

# Exploring Feedback for *All* Learners to Develop Creative Thinking

**Kirsteen Wright**

## *Abstract*

This paper discusses a small change made to feedback approaches in a Scottish Further Education College HND Visual Communication course. With higher levels of students declaring additional support needs (ASN) on this course, and across the college system, there was a need to look at inclusive practices, focussing on a change that would be effective, supportive and accessible for *all* students. Being a visual communication (graphic design) course the students are encouraged throughout their studies to learn from feedback to progress their creative thinking and to take on board opinions which will be important when working with clients in the 'real world'. With teaching having been online due to Covid-19 the students are now back in the classroom, face-to-face, and there is a disconnect as to how the students take on board feedback given in formative and summative forms, and even whether they read and value the feedback at all. Written feedback is mainly given through the virtual learning environment Moodle allowing a space to collect evidence for SQA assessment purposes. Taking on this need to learn more about how students use feedback, whether feedback practices need to be changed and how this change could be undertaken, this project worked with students on the HND course across both first and second year levels to establish a trial feedback sheet and assess future use of this to breakdown feedback to manageable 'chunks' of text, allowing students to learn and develop creatively as they progress on the course. And ultimately allowing *all* students access to develop from feedback.

## Introduction

This action research project was established to consider inclusive approaches for growing numbers of students with additional support needs (ASN) on a Visual Communication HND-level course. Numbers of pupils with ASN is rising across Scotland's schools – in 2020, 226,838 out of 702,197 are pupils with ASN, 32.1%. (Scottish Government, 2020) – and in turn many of these students move on to Further Education (FE).

FE Colleges in Scotland provide lifelong learning opportunities for all, equipping people to improve their life chances through learning routes which could be from school to work or university, further training, retraining or continuous skills development in conjunction with employers. The College Sector Statement of Ambition, published in December 2018, set out a five-year vision for “a dynamic, collaborative, and innovative sector delivering high quality lifelong learning, widening access to education, and promoting social inclusion that enables people to thrive in life, in their communities, and in work” (Colleges Scotland, 2018). Colleges also provide a supportive learning environment for those who may need additional support whether through extra learning support or the need to study part-time to fit around home life and work (Colleges Scotland, 2018).

The supportive nature of the college system means students do not have to disclose any formal ASN diagnosis if they do not want to or can also disclose what they think may be an ASN without a formal diagnosis. This can then leave figures slightly ambiguous as they may not give a true picture. Over the last two years within my area of Visual Communication there has been almost half the class disclosing an ASN. Within this there are students who choose to not disclose, or in the current year those that haven't disclosed yet. Many students are still waiting, and looking, for a diagnosis – a previous student's hope for the next year was to finally be diagnosed with autism.

The original intention of this action research was to consider ideas to 'include' ASN students – a focus on individuals rather than an integrated approach. However, through research, I have considered inclusion as learning approaches for *all* learners to reach their full potential through a flexible, relevant yet diverse provision which increases participation in learning

(Ainscow, 2007; Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Brady & Opertti, 2011; Ravet, 2011). As stressed by Ravet (2011) “there is no theoretical formula for ‘doing’ inclusion” (p.14) alongside the spectrum nature of the “diffability” as defined by Wood (2019, p. 33). Or indeed any of the other barriers experienced by FE learners such as poverty, caring responsibilities, care-experienced, work commitments and other outside forces.

During the Covid-19 pandemic from March 2020 onwards my course transferred to being online and it has been difficult to get students to communicate with each other and lecturers leaving feedback as mostly written. This has also opened up a disconnection as to whether the students use the feedback they are given and how best to provide this so that it can be easily acted upon. Feedback works both towards obtaining the qualification through making specific changes to pass the SQA specification outcomes, as well as enhancing personal development to work within the industry and enable Government policies to ensure pathways for young people to develop critically and enter the world of work contributing to the Scottish economy.

My action research will focus on feedback practices establishing how feedback is used by *all* students and how this could be enhanced, simplified and improved for *all* students. Within this, considerations will be given to neurodivergent conditions such as dyslexia, autism and ADHD with the idea to find a feedback method that can work for student learning and provide a feed-forwards approach to developing students to get the most out of their feedback.

## **Background to the course**

The creative industries in Scotland contribute more than £5billion to the Scottish economy each year and comprise over 15,000 businesses employing more than 70,000 people (Scottish Government, 2021). Thus, preparing learners for the workplace is a strong focus throughout teaching on this visual communications course. The course focusses specifically to prepare learners for roles “that require creativity, creative thinking, critical analysis, planning and reflection” (SQA, 2021). General aims of the group award are:

- develop communication and interpersonal skills

- develop candidates' skills as either, graphic designers, illustrators, new media designers or creative personnel
- develop self-presentation skills
- develop self-evaluative skills, enabling professional development
- develop analytical skills
- develop the ability to work independently and as part of a team
- develop self-assurance and the confidence to perform to potential
- develop professional attitudes
- enhance employment prospects and/or facilitate progression to higher education (SQA, 2021).

'Develop' is a critical word used throughout these aims. Learners should be given appropriate skills to aid this development in professional and personal skills. Within the college system this should take account of the levels of the learners with development aims being different to allow each learner to reach their *own* potential, ensuring inclusion for all to access the course and make personal improvements.

Delving deeper into specific course aims on the SQA arrangement group award, two hold particular interest with regards to feedback:

- an ability to develop personal skills and follow creative industry protocol
- an ability to develop critical analysis; to reflect on own work and continually strive for best practice (SQA, 2021)

These aims tie directly to working in a creative industry environment where learners have acquired personal skills in studying (and continue to develop these throughout employment) to take personal criticism of their own work and learn from it to create effective graphic designs.

Throughout the course feedback is given both formatively and summatively on continuous assessment tasks and projects, as well as through peer feedback sessions in group crits, thus helping "visual communication designers of tomorrow... to think critically and act

creatively in order to cope with the global forces” (Adiloglu, 2011, p. 982). A study by Weaver (2006) of Business and Art & Design students examined the value that learners put on feedback with design students being shown to have more ‘access’ to feedback through the methods of teaching used within the discipline such as workshops and tutorials. Within my own course these too are the main methods used to teach and feedback is given continuously throughout the course both verbally and written through the virtual learning environment, Moodle, as students work through projects simulating ‘real world’ design industry.

