

# IMPACT OF ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK ON STUDENTS



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# WELLBEING

- Staff and student wellbeing is increasingly becoming a priority for HEIs
- HEIs under internal and external pressures
- “In this consumer world of target after target that we are now in at universities, academics are under pressure and over-stretched.”

Assessment and Feedback – staff and students feel pressure and overstretched

Resource intensive (psychologically) for staff and students

- O’Brien, T. and Guiney, G. (2018). *Staff wellbeing in Higher Education*. Education support partnership

# ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

## Overall session aim:

Provide a forum to discuss how assessment and feedback can impact on students, and explore ways to enhance practices (start the conversation about A+F and wellbeing)

The session will touch on various areas and will provide an opportunity to:

- Reflect on the relationship between assessment and feedback and student wellbeing
- Share your own and hear of the experiences of others
- Consider how we can enhance assessment and feedback practices to engage and empower students and ourselves

# IMPACT OF ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK ON STUDENTS

## **Part a: Assessment and student wellbeing**

Karen and Rebecca – Preliminary findings from research project on assessment

## **Part b: Feedback: Understanding the students' perspectives**

Fifi and Alicia – Touch on the affective aspects of feedback

**Activity** – Bringing it all together with module and programme design

12.45 end (lunch!)





“I’m not going to run all the way across Reading just to get a Mars bar.”

Assessment regimes and student wellbeing

# How would you describe your assessment regime (or ones you have experienced)?

Mainly single  
points of  
assessment  
worth 100%

Multiple  
points of  
assessment,  
with many  
worth <10%



- Where would you fit on this continuum?
- Why do you have this assessment regime?

# TLDF project – Assessment regimes and impact on student behaviours and wellbeing

- Rationale

- IoE Periodic Review – our practice of single points of assessment were questioned
- NSS – UoR is below the university sector on assessment & feedback – so we need to look critically at what we do
- Concerns around student wellbeing



# Overview of the quantitative data analysed

- Assessment weightings, marks and overall module marks for 2017/18 and 2018/19 for Computer Science (CS), Economics (EC), Education (ED) and Maths & Stats (MS)
- Dissertations and placement modules were removed from analysis
- DNS'd assessments were removed from analysis
- Students who had withdrawn or been suspended were removed from analysis
- Submission rates were only available for 2018/19

# Main themes from quantitative analysis

- There is a lot of variety in the weighting of pieces of coursework

- Minimum weights

CS - 0.56% (22 instances for one module)

EC - 1.5% (10 instances, all online tests for one module)

ED - 15% (1 instance)

MS - 2% (4 instances, all online tests for one module)

# Main themes from quantitative analysis, ii

- Maximum weights for assessment (excluding exams)
  - CS - 100% (2 instances one year, one another)
  - EC - 90% (1 instance)
  - ED - 100% (37 instances one year, 42 the other)
  - MS - 100% (1 instance)

Types of assessment with high weighting includes presentations (MS, ED), coursework (all), exhibition (ED), groupwork (CS,ED).

# Main themes from quantitative analysis, iii

- What percentage of (non-exam) assessment is weighted below 10%?
  - CS – 54%                  EC – 36%                  ED – 0%                  MS – 53.5%
- What percentage of online tests have weights below 10%?
  - CS – 90%                  EC – 91%                  MS – 100%
- How many modules have more than 5 pieces of assessment?
  - CS – 7/31                  EC – 10/43                  ED – 0/54                  MS – 15/68  
(22.6%)                  (23.3%)                  (0%)                  (22.1%)

# Main themes from quantitative analysis, iv

- Percentage of assessed coursework submitted in 2018/19 by weighting

<b>Dept.</b>	<b>up to 5%</b>	<b>up to 10%</b>	<b>10%-30%</b>	<b>70% or more</b>
CS	86.02%	87.22%	91.59%	96%
EC	73.04%	75.56%	97.92%	100%
ED	N/A	N/A	100%	100%
MS	89.08%	92.17%	95.07%	100%

- Note the increasing trend – higher weighting has higher submission rate.

# Main themes from quantitative analysis, v

- Average coursework marks by weighting

<b>Dept.</b>	<b>up to 5%</b>	<b>up to 10%</b>	<b>10%-30%</b>	<b>70% or more</b>
CS	72.36	70.21	59.66	62.62
EC	74.93	73.74	62.33	62.61
ED	N/A	N/A	72.65	80.00
MS	75.21	70.04	64.69	63.83

- Smaller weighted pieces of work may be designed to keep students engaged and may be more routine, leading to higher marks

# Main themes from quantitative analysis, vi

- Average coursework marks by number of pieces of assessment in a module

<b>Dept.</b>	<b>1-2</b>	<b>3-5</b>	<b>6-9</b>	<b>10-15</b>	<b>&gt;15</b>
CS	60.72	58.27	59.56	58.82	63.29
EC	59.99	59.60	61.55	57.44	N/A
ED	64.58	63.14	N/A	N/A	N/A
MS	64.49	60.40	63.54	63.03	N/A

- No obvious trend seen.

