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Using a self-reflective ePortfolio and feedback dialogue to understand and address problematic feedback expectations

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ABSTRACT

To maximise the feedback effect, it is crucial to establish a dialogic feedback process between students and teachers. This can facilitate a mutually reinforcing cycle on each other's feedback practice and uncover unrealistic feedback expectations. In this article, we present a co-developed reflective ePortfolio platform designed to foster students' self-reflection, facilitate dialogic feedback processes and change the departmental feedback culture. Our findings suggest that incorporating the reflective ePortfolio and dialogic feedback processes enhanced students' feedback literacy, and promoted greater transparency for raising teacher awareness of local feedback practices. Students appeared to have invested more in their feedback literacy development than their teachers. We also identified expectation-related barriers which include students' persistence of performance-oriented goals, closely linked to expectations of feedback quality, and the need for teachers to articulate, and for students to make, pedagogic and epistemic transitions. To diminish ongoing barriers, students and teachers have much to learn from each other and increased agency for both parties may be an outcome of these interactions and warrant further exploration.

Introduction

Feedback is widely considered to be one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement (Hattie and Timperley 2007). However, these influences can be negative as well as positive and are highly dependent on the quality of the feedback (Ferguson 2011), how students make use of it (Winstone, Mathlin, and Nash 2019), and the assessment design and cultural context in which it is given and received (O'Donovan et al. 2021). To increase the desired effect of feedback, we sought to help students make sense of feedback through embedding a self-reflective ePortfolio and encouraging feedback dialogue. In this article, we describe this initiative and present the findings of research that give insight into students' and teachers' ongoing hidden feedback expectations which create barriers to these reflective and dialogic processes in practice.

Problematic expectations of teachers and students

Due to the high potential impact of feedback on learning, higher education institutions have been seeking to increase students' engagement and satisfaction with assessment feedback. Despite this sustained attention, it remains one of the lowest-scoring categories in the teaching and learning section of the UK National Student Survey (NSS 2021), with only 69% of students choosing definitely or mostly agree on being satisfied with assessment and feedback on a 5-point Likert scale in 2021.

Possible factors contributing to this dissatisfaction include a common misunderstanding of feedback processes among both students and teachers, the difficulty of effectively implementing feedback at scale, and the failure to fully leverage the potential of feedback processes to impact student learning (Evans 2013; Carless and Boud 2018). Recent research indicates that many teachers and students still hold traditional conceptions of feedback that see feedback as a one-way transmission of information from teachers to students (Esterhazy and Damşa 2019; Ippolito and Pazio 2019). As a result, teachers spend a lot of time *providing* feedback (Tuck 2017), assuming that students have sufficient skills to reflect on feedback and act on it to improve their learning strategies and performance—an approach termed 'feedback literacy' by Carless and Boud (2018). However, studies have suggested that without being guided, students lack sufficient feedback literacy to apply feedback effectively (Forsythe and Johnson 2017; Winstone, Mathlin, and Nash 2019). Due to mismatches in teachers' feedback expectations and students' feedback literacy, teachers often conclude with disappointment that students are not motivated to make use of feedback, rather than that they don't know how.

Students, on the other hand, often comment that they do not reflect on and use feedback because they do not *receive* much useful and/or timely feedback in their learning (Evans 2013; Forsythe and Johnson 2017). They often assume it is the teachers' responsibility to inform them about their weaknesses and how to improve, without realising their active role in feedback processes (Winstone, Mathlin, and Nash 2019). These unrealistic and unmet expectations can lead to negative perceptions between teachers and students, students and students, and even teachers and teachers. This can further damage the desired effect of feedback on learning.

Dialogic feedback—who does the talking and about what?

Our vision for feedback practice is captured by Carless (2015, 192) as 'a dialogic process in which learners make sense of information from varied sources and use it to enhance the quality of their work or learning strategies'. A dialogic feedback process involves shared responsibilities between teachers and students (Carless et al. 2020). In recent years, an ever-growing number of studies have argued for feedback as a two-way dialogic process (Esterhazy and Damşa 2019; Winstone, Mathlin, and Nash 2019; Carless et al. 2020). Often the dialogic process is described as taking place directly between the assessor and students. This can be challenging with large student cohorts and the persistence of anonymised assessment processes. Alternatively, the process may involve specific academic staff who develop ongoing relationships with individual students to support them in reflecting on and making sense of feedback. In our case, such support was provided by each student's personal tutor, a role found in many UK universities, in which a named academic has responsibility for supporting the academic and personal development of a number of students (tutees). In terms of format, dialogic feedback can be interpreted as a feedback conversation *replacing* written feedback, or being focused on *ongoing* learning (Heron et al. 2023). In this context, however, we are referring to a dialogue as conversations informed by written feedback on specific assessments.

