# To explore the validity of a self assessment tool in the development of transversal skills including self-regulation

**Tina Murray O'Donnell**
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Presented to Brónagh Heverin
School of Business
Letterkenny Institute of Technology

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## ABSTRACT

The changing economy has exerted pressure on education and training courses to produce graduates with transversal skills ready to function in a dynamic labour market and life-long learning. This study evaluated the introduction of an element of self-assessment designed to develop these skills in part-time adult learners in a Further Education and Training Centre. The literature review identified a number of themes associated with successful outcomes for learners. Self-regulation emerged as an important concept in the development of transversal skills. Self-regulating learners evaluate their performance in tasks and take action to improve outcomes. The ability to self-assess was identified as critical in this process. The impact of feedback as a catalyst to action was explored and the use of dialogue to improve engagement with feedback considered. This action research project used a mixed method approach to data collection. Questionnaires were used to establish attitudes and engagement with the assessment process and semi-structured interviews used to evaluate participants' behaviour following the introduction of a self-assessment tool. Documents were examined to corroborate findings and explain anomalies. It was found that the tool successfully promoted use of a range of self-regulation strategies identified by Zimmerman (1990). The learners' and teacher's perception of the purpose of feedback was found to substantially impact the learner's inclination to self-regulate and should be considered in future implementations of the tool. It is also recommended that learners receive instruction in the use of the tool and strategies formulated to address the areas of self-regulation not impacted by it.

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# RATIONALE AND INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

A key priority of Irelands education and training system, including its reformed Further Education and Training (FET) sector, is to target unemployment and provide learners[1] with the skills necessary to contribute effectively to the labour force (Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019; Sweeney, 2013). With 62 per cent of the funding available to SOLAS (The Further Education and Training Authority) earmarked for programmes that are predominantly labour market focussed, it's not surprising that FET courses will increasingly seek to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively participate in their chosen field. A Strategic Report of Further Education and Training undertaken by the Department of Education in 2013 found that 'soft skills' are important to employers and recommended that they should be embedded in all vocation-specific FET courses (Sweeney, 2013). As a result, educators are now required to look beyond the content explicitly specified in the course curriculum and include the development of the transversal skills[2] necessary to engage in the world beyond the classroom and to become life-long learners (The World Economic Forum, 2017 p.9; Scott, 2015). According to a European Commission Report released in 2018 to ensure that individuals are labour market ready they need to "acquire a combination of transversal core skills alongside the specific skills needed for a job and then develop their skills further throughout life" (European Commission, 2018 p.15).

[1] For the purposes of this study students will be referred to as learners which is the preferred term for Further Education and Training. It should also be noted that in some instances the learners who took part in the study may be referred to as participants.

[2] "Transversal skills, such as the ability to learn and initiative-taking, will help people deal with today's varied and unpredictable career paths" – explanation taken from the European Commission Education and Training webpage https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/skills-development_en

This research project is set within the FET sector and specifically within Further Education and Training (FET) Services at an ETB. ETB FET services offer a range of awards from levels one to six on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) from the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Common Awards System (CAS)[3]. The research project is designed to investigate the effectiveness of introducing an element of self-assessment to promote self-regulation in adult learners. A self-assessment tool was introduced and evaluated to assess the extent to which learners assumed independence in learning and developed the skills and competencies necessary to be able to reflect on performance (self-assess) and act on reflection (self-correct) (Jessop *et al*, 2014). An action research approach was taken as the researcher seeks to "empower, transform, and emancipate individuals from a situation that constrains their self-development and self-determination" (Creswell, 2012 p.577)

### 1.2 Background to the Research project

As part of the ETB's quality agreement with QQI each learner receives a brief outlining the assessment technique being used; the level on the NFQ; the learning outcomes being assessed; the weighting of the assessment; and details of submission deadlines. It also contains guidelines on the content of the assessment and the criteria being applied to grade the assessment piece. There is provision within the ETB's Quality Assuring Assessment procedures for the submission of a full draft of all written assessment for feedback. The draft and written feedback are returned and the learner has an opportunity to review the feedback and edit the assessment piece before their final submission.

[3] The CAS is a system of linked FET awards from levels 1 to 3 on the NFQ. A major award is achieved by completing a number of minor awards that satisfy the minimum awards standards for the major award as well as achieving the required number of FET credits for the award.

This practice encourages the learner to become dependent on the draft feedback which can result in a failure to self-assess or self-correct (Nicol and McFarlane-Dick, 2006; Wiggins, 2012). External regulation like this can result in learners with poor metacognitive awareness becoming dependent on the teacher[4] – waiting for the teacher to tell them what to do, how to do it and when to do it (Weinert *et al*, 1989). This dependence on the teacher means that learners fail to become empowered and develop the self-regulation that will be necessary to prepare them for learning outside of the classroom and throughout their lives (Boud, 2000).

Boud and Falchikov (2006) posit that facilitating individuals to become 'long-term learners' should be considered one of the main purposes of assessment. Jessop *et al* (2014) identified two ways in which assessment could facilitate this - by equipping learners with the capacity to make evaluative judgements about their own work and to be agents of their own learning. Carless *et al* (2011) posited that traditional assessment designs focussed excessively on content and task which they claim positioned learners as passive in the process. In education it is widely accepted that assessment has a substantial influence on where learners concentrate their efforts (Boud, 2007; Gibbs, 2006), so it can therefore be argued that assessment provides a great opportunity to enable learners to develop the skills necessary for a lifetime of learning. It is the authors view that there are opportunities to develop these skills within assessment practices at this ETB.

The compilation of feedback can be an onerous and time-consuming job (Fisher & Frey, 2012), yet teachers are reporting that learners are failing to engage effectively with it (Duncan, 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Orrell, 2006). In contrast learners are reporting a lack

[4] For the purposes of this study it should be noted that teachers may be referred to as tutors as tutor is the more common term associated with Further Education and Training teachers.

of meaningful feedback (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Orrell, 2006; Sadler, 1989). Crisp (2007) identified 'unilateral pronouncements by assessors' as a possible reason this. In the current feedback model teachers feed messages back to learners about strengths and weaknesses of their work. There is an assumption that these messages are understood by the learner who will then turn them into a plan of action. However, Sadler (1989) found that feedback often falls short of what is actually necessary to help a learner close the gap between their own performance and what is expected. He cites a lack of understanding of the academic language of feedback as one possible reason for this.

