Editorial

When I received the first draft of this edition of *Reflections* I had to smile. I had been thinking about what I might say about student partnership and voice and, after a bit of research I realised that much of the current debate focuses on our perceptions of our relationships with our students. The student as consumer or the student as someone that we develop a genuine partnership with. And then I read Jason's article, with which my editorial shares the front page. So, my job here is redundant; in true partnership style Jason, our VP Education, has explained the importance of how we frame partnership. I'd like to think that some of our chats over the last year, when we could have a coffee in Clements, have shaped some of Jason's thoughts, but I should add that I have learnt a lot from Jason about partnership as well. A shared understanding, patience and a genuine willingness to work together, which I believe is the foundation of good partnership.

In her article, Karen Fraser outlines a project that is a partnership between Schools, student interns and CED. The project aimed to support student interns in identifying areas of pedagogic and assessment practices, including feedback, in Schools that could be enhanced. A number of outputs have been created including an Assessment Hub that has case studies from both Queen's and the wider HEI community and a Handbook of Assessment Guidance and Support. The project process itself also meant that issues of student voice and representation were considered at both a University and School level.

The Learning Development Service take on a significant role in supporting the needs of our learners. Much of this is shaped through partnership with the student body. You can read all about their team and their services in their article. You can also read about the Careers, Employability and Skills service and how they have supported students during lockdown. The Graduate School reflects upon the importance of the postgraduate voice and how this has shaped the programmes that they provide to their students, including peer proof-reading.

I'm delighted to say that a number of our student interns associated with the partnership project have written articles about their individual projects.

Angela Rogan's article is both thoughtful and insightful, drawing upon her experiences of higher education. Angela explores what assessment and feedback might look like in a partnership model.

Sarah Murray addresses an important issue in that we are often not explicit about what we consider to be feedback and how it is given (and received). As a result their Partnership Project group created a Feedback Success Tool.

Úna Quin considers the need to develop feedback literacies with students so that any feedback received feeds into their learning cycles. As a result this Partnership Project created a course for students to undertake to help them understand the role and value of feedback.

Katie Goldsmith, in her article, tackles the issue of stress, well-being and assessment. She explores the use of Bloom's Taxonomy in open book exams and the potential for developing this form of assessment further.

Finally Michael Upham and Caitríona Quinn also consider the link between well-being and assessment. Together they consider the role that personalised feedback and innovative assessment can play in avoiding this.

That so many articles in this edition of *Reflections* consider the role of feedback to students and their learning is a recognition of the importance of assessment more generally to students. It is great to see that these concerns are being tackled through student partnership projects and that solutions are being created and implemented. Happy Reading!

Pedagogy of Liberation

By Jason Bunting, VP Education, QUBSU

An argument for the positioning of student representatives as partners for their effective involvement in university academic governance.

The inclusion of students in academic decision-making remains a contested space in higher education. As a student representative for the last three years, first as a Course Representative, then School Representative, now elected Vice-President for Education in the Students' Union, the arguments for and against student involvement in the forums of decision-making already seem well rehearsed.

Complex and perennial questions around perceived limits to student involvement in academic governance were once again re-invigorated this year, as our Students' Union worked in close partnership with the University on a project entitled the Academic Rep Review, which aimed to review all aspects of our academic representation programme. Wide-ranging consultation with students, current and former representatives and colleagues across the Institution, identified a number of challenges for academic representation including, but not limited to, issues related to communication, engagement and visibility. However, the project also revived arguments around the extent of full student involvement in governance.

By the conclusion of the first phrase of this project a number of key changes have been made including new mechanisms for communication and visibility, a newly co-created Student Academic Representation Code of Practice and most importantly a shift in culture to volunteerism and partnership within the programme. Still the debate on the limits (if any exist) to student involvement persists. In this article, it is my hope to present a cogent argument for the inclusion of students in all decisions on the student learning experience.

I will explore arguments which advocate for the involvement of students as 'customers' within a marketised model of education, then present the more convincing case which advocates for full student involvement as a method of achieving liberated education. Finally, I will detail other arguments which provide common ground for Students' Unions and universities to advocate equally for full student involvement.

Firstly, it should be noted that Students' Unions and their allies in universities must be wary of arguments which position the student as consumer. It has been suggested that students in a consumerist role should participate in decision-making precisely because of their rights as a customer. This approach is characteristic of proponents of a marketised system of higher education, which tokenises student representatives for quality assurance purposes. No true dialogue can come from this state and it engenders no true educational agency on the part of students or staff. It relies on the 'banking' concept of education (Freire, 1970) where knowledge is to be transferred from the expert to student with occasional student consultation and neglects the active role and expertise of both partners in education, characterising education with passivity and "compartmentalising education as a product instead of a

process"" (McCullough, 2009: 177). In the marketised University, student participation in governance is merely "window dressing" (Tamrat, 2019: 45) with no real consequence. Indeed, this argument accentuates a problematic understanding of education and serves only narrow consumerism. The active role expected by students in Higher Education fatally undermines an argument for student involvement based on marketization and does not reflect the "realities of contemporary higher education" (McCullough, 2009: 181).

Marketization is inherently a limiting force, restricting the role of student to one of token passive consultant and undermining their identity. By impeding the ability of students to use their voice and therefore become more fully human (Freire, 1970), marketization reveals itself as inherently oppressive. Profit is all, tempered only by the effective organisation of students. Moreover, the positing of students as the 'customer' undermines their agency in an environment where it is explicitly demanded. In a neo-liberal, marketised model of higher education, students can, therefore, be best understood as an oppressed constituency. Arguments for the full involvement of students must, therefore, have opposition to this oppression as a central tenet by building a clear alternative where students perceive the reality of their educational experience and work to transform it.

In particular, for today's Students' Unions, any argument to include student representation in academic governance should be deeply rooted in the humanising power of student voice and engagement to redress the student-teacher contradiction, couched in the work of Freire.

Indeed, drawing on Freire, it is the role of leadership to enlist students in the struggle for liberation to address this contradiction and construct an educational experience based on partnership.

This is a struggle which cannot be forged 'for' the members of any university community. Instead, students must be empowered to engage in reflective participation on their experience with the goal of liberation (Freire, 1970). Leadership must create the conditions necessary for students to be afforded this space for deliberative reflection and it follows naturally, given the centrality of reflection, that to truly address the student-teacher contradiction, this work must be active,

rejecting the banking or 'depositing' notion of education (Freire, 1970) and activating students as critical co-investigators of their education.

It is equally true that, although all students must engage in this work, the governance of higher education necessitates that students elect representatives to act as their conduit for this participation. Student representatives can, therefore, be most effectively understood as vehicles of educational agency for all students to contribute to the necessary "midwifery" (Freire, 1970) of their liberation. Equally, it should be recognised that in seeking to engage in this creation that it is not the aim of student representatives to usurp the role of the manager-academic. As Freire usefully delineates, it is the responsibility of the oppressed to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor (Freire, 1970). It is, therefore, of vital importance that students have full involvement in academic governance.

Finally, it should be noted that across Higher Education, Students' Unions and their parent institutions share much common ground in their desires to effectively embed the 'student voice' into decision-making.

This is particularly true in the shared recognition of a civic purpose of Higher Education institutions by both partners. As sites of democratic citizenship and "participative spaces" (Planas, 2013: 572), university governance can empower student representatives to practise democratic values, including the notion from representative democracy that 'everyone's' voice is heard. Universities, as civic organs and organisations pursuing a public good, therefore contribute to the development of embedded democratic values (Boland, 2005: 211) through student involvement. This is a "concept inherent" in universities (Klemencic, 2011: 11). Moreover, constructive engagement by students in the formal channels of university decision-making, reduces the perceived risk of students engaging in external political action in the form of protest. It has been argued that formal methods for inclusion of students can help in the development of a more "healthy organisational climate" in universities (Menon, 2003: 238) and a lessened risk of reputational damage.

It is also evident that Student's Unions and universities both benefit from the skills which student representatives develop while participating in university governance. Engaged

student representatives develop skills in autonomy, leadership and metacognition (Buckley, 2014: 6). Although these skills are transferable for employability, they also serve a useful civic purpose. It is the opportunity to participate within a framework of professional decision making which fully develops these skills (Meeuwissen et al. 2018: 666). As leaders and individuals skilled in areas such as teamwork and critical thinking (Lizzio, 2009: 70), student representatives can then act as useful advocates for both the Students' Union and the University.

Many student representatives have advocated for greater inclusion in academic governance on the basis that students should be empowered to participate as full members of the academic community (Luescher, 2013: 1449), along with academics and professional services. Moreover, students occupy an important political constituency in the university. As an important interest group, it has been suggested, students qualify as "legitimate governance actors" (Pabian, 2011: 270). Indeed, the decisions made on education may matter to no constituent more than the student (McGrath, 1971: 49) and students can therefore be said to possess a "legitimate political claim" (Buckley, 2014: 10) to representation, given the importance of the decisions for their educational experience.

It has also been contended that universities and Students' Unions equally benefit from a diversity of voices around the table and that student representatives can provide a kind of 'sense check' (Flint, 2017: 17) for decisions made on academic governance. After all, given their proximity to the consequences of such decisions, students may offer perspectives which are "hidden" from staff (Meeuwissen et al, 2018: 678).

Finally, student academic representation is a key mechanism by which universities can meet their requirement to engage students "individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience" (UK Quality Code, 2017).

Next steps

It is therefore incumbent on all those with a stake in the future of higher education, to work to negotiate educational principles which fully include the role of student and are naturally inclusive of the development of relevant programmes of student academic representation.

This will include Students' representation on all university committees, groups and forums. Engagement should be accessible and represent the involvement of as diverse a range of students as possible. It should also be considered whether or not these committees or groups are transforming to include student representatives or are merely accommodating their presence. Student involvement in decision-making fora must be accompanied with equipping those student representatives with the necessary skills to fully participate in the room. Otherwise, student involvement risks simple tokenism. Students' Unions and universities must work together to fully develop this preparatory programme.

At all times, the involvement of students must be delivered in partnership with those students. The necessary engagement of students as partners may provoke some reticence on the part of the administrators in Higher Education. Indeed, it is a sign of healthy student partnership that this partnership challenges a marketised status quo.

Conclusion

There are, therefore, legitimate reasons why both Students' Unions and Universities may wish to include student representation on the forums and groups related to academic governance. There is, however, a more potent argument around its humanising potential which should be advocated at all levels, including through taking practical steps to achieve this educational aim.

Finally, it must be noted that at the beginning of the University, it was the students who held the educational agency (Tamrat, 2019: 36). Student partnership and representation can represent a reclamation of this agency. In that reclamation, students must be central, playing a full and equal role in a seat at the table and an equal voice on their education. It is only then that education will reach its goal of delivering for students.

A graduate of French and Politics from QUB, Jason Bunting is the Vice-President of Education in Queen's University Belfast Students' Union.