To inform what change can be made in my practice I will explore the concept of feedback, analysing: feedback practices within art and design courses and the industry in general; barriers to learning from feedback; different forms of feedback; emotions associated with feedback; peer feedback and establishing communities; and examples of good feedback practice.

### ***Art and Design***

Feedback provides a method to develop critical analysis and personal skills to enhance best practise, essential to working within the graphic design industry where feedback is sought from colleagues, clients, target markets and audiences to ensure work is eye-catching to get the message across. Within the classroom, and online, group crits are used to give feedback to all students and for students to also give feedback to each other, emulating the environment of a design agency. Students are encouraged to show their work, to talk through ideas and concepts, seek feedback for the function of the design as well as gain technology help in an open studio environment. This in turns leads to students being able to observe “the results of other students' efforts together with the teachers' appraisals of those efforts” (Sadler, 1989), and thus learn further from feedback not only given on their own project but to those around them, deepening the learning.

Responding to design briefs forms the assessments for the students and these are created to align with the industry, as well as using live briefs where possible. The lecturer takes on the role of client, where a live client isn't available, and expects the student to take on board

feedback to meet client requirements. This creates an authenticity to the students' learning and feedback process. (Winstone, Balloo, & Carless, 2020)

## ***Barriers***

### *Previous experiences*

Approximately 28% of students come to FE from school with 38% from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds from SIMD20 (Colleges Scotland, 2021). The remaining percentage may be returning to study, working alongside studying, retraining, reskilling or for hobby purposes. FE can form the stepping stone to HE and start to prepare the learners for the self-analysis and study skills needed with this level of education. Previous educational experiences do not necessarily prepare students for the self-assessment and reflection skills, or the 'hidden curriculum' that underpins assessment and feedback practices both in FE and HE (Sansavior, 2021). Learners must learn "proactive recipience" (Winstone N. , Nash, Parker, & Rowntree, 2017b) and understand feedback to be a shared responsibility. Investment from both lecturer and student can aid how the feedback is interpreted and acted upon which can thus improve design project outcomes (Winstone N. , Nash, Rowntree, & Parker, 2017a). Although FE still has high contact time between the lecturer and student with classroom-based timetables and attendance monitoring, being able to work independently, and proactively, on projects is of strong importance. Feedback plays a key role in building the confidence to reflect and make changes, "if you can't make a change from what's provided then it's useless" (Poulos & Mahony, 2008).

### *Levels of students*

A further barrier to feedback can be the level of the students which can be vast within an FE class setting. Each unit works on a pass or fail basis with no actual grade awarded until they complete a Graded Unit in Block 2 of their studies both in Year 1 and 2 of HNC/HND. Knight and Yorke (2003) (as cited in Poulos & Mahony, 2008) indicate that there "must be equity in feedback, that is, different feedback for different-level students" to allow learning to occur through the feedback. Through the pass or fail nature of the units on the course there is an ability to work with students to develop skills appropriate to their level. Some students may

need encouraging feedback to just scrape the outcomes on the course, checking the 'correctness' of the work, while others may be pushed harder through critical feedback, developing more qualitative comments on the process (Weaver, 2006). This aligns to creating an inclusive learning environment recognising the diversity of the learners with the ability to provide personalised provision within a common framework (Opertti & Brady, 2011). With the diverse levels on my course, how to develop feedback to encompass all and enable learning through feedback is a key area for development.

### *Timing*

Timeliness plays a major role in feedback to aid the development of independent learners. Formative and summative feedback play different roles for the student; formative being defined as moulding the work to an achieved end; summative in contrast is concerned with summing up to a grade (Sandler, 1989). Sinclair and Cleland (2007) (as cited in Ferguson, 2011) found that less than half of undergraduates in a study actually collected their feedback showing they thought it of minimal use, finding only the grade to be of value. However, each stage of summative feedback should still be a strong learning tool for taking forward to future projects. Kerr (2017) refers to Sadler's work on feedback as a 'journey', an interaction between lecturer and student, feeding forwards rather than backwards. Winstone et al. (2017a) detail the process as being a communicative event, giving and receiving feedback, actively participating in the feedback process to then act upon it. Feedback should be seen as a skill to benefit lifelong learning, a skill for success in the workplace to take on criticism, refine and rework especially within the graphic design industry (Winstone, Balloo, & Carless, 2020).

On my course formative feedback is provided throughout each project, shaping and moulding the students' work towards passing the unit. Summative feedback is provided on completion of the project and students are then allowed to resubmit taking on board the feedback given to make changes to meet the outcomes set in the SQA unit specification. Higgins (2001) considers an "inside-out" approach of how the feedback is constructed and in turn how the student makes sense of it in their learning context (p. 273). Rather than feeding back,

creating a “feed-forwards” approach (2001, p. 274), a method of interest to explore further to challenge my own approach to feedback and to aid self-reflection skills to my students’ development as designers.

### *Emotions*

Feedback can be an emotional experience for students. Many in FE, even at HND level do not have the emotional maturity to learn from feedback yet. Hyland and Hyland (2001) (as cited in (Pitt & Norton, 2017) suggest feedback is more effective if it includes both positive and negative comments – a practice I already ensure to follow in my own feedback. Negative comments can increase anxiety and add the burden of failure. Removing the fear of failure through breaking down tasks to smaller assessments can help reduce anxiety and build confidence (Shields, 2015). This also gives the students a clearer idea of their progress and the ability to pass. Confident students are more likely to engage with feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 92) and the more emotionally engaged a learner is the more likely they will be able to learn (Weiss, 2000). Thinking of my own students I’m keen to learn more about their emotional experiences towards feedback and how this can be embraced to develop their learning further.

### ***Feedback Stamp***

Investigating possible examples of changes to feedback practices already in action I discovered this Feedback Stamp from Edinburgh Napier University used in the Product Design course (Firth, Cochrane, Sambell, & Brown, 2017). This simple feedback stamp is used to provide incremental feedback on work-in-progress in the art & design context. Stamped directly onto sketchbooks the feedback is broken down into five axis which detail the creative process. The lecturer can also use the stamp to create a visual indication of progress by making a mark indicating how far along each axis the student has travelled. All of this allowing a dialogue between lecturer and student and ensuring a feed-forwards manner which will prevent any surprises at summative assessment.