In the current model learner self-assessment is facilitated through the provision of assessment criteria to ensure that learners are aware of how marks will be allocated for the assessment. There is an assumption here that learners understand the assessment criteria and consequently what is expected of them. However, Orsmond *et al* (1996) found that learners may not be as clear on the meaning of assessment criteria as assumed, and as a consequence may not know how to use the criteria to enhance their work.

A self-assessment tool[5] has been designed to provide learners with an opportunity to assess their work in advance of the draft submission. It is hypothesised that in doing so learners will develop skills necessary to function beyond the classroom by decreasing their dependence on the tutor. Using the dialogic approach to feedback will result in more meaningful and focussed feedback and finally the tool will clarify, in plain English, what is expected of the learner thereby facilitating effective self-assessment.

[5] See Methodology section for a full description of the tool.

The self-assessment tool was implemented on a pilot basis with a group of 15 QQI Level 5 learners in a Further Education Centre. A learner successfully completing a course at level five on the National Framework of Qualifications is expected to exercise initiative and independence in carrying out tasks; learn to take responsibility for their own learning; assume full responsibility for consistency of self-understanding and behaviour; take responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs; and evaluate information and formulate strategies to determine solutions (National Framework of Qualifications Grid of Level Indicators QQI, 2003).

This group of learners attend part-time (three days per week) on a modular basis over a two-year period. The self-assessment tool was introduced to the learners over the course of a module. Learners received guidance on the use of the tool from the tutor. Research then commenced with their next module as outlined below.

A mixed method approach using a purposive exploratory sample was used in the research. Data collection methods used included questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and the review of documentation (feedback sheets). The questionnaires were used to establish attitudes and engagement with feedback, learning outcomes and assessment criteria, before and after the intervention. The semi-structured interviews were used to explore the use of self-regulation strategies by the learners when using the tool. The tutor feedback sheets were examined to identify the type of feedback being provided and finally a semi-structured interview was conducted with the tutor to get another perspective and test the findings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND CRITIQUE

In this section it is intended to research a number of themes identified as contributing to academic achievement as well as the development of the skills necessary for learners to work and learn independently. Self-regulation has emerged as the key theme and will be explored to determine what it is and how it contributes to a successful outcome for a learner. The academic merits of introducing an element of self-assessment in an effort to promote self-regulation in learners will then be examined and evaluated as an alternative to current practice. Next in an effort to address the issue of a lack of effective feedback and poor learner engagement with feedback, the introduction of an element of dialogue into the process will be explored. Finally, to complete the cycle it is intended to examine the concept of feedback in recognition of the impact feedback has on a successful outcome for a learner.

### 2.2 Self-Regulation

> "Education comes increasingly to be judged not on what it delivers now but on what it produces in the world beyond the present; it's outcomes and consequences"
>
> (Boud and Soler, 2016 p.40)

It's not enough anymore to successfully support a learner through their studies, educators are expected to facilitate the learner in achieving their ultimate goal of securing and effectively contributing in their chosen field (Further Education and Training Strategy, 2014-2019; Scott, 2015; The World Economic Forum, 2017). As a result, the need to regulate one's own learning has emerged as an important concept in the field of learning. Beokaert's (1999) posited a definition of self-regulation that focused on a learner's ability to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are transferable from one learning context to another and beyond the learning situation to their lives and work. The development of self-regulation in

learners is desirable as it results in increased persistence, resourcefulness, confidence and achievement (Bandura, 1977; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001) contributing to a successful outcome for the learner, and furthermore, a lack of self-regulation was found to be a major contributor to failure in learning (Cubukcu, 2009). Recognition of the importance of personal initiative in learning has also been affirmed by the QQI level indicators and component module descriptors (QQI, 2003). A number of researchers have attempted to identify and study some of the key personally initiated processes and responses by which learners regulate their own learning (Boekaerts, 2001; Pintrich, 1990; Zimmerman, 1990).

Zimmerman (1990) describes self-regulated learners as being meta-cognitively, motivationally and behaviourally active participants in their own learning process. He describes a model of self-regulation that consists of three sequential and interdependent phases: forethought, action or volition, and self-reflection (Zimmerman, 2000). In this model a learner selects and uses self-regulated learning strategies to achieve desired outcomes on the basis of feedback about learning effectiveness and skill. He went on to identify fourteen strategies that a learner could use to regulate their behaviour. They are: self-evaluation; organisation and transformation; goal setting and planning; information seeking; record keeping; self-monitoring; environmental structuring; giving self-consequences; rehearsing and memorising; seeking social assistance (peers, teacher or other); and reviewing (notes, books or tests) (Zimmerman, 1990).

Pintrich and de Groot(1990) describe a similar process whereby learners set learning goals and then attempt to regulate their cognition, motivation and behaviour in pursuit of their learning goal. In his model Pintrich (1999) categorises the strategies that learners would require in order to be able to self-regulate their learning. He presented three categories:

- Cognitive learning strategies, for example the ability to source and select appropriate material; the ability to organise the material; and in doing so develop a deep understanding of their topic;
- Metacognitive and regulation strategies, for example how they are going to plan, monitor and regulate their cognitive strategies;
- Resource management strategies, for example how the learner intends to manage their internal and external resources in order to reach their goal.

Boekaerts (2001), in her review of the literature on self-regulation, sought to develop the concept of self-regulation linking it to the theory of self and the goal theory proposed by Carver and Scheier (2000). She introduced the concept of a learner's higher-order goals, arguing that learners bring a range of these higher-order goals to the classroom. Examples of higher-order goals would be to be respected, to be successful or to be knowledgeable. According to Boekaerts (2001) these goals are intricately linked to self-regulation and are key to the development of self-regulatory strategies in the learning process. Vávrová *et al* (2012) make reference to one of these high-order goals when they posited that a learner entering a course of study will be more motivated to learn if their motivation for doing the course is based on a desire to help others above all else.

Goals are a key concept in most models of self-regulation (Boekaerts, 2001; Pintrich, 1999; Winne, 1995; Zimmerman, 1990). They provide the context that directs and guides a learner's cognition and behaviour – self-regulation requires effort, therefore learners motivated towards a goal will be more motivated to self-regulate. Self-regulated learners are aware of the relationship between their regulatory processes and learning outcomes and will use and adapt these regulatory processes in pursuit of their goals (Zimmerman, 1990). They

monitor their own effectiveness against a standard, generating feedback and regulating their strategies accordingly. Butler and Winne (1995) warn that learners who are less proficient at self-regulation will produce less effective internal feedback and are less likely to use that feedback effectively in pursuit of their goal.

