



FELLOWSHIP RESEARCH REPORT

What is meant and what is understood: written summative assessment feedback within the fine art subject area

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July 2009

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Introduction

This is a report of research undertaken by three members of staff at the University of the Arts London into assessment feedback in BA fine art courses at three of the University's Colleges (Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon). Details about the authors can be found in Appendix 6. The research was funded by the University through its Teaching and Professional Fellowship scheme.

Context

It is widely acknowledged in the literature that assessment in art and design is highly problematic (Orr, 2007; Mason & Steers, 2006; Rayment, 1999). Within this complex arena we decided to examine one aspect of assessment feedback: the written feedback issued following a summative assessment. Recent discussions around written assessment feedback at Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon Colleges (CCW) revealed that there are disparate practices across undergraduate courses. We set out to confirm that this is the case and to try to gain a better understanding of how the process of giving and receiving written feedback from the point of view of staff and students.

Searches of existing research revealed that written assessment feedback in creative subjects and in a higher education setting had yet to be the subject of research. In our experience, this written assessment feedback acquires special significance for both staff and students because it provides a record of student progress, as well as being the vehicle for issuing marks. By examining in some depth the current use of these forms by staff and students we wanted to be able to enquire into this important aspect of staff-student communication and identify areas of strength and of difficulty. Despite the recent increase in staff obtaining the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching and other professional development opportunities for reflection on teaching, in our experience it continues to be the case that many art and design tutors, whose roles include writing feedback, have very little training in, or practice of, writing. Furthermore written feedback has a relatively short history within 'art school' education and staff educated before the 1990s had rarely received written feedback themselves.

The aim of this project is to work towards ways of encouraging debates around good practice, using written assessment feedback as a tool for learning in ways that are perceived as valid, reliable and clear to all students. We set out with the belief that there is a need to better understand current practice in terms of *what* is being done as well as *why* in order to identify and provide effective and meaningful feedback.

Background

Eisner's (1985) theory of connoisseurship has been highly influential in the field. According to this view, assessors, like critics, develop connoisseurship with experience and hence are able to discriminate and make fine judgments. Although this might be an accurate description of what often happens, the theory begs the question of how one ensures the assessment feedback of 'connoisseurs' is dependable (Eça, 2002). Indeed emerging research into art and design assessment indicates that there is complexity and much misunderstanding (Cowdroy & Williams, 2007; McKillop, 2007) within the field. Recent assessment developments within art and design are responsive to learning outcomes rather than criteria and we believe that this shift may have led to some shifts of emphasis (for both staff and students) over whether the student's learning and effort on the one hand or the artwork produced and the process of producing it on the other is undergoing assessment (de la Harpe et al., 2009). This research allowed us to address this uncertainty directly.

It is clear that reception of assessment feedback is crucial to learning. Black and William (1998) found that students are more motivated to learn when they understand the meaning of the assessment criteria and when they have involvement in assessment themselves. Harlen and Deacon Crick (2002) also found that assessment that supports students' feelings of self-efficacy needs to emphasise subject learning and not marks or grades. Within art and design, Blaire's study (2006) of oral feedback during formative assessments also demonstrates that it would be wrong to assume that understanding of feedback is transparent or universal. Rust et al.'s (2003) work on the importance of students' engagement with assessment processes and Biggs' (1999) theory of constructive alignment also informs the research.

The Proposal and Research Questions

The research examined summative, written, assessment feedback in order to understand how it is used on BA Fine Art undergraduate courses. In particular, the research explored how this feedback is given, examining not just what is written but how it is read and understood. We confined our study to Fine Art, rather than a range of other subject areas, so as to ensure greater depth and coherence to our study as well the possibility for more meaningful comparative work, with the three Colleges being the key variable.

As a team of researchers and practitioners we conducted research into the assessment feedback in the three Colleges by mapping current activity across undergraduate courses and then focusing a more in-depth enquiry into a sample of fine art courses.

The key questions are:

- How is written, summative assessment feedback provided on fine art undergraduate courses at the three Colleges?
- In what ways do students understand this feedback?
- How might we work towards a more effective use of written feedback for all student constituencies?

Part 1: Results of analysis of forms

In part 1 a random sample of 94 feedback forms was analysed, in order to find out how they are being filled in and to inform the interview questions for part 2. There is a description of the methods used in Appendix 1. To help assure anonymity, the Colleges, which are the key variable, are coded but not named in the report. One college runs a fine art BA, the others run single discipline courses (sculpture, painting, drawing, photography, print and time-based media) and samples were taken from across these courses. Below are the findings from this part of the research.

1. Section 1 – Use of forms

1.1 Handwriting

- The majority (57%) of the forms were handwritten, although a significant number (34%) were typed, while 4.5% were a mixture of handwritten and typed.
- At Colleges A and B, it was essay feedback that often was typed, whereas practical/studio feedback was often handwritten.
- College C has significantly fewer entirely typed forms (a few were mixed typed and handwritten) compared to Colleges A and B.

1.2 Layout of forms

- At College A, in the sample obtained everyone had used the same form, although there was slight variation in how it was used (comments attached rather than in a box; some positioned the ticks in boxes to indicate mark and some did not, etc). College B employed 8 different forms, some with minor differences and others with significant differences. College C also used a variety of different forms.
- All forms were divided between space for written feedback and space or spaces for marks. Virtually all forms had the learning outcomes (LOs) on them, usually in an abbreviated form.
- At Colleges A and C, the LOs had a tick box or space for grade only. The majority of College B forms had space for comments against each of the LOs.
- Most forms had learning outcomes described either in full or as keywords.
- Most marked learning outcomes against 5 grading bands corresponding to final degree classifications. These grading bands were described on some forms as percentage bands (85-100%, 70-84%, 55-69%, 40-54%, 0-39%), some in degree class (1st, 2:1, 2:2, 3rd, Fail) and some in words ('excellent' or 'outstanding', 'very good', 'good', 'acceptable' or 'satisfactory' or 'pass' and 'not achieved' or 'fail'). College A forms all described the grade bands as percentages. College B used both percentage bands and words on most forms. College C used degree classification and words.

1.3 Word count

- The average length of the written feedback is 150 words.
- The length of written feedback varied significantly within each college as well as across them:

A	Avg: 151	High: 499	Low: 34
B	Avg: 198	High: 557	Low: 53
C	Avg: 101	High: 223	Low: 50

Table 1 – Word Count (n=94)

- The style of written feedback varied, from full sentences to notes and bullet points, which would account for some of the variance.

2. Section 2 – Content

2.1 Use of forms

- Most forms contain overall comments (78% of B; 97% of A; 83% of C).
- At College B a significant number (53%) have feedback against individual LOs, compared to 13% at College C and 13% at College A.
- At Colleges A and C ticks are sometimes 'visually' placed in a box, or between the dividing lines of boxes in a way that appears to reveal more detailed information about the level achieved. At College B each grade is usually divided into top, middle and bottom and ticks are placed according to level of achievement.

2.2 Use of Language

- It is rare to use 'I' (first person) and the majority are addressed directly to the recipient ('you'); although a significant number (38% College A; 22% College B and 13% from College C) use the third person (this may be in addition to other manners of address). At College A the language is more formal - the third person and passive are used most often and more frequently than at Colleges B and C.
- In the researchers' opinion, the vast majority of the language used was not confusing (53%) or was only slightly confusing (43%), with only 4% judged very confusing.

2.3 Praise and criticism

- Most of the feedback contained praise, with the majority a mixture of praise and criticism or praise followed by criticism. It is rare that a student would only be criticised (6% College A; 6% College B; 10% College C).
- The majority of feedback focused on the students' work for Colleges B and C, whereas for College A it is more equally divided between effort and work. Colleges B and C focused more on the work or mostly on the work with some mention of effort (College B 62%; College C 63%, College A 47%). Overall College A mentions effort more often (mostly work 9%; some effort 36%; mostly effort and some work 31%; equally divided 19%; effort only 3%).

NB: In making these judgements, consideration was given to what would be categorised as work and what as effort. Comments about the development of thinking and process have been categorised as work rather than effort. Effort was seen as related to productivity and levels of engagement.

2.4 Feedback on Essays

NB: Essay has been taken to mean any written submission.

- Overall the majority of forms analysed made no mention of essays. This may be because there was no written requirement for the unit being marked.
- Where essays were included they most often received separate feedback. The exception is College B where aggregated feedback did occur but sometimes in conjunction with separate feedback. At College B the essay and studio work are part of the same unit, whereas at

Colleges A and C the theory unit and studio practice are separate units (they run at the same time but are assessed separately).

2.5 Use of exemplars

- Some reports made use of exemplars. By this we mean pointing to the work of others to read/view/reflect upon.

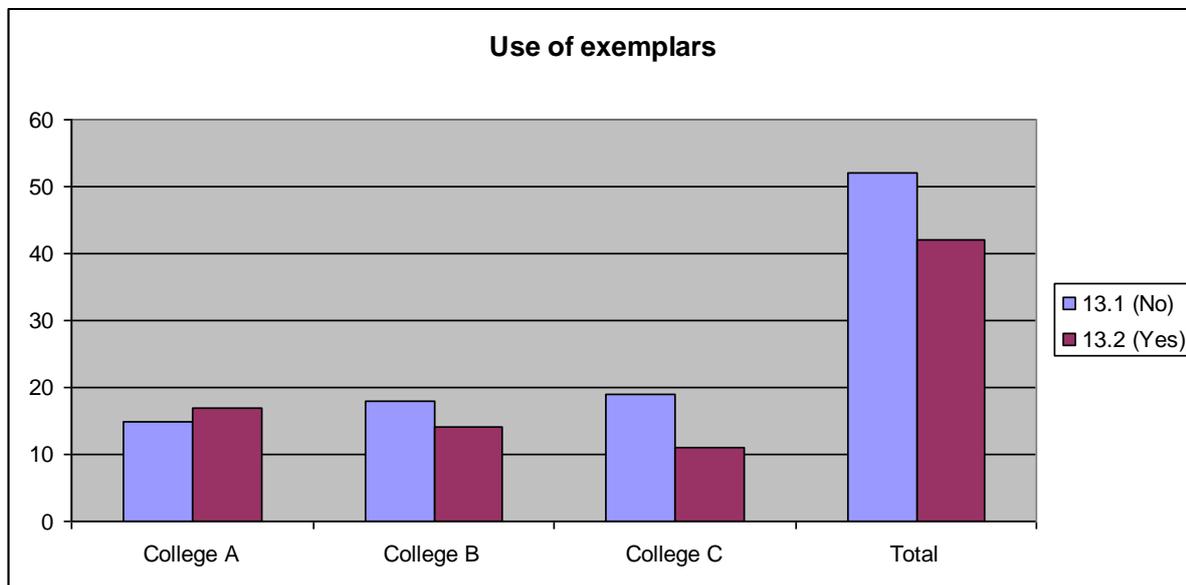


Figure 1 (n=94)

2.6 Suggestions for future directions

- Most feedback included some indication of areas for development of work and/or effort for the student. The majority of these comments were directed at the work.