Could this stamp work in graphic design? Yes but in the last year we have moved away from sketchbooks and printed work due to Covid-19. So could it be used digitally by finding a way to breakdown the written feedback given on tasks? Again it could be possible by establishing essential elements of the graphic design process to give feedback on. I intend to show this stamp idea to my students in the feedback focus group and find out if they believe this could be useful to their learning.

## **Methodology**

In order to make a change to feedback on my course a student focus group was set up with my students in Years 1 and 2 of the Visual Communication HND course. This focus group intended to learn more about how my students use feedback given on the course, changes they would like to see in feedback to aid their learning and to find out what they think feedback really is. Consent was given by my Curriculum Manager to undertake the research alongside permission for the students to mix within a larger classroom in line with Covid-19 regulations. Students were invited through a group chat on Teams with stress that it was a voluntary activity but with benefit to their future learning – cake was an additional incentive. Response was good with 18 out of 27 students agreeing to take part. Students were provided in advance with the research information sheet again through Teams and this was also available in an individual pack on the day. On the day students were given a pack containing a research consent form, information sheet, a pen, post-its, stickers and a final A4 sheet to be completed before leaving which said “Feedback is...” – 17 students turned up to participate. Students were given time to read the consent form and sign this before taking part in the activity and were told they were free to leave at any point. Responses were anonymous. Once consent was given the activity was outlined and students were free to move around the room and provide their thoughts on eight large sheets of paper using the post-it notes and stickers to answer the questions posed on each sheet. The sheets consisted of questions:

- I prefer feedback to be: (multiple choice/other).
- When I receive feedback on Moodle I: (multiple choice/other);

- In my feedback I like to see: (multiple choice/other);
- How do positive comments in feedback make you feel? Why?
- How do negative comments in feedback make you feel? Why?
- Who do you share your feedback with? (multiple choice/other);
- How could feedback be easier and clearer?

Would this idea of a stamp used on another course be useful? Or do you have an inventive idea?

- If we split feedback comments into heading areas what would they be?

(Ferguson, 2011; Weaver, 2006; Sadler, 1989; Winstone N. , Nash, Rowntree, & Parker, 2017a; Pitt & Norton, 2017; Weiss, 2000; Firth, Cochrane, Sambell, & Brown, 2017)

Students were free to discuss the questions with others but to try formulating their own perspectives. Time was a factor as students were taking time out of class to participate as well as following college Covid-19 distancing regulations while moving round the room. Smaller groups could have been used with focus placed on discussion of the questions as a group, however an individual perspective was wanted to allow all students a voice. Unfortunately, one student did test positive for Covid-19 after this date meaning students across both year groups had to take PCR tests. The positive case was not related to the activity but meant that any further set up of the two groups was considered too much of a risk and further feedback was taken online.

## **Focus Group Outcomes**

The data collected took the form of both qualitative and quantitative with students answering multiple choice questions using stickers and post-it notes to add reflections (see Appendix 1 and 2). The following quantitative data was considered towards a change in feedback (students were allowed to choose more than one answer, on reflection different coloured stickers could have allowed greater analysis of preference).

**Table 1****I prefer feedback to be:**

Written sentences	7
Written bullet points	7
Face-to-face	5
Written and followed up with face-to-face	11
Recorded so I can listen to it	2
Marked up work (eg poster design with circles areas to improve or essay with comments etc)	3
Other:	0

**Table 2****When I receive feedback on Moodle I:**

Take time to read through it	14
Only look to see if I've passed	0
Write down the remediation date and what I need to do	4
Ask my lecturer to explain further	4
Don't read it	1
I can't find my feedback	1
Something else:	0

**Table 3****In my feedback I like to see:**

How I should improve my work	17
Comments on what I did right	15
Comments on what I did wrong	15
What the lecturer liked	12
Personal, individual comments	4
How my <u>assessment</u> ties to the SQA unit specification	2
My progress through my class or course	10
Something else:	

**Table 4****Who do you share your feedback with?**

Other students in my class	13
My family	11
My friends outside of college	7
Other lecturers	2
I don't share	1

Table 1 shows that students prefer written feedback so that time can be taken to read through, digest and make change, *“helps a lot to refer back to”*. They would like this to be followed up with face-to-face contact to allow clarification and questioning. The effort put into work was also mentioned in a comment addressing that students feel they “deserve” feedback, aligning with Higgins, Hartley and Skelton (2001) that effort should be made on both sides (p. 58).

In Table 3 alongside improvement strategies students want to see what was done ‘right’ and what was done ‘wrong’ as well as what the lecturer liked. This shows a strong desire to please the lecturers’ preference and thinking there is a ‘wrong’ especially within an art and design perspective where the assessment is not black and white. Comments were given on seeking both positive and negative feedback to instil confidence as well as “constructive criticism” to improve work – constructive being a key word used here to be able to build that confidence.

In Table 4 sharing feedback with other students in the class was surprising to be the highest scoring as both year groups have been working online until recently and engagement online was quiet. This shows that a student community *is* being formed and creating a ‘sense of belonging’ (Booth & Ainscow, 2016, p. 28; Shields, 2015; Scott, 2011, p. 113). Further commenting showed this:

*“allows feedback to bounce around and be taken in and more useful as its more of a combined effort”*

*“To share feedback with others can sometimes help to connect the problem in the work”*

A competitiveness within the class is also shown in this sharing of feedback as students seek out others to compare to and chart their own progress (Pitt & Norton, 2017, p. 505):

*“Usually to see how everyone else has gotten on, also to see if I can improve where others may be better at – can seem to help each other more.”*

Turning to emotions, the following word cloud highlights words chosen by the students to express feelings from positive feedback:



In contrast negative feedback triggered these descriptions:



However, students express the desire to obtain both positive and negative feedback showing that they realise both will help towards their learning and improvement. Again constructive criticism is mentioned, negative feedback in a “*positive manner*”, to make the feedback meaningful with purpose, to help students to “*be [the] best and improve further*”. Ultimately students feel that positive and negative feedback can build confidence and confident learners can start to engage more critically with feedback building better self-reflection (Shields, 2015).