In order to be motivated towards a goal a leaner must believe that they are capable of achieving it (Locke and Latham, 2002). This belief or expectation of success develops based on personal factors, behaviours and past experiences (Schunk and Meece, 2005). Kasworm (2008) warns that adult learners confidence in their abilities may be negatively affected by their belief that they are less competent and more inexperienced in an academic environment. On the other hand Zimmerman and Martinez Pons (1990) posited that self-regulated learners believe that they have control over the acquisition and mastery of knowledge. This belief that they can achieve at a specified level is referred to as self-efficacy and can influence a learner's approach to class, learning and academic activities (Klassen and Usher, 2010). A strong sense of self-efficacy affects behaviour which in turn affects choices in the completion of a task (Bandura 1977). It can also affect coping efforts (Bandura 1977).

Motlagh *et al* (2011) note that there is a positive correlation between self-efficacy and academic achievement but conclude it cannot be presumed to be a direct reason for the improved performance. They argue that it will be the self-efficacy that will cause the use of self-regulation strategies and this in turn will result in academic achievement. From their research on 250 students they found that self-evaluation (self-assessment) and self-regulation were among the biggest predictors of academic performance. In other words self-regulation is the mechanism through which self-efficacy affects academic achievement. However, unlike self-efficacy self-regulation is a skill that can be developed and improved (Schunk,

2005). Furthermore, it has been found that teaching learners self-regulation strategies actually increased their self-efficacy (Tavakolizadeh and Ebrahimi-Qavam, 2011).

Predicated on the notion that self-regulation is a skill that can be learned educators are presented with an opportunity to encourage the development and use of the strategies associated with self-regulated learning. Rajabi (2012) talks about the importance of providing opportunities for learners to develop self-regulation so that they will assume responsibility for their own learning in the education system. On the other hand, the effectiveness of teaching self-regulation strategies has been disputed on the basis that knowledge about a strategy does not necessarily result in the use of that strategy (Caprara *et al*, 2008). Caprara et al (2008) went on to state that learners need to be willing and able to apply the strategies to their learning contexts and that they need to be using the skills on an ongoing basis to be able to achieve this. Zimmerman (1990) found that adults possessed the sophisticated reasoning processes that facilitate the complex metacognitive activity required to relate strategy effectiveness to desired learning outcomes and as a consequence were more willing and better able to make use of a strategy to self-regulate their learning. Rajabi (2012) asserted that the primary task of the teacher who wishes to promote this type of learner autonomy is to help them take responsibility for their own learning and bring about the necessary attitudinal changes in them.

Since assessment has such a strong influence on where learners focus their efforts (Gibbs, 2006; Boud, 2007), it could be argued that it provides educators with an opportunity to design assessment instruments that can be used to fulfil multiple functions; assessing their competence while providing opportunities for the development of the skills that they will need to function effectively in their chosen fields and become life-long learners.

## 2.3 Self-Assessment

Sustainable assessment was a concept developed to focus on equipping learners with the skills and aptitudes to make judgements about the quality of their own work, not only in the present, but beyond the classroom and into the world of work (Boud, 2000). In fact Boud and Soler (2016) went so far as to say that if learners leave a course unable to make sound judgements about their own work then they have been failed by their educators. Boud and Falchikov (2006) proposed a framework to promote the self-assessment skills necessary to enable learners to make sound judgements about their own work and in doing so take control of their own learning. This framework consisted of a number of elements: identifying oneself as an active learner; identifying one's level of knowledge and the gaps in this; practising testing and judging; developing these skills over time; and embodying reflexivity and commitment.

Brown and Harris (2014) went so far as to say that self-assessment should be viewed as a core competency on any course of study. They identified strong links between self-assessment and the capacity for learners to self-regulate. In order to effectively self-regulate a learner must be able to self-assess to evaluate the appropriateness of their strategies (Panadero and Alonso-Tapia, 2013) which is instrumental in the development of self-regulation in learners (Panadero and Broadbent, 2018). Andrade (2010) posited that self-assessment activities promote the generation of learners' internal feedback which is crucial to the process of self-regulation and learners' development. The sense of empowerment that comes with the ability to assess their own work results in increased confidence in their own ability and leads to increased motivation (Camp, 2012). Clarke (2012) argued that providing learners with opportunities to self-assess allows them to develop self-regulation strategies

that will sustain motivation and ultimately lead to improved performance. Rodgers (1969) posited that independence, creativity and self-reliance are all facilitated by self-assessment and evaluation.

It is increasingly being acknowledged that the provision of feedback alone is insufficient to effect higher standards of work by learners (Crisp, 2007). Black and William (1998) warn that automatically following the 'diagnostic prescription' of the teacher will not result in learning. In order for learners to improve academic performance there has to be an element of self-assessment (Nicol, 2009). Self-assessment requires learners to be able to compare actual performance with a standard and take action to close the gap but to do this they must already possess some of the same evaluative skills as their teacher (Sadler, 1989). Boud (2000) suggests that in light of this teachers should support learners in the development of their self-assessment skills. An attempt to answer how this might be done is a key question of this research. Boud and Molloy (2013) warn that learners rarely enter a course prepared for this so there is a need to help develop the capacity and disposition to participate effectively in this process and to seek and effectively utilise feedback.

### 2.4 Dialogue

The traditional view of feedback is a transmission model where a message is communicated from teacher to learner. Crisp (2007) identified 'unilateral pronouncements by teachers rather than dialogue with learners' as a possible reason for learners failing to engage with feedback. Laurillard (2002) offers a definition for dialogue where she describes it as a process whereby a knowledgeable person interacts with and supports another person with less knowledge and understanding. She claims that the purpose of dialogue in education is to help learners understand concepts and tasks and apply their understanding in learning tasks.

Engaging learners in a dialogue around feedback will result in greater engagement by the learner with the feedback (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006) and help them to better understand the feedback and the assessment process in general (Carless *et al*, 2011). Barton *et al* (2016) posited that a dialogic feedback approach will support learners to develop their self-assessment skills by reframing feedback in the assessment process. In order for a dialogic approach to be effective the feedback approach needs to be a collaborative process that will encourage dialogue around learning (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006). Magolda and King (2004) advocate a 'learning partnership' model that portrays learning as a 'complex process in which learning is socially constructed between the learner and the teacher. This approach validates the learner's capacity to construct knowledge for themselves through social interaction with the teacher, thus encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning. This reinforces the need for feedback to be part of a dialogic process.

