Using the Assessment Experience Questionnaire to engage Course Teams in the revision of programme-level assessment regimes

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Abstract

The NSS identifies assessment and feedback as the primary areas of student disquiet, but provides very little diagnostic information to help course teams to adopt more effective assessment strategies. The Assessment Experience Questionnaire (Gibbs and Simpson, 2003) is not as widely used as student experience questionnaires that have been adopted nationally. Nevertheless it has been used in universities in many countries and has been translated into Mandarin Chinese and Spanish. The programme-level version of the AEQ (Dunbar-Goddet and Gibbs, in press) is currently being used in more than a dozen UK universities, across a wide range of disciplines, supported by the TESTA project (Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment) based at the University of Winchester (http://www.testa.ac.uk/). Unlike the NSS and the CEQ, the AEQ has an evidence based underlying pedagogic rationale (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004) and scale scores demonstrate clear and consistent patterns of relationships with assessment practices (Gibbs and Dunbar-Goddet, 2007).

The workshop will:

- introduce participants to the AEQ and illustrate very wide differences in AEQ scale scores between degree programmes and between institutions. Participants will examine and discuss sample data for programmes, and what it means.
- demonstrate, with case study data, how it is being used in conjunction with a quantitative audit of assessment practices (so that clear relationships between practice and students’ experience can be demonstrated, Gibbs and Dunbar-Goddet, 2009) and qualitative focus group interviews with students (so as to illustrate the meaning of scale scores). Participants will examine one set of triangulated data in the form it is presented to Course Teams.
- explain the way the data is discussed in entire course teams, giving examples of wide changes introduced across all modules on a programme.

Course Teams find AEQ data convincing and use its underlying pedagogic rationale to select alternative assessment strategies at programme level. ‘Before’ and ‘after’ AEQ data is being collected to evaluate the impact of these changes on student experience.

The focus of the ensuing discussion in the workshop will not be on the AEQ itself, but on the way Course Teams are being engaged with, and acting on, AEQ data.
Assessment Experience Questionnaire (V3.3)

By filling out this questionnaire I understand that I am agreeing to participate in a research study. Please respond to every statement by circling sa, a, ?, d or sd to indicate the strength of your agreement or disagreement.

Degree course: ……………………………………………………………………………………………

Please respond with respect to your experience so far of the entire degree course named above, including all its assessment components.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 1 | I used the feedback I received to go back over what I had done in my work | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 2 | The feedback I received prompted me to go back over material covered in the course | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 3 | I received hardly any feedback on my work | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 4 | You had to study the entire syllabus to do well in the assessment | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 5 | The assessment system made it possible to be quite selective about what parts of courses you studied | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 6 | The way the assessment worked you had to put the hours in regularly every week | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 7 | It was always easy to know the standard of work expected | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 8 | I paid careful attention to feedback on my work and tried to understand what it was saying | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 9 | The teachers made it clear from the start what they expected from students | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 10 | The staff seemed more interested in testing what I had memorised than what I understood | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 11 | It was possible to be quite strategic about which topics you could afford not to study | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 12 | It was often hard to discover what was expected of me in this course | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 13 | On this course it was necessary to work consistently hard to meet the assessment requirements | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 14 | Too often the staff asked me questions just about facts | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 15 | I didn’t understand some of the feedback on my work | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 16 | Whatever feedback I received on my work came too late to be useful | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 17 | The way the assessment worked on this course you had to study every topic | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 18 | To do well on this course all you really needed was a good memory | sa | a | ? | d | sd |

These questions are about the way you go about your learning on the course.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 19 | When I’m reading I try to memorise important facts which may come in useful later | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 20 | I usually set out to understand thoroughly the meaning of what I am asked to read | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 21 | I generally put a lot of effort into trying to understand things which initially seem difficult | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 22 | I often found myself questioning things that I heard in classes or read in books | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 23 | I find I have to concentrate on memorising a good deal of what we have to learn | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 24 | Often I found I had to study things without having a chance to really understand them | sa | a | ? | d | sd |

Learning from the exam (only to be completed if there were exams on the course).

