Using technology for student feedback: Lecturer perspectives.

*In their words*
Introduction

This collection of short narrative portraits has been constructed during a research study titled ‘Using technology for student feedback: Lecturer perspectives’. This study is undertaken in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Doctor of Education award at the University of Liverpool.

Within the study, fifteen participants were interviewed. Each told their story of how and why they used technology in feedback. This illuminated challenges in the development of academic practice, it uncovered some of the ways in which feedback practice is formed, and it showed some of the ways in which lecturers mediate technology selection.

Individual interview transcripts were reduced to portraits using a process articulated by Seidman (2013). The portraits themselves, and the process of data reduction, provided learning which fed in to the wider analysis. These portrait stories are not all included in the final thesis in their full form, however given that narratives can provide instant knowledge (Webster & Mertova, 2007) I wanted to publish the collection. The portraits are presented here because they stand alone as valuable insights into academic practice.

Thanks to all of the participants for sharing their stories.

I used to be in engineering and construction, but then personal circumstances led me to make a change. I worked in a secondary school, but more as a mentor and then I got visiting lecturer status here and I’ve been doing that for two years, I got employed here in September, as a full time lecturer; so my teaching experience is quite limited really. I love it though. I feel lucky to have this role and it frustrates me that others don’t see the benefits of this job.

I think feedback is very important, but lecturers give feedback in different ways and on different things so students don’t have a consistent experience and this can cause confusion and it might explain why they don’t always make the most of their feedback. I don’t think students all use their feedback – I can tell because they make mistakes even after they have been pointed out. We have to ask why aren’t they using feedback? Why don’t see it as being very valuable? We need to make sure feedback works for students otherwise it’s a waste of everyone’s time. I think technology can help. The students are on their phones and tablets all the time – giving feedback with technology just motivates them. They just ‘do’ technology. They just like using it. I love using it too.

Feedback on academic writing and referencing is so important; they need to get this right to make it in industry. Not all lecturers address these issues. Just writing this is not a summary is not effective, it doesn’t tell the student anything, so I tend to list what should be in the summary, so then I can drag the whole comment in and then it, hopefully, they’ll learn how to write these different sections. Using GradeMark means you can write more for each point. I can give better advice. I’m only using it for the first time this year and there are quite a few other tools I want to try too. I saw Jing at the staff induction but just haven’t got round to trying it yet. There is another technology that I have noticed where you can use as a slide on one half of the screen and then have you talking on the other half. So I think that could be used by going through an assignment if you can scroll up its quite interactive, and visual. I like to be visual with my feedback. There are others I’m thinking about too including Pebblepad. Ideas about what to try next are always going on around my head because at the end of the day we are here because of the students. As lecturers we need to learn to use different technology. We need to get to grips with it.

There are things that need figuring out though when you use technology for feedback. I’m not quite sure how you do second marking on GradeMark, or whether the other lecturers second mark on GradeMark, so I printed them out to get them second marked but that’s just because I didn’t know. It would be nice to understand how other people work. There’s limited time though and the buildings don’t lend themselves to sharing practice here. I’ll sometimes shout down the corridor if someone has his or her door open. I’ve got to do a rubric next and I haven’t done one, so I haven’t got the foggiest how to go about
it, but I do know that I can get in touch with elearning. You can track people down for help but people are very, very busy, but there are lost opportunities. I think the staff forums that we have are great, but they are not compulsory and it’s a shame because it means that you don’t get the benefits of other people’s advice. If I know I have a particular problem I can generally find some help, but for the bigger decisions or for new tools that others aren’t really using, I will sit and work through those, and sort it out on my own. I need time and space to sit down and totally figure things out. Time is short though.

I haven’t had student feedback on my approaches yet as this is the first year that I have used GradeMark, but you’ve just got to keep thinking, haven’t you? And ask why is it not working, why did it work with last year’s group but not this year’s. I’m using the technology to make things better – it’s not about efficiencies. As long as the systems don’t talk to each other there aren’t any efficiencies to be found. I have to do a lot myself like enter grades twice – once on GradeMark and once on SITS, and I have to remember to tell the assignment office to make my online submissions anonymous, the IT people have some catching up to do with their systems. I do use technology a lot in my teaching and even with the glitches I think I always would as I just have a real interest in technology and what it can do.
Section 2

Ruth

I’ve been teaching for over twenty years. I was trained in secondary school education, and have taught in further education, but I moved over to higher education and began working here in 2000. My discipline background is ecology though I have taught biology and a whole range of topics related to environmental themes.

For me, feedback is critical. I think if we don’t give feedback, we are failing as educators because you can’t assure a student that you’ve marked the work fairly, that you’ve looked at it, you’ve analysed it and that you’ve critiqued it. You need to be quite clear where marks are but most importantly, give advice on how they can improve the work next time. Giving feedback is part of being a lecturer; it’s not an add on to what happens in class, it’s absolutely essential to help students improve. It needs to motivate, and be relevant. It needs to be personal and most importantly legible. Of course we can’t make students use their feedback, but we can assist them to engage with it by providing high quality feedback.

Legibility is one of the main reasons I always type my feedback; after doing some research in to the student experience of feedback I found that within the institution legibility was a real problem. I use Word to type comments, which allows me to personalise comments. I sometimes use Word like GradeMark – with a bank of comments. I always use typed comments for dissertation feedback, in part because it helps keep a record to inform face-to-face discussions and follow-up. I also use audiovisual technology. I’ve tried one-to-one feedback in this way, but not all of the students liked this. So I have moved from using it for individual feedback to using it for ‘one to many’ feedback; I also use it to provide advice and guidance on assignments to the group when they are developing their work.

There are technologies I’d still like to explore. I’m open to using GradeMark, I’ve had training, but the right opportunity hasn’t arisen yet. The problem was that I had a module where it didn’t really suit and I think you’ve got to be careful that you use the right technology for appropriate situations. I think GradeMark is best used when comments are likely to be repetitive. Because a lot of my assignments are highly individual, the feedback is always very different.

I think that you have to give feedback that works well with individual learning styles. That’s really important. We have a diverse range of students here, and many dyslexic students. The use of audio and visual technology for these students is quite powerful. Because students have different preferences, I’m going to offer them choice about how they get their feedback – through Jing, or by typed comments.

One of the main consequences for me of typing my feedback is being able to stand back and ask myself ”Does this tell the stu-
udents what I want it to tell them, is it constructive, is it clear, does it tell them where the marks are, does it tell them what their weak areas and if you want to get a better mark next time, this is what you need to do?” If not then I can change it. I can use the screen to craft my comments so they are beneficial to the students. I get a better balance of positive and negative comments. I think developing clarity in the feedback bank comments gives me clarity of thought about what I am asking students to do, in turn this helps me to guide them better in the development of assignments.

I am not a techie, but through my external examining, my own studies, staff development sessions, and through talking to others, I do see that technology has huge value. It's not until you see what's out there or you talk to colleagues that you know what's available. I never heard of screen capture and I might never have come across it had I not just by chance gone to a conference. Sometimes I'll see a technology and have a go at making it work, but then I won’t use it until I see what value it will add. You do need to commit time to making it work; but there is plenty of help available from others to make it happen.

Staff are not always prepared to put the time in to developing feedback or their use of technology. There is a big inequality and this is really frustrating, for the staff who do bother, and for the students. Until its mandatory we will have staff who invest time in this and staff that don’t take this seriously. Student’s expectations are changing and staff shouldn’t be able to opt out. Institutional backing for online feedback could open up so much; it would allow learner support to target attention and students to view their feedback journey so that they can reflect on it and learn. For now though, this idea doesn’t have the necessary commitment to make it happen.
Chris

I’ve only been teaching for four years, before that I was a business consultant. I wasn’t previously experienced in teaching. My view of feedback was that it was quite a negative thing, it was there to tell students what they’d done wrong. When second marking I saw how others used feedback; there were a lot of comments like ‘why didn’t you do this, why didn’t you do that, you should have done this’. If you were a student picking that up, you’d just feel criticized. Second marking gave me an opportunity to think about what feedback should be like for a student. Also, by luck, I was accosted by Peter Smith, who had a really clear idea about what feedback was for and how it should relate to an assignment. He showed me how feedback should line up with the criteria. He showed me that feedback was advice to improve rather than just observations on what was wrong. This has been instilled in me from day one. Doing a PGCE in Higher Education Teaching brought all this together – it exposed me to different approaches. But the main factor was Peter.