Looking at how to make feedback easier and clearer provided some interesting comments. Two students wanted feedback to be given on Teams rather than Moodle. perhaps related to prior learning experience. However, feedback is given on Moodle to retain evidence for SQA purposes as well as being college policy to ensure continuity should lecturer cover be needed. Students ask for a “*clear, concise manner*”, “*make the instructions simple to understand*”, “*breakins it down and highlight*”, “*consistent across lecturers*” and “*be complete and that’s all*”. A three point process could be:

*“State what went well, what didn’t work as well, and include ways that things could be improved.”*

On the same sheet students were then asked to consider the Feedback Stamp (Firth, Cochrane, Sambell, & Brown, 2017) and whether they would consider this useful, or if they have another idea. Comments are split between thinking it would be useful and others “*over complicated*”. With only 11 answers out of 18 students it also suggests that some didn’t understand the question or feel they could comment.

Looking into heading areas that could help to bring more clarity and breakdown feedback gave ideas such as; “*elements that work well*”; “*taking things to the next level*”; “*how well it stuck to the brief*”; “*highlights/lowlights*”; “*what could be improved*”; “*what you need to do*”; “*what steps you need to take further*”. Students are showing keenness to get feedback that will improve their assessments, showing that they will use feedback in a feed-forwards manner (Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2001, p. 274). This could be taken to show that the feedback they are already being given across the visual communication course is helping them to grow as learners and that they are taking on feedback and channelling it back into their work. Hopefully.

The final question to be completed before leaving was ‘Feedback is...’ Students were given this sheet in their pack on arrival and asked to consider the answer to this as they moved around the room. The answers are again show a knowledge of the importance of feedback in

improving design practice especially towards working in the industry. This comment sums up the responses given:

*“As a students it’s important but as a graphic designer or something else, it’s even more important because you really need to know what do and what do not work. If the feedback is missing, the good work is missing too. So my answer would be feedback is a constructive and concise review with stuffs to improve or to change with a positive ... THEY ARE IMPORTANT!!*

## **Planning the Change**

Considering the results I devised a feedback sheet to be used with Year 1 on submission of their next task in mid-November. This was considered to be the best task to trial the feedback sheet due to timing of submission, students being newer to the course and more open to change, and also being a more vocally engaged group than Year 2. I planned to breakdown feedback into areas which would show strengths, areas to improve, course progress and what needs to be changed for assessment, aligning to the seven fundamental principles pertaining to good feedback outlined by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick in Kerr (2017). Areas were developed to be: Positives, Presentation and pride, Progress, and Points to work on. In order to set up a dialogue through the feedback sheet an area was also added for student notes allowing students to add thoughts or questions which could then be brought to a face-to-face session to discuss further. This also builds student reflection on their feedback as well as their work.

At first the feedback sheet was complicated by adding student name, project, mark and remediation due date however this was felt to be adding an unnecessary administrative workload which would also be repeated on the Moodle submission area anyway. Simplifying this down to an editable Word document with fillable fields in diagram form helped to ensure comprehensive and constructive feedback in ‘chunks’ of text that are easily readable by all students including those with ASN (Figure 1).

4p

Positives:

Presentation and pride:

Graphic Design Feedback

Progress:

Points to work on:

Student Notes:

**Figure 1**

The feedback sheet was completed for each student in Year 1 on Task 2 of their Music Project and uploaded to their submission on Moodle as an attached file. A screengrab was also taken and added as an image to the feedback area to allow easy access directly in Moodle. Comments were personalised to each students' work although some comments could be attributed to various students' work and were repeated where applicable. The process was fast and the breakdown of feedback to the different headings brought more

focus to my writing as well as allowing me to write to the students' level with focussed support.

## **Evaluating the process**

As stated, due to a student testing positive for Covid-19 after the previous focus group it was decided to send out a survey to students to evaluate the process. This allowed for some additional feedback from students that may not have attended the first focus group but did receive the new feedback form for the submitted task. Consent was again taken and students were informed that their responses would be anonymous. Colleagues were also given the responses from the focus group and feedback was sought on the headings trialled in the new feedback sheet.

### ***Feedback from students***

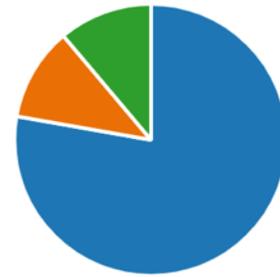
The survey was created in Microsoft Forms and the link was sent in a group message on Teams to the Year 1 group of 14 students who had received the new feedback form (Appendix 3). Questions were again multiple choice and open text. The response was low with only nine answers, split between five that had attended the initial feedback session and four that had not. This created an interesting perspective to see thoughts from those not involved in the original group. Late November is a busy time for students working towards final deadlines for projects so this could account for the low response. Or that this survey didn't involve any incentives such as cake like the first.

The new feedback form seems to have been well received with only one saying they didn't like it and another unsure, "Didn't like nor dislike".

## 5. Did you like the new/different format for feedback?

[More Details](#)

● Yes	7
● No	1
● Other	1



This respondent did go on to say that they found it “easy to read” which was also common across responses:

*“Was easy to navigate and anything I had to improve on was clear”*

*“I liked how it sectioned each part into bits.”*

*“It was much easier to understand the thoughts of the lecturer”*

*“...worked well for me to clearly show what I needed to fix.”*

*“I like how the feedback wasn't a paragraph of text, I found it easier to understand in a simple form.”*

*“it made the information easy to process”*

Although one respondent did say:

*“It's just that I prefer the conventional way of feedback, if it ain't broke don't fix it.”*

This response could be related to change and without knowing the respondent it is hard to determine whether this aversion is due to ASN.

The feedback was provided as both an image directly onto Moodle and an attached Word file, creating a choice for students. Asking which format was used provided an insight into how they use Moodle and access their feedback.

## 7. Did you download the Word file or read the feedback as an image on Moodle?

[More Details](#)

● Downloaded Word file	0
● Read the image on Moodle	4
● Both	5
● Neither	0



'Both' is the majority response meaning that all nine students read the image directly on the Moodle page with five going the extra step of downloading the file to hopefully use the student notes area.

