

# Assessment and Feedback Focus Groups Report

## Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present the findings from assessment and feedback focus groups with students across all schools from 22<sup>nd</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> October. The aim of the focus groups was to discuss student experiences of assessment and quality of marking in each school. Other reports such as the City SU Student Voice Report had already highlighted large variances in quality and frequency of feedback for assessments. This report presents university recommendations alongside school-specific feedback and recommendations.

## City-wide recommendations

These recommendations are based on the focus group feedback from all schools. These are intended as improvements that every school could implement to improve students' academic experience of assessment and feedback.

1. Schools, in collaboration with City SU, should agree a university-wide assessment and feedback guide which standardises the expected quality and volume of feedback for staff and students. School and departmental differences should be accounted for locally.
2. The turnaround time for feedback should be set at no more than 2-3 weeks across all schools.
3. Marking criteria should be made available for all students in all schools no later than the release of assessment questions.
4. Feedback should be bespoke and constructively refer to assessment and marking criteria and indicate to students areas they can work to raise their performance to higher grade boundaries.
5. Students should always be provided with opportunities to discuss feedback with peers, personal tutors, markers or module leads.
6. Revision sessions, where applicable, should be introduced as standard for all programmes in the lead up to examinations.
7. The clustering of deadlines should be avoided, with the scheduling of assessments organised to allow adequate time between assessments for students to prepare and take into account feedback from past marking.
8. Where available, script annotations should be provided to students.
9. All schools should improve their communications to students around assessment, feedback, and marking.

## School of Arts and Social Sciences

Feedback was received from final-year and second-year students in English, Psychology, Economics, Media, Communications, and Sociology.

### Assessment

Students noted that all exam and assessment dates are made readily available in good time. However, assessment questions and exam papers are released much closer to the deadlines. The clustering of deadlines leaves little time to work on each assessment when the questions are all released in close proximity to one another.

### Feedback

**Turnaround time-** Prior to the introduction of lockdown measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is reported that assessment feedback was usually delivered between two and four weeks following the completion of assessments. Students reported generally being happy with these turnaround times. Following these measures, the time to receive feedback rose to six weeks to more than eight weeks. Students were very dissatisfied with this time to return feedback. All students agreed that a guaranteed turnaround time of no more than three weeks, preferably two weeks, would be desirable.

**Quality-** Students were generally dissatisfied with the quality of feedback for assessments. Largely, they felt feedback was not detailed or bespoke enough to be constructive. It was noted that when the generic bullet points and short commentary regularly offered by lecturers was felt insufficient. Students voiced wishes for dedicated bespoke feedback offering constructive points for improvement.

**Consistency-** Students criticised the inconsistency of feedback and wished to be informed of who marks their script. Students expressed a particular desire for better regulation and standardisation of teaching assistant marking to ensure consistency. All students agreed a standardised marking criteria alongside marker's personal comments would be useful for consistency.

### Other themes:

**Study aids-** Students requested copies of written materials, such as PowerPoint slides, to annotate alongside lectures, as they felt this would aid in learning and retention

### Recommendations

1. The School should improve communications regarding assessment and feedback. If there is a delay in receiving feedback, the school should clearly state the reason for the delay and when students should expect their feedback.
2. The turnaround time for assessment should be 2 to 3 weeks.
3. Feedback should be more constructive providing students with practical guidance on how to improve in future assessments.
4. Descriptions of assessments should be released, and the process standardised across the school.
5. The School should increase the provision of revision materials available to students. Students should be given access to past papers and graded answers, prior to examinations, to aid revision. Exemplar answers should also be provided alongside these revision materials.
6. Revision sessions should become standard as part of all courses.
7. Lecturers should make online resources available, this includes, but is not limited to, PPT slides and transcripts. Slides on other resources should ideally be made available before the contact time to ensure students can prepare in advance.

## School of Health Sciences

Feedback was received from final-year and second-year students in mental health nursing and optometry.

### Assessment

Students noted that dates for exams and assessment are readily available in good time.

### Feedback

**Turnaround time-** Students report that, prior to the introduction of lockdown measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, that assessment feedback was usually delivered no later than four weeks following the completion of assessments. After the introduction of measures in response to COVID-19 this largely remained the same. Whilst students were generally satisfied with these times, students would prefer to receive feedback in a three week turnaround time wherever possible.

