

**Notes of the StARs Forum - Monday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2014**

**16:15 – 17:45 (EEG162)**

**Topic: Assessment and Feedback**

**Present:**

51 StARs

John Ryan – **JR** (Pro Vice Chancellor (Students))

Tom Clarke – **TC** (Vice President Education)

Dave Robson – **DR** (StAR Coordinator, Institute of Health and Society)

Tory Milner – **TM** (StAR Coordinator, Institute of Science & the Environment)

Ruth Christie – **RC** (Students' Union Membership Services Manager (taking notes))

TC welcomed everyone to the Forum and introduced himself as the Students' Union's Vice President Education. JR introduced himself as the University's Pro Vice Chancellor (Students).

TC asked StARs whether they were aware that there is a University feedback policy and what it says. Few StARs seemed aware of the policy but many knew that feedback should be received within 20 working days of submission of an assignment. For reference, there are links to the key documents below:

[University of Worcester Assessment Policy](#)

[University of Worcester Student Feedback Charter](#)

In order that all StARs had the opportunity to comment on behalf of the students they represent, TC invited students in each row of the lecture room to speak in turn.

Biochemistry Yr 2	Formative feedback, which is provided in a variety of formats, is very helpful as it links well to summative assessment.
JR	<p>It is probably helpful to explain that formative assessment and feedback is ongoing and designed to prepare students well for summative assessment. Summative assessment counts towards final module marks, whereas formative assessment does not.</p> <p><i>Further definitions can be found online, e.g.</i></p> <p><a href="http://www.edudemic.com/summative-and-formative-">http://www.edudemic.com/summative-and-formative-</a></p>

	<a href="http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/basics/formative-summative.html">assessments/ http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/basics/formative-summative.html</a>
Psychology Yr 2	There was no formative assessment in yr 1. It was suggested for the first time at the beginning of the second year in the form of a literature reviews posted as a blog, followed by a workshop. The feedback was very generalised and not particularly helpful.
Archaeology Yr 3	Students are very happy with the wide range of assessment types and the quality of the feedback they receive.
JR	It would be useful to hear to what extent students feel prepared for assessment too.
Conservation Ecology Yr 1	2 pieces of work have been submitted so far. Online submission proved very difficult due to the 10MB limit, particularly as the assessment was a report of a field study and included photographs. Feedback was quite brief. Students would like to be able to see exemplar reports.
TM	We provide the detailed guidance students need in the course handbook. It is not realistic to give examples of A, B, C etc. graded pieces of work for reasons of confidentiality and to avoid potential plagiarism issues.
DR	In mental health nursing, interview exercises from previous years are used, with the students' consent and these provide an excellent learning tool. Essays are much more complex. I used to annotate extensively, but students felt this was too complicated and too detailed.
Conservation Ecology Yr 1	Completely anonymised reports would provide helpful examples for students who have never had to compile a report before.
JR	Through the course handbook and guidance in class, it should be clear what is expected of students, including how to pass and how to get an "A" grade. It should be appreciated that there are bound to be differences between lecturers in terms of their expectations.
Psychology Yr	Students are expected to adhere to individual lecturers'

2	personal referencing preferences. The format of reports and the presentation of data should be standardised across the subject.
Geography Yr 2	Everything is working well in geography. There are useful formative assignments which form part of later summative assignments and feedback is consistent.
Outdoor Adventure Leadership & Management Yr 1	Formative assessments relate to summative assessments and are very useful. Feedback is helpful. The only problem is e-submission as there is confusion about whether Blackboard or SOLE should be used.
JR	The University is currently looking at the future development of online submission. Whereas SOLE is better than Blackboard in some ways, SOLE does not allow lecturers to annotate directly.
TM	Staff are very concerned about e-submission. When a lecturer has to mark the work of large numbers of students (50-70), they will print out the assignments anyway and will hand these back to students.  This may mean that feedback takes longer. Perhaps students prefer e-submission because it saves them money on printing costs.
JR	Where e-submission and feedback are used extensively (WBS and Institute of Sport and Exercise Science), it is very popular.
PE Yr 2	Students like e-submission because they can do it from home, rather than having to come into University. There is too much information in week 1, including details of assessments the following June. There have been tutorials for formative feedback. Feedback is hit and miss – some of it is quite generic and not particularly helpful.
Psychology Yr 2	Students prefer online submission because it's cheaper – there's no need to pay for printing or travel. Students have had very little support for a research proposal assignment and many are struggling with it.  The assignment deadline is this Friday, 5 <sup>th</sup> December, but many have only just had ethical approval.  Students were required to produce a novel piece of research right at the beginning of year 2, having had no report writing