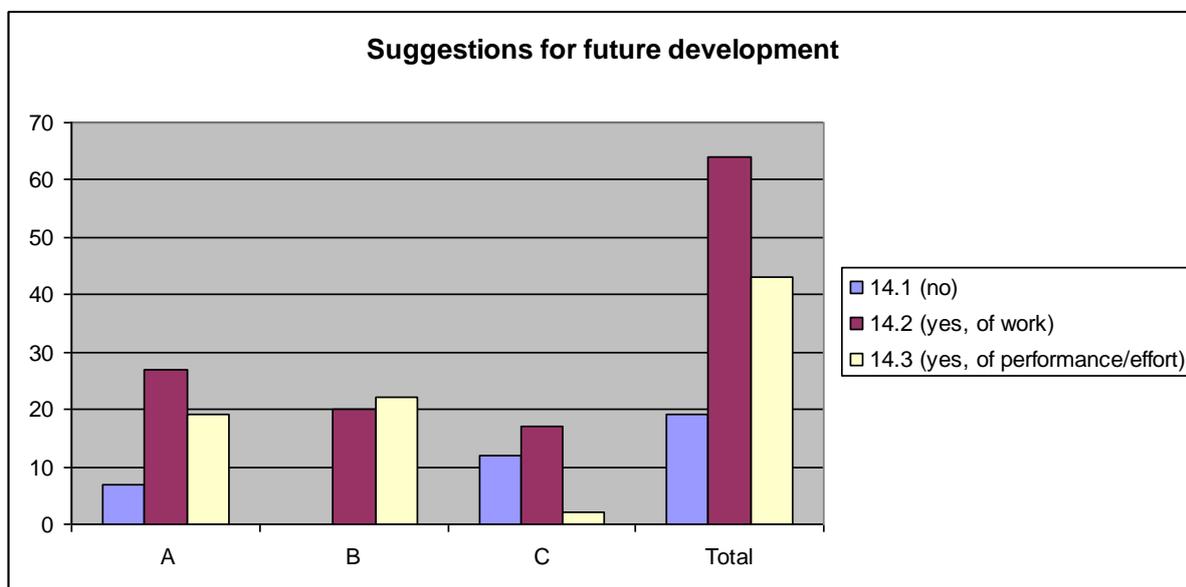


Figure 2 (n=94)

2.7 Validation of direction of the work

- Overall the direction is validated or validated with some criticism. It is rare for a student to be criticised without validation, or some validation of direction not to be included in the feedback.

2.8 Relationship between the marks and feedback

Overall the relationship between the mark and the feedback was clear or a little unclear. 11% were, in the opinion of the researchers, very unclear. In this 11% the researcher’s noting of a mismatch in the relationship between marks and comments, were for the following reasons:

- Good grades are matched by negative comments, or vice versa
- There was the possibility of mistakes, e.g. ticks in the wrong boxes
- Although not a computation, the mark is too high or low based on subsidiary marks
- There is a problem with the form not being explicit in what the mark means, for example where the tick is placed in relation to the mark on a numerical scale but there is no indication as to what this might mean, e.g. is a ‘5’ is the high or low mark?

2.9 Justification of the marks

Very rarely (10%) does the written report explicitly justify marks. If they are explicitly justified it’s usually because they have been capped for late or resubmission. On 47% of the forms the justification was implied rather than stated.

Are the marks justified?	A	B	C	Total
Yes	7	2	0	9
Implied	17	10	16	43
No	8	20	12	40
N/A			2	2

Table 2 – Justification of Marks (n=94)

2.10 Is it clear how the subsidiary marks relate to the overall mark?

- In the opinion of the researchers the majority (92%) are clear or only a little unclear, and 8% are very unclear.

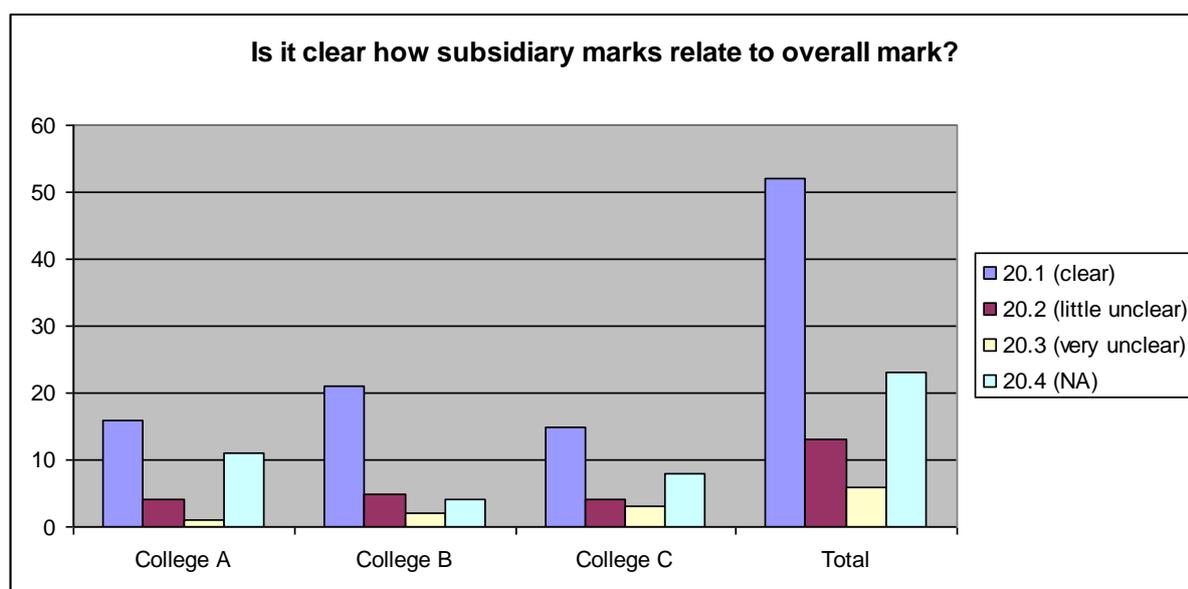


Figure 3 (n=94)

In the rare cases where it is unclear this may be due to a miscalculation – i.e. even allowing for LOs to have different weightings the final mark could not be achieved through the subsidiary marks.

2.11 Is it clear how the written comments relate to the overall mark?

- In the opinion of the researchers, the majority (90%) were either clear or a little unclear with 10% being very unclear.

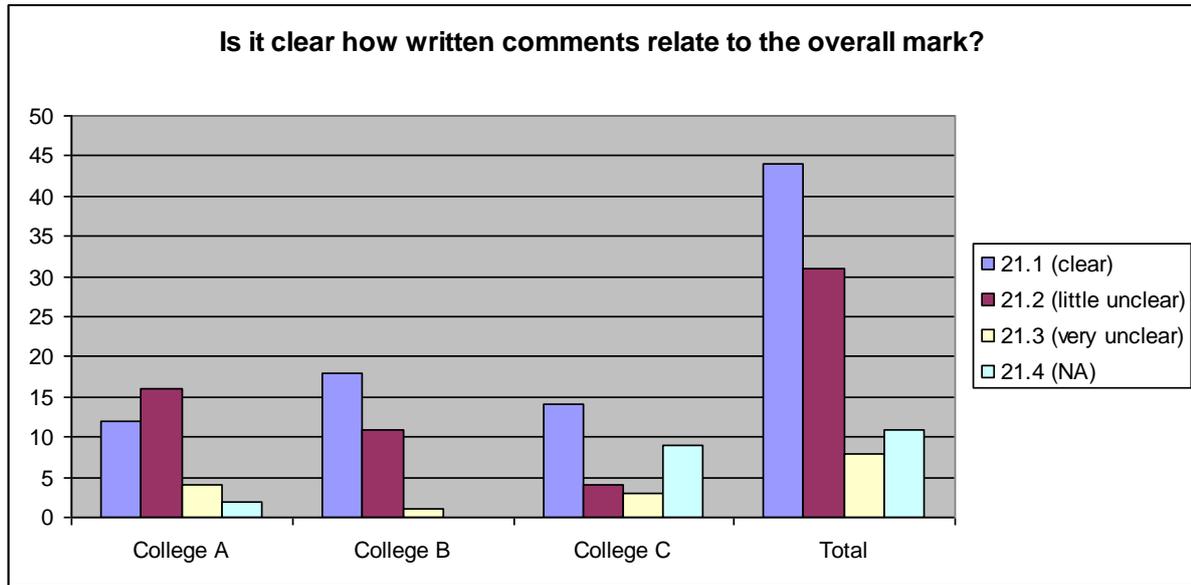


Figure 4 (n=94)

The 10% unclear included instances where, in the opinion of the researchers, the written comments led one to believe the student had achieved a mark (at least a grade) different to the one actually achieved. However it is expected that the written feedback is to some degree open to interpretation.

Part 2: Results of analysis of data from interviews

In Part 2, two tutors and six students were targeted for interviews at each College using purposive sampling. There is a description of the methods used in Appendix 1. To help assure anonymity, the participants are coded but not named in the report. Below are the findings from this part of the research. In reading these findings, it is necessary to bear in mind that all units do not have the same emphasis. For example, one that is on developing working methods concentrates less on the work made and more on student's progress (BT2), so it may be that the students we have interviewed will have received different types of feedback that reflect the unit rather than the overall course or teaching.

3. Role of assessment

3.1 Staff perception of the relation of written feedback to learning and teaching

There was a strong sense that assessment feedback was part of larger learning and teaching strategy, leading to the following beliefs:

- Staff reported that they consider that assessment needs to be 'constructive, as opposed to destructive' (BT2). Although one tutor acknowledged that sometimes written feedback was considered to be for institutional 'accountability' ('for the filing cabinet'), he concluded with the strongly held belief that they should ultimately be 'for the students' benefit' (BT1).

I don't want them to be feeling left that 'It's not worth carrying on'. It needs to be very constructive and supportive. So I'd say that with students that are not doing so well sometimes it just takes longer to pitch that to say that, to get that pitch correct for what you're trying to say. When I say pitch correct it's making it really clearly defined what they need to develop, not making it overly critical that would put them off developing, making sure it's critical enough that they know what they have to do but making it very positive as well. (CT2)

- Staff reported that the purpose of feedback is twofold; that is 1) to reflect on the student's progress and work to date but also 2) to make suggestions about how a student might progress.