I only use GradeMark as a feedback technology; I use it on final module reports. For me, the technology helps speed things up. Students can get their feedback quicker; as soon as it’s ready they can have it. It’s a lot faster for me to give quality feedback too. The total time isn’t quicker than paper marking but I feel I do more comments when I’m using GradeMark than I do when I’m using a pen and paper. We used rubrics when we paper marked, but Grademark speeds up grade calculations based on rubric scoring.

I think students like to pick their feedback up from their phone or whatever device they have. The international students really like it too, probably because they can see how they get their marks. They just like the technology.

I was working closely with June Hand; she was the driving force. June is champion with lots of different technologies. She got very involved when the university had a project to promote technology, a few years ago. We shared our marking comments and discussed them, and then it’s just been iterative.

Reading the screen for so long can be stressful with big groups, although it seems easier to actually see and to make the comments visible on the page. We did adapt the assignment to fit with the technology. GradeMark didn’t like long assignments, so we made the report shorter. Some might question the academic rigour of this, but it’s been important for us to balance the needs of standards with what’s possible with the technology. The external examiner congratulated us on the assignment and the use of technology; that has been really important in giving us confidence, and reassuring the institution about the legitimacy of this approach.

GradeMark has made us think about the structure of the assignments and what, actually what we’re asking students to produce. Which I’m not sure we do really in every other as-
ignment. We can provide clearer guidance and advice as a result, and be clearer as a marking team because we’re having these discussions.

The e-learning team has been really important in all of this. I use them on an ad-hoc basis but they have been an invaluable sounding board. I know there are obviously people who champion the technology here, but it seems to be a really small number of the total. I’m lucky to have landed in to a team who has shown me the way.

We’re going to try marking on iPads, others have just started to try this out but I think it might be more convenient to be mobile. I’ve heard it may not be totally straight forward; I’ll give it a try and see.

At the staff development forums I see what others are using. Dawn shared a pen, that you can talk in to and Anita shared Pebblepad. But I was just trying to think which module it would fit with, really. I quite like seeing what people do and then I think, actually, can I do that with anything I’m doing? When I have an idea on what I might do I would go to the person who is using it and get a bit more advice. Summer is a good time to think about this stuff and get new things set up – there is more time to think about the detail.
I came to the university in September 2008. Prior to that I’ve got 21 years in consultancy. I hadn’t taught in higher education before but I had extensive experience in training and addressing large groups. My approach to student feedback fits closely with methods of working from my previous role, where I’d comment on documents and offer constructive criticism in a written form. It is very natural to me to use Word to type feedback. My writing is not legible so I need to use technology, otherwise students won’t even be able to read it. This was the main reason why I always use a typed format.

My feedback is all about making work better for next time, which clearly should lead students to a better qualification or better grade. As a tutor you don’t always see the benefits of your feedback though, as students’ soon move on to another module.

When I see some feedback from other people I want to ask What are they supposed to do with this comment? How are they going and learn from that? Feedback needs to be understood and it needs to be meaningful. I guess not everyone thinks like this. To be fair, it’s important to recognise that some colleagues are overloaded and genuinely struggle for time. Some just have other priorities though and choose not to invest the time.

My approach to feedback has evolved a lot. I started with Word, using track changes but this didn’t work brilliantly because it messed up the formatting of the student’s work. I have used Quick Comments within word, where I have a bank of comments and add them. I use Dragon dictate to add bespoke comments to Word document comments, this helps to personalise and add content specific comments. It means I can add a lot of detail. I now use GradeMark, although it took me three years to be convinced of the benefits. I was about to give up on it when I spoke to the students; I expected them to say it was rubbish for them and they didn’t, they said it was brilliant for them, which was backed me into a corner of having to continue with it. Now I’ve got through the pain barrier of how it works. I use that in all my modules. I use screen capture for supervision and group feedback, and I am looking at using iPads soon for increased mobility; I am just trying to obtain the hardware and then I’ll give it a go starting with some small groups. I’m currently researching what I can use for feeding back on student’s project work – so I am interested in document sharing spaces.

Efficiency isn’t the driver for my use of technology; it’s about providing more comments and better comments, with more clarity and detail. My professional background does lead me to look for efficiencies though, so I do try to think smartly about the approaches I take. In industry I always asked where can we deliver the value but without a time cost? Now, when I
am typing, I ask can I do this with fewer mouse clicks or by using voice recognition, but I don’t compromise on what I want to deliver.

I actively look for appropriate technology, quite often at six o’clock on a Sunday morning, there’s a bit of my time where I have a little play and, when the house is quiet. I also pick a lot up from day to day activities, from other people. I just see what they are doing and commit it to the mind bank. There have been a few events where ideas have been shared and I’ve taken them on board, like a JISC event on screen capture. I just see it and think – I can use that. I tend to figure out difficulties with the technology on my own; I don’t use many support systems, I just experiment. People do tend to ask me about my approaches more than I ask others.

Using technology for feedback does bring a few challenges. For example second making can be tricky as colleagues are not always willing to participate, some have had bad experiences in the past that have put them off. I sometimes end up printing of files, which adds an administrative layer to the process. We also need to be careful that with different feedback approaches by staff, students are all having a similar experience. I’m mindful of this. Where I am marking with a colleague who uses hand written feedback, I just type my feedback and tag the work with numbers so students can see which point related to which place on the assignment. It feels uncomfortable to be giving reams of feedback using technology for half the group while the other half has a different experience, so I tend to compromise in the name of parity.

I think students will choose whether to use the feedback or not. Some will, some won’t. Most do, I hope. When they don’t, I try to encourage them to engage.

In future I want to undertake more evaluation to understand how students use the feedback. I would like to be reassured that all this effort is worth it; there is no point if students don’t use it. I hope that they do, but we don’t really know.
Anna

I qualified on my physio course at this university in 2011. I went on to do some weekend teaching for a year, then I got a job here part time and recently became full time.

As a student I used technology a lot. I was going to lectures to get the basics, and then I’d go and find things online too, because I’m a visual learner. I remember how these things helped, so as a teacher now, I use technology like TED videos and quizzes. Being younger gives me a drive for technology. If I like using something, my students usually do too. There’s a generational connection.

Feedback is probably the most important thing in teaching. Again this view comes from my own experience on different courses. On some courses I have done, the feedback was poor and it made learning more difficult. As a student I found it very frustrating not knowing what I’d done right or wrong. We need to offer good feedback to support students.

I’ve just started getting to grips with GradeMark. I’m planning to use this so that the distance learning students can have feedback instantaneously, and then we can then have a verbal conversation over the phone with both of us looking at the same thing. I’m trying as part of my PgC Teaching to bridge the gap between first and second year for the master’s students. Feedback is one way that I can help this happen, so I think online feedback will help.

I found out about this technology through Turnitin emails that I’ve signed up to. There was something on there about using GradeMark and I had a look. I didn’t hear about this from colleagues. All of us over here in these offices, tend to be quite a tight knit group because we are located on the edge of campus. Together we do get to discuss things like feedback a lot, but it means we don’t hear other approaches. Teaching to industry means that we can’t always get to staff development sessions too, so that’s an issue.

After becoming aware of GradeMark I spoke to Jessica Gayle about how she gave feedback, and she showed me Jing. I’m not sure that verbal feedback is necessarily as effective for students as being able to read it, so I am not trying this.

