Policy on Feedback to Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Students

The University of Manchester is committed to providing timely and appropriate feedback to students on their academic progress and achievement, thereby enabling students to reflect on their progress and plan their academic and skills development effectively. Feedback, and acting on feedback, is therefore part of the active learning process throughout a student's course of study.

Methods of feedback will vary according to assessment type, discipline, level of study and the needs of the individual student.

This policy applies to undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision. It sets out the principles under which feedback should be planned and delivered and relates to both formative and summative work. A glossary of terms can be found as Appendix 1 of this document.

Principles

1   Feedback must be provided in a timely manner that helps students understand (i) the marks or grades they have received for the work submitted, and (ii) how their performance might be improved in future.

2   Feedback must be as personal as possible to the individual student to enable reflection on individual skills and performance.

3.   Students have a responsibility to consider feedback given on their work, to seek to understand it, and to act on it.

Policies relating to the operational delivery of feedback to students

Communicating the feedback process

4   Unit teachers are responsible for providing programme directors, or equivalent, with details of how feedback will be provided on their unit.   The feedback mechanisms adopted should be capable of review by external examiners, processes for peer review and periodic review.

5   At the start of each academic year students should be informed of the feedback opportunities available in that year and the main goals of feedback at that stage in their studies. Information must be provided in programme handbooks, unit outlines and course materials to inform students of the mechanisms by which they will receive feedback and the forms it will take for both formative and, where appropriate, summative work. The Blackboard page for each unit should have a clear section explaining the feedback mechanism that the unit will follow. At the start of each unit, the unit teacher(s) should explain how and when feedback will be provided during the unit.

6　　An opportunity must exist in all units for formative feedback.

7　　It is a key duty of Academic Advisors that they reinforce the feedback mechanisms that exist on a programme and allow the opportunity for students to clarify their understanding of the purpose of feedback.

Grading as a part of feedback

8　　Students should be given clear information on the assessment process and the grading criteria applied to each assessment. Grade descriptors used should be consistent across the units in a given programme and should be readily accessible to students in unit and programme handbooks or equivalent. Assignment of a grade is an important aspect of feedback and should be provided wherever possible. Schools should also expedite the adoption of a common set of grade descriptors across all programmes in a manner to be informed by the forthcoming review of degree regulations and assessment policies.

Timescales for the delivery of feedback to students

9　　Feedback must be timely and students must be made aware of the timetable for submission deadlines and dates on which feedback will be returned for each unit.

10　For all formative assessments and assessed coursework, feedback will normally be provided within 15 working days after the final submission deadline or exceptionally, and subject to prior approval by the faculty, within 20 working days after the final submission deadline; extensions to 20 working days will be approved on academic grounds only and must be clearly communicated to students in advance.

For single pieces of assessed work carrying a credit weighting of 30 credits or more, the maximum time for feedback to be given is normally 30 working days after the final submission deadline.

In cases where these requirements would extend beyond the end of a taught programme then paragraphs 16 and 17 will apply.

11　Schools should have a clear policy to handle feedback on late submissions.

Delivery of feedback to students

12　Opportunities must be provided for students to discuss feedback in person or virtually, as appropriate, with the unit teacher/s.

13　Pursuant to principle 1, comments should be made on why students were awarded the given mark and how they can improve their work, including any recommendations for further reading where appropriate.

14　Constructive criticism should be the overriding feedback style.

15   Opportunities for feedback should be comparable in scope and scale between students and between units that are similar in style or structure.

Feedback on examinations

16   Schools must facilitate individual student requests to have access to their own exam scripts and/or coursework (or copies of these), apart from multiple choice questions (MCQs). This applies to both exams/coursework submitted online or as hard copy, and access must be provided without charge. This could be achieved by a variety of methods including providing physical access for students to see their marked exam script on campus, if practicable; making a scanned copy of paper exam scripts available by electronic means; or by allowing students to access their grades and feedback through Blackboard. Students are not permitted to remove original exam scripts from campus.