[it is] both to directly say something about what has happened and so the students get a sense of what we see in their work as being successful and what we see as being less successful. And as part of that also stake out some sort of future direction... So that it kind of goes back to go forward'. (AT2)

- When the emphasis is not holistic, that is engaging with the student's overall development, assessment is seen negatively by staff. For example a tutor reported being depressed by the extent to which students are concerned with marks: '...students who want to improve performance rather than the work' (BT1) and 'We don't want them working for a mark, we want them working to make it work; good marks tend to follow' (BT2). Some students reported that they were performing primarily for the assessment. 'I guess I didn't do what I needed to do, to tick the boxes' (BS4). However this was not the norm. When 'assessing' clashed with 'teaching' it could be considered unnecessary:

I find it troubling that there needs to be such a great amount of specific marks and so frequently...I don't know that it has any benefit for the students. (BT1)

3.2 Overall assessment context

- Assessments are conducted in a variety of ways: in a group or individually, with the student, the work, or students and work.
- Prior to assessments by tutors, inductions, self-evaluation or self-assessment and peer assessments may take place. A self-evaluation or assessment in this context is when students fill out the same or similar form used by staff. This is the practice in Colleges A and B, where it is seen as helpful in familiarising students with procedures and Learning Outcomes (LOs) (BT2) (BS2). However the opportunity for preparation is not always taken up at College A, where induction sessions are optional:

There are decoding sessions but they're not done for the whole...you opt whether you want to do them or not and I don't believe many people do them at all, I haven't done them. (AS2)

One student felt that these self-assessments are not responded to adequately:

When we do have the tutorials the tutors don't go through what has been written, it's usually just left in the folder and we talk about something else...some people just fill out whatever comes into their heads, and nobody reads them and they go into the folder, so they don't really work...you sort of lose faith in them eventually. (BS5)

- Staff involved in curriculum design take care to develop a context for assessment and assessment feedback that they consider to be useful for teaching and learning. Staff reported that they view written feedback as only one part of a greater assessment context. On its own it was considered 'not that important' (BT2). On the other hand, they did acknowledge its value in helping to sum up and give clarity to conversations. One College A tutor suggested that students had more chance of parity of experience with the feedback being more formalised at summative assessment, 'they follow the same kind of format for everyone [one bullet point per LO]. And it happens at the same time...' (AT2).

4. How assessment takes place

4.1 How it is written

- Staff reported that they discuss studio marks amongst themselves (often in pairs) but tend to write feedback alone (BT2).

Say there's two of us doing an assessment, we will share out the written feedback but we will check the others' because we will then sign off. So we will check with each other. We take notes when we are marking, so what we will do is we will have all the forms printed out with the students, and then we will take notes as we are marking. We will come together and discuss the assessment, make further notes in discussion with each other and then we will decide who we're going to write up. (CT2)

It is seen as important for fairness to never leave the assessment process entirely to an individual, 'because the academic tutor over time develops protective feelings for their tutees and when it comes to assessment this is not helpful' (CT1).

- Although written alone the feedback will reflect the discussion held by staff.

We talk together. The two of us will be in the room, the student will come in, we will both ask questions of the student. I will normally do the typing while the studio staff leads the discussion and then when the student leaves we can discuss what's on the form, what needs to go on, what needs to be changed and then we will go through each of the outcomes individually. So yeah, it's very much a discussion. (AT1)

- Essay marking and feedback is usually done by one tutor:

The written feedback is initially written while I'm reading the essay and after I've read the essay. (AT1)

The three Colleges have different practices in relation to feedback on essays, for example at College A the tutor who marked the essay is often present for the studio assessment and in College B it is sometimes the same tutor who marks both the essay and studio submission. Also in Colleges A and C studio and essay (sometimes termed 'theory') were assessed as separate units whilst in College B they are part of the same unit.

- Usually staff don't write feedback for a student that they haven't taught before (BT1) (BT2) (AT1), even though sometimes they were not known very well to the tutor. A tutor reported that 'It's easier [to write the report] when you do know somebody' (AT2).
- Some reports were handwritten because 'we should really have them all typed up but we just don't, it can't happen quickly enough' (BT2). The two tutors interviewed at College A typed their reports, one as a matter of course, the other because she considered her handwriting was poor:

I type it then we can change it in the discussion, and then I give all the forms to the studio staff who is then able to review all the forms and change it where they see fit. So there's still space for changing and editing but I try my best to type it up as it will appear because it's so easy to change. (AT1)

Because of this 'holistic' attitude which views assessment as part of teaching, most written reports are set within a context of oral exchange (tutorial and group feedback) and reports are rarely written to 'stand alone'. Although the writing does include comments you could understand without knowledge of these previous exchanges, a tutor comments: '*I don't spell it out*' (i.e. it is written as a short hand) (BT2) and students see it as a '*summary*' of a tutorial (BS5).

4.2 How feedback is given – oral and written

- Written assessments were almost always given in the context of personal (usually tutorial) exchange; when given instead of, it was seen as 'bad practice' (BT1). Without a tutorial to contextualise, written feedback is problematic:

I just got the essay back and what was written didn't make much sense at all. I didn't know what I had done wrong and what I should have done better (BS5).

Misunderstandings appear to arise when there is a lack of dialogue between staff and students (e.g. if a tutor has no time or students fail to engage).

- The different Colleges and courses adopt various feedback practices. In College A the written feedback was read to students before being given to them and they had opportunities to ask questions about it. At College B, one course gave the student a copy of the report to take away with them, whilst the other gave it to them to read and then returned it to their files in the office. At College C the students are read their feedback in the tutorial, then it is discussed and later a copy is given to them to take away.
- Staff and students at all three colleges believe a 'follow up' tutorial or combining the written with oral feedback is important for a full understanding. Tutors believe in the importance of using both strategies:

They're together. Because we give verbal feedback with the written feedback. We read out the written feedback and then interpret further what that means to make it clear that that's understood. (CT2)

I have regular tutorials with them and there's always a kind of evaluative aspect to those tutorials... if more [feedback] was needed I would then be approachable for further discussion (AT2)

- Students are equally clear that a follow up tutorial gives an opportunity to check understanding and offer additional discussion:

My tutor talked me through it and it made it even clearer. (BS4)

Like I say because it was gone through with us with the tutors if there was anything that I didn't understand they would explain it to me. (CS4)

- Follow up tutorials can also offer a solution if the student might have been upset or is sensitive:

I might actually seek that student out the week after and say: 'I think we ought to talk a bit more about your assessment'.... (AT2)

- Follow up tutorials for essay feedback are not as prevalent as studio tutorials and happen differently across the colleges. In College A and occasionally in College B the essay feedback tutorial is a one to one and takes place in the studio and focuses on the relationship of the theory to practice.
- The oral exchange often 'fleshes out' the written feedback.

... in the written report it mainly says development in these areas is required but it doesn't necessarily say what you need to do to develop them. But in the verbal [oral] one it was probably more helpful in terms of that.... (AS4)

- Although written and oral feedback are meant to be understood in conjunction with each other, there was a recognition that what is written can have a greater impact.

It was surprising for me to have it in words what I already knew I was not doing. It was surprising to see written down what I'd maybe missed out. It hit home really a bit. (CS3)

[I] make sure that I read it myself and question how I would feel if I was going to read that because it's very different having written feedback as opposed to verbal feedback. Because they should be the same but when someone gets it written down - especially if they've got a mark that they're not very pleased with - they will read and re-read between the lines so you need to be very careful about what you're clear about, what it is you are saying and find the most succinct way to say that. (CT2)

For some students written and oral are 'both equally important' but they 'enjoy oral more' (BS3).

5. Purpose

5.1 What do students want from the written report?

- Students hope that the writing provides an objective evaluation. One student 'needs to know how the [work] is being seen by tutors' (BS1) and another reported: 'I know the direction of my work, what I don't know is how the work is seen within this curriculum and this institution' (BS2).
- Students seem clear about what they want and appreciate the need for feedback, even if it were critical.

I wanted to have a harsh critique on my work and enable me to improve. I want to leave with more ideas and a keen sense of what I'm going to do next. (BS3)

Somebody who tells me my work is good doesn't help me as much.....I'm not getting enough critical feedback over my work. (BS5).

It was good to hear it from them because it gave me a kick to do something about the problems. (CS4)

However one student expressed a view that that staff are reluctant to be critical of students because they are 'fee-paying customers' who may leave.

- Students considered that the writing can provide an 'anchor' when a student feels 'lost' (BS1); it is there as a 'reference' you can return to (BS3); 'It is good to refer to' (BS4).

I think it will be useful. Because like I say I didn't take any notes in the verbal [oral] tutorial there are some points in there that I can refer back to and I think that it is useful. (AS4)

I have gone back to it once or twice just to refresh what the feedback wasI do sometimes go back to my marks to see what I might try and improve next time. (AS5)

- Students understood that one function of feedback was to inform them about and validate the overall direction of their developing practice. Their direction is 'clarified' by it (AS4,

AS6), and it is used for 'reassurance' (BS1) or '...reaffirming what had been said before and encouraging' (AS3).

- At its best it affirms the student as a self-directed individual:

It has made me stop and it has also made me realise that you have to listen and take things in but also you have to make your own decisions...It actually makes you think very carefully about what it is you're going to take on board and what you're not. (CS2)

Students appreciated when staff were not over prescriptive:

They weren't trying to push me into doing something I didn't want to do; it was more a sort of support and nurturing of my practice rather than trying to steer my practice somewhere else. (CS4)

However, they found it problematic when they were:

If my tutor wants me to make a specific piece of work I should probably do that and then I might do better, which is quite bad but I'm doing it. (BS4)

- The written report is also usefully used to indicate possibilities for the future:

...they might throw something in the pot that you might think... and that might inform it... (CS1)

...when they're coming up with things I hadn't thought of, that's when they're useful. AS2)

Students reported that it has an important influence on their future work and direction.

When I get the assessment feedback I'll go through and think: 'Right I need to do a bit more on this and a bit more on this. (CS5)

5.2 What use do students get from the written report?

- Students sometimes share their written feedback with others. It appears the impact of written feedback might be longer lasting, in part because of this:

Well it's firstly read out to me in the form of the teacher reading out to me in the assessment feedback. So it's different from just reading it yourself so it's good, it just enhances what's being said and they can go through specific aspects with you as well. And I of course read it myself again and during the term if I'm having any doubts or if I want to go back to it I can read again and look at the points that they've suggested. (CS2)

They read it to methen I read it once after on the train. And then I think I show it to my parents when I'm at home, but I don't read it to them, they read it so that's another person. (CS1)

Because we get marks so everyone knows about each other's marks in an informal way so it's a way of gauging who's doing well and who's doing not, I guess. (AS2)

- Staff and students considered that it is important to have a written record because when students receive oral feedback they may not take it in due to their emotional state:

You know which if you just hear it and you don't take it in the same way, you've got your anxieties and all of that. (AS1)

- However a minority of the students interviewed claimed written reports are not very useful at all.

