

**“CLEAR IN ADVANCE”:
A CASE STUDY OF FIRST YEAR
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS’
ENGAGEMENT WITH ASSESSMENT
CRITERIA**

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National Student Survey:

assessment and feedback questions

- ⦿ S5 The criteria used in marking have been made clear in advance (70)
- ⦿ S6 Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair (73)
- ⦿ S7 Feedback on my work has been prompt (58)
- ⦿ S8 I have received detailed comments on my work (63)
- ⦿ S9 Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand (57)

Brackets show NSS 2009 Sector Mean % of respondents in agreement

‘Clear in advance’:

Transparency and availability

or clarity of understanding?

- Simply “having explicit criteria” is no guarantee that student’s work will improve
(Rust, 2002)
- “Fuzzy” language
(Sadler, 1989)
- Social constructivist approach calls for engagement and interaction in learning
(O’Donovan *et al*, 2008)

- BA (QTS) in Primary Education
- 120 students per cohort
- Education and Professional Studies course
- Blended learning approach

Context

Engaging students with assessment criteria

- Tutors write and publish assessment criteria in advance
 - Active approach involving students (Hounsell *et al*, 2008; Nicol, 2009)
 - Students encouraged to 'unpick' these through discussion and activity, to build 'success criteria' in their own language
- 3 assessment items
1. Joint Report
 2. Peer assessment of portfolio
 3. Exam

Data

- Course outcomes
- End of year evaluation questionnaires

I understood the assessment criteria used for the summative assignments

<i>Strongly disagree</i>	0.0%
<i>Disagree</i>	12.9%
<i>Agree</i>	65.9%
<i>Strongly agree</i>	21.2%

n=85

June 2010

- Interviews – July 2010 with 3 self-selecting students from 2009-2010 cohort
- Themes discussed:
 - Purpose of criteria
 - Understanding of criteria
 - Development of ‘success criteria’

Interviews: Criteria as a checklist...

- ⦿ Do criteria lead to narrow students' approach and creativity?
- ⦿ “criteria compliance” (Torrance, 2007)

...basically I used (the criteria) at the start of it... and then the last bit I'd do is use it as a checklist

When we're given assignments to do, that's the first thing you look at in the course guide – it gives the kind of thing you should be including – that's what you're looking for when you're marking

...and a framework of support that builds confidence.

...structure...to fit in your own opinion and your own ideas rather than concentrating on 'am I doing this right' – you have checklists so you know you've got it right

...kind of helps you to 'let go' instead of worry about it and 'oh I've forgotten to do this' - if you check through (the criteria) first, you can kind of let go and not panic for the next four weeks while they're marking it

Criteria provide a focus for discussion

...if you're all off at different tangents then we can't support each other – where if we're working to the same goal...it helps I think

...at the end (of writing and assignment) ...my mum looks through and she'll ask me what the criteria is and she'll look through too

...by talking about it and talking about why you think it's important, gives you a deeper understanding of what you're looking for

...and bring opportunity, fairness and insight.

...gives us insight into how you're marking

...I think it helps for (tutors) to have a uniform (standard) for what they're marking to...(not just) down to the tutor's personal preference

...my A-Levels weren't brilliant and I feel that, if I'd had the criteria like a checklist to go against, I would of perhaps got a higher grade

...I waffle too much – the criteria really helped – it's university now , I can't waffle in essays...I need to be sharp in what I mean, have my explanation and move on

We need to build on students'
prior experience,
consider context

...it's useful to go
through the criteria but it
only becomes relevant
and real when you've
got something to do..at
the start of the year it
didn't really mean
anything to me...

...to be honest the first week ...we were
getting to know people...we were given
the course guide...I could see that under
every single subject there was
'assessment criteria'...I had to get a
definition coz I'd never come across what
it actually was

...and language.

...deciphering the jargon – and because of the (seminar) discussion we could actually pinpoint in our own language - 'oh so that's what it means', 'oh right okay' – and that goes into your own learning

...take (criterion 1)...it doesn't actually say you need to go away and do your own private study...but without having (seminar discussion) you're not really going to know

...I'm guilty of reading too much into things and making it more complicated than it is

...in other subjects...it was pretty much here's the criteria...read it through, go away

'Clear in advance'

- Is it possible?
- Is it advantageous?
- Should we develop our writing of assessment criteria?
- Should students become more engaged with criteria through activity and discussion?