NOTES OF GUIDANCE 4

FEEDBACK SERIES

Making best use of pro-forma for essay feedback

Welcome to the first of the Feedback series in the LSE Teaching and Learning Centre's Notes of Guidance. The series takes as its starting point a key principle set out in the recent Academic Board paper on feedback – that it should be a dialogue between student and teacher, not simply a grade. It also reflects the ten principles proposed by the National Union of Students, which has been active in addressing student concerns in this area through its Feedback Amnesty.

The ten principles of good feedback practice

Feedback …
1. should be for learning, not just of learning
2. should be a continuous process
3. should be timely
4. should relate to clear criteria
5. should be constructive
6. should be legible and clear
7. should be provided on exams
8. should include self-assessment and peer-to-peer feedback
9. should be accessible to all students
10. should be flexible and suited to students' needs

Source: The Great NUS Feedback Amnesty, Briefing Paper (http://resource.nusonline.co.uk/media/resource/2008-Feedback_Amnesty_Briefing_Paper1.pdf)

The LSE context

Feedback from LSE students through the National Student Survey continues to give 'assessment and feedback' the lowest rating compared with all other aspects of their studies (63 per cent of students satisfied).

• Only 52 per cent of students agree that 'Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand.'

• Only 56 per cent of students agree that 'I have received detailed comments on my work.'

• Only 60 per cent of students agree that 'The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.'

While feedback is a common concern across the HE sector, LSE is below the sector average. That said, it is clear that several colleagues do a great job in providing feedback to their students. Last year, the SU Teaching Excellence Awards focused on feedback, and below are some examples of where students felt that feedback made a real difference:

'Her essay assessment system provides refreshing clarity, covers every issue and has genuinely improved the standard of my writing throughout the year. Feedback is provided from three angles: a matrix grid of general points, on which progress can easily be displayed, a general comment at the end, and specific comments throughout the piece. Marking is prompt … Superb in this regard.'
(said of Charlie Peevers, GTA in Law)

'He has met personally with each of his students regarding the class's formative essays.'
(said of John Gledhill, Lecturer in Government)

'He shows ... commitment to the tutorial system that allows for non-graded, constructive assignments taking away focus from exams.'

'Thanks to continuous feedback, the quality of discussion in class with Mathijs is the best I have had at the LSE, and my written work has improved visibly over the months.'
(said of Mathjis Pelkmans, Lecturer in Anthropology)

'He is that rare teacher that patiently comes down to my level of thinking but skilfully brings my understanding up to a more mature analytical capacity.'

'He … takes the time to give not only critical but constructive feedback on my work that is both timely and encouraging.'
(said of Tony Cornford, Lecturer in IS)

'I've learned just as much about "how to learn" from Wendy's class as I have about the course materials itself. Wendy has literally changed the way I see the world.'
(said of Wendy Sigle-Rushton, Lecturer in Social Policy)

A sample pro-forma for essay feedback

It is recommended that a pro-forma like this be handed to students with an assignment, for return with the work.

This pro-forma can be adapted for other pieces of work. TLC will be publishing other titles in this Feedback series that include pro-forma particularly appropriate for presentations, problem sets and other types of work.

Ensure your student knows they are going to be getting feedback!

Consider customising your pro-forma with a departmental logo.

Basic 'house-keeping'.

Rather than asking students to collect their work from a heap at the front of the class, hand it back to them by name. It helps you get to know who is who and provides subtle feedback acknowledging their work. If they have not submitted work or handed it in very late, consider handing them a sheet with, for example, 'I note that you have not submitted the course work. Please can you come and see me in my office hour (time/date/venue). If you are facing difficulties with your studies, it is important to address them as early as possible.'

Note that the Code of Practice on UG/PGT teaching requires staff to return work to students within two weeks of submission, if they handed that work in on time. Discuss this with students. In some essay-based subjects, students have indicated that they might benefit from the feedback closer to their next assignment.

LSE

TLC Teaching and Learning Centre

Feedback on: Essay _____   **Assessment number: 1 of 4**

Student name: **Tutor name:**

Course code/name:

Title:

Date submitted:

To the student: Please note what you would find it most helpful to have feedback on for this piece of work (you can either note in the space below, or put a star next to one or more of the comment boxes below).

Students often have as much difficulty with remembering the array of staff names as you might remembering them!

