

Assessment & Feedback Toolkit: Student Resources



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This report includes findings and recommendations from a qualitative study conducted by students from the University of Connecticut visiting the University of Glasgow. A focus group and interviews with staff and student leaders included questions to explore the assessment and feedback practices students find useful, if anything, to inform an online Toolkit.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of this project was to evaluate the assessment and feedback practices and resources at the University of Glasgow, as well as online resources that may be beneficial in an assessment and feedback Toolkit, if anything. This assessment looked specifically at students' perspectives on usefulness regarding assessment and feedback. The University of Glasgow is currently undergoing development of evidence-based tools and guidance on assessment and feedback best practices for an online Toolkit to initially be released in June of 2016. The Toolkit is to be provided for both academics and students to help understand assessment and feedback and create more effective design and practice across the institution. This project builds on a pilot phase, completed in July 2015. Participants in an Assessment and Feedback Symposium in October 2015 displayed the desire for a University specific Toolkit. The University of Glasgow partnered with the University of Connecticut's Higher Education and Student Affairs master's program to bring three rising second-year students in order to research the student-facing component of the Toolkit.

Through meetings with project sponsors and Toolkit developers, our team developed an assessment plan. Using a qualitative approach, we sought to gain a thorough understanding of assessment and feedback practices and resources at the University of Glasgow from both the staff and administrative perspective, but especially the student experience. Focus group participants were recruited through the University's Student Representative Council (SRC) to gain involvement from students interested in assessment and feedback policies from diverse majors and backgrounds. The interview protocol was a localized instrument that focused on the assessment and feedback practices and resources at the University of Glasgow and what students would look for in an online Toolkit. Researchers also spoke directly with University Senate

members, staff from Disability Service and Student Learning Service, and SRC Vice Presidents. Interview questions for staff were created particularly for each meeting and to which areas of expertise and student involvement those individuals pertain. Questioning was specific to the project's needs in order to assess the students' perspectives regarding assessment and feedback at the University of Glasgow and provide recommendations for further development of the Toolkit.

Our findings looked at how students perceive assessment and feedback practices and resources to be useful, if at all, and what they would look for in potential resources, if anything. We found that students describe continuous assessment as being the most helpful to them and prefer feedback that is timely, detailed, and actionable. Students describe wanting resources that provide concrete examples of what is expected of them, as well as readily available online academic support resources. We conclude with recommendations for student-centered practices and resources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

With regard to improving teaching and learning efforts in the United Kingdom, assessment and feedback has been at the forefront. Based on the U.K. National Student Survey (NSS) in 2014, assessment and feedback was rated the lowest by students; this was reflected with just 73% saying they were satisfied with it, the same level as in the year before. The concepts of assessment and feedback go hand-in-hand for a student. From a student's perspective, feedback is one of the most useful products of assessment (Gibbs & Simpson, 2003). Assessment has the ability to support student learning when, (a) it sets high standards; (b) causes students to engage in sustained and productive work; (c) arrives in time to be used to guide further study; (d) is comprehensible to students, and (e) focuses on the work rather than the students themselves (Gibbs & Simpson, 2003).

With regard to the expectation of assessment feedback, Higgins, Hartley, and Skelton (2002) explored university going students' understanding of feedback received from instructors. They found that students place high value on the importance of timely, specific, and clear feedback from instructors. Additionally, students expressed that comments which directly related to the assignment were most helpful as opposed to general feedback provided to the entire class.

Additional research that has explored students' feedback preferences found that students prefer feedback comments which are directed toward the task as opposed to the self (Orsmond, Merry, & Reiling, 2005); highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the work, explain mistakes, and provide advice about how to improve their arguments (Lizzo & Wilson, 2008); provide advice on how to improve their critical analysis (Lizzo & Wilson, 2008); help them "focus on skills relating to a deep approach to learning" (McDowell et al., 2007); and have the ability to help them on future assignments along with being reasonably fair (Lizzo & Wilson, 2008).

In an effort to balance the literature on student and teacher perspectives on assessment and feedback, J. Tuck (2012) researched assessment and especially feedback from a social practice as opposed to a product. Academics highlight the difficulty in prioritizing providing feedback given their various roles and duties which together are time consuming (Tuck, 2012). Academics also have different views of what feedback means which results in implementation varying across disciplines (Tuck, 2012).

To address student concerns around assessment and feedback, there have been multiple university specific and national level initiatives in the U.K. Some of these initiatives have included universities conducting their own surveys to assess how they can improve assessment and feedback on their campuses. To address the concern of the overworked academics, researchers have investigated making students active producers of feedback (Nicola, Thomson & Breslin, 2014). Allowing students to produce assessment feedback engages them in multiple acts of evaluative judgement, both about the work of peers, and, in reflection, about their own work; which allows them to apply criteria to explain those judgements. A result of such approach is that it allows students to be active in the feedback process which may reduce their need for immediate external feedback (Nicola, Thomson & Breslin, 2014).

Without question, assessment and feedback practices play an integral role in student learning. It is thus vital that student needs are met so that they feel well supported and prepared as they matriculate through university, both at the undergraduate and post graduate level. In order to have effective practices that are relevant for students, it is important for universities to assess what this means at various institutional levels. This project aims to assess student perception toward assessment and feedback in order to inform an online Toolkit at the University of Glasgow. This may provide insight into the unique needs of students.

METHODOLOGY

This assessment project sought to answer the following research questions about perceptions of assessment and feedback practices at the University of Glasgow to inform an online Toolkit:

1. What assessment practices and resources do students at the University of Glasgow find useful, if anything?
2. What feedback practices and resources do students at the University of Glasgow find useful, if anything?
3. How can the design and content of the Assessment and Feedback Toolkit be a viable resource to meet the needs of students, if at all?

We addressed our research questions using qualitative data collected through focus groups and informational interviewing. We followed an exploratory design, in which we used qualitative data to develop a quantitative instrument in the form of an online survey (Appendix B). We held a focus group at the University of Glasgow with eight undergraduate and postgraduate students, from a variety of colleges and years. Table 1 provides specific information about participants' academic colleges and current class year. The interview questions were developed by the researchers and the focus group was conducted by two researchers: an interviewer and a note taker. The session lasted 45 minutes and was recorded and transcribed non-verbatim, then double-checked by a fellow researcher. Each focus group participant chose their own pseudonym, which was used in the transcription and reporting process to ensure confidentiality. Each researcher coded the transcript independently, and then, as a group discussed potential codes and any discrepancies.

Additionally, we collected and used data from informational interviews with four groups on campus: Disability Service, Student Learning Service, SRC Vice Presidents, and University Senate Members. Interview questions were created for each meeting, specific to areas of expertise and student involvement. Questioning was specific to the project's needs in order to assess the students' perspectives regarding assessment and feedback at the University of

Glasgow and provide recommendations for further development of the Toolkit. We also took notes from each meeting with staff and analysed and coded the notes. Following coding, we identified patterns and themes from the compiled student and staff data. Our findings looked at how students perceive assessment and feedback practices and resources to be useful, if at all, and what they would look for in potential resources, if anything.

Table 1
Participant Demographic Information

Category	Options	Participants(n=8)
College	College of Arts	3
	College of Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences	2
	College of Science & Engineering	1
	College of Social Sciences	2
Current Year	First year	2
	Second Year	1
	Third Year	1
	Fourth Year	1
	Fifth Year	3

The online survey was distributed via the University of Glasgow's official Facebook and Twitter accounts, including retweets and promotions from other offices on campus. The online survey consisted of open- and closed-ended questions about the students' perceptions of assessment and feedback, design and content of an online toolkit, and participant demographics. The survey was open for seven days and was completed by ten students. Due to the lack of

respondents resulting in inconclusive data collected from our survey, we did not use this information in our analysis.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

Utilizing our qualitative data, we were able to answer both of our research questions. Below, we address each research question separately.