	experience in the first year. In some cases, relevant lectures take place after assignments are due. The formative blog (referred to above) would have been good at the start of year 1.
JR	Have students had the opportunity to give mid-module feedback yet? (Most had)
Psychology Yr 2	StARs will be taking students' comments to the course management committee. Students know that Psychology is going through massive changes and appreciate that it will take some time for changes to be put in place.
JR	It is important that students do not feel they are disadvantaged by studying a course where many changes are happening.
Psychology Yr 2	Many students are struggling with group assessments – some feel they are doing all of the work, but they are having to rely on other students for their grades.
JR	How many of you have group work assessments? (The majority of those present)
Psychology Yr 2	There was peer assessment of group work in the first year. We have a group work assignment to do over Christmas – the deadline is the first day back at University. It will not be realistic for groups to meet up over the Christmas break, which means that the deadline is actually the end of next week.
PITE Yr 3	We've had group work, but students' contributions were identified individually
Computing Yr 1	Students have been assigned to teams
Psychology Yr 2	Formative group assignments across all courses would be a good idea.
Youth & Community Yr 1	Students have had two lectures on group work with mini-presentations, but didn't have enough time to do them well.
English literature Yr 3	The first 30 minutes of lecture time is reserved for groups (on a rota basis) to practise and work through group work with lecturers and students present – this is really helpful.
JR	The University will provide more information on group assessment and seek reassurance that individual

	contributions are acknowledged.
Computing Yr 1	There is very little formative feedback. Students receive feedback on only 20% of their assignment (application development module), which is of limited value.
Business, Economics and Accountancy Yr 2	There's a lot of confusion about what's included and what isn't included in the word count. Students are unclear, for instance, whether tables are included.
TC	My understanding that only the words in the main body of the text need to be counted – not tables, references or appendices
JR	There is no hard and fast University-wide rule about what's included in the word count
Sociology Yr 3	There have been significant improvements since last year. The first feedback is due back next week. There is better preparation for assessment and more e-submission, which students like. There was quick feedback on the mid-module evaluation and better variety of assessments.
Psychology Yr 1	<p>We recently had a counselling exam and were told the following day that we'd all passed. It was really good to have this reassurance straight away, in advance of detailed feedback.</p> <p>A joint honours student has no assessments until March for a 30-credit module and this is in marked contrast to her other subject, drama.</p>
JR	This is the second year of the change to far more 30-credit modules. There should be <u>more</u> opportunities for formative feedback on longer modules. StARs should raise their concerns about the lack of formative assessment and feedback at course management committees.
PE & Sports Studies Yr 2	Everyone likes online submission and feedback
JR	Students should expect <u>not</u> to have to submit work during periods when they're not required to attend University.
	Students may submit assignments by post, but are advised to get proof of postage from the Post Office. This provides

	assurance against loss and evidence of having posted the item on or before the submission deadline.
Psychology Yr 2	Students have been told that no tutors will be available over Christmas, so students will need to submit assignments by the end of term, even though the published deadline is in the middle of January
Sociology Yr 2	Students are allowed to submit drafts of their assignments – this is really good and the feedback is very useful
JR	How many of you can submit drafts? (Around a quarter)
Psychology Yr 2	We're specifically told that we can't do this. We can get feedback on a plan or an outline.
OALM	Students can't submit drafts, but this is good because it encourages us to be more independent. You have to work harder to get it right first time.
PITE	We can submit a plan or up to 700 words of an assignment, which is good.
Journalism	We're encouraged to talk to tutors about our ideas
Nursing Yr 2	<p>There are inconsistencies between academic tutors – some give very brief feedback whereas others provide feedback that is much more detailed.</p> <p>Most students do not have faith in group assessments, but the alternative is 2 long written assignments on the lead up to the exam and placements.</p>
History Yr 2	Last year we were taught by a PhD student, which was very unsatisfactory. Feedback took 42 days and he was often out of the country and not available. This year is fine – we have extensive written feedback and tutorials are good and easy to arrange.
Journalism	Students are very clear about expectations. There is a maximum 30% awarded for group work and it's set out so that it shows who contributed what.
Youth and Community Yr 1	Students themselves prepared a step-by-step guide to e-submission and feedback. A guide from ILS would be helpful.

