

University of Edinburgh

Feedback Standards & Guiding Principles

Feedback plays a vital role in sustaining excellence in teaching and learning at undergraduate and postgraduate level. This document sets out the standards required of feedback at Edinburgh, together with a framework of guiding principles to underpin the effective provision and use of feedback by teachers and students.

Throughout the document, feedback is defined as information to students which can enable them to review what they know, understand and can do in their studies, and to identify areas for improvement. Opportunities for feedback arise within timetabled classes (tutorials, practicals, lectures) as well as more informally. And feedback can be provided not only on coursework assignments, tests and exam answers, but also on activities that are not formally assessed such as class discussions, group exercises, problem-solving, and developing project plans and proposals.

Standards

1. Feedback is integral to course design. Every course and programme will provide opportunities for students to get feedback on their performance and achievements.
2. Feedback will be prompt, informative and helpful.
3. Course and programme documentation (e.g. the course handbook or website) must inform students when, where and how feedback is offered in the course concerned.
4. Assessment expectations, standards and marking criteria will be clearly communicated to students, with opportunities for discussion, to enable them to understand and interpret feedback.
5. All students are expected to take careful note of feedback and to make good use of it in their learning.
6. All teachers and assessors are expected to give feedback effectively, and to reflect on, review and update their expertise.
7. The provision of feedback must be regularly monitored in quality assurance procedures (e.g. in course questionnaires and/or focus groups, in staff-student liaison committees, and in programme/subject reviews) and appropriate action taken to address concerns raised.

Guiding Principles

- a. Feedback is a two-way process. It thrives on interaction and dialogue between students and their teachers, and where there is a sense of belonging to a vibrant community of learners.
- b. Feedback varies in a number of ways:
 - It can fulfil a range of *purposes*, including to correct, to justify a mark or grade, to encourage and praise, to diagnose, to explain why or how, to troubleshoot, to debate, to suggest alternatives, to edit, to clarify, to advise on where and how to improve.
 - It can come from many *sources*: from lecturers, supervisors, tutors and demonstrators; from fellow-students; from professional practitioners; from students' own personal reflections; from the audience for a seminar or poster presentation
 - It can take many different *forms*, including pre-assignment guidance; handwritten notes in the margins of an essay or report; ratings on a pro forma; verbal or emailed comments; 'clicker' responses in a lecture; a practice session in marking and

commenting on a sample assignment; 'drop-in' advice; a supervision meeting; a debriefing by a professional practitioner; whole-class feedback on how an exam question had been tackled

- c. Feedback needs to be fit for purpose. The particular kinds of feedback that are offered within any given course or programme unit will vary, depending on what and how students are expected to learn and the resources available.
- d. Good feedback and high-quality learning go hand-in-glove. Where feedback is effective, it can help students to improve what they know, understand and are able to do — and so attain their full potential.
- e. In order to be effective, feedback needs to be prompt, informative and helpful.
 - *prompt* feedback is returned to students within the agreed timescale for the work submitted;
 - *informative* feedback highlights strengths and weaknesses, giving specific examples or explanations;
 - *helpful* feedback offers suggestions about how to improve.
- f. Students' engagement with feedback thrives when they experience it in a wide range of forms and settings, while gaining practice in acting upon and giving feedback as well as receiving it.
- g. Staff expertise in feedback grows when new tutors, demonstrators, supervisors and lecturers are well-supported in learning how to give feedback effectively in their subject area, and when good practice and innovation in feedback are shared amongst staff at all levels of experience. [A website resource has been compiled on *Improving Feedback*, which links a range of innovative feedback strategies to over 200 case-examples drawn from across the subject range and from within and outwith Edinburgh: www.tla.ed.ac.uk/feedback.htm]
- h. Feedback can only work well when it is a joint and shared responsibility.

<p><i>The onus is on students to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ familiarise themselves with when, where and how feedback is provided ◦ develop their understanding of assessment expectations, criteria and standards in their chosen degree programme ◦ collect and reflect on the feedback provided, and grasp opportunities to put it to good use 	<p><i>The onus is on teachers to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ design courses and programmes in ways that enable students to get and to act on feedback ◦ inform students when, where and how feedback will be provided ◦ provide feedback which is prompt, informative and helpful, within the resources available to them
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- i. The quality of feedback is safeguarded when it is monitored and when it is valued appropriately in staff appraisal and promotion.

Approved by Senatus on 16 June 2010