10 strategies to engage students with feedback

The Higher Education Academy
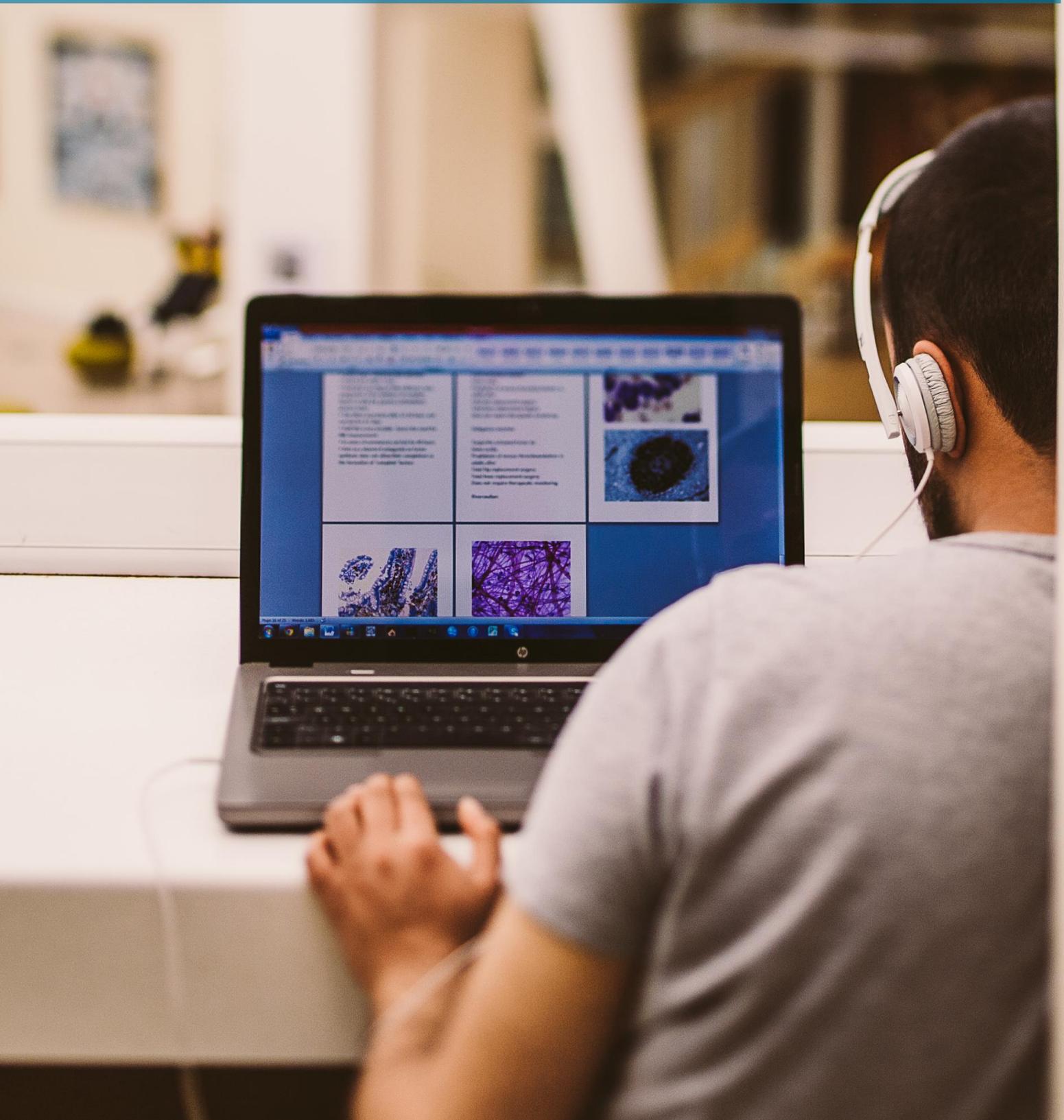
Make it worth their while!

This presents a strategy which aims to engage students in self-assessment and thereby develop their ability to make informed judgements on their own work.

The strategy involves giving feedback without marks, and suggests an interesting approach to motivate students to engage in critical reading of the feedback you have given as they may be able to gain a few more marks in the process.

Phil Race is confident that engaging students in critical reading of feedback means that most students will self-assess to a mark which is within 5% of the tutor mark, but the strategy could be time-consuming if a significant number of students had guesstimated marks are outside these parameters. Nevertheless, it is an interesting approach, and one that is probably worth a try.

Enabling and Motivating Student Self-Assessment - Phil Race, Smart Feedback

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Build activities focussing on feedback into class - or tutorial - time

Students do not necessarily know quite what to do with the feedback they receive.

The 'Feedback SNOB Analysis' from the University of Salford is a constructive and feedback-oriented adaptation of a SWOT analysis and provides a clear, simple and structured framework for student reflection on the feedback received on an assignment in relation to the work undertaken.

Students are encouraged to draw on the feedback received to identify their:

- Strengths - 'the things that you did well and that you can continue to do in future assessments'
- Needs - 'things that you think you need to do before the next assessment to give you the best chance of improving your marks'
- Opportunities - ' things that you got wrong or missed that could have helped you to gain more marks' and
- Barriers - 'what you think could make it difficult to do the extra things you think necessary'. (Sykes, A.E., 2010, p.9)

They are encouraged to build the points emerging from this into an Action Plan for future development.

