Are They Hearing What We Are Saying? Facilitating a Community Based Approach to Effective Feedback

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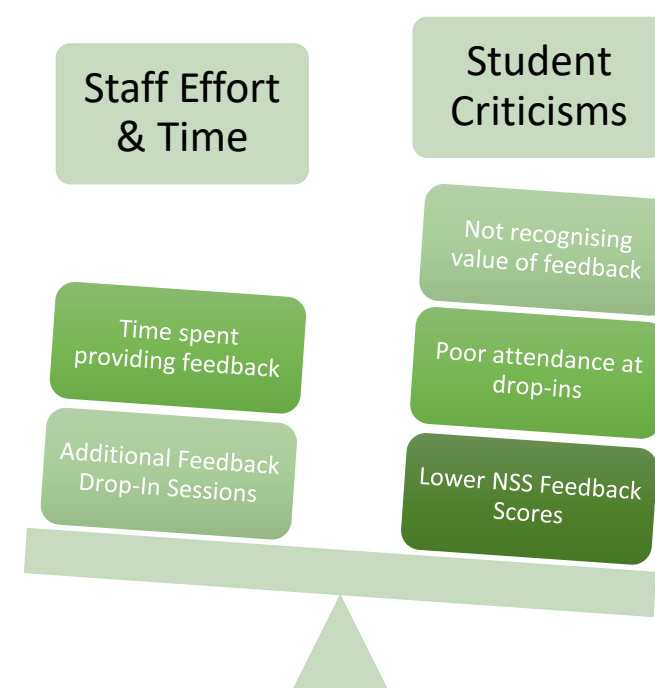
"ARE THEY HEARING WHAT WE ARE SAYING?"
Facilitating A Community Based Approach to Effective Feedback

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1. THE ISSUE(S) & MOTIVATION BEHIND OUR INTERVENTION

- **Imbalance** between staff efforts to provide quality assessment feedback and students' recognising such efforts (in both module evaluation forms and end of programme NSS scores). *Not dissimilar to other Law Schools' across the UK, see: Alison Bone & Jane Woods, 'Feedback, the NSS and Fixing It' (ALT Website).*

- **Poor take up** of further optional drop-in sessions to discuss feedback (often only well attended by A/B grade students, with lower take-up by those who would benefit most). *Lecturers discussing such with Staff-Student Committee to reveal concerns pertaining to 'community' feel, even though we had an 'open door' policy to discuss feedback.*

- Lecturers' concerns over **similar errors being made** in future assignments, and students not acting upon the feedback they have received. *The 'are they hearing what we are saying' effect…*

  Questioning the effectiveness of our approach…recognising the need to do something different.

Staff Effort & Time
- Time spent providing feedback
- Additional Feedback Drop-In Sessions

Student Criticisms
- Not recognising value of feedback
- Poor attendance at drop-ins
- Lower NSS Feedback Scores

2. THE PEDAGOGY AND THEORY UNDERPINNING OUR REVISED APPROACH

- Existing studies recognise that both staff and students have similar perceptions in relation to quality, but are very different in relation to engagement and interest expectations. *E Mulliner & M Tucker, 'Feedback on Feedback Practice: Perceptions of Students and Academics' (2015) 2 Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education 42.*
- Pedagogy proposes community-based approaches for facilitating effective dialogue between staff and students, by closing the feedback loop. *Charles Kivunja, Teaching, Learning and Assessment (2nd edn OUP 2015) pages 410-426.*
- Recognising the need to embed greater skills development within our modules, linked to societal needs for lawyers who are able to reflect critically upon their own work. *Richard Grimes 'Reflection in Teaching, Learning and Practice' in Chris Ashford and Jess Guth, The Legal Academics' Handbook (Palgrave 2016) Ch 31.*
- The need to facilitate increased constructive alignment in teaching and learning. *John Biggs, Teaching for quality Learning at University (2nd edn Open University 2003) Ch 2.*
- Recognition that the pedagogy states that the best law teachers relate to their students (in facilitating effective and meaningful dialogue between staff and students; in viewing students as collaborators, colleagues and peers). *Michael Hunter Schwartz, Gerald F Hess and Sophie M Sparrow, What the Best Law Teachers Do (Harvard University Press, 2013) Ch 4.*

Recognition that we needed to integrate more 'community-based' approaches for facilitating 'two-way dialogue' between staff and students within our teaching; as well as encourage meaningful self-reflection as to existing practices (in order to close the 'feedback-loop').

3. WHAT WE DID: FACILITATING A 'COMMUNITY' & 'INCREASED DIALOGUE' SURROUNDING FEEDBACK

Closing the 'feedback-loop' and 'self reflecting' upon how both staff and students can improve feedback practices.

The Aim: To promote a Law School wide discussion as to what feedback is, what it looks like, and how it can be used.

Objectives: i) to develop new opportunities for students to review anonymised essays and to provide their own feedback on the scripts; ii) to provide students with our feedback on the same anonymised scripts, in order to reflect upon commonly recognised strengthens and weaknesses; and iii) for both staff and students to jointly reflect upon how feedback can be most effectively communicated (i.e. building a sense of community around feedback as to assignment performance).

To facilitate better communication of feedback on exam papers, the authors devised an informal session whereby students were able to access their exam papers and review the feedback contained within their scripts (in order to further build upon the sense of community within the School).

Coursework (Year 1)
Compulsory workshop delivered as part of the Legal Skills module.
Multiple lecturers attend.
Share anonymised previous students essays and feedback they received (graded A-E).
Reflect upon whether they recognised the same strengths and weaknesses as the lecturer in other students' work.

Exams (Years 2, 3 and 4)
Optional workshop scheduled during free slot. Students were able to review their exam scripts and reflect upon their performance and examiners' comments. Lecturers were available, but students were under no obligation to discuss their marks with them if they did not wish to. Refreshments and snacks offered to encourage attendance.

4. REVIEWING & MEASURING ITS SUCCESS?

Measuring the success of the coursework session:
- The Legal Skills module evaluations indicate 94% satisfaction with the approach the module took towards discussing 'effective essay writing.'
- First year students' performance in essays, following this session, evidenced a 9% increase in attainment in semester two, when compared with the same cohort's performance in semester one.
- First year students' performance in essays, following this session, evidenced a 12% increase in those achieving A/First Class grades in semester two, when compared with the same cohort's performance in semester one.

Measuring the success of the exam feedback session:
- Students were asked to complete a feedback form at the end of the session. The evaluations indicate that 73% of attendees would not have requested access to their exam scripts if the session had not been organised.

- 81% said they would make use of the feedback they had received during this session to prepare for their next exam *(see summary of results from student evaluations of the exam feedback session below).*

Yes | No

- 73% / 27% — WOULD YOU HAVE VIEWED YOUR EXAM FEEDBACK IF YOU HAD NOT ATTENDED TODAY'S SESSION?
- 19% / 81% — WILL YOU BE ABLE TO MAKE USE OF THIS FEEDBACK WHEN YOU PREPARE FOR YOUR NEXT EXAM/S?
- 100% — WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THAT THIS SESSION IS REPEATED AFTER EACH EXAM PERIOD?