



**Feedback: what students get, what students
want, what students need to achieve
excellence**

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**And with thanks to all of the UEA students who took part in
this research**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Feedback on assessed work is one of the most critical, and most currently controversial, components of student learning. National Student Survey results have shown persistent student dissatisfaction with feedback relative to other aspects of the university experience, and many students report difficulties in responding to feedback. At a time of monumental change across the whole of the higher education sector, UEA is responding with vigour. One aspect of our response is introduction of the New Academic Model (NAM); this emphasises the need to engage students through formative assessment, and to maximise the proportions of students attaining good honours. It is therefore critical that we rigorously investigate the social and psychological mechanisms through which our range of formative feedback practices exert their influence. We need not only to investigate formative feedback-satisfaction and formative feedback-engagement links, but also to examine the specific impact of different formative feedback types on student study planning for related summative assessments and attainment.

The feedback process is inextricably intertwined with issues of engagement (Price, Handley, Millar & O'Donovan, 2010). As one report (Oxford Brookes University, 2008) has stated "engagement is important because, no matter how much feedback is delivered, students still have to pay attention to it, process it and turn it into actions that improve subsequent work. Unless they do this, feedback has no effect and staff time is wasted" (p.3). Engagement can be thought of as existing on a continuum with non-engagement at one pole and full engagement at the other. Psychological definitions of engagement might characterize it as the 'involvement' of an individual with a group or task. It can thus be manifest in feelings of 'belongingness' or 'identification' with a community of learners; as well instrumentally through the generation of specific action plans reflecting involvement with educational processes.

The issue of how best to provide efficient and effective feedback for students is a major current issue for all HEIs. Good feedback should enhance satisfaction, fuel engagement, and propel attainment upwards, so facilitating personal development and empowerment, as well as improving employability. Across the sector, student charters epitomize universities' explicit desires to form learning partnerships with their undergraduates. Charters explain the partnership basis of learning to students and emphasize to students the need for self-reflection and independent study over the course of the university experience. Peer assessment is increasingly used alongside standard feedback practices such as lecturer delivered individual and group feedback, but not all feedback types may be equally positively perceived by students. For example, based on research conducted outside the UEA, peer feedback and self-reflection may be perceived as 'second rate' forms of feedback the use of which suggests institutional disinterest in the individual learner. As one student puts it: "I mean it seems only fair really when you've spent the time writing the essay they should give you some feedback back really" (Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2002, p.58).

This report provides details of a research project funded by a Vice Chancellor's Teaching Fellowship Award of £9059 to Dr Vicky Scaife and Dr Neil Cooper from the School of Psychology. The project was designed to explore student perceptions of, and responses to, a range of traditional and modern feedback variants; it specifically sought to answer **three key questions in relation to feedback on assessed work at UEA undergraduate level**. These were:

- **What feedback do students get?**
- **What feedback do students want?**
- **What feedback do students need to achieve excellence?**

Social psychological conceptual frameworks and research methodologies were used, and the project comprised three major phases of activity as set out below:

PHASE 1: Scoping exercise

This explored the range of local feedback provision. It was based primarily on NAM course submissions from across the UEA, but also informed by selected data from the most recent National Student Survey and the most recent UEA Student Experience Survey, plus a small sample of psychologically relevant research to help contextualise the PHASE 2 and PHASE 3 empirical work.

PHASE 2: Empirical work: qualitative (focus groups and interviews)

This used student focus groups (and some supplementary interviews) to elicit qualitative data on formative and summative feedback preferences from a diverse range of UEA students.

PHASE 3: Empirical work: quantitative (quasi-experimental questionnaire study)

This used an online quasi-experimental self-report questionnaire to elicit quantitative data regarding the impact common different formative feedback types have on measures of student satisfaction, feelings of engagement, and instrumental study plans.

Work was conducted during 2012-13 and is more fully described in the chapters which follow, specifically:

Chapter 2: Scoping exercise

Chapter 3: Empirical work: qualitative (focus groups and interviews)

Chapter 4: Empirical work: quantitative (quasi-experimental questionnaire)

Chapter 5: Discussion and recommendations

2. SCOPING EXERCISE

A sample of undergraduate course proposals submitted as part of NAM preparation were inspected in order to gain a university-wide snapshot of the range of formative and summative assessment and feedback strategies being implemented as part of the NAM. At least one submission from each school in each Faculty (SSF, SCI, HUM, FMH) was inspected. A very wide range of different formative and summative assessment and feedback strategies were evident, both traditional and innovative. Examples are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample of formative and summative assessment and feedback variants as recorded in selected undergraduate NAM course proposals

Assessment variants	Feedback variants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essay • Laboratory Report • Course test • Examination • Project/Dissertation/Report • Oral presentation • Assessment of practice • Other <p><i>Listed under 'other'</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marking exercise • Reflective diary • Intercultural interview • Practical exercises (e.g. subtitling, listening tests) • Group discussions • Annotated translation • Case studies • Take home exam/test • Poster • Group project and presentations • Portfolio (e.g. data handling) • Briefing paper • Taxonomy selection • Year abroad/year in industry (assessment defined by host institution) • Web page • Event (e.g. science communication) • Weekly problem sheets/quizzes • Plan/work in progress/full draft/final/sample (e.g. quarter of a reading log) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written • Verbal • Self-mark/reflection • Peer (e.g. on senate scales) • Lecturer/seminar leader/placement educator/artist feedback • Problem Based Learning (PBL) tutor reports • Standard form • Marking descriptors with verbal identifiers • Virtual/computer generated (e.g. assignment software in blackboard; MyAccountingLab; AiM and MapleTA systems) • Individual/group/cohort/general • Numerical mark on technical test questions • Podcast on MCQ (not just answers, also explanations) • Explicitly dialogic (e.g. tutorial, in-class debate/discussion) • Automatic/possible/open-door/on-request/relational dependent on student and supervisor • Examiner's report • Continuous/specific points • Instant or delayed • Model answers on website

Items as listed in Table 1 represent single instances of assessment, or single instances of feedback. In reality, many different combinations and cycles of formative and summative

assessment and feedback are experienced by students over the course of their undergraduate study. Furthermore, within the UEA:

- some schools/courses, as a reflection of disciplinary area/specialism, may use some formative and summative assessment and feedback types more than others
- some schools/courses, as a reflection of disciplinary area/specialism, may use some *combinations* of formative and summative feedback types more than others

The complexity of these experiential realities needs to be kept in mind when considering the reliability and implications of findings from National Student Surveys (NSS) which rely on simplified 'satisfaction' ratings. Such items (used in successive NSS surveys) have found evidence of persistent student dissatisfaction with feedback relevant to other aspects of the university experience. Independent from this, the most recent UEA Annual Student Experience Survey (SES) (Ghosh, 2013) has found that assessment and feedback tend to be rated less well than other components of the university experience (e.g. teaching quality, and clarity of procedures around submission). Specifically, the SES found that 22% of respondents were dissatisfied with the quality of written feedback, and 32% were dissatisfied with the quantity of written feedback (Ghosh, 2013). These findings can be considered local examples of a sector-wide effect. While it is worth noting that the majority of UEA students are 'satisfied' there is still scope for improvement in what is a highly competitive market.

In the research literature, *numerous factors have been identified which may potentially be responsible for students' negative perceptions of university feedback relative to other areas of provision.* For example, where some studies identify features of educational cultures as potentially responsible; others focus more on dialogic aspects of staff-student relationships, or internal features of individual students. In terms of *educational cultures*, Beaumont, O'Doherty and Shannon (2011) conducted qualitative work examining staff and student perceptions of feedback quality in schools/colleges and HE. Differences in feedback cultures at school/college compared to HE were found. Where school/college level feedback cultures were perceived to emphasise formative feedback and guidance aimed at delivering high grades, HE feedback cultures were perceived to be more focused on independent learning, with feedback seen as a post-submission summative event. Beaumont and colleagues (2011) suggested that students need more dialogic feedback supports over the course of their first year while they integrate into HE culture, and argue that this will help them to develop more autonomous learning practices. In terms of *dialogic aspects* of staff-student relationships, Cramp (2011) has pointed to the importance of dialogic feedback and supportive staff-student relationships at year 1 as being critically important in helping students to develop academic skills, as well as a sense of belonging to an academic community. Cramp (2011) specifically highlights the first formal feedback moment (when student confidence and self-esteem are argued to be at heightened risk) as a critical juncture for intervention. In terms of *internal features* of individual students, Malachowski, Martin and Vallade (2013) reported results from a series of studies seeming to indicate that students with 'adaptive traits' perceived feedback to be more useful and memorable than students with 'aggressive' and 'apprehensive' traits; students with 'aggressive' and 'apprehensive' traits reported being more sensitive to feedback and perceived it as having comparatively limited utility. What is clear from all of this is that *university feedback processes operate at cultural, relational and individual levels, and that feedback as a human experience is therefore socially, as well as cognitively, significant.*

Social psychology is a domain of psychology primarily concerned with understanding how individuals influence, and are influenced by, their social environments. Social psychologists use both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate human behaviour; studies may be

laboratory-based or naturalistic; conceptual approaches may be hypothetico-deductive or inductive. Good social psychological research moves continuously between the psychological laboratory setting and the real-world environment. One conceptual model from within social psychology which can be applied to help us better specify and understand how university students perceive and respond to feedback is Doise's (Doise, 1986; Lorenzi-Cioldi & Doise, 1990 cit. Hogg & Vaughan, 2008) levels based analytical and explanatory approach. According to Doise (Doise, 1986; Lorenzi-Cioldi & Doise, 1990 both cit. Hogg & Vaughan, 2008) human behaviour can be analysed at different levels, and each level of analysis provides a corresponding level of explanation. It is a general model well-suited to the present topic. There are four levels of analysis: 1) intrapersonal, (2) situational, (3) positional, and (4) ideological.