1. What assessment practices and resources do students at the University of Glasgow find useful, if anything?

Students described continuous assessment as the major factor that influences effective assessment practice. During the focus group, students discussed that without continuous assessment, it is often difficult to gauge how well they are grasping the material or performing in a course. Additionally, students perceive frequent assessment as providing more opportunities for them to apply the feedback they receive. Marc, a focus group participant, stated:

And also if there were more continuous assessment, because then you can actually take it right into your next assignment, whereas at the moment you only have an assignment a semester so you have to wait and such, then hopefully incorporate the feedback.

2. What feedback practices and resources do students find useful, if anything?

Students described several factors when describing feedback that is beneficial to improving their course performance. Feedback is perceived as helpful when it is timely, actionable, clear, and detailed. Further, students perceive feedback as coming from multiple sources including lecturers, GTAs or their peers.

In general, students perceive feedback as timely when it is given back to them with enough time to apply it to their performance in the same course. An example of this would be if a student receives feedback on an essay with enough time to adjust their performance to make any needed improvements on their next essay or draft. Helen stated, “The only reason that feedback was useful was because the lecturer talked to us immediately after the meeting was over, and we didn’t need to wait for weeks to get the written feedback.” Students described the most helpful

type of feedback as immediate feedback, in which they were able to apply it right away to their performance.

Some students felt that it was more difficult to apply feedback when they only receive it after their final exams, as they have to wait until the following semester or academic year to potentially apply it to a different course. Fernando explained:

With my course ... it's fairly hard because the only feedback you get is after the essay or the exam at a point where you can't really improve immediately, you'd have to wait until the next year before you can start thinking about it because it's very rare at the end, only after assessed work, it's not particularly helpful for the immediate future, so you can use it to improve in later years.

Students also describe helpful feedback as being actionable. To them, this means feedback that includes a direct way or action in which students can improve their performance. Isla stated, "I think in general the more actionable the feedback is the better it's going to be. There's no use giving feedback that is not in any way applicable to further assessment or development of skills."

Additionally, students perceive specific and detailed feedback as being helpful to improving their course performance. Gabrielle explained, "But otherwise usually when it's essays, especially in History but not so much in Politics I find, I get very thorough, developed feedback about my entire essay which really helps me later on."

Students spoke to the idea of receiving feedback from their peers as a type of feedback, too. Generally, the students in the focus group have not received much peer feedback in their previous courses, but believe that it could be beneficial to their learning without greatly affecting staff workload. Regarding staff workload, Dawn stated:

I think if that's an issue, it would be worthwhile considering courses should have more formative sessions where people mark each other and do the whole peer assessment thing, because then it's not really more work for staff and it means you're gaining from other people's ideas and what they think you can improve on this, kind of in the middle.

3. How can the design and content of the Assessment and Feedback Toolkit be a viable resource to meet the needs of students, if at all?

Students expressed several ways that the Assessment and Feedback Toolkit could be beneficial to their needs. Two major results that emerged were providing specific examples and having online academic support. Although these two points emerged from the data, the research team suggests continued research into the resources and tools students would find useful.

Types of specific examples that students mentioned included model answers, example questions and past essays. Further, students mentioned it would be helpful to see the feedback that would be given to these example questions for their own reference. In the focus group, the majority of students discussed how having access to model answers can provide them with a more explicit view of the work that is expected of them. Students stated that model answers could help guide how they approach assessment. Jessica stated:

I think a lot of the time, people don't do as well because they don't really understand what the person that's asking the question is looking for or the level of detail or the angle that they want me to go down, so it would be really useful.

Specifically, one student mentioned having an example showing how feedback can be incorporated into an assignment over several drafts. This could provide an explicit example of how feedback can be applied to improve performance on assessments. Isla stated:

I guess, comparative examples of the before and after, if you see what I mean, so you got a piece of assessment, you've got the feedback that was given on that, and you've got how that, like an example all the way through, how that was actually incorporated and how that would look different and how it would be done differently.

Based off our focus group and our meeting with Student Learning Services, some students and staff perceive a lack of formal support around writing and language skill development.

Therefore, there is an opportunity for the Toolkit to be an online resource to support students in their writing skills, study skills, or other academic skills relating to feedback and assessment.

Specifically, students expressed their want for the Toolkit to contain tips and advice for academic performance. Dawn explained:

If it was like an online resource, I think it would be quite useful to have tips and advice for essay writing and stuff like that if you've never done it before and formatting them, or even laying out a presentation.

Additionally, students expressed that they find feedback to often be vague and not actionable. The toolkit therefore could be a helpful resource for students by providing specific ways and methods in which students can apply their feedback or better explain what is meant by certain written comments. For example, Dawn stated:

...I've very rarely had good feedback. Quite often you'll just have a few tips or sometimes they'll underline something, but they'll never say why they've underlined it. It's just not very helpful.

Therefore, a resource that may help clarify comments that may appear vague or unclear to students could be a beneficial resource.

THEMES

When analyzing our results, several themes regarding students' experiences around assessment and feedback emerged from the data.

Student Definition of Assessment

During our focus group, students were able to articulate their definitions of assessment and distinguish between the different forms of assessment. When asked for the definition of assessment, students mentioned different means of being assessed, such as essays and exams. Further, students brought up formative and summative means of being assessed. Isla stated:

I think assessment obviously should be anything formative or summative for which you are being assessed in any way. Your skills are being assessed, and which is responded to in any form of feedback. In an interdisciplinary thing like Languages, it's quite easy to see where that comes in, it's not a big hand in/hand back an essay so much. It's just having your language corrected and in the course of a class, it can be quite low level in that sense.

Students also saw the type of assessment as affecting the feedback they received. Gabrielle stated, "In general, if the assessment is formative as opposed to summative, feedback is likely to be more extensive, whereas an exam you're going to get a grade on a piece of paper."

Difficulty Gauging Course Performance

Overall, students stated that they often have difficulty in knowing how they are performing in a class. Several stated that their course performance isn't generally discussed and it's often not until the final exam that they have an idea about their performance. Gabrielle stated,

“I don’t think it’s ever really discussed, actually. It’s more of a solo journey.” Some of this difficulty was attributed to not having continuous assessment in a course or not receiving feedback that gives students a clear picture regarding their performance. Gabrielle continued, “I think you can count on being assessed but you don’t always get the feedback.”

Self-assessing Course Performance

As discussed above, students report having difficulty knowing how they are performing in a course based on formal feedback and assessment methods. Our data indicates that students find their own modes of self-assessing their performance throughout the semester in order to fill this perceived gap. For example, some students stated that they understand their own course performance through self-assessing how they have engaged with the course material. Gabrielle stated, “I think I’d say it’s how much I’ve been personally engaging with the material and how much I understand it and kind of utilize it.”

Other students gauge their course performance through comparing themselves to their peers or self-assessing their performance in lectures. Marc stated:

I guess it’s also in seminar contribution, like how much you can contribute and answer questions that your tutor asks that you can talk through yourself and how far you’re keeping up. Sometimes it does take a while to get your grades back on essays and stuff, so it’s, it is quite hard to tell throughout the semester how you’re keeping up.

Delayed Feedback

Students in the focus group described long delays to receive feedback as a common experience. Often this can be influenced if a student is able to apply this feedback to any future assessments in the same course or not. Dawn explained:

Yeah, actually, even for my dissertation, we were to hand in a draft so that we could get feedback, and I think I got it back about two days before the deadline with nothing useful, and then some of the feedback I got from the final mark thing, was like why didn’t I get this before, what was the point of me giving you a draft?

This delayed feedback can also affect students who suffer from anxiety. Disability Service staff stressed the importance of delivering timely feedback as an extended wait time increases anxiety in students.

