Feedback is an ongoing and universal issue for both students and their teachers. It is therefore no surprise that a formidable amount of educational literature continues to address this topic. However, despite the attention given to feedback practice, problems persist. The report below provides an overview of the factors contributing to feedback quality and therefore serves as a useful discussion guide for those with feedback and assessment responsibilities at all levels of institutional curriculum and assessment leadership.

A view of the Assessment and Feedback Landscape: baseline analysis of policy and practice from the JISC Assessment & Feedback programme. A report for JISC by Dr Gill Ferrell, April 2012

To link to this report:

Previous TEDI Assessment Briefs with a focus on feedback include:
- No longer exempt from good practice: using exemplars to close the feedback gap for exams
- Hearing you loud and clear: Student perspectives of audio feedback in higher education
- Feedback: all that effort, but what is the effect?
- Designing first-year assessment and feedback: A guide for University staff
- Improving feedback in large classes: application of task evaluation and reflection instrument for student self-assessment (TERISSA) in a unit on business statistics
- Using feedback to help students to learn
- Conditions under which assessment supports students' learning

Executive summary (reproduced in full: p.3)

Assessment and feedback lies at the heart of the learning experience, and forms a significant part of both academic and administrative workload. It remains however the single biggest source of student dissatisfaction with the higher education experience. The JISC Assessment and Feedback programme (Sept 2011-Aug 2014) is supporting large-scale changes in assessment and feedback practice, supported by technology, with the aim of enhancing the learning and teaching process and delivering efficiencies and quality improvements. This report summarises baseline reviews undertaken by a number of institutions as part of their programme activity. The report paints a picture of a sector that has identified some significant issues and the need for change. There is a growing body of literature and empirical evidence on what constitutes effective support for learning and some excellent examples of the innovative use of technology to deliver that support but, on the whole, the sector is finding that ‘practice remains stubbornly resistant to change.’

The main findings of this report are:
- the real responsibility for assessment and feedback is highly devolved within institutions and considerable variations in practice give many institutions cause for concern;
- formal documentation remains quite technical and procedural in nature and is slow to catch up with the shift in thinking about assessment as a more developmental process for as well as of learning;
the academic structure of degrees, particularly 12 week modules and semesterisation, contributes to assessment of learning and diminishes opportunities for assessment for learning;

academic staff have too few opportunities to gain awareness of different approaches to forms of assessment because of insufficient time and a lack of opportunities to share new practices;

there continues to be heavy reliance on traditional types of assessment such as essays and examinations in some disciplines;

considerable efforts are being made to develop practice that feeds forwards into the learner’s longitudinal development but academic opinion on approaches to feedback remains divided;

lack of sequencing different varieties of assessment, timing of feedback in relation to the next task, and a culture of ‘ticking off’ modules all prevent feedback from feeding forward;

engagement with employers is causing some institutions to question some of their current practice which does not reflect the ways in which professionals undertake formative development during their careers;

opportunities for students to engage with assessment design and the process of making academic judgements appears to be limited at present;

many institutions have made significant investment in the technical infrastructure to support assessment and feedback but this is not yet delivering resource efficiencies due to localised variations in underlying processes;

institutions are preferring to work with existing/established technologies but are nonetheless finding that innovation projects are difficult to scale up;

institutions need to develop effective structures to facilitate the sharing of good practice that exists in small pockets across each institution.

Summary and conclusions (p.21)

From this comparison we can conclude that the expertise and the potential for assessment and feedback reform exists at [institution name], but at present resources are not being put to best use. An overarching theme is one of missed opportunities for enhancing learning through assessment. However, there is evidence that a technical approach to assessment has begun shifting towards a more developmental one and this suggests that the time is ripe for change.

References

The report provides five references.

This series of briefs on assessment topics has been prepared by the UQ Teaching and Educational Development Institute (TEDI) for UQ teaching academics. “UQ ASSESSMENT BRIEFS” of journal articles, book chapters, reviews, websites, reports etc are distributed to Faculty and School Teaching and Learning Chairs in a form designed to encourage wider distribution.

Please send feedback, requests or suggestions for future “UQ ASSESSMENT BRIEFS” to:

Dr Clair Hughes (clair.hughes@uq.edu.au)
Senior Lecturer in Higher Education
The Teaching and Educational Development Institute (TEDI)
The University of Queensland, St Lucia Qld 4072
Telephone +61 7 336 52456
Facsimile +61 7 3365 1966