Analysing whether the design was easier to read all students agreed that it was:

*"In terms of comparison over several feedbacks, it will be easier to compare in the diagram format"*

*"... helped to properly distinguish between different aspects of the feedback"*

*"It was a lot easier to read, I get overwhelmed when there is a lot of text."*

One student thought that, *"It was a bit all over the place, but it got the message across"*. The design was rushed for this project so improvements could be made by allowing students to be involved in the design process for a more universal future feedback sheet (Scott, 2011).

Looking at the chosen headings used in the feedback sheet students were asked: "Do you think the different headings work to breakdown your feedback? Positives, Presentation and pride, Progress, Points to work on. What would you change?" Again responses were positive:

*"I think the categories cover the bases I'd like to be fed back about."*

*"Yes, I wouldn't change anything"*

*"Definitely"*

*“I think it works well on all of those points and wouldn't change any of it.”*

One student considers that it could be “*confusing to some*” but they don't give a reason why or make suggestions for further change. Another student would like further explanation in person, also added by another in further thoughts on the process. This ties back to the initial focus group findings where student preference was shown to be written then followed up with face-to-face – a process I need to take time to build back into my practice being back in the classroom.

Considering anything missing from feedback students found the sheet to be comprehensive although one student said “*Instructions on what to do to complete the remediation*”. This comment shows that this particular student is still not able to consider feedback as a learning and development tool but rather as a means to pass the unit.

### ***Feedback from colleagues***

Adapting to the challenge of teaching graphic design online due to Covid-19 has bound my small team of four lecturers closer and allowed continuous professional discussion.

Feedback processes and ways of writing differ across the team and it is always an interesting comparison to see the different ways of writing on Moodle. Some SQA units are team taught and feedback and remediation passes between lecturers on the different days of teaching the unit. The project chosen to use this feedback form with was a unit that is team taught. This gives students the chance to gain different opinions on their work and allows the teaching to be split within a bigger project.

Sharing the feedback focus group data with my colleagues allowed consideration of the student in the process of feedback currently used. One colleague said “*I'm pleased that you did this! It seems much more effective than listen to learners*”. Listening to Learners is the College survey which happens twice a year. One colleague also told me that they wanted to do a project like this last year after taking on some internal verification on a different course and noticed the inconsistency of feedback processes for students. However, this had been limited by time. Discussing my ideas for this project and the idea of a diagram allowed

conversation on how to make feedback more accessible particularly for the high amount of ASN students attending college, as well as supporting the different levels of students across our course. One colleague uses a system of “a big green tick for all good , amber circle for needs fixed , big red cross for fail ”. However this system focusses on passing the unit, ticking off the SQA specification outcomes, rather than self-development from the feedback. One colleague still felt that the new form was:

*Too wordy, could symbols be used? And a scale so 5-1 presentation skills, preparation, development, understanding of the brief. So there are key parts which overlap every project we do - as a cover sheet? And then we can give a few individual comments at the bottom but students can quickly see where their strengths and weakness are?*

The idea of a scale had been considered but with students informing in the focus group that they compare feedback with each other I felt that a level would be unhelpful given the different levels in the group and the personalisation of the feedback to the abilities of each student. The units also work on a pass/fail basis so starting to indicate a level could be confusing to students as they only receive a grade based on one unit in the year.

The colleague I team teach with on this Project said:

*As we are team teaching on the music project I felt, from a lecturers point of view, it was useful. It allowed me to clearly see your feedback and enabled me to check up on remediation easily.*

At times when team teaching, feedback and remediation can be split with each lecturer taking a certain amount of students rather than a shared purpose of variety in lecturer opinion to feed-forward (Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2001, p. 274) into work. This form could allow consistency across the style of feedback, with an individual voice still being used to give opinion for development.

## Further Progression

Continuing progress for more conversations and development of the process, the feedback sheet was used again in Block 2 with the same set of students, building continuity. In discussion with a student on the course who has dyslexia and short-term memory issues they told me that the feedback sheet has helped this year to understand feedback easier. They believed the layout helped to visually understand the feedback by breaking it down from an overwhelming chunk of text to a more manageable form, allowing them to take on board the feedback on the project as well as any feed-forward points to consider to improve work.

A fellow lecturer also tried out the feedback sheet with the same set of students on a different unit. Further student feedback included:

*“like the 4 section, it simplifies what you are looking at”*

*“the feedback is more balanced and easier to take in”*

*“I only need to know about things I haven't passed”*

However, the lecturer did not screengrab and paste into the feedback field on Moodle so some students didn't realise the feedback was there as they had to download it. The lecturer felt that there was a lot of administration to using the feedback sheet and the process could be improved to take less time. The four areas however were considered good to help writing up feedback with a suggestion to add a further development area of how to take work to the next level for final summative assessment.

## Next steps

Taking on board feedback given from students and fellow lecturers I have been investigating ways that Moodle can be used rather than a separate Word document. Rubrics have been considered but as students are encouraged to 'design' all project submissions even essays it was felt that rubrics do not align with the course value or breakdown the feedback text in the way intended visually. It was found that Sways and H5Ps can be embedded in Moodle feedback comments and that these could be possible methods to give feedback that breaks down the text and could also be visually appealing to design students. However, at the time

of writing, there is a problem using this method in Moodle and the feedback disappears. Currently this has been passed to the Moodle team before further trials can be undertaken.

## **Conclusion**

Overall the feedback sheet has been successful as shown in student feedback and discussion. As the students take learning journeys through the college and education system, feedback should be a main focus of this journey, providing a pathway suitable to individual levels and accessible for all to learn from. A feed-forwards (Winstone N. , Nash, Rowntree, & Parker, 2017a) approach will develop creative thinking, taking on board opinions which will be important when working with clients in the 'real world'. One student noted that the sheet gave them "*a direction and area to work on despite passing*", creating the feedback journey as discussed by Kerr (2017). Looking to institutional feedback, (Winstone N. , Nash, Parker, & Rowntree, 2017b) methods should be taught to new lecturers and consistency developed within each course to align practice without losing individual voices. Feedback can build confident, productive, motivated and happy students – surely our ambition.