References

Arnstein, S. (1969) A Ladder of Citizen Participation *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* (35: 4) pp. 216–224

Boland, J. (2005) Student Participation in shared governance; a means of advancing democratic values? *Tertiary, Education and Management* (11) pp. 199- 217

Buckley, A. (2014) How radical is student engagement? (And what is it for?) *Student Engagement and Experience Journal* Volume 3, Issue 2 pp. 1-23

Carey, P. (2018) The impact of institutional culture, policy and process on student engagement in university decision-making, *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education* (22:1), pp. 11-18

Ciobanu, A. & Hojbota, A. (2013) Student's Perceptions about Students' Representation in *University Governance: Implications for Practice*

Dollinger, M., & Vanderlelie, J. (2019). Developing and enacting student governance and leadership training in higher education. A Practice Report. *Student Success* (10:2) pp. 59-64

Flint, A., Goddard, H., and Russell, E., (2017) *Architects of their experience: the role, value and impact of student academic representation systems in Higher Education in England* London: TSEP

Friere, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Brazil: Herder and Herder

Halbesleben, J.; Becker, J.; Buckley, R. (2003) Considering the Labour contributions of students: an alternative to the student-as-customer metaphor *Journal of Education for Business* Oklahoma (78:5) pp. 255-257

Johnson, R.; Deem, R. (2003) Talking of students: Tensions and contradictions for the manager-academic and the university in contemporary higher education *Higher Education* (46) pp. 289-314

Klemencic, M. (2011) Student representation in European higher education governance: Principles and practice, roles and benefits *Leadership and governance in higher education: Handbook for decision-makers and administrators* pp. 1-26

Lizzio A. & Wilson K (2009) Student participation in university governance: the role conceptions and sense of efficacy of student representatives on departmental committees, *Studies in Higher Education* (34:1) pp. 69-84

Luescher, T. (2013). Student involvement in university decision-making: Good reasons, a new lens *Studies in Higher Education* (38:10) pp.1442-1456

McCulloch, A. (2009) The student as co-producer: learning from public administration about the student–university relationship, *Studies in Higher Education* (34:2) pp. 171-183

McGrath, E. (1971) Should students share the power? A study of their role in college and University governance *AAUP Bulletin* (57: 1) pp. 28-29

Meeuwissen, S.; Spruijt, A.; van Keen; J.; Goeij, A. (2018) Student participation in governance of medical and veterinary education: experiences and perspectives of student representatives and programme directors *Advances in Health Sciences Education* (24) pp. 665-690

Menon, M.E. (2003) "Student Involvement in University Governance: A Need for Negotiated Educational Aims?" *Tertiary Education and Management* (9:3) pp. 233-246.

Menon, M.E. (2005) "Students' Views Regarding their Participation in University Governance: Implications for Distributed Leadership in Higher Education" *Tertiary Education and Management* (11:2) pp.167-182

Pabian, P.; Minksová, L. (2011) Students in Higher Education Governance in Europe: Contrasts, commonalities and controversies *Tertiary Education and Management* (17:3) pp. 261-273

Planas A. , Soler P., Fullana J., Pallisera M. & Vilà M. (2013) Student participation in university governance: the opinions of professors and students *Studies in Higher Education* (38:4) pp. 571-583

Rodgers, T.; Freeman, R.; Williams, J.; Kane, D. (2011) Students and the Governance of Higher Education: A UK perspective *Tertiary Education and Management* (17:3) pp. 247-260

Tamrat, W. (2019) The exigencies of student participation in university governance; Lip services and bottlenecks *Higher Education Quarterly* Ethiopia pp. 35-47

Giving Students at Queen's a Voice through Pedagogic Partnerships

By Karen Fraser, Centre for Educational Development

The Student Partnership Project 'Enhancing Assessment through Partnership' was established in 2017 in response to the New Academic Year (NAY) initiative.   The NAY initiative aimed to facilitate more innovative models of assessment and curriculum delivery to meet the changing skills/development needs of students and the Student Partnership Project aimed to give students a voice in the changes to assessment and feedback.

The project team is a partnership of the Students' Union/student interns, academic staff in Schools and The Centre for Educational Development (CED). CED provides the pedagogic expertise to ensure that any agreed programme assessment strategies are evidence-based, that they follow University policy and that they are appropriate for the academic level at which they are aimed. The goal was to identify issues highlighted by students and address these issues whilst ensuring alignment with the pedagogical principles which drove the introduction of the NAY restructure project. School staff helped identify programmes where change was required, the interns ran surveys and focus groups with students, and the partners worked to co-create solutions by establishing mutually acceptable assessment strategies.

'*Institutions of higher education and individuals around the world have developed programs and projects through which students, faculty, and staff participate in various forms of co-creation of teaching and learning approaches*' (Cook Sather, Bahti and Ntem 2019)[1] and there is strong evidence that creating pedagogical partnerships can embed teaching and learning experiences that include and value everyone and foster a deeper sense of institutional belonging for both students and academic staff.

Evaluation of the project

Changing thinking/knowledge; Separate focus groups were held with each of the key partner groups in November, February and June of the first year and at the end of Phase 1 the perceived impacts and successes included academic partners believing that partnership brought a new perspective to work to enhance assessment. The interns felt that the project helped to identify areas of assessment that needed improvement, that students felt more listened to and valued, and that student voice had greater prominence. CED considered that student involvement was being considered at an earlier stage in enhancement work, rather than students being asked to feed-back after initiatives had taken place. Students were more likely to be invited in at the design stage and that this should be embedded in University practice beyond the life of the project.

The research and experiences of the partnerships have contributed to knowledge and understanding between the partners and there was recognition that many of the outcomes of the partnership project are not tangible and will only be visible in the longer-term.

Changing culture; it was recognised across the three groups that we were beginning to see changes in institutional culture, that there were new and different conversations about assessment and feedback leading to greater understanding, sharing of ideas and perspectives and potential to influence practice. Academic partners reported that the experience was encouraging them to look for good practice beyond their own disciplines. Both the academic and student partners felt that the project has put partnership on the institutional agenda and hoped that the outcome would be a longer-term commitment to partnership. The student interns recognised that students had been given a platform at institutional Committee and Board meetings, as well as an awareness of students having a voice with opportunities to share their views (though there were challenges in encouraging students to take these opportunities).

Changing practice; CED perceived that the experience would lead to different conversations about professional development with staff and this has indeed been the case with a suite of externally accredited courses having been developed to address some gaps in existing provision. There has also been a very positive development of relationships between the SU and CED.

One of the outcomes from the project is an assessment handbook, created by CED in collaboration with the Students' Union and academic partners, and to be used as a support resource. The *Handbook of Assessment Guidance and Support* provides support for UG degrees and all disciplines at this level and will be launched in August 2020. It contains advice on both formative and summative assessments and includes the detail necessary for staff to implement change. It is compliant with our Study Regulations and therefore encourages consistent practice across the University. The Handbook will be available to support both students and staff.

CED has also built an online Assessment Hub, a catalogue of 267 case studies covering the assessment examples from both national and international sources;

We currently have a call out for staff to contribute more case studies to the Assessment Hub.

Other outcomes of the project included staff and students presenting

1   CookSather, Bahti and Ntem 2019, Pedagogical partnerships: a how-to guide for faculty, students, and academic developers in higher education, Elon, North Carolina : Elon University Center for Engaged Learning, [2019] | Series: Center for engaged learning open access book series.

at conferences (both internally and externally at the Partnership Conference), to School committees and at a national conference. There was also observed personal development for the student interns in terms of professional skills, enjoyment and enthusiasm for partnership in academic enhancement.

Next phase – Feedback policies

In the current academic year, the project moved to the next phase and the student interns have worked with Schools on developing and promoting feedback policies. They have become co-creators of change through the Student/Staff Partnership approach, and that partnership is being used for change. Students and staff have the opportunity to foster power sharing relationships through dialogue and reflection. It is widely acknowledged that this type of collaborative approach to ensuring that students have meaningful ways of engaging with, and enhancing, their education and learning is highly beneficial[2].
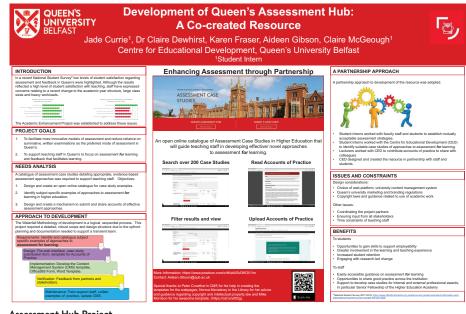
The institutional benefits of Student/Staff partnerships include opportunities for students to gain skills to support employability, and greater involvement in the learning and teaching experience, increased student retention and students engaging with research-led change[3].

The importance of the student voice cannot be ignored, especially in relation to national surveys and the role of partnership in successful NSS outcomes. The addition of the Student Voice section of the NSS in 2017 includes questions on how far students feel able to provide feedback on their course, how much they are listened to, and how far their feedback has been acted on. This moves us on from consultation with students and into partnership.

Student Interns 2017

Students as partners and change agents is an approach that is increasingly embedded within many UK university educational projects and practices; there is now a considerable body of evidence to show that effective engagement with learners in terms of a genuine partnership can bring enormous benefits to projects and subsequently wider embedded practices.

Assessment Hub Project

2   https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/engagement_through_partnership.pdf

3   https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/developing-successful-student-staff-partnerships/benefits

Approaches to Assessment and Feedback: Partnership or Consumerism?

A reflection on assessment and feedback in the context of a partnership approach to education

By Angela Rogan

Angela Rogan graduated from Queen's University Belfast in 2019 with an Undergraduate degree in Criminology and Sociology and was awarded the highest performing degree in the Social Sciences. She also works as a Research Assistant for the New Methods for New Media Network and holds a NINE PhD Scholarship.

Assessment and feedback continue to provoke debate and discussion in the UK Higher Education sector, particularly in relation to student satisfaction.

This is most easily demonstrated by the results of the National Student Survey (NSS) but can also be visible in the responses to modular evaluations (Andrews et al, 2018). NSS data indicates a lower satisfaction rate for the feedback and assessment category compared to other components of the survey (Deeley et al., 2019). The NSS (2019) results for QUB indicate there is considerable room for development in this area. Only 65% (Q11) of Queen's students felt feedback comments were helpful, with 63% (Q10) satisfied with the timeliness of feedback. Mutch et al. (2018) note that feedback needs to be helpful and timely to provoke effective engagement.

There exists a clear apparent divide, particularly in regards to assessment and feedback between students and staff, with each partner dissatisfied in equal measure. A gap exists between varied expectations and understandings of the task of assessment and feedback (Matthews et al, 2018). The provision of high-quality feedback is regarded as labour intensive and a prioritisation of research over teaching activity has exacerbated this issue. Teaching staff, it is contended, would appreciate the valuable hours they spend delivering feedback, to have useful and effective outputs. Yet studies illustrate that many lecturers and tutors feel that students don't engage or value assessment and feedback enough (Mulliner & Tucker, 2017). Many students report active engagement with feedback, but still feel dissatisfied.

The pertinent question, therefore, is how best to address these issues and which model of education best facilitates effective responses to these questions.

Locally at Queen's University Belfast, the enhancement of assessment and feedback has been a key priority. It is one of the four strands of the Queen's Partnership Framework, developed in 2017-18. One of the key ways in which the Framework is operationalised is through the Enhancing Assessment through Partnership Project. As part of this Project, four interns, based in the Students' Union but working collaboratively with Faculties/Schools and the Centre for Educational Development, have been working to create effective feedback strategies for seven months. This has involved examining existing areas of good practice, such as the creation of a podcast for student partnership at Queen's, the inaugural episode of which involved a discussion with _Dr John Topping_ from the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work. Dr Topping was the recipient of a Students' Union Education Award for 'Excellent Use of Feedback' in 2018. In the podcast, he describes the benefits of providing audio feedback and how colleagues across the University can implement this practice.

