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Improving Student Outcomes through Dialogic Feed-Forward Assessment

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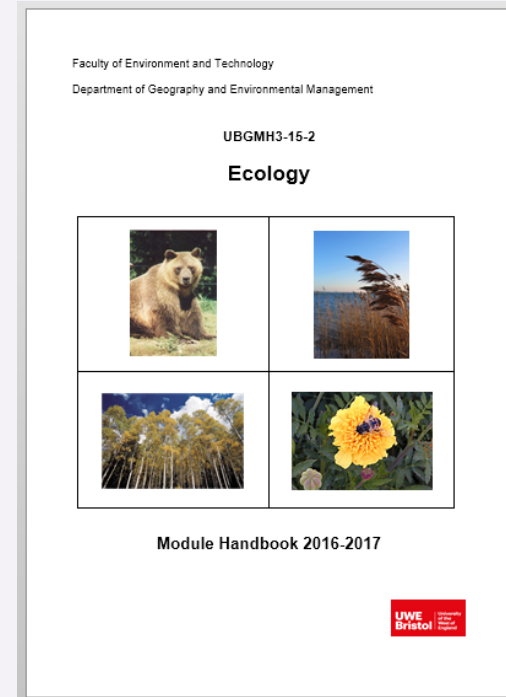# Feedback Context

- Feedback should help students to:

  - Understand current performance
  - Understand how to close the 'performance gap' in future assignments
  - Have the confidence and belief they have control over their success
  - Maintain motivation throughout their degree

  (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)

- But … low satisfaction scores for assessment and feedback in national student surveys

Feedback Intervention

- We implemented an assessment approach on a 2nd year physical geography module to optimally support students use of feedback

- Based on premise that feedback should occupy a central position within a **dialogic** approach to learning and teaching (Alexander, 2004; Sutton, 2009) and be **future-oriented** (Sadler, 2010; Beaumont *et al.,* 2011)

Faculty of Environment and Technology

Department of Geography and Environmental Management

UBGMH3-15-2
Ecology

Module Handbook 2016-2017

Research Aims

1. Explore **student perceptions** of the dialogic feed-forward approach and whether it asserted a **positive influence on their learning experience**

2. Identify if and how the **task-specific behavior** of students was altered by the assessment approach

3. Identify the extent to which students believed their **self-efficacy** and **self-regulation** skills were improved

4. Examine whether the assessment approach **enhanced student performance** and whether it could potentially raise **NSS scores** related to feedback

Module Assessment Structure

Supporting Lectures

| Students choose essay from selection | → | Students write draft essay | → | Students submit draft and attend 'feed-forward' meeting | → | Students reflect on meeting and essay – grading their work | → | Students complete and submit final essay | → |

25% module assessment

75% module assessment

Assessment discourse

Feedback discourse
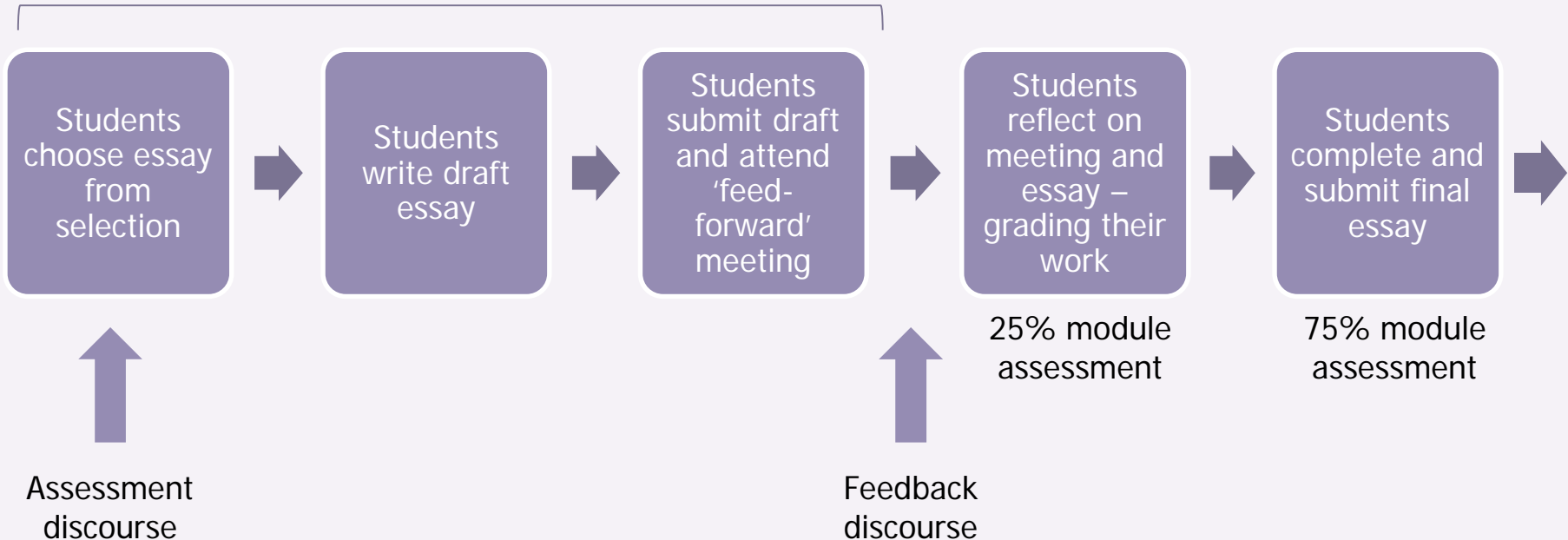
Data Collection

Qualitative case study approach

- Individual semi-structured interviews... two consecutive year 2 cohorts at the end of the module (2015/16 and 16/17)... analyzed thematically via grounded theory