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 25 | Doing exams brought things together for me | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 26 | I learnt new things while preparing for the exams | sa | a | ? | d | sd |
| 27 | I understood things better as a result of the exams | sa | a | ? | d | sd |

Overall satisfaction

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 28 | Overall I was satisfied with the quality of this course | sa | a | ? | d | sd |

Comments you would like to make:
AEQ Scales

**Quantity of effort (alpha=0.69)**
6 The way the assessment worked you had to put the hours in regularly every week
13 On this course it was necessary to work consistently hard to meet the assessment requirements

**Coverage of syllabus (alpha=0.85)**
4 You had to study the entire syllabus to do well in the assessment
5 The assessment system made it possible to be quite selective about what parts of courses you studied (Negative scoring)
11 It was possible to be quite strategic about which topics you could afford not to study (Negative scoring)
17 The way the assessment worked on this course you had to study every topic

**Quantity and quality of feedback (alpha=0.61)**
3 I received hardly any feedback on my work (Negative scoring)
15 I didn’t understand some of the feedback on my work (Negative scoring)
16 Whatever feedback I received on my work came too late to be useful (Negative scoring)

**Use of feedback (alpha=0.70)**
1 I used the feedback I received to go back over what I had done in my work
2 The feedback I received prompted me to go back over material covered in the course
8 I paid careful attention to feedback on my work and tried to understand what it was saying

**Appropriate assessment**
10 The staff seemed more interested in testing what I had memorised than what I understood (Negative scoring)
14 Too often the staff asked me questions just about facts (Negative scoring)
18 To do well on this course all you really needed was a good memory (Negative scoring)

**Clear goals and standards**
7 It was always easy to know the standard of work expected
9 The teachers made it clear from the start what they expected from students
12 It was often hard to discover what was expected of me in this course (Negative scoring)

**Surface Approach**
19 When I’m reading I try to memorise important facts which may come in useful later
23 I find I have to concentrate on memorising a good deal of what we have to learn
24 Often I found I had to study things without having a chance to really understand them

**Deep Approach**
20 I usually set out to understand thoroughly the meaning of what I am asked to read.
21 I generally put a lot of effort into trying to understand things which initially seem difficult
22 I often found myself questioning things that I heard in classes or read in books

**Learning from the examination (alpha=0.78)**
25 Doing the exams brings things together for me
26 I learn new things while preparing for the exams
27 I understand things better as a result of the exams

**Satisfaction**
28 Overall I am satisfied with the teaching on this course
The programme level version of the AEQ (V3.3) displays an adequate factor structure, with all items loading only on their respective scale and with adequate scale coherence.

Table 1: AEQ factor analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity of effort</th>
<th>Coverage of syllabus</th>
<th>Quality/Quantity of feedback</th>
<th>Use of feedback</th>
<th>Learning from exam</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.85</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5 (R)</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 (R)</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.82</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronbach Alpha: 0.69, 0.85, 0.61, 0.70, 0.78

ªLoadings above 0.5 only
ª (R) = reversed scoring

Table 2: AEQ scale means and ranges across nine degree programmes studied by TESTA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>Quantity of effort</th>
<th>Coverage of syllabus</th>
<th>Quality/Quantity of feedback</th>
<th>Use of feedback</th>
<th>Clear goals and standards</th>
<th>Surface Approach</th>
<th>Deep Approach</th>
<th>Overall satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>3.41-4.00</td>
<td>2.30-3.38</td>
<td>2.77-3.94</td>
<td>3.24-4.38</td>
<td>2.69-3.79</td>
<td>2.79-3.88</td>
<td>3.74-4.03</td>
<td>2.41-3.43</td>
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Assessment audit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average on 9 TESTA programmes</th>
<th>Range (all data)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Assessments</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>32 - 145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. Summative</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11 – 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. Formative</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0 – 134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2 – 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam %</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>3% - 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeliness</td>
<td>20.4 days</td>
<td>1 – 28 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral feedback</td>
<td>6 hrs 40 mins</td>
<td>37 mins - 68 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written feedback</td>
<td>7,153 words</td>
<td>2,700 - 15,412 words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relationships between assessment regimes and support of student learning