The use of technology to establish innovative feedback practice was further delineated by Dr David Cutting in a previous edition of _Reflections_ (December 2019, ISBN 978-1-9164841-5-3) in his exploration of automated feedback. While not appropriate for all disciplines, it can help reduce low-level errors and engage students in feedback practices from the onset of

teaching. It is through the sharing of innovative practice that initiatives to enhance feedback are most usefully disseminated. In 2020/21, the Enhancing Assessment through Partnership Project also usefully produced a number of other outputs which will be trialled over the next academic year. These include the development of a Feedback Success Tool to embed engagement with assignment feedback in the dialogic learning cycle and the development of student Feedback Literacy Training to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in feedback. Each resource was also contextualised with an understanding of the link between assessment/feedback and the mental wellbeing of students.

The aim of this article, therefore, is to examine in a wider sense, approaches to assessment and feedback in the context of competing models of higher education. Indeed, it is intended to elucidate the tension between student-staff partnership and the marketization of higher education.

In the marketized system of higher education, universities are multi-layered with complex and contradictory interests. Tensions intersect between education, economics and politics as the sustained expansion and diversification of the student body propels the commodification and marketization of the sector (Alauddin et al., 2017). Moreover, challenges to the existing system have multiplied in recent years, exemplified by the two periods of industrial action in the academic year 2019/20. However, despite differential logics within a hierarchical ordering of University interest, enhancing the levels of student satisfaction is often perceived as a common ground for all partners. While this is often true, ultimately measurements of satisfaction retain an inherently consumerist quality.

Some elements in the Higher Education sector are contented with a marketised system of higher education, arguing it

offers students a high-quality education with a return on investment. Indeed, dynamics within the University sector have shaped the student graduating in the Class of 2020 as occupying a position of consumer. The fee-paying student expects to receive all the proclaimed benefits and experiences that is promised (Helmsley - Brown et al., 2010).

However, Higher Education demands an active engagement and joint responsibility on the part of the student (Alauddin & Ashman, 2014). This problematizes the concept of the student as customer and education as transactional. Matthews et al. (2018) argues for a counter-narrative to university consumerism within a Students as Partners (SaP) model. Creating a shared and collaborative space for staff and students to come together can create pedagogical strategies based on student agency and shared values. Working towards an equitable and reciprocal relationship, partners contribute to the planning and delivery of both assessment and feedback within a reconciliation of their knowledge and expertise. The partnership model can help mitigate power inequalities between staff and students with a focus on shared responsibility for constructive learning.

This can help foster greater involvement of students through co-creation of feedback and assessment processes. Increasing the agency of students through a collaborative model can encourage engagement and responsibility through active participation. A partnership model of feedback and assessment can increase student satisfaction and benefit all stakeholders.

Instituting a partnership model for feedback and assessment means creating a cultural transformation. Matthews et al. (2018) notes this will present particular challenges as both staff and students may be stuck in their ways. Some may regard the partnership model as further evidence of neoliberal mechanisms that demand constant improvements in a sector which already expects too much from its workforce (Matthews et al., 2018). However, a partnership model represents shared responsibility and interaction. Perhaps this model has the potential to relieve the burdens of teaching staff in the long-term, and transform feedback and assessment practices within a narrowing of the feedback gap.

Therefore, it would be our argument that changes to assessment and feedback should be developed through an approach of student-staff partnership. This brings us to the question of a partnership approach to assessment and feedback in particular.

Feedback and assessment as a social construct represent a flexible and dynamic concept which is presented in various formats and definitions. Mutch et al. (2018) promotes sustainable feedback to create an application that extends beyond the modular level, providing information that students can apply as a lifelong learner. Similarly, student agency in helping to design and deliver assessment practices should empower students to be self-assessors capable of evaluating their progress beyond university life (Andrews et al. 2018). These constructs of feedback and assessment can strengthen the depth of learning and extrapolate into employment behaviours. We can achieve student participation in pedagogical practices in numerous ways to create innovative practices.

The work undertaken this year on understanding how students and staff perceive feedback and assessment presents the initial conversation on which to establish feedback literacy and dialogic practice. Narrowing the gap between students and staff perceptions and expectations of feedback can increase awareness on both fronts. Poulus & Mahoney (2008) note this relies on students being confident enough to interact with honesty; we can only challenge power differentials through the building of equitable relationships which can take time. Moreover, marginalised groups such as disabled, mature and working students and student parents should be included in these conversations to ensure we do not limit the discussion to a small privileged number of students (Curran, 2017).

Instilling a partnership model that reinvigorates assessment and feedback practices has several key benefits that go beyond heightening student satisfaction. A reciprocal responsibility to acknowledge a shared understanding, with realistic expectations of what feedback and assessment can achieve, can enhance practices of learning and teaching to provide a better experience for all partners.

References

Alauddin, M., & Ashman, A. (2014). The changing academic environment and diversity in students' study philosophy, beliefs and attitudes in higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *33*(5), 857-870.

Alauddin, M., Ashman, A., Nghiem, S., & Lovell, K. (2017). What determines students' expectations and preferences in university teaching and learning? An instrumental variable approach. *Economic Analysis and Policy*, *56*, 18-27.

Andrews, M., Brown, R., & Mesher, L. (2018). Engaging students with assessment and feedback: improving assessment for learning with students as partners. *Practitioner Research in Higher Education*, *11*(1), 32-46.

Curran, R. (2017). Students as partners—good for students, good for staff: A study on the impact of partnership working and how this translates to improved student-staff engagement. *International Journal for Students as Partners*, *1*(2), 1-16.

Deeley, S. J., Fischbacher-Smith, M., Karadzhov, D., & Koristashevskaya, E. (2019). Exploring the 'wicked'problem of student dissatisfaction with assessment and feedback in higher education. *Higher Education Pedagogies*, *4*(1), 385-405.

Hemsley-Brown, J., Lowrie, A., Gruber, T., Fuß, S., Voss, R., & Gläser-Zikuda, M. (2010). Examining student satisfaction with higher education services. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*.

Matthews, K. E., Dwyer, A., Hine, L., & Turner, J. (2018). Conceptions of students as partners. *Higher Education*, *76*(6), 957-971.

Mulliner, E., & Tucker, M. (2017). Feedback on feedback practice: perceptions of students and academics. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *42*(2), 266-288.

Mutch, A., Young, C., Davey, T., & Fitzgerald, L. (2018). A journey towards sustainable feedback. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *43*(2), 248-259.

Peseta, T., Bell, A., Clifford, A., English, A., Janarthana, J., Jones, C., Teal, M., & Zhang, J. (2016). Students as ambassadors and researchers of assessment renewal: puzzling over the practices of university and academic life. International Journal for Academic Development, 21(1), 54–66.

Poulos, A. and Mahoney, M. (2007) 'Effectiveness of Feedback: The Students' Perspective', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 33:2, 143-154.

Supporting Undergraduates at Queen's to Reach their Academic Potential

By The Learning Development Service (LDS)

A priority of Queen's new Widening Participation Strategy is to provide specific support to widening participation cohorts, including students who have come through an Access route, Widening Participation Outreach Programme i.e. Pathway Opportunity Programme and Senior Academy Programme, and direct entry level students.

This article presents both an overview of support provided by the LDS team and a summary of our approach to designing targeted support to widening participation cohorts in 2020-21.

Overview of LDS support

One-to-one

LDS offers one-to-one tailored appointments to undergraduate students across the University who are preparing for various forms of assessment, including assignments, dissertations and exams. In addition to one-hour consultations, students have the option to meet regularly with a member of the team for shorter 'check-in' appointments. All appointments are conducted online, via Microsoft Teams, by the team of LDS Tutors and Assistants, and provide a space for students to explore their (remote) learning. Common themes in students' requests for support include advice on referencing, citation and paraphrasing; assistance with interpreting feedback from tutors, such as incorporating criticality into their work; tips for structuring and organising material; guidance around time management and working to deadlines; help with exam preparation techniques; and support for developing key study skills, such as communication and research skills. Students can submit a piece of work to be reviewed during the session; this provides a focus for discussion and allows feedback to be given in a concrete and practical way. The

Dr Laura McGinnis

emphasis remains solidly on providing developmental feedback to students, as well as general advice and tips to be applied to future assignments. Student feedback, collected anonymously after appointments, states that appointments have proven '*very informative*' and '*incredibly helpful*', and has asserted that staff were '*amazing and willing to go the extra mile*'. The developmental potential of the appointments is highly valued by students, who have noted that '*I now understand how to write assignments in the future*', and '*I now have a good idea of how to improve my writing*'. Our one-to-one appointments are actively promoted through School contacts and during embedded workshops, and also through an active social media presence on Instagram and Twitter.

For more information, please contact Laura l.mcginnis@qub.ac.uk

Workshops

LDS tutors work with individual Schools to embed academic support within modules, as highlighted in this example:

Dr Ciarán O'Neill

The Learning Development Service collaborated with academic staff in the School of Nursing and Midwifery across May and June to deliver online evidence based practice and critical writing workshops. Engaging with Level 2 and 3 Nursing and Midwifery students via Canvas and Microsoft Teams, these embedded workshops enable opportunities for co-teaching and interactive learning, whilst promoting accessibility to academic skills support in the current context of remote study.

Level 3 Nursing students have provided encouraging positive feedback: "*Thanks for organising the session today, it was really useful and I am back on track with this work now*" (Level 3 Nursing BSc student).

Dr Karen Galway, Lecturer in Mental Health in Nursing and Midwifery reflected after the sessions, "*One major benefit of running these workshops with LDS and academic staff is the ability to answer 'chat' queries at the same time as delivering the material. This is only possible to achieve when two facilitators are present in the sessions. Two facilitators working together also provides variety for the students, and a sense of camaraderie between the facilitators. As we move forward and adapt, we will develop our online delivery skills and methods, to make content more engaging, more interesting and hopefully more fun for both students and teachers! We are ready to embrace these opportunities.*"

Dr Lorna Lawther, Lecturer in Antenatal and Reproductive Health has commented, "*From an academic perspective it has been important to engage LDS in online support so that Level 2 Midwifery students can recognise that we are addressing all their academic needs at this time. It has been a really positive experience because unlike face to face teaching where there is no written record of the student engagement, I have been able to save the questions and conversations from the 'chat' thread on Canvas Conferences and use this to provide additional support and direction in module teaching. The LDS ethos of 'business as usual' during the current situation has instilled confidence that students can access the same level of support online and that academics can work with LDS to meet students' needs.*"

If you are interested in a few condensed tips for online teaching, the following article offers a useful read: https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2017/07/12/7-guidelines-effective-teaching-online

To find out more about this ongoing work with the School of Nursing and Midwifery, please contact Ciarán c.g.oneill@qub.ac.uk

Peer mentoring

Students often advise and guide each other based on their shared experiences of settling into university and their encounters with a new and unfamiliar environment and

Angela McQuade

new teaching methods. However, not all students have easy access to the support of other students, particularly in the first few daunting weeks of a new semester. Formal Peer Mentoring schemes allow us to harness students' willingness to support their peers, enable us to create small welcoming communities and provide an enriching developmental opportunity for those students who act as mentors. Currently, peer mentoring is in place in most subject areas in all Schools in the University. There are approximately 600 mentors supported by designated academics who coordinate the schemes in their respective subjects.