Self-Advocacy

Students discussed the need to be proactive and self-advocate in order to receive feedback they perceive as helpful. This can mean going to ask their academics or GTAs for additional feedback or going through the process to receive individual feedback after final exams. Helen stated, “It’s basically, we should be proactive and independent in studying and going and asking for feedback.” Additionally, self-advocacy was a common theme when asked about interactions with their professors. Students described needing to be proactive if they have questions or want to interact with professors on a one to one basis. Gabrielle stated:

It’s very much ... you kind of ... they don’t make themselves open to you. You kind of have to pursue them if you really want something. And usually when you do pursue them, that means you’re either A) highly motivated or B) really struggling or something like that.

Feedback Turnaround Policy

When asked about the 15 day turnaround policy for receiving feedback, students did not seem to know for certain that the policy existed or any of the specifics. Many students stated that they think there is a policy, but they weren’t sure if there really was one or not. Jessica stated, “I thought there was a 15 day turnaround policy at Glasgow, I know it isn’t adhered to a lot.” Other students did not know it existed and suggested that the university implement a feedback policy.

Dawn stated:

I think they should have a policy, like a deadline for how long it should be for them to get the feedback back to you. Cause I know other unis do, as part of my course I’ve done

some courses at Strathclyde and Dundee, and they get it back within a week or two weeks or something, they have deadlines.

Students stated that they think departments should be held accountable for following the policy, as experiences with feedback turnaround is inconsistent across colleges and subjects. Hannah stated:

But then this year in first year Philosophy, the results came two weeks after the deadline, because someone kept forgetting ... one of the tutors kept forgetting to submit their stuff, so if they could do that, but actually make sure people do it.

Dawn elaborated:

But yeah, I also agree with the point about consistency, I think if they do bring any of these kind of things in, even the thing that people were saying about the time of turnaround, the three weeks thing, if that is a policy it should be in all schools, and if it is already in all schools it should be more transparent, students should know about it.

Further, students discussed how a student would handle the situation if they felt like the turnaround policy was not being followed. Isla stated, "It's whether students know that they're within their rights to complain and that action is on them to take, which is actually more stressful for the student, where it shouldn't be."

Inconsistencies Across the University

A prevalent theme that arose during our focus group and meetings with department staff is that student experiences with assessment and feedback is inconsistent across different schools, courses, and levels, such as Honours, Pre Honours, postgraduate, and undergraduate. Overall, students expressed that class size and class year affects the amount of personal interaction with academics and the amount of individualized feedback received. Helen stated:

For some subjects, especially computing science it gets better in fourth year when the classes are smaller, about 20-30 people, because we get a lot of choice in terms of subjects and courses to choose from, and then we actually work on our dissertation, so that means we get to actually work on something we're interested in with someone who is

willing to help in most cases, but in general, when you are 60-something to 100-something people in a room, it's kind of difficult.

Isla further elaborated on interactions being subject specific and influenced by it being Honours or Pre Honours. Isla stated;

I think it's very subject specific as well, I think that my Arts degree experience is somewhat typical at the Honours level in that there's ... lectures tend to be smaller and there is more seminar and tutorial time, which by its nature means that you're getting a lot more facetime with staff and a lot more approachability.

Additionally, Dawn described her inconsistent experiences between her time as an undergraduate student and time as a postgraduate student. Dawn stated, "I did my undergraduate degree here, too, and I had a much more positive experience with the University and the staff then. It's just been the Master's."

Students stated that it was hard to make generalizations about their experiences sometimes, because there is such a difference based on the factors described above. Isla stated;

Honestly, it depends massively across the courses, but in general I feel the format we work on is you have your big classes and your small classes, most courses still have that, so you should still have a tutor or a seminar demonstrator, or whatever it might be, whether it's a lab or something, you should have a small, more contained thing in between your bigger overarching lecture structure, but it's just impossible to talk about as one.

LIMITATIONS

When interpreting our results of this study, it is important to note the limitations of our research methods and findings, as this aids in understanding the processes we underwent in collecting, analyzing, and sharing the data. It also is of note for potential future research regarding assessment and feedback practices and the online Toolkit at the University of Glasgow.

Participation and Recruitment

Recruitment for focus group participants was organized by a member of the Student Representative Council and while all our expected participants showed up, we were only able to conduct one focus group. Additionally, the response rate for our survey was very low, and thus we were unable to use the responses to answer our research questions. The lack of participation may be attributed to this period being intense for students, as it is the end of the academic year, where they are preparing for assessments, moving out, and preparing to for their summer internships or activities. Given this, a representative sample of students may not have been able to attend in-person focus groups on campus. Also, a greater number of students may not have been represented in the survey as they did not see our survey on University social media accounts. We were unable to send an email to the student body given that the University currently has important live surveys, this limited us to one recruitment strategy.

Focus of Assessment

Conducting research on students' perspectives about assessment and feedback during their examination period may have also contributed to a lack of participation. Students may have already felt overwhelmed with the idea of assessment, and therefore participating in research investigating their perspectives may have furthered that feeling of stress or anxiety.

Lack of Quantitative Data

Due to the lack of respondents in our survey, we were unable to use the results from this research instrument as they were not representative of a large student body for quantitative results. As such, we could not support our qualitative findings with numeric data. Without quantitative data we were also unable to triangulate with qualitative data in order to strengthen the validity of our results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

When looking at recommendations for assessment and feedback practices and resources, there are three main areas to focus on: continued research with students' perspectives, online academic support services, and a two-part outreach to students, academics and GTAs regarding policies and gaining buy-in. In addition to the main three recommendations, the research team has also created an accessible infographic on some basics of assessment and feedback to market to students online and through print media.

Continued Research on Students' Perspectives

Given the limitations of this assessment in regards to duration and time of semester, it would be beneficial to continue collecting data directly from students on their perspectives of assessment and feedback practices and resources. We recommend that staff involved in the development of Assessment and Feedback Toolkit utilize the survey instrument created by the research team. The original Google survey consisted of quantitative and qualitative questions that directly related to their research questions, found in the methodology section. We also recommend further in-person involvement with students, whether through focus groups, SRC committee members, or a wider audience in order to best serve all students through the Toolkit.

Online Academic Support Services

As we found in our focus group and interviews with staff members, an online Toolkit would be useful for students at the University of Glasgow. We recommend looking at academic tips, advice, and feedback that students can access through the Toolkit. The information in the

Toolkit can aid students in their entire schooling process, including: writing and grammar tips, as well as model examples and essays; a breakdown of assessment practices at the University and what a student can expect from their various assessments, ways to prepare for assessments, and how students can self-assess their learning; and a clear definition of feedback, how students can make the feedback actionable, and what processes they can follow if the feedback isn't sufficient or is delayed. Further involvement from students on what is effective or not in the Toolkit is necessary as the project progresses.

Outreach to Students

After speaking with students, we realized that their understanding of assessment and feedback policies does not always align with the policies themselves or what academics and staff understand of the policies. We recommend outreach and education for students on what to expect in assessments, what their feedback means and how to make it actionable, and what their rights are within the policies. This also includes where they would find further information (the University Calendar or the Assessment and Feedback Toolkit), who to contact with an issue, and what the process would be to advocate for individual or timely feedback. This outreach should be multifaceted, through academic and student services channels, as well as multimedia platforms and SRC resources.

Outreach to Academics and GTAs

We also saw overall themes throughout the research that demonstrated either a misunderstanding or a lack of buy-in from academics regarding assessment and feedback policies. As students voice concerns about delayed and/or generic feedback, and staff shared inabilities to provide timely and individualized feedback in large class sizes, we recommend outreach to academics and GTAs to gain a better understanding of the policies and their benefits for students. Students pushed for a 15 working-day feedback policy and have expressed the desire for more timely feedback. Better communication between academics and students regarding the timeline of feedback would alleviate some stress and anxiety on both sides, as well

as develop more open paths for students to vocalize feedback concerns. A lack of buy-in regarding policies on the academics end may be remedied by conversations on the reasons for policies and the benefits they play. Overall outreach to academics and GTAs regarding assessment and feedback policies also needs to be continual and multifaceted.

