li> </ul>	5

In the reflective journals, the comments of two teachers were particularly striking.

Anonymous, in July, said: 'Following today's meeting at UCL I've been reflecting on the true change to my practice that I have experienced over the last two terms. What I have realised is that whilst my lessons have not changed drastically (as an Art teacher, verbal feedback has always been my primary form of communication), and I have not seen a positive or negative change in my students results – I HAVE recognised a significant change to my mental wellbeing... I felt happier at work, more in control and more capable of managing my work load. Since I have stopped writing long written comments in their homework books, I have dramatically reduced the time I spend marking and yet I am still able to feed back to all my students, and it has had no significant negative impact on their progress - my students are progressing just as well as my students who have been marked using our full written comments system.'

And this is Nadia's overall conclusion : 'On the whole I felt that the techniques I have learnt and used with this particular group have been worth the time spent in trying to perfect them. Although it has taken time for this particular type of group to adjust to this method of feedback I think that it is definitely something that I am keen to develop further with other classes. In particular the fact that the feedback is instantaneous ensures that pupils remember and act on the advice at that time and can ask questions to further clarify anything that they are unsure of.

There are other methods I have used in conjunction with verbal feedback that I think have had an impact on improving engagement (such as more rewards and extended tasks/project work). Doing this research project has enabled me to be a better practitioner and ensured that teacher-pupil contact time in the classroom has increased.'

# Conclusion

For our R&D project, 13 secondary school teachers in England applied verbal feedback strategies and reduced the written feedback they gave to their students. They collected evidence of the impact of these changes upon the engagement and progress of their students, and of the effects on their own practice and wellbeing.

Verbal feedback is not easy to do; it is not easy to stop or radically reduce the amount of written marking teachers do. As with any other complex teaching process, verbal feedback is something that teachers can learn to do, can get better at doing and that can have an increasing effect on their students. The evidence of this report suggests that schools would be wise to invest in professional development in this area.

Verbal feedback, when applied well, has a positive impact on the engagement of all students (including those who are disadvantaged.) It may also lead to gains in progress and achievement and – at the least – appears to have no detrimental effects. When teachers learn to apply verbal feedback strategies consistently and with confidence it has a marked positive effect on their overall practice and on the time they have available for other teaching tasks such as planning.

**Mark Quinn**  
**August 2019**

# Glossary

## **ABC**

A questioning technique where the teacher calls upon students to Agree, Build upon or Challenge an earlier speaker.

## **Cold-calling**

A questioning technique where the teacher insists upon no hands up, and calls upon any student in the class to answer.

## **C3B4Me (Or, See Three Before Me)**

A strategy to build the resilience and independence of the students, whereby they check three other sources of help before asking the teacher.

## **DIRT**

Dedicated Improvement and Reflection Time.

## **Pose pause pounce bounce**

A questioning technique in which the teacher *poses* a question, *pauses* to allow the whole class to consider their response, *pounces* on one student to answer it, and *bounces* their answer on to other students to respond.

## **Zonal marking (Or Yellow Box marking)**

Where the teacher selects just one area of the student's work to mark (or give verbal feedback on). They give highly specific feedback on just this one area

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