Criteria for assessment ‘working’
1. enough student effort, distributed reasonably evenly across all important topics
2. the effort they put in at a high intellectual level – focussed on understanding rather than memorising or ‘sufficing’
3. students clear and about ‘goals and standards’ and orient their effort to them
4. feedback is effective: students read it, understand it and use it to improve what they do next.
5. progression over time so that students become more sophisticated in the way that they tackle similar tasks

Assessment patterns that fail
1. Too much summative assessment for marks and too little formative assessment, for learning, resulting in:
   • a student focus on marks
   • not enough student effort, because it is not possible to mark often enough
   • not enough feedback, and delay in feedback
2. Trivial assignments that make low intellectual demands, in order to save marking time
3. Feedback that does not feed forwards – because:
   • it not relevant to the next assignment which is different in form
   • it is too late (sometimes because of the examination regulations associated with marking)
   • it is too specific to the content of the assignment
4. Too much variety in forms of assignment, causing:
   • student confusion about demands and forms of discourse
   • lack of progression in standard over time as too little practice at each form
• feedback not feeding forwards
• the whole being less than the sum of the parts
5. Over-reliance on documentation to clarify goals and standards, resulting in:
• lack of student understanding of goals and standards
• differences between teachers in marking standards and the focus of feedback, as they don’t understand the learning outcomes and criteria

Assessment patterns that work
1. Large number of regular tasks or assignments (or smaller number of large and complex assignments) that generate sufficient effort and distribute that effort across topics.
   (Unseen exams with clever questions can also achieve this)
2. Most assignments as course requirements, without marks, so that:
   • the focus can remain on learning
   • the marking load is reduced
   • informal feedback mechanisms can operate very quickly
3. Regular cycles of feedback and practice involving a limited range of types of assignment so that student come to understand goals and standards through engaging with those standards, whether or not they are written down anywhere
4. Less reliance on teachers for feedback and more involvement of students to engage with internalising criteria and standards so that they can supervise themselves
   …but increasing informal oral feedback from teachers
5. Wide use of exemplars of grades for each type of assignment – for the benefit of both teachers and students - and discussion of these exemplars.

Implications for course design
1. Longer, bigger and fewer course units, in order to:
   • reduce the number of summative assessments
   • free up resources for more formative assessment
   • provide more opportunity for sequences of assignments with feedback that can feed forwards, within courses
2. Limitation on variety of types of assignment, and planned consistency across semesters and years in the nature of assignments and the nature of criteria used in assessing assignments, so as to:
   • provide enough practice for students to progress in their sophistication
   • enable feedback to feed forwards
3. Orienting assessment to programme level learning outcomes, rather than mainly to course-level outcomes, so as to:
   • increase consistency and progression
   • clarify the meaning of goals and standards to students, as they will encounter programme-level outcomes repeatedly
   • increase the validity of degree classifications
4. Less reliance on formal documentation to communicate standards, and more effort to provide exemplars so as to
   • make explicit, and open to discussion, the meaning of goals and standards, for both teachers and students
   • enable students internalise standards, through marking exercises, and through self and peer assessment in relation to exemplars
5. The use of course requirements (with formative feedback) to increase and distribute student effort, with pass/fail judgements on them, or sampling for summative assessment and grading.
6. The use of integrative or ‘capstone’ courses that carry a heavy summative assessment load, enabling some preceding courses to be pass/fail and focus on learning.
Case Study