It can be found at:

SNOB Analysis - University of Salford -
http://www.careers.salford.ac.uk/cms/resources/uploads/File/Making%20the%20most%20of%20Feedback(1).pdf - page 9

Be seen to monitor whether students are reading and acting on Feedback

The strategy gives students a specific reason to look at and read the feedback they receive, and to work with key guidance for improvement from one assignment to improve their work on the next. In this way FeedBACK is turned into FeedFORWARD.

The expectation to comment on progress made in attempting to improve on each of their chosen points, students are encouraged to be self-critical and to evaluate their own progress.

By commenting on the points raised, and responding to students' self-evaluation, within your next feedback, you place value on their engagement in the task of acting on feedback and are seen to be 'monitoring' their involvement.

View this 'Thought'

Involve students in actively doing something with the feedback

Don't just assume that students know what to DO with their feedback comments; ensure that they know how to use them to enhance their learning:

- encourage reflection on what the feedback means and how they can act on advice;
- encourage students to compare tutor feedback with their own impression of their work;
- involve students in evaluating their next assignment using points arising in previous feedback;
- develop Action Plans.

An example Feedback Action Plan can be found in;
Race, P. (2008) Building on feedback: document adapted from 'How to Get a Good Degree: 2nd edition and 'How to Study' published by Blackwell in 2003.
Available online from:
http://phil-race.co.uk/students/

Give audio feedback, with the marks at the end

Students have been shown to respond well to audio feedback - in pilots they have reported that they find it more personal, more detailed, and expressed in a way that it makes it easier to understand what is being said about their work. There are reports that students are altogether more likely to listen to feedback than to read feedback, and to return to the same piece of feedback more frequently when it is audio feedback.

Thus some experience suggests that just by giving recorded audio feedback, students are more likely to pay attention. However, another strategy which can be incorporated is to keep the actual mark for the work until sometime towards the end of the audio feedback, so that they have to listen through to find out their grade.

Give feedback without, or before, marks

Would it be possible to give your students the feedback on their work before the marks? We know that when the two come together, some students only look at the mark, and ignore the

feedback, or at best glance briefly at the comments without trying to make sense of what they say. It's as if the mark blinds them to the feedback:

'If the mark is good, they smile and file ... If it's low, they frown and bin it'
(Race, P. 2012)

If feedback is given by itself, without, or ahead of, the mark, there is a strong probability that this will encourage them to read the feedback as the only way to get a sense of how well they have achieved. One 'window' might be between your initial marking of the work and the completion of the full moderation process of second marking and scrutiny by the External Examiner.

Could your initial feedback be given immediately to students, clearly flagged as provisional feedback, before the final results are released?

A more extended strategy involves building reflection n feedback into the process by which students receive their marks:

University of Westminster (2010) Case study 8: Reflecting on feedback, in Effective Assessment in a Digital Age, JISC.
Available online at:
http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/elearning/digiassess_rereflectingfdback.pdf

Embed some dialogue with students within your feedback process

Traditionally feedback can feel like something which is done TO students; tutors write feedback which is given to students as passive recipients, a process which does not empower or engage students, especially when combined with the difficulties they may have in understanding the feedback we write. The NUS is in favour of strategies in which we ask students to indicate what aspect of their work they would like feedback on, and include reference to this within our comments.

To do this, encourage students to think about feedback IN ADVANCE and target your feedback accordingly - when they submit an assessment ask them to:

- either indicate what they would like feedback on, which may be an academic skill (e.g. structure of argument) they are trying to develop;
- or to indicate what aspects of an assessment they found difficult.

However, it will also be important to draw attention to key issues in the work which they may have missed.
(Irons 2007, p.76).

Let feedback from one stage of an assessment feed into the next

Within some courses, there is a tradition of assessing only by one long assignment at the end of a module. Given the length of time between assignment submission and completion of the university moderation processes, there can be some considerable delay before students receive

their feedback, their attention may have moved on, and the assignment feedback may no longer feel relevant.

This can be tackled by the use of two-stage assignments in which both stages 'count' but where feedback from Stage 1 feeds into the work for Stage 2. Students will at least then read the feedback for Stage 1, and hopefully act on it. Having done so, they will hopefully see the value also of reading the feedback for stage 2.

Make sure your feedback is worth reading!

Throughout this Feedback Toolkit, various features of Effective Feedback are explored. Have a look at those, and try to make sure your feedback reflects as many as possible of such features. For an overview, visit the page 'What makes feedback effective?'

Listen to student views of what they do and do not find useful in feedback - a good overview is found in the Higher Education Academy video in which students discuss their experiences of feedback -
Avaliable online at: http://vimeo.com/channels/154640/9319496

Make sure your feedback is high profile

One of the findings emerging from the current focus on feedback is that students do not always recognise the different forms of feedback that teachers provide. So, when giving or discussing feedback, in tutorials, in class, in email or online forum discussion, don't be afraid to say "This is Feedback!"

Similarly, if it is not yet normal practice where you work, explore whether it would be possible to send students their feedback by email. They are much more likely to read the feedback if it is PUSHED to them than if they have to seek it out and collect it.