

Enhancing Assessment and Feedback Practices: The Student Wishlist



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Background

As part of the University of Aberdeen's 'Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment' (TESTA) pilot project, focus groups were run with third- and final-year students in two academic schools, to ascertain their perceptions of the feedback and assessment practices they encounter as part of their degree programme.

Aim

The aim of the focus groups was to gather qualitative data from students to use alongside student survey data and staff reflections of current assessment and feedback practices. This approach is designed to investigate assessment and feedback patterns across degree programmes, to identify how these can enhance learning.

Focus Groups

After obtaining ethical approval from the Committee for Research Ethics and Governance in Arts, Social Sciences, and Business at the University of Aberdeen, we conducted focus groups with **22** undergraduate students from the following two academic schools:

13 students from the School of Social Science **9** students from the School of Natural and Computing Sciences

Of these, **13** were female and **9** were male. In total, **11** were third-year and **11** were final-year students.

In order to elicit student experiences of **assessment** and **feedback** across the programme, we asked participants the following two questions at the end of each focus group:

If you could improve **One thing about current assessment / feedback practices at the University of Aberdeen, what would it be?**

Findings

There were: **17** suggestions for assessment enhancements

Areas of potential **assessment** enhancement include:

- More formative assessments
- Staggered deadlines
- Varied assessments
- Continuous assessment
- Practical assessments
- Clearer expectations
- Inclusion of a revision week

17 suggestions for feedback enhancements

Areas of potential **feedback** enhancement include:

- Oral feedback
- Specific and detailed feedback
- Exam feedback
- Class feedback
- Peer feedback
- Timely feedback
- Standardised feedback/marking

The following sample quotations illustrate some of the main findings.

An interest in **specific and detailed feedback**:

“If they just say it is wrong, that is not going to help you. If it is good, why is it good? If it is bad, why is it bad?”

“I'd like to see more in depth feedback that corresponds with the weighting.”

An interest in **more varied assessments**:

“There's so many different types of personalities and even learning disabilities, stuff like that. [...] Maybe we would all benefit from having different types of assessment that maybe draw also upon different types of careers.”

“I did like the variety of assessments in the earlier stages.”

An interest in **staggered deadlines** to avoid pockets of overassessment:

“Collaboration between courses to stagger deadlines so that we don't get bombarded with three in a week.”

An interest in receiving **feedback on exams**:

“Once we turn in our exam scripts, we never see them again.”

Next Steps

We will continue the collaborative TESTA process and offer academic disciplines opportunities to:

- Exchange interdisciplinary practice to disseminate innovative and varied assessments.
- Offer CPD opportunities for staff to explore various feedback methods (e.g., audio, video, oral, written, peer, class, rubric).
- Discuss to what extent formative assessments are currently used across degree programmes.