This ongoing dialogic feedback process with a personal tutor is important, as it allows students to talk about feedback from varied sources with an academic who can be aware of how

their work and learning strategies develop over time (Carless 2015). We argue that dialogic feedback processes designed to make sense of and increase the use of feedback can themselves help to uncover unrealistic and hidden expectations between students and teachers.

Co-developing a reflective ePortfolio

Starting the dialogic process is not possible unless students reflect on past performance and feedback. Self-reflecting on feedback is an important early step in fostering dialogic feedback as it supports students to gradually develop their centrality in the role of sense-making between comments and improvement to subsequent work. Effective dialogue also requires both students and teaching staff to actively respond to feedback information within the cultural context of their academic department, taking into account any discipline-specific signature feedback practices (Quinlan and Pitt 2021). In response to the NSS survey, departmental student representatives at the UK university (that is the subject of this paper) also requested further opportunities for guided self-reflection beyond the practice of a few teachers in the department. As a result, the catalyst for the ePortfolio initiative was the department's attempt to ensure all students start to engage in self-reflection and iterative dialogic feedback processes.

The ePortfolio is a way for students to gather together feedback from multiple sources, to scaffold and record their reflections on the feedback, and to enable easy access to this material in the future, allowing ongoing reflection on the development of learning skills. There are many types of reflective ePortfolio created for different purposes, from a portfolio of coursework for assessment together with reflection of learning (Flynn 2022) to a portfolio purely for student reflection on assessed coursework and skills to allow future development and target setting (Winstone et al. 2016). The reflective ePortfolio in our study was co-created by undergraduate students, academic staff, and educational technologists and was based on Microsoft OneNote. The purpose of the ePortfolio is to encourage and scaffold students' self-reflection on feedback on both formatively and summatively assessed work and to facilitate conversations with personal tutors. In this department, over 1000 undergraduate students are allocated to one of about 90 academic staff members, who act as their personal tutors for the whole of their typically 3-year undergraduate degree programme.

The use of the reflective ePortfolio should benefit both students and personal tutors. It acts as a convenient repository for assessed student work; offers reflection prompts to help students to reflect on feedback on certain key items of formative and summative coursework (e.g. essays, reports, teamwork, presentations) and on exam feedback; and guides students on producing action plans for future similar work. Students submit a summary comprising coursework items, marks, key feedback, reflections, and action plans to their personal tutor before personal tutorials. This allows personal tutors to better follow the academic progress and development of their tutees, discuss recurring issues and provide more tailored academic support throughout their degree programme.

Our hope was that by reflecting and discussing feedback together, tutors and students would realise their unrealistic and hidden expectations of each other regarding feedback, thus their unrealistic expectations and practices can be diminished. Students would feel motivated to commit their time and energy to reflect on feedback in order to discuss it with personal tutors who provide coaching and modelling to support students' actions in response to feedback, thus helping them make sense of feedback through self-reflection. As a result, we expected students' ability to self-reflect on feedback to increase after using the ePortfolio. At the same time, seeing how their students actively engaged with feedback through dialogue, tutors would be motivated to provide better support, and the discussions around how their tutees make use of feedback would also have a positive impact on the nature of the feedback that tutors give when they are acting

as assessors. It would also inform tutor development around feedback practices and in this way improve the student experience. In short, the use of a reflective ePortfolio and the dialogic process around feedback could potentially help teachers and students develop a mutually reinforcing cycle on each other's feedback practice which could maximise the feedback effect and increase student satisfaction.

