Sheffield Hallam University

Consistent and fast feedback through spreadsheets

Fostering effective staff feedback practice and an improved student experience through the use of personalised spreadsheet feedback

The aim

Some teaching teams in SBS were striving to provide quick, high quality feedback, while at the same time ensuring consistency between each marker. On the other hand, students found handwritten feedback hard to read. The challenge was therefore for the marking teams to find a new tool for providing good quality feedback to students.

Benefits

o Fast feedback turnaround times

o Consistent feedback generated

o Provides legible feedback matched with assessment criteria

o Space for personalised feedback

The approach

Student focus groups were run to discuss the design of a feedback tool. Experienced staff were consulted and feedback from this group was sought at various stages of development and cycles of refinement. The basis for the feedback tool is a grid containing the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, which was initially developed into a paper-based marking grid. However this initial iteration did not reduce the amount of time that tutors were required to spend providing feedback and the handwritten feedback continued to be illegible for many students.

The final iteration of the tool used an Excel spreadsheet with automatic functions to speed up the process of providing feedback in a consistent way. One sheet was set up as a table with the assessment criteria listed in the first column, its associated weighting in the second column, a third column for comments and the final column for the mark. Above the table were spaces for individualised feedback (or rather feed-forward) comments and a resource link. A second sheet contained standard feedback comments within a mark range for all the assessment criteria.

During marking the tutor entered a grade against each criterion and a corresponding generic feedback comment is automatically selected based on this grade. The proposed grade for the assignment was automatically calculated based on these criteria. As well as providing individualised feedback/feed-forward comments, tutors could automatically enter a link to provide further resources to help students (e.g. group work skills, referencing and plagiarism). The output produced a personalised feedback sheet for each student which could be printed out and attached to their original submission for collection from the Faculty Reception or saved as a PDF file which could be uploaded to the Blackboard Grade Centre for students to access online.

The outcome

Feedback from tutors who have used the tool with students at levels 5, 6 and 7 has been positive and no further suggestions have been received from module teams about refining the tool further. This may indicate that the refinement process worked quite well and there are no immediate concerns to be addressed. The teaching teams have reported a reduction in the amount of time spent in producing and disseminating feedback to students.

Similarly students have been positive about the approach, and a reduction in the number of enquiries received by the teaching team from students about their feedback has been noted.

Future development

The teaching team will seek further feedback from students in relation to the feedback tool (e.g. whether displaying the individualised remarks at the top of the feedback sheet actually encourages the students to read and engage with these important comments), and intend to roll out this tool across more modules. It has also been suggested that the tool collates the individual feedback/feed-forward remarks and displays the most commonly used ones as on-screen shortcuts so that tutors can quickly re-use these without having to re-type these each time and further reduce the amount of time taken to produce feedback.

Profile

Tutor name:
Lucian Tipi

Faculty:
Sheffield Business School

Size of cohort:
Very Large (150+ students)

Technologies used:
Excel, Blackboard Grade Centre

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Recommendations

o Introduce the proposed feedback tool to the teaching team on a specific module first

o Get buy-in from the whole teaching team to this way of providing feedback

o Get comments from the teaching team in relation to the proposed feedback tool for that module

o Refine the feedback tool as required and then "lock down" the agreed version

o Seek input from students on the feedback tool and refine the tool further if required