Development and evaluation of two interventions to improve students' reflection on feedback

Richard Harris, Pam Blundell-Birtill & Madeleine Pownall

Published online: 09 Aug 2022.

Submit your article to this journal ↗

Article views: 1634

View related articles ↗

View Crossmark data ↗

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

OPEN ACCESS

Check for updates

Development and evaluation of two interventions to improve students' reflection on feedback

Richard Harris (iD), Pam Blundell-Birtill (iD) and Madeleine Pownall (iD)

University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

ABSTRACT

National student surveys reveal that feedback is an aspect of the education experience with which students are less satisfied. One method to increase student engagement with their written feedback and to improve feedback literacy is promotion of critical self-reflection on the feedback content. We describe two interventions aimed at improving students' reflective practices with their feedback. In a School of Psychology at a UK research-intensive university, we designed, implemented and evaluated two interventions to improve students' reflection on, and engagement with, their feedback. The first intervention was a feedback seminar, which comprised a modified version of the Developing Engagement with Feedback Toolkit, adapted for our context and online delivery. The second intervention was an interactive assessment coversheet that was designed to promote self-reflection and dialogical feedback practices between student and marker. We provide a summary of the development of these interventions and share evaluations of both components. Overall, our evaluation demonstrated that these interventions can be a useful opportunity for students to engage with their feedback practices and develop feedback literacy. However, variability in student experiences and inconsistencies across markers, despite these interventions, were barriers to success. We contextualise this with our own reflections and end with recommendations for educators.

National student surveys consistently demonstrate that assessment and feedback is an aspect of the student experience that students are least satisfied with (e.g. National Student Survey (NSS) 2019; Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2020). This negatively impacts students' engagement with their feedback (Price, Handley, and Millar 2011; Jordan 2012), which is concerning, given that appropriate use of feedback 'is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement' (Hattie and Timperley 2007, p. 81). Empirical research has noted that 'good feedback', according to students, should be constructive, honest and detailed (Weaver 2006; Voelkel, Varga-Atkins, and Mello 2020). Furthermore, students' engagement with their feedback is associated with factors such as their ability to understand marker's comments (Walker 2008), student feedback-contingent self-esteem (Hattie and Timperley 2007), their associated emotional response (Unsworth 2014), the perceived usefulness of written comments (Jordan 2012), relationships with staff (Crawford and Hagyard 2011) and student's use of peer discussion to 'make sense' of feedback (Orsmond and Merry 2013).

Others have noted distinct challenges that exist in the provision of effective feedback, including the context of 'mass' higher education (Nicol 2010). Mass higher education typically positions feedback as a *monologue* rather than a two-way *dialogue* (Carless 2006; Orsmond et al. 2013) due to large student numbers. This affects the relationship between timeliness of feedback and its usefulness (e.g. Price, Handley, and Millar 2011), which also affects student's approach to engaging with their feedback content.

In line with this, there has been some work that attempts to improve the utility of feedback provision; for example, the 'Making Assessment Count' project at the University of Westminster uses diverse on- and offline methods to overcome misaligned perceptions of feedback (Kerrigan et al. 2011). Similarly, Evans (2016) Enhancing Assessment Feedback Practice demonstrates how good feedback practice can be promoted. More recently, work has focussed on improving students' 'feedback literacy' (e.g. Carless and Winstone 2020; Molloy, Boud, and Henderson 2020; Winstone, Balloo, and Carless 2022) which is defined 'as the ability to read, interpret, and use written feedback' (Carless and Boud 2018, p. 1316). Winstone et al. (2017a) provide a systematic review of interventions to improve feedback utility and note four core approaches. The first is 'internalizing and applying standards' whereby staff prompt students to understand the standards and marking criteria used in assessment provision. Secondly, interventions based on 'sustainable monitoring' were concerned with action planning and progress monitoring. 'Collective provision of training'-based interventions focused on large-group style interventions, and finally 'manner of feedback delivery' interventions revolved around the practicalities of feedback provision (e.g. modality).

One method of improving engagement with feedback, and indeed other facets of the student experience, is encouraging reflective practice. The definition of what constitutes reflective practice in the context of higher education is relatively contested (Bleakley 1999). Kahn et al. (2006) define reflective practice as the 'extended consideration of problematic aspects of practice' (p. 10). Schunk and Zimmerman (1998) argued that reflective practice forms part of a dynamic self-management system that incorporates a process of monitoring, evaluating, integrating and re-monitoring. In the context of assessment and feedback practice, 'reflection' refers to a 'pro-active recipience' (Winstone et al. 2017b; Winstone, Mathlin, and Nash 2019; Balloo and Vashakidze 2020) in which students ultimately take responsibility and ownership over the function of feedback to improve future work, which can prompt agentic engagement with the content (Reeve and Tseng 2011; Winstone et al. 2017b). As such, the two interventions that we describe in this paper were both inspired by the literature that highlights the utility of encouraging reflective practice to improve engagement with feedback (Winstone and Nash 2016; Winstone et al. 2017a; Winstone, Mathlin, and Nash 2019).