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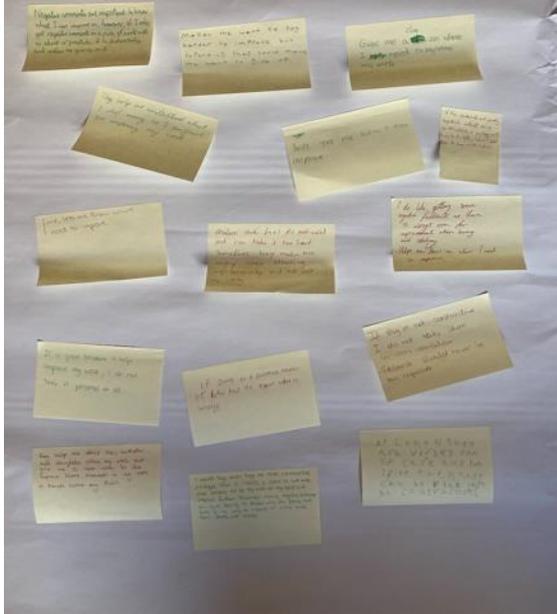
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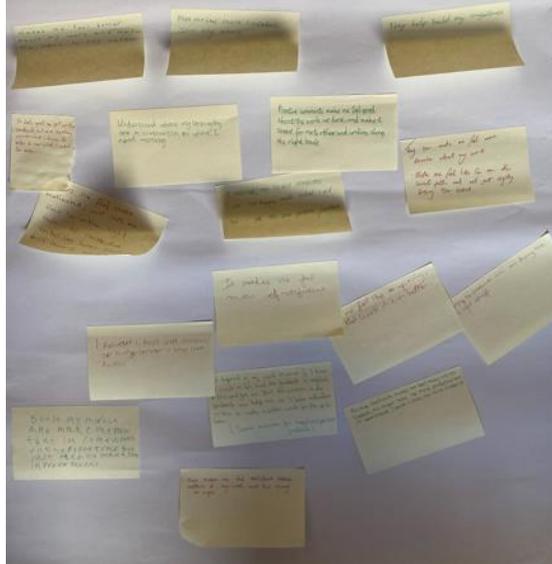
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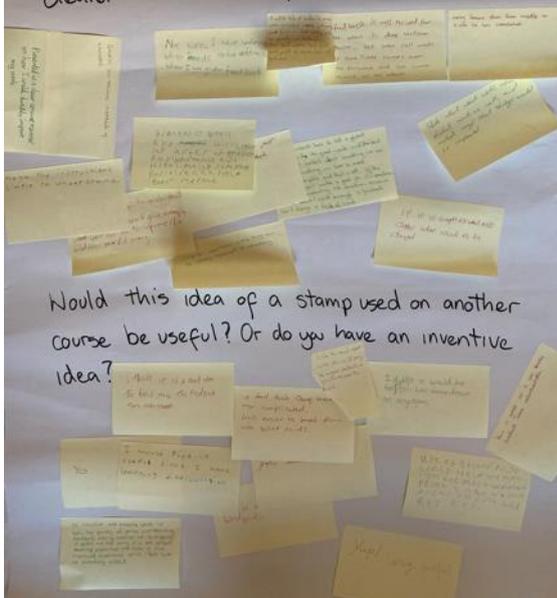
How do negative comments in feedback make you feel? (use a post-it and stick it below)



How do positive comments in feedback make you feel? (Use a post-it and stick it below)



How could feedback be easier for you and clearer to understand?



Would this idea of a stamp used on another course be useful? Or do you have an inventive idea?



## Appendix 2 – Focus Group Answers

### Focus Group – 5 November 2021

#### Sheet 1

##### I prefer feedback to be:

Written sentence	7
Written bullet points	7
Face-to-face	5
Written and followed up with face-to-face	11
Recorded so I can listen to it	2
Marked up work (eg poster design with circles areas to improve or essay with comments etc)	3
Other:	

Using full written sentence allows feedback to be conveyed more clearly than just one word feedback or in some cases bullet points. Following this up with continuing feedback face to face enhances this.

Ideally very hands on and detailed feedback that takes care to address the person and their work on an individual level is going to be best. Unfortunately this isn't always possible (effectively more time could always theoretically be spent on someone). So most effective use of timeframe of feedback is key I would say. Teaching an analysing then helping has got to be one of the hardest and most important jobs of all.

Face to face with notes helps a lot to refer back to

I don't like face to face as it really triggers my anxiety

Bullet points can be misinterpreted. We put a lot of effort into our work and it can be disappointing to get a bullet point or single sentence in response. I really value critical feedback for learning, improving, considering different points of view.

#### Sheet 2

##### When I receive feedback on Moodle I:

Take time to read through it	14
Only look to see if I've passed	
Write down the remediation date and what I need to do	4
Ask my lecturer to explain further	4
Don't read it	1
I can't find my feedback	1
Something else:	

I ask in person/or in calls to go over it further or to help sometimes I don't get notified so have to keep checking every day.

I love getting feedback, so I collect it all from Moodle in one place so I can review it later as a whole and see any consistent trends/areas to work on

I wait 1 months for a work and still get nothing, maybe some teachers should improve that

I read through it then if I need I ask my tutor to elaborate on it

I always check for feedback so I can take it in and apply it to my future work and develop my skills in the given fields.

#### Sheet 3

**In my feedback I like to see:**

How I should improve my work	17
Comments on what I did right	15
Comments on what I did wrong	15
What the lecturer liked	12
Personal, individual comments	4
How my assessment ties to the SQA unit specification	2
My progress through my class or course	10
Something else:	

Explanation or guidance on how to improve and what steps to take to achieve this

Give me positive feedback as well as negative

I like all of the above! I know its important to get peer feedback, but the lecturers are all highly experienced in the design field so I think that's a critical source of information, to get their opinion. Of course styles vary but its still valid. It's also good to see how your own view of your progression compares to the lecturers view.

I like seeing both positive and negative feedback. Positive feedback instills confidence and constructive criticism allows me to see the aspects I must improve.

**Sheet 4****How do positive comments in feedback make you feel? Why?**

Boost my morale and make me know that Im somewhat on the right track but just need to make some improvements

They make me feel confident about aspects of my work and the things I do right

Positive feedback makes me feel happy and less stressed, this might make me more productive but unsure. Could make me more complacent.