**2.5 Feedback**

David Boud provides what he refers to as a working definition of feedback:

> 'Feedback is a process whereby learners obtain information about their work in order to appreciate the similarities and differences between the appropriate standards for any given work, and the qualities of the work itself, in order to generate improved work'
>
> (Boud and Molloy, 2013 p.6)

Boud identifies a number of features associated with his definition:

- The focus is on what the learner is doing as opposed to what the teacher is doing for them;
- It recognises the importance of having stated assessment criteria (standards) and the need for learners to understand these;
- It acknowledges that the process is longitudinal as opposed to occurring in isolation;

- It focuses attention on the variation between work produced and standard required;
- It implies that feedback should lead to action (Boud and Molloy, 2013).

A student survey conducted in the UK in 2011 found that although substantial improvements have been made, students still had issues around feedback and in particular receiving feedback that helped clarify points they did not understand. To take on an instructional purpose feedback must close the gap between what is understood and what is expected to be understood (Sadler, 1989). Feedback closes the gap through affective processes including engagement, motivation and increased effort; and cognitive processes including restructuring understanding, confirming correctness or incorrectness, indicating that more information is needed and pointing them in a particular direction (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). However, Sadler (1989) warns that without providing strategies for improving learning and without monitoring how performance information subsequently influences the learners, feedback may be simply viewed as 'dangling data'.

A teacher's fundamental beliefs about learning and teaching inform their view of the role of feedback. Askew and Lodge (2000) categorise teachers as holding either a cognitivist or socio-constructivist view of feedback. According to them a cognitivist views feedback as a corrective 'gift from the teacher' where feedback is a one-way communication from teacher to learner. The teacher is the expert and focuses on the content and imparting further knowledge. On the other hand, a socio-constructivist holds the view that learning develops through a dialogic feedback loop. The teacher is the facilitator and focuses on development of metacognitive skills and the learning process (Askew and Lodge, 2000). Therefore, using feedback to effectively promote self-regulation in learners would require teachers to hold a socio-constructivist view of feedback.

Hattie and Temperley (2007) argue that enhancing learner self-efficacy and promoting self-regulation should be one of the primary purposes of feedback. To do this learners need to be able to feed-forward, that is, to view feedback as not just corrective but use it to inform or amend their practice. Hattie and Temperley (2007) further pointed out that feedback is only effective if combined with information either related to improving learner strategy or with raising self-regulation in learning. Feedback shouldn't just be viewed as merely corrective in nature, it should be the catalyst for self-regulated behaviour (Butler and Winne, 1995). However, Zimmerman (2000) warns about what he calls 'dysfunctions in self-regulation'. He attributes these dysfunctions to a reliance on reactive methods of self-regulation instead of proactive methods thus supporting the idea of introducing an element of self-assessment making the learner proactive in the process.

Learners are often unaware of the feed-forward nature of feedback thus resulting in learners not making the connections with how they could improve their work in the future (McCune and Hounsell, 2005). Hounsell (2007) argued that transforming the role of learners in feedback to be more active participants, would reposition feedback away from having a short-term effect to one that would continue over time. Carless et al (2011) referred to this as sustainable feedback and identified four characteristics of this type of feedback:

- Involving learners in dialogues about learning that raise their awareness of quality performance;
- Facilitating feedback processes through which learners are stimulated to develop capabilities in monitoring and evaluating their own work;
- Enhancing learner capacities for ongoing learning by supporting learner development of skills for goal setting and planning their learning;
- Designing assessment tasks to facilitate learner engagement over time in which feedback from varied sources is generated, processed and used to enhance performance on multiple stages of assignments.

Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick (2006) suggest seven principles of good feedback practice that, if adopted, would result in an approach to feedback that could be used to promote self-regulation in learners. According to them good feedback practice:

- helps clarify what good performance is (criteria, expected standards);
- facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning;
- delivers high quality information to learners about their learning;
- encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning;
- encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem;
- provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance and;
- provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape teaching.

The literature review has established that promoting self-regulation in learners through the introduction of an element of self-assessment will facilitate learners to develop transversal skills (Boekaerts, 1999) and contribute to a successful outcome for the learner in terms of academic achievement (Zimmerman, 1990), personal development (Bandura 1977, Zimmerman and Schunk, 2001), enhancing self-efficacy (Motlagh et al 2011) and encouraging learners to assume responsibility for their own learning (Rajabi 2012). The type of feedback required to encourage an individual to self-regulate was identified and the merits of introducing an element of dialogue into the assessment process discussed.

## IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

### 3.1 Aim and Objectives

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate the effectiveness of introducing an element of self-assessment in the assessment process to promote self-regulation in adult learners. The effect that current practice has on learners' attitudes and engagement with feedback, assessment criteria and learning outcomes was investigated. The relationship between engagement with assessment criteria and academic outcome was explored. The effect that current practice has on learner autonomy was considered and finally the introduction of an element of self-assessment was examined for the use of self-regulation strategies.

### 3.2 The Tool

In FET a validated Programme Module Descriptor details the assessment instruments to be used to assess the attainment of learning outcomes for a module of learning. A module of learning usually leads to a minor award at the relevant level. The Programme Module Descriptor also details the waiting assigned, and the assessment criteria to be applied to each instrument. The tutor devises an assessment brief[6] that includes specific guidelines for the assessment piece and the assessment criteria to be applied. The brief is given to the learners and is usually accompanied by a discussion in which the tutor gives additional verbal guidelines about what should be included. Some tutors give additional written guidelines that include headings and a suggested layout for the assessment piece, however these are produced at the discretion of the tutor and do not form part of the official assessment documentation. The tutor also devises a marking scheme based on the individual assessment

[6] See page 2 for a description of the information contained in the assessment brief.

criteria detailing what is acceptable for a pass, merit and distinction based on the grading criteria for awards at the relevant level (QQI, 2013)

For the purposes of this research project a self-assessment tool was designed for each assessment piece. The tutor provided comprehensive details on what was required to meet each assessment criteria. Using this information and the grading criteria for awards (QQI, 2013) as a reference guide, the level of detail required for pass, merit and distinction was established and displayed in a table for the learner. See Appendix 1 for an example. Before submitting their draft to the tutor for feedback, learners were instructed to evaluate their own performance against the self-assessment table and indicate where they felt they were in terms of the grading information provided. Having completed their self-assessment, the tool contained a section where the learner was asked to highlight areas they felt they had performed well in and to specify areas they would like assistance with. In theory, the tutor would focus only on the areas identified by the learner in the review of the draft, and should the intervention be deemed successful, this will be introduced as the preferred practice for all level 5 awards. However, in order to ensure that the learners were not harmed by their participation in the pilot it was agreed that the tutor would review the full draft and provide feedback accordingly. The tutor would also note the learners proficiency in self-assessment.