A working principle on feedback is that it should be a dialogue. Encourage the dialogue by asking students to think about what they need to work on more. This can then guide you as to where to place at least some of the emphasis in the feedback.

Feedback on:

The extent to which this piece of writing addresses the question.	
The appropriateness of the writing style for the nature of the piece of work and the discipline.	
The quality/range/ appropriateness of evidence used.	
Care of presentation, eg accuracy and appropriateness of referencing/citation, quality of proof reading, any concerns regarding punctuation, layout, sentence structure, use of English, etc.	

What goes in the following boxes might vary depending on:
• the type of work being assessed
• the criteria used for grading purposes
• key issues arising in the particular course that students most need to understand/ work with/critique/evaluate/synthesise.

The main strengths of your essay:

What needs to be worked on in your essay:

What you should pay attention to if you wish to improve your grade for your next submission:

Any additional comments (eg how this assignment relates to examination):

Summary table

	Bad fail (0-19%)	Fail (20-39%)	3rd (40-49%)	2:2 (50-59%)	2:1 (60-69%)	1st (70-100%)
Answers question						
Writing style						
Quality of evidence						
Presentation/ referencing						

Please make an appointment to meet with me on:
My room number is:
Office hours on:
Email:

You might find it useful to get further advice from
☐ your academic adviser   ☐ LSE Teaching and Learning Centre
☐ LSE Language Centre   ☐ LSE Library

GRADE: _____
(NB: Grade will be given following the face-to-face meeting with your tutor)

Using feedback pro-forma as part of a feedback process – improving the dialogue with students

Feedback and assessment are fundamental to learning. They can drive learning, but also divert it if used inappropriately. Thinking through all elements of the assessment and feedback process is a crucial part of course design and implementation.

1

At course design stage give careful consideration to:

• the outcomes you want your students want to achieve (and the outcomes they want to achieve)

• the match between those outcomes and the formal assessment you plan to use – is the assessment valid? reliable? manageable?

• the match between the formal assessment and any in-course assessment (formative assessment) you engage students in

• the criteria you will use to judge student performance

• the process by which you share those criteria with your students and the feedback they will receive

At the Academic Board meeting of 9 June 2010 it was agreed that the USSC/GSSC course proposal forms be revised to include a separate section on formative feedback. This section asks for details on: how students will be formatively assessed; how feedback will be delivered (a combination of written comments, self-/peer-assessment, group feedback, one-to-ones, etc); how teachers will relate their feedback to the assessment criteria and how teachers will relate formative assessment – and feedback on that assessment – to summative assessment.

2

In planning course implementation consider:

• how you, together with others involved in course delivery (ie the full team of lecturers, class/seminar teachers, other advisers), work together with students to discuss and share your understanding; for example, the introduction of a simple 'marking exercise' for

both students and the course team can really help all concerned get a firm grip on what is deemed important in the discipline/subject

• explaining to students how any course work links through to their final assessment and actively supports their learning

3

When students are about to start work on their first assignment:

• clarify the task – in both lectures and classes/seminars

• provide students with the assessment criteria used in the course; the marking exercise suggested in point 2 above can assist in bringing the criteria to life and to the attention of your students

• let students know when and how they will receive feedback – for example, for a first assignment on a first-year UG course or a core MSc course, hand out a small package: the feedback pro-forma, the assessment criteria and the *Making feedback work for you* leaflet for students

• ask students to fill out the top part of the feedback pro-forma and attach it to their work when they submit it

4

When returning work to students:

• again consider how the lecturer and class/seminar teachers can be seen to be working as a team together with the students

• establish opportunity for dialogue

• consider how ideas/feedback from current work might be used to guide future practice – both in terms of broader learning of the discipline and the more specific requirements of the final course assessment (ie in the LSE situation, in many cases, what students will be expected to do in their exams)

Further reading

For more on the NUS's Feedback Academy see
www.nus.org.uk/en/Campaigns/Higher-Education/Assessment-feedback-/

For further ideas on assessment, see the LSE Teaching and Learning Centre's Notes of Guidance 1 (Broadening student assessment) and 3 (Preparing examination papers and preparing students for examinations). All Notes of Guidance are available at available at the Publications page of the LSE Teaching and Learning Centre website (**www.lse.ac.uk/tlc**).

Coming soon in the Feedback series:

• Feedback on student presentations
• Doing less better
• Self-feedback and peer-to-peer feedback