CONCLUSION

Assessment and feedback practices play an integral role in student learning performance. It is vital that student needs are met to ensure that they feel well supported and prepared as they matriculate through university, both at the undergraduate and post graduate level. In examining the perspectives of students, we found that experiences differ across Honours, Pre Honours, postgraduate, undergraduate, colleges, and subjects. Overall, students find continuous assessment to aid their learning and describe helpful feedback as being timely, detailed and actionable. Students expressed several ways that the Assessment and Feedback Toolkit could be beneficial to their needs. Two major results that emerged were providing specific examples, or model answers, and having online academic support. Using our data, we were able to provide recommendations regarding continued research on students perspectives of assessment and feedback, resources for the online Toolkit, and outreach to students and academics. With these findings in mind, it would be beneficial for the University to continue involving students as they move forward with the Assessment and Feedback Toolkit.

SPECIAL THANKS

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Student Representative Council

Disability Service Staff

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HESA Glasgow 2015: Ryan, Meg, and Erin

APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

Assessment and Feedback Quantitative Survey 2016

Student Researchers: Lauren Hennes, Emily Pearson & Abigail Smith

Study Title: Assessment & Feedback Toolkit: Student Resources

You are invited to participate in a research study that seeks to understand students' perspectives of assessment and feedback practices at the University of Glasgow and how the planned online toolkit can meet the needs of students. You are being asked to participate because you are currently a student at the University of Glasgow.

Findings from this study will be provided to the University of Glasgow to inform the design of resources provided in the online assessment and feedback toolkit. This study is being conducted as part of a course at the University of Connecticut (United States) in the Higher Education and Student Affairs Master's Program.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to answer questions to the best of your ability regarding your experience with feedback and assessment during your time at the University of Glasgow. Participation in this research includes an online survey, which will take no longer than 10-15 minutes to complete.

At the conclusion of this study, the researchers may publish or present their findings. We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. Please note that if you participate in a survey you do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer.

If you have further questions about this study or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact our student research representative, Lauren Hennes (lauren.hennes@uconn.edu).

I am or was enrolled as a student at the University of Glasgow for the 2015-16 academic year.

- Yes
 No

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the following survey.

- Yes, I agree to participate in this survey.
 No, I will not participate in this survey.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. As a student at the University, we want your opinion to inform the University's initiative to create an online resource for academics and students in regard to assessment and feedback practices.

On a scale of “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” please select your level of agreement with the following statements in regard to your understanding of assessment and feedback.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
I have an understanding of what academic assessment is in a higher education context						
I have an understanding of what academic feedback is in a higher education context						
I know the difference between formative and summative assessment						

I am aware of current University policies regarding assessment						
I am aware of current University policies regarding feedback						
I know where to find the University's <i>Guide to the Code of Assessment</i> online						
I know what the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) are in regards to each of my courses						
The “minimum standard” for feedback following examinations is shared with me at the start of each course						
I know how to interpret the minimum standard for feedback						

On a scale of “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” please select your level of agreement with the following statements in regard to your understanding of assessment and feedback.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
Generic feedback directed towards the entire class is beneficial to my learning						
I receive generic feedback directed towards the entire class after every examination						
Individual feedback specific to my performance is beneficial to my learning						

I receive individual feedback specific to my performance after every examination						
I receive peer feedback in my courses						
Feedback from my peers is beneficial to my learning						
I know how to incorporate feedback into my future work						
Practical examples of what is expected of me in assessments would be helpful						
Practical examples on how to use feedback would be helpful to me						
An online resource on how to use the <i>University Calendar</i> and <i>Guide to the Code of Assessment</i> would be helpful to me						

Additional Questions

Thank you for your responses. We will now ask you for examples of effective practices that you have experienced on campus. Please complete the following open ended questions:

What assessment practices do you find effective in demonstrating your learning, if anything? Please provide an example.

What feedback practices do you find useful, if anything? Please provide an example.

What, if anything, would be helpful for you in an online resource about assessment and feedback?

Demographic Information

The section is asking for basic demographic information in order to help us better understand who are our respondents. Your responses will remain confidential.

Student standing:

- Undergraduate student
- Postgraduate student

What is your current year of study?

- First Year
- Second Year
- Third Year
- Fourth Year
- Fifth Year

College at University of Glasgow:

- College of Arts
- College of Medical, Veterinary, and Life Sciences
- College of Science and Engineering
- College of Social Sciences
- Unknown

Degree Subject(s): _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete the **Assessment and Feedback Survey**.

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study

Study Title: Undergraduate student perceptions toward assessment and feedback/ resources for the assessment and feedback toolkit at the University of Glasgow

Student Researchers: Lauren Hennes, Emily Pearson, Abigail Smith

Dear Student,

You are invited to participate in a research study that seeks to understand students' perspectives of assessment and feedback practices at the University of Glasgow, and how the planned online toolkit can meet the needs of students. You are being asked to participate because you are currently a student at the University of Glasgow.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this research study is to 1) better understand students' perspectives of useful feedback and assessment practices; and 2) discover what would be most helpful for students in an online resource for assessment and feedback at the University of Glasgow.

What are the study procedures? What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group. The focus group will take place in person and should last roughly an hour. The focus group will take place on May 19 in the John McIntyre Building.

Will I receive payment for participation? Are there costs to participate?

There are no costs and you will not be paid to be in this study. However, food will be provided for those who agree to participate in focus groups.

How will my personal information be protected?

The researchers will keep all study records in a secure location. Any information reported will be anonymous, and pseudonyms (made up names that will be used to protect your real identity) will be included in transcripts of focus groups. All electronic files (e.g., database, spreadsheet, etc.) containing identifiable information will be password protected. Information will be presented in summary format and you will not be identified by your real name in any publications or presentations. We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you, but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality.

Can I stop being in the study, and what are my rights?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate.

Whom do I contact if I have questions about the study?

If you have further questions about this study or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the student researcher representative, Lauren Hennes (lauren.hennes@uconn.edu).

Documentation of Consent:

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

Participant Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

Signature of Person:

Print Name:

Date:

APPENDIX D

Focus Group Protocol

“Assessment & Feedback Toolkit- Student Resources”

Lauren Hennes, Emily Pearson, Abigail Smith

Focus Group: University of Glasgow Students

12pm, Thursday, May 19, 2016

Williams Room, John McIntyre building

Welcome and thank you for coming to today’s focus group. We appreciate your time and willingness to participate.

The purpose of our project is to learn about students’ perspectives on the assessment and feedback practices at the University of Glasgow. There is currently a University initiative to create an online resource for faculty and students in regards to assessment and feedback practices. Our project is aimed at looking for ways in which this online resource can meet the needs of students.

We are a team of postgraduate students from the University of Connecticut in the United States who are here for 3 weeks to conduct this project. My name is Abigail and I will be asking you questions today. My colleague, Lauren, will be taking notes and may also ask a few questions during our session.

You are not required to participate in this focus group and may chose to leave at anytime. Everything you say in this room will remain confidential, we will only use the pseudonyms you provide, and no report will link what you say to your department. Please take a moment to review the demographic sheet and consent form and and sign if you wish to continue.

This session will last approximately one hour. I will be asking you questions and follow-up questions throughout this time. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be as open and honest with us as possible, even if your opinion is different than the rest of the group, as we truly want your opinions and thoughts. Because we’ll be recording for an accurate record, it is important that you speak up. We don’t want to miss any of your comments. Only one person should speak at a time. We will also be taking

notes. I will ask you questions, and I will listen to what you have to say. I will not participate in the discussion. So please, feel free to respond to each other and to speak directly to others in the group.