The role of the Learning Development Service (LDS) is to support the development and implementation of mentoring by providing guidance, sharing good practice, helping with mentor recruitment, designing and delivering training, and offering ongoing support to academic coordinators and mentors, as required.

Dr Michael Pierse, the peer mentoring coordinator in AEL outlines the benefits of peer mentoring: "*Our peer mentoring scheme is one of our most positive and important wellbeing initiatives at Queen's. Each year, as we interview for a new cohort of keen and engaged student mentors at AEL, it is both refreshing and encouraging to hear why they have been so enthused by the scheme and decided to become mentors themselves. Some, coming from abroad, or from a distance – or indeed, in many cases, from families with no higher-education tradition – will tell us how their first steps in university life were taken with trepidation. Meeting with peers, under the guidance of LDS-trained mentors, was key, they so often attest, to calming fears, dispelling misapprehensions, building a social network, and discovering the many joys of university life. Others will have found university daunting because they were not living in halls or shared accommodation, or maybe commuting from home. These students often feel they didn't make the instant friendships that sharing a house or*

flat with fellow students can provide. Peer mentoring helped them settle in, they will say—find students with common interests, take those first, nervous steps into clubs and societies, or discover that their fears weren't so unique after all. A Stage 2 or 3 student, leading a group of mentees, can relate how they felt exactly the same way but overcame their worries about fitting in. Nearly all of the students we interview find that its most important role here is as a layer of informal and relaxed consultation that helps mentees navigate the institution. While academic and support colleagues will of course have an open ear on student issues, it is often the peer mentor who steers a reluctant Stage 1 student toward that crucial support; a relaxed chat with a peer mentor might be all a worried student needs to pluck up the courage to get the help they need. "

The support of fellow students will be more important than ever as teaching and learning moves to an online environment with the potential for new students to feel unsure and isolated as they navigate a university life that is very different from what they expected. To this end, LDS is designing training that will be delivered live online to small groups of mentors, starting in June and continuing to the beginning of the academic year in September. Consultation is ongoing with academic coordinators and mentors regarding how mentoring might function in a remote environment. As Dr Pierse comments: "*In uncertain times, as universities grapple with the complexities and challenges of moving to online platforms and as their new students face the prospect of socially distanced learning (at a time they had hoped they would be doing more socialising than ever!), peer mentoring will be key in providing reassurance, building resilience and making an unfamiliar HE climate that bit more welcoming and less overwhelming for many.*"

Dr Susan Doherty who, along with Dr Jeanette Robertson, will be co-ordinating a new mentoring scheme in Biological Sciences, reflects on the importance of peer mentoring in the current climate: "*We are delighted to be introducing the UG Peer Mentoring programme into Biological Sciences in September and the support of LDS has been invaluable. Through the scheme, incoming Level 1 Food and Microbiology students will be matched up with Level 2 students who have been recruited and trained to act as mentors. It is going to be more important now, more than ever, that new students feel supported and have a sense of being part of our Queen's community. We may have to be creative about the way peer mentoring works in practice this year but I think it will also*

provide us with a fantastic opportunity to enhance not only the mentees' but also the mentors' university experience".

Embracing the challenge of expanding mentoring to online platforms can only serve to enhance undergraduate peer mentoring in the future, providing a range of ways that new students can receive the support they need to help them make the transition into the Higher Education environment. . For further information, please contact Angela a.mcquade@qub.ac.uk

Developing tailored support to widening participation cohorts

Approach

A first action agreed was to review the aims of the Service and in this process work towards adopting an approach that would enable the Service to demonstrate

Joanne O'Keefe

impact. Working closely with Professor Allen Thurston, from the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, a new role was created to work on evaluation across both the Learning Development Service and Widening Participation Unit. The initial action taken by the evaluator was to facilitate the team to create a Logic Model for the overall LDS. The Logic Model enabled individual staff to share and discuss outcomes and to map these to the activities being delivered as a service. The Logic Model approach has helped to build a consensus on LDS outcomes in both the short and long term. LDS is also using Logic Models to help plan and evaluate individual programmes; this process has helped LDS identify the theory of change and programme logic. It has facilitated a better understanding of all the components needed to ensure that the LDS outcomes are delivered in a way that is student led and informed through evaluation and feedback. LDS has started to use multiple types of research instruments to evaluate programmes, including—surveys, focus groups, interviews, observations, and questionnaires. This enables the service to capture and analyse data from as many different angles as possible to triangulate the data most effectively. This data is then used to inform future programme delivery and to measure impact. For further information, please contact Joanne j.okeeffe@qub.ac.uk

Transition support

Preparation for university has been reported as a factor contributing to early withdrawal and therefore the rationale for a transition module is to help students adjust and settle in to university. Given the current climate of remote learning and the inevitable social distancing measures in place for the 2020-21 academic year, the provision of transition support for students is imperative. As a result, LDS is developing material to support level 1 students starting Queen's in September 2020.

In 2016, the QAA Scotland selected Transition as an enhancement theme, from which there are several learning gains relevant to this current project. Firstly, that transition should target

Tim Crawford

students' resilience and academic buoyancy, through experiences that help increase confidence, planning, persistence, composure and control. Furthermore, transition should help prepare students for embracing diversity, including social belonging. In addition, successful transition to university requires students to self-manage their expectations. Lastly, developing students' academic and digital literacy skills should be core to the delivery of transition support.

The LDS project will be delivered online through *Canvas*. The initial focus is on students from WP backgrounds, targeting those coming through direct entry and access routes. The module will include various aspects of the transition to university, covering four main areas:

1. Orientation - to campus, academic teaching and support, the first year experience, independent learning, and student services.

2. Developing as a Student - learning styles, information gathering and using the Library, note-taking, student life, peer mentoring and social support.

3. Critical Thinking – deconstructing academic questions, process words, referencing and plagiarism.

4. Assessment and Support – group work, coursework, exams and revision, understanding and using feedback, and handling stress.

Student participation in the module will be self-paced and mostly asynchronous, however it will incorporate the opportunity for students to communicate via discussion forums and live group chats. Upon successful piloting, the intention is to develop the material for the wider undergraduate student body, tailored at an individual School and subject-level. For further information, please contact tim.crawford@qub.ac.uk

Learning Development Service

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes		
	Activities	*Participation*	*Activities*	*Medium*	*Long*
Who provides the services	**What we do?**	**Who we reach?**	**What are the short term aims?**	**What are the medium term aims?**	**What is the ultimate impact/outcome?**
Tutors	➢ Academic skills support via workshops, one-to-ones	➢ UG Students	➢ Supporting students to develop their academic skills	➢ Supporting student retention	➢ Developing students to become autonomous learners with the academic skills they need to succeed in HE
Student Assistants	➢ Resource provision	➢ Academic Teaching Staff	➢ Supporting specific widening participation student groups to develop academic skills and make a successful transition to and through HE	➢ Supporting students' academic progression	➢ Supporting students to achieve their academic potential
Graduate Intern	➢ UG tailored peer mentoring	➢ Careers Service		➢ Promote greater student engagement within the life of the school	➢ Improving the student experience of the learning environment
Digital Developer	➢ Coordination of the University's Personal Tutor	➢ Wellbeing and SU	➢ Providing students with training, volunteering and developmental opportunity	➢ Remove barriers between staff and students and between year levels	➢ Contributing positively to academic outcomes via a sustainable model of student learning support
Evaluator	➢ Tailored pre-entry and transition academic skills support for widening participation student cohorts	➢ Potential and current students from a widening participation background			
	➢ Monitoring and evaluation				

Assumptions
Senior Management support and resource the Learning Development Service activities.
Students and academic staff see value in academic skills support

External Factors
Coronavirus, government regulations, health and safety

Demographic Factors
Gender, SEN, EAL, Socio Economic Status, previous educational experience/background (e.g. A levels vs Access course)

Implementation Factors
Student uptake, retention, staff digital skills, evidence of impact

Logic Model created for LDS

Feedback: The Role of the Learner

Creating a Feedback Success Tool to engage students as active partners on their educational experience

By Sarah Murray

For the last seven months, while completing a Master's in Marketing, I have been working with the Queen's Partnership Project as an intern, investigating methods of enhancing feedback strategies for student engagement.

In the literature, and reinforced through student feedback, it has been well documented that assignment feedback is often perceived by students as confusing, generalised and inaccessible. Consequentially, students have failed to engage with assignment feedback due to either a lack of understanding or a lack of perceived value (Blair et al., 2013). Addressing this dilemma has been the subject of countless exercises on the part of universities and Students' Unions across the UK and Republic of Ireland. However, the value of feedback still remains a contested space, especially on the part of learners.

This understandably results in much frustration on behalf of both the staff, who spend valuable hours preparing and delivering feedback, and the students, who wish to learn but feel too often that the feedback does not add to their learning experience. There is a myriad of reasons for this dichotomy, and equally, many useful suggestions on the part of students and staff. However, in this Project, our focus has been on addressing this dilemma through encouraging the active participation of students as engaged partners in their learning. In this article, we explore the utility and rationale of our approach, which involved the creation of a Feedback Success Tool for students. Through this tool, it is our hope to break down perceived barriers to feedback and enable students to take control of their own learning through the provision of informative and practical resources.

Rationale

For our project, it was necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of the existing perceptions of feedback. The Partnership interns held useful sessions with staff which revealed a range of good practice underway across the University. Many staff members are encouraging important and useful initiatives in the area of assignment feedback. However, many staff members also felt that their efforts to provide high-quality feedback were not recognised by students who often, it was felt, fail to recognise informal feedback, given verbally in class or through peer discussion, as feedback. This frustration is well documented in the literature as a gulf in student knowledge of what constitutes feedback between the academic and the learner (O'Brien & Sparshatt, 2008).

To gain an insight into the student understanding of feedback, the student interns held student engagement days, where simple consultation was achieved through 'action cards'. Students were asked what they wanted from feedback as well as their experience of feedback. While some students did report positive experiences of feedback, the commentary from students was overwhelmingly critical. Students expressed a desire for feedback which is constructive, tailored and personalised. Students reported feedback as too general, untimely and characterised by a failure to demonstrate how the student can improve. This is commonplace throughout the HE sectors with students often feeling a lack of quality, clarity or amount of feedback within their education (Beaumount, 2011; Henderson et al., 2019).

The comments we received from students seemed to demonstrate that feedback was viewed as irrelevant or peripheral. This is despite the imperative that for feedback to be effective, it must be woven into the curriculum with multiple opportunities presented for the feedback loop to be closed (Carless, 2018). In other words, feedback cannot be viewed as separate to the learning experience and our solution to the feedback dilemma cannot be a tool which only the most engaged will use.

Therefore, there seemed to be a disparity between staff effort, student recognition and student engagement with the feedback. The obvious efforts of staff but frustration of students compounded some of the confusion around why student assignment feedback remains contentious in HE debate.

