# Record of Observation or Review of Teaching Practice

Session/artefact to be observed/reviewed: Dissertation feedback and grading

Size of student group: Saw students on individual tutorial basis, please focus on 6 students I have first marked.

Observer: Carys Kennedy

Observee: Paul Bench

##### Note: This record is solely for exchanging developmental feedback between colleagues. Its reflective aspect informs PgCert and Fellowship assessment, but it is not an official evaluation of teaching and is not intended for other internal or legal applications such as probation or disciplinary action.

Part OneObservee to complete in brief and send to observer prior to the observation or review:

What is the context of this session/artefact within the curriculum?

Feedback is for the final assessment of final (3rd or 4th year) dissertations at CSM. Students are from a range of degrees and have been placed with me in relation to my research interests. The degrees are noted in blue on attached document and include BA Fashion Print, Menswear, Knitwear, Womenswear and Communication and Promotion. I do not teach on other parts of the dissertation or any other units at CSM, meeting students only for up to 3 tutorials (if they attend all) and providing Formative written feedback against formative submission at a mid-way point. Tutorials are spaced out, 11th Oct, 1st Nov, 29th Nov. They are one-to-one online tutorials at times chosen by the student on a scheduler.

I am expected to integrate notes from a second marker fluidly into coherent feedback. I am also expected to use terms appropriate to the Assessment Criteria.

How long have you been working with this group and in what capacity?

As above, only meeting online across October and November 2023. Assessment following submission is from Jan/Feb 2024

What are the intended or expected learning outcomes?

LO1 Demonstrate **knowledge** and understanding of how to **employ research skills** in the development and completion of a major **academic research** essay (AC Enquiry);

LO2 Demonstrate the skills to **synthesise primary and secondary sources** in the

formulation of **questions** and the presentation of **arguments** (AC Enquiry, AC Process);

LO3 Demonstrate the ability to sustain a focused study and gain depth of **knowledge** and understanding of an area within art, design, popular or media culture (AC Knowledge);

LO4 Adopt **academic conventions** in the formulation of ideas, **arguments** and their

resolution in a reasoned and succinct manner supported by a **bibliography** and **visual**

**sources** (AC Communication).

What are the anticipated outputs (anything students will make/do)?

4,500-5,500 word essay with title page, abstract, list of figures (images) and bibliography of sources.

12 point font. Double line spacing.

Images must have captions/source next to them

Appendices include transcriptions

Are there potential difficulties or specific areas of concern?

It can be difficult to balance being assertive enough so it is clear to the student why they haven’t met Learning Outcomes to perhaps the degree they might have thought, while also remaining sufficiently sympathetic/kind/positive.

Grading is occasionally harder to moderate depending on the moderator, but feedback points are generally similar, making it generally ok to integrate second market feedback.

It can be hard to assess on LOs that have more than one criteria attached, and also pay attention to the criteria matrix.

How will students be informed of the observation/review?

Assessment feedback is written and for students who have now graduated. As the assessment is within UAL and has been published to the student a year ago, it will not be possible to contact them, but there is limited ethical concern attached to the exercise. Students have also been anonymized for the exercise.

**What would you particularly like feedback on?**

The quality and nature of my assessment feedback. Any ways I could improve.

**How will feedback be exchanged?**

Feedback for this exercise, as Carys wishes – email or online meeting.

## Part Two

### Observer to note down observations, suggestions and questions:

Thank you Paul for sharing examples of your written dissertation feedback for final year CSM students. I appreciated you taking the time to talk me through your approach to writing this feedback, and the guidance you’ve been given at CSM and LCF about this. For the purposes of this review, I’m focusing particularly on your feedback for ‘Student 4’ (D+, focus on fetish and fashion) and ‘Student 8’ (A-, focus on Filipino Transgender Identities in Film).

When reading your feedback to students, I came away with a very clear sense of the students’ dissertation topics and research interests, almost as if I had read the dissertations myself. This suggested to me that your written feedback is deeply personalised and tailored to individual students. Feedback has an important role to play in fostering a sense of belonging, and my impression was that students would feel seen by your feedback. As well as supporting students to feel seen, the specificity in your feedback will allow students to know exactly what you’re feeding back on, both positively and developmentally.

In Section 1, you noted that “it can be difficult to balance being assertive enough so it is clear to the student why they haven’t met Learning Outcomes to perhaps the degree they might have thought, while also remaining sufficiently sympathetic/kind/positive”. You also explained that the CSM guidance is to address the student directly for positive feedback (e.g. “You have done this well”) and less directly for developmental feedback (“The essay would have benefited from more…”). This is a strategy that you’ve employed well in the written feedback, most notably for Student 4 who had overused quotations which hadn’t allowed space for their own analysis.