Half disregard it. Do you know? Look at it, go, 'Oh yeah, that's what you think'. It doesn't have much meaning to me I have to say. (AS1)

So in that sense it's good to know that I'm on track but that I don't need to keep referring to them to know what I need to do. (AS2)

6. Form's layout

- Staff reported that the form's visual aspect (e.g. orientation and spacing) is very important to students' understanding (BT2). College B has produced a form with 'little prompts' (BT2) on the reverse side to help students when using the form, these prompts pose questions which relate to the LOs (BT2). At College B grades are divided into three boxes so a student's achievement within the grade (high, middle or low) is apparent. In Colleges A and C marks were sometimes positioned within the boxes 'visually' and so the level achieved was sometimes ambiguous.

And when I hand them back I also talk about what it means when something is on the boundary and how easily it could perhaps be in the other category both ways. (AT2)

- Some students were critical of the layout of the forms:

The [boxes on the] forms are so small - how much can you write in them? It's difficult. (BS5)

- Some students reported that they find the practice of shortening the LOs to sub-headings (e.g. 'concepts and debates') on the report form difficult to understand (BS3).

7. Marks/Marking

7.1 UAL's marking

- One tutor (BT2) remarked upon UAL's 'extraordinary banding' where 85% is bottom of 1st unlike many other undergraduate courses where 70% is a first. This was also noticed by a student at College C:

But also other universities I think the boundaries are higher or something. Because I was talking to my friends who are doing dissertations now – they're the same age as me but they didn't do Foundation and they're in third year but at universities across the country.

And I'd be like 'I got this mark.' and they'd say 'Oh brilliant that's that?' And I'd be like, 'Oh no it's not,' and they'd be like 'Why?' And I'd be like 'I think our boundaries must be set differently'. It's probably art isn't it? I don't know. (CS1)

7.2 Subjectivity

- Some staff expressed an awareness of the subjectivity of marking:

Perhaps I would write something different next year about the same student, the same work, because I will be in a different place. (BS1)

However for the most part staff appeared to have come to terms with its subjective nature. It is perhaps pertinent that BS1 who is quoted above was new to teaching. Researchers found that in Colleges B and C summative assessment was considered subjective by students.

- Some staff considered that how well they knew the student had no effect on the mark awarded.

I wouldn't want to think there was, no...The first time I mark their essay I don't know them at all. The chances are I've never met them, no idea what they look like, don't know anything about them. (AT1)

- However for some this was qualified:

I think it depends on the kind of assessment situation, for example if the student is present, it's not just their work, they're there presenting it and talking about it. I think if you were doing a different kind of system where you're just looking at the work and so all you are feeding back on is what you saw in front of you then maybe that's a different dynamic. (AT2)

All the same, this research found there was a difference in receiving feedback between when a student was little known and where a relationship had been established.

I think I focused on the feedback because I think you have this relationship with your tutor that they know your practice but this gives them a chance to elaborate on that in certain aspects, so I think I listen to the feedback more. (AS6)

Some students considered that when the marker did not know them then the feedback was as a consequence less meaningful, or it might result in a different outcome:

The only problem I've had and probably the rest of my seminar group has is that we've had three different tutors across the year. So that's not anyone's fault so maybe my review was not quite as - I don't know if the tutors knew my work quite as well and so I think it's harder to get across...I think if I had the same one throughout it would be easier for me to communicate my ideas and maybe that would result in a slightly better outcome for my assessment. (AS5)

7.3 How marks are agreed

- Marks are usually agreed between staff 'holistically' and the weightings of LOs are flexible to reflect students' overall achievement. Students know that the marks are agreed rather than assigned by an individual tutor. *'It's not a calculation it's a decision'* (AT1).
- Staff use LOs to help calculate their marks (see 8.2 below).

7.4 Fairness and unfairness

- Students and staff feel strongly that assessment and feedback have to be fair.

You have to really focus on fairness and equality and try to be very kind of like be very aware of how you're seeing situations. (CT2)

- The majority of students believe it to be fair and accurate: *'...can relate to it and agree with..'* (BS1); *'I saw many points that I agreed with'* (BS2); *'...very clear and everything was true...'* (BS3); *'And I think they largely get it right. Or what I understand to be right. Yeah I do. I think they are fair'* (AS1); *'I think the feedback was actually pretty accurate'* (AS2).
- However there was a minority view reported that that the marks awarded were not always fair.

It was in particular, there was a lot of discussion – this isn't so much about the feedback - because we felt that the assessments weren't all, there was no parity. And it depended on which group of tutors you got what, what you were getting...I think there was a general feeling of disquiet amongst a few people about the fact that and there was a lot of commenting amongst students about – even students that felt that they had been favourably treated were sort of saying, 'It's a bit odd'. And I think it's let itself down in that sense, that everybody wasn't if you like – what a cliché – singing from the same hymn sheet. You know if everyone's not applying it in the same way it sort of destroys it, people lose confidence in it. That's it really. (CS2)

- Although Part 1 of this research indicated huge differences in word count across colleges and across courses, tutors commented *'I try and write the same amount for each student'* (BT1) **add quote from Katrine here** for the sake of parity.
- Perception of fairness was enhanced if the student had built up a relationship with the tutor and tutors felt they could be critical without students feeling singled out or unfairly treated, even though it may be hard to take:

I would be very careful not to do that...their feedback and responses may be different but I've never felt I've given a student reason to feel that way. Even when they cry they seem to think it's okay and fair. (AT1)

7.5 Understanding of mark

- At College B students interviewed often reported they did not fully understand their own marks. BS2 thought he had failed (he had 55%; failure is below 40%) and BS1 had ticks in the wrong boxes to achieve the final mark but didn't realise. BS3 didn't register which

degree classification he was achieving but had a 'sort of idea' and BS4 'guessed it was a third' (it was a middle 2:2). However it may be that this is partially by design as a tutor said that they do not explain banding in terms of degree classification until the third year (BT2).

- Use of marks against LOs helped students to be clear about what was being marked.

I probably find those a little bit more – it's maybe a bit of a A-level way of looking at it [marks against LOs] but I quite like looking at where I've come in the percentage bars. Because then if it's good if it has a short sharp statement of what 'this is what they're marking on'. It's easier then to know 'I need to improve on that section'. So that's very useful. (AS5)

7.6 How mark are received

- Students try not to react too much to their mark and reported that they value other things (e.g. progress, contentment) over their mark.

Of course it would be great to have a really good mark; that's like a boost to your self esteem...[but] the most important thing is just for me to progress and be able to work happily. (BS3)

They want to use assessment to bolster their '...more personal wanting to improve rather than [dissatisfaction with grade]' (BS1).

- All the same, when students talked about marks or grades, it was clear they pay a lot of attention to them:

[the mark was] *the thing that...I was most bothered about. (BS4)*

Obviously if you're slacking and you get a bad mark it would affect you, or it would affect me personally. (CS1)

I am always really interested to see what my mark is. It helps you to place yourself on a more quantitative kind of scale I guess. (AS3)

- Marks can create a desire to improve:

I think they marked me a bit higher than what I was expecting, I guess... I've been thinking a lot. I've got loads more to do. It wasn't that I feel I didn't deserve it, it wasn't like that but that I've got a lot more to improve on so like I normally look at the ones I'm doing lower as in what I can improve on. (CS2)

- Some students make no 'direct comparisons' (BS4) with others' marking because of the huge differences in work and ways of working. Some however use them as a way of gauging how they are doing in comparison generally:

Because we get marks so everyone knows about each others' marks in an informal way so it's a way of gauging who's doing well and who's doing not I guess. (AS2)

- Overall, students at College A reported no surprises in their feedback or marks. This was partly down to having had regular tutorials or because they were self aware. However, their keenness to find out their grades may indicate that in previous tutorials and encounters with their tutors they have not understood how well the tutors think they have done.

Yeah, I mean last time I was told it was pretty harsh and then I found out my grades and thought it wasn't very harsh. I suppose I'm probably quite in tune with what I need to try and improve. So really it's more interesting to see where I'm coming grade wise. (AS5)

7.7 Relationship of comments to mark

- In general '...when they stop to think' (BS2) students are more interested in comments than marks. They believe that marks only 'make sense' with comments (BS3). 'I think they [other students] are more interested in what's written actually, no one really seemed that bothered about their mark' (BS4), although she added that she thought they would mind were the mark to go towards the final degree.

I think the comments give you more to go on. (BS5)

Written comments are most helpful and you get more from them than the mark because art in general is so subjective. I don't know, just the written information is a lot more informative than the mark. (CS1)

I think the more important would be the comments and the recommendations. You get a bit more of a longer story where you can pinpoint different things. Whereas the grades it's got too much certainty to it, there's not enough encouragement in a grade, even if it's a hundred percent. (CS4)

- Getting the balance of positive and critical comments in relation to the mark is a challenge:

But I think that if you just read the comments purely you may not always be able to work out exactly the mark is what I'm saying. Because they are specific for that student's ability or where you think they might be able to go if they just did more. (AT2)

There is always seen to be room for improvement even if the mark is high, which may result in negative sounding comments in relation to a high mark:

I think that a student who is doing very well I would not write 'Excellent, excellent, excellent, excellent'. I would probably say, 'This is good but more effort here could make it even better'. So maybe it sounds quite negative in relation to the mark... (AT2)

It is also possible to write positive or overly positive comments in relation to a low mark:

If there's someone with a very low mark I would try to, in the comments, pick up on the more positive aspects so [the reverse may be true], but also being very clear about why the mark is low and how it can be improved. (AT2)

8. Language

8.1 Approaches to language use

- Tutors reported taking a lot of trouble to write the feedback clearly, so that it could be understood.

...you need to be very careful about what you're clear about what it is you are saying and find the most succinct way to say that. (CS2)

- Some tutors believe in writing tailored to the individual student; language might be 'readable' or more 'complex' dependent on the student (BT1).

