Keys to Effective Feedback
A guide to support implementation of the Assessment Policy and the Assessment, Examination and Moderation Procedures in relation to feedback

Assessment Policy

Principle 4.3 (b): ECU is committed to formative and summative assessment practices that build capacity for future learning by intentionally including opportunities for students to independently judge and improve performance quality.

‣ Provide a summary of the process of benchmarking ECU's teaching and learning; and

‣ Clarify the steps required to successfully use the "Benchmarking Mechanism for Activity and Results Collection (BenchMARC)", ECU's web-based tool (Edith Cowan University, 2013a).

Assessment, Examination and Moderation Procedures

Procedures 2.31, 2.32 and 2.33 relate to feedback: Students must receive feedback on all assessment tasks, except final examinations, that is constructive and clear; students must receive specific feedback in relation to course learning outcomes; and, feedback may be generated through self and peer review and assessment. Students should always receive feedback on their self and peer assessment to assist them in calibrating their judgement to match discipline standards. Self and peer assessment is to be used for formative purposes only, however the quality of feedback provided to a peer may be a component of summative assessment.

Effective feedback is goal-referenced, timely, clear, constructive, specific, and actionable. Effective feedback is not a monologue delivered by the teacher, in which the student is a passive recipient. In fact, effective feedback is best described as a process rather than a product – a process in which students have ongoing opportunities to develop evaluative judgement and apply this judgement to improve the quality of their own work and that of others.

Effective feedback is meaningful. It is not simply the correction of errors, but a rigorous process generating meaningful information that may correct errors, but will also develop understanding, generate more learning, develop meta-cognition through reflection, promote the development of discipline-specific and generic skills, and encourage continued engagement with learning.

Effective feedback is also sustainable. The process must be manageable for students and for the teacher. Race (2010) offers suggestions on how to balance effectiveness and efficiency in assessment and feedback, such as:

‣ Review the assessment task to determine if it could be approached differently, e.g. could a 2000 word paper be replaced by a 500 word synthesis/critique?
‣ Incorporate self or peer review;
‣ Increase engagement with feedback asking students to reflect on feedback and estimate their grade before receiving it, or to include a response to feedback in subsequent tasks;
‣ Provide generic feedback, to a whole class or to small groups, in written and/or oral form; and,
‣ Provide model answers that include comments on common difficulties/errors.

Effective feedback is dialogic and interactive (Nicol, 2010). It offers opportunities for conversations about assessment such as small group sessions where students evaluate examples of work at a range of levels and discuss potential improvements. Digital technologies and software make interactive learning increasingly feasible, providing real-time feedback and opportunities to correct misconceptions and re-direct learning.

References

Race, P. (2010) Making learning happen (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications.

Nicol, D (2010) From monologue to dialogue: improving written feedback in mass higher education. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education.* 35(5) pps 501 -517.