You explained that, at the time of writing this feedback, you took notes sequentially and wrote your feedback according to the notes, whereas you now cluster feedback around the Learning Outcomes. You explained that you don’t use the language from the assessment matrix in the body of the feedback as there’s a risk that this might need to be amended post-moderation – which I think is a sensible strategy – and at the same time, it may mean that students are unclear which LO the feedback relates to. Clustering the feedback might mitigate against this, so I wonder how you’ve gotten on with this.

For example, I noticed that for Student 4, you make reference to citation conventions in paragraph 2 and also in paragraph 4 – a minor point, but I did wonder whether a section on LO4 might have been clearer for the student. I did wonder if the second paragraph for Student 4 (starting “You include quotations to set the scene”…) might be a bit confusing, given that you say that some texts “needed to be presented as a quotation” while also saying that they present too much quotation. I feel like I understand the feedback, and was wondering whether it might be less clear (and perhaps feel contradictory) for a student struggling in this area.

For Student 8, you wrote positive feedback focusing on their many successes while still offering developmental feedback. You explained that you have received guidance to avoid developmental feedback for final year students, as they won’t have the opportunity to apply the feedback. Personally, I appreciated the approach you took for Student 8 as it will support them to develop their research skills even further if they go on to further study – and also lets them know why it was an A- instead of an A+.

When talking about your approach to feedback, you were thoughtful and reflective; I was particularly impressed with how you balance your own feedback style alongside the prescribed expectations of the colleges. You shared a little about the different moderation/benchmarking activities you’re involved with, and it was interesting for me to hear how the different colleges approach this. Thank you again for a really interesting conversation, and for sharing your feedback practices with me.

## Part Three

### Observee to reflect on the observer’s comments and describe how they will act on the feedback exchanged:

I appreciated comments that students would feel seen by my feedback in view of my close attention to their work. I find it difficult to skim read and can get bogged down in detail, but this is one positive outcome. A further reason is because I’m aware of the potential of feedback as a reference point if students challenge their grading, specifics helping unit leaders. I appreciated notes that my way of addressing the student worked well, including for the D+ dissertation. I will continue with this.

Understanding that feedback is monitored by unit leaders contributes to a sense of hidden surveillance (Addison, 2014, p. 317), and that judgements are being made on my work by senior staff, potentially impacting on my re-employment as an HPL. Nicholas Addison relates the ‘audit/target culture’ of LOs to student ‘attainment and retention’, but in this case, they contribute to a feeling that I am audited, which is helpful in surfacing issues, but uncomfortable (2014, p. 317). On reflection, this has pushed me to do the best possible job, but permanent staff might not be so motivated, while there is a sense that they have a superior claim on correct assessment because of their integration with students and the curriculum, which I am not exposed to. Carys’ positive feedback gives me confidence that my feedback is generally sound.

Feedback notes my strategy of not including many criteria descriptors to avoid contradiction and student confusion. I sometimes do add these in editing and will be more conscious of doing this, going forward. We discussed clustering feedback, which I have been doing recently. This may avoid some of the repetition noted, but I will continue to add criteria terms infrequently and avoiding contradictory terms across feedback, as without subheadings, it is unclear how the student will read it.

Carys noted potential confusion in my reference to quotations being used well and misused. This was likely a symptom of finding ways to avoid suggestion of plagiarism. In future I will remain vigilant in avoiding contradictions, where possible clustering statements and making comments clearer, e.g. ‘while you have used quotation well in support of your argument, these were not presented in Harvard form’.

Dylan Wiliam notes that ‘feedback is more than just information. It is information generated within a particular system, for a particular purpose’ (2011, p. 4), that is, to focus on specific ways students can improve. My feedback was summative, and I was directed not to stress development. However, this does enter my feedback as a kinder way of indicating missteps. This was appreciated in Carys’ notes and I think it is important. As someone with a design degree, who took a later turn to academic studies, I would have appreciated this. For this reason, I sometimes note the potential for further study in feedback. I see feedback as relating to the student as a person, beyond its function as a record of achievement (Wiliam, 2011) and in hierarchical categorising (Davies, 2012).

I appreciated comments that I managed different expectations, which includes across departments, universities and individual staff. In the observed feedback, I had to integrate moderator comments into my own. Carys’ feedback did not flag an issue, suggesting this was done this seamlessly for the student, which is reassuring.

Bibliography

Addison, N. (2014) ‘Doubting learning outcomes in higher education contexts: from performativity towards emergence and negotiation’, in *The International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 33(3) pp. 313-325.

Davies, A. (2012) ‘Learning outcomes and assessment criteria in art and design. What’s the recurring problem?’, in *Networks*, 18, July, University of Brighton, Faculty of Arts, online. Accessed 25th February 2025 <<http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/projects/networks/issue-18-july-2012/learning-outcomes-and-assessment-criteria-in-art-and-design.-whats-the-recurring-problem>>

Wiliam, D. (2011) ‘What is assessment for learning?’, *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 37 pp. 3-14.