The first of these interventions was an adaptation of some of the resources provided by Winstone and Nash (2016) Developing Engagement with Feedback Toolkit (DEFT). The DEFT is a particularly useful model, because it provides students with a pedagogically-informed set of activities to promote reflective practice with their feedback. The second intervention was an interactive coversheet to provide students with their feedback on coursework assignments, which aimed to promote engagement through dialogical feedback (as per Bloxham and Campbell 2010; Arts, Jaspers, and Joosten-ten Brinke 2021). These interventions were both developed as part of an undergraduate programme at a UK research-intensive Russell Group university. The two interventions discussed and evaluated here form part of an ongoing portfolio of work that aims to improve students' use of their summative feedback.

Intervention 1: feedback engagement tutorial

The evidence base for the value of encouraging reflection and engagement with the feedback process itself is vast (Winstone et al. 2017b; Winstone, Mathlin, and Nash 2019; Balloo and Vashakidze 2020). Here, we reflect upon the development, implementation and evaluation of a

'Reflection on Feedback' tutorial that was designed and implemented across two year-group cohorts in a UK-based School of Psychology at a research-intensive university. This one-hour tutorial was a condensed and adapted version of Winstone and Nash's 'Development Engagement with Feedback Toolkit' (2016), and included modified activities from this toolkit of engagement exercises. The DEFT is a co-produced feedback manual, which provides resources for improvement, reflection and engagement with feedback practice for students (Winstone, Mathlin, and Nash 2019). The DEFT is freely available and designed to be implemented flexibly (Winstone and Nash 2016), and, therefore, we selected aspects of the DEFT resources that we felt would cater most closely to the needs of our students and which could be most effectively implemented online.

Designing the tutorial began with the two tutorial developers reading Winstone and Nash's DEFT in detail, establishing which of the tasks within their toolkit may be most suitable for our context as a School of Psychology and the online teaching environment. We also consulted the pedagogical literature and Winstone and Nash's own reflections on implementation of the DEFT to help us select appropriate resources. For example, in previous evaluations, students have responded particularly positively to the 'portfolio' element of the DEFT (Winstone and Nash 2016), so we ensured that this was covered in our tutorial. The final tutorial comprised six core elements, some of which were adapted from the DEFT and some that reflected the context of our School (Table 1).

Table 1. Structure of the engagement with feedback tutorial, including alignment with Winstone and Nash's DEFT (2016).

Part of the tutorial	Activity	Alignment with the DEFT
Part one: Introduction	Students were welcomed to the session and the importance of reflecting on feedback was explained by the tutor.	
Part two: Initial response to feedback	Students were asked to share their typical actions upon receiving feedback. Students grouped these actions into 'helpful responses' and 'not helpful responses', considering the reasons for their grouping. Students were reminded that their responses will depend upon their own experiences and preferences. Tutors then led a discussion about how those that had been ranked as 'unhelpful responses' could be reframed to become more effective. Students were invited to reflect on whether they think they do enough with their feedback.	Activity K3: Feedback as a learning resource
Part three: Barriers to engagement	Tutors led a general class discussion about what makes using feedback feel difficult. Students were divided into breakout groups and read quotes taken from Winstone and Nash's focus groups on feedback utility. Tutors explained that these are quotes from students when talking about their feedback. In groups, students generated three broad themes of barriers to using feedback, and sorted the quotes into these groups.	Activity B2: Overcoming Barriers
Part four: importance of feedback	Students were brought together and were asked to reflect upon and discuss the following prompt questions: *What is feedback? What is the function of feedback? (for student, for lecturer, for university, etc.) From where and whom does feedback come? What effects does feedback have?*	Activity K1: The purpose and function of feedback
Part five: Understanding feedback content	Students collectively read an extract from B1 in the DEFT, which is a piece of feedback in response to an essay. Students were split into breakout groups and were asked to reflect upon the following questions: *How would you feel if you received this feedback? How would you interpret these comments?* Tutors brought students back and continued these discussions collaboratively.	Activity B3: Using emotion positively Activity A2: Identifying actions Resource B1: Feedback and identity
Part six: Rounding up and conclusion	Students had a chance to share what they had learnt and tutors answered any remaining questions.	

Implementation

This tutorial was delivered as part of the second and third-year tutorial schedule in October and November 2020, during which time teaching was entirely online. Tutorials are small group (approx. $N = 8$ per session) teaching sessions that are each run by personal tutors, who are academic members of staff. These sessions were held online via Blackboard Collaborate, the School's virtual learning environment platform.

Evaluation

It is important to embed a sense of student voice, alongside staff reflections, in assessment and feedback practice (Beaumont, O'Doherty, and Shannon 2008; Bevan et al. 2008; McCallum and Milner 2021; Stein et al. 2021). Therefore, here we report both student and staff evaluations and end with our own reflections on the tutorial.