- Level (1) intrapersonal analysis focuses on events occurring within an individual's own head (e.g. cognitive processing of verbal feedback).
- Level (2) situational analysis focuses on processes occurring between individuals in circumscribed situations (e.g. how a tutor and student interact during dialogic feedback, or how two students interact with each other when discussing a disappointing grade).
- Level (3) positional analysis focuses on processes occurring within (*sometimes* between) groups (typically small-to-moderate sized groups) (e.g. how norms about appropriate responses to positive feedback develop in a friendship group; how a group of students discuss feedback on a social networking site); it may further develop analysis related to the investigation of gender, class or another similar social factor in the same context.
- Level (4) ideological analysis focuses on processes occurring between groups (typically very large groups e.g. school/college students compared to HE students) and/or on societal/cultural level beliefs and values (e.g. prevailing societal/cultural level views that '*students are customers*').

It can be seen that Doise's (1986) levels-based analytical and explanatory approach is a useful conceptual tool for helping to situate research questions and findings in relation to UEA formative and summative assessment and feedback. It is clear from materials reviewed so far that in terms of 'what students get', there is considerable discipline-appropriate variation in formative and summative assessment and feedback practices across UEA schools, along with widespread utilisation of both traditional and innovative pedagogical practices. NSS ratings on feedback satisfaction may provide useful 'benchmarks' for inter-institutional comparison, but much more rigorous, psychologically informed methodologies and measurement techniques need to be applied in this area. More needs to be learned about the underlying mechanisms explaining how specific factors (e.g. peer vs. tutor feedback, individual vs. group feedback, public vs. private feedback) work independently, or as part of moderated or mediated relationships, to produce outcomes related to learning effectiveness and attainment, satisfaction and other experiential variants. As contribution towards this goal with specific application to the UEA, this project has used qualitative and quantitative methods in combination; this enables us to discern the operation of factors at all levels from 1 through 4.

SUMMARY

- A very wide range of discipline-appropriate formative and summative assessment and feedback types are in use at UEA
- Levels of satisfaction with feedback at UEA are high (NSS, 2013)

- Assessment and feedback tend to be rated less well than other aspects of the UEA experience (e.g. teaching quality) (SES, 2012)
- NSS and other satisfaction-related measures can be useful indicators of areas where improvement is needed but reveal little in terms of underlying psychological mechanisms responsible for performance
- The 'levels of analysis' based social psychological approach provides a useful conceptual framework for investigating individual and social responses to assessment and feedback at UEA

3. EMPIRICAL WORK: QUALITATIVE

This chapter reports details of the qualitative phase of the research project which explored UEA students' perceptions and experiences of receiving, making sense of, and acting upon, formative and summative feedback.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 28 students participated in 6 focus groups (ranging from 3 to 6 participants). Participants included mature students and students from all faculties at the University thus representing a range of courses, and vocational and academic orientations. International, exchange, European and home students were included as were those students living at home and those living on or near campus. Focus groups lasted approximately 1½ hours, (ranging from group 2, 1 hour 46 minutes, to Group 6, which lasted 1 hour 14 minutes).

Table 2. Focus group pseudonyms

Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Focus Group 4	Focus Group 5	Focus Group 6
Chris	Ethan	Matt	Leila	Jo	Charlotte
Madeline	Lizzie	Sylvia	Vicky	Liam	Keona
Naomi	Miles	Hazel	Barry	Gavin	Gillian
	Stella	Jasmine	Amy	Ian	Kat
	Isadora		Ashlee	Collette	Elise
			Tanisha		

The students who took part in the focus groups were all motivated and vocal; underperforming students and those who had experienced difficulties did not volunteer. A further series of individual interviews were arranged to target those sections of the population, but several students declined the invitation to participate. A total of 3 supplementary interviews were completed, and participant pseudonyms are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Interview participant summary showing pseudonyms

Steve	returning to masters level study after a long period out of education
Rebecca	mature exchange student
Paolo	undergraduate student

Focus Group Procedure

Focus groups are helpful in creating discussions about a subject area, and can often pick up common norms about a topic (Kitzinger, 1994). This type of data collection allows discussions between participants to occur, and being open to conversational exchange may “facilitate the expression of ideas...that may be left underdeveloped in interviews” (Kitzinger, 1994, p.116). A small seminar room was used as the group setting. Following participants being reminded of the research brief, focus group ground rules and consent, a brief ice breaker was employed to allow each member of the group to introduce themselves and to say a few words at the start of the discussions. The focus group participants were encouraged to ask each other questions and respond to each other's comments, and not rely on the researcher to ask questions. A task

about rating feedback types was also undertaken in the groups. After the focus groups ended participants were thanked for their time and debriefed further about the research. Focus group material was transcribed into 'Word' documents, and checked for errors on completion. All transcriptions were kept on a password-protected-account, participants were labelled with pseudonyms, and any identifying material (e.g. School of study, subject area) was removed.

Thematic analysis was then employed following the process and procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2008). Researchers first familiarised themselves with the data and initial ideas were bullet pointed and noted on transcriptions. Initial codes were devised, to identify areas within the data that seemed important to the issues of feedback and learning. The data was then reviewed for further themes, developing relationships between codes and establishing how they can group into overarching ideas to describe the multiple and complex factors involved in feedback and its use.

ANALYSIS

It was evident from the analysis that student focus group members had complex understandings around feedback issues. This included recognition of appropriate inter-disciplinary and cross-task diversity, as well as aspects of inter-individual differences, in terms of *what students get*.

Recognition of diversity

Student focus group members recognised appropriate inter-disciplinary and cross-task diversity relevant to feedback provision, as well as aspects of inter-individual differences in contemporary HE. This was very informative with regards to the issue of *what students get*. Students were appreciative of the constraints on markers in terms of time, and logistics. They also expressed views that some systems of feedback are dependent upon interpersonal and personality characteristics (e.g. differences in the approachability of staff, disparities in staff responses to e-mails). They also were aware that some aspects of the marking process felt impersonal (e.g. 'standardized tick boxes'), but were perhaps inevitable in mass higher education. Varying logistical issues within subject areas were highlighted, with students' experiences ranging from large compulsory classes to small optional modules. There was in-depth recognition of subject specific issues; discussions in all focus groups highlighted the potential for 'factual' material in science to gain objective marks, while other areas such as art and creative writing were seen to be more subjective, demanding different marking and feedback approaches. It was considered that some subjects (such as Maths) could be associated with the possibility of gaining high marks when students were correct, while in other subjects, especially the humanities, a mark of 80 per cent would be considered exceptionally high. Discussion clearly demonstrated that the students were sophisticated in their understanding of the individual and institutional context of assessment and feedback. Set against this, however, there was very marked uncertainty about marking mechanisms and processes, as summed up by Jo:

...we've never had anything specific about any [marking process] for exams or coursework and how really the whole process is and I think, I think having a knowledge the process would probably help a lot to know and then to see where they're coming from and you probably more faith in that if there you know there's a system...

Due to this level of student 'vagueness' with regards to how marking is conducted, it is worth considering how individual schools/programmes can create greater transparency in the marking process; this might help reassure students about the various checks and safeguards embodied in moderation activities, especially where modules are team-taught/team-marked.

In terms of *what students get, want and need*, three emergent themes were derived from the thematic analysis and these are shown in Schematic 1 below.

Schematic 1: Three core emergent themes from qualitative analysis

- **To be 'known'**
 - *Constructing dialogue through feedback*
 - *Knowing the self through cohort feedback*
- **To be part of a learning community**
 - *'Personal' feedback doesn't have to be individual*
 - *If feedback is part of learning it is also part of teaching*
 - *Vicarious feedback - learning from previous years*
- **To make their 'good' better**
 - *Locating formative work - it's the first year that counts*
 - *The early second year window of reflection*
 - *Feedback as building blocks – the role of advisers*

The sections which follow provide further details in relation to each of these themes, and are evidenced by extracts from the discussions/interviews.