I thought I had to go through the course approvals processes to be able to go electronic, and actually discovering I didn’t have to was a real breakthrough. I can move all of my modules over to digital feedback when I am ready. Time has been an is-
sue too. I’d actually planned to start using GradeMark for these assignments that have just come in, but unfortunately the set up of my area on Moodle meant that work wasn’t anonymous – so I couldn’t proceed this time. My start has been delayed.

I have encountered some challenges with colleagues who will be part of my assessment and feedback process. They prefer handwritten approaches, which makes second marking difficult. But I feel quite strongly, that it needs to be done for the students. I’ve been quite strong about putting my foot down and saying this is what I’m doing. I guess people just have different ways of working but I will put the students’ needs first.

Once I am underway I hope the students find the feedback more accessible, convenient and of a higher quality. I will evaluate their experience, but I can’t imagine why they wouldn’t like this approach.
Anna

I taught adult learners for ten years at a further education institution and then I’ve been here since 2007, I deliver and assess ICT modules, specific skills modules and personal development. In my teaching I mainly try to use feedback for the benefit of the students. I prefer formative feedback and I like to give feedback that I feel students will be able to use to improve whatever they do next. Even though I teach ICT I don’t use lots of technology in my actual teaching methods, but I just feel one should be using technology for feedback.

The technology I use helps give better quality feedback but it doesn’t save any time. I started using technology for feedback make it legible, also I think it’s more professional because if you make mistakes as you form the feedback, it’s easier to correct. I often find myself going back and revising what I have originally written. That’s one of the reasons why audio-visual hasn’t yet worked for me – if I started talking I’d probably change my mind quite a few times, so there would be lots of hesitation, and it would probably take me much longer. I use GradeMark and Pebblepad, and I have tried audiovisual but only as an experiment – I never released that feedback to the students.

I’m trialling PebblePad in response to issues that I noticed with a particular module. I thought it would help the students to gather assessment evidence and that it would aid their reflection. I saw it at a Learning and Teaching Forum, I thought, yeah I can use this, this has got benefits for this one group of students, whose results haven’t been that great in the past. I wondered whether using PebblePad might make it easier to keep an eye on how students were doing throughout the year, so that I can motivate them as needed. I would only try out something like this on a small group. There have been a few teething issues in the pilot, like how to set submission cut off deadlines to meet with university regulations, but the e-learning team have helped work out ways of dealing with this. I know others are trying out Pebblepad for the first time but we haven’t had a formal group to share approaches, we’ve just got on with it separately. Occasionally we will have a quick catch up, but there is nothing formal.

GradeMark is more established and I’ve used that as it became available in the institution. It works well. When using technology second markers are sometimes hard to find and engage, printing everything off for them just makes a mockery of the whole thing really. I share a number of my modules and this can be frustrating because you don’t get to make the decisions that you think will be of benefit. If you’re working in a group, then you have to decide whether this is something everybody would be willing to get involved in. Working as a team
also affects how a technology is used, for example in one module as a team of tutors we agree to mark to the midpoint to ensure its fair for the students, but it can be a bit limiting.

It’s very natural for students to access their feedback through computers, and more so as the numbers of staff using technology increases. Having a digital record of their feedback means students can access it with ease 24/7. I do worry about the amount of text we give students though, they have so much to read and they just don’t like to read. Maybe there is a need to use more media types. I might revisit this.

The technology helps me look to at whether students actually look at the feedback – in one case fifty plus per have actually accessed it within a week, but this fell to a quarter of students for the final summative piece of work. I keep reviewing what I do to try to get students engaged, but I would like to understand more about how students use their feedback and whether the time is well spent on giving summative feedback. I am interested in an idea from the Learning & Teaching Forum, where you give more formative and less summative in an effort to make it valuable to students.
I have been at the university for about 16 years, before which I was largely involved in industry training. My background is in agriculture, people management, and human resources. I didn’t come here to teach originally, bought by very quickly got drawn in.

In my mind, when you mark something and feedback, you should be able to defend your mark and be able to say to the student if they come back and ask ‘where did I go wrong?’ and you should be able to say all that reason, x, y and z. I use technology because it helps create a record of this. I like the technology to be within the university’s systems. I am slightly nervous of losing assignments. If my feedback is locked into the VLE, I know it is there. Whereas outside, in other systems, I am slightly nervous that it will get lost, but that is probably down to my incompetence.

In my teaching I use a number of different technologies. I use online tools so the students can create job advertisements instead of just traditional assignments. I try to use the tools because the students like it. For feedback I have used audio commentary, GradeMark, peer to peer marking within the VLE, and I have tried screen cast. I started using all this about three years but thought it was too clumsy and systems were slow. But having tried it, and left it, I am now having a second attempt. Partly this is because I think the technology has improved a lot in this time everything works quicker; I can see that from other people’s experiences. My ambition this year was to have a go with the iPad, as I think that would be quick and I could work from home. I got delayed in the setup process so it didn’t happen, but once I had said to my students we’re going to mark and feedback online, I was committed. And then when it got closer to the date, I thought oh God, I wish I hadn’t done that! But I was committed and so I had to do it. And I don’t regret doing it actually. It forced my hand.

I hope these approaches will help save me some time, though my experience of this so far is that it has not sped things up. Is all probably takes longer than marking by hand. I am optimistic though that as I get better at using the technology I can make efficiencies. It is somewhat selfish. I think the use of audio can save time. I really like the audio in GradeMark as it is limited to three minutes, this means I need to be straight to the point. I don’t just stop with audio though, and I tend to use written feedback and then reinforce this with a précis comment in audio. I think the audio adds a personal comment and
stops me recycling summative comments in copy and paste. It reinforces the main issues too. So I guess I am adding work here. I do need to keep looking at what I am doing to try to save time. Potentially, you could do the verbal whilst doing the written to save time. That is worth looking at, marrying the two technologies.

Dawn was important in inspiring my work in with feedback online, she showed me how I can structure feedback on the VLE, but then was away at the time I started using this, because I wasn’t 100% ready to go online without her support. I took the ideas from our discussions and run it as a paper exercise in the first year, but I am now moving over to the VLE for this.

I am working in a large team for one module; in this we use GradeMark and not everyone likes it, some won’t use. We have though, used the idea of marking to the midpoint of a rubric grade boundary for all members of the marking team to promote consistency. This is a direct result of the technology changing the team’s practice. Working as a team also allows us to share comments so that we can all be consistent in our messages; this is really hard in any team.

I’ve got less teaching over the next few weeks so I really need to focus on developing my plans for next year as it all needs to be ready at the start of term, which comes round too quickly! For the future I’ll see what comes up. There is sharing of ideas in the department at meetings, through small presentations for example. If the technology is there I will always look at it and try and to make it fit. If someone came along and showed me something, I could see how it would work. It’s that mindset; it’s that translation of what you’re doing at the moment and using technology in trying to make it work. And that’s what some people might struggle with. Unless they do tackle it though they won’t solve the major problem of how much time assessment and feedback takes. They’ve got to be prepared to have a go.
Marcus

I came from professional practice, as a surveyor about twenty years ago. I’ve been involved in teaching all levels, though I concentrate more on first and second years now and I’m course manager which means looking after about 300 students on a specific programme area. I’m an external examiner for two different universities.

I went on a course quite soon after I came here, and something I learnt from that is that you can mark things but if you give bad feedback that is almost worse than having nothing at all. So, I take it quite seriously. I just add notes, probably like lots of people, on their assignments briefs but the last couple of years, I now type it because my handwriting isn’t very good but it also allows me to give feedback related to the areas of the task. I try to relate to exactly what they have been asked to do and I tell them what they have done well on and what they have missed and the mark is there. You can re-use your comments when it’s typed, you can be more comprehensive and you’ve got a permanent record so if a student queries it, I can go back to it. I’ve got some ways of working which save some time; I have comments and just edit them and reuse them.