It depends of my work because if I know I work a lot, and the feedback is negative, it's sad for me. But the answer in the feedback can help me, so I take motivation in this to make a better work for the next time. (Same answer for negative/positive feedback)

I fell that I helps with confidance but pointing out what is wrong is also helpful

It makes me feel more self-confident

Makes me feel like I'm improving and that I could do even better

Help to assure me I'm doing the right stuff

Makes me feel more motivated, and lets me know I'm on the right track as constructive criticism helps sometimes feels personal and rude

It motivated me because sometimes I am not happy with what I did but I get nice and positive feedback

They can make me feel more positive about my work – make me feel like I'm on the correct path and not just slightly passing the classes

Positive comments make me feel good about the work I've done, and make it easier for me to relax and continue along the right track

Understand where my strengths are in comparison to where I need improving

It feels great to get positive feedback, but in a learning environment I think it's better to hear what I could do better

Makes me feel better about my work and makes me want to try harder

Make me feel more confident about my work

They help build my confidence

## **Sheet 5**

### **How do negative comments in feedback make you feel? Why?**

They help me notice the mistakes and downfalls within my work and give me a clear vision to then improve these elements in my work to overall better my skills

I would say when they are more constructive critique that it instills a desire to be better and pushes me to try and be my best and improve further. However more negative/extreme can give feeling of despair and the feeling that there is no way to improve or come back from faults and issues

As long as they are worded out of care and not spite then they can be fine just be constructive!

It is good because it helps improve my work, I do not take it personal at all

If done in a positive manner it can help me know what is wrong

If they're not constructive I do not take them in consideration. Feedback should never be too negative.

Fine lets me know where I need to improve

Makes me feel demotivated and can take it too heart sometimes they make me angry when attacking my personality and not just my work

I do like getting some negative feedback as there is always room for improvement when learning and studying – helps me focus on where I need to improve

If the comments are purely negative without being constructive or pointing out how to do better, I don't feel like it has much value

Helps tell me how I can improve

They help me understand what I did wrong so I can focus on improving my work

Negative comments are important to know what I can improve on, however, if I only get negative comments on a piece of work with no advice or positivity, it is disheartening and makes me give up on it.

Makes me want to try harder to improve but depending they could make me want to give up

Gives me a clue on where I need to improve my work

## **Sheet 6**

### Who do you share your feedback with?

Other students in my class	13
My family	11
My friends outside of college	7
Other lecturers	2
I don't share	1

Why do you choose to do this?

I suppose generally the first people I would share my feedback with are people who I either are closest/care about the most or people whose opinion I would hold of value the most

No family, but I share feedback with friends outside of college. I get shy sharing with classmates. I may discuss feedback with other lecturers if I'm unsure what is meant.

I share my feedback with other student to help with my work if I need assistance or advice

Usually to see how everyone else has gotten on, also to see if I can improve where others may be better at – can seem to help each other more

Sharing feedback with other students in my class allows feedback to bounce around and be taken in and more useful as its more of a combined effort. Feedback can be more impactful this way.

Because I don't always understand tasks at time and asking others what should we be doing is helpful or not only me to do the task requirements but other colleges to get each other thinking. Not only that but I would review my work with my pals to get more defined criticism.

Because for me it's important to have more than only 1 feedback. When you need to reach 18-25 yo. It's useful to ask them and not only to 40 yo teachers.

W. stutnts. Its good to have so no one with simlre knolage to see work. W friends/family it allows outsiders veue on ure stuff

To share feedback with others can sometimes help to connect the problem in the work. It can help to understand things with others mind.

### Sheet 7

#### How could feedback be easier and clearer?

Given on Teams instead of Moodle

Presented in a clear concise manner on how I could directly improve my work

Make the instructions simple to understand

Not sure. I have understood what needs to be addressed when I am feedback

Breakins it down and highlight in areas of interest and importance also highlighting something positive can help boost morale

No personally I am happy just receiving bullet point feedback

In person conversation where things can be actively discussed as necessary

It would help if feedback areas were consistent across lecturers, some focus on SQA mostly, some are generally 'nice' feedback. More detail across SQA, good parts, parts to improve, from all lecturers.

Feedback is well received for me when its done written down, but over all works but sometimes comes over too personal and come across as an attack.

Using teams rather than Moodle as it can be convoluted

For me, feedback have to tell as global opinion with the good work ad the bad work. With content about something we can change, something we have to avoid. Just be complete and that's all. If the student doesn't make a good job, it's sometimes just a misunderstanding but sometimes because he/she doesn't work enough. A feedback can't change a lack of work.

State what went well, what didn't work as well, and include ways that things could be improved

If it is straightforward and clear, what needs to be changed.

**Would this idea of a stamp used on another course be useful? Or do you have an inventive idea?**

I think it is a good idea to help make the feedback more understandable

Yes

I would find it useful since I have learning difficulties

It's intuitive and probably speed up both the process of giving and receiving feedback clearly, however at first glance it gives the worry of a less personal teaching experience and rather a more machined experience which I feel isn't as potentially helpful.

A feedback stamp seems over complicated. Feels easier to breakdown into bullet points.

I like the visual aspect of the star so it's easy to compare feedback and growth across the board

Maybe more of an English based course – not art/graphic courses

Would be easier if done in bullet points

I doubt it would be helpful. Let alone direct in my eyes.

Use of colour also could help to highlight the most important point that we shold focus on first. Like red etc.