.... sometimes the student may be more aware of a broader range of critical references - in which case you can talk to them using more technical language. Other times that has to be much more kind of colloquial and based around things I think that the student would recognise. (AT1)

Some staff reported that adjustments may be made for students for whom English is not their first language. One tutor said: 'I find I have to try and listen to them to try and get a sense of what level I think their English is at' (AT1). However another reported: 'I try and use simpler language. But I think sometimes I'm not so conscious when I write because I think then that they can look it up' (AT2). Another tutor resisted 'dumbing down':

You need quite an amount of English to do the course, the writing scheme. I do find myself crossing out words I use and writing it differently, but that's pretty rare – I don't really like to do that, I'd rather explain what I said if they don't fully grasp it or get them to go away, read it and then come back; I'd rather not change the way I write things, if anything - it's an appropriate level and you give feedback at degree level, and I don't think you should taper that to an individual. (BT2)

- At College B they are very careful to use correct adjectives and vocabulary, so that 'excellent', 'very good', 'good' etc. are only used when achieving the grade these words describes (BT2).
- One student perceived an inconsistency in staff's use of language and how they encourage students to write:

We're all encouraged to use good terminology through the course but the actual feedback I've been given has been very easy to understand, and very colloquial. (AS5)

8.2 Anxiety about language/writing

- Writing is not 'an area of expertise' and can be 'an anxiety' (BT1) for some studio tutors. One reported that the time allotted to undertaking assessment makes it difficult to achieve: 'some staff find it really difficult to write at the pace that I think you have to do it' (BT2). It was reported that experience makes writing feedback easier and less of a cause of anxiety:

I find it easy because of the many years of experience I have of reading students' work both at [College A] and at [two other colleges]. So it becomes much easier with experience. And obviously you become much more familiar with learning outcomes and with the expectations of the course and the relevance of it and so on. You can identify what important things need to be addressed. (AT1)

- There was a concern reported by tutors that writing can seem harsher ('negative or aggressive') than personal exchange, where in fact you can be 'tougher' (BT1) and can say things at a tutorial that 'you wouldn't in writing' (BT2). There are difficulties of articulation: 'can't use body language or rapport' (BT1); 'I think everything that's written down you need to be very careful' (CT2). Some of this stems from the sense of permanency of writing:

Because you can sort of imagine someone obsessing about it and going over and over a sentence and sort of 'Oh, why did she write that?' So I felt quite anxious about writing them' (AT2).

8.3 Tone

- In general, the tone of writing was reported by tutors and students as being quite 'informal' (BS1). '...pretty straightforward, were friendly, easy to understand' (AS5). 'It was more like guidelines, it wasn't massively formal' (AS3); 'colloquial' (AS5); 'quite considered and articulate' (AS6).
- College A and C tutors reported that the tone of language used was tailored to the individual student. One from College A explained that was especially true if the student is perceived as being sensitive:

And also it depends a little bit on the student. If I know a student is fragile, has had a tough time in other ways, especially in that quite, in that quite sort of overwhelming situation I would perhaps be diplomatic in how I'd say it. (AT2)

This might also work conversely, adopting a different tone or approach if a student is perceived as resistant to criticism:

So if it is someone who's being very cocky or who's being, I don't know, unreceptive perhaps to criticism I would try and to raise that in a different way. (AT2)

8.4 Clarity

- Virtually all students reported that they understood the written feedback they received for their studio work. The language was 'understandable' (BS5); 'everything was understood' (CS3); 'It's quite clear the issues that they've outlined. There's nothing that I don't really understand' (CS4). 'It's fine, it's adult, understandable' (CS6). 'Language used is fine, like a lot of the language used is referring to things I've talked about in my essay or things I'm familiar with' (AS4).
- Some students and staff found the language of learning outcomes 'a bit impenetrable-ish' (AS1):

I guess the language [of LOs] can be sometimes a bit abstract and obscure considering it's for an art course, stuff like 'Evaluate the relevance of your supporting research to your studio practice' is a hard thing to quantify....That's the kind of language which is a bit ridiculous I think. In terms of it can become so abstract and you kind of repeat the same thing from a slightly different angle at slightly different times....And I think: that's why you get a load of ridiculous jargon that doesn't really apply. (AS2)

So you have to look at 'clarify a conception, realisation and critical analysis of your art works'. And you've got to then think 'What do they mean?' And kind of unpack it. (AS1)

9. Content

9.1 Need for unique feedback

- It was reported by staff that reports need to be perceived as individual and unique, as sometimes when students compare reports and find they are very similar they are consequently 'disappointed' (BS5). This was corroborated by students at College C who reported being dissatisfied because with feedback for critical practice:

The critical practice feedback was brief, it seemed a little bit generic – sort of like that's the sentence that everyone got - it didn't really feel very individual. (CS6)

9.2 Level of detail/length

- Tutors reported that they tend to write feedback in greater detail when a student is not achieving to a high standard: 'Tend to write more when someone has failed' (BT2), because of the need to be very clear. Tutors reported that although they were not always conscious of writing more for lower achieving students, they did feel they needed to explain fully why the mark was low (AT2). It was reported by two tutors that it was more difficult to write at length about those students awarded high marks: 'If I can't find fault with it or think of ways to improve it, it's very difficult to write anything about it that isn't descriptive' (AT1); whereas 'Stronger students you can be more critical of' (BT1).
- Students reported that they want feedback that contains as much detail as possible and can include recommendations of what they might need to do. An exchange at College C demonstrates this:

The studio feedback was really good, really good, really good. That was fine, that was in depth, and the positive and negative, it was clearly written. A lot better.

So it was better because they told you more?

Yeah. They basically gave me more information to work on. And I think coincidentally that's what across the board I think students do better in studio practice than they do in critical practice and I think that might be a reason for it. That you get more in depth information to get better results. (CS3)

- Some students reported that for them the written report did not contain enough detail to be useful (see How it is written section 2.1 above). The section on the form marked 'future action' was too vague: 'It would have been useful to have some references to specific texts...or artists' (BS1) and 'I'd like to get more specific details...specifically what I could do better, what I am doing well' (BS5). Students identified a problem of length and considered that if the feedback is too short (in this case three lines), 'It doesn't help; I'm just left in this oblivion over what was being done (BS5).

Maybe it's good if it's brief, maybe I don't need to improve that much, but maybe in my case the tutors didn't know enough [about the student]. (AS5)

- Students reported that they would like all the spaces and sections of the report form to have been filled in, particularly if tutors were asking the student to do this on their self-assessment:

The [report] I get from the tutors rarely ever goes through most of the things discussed on the side [the learning outcomes]...It would make more sense to fill in all parts of the form, because why am I otherwise filling out forms? [in my self assessment]. (BS5)

- Staff and students considered that it is important to have a written record because when students receive the feedback they may not take it in due to their emotional state:

'You know which if you just hear it and you don't take it in the same way, you've got your anxieties and all of that' (AS1).

9.3 What is commented on or emphasised

- Tutors reported that they prefer to temper criticism with praise:

What we see in their work as being successful and what we see as being less successful. (AT2)

However there *'are always criticisms to be made'* (BT1); it is *'important you have both criticism and praise – particularly where someone has failed'* (BT2). *'But I think I always try and phrase things in a positive way so that even if there are problems I would perhaps try to focus on the potential'* (AT2). *'Well, generally I will try and make sure there is some praise'* (AT1).

- One tutor reported having a belief that the feedback should emphasise raising the bar:

I'll always challenge. Even the highest scoring students – well firstly I limit how high I will score them and secondly I will always find space for criticism. So yes, it will always be a challenge. (AT1)

- Tutors' comments are most often written in relation to the unit's learning outcomes and thus deal principally with the students' work, where there is evidence of students' learning; indeed staff and students reported that they were keen that the written report should respond to 'the work' - *'I'm really keen to focus the attention on the work'* (BT1).

Where a learning outcome is directly about the body of work and how something is evidenced in the work then it would be about the work. Sometimes it would be, if it's more on the studentship side of their engagement, then it would be that. (AT2)

- However reports also comment on the student's effort and 'studentship'.

... you can have a student who's fantastic – has fantastic studentship - but their work is not going so well at the time and the form can reflect that. (AT2)

- Tutors reported that they considered it to be important to recognise the level of engagement as well as outcomes:

If a piece of work is clearly well researched, if the student has spent a lot of time thinking about reading around the area, I will make comment that this is a well-researched piece of work, that there's a sort of commitment and engagement despite the fact that there may be problems with the way the essay was written. (AT1)

9.4 Relationship between practical and written elements

- In College B essays were marked within the unit, in Colleges A and C there were separate units. One member of staff at College B felt their way had some advantages and there was a suggestion that it was good practice to feedback holistically about writing/essay and practical work *'[it is] a positive thing, writing about their practical work when I was giving feedback about their essay'* (BT2). However some staff felt that writing required different skills and was best served with independent feedback. In College A some staff and students commented on the difficulty of recognising and teasing apart the theory and practice units,

... as that's what's being asked of both us and the students as things to identify, obviously those are the terms that they need to be described in. (AT1)

- Some students distinguished between the quality of the feedback they received for their studio work and that they received for their essay. In College C some students considered their critical practice (theory) feedback not as good as their studio feedback. Generally it was felt that essay feedback required a great level of detail to fully inform the students about how to improve. Two students in Colleges B and C commented on the need for follow up tutorials that deal with the student's written submissions. In College C students reported that essay feedback was too brief, failed to include formative recommendations about what they needed to do to improve and was in language they found difficult to understand:

My critical practice – because we had two, studio and critical practice and that [the latter] was very brief, like one line. (CS1)

The critical practice. Yeah it can be a little bit hard to understand sometimes and I don't think I want to understand it when I know that ten of my friends have the same sentence...critical practice is flowery language and I understand that is how they have to be and how they have to work but in the same respect not everyone can understand it as clearly and they don't have tutorials to go through it verbally [orally]. (CS5)

One of my close friends lives with me...hers was more critical practice that she got worse on...she ripped it in half actually and it was on the kitchen sink - well next to it - and we were piecing it together, trying to read it. (CS1)

However in college A the essay is marked separately, and generally receives detailed written and oral feedback:

I think all the comments are very sort of fair comments about my work and very helpful in regards to further development for the thesis... these are just essays that are probably gonna be used to develop further ideas for a thesis because next term the proposals need to be in for that. (AS4)

- In College A the feedback directly addresses the relation of theory to practice. A theory tutor interviewed reported: *'I don't expect them to be academics, so I just want them to be accountable for what they're doing and I try and make that very clear'* (AT1).

10. Learning Outcomes

10.1 Staff and students' understanding of learning outcomes

- Some tutors reported that they are unsure how to understand LOs. BT1 described them as *'blurred or unclear'* and suggested that learning is a complex procedure that cannot easily be divided into sections. There was also a view that learning and art-making requires lateral thinking:

Kicking against things is quite natural and is discouraged by the language of learning outcomes. (BT1)

- There is a perceived problem with writing feedback on the LOs when they do not adequately address the student or work, as evaluating against learning outcomes *'in a meaningful way in relation to everybody's practice is not always that easy'* (AT2).