We gave students who attended the tutorial the opportunity to share their experiences to enable us to evaluate its effectiveness. We sent all students who received the tutorial an email that contained a link to an anonymous evaluation questionnaire, hosted on Qualtrics. The survey received ethical approval from the School Ethical Committee (PSYC-123) on 22nd October 2020. Of the students who received the tutorial, 14 completed an evaluation questionnaire immediately after the DEFT tutorial (10 in second year and 4 in final year of their studies). Although this is a small response rate, given the richness and depth of the responses in the evaluation, we considered the sample size to be sufficient in order to capture meaningful insights about the tutorial's effectiveness. Approximately 400 students were offered the tutorial and were given the opportunity to evaluate it via the questionnaire. Given that we were interested in students' *immediate* perceptions of the tutorial, rather than the impact of the tutorial materials several weeks after the tutorial, our data collection window was relatively tight. However, this sample of students provides a useful source of evaluation, particularly given that our evaluation methodology is centred around understanding students' lived experiences using a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions. Indeed, qualitative research that is interested in capturing lived experience is typically less concerned with large sample size, particularly in populations such as the student body, and instead focuses on understanding depth of experience (Boddy 2016).

To first provide some quantitative metrics on the tutorials' effectiveness, we asked students to identify the extent to which they agreed with five statements on a 1 (*entirely disagree*) to 7 (*entirely agree*) Likert scale. Statements included 'the tutorial was interesting/useful' and 'I was engaged during the tutorial'. We then provided students with three free-text boxes to tell us more about their experiences of the tutorial. The first asked students to report what they found useful about the tutorial, the second asked students to explain whether they think the tutorial will change the way they use feedback in the future, and the final asked whether they would like other tutorials based on assessment and feedback practice.

Overall, responses indicated that students generally, but not strongly, agreed that the feedback tutorial was useful. Among the students who completed the evaluation questionnaire, perceptions of the tutorial's usefulness and engagement seemed to be relatively mixed (Table 2).

Students' qualitative comments provided some useful context to these responses. When we asked about the usefulness of the tutorial, some students provided detailed feedback about discussing the semantics of feedback with a member of staff. For example, one noted that '*It was useful to have a look at unpicking feedback with a member of staff who gives it because it helps us to understand what they mean when they write it*'.

Other students noted that they specifically liked the structure of the session. For example, one wrote about how they found it useful having '*lots of questions, use of collaborative whiteboard, informative, useful and supportive information given by tutor*'. They also noted that they

Table 2. Average response and standard deviation for the tutorial evaluation.

	Mean response	Standard deviation
The tutorial was interesting	4.29	1.68
The tutorial was useful	4.71	1.68
I was engaged during the tutorial	4.79	1.37
The tutorial has encouraged me to engage more with my feedback	5.00	1.71
The tutorial has changed the way I will use my feedback	4.29	1.38
Following this tutorial, I feel more prepared to receive feedback than for past assignments	4.79	1.85

Higher scores indicate more agreement (on a 1—seven scale).

enjoyed the '*opportunity for students to express concerns, provide insight relevant to their experience of feedback*'. Other students reported that they found it useful to 'normalise' finding receiving feedback difficult, and specifically noted that they found useful the opportunity of '*Understanding that it is normal to respond negatively*'. Similarly, other students enjoyed sharing this experience with their peers, reporting that it was '*nice to hear other people's opinions about feedback*'.

When asked about whether more tutorials on assessment and feedback would be useful, responses were more mixed. Some students responded positively; for example, one student responded that they would '*definitely*' like more tutorials, such as '*tutorials relating to essay-based exam questions that will be coming up in January—just general guidance on how to approach them as we haven't encountered them previously—going through exemplar answers/common feedback received on these question*'. However, four students in the sample responded to this question with '*no*' without providing context.

One student also commented that they found the tutorial less useful because '*I feel I already made good use of my feedback*'. When asked about the value of future tutorials, some students took the opportunity to detail the kinds of feedback tutorials that they would find most useful, which provided helpful context. For example, one student reported that they '*would have liked to be able to bring some of our own feedback to go over*'. This student elaborated, explaining that they would like a tutorial where they '*Look at common feedback phrases and what they mean: e.g. 'include more detail'—of what? Evaluation? Explanation? Study details? etc.*'. This was also echoed in another comment, which suggested that more tangible and applied feedback tutorials, that focus on the mechanisms of improving their grade, would be useful: '*Further tutorials should not include feedback responses, instead give ideal/high scoring examples of essays/reports and maybe explain the mark scheme*'.

Overall, in our adapted version of the DEFT, we tried to select activities that would most closely align to the needs of our students in their assessment and feedback practice. For example, local metrics indicate that the purpose and clarity of feedback provision is not always clear to students, and so we included activities K1 and B3. As students noted in their evaluation, other facets of the DEFT could also have been useful to cover; in particular, allocating further time to the A2 ('Taking Action!') and A3 ('Action Planning') resources of the DEFT may have responded to students concerns about the concrete use of feedback to improve future work. Turning perceptions of feedback into concrete, actionable goals is a useful part of developing 'feedback literacy' (Hattie and Timperley 2007; Carless and Boud 2018).

Although students reported that more exemplars of 'good' or 'bad' pieces of student work would have been useful, this kind of activity serves a different function to the purpose of the DEFT itself. Exemplars are useful to help students engage in the assessment process and understand its requirements (Handley and Williams 2011; Lipnevich et al. 2014); however, they do not allow students to necessarily reflect on the feedback process *itself*. Instead, with this tutorial, we were interested in encouraging students to take a broader perspective on the function, use and practice of feedback, rather than continue to be concerned with the minutia of specific essays, examinations or reports. This could have been more actively communicated to students in the tutorial materials.