**Quality-** Students were largely dissatisfied with the quality of feedback. It was felt that there was minimal feedback and that when it was given it was not constructive or bespoke. Students said if feedback referred more regularly and consistently to the marking rubrics, this would be very helpful in understanding points for improvement and the rationale behind marks. Students added they would perceive marking as fairer if the marking rubric was more frequently referred to.

**Consistency-** Students felt that, largely, marking standards were consistent. This was propelled by students having access to marking criteria by default.

### Other themes:

**Revision-** Students noted that they benefited greatly from planned revision lecture and suggested these continue as a standard part of all courses. Revision planning advice when provided by academic staff was greatly appreciated, all students agreed this should be expanded across the school.

**Marked scripts-** Students noted the benefit of having access to marked scripts to aid revision and progression.

### Recommendations

1. Students on all courses in the school should be provided with bespoke, detailed, constructive and encouraging feedback. Feedback should indicate students' strengths and areas for development. Opportunities should be given to discuss this feedback either with peers, markers or module leads.
2. Feedback should be related to the module learning outcomes and assessment criteria- which should be explained before the first assignment.
3. Students should have access to past papers, accompanied by model answers, by default.

## The City Law School Focus Group

Feedback was received from final-year and second-year law students.

### Assessment

Dates of assignments are released well in advance. However, the release of assessment questions and exam papers in remote environments is not consistent. Students noted that deadlines and exams should be less clustered, particularly under remote-study conditions. It was also noted that remote-study assessments should be standardised across courses.

### Feedback

**Turnaround time-** Prior to the introduction of lockdown measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is reported that assessment feedback was usually delivered between two and four weeks following the completion of assessments. Students were generally satisfied with this turnaround time. After the introduction of measures, cancelled assessments notwithstanding, the time to receive feedback rose to roughly two months. Students were extremely dissatisfied with this turnaround time. Issues were compounded by lengthy exam assessment periods which had an impact on module selections.

**Quality-** Students were largely satisfied with the feedback for formative assessments whilst largely dissatisfied with the feedback for summative essays. Students felt the volume of feedback varied too greatly and this impacted on quality. Students would like feedback which indicates its rationale and links to class content, as well as feedback offering constructive points for improvement.

**Consistency-** Feedback was perceived as inconsistent. Students requested marking criteria be made available as standard.

### Other themes:

**Exemplar materials-** Students indicated that it would be useful to have access to exemplary materials as standard for each module. These would help indicate the expected style and standard of answers to achieve different grade boundaries.

**Revision-** Students were very satisfied with having revision sessions as standard. It was noted that more materials should be made available online in addition to the revision sessions.

### Recommendations

1. The turnaround time for assessment should be 2 to 3 weeks.
2. Students should have access to marking schemes for every assessment when the task is released.
3. The School should improve communications regarding assessment and feedback. If there is a delay in receiving feedback, the school should clearly state the reason for the delay and when students should expect their feedback.
4. If there is a delay in receiving feedback, the school should clearly state when students should expect their feedback.
5. Students on all courses in the school should be provided with bespoke, detailed, constructive and encouraging feedback. Feedback should refer directly to RACER. Feedback should indicate students' strengths and areas for development. Opportunities should be given to discuss this feedback either with peers, the marker or module lead.
6. Students should receive an annotated marked script by default.
7. The remote assessment process should be standardised across the school, made clearer and the changes communicated to students.
8. The school should take into the consideration of the period of holiday and celebration in winter in timings for question releases.
9. Revision sessions should be provided for modules by default. The number of revision resources available online should be increased.

## The Business School Focus Group

Feedback was received from final-year and second-year students in Accounting and Finance and Business Management respectively.

### Assessment

All assessments dates are provided in good time and any changes are confirmed in good time. Past papers and other resources are provided well in advance of assessment. Students noted that exams and assessments were clustered together, and it was recommended that these should be spread out. This was particularly important to students in a remote study setting. Students felt strongly that 6 or 8 hour exams should be replaced with 24-48 hour. It was felt that no clear rationale behind 6 and 8 hour exams had been given.

### Feedback

**Turnaround time-** Prior to the introduction of lockdown measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is reported that assessment feedback was usually delivered in around three weeks at most, and on some occasions arriving inside two weeks. Students were satisfied with these times. Following the introduction of measures, feedback took a month or more to be returned. When assessments were returned within three weeks the quality was greatly reduced.