• **Being Known**

'Being known' implies individualised orientation to feedback. However, this theme is not exclusively focused on individualised orientation to feedback; rather, it concerns how students feel about how much markers acknowledge and understand the context in which they are studying, and the pressures and experiences they are going through. From this perspective feedback is not necessarily an individualized practice but one in which the markers are challenged to pitch feedback which fits into the overall student experience. Of the two sub-themes which contribute to **'being known'** one relates to individualised communication, but the other is concerned with enabling students to **'know themselves'**.

○ **Constructing dialogue through feedback**

While students accepted that some classes were large and bespoke feedback to individual students may be difficult, focus group comments raised a number of ways in which students felt they could be known. One element related to how markers *responded* to student work, and how students felt they could be 'recognised' for taking a particular approach with the marker's style pitched to enter into a dialogue with the student:

There's a basic point here a grade isn't feedback its evaluation an evaluation is sort of very very extremely minimal sort of form of feedback...And that brings me back to the idea of response you know two people could get the same grade but may have approached things really differently, to have done something very different you know

your obviously going to be interested to get some sort of response to that back, what did they think, why did they think it?

Barry

This is echoed in other group discussion, for example, the following exchange occurred as receiving comments were discussed:

Ian: [in getting back work you want] something in response

Collette: People do look forward to reading what feedback they've got and embrace it

Jo: Sometimes you just feel like they've made an effort and they've actually read it

The pitch of feedback was widely discussed as was the importance of motivating students. Some students felt that there was a tendency to criticise, and point out failure rather than offer support. It is worth considering how feedback is constructed in terms of phrasing and encouragement, and how feedback can be forward-looking to future years, or even professional life after university. This is especially the case for feedback which is provided to students after a module has been completed.

o **Knowing the self through cohort feedback**

While 'being known' incorporates the phrasing of feedback to individuals, offering class feedback provides information about how students are positioned and how they can recognise their own learning needs:

Jo: I love the feedback on the exams where they show where you are in proportion to other people that's really helpful that's been really good

Collette: it's like the bell curve isn't it

Jo: yeah so just to see where you are

Ian: You can judge where you are

This theme suggests that feedback to cohorts can help students to position themselves and get a sense of their own position in the class especially, when provided with additional information about any specific grading problems and issues. This information can also be offered with direction to areas where students may be prompted to seek help, for example in additional learning resources.

Providing cohort feedback helps to demonstrate a further element of being known which relates to 'knowing their experiences'. Within cohort feedback markers can indicate specific learning strands which recognise the nature of the task within the cohort's academic development. So, for example, first year cohort feedback might tap into and explicitly identify general writing issues, while observations about third year work might highlight the link between theory and real world issues. Showing that markers understand the context of the student experience also means preparing students to *gauge performance* based on feedback, as Sylvia's and Hazel's comments illustrate:

Because I'm an international student when I came here and got my first mark it was something of a 60 I saw that was really really bad because I saw that out of 100 that's just made me just... I think they should at least tell at the beginning because people feel that they are doing really badly I think they get really frustrated whilst when I went and asked it's just normal.

Sylvia

I was generally told don't expect the grades you got at A level so you got like A stars you could probably drop to what would be here the equivalent of an A or B sort of thing cause that's the way the system works.
Hazel

Some aspects of 'knowing' students can be more difficult to locate when they are masked by institutional processes. As the exchange below points out about examinations, knowing students also means recognising how different groups of students have different assessment loads and weightings; feedback needs to complement these differences:

Exams for us are usually worth about half the mark as well which I think is a lot it's not 20% or something

Sylvia

I actually have two 100% exams this term and I won't get any feedback on those I'll just get a mark and it is 100% which I think is really frustrating

Jasmine

A lot of it (CW) does count pretty much, if you have [a series of CW] which are worth 10% each and then an exam, although it won't really change your grade too much it forces you to revise a bit more

Matt

The above comments from Sylvia, Jasmine and Matt indicate that for some students having minimal examination feedback is considerably more problematic than others. While Jasmine has a significant proportion of her work based around examinations, Matt recognised that his exams play a minor role in his overall outcome, his investment in receiving feedback is therefore diminished. This issue indicates that examination feedback needs to be considered within the student perspective. It could be argued that Jasmine's course needs to offer a blend of coursework and exam assessment to facilitate feedback, however when professional courses and external accreditation is required altering examinations can be difficult. In this case the feedback offered to students in Jasmine's situation needs to be different and offer more insight than feedback for Matt. From this perspective, institutional policies which are practical and reasonable for some (e.g. cohort level feedback for examinations) may be experienced very differently by others; how to manage institutional directives while responding to specific student experiences in this regard requires careful consideration.

- **To be part of a learning community**

Engagement can be thought of as existing on a continuum with non-engagement at one pole and full engagement at the other. Psychological definitions of engagement might characterize it as the 'involvement' of an individual with a group or task. It can thus be manifest in *feelings* of 'belongingness' or 'identification' with a community of learners; as well *instrumentally* through the generation of specific action plans reflecting involvement with educational processes. Feedback is therefore linked in with the wider community and engagement of students; focus group talk indicated that there was much informal discussion amongst students about feedback and marks which might usefully be captured and included within feedback processes.

○ **Personal feedback doesn't have to be individual**

Feedback and social networking was discussed, but it was generally agreed that self-promoting and campaigning styles often operated in such forums:

People who get really good grades 'Oh I got a 75' but that's the only time really.
Tanisha

I don't think people would put I just got 50 or something.
Madeline

It's just focused on the marks really it's not the reasons why we got the marks.
Ethan

The use of social networking sites for the consideration of feedback was considered to be of limited use, with immediate reactions providing an indication of an issue rather than any measured discussion. More thoughtful discussion of feedback was considered to be facilitated by talk at a face to face level. It was widely agreed that students talk about feedback and marks after they receive coursework back.

Researcher: Quite a few people have mentioned going to talk to advisers or lecturers does anyone talk to other students about feedback? After you've got it?

Charlotte: Definitely, that's the first thing I do... we all kind of know each other, and there are certain places we are going to be when we get our work back so there is a lot of kind of what feedback, what mark did you get, there is a lot of discussion over that

Keona: Yeah, so you can look at other peoples feedback to see if you have any mistakes or something to correct yours with written feedback I'll compare with my friends so what is written on yours what is written on mine and sometimes like the comments are so general and so common to all students sometimes we all get the same kind of feedback

Charlotte: Yeah, definitely there is a lot of comparisons to see if your feedback is kind of legitimate or not to see if it is others or just you

One way in which feedback could be further developed would be to build upon these informal conversations, to create time in the classroom for discussing feedback. This also mirrors how useful students found talk about feedback in the classroom which was also considered to be positive, supportive and helpful:

It's good because you get to know whether it's what everyone generally thinks or that's just the way the lecturer is looking at it. Your friends might be a little bit more likely to say well you could have done that better you know.
Hazel

I think a good teacher could lead a good group feedback session... In group feedback they've pulled people together with the same grades and sort of said this is what you've done well but you need to concentrate on this...

They've sort of paired us with people so when we've done stuff badly they've paired us with somebody who did that particular thing quite well so then we sort of try to work together to work out what we're both lacking.
Elise

You would maybe expect that teaching staff are like... these are very professional questions and so... but peer questions may also be very like interesting and from the other dimension and, I like can't say that one would maybe better than the other.

Amy

Group feedback... because if it is what most people found difficult you're probably one of them.

Chris

These comments illustrate that class feedback and working through issues in the classroom covers lecturer as well as peer feedback. Indeed the focus groups on the whole were very positive about peer feedback provided that it was well managed. This usually included some degree of anonymity, and guidance on the format of feedback. However, working with feedback in the classroom could be problematic depending upon course climate, or if the form of facilitation is inappropriate:

I've found my subject has become quite competitive so no one is really willing to discuss their marks I think it's maybe it's cause its quite personal and it's your opinion and it's how you take it whereas with [other subjects] it's kind of less I don't know, you're more willing to tell your peers

Jasmine

I think the face to face feedback from a lecturer on a 1-2-1 basis is good because sometimes if you do get some feedback it's sort of in a group setting like in a group like this you don't always feel that you can talk about your grade and the reason why you got that grade and stuff because you may feel embarrassed...

Keona

While Chris represents the broad view in the focus groups that group work and feedback is helpful, Jasmine identified that for some courses preliminary work is required to facilitate group feedback being successful. Keona identifies the sensitivity required when working with feedback in the classroom and how it needs to be distanced from individual marks. Overall the classroom and teaching session in general were regarded as useful places for further learning from feedback.

○ **If feedback is part of learning it is also part of teaching**

The use of classroom feedback and peer work around feedback indicates that for students, the feedback process is not regarded as a separate aspect of teaching. Partly this connects to the relationship element of feedback:

From the feedback you can see how much the lecturer wants to engage with the students.

