

Staff Handbook on Assessment and Feedback 2009

Relevant sections on assessment for In Curriculum

- Assessment of student work for art, design and media subject areas often present subject-specific challenges for both staff and students.
- Student submissions for art, design and media frequently generate discussion around how more generic, sector-wide guidance on assessment, such as that in the QAA Code of Practice, is applicable to the breadth of assessment submissions experienced by staff in creative arts subjects.
- When designing assessment and specifying assessment requirements for students, it is worthwhile giving careful consideration to the following areas:

Formats for digital submission

- Appropriate and acceptable file formats for digital submissions need to be agreed and clearly communicated to students at the beginning of any unit or project, i.e. before a student commences work. A failure to communicate this to students in a timely manner can be contested as part of any future appeal procedure should difficulties occur with the submission, compatibility or legibility of file formats.

Assessment management issues around time-based or sited work

- Time-based or sited work often makes demands on assessors in terms of the time required to make an assessment of the work, either because the work has a set duration, or a fixed venue, possible even outside of the College estate.
- It is essential that if students are encouraged to present a time-based submission i.e. a performance, show reel, audio work or interactive work, that students are informed of the amount of time staff have to make an assessment of that submission.
- This should be broadly equitable with the assessment time given to submissions that are not time-based or location specific.
- Students should be counseled in this process in that they may need to consider producing a representative version of the work or of having a more pro-active role in presenting or navigating the content for assessors.

- The conduct of assessment for time-based or sited work needs to be carefully managed in order not to take up disproportionate amounts of staff time and consequently distort the assessment process for other student submissions.

Anonymous marking

Anonymous marking is common practice for some subject areas in HE, but this brings particular challenges for art, design and media; however, it may be appropriate or feasible in some contexts.

A series of studies over the past 20 years are generally considered to have demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that bias in marking can occur for several reasons. (A useful overview of the topic is provided by Neil Fleming in *Assessment Matters in Higher Education* (Eds, Brown, S. and Glasner, A.) OUP, pp. 83-92.)

The most significant reasons for bias in marking are pre-conceptions about gender, race or personal knowledge of the candidate.

Anonymous assessment of examinations is more or less standard across the UK HE sector but anonymous assessment of art, design or media coursework is uncommon. The following exemptions from anonymous marking have been noted within the sector

1. transient assessments, including those based on oral or visual presentations
2. assessment in which candidates can be identified during the assessment e.g. observation of professional practice, performance, reading.
3. assessment in which the production of the work has been closely supervised by the marker e.g. art, design or media work, research reports or dissertation
4. assessments for which anonymous marking would be in contravention of a code of practice of a professionally accredited course

Feedback to Students

General precepts regarding assessment and feedback are outlined in section 3 of the University College's [Student Charter](#). In addition, the University College has taken account of the principles outlined in the [NUS 'Great Feedback Amnesty'](#) (where applicable) as follows:

- Feedback should be for learning, not just of learning - feedback should be primarily used as a learning tool and therefore positioned for learning rather than primarily as a measure of learning.
- Feedback should be a continuous process - feedback should be part of continuous guided learning and an integral part of the learning experience.
- Feedback should be timely - allowing students to apply it to future learning

and assessments. The [Student Charter](#) makes the commitment that feedback will be given to students within 1 month of assessment.

- Feedback should relate to clear criteria with the assessment aims and learning outcomes for assessment and grade criteria need to be clearly communicated to, and fully understood by, students. Subsequent feedback should be provided primarily in relation to this.
- Feedback should be constructive - concise, focused and meaningful to feed-forward, highlighting what is going well and what can be improved.
- Feedback should be legible and clear - written and verbal feedback should be given in plain language so it can be easily understood by all students, enabling them to engage with it and support future learning.
- Feedback should include self-assessment and peer-to-peer feedback - feedback from peers and self-assessment practices should play a powerful role in learning by encouraging reassessment of personal beliefs and interpretations.
- Feedback should be accessible to all students - the University College may use assistive technologies to ensure all students have appropriate access to their feedback.
- Feedback should be flexible and suited to students' needs - students learn in different ways and therefore feedback is not 'one size fits all'. Within reasonable limits, students can request feedback in various formats depending on their needs.

Guidance for staff on giving written and spoken assessment feedback

- All conversations and dialogues with students in all situations should be considered as part of the overall Student Experience within the context of the course of study and the wider University College. As much as the concept of the 'Student Voice' has emerged over the past few years in relation to feedback and input into the learning experience, what we might call the 'Student Ear' often plays a vital role in student perceptions and understanding of the institution, the course and the staff.
- The student-facing processes of assessment, and feedback on assessment performance should be considered as an integral part of the teaching and learning experience, and not something that takes place independently of these activities. Assessment is a key process for acknowledging student achievement, but it can also be a means to motivate and engage students in the process of learning.
- It is essential that assessment feedback to students is clear, concise and easily understood. Written assessment should always be word-processed and spell-checked. Increasingly, staff and students are employing assistive technologies for the delivery and review of feedback and it is increasingly

important to consider the format of the feedback: MP3, MOV and WME files, developed using tools such as Audacity, Jing and Camtasia can be used to supplement written assessment formats).

- In whatever form the assessment feedback is delivered, in writing or through the spoken word, it is important to minimise the possibilities for students to misunderstand or misinterpret the information and advice given. At the end of a feedback, in whatever form, it is advisable to summarise the key points in a series of bullet points. Recent research from the Osney Grange Group (2009) suggests that what students' want from feedback is dialogue with their tutor(s) in order to help them interpret their marks and performance.
- Assessment feedback should be given in the context of the approved unit learning outcomes, assessment criteria and requirements and it should directly reference course and unit outcomes as well as the expectations of the student.
- Feedback should be objective, qualified and balanced. Clarify strengths in the work or the approach to learning, clearly indicating what these are and how the criteria have been applied. Confirm areas for development and what the student can do to improve future performance.
- Place the assessment of a single project or unit within the larger context of level and course aims. This is particularly useful where performance may be below expectations from either side. Managing a dip in student performance and presenting the learning experience as more relevant than the outcome of the work requires sensitivity and a degree of wisdom in terms of medium and longer-term course aims.
- Avoid making subjective quality statements about work being good or needing development without an evidence-based explanation, and ensure that your final observation or comment is one of encouragement and support regardless of the student's level of achievement or assessment grade.
- Remember also that the location in which feedback is delivered is important. Feedback should be delivered in an appropriate space where interruptions are minimised and preferably in a situation where other students are not able to listen to the feedback given. The use of clear and straightforward spoken language in spoken feedback is important; the tone of voice used and body language displayed play a part in how feedback is received and understood.
- It is important that students are aware at the start of a session that it is explicitly dealing with **feedback**, whether this is formative or in relation to assessment. Lists of feedback tutorials should be highlighted as such so that students are individually and collectively aware that feedback is being delivered. Essentially, indications are that students may not be able to recognize the conversation as feedback unless this is explicitly and clearly flagged.