Audit data

Summary of nine degree programmes in current TESTA development work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Case Study Programme</th>
<th>Average on 9 programmes</th>
<th>Range over 9 programmes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Assessments</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>32 – 80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summative</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26 – 52</td>
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<td>Formative</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>0 – 41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7 – 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam %</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>3% - 34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeliness</td>
<td>28 days</td>
<td>20.4 days</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral feedback</td>
<td>37 mins</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4,089 words</td>
<td>7,153 words</td>
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Assessment Experience Questionnaire (AEQ) data

Summary of nine degree programmes in current TESTA development work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>Quantity of effort</th>
<th>Syllabus Coverage</th>
<th>Quantity &amp; quality of feedback</th>
<th>Use of feedback</th>
<th>Appropriate Assessment</th>
<th>Clear goals and standards</th>
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<td>2.79-4.03</td>
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<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.16</td>
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</table>
Case Study comments:

- This course has the lowest scores of all programmes for **quantity and quality of feedback**, in spite of an average volume of written feedback. The scores may have been predicted from the audit by limited oral feedback and slow return of feedback.

- **Use of feedback** is also lowest of all programmes.

- The students rate **appropriate assessment** lowest of all programmes which means that they regard the assessment as geared more towards memory.

- Students have relatively low scores on **clear goals and standards**, predicted in the audit data by high variety of assessment, low volumes of formative-only assessment, slow return of written feedback and low volumes of oral feedback.

- The case study students have significantly higher scores for **learning from exams** than the mean.

- Students perceived that they were not being required to work particularly hard across the programme with a low **quantity of effort** score.

- Students report taking a **surface approach** to their studies on the programme to a greater extent than in any other programme.

Focus Group data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group: Code Frequencies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scales</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of Feedback</td>
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<td>Distribution of Effort</td>
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<td>Explicit Criteria</td>
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<td>Written feedback</td>
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<td>Surface Approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clear goals and standards</td>
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<td>Academic Structure</td>
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<td>Appropriateness of assessment</td>
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<td>Marker variation</td>
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<td>Strategic Approach</td>
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</table>
Use of feedback

Headline 1: Students value specific, developmental feedback which links to criteria

They are very general, all of mine are very general and then I look at my mark and think well what I want to do on my next one is what can I improve, what can I get better at and then like I said before there is nothing there to say this can be improved.

Sometimes they will write on the script as well which is more helpful, they will say ‘see my comments on the script’ and they will actually use specific examples which is better than just the general comment. I have had two or three pieces of coursework back with absolutely no writing on the front at all.

I would say it is important to have constructive feedback as well on the item report form at the end where you get your grade but sometimes you just get your grade and then sort of a broad statement, ... if it was more constructive you would know what your areas were that you needed to improve on.

Our tutor on blackboard after our assignments sort of put the sort of things that the group did well and the sorts of things that the group didn’t do well, so we could probably work out who was who but as a whole it gave us the opportunity as a group to see where we didn’t do well and that was helpful as a group, she did that for the exam as well it was helpful.

They don’t link the comments to the mark scheme, if they enclose a copy of the mark scheme with the thing and then highlight the mark scheme to the parts that you miss that would be really useful but they don’t.

General everyone did really well or some people didn’t do very well and that is about all we get in the lectures.

Headline 2:....but being module specific may limit the future use of feedback

... if it was something general like say report writing because that is going to say span across several modules then that is more useful in some ways because you can then apply it in the future but something that is very specific, you could get feedback on how to get it better but you are not going to have the opportunity to improve on it because you are moving on to another module.

Headline 3: Students are nervous about taking up tutorial opportunities

They do encourage you to have tutorials to get verbal feedback, but on the other aspect as an undergraduate I find it quite intimidating to walk in and get the feedback because firstly you know that they are very busy, that is made quite clear at all times I think I am safe to say and so you almost feel as though you are imposing.

I must admit I don’t go back for verbal feedback. It depends who the lecturer is if I go for a tutorial, I did find one or two lecturers very intimidating and they make you feel stupid so rather than go there and feel stupid I would rather battle through it alone and see what happens at the end which is not the way to do it.