Developing and using an ePortfolio in this way to support learners' self-reflection and dialogic feedback with a tutor has novelty and value. However, we doubt our initiative will eliminate all problematic expectations in feedback processes. Thus, we conducted focus group interviews after one academic year of using the reflective ePortfolio and dialogic feedback processes in order to explore the impact and the ongoing unrealistic expectations. The results will allow us to keep challenging problematic expectations of teachers and students regarding feedback processes in the future.

Method

Participants

This project was conducted in the Department of Life Sciences in a research-intensive, STEMM (i.e. Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine) subjects-focused institution in the UK where the ePortfolio was introduced at the beginning of the 2021–2022 academic year. In total, over 1000 undergraduate students and 90 personal tutors were involved in this project.

Evaluation surveys—personal tutors and students

After one academic year of using the ePortfolio and dialogic feedback processes, all students and personal tutors were invited to evaluate the effect and their experience of using the ePortfolio. 111 students and 37 personal tutors completed an evaluation survey. Data from surveys highlighted early perceived benefits as providing a firmer basis on which to discuss learner development, giving students a need to use feedback, and encouraging teaching staff to reconsider how to make their feedback actionable by students. An area for work is to persuade students and personal tutors of the educational and socio-cultural value of their time and effort investment. These insights, which we will not report in detail in this manuscript, informed focus group interview questions to explore the why and how.

Self-reflection scale

The Self-Reflection and Insights Scale (SRIS, Grant, Franklin, and Langford 2002) was used to measure students' awareness of using self-reflection in their learning before the launch of the ePortfolio (pre-test Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$) and one academic year after its launch (post-test Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$). This scale contains 20 questions (e.g. 'I frequently take time to reflect on my thoughts'.) that participants rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). All students were invited to enter a prize draw for a £50 gift voucher for completing pre- and post-test questionnaires. In total 201 students completed pre- and/or post-tests. The respondents were 65% female, 22% male, and the rest preferred not to report. Among these students, 180 students completed the pre-test, 50 completed the post-test, and 29 finished both.

Focus group interviews

All students who used the ePortfolio were invited to join a focus group interview. Two focus group interviews were conducted, with 4 and 6 participants each. Both focus groups took place at the end of the 2021–2022 academic year; interviews lasted about one hour and enabled rich

discussion about students' comparative experiences of using the ePortfolio and dialogic feedback processes. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interview, and participation was rewarded with a £10 gift voucher. All personal tutors were invited to join focus group interviews, five volunteered, leading to one focus group interview and one individual interview due to busy schedules.

Procedure

The procedure of the project and data collection is depicted in Figure 1. This study was approved by the ethical review board of the university.