Stella

Such comments reflect the importance of engaging students within a dialogue in the phrasing of feedback, but it was recognised that in constructing feedback the lecturers can also be informed about the class as well as individual performance.

Researcher: Do you think that there are any benefits for teaching staff giving feedback to students?

Matt: It could help them to give you more instruction in areas if they found that a class or a seminar group had gone wrong in a certain area they could then cater for that with their teaching and address these problems to the class.

Matt suggests that lecturing staff consider group performance and directly work with this to enhance learning. This issue has implications for *when* assessment is undertaken and *how* feedback can be incorporated into class time.

- **Vicarious feedback learning from previous years.**

It was recognised that similar tasks might often be employed over several cohorts. Finding out more about the way in which previous years had tackled work was seen as offering potential learning opportunities. In group 5 a discussion occurred about the use of previous work within the classroom. It was recognised that using such work needed to be managed so that it was not 'spoon feeding' a group, or providing advantages not available to previous years.

Collette: Brilliant like relating to what you said earlier you could bring in from previous years the same essay and like go through in the seminar what mistakes they made, and then that would sort of benefit the university as well because that makes sure their students have less chance of making the same mistakes over and over every year

This was followed by Ian who explicitly connected such work to feedback:

Ian: That would just be a good example of good feedback but as you were saying cause it's it's what I know even though it's not our work it's the kind of thing ought to happen, what's good what's bad what's relevant what's useful what's not

Ian suggests that good feedback is not necessarily feedback on his personal work. This notion of learning from other students, and being part of a learning community, frames feedback differently from the more standard understanding, that it is individualised, and related to a personal piece of specific work. This notion of considering previous years' work is not only interesting, it is also non-threatening to students as it is not their work and therefore opens up routes for developing a crucial position about the work. Despite this distance from individual performance Ian still couched this in terms of feedback and this perspective was unchallenged within the group. This moves the traditional notion of feedback pitched to individual students into more innovative territory.

- **To make their 'good' better**

Given the remit of the research there was much discussion of formative work and the timing and place of this type of work.

- **Locating formative work - It's the first year that counts**

A number of tensions were identified in this area. For instance, students indicated that involving formative work in taught sessions might cause attendance might drop. There was much discussion of how formative work helps to improve performance and how to balance the demands of undertaking formative work with summative. While well designed formative work will explicitly link into summative work and so help students to develop the skills and knowledge that a summative piece will demand, the focus group conversations indicated that formative work was not always valued.

Talk around formative work highlighted the issue that as the first year 'doesn't count' towards the degree outcome, this created a valuable learning space where students are motivated to learn the core skills associated with their subject. UEA's NAM has emphasised the need for formative work throughout the degree, and so weighs all the years of study equally in terms of learning from formative work. The first year was identified as the year in which style, structure and core elements of work could be consolidated, and formative work within the first year made ready sense to students.

○ **The early second year window of reflection.**

The second and third years of study were recognised as focused on degree outcomes; it was intimated that students paid less attention to work which 'doesn't count' toward the degree during these 'honours years'. However, talk across the groups offered suggestions about specific critical points for reflection and talk; FG5 identified that the start of the second year offered a focus for contemplation and development:

Ian: once you've taken in what they've been trying to ground you in for the first year that's the best time say right have they taken it in hand over the essay yes yes no no and then pointing it out to them you have them this is what to do

Collette: sort of like your personal analysis of yeah

Ian: personal analysis yeah

Collette: if it was specifically for that for that reason if it was really detailed even you know one one little work really detailed in three years its that's not too much to ask

Ian: I think if if you emphasise to a student you know put as much effort into this as you can because this is like your one goal opportunity for them to tell you exactly where you're weak where you're strong

This exchange reconfirms the first year as providing the opportunity 'to get the basics under your belt', but also emphasises the early part of the second year as a key leverage point when close attention to individual student work can be undertaken. This also links into the potential role of the adviser, who rather than (notionally) monitoring student performance throughout the degree can target specific intervention points such as the start of the second year with maximum impact. A targeted and formative piece early in the second year specifically designed to reflect upon first year work, and inform future development, could help students who are starting to work on material which 'counts' towards their degree.

○ **Feedback as Building Blocks - the role of advisers**

Some issues in relation to student talk about feedback referred back to phrasing issues and how written feedback can engage and inspire students; but within these group exchanges there also emerged a dilemma between the management of the marks from individual modules and the cumulative overall performance:

I mean I've had feedback with a list of pros and cons and this really helped you could work from there. I've had feedback that is a kind of narrative and it's 'you did this and this sentence was good' but each essay is different.

Miles

If everything's good then then what else should I do?

Ethan

[after discussing an essay which received 87%] obviously they're critically like evaluating and stuff and marking...how to get a hundred per cent because they've never really told

us how to get a much better mark you know how to get first. So just more detail on how to actually get you know ninety per cent.

Ashlee

Discussion on how to manage feedback about individual pieces of work highlighted that some monitoring across performance was required. However, as Libby's and Matt's further comments indicate, while advisers offer a potential route for personalised conversations with students this also runs the risk of discussion/feedback becoming tokenistic, or distanced from specific tasks.

I think it could involve things like talking to your tutor... to see how you're getting on to see how things are coming up quite often in your work that you are having problems with but I'm not so sure in my experience I've never had the opportunity to do that as much it's been more written feedback on work we don't have that much contact time to talk about our progression

Libby

Well mainly like in the (his subject) when you do course work it goes back to your adviser and your adviser sort of chats through what you did and how you've done and your adviser is meant to keep up with how you are progressing throughout the year but you don't really get the opinions of the teachers who actually taught you the adviser is just reading comments

Matt

It was recognised that advisers' roles vary across Schools, but also that individual advisers had different characteristics and approached advising in different ways. In considering overall performance, the way in which advisers were in a potentially strong position to offer overarching advice was identified, but it was also suggested that this area of performance management needed to be targeted.

Gavin: that's when you've got the whole thing with advisors is they can get involved

Collette: exactly yeah

Gavin: I mean I to have see my adviser was I can't remember when I last saw him but yeah that should be the role of the advisor I believe to help give you feedback on that it it's just the lecturer is gonna be there going over about a hundred essays of probably the same thing and he's going to get fed up with saying do better

Jo: that'd give a more direct role as well wouldn't it the advisors cause they don't they do some of them like some people I know who are really they take on advice and they you know meet with you regularly and they have a real interest in knowing who you are at the end of the three years but 99% of people I know have seen their advisor maybe once and there's not anything nothing really clear about what their advisor is there to do

Collette: what if like all of the feedback was kind of stored on a data base and then when there was more regular meeting with your advisor they could go through it with you and actually look at it and see and maybe point where you were going wrong that you haven't thought of before

This exchange directs attention onto the role of the adviser and the patchy way in which they are utilised. In some ways this connects with the idea of the 'second year window' and the way in which advisers attention can be focused on performance of students at specific key points across their degree study.

...even if it was once a year and comprehensive talk with them that'd be ten times more useful than getting a you know a third of a page every then every essay which isn't really applicable
Jo

This places advisers in a critical position for reviewing *progression* rather than providing feedback, but also as Jo comments, an intense critical consideration of one piece will be more fulfilling than brief conversations about several tasks.

SUMMARY

- Student experiences of assessment and feedback are highly diverse across courses. This is partly a function of discipline appropriate variation in structural aspects of course design, and other aspects of pedagogy. For example, students are keenly aware that 'all exams are not equal' (some are 'worth more' than others in terms of contribution to final degree grade); and feedback needs be sensitive to the proportion of assessed work that is coursework versus exam based. In addition more individualised (or idiosyncratic) elements of staff- student relationships also play a role in generating diversity in student experiences within and across courses.
- Students want empathy. Markers need to show that they know and understand what students' experiences of assessment and learning *are like*. This can occur through use of individually responsive marking styles recognising that a student has adopted a particular approach to a problem; it can also be achieved by the marker showing that s/he understands the nature of the *group experience* (e.g. *feedback indicating that 'lots of people found this challenging', 'most people did this easily'*)
- Students do not see feedback as 'separate' from teaching. They want feedback that is supportive and motivating, as well as critical; from the student perspective feedback is one element of broader staff-student relationships. Ensuring that feedback is supportive and motivating will partly involve provision of (more) explicit guidance on how performance levels/skills gained are relevant to future performance (including career planning). This especially applies to feedback which is given at the end of a module.
- Students inhabit social worlds - class feedback helps students position themselves in a way that helps them to recognise their own learning needs. Students talk to each other a lot about feedback. While some aspects of such discussions can be seen as threatening by students (e.g. when only information about good/excellent performance is publicised), peer discussion was generally valued, and this could be harnessed as a powerful learning tool. Feedback on the previous cohort's performance is very non-threatening for students and could also be usefully harnessed in this regard (e.g. what students last year said/thought about a topic/assignment; what the lecturer said/thought about how students tackled a particular type of assessment/responded to formative feedback last year).
- Several critical leverage points for positive influence have been identified. Year one is a time for students get to 'know the ropes' and 'acclimatise' to university assessment and feedback processes. The first feedback instance is particularly critical and could be a key focus point for student-adviser discussion and advice. The start of year 2 is a second critical juncture and 'personal analysis' specifically focused on individual student

responses to feedback and other progression issues could usefully be situated in an early student-adviser meeting. Advisers can have unique individual relationships with students and provide the kind of over-arching feedback that is so crucial to students in terms of *progression*.