So really my problem is maybe the whole idea of learning outcomes in Fine Art or in education in general. Although the ones we have are as good as any I have seen, there's still something about that that is slightly restrictive and something that students get very anxious about it as well, and that they have to be written to be able to be loose also makes them quite hard to understand...The fact that they should be able to fit anyone actually means they fit no-one. And everyone thinks that 'Oh I'm not doing very well, because this learning outcome doesn't seem to apply to me'. But I think we've done a good job with the ones that we have. I've seen some much worse ones. (AT2)

- Some students also hold the view that learning is more complex than LOs suggest. BS2 was *'sceptical'* of LOs as *'not easily distinguishable or marked'*; they are a *'puzzle'*, *'whimsical'* and he comments, *'who is to say I don't have it or I ever had it...I could learn many, many things'*. Moreover students reported that they find LOs are difficult to apply to themselves (in self assessments):

I don't think that someone's work can apply to those different boxes so neatly....but when a tutor does it, it makes sense. (BS3)

I think quite often they sound quite similar to each other and I find it quite difficult to differentiate between them, sometimes. (AS4)

It can be very difficult to see 'why do I put this in this box and that in that box' and make arbitrary decisions. (AS1)

- Some students reported that they sometimes find LOs unintelligible. They considered that the concepts of LOs were too broad to be understandable.

'Concepts and debates' it is such a large topic.....what does it actually mean? (BS5)

I know something about self-directed studying, research and independent work and something like that. But I did look at them and think to myself: 'I'm not really too sure that those boxes really...' They seemed a bit contradictory actually. (CS2)

- Students appear not to know the LOs but to have 'absorbed' them. Although 'no one actually sits down before an assessment and reads the LOs', students' use of them in their self-assessment means that they have thought about them in some depth (BS1):

'Do I read the handbook? No' (BS3).

- In College A there was a perception that it may be difficult for students to have to decode and interpret two sets of LOs (theory and practice) in one assessment (the two units are assessed simultaneously but separately). It was felt one set of LOs would bring the theory and practice more closely together and add clarity for the student (AT1).

10.2 Use of learning Outcomes

- Tutors reported that they considered forms containing learning outcomes and marking criteria were on principle helpful in making assessment feedback transparent and effective. Tutors may have a sense of the level of a student's achievement but the LOs facilitate discussion about why they get the mark. This can be adjusted during this conversation (BT2) and there is a defensible logic:

If you have give marks then it has to be based on criteria. (BT2)

When the unitised system came in I thought: 'Oh no, more paperwork'. But actually I think it's very good and I think that it's another way of being very clear about what you're perceiving, it's another way of looking at the situation, it adds. (CT2)

Even though I may have to interpret the language to the students, I would say that it's a very good process; I think the tick box method actually, I mean quite often when we're discussing a student we'll go: 'Right, let's do the tick boxes and see what comes up'. And as soon as you do the tick boxes it answers your queries. (CT2)

I'd need to make sure I'm making clear why it's being marked as a bad essay, why it's been identified as weak. But those things can be stated quite clearly in terms of...learning outcomes... (AT1)

- Tutors reported that LOs allowed understanding and learning to be evaluated, rather than just the final product or artwork:

The mark comes out of the learning outcomes quite directly because I think that if you have to give marks then it has to be based on the criteria and that's really the way you look at it. The comments I think have a looser relationship to that. A good example would be in the last lot that I've marked there were two students who had both made, not particularly meaningful abstract pictures, but one of them has been asking himself some really, really difficult questions and this was a way of trying to figure the way out of some very difficult questions and the other one really isn't asking himself difficult questions at all and on paper the work was very similar but the way that you talk about

it, the way that you approach the way that they are dealing with it, is very different.
(BT1)

- Students also reported that LOs were helpful in understanding how they were doing and pinpointing areas for development.

Sometimes I'll have a look at some of the learning outcomes, even if they're from a different unit. I feel that as the units go on the units only get added to, so that there's more that's needed from each unit. So to go back and look through the learning outcomes of a previous unit is quite helpful. It allows you to look through your own studio practice and body of work and be able to say 'Yes, I've done this,' and you tick off boxes before you can really...just tick off the boxes really yeah. (CS5)

So it would be maybe understood that they were sticking strictly to the syllabus guidelines and what was needed of us. In a good way, not in a kind of regimented way but they wouldn't kind of go away from the point too much I suppose, yeah. (CS3)

I suppose the learning outcomes especially when it comes to my thesis I need to be thinking about them more. And the specifically [sic] areas where I scored lower down in the band I've got a specific way of referring to which ones they are. (AS4)

- One tutor reported arriving at a mark first and then working out marks against the LOs: 'I have to work backwards for these [LOs]' (AT1). In other cases it is more of a negotiation between LOs as subsidiary marks and the final mark:

...we do have a sense of where we think the students is and where they are and often then the conversation will be about looking at the learning outcomes and saying 'Well, we've given the student 60 but look how fantastically well they are showing how they are meeting that learning outcome' and at that point you'd, that would probably adjust the mark or I think that helps us to be able to make use of the learning outcomes, so we use them in that way. (BT2)

- Some tutors reported that when writing the feedback, they did not always feedback against the individual LOs: '*...it will be without reference to the learning outcomes as statements in front of me*' (AT1). Where this happens, students may not get an explanation of the mark or how to improve. NB in the case of the essay in College A, they won't see the marks against the outcomes either, or be able to ask for specific explanation.

10.3 Difficulties with learning outcomes (see also 8.1)

- Some students reported that they find the practice of shortening the LOs to sub-headings (e.g. 'concepts and debates') on the report form difficult to understand (BS3).
- Working towards the objective of ticking (LO) boxes rather than for the work in and of itself was seen as depressing by some students: '*I just kind of hoped that you didn't have to tick the boxes. I didn't realise that it was that important or didn't want to realise I guess. Because they give you the impression that it's not*' (BS4).
- It was reported that ticks in all the same LO boxes don't make accurate distinctions about the student's performance (BS3) and sometimes students do not agree with them: '*I must*

say I didn't agree with the way some of them [criteria] were ticked' (CS2). One student reported not understanding the holistic approach and weighting: the best mark received had not been about work but about exhibiting, but this particular LO was not valued (AS1).

- Some tutors found the educational language of LOs problematic; *'they're so bogged down in bureaucratic language'* (AS2) (see also 6.4).

Findings

Both staff and students consider that written feedback is an important and valuable part of assessing on fine art courses. The fact of having to write, rather than only tick boxes or give spoken feedback, allows tutors the time to seriously reflect on their student's work and its progression. Most tutors take a lot of trouble writing feedback and discussing amongst themselves what to write and written feedback is often the result of serious consideration and discussions. Students appreciate critical feedback that they can return to and appear keen to receive as much, and as detailed, written feedback as possible.

There is considerable variation in the quality and quantity of what is written, both within and between courses and Colleges. For example the word count varied from just 34 to 557. There are several different forms operating across the Colleges, some quite similar and others with marked differences. Most feedback was handwritten (some with crossings out and with varying degrees of legibility) and only 34% of the feedback forms analysed for this research had been typed. Although it is often personalised, there is variation in how feedback is written, from formal to informal forms of address. Only a very small proportion of the sampled reports had mistakes (no marks/ marks not achievable from subsidiary marks/ grammatical and spelling errors).

Whilst there is also variation in the contexts and procedures that each course and College has developed for assessment, it is universally accepted that feedback is not written to stand alone, but to be understood in the context of extensive formal and informal spoken feedback. There was variation in how much the written feedback might be able to be understood in its own right.

It is clear from student and staff responses that feedback is felt to be more accurate, and therefore of greater value, when it is written by a member of staff with whom students had built up a relationship, usually in the form of a personal tutor. A 'follow up' tutorial after receiving feedback or to receive feedback is the norm and where this does not take place (e.g. with some essay feedback) it is sorely missed.

Feedback plays an important role in summing up not only what has been achieved, but recommendations for further development and improvement. It tends not to be written only about the work, but is intended to guide the development of the individual and address each student's needs. In the main, reports provide both supportive critique and validation of a student's endeavours.

Marks are of secondary importance to the writing because it was how to improve that students sought most from written feedback. Indeed the general ethos (for both staff and students) tended to be focused on wanting to improve work, rather than perform for a mark. There is an emphasis in the feedback on the students' responsibility for the actions they need to take on the advice given and making their own judgements or connections.

Students generally consider that their written feedback is fair and accurate, although they are not always sure about what is being marked (in terms of LOs). LOs were found to be helpful, albeit sometimes difficult to interpret, both because of an unfamiliar language and because of their scope (where one ends and another begins was not always understood). Variance in approach to unit inductions where LOs are 'decoded' accounts for some of this difficulty.

It appears that procedures are being adopted by staff because they are being asked to do them in that way, but there is also a healthy questioning of what is the best way. Engagement with curriculum development has led to clear communities of practice operating on different courses.

In general students understand what is written. On the other hand, marks, banding and LOs are not so well understood. This is exacerbated where there are variations in how marking bands are described between different forms. Marks are sometimes not understood in relation to final degree classifications.

There was recognition by staff that judgements about student's work in fine art are necessarily subjective and bound by the particular cultural biases of that tutor. Students seemed to be seeking a more objective judgement, whilst at the same time wanting to be addressed individually.

Conclusions

The findings of this research are generally reassuring, but with some caveats. In the main staff write clearly and students understand what they mean. It is important to acknowledge the time and effort taken to write feedback and that students understand and value the written element of their report more than the ticked boxes or final percentage mark. This has to be understood in the context of teaching fine art, where there can be enormous variation between students in the kinds of work they do and tutors consider they have a responsibility to each student to develop her or his distinctive practice. It is probable that a range of students developing all sorts of art practice at their own speeds does not fit easily into an established university structure. However, written feedback provides a vital medium for this to happen.

Although there is variation in student outcomes and the need for carefully tailored feedback, it does not follow that there needs to be such variation in the way written feedback is produced, especially in the same subject area within three linked Colleges of one University. Although an imposed solution would not be appropriate, it is necessary for there to be a discussion as to whether and how some of these processes could be brought closer together, and whether a set of common guidelines could be produced. Forms might also be reviewed for consistency and clarity, particularly in relation to the students' understanding of their own level of achievement.