**Quality-** Students were generally pleased with the quality of feedback on individual assessments. Feedback for group assessments was considered of a low quality and unconstructive. Students noted that bespoke feedback offering constructive points referring to a marking scheme would increase the quality. It was also suggested that the quality of feedback would be improved if opportunities were given to have 1-2-1 conversations with lecturers or the marker.

**Consistency-** Feedback was often perceived as inconsistent for both individual and group assessments.

### Other themes:

**Exemplar materials-** Students requested exemplary material which indicates the style and standards of answers to achieve a particular grade boundary.

**Transparency-** Students highlighted a perceived lack of transparency in the marking process. This led to students questioning the fairness of marking and assessment. Students often felt they were unable to discern the logic behind their marks. It was noted that access to marking schemes, past papers, increased communication, and higher quality feedback would work to improve this.

**Revision-** Revision sessions as standard part of courses were praised. Students requested the introduction of revision sessions as standard across the school. It was felt these would be beneficial to progression and attainment in all areas.

### Recommendations

1. Students on all courses in the school should be provided with bespoke, detailed, constructive and encouraging feedback. Feedback should indicate students' strengths and areas for development. Opportunities should be given to discuss this feedback either with peers marker or module lead.
2. Students should have access to marking schemes for every assessment when the task is released.
3. The 6 and 8 hour exam model should be replaced with a 48 hour or 24 hours exam model.
4. Students should be given access to model answers for assessments. Model answers should be on a grade scale to provide students the opportunity for comparison.
5. Students should be given access to marked scripts to support them to improve.

## School of Mathematics, Computer Science and Engineering

Feedback was received from final-year and second-year undergraduate students in Mathematics and Finance, Aeronautical engineering, Civil engineering, and Computer sciences.

### Assessment

All dates are made readily available at the start of the course and any alterations are confirmed in good time nearer the actual deadline and assessment dates. Less clustering in deadlines and exams was recommended, especially under remote-study conditions. Students noted that assessments should be removed from reading week.

### Feedback

**Turnaround time-** Prior to the introduction of lockdown measures in response to the CoViD-19 pandemic and across the courses surveyed, it is reported that assessment feedback was usually delivered between two and five weeks after the passing of an assessment deadline. All expressed regular experiences where either no feedback was returned or was feedback was merely generic to the point that it was largely unconstructive and of minimal use in supporting students' understanding of their mistakes and learning. Numerous occasions arose where students were informed that feedback had not been supplied because it had not been requested.

After the measures were introduced, changes to feedback times varied around departments. Courses varied, with some receiving feedback faster than before, but much reduced in detail (maths and finance), and others receiving none.

**Quality-** Students were dissatisfied with the quality of feedback with students often receiving no feedback or feedback that was generic and offered no detailed commentary on the assessment. Students expressed constructive and individual feedback would be extremely useful for improvement and progression. Students noted a strong appreciation for sit-down time with lecturers to give detailed individual feedback and advice on assessments after their completion. Exemplary material which indicates the style and standard of answers necessary to achieve each boundary was also noted as an improvement to quality.

**Consistency-** Students noted the consistency of quality feedback varied greatly amongst markers and departments.

### Other themes:

**Transparency-** Students felt it was difficult to assess the fairness and consistency of marking due to a lack of transparency. It was often felt that students were unable to discern the logic behind their marks and that given marks were not justified in terms of any standardised grade scheme. It was noted this could be improved with the distribution of mark schemes under which different grade boundaries are judged. Students particularly wished to note that marking in maths was an exception to the above commentary given the structure of assessments but noted that mark schemes would also be useful.

**Revision-** The hosting of general revision sessions on Moodle for each assessment was recommended as helpful. It was felt that students in the school from targeted revision advice and guided revision.

### Recommendations

1. Feedback should always be given as default to assessment or examinations.
2. Students on all courses should be provided with bespoke, detailed, constructive and encouraging feedback. Feedback should indicate students' strengths and areas for development. Opportunities should be given to discuss this feedback either with peers marker or module lead.
3. All courses should have mark schemes, at minimum, available to students in advance of assessment and ideally at the start of modules.

4. Following assessment of exams, marked scripts should be returned to students alongside constructive feedback for improvement.
5. Revision sessions for assessments should be introduced. This should be hosted and stored on Moodle for easy access.
6. Assessments should be removed from reading weeks and ensured they are spread out across the term.
7. Revision materials should be made available as standard for students. This includes, but is not limited to, past papers and model answers.