We will now begin asking questions. I will turn on the dictaphone. - The dictaphone is on.

Questions:

“We’re going to begin with a general question. First,”

1. How would you describe your interactions with your professors/academics at the University of Glasgow?

“Now we are going to move into talking about assessment and feedback, I will begin by asking,”

2. In the context of a classroom, how do you define assessment?

“Great, next question”

3. In the context of a classroom, how do you define feedback?
 - a. What do you think is the difference between assessment and feedback, if anything?

“Thank you for sharing,”

4. Throughout the semester, how do you judge how well you are doing in a course?
 - a. How do you know this?
 - b. What gives you clues or an idea about how well you are doing in a class?
5. When you receive feedback on your coursework, what do you do with that feedback, if anything?
 - a. What makes feedback harder to incorporate into future work?
 - b. What makes feedback easier to incorporate into future work?
6. What, if anything, would be helpful for you in an online resource about assessment and feedback?
 - a. What resources would be helpful for you in order to better incorporate feedback into your future work?

- b. What specific types of resources or tools would you like to see in an online resource?

“Thank you for sharing with us, now we are going to focus on academic policies,”

7. For the benefit of your own learning, what guidelines or policies should or should not be in place in regards to assessment and feedback?

(Move to *additional questions*, if time allows)

“Thank you for sharing with us. Our final question will give you an opportunity to mention any other thoughts that you have on the subject.”

8. Is there anything else you would like to add about assessment and feedback practices that you’ve experienced at the University of Glasgow?

Additional Questions:

9. In what ways do your professors (academics) assess your course performance?
 - a. Does this type of assessment help you better understand what you have learned?
 - b. Do you find this helpful?
 - c. Why or why not?

10. In what ways do your professors (academics) give you feedback on your work, if at all?
 - a. Does this feedback give you an idea on how you can improve your performance?
 - b. Do you find this helpful?
 - c. Why or why not?

This concludes our focus group today. Thank you for your time and willingness to participate. We appreciate your responses.

APPENDIX E

Focus Group Transcription

“Assessment & Feedback Toolkit- Student Resources”

Lauren Hennes, Emily Pearson, Abigail Smith

Focus Group: University of Glasgow Students

12pm, Thursday, May 19, 2016

Williams Room, John McIntyre building

Interviewer: Abigail Smith

Note taker: Lauren Hennes

Number of Focus Group Participants: 8

Participant Pseudonyms: Dawn, Isla, Jessica, Helen, Fernando, Gabrielle, Hannah, Marc

Interviewer: We’re going to begin with a general question first. How would you describe your interactions with your professors/academics at the University of Glasgow?

Jessica: It’s quite good in the Veterinary School. We have a lot of 1 to 1 time with our lecturers, and we have mentors as well who are dealt with on a fairly regular basis.

Dawn: Yeah, it’s quite a mix, I’m in a master’s course in MVLS. Some of the teaching staff are lovely and really helpful and quite nice, but some of the staff running the program are horrible. And one of them is an academic, but they’re just really rude and really demeaning to all of us.

Hannah: I would say the same. There are some lecturers who are really good, but then others who have a bit of superiority complex to make you feel a bit terrible.

Gabrielle: I’d say comparatively to other Higher Education environments around the world, we have a lot less personal 1 on 1 interaction than with our lecturers and tutors and stuff like that. It’s very much ... you kind of ... they don’t make themselves open to you. You kind of have to pursue them if you really want something. And usually when you do pursue them, that means you’re either A) highly motivated or B) really struggling or something like that.

Helen: For some subjects, especially computing science it gets better in fourth year when the classes are smaller, about 20-30 people, because we get a lot of choice in terms of subjects and courses to choose from, and then we actually work on our dissertation, so that means we get to actually work on something we're interested in with someone who is willing to help in most cases, but in general, when you are 60-something to 100-something people in a room, it's kind of difficult.

Dawn: Yeah, actually, I would say as well. I did my undergraduate degree here, too, and I had a much more positive experience with the University and the staff then. It's just been the Master's.

Isla: I think it's very subject specific as well, I think that my Arts degree experience is somewhat typical at the Honours level in that there's ... lectures tend to be smaller and there is more seminar and tutorial time, which by its nature means that you're getting a lot more facetime with staff and a lot more approachability. My experience has been pretty good.

Gabrielle: Yeah, I think there is a real difference between pre-Honours and then Honours level, like exactly what you said (referencing Isla), because under ... when you're pre-Honours quite often it's, you know, it's like for example History I think now it's like 400 people for getting your one class, so it's hard obviously to have meaningful interaction, but then once you narrow your interests and your subjects and everything, then it gets a lot more personal and better.

Helen: In fairness for computing science, First and Second year are better than Third, because First and Second year we are split into smaller labs and we have one tutor and one demonstrator to work with us and we're basically 20 people and now for Third year labs we get like 1 lab slot for 60 people with a lecturer and a demonstrator at most, so that's not really a great interaction with staff in the labs. It's basically, we should be proactive and independent in studying and going and asking for feedback.

Interviewer: Okay, we'll move onto the second question. So now we're going to move a little bit and talk about assessment and feedback. I'm going to begin by asking: in the context of a classroom, how do you define "assessment"?

Gabrielle: I think it varies by what classroom you're in and what subject you're studying. With languages you have oral assessments, (addressing Isla) you can talk more about that. In the Arts, I do History and I do Politics, and mostly it's essays assessments, and group presentations and things like that occasionally, but largely exams and essays, or seminar presentations in History .

Isla: I think assessment obviously should be anything formative or summative for which you are being assessed in any way. Your skills are being assessed, and which is responded to in any form of feedback. In an interdisciplinary thing like Languages, it's quite easy to see where that comes in, it's not a big hand in/hand back an essay so much. It's just having your language corrected and in the course of a class, it can be quite low level in that sense.

(long pause)

Interviewer: In the context of a classroom also, how would you define "feedback"?

Jessica: I'd probably define feedback as a response from your lecturer to a piece of assessment or a piece of work that you've handed in that doesn't necessarily count towards your final grade or credits but has been overseen by a member of qualified staff, probably.

Helen: Usually delayed. (laughter)

Interviewer: And, what do you all think is the difference between assessment and feedback, if there is any differences?

Jessica: Assessment probably counts toward a grade or something, or counts toward credits, whereas feedback is ...

Fernando: Yeah, there's different kinds of feedback I guess. You could have student feedback or like peer feedback where you mark each other's work and stuff, which is I guess an assessment in itself, but like, that's the difference I guess ...

Gabrielle: I think you can count on being assessed but you don't always get the feedback. (laughter)

Isla: Yeah, very often we get a grade with no hint as to how we did or didn't get that grade.

Gabrielle: In general, if the assessment is formative as opposed to summative, feedback is likely to more extensive, whereas an exam you're going to get a grade on a piece of paper (multiple talking at once). You have to realize it's kind of a lengthy process, then find out how you did on your exam and what specifically you didn't do well on, and it's quite (multiple voices).

Hannah: For one of my subjects we get this thing where they assess how everyone did, and say which questions were answered well, but it's a bit useless because it says people did well and some people didn't it's...

Isla: generic

Hannah: yeah

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing. Throughout the semester, how do you judge how well you are doing in a course?

Jessica: Probably by peer comparison.

Dawn: Yeah, and I guess if you've got assessment going on throughout it's great, that would probably be something, as well.

Gabrielle: I think I'd say it's how much I've been personally engaging with the material and how much I understand it and kind of utilize it, or, yeah, I think it's a bit different because of the subjects I do, because in my courses I don't have as much continued assessment, but it's how much I'm digesting and sort of able to use it analytically.

Marc: I guess it's also in seminar contribution, like how much you can contribute and answer questions that your tutor asks that you can talk through yourself and how far you're keeping up. Sometimes it does take a while to get your grades back on essays and stuff, so it's, it is quite hard to tell throughout the semester how you're keeping up.