Yup! Very useful

**Sheet 8**

**If we split feedback comments into heading areas what would they be?**

Use of colour/line/space/size/texture etc – things that could improve/things to consider – elements that work well / how to take to next level

Colours / scheme / constructive / detailed / not negative (trying to be positive)

Colour scheme / use of text

Use of colour, use of form / how well it stuck to the brief / things that worked / things that could be improved

Highlights (things/work done best) / lowlights (work that is most lacking and requires more attention or change) / what issues may be holding the student back / advice on how to improve specific to the student work

Composition / colour scheme / subject matter / legibility / creativity

About as informative as I would expect

What was done well / what needs re-done/looked over / what could be improved

Constructive criticism / what I can do better / positives of the topic

What works / what's good/bad / how to improve

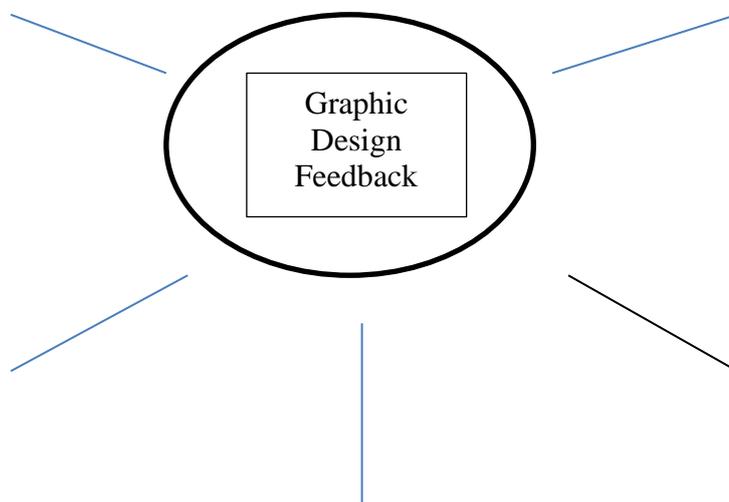
What you need to do / what you finished / deadlines / title of the class

What steps you need to take further soe aren't even broken down

They could be coloured, with a specific type maybe, they could be physically int eh same style of the content

Various areas of design like colour scheme, texture, composition etc

Broken down and highlighted can help pin point the various ideas and development that the student needs to do.



Feedback is...

Think about your answer during this focus group and write it down at the end before you leave

Super important! I can see when I'm happy with a design and when I'm not but because of inexperience and a 'not yet trained' eye, I don't always know why. The lecturers are all highly experienced and clearly know what they're talking about, so I think their opinion can make a massive difference. While I do appreciate a 'well done' and it feels nice, I find critical feedback much better for improving my skills, widening my mindset and perspective and considering other points of view.

When done right it can be helpful and inspire student to reach their highest potential when done wrong it can demotivate a student and make them want to give up so as a tutor it's important to get feedback right for the sake of the student and their well-being

Feedback for me is a resume of the result of my work. I know it's important to make better. It has to contain the good job and the bad too. It can help us for my evolution. Feedback has to be complete with what I can change, what I need to focus on. It's a formal opinion from a teacher (a professional).

Feedback is very important when you are proceeding through projects, especially ones that are constantly being developed. I think that feedback should be delivered in a understanding and guiding manner, pointing out ways in which work can be improved and using your more developed skillset in the industry to help and show people that are not as skilled reach your level. Using this type of feedback would be extremely helpful to everyone involved in the industry.

Helpful and helps to highlight areas that need improvement to make my work the best it can be

Really helpful. It helps to improve but it also helps be more confident. It is really important because without it you do not know when you really are on your work. It is also really nice to have another opinion, another point of view of your work.

A help to improve/fix any of your work and get new look to what should be changed if you have no idea what to do.

I cannot be sure on how to improve said feedback for I feel it is as direct and informative as it can be. I'm also not sure myself for I have been known for misunderstanding things on my own terms, however I have found methods already to understand better to the average person.

This way of giving feedback was fun since we were walking around and not sitting at a desk

Everything works and was easy to work around over all nothing to complain about

Good and insightful

Always something very useful that a lot of lecturers sometimes forget to do. As a student it's important but as a graphic designer or something else, it's even more important because you really need to know what do and what do not work. If the feedback is missing, the good work is missing too. So my answer would be feedback is a constructive and concise review with stuffs to improve or to change with a positive opinion (try to say "you should try to make this easier to read" instead of "it's not legible, improve this") **THEY ARE IMPORTANT!!**

Great! It really helps to understand your strengths and weaknesses

Some of my lecturers deliver feedback really well helping me know the next steps I need to take to improve my work and gives me resources to help with spelling and such, which I find helpful and helps me progress where as some don't help with resources and just give negative feedback which brings me down and doesn't help me be motivated to finish the work.

A way to understand where my strengths and weaknesses are and where I can improve in the future.

An important way to discuss how a task went and how it could have been done differently

**Appendix 3 – Survey**

1. I am happy for my comments to be used in research essays and papers. I understand my comments will be anonymous.

[More Details](#)

● Yes	9
● No	0



2. Did you attend the Feedback Focus Group with Kirsteen?

[More Details](#)

● Yes	5
● No	4



3. Do you enjoy receiving feedback?

[More Details](#)

● Yes	6
● No	0
● Sometimes	3



4. Did you receive feedback on Moodle for Task 2 Music Project

[More Details](#)

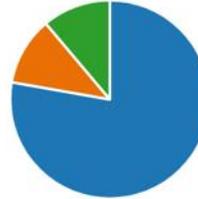
● Yes	9
● No	0
● Don't know	0



5. Did you like the new/different format for feedback?

[More Details](#)

Yes	7
No	1
Other	1



6. Why did you like or dislike the new format for feedback?

[More Details](#)

9  
Responses

Latest Responses

*"it made the information easy to process "*  
*"I like how the feedback wasn't a paragraph of text, I found it easie...*  
*"Some parts of the feedback weren't completely clear but all in all t...*

7. Did you download the Word file or read the feedback as an image on Moodle?

[More Details](#)

Downloaded Word file	0
Read the image on Moodle	4
Both	5
Neither	0



8. Was the new design easier to read breaking the text down into a diagram?

[More Details](#)

9  
Responses

Latest Responses

*"yes"*  
*"It was a lot easier to read, I get overwhelmed when there is a lot ..."*  
*"Yes, The diagram helped to properly distinguish between different ..."*

9. Do you think the different headings work to breakdown your feedback? Positives, Presentation and pride, Progress, Points to work on. What would you change?

[More Details](#)

9  
Responses

Latest Responses

*"i think they work fine the way they are presented "*  
*"Yes I do. What I would change is that the person explains what th..."*  
*"I think it works well on all of those points and wouldn't change any..."*

10. Do you think there is anything missing from your feedback?

[More Details](#)

9  
Responses

Latest Responses

*"no"*  
*"Instructions on what to do to complete the remediation. "*  
*"Not particularly no."*

11. Any further thoughts...

[More Details](#)

9

Responses

Latest Responses

*"no"*

*"Nope "*

*."*