17   Markers/course unit leads are encouraged to ensure that general feedback on performance in assessments (particularly MCQs) is made available to students.

18   Staff should inform students that copyright of all exam questions/papers is owned by the University and that, in accordance with the University's copyright policy, any sharing of the materials without permission is prohibited and, if students are found to be in breach, they may be subject to disciplinary action

19   Written comments should be provided for all exam scripts and coursework and must be clear and legible. These comments may be provided in a separate document but should enable students to understand to which part of their work comments refer. Students should have the opportunity, within reason, to seek clarification and further feedback; however, students are reminded that there can be no appeals concerning matters of academic judgement.

Further guidance on how these principles might be implemented by Schools can be found in Appendix 2 of this document. It is recommended that the provision of feedback opportunities should form part of both vertical and horizontal curriculum and assessment planning to ensure that there is consistency of approach across the programme.

Revisions to paragraphs 12, and 16-19, approved by Senate on 4 December 2020

Appendix 1: Glossary of terms used in the Policy on Feedback to Students

- **Formative assessment**: Assessment that does not contribute to the final mark of a unit. Formative assessment focuses on measuring progress to date and feedback on formative assessments should enable the recipient to develop and improve before completing summative assessments.

- **Formative Feedback**: Feedback that enables the recipient to develop and improve with the unit and/ or programme of study

- **Summative assessment**: Assessment that contributes to the final mark of a unit. Summative assessment can include both coursework and examinations. The completion of all required elements of summative assessments normally indicates the end of a unit of study.

- **Coursework**: Assignments completed and marked outside of examination conditions which may or may not contribute to the final mark of a unit. Types of coursework include essays, report, in-class tests, laboratory work, projects, dissertations, practical work, and presentations.

- **Assessed Coursework**: Coursework which contributes to the final mark of a unit.

- **Academic Advisor:** The member of academic staff who has responsibility for providing academic development guidance to a specific student or group of students. Each student should be informed of the named individual who is their academic advisor

- **Grade Descriptor**: Description of the learning processes and outcomes demonstrated by a student in order to attain a particular grade.

- **Constructive criticism**: Feedback designed to enable an individual to understand and learn from their mistakes and to build on demonstrated strengths.

- **Working day**: Monday to Friday excluding student vacation periods and University examination periods.

- **Vertical curriculum planning**: Structuring the curriculum to ensure that units at higher levels build on the skills and knowledge acquired at the lower levels. Clear and transparent vertical planning can help students to make informed choices about their curriculum pathway.

- **Horizontal curriculum planning**: Planning the curriculum to ensure that there is minimal duplication between units at the same level and that connections are made between content and skills acquisition in different units within the same broad programme of study to enable students to have a clear understanding of the structure of their programme of study. This includes planning important dates with the academic year to avoid unnecessary clashes in the submission of assessed coursework.

Appendix 2: Guidance to support the implementation of the Policy on Feedback to Students

Communicating the feedback process

It is important to manage student expectations with regard to feedback. There are three main points that should be communicated to students by programme and unit leaders:
- What form/s feedback will take on that specific unit/programme.
- The timescale for the return of feedback on submitted work and/or the process by which continuous feedback will be delivered (for example, on technical skills in laboratories).
- How the feedback ought to be used by the recipient.

As a fundamental part of the learning experience for students, it is essential that the process of providing feedback is monitored for both effectiveness and overall quality. Feedback based on work electronically submitted and returned by Blackboard can be monitored easily, but this will only account for a portion of all feedback.

Particular care needs to be taken in programmes such as Joint Honours programmes, where units are drawn from multiple disciplines/Schools or Faculties. A common concern voiced by students on such programmes is the perception that they are treated differently by different parts of their programme. Therefore the effective use of vertical and horizontal curriculum planning is particularly important to ensure that students understand how the different elements of the programme fit together, to avoid assessment clashes, and to make sure that the assigned academic adviser is able to effectively advise students on their academic development and attainment in all components of the programme.