# Overview of the qualitative data analysed

- Focus groups with students in Computer Science, Economics, Education and Mathematics



# Main themes from qualitative analysis i

- Volume of assessment
  - over the year, they **submit 5 pieces of coursework and they do 3 exams at the end of the year, and that's their total output** of University that generates their grade. And I look at mine, and I don't know if I messed up my module selection, I know loads of people on my course who are doing similar ones to me, and I think **over the year 26 or 28 submission points, including exams**, where I have something I have to produce to contribute to my grade
  - **I had 23 submission points. That was outrageous**
  - **Literally every time they [current 2<sup>nd</sup> yrs] turned up to a lecture they got another piece of coursework before they finished the last one.** That's just not very well thought through.
  - it was tiny. It was ridiculously small, but you'd end **up stressed, having to spend your whole life handing in coursework ... I don't think we had any weekends of coursework free in first year.**

# Main themes from qualitative analysis ii

- Timing of submission points
  - **So the 29<sup>th</sup> April this year was the dissertation deadline, plus the report deadline, that was also the same date as our first exam.**
  - **I can say there was absolutely no coordination in our 3<sup>rd</sup> year**
  - **So, within 7 days I had 6 submissions that made up something like 50-60 credits of my final year.** That was the most stressful week of my life, that was insane.
  - **you only have a week or so to do it, sometimes a week. I like when you have two weeks, a bit longer because you can think about it more**
  - **I don't need four at once**

# Main themes from qualitative analysis iii

- Weighting
  - some of the modules are a 30:70 split and **some of the actual work for 30% would have been easily worth 50%.**
  - **One of my 10% was coursework of 25 pages. Absolutely huge.** And if you have a similar one on the go at the same time. And then you walk into an **exam and you knock out at 10% question in 2 minutes, you think that's totally out of proportion.**
  - we end up submitting these like **7000 or 8000 word reports for 15% of a 10 credit module**
  - we have **loads of small assignments.** It's kinda confusing. **Do you delegate the same amount of time to those assignments?**
  - the **40:60 ratio that we had in first year which was really nice**
  - **It's just working out a balance, you don't want to have too many pieces of coursework, you want to have gaps and have rest, but you still want to give enough marks that it reduces the exam pressure.**

# Main themes from qualitative analysis iv

- Worthwhile/authentic assessment
  - **a lot of it just seemed pointless**
  - **Coursework is probably the best method of assessment for a practical degree**, cos we are learning these things and we're applying them straight away.
  - I find the **most beneficial ones** are the ones where **we write about what we actually done in schools.**

# Main themes from qualitative analysis v

- Clarity of expectations
  - **In industry you've all these requirement documents, you know what you have to do**, it's clearly defined, other people are relying on you for this sort of thing ... but if you're at a university that's trying to prepare you for industry work, **why aren't those mark schemes crystal clear**
  - M do they make it explicit to you how your assessment contributes to the programme learning outcomes?
    - **I didn't know there were programme learning outcomes**
    - **what's a programme learning outcome**
  - M – It's the learning outcomes from your whole degree
    - what you expected to know after your degree. **I had no idea**
    - **I literally couldn't tell you**
    - where are they? In the programme specification?

# Main themes from qualitative analysis vi

- Impact on wellbeing
  - **the lack of sleep that week was the most ever**
  - **I really don't like 100% exams. That is too much pressure**
  - **You're not going through the year enjoying your learning experience, you're like holding it together**
  - **you want to do things outside of uni as well**
  - I had a module this year and he recommended some books and he was surprised nobody has taken it out of the library, nobody asked him for more problems. I'm sat there thinking **'I'm working flat out, every single week, there is no room to do the extra bits that would improve my knowledge**

- **it's having a consistent barrage of different deadlines and that's not fun**
- You just end up **working a solid week with no breaks**, and I was getting up early and working all evening, only stopping to eat more or less
- **deadline after deadline after deadline and it really, really deteriorates their mental health.**
- in first year **there's a lot of people, apparently, who just drop out, because of the amount of deadlines and things**

# Main themes from qualitative analysis vii

- Behaviours
  - I avoid any module which says group work
  - I picked ones [modules] with lots of coursework
  - I don't like choosing 100% exam modules
  - I feel like the coursework is the bit that **actually makes me learn.**
  - It's so easy in an exam, so of a few weeks of cramming, like speed learning through a topic which otherwise would have been really interesting to learn.
  - I think **coursework definitely helps your understanding**