At the end of the first module the tutor reported that the learners were finding it difficult to navigate the level of detail that was contained in the self-assessment tool so the tool was revised accordingly. The learners were provided with the detail required to achieve a distinction and the grading criteria for pass, merit and distinction. See Appendix 2 for an example. The learners found this approach easier and it was implemented for the second module.

The tool also contained a checklist for the learners around the mechanics of writing including things like capital letters, sentence and paragraph structure and signposting (Appendix 3). Learners were instructed to review their draft and complete the checklist. The learners are provided with guidance on the mechanics of writing at the start of a course and this checklist is designed to act as a reminder for them to check that their writing meets the required standard in this area.

Learners were instructed to submit the checklist along with their self-assessment to the tutor with their draft. It was then returned with the draft and learners instructed to submit it along with the final piece. The documentation was then collected by the researcher from the portfolios of those who indicated that they were willing to take part in the research project.

### 3.3 Methodology

An Action Research approach was used in this research project. In action research change is studied to learn more about the way a thing works, adding to the desired improvement in practice by contributing data that has been systematically and rigorously collected (Denscombe, 2014). It differs from normal reflexive practice through the use of a range of tools to collect data that is systematically analysed to evaluate effectiveness (Briggs *et al*, 2012). In action research the practitioner (in this case the tutor) acts as a 'sponsor and director' of the research process (Denscombe, 2014 p.125) while the researcher[7] acts as facilitator, guide, formulator and summariser of knowledge (Cohen, 2007). Partly because of the close links between the research and the action, the process (action research) is cyclical

[7] The researcher is also the author of this paper and will be referred to as the researcher in this section.

rather than linear (Briggs *et al,* 2012). The changes implemented are systematically evaluated which can lead to further research and variations to practice (Denscombe, 2014).

Briggs *et al,* (2012) assert that Action Research should not set out to answer the big questions about learning and teaching, but rather to collect data that is meaningful to the researcher and others who share their context, so that practice can be altered accordingly. The thinking behind it is that research should not only set out to gain a better understanding of the problems which arise in everyday practice, but actually set out to change them (Denscombe, 2014). Because of the close links between the researcher and the research Cohen (2007 p.329) warns that the practitioner and the researcher need to be aware of the affect they have on the research process, 'how their values, attitudes, perceptions, opinions, actions and feelings are feeding into the situation being studied'. They recommend applying the same rigorous scrutiny to this as applied to the other participants and the research.

The research took place in an ETB Further Education Centre. The participants were a group of part-time learners on a two-year programme leading to a QQI Level 5 award. The learners in this group were all self-referrals and had been through a selection interview to assess suitability for the course.[8] Learners attending this programme do not receive a training allowance. This programme[9] targets early school leavers (less than upper second level education) and those in receipt of social welfare payments. Learners on this programme attended class two days one week and three days the next.

[8] FET courses also accept referrals from the Department of Social Protection and the Adult Learner Guidance Service.

[9] Training at ETBs is delivered through a range of programmes each with their own eligibility criteria and payment arrangements with some programmes having a training allowance attached funded by the Department of Education and Skills for example VTOS.

The sample was selected using non-probability sampling as the aim was to produce an exploratory sample rather than a cross section of the population (Denscombe, 2014). Exploratory samples are often used in small-scale research and tend to lend themselves to the use of qualitative data (Denscombe, 2014). A purposive sample was selected based on relevance to the issue being investigated (Creswell, 2012 p.206) and the privileged knowledge and experience of the tutor (Denscombe, 2014). According to Denscombe (2014 p.41) 'purposive sampling is particularly well suited to an exploratory sample'. As a group of level 5 learners, progression routes for the group will mainly be outside of FET and into Higher Education and Training or employment therefore there is an obligation to ensure that they have the requisite skills for these progression routes (Further Education and Training Strategy, 2014-2019; Sweeney, 2013). The literature review has established the importance of self-regulation and the ability to self-assess and self-correct as being important skills for learners in the pursuit of lifelong learning and employment opportunities. The tutor for this group was involved in initial discussions that lead to the development of the research. Because of this tutor's 'privileged knowledge and experience' she was keen to take part in the project. The group were located in the centre where the researcher was based. Although this was not the primary consideration for the researcher it will make the process of data collection easier (Denscombe, 2014). A nested sample (Briggs *et al*, 2012 p.132) was then selected to participate in the semi structured interviews.

### 3.4 Data Collection Methods

Permission was requested from the appropriate management within the organisation prior to the commencement of data collection. A mixed method approach was used in the research. Denscombe (2014 pp.146-7) states that the mixed methods approach to data collection has three defining characteristics that set it apart from other strategies for social research: a

preference for viewing research problems from a variety of perspectives; the combination of different types of research within a single project; and the choice of methods based on what works best for tackling a specific problem. This type of research combines aspects of quantitative and qualitative research methods taking advantage of the strengths of both (Briggs *et al,* 2012).

Because the issue under review is complex and multifaceted it was determined that a complementarity approach would work best, using different methods to broaden and enhance interpretations. While a questionnaire would offer a summary of attitudes and beliefs amongst the sample, the researcher believed that more in-depth probing would be necessary to determine the presence of self-regulation strategies. One weakness identified in the empirical research on self-regulation is that self-report tests to not necessarily give a reliable picture of self-regulation tactics that learners actually engage in (Winne *et al,* 2000 cited in Puustinen and Pulkkinen, 2001). Multiple research methods facilitate the use of triangulation (Cohen, 2007 p.412) which can be used to corroborate participant's responses (Denscombe, 2014). As mentioned earlier the close links between the researcher and the research in an action research project could lead to issues around objectivity (Cohen, 2007 p.329). Scott and Morrison (2006 p.202) asserts that the use of multiple research methods can be used to ensure objectivity in this situation.

The methods used in the research being reported were questionnaires, interviews and the examination of documentation. Questionnaires were issued to the participants before the commencement of the pilot to form a baseline for participants attitudes and beliefs before the introduction of the self-assessment tool. A second identical questionnaire was issued at the end of the pilot stage (at the end of the second module) to check if any significant change had

taken place. A sample of the participants was selected to take part in a semi-structured interview designed to investigate the use of self-regulation strategies. The third stage of data collection involved the collection of the assessment sheets and feedback sheets completed by the tutor as part of the assessment process. These were examined to corroborate the findings from the other stages of the research project as well as provide insights in their own right. The final stage of data collection was a semi-structured interview with the tutor. This project required the tutor to be reflexive and may result in a change to practice, therefore, it is important to consider her perspective in the research in her own right and as a representative of her community of practice.