I need more tutorials; I need to talk with the tutor because sometimes I don’t understand what they try to say (YR 2).
Headline 4: They perceive variations in the quantity and quality of written feedback

I think it should be typed up because we have to type up our assignments to hand it in so that the lecturers can read it to mark it and yet the scrawl the comments on the front and you can’t...

That is another thing about the consistency of feedback though isn’t it because if you can’t compare feedback from two different essays then what is the point? Yes it is like which one shall we go with?

I do find when they give us feedback that some people, some are more about marking the papers they are more about putting the ticks in the boxes and they don’t put anything to help you. Some do put like a page, about a page of stuff which is really helpful but you find the majority of them don’t actually do that.

I have had one recently, someone had written about a page’s worth of stuff and then written “Come and see me”. They gave me things to think about and then asked me to go and see them to discuss them so they gave me things to think ... whereas there are other times where there is just a tick and in the boxes at the bottom but it had said nothing.

It isn’t that feedback isn’t on offer in some subjects, in some modules, but we can’t make the most of it all the time. It’s like we are quite dependant on which tutor is with which module and their style of teaching and approach to the students in general.

Headline 5: Slow feedback diminishes its use and value

Yes, because sometimes by the time you have got it you have done your next one anyway so it is no use to you, it might be useful in a future essay but not for the same module.

I think sometimes when you get it so long after it you have forgotten what the whole purpose is really about and so you sort of oh yes have a quick read but you haven’t really taken it in in that time scale, by the time you have taken it in to the time it is marked to the time you get it back you think is that really important and then you have moved on to something else.

Headline 6: Publishing grades before comments deters students from using feedback

The thing is you get your grade a long time before you get your work and I think if your grade is ok you are not bothered, you just think oh well ok whatever, I got a B plus or I got a C, I passed I am ok, I mean obviously if you failed or you got a D or something you would be more keen, ok I have got to improve this and get on, so I think if your grades are alright you get lazy about looking for feedback because you think, well I have done alright.

Headline 7: Students value strategies which engage them in interacting with feedback

There is a seminar coming up in which we have to take two pieces of work from last year or at least something we consider to be up there as our best and as our worst and actively go through the feedback and talk about how we can learn from that feedback in order to produce a better assignment this year for this particular module.
Quantity and Distribution of Effort

Headline 1: Students believe that small, frequent assessments may help them to learn and engage

I did think of approaching a module with small but often assessments so instead of one big 2,500 word essay, which means nothing to anybody by the time you leave, I would rather do three small assessments on different topics.

I: And you can engage in the whole module rather than just one aspect of the whole module
R: Yes exactly
R2: I don't know about anyone else but you I have found with x I have learnt a lot more.
R1: It is the only module I have found that does it this way, every other module is one assignment, one exam or just one exam
R: Yeah I love it.
R2: I am actually learning the material.
R1: I have one next semester that does that as well, it is the cultural one, which is pebble pad as well which I think is going to be just as good.

My mate went to America last year, the exchange thing with the Uni and the amount of work he got was probably about three times more than here but it was done in small chunks each week of the assignment and he managed it a lot easier.

Headline 2: Bunching of assessments leads to a surface approach to learning

That’s one thing they could look at, say, the subject of psychology as a whole, modules could look at when pieces of work have got to be in and try and span it, spread it across the... over the semester because sometimes it is just ridiculous. Also that feeds into the fact that you become surface learners as opposed to deep learners.

Revision yeah and the of course you have got the three exams all in the same week and you have got to make sure you have covered everything in my limited memory all three exams, which sometimes confuses things I think because sometimes and I know it really should tie in but it doesn’t always.

And also the fact that all the assessments seem to come in within like a week of each other, it just means that I don’t have any work for like 3 months and then suddenly I have 5,000 words to write, I just don’t understand it.