Data analysis

We analysed the quantitative data using R version 4.1.2. To test whether students' awareness of self-reflection changed significantly, we performed paired samples *t*-tests for those who completed both pre- and post-tests. We also performed independent samples *t*-tests for those who only finished pre- or post-tests. Student and tutor focus group interviews were conducted by LH and KI, audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis approach (Clarke and Braun 2021). LH and KI thoroughly read the transcripts. LH used NVivo to conduct initial coding. KI and LH discussed coding, and iteratively refined it to capture participants' shared and differing beliefs and experiences. Then, LH applied the modified codes to the whole data set. The initial and refined codes were discussed with all authors until final interpretations were reached.
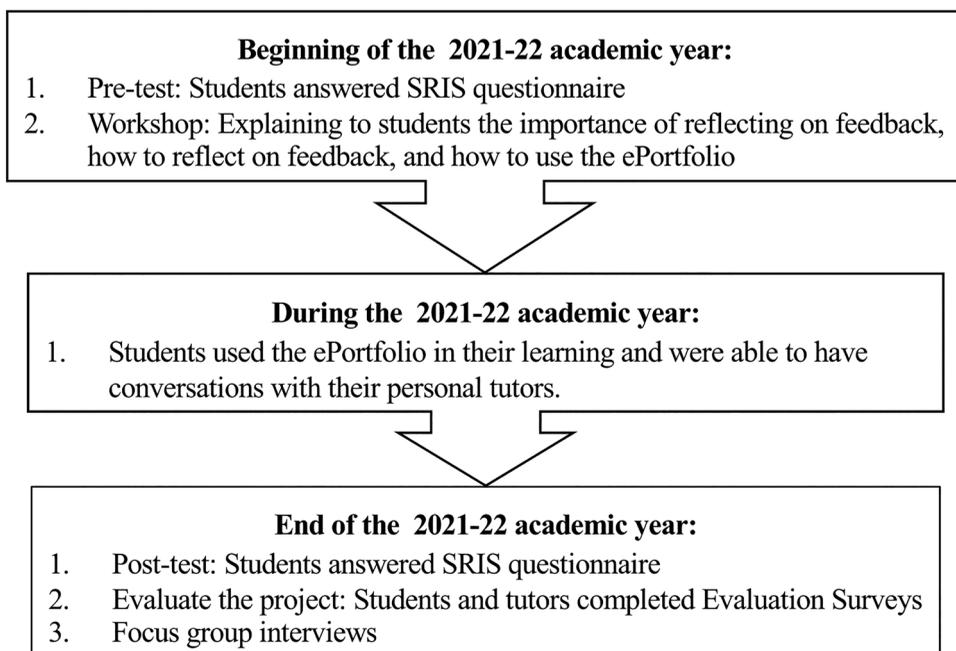
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│          Beginning of the  2021-22 academic year:                │
│   1.   Pre-test: Students answered SRIS questionnaire            │
│   2.   Workshop: Explaining to students the importance of        │
│        reflecting on feedback, how to reflect on feedback,       │
│        and how to use the ePortfolio                             │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                              ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│            During the  2021-22 academic year:                    │
│   1.   Students used the ePortfolio in their learning and        │
│        were able to have conversations with their personal       │
│        tutors.                                                   │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                              ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│            End of the  2021-22 academic year:                    │
│   1.   Post-test: Students answered SRIS questionnaire           │
│   2.   Evaluate the project: Students and tutors completed       │
│        Evaluation Surveys                                        │
│   3.   Focus group interviews                                   │
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Figure 1. The procedure of the project and the data collection. SRIS indicates the Self-Reflection and Insights Scale.

Results and discussion

We first present quantitative data indicating how students' self-reflection changed before and after using the ePortfolio. Then, we present the results and discussion of focus group interviews, focussing on the impact of using the ePortfolio and dialogic feedback processes on feedback expectations and culture.

Changes in self-reflection

Numerically, students who finished both pre- and post-tests were more aware of their self-reflection after using the reflective ePortfolio ($M=77.34$, $SD=10.53$), compared to before using it ($M=75.66$, $SD=11.45$). However, a paired samples t-test revealed that this change was not statistically significant ($t(28) = 0.98$, $p=0.34$). The analysis revealed a similar result for students who only finished the pre-test ($M=73.28$, $SD=10.91$) or the post-test ($M=75.33$, $SD=11.97$), again the difference was not statistically significant ($t(24) = 0.74$, $p=0.46$). A numerical increase in awareness of self-reflection following use of the reflective ePortfolio is consistent with the findings from the focus group interviews reported below. Though without reaching a level of statistical significance, it should be noted that the SRIS does not specifically focus on measuring students' self-reflection on feedback, but self-consciousness in general. Yet, to our knowledge, there is no available scale to measure students' self-reflection on feedback specifically.

Feedback expectations informed by focus group interviews

Exceeding expectations—student feedback literacy

Our in-depth focus group interviews revealed that by the end of the academic year students had good feedback awareness. They understood that the purpose of self-reflection is to improve themselves in the future by looking back. They also demonstrated good feedback literacy according to the four features of Carless and Boud (2018) student feedback literacy model (i.e. appreciating feedback, making judgements, managing affect, and taking action) in a way that exceeded our expectations.

Appreciating feedback. Participants understood and appreciated the role of feedback in improving their learning and self-development by offering alternative perspectives, as the following quote indicates. This appreciation may not be apparent to personal tutors.

> So it's [feedback] just like a joyful thing that you received from others. They [assessors] can see the things you could improve. You always see the perfect you, but actually, you're not perfect (Student, Zack)

Making judgements. When making academic judgements about feedback and their work, students engaged heavily with their peers.