Moreover, it is critically important to contextualise this desire on the part of students for more staff time, with the broader discussions around staff workload, particularly in a year which experienced two periods of industrial action. It seems imperative that feedback cannot be improved at the expense of staff wellbeing. Therefore, one of the main challenges of feedback is how do we create more opportunities for feedback without adding to this staff workload (Yang, 2013).

It has also been argued that appropriate opportunities do not yet exist for peer or self-assessment feedback which can address the issue of staff workload (Henderson et al, 2019)

Furthermore, in light of COVID-19 and the necessary switch to online learning, there is an increased challenge

regarding feedback. Most feedback is said to occur informally and verbally in a classroom setting (Sambell, 2011). However, without the classroom environment we need to be inventive in creating opportunities for ongoing feedback.

Therefore, our project wished to address these concerns of the student understanding of feedback, student engagement with feedback and the need to keep staff workload in mind.

Solution

This year, the student interns on the Partnership Project have therefore worked to produce a Feedback Success Tool. This is intended to be a practical tool which embeds engagement with feedback as an integral part of a student learning experience. It is intended to be an essential tool for a student learning experience and guide a student through a semester, encouraging the student to identify, recognise and engage with their feedback throughout their learning journey. Through this Tool, students will store, gather and utilise their feedback over the course of a module. Moreover, the Tool attempts to address the teacher-student contradiction, where the teacher deposits knowledge in the form of feedback as a transactional arrangement. Through their engagement, students become proactive engaged learners (Race, 2014; Hill & West, 2020).

The first iteration of this tool has been developed in partnership with the Centre for Educational Development (CED), the Learning Development Service (LDS) and the Students' Union.

The contents of the *Feedback Success Tool* combine a series of activities, worksheets and informative sections aimed at encouraging varying levels of engagement with feedback.

Section A of the *Feedback Success Tool* first outlines basic informative knowledge to reinforce student understanding of feedback. For example, provision of the School Feedback Policy, explanations of the different types of feedback and extra external resources. These resources are accompanied by short exercises to test student knowledge and understanding, but are not intended to be overly prescriptive, allowing a degree of flexibility for the Tool to be adapted by discipline as necessary. Indeed, they are intended to accompany material which already exists and is often profiled in the student Module Handbook.

Student Engagement Event

Section B of the *Feedback Success Tool* holds greater utility and engagement for students as the Feedback Success Tool becomes a live workbook which students complete over the course of the module, including practical guidance and activities for students.

I will now outline the various resources which form the contents of the *Feedback Success Tool*.

First, an activity for students to explore not only their expectations of feedback but also their understanding of staff expectations. It has been argued that in feedback policies, a clear understanding is often articulated of expectations of staff, but a more limited understanding of the expectations on students has been articulated (Bloxham & Campbell, 2010). Through the understanding from each partner of the other's expectations, it is intended to operationalise the values of student-staff partnership, including open and

constructive dialogue. Values underlying partnership must be explicitly outlined (Mercer-Mapstone, 2019) and as such we thought it useful for inclusion in this *Feedback Success Tool.*

Secondly, students are equipped with a practical tool to help their understanding of 'Feedback Jargon'. The parlance of feedback can lead to an inaccessibility for students attempting to engage in feedback as students struggle to understand what their feedback actually means in practice. Students lack an innate literacy to equate phrases such as "better organisation of ideas" with the identification of structural issues. It is not condescending to students to suggest that guidance is needed on navigating this language. Indeed, students can only learn from feedback that they understand (Price et. Al, 2010). In collaboration with staff from the Learning Development Service, we have developed a bank of phrases

and inaccessible jargon. Students have the space through this practical tool, to suggest the phrases with which they have difficulty. The bank outlines the jargon, its meaning and what actions students can take to address the feedback and affords students the space to reflect on the jargon they have encountered during their studies.

The substantive content of the *Feedback Success Tool* is a weekly guide for students which embeds continual engagement with feedback into the learning cycle of students. This "Feedback Calendar" outlines a set of week-to-week activities for students to work through. These activities are designed so that a student can complete them as part of private study or so that they can be incorporated as an activity in workshops or tutorials. It is intended that, by weaving feedback engagement into the structure of the module, students are empowered to take ownership of their engagement. As noted elsewhere, for feedback to be most effective, most of the feedback should occur prior to assessment periods as opposed to after it has ended (Careless, 2019b). Students will consequentially become active learners through this engagement.

Finally, one of the most useful activities in the Feedback Success Tool is the Action Plan. The Action Plan resource recurs throughout the *Feedback Success Tool*. As suggested by Bowman (2020), action plans give students space to analyse feedback comments, draw out main points and respond to the feedback. The creation of the Action Plan necessitates student engagement, as they reflect and plan for how they can avoid recurrent mistakes and create 'SMART' goals for improvement.

Finally, the *Feedback Success Tool* provides space for students to keep a record of feedback which they have received in all forms. This creates a bank of feedback which students can draw from, identifying recurrent areas of feedback to help inform future assignments (Johnson, 2013).

Of course, as with any tool for self-regulation, while there is utility in autonomy, students may find it useful to embed dialogue on their engagement with the *Feedback Success Tool* through their meetings with their Personal Tutor. This may be useful in creating a site of staff-student dialogue, useful in determining the reaction to feedback. (Tschirhart, 2019).

Next Steps

It is necessary to trial the *Feedback Success Tool* with a targeted cohort of students. Through this trial we will determine the utility of the Success Tool, and make necessary revisions as appropriate.

Moreover, we will consider necessary adaptations to the Tool which may facilitate greater utility in different subjects, paying due regard to the idiosyncrasies of disciplines.

Finally, it must be noted that this *Feedback Success Tool* is not intended, and must not, disown the responsibility of staff to provide high-quality feedback, or of our universities to embed and champion effective feedback strategies. However, it is of crucial importance that students are engaged with their feedback as part of a dialogic learning cycle. It is only through this engagement that students can fully assume the role of partner in their educational experience.

Works Cited

Arnold, L. (2020) *Encouraging students to choose their own #feedback depending on the time and emotional space they have to use it*[...] [Twitter] 25th February 2020. Accessed: 25th February 2020. Available at: https://twitter.com/HarperEdDev/status/1232330256129896449

Beaumont, C., O'Doherty, M. & Shannon, L. (2011) *Reconceptualising assessment feedback: a key to improving student learning?*, Studies in Higher Education, 36:6, 671-687

Blair, A. *et al.* (2013) 'What Feedback do Students Want?', *Politics*, 33(1), p. 66.

Bloxham S and Campbell L (2010) Generating dialogue in assessment feedback: Exploring the use of interactive cover sheets. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 35(3): 291–300.

Carless, D. (2019a) Feedback loops and the longer-term: towards feedback spirals. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 44(5), pp.705-714.

Carless, D. (2019b) "Beyond teacher comments: Designing for student uptake of feedback", Available at: https://www.slideshare.net/DavidCarless1/beyond-teacher-comments-designing-for-student-uptake-of-feedback

Henderson, M., Ryan, T. and Phillips, M., (2019). The challenges of feedback in higher education. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 44(8), pp.1237-1252.

Hill, J. & West, H. (2020) 'Improving the student learning experience through dialogic feed-forward assessment', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 45:1, 82-97.

Jonsson, A. 2013. "Facilitating Productive Use of Feedback in Higher Education." *Active Learning in Higher Education* 14 (1):63–76. doi:10.1177/1469787412467125.

Khan, R. A. and Jawaid, M. (2020) 'Technology Enhanced Assessment (TEA) in COVID 19 Pandemic', *Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences*, 36, p. S-1. Available at: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=143046343&site=eds-live&scope=site eaching in Higher Education 18 (3):285–297. doi:10.1080/13562517.2012.719154

Mercer-Mapstone, L. (2019) "Practical Guide: Scaling up staff-student partnership in higher education" Available at: http://www.docs.hss.ed.ac.uk/iad/Learning_teaching/Academic_teaching/Resources/Student_Engagement/MercerMapstoneMarie_Practical%20Guide_Scaling_up_student-staff_partnership.pdf

O'Brien, R., and L. Sparshatt. (2008). "*Exploring Staff and Students' Mental Maps: Creating Narratives for Successful Assessment Feedback.*" Paper presented at the Transforming the student experience: Higher Education Academy Annual Conference 2008, Harrogate, July 1–3.

Price, M., Handley, K., Millar, J. & O'Donovan, B. (2010) Feedback: all that effort, but what is the effect?, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35:3, 277-289

Race, P (2014) "Tips on feedback for staff and students"

Sambell, K., (2011). *Rethinking feedback in higher education*.

Tschirhart, C. and Pratt-Adams, S. (2019) "Closing the Loop: An Evaluation of Student-Led Module Feedback at one UK Higher Education Institution"

Yang, M., and D. Carless. (2013). "*The Feedback Triangle and the Enhancement of Dialogic Feedback Processes.*"

Student Partnerships at the Graduate School

By Kate McCorry, Graduate School

The Graduate School has been focused on curating partnerships with our postgraduates by engaging in constructive dialogue and ensuring student feedback is at the heart of what we do. Student voices are heard via the Postgraduate Forum, through strong links with Students' Union Officers and from student representation on Postgraduate Committees and Advisory Bodies. We listen to our students by way of the annual Postgraduate Experience Surveys to ensure that student feedback, along with focus groups and course evaluation, is incorporated into our programming.

When the Queen's Partnership Project launched in 2019, its aim was to acknowledge that the student population was working in partnership with staff on a number of exciting projects. Formally acknowledging these relationships gave confidence to all parties to develop opportunities by empowering representation and highlighting platforms for collaboration. This framework has given the Graduate School a more systematic approach to joint objective-setting and evaluation.

The Graduate School Postgraduate-led Initiative programme makes funding available to assist current postgraduate students organise academic events and cultural interventions. These events are designed to be a creative and experimental space, bringing together and creating wider student communities. Our Student Community Assistants have a growing role in this creative space, through driving our Community and Wellbeing programme and by converting successful initiatives into programme staples.

Peer Proofreading and *IMPACT Journal* are two flagship, co-created and delivered programmes, currently running at the Graduate School and are discussed further below:

Peer Proofreading

"Proofreading helped me to take a step back from my work and think about how the reader would understand it." – Postgraduate Student

Peer Proofreading is a peer-led forum designed to help postgraduate students gain the skills and knowledge to confidently undertake the proofreading of their academic work. It was co-conceived by a Master's student and a member of the Graduate School team and started as a formal co-created project in the Queen's partnership framework. This forum allowed students to support and assist one another, improving on their existing skills and knowledge and helped students to recognise proofreading as a proficiency rather than something that was done for them.

In a Peer Proofreading session, a staff member or student volunteer introduces a chosen topic or area that will be focused on. A short talk on the subject is delivered and following this students practice that skill. Students exchange any work they have brought along and give comments and advice to one another. The partnership has evolved since it began with chosen topics now being decided by the group of learners, with Graduate School staff and student volunteers preparing content.

As this co-leadership partnership is constantly evolving, it is now led by a member of the Graduate School team and supported by postgraduate volunteers. Within this cultural exchange, students have the opportunity to develop mentoring skills, learn from their peers and ask questions in a relaxed, supporting and informal environment.