Headline 3: When assessment focuses too narrowly on one topic, it may limit learning

... for example if you have done an essay on behaviourism, and that whole module even though you have learnt about all those other things, all the other themes, you focus on behaviourism and all the other things go out the window because that is what you are doing your essay on, and you walk out of the module knowing more about behaviourism and not much about anything else.

Headline 5: Summative, graded assessment is the only thing worth working on, for some

Why waste extra time on stuff that no one is going to check up on
Personally if I know that it is not being marked or we are not necessarily going to get feedback form it then I won’t put as much effort into it, I might as well focus more attention on the things that are going more important and are going to get the grades at the end...

Clear goals & standards

**Headline 1: Students generally feel unable to judge the quality of their work**

What each module does have is a learning outcome at the beginning which you could obviously use in order to guide you towards certain aspects because you can kind of guess, but again it is kind of guess work.

R2: Yeah even if you are following the generic grade descriptor around the learning outcomes and the front sheet you still don’t know whether you are going to get a good mark or not.
R1: You guess.
R4: You guess and if you pass you are lucky. Basically if you get a good grade then you have got lucky for that one essay.
R1: You have guessed right.
R2: It is potluck isn’t it?

I think you could probably tell what was bad, but I wouldn’t be able to distinguish between a C and B and an A possibly because I wouldn’t know what was the top, top, if you popped one in front of me I wouldn’t know if it was the top one.

Oh, I could say that this is a strength or this is mediocre or this is a weakness but when it comes to judging I couldn’t give it an overall grade, like I could say ‘this is really good, this is not good’ but I wouldn’t be able to put them in levels of importance to come up with a grade.

It’s like I can never do that with my own work when I hand in a piece of work, I literally think ‘oh that is quite good’ or ‘oh I think that is going to be bad’ and that is as far as it goes, I can never judge and I never know, I can never expect what grade I get.

I get ones where I think I did really well on that and it will come back and it is a low grade or I get ones where it comes back and I think ‘oh that is going to be awful’ and it comes back with a good grade and I am like what is right, how do I know what I am doing?

Yeah I can never safely assume.

I just kind of do it and hope it is good and cross my fingers because I am not really sure if I have done it correctly or not or whether I have done it to the highest standard or not.

I can usually tell, I must be one of the exceptions I think, I can usually tell roughly where it is going to be.

**Headline 2: Students find criteria, descriptors & learning outcomes indigestible, open to interpretation, and even counter-productive**

Partly because at the start of the module they give a very general thing for the whole
module, and they don’t revisit that general one until the end and then each individual
lecture had its own learning outcomes and so there is a hell of a lot of them so it is
hard to keep track of them all.

Yes, it is not in layman’s terms, sometimes they use words that we haven’t yet learnt,
we might know what it is at the end but we don’t always revisit it at the end so it does
become difficult.

Yes they are out of context completely. It’s like in a module handbook “to get a good
mark it has to be clear and concise”, but what does that mean?

Yes, I would say it is quite clear, we have got grade descriptors about how to get to
each grade, having said that it can be interpreted really wrongly.

R3: Having specific learning objectives at the start that you can sort of		treat as your
assessment criteria, it will make you have a really narrow approach to it, everyone is
all about getting the right grades and they sit down and say this is exactly it.
R2: No one would do any extra reading.
R3: So, it would bump the grades up and everyone would know what they were going
for exactly, it would actually limit what you get out of the module.

Headline 3: Some lecturers help with the indigestion, while others ignore the criteria

They had two compulsory sessions and that was very helpful and I think it helped to
clarify what they were after, what the tutors were looking for from us and yes that was
helpful and we were given ideas on how to go about it and I thought they out an awful
lot of effort into helping us sort of try and produce a good report.

I think some are, I think some are, giving more guidance than others but I think some
areas are harder for students to grasp and I think those areas require more guidance
and I find the staff here really urmm, they are willing to help in any way they can and
they are quite amenable.

Some lecturers will go through the outcomes when you first start the module and kind
of define what they mean and so that does give you a better understanding but not all
of the lecturers do that so it kind of leaves you thinking I don’t know what I am
supposed to be doing.