We tend to give feedback to them but don’t really think how they use it. We try to give them their money’s worth with the aim of helping them. But how do they use it? That’s something I’ve never really thought about. I think students don’t look at their feedback very much. The students move on so quickly you don’t really see what they do with their feedback. Perhaps we should have a feedback sheet from the students. They write back to us on what they have gained from the feedback.

I am a bit of a dinosaur with technology. In my teaching I use OHP’s for calculations, because they serve the purpose I need. I realize that schools are pushing technology; students might think that we are behind the times. I like the idea of iPads because they seem interactive. That’s my next step. For feedback though I have until recently just used Word. Recently I have tried Pebblepad, but other colleagues having an influence brought that about.

We’ve started a new module but there weren’t enough staff with expertise to teach the whole module, so it’s being team taught. I am module leader. I thought it was going to be 100% coursework and just submit a massive piece of work at the end of year on all the different topics they had covered. But Victoria, who is one of the team, had been on a course, and had experienced Peddle Pad, and she thought it would be good to
have some feedback as they went along. After every 3 weeks they would submit a piece of work associated with each tutor’s delivery. Victoria thought they wanted to have instant feedback so after a week, so they immediately had some feedback on how they were doing, ready for their next piece of work. Victoria and David thought that Peddle Pad was a way of doing that. They could put the information on, and then we can give comments, side by side, by the side of those comments.

I was a bit skeptical about why do we need another package, but I wanted to back Victoria’s enthusiasm. She thought it was a good thing, I thought I’d give it a go. It might be brilliant; it might be useless. But I was prepared to give it a try. Staff weren’t happy to give a mark for each section but they would make comments. I will mark them all at the end and give a grade.

The e-learning team were great. They trained students and the staff. So I didn’t have to deal with technology issues, I just directed students to e-learning. We did have a few issues with QA, like needing to have a hand in cut off time, at the time I thought this was difficult but we sorted it out quickly. I haven’t thought about how the external will look at the work – there’s no point thinking about this until we know if we are going to progress it in future years.

With this planned interim feedback, theoretically the students should perform much better and get better marks. Is that right against other assignments where they put the assignment in at the end? If you want differentiation of marks, it probably isn’t. If you want them just to learn and increase their understanding, then this is probably a very good system.

When you are giving feedback in different ways you have ideas on how you might improve it further. Looking at things in a different way so it might trigger you to what you want to do in the future. So having conversations with people around these new approaches triggers new ideas and ways to improve.
I’ve been at the university for around six years, after coming from local government. I teach planning and environment related subjects across all levels on countryside, enterprise and land management related courses. For me, feedback is very important as it enables the students to see where they’ve gone wrong and what they could have done better. I try to balance my comments so to give positive feedback, as well as critical comments. Some students don’t seem to make much use of it though. I think a lot of them just look at the mark and if they’re reasonably happy with that, they don’t look at the feedback. A few years ago I checked who had read their feedback, and I was surprised how many had not accessed it. Nevertheless it’s part of the job to provide feedback. Irrespective of whether students read it, we need to offer it.

Increasingly I think it’s harder to hold students’ attention in class, so I do try to use technology. I use PowerPoint, Quizdom, videos, and I’ve used Jing to launch assignments.

I’m not too adventurous though. The two specific feedback technologies that I use are Pebblepad and GradeMark. From my previous work role I did bring a sense of how technology can work well in communication, project management and other work processes, so this may have had an influence in my willingness to use technology in the feedback process. I don’t use any audio or audio visual as I think it would be very time consuming to plan a script, and I don’t like the sound of my own voice!

My use of Pebblepad is more recent. The module is taught by a team and each of us do two or three weeks teaching, where students produce a formative piece of work that they upload to Pebblepad. I have to give them some formative feedback and when all of the module sections have been taught, students are meant to rework the assignment and pull each of the sections together into one report. I didn’t get a say in the use of Pebblepad but I didn’t have any particular problems with it apart from the time as small extra burden, but it wasn’t much time in reality. Pebblepad was quite limited in what it is allowed you to do though – it doesn’t allow you to annotate or correct the student’s work, I could only add a comment next to their work.

I tend to use GradeMark quite a lot. I use it on most modules, including one with over a hundred students. The biggest challenge in using this approach is setting up the rubric. This allows you to have a more complex set of marking criterion, with a more complex weighting, without worrying about calculating the end results. It does limit your marking to the mid
point; sometimes it’s hard to choose between categories of performance, but it does make the marking fairer and more consistent. I inherited a rubric from my predecessor so I didn’t need to set up the whole thing; I just adapted what I had to fit the template. One of the module’s that I haven’t yet used GradeMark on needs a rubric setting up, but that needs to be a summer job. You can do the rubric without GradeMark of course, but the two just work well together particularly with the automatic calculation.

I tend to use the summer to try anything new and to prepare for the next year. This summer I want to look at moving more of my modules to GradeMark and I want to work on the underpinning rubrics. I have one module, which includes the submission of a more visual piece of work, with lots of photographs, and I felt it would be better to be flicking through pieces of paper looking at that, than to look at it on screen. Also it’s a new module to me, and I just didn’t want to make too many changes too soon. Over the summer period I will need to think about whether to switch to online feedback for this visual submission.

I started to use GradeMark after a university wide push, a few years ago. I thought it would reduce the need to travel in to campus and to carry boxes around. It also speeds up marking because I can get started as soon as work is uploaded; I don’t have to wait for them all to be in. I feel that I put more comments on assignments, with more detail and hyperlinks to follow up support. I don’t think it saves me any time but the detail is much better for the students.

I got a lot of support when I began using it, particularly from people like June Hand and the e-learning team. There are a few of us now using GradeMark - I think there’s more of a community developing. We tend to loiter in the corridor just having a brief chat about it. We should sit down together properly, and discuss what works as we are all doing slightly different things.
I’m currently teaching on subjects focused around business, academic skills, and I’m also teaching a post-graduate online course. Prior to that, I worked in international development and in wildlife management.

I see feedback differently for different modules. For, for example, the extended foundation students academic skills, I see feedback is absolutely critical because that is the point at which they are forming a key building block in their learning skills, and if they haven’t got that building block in place, they’re potentially not going to be able to stack the other blocks up on top. Whereas, at master’s level you’re commenting on concepts, ideas and students’ opinions.

In terms of technology I’ve tried things like YouTube clips for the foundation students. I wouldn’t use that, really, with post-graduate in the same way, unless it was TedTalks, but I’m trying to use something that breaks up the lectures, so the media comes in as a way of constructing a journey. I haven’t been able to find a way to use interactive models particularly effectively, and I haven’t used tests, but I think I could use those. So I think I’m constantly trying to push the boundaries myself. For feedback on assignments I’ve used GradeMark, both on an iPad and on a PC, that’s for the foundation students. I’ve used PDF notes/comments, so for the PgC. I’ve used Word by review and comments. I think all of those have a place at different levels.

I’m not totally sold on GradeMark. I will try again next year. Whether it’s because I haven’t mastered its functionality, I’m not sure. I don’t feel it is as flexible and adaptable to my needs as I want it to be. I really like that it keeps the students work looking the same. I really like Word as a way of interacting with a piece of work. For me, it’s more user-friendly, but I don’t think it helps the students with for their work to be pushed all over the page and changed, so I would like to see something that blends the two of those approaches to be able to create something that is useful for students and is useful for me. Before last summer, my approach before this was to annotate a student’s piece of work and then to write electronic comments.

I started with the PDF because I realised I had to do something for those who were at a distance. I needed to pass their marking back electronically. PDF comments are brilliant at my Masters level. That really works. You’ve not got to go in and say your full stop is in the wrong place, your referencing is wrong, but you’re commenting on concepts, and students’
opinions. PDF annotation doesn’t interfere with their work but it allows you to put fairly extensive comments next to work that they’ve written, which is what I needed to do was to write one or two paragraphs around the way they were thinking.