History	We don't understand why we have to use e-submission <u>and</u> submit a hard copy
PITE Yr 2	<p>Our assessments are due in the day we come back after placements. We now have online submissions and Turnitin and these are now available across the Institute of Education. Students are very happy about this.</p> <p>The timeframe for assessments is very tight – we have to present next Monday and Tuesday on a placement which finishes this Friday. Elsewhere, students are given just 48 to submit a blogpost.</p>
JR	<p>If the blogpost is part of the assessment, there should be a rationale for the short timeframe.</p> <p>The end of module assessment should take place during assessment weeks (the fortnight beginning Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January). With a 30-credit module, hand-in dates may be in December to avoid clustering deadlines.</p>
PITE Yr 2	<p>There has been a lot of positive feedback from PITE students, who feel they have excellent support and help through tutorials. There are concerns about lack of consistency around marks, though, when two students with exactly the same (cut and pasted?) feedback comments have very different grades. StARs have been advised to raise this at the course management committee.</p> <p>One hand-in date is Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> January, immediately following three days out on placement when everyone will be at home.</p>
English Literature	<p>How is the 20 working day turnaround time for feedback calculated over the Christmas break?</p> <p>Last year, we had a deadline in early December but didn't receive feedback until mid-January.</p>
JR	<p>Working days include all those except Bank Holidays and "University closed" days (29<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> December)</p> <p>It's encouraging to see that more courses are now publishing the dates when students will receive feedback</p>
English Literature	We have very little formative feedback. Students recently had to submit a detailed plan and timetable for their

	<p>independent study, which is worth 25% of the overall mark.</p> <p>Everyone interpreted this in a different way. It would have been very helpful if a tutor had uploaded what layout was expected and further guidance. We also had to include a reflective piece, which is very difficult to do in relation to planning</p>
JR	<p>Guidance for students in relation to independent study should be as clear as for other types of assessments. Did the research methods module not prepare you well for the independent study?</p>
English Literature	<p>We don't have research methods modules in English literature</p>
Creative writing Yr 1	<p>Students didn't realise how "journalistic" the course would be, nor understand that tutors have other jobs. We have been told not to expect that the tutor can "teach" students in just 3 hours a week. Students want a good grounding in the basics – they understand its then down to them to work independently for a better grade.</p> <p>The "assessment" link on SOLE was just a link to an article and they received no assessment brief until a few days before the assignment deadline. Whilst it's good to have input from professionals, it's not always the case that a good journalist makes a good lecturer</p>
HND Business Yr 1	<p>We're just handing in our first assignment. We've had fantastic help with understanding what's needed for different grades.</p> <p>When we need help, we always get a response within 48 hours. We've practised group presentations and the peer assessment has been very helpful</p>
PITE Yr 1	<p>We have problems with e-profiles and e-journals. We have to produce 300 words every week after each lecture and this results in a straight pass or fail, but we've had no feedback at all to date and some students have yet to submit anything.</p> <p>There is a deadline cluster in June with two assignments due in per week including two on the same day.</p> <p>There has been poor preparation and guidance for assignments and we haven't been told to take anything with</p>

	us to tutorials. There are inconsistencies between the different subject areas.
PITE Yr 3	We have deadline clustering around now. We're divided into groups and some groups have had lots of support, feedback and preparation, whereas others have had very little.
PITE Yr 1	We're divided into groups A-E. Group E is known as the "challenge group" and is specifically issued with additional work.
Conservation Ecology Yr 1	<p>We've had problems with feedback not being issued on time. We have very little formative assessment on this 30-credit module.</p> <p>There should be a mandatory lecture at the start of the year to help prepare students for assessment. The 10MG limit for online submission is very restrictive</p>
JR	The University is reviewing this limit and considering alternatives.
MA in Nursing Yr 1	There has been excellent feedback from students. The 500-formative assessment was very helpful in preparing us for the summative assessment.
Animation and Screenwriting Yr 2	Feedback is too general and too late to arrange useful tutorials
Sports Therapy Yr 1	We have three assessments due in January. There has been lots of preparation, support and tutorials
Human Biology Yr 1	<p>The University brings together a diverse range of students in terms of age, experience and outside commitments. Not everyone is used to being assessed.</p> <p>With tuition fees of £9k, it's the responsibility of the institution to instruct us thoroughly on how to meet the criteria. We need more formative feedback</p>
JR	It's really important that students engage in all opportunities to provide feedback to the University – not just module evaluations and course management committees but also through the National Student Survey and the internal student survey

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