IMPACT Journal

"It's made me feel more connected to the PGR community, and especially to those outside of my own faculty." – Postgraduate Student

"Developing leadership; resilience; collaborative work; communication; team-work; team-decision." – Postgraduate Student

Postgraduate Bookclub

IMPACT Journal is the creation of an online peer-reviewed open-access journal which is a collaboration between PhD students, the Graduate School and leading academics. This "*student as-partners*" initiative allowed postgraduates to work collaboratively in multidisciplinary teams and with staff members to create a new academic journal.

IMPACT journal aims to spark conversations that will lead to innovative research ideas and partnerships that provide solutions to real-world problems. This platform enables two-way communication and exchange between communities and academia. It welcomes community-based contributions focused on outreach initiatives across all disciplinary areas.

Students within the editorial team have shaped all aspects of the journal including title, remit and strategy, as well as ways of working, policies and Code of Conduct. Although split into different areas of responsibility, the students are able to use their experience to support one another and draw on each other's skills. This collaborative initiative equips students to successfully navigate challenging learning experiences in the real world.

Moving Forward

Student partnerships challenge the Graduate School to innovate, generate and test new ideas while gaining student buy-in. They offer us a chance to empower students to engage with issues that resonate with them. They offer students enhancements to employability by way of the development of high-level knowledge, skills and behaviours while creating a sense of belonging during their time at the Graduate School.

Building an ethos and culture of partnership takes time and the high turnover of students can present a challenge in maintaining the continuity. We constantly strive to improve on the partnership experience and want to encourage meaningful postgraduate input at an early stage of development, mindful of changing expectations and managing team dynamics and behaviours.

The Graduate School is embracing technology and is delivering partnerships across virtual platforms, including most recently the *'QUBSU and Graduate School Online Student-Supervisor Relationship Webinar'* in collaboration with the Students' Union. As we assess the way we use technology in a post-COVID world, there is space (virtually) and a demand to deliver on partnerships that offer cultural exchange, develop networks and redefine the educational experience.

Jordanian Society Launch

Training for Success

A student perspective on training students on feedback literacy to make the most of their assessment feedback

By Úna Quinn

Úna Quinn is currently in her final year of studying English and Sociology at Queen's University Belfast and is the Lead Peer Mentor in the School of Arts, English and Languages

Over the last six months, I have been working as a Partnership Project intern while completing my final year as an English student. This year, our project has been explicitly concerned with the role of student engagement in assignment feedback a topic of much debate in Higher Education.

At the heart of the dilemma of assignment feedback, is a competing set of expectations by students and staff. Students expect detailed, timely, comprehensive and tailored feedback. Yet in practice, staff often report that there is limited engagement on the part of students with this feedback.

One of the aims of this project has been to help to resolve this dilemma. The problems we explored were consistent with my experience so far in University. When I commenced studying at QUB, I recognised feedback as the comments I received on assignments I submitted. Despite the many facilities and resources in place to help me to utilise this feedback, it wasn't an integral part of my learning. It is clear how this creates difficulties and frustrations, not only for the students receiving feedback, but the staff spending time preparing and delivering this feedback.

The aim of my strand of the project was to address this dilemma by engendering feedback literacy and beginning to shift the focus of students to greater engagement with feedback. After all, without this literacy, as soon as the feedback is received, it loses its potential value despite the best efforts of staff encouraging participation.

However, it is our contention that students need practical tools to engage with their feedback.

 One such practical tool which we have developed is a course to facilitate student learning on how to use their feedback. This course pays particular attention to common barriers to recipience of feedback and how students can become active participants in education through engagement with their feedback, if feedback literacy can be broadly defined as an understanding of what feedback is, how it can be used and how a student can engage (Carless, 2018), then the barriers to a student engaging with feedback begin with a lack of knowledge. From this informed supposition, we identified five areas of priority where the need for guidance to be provided to students was most pressing.

- Firstly, we want to provide an understanding of the purpose of feedback for students. Although this may seem obvious, it is crucial to a student's motivation to engage with the feedback material.

- Secondly, there is a need to break down the language of feedback so it is accessible to all students and so the parlance of feedback does not inhibit a student's willingness to engage fully with the material.

- Thirdly, students need to understand and accept the role of the student as an active participant not a passive consumer of their feedback. Feedback, in other words, is not something which is only provided 'to' the student. Rather, feedback is a crucial process in which the student has a key role of partnership.

- Fourthly, there is a need for students to understand how to apply the feedback to their own personal learning experience.

- Finally, there is a need to equip students with practical strategies for their engagement with feedback.

Through this course, we want to reframe the overall perspective of feedback as a learning process for students. Students should understand, on completion of the course, how feedback is a key tool to improving their own overall learning and performance. In turn, students will better understand and engage with feedback and be able to contribute more fully to discussions on how feedback can be enhanced. Students will be consequentially equipped to create the opportunity to better assess the quality and effectiveness of their feedback.

I will now outline the substantive content of the course.

The first module concerns a *generational introduction to pedagogic practice in student-friendly language*. It explicitly introduces feedback as integral to a continuous learning process and outlines the expectations of the student. The first step of closing the gap between a student receiving feedback and acting on that feedback is to reframe the students' perception of feedback itself. Otherwise, even when the feedback is of high quality, the feedback gap will continue to persist (Evans, 2013). As a response to student satisfaction surveys, particularly the NSS, universities have often focused on improving the quality of the feedback provided. This is important and indeed necessary, but not sufficient. Without the student appropriately empowered to act on this feedback, feedback will remain a point of contention and debate in the Higher Education sector for many years to come. This is particularly true as students begin the transition to university as their perception of feedback is limited to its corrective function for graded work (Carless, 2018). Therefore, presenting students with the requisite domain knowledge allows them to develop a critical ability to understand feedback as an essential part of the learning process.

The introduction, therefore provides information for learners. However, whether students act on this knowledge is reliant on both their willingness to invest in feedback and their emotional resilience to receive it (Winstone,

2017; Hill, 2020). Therefore, the rest of the course places an emphasis on instruction intended to guide the learner through a feedback process. While this may seem contradictory as part of a course intended to enhance independent learning, it is instead vital in encouraging the student to practice self-regulated learning to build confidence (Winstone, 2017). Students should be independent learners, but it is only through the practical provision of tools that students can be fully empowered to develop their independence in the classroom. The provision of initial instruction and guidance is both supportive and encouraging in reaffirming students that they are 'on the right path'. Guidance, particularly in the transition to third-level education, contributes to a maintenance of student interest and motivation to learn.

The second section of the course relates to *breaking down the language of feedback*. Through student feedback, we are aware that students consistently highlight that the language of feedback can create an obstacle to access the feedback itself (Carless 2018; Bailey, 2010). While feedback literacy requires students to build an academic vocabulary (Carless, 2018), where students cannot understand the nuance of feedback phraseology, this can result in an inability to effectively appreciate how the feedback can help the student improve their academic performance (Gartland, 2016; Evans, 2013).

As noted above, the third part of the module is concerned with engendering a sense of active agency in the *student perception of feedback*. Students need both the capacity to decipher feedback, the knowledge to use that feedback and the emotional resilience to accept the feedback. It is intended to foster a sense of responsibility within the feedback process so that with the capability of an understanding of feedback, that the student will be willing to act on it. Another consequence of this may be a greater clarity on the role of staff in the provision of feedback as students establish realistic expectations of feedback (Dawson, 2019). It is also intended to reverse the current understanding of feedback as a 'finished product' which is provided to the student, which can unintentionally signal to the student that the feedback is easy to disregard (Price, 2011).

The fourth module on the course equips students with a knowledge of *making the assignment feedback individual to the student's learning experience*. In this sense, while the student expectation of feedback is often an insistence on tailored, personalised feedback, the

module focuses on the role of the student to usefully apply the feedback to their personal learning journey. After all, who better to appreciate the nuance of their learning journey than the student themselves?

By demonstrating to students that an active learner is one who takes responsibility for their feedback and learning, engagement with feedback becomes intertwined with, and reinforced by, their identity as a student (Price, 2011). A link between student identity and active participation provides the foundation for an educational experience which is not only characterised by passivity but also partnership. This module attempts to address a delicate balance, between equipping the student with knowledge and also ensuring that feedback is not laden with instruction, as this may unintentionally limit the agency of the learner. University affords more agency to learners, but the task at hand becomes the interpretation of key information through an increased volume of feedback from multiple sources (Yang, 2013). The encouragement of students to interpret their feedback and practically apply it to their own needs, empowers students to recognise and use their feedback by means of self-assessment (Evans, 2013). The students are therefore facilitators of their own feedback, demonstrating how they can take ownership to create evaluative opportunities within the feedback process. The practice of this, over time, will enable the students to make more refined judgements (Carless, 2018).

Finally, students are equipped with the knowledge, through the final module, of the necessary tools to *engage with feedback*. The structure of the entirety of the course, through this sequential development of knowledge of feedback then the practical application of feedback, is intended to spur momentum on the part of the learner. The demonstration of strategies used to engage with feedback, generates the development of agency and ownership in feedback, as well as the practice of self-managed learning (Winstone, 2017).

This article has offered a preliminary insight into a project which has necessitated considerable staff and student input, and which is in itself only beginning. Over the coming months, this course will be trialled with students. It is more important than ever that we critically investigate, particularly in the context of COVID-19, how students can take ownership of their educational experience and become active, engaged partners in education.

References

Bailey, R. and M. Garner (2010) 'Is the feedback in higher education worth the paper it is written on? Teachers' reflections on their practices.' *Teaching in Higher Education* 15(2): 187 – 198).

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

Dawson, P., Henderson, M., Mahoney, P., Phillips, M., Ryan T., Boud, D. and E. Molloy (2019) 'What makes for effective feedback: staff and student perspectives.' *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 44(1): 25 - 36.

Evans, C. (2013) 'Making Sense of Assessment Feedback in Higher Education.' *Review of Educational Research* 83(1): 70 – 120.

Gartland, K.M.A., Shapiro, A., McAleavy, L., McDermott, J., Nimmo, A. and Armstrong, M. (2016) 'Feedback for future learning: delivering enhancements and evidencing impacts on the student learning experience'. *New Directions in the Teaching of Physical Sciences*, (11).

Hill, J. and H. West (2020) 'Improving the student learning experience through dialogic feed-forward assessment.' *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 45(1): 82 – 97.

Pitt, E. and L. Norton (2017) '"Now That's the Feedback I Want!" Students' reactions to feedback on graded work and what they do with it.' *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 42(4): 499 – 516.

Poulas, A. and M.J. Mahony (2008) 'Effectiveness of Feedback: The Students' Perspective.' *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 33(2): 143 -154.

Price, M., K. Handley and J. Millar (2011) 'Feedback: Focussing Attention on Engagement.' *Studies in Higher Education* 36(8): 879 – 896.

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

Yang, M. and D. Careless (2013) 'The Feedback Triangle and the Enhancement of Dialogic Feedback Processes.' *Teaching in Higher Education* 18(3): 285 – 297.

Adapt, Deliver, Result: how the experiences of the weeks in lockdown will improve career and employability support

By Deirdre Lynskey, Student Development Manager, Careers, Employability and Skills

Three months into lockdown and the easing of restrictions brings with it a new set of challenges. Planning for a successful return to the office means that reflection is critical. The relative ease with which we all transitioned to working from home surprised many of us; we in the Student Development team gathered our equipment, headed home and were back up online, just like that!