I have not used audio or screencast. After a demo I thought how utterly unrealistic to think that I can actually sit down and do this for sixty pieces of work. Fine if you’ve got five, but for sixty pieces of work, it’s going to be much more efficient for me to type. I give much more feedback, if it’s in the written form. If I had a piece of work that I was able to craft, and not too many of them, then maybe I could work that way. But turning round sixty. I haven’t got the time to be thinking how am I presenting this? I have to present it in a positive and upbeat way, when I’m actually thinking I’m on my fifty-fifth and I’ve got five to do.

I’m using Word for formative. I haven’t used it for summative feedback, I had planned to, but the students asked me not to do electronic feedback. I then gave them choice, did they want handwritten comments or electronic? And they chose as a group to have handwritten comments. I don’t think we fully understand what our students want, because we think the students are saying they want electronic. However we’ve done a survey on the module where we used GradeMark and it doesn’t give a clear picture. I will carry on using it, because partly it could be the way that I’m using it as a tool. I’m not utterly convinced it gives better results for the students, and the students would suggest that they’re not actually convinced it does either. They like to see my handwriting on their paper. There’s a physical thing for them. They like to know that I’ve sat and held and poured over their hard worked pages and when they have it electronic, they don’t feel that same relationship has happened. But this youth generation who supposedly are to be totally in tune with electronic, you know, I was laughing with them, I said, “I’ve had to come to use this technology, now I’m the one who has to encourage you to engage “.

Rubrics have been the biggest change in the way I give feedback since I encountered them. I think the grid is a fairer way in terms of the feedback transparency, but also I think it gives better marks. There’s an element of emotional response to a piece of work, and, I have a suspicion we tend to do is penalise a student excessively if we just give a single mark. Whereas if we’re required to work on a grid system, it makes us be fairer in our marking.

Moving from paper grids to GradeMark grids was painful, because the matrix formed in Word is utterly different from when you apply it GradeMark. I hadn’t fully appreciated the complexity of that transfer. I think grids should be where we should be moving institutionally. If you’re going to get people to put them into GradeMark, they’ve got to understand the need to go higher than seventy and lower than forty percent, and what the implications of that are. So, for me, there’s a process to get to that point, I think I’m nearly there. It’s always been very hard to for justify why you give a mark higher than, sort of, eighty-five, and it’s, sort of, something I’ve shied away from, and I think that what it does is it forces you to
think about explaining to a student what does that mean. For student’s it’s a game. They have to understand that ultimately they are playing a game and there are rules, and if they can understand those rules, then they will perform better in the game.

In getting started with GradeMark there was some serious hand holding. I hadn’t appreciated what it was involved. I didn’t see the problems, the hurdles I was going to have until I hit them. Because it’s quite a long time between uses, you only use these things once or twice a year, I didn’t realise when I was creating the comment banks how difficult it was to go back and change, once you set them up. I need to create a sense of logic that is my own, so that I can reuse and reuse. Next year I shall probably have to go and recreate them again because I don’t think I set them up with the right logic because I didn’t really appreciate what I was doing until I’d started doing it. So that I think, for me, was a massive issue, was not really knowing what I was embarking upon before I did it, or whether or not you can get over that by having some appropriate training. The support that I had from e-learning really was second to none. However there were also allsorts of problems with my PC, it was running really slowly, and I found that really frustrating. That’s why I went across to using the iPad because I found the functionality much better on an iPad. But it was very hard to type the comments and I got told off by personnel on health and safety grounds for using it to type comments in. So I actually got reprimanded for doing what I thought was good practice, which made me smile. And

the university hadn’t provided me with an iPad. And because I’m not extremely technologically aware, I’m having to understand what the student would have to understand just before they do it, so I think there are potential barriers again. I was only a step ahead of the students. I had to print off the work And That took me half a day to get those printed off because the second marker was unfamiliar with GradeMark. And it’s only when I got through the process that I realised I could remove paper submission altogether; next year, I would remove paper submission. I’ve got to be honest, technology wastes time phenomenally. Utterly frustrating. If I’m being honest, the whole process of using GradeMark was deeply frustrating.

I had committed myself because if this ultimately is a piece of technology we have to get familiar with; at the time it looked like the institution was saying, you can all use it. It was a totally personal commitment. I want to become more aware and then be able to sift out what I think works and what doesn’t work for my style of teaching.
Greta

I taught in primary, secondary FE and higher education. I teach modern languages, economic business environment and principles of marketing. I think [students] do [use feedback] but I feel that especially with the languages, in the language classroom there is a constant stream of feedback being given because it is interactive … so actually I don’t see this feedback as something they just get at the very end. The feedback that I give them at the end… I don't think all students use it and a lot of feedback, I think, is a complete waste of time. I don't think every single module is suitable for the type of feedback that is perhaps expected to be given. I tell my students, if they do get a bad mark, I say look this is past, concentrate on the future and I don’t necessarily say, right let’s look at the feedback and see how we can improve that. Feedback is high on the higher education agenda so they are being stuffed with feedback and some of the feedback they don’t really need.

I am not convinced that there are any expectations of the use of technology in feedback. I would like to give feedback online on speaking in the foreign language and I have explored that possibility of being able to do that, and it was not possible. I wanted students to be able to record themselves and the recording come up on Moodle and I can comment on it and I can hear it and we can improve it. We can’t do that. A facility does exist on Moodle – a student can record themselves and the lecturer can comment and record themselves but e-learning decided not to make it available here because they feared that it might make other functions on Moodle unstable. I haven’t asked about it again – it might be possible now.

The other time I have used technology, is where I have recorded feedback but of course. I have written it [by hand], but I have also given them a little commentary. This was maybe three years ago. I personally didn’t use any technology, I just used a digital recorder, recorded that, [the e-learning team] took it and sent it to them. I tell them how they have done. I think that spurs them on. I think the reason I haven’t continued those things in the last two years is because I have been focusing on other things. It is not really, not wanting to do those things, it is just having to do other things really. The individual summative recording, I think if I did that in a big group it would be quite time consuming. It was just a spoken version of what was written. I would be interested to know whether a student would listen to negative feedback several times and I think they wouldn’t.
I haven’t come to use [ipads for marking], I think there was a decision made that marking was going to be online and we would have done the marking online and shared it this year. I am actually happy that didn’t happen and I am only going to be second marking on line because I am not convinced that it is easy to use, but I will have that experience, I will just do some second marking online.

Last week, I would say that it took me several hours to get an Ipad with all the submissions on it. The perception is that technology is fast, it is supposed to be fast, I don’t think there would be much difference [than paper methods]. I am old and I like paper. [I]f you have problems, you have got to turn to somebody, who do you turn to and you just think that it is going to take a lot of time.

When I thought more about feedback was when we went to listen to Royce Sadler … one of the things that he said was that praise has no place in feedback. Perhaps we should get to the message sooner rather than later and also about performance and practice and deliberate practice and I think that is what it is and I think we don’t really explain to students enough how the feedback fits, where does that fit, because they think of it like an end product, but it is not only an end product, it is a product that gets dismissed or accepted depending on what it is. I think the reason why there is so much focus on feedback is due to the national student survey and quality assurance so I think there is this push from above and I think perhaps the student and what the student wants is being forgotten and I sometimes think the student.

I think some members of staff struggle with [feedback] … I have got children that have gone through higher education and do use technology and I speak to a lot of students as well and I think maybe some members of staff don’t have those conversations with students and they are very much focused on their subject and I think maybe that is why I have a different view on it. Sometimes they really don’t care about feedback, it’s just the mark isn’t it, and it really depends on what it is and I think depending on which year you are in and depending on whether it is high stakes or low stakes and depending on what their perception of the module is. My children have definitely influenced me in that side of things as well but maybe that is why some staff don’t have the same sort of view.