Dawn: Yeah, in my degree we never really do tutorials and stuff. There's never really an opportunity to test yourself like that. We just get lectures, and you just know yourself if you've paid attention or not, but you're not really going to know how well you've understood it until you come back and try to learn it, so it's quite hard to gauge, I guess.

Gabrielle: Yeah, I think it goes to show it's very subject specific, because while you don't have any tutorials, with arts and social sciences it's all about tutorials and seminar groups and seeing whether or not how you respond to the prompts they give you and how you relate it back to the reading and everything.

Interviewer: Thank you. So when you all receive feedback on your coursework, what do you do with that feedback, if anything?

Jessica: Write it down, try and read over again before the next assessment.

Helen: Usually our assessments are more practical while the exam is more theoretical, you basically spend a lot of time on practical stuff, and then you should read about 900 pages of a book and try to remember stuff, and only 200 of those pages show up on the exam, and usually the feedback is handwritten, and it won't really help you in the future or tips you should try to follow, but it basically is improving your coding style compared to actually knowing more about the subject.

Dawn: Yeah, I think it's quite, I've very rarely had good feedback. Quite often you'll just have a few tips or sometimes they'll underline something, but they'll never say why they've underlined it. It's just not very helpful.

Interviewer: So what makes feedback harder to incorporate into future work?

Fernando: With my course ... it's fairly hard because the only feedback you get is after the essay or the exam at a point where you can't really improve immediately, you'd have to wait until the next year before you can start thinking about it because it's very rare at the end, only after assessed work, it's not particularly helpful for the immediate future, so you can use it to improve in later years.

Dawn: Yeah, actually, even for my dissertation, we were to hand in a draft so that we could get feedback, and I think I got it back about two days before the deadline with nothing useful, and then some of the feedback I got from the final mark thing, was like why didn't I get this before, what was the point of me giving you a draft?

Helen: I think there was only one course that I found the feedback useful to apply to future assessment. It was a course that we worked with real customers developing software for them, and we had customer meetings, and we were marked on how effectively we communicated, how we identified future requirements, and how we would prioritize those types of things, and the only reason that feedback was useful was because the lecturer talked to us immediately after the meeting was over, and we didn't need to wait for weeks to get the written feedback. That's the

only reason it was useful, but when you have 20% course continuous assessment and the exam being something entirely different, you can really incorporate that feedback in your exam.

Isla: I think in general the more actionable the feedback is the better it's going to be. There's no use giving feedback that is not in any way applicable to further assessment or development of skills.

Interviewer: So on that note, what makes feedback easy to incorporate into future work?

Dawn: I guess if it's a bit more detailed and if you get it in plenty of time to actually apply it.

Marc: And also if there were more continuous assessment, because then you can actually take it right into your next assignment, whereas at the moment you only have an assignment a semester so you have to wait and such, then hopefully incorporate the feedback.

Gabrielle: I think it varies, because with Honours, if you have a lot of courses, then you can apply to up and coming assignments, so I think that was my frustration with pre-Honours level, that you couldn't always apply the feedback you got immediately, you'd have to wait for the next semester or the next year.

Jessica: I was just going to add, also if they direct you or point you in a direction where perhaps you could improve your knowledge, if they say maybe why don't you read this chapter of this book or look at this resource to help further your understanding.

(long pause)

Interviewer: So what, if anything, would be helpful for you in an online resource about assessment and feedback?

Gabrielle: What kind of online resource?

Interviewer: So the University is working on a resource based on assessment and feedback, so there's going to be a part for faculty with cases studies of what good feedback and assessment methods are for students, so we're focusing on the student page of that, trying to figure out what would be helpful for y'all on that resource page.

Hannah: If you could access all the feedback from all through your class rather than keeping a piece of paper which will inevitably get lost.

Jessica: Maybe if you could have access to anonymous feedback on other people's work so you could see what other people have got right and wrong and what their feedback has been.

Isla: I think some kind of resource that's, as you know this varies from course to course, but sometimes the stuff that you'll find in your handbook, your criteria for assessment, are not expressly linked to the feedback that is given to you or not in the same format or something. So something that links those up, so you know why you're being told to do something and how it relates to what you're supposed to be trying to get out of the course.

Interviewer: And I guess in that same breath, what resources would be helpful for you to better incorporate feedback into your future work? So think about stuff online.

Jessica: The only thing I can think of is like in a Word document where you can have text boxes linked into the essay(trails off)

Isla: I guess, comparative examples of the before and after, if you see what I mean, so you got a piece of assessment, you've got the feedback that was given on that, and you've got how that , like an example all the way through, how that was actually incorporated and how that would look different and how it would be done differently.

Interviewer: So you mean like a generic example or an example of your personal work?

Isla: I think generic would be a place start, yeah.

Jessica: Even in terms of the past papers, I know that it's a rule that you can't release past answers online, but it would be so useful (agreement from around the room) to have so many years worth of catalogs of questions and model answers would be phenomenal.

Gabrielle: That was something I really didn't understand when I first came to this University, because I came from doing the IB (International Baccalaureate) where you get all of the past papers, and they have all the answers and stuff like that and so from there you figure how they did it and things like that, especially with economics, I really struggled with that, because I

wanted to understand how they got to the answers, but there were no answers so it was very...
(others speaking) What?

(Multiple people speaking)

Fernando: There's only so many questions they can ask, though.

Dawn: Yeah so if you just memorize the model answers it doesn't show that you've understood it.

Helen: Yeah, they're reusing questions all the time.

Gabrielle: Yeah, but I feel like especially at pre-Honours level it would be helpful to have a sort of format or just to show that this is what a good answer looks like, you don't copy it, but may some people will use the formula, but then they're just not going to do as well, but some people could use it.

Fernando: I think they could even come up with a couple of questions that they know they will never ask and then have model answers for those.

Gabrielle: Yeah, exactly.

(multiple people speaking)

Helen: but basically types of questions so you can really know what the type questions you can get, but the answers kind of help.

Dawn: Yeah, no, I agree with the useful, like if they have an example one and didn't do it for all the questions, because sometimes you don't actually know what level of detail you need (agreement around the room), if you could compare that to something, it would be easier to work out.

Jessica: I think a lot of the time, people don't do as well because they don't really understand what the person that's asking the question is looking for or the level of detail or the angle that want me to go down, so it would be really useful.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing that with us. Now we're going to focus on some academic policy questions. So, for the benefit of your own learning, what guidelines or policies should or should not be in place in regards to assessment and feedback?

Dawn: I think they should have a policy, like a deadline for how long it should be for them to get the feedback back to you. Cause I know other unis do, as part of my course I've done some courses at Strathclyde and Dundee, and they get it back within a week or two weeks or something, they have deadlines (interruption)

Isla: Yeah, feedback and assessment turnaround is something that Arts is held to, it is Arts, isn't it, it's not just ... my school's policy, they have a 3-week turnaround policy, and I think that's not something that should be ruled out.

Hannah: But then this year in First year Philosophy, the results came two weeks after the deadline because someone kept forgetting ... one of the tutors kept forgetting to submit their stuff, so if they could do that, but actually make sure people do it.

Dawn: Yeah, I had to wait two and a half months for an essay and there's only about 30 people in my course and it was a 1,500 word essay, so there is no excuse at all, and the lecturer even emailed us to say he had a cold, and it was just ridiculous, 'cause we obviously wouldn't get away with handing in work that late because of a cold.

Jessica: I thought there was a 15 day turnaround policy at Glasgow, I know it isn't adhered to a lot. Was that not a learning and teaching (mumble)?

