"Developing a feedback foghorn - Encouraging students and staff to hear each other's views in the feedback fog to support learning on both sides!"

Background and Aims: It is well documented that students are not only dissatisfied with assessment feedback but are disengaged with its use [1]. Academic staff, despite devoting considerable time in the provision of feedback, are unclear as to the extent of student engagement with this feedback and if the intended message has been successfully transmitted [2]. The response in most institutions has been to widen the variety of feedback provided to students or to introduce innovative feedback practices. However the resulting effects appear to have further depersonalised feedback for both students and staff ensuring that the current feedback fog is getting thicker!

Summary of work: The feedback foghorn was developed to explore the potential impact of a novel but simple structured engagement strategy which uses both a student and staff-centred approach in combination. Perception data from students and staff about current forms of feedback, with a particular focus on stage 1 assessments (extended matching item (EMI) examinations, essays and practical reports) was collected and disseminated through a series of feedback forums. A subject-specific feedback ePortfolio was then designed by student interns and integrated into the stage 1 timetable. Student questionnaires have been used to gather opinions on the design, overall use and impact on future learning provided by the 'feedback foghorn'.

Outcomes: Opinions were gathered from 243 undergraduate BSc programme registered students (n = 171 stage 1 and n = 72 stage 2) and 35 members of academic staff. Key issues identified were:
1. Almost half (49%) of all students did not feel they used their feedback effectively and agreed they would discuss their feedback with friends before staff members.
2. Staff significantly underestimate student reference to the marking criteria (40% vs. 86%).
3. Almost half (43%) of students agreed they simply forget suggestions for improvement.

In the pilot introduction 105 undergraduates were given a scheduled session in which to review a populated 'feedback foghorn' and complete a personal reflection on an assessment of their choice. Over 75% of students strongly agreed or agreed that the design was useful and student friendly. The majority of students (~50%) strongly agreed or agreed that the 'feedback foghorn' was useful for their learning but that marks must be automatically uploaded and timetabled sessions provided. Finally over 60% of students said they would use the 'feedback foghorn' to structure their personal tutor meetings in future.

Discussion and conclusion: Students need tailored guidance and support to understand that feedback is a long-term developmental process, which requires self-reflective skills to ensure its' effective use. The 'feedback foghorn' project has designed a simple, structured framework to support student engagement in this process which students rate as an effective learning tool. In providing an electronic record of feedback reflections the project now seeks to measure if HE assessment can be re-personalised for both students and staff.

References:

1. HEFCE: Higher Education Funding Council for England. (2011) National Student Survey: Findings and trends 2006 to 2010. Available at http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2011/201111/ (last accessed 28/09/2015)

Bevan R, Badge J, Cann A, Willmott C and Scott J. (2008) Seeing Eye-to-Eye? Staff and Student Views on Feedback. Bioscience Education; (12): 12-1. Available at https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/beej.12.1b.pdf (last accessed 28/09/2015)