Staff reflections

We then spoke to tutors who conducted the tutorials to gain some insight into staff reflections on the adapted DEFT tutorial. Much like the students, staff had mixed responses. One member of staff described running the seminar with year two students as 'like pulling teeth'. Students kept cameras off and generally didn't engage with the content. This tutor noted that this emulates other online small-group teaching sessions this semester, and is thus not necessarily a reflection on the DEFT tutorial itself. Conversely, the same member of staff noted that the 'tutorial worked much better with third years than second years. The third years could pick out the feedback, the second years thought it was too vague'. This reported perception of vagueness in the activities reflects the students' responses in our evaluation sample.

Other tutors were generally positive, for example one member of staff reported that students found the tutorial useful for their understanding of feedback. However, several members of staff suggested that some groups struggled to get through all the material. This was a frequent comment among tutors, with many noting that the organisation of materials online took a considerable amount of time during the tutorial, which meant that they had less time than required to work through the activities slowly and thoughtfully.

These staff reflections on the DEFT have demonstrated that online teaching sees many logistical and technical challenges that must be navigated when delivering these kinds of discussion-based tutorials. The original DEFT was, of course, not designed to be run online and, therefore, we adapted it to create a 'slimmed down' version of the activities in an attempt to accommodate any technical issues. However, as staff noted, the activities could have been reduced even further, to ensure that there was sufficient time to engage in critical discussion. Given that some members of staff found it difficult to cover all the materials, in future we will stress the flexibility of the session depending on student's engagement and needs, as per Winstone and Nash (2016). For example, if students engage in a lively and useful conversation surrounding the purpose of feedback in part five of the session plan, this should be encouraged by the tutor, adapting other timings as necessary.

Intervention 2: dialogical feedback coversheet

Our second intervention involved the development and evaluation of a feedback coversheet, which aimed to prompt a more *dialogical* approach to feedback. Dialogical feedback aims to promote a conversation between student and marker, which ultimately makes the process more active, responsive and engaging (Carless 2006). This aims to shift feedback away from an 'information transmission' approach and instead provides space for students to accompany their work by prompting dialogue about what matters to them in their feedback (Bloxham and Campbell 2010). In articulating this information, students improve their feedback literacy and are prompted to reflect upon their feedback processes and experiences.

In the pedagogic literature, research has demonstrated how implementation of a feedback coversheet, i.e. a page that staff and students complete that accompanies written assessments, can lead to enhanced feedback literacy and increased feedback quality (Arts, Jaspers, and Joosten-ten Brinke 2021). Coversheets can be useful in providing structure to feedback and have been associated with more elaborate explanations of feedback (Newton, Wallace, and McKimm 2012). Some research has also demonstrated that assessment coversheets can improve efficacy of feedback processes because they allow markers to focus specifically on areas of improvement that students articulate in advance (Bloxham and Campbell 2010). Therefore, coversheets generally are thought to improve the quality of feedback and students' feedback literacy, as they provide a more structured, rigorous and personalised approach to the provision of written feedback (Newton, Wallace, and McKimm 2012).

Development

We aimed to develop an interactive coversheet that could prompt both staff and students to take a more dialogical approach to the feedback process. Our coversheet development was in response to student feedback that showed how students find it challenging to connect their feedback between assessments. As marking is anonymous and conducted by different members of staff, the feedback given to students on sequential pieces of work can seem disconnected and fail to recognise the progress students have made as a result of their previous feedback. For example, students have fed back that feedback can be viewed as unclear, particularly when considering: (a) what *actions* should be implemented for students to improve, and (b) how students can continually build upon previous feedback.

In response to students' comments, the coversheet that we designed is broken down into three distinct sections: a focus on previous work, current work, and future work (Table 3; openly available here [https://osf.io/469nu/?view_only=6b5d7aaa30654abd8083aaf7e7c83337]). For the first section (focus on previous work), students are encouraged to complete this before starting their current written assessment. This section asks students to tell the marker what three actions they received in their previous assignment and reflect on how they acted on this feedback in their current assignment. In Sec. 2 (focus on current work), the marker comments on how successfully these actions have been implemented, before providing two points of general feedback on the present assessment. Students are provided with a space here to request specific feedback on an area that they would value feedback on, in order to create more of a dialogue between marker and student. Finally, in Sec. 3 (focus on future work) the marker provides students with three actions for improvement to be implemented in the next assignment. Thus, these three points feed into the assessment coversheet in a cyclical nature, which represents the dialogical nature of this intervention (see Figure 1).

Evaluation

To evaluate student perceptions of the newly developed coversheet, we surveyed 102 undergraduate students on the psychology programme: 40.2% were in first year, 36.3% were in second year, and 23.5% were either in final-year or a year in industry. We asked students to report whether they felt the marker typically completes the coversheet correctly [yes/sometimes/no] with space to elaborate on this. Students were then asked if they complete the coversheet [yes/sometimes/no] and were asked to rate their level of effort in completing it ('I put effort into

Table 3. Overview of the interactive assessment coversheet, including verbatim text prompts on the coversheet.