4. EMPIRICAL WORK: QUANTITATIVE

This chapter reports details of the major elements of the quantitative phase of the research project.

METHOD

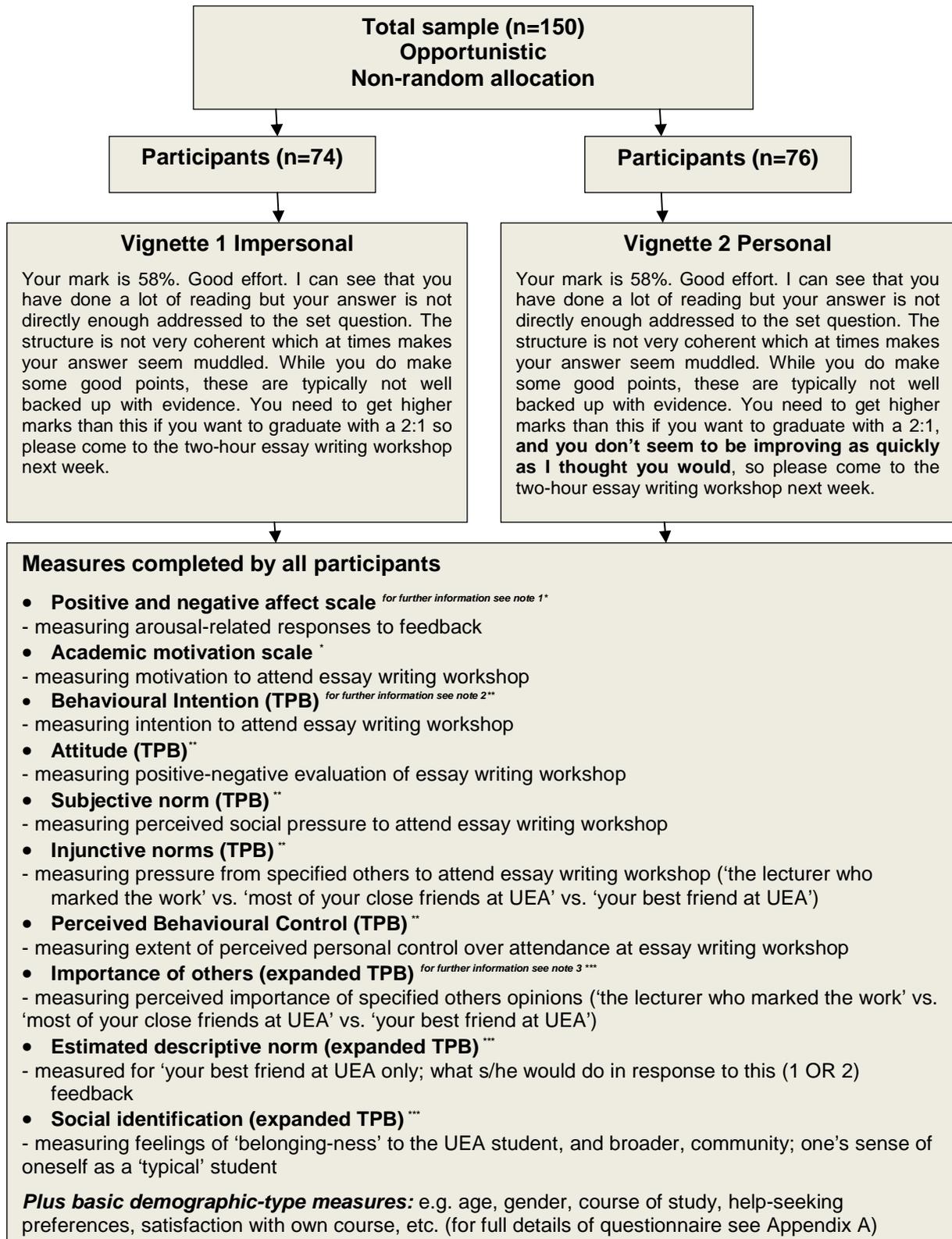
Participants and procedure

An online questionnaire was used to investigate UEA undergraduate students' perceptions of, and responses to, coursework feedback variants. A total of 150 undergraduate students (of which n=111 female, and n=39 male) from all four faculties at the University of East Anglia took part. The mean age of the sample was 21.24 years (median 20; mode 21; min 18; max 61) and 81.9% of the total sample was aged between 18-21 years. Students were asked to report their lowest and highest marks obtained so far at UEA. The lowest reported mark was 3rd class and highest reported mark was 1st class.

Recruitment was achieved by way of standard snowballing methods. Available members of the undergraduate student steering group snowball-contacted their colleagues (e.g. by sending an electronic flyer via email) to provide them with a link to the questionnaire on the Survey Monkey website where full details of the study were available, and recipients were invited to further publicise the study if they so wished. On the survey monkey website full study briefing materials, questionnaires and debriefing materials were located and presented in sequence. The opportunity to be entered into a prize draw for £250 worth of shopping vouchers was offered on completion of the study.

In light of results from qualitative work, we were particularly concerned to explore how personal feedback (independent variable level 1) vs. non-personal feedback (independent variable level 2) related to a range of other psychological measures. Each student experienced one type of feedback online (i.e. personal OR impersonal) and then went on to complete the range of other measures. For the purposes of this report, Schematic 2 provides a visual display of what participants taking part in the study experienced in terms of major details of design, procedure, and materials.

Schematic 2: Participant experience: major design and procedural elements



Note 1*

Inclusion of these scales (PANAS and academic motivation) enables assessment of the extent to which the two different feedback types are associated with different levels of positive and negative arousal, and the extent to which the two different feedback types are associated with variation in motivation to attend the essay writing workshop.

Note 2**

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is a well-established social-cognitive model of behavioural decision-making with excellent predictive utility across a range of different behavioural domains including those which are study/education related. It boasts a high level of operational homogeneity and is not a final universal model of behaviour; additional predictors can be included in the model if they explain additional variance above and beyond that accounted for by the extant basic model components. According to the TPB, two direct proximal determinants of future behaviour are behavioural intentions (in the form of specific action plans, expectations, and desires), and globalised perceptions of control. Perceptions of control refer to both self-efficacy-type beliefs about (internal) personal skills, and perception of access/exposure to (external) resources likely to help facilitate or impede performance of planned behaviour). Perceived behavioural control (typically the internally focused element) can also function as a (direct) proximal predictor of behavioural intention. Two further proximal determinants of intentions are attitudes towards the behaviour (evaluations of the behaviour in terms of positivity-negativity) and subjective norms (generalised perceptions of social pressure regarding behavioural performance). These proximal predictors of intention are themselves predictable from separate sets of more specific beliefs, namely attitude (beliefs about outcomes x evaluations of outcomes); subjective norms (injunctive normative beliefs x motivations to comply); perceived behavioural control (perceived likelihood of occurrence of barriers/facilitators x perceived facilitating/inhibiting power). The model proposes that individuals make decisions about to behave based in a detailed but subjective cost-benefit analysis of available information.

Note 3***

In addition to the basic TPB components listed under note 2, several additional variables have been found to improve the predictive utility of the model for intentions and behaviour. A subset relevant to study planning have been included in the current research namely, social identification (i.e. level of felt similarity to/belongingness with a particular group or groups), descriptive norms (observations of others' behaviour) and perceived importance of others' opinions.

ANALYSIS

Table 4 shows descriptive information for each of the core arousal, and basic and expanded TPB measures used in the study.

