

Encouraging student use of the feedback mechanism

What did/do you do?

Students are required to maintain a “feedback and learning plan record” that encourages them to reflect on and make greater use of feedback received throughout the year.

Who is involved?

Keerthi Rajendran and other study skills teachers work with approximately 120 Foundation year students in Science and Engineering. There are plans to pilot the project with Foundation year Humanities, Business and Architecture students.

How do you do it?

Students are required to keep a study portfolio with a subsection for each subject they are studying and for any identified skills that go across modules (e.g. presentation skills). They record any marks and feedback received (instructions are provided on how to recognise feedback, the different formats in which feedback might be received, and from whom they might expect to receive feedback). Each student must also include self-feedback that responds to the marks and feedback received on assessments. Two to three times a semester, students write a summary of their marks and feedback, which encourages them to reflect on how they are doing and on what improvements they might be able to make. The study skills teacher looks at these summaries, and the portfolios contribute 20% of the overall study skills subject mark.

Dedicated time is set aside in the study skills class for students to work on their portfolios and discuss them with the teacher. Students also take the portfolios into discussions with their personal tutors or with subject teachers if they have concerns about marks or feedback received.

The portfolios are currently kept in physical form—a format that allows students to easily carry them into meetings and class sessions. Attention is now being paid to the possibility of migrating the study portfolios into e-Portfolio and incorporating them more actively into personal tutorials. The team hopes that this move would allow the Foundation year course to link up more clearly with personal tutoring and study skills in undergraduate programmes.

Why do you do it?

In the past, students too often failed to pay attention to feedback. Either they did not recognise or actively acknowledge feedback as such, or they had not learnt how to incorporate the use of feedback into their study habits. Students needed to learn how to reflect upon feedback and change their study skills in response.

Does it work?

Students were reluctant at first and often did not see the purpose in the study portfolio (it helped, then, that a mark was associated with it), but typically, students acknowledge that they found the portfolio useful after a period of time. Study skills teachers have found that the students are now more involved and more responsible for their self-development; they have a greater sense of control over their own improvement and a better sense of how to study. The study portfolio also provides students with a good platform from which to ask for help; for international students in particular, it provides a way to bridge cultural differences surrounding feedback and the process of seeking advice from teachers.

Teaching and Learning Case Study

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Coherent Curriculum themes:

- Assessment and feedback
- Skills and employability
- Student engagement

Other keywords:

ePortfolio, INTO, Skills for learning life work and practice