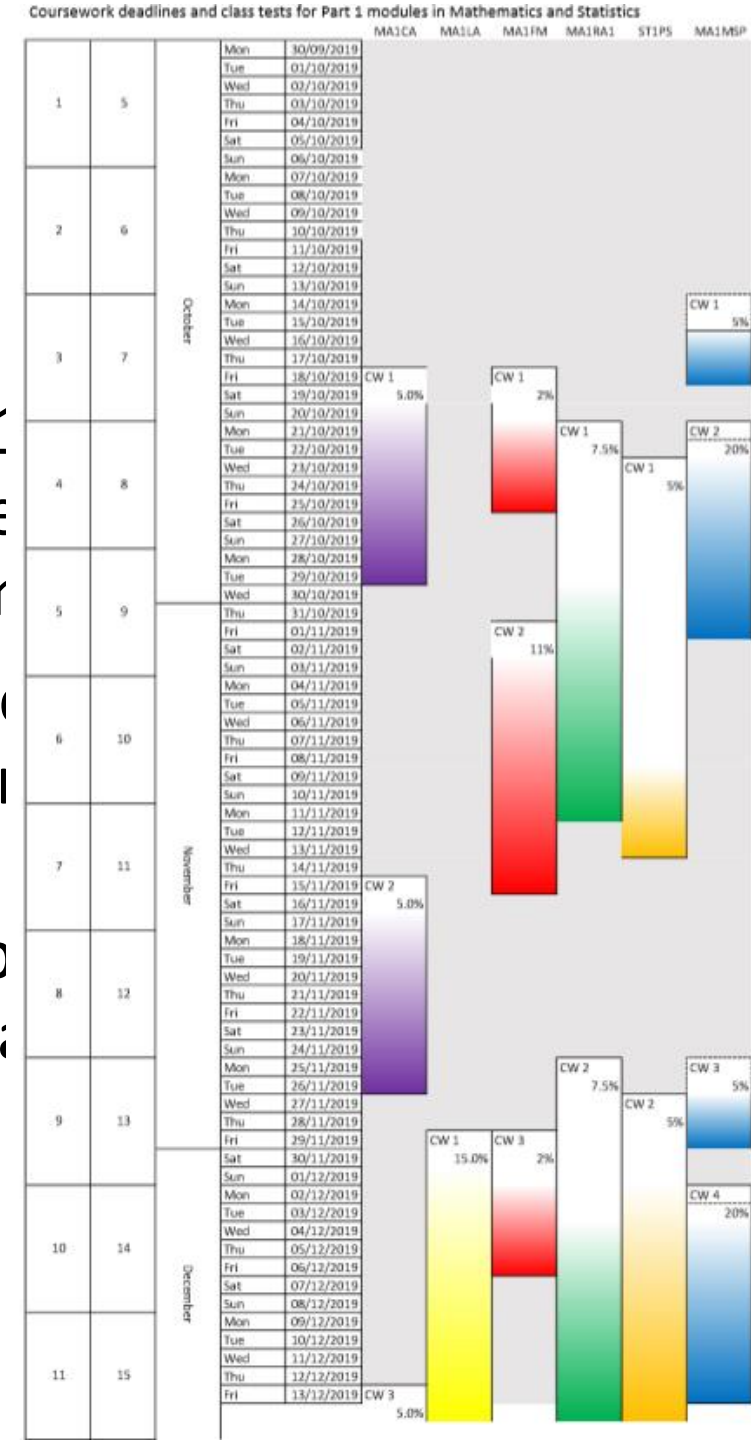


# Main conclusions

- There is little difference in attainment between different assessment regimes
- Students are more likely not to complete coursework where there are lots of pieces
- Students prefer coursework – as long as there are not too many pieces of assessment and the weighting makes the effort worthwhile
- Avoid submission pinch points (easier to manage with fewer pieces of work to be submitted)
- Clarity of expectation about what is expected and how the work is valuable
- Failure to consider the points above has a detrimental impact on student wellbeing

# What we do in Maths & Stats

- For a number of years we have handed out a Part 1 calendar of coursework hand-out and hand-in dates from the start of term – this helps students plan their time
- Some staff operate an ‘early feedback’ scheme where students can submit a draft of their coursework, get feedback on it and then resubmit it before submitting it
  - An alternative version to this is multiple attempts (with randomised questions) where the final mark is based on the best of the individual answers.



# What we do in Education

- Nearly all modules have one or two points of assessment
- Formative feedback opportunities built into every assessment
- Fewer assignments makes it easier to avoid pinch points
- Assignment hand in dates are planned to spread workload
- Conscious effort to address student and staff workload in relation to assessment and feedback
- Assignments are largely directly linked to professional practice
- Significant work has gone into clarifying marking rubrics

# Consider the following ...

- For each of the following statements discuss the pros and cons of each considering the wellbeing of students (and staff)
  - There should be no more than 3 pieces of assessed work per module
  - 10 credit modules should be abolished
  - 2500 words is the maximum word count (or equivalent) for any 20 credit UG module
  - Students should have a minimum of two weeks to work towards any point of assessment
  - Students should have no more than three pieces of assessment to work on at any one time
  - No piece of assessment should be worth 100% of the module

Please add anything else of relevance in relation to assessment and student wellbeing in your context.

# Summary

- Assessment which is well-designed is important – this could be one piece or it could be several pieces.
- It is important to take a programme-level approach to assessment – avoid bunching of deadlines, provide a schedule, and make it clear what the purpose of assessment is.
- Assessment must be *for learning* – and so the quality of feedback is just as important as the design of the assessment.
- Design your assessment to allow for effective feedback!

# EDUCATION OFFICER MANIFESTO

- **Improving assessment feedback**

Raising the threshold of feedback to improve consistency and quality, so that students have insight into their progress and direction for improvement.

- **Improving summer library opening hours for postgraduate students**

Ensuring that postgraduate student have adequate access to the library over the summer to complete their work.

- **Improving reading list access**

Making sure that module convenors are using TALIS to create reading lists to ensure adequate access to resources both online and in print

# FOCUS ON FEEDBACK CAMPAIGN

CQSD and RUSU have launched a joint campaign called 'Focus on Feedback' to improve feedback across the University