I know a few years ago, a study on some engineering students … took away the mark, they actually took the emotion out of it, the thing is if you get feedback, the emotion can cloud your response to it, can’t it? They took that away and what they found was the students practiced far more and actually there was an improvement in their performance at the end of the year so we are in the danger of clouding and preventing higher performance by, as I said before, stuffing students with feedback.
Malcolm

I'm teaching business modules to the final year undergraduates and management and leadership to the masters student. In the past I have taught pretty much all the business subjects from level 4 through to 7, and of course I've been involved in supervision as well. I have been at Robson University for over twenty years.

I've always considered feedback an important part of the teaching process, and of the learning process of the students. I certainly think most of the students learn something from it. Dare I say it at the lower end, some of the students look primarily at the mark, ignore the, what's written and just merrily carry on. But I would say the majority of the students, they're reading, they're trying to understand and trying to learn at the very top end I think there are students who, they do read, they do learn, and they do better themselves from it. If you put some time and effort into your feedback, the students will put some time and effort into looking at it, and making use of it. I think the students reflect back to the module leader the amount of effort that they've bothered to put in. For me, each student gets a two-sided crib sheet that I use, and half the second side is hand-written notes you know, about the particular assignment.

I would say that my crib sheet is fairly comprehensive, I would hope it does cover everything that is of importance and that it also is structured around the specific assignment criteria I set as well, so that there is a link between things and the students can see how it fits together. I've got a statement at the top of that form that says the mark does not correlate directly to the ticks in the different boxes, and that's because I think it's almost impossible to do an assignment or mark it according to a, strictly speaking, a formula, because the students can answer the, or address the brief in lots and lots of different ways, and I think the marker needs to retain some right, to make some decisions, perhaps on some criteria that we haven't actually got listed, but I would hope to write about it in the written part as well. So I think as long as you explain to the student why they've got the mark, then I think it's an appropriate way of doing it.

I think there is kind of a personalised element to this. When you see a sheet with boxes ticked, you look at this and think 'rrr' but when you get to half a side of writing about a specific assignment, I think it demonstrates that you're putting the effort in, ticking boxes doesn't have the same meaning to the individual.

For our own children we get these letters home, where the teacher has obviously selected a statement from this side of the screen, slotted it in. I find most of it so generic that you can't relate it to anything. It's generic, and the wording, in a lot of cases, is education-speak. It means just nothing to the
child. I suppose in some ways that's why I continue with the pen.

I fully recognise that younger generations are much more switched on to technology, not least because I think they're kind of conditioned to it through their schooling, so when they come to university they kind of expect it, so I accept it. That's the way they communicate and I need to communicate in their language for them to understand and for me to be, dare I say it, a half decent lecturer. I come from a generation where I suppose we may have been the first generation to work with computers in the universities, and I think about some of the systems I originally used, it was quite clear early on that these systems just were not fit for purpose. They were more botheration than, to my mind, than it was worth. Now obviously things have changed a lot. I engage with technology in my teaching to a level, which I think is appropriate. I have some concerns with some of my colleagues' approaches to technology, particularly in their teachings, not necessarily in their feedback, and I don't think they fully understand what they're doing, and where it fits in and why they're doing it, and as a consequence I am not fully supportive of everything they're doing.

As a member of staff, you're, I suspect, going to be seen as a bit of a dinosaur if you're not using the latest technology. There's a lot of encouragement to use it in a sense that everybody else uses it, so why aren't you using it? Yeah. Yeah. But I just like to think that I'm using it in a way that is more efficient and more effective than, again, some colleagues.

It's one of those things that the pressure is not necessarily overt, it is more covert, if you are a university or a lecturer that isn't using technology, then you are at a competitive disadvantage.

I suppose that my reluctance to use technology for feedback is again, it's probably multifaceted, it's probably to do with the basic philosophy of what Robson University is about. I came here because we were teaching in smaller groups and you got to know the students, which is a system that I experienced as a student. I like it when the student's in the room and you can eyeball them and explain, and you can see the light bulb going on. Obviously, with increasing student numbers, that's not always possible, but the question is, has Robson got to the point where you have to give your feedback by some other means, and can't just meet the students. I think a lot of universities are built around economies of scale. Robson has not been like that, I think things have changed but we're probably not quite there yet. And its personal preference. I think it's more effective to speak to a student than just have notes on a computer somewhere that they can just pick up. It would be more effective, you know, to have something in writing, obviously to confirm things, so then there's a record, but then to actually speak to the students.

I'm very much aware that there's a bit push to provide better feedback, more efficient, more effective, and also I guess that
I've started to pick this up from external sources as well, expectations are either beginning to change now, or they will change in the near future.

In terms of technology generally, there's only so many hours in a day and you've got to make decisions about what you're going to do with those hours and what's going to be best for both your students and for yourself and your career. So, I think a lot of people come into higher education and don't understand that this is the case. And I think some colleagues have got kind of drawn into IT, and they do a lot of work with IT, but then five years later, they're wondering why they've not been made Principal Lecturers, and it's because they've not been putting time into the other main function, as I see it, of being a lecturer, which is not just the dissemination of information, it's also the generation, through research as well. I think technology distracts them from other things, which eventually they will be held to account on.

The human brain can only deal with so much information coming in, and you're filling your head with IT, then you're not filling it with the theory that should be underpinning your modules. I think that this is something of a limitation and to some extent, a distraction. It's about IT working for us, rather than us working for the IT, you know, and where it fits together. As technology change slows down and becomes a little bit more steady state, let's say, then it will probably be a bit more worthwhile putting some time into some things because it will be around a bit longer.
Adam

I did my undergraduate degree about ten years ago, then my Master’s degree in interactive digital media. I’m very interested in digital media; one of my specialisms is user experience. I teach on the user experience module, web design module, an audio module and a motion graphics module.

Feedback plays a huge role [in my teaching]. How useful feedback is depends on how constructive and detailed it is. [In my feedback] there is an element of ad hoc meetings and pastoral care for students. Often this is verbal and there isn’t anything written down. [For summative work] we have a four week turnaround for our assignments, we have got four weeks to mark them and get provisional marks back to the students, as well as some effective, constructive feedback. As members of staff we tend to be put under more pressure to provide more written feedback, detailed and constructive feedback.

I have been generally wrestling with sheer numbers of students this year, and I’ve been using standard documents to present their feedback this year, so just word documents, but over the last two years I’ve been dipping in and out of using audio feedback and video feedback. For me it was a lot quicker than writing things down, and it also gave them context, for them it was something that they could refer back to, it was a bit different and something that was a bit less daunting. One of my primary motivations was to make my life easier and I had a lot of feedback to document and I wanted to utilise some of my own skills to make the formative feedback process easier. Obviously at the same time it couldn’t be detrimental to the student experience. I knew it was worth taking a risk with because actually I would like my own feedback to be presented to me in this way. These are tools and technologies that I am using anyway and I just thought wouldn’t it be great to use some of these in my feedback.

It was straightforward for me because I had the systems in place already, I knew where I was going to host it, I had a hosting site called Vimeo, I knew that I could keep it confidential, that I could set passwords, I knew I could make it private so only the students could see it. I knew that if it needed polishing up in terms of cutting or editing I had the skills and the software to do that, so there were no barriers whatsoever, not for me anyway.

I think the central IT team are trying to develop and to offer some kind of internal service, but it’s probably going to be quite clunky. I’ve already got quite expensive software that I have paid for out of my own pocket, it would need to be very good to beat what I’ve already got. I am probably contravening university policy in that I am uploading confidential feedback to none university systems, but I think it’s a real grey
area and I don’t think there are any rules, these are everyday tools.