> I do it [peer feedback/discussion] as well. … we will discuss on, you know, what we think and make our judgement, comment on it…everyone strives to get better together because it's like a positive competition. (Student, Rowan)

Bandura's social learning theory proposed that humans learn from each other through observation and modelling (Bandura and Walters 1977) and discussion with peers was one of the most important social elements that we observed. The following quote highlights the value of vicarious learning from feedback received by peers, and the potential for extending the impact of assessor feedback and contributing to the dissemination of a disciplinary feedback culture:

I always like read others' [peers'] feedback as well. Because if they have any problem, it doesn't mean you're good at it. Maybe just you did not present your problem to the markers. So we can learn something from others' feedback as well, like, try not to make the same mistake. (Student, Xena)

Managing affect. Participants demonstrated good emotion regulation strategies when receiving critical feedback. This included situation modification (Gross 2015) where, for example, they put away 'harsh' feedback for a while and came back to it when they were ready to make sense or use of it. Previous research has indicated that critical feedback may threaten self-esteem and cause discomfort when receiving it (Xu and Carless 2017; Carless et al. 2020). Despite this, our participants claimed to actually prefer critical feedback as it gives valuable information about the gaps between their current knowledge and skills level and the desired level.

I feel happy to get positive feedback. But actually, I will pay more attention to the negative feedback. Because I always think I need to get more progress and improvements in my work. So I really try to focus more on the negative feedback. (Student, Jen)

Discussions on feedback between students and their personal tutors may help to develop cooperative relationships and a more positive attitude in students towards critical feedback (Carless et al. 2020; Matthews et al. 2023). Students also reported discussing feedback with their peers as 'damage control', to minimise their negative feelings if the feedback was perceived as too critical. Interestingly, they preferred not to discuss marks with peers as they were aware that it may cause peer pressure. This discovery of peer-based emotional support and regulation around assessment and feedback seems particularly important and potentially protective against the unhealthy effect of toxic competitiveness (Bishop 2020) and challenges to emotional well-being in university teaching and learning.

Taking action. Actions students took included seeking help from personal tutors or peers and asking assessors to provide clarification when feedback was unclear. They also made changes to improve their work according to feedback or stored feedback and used it to instruct themselves when completing similar coursework in the future.

In contrast with previous studies which suggest that students lack feedback literacy (e.g. Forsythe and Johnson 2017; Winstone, Mathlin, and Nash 2019), our focus group data show that the student participants had sophisticated skills, especially in how they engaged with their peers. These skills may have been built up gradually by using the reflective ePortfolio and engaging in dialogic feedback practice. Interestingly, our tutors did not seem to realise the extent of students' peer interactions and their sophisticated feedback literacy.

Impact of transparency on expectations

From the tutor perspective, the ePortfolio allows them to see the assessments an individual student has undertaken, and the marks and feedback received. This has significantly increased the transparency between tutor and tutee and created a basis on which to have an evidence-informed discussion about the student's academic development and about setting realistic expectations. In some cases, this served as a catalyst for conversation. Moreover, the ePortfolio and dialogic process has also increased the transparency between tutors/assessors as they can access the feedback their colleagues provide to their tutees, either through the ePortfolio or their tutees. This

transparency has created additional motivation to provide high-quality feedback when tutors act as assessors.

> I was more aware that people would be looking at it [the feedback I provide], so I went through it systematically …I made sure that it was more 'This is the problem. This is why it's a problem. This is what you need to do to fix it.' (Tutor, Sam)

Although this suggests a positive impact on feedback practice, it seems to come from a place of avoiding judgement from others. Whilst students talked about collaborating over feedback to improve, tutors did not mention collaborating with other tutors to improve their approaches to giving feedback or their understanding of students' use of feedback. This highlights that not only our students, but also tutors may benefit from feedback literacy development (Carless et al. 2020). Interestingly, despite demonstrating well-developed and supportive feedback practices, Sam still conceives feedback as identifying problems that need to be fixed. Maybe this is due to the way he perceives student expectations or part of undergraduate STEMM disciplinary signature feedback.