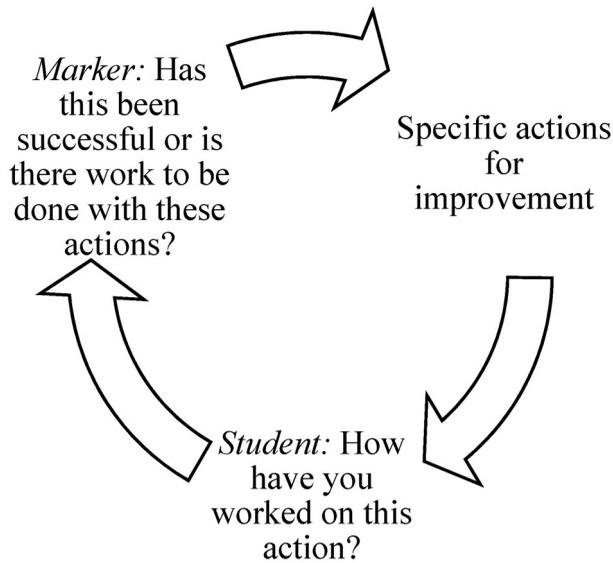| Section of the coversheet	Completed by	Text prompt
Section 1: Focus on previous work	Student, *before* writing the assessment	What 'actions' for improvement did you receive on your last assignment? Cut and paste your previous feedback for this type of assignment e.g. if you are completing a practical report refer to your last practical report. If this is your first assignment of this type leave this section blank.
	Student, *after* writing the assessment	Thinking about your previous feedback, how did you try to improve your report for this assignment?
Section 2: Focus on current work	Marker	Please comment on whether the student has successfully implemented these actions, or whether further work is still needed.
	Student, *after* writing the assessment	Is there anything you would specifically value feedback on?
	Marker	Feedback specific to this piece of work:
Section 3: Focus on future work	Marker	General areas of improvement and actions to take to improve your work for next time:

Figure 1. The dialogical feedback process that informed the development of the coversheet.

Table 4. Student agreement with perceptions of correct completion of the coversheet.

	Yes	Sometimes	No
Staff complete the coversheet correctly	76.5%	19.6%	3.9%
I complete the coversheet correctly	91.2%	5.9%	2.9%

completing the student boxes', 1 = Strongly agree, 7 = Strongly disagree). Students were given free-text boxes to state the three things they find more useful about the coversheet and three things they would like to change, before a general textbox for 'anything else you would like to tell us about the coversheet'.

Results showed that most students were satisfied with the feedback they have received using the coversheet; 86.3% were either extremely, moderately or slightly satisfied with their feedback. Table 4 shows perceptions of staff and students completing the coversheet 'correctly': 85.9% of students reported that they agree that they 'put effort into completing the student boxes' of the coversheet.

Students created a list of 241 items that they find useful about the coversheet. After condensing the list down, Figure 2 shows a word cloud of students' responses. Larger words indicate higher frequency across the data. The most frequent responses were a focus on improvement (e.g. '*I like how there's space to say how you've improved*' and '*It helps me improve in specific areas through actions*'), specificity of feedback (e.g. '*I like that we can request specific feedback*' and '*having the marker directly respond to specific concerns*') and opportunity for reflection (e.g. '*I have to reflect back on previous work*' and '*Reflecting on what I've tried to improve*').

This process was repeated to understand what students would like to change about the coversheet. Students provided a list of 122 items for this question (Figure 3). Among the most common were more positive feedback (e.g. '*Include a box for markers specifically to give positive feedback (not just constructive/negative)*'), better alignment with the marking criteria (e.g. '*Make the sections specific to marking criteria, e.g. things I to improve in introduction*' and '*relating feedback to the marking criteria to say that if this was done*'), and some commented that the coversheet was too long (e.g. '*it takes too long*').

Figure 2. Word cloud displaying student's responses to the 'three things they find more useful about the coversheet' prompt. Larger words indicate higher frequency across the dataset.

Figure 3. Word cloud displaying student's responses to the 'three things they would like to change about the coversheet' prompt. Larger words indicate higher frequency across the dataset.

We then investigated the free-text responses that students provided in the evaluation. Some students were very positive about the structure and use of the feedback coversheet, for example, one student explained:

[The marker] answered each one of the components from the previous feedback where I had decided to improve on and gave proper feedback on whether I had improved in those aspects or gave feedback on how I could improve further. They also answered my questions for further feedback on particular sections of the assignment where I needed more guidance on.

Other students commented on how feedback on the coversheet was '*much better than last years*' and it '*made clear what my strengths and improvements are*'. When asked for other comments, one student described how the coversheet allows better connection between the marker and the student:

> The coversheet allowed me to see what different markers were looking for and what their different suggestions for improvement could be so that for subsequent pieces of work I knew what I had to do to get better marks.