This has been as a response to both the Students' views, and also the NSS scores

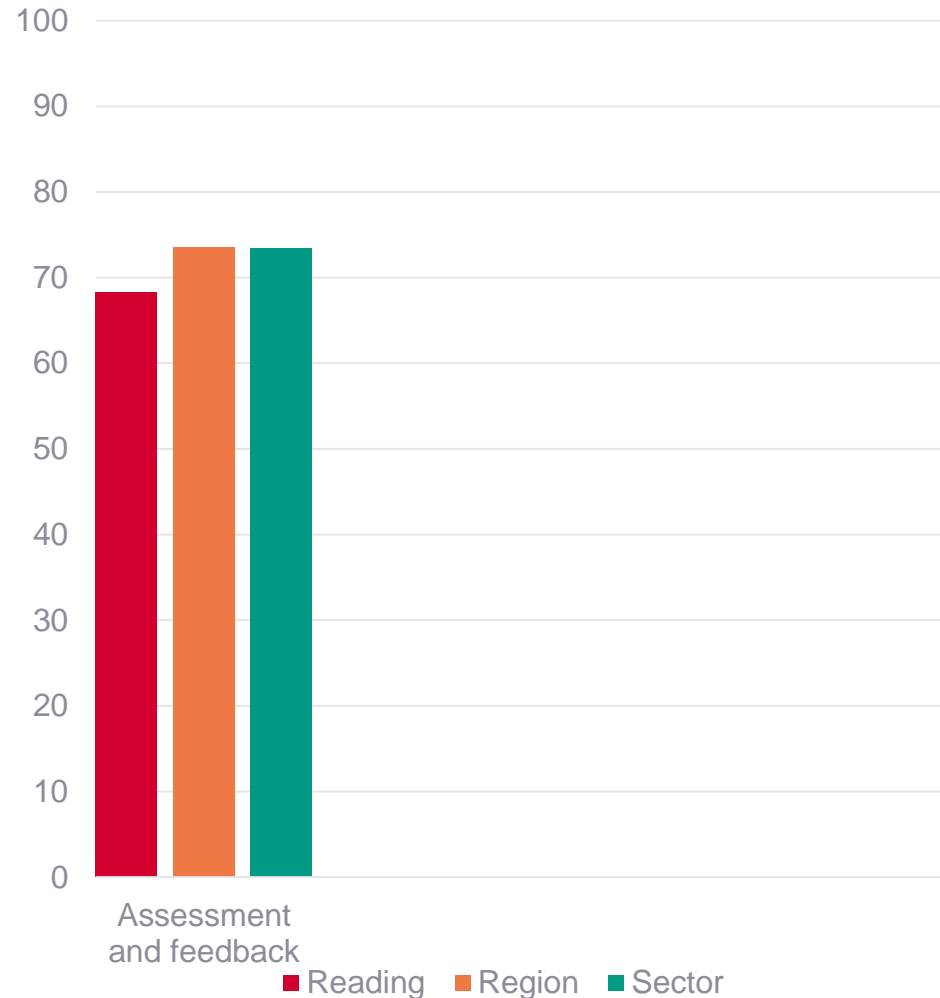
We are creating resources to help both assignment markers and also students to make the most out of their feedback