### 3.5 Questionnaires

In advance of the commencement of the pilot the researcher spoke to the participants and explained what was involved in the research and what it hoped to achieve. It was made clear that, unlike the pilot, participation in the research was entirely voluntary. Bell (2010 p.152) recommends personal contact with the participants at this stage stating that it will likely result in better cooperation. The following week cover letters, information sheets and questionnaires were issued to all learners (Appendix 4). They were reminded that participation in the research was voluntary and those who wished to take part were asked to complete and return the informed consent and the questionnaire the following week. The questionnaires were distributed by the researcher in advance of the assignment brief to give the participants time to complete without competing demands for their time (Denscombe, 2014 p.168). Participants were invited to take the questionnaires home to complete and then return to the tutor the following week. It was decided to allow the participants to complete them in their own time in an effort to minimise 'interviewer effect' (Denscombe, 2014

p.167)[10]. Participants were also asked to indicate at the end of the questionnaire if they would be willing to take part in a semi-structured interview. A total of twelve out of thirteen questionnaires was returned.

Questions were piloted with a colleague who has prior knowledge of the research area to eliminate any issues with comprehension prior to distribution (Scott and Morrison, 2006; Briggs *et al,* 2012). This is an important consideration in the production of a questionnaire and is the only way to be sure that it is ready for distribution (Briggs *et al*, 2012 p.276). Researchers should be cognisant of the fact that issues can occur with the written word that might not occur in direct conversation (Wellington, 2015). In addition to issues of comprehension, piloting allows the researcher to determine how long it takes to complete the questionnaire (Denscombe, 2014 p.172). Denscombe (2014 p.173) recommends letting participants know the number of questions and the length of time it will take to complete the questionnaire at the outset, claiming that this can help to minimise questionnaire fatigue and the resultant poor response rates.

The questionnaire was broken down into three sections with a maximum of eleven questions in a section. Each section represented an element of the assessment process namely, learning outcomes, assessment criteria and feedback, and started with a brief description of what the focus of that section was. Providing this information to participants encourages them to become 'more involved and identify with' the questions (Cohen, 2007, p.357). Questions in each section started at number one to make the questionnaire appear more manageable. If a participant can see that there are a substantial number of questions to be answered it can make the task appear more formidable and be discouraging (Cohen, 2007 p. 338). Careful

[10] The 'interviewer effect' is explained in detail in the section on Interviews.

consideration was given to the language to be used in the questionnaire. The terms used were those commonly referred to in class and were familiar to the participants. It is important that the language and concepts used in a questionnaire are within the grasp of the participants (Cohen 2007, p.322). Care was taken to avoid leading or loaded questions and statements. It is essential not to frame a question or statement in such a way that it influences the participants response (Briggs *et al*, 2012; Cohen, 2007; Denscombe, 2014; Scott and Morrison, 2006)

A number of factors were considered when determining the types of questions to be included in the questionnaire. A series of open questions was included to capture the richer, more personal and more complex views of the participants (Denscombe, 2014 p.176) where the participant is invited to respond in the way that they think best, and a response to the question is not presupposed by the researcher (Cohen, 2007 p.321) or based on past research (Creswell, 2012 p.218). According to Cohen (2007 p.321) this type of question gives the participants the opportunity to explain and qualify their responses however, he does warn against an over use of these types of questions as a questionnaire does not allow for the probing of unclear responses. There is also the danger that open questions can result in irrelevant or redundant information which adds to the need to ensure that the wording of open questions is clear and unambiguous (Cohen, 2007 p.322). The pilot of the questionnaire helped to ensure that any ambiguity was eliminated before distribution. Open questions are particularly useful in providing information where it has not been possible to directly observe the individual (Creswell, 2012 p.218).

A series of closed questions was also included. This type of questioning gives participants a choice of responses from which to choose from when answering the question. Questions are

more direct and are useful when the researcher wants to measure the frequency of a particular response (Cohen, 2007 p.321). A series of statements and Likert scales were included to allow for a 'greater degree of discrimination' in the participant responses (Briggs *et al*, 2012 p.272) for example where not only information on whether the participant agrees or disagrees but the extent to which they agree or disagree was required. Using Likert scales in closed questions is particularly useful for 'tapping attitudes, perceptions and opinions' (Cohen, 2007 p.328) however one limitation with this type of questioning is that there is no way to tell if the participant is telling the truth (Cohen, 2007 p. 327). With this in mind it was decided to include a small number of checking questions to minimise falsification (Cohen, 2007 p.343) and the resultant effect on the reliability of data.

### 3.6 Interviews

A small number of semi-structured interviews were conducted with learners following completion of the pilot. Information sheets and consent forms were distributed to participants who had indicated that they would be willing to take part in an interview. It is recommended to provide the information and obtain consent in advance of the scheduled interview providing an opportunity for participants to seek clarification on anything that they are unsure about or even withdraw their consent (Bell, 2010 p.160; Denscombe, 2014 p.193). A schedule was agreed with the tutor facilitating the conduct of interviews during class hours were possible. The interviews were carried out onsite in an office pre-booked by the researcher to minimise interruptions.

Interviews provide in-depth information about the experiences of others (Scott and Morrison, 2006 p.134). When open questions are necessary in the research, interviews are the method of choice mainly because participants become more involved and, hence, motivated in their

responses (Cohen, 2007 p.352). Interviews can range from being structured to unstructured depending of the level of flexibility allowed in the encounter (Denscombe, 2014 p.186). A structured interview will be made up of mainly closed questions while the unstructured interview will usually start with an initial question but then the direction of the interview will depend on the individual being interviewed (Briggs *et al,* 2012 pp.252-3). Within a mixed method approach the semi-structured interview is probably the most common (Brigs *et al,* 2012 p.252). In the semi-structured interview, the interviewer (researcher) has a list of questions or topics that they need to cover, however, the order in which they are to be covered is not set, rather it develops through the interviewee's responses (Denscombe, 2014 p.186). This type of structure allows the interviewer greater flexibility to develop, expand or clarify participants' responses (Scott and Morrison, 2006 p.147).

