POLICY ON GIVING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK ON ASSESSED WORK

AU-RSC-18-1866-A

2019/20

Policy Summary

This policy sets out the University's approach to feedback on student assessment, including:

- The return of marks to students, including feedback on coursework, examinations, and deadlines for the provision of coursework feedback.

- Guiding principles of giving effective feedback, and the preparation of students to receive feedback.

- Guidance on recommended feedback techniques.

Related Regulations, Policies, and Guidance

The University's Assessment Policies and Examination Regulations for Candidates provide further information on the assessment of students.

Version Control

Ref No	Version	Responsible Officer	Approved by	Approval Date	Effective Date
AU-RSC-18-1866	A	Adam Hewitt	ULTC	Jun 2019	Sep 2019

What is feedback?

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education defines assessment as "not a linear process; it is an ongoing cycle through which staff design, set, mark, engage in dialogue about performance, review and develop assessments.

1   Aston University values and emphasises those activities that encourage students to reflect on and review their academic work to improve their performance.

2   Feedback can take many different forms. It may be spoken or written. It includes discussion and debate, annotations on written coursework or exam scripts, separate completed feedback sheets, peer-review and self-assessment/reflection.

3   Feedback will be given on work that contributes to the mark for a module. It may also be provided on work that does not contribute a mark depending on what the module leader has identified as important at that point in the module and whether the assessment feeds into similar pieces later on in the module of the programme. We use and value all kinds of feedback.

4   It has a range of purposes, such as helping understanding of progress, identifying strengths and weaknesses, assisting in improving performance.

Responsibility for Feedback

5   Each module leader should ensure that the University's policy on giving effective feedback is addressed in relation to all assessed work in the module. The School should have a mechanism in place to ensure confidence that this policy is being applied across the School.

6   Students will be provided with information on the learning outcomes, nature of the assessment tasks and assessment criteria for each module.

Return of Marks to Students

7   Aston University recognises how important the timing of the return of marks is to students. Staff will aim to return provisional marks for assessments (coursework and other non-examination forms of assessment) to students **within 4 weeks of the submission deadline**. Provisional marks are marks which have not yet been considered and formally confirmed by the Module Board. Students should be informed that provisional marks may be changed by Module Boards. When it is not possible to return provisional marks to students within 4 weeks students will be informed of the date by which the work will be marked.

8   Schools normally will release provisional marks to students via MAP.

Feedback to Students on Examination Performance

9   As a minimum requirement all Schools will provide a Generic Feedback Report on examination performance for each examination paper, and will provide feedback on examination performance to individual students on request, particularly in cases where the student has performed poorly or less well than expected.

Other sources of information

10   School information for students including module guides and student handbooks may also include useful information on feedback. The Learning Development Centre is also a useful source of advice and guidance.

Advice and guidance on good practice for effective feedback

Key Principles for Effective Feedback
For all assessed work, other than examinations, module leaders should have in place a process which ensures that feedback is:

- **Timely**
  Feedback should be returned as quickly as possible to students, and in sufficient time for students to be able to review the work in order to improve, on the basis of the feedback, the next related piece of work.
- **Perceived as relevant and meaningful**
  Students need to know how to correct their mistakes. Provide focussed specific comments on aspects of the work, and direct them to further reading to improve their understanding of key points. Distinguish between different skills and attributes of the piece of work, so that students can identify their own strengths and weaknesses, and identify discrete areas for action and improvement. Clear marking criteria which articulate the important aspects of a piece of work provide a framework against which feedback can be given. It is good practice to give students the marking criteria.
- **Encouraging**
  Feedback should offer a balance of encouraging comments and criticism; it should state what is good about the piece of work as well as what could be improved.

Balance of Assessment Methods
It is recognised that increasing class sizes place considerable demands on teaching staff, and that some types of coursework may take significant amounts of time to mark and return to students if the quality of feedback provided is to be useful to them in improving their learning. Teaching staff are therefore encouraged to consider a range of assessment methods which include some where feedback can be given more quickly.

All modules should have a feedback strategy which explains the purpose of feedback and how and when feedback will be given
There should be information for students that explains how feedback will be given: written or oral, group or individual, on feedback forms etc. Students must be advised when to expect feedback.

There should be an appropriate balance of feedback
Programme teams should agree the regime of assessment that will provide the appropriate balance of feedback. They should consider placing additional emphasis on feedback on assessed pieces in the early stages of programmes and where students are making a transition between learning institutions (as, for example, with 'top-up' students).

Students should be prepared to receive feedback
This can be done by a variety of means, including:

- Managing students' expectations so that the purpose of feedback is clearly understood prior to assessment or evaluation. Discussion of learning outcomes and assessment criteria with the class can ensure that students properly understand what is required of them. Some students may not understand the language used in assessment criteria and assessment feedback without having the opportunity to discuss them with their tutor.

- Identifying all channels of feedback (for example, oral in class, from peers, self-feedback through reflection, written on assignments, group feedback). Many students only consider 'feedback' to be the written comments on assessed pieces of work, and fail to fully recognise the valuable feedback that they are given on an on-going basis throughout their programmes of teaching. Regularly pointing out to classes when feedback is being given can help students appreciate and use all modes of feedback to improve their learning.

- Encouraging the application of feedback by asking students to use their feedback to improve their later assignments.

All feedback should be designed to support students in closing the gap between current and desired performance

Feedback should be provided in relation to assessment criteria that are linked to programme or module learning outcomes. It should identify strengths and weaknesses in relation to specific assessment criteria, and should offer guidance to the learner on how to correct their mistakes. For example, where written feedback is provided this might be in the form of specific 'action points' alongside the normal feedback that identify for the learner what he/she needs to do next time to improve performance. Especially for work not contributing to the marks for a module, this may involve students identifying their own action points in class, based on feedback they have received from class activities.

Many of the criticisms that students make of the feedback they receive relate to this issue – they comment that feedback is often too vague and does not help them to identify the things they need to do to improve, or that it is too general in that they cannot identify which sections of their work need improvement.

Feedback techniques

It may be helpful to consider how different forms of feedback can be used for different purposes. For example, students are likely to find it helpful to receive constructive comments on their work from a range of sources including teachers, personal tutors, peers and, where appropriate, practitioners. Encouraging students to reflect on their own performance, as well as receiving feedback from others, can be a useful part of the learning

process, especially when opportunities for self-assessment are integrated in a module or programme.

It is also possible to provide generic feedback to students in ways that help them to improve their individual performance by learning from the cohort as a whole. For example, making available anonymously a summary of all comments provided to individual students on an assessment task set for a group can help each student to think about how their work could be improved, especially if the comments are clearly related to learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Another strategy that can be economical of staff time but that can provide helpful feedback to students is publishing, anonymously, assessed work at different levels showing examples of progression and staff expectations of increasing development.

In meeting the needs of students for feedback on their progression and attainment, it can be helpful to consider:

- the desirability of providing feedback at an appropriate time in the learning process, and as soon as possible after the student has completed the assessment task
- specifying the nature and extent of feedback that students can expect and whether this is to be accompanied by the return of assessed work. It is important to consider the particular needs of students studying part-time and/or remotely
- the effective use of comments on returned work, including relating feedback to intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria, in order to help students identify areas for improvement as well as commending them for achievement
- the role of oral feedback, either on a group or individual basis, as a means of supplementing or replacing written feedback
- providing guidance about the point in the module or programme where it is no longer appropriate for a member of staff to continue providing feedback to a student on his/her work. This is normally when a student is approaching an assessment, such as submission of a dissertation, or handing in a coursework assignment.