Tutors commented that requiring students to fill out the reflective ePortfolio helped students reflect more deeply on feedback, however, bringing up the reflection on-screen during a tutorial got in the way of a natural, enjoyable conversation:

> I looked into the files [ePortfolio] a little bit, … It is just too much and I don't want to take away from just a natural conversation with them [tutees]. (Tutor, Lily)

Despite personal tutors' assumptions to the contrary, there was no expectation that they should read reflections, rather it was expected that students would review their reflections and come to the tutorial ready to discuss their thoughts with their tutor. The tutors' assumptions imply a transmission approach with the reflection seen as output that needs to be read and commented on, rather than a vehicle for conversation, led by the tutee. Indeed, the following comment highlights how a personal tutor's enthusiasm and engagement with the process can inspire students to engage more fully with reflecting on their feedback:

> I think just their [personal tutor's] enthusiasm really makes me want to do it [self-reflection]…it prompts you to reflect further on the feedback you get… when you're doing it alone, it's just like a task you have to do. (Student, Xiao)

Despite the benefit of increased transparency, both tutors and students expressed concerns that using the ePortfolio was time-consuming from their perspective and felt that their effort may not be reciprocated (O'Donovan et al. 2021). Some students complained that their tutor did not refer to their self-reflection enough, which made them feel that reflection was just a mandatory hand-in task, leading to demotivation. Although students demonstrated self-reflection ability and feedback literacy, it seems that they did not all fully understand that self-reflection with the ePortfolio is for their own benefit and they should be responsible for engaging their tutor in the dialogic feedback process rather than expecting the tutor to take the lead. This demonstrates a lack of agency (i.e. students' proactive role in the feedback process) with students expecting to be reactive rather than proactive in the dialogic feedback process (Winstone et al. 2017; Nieminen et al. 2022).

Performance vs mastery expectations

Our contemporary fast-paced society is becoming increasingly competitive (Jones, Davis, and Thomas 2017). Wider societal expectations communicate messages to students about what is important in their learning and that they have to perform extremely well in assessments to

secure a desirable job in the near future. This can understandably lead to an orientation towards performance rather than mastery-achievement goals (Dweck 1986), especially if the local disciplinary culture does not explicitly challenge these prevailing conditions.

> I think it's society and human nature… I feel a lot of students, they've gotten more anxiety, because they want to do extremely well… And they put a lot of pressure and they forgot to be a student and what it feels to be a student… After the exam, they forget everything. As they just worked for the grade. And it's extremely frustrating [as a teacher]. (Tutor, George)

We observed that many students indeed had overwhelmingly high expectations of themselves, and tutors indicated that, in recent years, they have spent more and more time supporting students' well-being. This limited the time available to have developmental conversations about realistic expectations and goal-setting in such achievement contexts. The risk is also that any initiative seeking to raise the profile of feedback may inadvertently reinforce the perceived need for students to perform better and better in assessments. These feedback conversations may help to address students' perceived pressures that are often based on a reinforced notion of success as getting high academic marks, rather than defining success as developing new skills and understanding as a science student. These dialogic feedback processes offer a step toward redefining academic success (Bishop 2020). To this end, to take the emphasis away from marks, we strongly encourage the use of the reflective ePortfolio and dialogic feedback for formative assessment and professional skills development.

Different expectations regarding learning between tutors and students led to strained interactions. Students' performance-goal orientation caused them to expect feedback to justify their marks, while currently assessors mainly provide feedback focusing on how to master knowledge. Unsatisfied expectations led students to criticise assessors and to express dissatisfaction with the feedback provided (e.g. suggesting that the feedback quality is low). Tutors complained that when receiving assessment feedback, students only focussed on marks, which limited their effective use of feedback:

> That's one thing that I find really hard about the exam feedback that we give to students…we give them feedback and take them through their scripts. And it's supposed to be a reflective process. But… they'll be like, why have I lost a mark there. (Tutor, John)

Tutors observed that students' performance-oriented beliefs, that high investment of effort should result in high marks, hindered them from making use of feedback that focussed on how to learn at university (e.g. applying learning strategies and time management). Students took tutors' advice only after finding that their own learning strategies did not help them to reach the mark they expected:

> I gave feedback about the ways they were learning because it is important, particularly in the first year… And then after the first exam, [students said]: 'oh, I should have done that'. And they changed… (Tutor, George)

Wider societal expectations still seem to dominate students' learning goals even after a whole academic year of discussion on self-reflection and feedback. It may be that despite individual tutors' beliefs about the importance of learning like a science student, the wider societal expectation conveys more powerful messages about what it takes to succeed and this needs to be unpacked for students. Perhaps tutors also have to accept that teacher feedback will only ever be one source of information that students use to inform their approaches and experiential learning is another powerful source. Then the dialogue proposed can surface and critically consider the societal expectation and perceived disciplinary feedback practices when students are ready (Heron et al. 2023).