Bell (2010 p.167) recommends the recording of interviews as it allows for better interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee while also facilitating greater accuracy in the reporting. However, it is important that it is done 'sensitively' so as not to inhibit the participants responses (Denscombe, 2014 p.196). Field notes were used to record the non-verbal information that is missed in an audio-recording. Things like non-verbal cues or clues about the intent behind the participant's responses will not be picked up on an audio recording but may be significant and should be recorded (Denscombe, 2014 p.197). Often the non-verbal communication is more reliable than the verbal (Cohen, 2007 p.365).

The interviews were designed to explore the use of self-regulatory strategies. Zimmerman's (1990) strategies were used as the basis for the interview. Ten out of the fourteen strategies were used as they were considered relevant to the completion of written assignments. The remaining strategies were discounted as they pertained to exams. The strategies were noted

on a pre-prepared schedule that acted as a guide for the interview (Appendix 5). A list of questions designed to probe for evidence of use of the strategies was compiled and used where necessary. The participants were questioned directly about how they used the self-assessment tool to address the assessment task. The interviewer assessed participant responses for use of the strategies and noted this during the interview. Bell (2010 p.162) advocates the use of such a schedule to make data analysis more straight forward following the interview. While the self-regulation strategies were used as a basis for the questions in the interview the researcher was cognisant that new themes or issues might emerge with this type of data collection (Scott and Morrison, 2006 p.135).

The interview questions were piloted using the prepared schedule to ensure that the questions were clear and relevant and that the interview was manageable in the time allotted (Briggs *et al*, 2012 p.260). Cohen (2007 p.363) recommends keeping questions short while giving the participant sufficient time to answer in whatever way they see fit. However, this has to be balanced with getting to the required information while keeping to the agreed schedule (Cohen, 2007; Briggs *et al*, 2012; Scott and Morrison, 2006). The piloted schedule was used as the basis for the interview but in semi-structured interviews questions may change over time as new points of interest can develop (Denscombe, 2014 p.186).

The interviews were conducted by the researcher thus it was necessary to be cognisant of 'the interviewer effect' (Denscombe, 2014 p.189). The interviewer was known to the participants in her professional role so it was important to bear this in mind as it could have an effect on the participants' responses and thus could affect the validity and reliability of the data collected (Briggs *et al*, 2012 p.260). There is a danger that the participant will tailor their answers to give the interviewer what they expect (Denscombe, 2014 p.190). This is

especially important in this research as the participant was aware that it was the researcher who designed the self-assessment tool and was the main driver of the pilot. Maintaining a neutral stance throughout the interview by remaining non-committal on the statements made by the interviewee helped to minimise this effect and protect the integrity of the data collected (Denscombe, 2014 p.191). However, the interviewer needed to offer some encouragement and reassurance to the interviewee to ensure that they did not become discouraged or disengaged from the process (Denscombe, 2014 p.191). It is important to remember that the interview is not just a data collection activity, it is a 'social, interpersonal encounter' and as such the conventions of such encounters should be maintained (Cohen, 2007 p.361).

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the tutor. Denscombe (2014 p.126) talks about the importance of respect for the role of the practitioner in action research so this interview was designed to capture the tutor's informed view on the outcome of the intervention. The interview examined whether the participants were able to effectively use the tool to self-assess before the submission of the draft and whether there was evidence that the standard of the drafts was improved by the self-assessment, that is, were participants able to identify the gaps and take remedial action before submitting the draft. The tutor was also asked about how the tool had been perceived by the learners and their resultant engagement with it. And, finally the tutor was asked for recommendations around the implementation of the tool in the future.

### 3.7 Examination of Documentation

The tutor provided written and oral feedback to individual learners on each piece of assessment. In general, the feedback highlighted areas of the assessment piece that the tutor felt warranted further review or development by the learner. Tutor feedback sheets were analysed to identify themes and check whether these are repeated over time for the same learner, or for groups of learners, to examine for evidence of 'feed-forward'. In this case the documents contained information beyond its literal contents and deep reading of the documents revealed things other than the obvious (Denscombe, 2014 p.225). The learner assessment sheets were examined to gauge academic performance in the assignments and to check for effective use of feedback.

Bell (2010 p.129) classifies all documentation as either deliberate or inadvertent sources of data. In her classification deliberate documentation is produced for the attention of future researchers while inadvertent documentation is used by the researcher for a purpose other than for which it was originally produced. She claims that inadvertent documentation is the more valuable as it was produced for practical reasons unrelated to the research. Denscombe (2014 p.240) classifies this type of data as secondary data if it was produced for purposes other than specifically for the aims of the research project. However, Briggs et al (2012) class any type of 'raw' data that has not been subjected to analysis or interpretation as primary data and documentation produced during the period of the project should be classed as primary (Bell, 2010 p.128). Regardless of their classification of the data the writers (Briggs *et al*, 2012; Bell, 2010; Denscombe, 2014) agree that the documentation must be subjected to rigorous and systematic analysis before being included in the research. Scott and Morrison (2006 p.89) recommend four criteria for assessing the quality of documents. The authenticity of the document needs to be established. It should be genuine and of

unquestionable origin and should be untouched and unaltered since it was first produced. To be considered a credible source the document needs to be free from bias and distortion. It should be evaluated to ascertain the extent to which it is believable in terms of the events that led to its production. The document needs to be representative, that is, typical of its kind. If it is found not to be typical then the extent of its untypicality needs to be established and evaluated before being included in the research. The evidence should be clear and comprehensible so that the researcher can understand and make sense of it. This will require an examination of the documents context and circumstances of production. Part of the researcher's role is to establish what the purpose of the document was in order to make it usable in relation to the research (Scott and Morrison, 2006 p.90). In the case of this research the documents will be used to supplement and check the data obtained from the Interviews and Questionnaires (Bell, 2010 p.124).

### 3.8 Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in accordance with the Institutes Ethics Policy and the application approved by the Institute's Research Ethics Committee.

Denscombe (2014) recommends the adoption and use of a code of practice by all researchers and identifies the key principles that should underpin research ethics. Participant interests should be protected and they should not be harmed by the conduct or outcome from the research project. Participation should be voluntary and based on informed consent. To ensure this information provided to potential participants should be sufficient to allow them to make an informed decision on whether or not they wish to take part in the investigations. Furthermore, he recommends getting this consent in writing. Researchers should operate in an open and honest manner with respect to the investigation. There are two aspects to this

consideration. Firstly, researchers must be open and honest with participants in relation to their respective roles in the research and its purposes. Secondly, researchers must be honest and professional in the conduct of the investigation, the treatment of the data and the reporting of findings. The final principle identified by Denscombe (2014) is that research should comply with the laws of the land. With these principles in mind each data collection method used in this research was accompanied by a cover letter, information sheet and consent form. The researcher introduced the research to the participants detailing why it was being done, what was involved, what it would be used for and emphasising that participation in the research was voluntary and in no way affected their participation on the course. The researcher was based on the same site as the participants' and was available to anyone who wanted clarification or had any concerns in relation to the research.