- 44 interviews (x30 mins), 61% response rate   male = 45%   female = 55%

- Group semi-structured interviews with year 3 students elucidating post-assignment behaviour

- Essay performance data pre- and post-assignment intervention (inferential stats)

- Answers to NSS feedback questions

Selected Results

Enhanced Learning Experience

- Conversation compels students to **engage critically** with their work:

"When I have had drafts handed back to me and it's just written over, either I don't understand what they are trying to say, or it's not clear enough. I can ask you questions if we're talking to each other about it, it's easier to see things... It's definitely better to talk about it" (R7)

"I've had it before where you get electronic feedback and you might not be sure what some of the comments mean... being able to discuss it is important. You get that progress and can discuss how you can change it as opposed to just saying this is wrong" (R9)

Selected Results

Enhanced Learning Experience

- **Motivational** and **empowering** due to **pertinent application**:

"the bit in between my draft and writing the final piece was the best bit because I knew what I was doing, and could tweak it and I enjoyed that process of making it better. It gave me more confidence in my writing skills" (R7)

"my first draft was quite vague and I didn't really know what direction I was going with it. Then, after speaking and having the feedback, I spent more time on it because I knew where I needed to go with it" (R8)

Selected Results

Task-specific behaviour … and self-regulation

"it helped me to realise how to critique my own essays because I was able to sit down with you and go through the essay and know exactly why you were commenting on something... it allows me now to see in other essays the same things I'm doing" (R10)

"Now, I feel like I can evaluate at different stages throughout an assessment and therefore make changes. Before I just skimmed over work, handed it in, and got feedback at the end without really thinking about it" (R29)

Selected Results

Self-Efficacy

- Students also self-avow to altered year 3 behaviour:

"I felt my critical analysis was improved through the feedback session and this has been helpful writing other essays and exam answers... I was able to achieve higher 2:1s and 1:1s at year 3 because my understanding of critical analysis had improved" (R28)

"Since this module I have made sure that whenever possible I meet with academics and discuss my work. This is something which prior to the Ecology module would scare me as I was embarrassed by the mistakes in my work" (R29)

Selected Results

Enhanced Student Performance

Significantly higher marks 2015-17 v 2011-13
(p = < 0.0001)

Band (%)	2011-2012 (%)	2012-2013 (%)	2015-2016 (%)	2016-2017 (%)
0-39 (inc. NS)	16	5	0	5.5*
40-49	9	14	3*	5.5*
50-59	34	38	28	17
60-69	41	38	58	58
70-100	0	5	11	14
Number (n)	32	37	36	36

* Did not have a meeting

Average Ecology mark 4.5% higher than average mark for other second year optional modules (p = 0.01)

Dialogic assessment

Selected Results

- All students rated the module as giving them high quality feedback: detailed, conversational, personalized, timely (relevant application), multi-faceted

- Students proactively engage with learning – they have to prepare for the meeting, think about their work, ask and answer questions

Prior experiences of assessment

- Proactive recipience (Winstone, 2017).
- Motivation/self-efficacy (Ritchie, 2016).
- Self-regulation (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006; Nicol, 2010).
- Emotional risk/resilience (Barnett, 2007).

Open Boundaries Feedforward

- Raise awareness about skills transferability

- Assessment becomes more than a grade - habits of good learning

Distribute assignment

Preparatory Guidance

- Explanation of criteria

- Discussion of task

- Tutor introduces task goals, criteria and standards (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006).

Submit final assignment

- Students engage early with task & generate personal understanding via dialogue – take ownership (Carless, 2006).
- Students understand standards as interpreted by tutor (Carless, 2006).
- Students can 'make good' – motivated to close performance gap and knowing how to get there (Blair & McGinty, 2013).
- Affective spaces: 'head on learning', anxiety but caring and personalized (Yang & Carless, 2013).

In-Task Performance Feedforward

- Draft discussion

- Audio feedback

- Exemplar paragraphs

- Criteria/standards related

Submit draft assignment

In-Task Guidance

- Model answers
- Generic Feedback
- Peer assessment
- Self assessment

- Tutor clarifies task goals, criteria and standards (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006).
- Peer discussion of criteria and standards (Liu & Carless, 2006).
- Students judge their own work developing in-task assessment literacy (Price *et al.,* 2010).

Modified from Beaumont *et al.,* 2011

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