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**Title** A pointless exercise? Comparing staff and student perceptions of the use of assessment feedback  
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### **A pointless exercise? Comparing staff and student perceptions of the use of assessment feedback**

In addition to regular information from performance measures like the National Student Survey, there is a large volume of scholarly literature on students' experiences of assessment and feedback (e.g. Hanrahan and Isaacs 2001, Weaver 2006, Lizzio and Wilson 2008). There is also a reasonable amount of research on staff perceptions of assessment and feedback (e.g. Bailey and Garner 2010, Tuck 2012). There is less research that directly compares the views of staff and students.

A key issue to which comparative data on staff and student attitudes is relevant is what Evans (2013) terms the 'feedback gap': "the gap between [students] receiving and acting on feedback" (p. 94). Concerns that feedback is not sufficiently well-used by students have been common in the literature for a number of years (e.g. Sadler 1983, Ramaprasad 1983, Gibbs et al 2003, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006, Denton and McIlroy 2017, Winstone et al 2017). There is understandable concern that academic staff are spending large amounts of time providing feedback to students, but to apparently limited effect (Gibbs 2006).

Comparative data about staff and student perceptions of the use and usefulness of feedback have so far suggested that staff are in general more positive about the use of feedback than students: that staff are more likely to think that feedback prompts discussion with tutors (MacLellan 2001); that staff are more likely to think that feedback is acted upon (Carless 2006); that staff are more likely to see feedback as helpful to learning (Adcroft 2011).

This paper will describe the use of the Assessment Experience Questionnaire (AEQ) to explore the perceptions of students and teaching staff about assessment and feedback, and in particular to compare their views about the use of feedback by students. The AEQ was designed to explore students' perceptions of programme-level features of feedback that effectively support learning (Gibbs and Simpson 2003). It has been widely used as part of the 'Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment' (TESTA) research methodology (Jessop et al 2014, Jessop and Maleckar 2016). The paper will report on the use of a staff-facing variant of the AEQ alongside the original student-facing questionnaire to compare staff and students' views of the constructs addressed by the questionnaire, which include the quality of feedback, the clarity of expectations and the use of feedback. Both variants contain 28 items with Likert-style agree/disagree response options, and include items exploring student activity, staff activity, and features of the programme environment.

Questionnaire data was collected from 77 staff and 538 students from three departments at a large pre-1992 institution in Scotland, and results were analysed to explore the validity and reliability of the staff-facing questionnaire, and to explore differences in the perceptions of staff and students.

Reasonable levels of reliability were found for the staff-facing variant of the AEQ, although the factor structure was markedly different from the student-facing AEQ. A wide range of statistically significant differences were found between the staff and student responses, with effect sizes varying between small and large. In general, students were more positive about the aspects of assessment and feedback addressed by the questionnaire. Students were much more positive than staff about students' use of feedback, and in particular about whether or not students' pay careful attention to feedback that they receive. Staff were much more positive than students about the feedback that students received, particularly about the extent to which students received actually received feedback.

Differences were also found in the relationships between aspects of staff and student perceptions. For students, the question groups that correlated most strongly with their overall satisfaction with the quality of their course were those that addressed the clarity of goals and standards, and the quality and quantity of feedback. For staff, the strongest correlation with their perceptions of students' overall satisfaction was for the questions about students' use of feedback; and in fact for staff, all of the question groups that correlated significantly with their sense of students' overall satisfaction were those that related to student effort.

The paper will relate these findings to discussions about the gap between students receiving and using feedback. On one level, the findings were clear: students think that feedback is minimal, unclear and late; staff think that students don't use feedback. This paints a concerning picture that chimes with a widespread sense of the challenge of feedback (Evans 2013). It also contradicts some of the earlier research (cited above) which has suggested that staff are more positive about students' use of feedback. The largest gaps between students and staff were for two questions: 'I [Students] receive hardly any feedback on my [their] work'; 'I [Students] pay careful attention to feedback on my [their] work and try to understand what it is saying'. The impression of communities at loggerheads is hard to avoid. Previous research has indicated that students are unduly negative about staff views of students' use of feedback (Bevan 2008): these findings suggest that such negativity may well be warranted.

The picture is complicated by the findings from the correlation analysis. Staff seem to have very different perceptions to students of the factors that contribute to students' overall satisfaction with the quality of their course. For staff it is students' use of feedback that has the strongest relationship with whether or not students are satisfied. Staff may be pessimistic about the extent to which students use feedback – and pessimistic in general about the effort expended by students – but they appear to take students' use of feedback to be a powerful factor in their satisfaction with the quality of their course. This may indicate that staff conceive of teaching quality in ways that

encompass ideas about the value of constructivist approaches to feedback (Higgins et al 2002), while remaining sceptical about students' level of engagement.

The findings of this study suggest the need for further qualitative research on staff attitudes to students' use of feedback, in particular to explore their perceptions of the importance of the use of feedback to students' overall perceptions of programme quality.

999 words

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