R1: I think you almost... it is a shame but you have got to keep in mind who is
marking the work
R2: Yes you do definitely.
R1: And I definitely keep that in mind when I am doing something.
R3: Because what is unacceptable for one lecturer is ok for others.

Headline 4: One-to-ones, exemplars, formative ‘dry runs’ and generic in-class
guidance all help to clarify goals and standards

In addition to what happens now, it would be, if it could be fitted in it would be
beneficial for the students to be able to have a one-to-one with the course tutor and I
think a discussion on perhaps approach and maybe how the assignment needs to be
completed, I think that would maybe be the most beneficial.

I would rather look at past examples because I have worked well where they have
drew my what they are doing and then in my brain I can try and figure out how we
are supposed to do it. So even if it is not on the same subject it is a similar style, the I
can use that and kind of transfer that onto what I want to do, I find it easier that way.

There is a module guide yes but it would be good to have some good examples of good work, that makes sense because then you can see it and say 'ok that is an A grade' and so that is what I need to do.

What would be helpful is if you could some how have access to say an essay that had got a D and an essay that had got a C and an essay that had got a B and an essay that had got an A and an A plus so you could see.

Recently for one of the modules we had like, because it was obvious that a lot of people didn't know what they were doing, so the whole group... there was a question and answer session and for the quieter ones who maybe didn’t want to ask the questions in the group, write it on a slip and the next time she emailed this feedback sheet for everyone, so even though she hadn’t asked the questions we are getting the feedback and direction they needed which was really useful.

It would definitely help if we had one of those reports that we were given in the first year when the grades didn’t count towards your degree, so that would have been trial and error then you could see where it worked and carry it on to the second year and do it properly.

Case Study Summary

Audit: wide variety of kinds of assessment, few formative assessments, slow feedback, little oral feedback.

AEQ: perception of poor quantity and quality of feedback, students make little use of feedback, perception of assessment as testing recall of facts, students report taking a surface approach

Focus groups:

(a) Quantity and quality of feedback: they lack confidence to take up tutorials with academics, and feel that they might be imposing on busy schedules; the quantity of feedback on scripts and cover sheets varies hugely; that they don’t get any feedback on exams (a third of all assessment).

(b) Use of feedback: students commented on slow returns, difficult to access in small windows of admin time, grade reaching them on portal pages before comments; variability in usefulness in terms of constructive developmental feedback; modularity prevents use.

(c) Appropriate assessment: exams are often memory and recall directed, as are multiple choice questions, bunching of assessment leads to surface approaches. Students don’t prioritise weekly readings and engagement as they feel overloaded and assessments dominate.
Case Study Changes to Assessment

Specific and particular changes have flowed from this evidence-led process, including:

1) Whole programme reduction in summative assessment
2) Increase in formative.
3) More linked assessment for feedback to feed forward.
4) Dedicated core team to handle one-to-one tutorial feedback
5) Referral of 'marks-posted-before-grade' system to Senior Managers for reconsideration.
6) Redesign of programme to reflect alignment of content, outcomes and assessment.
7) Removal of most MCQs
8) Introduction of more self-assessment
9) Introduction of more portfolio, patchwork type assessments
10) Reduction in exams
11) Rationalising variety
12) Dealing with sequence and spread of tasks.

Case Study Changes to AEQ scores (before and after)

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<tr>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>Quantity of effort</th>
<th>Coverage of Syllabus</th>
<th>Quantity &amp; quality of feedback</th>
<th>Use of feedback</th>
<th>Appropriate Assessment</th>
<th>Clear goals and standards</th>
<th>Surface Approach</th>
<th>Deep Approach</th>
<th>Learning from exams</th>
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References


TESTA web site  http://www.testa.ac.uk/

The TESTA web site contains all the documentation you need to run the TESTA methodology yourself, and a wide range of useful supporting materials, including a video lecture about the pedagogic rationale, case study material, guidance to students on feedback etc etc.