Helen: I think there is a policy that's about like 3 weeks for them to give you your marking feedback

(multiple voices at once)

Unknown: but that's definitely not held to

Unknown: I don't think that's held to

Isla: definitely 3 weeks, but I think that's Arts

Jessica: Yeah, it does apply to MLVS because it was brought (mumble)

Isla: If it's in the coursebook they have to do it. It's whether students know that they're within their rights to complain and that action is on them to take, which is actually more stressful for the student, where it shouldn't be.

Unknown: Yes, I will look into that.

Unknown: Yeah. I think it is a policy.

Helen: Then the other policy might be what percent your grade of the exam should be, because I think that 80% is not ... is a lot for an hour and a half exam (agreement from others), especially when you have like 9 of them in a period of three weeks.

Dawn: And also, I would've thought for your degree the practical stuff is probably more important, surely?

Helen: Well...

Dawn: You would've thought that was more useful, applicable skill? I don't know.

Helen: And then the other thing is, they should have a minimum of what should be on the exam, because if you have ten chapters and then only two of them show up on the exam, I don't really think that's a good assessment.

Isla: So you think there should be policy for percentage or ratio to course content to the assessed content?

Helen: Yeah, at least 60%. For one of my exams it was really good, because we had like four chapters and then all of them showed up on the exam, which was fine, but then for most things it's just a part of it, like 30% or 40%, which is nothing

Fernando: I don't know if that would work particularly well with ... it might be good for your subject, but for Arts, for history, they'd never be able to ask 10 questions for one exam.

Isla: It takes away from student, from self-directed study.

Fernando: Yeah

Isla: The sort of idea that you would be able to focus on what you choose to focus on.

Helen: Well if you have like for some degrees, you have the option to choose two essay questions out of six, that's fine, but when you don't have the opportunity

(Multiple people talking)

Helen: And then there are some subjects that do multiple choice questions and then subtract marks, so there should be a review of what's (an) acceptable exam format.

Jessica: Another thing that I thought should probably become policy is that group work counting towards, which kinda, I don't know what grade, you know you get like 2 1 or what you get at your school, but for instance my sister was doing group work, but people don't work as hard or you don't get as good a grade as you normally do if you're submitting your own piece, and it will bring down a grade for you overall, and that seems a bit odd that it would affect your degree as much. (agreement from others)

Helen: Do you tend to submit for other people in terms of their performance and total contribution to the final product?

Jessica: Yeah

Dawn: Sometimes you do, sometimes you don't. One of the ones I did at Strathclyde we didn't. I would've marked everyone in my group down so hard, but I'm sure they also would've voted me down because they didn't like me because I was basically shouting at them the whole week because they weren't pulling their weight, but yeah, I don't know, I do worry that if too much is weighted on peer review in a group work situation you might not want to mark someone very well if you don't get on with them, which is petty, but people will do it.

Isla: But definitely some kind of more robust structure or look at mechanisms making sure students wouldn't lose out in the event of a disastrous (multiple talking)

Dawn: But yeah, I don't think it should be weighted too heavily either. Because I do agree if people aren't pulling their weight there's only so much you can do to motivate them, and no matter how well of a team player you are ...

Jessica: and you can't do ten people's work yourself

Dawn: yeah

Jessica: or doing ten people's work just can't be expected

Dawn: yeah

Fernando: With group study, would part of the assessment not be how well you can work with other people, and therefore...

Jessica: That's the interesting thing,

Fernando: yeah, so how could you balance it that you get marked for how well you've done in a group but also if your group hasn't been good, how can they insure that (interruption)

Isla: That's the results they get marked in general, my understanding of it is in the, cause I'm not is something that does a lot of group work, but it is the presentation or whatever it is that is the end result that is judged and the contribution (interruption)

Fernando: but the only point I can see in it being a group presentation instead of an individual presentation is time saving maybe or to actually test if you can work well in a group, and that makes it very hard to mark and be fair to someone who's tried their best, but their groups let them down when they're also trying to be marked for that.

Isla: That's the issue

Fernando: yeah

Isla: That's why it doesn't work well. I think you would, what you would need to do is have more of a formative component to the group work

Unknown: yeah

Isla: so that it's assessing the skills it's meant to be assessing rather than just assessing it as if it were an ordinary ...

Jessica: yeah, cause ... it ... the result it can have and the effect it can have on your overall degree is just too much at the moment.

Gabrielle: Yeah, last year I had a presentation that was worth I think 40 % percent of my final degree, on no, it wasn't a presentation, it was a group research project, there was this one girl who kept going on holiday all the time (laughter), she's like off skiing, then she's in Barcelona, and she was just not pulling her weight, and it just was an absolute ... I don't know.

Unknown: And there's nothing you can do.

Gabrielle: I mean you can't make them, it was just really sad, because the rest of us, we were actually a really good team and we were all like really in tune with each other. We all were fairly good writers and fairly good ... yeah ... it was just ... we were all on the same page for most things ... it was just, you know.

Dawn: yeah, my group work, they, I've already complained to you all about this, but they all handed in about a page of work that was completely unreferenced, just made up, it was so so bad, and this is master's students, I was like how did you ever get an undergraduate degree if you think that's acceptable, and clearly they just knew that I cared more than them and that I was just going to go and do it for them, so ... I don't think that's me working badly in a team, I think that's other people being lazy, and I don't think you should be marked too heavily on that.

Isla: I've forgotten what we were supposed to be proposing. (laughter)

Unknown: yeah, what was the question?

Unknown: we got off on a tangent

Interviewer: What guidelines or policies should not be in place in regards to assessment and feedback?

Dawn: Okay, so there should be more ... what specific policy should not be there ... we didn't think that group work should be too heavily weighted

Unknown: yeah, formatively

Jessica: yeah, formative instead of summative

Isla: yeah, should look at the process more than the result, as well is what I think we're getting at.

Interviewer: okay. In what ways do you all think, or not in what ways do you all think, but in what ways do your professors assess your course performance?

Jessica: I don't know if they do. (agreement and laughter)

Fernando: From your exam performance?

Interviewer: No

Unknown: Okay, well then...

Interviewer: Okay, then yeah, it can be, however you want (multiple people talking)

Fernando: I don't think there's any official way, in at least my subject, to assess you during the course, other than the essay and the exam.

Isla: So then you can say it's quite informal

Fernando: yeah

Isla: and continuous

Fernando: well I guess it then depends on the tutor, sometimes the tutor will be quite good help you along the way and sometimes they'll just be there and do their thing and not actually help out.

Interviewer: And do you find this helpful, the way that they assess your course performance, or don't assess your course performance?

Jessica: The only thing that is done is that if someone were to fail their final exams, then you have a meeting with members of the faculty, and they go over your Christmas exams or your first attempt and your second attempt and see how much of an improvement you've made and they at that meeting decide whether or not you'll be kept on the course or be able to progress and that's the only time your overall course performance is discussed.

Gabrielle: I don't think it's ever really discussed, actually. (some agreement) It's more of a solo journey.

Interviewer: And then, in what ways do your professors give you feedback on your work, if at all?

Hannah: I think it's just when you get a grade. I think that's the only feedback I ever got from a professor.

Gabrielle. It's quite good in History is that they've started to, I mean not all courses in History, but they often do like try and when you're getting back an essay or something like that you can or they encourage you but I haven't, but you're supposed to sign up for a feedback session on your essay, and then they talk to you about your essay and what you did blah blah blah and then sometimes they'll chat more about the course

Fernando: Yeah, it's about 10-15 minutes, which is quite good.

Gabrielle: Yeah, and then they talk quite thoroughly about your essay and etc. and then usually this is towards the end of the semester sometimes they'll be like, okay how are you feeling about the exam and stuff like that.

Interviewer: So does feedback usually give you an idea of how you can improve your performance?

Jessica: Yeah, when you do get it.