Table 4. Basic descriptive and reliability statistics for study variables (mean, standard deviation, Cronbach's α)

Variable name	Mean	Standard deviation	α
PANAS PA (Positive arousal)	2.06	.70	.86
PANAS NA (Negative arousal)	2.70	.93	.91
Academic motivation	4.61	1.89	.84
Behavioural intention	5.25	1.60	.92
Attitude	5.03	1.18	.87
Subjective norm	3.05 (<i>item a</i>)	1.76 (<i>item a</i>)	.09
	5.75 (<i>item b</i>)	1.31 (<i>item b</i>)	
Injunctive norm ('the lecturer who marked the work')	6.40	.99	na
Injunctive norm ('most of your close friends at UEA')	5.15	1.49	na
Injunctive norm ('your best friend at UEA')	5.56	1.44	na
Importance of others (lecturer)	5.53	1.36	na
Importance of others ('most of your close friends at UEA')	5.15	1.43	na
Importance of others ('your best friend at UEA')	5.51	1.38	na
Estimated descriptive norm ('your best friend at UEA')	4.98	1.56	na
Perceived behavioural control	5.87	1.23	.75
Social identification	4.61	1.22	.77

Inspection of the mean scores shown in Table 4 indicated that, following exposure to feedback, levels of positive arousal were low, and so were levels of negative arousal; academic motivation levels were also low (below the midpoint of the scale). With one exception (subjective norm *item a*) all other core measures related to attendance at the essay writing workshop were rated positively: participants tended to plan to attend the workshop (behavioural intention), it was evaluated positively (attitude); and attending it was perceived to be under individual control (perceived behavioural control). A reliable subjective norm scale could not be computed due to the low α score for *items a and b*. The mean score for *item a* indicated that in general participants disagreed with the statement 'I feel under social pressure to go the essay writing workshop', where the mean score for *item b* indicated that in general participants thought that 'most people who are important to me would think that I *should* go to the essay writing workshop'. These items will be treated individually in analyses. With regards to other norm-related measures, inspection of mean scores shows that in general participants felt that specified others thought they *ought* to attend the essay writing workshop ('the lecturer who

marked the work', 'most of your closest friends at UEA', 'your best friend at UEA') and that the opinions of those specified others were considered important. The mean score for social identification showed that in general participants socially identified with the UEA student community. Following on from this, in order to determine whether or not there were any important differences in arousal and decision-making variables as a function of the type of feedback to which participants were exposed, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was applied to the data. Inspection of results (Pillais $F(16, 107)=1.13, p=.38$) showed that there was no significant difference on any of the measures listed in Table 4. The tested variation in feedback type is not associated with any significant differences on any of the measured variables relating to arousal, motivation and decision-making.

A further section of the questionnaire asked participants to report on their own personal experiences of UEA. Participants were asked to indicate who they would approach for learning support if they were 'having trouble writing an essay'. The top 3 choices were 'lecturer' (n=50), 'classmate' (n=34) and 'other tutor' (n=21). When participants were asked how many hours they studied in a typical week reports ranged from 0-70 hours per week (mean 19 hours, median 16 hours, mode 20 hours). Other key findings are shown in Figures 1-10 below.

FIGURE 1

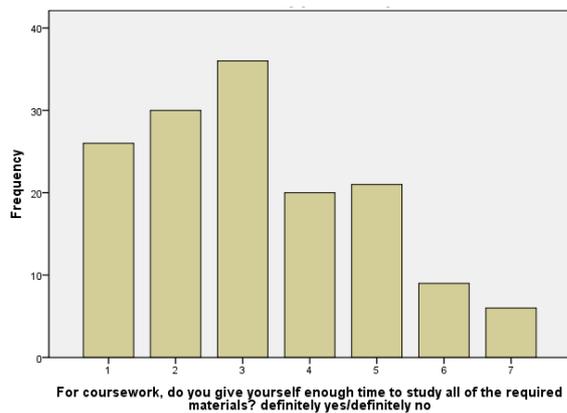


FIGURE 2

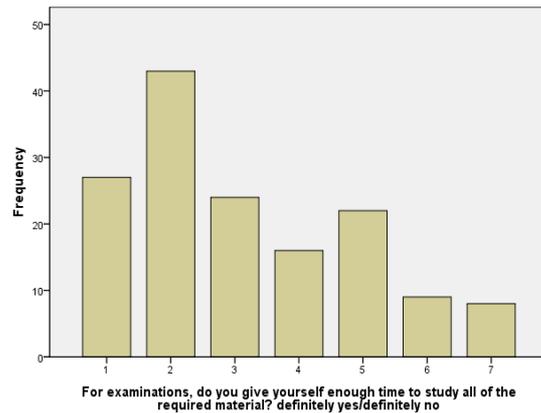


FIGURE 3

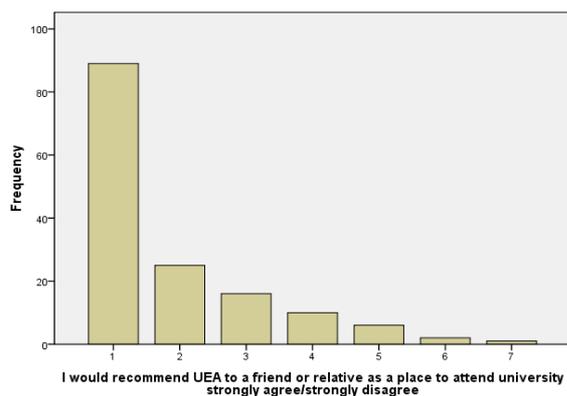


FIGURE 4

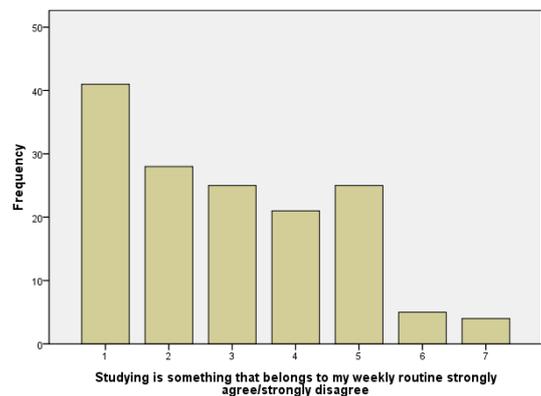


FIGURE 5

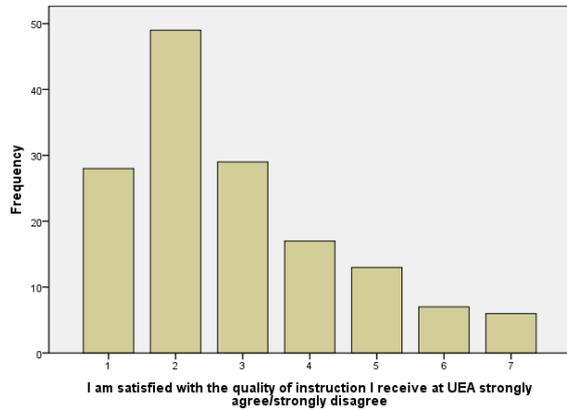


FIGURE 6

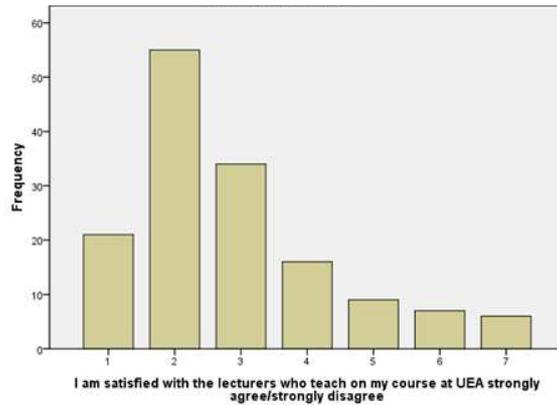


FIGURE 7

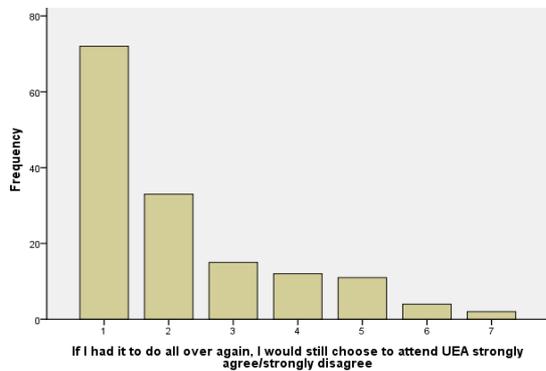


FIGURE 8

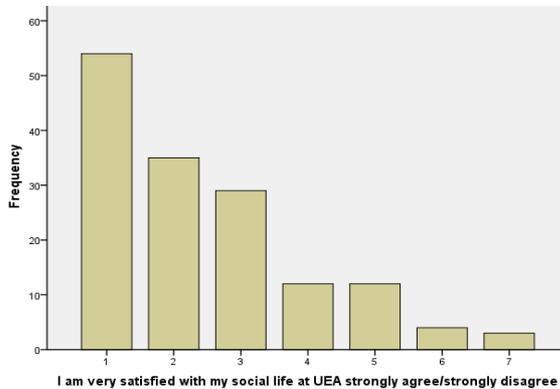


FIGURE 9

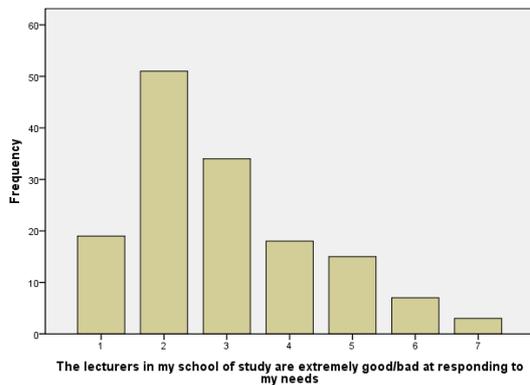
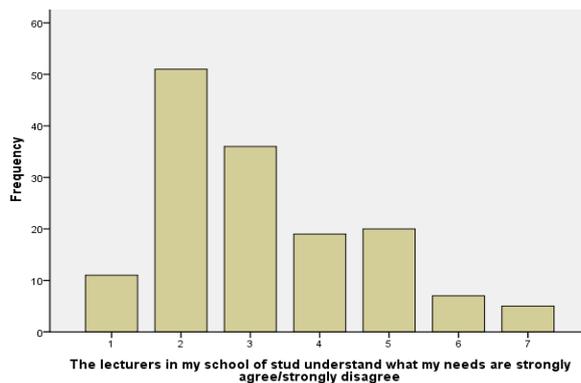