However, despite the positive feedback, students also reported on the inconsistency across markers. For example, while some students commented on how markers '*evaluated my work really well*' and provided '*really useful and implementable feedback*', others reported that '*the coversheets have been ignored and lecturers just provide feedback in the normal way*'. This speaks to a wider issue of inconsistency across markers in content and modality of feedback, which can lead to frustration in students. For example, one student described their underwhelming feedback in the coversheet:

> I only received 2 brief lines of feedback on both my essays. These pieces of feedback were very vague and didn't feel specific to my work. The feedback said to include more detail and use a better structure. It would have been good to have some indication of what would constitute a 'better' structure to allow for improvement moving forward. Whilst I appreciate staff have lots of papers to mark, it is a bit disheartening to spend so much time on your essays to receive such minor comments.

This was corroborated throughout the evaluation, with other students reporting receiving '*very short and generic feedback*' which makes it difficult for them to know '*why we are being marked down and how to improve in the future*'. This indicates that it is necessary to ensure consistency of the feedback that is provided. Some students explicitly recognised this '*there are inconsistencies in quality of marking between staff*'. Such inconsistencies may be due to a mismatch between student and staff expectations of feedback. In this sense, student perceptions of markers' *engagement* with the feedback process appears to play an important role in wider perceptions of feedback quality and, in turn, the coversheet's usefulness overall. For example, students spoke about feeling '*that the markers often skim read our work*' or, in a more positive example, '*I thought [my feedback] extremely helpful and a lot more effort put in*'. Perceptions of staff engagement with the coversheet appeared to drive perceptions of the feedback itself. More broadly, some students in the evaluation felt that the coversheet was *overly* supportive, in a way that borders on being patronising to students. For example, as one student explained:

> Thinking about previous feedback is good but having to prove that you've done this by putting it in the box feels childish. If people choose not to look at previous feedback to help their next work that's their own stupidity really. Plus after spending so many hours doing the assignment the last thing I want to do is fill that sheet in. The comments from the markers are better in-text since you know exactly what they are referring to. Overall the cover sheets aren't really needed.

This issue of time, energy and effort required to complete the coversheet is an important consideration and, again, highlights the variability in both staff and student commitment to completing the coversheet accurately and effectively.

Discussion

Overall, in this paper, we have outlined two interventions that we implemented to improve feedback literacies. Across the evaluations, some common experiences emerged. For example, students generally felt that both the adapted DEFT and the coversheet could be useful, but variability across both student experiences and staff engagement were barriers. Evaluation of the DEFT tutorial indicated that this intervention was useful for some students, particularly

those who are invested in improving their use of feedback. For other students, the adapted DEFT activities lacked concrete application to their future assessments and, therefore, the utility of the session was not clear from a student perspective. Likewise, some students felt that the coversheet was useful and led to improved feedback literacy, whereas others felt it was not a necessary intervention. In both evaluations, and consistent with the literature, students were focused predominantly on using feedback as a means of improving grades or 'knowing where they went wrong', rather than as a learning process in and of itself (e.g. Winstone et al. 2017a).

These interventions were conducted in our local context; therefore, there may be other contextual factors that impact their efficacy. This may be a limitation in the present work. There is a tendency for these kind of evaluations to only capture the views of students who have particularly critical points to raise (e.g. see Hobson and Talbot 2001). However, our evaluations revealed nuanced and varied commentary, which demonstrates the suitability of our evaluative method. The evaluation of the coversheet and tutorial through questionnaires allowed us to understand student's perceptions of these interventions. However, future evaluation of these interventions might consider whether these interventions lead to changes in student behaviours, or improved student attainment.

We purposefully designed the tutorial to take a broader perspective of feedback literacy. Our evaluation demonstrated that students' perceived value in this; for example, it enabled them to understand '*that it is normal to respond negatively [to feedback]*'. However, the staff evaluation suggested that on some occasions delivering the tutorial was 'like pulling teeth', and students indicated that other tasks may have been more appropriate to help them develop their feedback literacy. With this in mind, future interventions that aim to improve feedback literacies may also wish to consider the notion of feedback as a long-term developmental process (Malecka, Boud, and Carless 2020) that relies on interactivity (Carless, n.d.). That is, whilst one-off tutorials or coversheets may be a useful starting point, more longitudinal efforts to promote students' feedback literacy over the course of a semester or year may also be needed to complement these efforts (e.g. Carless and Boud 2018). For example, tutorials earlier in the semester could facilitate broader discussions that consider the purpose and nature of feedback, much like the tutorial we have outlined. Tutorials delivered later in the semester could target how to use feedback effectively and could allow students 'to bring some of our own feedback to go over'. These later tutorials may be particularly effective once students have received their feedback and are considering how they may implement this feedback in future work.

Indeed, teaching and learning in an online context may facilitate more longitudinal efforts to encourage effective use of feedback. For example, Boud, Lawson, and Thompson (2015) used an online tool to track students' self-assessments of their coursework performance throughout the course of the year and this was used to monitor and students' evaluative judgements about their process. There may be scope to embed a more longitudinal approach to feedback interventions, especially given that our evaluations suggest there is variability in student experiences.