Also examining the policy to update it and bring it in line with EMA

# WHY IS FOCUS ON FEEDBACK NEEDED?

## NSS RESULTS

Assessment  
and feedback  
overall

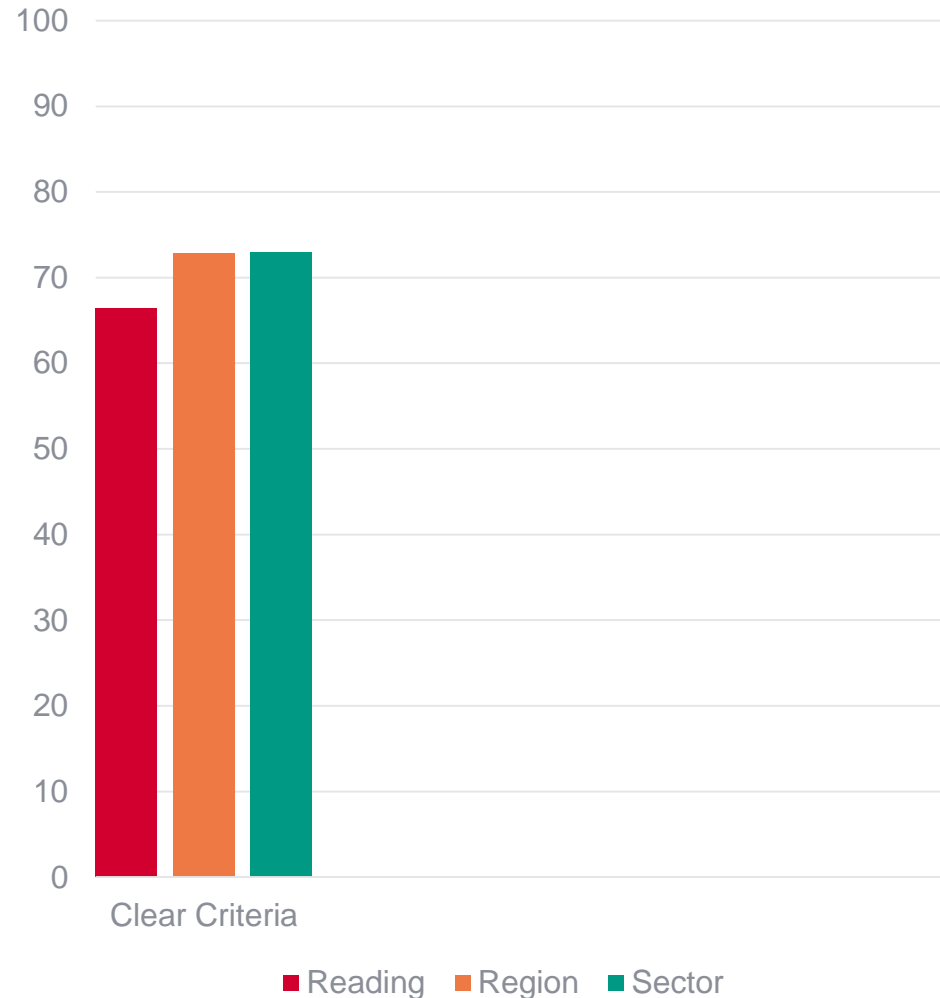




# WHY IS FOCUS ON FEEDBACK NEEDED?

## NSS RESULTS

8. The Criteria used in marking have been clear in advance

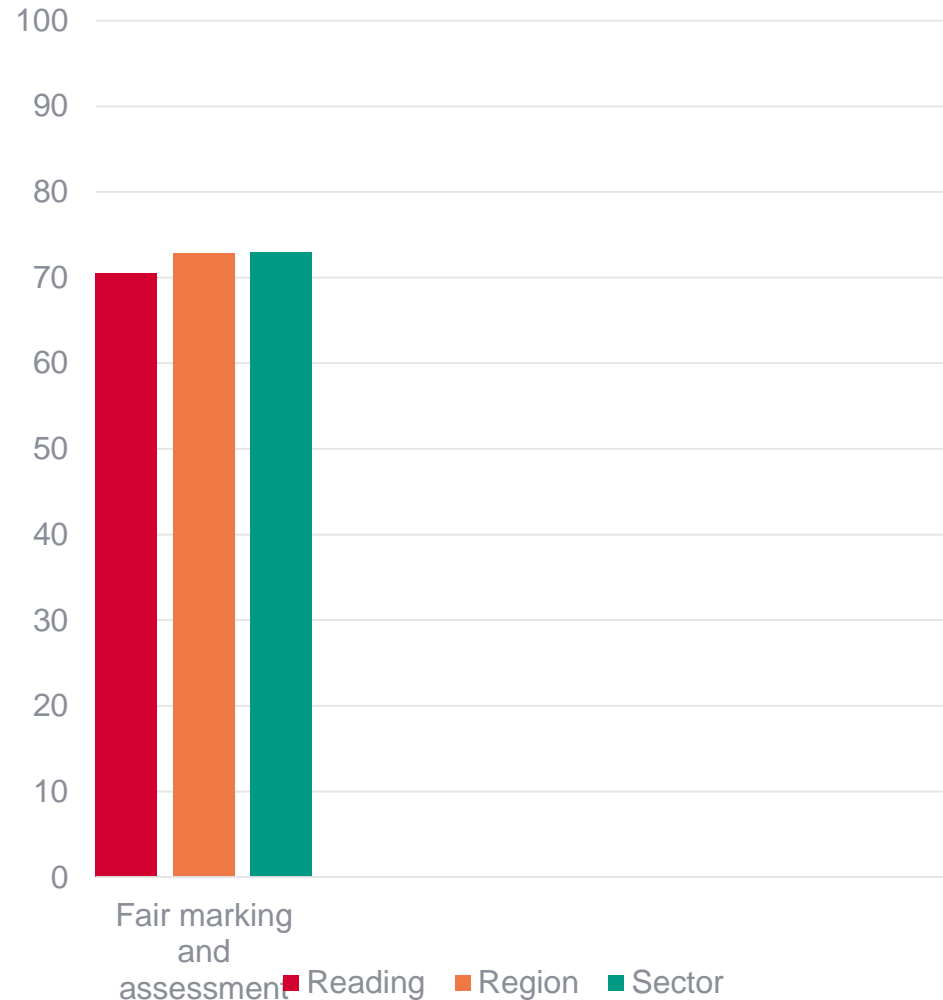


# WHY IS FOCUS ON FEEDBACK NEEDED?

## NSS RESULTS



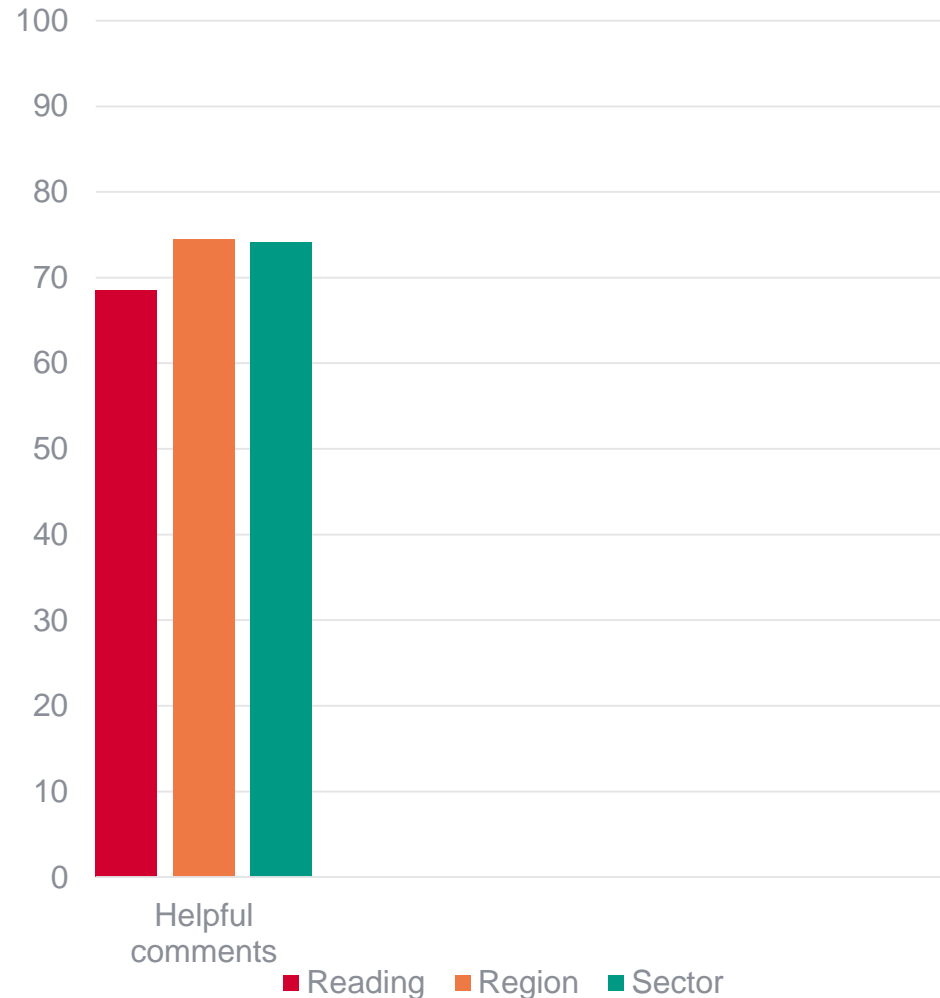
9. Marking and assessment has been fair



# WHY IS FOCUS ON FEEDBACK NEEDED?

## NSS RESULTS

11. I have received helpful comments on my work



# FEEDBACK ON FEEDBACK

To help guide the Focus on Feedback Campaign, we have spoken to both Staff and students.

Need more exemplars for 'first' level work and need to get more feedback on what I can actually improve on in essays

The feedback given in essays and reports don't exactly state on how to improve in essays  
Unfair marking depending on the marker- subjective

Really confused about the assessments we have this year and what's to do with placement and what's to do with uni. I'm just confused!

Don't give you a lot of good constructive feedback, need more. But also have way too many assignments I have about 7 due in 1 week all heavily weighted, staff don't communicate to understand what is being set throughout the course in different schools.

What lecturers expect can differ greatly and I sometimes find it hard to remember what one likes but another doesn't. Seems very subjective sometimes.