The fact that most written feedback is not typed is cause for concern, particularly as staff themselves have indicated that this is as a consequence of lack of time rather than for academic reasons. Steps could be taken to ensure all staff have access to software that enables feedback to be easily typed. Another advantage of this would be the ease with which copies could be stored without the need to photocopy.

There is still some residue of anxiety for staff around writing as well as around LOs, both in relation to the subject and to learning more generally. Forums for discussion of these, such as course team meetings, are thus to be encouraged.

Although written feedback relates to a range of other forms of spoken feedback, indeed is not effective without it, it is the written record that students report they store and look at from time to time. Therefore, what is written should perhaps be able to stand alone and written in sentences rather than in the form of notes that only mean something if a student recalls previous conversations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Methods

A mixed methods design was employed for this research. For part 1, it was necessary to identify patterns and therefore an instrument was designed that elicited quantitative data, supplemented by more detailed qualitative data which helped to provide a fuller picture. For part 2, it was necessary to collect rich, in-depth data about what people understood and what their views were and this was done through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. For both parts, each of the three researchers employed the same methods for their sampling, data collection in each of their respective, targeted colleges. Meetings were held to determine the sampling strategy, design the instruments, quality assure data analysis and discuss implications. Below we outline the methods used for each part in more detail.

For part 1, the sample (n=94) was drawn from all BA Fine Art second year feedback forms in each college. To provide validity, this was obtained by using a random numbers table to determine which forms to select. This same sampling method was employed at each of the colleges. For Colleges A and B there were 32 forms in their respective samples and for College C 30.

An instrument was developed that asked 21 questions for each researcher to answer about each of the forms. These included questions about:

- Layout; how the form conveys information visually
- Tone of address: use of language (pronoun or second person, use of imperative)
- Recommendations: how praise and criticisms are articulated
- Length & scope: issues of detail, inclusiveness
- Marks: relationship between marks & writing, writing to justify or explain marks

This instrument was piloted and found to be satisfactory; however at a quality assurance meeting, it was apparent that each researcher was interpreting three of the questions in different ways. As a result, one of these that asked about 'the register' of the language used was not included in the statistical analysis and the two others rewritten and new data collected. The instrument used is in Appendix 2.

The statistical data were analysed using Excel. This entailed frequency counts for each question, with the three colleges as the key variable. The researchers also wrote qualitative responses to the questions of the instrument and the main themes from these were identified and reported accordingly.

For Part 2, it was decided to target two tutors to interview at each of the colleges (n=6). BA Fine Art students were also targeted and the sampling frame used was all those second year students who would have received written feedback from one of those tutors. From these, a sample of 6 students was obtained at each college (n=18). A variation strategy was employed for selecting the samples. Therefore at each college, the tutors needed to have either a lot or a little teaching experience and to be teaching on different Fine Art courses (e.g. Painting, Media, Drawing, Sculpture). The students were to be high, middle and low achieving. These were chosen because it was felt that they might be important variables and therefore provide a greater breadth of data. The timing of the interviews was to be determined by when assessment feedback forms were distributed.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in private in the respective colleges with the selected tutors and students. These interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. For these, two interview schedules were devised, one for the staff and one for the students. In formulating the questions for the schedule, care was taken to include questions which would generate data likely to address the overall research questions of this project. Care was also taken to ensure that questions were unambiguous and easy to understand. A large number of questions were generated and then refined and sometimes combined and grouped according to topic. It was decided that most questions would be used as prompts, as felt necessary. The schedules were piloted and found to be satisfactory, although piloting did result in further refinement and rewording of two questions. The schedules are in Appendices 3 and 4.

Interviews took place between February and March 2009. Whilst every effort was made to replicate the interviews at each College, it needs to be borne in mind that they were conducted by different researchers. Therefore, it is inevitable that the different experience, biases and personalities of each of the researchers will have had some influence on the outcome. However, this is considered a strength of the research for two important reasons. First, because as experienced art teachers they each could conduct the interviews using their particular knowledge and experience. Second, because using three researchers helps to assure reliability of similar results.

In the first instance, the interviews were analysed using pre-determined themes. Since these proved inadequate, further themes were identified while reading the transcripts and these were combined or split, as the analysis progressed. The interviews were coded according to these themes and interpreted in relations to the overall aims of this research project. A meeting was held to compare interpretations and ensure reliability of the analysis.

Every effort was made to ensure that this research was fair, honest, would cause no harm and that all participants gave informed consent. Ethical approval for this research was sought from the UAL's Research Ethics Sub-Committee and granted on 9th December 2009. For part 1, names on the feedback forms were blanked out so that they became anonymous. For part 2, all participants were given a written statement about the project, were guaranteed anonymity and gave consent in writing to participate in the research. The forms used for receiving informed consent are in Appendix 5.

Appendix 2: Tool used for Part 1

Tool for the analysis of student feedback assessment forms

n.b. Providing details is optional

Researcher:

Date of analysis:

Code of Feedback Form:

1. Handwritten or typed?

- 1.1. Handwritten
- 1.2. Typed
- 1.3. Mixture
- 1.4. Other (Please specify)
(details...)

2. What is the layout of the form used? [categories not mutually exclusive]

- 2.1 Learning outcomes not on the sheet
- 2.2 Learning outcomes on sheet with space against each for ticks/marks
- 2.3 Learning outcomes on sheet with space against each for comments
- 2.4 Learning outcomes on sheet with space against each for ticks/marks and comments
- 2.5 Form describes grade bands as percentages.
- 2.6 Form describes grade bands in words
- 2.7 Other layout (please specify)
(details...)

3. How is the form used? [categories not mutually exclusive]

- 3.1 Ticks made against bands and learning outcomes
- 3.2 Percentile marks provided against bands and learning outcomes
- 3.3 Comments made against bands and learning outcomes
- 3.4 Overall comments provided
- 3.5 Overall comments not provided
(details...)

4. Feedback on essay

- 4.1 Written essay given separate feedback
- 4.2 Written essay given aggregated feedback
- 4.3 Not applicable

5. What is the word count?

- 5.1

6. Use of language [categories not mutually exclusive]

- 6.1 Second person singular (you)
- 6.2 Third person singular (she/he/name)
- 6.3 Passive tense
- 6.4 Other (please specify)

7. Language register

- 7.1 Academic
- 7.2 School report
- 7.3 Colloquial
- 7.4 Friendly
- 7.5 Subject-specific
- 7.6 Other (please specify)
(details...)

8. In the opinion of the researcher, was the language ambiguous or confusing?

- 8.1 Yes a lot
- 8.2 Yes a little
- 8.2 No
(details...)

9. Does the report praise and/or criticise?

- 9.1 Praised only
- 9.2 Criticised only
- 9.3 Praised then criticised
- 9.4 Criticised then praised
- 9.5 Mixture of praise and criticism
- 9.6 Other (please specify)

10. Was the focus of the report the student's work or the student's effort/performance?

- 10.1 Work
- 10.2 Effort
- 10.3 Mostly work, some effort
- 10.4 Mostly effort, some work
- 10.5 Equally divided work/effort

11. Was student work praised and/or criticised?

- 11.1 Praised only
- 11.2 Criticised only
- 11.3 Praised and criticised
- 11.4 Not mentioned
- 11.5 Other (please specify)
(details...)

12. How was student work mentioned?

- 12.1 Description only
- 12.2 Description and evaluation
- 12.3 Evaluation only
- 12.4 Not mentioned
- 12.5 Other (please specify)
(details...)

13. Is there any use made of exemplars?

- 13.1 No
- 13.2 Yes
(details...)

14. Are there any suggestions for future development?

- 14.1.No
- 14.2 Yes, of work
- 14.3 Yes, of performance/effort
- 14.4 Other (please specify)
(details...)

15. Is there validation of student's overall direction?

- 15.1 Yes validated
- 15.2 Validated and criticised
- 15.3 Criticised but not validated
- 15.4 No, not mentioned
(details...)

16. Is the relationship between marks and comments clear?

- 16.1 Yes, clear
- 16.2 A little unclear
- 16.2 Very unclear
(details...)

17. Is there a justification for the marks given?

- 17.1 Yes
- 17.2 Implied
- 17.2 No
(details...)

18. What are the subsidiary marks/grades/letters?

- 18.1 (details...)

19. What is the overall mark/grade/letter?

- 19.1 (details...)

20. Is it clear how the subsidiary marks/grades/letters relate the overall mark?

- 20.1 Clear
- 20.2 A little unclear
- 20.3 Very unclear
- 20.4 Not applicable (e.g. no subsidiary marks)
(details...)

21. Is it clear how the written comments relate the overall mark?

- 21.1 Clear
- 21.2 A little unclear
- 21.3 Very unclear
- 21.4 Not applicable (e.g. no comments provided) (details...)

Appendix 3: Interview schedule used for interviewing students

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – STUDENT

This interview's about written assessment feedback. Please tell me about reading this feedback.

What did you think of it?

[What do you think about the kind of language that was used?]

[What do you think about the tone?]

[Did anything written surprise you? Why/why not?]

What did you do with it? How often did you read it? Did you discuss it with other students?

[What difference will it make to your work?]

[What difference will it make to how hard you work?]

Did you understand all of it? If not, what didn't you understand?

If not, did you ask for clarification?

Did you read the official assessment criteria on the form? Why/why not?

Did you understand them?

What did you pay more attention to: the written feedback or the mark/grade? Why?

Do you think that the comments written were fair or unfair? Why?

Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your written feedback?

Appendix 4: Interview schedule used for interviewing staff

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – STAFF

This interview's about written assessment feedback. Please tell me about writing this feedback.

Do you find it easy or difficult to write assessment feedback? Why?

What do you think of the form you have to use?

[If you could change the form, which changes would you make?]

Do you do it on your own, or with colleagues?

Do you discuss it first?

Do you write out a rough copy first?

[Do you tend to type it or write it by hand? Why?]

What do you think the purpose of this feedback is?

[How does it fit into the other ways you feedback to students?]

[Is it intended to stand alone, or be read alongside oral feedback?]

Do you ever write feedback for a student you haven't taught? Tell me about this.

Is it easier or more difficult to write the feedback if you've established a good relationship with a student? And if you haven't?

Do you write about the work, the performance of the student on the course, or about both?

Do you have any sort of system you adopt, such as matching criticism with praise? If yes, please give details (including any other techniques).

Do you alter your language or tone depending on the characteristics of a particular student?

[Do you try to encourage some but rebuke others, depending on the kind of person they are?]

[Do you write it differently if their first language isn't English?]

[Are there any other reasons you might tailor the feedback to a particular student?]

How much attention do you pay to the assessment criteria?

Do you find you arrive at a mark and then work backwards to the criteria, or vice versa?

Do you write the feedback in a certain way according to the mark/grade?

Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about writing assessment feedback?

Appendix 5: Ethical approval forms and accompanying statement about the research

[Staff consent form]

What is meant and what is understood: written summative assessment feedback within the fine art subject area

You are invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide to take part it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the attached information sheet carefully and discuss it, should you wish. Please do ask if anything is unclear or if you would like to know more about any aspect.

I understand that I have given my consent to be interviewed about assessment feedback and approval for this interview to be transcribed and used as data for the project and that selected sections may be used in publishing and presentation of the research project, with complete anonymity and so that I could not be identified. I further consent the collection of statistical details of my employment history and length of time teaching to be used for analysis, again with complete anonymity. Data will be securely stored in digital form with access to the data being limited to the three researchers on this project.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and personal data related to this research, will remain strictly confidential. My personal details will be anonymised by replacing my name and the name of the college with numbers and a pseudonym. Only the three researchers involved in the study will have access to the anonymised data in the form of interview transcripts. It has been explained to me that once the research programme has been completed, the data will be kept in a secure place in digital form for six years and then destroyed. These data will not include my name or any other means of identifying me.

I have been informed fully of any potential risks.

I have read the information leaflet about this research, in which I have been invited to participate, and have been given a copy of this information leaflet to keep.

What is going to happen and why it is being done has been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions.

Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, or decline to answer any question without having to give any reason and there will not be any consequences at all of my doing this.

I hereby fully and freely consent to participation in the study which has been fully explained to me.

[One copy of this form is to be given to the participant and a second retained by the researcher.]

Participant's name

(BLOCK CAPITALS):

Participant's signature:

Date:

Researcher's name

(BLOCK CAPITALS):

Researcher's signature:

Date:

Witness' name(BLOCK
CAPITALS):

Witness' signature:

Date:

For further information, please contact us.

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For further information about the University's research ethics policies and procedures, please contact the Research Support Office, 65 Davies Street, London W1K 5DA; 020 7514 6263; research@arts.ac.uk

[Student consent form]

What is meant and what is understood: written summative assessment feedback within the fine art subject area

You are invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide to take part it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the attached information sheet carefully and discuss it, should you wish. Please do ask if anything is unclear or if you would like to know more about any aspect.

I understand that I have given my consent to be interviewed about assessment feedback and approval for this interview to be transcribed and used as data for the project and that selected sections may be used in publishing and presentation of the research project, with complete anonymity and so that I could not be identified. Data will be securely stored in digital form, with access to the data being limited to the three researchers on this project.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and personal data related to this research, will remain strictly confidential. My personal details will be anonymised by replacing my name and the name of the college with numbers and a pseudonym. Only the three researchers involved in the study will have access to the anonymised data in the form of interview transcripts. It has been explained to me that once the research programme has been completed, the data will be kept in digital form in a secure place for six years and then destroyed. These data will not include my name or any other means of identifying me.

I have been informed fully of any potential risks.

I have read the information leaflet about this research, in which I have been invited to participate, and have been given a copy of this information leaflet to keep.

What is going to happen and why it is being done has been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions.

Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, or decline to answer any question without having to give any reason and there will not be any consequences at all of my doing this.

I hereby fully and freely consent to participation in the study which has been fully explained to me.

[One copy of this form is to be given to the participant and a second retained by the researcher.]

<i>Participant's name</i> (BLOCK CAPITALS):			
Participant's signature:		<i>Date:</i>	
Researcher's name (BLOCK CAPITALS):			
<i>Researcher's signature:</i>		<i>Date:</i>	
<i>Witness' name</i> (BLOCK			

CAPITALS):

Witness' signature:

Date:

For further information, please contact us.

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[INFORMATION SHEET STUDENTS]



What is meant and what is understood: written summative assessment feedback within the fine art subject area

We'd like to invite you to take part in our research project. Before you decide to take part it's important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it'll involve. Please take time to read this information sheet carefully and also discuss it, should you wish. Please do ask if anything is unclear, or if you'd like to know more about any aspect.

We're three researchers who've been awarded a Research Fellowship at the University of the Arts London to investigate summative, written assessment feedback within a sample of Fine Art courses at Wimbledon, Camberwell and Chelsea Colleges of Art, in order to find out how it's used on undergraduate courses. It's the University of the Arts that's funding our research. The research will explore how this feedback is given, examining not just what's written but how it's read and understood. We've confined our study to a single subject area (fine art) so as to ensure greater depth, as well as the possibility of more meaningful comparative work. Our research is designed to find out about what is happening and we are NOT interested in making judgements.

The key questions are:

- How do we provide written, summative assessment feedback on fine art undergraduate courses at CCW?
- In what ways do students understand this feedback?
- In what ways might we work towards a more effective use of written feedback for all student constituencies?

For this research we're interviewing two teaching staff members at each of the three Colleges and three students. We're using a two stage sampling strategy: first we identify courses and then we take a random sample of students we would like to interview and your name came up.

Participation in this project is absolutely voluntary and you may decline or withdraw later at any point or decline to answer any of the questions if interviewed. Should you do any of these things, you don't need to give any reason and there will be no disadvantage to you whatsoever. Should you agree to participate, you'll be given a copy of this sheet to keep and asked to sign a formal consent form.

Participation involves being interviewed for about 10 minutes to find out your views about assessment feedback. Interviews will be recorded (should you consent) and then transcribed. We are very keen to find out your opinion and collect your views. Sections from the interviews might be published, however WITH COMPLETE ANONMYITY. We shall not identify you to anyone and have stringent procedures to ensure that your identity is protected. The data will be securely stored in digital form with access to the data being limited to the three of us who are working on this project. Your involvement in this study, and personal data related to this research, will remain strictly confidential. Once the research programme has been completed, the data will be kept in a secure place in digital form for six years and then destroyed. These data will not include your name or any other means of identifying you. A research report will be written and you will be sent a copy, unless you specify you don't want to.

Thank you!

For further information, please contact us.

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[INFORMATION SHEET STAFF]



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The key questions are:

- How do we provide written, summative assessment feedback on fine art undergraduate courses at CCW?
- In what ways do students understand this feedback?
- In what ways might we work towards a more effective use of written feedback for all student constituencies?

For this research we're interviewing two teaching staff members at each of the three Colleges and three students who've received feedback from each of those staff members. We're using variation sampling to identify staff with a range of teaching experience (greater and lesser) to interview and you were identified as meeting one of these criteria.

Participation in this project is absolutely voluntary and you may decline or withdraw later at any point or decline to answer any of the questions if interviewed. Should you do any of these things, you don't need to give any reason and there will be no disadvantage to you whatsoever. Should you agree to participate, you'll be given a copy of this sheet to keep and asked to sign a formal consent form.

Participation involves being interviewed for about 20 minutes to find out your views about assessment feedback. To help us to analyse the interviews, we shall also need to collect limited statistical information about your employment history and length of service. Interviews will be recorded (should you consent) and then transcribed. We are very keen to find out your opinion and collect your views. Sections from the interviews might be published, however WITH

COMPLETE ANONMYITY. We shall not identify you to anyone and have stringent procedures to ensure that your identity is protected. The data will be securely stored in digital form with access to the data being limited to the three of us who are working on this project. Your involvement in this study, and personal data related to this research, will remain strictly confidential. Once the research programme has been completed, the data will be kept in a secure place in digital form for six years and then destroyed. These data will not include your name or any other means of identifying you. A research report will be written and you will be sent a copy, unless you specify you don't want to.

Thank you!

For further information, please contact us.

Ellen Sims, Chelsea College of Art
e.sims@chelsea.arts.ac.uk

Rebecca Fortnum, Camberwell College of Art
rebecca@elliottfortnum.co.uk

Nicholas Houghton, Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design
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For further information about the University's research ethics policies and procedures, please contact the Research Support Office, 65 Davies Street, London W1K 5DA; 020 7514 6263; research@arts.ac.uk

Appendix 6: Details about the researchers

Rebecca Fortnum is Reader in Fine Art at University of the Arts, London and Research Fellow at the Lancaster Institute for the Contemporary Arts at Lancaster University. Her research falls into four related areas; fine artists' processes and their documentation; contemporary women artists and feminist theory; a visual art practice; fine art pedagogy. She has been an Associate Lecturer at Bath Spa, CSM and Chelsea, a Fellow in Painting at Plymouth and at Winchester, a visiting artist at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a Senior Lecturer at Norwich and Wimbledon.

Awards include the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, the British Council, the Arts Council of England, the British School in Rome and the AHRC. She has exhibited widely including solo shows at the Collective Gallery, Edinburgh, Spacex Gallery, Exeter, Kapil Jariwala Gallery, London, Angel Row Gallery, Nottingham, The Drawing Gallery, London and Gallery 33, Berlin. She was instrumental in founding the artist-run spaces Cubitt Gallery and Gasworks Gallery in London. Her book of interviews, *Contemporary British Women Artists, in their own words*, was published in 2007. In 2008 she was a recipient of a Space for 10 award for mid-career artists and was a lead international artist for the TRADE project in Ireland. She is currently part of the first cohort of *Method*, a programme designed to realise artists' leadership potential (<http://www.solarassociates.net/method/>).

Dr Nicholas Houghton is Course Director at the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design (cltad), University of the Arts London. He has worked in education for 36 years, at the same time developing his own arts practice.

Nicholas studied at Wimbledon College of Art; Slade School of Fine Art, University College London; Nova Scotia College of Art and Roehampton University. His research interests are in craft; the post-secondary art and design curriculum; assessment in art and design and social science research methods. A good proportion of his teaching experience has been gained outside the UK, working in Canada, Portugal and Belgium.

As well as teaching a range of art and design subjects, he has worked as an educational researcher. At London University's Institute of Education he helped to develop methods for undertaking syntheses of educational research findings. In addition, he has undertaken research for a number of government departments, agencies and councils. Nicholas is Associate Editor of the International Journal of Education through Art.

Ellen Sims heads Learning and Teaching Development at Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon Colleges, University of the Arts, London (UAL). She has a BA in Fine Art (Painting and Printmaking) from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, USA and an MA in Education from the University of Bath, UK. She has taught in the USA and UK and as a tutor on the UAL's Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in HE.

For the past 4 years Ellen has been part-seconded to the Creative Learning in Practice Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CLIP CETL) at the UAL, where her role has been to carry out and support others in pedagogic research and development in the Creative Arts. Her research interests include pedagogies of art and design, visual literacy and communication, inter- and trans-disciplinary exchanges and collaborations, and the use of new technologies in learning and teaching. She has published and presented widely in these areas and has been a peer reviewer for the journal *Art, Design and Communication in HE* and for the HEA National Teaching Fellowship Scheme.