

## [P10] Development and implementation of a policy for delivering effective feedback to students

**Maureen M. Dawson<sup>1</sup>, Joyce A. Overfield<sup>2</sup>, Carol Ainley<sup>2</sup>, Alan Fielding<sup>2</sup>, Rod Cullen<sup>1</sup> and Michael Cole<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Learning and Teaching Unit, Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), Manchester M15 6BY

<sup>2</sup>School of Biology, Chemistry and Health Science (MMU), Manchester M1 5GD  
m.m.dawson@mmu.ac.uk

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### Introduction

Provision of timely, high quality feedback on assessments has been identified as supporting student learning (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004; Juwah *et al*, 2004). The National Student Satisfaction Survey of level 3 students, which was conducted in 2005, indicated student feedback as an area which could be improved in clarity and detail of comments and in timeliness. Local surveys of level 2 students at MMU have produced similar findings.

A number of developments within MMU relevant to the teaching of Biology and Chemistry have provided an ideal opportunity to reflect on mechanisms for providing feedback to students. These developments have included the recent formation of the School of Biology, Chemistry and Health Science from the merger of the Departments of Biological Sciences and Chemistry, and the subsequent review of all programmes within the School. In addition, the School has piloted the move of the MMU Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) from WebCT Campus to Blackboard Vista. Currently all modules within the former department of Biological Sciences are delivered within a VLE and this will, next year, apply to all modules across the School. The project reported here is on-going and has been supported by a Departmental Teaching Enhancement grant from the HEA Bioscience.

The aims of the project are to develop, evaluate and embed a School procedure for delivering effective, relevant and high quality feedback on assignments. The objectives are to:

- a) survey the extent of use and primary purpose of feedback proformas used within the School;
- b) devise, trial and evaluate the use of feedback proformas which are explicitly linked to the learning outcomes of different types of assignments.
- c) transmit feedback proformas to the students through the VLE.
- d) embed the use of feedback proformas, if deemed successful, within all modules in the School.

## Methods

1. A survey of existing proformas/marketing schedules has taken place (objective 'a'.)
2. Academic staff (eleven in total) took part in a structured interview in order to clarify current practice regarding the use of feedback proformas. Questions used are bulleted below:
  - Do you use a proforma when marking student assignments?
  - What is the primary purpose of the proforma that you use? Is it to make marking easier, more consistent, to provide useful feedback to students on their assignments or to provide evidence for audit purposes?
  - Do you provide generic feedback on assignments? If yes, do you use templates
  - Do you provide an assignment brief? If yes does this brief make clear to students the learning outcomes of the assignment, the mark allocation, the skills being tested and the link to grade descriptors?
  - During the interview staff were also asked to consider what would be their expectations of the learning outcomes for different types of assignment at different levels of the programme.

## Results and discussion

More than thirty individual proformas are currently in use within the School of Biology, Chemistry and Health Science at MMU. However, there is considerable overlap between them. There is, therefore, scope for using proforma templates, which can be adapted to suit individual tutor need.

The structured interviews of academic staff showed that, often, assessment proformas are used to make marking easier, more consistent and to provide evidence for audit, though most staff agreed that the primary use of proformas should be to provide useful feedback for students. The survey of the proformas frequently demonstrated that the language of the proformas was not 'student friendly' and may, indeed, be confusing. This exercise has raised awareness amongst staff of the need to simplify proformas so that students can readily access their message, rather than simply register a mark.

Staff have identified generic learning outcomes for different assignments at different levels. One example is shown in **Table 1**.

Three modules were selected from each of levels 1, 2 and 3 within the Bioscience undergraduate programmes offered by the School of Biology, Chemistry and Health Science. The modules were selected so as to cover a range of assignments across the programmes. Unit teams have identified a maximum of four learning outcomes that will be assessed in this assignment. Proforma templates have been devised for the different assignments. These proformas will be given to students with the assignment brief so that the learning outcomes and marking schemes are explicit. Since the School has now moved to Blackboard Vista, use will also be made of the Vista Grade tool for designing feedback proformas. Thus, we will build several feedback proformas into the new Vista templates and assess their use. Generic feedback will be given electronically via the VLE.

Assignment	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Essay/report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Structure an essay/report</li> <li>○ Search for information from appropriate sources</li> <li>○ Report facts in own words</li> <li>○ Correct use of bibliography: list references correctly in appropriate format</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Source appropriate information</li> <li>○ Use appropriate scientific terminology</li> <li>○ Appreciate the value of the scientific integrity of the information</li> <li>○ Use in-text referencing</li> <li>○ Appropriate use of IT to present information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Critically appraise information sourced</li> <li>○ Give a balanced and reasoned account</li> <li>○ Use appropriate texts/sources</li> <li>○ Evidence of original and creative thought</li> <li>○ Appropriate referencing in-text using a defined style</li> </ul>

**Table 1:** Examples of learning outcomes identified at each level of study for an essay or report

It is hoped that, as the project continues, students will receive more rapid feedback on their assignments, especially if staff confine their feedback to those learning outcomes explicitly stated in the assignment brief and in the proforma.

## References

Gibbs, G., and Simpson, C. (2004) Conditions under which assessment supports student learning. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Issue 1*  
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