There is too much work load in a particular module and it is not being communicated clearly how important various assessments are

Just given a title and no context. Each assignment is the same assessment criteria - a lot to absorb

# FEEDBACK ON FEEDBACK

Some of the reviews and rubrics are unclear, professors who are in charge usually give very vague comments on the work and preventing our growth/improvement on it.

I rarely understand why I got the grade I got. For example, I recently got a lower grade than usual but most of the comments were very positive and there were a few negatives that weren't explained very well.

Feedback depends on the marker- I've gotten 72 on one paper and 62 on a similar layout paper just because of the subjective nature of the markers- they need to have a similar marking standard because its unfair if people get nicer markers.

If you get a low first as your grade, in my experience they rarely give feedback on how to improve, only what you did well, even though you've still missed out on 15 marks or so.

Lecturers are really varied in the feedback they give on essays- some are in depth and helpful and some lack in specifics. There should be a blanket standard of what's expected

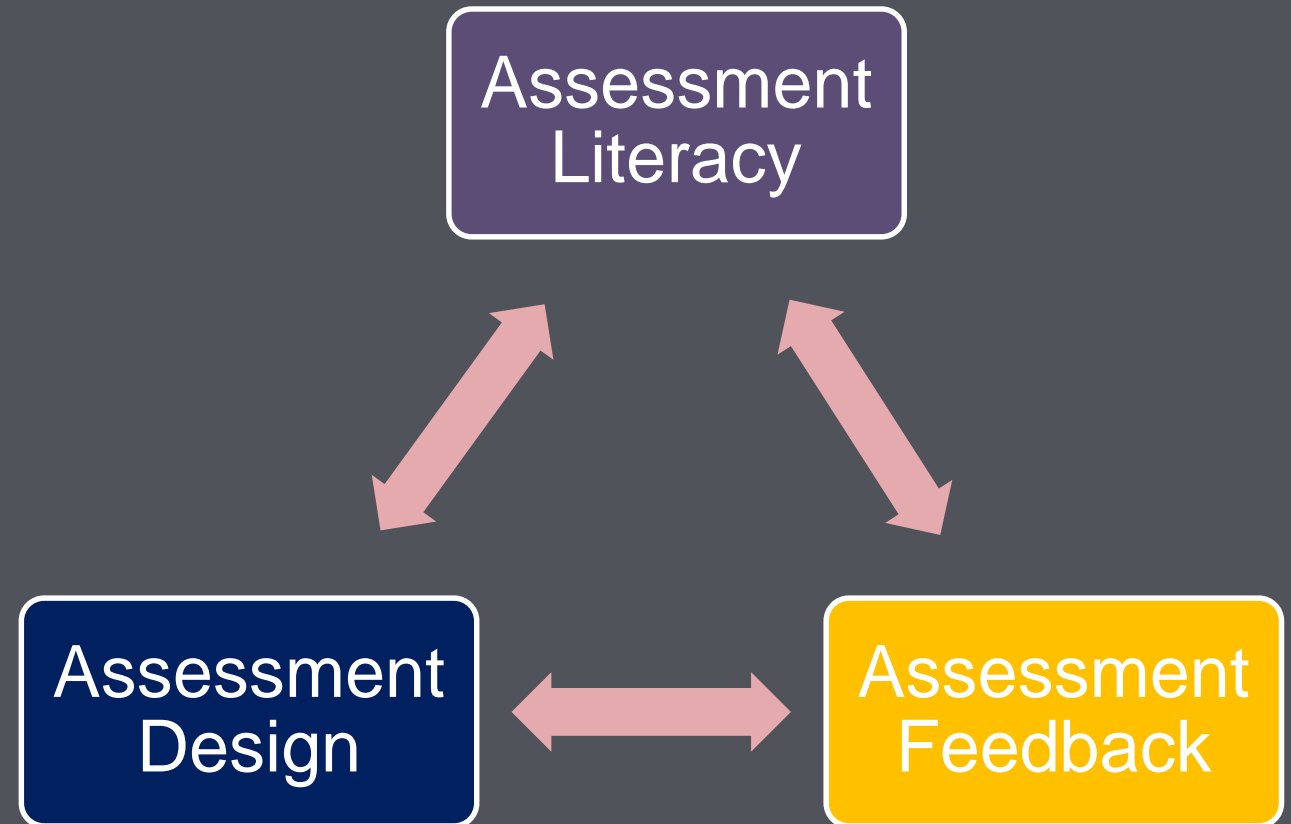
Although I appreciate good feedback, on certain assessments I find there is no constructive criticism, therefore more balanced feedback would be appreciated.