Gabrielle: Unless it's ... cause I have had feedback that's like kind of what everyone mentioned as well, but it for this really big stats project, and I remember it was just so soul destroying doing that project, and in the end all the feedback we got was just general feedback for the entire course, and like oh people were generally weaker on this stuff and I was like oh I really would've liked to have known what specifically I could have done, cause I really didn't, I was really struggling with the material with the project, but otherwise usually when it's essays, especially in History but not so much in Politics I find, I get very thorough, developed feedback about my entire essay which really helps me later on.

Interviewer: So we have a final question just to mention any other thoughts you have on the subject. So, is there anything else that you would like to add about assessment and feedback practices that you've experienced at the University?

Hannah: I think if they could be more consistent among the colleges, so I do take subjects in the same college and it can be really different and when they give all of to you at same time it can be quite confusing to my brain, which makes it hard to understand feedback.

Marc: I guess lately a lot of faculty have been trying to incorporate a lot of student feedback into how they can improve feedback and assessment, but when it comes down to actually implementing new policies, they always struggle with workload implications for staff, that's what it always come down to.

Unknown: yeah

Marc: there's a lot of work going on, a lot of really good work, trying to get students' views on how it can be improved, but then it's like that would mean more work for us and we don't have the time or have enough staff to do it so that's kind of just the bottom line what it always comes down to. It's a bit of a shame.

Dawn: I think if that's an issue, it would be worthwhile considering courses should have more formative sessions where people mark each other and do the whole peer assessment thing, because then it's not really more work for staff and it means you're gaining from other people's ideas and what they think you can improve on this, kind of in the middle.

Jessica: I think anonymous submissions like that could be useful. We had something similar in second year, and you each had to submit one question and then mark and then answer so many

questions, and it was basically idea generation throughout the year group, and it was really useful, because there were some really smart people in the year and got some really good feedback.

Dawn: but yeah, I also agree with the point about consistency, I think if they do bring any of these kind of things in, even the thing that people were saying about the time of turnaround, the three weeks thing, if that is a policy it should be in all schools, and if it is already in all schools it should be more transparent, students should know about it.

Gabrielle: I think here more than at other universities I've heard of, we're very much at the mercy of staffs' workload, which I understand that they have stuff to do, they're academics and they need to write their papers to be academics, but sometimes

Isla: it's a research heavy institution, it does take it's toll on student-facing staff sometimes

Interviewer: Do you all have teaching assistants in your courses?

(multiple people) tutors

Helen: And demonstrators sometimes, usually for first and second year or fourth years, but they're not really useful sometimes, in terms of what they know, and sometimes they may give you a wrong idea of what you do (interruption)

Isla: Honestly, it depends massively across the courses, but in general I feel the format we work on is you have your big classes and your small classes, most courses still have that, so you should still have a tutor or a seminar demonstrator, or whatever it might be, whether it's a lab or something, you should have a small, more contained thing in between your bigger overarching lecture structure, but it's just impossible to talk about as one.

Gabrielle: yeah, kind of what I've noticed, in most social sciences and arts courses, in the first and second year you will have the big lectures, and then sometimes you will have a lecturer be your seminar leader or tutorial leader, but often you'll have a GTA or TA being your tutorial leader or tutor, and it really varies, cause it's just how passionate this grad student is about this course and how much effort they're willing to put into this, into teaching and how much they like teaching. I've had some really excellent, passionate ones that have made me want to continue studying whatever I'm studying or have really great discussion, but sometimes I've had people

who are literally ... one time we all sat there in silence for five minutes because he would refuse to speak until other parts of the group would speak, and it was just awkward and not very useful.

Isla: We have GTAs in languages, but obviously their role is slightly different because they're your conversation tutors, so it's less relevant whether it's, their formal qualifications or their passion for individual teaching areas is less relevant because they're there as a sort of conversation starter. It's a more casual, more informal relationship, I think that's quite exceptional.

Gabrielle: Do you have them in Honours as well?

Isla: Yeah

Gabrielle: Yeah, like in Honours mostly it's the lecturer who leads the seminar or tutorial group.

Isla: Just for our classes it's still GTAs because of the benefits of it being a peer, close-peer relationship.

Interviewer: With regards to assessment and feedback on campus, if you can't go to your professors or academics, what services are there on campus for students?

Gabrielle: What do you mean?

Isla: The advisory system?

Interviewer: Pardon

Isla: So, with your teaching staff who would you go to/

Interviewer: Yeah

Dawn: There's like some in the reading room, I don't know what you call them, but there's Maths and Stats support definitely for life sciences students, I don't know if it's just for them, but then there's also, there are just a few, there aren't many as far as I know, but there are just a few members of staff who can help in more generally, but obviously when you get to Honours

level because it's so specialized some of the stuff you're doing they wouldn't be able to help you at that point, it more for first and second year I think.

Isla: First and foremost you're meant to have an advisor of studies, I don't know how entry level stuff, but that's supposed to be someone roughly in your subject area who should therefore be able to give you some guidance on academic matters, but whether they're going to be an expert on what you're doing, it's not who you would seek out necessarily for real course problems.

Hannah: We were introduced to someone in Freshers, but in, cause in Politics there's no advisor of studies, it's like someone who is the advisor, kind of the advisor of studies but everyone doing that, and I don't remember their name or anything about them, just that they're there and I don't know where I'd find them.

Isla: Just like a Politics person?

Hannah: I have no idea. I genuinely have no idea who I would talk to.

Gabrielle: I had a really, I had a really excellent advisor of studies, but now she's on maternity leave, but I never really came to her with academic issues, cause that's the thing, once you're at a certain level it's so specialized, and I think she (interruption)

Isla: meant to be for support issues

Gabrielle: Yeah, it's more like support issues or welfare kind of things 'cause she did Sociology or something like that that's just , History and Politics, that's quite separate, and she couldn't really help me in that way, I guess. I think you are encouraged to go to your lecturer or to the tutor that you have.

Helen: Usually the year head tends to be quite helpful just in case there are common problems with other lecturers and just a starting point.

Interviewer: So what would some of those resources look like if you could make some change on campus, what would those resources or services look like if you needed, well, for assessment and feedback, what would you like to see be implemented?

Hannah: For Politics to have an advisor of studies. (laughter)

Interviewer: You said advisor of studies?

Isla: So someone who is meant to be, yeah a point of contact, but prioritizing academic issues rather than support issues maybe.

Dawn: If it was like an online resource, I think it would be quite useful to have tips and advice for essay writing and stuff like that if you've never done it before and formatting them, or even laying out a presentation, just little things you wouldn't think of if you've not done a lot of it before, obviously by the later years in University that doesn't really help, but definitely to start off with those sort of resources would be useful, and again with the Maths and Stats things, I don't know, I was always the kind of person who would be intimidated by the thought of going for help, to get help, even though the people that do it are really nice, so if there was like an online thing where you could do like practice questions or something like that and it would give you feedback. Stuff like that.

Jessica: We had like an online forum that was used a lot in the Vet school, so some day you can post a question, and then people will, members of staff would answer it, and it gets around to everyone's email addresses, and you can either email back anonymously 1 to 1 or post on the forum for everyone to contribute and actually it's got quite a lot of use.

Isla: There's quite a lot of stuff like that out there, but uptick and usage totally depends, and obviously that's quite different in my subjects.

Helen: Do you just use the Moodle one, or?

Jessica: Yeah, there's our Moodle page, so that would be under your group, and then we have one I set up an ask a final year where first and fourth years can ask and any of the final years will respond and sometimes staff get involved and I didn't really know how it would go, but towards the second half of the year it was getting used quite a lot.

Interviewer: Lauren, do you have any questions? ... Do you have anything else you want to share with us? ... Well, thank you, this concludes our group today. Thank you for your time and obviously your willingness to participate. I know it's a heavy and probably hectic part in the semester for you, but summer's almost here. So thank you, we really appreciate your responses.

END OF FOCUS GROUP