I’ve also had some positive feedback in the year that I did it. Including from the dissertation students. Including ‘I wish we’d get all feedback like this’. I know through the number of plays that I can monitor through my video account - I know from those plays that they went back and they looked at it more than once. I can see it’s well used.

I am less comfortable with [this for summative feedback], this is where it can take time, because summative feedback is something that you need to sit down with external examiners with, and because it is so formal and there is monitoring, it’s difficult to use screencasts; because of the nature of them, it’s all very live and raw, so it’s difficult to get it perfect.

[I use PDFs for summative feedback]. The only reason I would choose to use PDFs would be because word documents can be manipulated very easily, so it was like making it concrete. It was a bit of a security thing for me, as word documents can go into a system and be modified, so it was to make sure they are going to the system as prints rather than project files. There was nothing unique about this technology other than comments are ‘baked in’ – that’s probably the best way to describe it.

When I inherited a couple of modules that I deliver now, I looked at previous feedback, [typing] was the way it was always done so it was just following on from what was done previously. They must be typed. [Then] I thought that I wanted to optimise my own workflow as well as benefiting the students, and then there was something a bit richer and more constructive and that’s where the video came in to play. I would have to fight hard to contravene the existing front sheet, or I could [create videos] in addition to, but then we are talking about more workload, [so the videos are formative only]

There is another piece of software which is a piece of software called In-design. [It] is really interesting. [F]or my MSc, my thesis, [I wanted] to reduce the skills gap between some of the multimedia students before they move in to industry. So one of the things I looked at was feedback and module resources, so bringing in materials for week by week workshops and embedding rich content. The key thing about that is getting all of this content together, using media rich material, so they had a video link saying watch this, it was my video, my screencast, so they could see some of the software they were using, so they could see some of the applied techniques, and the actually tried them themselves. It was like a big interactive workbook and it was all created in this software called in-design. Again it’s a really useful tool and the feedback I had was really good. But again it comes down to time. So it could be utilised for feedback, although it was mainly about resources, it certainly could be utilised for feedback. The software doesn’t have much of a background in education, it’s more of a digital publishing tool, so it would be interesting to see if any other academics are using this in any similar ways.
I got into health education in the 1980’s in the schools of health attached to the hospitals, where I worked. I came in to the university in 1991 when we went from a diploma to degree. I am a teaching fellow for distance learning across the faculty and I’m a distance learning and technology enhanced learning lead. All of my teaching now is online distance learning.

Feedback is integral [to teaching and learning]. I see feedback very much as an on-going dialogue as opposed to an episodic point in time where you stop and you just give some specific feedback. You get the students who crave feedback and you can’t give them enough. On the other end of the spectrum, you get the ones who are just simply interested in “I need to pass on this module,” “I want to earn the mark but I’m not necessarily going to use it for professional development going forward.” One of the key things we spend a lot of time on is providing guidance to students about what constitutes feedback and what they should do with it.

Because all of my teaching is distance learning, it has been a case of having to look at different ways in which we can utilize technology in order to provide feedback to learners in various guises, be it asynchronous or synchronous. It’s a different arena and there’s different sorts of barriers. You’ve got systems; you’ve got to circumvent to make it work in that context.

There’s a range of things that we try and utilize. There’s so much around now in terms of what is available. Whatever you do it [needs to be] really accessible by learner because you’ve got a whole range in terms of the digital skills they have that they bring to the table. You’ve got to cater for the most common denominator as well. Although these are qualified professionals and they’re using millions of pounds of computer-controlled equipment, really high-tech stuff, but by no means does that mean they’re all digitally savvy.

We use a variation on Salmon’s model in terms of constructivist approach and all of the modules are structured in such a way that there’s a self-learning content and an associated e- tivity. The e-tivity is where they get formative feedback both from the tutors and from their peers. The way we normally work is we try to link to the activity on a module and the draft submission which means you get to see a draft and they get some feedback. Hopefully they are more likely to succeed with the summative assessment at the end. I think the key is in terms of how you design the learning in that because we can’t make these compulsory because of the assessment regulations that the university have because these are formative assessments, the learning design has got to be clear such that each utility builds incrementally towards the summative submission and they can see the value of undertaking it because this
is works that would have to do anyway for the summative submission.

Once we moved to forms of assessment including the portfolio, it didn’t seem particularly effective to just upload some of the written sheet of feedback or assessment criteria grid to give a student an indication of performance. I started doing some audio feedback where what I was doing was walking through their portfolio on screen and I was narrating as I am going along. I’m talking, “follow me through on your webfolio.” I was giving audio feedback in that way.

It was partly to try and introduce some variety in terms of the feedback. If you get a standard feedback sheet after a while you kind of switch off. In the same way as you try to provide for interactive learning, I think doing the same on the feedback as well is a key part. The other key part as well is because these are online distance learning students; we can’t see them until graduation. We try to bring a more human element to it with the voice and in terms of your intonations and the way you say things that really don’t come across on the text base piece of feedback. Part of that was about trying to see if we can get a dialogue going around the feedback, the possibility whether they would actually come back to us about things that we said in the same way as if you had a one-to-one with a student and you were given some feedback on a piece of work, you would have a conversation very much felt as though we were pushing the feedback at them.

That was very well received but for me it was quite unsatisfactory as well. When I recorded the audio feedback, I would play it back to see if it was okay before I would release it. I would walk through the portfolio as if I was a student. To me it just didn’t feel like I was entirely sure when I had to change the page that kind of thing. It just didn’t seem to work. Particularly if I focused on something on the audio, a specific piece of a page or a section of text, I had to go and find it by the time I found it, the comments are gone and moving on unless I pause it. It was okay but it wasn’t quite as effective as just walking through the on screen watching and listening at the same time.

It was only when I stumbled across screencast-o-matic as a way of doing the screen cast that I thought about, that would be much more effective in terms of providing feedback. We posted that and the feedback from the students is very good. They are very receptive to that it is great because they just have to press play and they can watch me walking through their webfolio and listen as well and I can highlight aspects that I felt were particularly good or areas that I thought they could enhance.

What it has made us do is think about extending that approach in terms of how you introduce learners to modules. For example, what the module leaders now screencast where they will walk somebody through “this is the modules side. This is where you can find x, y and z, and this is where you do stuff like that,” which is a much nicer way of leading somebody into a module.
People have played around with things like Audacity and Captivate. Those have been felt to be a bit clunky and not as user-friendly as they might be. We seem to have gone for the things that, in terms of producing them, are much more straightforward and hopefully in terms of the message being received, is easily transmitted.

There’s been a big drive centrally encouraging online submission, and then using Turnitin but also, because we’ve got the facility within BlackBoard to do the inline marking. There’s very much a big push for that to happen as well. Obviously, you’re going to get the ones that will turn that will kick against it, which is normal. There’s very much an institutional push towards that in terms of more online with the view that it’s expected that that’s going to be more timely, and meet the students’ needs and requirement more effectively.

I’m always on the lookout for new things to use. I don’t think I’ve got anything planned at the moment. There are some events that I go to that really start giving me some ideas about ways in which you can maybe utilize technology to enhance whatever you do and in terms of providing feedback. I wouldn’t say that technology drives, but I think the technology provides you with opportunities to do things differently.
Peter

I started in 1980’s in the mathematics department. I teach Maths courses and medical statistics. I am the only one that really uses clickers and voting panels, but other people, other institutions have tried it, but it is really only me that has actually brought the thing in here.

I think I have always had this idea of trying to get statistics across to all people of different levels from Joe public to undergraduates to senior healthcare professionals. I knew clickers would work because they can actually contribute to the session by voting. If you put a headline up that says this is poor science or poor statistics and they have seen this headline in the paper, these people, not mathematicians by training but they can contribute by having a laugh, a giggle and they can vote. Then when I go through the answer, they can change their mind, they can see where they went wrong and because it is summarising the results in the group, they feel like they are doing something.