# DIAGNOSTIC TOOL

- Developed by Evans (2026)
- Can help to facilitate discussions between staff and students, and programme and/or module teams of the facilitators and barriers to student engagement
- Identify why students choose to engage or not in assessment and feedback and a consideration of the extent to which a programme/module enables them to fully engage.
- Used to identify areas of enhancement and staff-student partnership (marginal gains – small changes can have significant impact)

# ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK – THE BIGGER PICTURE

“To enhance assessment feedback practice it is important to look at the *interconnected* nature of all three core dimensions of practice” – Evans (2016)



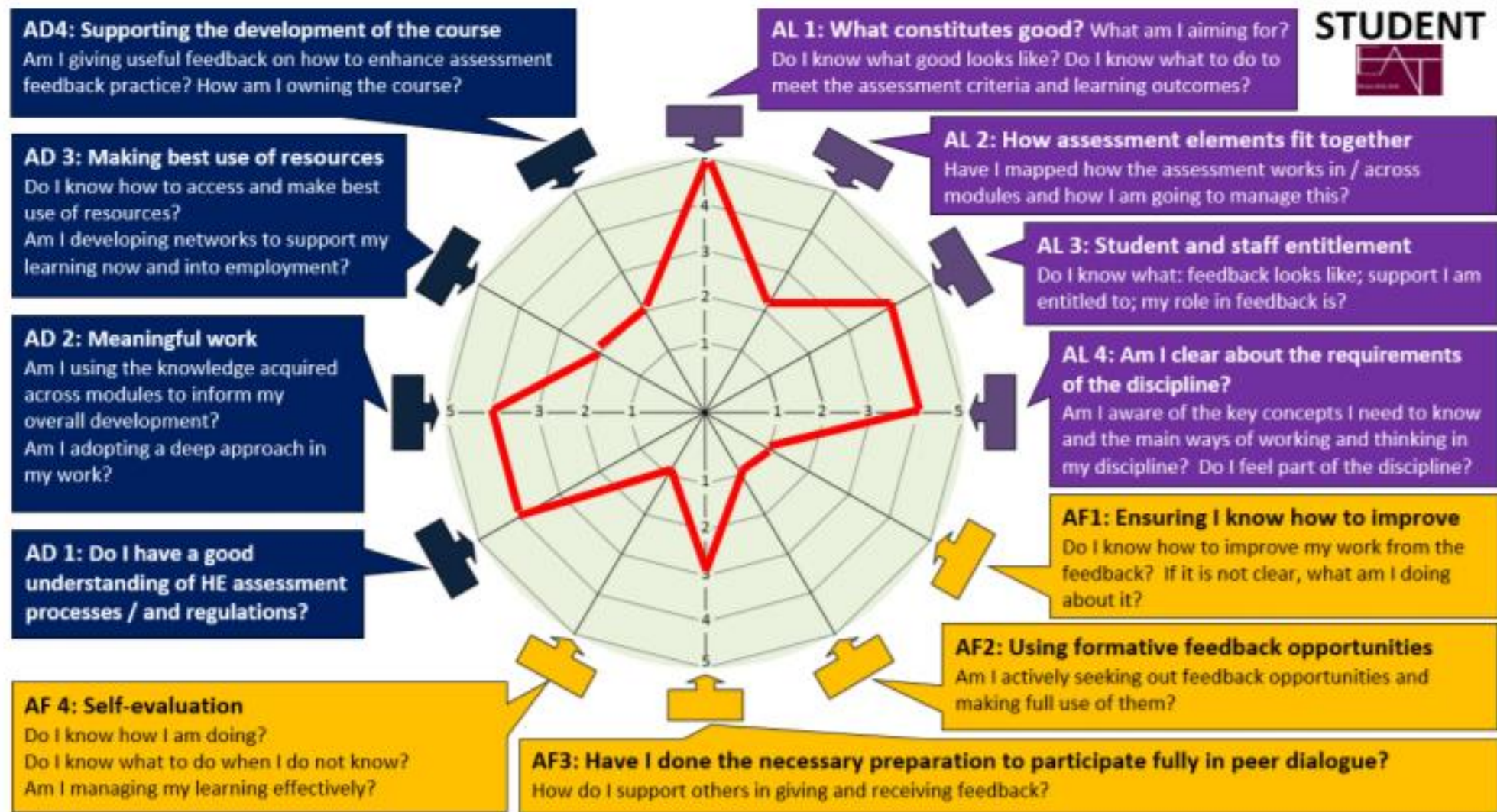
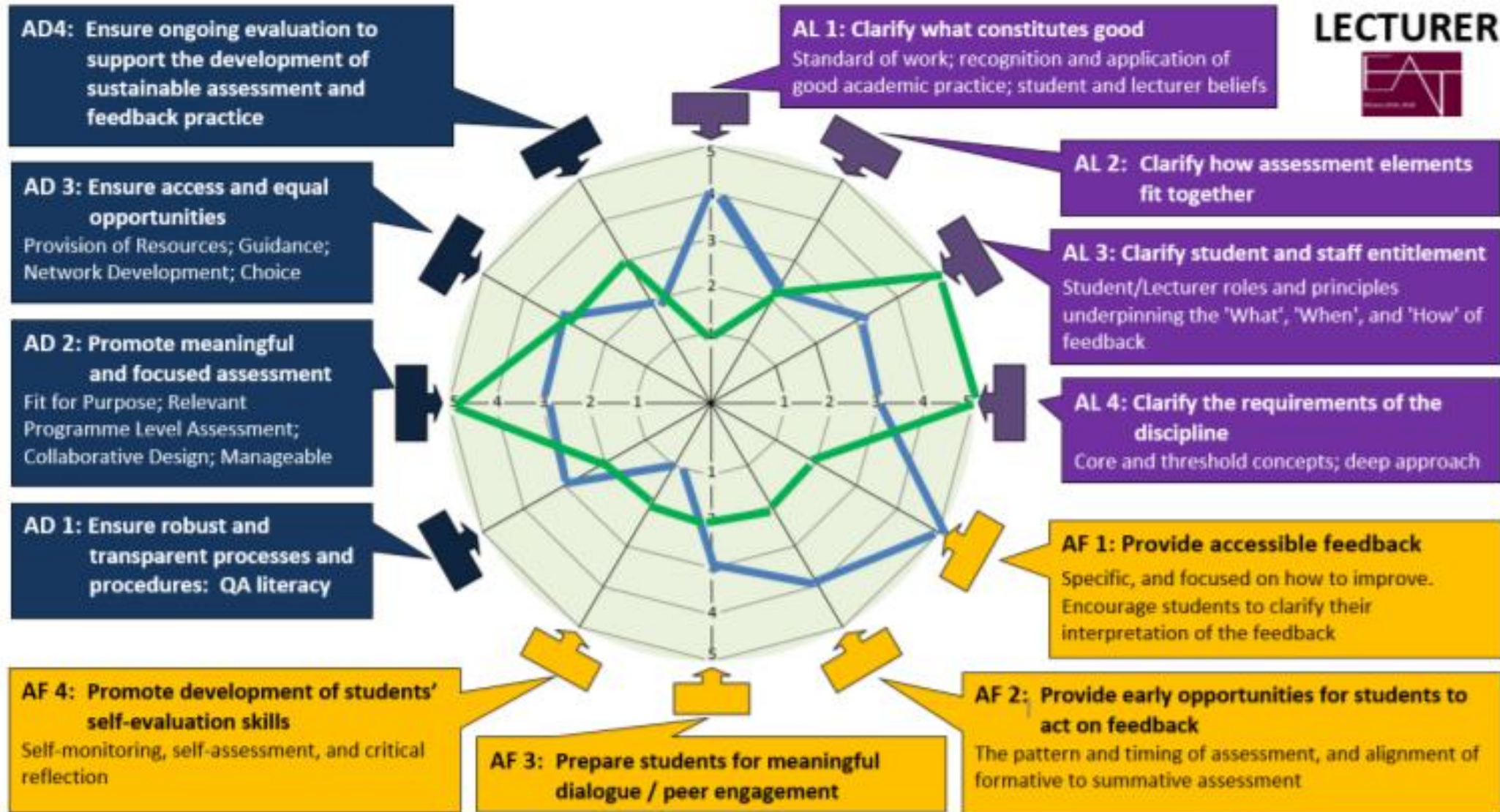