As soon as the reality of lockdown took its grip, we knew that our programmes would not be happening. The Global Leaders who were meant to be heading to San Francisco, The Boston New York Career Development programme (targeting widening participation students and delivered in partnership with Ulster University (UU); and others including the very popular Insight in Management and Leadership in Practice are all face to face programmes. Their value is in the experience and cannot '*just*' be transferred online. Informing the students that the programmes were not going ahead was not easy. None of us like to disappoint, but at the same time we appreciate how unnerving indecision is; we have all, over the last three months experienced that feeling! Therefore, it was important to be up front and transparent with our students.

With Development Weeks, we did explore online delivery and some of the student-led activity could have transitioned to virtual delivery, however the extension of the assessment period meant that Development Weeks were also postponed

Guidance consultations and CV checks transitioned flawlessly from face to face to virtual, and students continue to make appointments. Our monthly team meetings are now weekly and one to one catch ups are a regular feature. One element that working from home does not provide is the casual catch up and chats that take place so naturally in an office environment, '*can I have a quick word about…*', '*let me run something by you*'… '*I've been thinking*'…

As I reflect on those first few weeks now, I am mindful of just how flexible we are as a team, supporting students and graduates as they come to terms with the multiple impacts that COVID-19 will have on their lives now, and over the next few years, whilst also dealing with the same challenges for ourselves, family and friends.

As we start the planning for our return to campus, the words of Tristram Hooley, Chief Research Officer at Institute for Student Employers (ISE), echo,

'For universities, this means that the provision of career support will continue to be critical over the next few months. Such support will need to be proactive, reaching out to current students and recent graduates…'

We were delighted to be able to successfully run GradFest2020 in June using WebinarJam to deliver virtual sessions featuring successful alumni, key employers and our own expert career and employability consultants to support our class of 2020 as they compete in the emerging job market. Indicating what is possible, when we continue to harness the creativity, team work and use of IT (just 3 of the 12 employability skills that we in CES encourage our students to develop!). It truly was a team effort and every member of CES made it the success it was!

The new technology, skills and approaches that we have adapted and developed in such a short space of time will now influence our decision making as we plan our delivery going forward. We must continue with that proactive approach that Tristram Hooley endorses to support our students and graduates - consultations can continue to be online, taking a connected approach to events where we can blend face-to-face with virtual and engaging with alumni because we can now have them all in the same virtual room.

Our challenge now is to blend these approaches and not be afraid to experiment along the way to find out what works best. Engagement with students and our other stakeholders is essential. It's going to be an interesting few months as we transition again… this time more gradually and definitely more skilled!

Reading this next year and reflecting upon just how we did it will be fascinating.

New Opportunities: A Student Perspective of Open Book Exams

Examining the use of open book examinations as alternative assessments and consequences for student mental wellbeing

By Katie Goldsmith

Katie Goldsmith graduated in 2019 with a degree in European Studies from Maynooth University. She is currently studying for a Master's in International Relations at Queen's University.

For the last seven months, I have been an intern on the Queen's Partnership Project in Queen's University Belfast, working as part of a team to improve assessment and feedback.

In the context of COVID-19 and the widespread use of alternative assessments, especially open book examinations, we thought this was a useful area of exploration to examine in light of other changes to assessment and feedback.

In particular, this short article will provide an overview on the literature surrounding the relationship between assessment and student wellbeing. The feasibility of open book assessments will be looked at through examining how this method differs from other assessment methods and what it can tell us about the anxiety felt by students regarding exams and assessments. This article will make particular use of Bloom's Taxonomy scale of educational learning objectives. Through this we can ascertain how open book and other types of assessments can be utilised to ensure objectives are met, while also ensuring that students face no undue anxiety. Some commentary from students will be provided to highlight the sentiments of current students and to enable some forward thinking for how Queen's University staff and students can approach the next semester.

It is important to recognise that while stress is an unpleasant yet unavoidable part of life, there has been an increasing trend of poor mental wellbeing among students in third-level education. Students routinely report high levels of stress and anxiety throughout their time in higher education. Indeed, it is estimated that globally, at any given time, 20-25% of university students are 'stressed' and 50% of students may experience stress in the form of anxiety and depression (Regehr, et al., 2013). In the UK specifically, the University Student Mental Health Survey 2018, which surveyed over 33,000 students from 140 UK universities showed that the prevalence of stress and anxiety amongst students is alarmingly high with 87% of respondents stating they struggle with feelings of anxiety (Network, 2019). More recently in Queen's Students' Union, the OMNI survey reported that academic stressors were the single biggest factor in determining poor mental wellbeing. Over 71% of students reporting that their quality of life had been indicated by their mental health, 70% had struggled with burnout and 46% reported having seriously considered leaving their course.

Academically, this stress is often attributed to workload and anxiety surrounding assessments. The reality of the mental pressure associated with bunched deadlines and traditional timed, closed-book proctored exams cannot be ignored. The OMNI survey reported that 72% of students reported struggling with deadlines. The next part of this article will explore in depth different assessment methods. Focusing on the topic of open book assessments we will examine whether they could potentially be developed further by QUB in the next academic year.

Furthermore, it goes without saying that assessment is a necessary part of academic studies on all levels. To explore it fully, a definition for what is meant by the term 'open book' is warranted. An open book assessment describes an assessment wherein students are permitted to consult reference material while completing the assessment. Open book and closed book assessments have different pedagogical ends (Ryerson University, 2014). This can be seen when analysing Bloom's taxonomy scale, which functions as a hierarchical description of students' learning. When viewed from the bottom to the top, Bloom's taxonomy scale lays the foundation for how students move from 'root' learners, where learning is characterised by 'remembering', to true scholars where they create new knowledge (Bengtsson, 2019). Closed book assessments can clearly be grouped with the bottom part of Bloom's taxonomy (remembering) while open book assessments can be grouped with the top (creating). In terms of alleviating stress associated with assessments, one can imagine how the certain level of freedom afforded to students with open book assessments encourages students to develop new learning strategies which will ensure their success. It should be noted that in many cases open book assessments are perceived to be marked to a higher standard than traditional closed book exams and assessments due to the expectation that with access to resource materials, students can deliver a high calibre answer. Despite this, the level of stress and anxiety associated with this method of assessment are lower. Furthermore, when developed properly, they can lead to lasting learning outcomes especially under

the 'create, evaluate and analyse' levels determined by Bloom.

When constructing suitable assessments it is necessary to adhere to learning outcomes and objectives set out in the course; more broadly speaking, it is also necessary to understand the nature of teaching programmes in general (Mohanan, 2004). Mohanan describes two stances on teaching; teaching as transmitting information and teaching as triggering mental development. There is also a difference between students developing rote learning skills vs thinking skills (Mohanan, 2004). Considered in these terms, it is easy to see how traditional closed book, timed and proctored exams can be viewed as promoting rote learning in the eyes of many students. These exams are essentially just a memory game. Academic Maryellen Weimer puts it succinctly: "*exam situations are pretty artificial. How often in your professional life do you have a limited time window and no access to resources or expertise? In this age of technology, we need to be purposely teaching students how to access, organise and apply information.*" (Weimer, 2013). This demonstrates how open book assessments more accurately represent the type of real-world scenario that students will face in the workforce and provide them with a better opportunity to further develop problem solving skills.

This past academic year has been one of unprecedented challenges and difficulties for the entire university sector, and indeed the world at large. The emergence of COVID-19 and the subsequent pandemic forced universities across the world to abruptly shift to digital learning, undoubtedly causing some necessary changes in assessments for students, including in Queen's where 'alternative assessments' have been introduced. When speaking about open book assessments, students have expressed the belief, in consultation with the Partnership Project interns, that more incorporation of open book assessments into curriculums would be a step in the right direction, particularly when considering the impact it would have on student wellbeing, through greatly reducing the stress students feel when faced with a timed closed book exam. Students also felt open book assessments more accurately represented the type of real-life scenarios graduates will face once they enter the workforce. Here they will have to rely on their problem-solving skills rather than knowledge recall and will have access to the necessary materials before them while completing the task. However, some concerns were raised by students which should also be noted such as the insurance of equity in access for students in terms of equipment required for an open book assessment. Furthermore, if the assessment is being completed at home, challenges facing students in terms of technology and their home environment also need to be taken into consideration.

As stated above, the university sector has faced many challenges this academic year and while there will undoubtedly be many more challenges in the future, there are also many opportunities. Particularly, the opportunity for universities like Queen's to utilise these times to reassess their approach to academic assessment. They can endeavour to devise suitable assessment methods which not only follow the proposed objectives identified by Bloom's taxonomy, but also take into consideration the anxiety and stress that students face regarding assessments. As alluded to in this article, learning objectives and outcomes and the best assessment method to achieve these can vary across disciplines. However, it is worth considering whether a dual approach might be incorporated into the curriculum. More open book assessments utilised alongside the more traditional closed book assessments and exams gives students a more balanced assessment experience. This not only alleviates stress and anxiety but also exposes them to new academic skills which could benefit them once they graduate. This is a time of opportunity as well as challenge and QUB could use these challenging times as an opportunity to examine and develop new assessment approaches.

References

Bengtsson, L., 2019. Take-Home Exams in Higher Education: A Systematic Review. *Educational Sciences*, 9(267), pp. 1-16.

Mohanan, K., 2004. *INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH (IISER) PUNE.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.iiserpune.ac.in/~mohanan/educ/cdtl-obe.pdf
[Accessed 01 June 2020].

Network, I., 2019. *University Student Mental Health Survey 2018,* London: The Insight Network.

Regehr, C., Glancy, D. & Pitts, A., 2013. Interventions to reduce stress in university students: A review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders,* 148(1), pp. 1-11.

Ryerson University, 2014. *Open Book Exams,* Toronto: Centre for excellence in learning and teaching.

Weimer, M., 2013. *Faculty Focus.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teachingprofessor-blog/crib-sheets-help-students-prioritize-and-organize-course-content/
[Accessed 29 May 2020].

Careers, Employability and Skills (CES): Transforming into a Virtual Service during Lockdown

By Eimear Gallagher, Careers, Employability and Skills (CES)

Like all other areas in Queen's, COVID 19 has been a powerful force of change in CES. Over the last 2-3 years, we have engaged in many planning conversations with students, colleagues, professional bodies and employers about the anticipated changes in future graduate workplaces over a period of around ten years.

In 2017, this was considered to be a rapid and dramatic timeframe for the level of change that was anticipated in all our working lives as the impact of virtual technology, artificial intelligence and machine learning took full effect.

However, what was not considered in detail in the predictive models was the ignition power of a very simple life form – a small RNA virus. COVID 19 has changed our perceptions of appropriate timescales for managing change and has revealed our true capacity to transform in a matter of weeks into an entirely virtual service.

Our next challenge is to reimagine our service in a *"new normal"* where we will seek to integrate face- to-face services into a virtual delivery model. This is an interesting reverse image of the planning scenario that we had in mind four months ago when we were considering plans for new and reimagined delivery models that could provide the most engaging blend of virtual and on site services to meet the needs of Queen's students and placement/graduate employers.