Conclusion

In summary, we have described two interventions that we implemented and evaluated to improve student's feedback literacies. We first developed Winstone and Nash's DEFT (2016) and adapted it to our current specific assessment and feedback context. We also designed an interactive coversheet to accompany written assessments, in order to instil a more dialogical approach to feedback. Both of these interventions had generally positive feedback, particularly in terms of student evaluations, although this also identified variability in experiences as a key challenge. This suggests that future interventions to improve feedback practices should focus specifically on how to overcome inconsistencies in approaches between markers, while also remaining attentive to students' unique needs as individual learners.

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

Notes on contributors

Dr. Richard Harris is a Lecturer and Deputy Director of Student Education in the School of Psychology at the University of Leeds.

Dr. Pam Blundell-Birtill is an Associate Professor in the School of Psychology at the University of Leeds, and the Assessment Lead for the University of Leeds.

Dr. Madeleine Pownall is a Lecturer in the School of Psychology at the University of Leeds. The authors are teaching focussed lecturers and together have several publications on topics such as the hidden curriculum and psychological literacy

ORCID

Richard Harris http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2504-382X
Pam Blundell Birtill http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4690-2558
Madeleine Pownall http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3734-8006

References

Arts, J. G., M. Jaspers, and D. Joosten-ten Brinke. 2021. "Enhancing Written Feedback: The Use of a Cover Sheet Influences Feedback Quality." *Cogent Education* 8 (1): 1901641. doi:10.1080/2331186X.2021.1901641.

Balloo, K., and A. Vashakidze. 2020. "Facilitating Students' Proactive Recipience of Feedback with Feedback Portfolios." In *Enhancing Student-Centred Teaching in Higher Education*, 255–272. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Beaumont, C., M. O'Doherty, and L. Shannon. 2008. "Staff and Student Perceptions of Feedback Quality in the Context of Widening Participation." *Higher Education*.

Bevan, R., J. Badge, A. Cann, C. Willmott, and J. Scott. 2008. "Seeing Eye-to-Eye? Staff and Student Views on Feedback." *Bioscience Education* 12 (1): 1–15. doi:10.3108/beej.12.1.

Bleakley, A. 1999. "From Reflective Practice to Holistic Reflexivity." *Studies in Higher Education* 24 (3): 315–330. doi:10.1080/03075079912331379925.

Bloxham, S., and L. Campbell. 2010. "Generating Dialogue in Assessment Feedback: Exploring the Use of Interactive Cover Sheets." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35 (3): 291–300. doi:10.1080/02602931003650045.

Boddy, C. R. 2016. "Sample Size for Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* 19 (4): 426–432. doi:10.1108/QMR-06-2016-0053.

Boud, D., R. Lawson, and D. G. Thompson. 2015. "The Calibration of Student Judgement through Self-Assessment: Disruptive Effects of Assessment Patterns." *Higher Education Research & Development* 34 (1): 45–59. doi:10.1080/07294360.2014.934328.

Carless, D. 2006. "Differing Perceptions in the Feedback Process." *Studies in Higher Education* 31 (2): 219–233. doi:10.1080/03075070600572132.

Carless, D. n.d. New Paradigm Feedback Practices. [Blog Post]. https://davidcarless.edu.hku.hk/new-paradigm-feedback-practices/#:~:text=New%20paradigm%20feedback%20practices%20are,Carless%2C%20D.

Carless, D., and D. Boud. 2018. "The Development of Student Feedback Literacy: Enabling Uptake of Feedback." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 43 (8): 1315–1325.

Carless, D., and N. Winstone. 2020. "Teacher Feedback Literacy and Its Interplay with Student Feedback Literacy." *Teaching in Higher Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2020.1782372.

Crawford, K., and A. Hagyard. 2011. "Good Practice in Assessment Feedback in Social Studies: Highlighting the Significance of Student-Teacher Relationships." *Practice and Evidence of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 6: 61–76.

Evans, C. 2016. *Enhancing Assessment Feedback Practice in Higher Education: The EAT Framework*. Southampton, UK: University of Southampton.

Handley, K., and L. Williams. 2011. "From Copying to Learning: Using Exemplars to Engage Students with Assessment Criteria and Feedback." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 36 (1): 95–108. doi:10.1080/02602930903201669.

Hattie, J., and H. Timperley. 2007. "The Power of Feedback." *Review of Educational Research* 77 (1): 81–112. [Database] doi:10.3102/003465430298487.

Hobson, S. M., and D. M. Talbot. 2001. "Understanding Student Evaluations: What All Faculty Should Know." *College Teaching* 49 (1): 26–31. doi:10.1080/87567550109595842.

Jordan, S. 2012. "Student Engagement with Assessment and Feedback: Some Lessons from Short-Answer Free-Text e-Assessment Questions." *Computers & Education* 58 (2): 818–834. doi:10.1016/j.compedu.2011.10.007.

Kahn, P., R. Young, S. Grace, R. Pilkington, L. Rush, B. Tomkinson, and I. Willis. 2006. *The Role and Effectiveness of Reflective Practices in Programmes for New Academic Staff: A Grounded Practitioner Review of the Research Literature*. York, UK: The Higher Education Academy.

Kerrigan, M. J., S. Walker, M. P. Gamble, S. Lindsay, K. Reader, M. Papaefthimiou, L. Newman-Ford, M. A. Clements, and G. Saunders. 2011. "The Making Assessment Count (MAC) Consortium Maximising Assessment and Feedback Design by Working Together." *Research in Learning Technology* 19 (sup1): 7782. doi:10.3402/rlt.v19s1.7782.