FIGURE 10



Inspection of the simple data shown in Figures 1-10 reveals a number of interesting patterns, especially when set against some key findings from the qualitative element of the programme of work. Low scores indicate agreement/endorsement of statements and high scores indicate the reverse. Two questionnaire items explore aspects of time management. Figures 1, and 2 show that respondents tended to perceive themselves to be managing their university study time in an effective manner, at least to the extent that they were allowing themselves enough time to prepare for examination and coursework assessments. These perceptions may be well

calibrated with course requirements or students may be under-estimating the time that is required. Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 all show that students rate their experiences at the UEA positively, and ratings are especially positive in terms of 'I would recommend UEA to a friend' (figure 3) and 'If I had to do it all over again I would still choose to attend UEA (Figure 7). Perhaps most interesting of all though, especially in light of the findings from the qualitative phase of this programme, are the patterns of scores displayed in figures 9 and 10. Qualitative work found that students want empathy – to feel that markers and lecturers understand what their experiences of assessment and feedback *are like* at an individual and group level. Figures 9 and 10 show that respondents were least likely to 'strongly agree' with the statements 'the lecturers in my school of study are extremely good at responding to my needs' and 'the lecturers in my school of study understand what my needs are' than any of the other satisfaction-related items shown in figures 1 through 8 and that this was especially marked for figure 10.

SUMMARY

- Minimal manipulation (personal vs. impersonal) of hypothetical written coursework feedback at the good honours borderline had no significant multivariate impact on ratings of positive and negative arousal, or academic motivation to attend a specified teaching session.
- Minimal manipulation (personal vs. impersonal) of hypothetical written coursework feedback at the good honours borderline had no significant multivariate impact on the basic or expanded TPB components that were measured. Borderline univariate effects for behavioural intention and some normative variables (injunctive norms) were noted; future trials will need to examine the impact of further manipulation of different personalisation variants within an alternative experimental design.
- Quantitative ratings of personal experience at the UEA show that students rate the UEA in generally very positive terms – an excellent achievement, and a set of findings commensurate with results from corresponding measures in other key surveys (e.g. NSS, 2013).
- While there was some evidence of uncertainty and disagreement, the majority of respondents said that they allocated sufficient time to coursework and examination preparation; and agreed that studying was an activity which belonged to their weekly routine. The majority of participants rated their social life at UEA in positive terms, would recommend UEA to their friends, and if they 'had to do it all over again would still choose to attend UEA'.
- Qualitative analysis reported in Chapter 3 showed that students want empathy; that is, they want markers/lecturers to show that they *understand what assessment and feedback experiences are like for them at an individual and group level*. In light of this, participants' responses to the statements 'lecturers in my school are good at responding to my needs' and 'lecturers in my school understand what my needs are' must give pause for thought. While the overall pattern for both statements is certainly positive, only a relatively small proportion of participants indicated the strongest possible level of agreement with these two statements. The statement 'lecturers in my school understand what my needs are' was the statement participants were least likely to strongly agree with across all of the personal experience statements.

5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

DISCUSSION

This research project approached feedback from a social psychological levels of analysis perspective which recognises that internal factors (e.g. psychological dispositions) individual's positioning within the learning context (e.g. international student, gender), external factors (e.g. access to learning support), and the wider ideological climate of HE (e.g. students as fee paying customers) all impact on feedback conventions and routines. This approach enabled a consideration of the different psychosocial dimensions of feedback and the interacting circumstances which mean that student adeptness in utilising feedback is shaped by personal understandings, School relationships, and course assessment arrangements, all nested within wider aspects of institutional and political socioeconomic conditions. In this context, feedback 'episodes' for individual students which offer opportunities for reflection and change require attention to individual, interactional and institutional elements.

The three major elements of this research project (i.e. the scoping exercise, plus the qualitative and quantitative empirical phases of work) provide valuable information which is relevant to a number of domains of assessment and feedback related activity within the UEA. Three aspects of our findings worth highlighting here, relate particularly to issues of experiential diversity, empathy and progression, and social positioning.

In terms of *experiential diversity*, results from the scoping exercise indicated that a very wide range of discipline-appropriate formative and summative assessment and feedback types are in use at the UEA. In particular it was noted that some schools/courses, as a reflection of disciplinary area/specialism, may use some formative and summative assessment and feedback types more than others, and that some schools/courses may use different *combinations* of formative and summative feedback types more than others. Students are well tuned-in to this type of diversity and focus group discussion highlighted a special focus on pedagogical diversity relevant to examinations. Focus group participants were keenly aware that 'all exams are not equal' (i.e. some are 'worth more' than others in terms of contribution to final degree grade). More individualised (or idiosyncratic) elements of staff- student relationships were also recognised as playing a role in generating diversity in student experiences within and across courses. This is importantly underlines the broader finding that participants did not tend to see feedback as an isolated event, but rather as an embedded aspect of teaching activity and staff-student relations.

Students need feedback that is supportive and motivating, as well as critical. One key finding from focus group discussion on assessment and feedback processes was that students want *empathy*. Markers need to show that they know and understand what students' experiences of assessment and learning *are like*; this may usefully feature in feedback but also should be more broadly embedded in teaching activity. Quantitative work has shown that a single specific very minimal or isolated manipulation may not have a large impact on key behaviour-relevant variables. In light of this, it is especially important to ensure that feedback is effectively embedded in broader teaching processes, and a number of critical leverage points for positive influence were identified in this study. Year one is a time for students to get to 'know the ropes' and 'acclimatise' to university assessment and feedback processes. The first feedback instance is particularly critical and could be a key focus point for student-adviser discussion and guidance. The start of year 2 is a second critical juncture and 'personal analysis' specifically focused on individual student responses to feedback and other progression issues could usefully be situated in an early student-advisor meeting. Advisors can have unique individual

relationships with students and provide the kind of over-arching feedback that is so crucial to students in terms of *progression*.

Group feedback helps students position themselves in a way that helps them to recognise their own learning needs. Students talk to each other a lot about feedback. While some aspects of peer discussions can feel threatening to students (e.g. when only information about good/excellence performance is publicised through social networking mechanisms), peer discussion was otherwise notably valued and, if managed appropriately, could be harnessed as a powerful learning tool.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Bearing all of the above issues in mind, it is possible to produce a range of recommendations for consideration and these are shown below.

Recommendation 1 (examination feedback issues)

At course level, providers should consider if current feedback strategy is sufficiently well-calibrated with the proportions of examination vs. coursework-type assessments that students are experiencing. As different students have different loadings of examinations the impact of minimal individual feedback for examinations impacts on some students more than others. Modules which are completely exam based may need to give more attention to feedback compared to modules which are coursework oriented, or which offer mixed coursework and examination assessments.

Recommendation 2 (timing of feedback – critical leverage points)

A range of feedback activities can be specifically targeted at the key leverage points for positive influence that have been identified in this research:

- In terms of timing of formative feedback, the first year counts. Formative feedback around style, structure, and content of material can be routinely undertaken in the first year when students are open to formative work.
- Formative work in the second and third years is likely to work best when specifically bound up with an upcoming assignment and facilitated with teaching sessions.
- There exists a 'window of opportunity' at the start of the second year. The start of the second year 'when people get serious' offers an ideal time for advisers to reflect with students on their *performance* in the first year and clarify what they need to work on to help underpin *progression*. Advising time commitments should recognise the importance of this phase for students.
- The beginning of the second year also offers a critical period in which a significant formative piece could be undertaken and students would have a vested interest in making the most of this opportunity.

