

Enhancing communication and feedback: Developing a common language

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Introduction

- Feedback provided as part of formative or summative assessment can help students become aware of any gaps that exist in their current knowledge, understanding, or skill (Sadler, 2010). More specifically, discussions between student and tutor can help students to understand what is expected of them (Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2001). Feedback therefore offers a powerful tool for supporting the academic journey. However, there can be a discrepancy between staff and student perceptions of feedback and this can have a negative impact on student learning.
- The **aims of this project** are to enhance feedback practices and promote two-way communication between students and staff.
- The **specific objectives** are to:
 1. Improve student and staff knowledge and understanding of formative and summative feedback.
 2. Improve communication between staff and students, particularly in relation to feedback.

Method

This project is student-led and has involved a number of methods to gain information from both staff and students on feedback:

- Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with academic staff members across the School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences
- Focus groups were undertaken with first year undergraduate Psychology students
- A class-based discussion and quiz was undertaken with first year undergraduate students
- A survey was administered to first year undergraduate students.
- The results were used to develop an on-line learning tool to help improve communication about forms of feedback and how to use it optimally.

Findings

What types of feedback do 1st year students prefer?

Type of Feedback	n	% of sample*
Written comments on coursework	67	64
One to one discussions with staff	47	45
Asking questions	31	30
Summative grades	21	20
Interactive quizzes in class	12	12
Peer feedback	5	5

*Students provided up to three responses

What did the academic staff tell us about feedback?

Students are unaware of how useful formative feedback can be

It is difficult to give detailed feedback to large cohorts

Students are only concerned with the summative mark

Not all opportunities to receive feedback are used by students

What did the students tell us about feedback?

We do not get enough feedback on submitted work

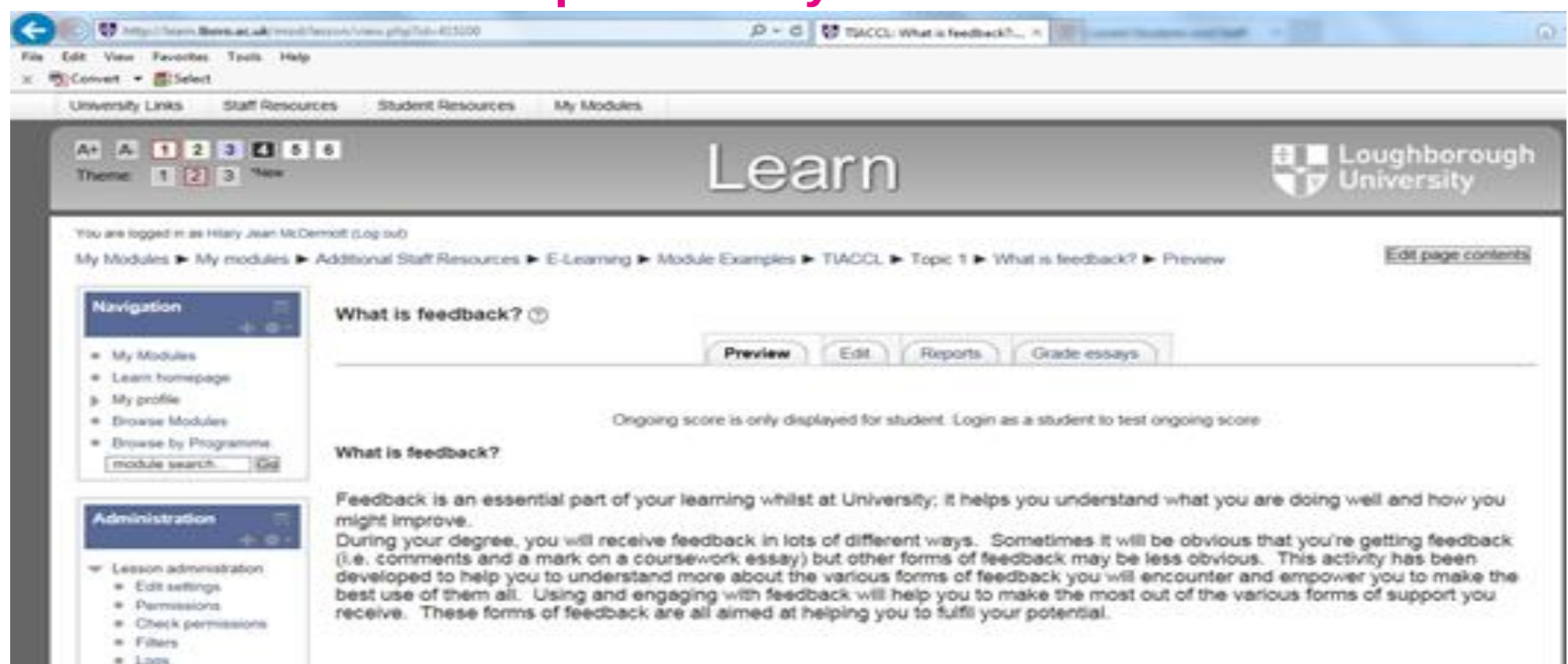
Don't understand the difference between formative and summative feedback

Really enjoy using handsets in class

Electronic submission leads to less feedback

Difficult to ask some lecturers for help

The results of our preliminary work: A VLE feedback tool



Discussion

- The majority of 1st year undergraduate psychology students questioned during this project were not confident with the concepts of formative and summative feedback
- Many 1st year undergraduate students did not recognise many forms of formative feedback
- The interviews and focus groups identified differences in perceptions of feedback between staff and students
- An on-line learning tool, accessed via Learn – our VLE - has been designed to inform 1st year undergraduates about feedback. This should help to align the two viewpoints and improve communication between staff and students

Future directions:

- Further evaluation of the on-line tool and student perception of feedback is planned for later on in the academic year.



References

- Sadler, D.R. (2010). Beyond feedback: developing student capability in complex appraisal, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35:5, 535-550. DOI: 10.1080/02602930903541015.
- Higgins, R., Hartley, P. & Skelton, A. (2001). Getting the Message Across: The problem of communicating assessment feedback, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 6:2, 269-274. DOI: 10.1080/13562510120045230