I thought the key thing is if we want to get some sort of feedback initially so I can actually see what the group is doing in terms of understanding, I thought well we didn’t have the technology available initially so the [comminicube] cube idea, so I ran with it, two or three times where I used these cards. They had to hold up ABCD, here and they were colour coded ... but to get some scores back and some summary values about the bar charts so I could figure out how many, rather than simply count how many squares are red, the clickers give you that feedback, they give you the bar charts, they give you actually how many got it right, how many got it wrong, whereas the cube is just a visual

I find with a big group of that order that if you want to get something that says do that, are they understanding the material, are they taking something from the lecture and I find that if you put this sort of quiz, not every time but if you put this quiz at the end of the lecture, you want to test some ideas, it is nice to have this before and after design where you give them material, have they really understood it, you give them one example then you give them another example to see whether they have understood what is going on. It is the only way you can do it in a large group very very quickly.

The danger is when you use a technology you can get too reliant on it so when I first ran with the clicker, it didn’t work, so when the technology lets you down, you need a back up. That is my only real reservation sometimes. This idea of using cubes or cards, it is still there as a way of getting feedback or testing a concept but it is only really the technology that sometimes, you test it, but when you go live with it, sometimes it doesn’t work. Technology doesn’t supersede everything you still need that idea of going through a white board or a chalkboard, something where you have to take your time with it.
The first thing I get asked on a course is, is the material online, is it on a VLE and then as soon as you finish a week’s lectures they want you to upload the completed notes, so there is this, I don’t know if it comes from this experience of school, but they want this sort of perpetual material, upload the latest version, stuff like this, they want it at their fingertips ... I think the days of going away and writing notes from a book or writing a summary of lecture notes ... it’s gone, I think they want it at their fingertips. They want instant feedback, they want, as soon as you have a deadline, they say, they want it processed, assessed back within a week. They are quite aware of the timeframe between handing work in and wanting to get it back.

For most students, the rule is you hand a piece of work in and a week later you are given the marks. They are quite aware of the timescale it takes to get feedback back here.

I hand mark their work because I want to see, most of the reports will be word processed but I will just hand mark them back with points where, have they brought the evidence together, have they interpreted the material effectively and stuff like that so I still always do the handwritten staff with comments on. Yes, it is, perhaps it is this particular year that the actual physical hand writing has got really poor the last few years because I think it is all keyboard and text thing on the phone and it has manifested, it probably sounds old fashioned, but it has fed through their poorly constructed handwriting. I am not sure how you get around that but I think it is a balance that has to be assessed because I think, I think there is going to be a backlash with all this technology at some point ... at some point they will say hang on, what skills do we want students to have? I think writing is under sold because it is all done by technology. I can’t be the only one thinking that.
I spent about 35 years in the local radio...presenting, producing...all sorts really. Took early retirement...and by coincidences and chances, was asked to teach radio production one day a week and ten years later, here I am as the award leader. I don’t have any sort of academic background.

[Feedback] has to be a very substantial part of [learning]. Two thirds of them ignore it...you can tell when you feedback online whether they have looked at it and lots of them haven’t even been near it. If you hand feedback out in class – I have been known to give printed feedback out in class and go round the room picking sheets from the floor where they have just been left. So verbal feedback, in my mind, is a lot more important than written feedback. Giving it to them fast helps [though]. Four weeks [is] our university target, but I like to target it 2 weeks to get feedback to students if I possibly can. It’s a physically impossibility at this time of year to do that. And the longer it is left, the less likely they are to read it and to take interest about it. Sometimes I’ve been able to go to class and been ‘ok, feedback on last weeks piece of work is online’ and woosh they are all onto the computers and looking for the feedback. So the faster you can get it, the better. But apart from that, I haven’t seen much I can do.

In terms of technology that I personally use, Powerpoint obviously. Colleagues use Prezi but I have never had time to sit down and convert my Powerpoint links into Prezi. If I am delivering a lecture now I tend to have my notes on an iPad instead of bits of paper all over the place, which actually makes life much easier. How else do I use technology?! We use WhatsApp with...we started using it with the First Years, this year. And obviously in a different sense we are using technology all the time as we are doing practical workshops...and we are using computers. I don’t do anything else on paper. I’m not used to actually the physical hold of the pen anymore and I never have ever since computers existed, or even typewriters. I never have been able to compose with a pen. I have always written on a machine.

In terms of feedback ... We started off just getting the work through it to just check for plagiarism...and we used to download the stuff and then I would email it back with comments on. But now I use the Turnitin system...which is a mixed blessing. I like that I can write my own essay at the end and give my own summative feedback if I want. The comments that you put in as you go through are slightly more difficult to use. But it is still quite effective to be able to have ‘this doesn’t make sense’ already written...so all you have to do is click it
and not write it. So it does speed up the marking I think. I like the fact that it then does it automatically and puts the mark up and makes the feedback available...you don’t have to think about it. Occasionally if things don’t go through Turnitin for whatever reason, but do come through email, I will email them straight back with the feedback already on. I don’t fill in the fancy feedback forms that we used to have, where you have to fill out their names, the module and all that stuff.

Initially I couldn’t understand that you could [use Grade-Mark]...once I did, I worked out how to use it...but it was finding the time to sit down and learn how to use it. And then once I had done that, I had getting colleagues to use it, to get that element of consistency, which I haven’t quite achieved, but I am working on it. If I say I want it done this way, then it usually gets done this way and it’s not a problem. Or somebody will say ‘do you really want to do it that way because...’ and then we will discuss it and sort it out. So we are in that sense, a good department to work in. The rest of the department has at least one technological dinosaur in there who has to be pushed, pulled and dragged into every advance. Hes just about got the hang of email...but we are working on him. But the others, there is no problem. If I say we need to do this training course, they will sign up for it...not a problem.

Efficiency is definitely [a benefit] because you do a click and the feedback through to them. That’s brilliant. But the other benefit, yes it is better because, again, if I had a paper script in front of me and I was laboriously writing on it ‘this doesn’t make sense,’ or ‘grammar,’ ‘exclamation mark’ or whatever it was, it was taking a long time. Sometimes where you’ve marked a mistake once you think oh I can’t be bothered to mark it again because it’s going to take me so long to scribble out what it says. Added to which, they can’t read your writing by the time you get to person thirty in the class. So in that bit of efficiency is absolutely brilliant and it does speed it up. But it’s also more efficient from the students’ point of view. Because they are getting it more quickly, because they can read the writing and because I’m more thorough.

What I did once when I had a class that made a lot of the same mistakes, it was fairly easy to copy and paste stuff out and then make a general feedback sheet which I then distribute and talked round in class, just picking out different comments from different people’s work and listing them. If I had been handwriting feedback, it wouldn’t have happened so easily. I don’t think otherwise it has changed what I do, except maybe I say actually in more depth than what I was doing before.

Blackboard and Turnitin are diabolical pieces of software in my opinion. They are not user friendly. Students hate them because they look and feel clunky. Turnitin is a pain in the backside because if you get distracted for a minute you get back to it and find that it’s switched you off and you’ve got to go back and log in again. And it doesn’t always save before it does that. So you’ve got to be quite careful to keep saving as you go along or you lose stuff. And it’s even so stupid that unless you have it on full screen, you can’t actually see the, sort of, icons at the bottom that you need to click on to do things. I just hate
it as a piece of software. I would love something more efficient. So the software in itself is a challenge I think.

I tried downloading Turnitin to my iPad because there is a Turnitin app for iPad but that, again, seems so complicated because every time you want to go into it, you’ve got to, sort of, put in a code for the class or something. I can’t even remember how to do it now, but it was just too much like hard work. Whereas in marking time it would have been quite useful. I’ve got twenty minutes to spare, I’ll just mark a paper. One of my colleagues is doing a full PGCHE, and she is making me aware that there is other stuff around because the stuff she’s using on the course but nobody seems to be bothering to tell the whole university about these thing.