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Dialogic feed-forward assessment: re-energising the undergraduate essay

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**Innovative Assessment of Geography
Students in Higher Education**

**RGS-IBG Annual International
Conference, September 2017**

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Feedback Context

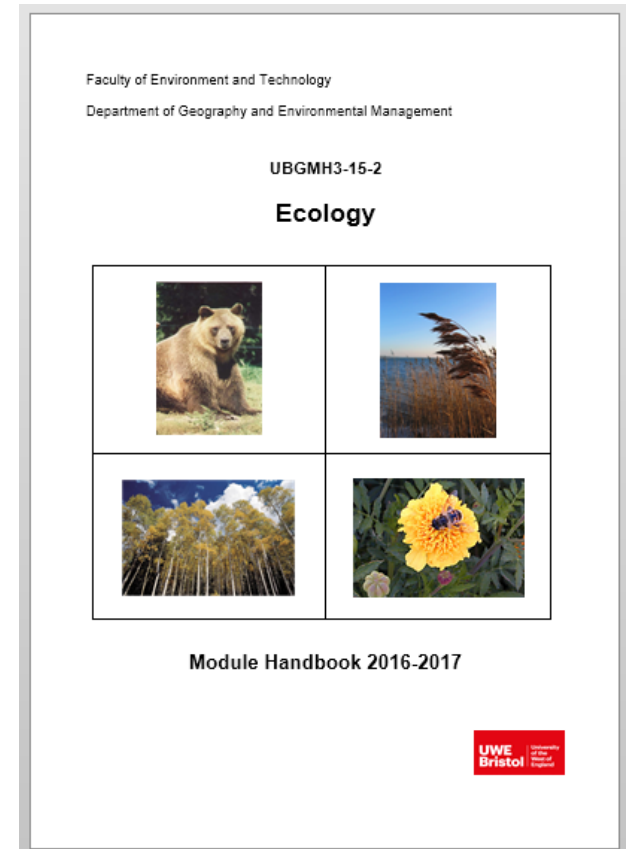
- Feedback should help students to:
 - understand current performance
 - understand how to close the 'performance gap' in future assignments
 - have the confidence and belief they have control over their success
 - maintain motivation throughout their degree

(Hattie & Timperley, 2007)

- But ... there is a recognised gap between staff perceptions of feedback and the student experience (Price *et al.*, 2011)
- Low satisfaction scores for assessment/feedback in national student surveys

Feedback Intervention

- We implemented an assessment approach on a second year physical geography module to optimally support students' use of feedback
- Traditional essay used innovatively to move students beyond 'regurgitation' of information
- Based on premise that feedback should occupy a central position within a **dialogic** approach to learning & teaching (Alexander, 2004; Sutton, 2009) and be **future-oriented** (Sadler, 2010; Beaumont *et al.*, 2011)



Definitions

- **Dialogic feedback** is the creation of meaning and understanding via spoken discourse between lecturer and student, or student to student
(Nicol, 2010)
- **Feed-forward** refers specifically to feedback given by tutors that:
 - impacts upon an upcoming assignment
 - is given post-assignment with more specific direction on how this can be applied to future assignments
(Carless, 2007)