In addition to the suspension of all face-to-face student support, CES faced a further challenge to engaging with students in large numbers during lockdown. The institutional development and roll out of Canvas has had to be focused on the core priority of academic courses in the first instance, with services to be considered at a later phase. CES and other services did not, therefore, have a presence in the central resource that our students migrate to on a regular basis during term time. A range of alternative options, therefore, had to be quickly considered such as the potential to make use of the Free Canvas options (as other services such as LDS and the Graduate School were already doing) and considering new options. While CES has significant plans for a pilot of a Canvas course in 2020-21, the best short term alternatives to fill the immediate gap were agreed to be:

1. To maximise the opportunities offered to us in our existing software options offered of MS Teams and MyFuture. By doing this, we were able to immediately re-establish our one to one career consultation appointments and advertise virtual events to student groups of less than 250 participants.

2. The purchase of a WebinarJam license to enable CES to offer panel events to up to 5000 participants. This has proven to be a particular successful tool for a relatively low cost. MRCI had already been using the tool for student recruitment events and in the period from 16th – 22nd of June, CES attracted 517 Final Year students and recent alumni to attend 5 live Careers and employability events. Recordings of these are now available and are continuing to be viewed in our Gradfest2020 website.

3. To engage in more focused exchanging of ideas with joint delivery activity with other services (E.g. MRCI, DARO and WP/LDS)

4. To provide short, localised and highly tailored staff training in the tools relevant to the delivery of their activity.

5. To revitalise our web and social media information and promotional tools.

6. To use the analytics from each of the above to evaluate the relative success of the novel approaches as we progressed and to inform future planning/refinements.

As we reflect on what made the transition successful, there is no doubt that the good ideas, drive, commitment and sheer hard work of so many CES colleagues in coming together as a collective force has been a vital ingredient in recent weeks. COVID 19 severely curtailed the delivery options left open to us. The positive side of this was that it brought a clearer focus on what we could do that helped us to come together as a team in the pursuit of a single goal. The short lead-in time and working from home scenario also meant that we had reduced timeframes for decision making and communication. The reduction in communication was indeed a problem. It was notable, as we progressed, how the removal of informal, on-site communication did create some issues and unintended duplications and, no doubt, frustration to individuals at some points. It did also place exceptional demand on the time of individual staff, which could not be sustained in the longer term. However, there is no doubt that, despite all of this, CES has found a way to make it all work. The main services of information, large career development workshops; employer presentations, Degree Plus and, potentially, Canvas modules can and are now being very successfully delivered. COVID 19 has been a disrupter and a catalyst of change that is generating ideas and innovation. The future of work has already arrived and we are ready and our students will be too.

Under Pressure – Feedback, Assessment and Student Mental Wellbeing

A student perspective of feedback, assessment and the link to student mental wellbeing

By Michael Upham and Caitríona Quinn

Michael Upham is a second year Mechanical Engineering student who has served as a student representative for the past two years, first as Course Rep and now as School Rep of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering.

Caitríona Quinn is a graduate of BSc Physiotherapy from Trinity College Dublin and is currently completing a PhD in Physiotherapy in Trinity Centre for Health Sciences, Dublin.

As a student representative, the topics which elucidate most feedback from students are often those closest to their educational experience, including assessment and feedback which remain pivotal to their education and indeed, their future. These gain added relevance for students when their role in influencing students' wellbeing is considered. While both assessment and feedback play crucial roles in determining progression and academic performance, their role in impacting the mental health of students cannot be ignored. This includes the pressure of more deadlines, less feedback, and high expectations.

It is the contention of this article that this impact must gain more prominence in discourse around assessment and feedback and that enhancements to feedback and assessment can be utilised to positively shape the education system to embed the centrality of student wellbeing in education.

Feedback

One of the most contested areas of debate remains the role of assessment feedback in enhancing student learning and it is often one of the topics on which students engage with their representatives most enthusiastically.

The multiplicity of ways to interpret feedback (here defined as "Information about a person's performance of a task, etc. which is used as a basis for improvement" (Dictionary, n.d.)) understandably means that the role of the learner is central. The student experience of feedback has often been that it is depersonalised, auto-generated, or solely a grade (which does not indicate how performance can be improved). It is our argument that this feedback is not beneficial for students, and can indeed be damaging. In order to be of developmental utility, students often report that feedback must indicate how a student can progress, and should be easily recognisable to students as feedback. This correspondingly identifies a need to explicitly classify where feedback has been given, usually unclear or non-existent.

Extensive literature exists which details 'ideal' feedback. Characteristics of this feedback often include detail for students on both positive and negative aspects of their work, personal and frequent written feedback which can improve the quality of subsequent work (Rogers, 2018). Feedback, such as written comments, should highlight strengths while showing areas for improvement, and indicate how improvements can be achieved; facilitating a student's learning journey. Indeed, a lessened focus on a grade can empower students to understand their development (Watson, 2020). It is thought that prompt, written feedback, highlighting where to improve is most valuable. Feedback should be meaningful, manageable, and motivated. Even highlighting a student's fault in an equation, instead of just marking it incorrect, can help them progress, understand their mistake and identify a correct method.

Current provision of feedback almost always fails to meet this standard. Prior to University, some students experience minimal self-directed study and it is only through the necessary provision of scaffolding for improvement through feedback, that students can enhance their learning. Assumptions that students will know how to apply feedback will inevitably lead to lower overall outcomes.

Of course, demands for increased provision of high-quality feedback has often been met with concerns around staff workload. Staff may justifiably argue that there is insufficient time for the detailed marking of assignments. Yet this, coupled with a lack of independent learning may produce unmotivated students.

Students may also often consider the differences between primary and third-level education. In primary education, marking is more intensive and daily, individualised feedback is commonplace.

This may not be a comparable experience given the different demands of higher education. Yet, it is important that when interacting with students, the interface of the University meets students where they are. The 'preparation' for the expectations of third-level education is often grounded in the experience of earlier education. Deviance from this, and the corresponding reasons why, should be communicated to students through dialogue.

Assessment

It is true that in Higher Education today, independent learning is less commonplace. It is not uncommon for companies accommodating students on placements to report that students lack professional skills, problem-solving abilities, or the ability to apply skills across areas.

It would be the argument of this article that university assessment methods contribute to this.

Existing assessment practices often involve a majority of examinations, coupled with coursework, much of which is in the form of class tests. These are identical to exams, without revision periods or, arguably, due consideration for other modules. In reality therefore, modules become determined solely by

exam assessment, a poor indicator of deep learning. As it is difficult to assess a whole module's content within an exam, if sixty per cent of the module content was covered in the exam, a pass mark of forty per cent would mean that a student could pass with as little as demonstrating twenty-four per cent 'knowledge' of the content. Indeed, the demonstration of this knowledge may be restricted to the regurgitation of information.

There are other reasons to consider exams poor practice for assessment. Exams test information retrieval under pressure, do not replicate the experience of working in industry, nor do they represent projects to be undertaken later during education. Common revision techniques encourage the learning of model answers for questions. This targeted revision neglects topics and does not improve understanding of the content, instead preparing a student to jump through the hoops of an exam. This further reduces the ability to demonstrate independent learning. Short exams encourage students to rush, resulting in simple mistakes, which could be avoided if sufficient time was allowed.

Class tests throughout the year impact attainment. Before university, students have no experience with the time management needed for this. Schools allow study leave dedicated to revision. For class tests, a student may have come from another lecture, or be overwhelmed with lectures and deadlines; they cannot dedicate study time without jeopardising other modules, or worse, their wellbeing.

If a university does not provide specific information about how to learn, structure time, effectively revise, and work independently, they are not empowering students to achieve their potential. When attainment reflects on the university, it is within the university's interest to ensure they create graduates who can reflect, adapt, and innovate.

In this sense, exams can only serve as 'snapshots' of a student's understanding. Alternative assessment methods, suitable for all learners, should be identified, whether a greater number of research projects, report writing, group work, or physical creation. An effective way of examining understanding which also produces personal notes is through a learning journal (Rogers, 2018), which can be assessed regularly and is individual to the student – whether they write notes, use diagrams, or develop their own method.

The notion of choice in varied assessment methods is also central to effective assessment. Allowing students to complete an assignment 'their own way' would enhance both student performance and the student experience. For example, through the inclusion of allowing students to submit the assessment through video format. Successful demonstration of knowledge can be achieved through the effective implementation of a range of methods.

Mental health

In any consideration of assessment and feedback, the mental wellbeing of students must figure as part of the discussion. Indeed, it is our argument that the role of mental wellbeing can no longer be separated from conversations around the educational experience.

Data gathered through the OMNI survey by Queen's University Belfast Students' Union in 2019, supports this conclusion. Among its key headlines were that 44% of students struggled with deadlines while forty-four per cent of students struggled with their workload. Perhaps most worryingly, seventy per cent of students reported experiencing 'burnout' and 70% of students reporting having considered leaving their course due to its impact on their mental health. Some possible explanations for these statistics may be the 'bunching' of deadlines or a lack of space in the timetable for proper preparation. Whatever the reason, it is clear these figures indicate a deep unease on the part of students.

This unease is further exacerbated by the qualitative comments collected by the OMNI survey, including:

"I dread going into university but I don't know what else to do with my life"

"There are periods when there is a mountain of work with deadlines all bunched together"

"You're just one face in a massive lecture hall to them [the lecturers]"

These comments point to a feeling of division between lecturers and students in an unequal power dynamic, potentially including a sense of limited agency, owing to the feeling that students perceive themselves to be viewed as 'customers' in Higher Education.

Most conclusively, the OMNI survey highlighted academic pressures as the biggest factor impacting student mental wellbeing.

It would be our argument that the provision of personal, quality feedback and a move to more innovative assessment methods, could help in reducing this pressure, while better preparing students for industry. Moreover, students must be empowered as partners in education, actively exploring approaches to learning and consequentially activated to increase deep learning and become independent learners.

Conclusion

This article has sought to provide a student perspective on assessment, feedback and the link to mental wellbeing.

In the course of our exploration, it is our belief that we have demonstrated that there is an urgency needed to tackle the problems inherent in our current education system. Feedback should be enhanced to foster student academic development while assessment should be tackled to prepare students for workplace challenges. The University experience in totality should become universally accessible. In making these changes, it will be possible not only to create a society of independent learners, but also embed changes in curricula which will positively benefit student mental wellbeing.

Bibliography

@Mrshumanities, 2016. *UKEdMag: Three Pillars of Effective Marking & Feedback by @mrshumanities.* [Online]
Available at: https://ukedchat.com/2016/12/27/ukedmag-three-pillars-of-effective-marking-feedback/
[Accessed 22 February 2020].

Cooper, H. & Shoolbred, M., 2019. *Using Feedback to Boost your Grades.* 1st ed. London: Red Globe Press.

Dictionary, O., n.d. *Lexico - Feedback.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/feedback
[Accessed 22 February 2019].

QUBSU, 2020. *OMNI - all in for mental health The Results,* Belfast: QUBSU.

Rogers, R., 2018. *Learning Journals: A powerful feedback system.* [Online]
Available at: https://ukedchat.com/2018/03/10/learning-journals/
[Accessed 22 February 2020].

Watson, E., 2020. *SB Pedagogy.* [Online]
Available at: https://sbpedagogy.wordpress.com/2020/02/03/feedback-written-verbal-and-peer/
[Accessed 22 February 2020].