Diversity of feedback expectations

Diversity of beliefs about university learning and teaching, previous feedback experiences, and a sense of self-concept (Rogers, Smith, and Coleman 1978) shapes students' diversity of feedback expectations. In line with O'Donovan et al. (2021), students' responses to 'what is good feedback' were highly divergent. Some students prefer specific feedback that focuses on detailed information regarding the work they did, as it provides immediate satisfaction in the form of 'telling' how to do it correctly:

> like the immediate gratification that, like I know how this is supposed to be done. And for me, it helped. Like OK, this is wrong, this is specifically how it should be done. (Student, Jack)

The term 'immediate gratification" implies that Jack was aware that the corrective feedback may not help his learning in the long run.

Some students prefer constructive generalised feedback that focuses on future solutions, as it can help them in future exams or coursework, while specific feedback has a limited function because they will probably never do the same work again. Students, like Lucy, conceived of different feedback as having different purposes and valued its context relevancy.

> This specific piece of feedback is, he's [the assessor] like, trying to correct my mistakes so that I wouldn't do the same again. This really broad one that I mentioned is more of, I think it's more like how I wrote the report… I think they're just like two different kinds of feedback. But some people might find one more helpful than the other. It just changes according to how you want to do it. (Student, Lucy)

This echoes tutors' suggestions that the diversity of students' feedback expectations may partially account for why student satisfaction with assessment and feedback remains low. Even positive feedback, for example, praise, caused dissatisfaction in some students as they believed that positive feedback could not help them to improve, while others enjoyed receiving praise as it motivated them and encouraged them to keep investing effort.

Diversity of feedback may be perceived by students as inconsistency in feedback quality but tutors agreed that university is an opportunity to learn about the value of this diversity that reflects the wider world. Students are also likely to be in the role of giving feedback to individuals with differing preferences and self-concepts. In preparation for future life, students need to learn to assimilate and accommodate a range of feedback from a range of perspectives. To address dissatisfaction with assessment and feedback, we could move towards separating the feedback from the assessment process by getting students to look at feedback holistically and over time (Winstone and Boud 2022) and by involving personal tutors, who have an overview, rather than individual assessors.

Challenging expectations—epistemic and pedagogic transitions

As the newest members of our disciplinary community, students' voices are valuable for understanding how those transitioning in make sense of and can shape dialogic feedback practice. We asked students to talk specifically about the ways in which feedback could be improved to better understand the practices and academic conventions of the departmental community. Students indicated that accessing timely feedback provides a chance for them to engage with feedback in daily learning. Moreover, having experienced dialogic feedback processes with personal tutors for one academic year, students pointed to the valuable potential of dialogue directly with assessors that a more relational approach could facilitate:

> I feel like it would be a lot better if it was more transparent, like, between the students and professors in terms of communications, because I feel like the whole purpose is to help us learn and improve. So if it's just, [written] comments, it's not really serving the purpose. (Student, Rowan)

If we apply this idea of transparency to students and teachers better understanding the nature and value of feedback in this disciplinary context, such conversations are timely.

Despite the unexpected sophistication with which some of our participants engaged with feedback, the role of feedback in correcting mistakes was mentioned multiple times by different students during the focus groups and likely represents the views of many students. Knowing how specifically their assessed answer is wrong and could be corrected implies a very fixed view of knowledge with a need for epistemological certainty. Many students hold a view about the nature of knowledge as being immutable and the role of feedback as being to correct incorrect understanding of that knowledge (O'Donovan et al. 2021). This is understandable as in these undergraduate years students' relationship with knowledge is developing (Magolda 2004). They are transitioning from being school pupils who believed there to be a correct answer, and were rewarded and reinforced based on this, to university students with an appreciation of the uncertain and dynamic nature of disciplinary knowledge. It may also be a distinct feature of signature feedback in scientific disciplines where a factual understanding based on uncontested knowledge of the time is foundational, but this needs to be unpacked (Quinlan and Pitt 2021). As the student's own recognition of their current need for 'immediate gratification' suggests, unless this epistemological shift is explicitly scaffolded and reflected in the changing requirements of assessment tasks, this could be storing up discomfort for later in the degree programme. As O'Donovan et al. (2021, 319) argues, 'only students who view knowledge as relative and mutable are likely to be satisfied with feedback on complex open-ended assignments where definitive and corrective commentary is unachievable'. Given that the NSS is completed towards the end of the undergraduate degree, consistently relatively lower scores for assessment and feedback might imply that this epistemological shift has not occurred, or at least not been applied to feedback.