Grading as a component of feedback

The provision of a grade is important for students. It helps them to position themselves within their cohort and to plan their academic development with reference to attainment in particular modes of assessment and to judge their general progress. However any grades provided must be meaningful to the student and standards of grading should be consistently applied across a programme of study. The consistent use of grading descriptors is strongly encouraged. Feedback on assessments, whether formative or summative, should indicate areas for improvement that relate to the grade given so that students can make use of the feedback to improve their attainment level in other units.

Timescales for providing feedback

The timing of feedback must be such that the feedback can be used by the student to respond and improve performance in a unit and throughout their programme. One of the key themes raised by students when asked about the quality of their feedback is that they would like feedback on coursework to be returned in a timeframe that allows them to better prepare for further assessment.   Schools should give consideration to submission dates for coursework to ensure that where appropriate the schedule for submission and feedback fits with the relevant dates for future assessment.

It should be accepted that appropriate timing for feedback depends on the nature of the unit. The following points may be useful when considering when feedback would be most appropriately delivered:

- If feedback will be helpful in further assessed work set within the timeframe of the unit then clearly feedback will need to be delivered earlier.
- If feedback will be most useful to inform performance in end of unit examinations that take place a number of weeks after teaching has ended, then it maybe more appropriate to collect work for feedback nearer the end of the unit.
- Nothing in this policy prohibits multiple feedback points within a unit. However, care should be taken to ensure a balance between the time needed to deliver the unit and students' ability to assimilate knowledge, against the time needed to undertake the work to be submitted for feedback.

Delivery of feedback to students

It is crucial for students that the feedback they receive is meaningful and useful. Therefore, any comments made should be clear, directly related to areas of assessed performance, and sufficiently detailed to be useful for the student in their personal and academic planning. Where brief comments such as "good" or "satisfactory" are used they should be used consistently across the programme and if possible the discipline area or School. It may be appropriate to align this type of comment to grading descriptors. Students should be given advice on how to interpret feedback comments and be able to ask questions if the feedback given is not clear to them.

Each student must feel that appropriate consideration has been given to their piece of work and their personal development as a learner. Students are very clear that feedback must be personal to them. Generic feedback is only acceptable as additional feedback, and substantive feedback must be given to each and every student in a unit.

It is recommended that a common programme-based or School-based feedback process is followed by each unit on a programme. It is important to recognise that such processes will vary across levels of a programme as, for example, the feedback needs of students in Year 1 of an undergraduate programme are very different from the needs of students in the final year. However, within a given programme level, consistency of feedback must be maintained.

Feedback on examinations

There is still a lot that students can reflect upon about their performance in end of unit examinations in order to improve their results for future units, such as learning from their examination performance therefore feedback on this type of assessment is still important even though it tends to take place at the end of a unit of study.

Examiners will be aware that comments they write on scripts may be viewed by students and should therefore ensure that such comments are provided in the same manner as comments on course work and other related material. Such comments should be made to provide constructive criticism where appropriate, to provide assistance to the external examining process, and, where appropriate, internal moderation of the marking process.

Version amendment history: Policy on Feedback to Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Students		
Version	Date	Reason for change
1.0	April 2010	Creation and approval by Senate.
1.1	January 2016	Removal of the words 'or copies of the script' in paragraph 16; updates to Document control box re related procedures and guidance and policy owner's title.
1.2	December 2020	Revisions to paragraphs 12, and 16-19, approved by Senate.
1.2	February 2022	Policy owner and lead contact details updated in Document control box.

Document control box	
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Policy owner:	Head of Student and Academic Services (SAS)
Lead contact:	Teaching and Learning Manager (Policies and Degree Apprenticeships), Teaching and Learning Delivery, Division of SAS

For any queries or questions relating to this document, please direct your email to teaching-policy@manchester.ac.uk |