Recommendation 3 ('feeling known', advisory systems and progression)

Students want to feel that they are 'known' by staff and that staff are taking an interest in their progression as well as offering critical, motivating advice. An empathetic perspective can be signalled through the use of individually responsive marking styles recognising that a student has adopted a particular approach to a problem; it can also be achieved at cohort level by the marker showing that s/he understands the nature of the *group experience* (e.g. *feedback indicating that 'lots of people found this challenging', 'most people did this easily'*). However, there is scope for more innovative (including dialogic) practice in this regard.

- More extensive use of advisory systems to support feedback activity is likely to be highly beneficial. While 'markers' are in a good position to provide feedback on specific work, advisers are well placed to consider progression. The routine practice of handing back

work through advisers can be seen as tokenistic rather than targeted, and advising that does not routinely use information on marks to inform discussion with advisees appears ineffective and unhelpful.

- A blended model where advisers offer advice on progression at key junctures and consider a small number of pieces of work in detail would be likely to have the greatest impact.
- Within modules, markers can ensure that feedback is supportive and motivating by providing (more) and embedded, explicit guidance on how performance levels/skills gained are relevant to future progression, performance and career planning. This especially applies to feedback which is given at the end of a module. Feedback that is related to module content and offered at the end of, or following completion of, modules can be especially difficult for students to utilise in a practical way. The new academic model and the preference for larger modules, especially those which run across the academic year allows for greater use of feedback *throughout* the module.
- Feedback formats need to be future-oriented to help students recognise where specific skills and knowledge will be required at forthcoming points (for example in specific modules in the subsequent year of study).
- Feedback can also usefully prompt students to consider linkages across modules; looking back at previous performance can help provide students with a distanced opportunity for reflection and development.

Recommendation 4 (group positioning and learning needs)

Students frequently discuss marks and feedback and this can be drawn into the classroom and harnessed to provide a powerful learning tool if undertaken in a sensitive and appropriate fashion. When paper based individual feedback is given students often felt criticised and reproached for work rather than encouraged and supported.

- In class-feedback does not have to be related to an individual student's own work. At first this appears counter intuitive, but when students are exposed to the work and difficulties of previous cohorts they do regard this as a form of feedback.
- Feedback on the previous cohort's performance is very non-threatening for students and could be easily incorporated into teaching (e.g. in class focus on what students last year said/thought about a topic/assignment; what the lecturer thought about how students tackled a particular type of assessment/responded to formative feedback last year).
- Cohort feedback (such as 'bell curve' information) was well liked by students and enabled them to identify their own positioning within the group. When allied with classroom activities on specific difficulties this cohort level analysis helps students to understand their own individual position and identify learning needs.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

Please provide the following information about yourself

Age in years: _____

Gender: _____

Are you a UEA undergraduate student? yes/no

.....

Please read the information below, and then answer the questions that follow:

Take a moment to imagine that you have recently submitted a 2000 word essay, and have just been given the written feedback below.

Vignette #1 Impersonal – Your mark is 58%. Good effort. I can see that you have done a lot of reading but your answer is not directly enough addressed to the set question. The structure is not very coherent which at times makes your answer seem muddled. While you do make some good points, these are typically not well backed up with evidence. You need to get higher marks than this if you want to graduate with a 2:1 so please come to the two-hour essay writing workshop next week.

Vignette #2 Personal – Your mark is 58%. Good effort. I can see that you have done a lot of reading but your answer is not directly enough addressed to the set question. The structure is not very coherent which at times makes your answer seem muddled. While you do make some good points, these are typically not well backed up with evidence. You need to get higher marks than this if you want to graduate with a 2:1, and you don't seem to be improving as quickly as I thought you would, so please come to the two-hour essay writing workshop next week.

.

1. How does reading this feedback make you feel right now? On each line, click the number that best describes how you feel. Click only one number on each line.

	Not at all	a little	moderately	quite a bit	very much
Interested	1	2	3	4	5
Distressed	1	2	3	4	5
Excited	1	2	3	4	5
Upset	1	2	3	4	5
Strong	1	2	3	4	5
Guilty	1	2	3	4	5
Scared	1	2	3	4	5
Hostile	1	2	3	4	5
Enthusiastic	1	2	3	4	5
Proud	1	2	3	4	5
Irritable	1	2	3	4	5
Alert	1	2	3	4	5
Ashamed	1	2	3	4	5
Inspired	1	2	3	4	5
Nervous	1	2	3	4	5
Determined	1	2	3	4	5
Attentive	1	2	3	4	5
Jittery	1	2	3	4	5
Active	1	2	3	4	5
Afraid	1	2	3	4	5

.....

2. Imagine yourself attending the two hour essay writing workshop next week. How does that make you feel? On each line, click the number that best describes how you feel. Click only one number on each line. Note that in some cases the most positive score is “1” while in other cases it is a “7.”

Motivated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unmotivated
Interested	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Uninterested
Involved	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Uninvolved
Not stimulated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Stimulated
Don't want to study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Want to study
Inspired	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Uninspired
Unchallenged	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Challenged
Uninvigorated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Invigorated
Unenthused	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Enthused
Excited	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not Excited
Aroused	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not Aroused
Not fascinated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Fascinated

.....
Now imagine you are really making a decision about whether or not to attend the two hour essay writing workshop next week. Please read each statement below and then circle the number that best describes you. Circle only one number per statement.

(4) I would intend to go to the essay writing workshop

unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 likely

(5) I would plan to go to the essay writing workshop

definitely no 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 definitely yes

(6) I would want to go to the essay writing workshop

definitely no 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 definitely yes

(7) How likely is it that you would actually go to the essay writing workshop

unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 likely

(8) How confident are you that you could go to the essay writing workshop if you really wanted to

Not confident at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 extremely confident

(9) How much personal control do you think you would have over going to the essay writing workshop

no personal control 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 complete personal control

(10) I would feel under social pressure to go the essay writing workshop

strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

(11) Most people who are important to me would think that I

should not 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 should

go to the essay writing workshop

(12) The lecturer who marked my work would think that I

should not 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 should

go to the essay writing workshop

(13) The opinion of the lecturer who marked my work would be:

not at all important to me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 very important to me

(14) Most of my closest friends at UEA would think that I

should not 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 should

go to the essay writing workshop

(15) The opinions of my closest friends at UEA are

not at all important to me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 very important to me

(16) My best friend at UEA would think that I

should not 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 should

go to the essay writing workshop

(17) The opinion of my best friend at UEA is

not at all important to me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 very important to me

(18) If my best friend at UEA received this feedback s/he would go the essay writing workshop

definitely would not 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 definitely would

(19) For me to attend the two-hour essay writing workshop next week would be...

(Circle the numbers that best reflect your views. Circle only one number on each line)

- | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|------------|
| (a) Bad | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Good |
| (b) Harmful | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Beneficial |
| (c) Unpleasant | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Pleasant |
| (d) Unenjoyable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Enjoyable |
| (e) Foolish | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Wise |

.....

Now please answer the following questions about yourself by clicking the number that best reflects what your view. Click only one number for each question.

(20) I see myself as a typical UEA student

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

(21) I feel I have a lot in common with other UEA students

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

(22) I am a valued member of the UEA community

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

(23) Think about who you are. How important is being a UEA student to you?

Very important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 very unimportant

(24) Who would you be more likely to go to for help if you were having trouble writing an essay? (click one only)

- Lecturer
- Other tutor
- Male partner
- Female partner

- Classmate
- Friend
- Mother
- Father
- Sibling
- Other (please specify)

(25) How many hours do you study in a typical week? Type the number in the space provided

(26) For coursework, do you give yourself enough time to study all of the required materials?

Definitely yes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely no

(27) For examinations, do you give yourself enough time to study all of the required materials?

Definitely yes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely no

(28) Studying is something that belongs to my weekly routine

strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly disagree

(29) I would recommend UEA to a friend or relative as a place to attend university

strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly disagree

(30) I am satisfied with the quality of instruction I receive at UEA

strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly disagree

(31) I am satisfied with the lecturers who teach on my course at UEA

strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly disagree

(32) If I had it to do all over again, I would still choose to attend UEA

strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly disagree

(33) I am very satisfied with my social life at UEA

strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly disagree

(34) The lecturers in my school of study are:

Extremely good at responding to my needs 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Extremely bad at responding to my needs

(35) The lecturers in my school of study understand what my needs are

strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly disagree

.....

What is your highest mark so far at UEA? Type in the space provided

What is your lowest mark so far at UEA? Type in the space provided

Are your marks typically: 0-20%; 21-30%; 31-40%; 41-50%; 51-60%; 61-70%; 71-80%; 81-90%; 91-100%

What are the top five things you most like about UEA Type in the space provided

What are the top five things you most dislike about UEA Type in the space provided

What is your school of study? _____

What is your course of study? _____

What year of study are you in? _____

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

If there is anything you want to say about what it is like to be an undergraduate student at UEA, or about this questionnaire, please type your comments in the box below