Lipnevich, A. A., L. N. McCallen, K. P. Miles, and J. K. Smith. 2014. "Mind the Gap! Students' Use of Exemplars and Detailed Rubrics as Formative Assessment." *Instructional Science* 42 (4): 539–559. doi:10.1007/s11251-013-9299-9.

Malecka, B., D. Boud, and D. Carless. 2020. "Eliciting, Processing and Enacting Feedback: Mechanisms for Embedding Student Feedback Literacy within the Curriculum." *Teaching in Higher Education*. doi:10.1080/13562517.2020.1754784.

McCallum, S., and M. M. Milner. 2021. "The Effectiveness of Formative Assessment: Student Views and Staff Reflections." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 46 (1): 1–16. doi:10.1080/02602938.2020.1754761.

Molloy, E., D. Boud, and M. Henderson. 2020. "Developing a Learning-Centred Framework for Feedback Literacy." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 45 (4): 527–540. doi:10.1080/02602938.2019.1667955.

National Student Survey (NSS). 2019. Office for Students. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-information-and-data/national-student-survey-nss/get-the-nss-data/.

Newton, P. M., M. J. Wallace, and J. McKimm. 2012. "Improved Quality and Quantity of Written Feedback is Associated with a Structured Feedback Proforma." *Journal of Educational Evaluation for Health Professions* 9: 10. doi:10.3352/jeehp.2012.9.10.

Nicol, D. 2010. "From Monologue to Dialogue: Improving Written Feedback Processes in Mass Higher Education." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 35 (5): 501–517.

Orsmond, P., and S. Merry. 2013. "The Importance of Self-Assessment in Students' Use of Tutors' Feedback: A Qualitative Study of High and Non-High Achieving Biology Undergraduates." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 38 (6): 737–753. doi:10.1080/02602938.2012.697868.

Orsmond, P., S. J. Maw, J. R. Park, S. Gomez, and A. C. Crook. 2013. "Moving Feedback Forward: Theory to Practice." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 38 (2): 240–252.

Price, M., K. Handley, and J. Millar. 2011. "Feedback: Focusing Attention on Engagement." *Studies in Higher Education* 36 (8): 879–896. doi:10.1080/03075079.2010.483513.

Reeve, J., and C. M. Tseng. 2011. "Agency as a Fourth Aspect of Students' Engagement during Learning Activities." *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 36 (4): 257–267. doi:10.1016/j.cedpsych.2011.05.002.

Schunk, D. H., and B. J. Zimmerman, eds. 1998. *Self-Regulated Learning: From Teaching to Self-Reflective Practice*. New York: Guilford Press.

Stein, S. J., A. Goodchild, A. Moskal, S. Terry, and J. McDonald. 2021. "Student Perceptions of Student Evaluations: Enabling Student Voice and Meaningful Engagement." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 46 (6): 837–851. doi:10.1080/02602938.2020.1824266.

TEF. 2020. About the TEF. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/about-the-tef/.

Unsworth, M. 2014. "Students' Views on Feedback: Insights into Conceptions of Effectiveness, Areas of Dissatisfaction and Emotional Consequences." *Innovations in Practice* 9 (1): 23–31.

Voelkel, S., Varga-Atkins, T., and Mello, L. V. 2020. "Students Tell Us What Good Written Feedback Looks like." *FEBS Open Bio* 10 (5): 692–706.

Walker, M. 2008. "Feedback, Assessment and Skills Development." In *Improving Student Learning – for What? Oxford, UK: The Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development*, edited by Chris Rust, 228–240. Oxford: Oxford Brookes University.

Weaver, M. R. 2006. "Do Students Value Feedback? Student Perceptions of Tutors' Written Responses." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 31 (3): 379–394.

Winstone, N. E., K. Balloo, and D. Carless. 2022. "Discipline-Specific Feedback Literacies: A Framework for Curriculum Design." *Higher Education* 83 (1): 57–77. doi:10.1007/s10734-020-00632-0.

Winstone, N. E., G. Mathlin, and R. A. Nash. 2019. "Building Feedback Literacy: Students' Perceptions of the Developing Engagement with Feedback Toolkit." *Frontiers in Education* 4: 39. doi:10.3389/feduc.2019.00039.

Winstone, N. E., R. A. Nash, M. Parker, and J. Rowntree. 2017a. "Supporting Learners' Agentic Engagement with Feedback: A Systematic Review and a Taxonomy of Recipience Processes." *Educational Psychologist* 52 (1): 17–37. doi:10.1080/00461520.2016.1207538.

Winstone, N. E., R. A. Nash, J. Rowntree, and M. Parker. 2017b. "It'd Be Useful, but I Wouldn't Use It': Barriers to University Students' Feedback Seeking and Recipience." *Studies in Higher Education* 42 (11): 2026–2041. doi:10.1080/03075079.2015.1130032.

Winstone, N., and R. Nash. 2016. *The Developing Engagement with Feedback Toolkit (DEFT)*. York, UK: Higher Education Academy.