Limitations

Though this study provides insight into problematic expectations during feedback processes, it has some limitations. Although this is a fairly large-scale, department-wide initiative with many participants, only a small subset has taken part in the research element and may represent the more engaged. This limitation is mitigated to some extent, particularly amongst personal tutors, some of whom volunteered through a desire to voice their own and wider staff concerns about feedback culture and the ePortfolio, with a view to helping improve it. This is evident in the findings. In terms of students, even if those attending focus groups were amongst the more highly feedback literate, this still helps to indicate what is possible and raises morale and motivation. Another limitation is that the Self-Reflection and Insights Scale did not fully reflect the changes in awareness of self-reflection on feedback in student learning. Self-reflection on feedback is one of the most important aspects of feedback processes. To better understand students' reflection on feedback during learning, future studies could focus on developing and validating a 'self-reflection during feedback' scale. Moreover, the lack of significant changes in self-reflection might be due to the fact that self-reflection is a skill that is gradually developed over time (Hartman 2001), such as throughout the entire undergraduate programme. The changes in self-reflection skills might not be quantifiable within just one academic year. Future studies could measure these changes over a longer period of time.

Implications for practice

As indicated, we are at the early stages of embedding this more reflective, dialogic approach to assessment feedback into departmental culture. Lessons learned, and that inform ongoing progress, centre on conceptualisations of how to make sense of and use feedback. We have identified a need to support the development of teacher feedback literacy, with possibilities including sharing our encouraging evidence of student feedback literacy and showcasing the practices of those

modelling feedback literacy. Learning to adopt new pedagogic approaches creates risk and makes us vulnerable. Positive cultural change cannot happen in an environment where risk and vulnerability are accompanied by fear of negative judgement. In an attempt to overcome this, the development of student and teacher feedback literacy should be positioned as an ongoing, relational process that can be improved upon through the feedback dialogue itself. Guidance can be given but there is no 'best' way to do this. If teachers are more feedback literate, they will be able to model through dialogue with tutees, thus embedding valuable concepts in departmental practice and interaction.

Conclusions

A prevailing view is that for feedback to be effective, students need support in making sense of it through dialogic feedback processes (Esterhazy and Damşa 2019). We have demonstrated that, with the use of an ePortfolio to collate all assessments and feedback and to scaffold self-reflection, this dialogue can usefully and feasibly be with a personal tutor or disciplinary academic with an ongoing professional relationship. Whilst evaluating the early impact of this ePortfolio and personal tutoring dialogue intervention, we identified expectation-related enablers and barriers to developing feedback dialogue. Enablers include students' actual feedback literacy, including the way peers engage together over feedback resulting in unexpectedly productive feedback dialogue, and the positive impact of transparency on raising teacher awareness of local feedback practices. In some ways, students appear to have invested more in their feedback literacy development than the teacher community and serve as a source of inspiration. Barriers include the persistence of performance-oriented goals, closely linked to expectations of feedback quality, and the need for teachers to articulate, and students to make, pedagogic and epistemic transitions. Framed positively, these barriers give a list of learning points to be explored and negotiated in feedback conversations. Students and teachers have much to learn from each other; increased agency on the part of both parties may be an outcome of these interactions and warrant further exploration (Nieminen et al. 2022).

Changing feedback culture and practice from a one-way to a two-way dialogic process is slow. Whilst collecting evidence to identify the beginnings of feedback culture change, we surfaced unexplored expectations from key stakeholders that helped us identify as many complex challenges as solutions. In a sense though, finding solutions was not our aim. Rather, a process as contextual and relational as feedback can never be pinned down, but requires the identification of foci for meaning-making that need to be continually explored and negotiated through feedback dialogue itself.

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