Figure 6: Using EAT Student Profiles





# ACTIVITY

- Fill in diagnostic tool (individually) - How might a student experience your programme or module? Doesn't have to be perfect!
- Non-teaching colleagues – consider your work in relation to the areas. How is it enabling positive staff and/or student behaviours? Areas for enhancement?
- 1 = do very little
- 5 = do as much as possible

- In pairs, identify areas of strengths and areas of enhancement
- How might you use the tool with colleagues and students?
- For support, please write down name and email address on post-it

# CLOSE

- Big thanks to presenters and session participants!!!!
- Lots of themes touched on, please get in touch if you would like to explore these further
- Please complete the **evaluation forms**
- Meadow Suite – Lunch

# UPCOMING T&L SESSIONS

- 30<sup>th</sup> Jan, 9.30-12.30 – **Supporting Students with Mental Health Difficulties**
- 10<sup>th</sup> Feb, 10-12 - **Assessment Design: Effectiveness, Authenticity and Inclusivity**
- 26<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2-4 - **Multiple Choice Questions: More than just a test of information recall**
- 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2-4 - **Leadership in Assessment & Feedback**
- 26<sup>th</sup> March, 9:30-11:30 - **NSS Fairness of Assessment: Enhancing marking calibration and moderation**
- 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2-4 - **NSS Fairness of Assessment: Designing and Assessing Groupwork**

# Academic Tutor System – afternoon conference

- Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> March, 1:30-4:30 (inc. lunch)
- Keynote speaker – Dr Naomi Winstone (University of Surrey)
- Topics:
  - Helping students use feedback effectively
  - Running group tutorials
  - Coaching skills for Academic Tutors
- More information will be sent out soon