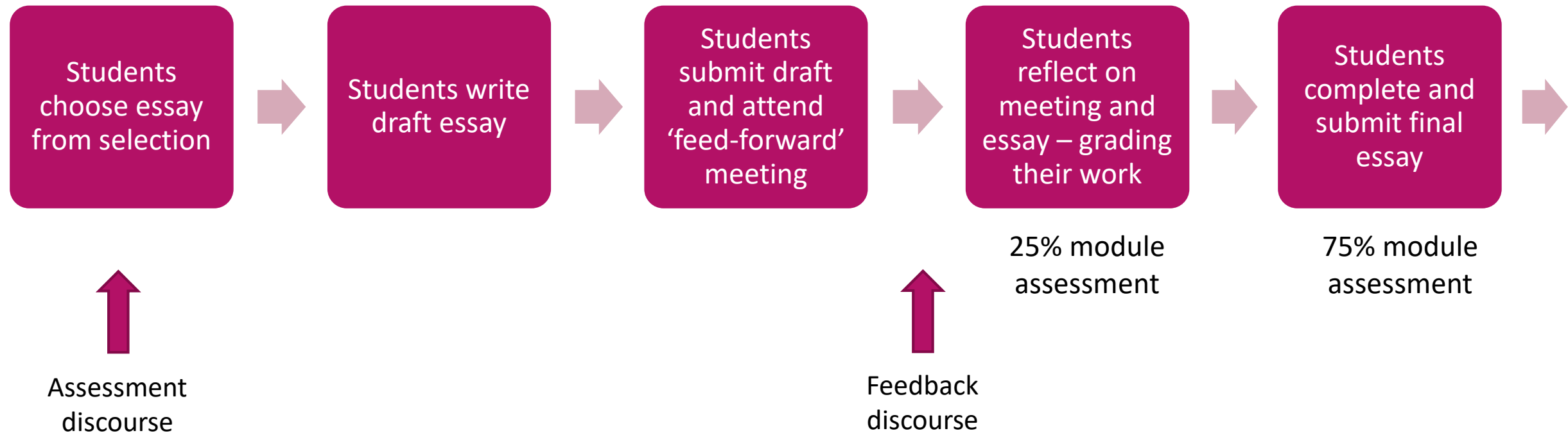


Research Aims

1. Explore **student perceptions** of the dialogic feed-forward approach and whether it asserted a **positive influence on their learning experience**
2. Identify if and how the **task-specific behaviour** of students was altered by the assessment approach
3. Identify the extent to which students believed their **self-efficacy** and **self-regulation** skills were improved
4. Examine whether the assessment approach **enhanced student performance** and whether it could potentially raise **NSS scores** related to feedback

Module Assessment Structure

Supporting Lectures



Data Collection

Qualitative case study approach

- Individual semi-structured interviews ... two consecutive level 2 cohorts at end of module (2015-16 and 2016-17) ... analysed thematically via grounded theory
- Group semi-structured interviews with level 3 students elucidating post-assignment behaviour
- Essay performance data pre- and post-assessment intervention (inferential stats)
- Answers to NSS feedback questions



Enhanced Learning Experience

Conversation compels students to engage critically with their work:

*‘when I have had drafts handed back to me and it’s just written over, either **I don’t understand what they are trying to say**, or it’s not clear enough. I can ask you questions **if we’re talking to each other about it, it’s easier to see things** ... It’s definitely better to talk about it’ R7*

*‘I’ve had it before where you get electronic feedback and **you might not be sure what some of the comments mean** ... being able to discuss it is important. You get that progress and can **discuss how you can change it as opposed to just saying this is wrong**’ R9*



Enhanced Learning Experience

Motivational due to pertinent application:

*‘the bit in between my draft and writing the final piece was the best bit because **I knew what I was doing** and could tweak it and **I enjoyed that process of making it better**. It **gave me more confidence** in my writing skills’ R7*

*‘my first draft was quite vague and I didn’t really know what direction I was going with it. Then, **after speaking and having the feedback**, I spent more time on it because **I knew where I needed to go with it**’ R8*



Task-Specific Behaviour & Self-Regulation

*'it helped me to **realise how to critique my own essays** because I was able to sit down with you and go through the essay and know exactly why you were commenting on something ... **It allows me now to see in other essays the same things I'm doing**' R10*

*'I **never understood how good submitting a draft and getting feedback is** and now that I've done it I'm **definitely going to take advantage of it this year**' R24*



Self-Efficacy

- Students display increased self-efficacy: stronger beliefs in their capabilities to accomplish tasks in future
- Believe learning is carried over to other level 2 assignments
- Self-avow to altered level 3 behaviour:

*'I felt my **critical analysis was improved** through the feedback session and this has been helpful writing other essays and exam answers ... I was **able to achieve higher 2:1s and 1sts at level 3** because my understanding of critical analysis had improved'*

Enhanced Student Performance



Significantly higher marks 2015-17 v 2011-13
($p = < 0.0001$)

Band (%)	2011-2012 (%)	2012-2013 (%)	2015-2016 (%)	2016-2017 (%)
0-39 (inc. NS)	16	5	0	5.5*
40-49	9	14	3*	5.5*
50-59	34	38	28	17
60-69	41	38	58	58
70-100	0	5	11	14
Number (n)	32	37	36	36

Average Ecology mark 4.5% higher than average mark for other
second year optional modules ($p = 0.01$)



Dialogic assessment

* Did not have a meeting

Enhanced NSS & TEF Metrics

- **All** students rated the module as giving them high quality feedback: detailed, conversational, personalised, timely (relevant application), multi-faceted
- **All** students said the feedback helped them clarify things they did not understand: proactive engagement with learning – they had to prepare for the meeting, think about their work, ask and answer questions



Conclusions

Dialogic feed-forward assessment enhanced the student learning experience by:

- Increasing **motivation** to engage with current assignment
- Increasing **confidence** in their ability to complete the assignment
- Solidifying **good practice in-task** & supporting higher assignment **grades**
- Increasing **satisfaction** with the feedback process (potentially boosting NSS metrics)
- Encouraging feedback **proactive recipience** (Winstone *et al.*, 2017)
- Positively **changing behaviour** working towards future assignments (fostering self-efficacy & self-regulation)



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Thank You For Listening



Questions?

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