# University of Kent

## Assessment and Feedback in Higher Education: A Research Symposium

**Wednesday 16 May 2018**
University of Kent, Sibson Building, Sibson Lecture Theatre 1,
Parkwood Road, Canterbury CT2 7FS

# Programme

12.30 – 13.00 **Registration and tea/coffee** – Sibson Atrium.

13:00 – 13:15 **Welcome Address** – Dr Kathleen M. Quinlan, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Kent.

13:15 – 14.15 **The Assessment-for-learning (AfL) movement in primary and secondary education: Lessons for higher education.** Dr Therese Hopfenbeck, Director, Oxford University Centre for Educational Assessment, University of Oxford.

**Abstract -** There seems to be a research consensus regarding the positive effects of Assessment for Learning (AfL) as perceived by participants in primary and secondary education (see for example Ofsted, 2008; DfES, 2007; Condie et al., 2005; Hayward and Spencer, 2010; Kirton et al., 2007; Webb and Jones, 2009; Kellard et al., 2008). However, although AfL or formative assessment practices has been researched, piloted and/or implemented in a wide variety of contexts such as Australia, New Zealand, UK, the US, Canada, Hong Kong, Chile, Singapore, Rwanda, Cameroon, The Netherlands, a series of caveats and difficulties have been found in relation to the feasibility of its implementation (Hopfenbeck, Florez Petour and Tolo 2015). Furthermore, a state of the field review of 907 peer reviewed articles on AfL (Baird, Hopfenbeck, Stobart, Newton and Utheim, 2014) documented that most studies are small scale, and only a few studies demonstrate how AfL practices can enhance students' learning through linking such practices to achievement as measured through test scores. In my presentation, I will discuss possibilities and limitations for higher education with respect to implementing AfL practise based upon previous and ongoing research studies at OUCEA.

14.15 - 14:45 **From alienation to engagement through programme approaches to Assessment.** Professor Tansy Jessop, Professor of Research Informed Teaching, Solent Learning and Teaching Institute, Southampton Solent University.

**Abstract -** In spite of the best efforts of academics, many students feel alienated by assessment and feedback. In this talk, I will argue that taking a programme approach engages students in challenging and coherent assessment which has the potential to counter alienation and light the fires of learning. Using large-scale evidence from 'Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment' (TESTA), I will demonstrate the value of more relational and learning-oriented assessment across whole programmes of study. The session will explore examples of proven approaches to formative assessment which engage students in powerful learning. It will highlight overarching feedback design practices which have come about through TESTA, and provide some elixirs for curing student confusion about goals and standards.

14:45 – 15:00 **Refreshment Break** – Sibson Atrium.

15:00 – 15:30 **University students' development of evaluative expertise for essay writing in literature through peer assessment activities.** Ms Natalie Usher, PhD Candidate, Oxford Centre for Educational Assessment, University of Oxford.

**Abstract -** Assessment criteria and feedback can be difficult to understand because of the slippery and contested nature of terms such as 'argument' (Lea and Street, 1998; Wingate, 2010). To address this, Sadler (1989, 2010) proposes that students should have opportunities to assess work in order to directly develop their own evaluative expertise. Such evaluative expertise should in turn enable students to better monitor and evaluate their own work during learning. This study examines how this process unfolds, and how students apply evaluative expertise to develop their own writing. It uses a theory of action that synthesises Sadler's proposals with self-regulated learning theory (Winne and Hadwin, 1998, 2008). The participants, 21 first-year English Literature students, were learning to write complex exam essays, and took part in a series of four workshops. First, students assessed a range of example work. Criteria were not pre-determined, instead emerging through assessment and discussion. Participants then produced their own essays, before participating in anonymous peer assessment, giving and receiving three reviews. Thirty-four criteria codes emerged from inductive analysis of student data, including interviews, comments on example and peer essays, and reflections on writing. Visualising the connections between codes reveals writing quality to be a complex web of criteria, with the question at the centre. There was a strong overlap between Faculty assessment criteria and the codes emerging from student data. However, students also frequently commented on aspects of writing like introductions and conclusions, which are tacit or latent in Faculty criteria. After the writing workshops, it was these aspects, as well as an emphasis on clarity, which primarily drove the changes students made to their essay writing approaches. I will use a case study writer to show how evaluative expertise developed during the workshops was then used as a catalyst for changes in essay writing.

15:30 – 16:00 **How university students receive and cognitively process feedback.**
Dr Naomi Winstone, Senior Lecturer, Department of Higher Education, University of Surrey.

**Abstract** - Higher Education Institutions face what has been described as a 'feedback paradox': students are vociferous in telling us what they want from feedback, and educators have responded to the student voice by investing considerable time and effort in developing assessment and feedback practices. However, assessment and feedback continue to dominate the headlines following the release of metrics such as the NSS as the area of students' experience with which they are least satisfied. Is the sector as a whole perhaps too focused on efforts to improve the delivery of feedback, without giving equal attention to how to improve its reception? Our work has focused on students' cognitive, motivational, and emotional landscapes and how they influence the ways in which students receive, process, and implement feedback on their work. I will share findings from a series of experimental studies exploring students' memory for feedback information. I will also argue that the ability to be a 'proactive recipient' of feedback is not just an academic skill but a life skill, and that part of delivering a sustainable university education requires us to find space within the curriculum to support the development of these skills in our students. I will share the work we have been doing at the University of Surrey to embed the development of proactive recipience within the curriculum, and illustrate how the responsibility for ensuring that feedback has high impact can, and should, be shared between educators and students.

16:00 – 16:30 **Researching models of dialogic feedback between lecturers and students.** Dr Edd Pitt, Director PGCHE, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Kent.

**Abstract -** It has been suggested that more dialogue rich forms of feedback, such as dialogue with lecturers, exemplars and peer learning, can develop student's evaluative judgements and feedback literacy. Subsequently this may enhance their utilisation of feedback in subsequent assessments (Carless, 2006, 2015; Nicol, 2010, 2013). Such a claim is presently conceptual and has not been empirically investigated across differing disciplines, despite the growing research interest in the area of assessment and feedback within higher education. While this approach is theoretically sound and early studies of its use outside the UK are promising (Carless, 2017), it is sparsely used in UK higher education. To this end little is known about its effects on students' feedback literacy. One reason it may be rarely used is because it is not well understood how to put dialogic practices in place in mass higher education. This session will report on staff and students' experiences of feedback dialogue from across the English HE sector. Delegates will gain an insight into how practitioners have used dialogic feedback and the effect it has had on their students' development of evaluative judgement and feedback literacy.

16:30 – 17:00 **Panel Discussion** facilitated by Dr Kathleen M Quinlan.

17:00 – 17:30 **Drinks Reception** - Sibson Atrium.