Developing Effective Assignment Feedback for an Interprofessional Learning Module – An Action Research Project.

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Introduction
At UCS the pre-registration interprofessional learning (IPL) consists of three modules; one in each year. The students involved in IPL are: adult, mental health and child health nurses, midwives, operating department practitioners, social workers, diagnostic and therapeutic radiographers.

The first year module IPL – The Professional Person looks at the transition that students make to become professionals1. For this module the students submit a 2,000 word essay entitled “An evaluation of a specific area of communication that I consider I need to develop as part of my professional role within an Interprofessional team”. Due to the number of students completing the module (300), this essay is marked by 30 different lecturers and there is therefore some variation in the feedback that students receive.

We were keen to find a way to reduce any discrepancies and work with both staff and students to ensure that the essay and subsequent feedback were useful for all involved2.

We developed some action research with the interprofessional team of lecturers and students to evaluate the assessment criteria and feedback for the essay so that it was useful for students from all professional backgrounds3. This action research involved an initial questionnaire and a focus group. At the end of the research the assessment criteria were reworded and the student feedback sheet re-structured to be of use to both students and staff.

Research method
19 staff members who had marked the IPL assignment last academic year were invited to take part in the research. 18 student representatives from the cohorts studying the module last academic year were also invited to participate to represent their student group.

The staff were sent an information sheet about the research and curriculum development - see References section. Those unable to attend were invited to email their feedback and questions.

Following the focus group four different feedback sheets were created based on the comments. These were sent to all those involved to decide on a preferred format.

The assessment criteria were also modified as follows:

Which criteria are more important to staff and students and why?
- Staff see presentation, spelling, grammar and referencing as important.
- Students need to identify just one area to discuss, assignments that have not done this trend to be too vague and general.

What did students think of the style of the feedback?
- There was a variation in feedback from different markers.
- Some students felt that their feedback was very difficult to read as all of the feedback and assessment criteria were in the same font with no line breaks in between.

Do you have any suggestions about how the feedback sheet could be modified?
- Feedback needs to be in a different font from the assessment criteria and there needs to be a line break in between the assessment criteria and the feedback.
- The feedback sheet could be in a table format with boxes to write in.
- We could have weighted criteria with marks given so that we can see which areas we have done well and which areas are weaker.
- Students would like a more structured feedback sheet and instructions are needed for staff so that all do the same.

The interprofessional criterion needs further clarification.

If you had to write one suggestion for change to the feedback for the essay, what would it be?
- Staff said that they look at the whole assignment and make a judgement about it in terms of grade and the criteria.

• They also articulated that spelling and grammatical errors can be a real irritation and may result in a lower mark as it appears that the students have not taken care in the presentation of their work.
• Some students do not read the feedback in detail, especially if they had passed.
• There was some variation in understanding of the reasons for marks.

Are the assessment criteria easy to understand by staff and students?
- Some students said that the assignment and assessment criteria were explained well during the module.
- They said that different advice was given by different lecturers and that some criteria were not very clear.

Discussion
It was interesting to hear that students were concerned about the layout of the feedback sheet and the way in which their feedback was written. There were also comments about the assessment criteria.

Following the focus group four different feedback sheets were created based on the comments. These were sent to all those involved to decide on a preferred format.

A new feedback sheet was created which had weighted criteria and this was piloted with the students and staff.

Comments from students:
- ‘The new assessment criteria and this feedback sheet appear much clearer’.
- ‘The modifications are easier to understand and the weighted criteria will help students pinpoint areas they can work on.
- ‘This allows for a precise view of where marks came from and where areas for improvement were.’

Comments from staff:
- ‘I like the modified assessment criteria and weighted marks.’
- ‘I think this approach is always useful for students to see exactly where they have scored well, or not.’
- ‘I like how the criteria have been weighted, this gives clarity to the marker and to the student when reading their feedback.’

Conclusion
This was a really useful piece of research and demonstrated to the researchers the importance of student involvement in designing feedback sheets and the value of using action research as a method.

In conclusion the researchers were happy with the results of the research and felt that all of the stakeholders were able to contribute to the research process.

There were some interesting ideas about what students did and did not find useful.

Recommendations
- Staff development events with markers to go through the new feedback sheets and clarify the expectations of markers
- Evaluate the feedback sheets once they have been used to see if they are of use to the students and staff
- Try to engage staff further in the process of developing effective feedback mechanisms for student assessment
- Use action research again for future research and curriculum development

References