

Title: **Do Indicators Such as the National Student Survey (NSS) Help or Hinder Endeavours to Enhance the Student Experience?**

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

- To understand student expectations of feedback and to compare these to our own preconceptions.
- To explore the tensions between what students think is useful and what we can actually provide.
- To examine the value of addressing these tensions (even, if they cannot be met in full), in order to enhance students' experience and utilisation of feedback on their work.

Session Outline

Results from NSS show that assessment and feedback are the areas of their course with which students are least satisfied¹. In relation to feedback, students are asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the statements²:

- Feedback on my work has been prompt
- I have received detailed comments on my work
- Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand

We know that 'the most important thing we do for our students is to assess their work' (Race, 2001:51) and 'unless students are able to use the feedback to produce improved work,..., neither they nor those giving the feedback will know that it has been effective' (Boud, 2000: 151-167). Yet students can feel that assessment and feedback are 'inauthentic and pointless' (Ramsden in Norton *et al.* 2001:269-284) and student and staff perceptions of assessment and feedback often differ (MacLellan, 2001: 307-318). At face value, the NSS results suggest we should improve our feedback methods. But is this actually the case? Is the issue behind the NSS results our assessment and feedback approaches, student understanding and perception of good feedback, or a mix of these?

To understand this we need to know how students interpret the NSS questions:

- What is 'feedback' to students?
- What do they think the purpose of feedback is and what aspects of it do they value?
- What do they think of the feedback they receive and how do they interpret and utilise it in future work?

We set out to answer these questions; running a series of structured focus groups with students, supplemented by broader survey data. First and second year students made up our sample to gauge the difference between the expectations of those new to university and those midway through their studies.

The session will present the results of this work and use these to explore the tensions between student expectation and their perceived needs, the academic purpose of feedback and the demands of staff. It will then consider what approaches can alleviate these tensions and ultimately improve the student experience.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Please provide an indication of how the session will be structured and how activities and discussion will be facilitated. For discussion papers please include a few indicative questions which will focus the discussion element.

Timing	Activity
5 Minutes	Discussion to establish our academic definition of what constitutes feedback, its purpose and value and how students utilize it.
20 Minutes	Presentation of the data and our initial conclusions
10 Minutes	Co-interpretation activities based around student feedback; with delegates in small groups interpreting some of the views gathered from students.
10 Minutes	Discussion of how we can meet and manage student expectation. Identifying where we need to change practice and where we need to manage expectations by improving student understanding of what we can offer them

References

Boud, D. (2000) Sustainable assessment: rethinking assessment for the learning society, *Studies in Continuing Education*, vol 22, no. 2, pp 151-167.

Maclellan, E. (2001) Assessment for learning, the different perceptions of tutors and students, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol. 26, no. 4, pp 307-318

Norton, L. S., Tilley, A. J., Newstead, S. E. and Franklyn-Stokes, A. (2001) The pressures of assessment in undergraduate courses and their effects on student behaviours, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol. 26, no. 3, pp 269 – 284.

Race, P (2001) *The Lecturer's Toolkit*, London: Kogan Page

(1) www.hefce.ac.uk/news/hefce/2007/nss.htm

(2) www.thestudentsurvey.com/archive/nss-questionnaire-english.pdf