

Improving the Department's National Student Survey Feedback and Assessment Scores [Paper 7]

The National Student Survey (NSS) is becoming more important as it impacts on the University's and Department's position in various league tables and is a major component in the Key Information Set data that is presented to potential applicants. Furthermore, one of the outcomes of the Outcome Agreement agreed by the Principal was to see Strathclyde placed in the top quartile of the NSS.

One area where the University performs poorly is in the Assessment and Feedback (F&A) both in comparison with other Scottish universities and its benchmark universities.

As a Department our NSS scores for F&A compare well with the University's scores, Faculty's scores, UK Physics' scores and Scottish Physics Departments' scores, as shown in Table 1.

	Average	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9
Scotland	72	76	77	68	71	66
Strathclyde	64	71	78	54	58	61
Faculty	67	72	85	64	50	67
UK Physics	71	76	83	69	62	68
Scot Phys	66	76	81	55	54	64
Strath Phys	69	75	85	65	50	70

Table 1: NSS F&A scores for Scottish institutions, Strathclyde, the Science Faculty, UK Physics Departments, Scottish Physics Departments and ourselves.

As a Department we should not be complacent about our performance. Whilst we appear to doing OK when measured against the groups listed above there has been a decline in our performance compared with 2012/13, as shown in Table 2 and we need to address this decline.

	Year	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	All Agree	% Change
Q5	12-13	0%	2%	14%	54%	30%	84%	-9%
	13-14	0%	10%	15%	40%	35%	75%	
Q6	12-13	0%	5%	12%	47%	35%	82%	3%
	13-14	0%	10%	5%	40%	45%	85%	
Q7	12-13	0%	12%	12%	46%	30%	76%	-11%
	13-14	0%	10%	25%	30%	35%	65%	
Q8	12-13	0%	25%	14%	39%	23%	62%	-12%
	13-14	5%	20%	25%	20%	30%	50%	
Q9	12-13	0%	14%	14%	32%	40%	72%	-2%
	13-14	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	70%	

Table 2: Comparison between 2012/13 and 2013/14 NSS F&A scores for Physics

The five questions that make up the NSS F&A section are:

Q5 The criteria used in marking have been made clear in advance.

Q6 Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair.

Q7 Feedback on my work has been prompt.

Q8 I have received detailed comments on my work.

Q9 Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things that I did not understand.

The University has refined the 12 Principles of Assessment and pulled together them together to form a more coherent set of assessment and feedback principles. Details can be found at http://www.strath.ac.uk/media/ps/cs/gmap/academicaffairs/policies/assessment_and_feedback_policy

- [Effective_Sep_14.pdf](#) and are extracted from the document and copied below

Principle 1. Assessment And Feedback Practices Promote Effective Student Learning

- 1.1 Assessment and feedback activities are designed to foster student engagement, to support students' attainment of knowledge, understanding, and transferable skills.
- 1.2 A range of assessment methods are used, increasing in complexity across a programme, and taking into consideration student and staff workloads.
- 1.3 Assessment and feedback practices align with intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and provide opportunities for students to be active participants in the process, including opportunities for students to discuss feedback.
- 1.4 Timely, constructive, and supportive feedback is required to help students understand the extent to which they have fulfilled the assessment criteria, and supports future development of students' work.

Principle 2. Assessment And Feedback Practices Are Appropriate, Fair, And Transparent

- 2.1 Assessment tasks are appropriate to disciplinary and/or professional contexts.
- 2.2 Assessment applies rigorous academic standards related to and across the discipline(s) or professional context and is based on clearly defined assessment criteria.
- 2.3 Assessment grading and feedback is based solely on students' achievement against criteria and standards.
- 2.4 Assessment and feedback practices are fair, inclusive and accessible to all students.

Principle 3. Assessment And Feedback Practices Are Clearly Communicated To Students And Staff

- 3.1 Students are made aware at the beginning of a class of the purpose, weighting, and timing of assessment, and of the importance of academic honesty in assessment.
- 3.2 Students are made aware at the beginning of a class of the nature and timing of feedback.
- 3.3 All students and staff are aware of the criteria and standards used to assess and provide feedback on students' work.
- 3.4 There are opportunities for students and staff to engage in a dialogue around assessment and feedback, including opportunities for students to clarify feedback.
- 3.5 In each programme the processes for marking, moderation, and feedback are appropriate and fair and are explained to students and staff.

Principle 4. Assessment And Feedback Practices Are Continuously Reviewed

- 4.1 Assessment and feedback activities, and the outcomes of assessment, are reviewed via the class review and external examining processes.
- 4.2 Assessment and feedback activities are continuously reviewed to ensure effective alignment with a programme's intended learning outcomes and graduate attributes.
- 4.3 Opportunities to develop effective practice and innovation in assessment and feedback are available to all staff involved in assessment.

With reference to the above principles it should be possible to develop a consistent approach to feedback across the Department and so improve the NSS F&A scores on a question-by-question basis.

Q5 The criteria used in marking have been made clear in advance:

- a) Make the students aware of the marking scheme which shows how marks and why the marks are awarded e.g in 1st year teaching lab students are awarded marks for labeling axes on a graph – explain why it is important to label the axes.
- b) Allow the students to develop the marking scheme for a piece of work that is to be handed in, this way they have ownership of the marking scheme.

Q6 Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair:

- a) Make sure that class information sheets have full details of all assessment tasks and their dates. This should include the percentage breakdown between examination and continuous assessment.
- b) Make the students aware of the format of the examination as soon as possible.
- c) In teaching labs make sure that students are marked by all the demonstrators in the lab, this way any perception of marker A being more generous than marker B can be managed out of the lab.

Q7 Feedback on my work has been prompt:

- a) This requires management of the students' expectations. Students should be made aware of the Faculty policy on providing feedback, which is that there is a two-week turn around time. If this is not possible then explain to students as soon as possible.
- b) Explain to the student how and when they will receive feedback e.g if writing up lab work explain that feedback will be given to them in their lab books and that lab books will be marked and returned at the start of the next lab session.
- c) Develop assessment practices that are efficient and can provide effective feedback within the prescribed timescale. This will feed into Q8. Ask yourself why you are assessing material in a particular way. Consider using "structured multiple choice questions" whereby a student's choice of answer can be used to highlight and subsequently address a given misconception.
- d) Consider using online resources such as Webassign to give rapid feedback.
- e) Think about using personal response systems in lectures to give instant feedback.

Q8 I have received detailed feedback on my work

- a) Quite often we set work that is either right or wrong. Avoid returning work with only ticks and crosses and without reference to the solutions. If you have produced detailed solutions for the submitted work upload these on Myplace and point the students to the solutions.
- b) If marking lab books or essays use a pro-forma to supply feedback and include standard stock phrases.
- c) Encourage students to discuss their work with you once it has been marked.
- d) Ensure that you complete the "Exam feedback" sheets for all exams be they class tests or formal examinations.

Q9 Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things that I did not understand:

- a) If we get Q8 sorted out then Q9 should be a natural consequence.
- b) Encourage the students to look at the feedback given to them and act on it.
- c) Explain to the students that group work is a source of student feedback that should be exploited by peer working etc.
- d) Give students the opportunity to discuss work with you prior to submission.