Because of its location access did not pose any major concern in the conduct of this research project. The researcher was able to schedule data collection at intervals that suited the practitioner, the participants and the requirements of the research project. The researcher had access to a private office that was used for the conduct of the interviews allowing for privacy and freedom from interruptions. The research project fed into the organisations strategic objectives and therefore had the support of senior management within the organisation. This meant that data collection could take place during work hours and could be arranged to suit participants.

While the location facilitated access to participants it did pose concerns around confidentially and the protection of participants anonymity. Briggs *at al*, (2012) point out that where a researcher also has another role in relation to participants this can have an effect in terms of confidentiality. Something disclosed to the researcher in the course of the research is also

disclosed to the same person in their formal role. In addition, the pre-existing relationship between the researcher and the participants meant that it was impossible to guarantee anonymity in the interview stage of the research. Even though anonymity could not be guaranteed participants were reassured that confidentiality would be protected (Bell, 2010). Participants were assigned a reference number to be used in all documentation relating to the interviews and in the resultant report.

Within the wider research steps were taken to protect the anonymity of the participants. Numbers 1 to 15 were printed on individual pieces of paper and placed in an envelope. The pieces of paper were picked at random by the participants and they were asked to note their number and then write their name on the back of the paper. The paper was folded with their name on the outside and returned to the envelope. Once all numbers were returned the envelope was sealed by the researcher. Participants were reassured that no one would have access to the envelope and it would only be opened by the researcher should one of them forget their number. The number was used as a reference on all the research documentation. This allowed for anonymity in the completion of the questionnaires.

Bell (2010 p.50) warns that where an individual is easily identifiable in the research it poses difficulties around anonymity and confidentially. With regards to the contributions from the practitioner both anonymity and confidentiality were a concern. However, efforts will be made to ensure that confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured outside of the organisation itself through the careful use of language in the writing of the report.

It was also necessary to consider that the outcome of this research will not only affect those directly involved in the research. Should the pilot be deemed successful the change will be

rolled out and will inevitably affect other practitioners within the organisation. The researcher raised this concern with relevant management and suggested that a change management strategy would be considered for implementation.

Another ethical consideration involved a recognition of the strategic priorities of the organisation (Briggs *et al*, 2012 p.172). This research formed part of the organisation's Quality Assurance Improvement Plan and as such has implications for the standing of the organisation in the wider community of practice.

A final ethical consideration for the researcher is manageability and the additional workload that the research would placed on the practitioner. The joint interest in the outcome of the research meant that the organisation was keen to support the project (Briggs *et al*, 2012 p.178) including providing any additional support that the practitioner requested. This was discussed in depth with the practitioner in advance of the commencement of the pilot and support was offered throughout.

### 3.9 Evaluation

Results were analysed using a multidata-multianalysis approach. This approach is recommended with mixed research (Briggs *et al*, 2012 p.134). Quantitative data collected from the Questionnaires was analysed using quantitative analysis to establish any patterns or relationships arising in the research. The qualitative data from the questionnaires, documentation and the semi-structured interviews was analysed using qualitative analysis.

The initial questionnaire was analysed using univariate analysis to establish a baseline for learner engagement with the assessment process. Univariate analysis is used to examine

individual variables and generate some initial descriptive statistics that help to understand the data (Briggs *et al*, 2012). For the purposes of the questionnaire the assessment process was broken down into three separate constructs, feedback, assessment criteria and learning outcomes. During the analysis the researcher attempted to ascertain the level of engagement with feedback, to explore the presence of feed-forward and to ascertain levels of engagement with assessment criteria and learning outcomes.

In the questionnaire there were seven questions designed to measure participants' engagement with feedback. Questions one to three and questions six to nine were grouped and a frequency table created to represent the participant responses (Table 4.1). These questions dealt directly with the participants' perceptions of the usefulness and appropriateness of feedback and their resultant actions, that is, what they did with the feedback.

Table 4.1 Frequency of participant response relating to engagement with Feedback

| **Responses** | **Never** | **Rarely** | **Sometimes** | **Frequently** | **Always** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q 1 Tutor provides useful feedback | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 |
| Q2 Feedback helps understand what is required | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 9 |
| Q3 Feedback is in line with original request | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| Q6 Can see how it adds value | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 10 |
| Q7 Uses all of the feedback | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 8 |
| Q8 Clear what needs to be done to add value | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 7 |
| Q9 Feedback helps understand what tutor wants | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 9 |

When asked if they perceived that the tutor provided useful feedback (Q1) all twelve participants indicated that this was always the case. However, only 50 per cent of the participants indicated that it was always in line with what the tutor had originally asked for

(Q3). This indicates a mismatch between the tutor's expectations and the learners understanding of those expectations. This may be as a result of the learner being unclear about what the assessor (tutor) was looking for in the assignment, or the assessor not being clear about what they were looking for.

Whilst ten out of the twelve responded that they could always see how the feedback would add value to the assignment (Q6) and the other two could frequently see it, only seven were always clear on what they needed to do to add value (Q8). Four were frequently clear and one was sometimes clear on what needed to be done (Q8). There is evidence here that learners are often not as clear on the academic language of feedback as we, as educators, assume. Although learners perceive the feedback as valuable they are unsure of how to use it. This is evidence of the existence of the phenomenon that Sadler (1989) referred to as "dangling data'. It is not enough to provide the information, it must be done in a way that encourages the learner to learn from it and not be merely corrective in nature.

Question two (Q2) asked the participant if the feedback received helped them to understand what the tutor was looking for in the assignment. Nine always did, two frequently did and one sometimes did. Question nine (Q9) was included as a check question and asked if the feedback received gave them a better understanding of what was expected of them. Nine always did, two frequently did and one sometimes did. This corresponded with what was found in the responses to Question two (Q2). The suggests that the tutor is adept at delivering feedback that helps the learners understand what is required of them and that the feedback is focussed and clearly relatable to the assignment.

Question seven (Q7) asked participants about their subsequent use of the feedback provided. Eight participants indicated that they always use all of the feedback provided, while three frequently did and one sometimes did. This indicates that even if learners receive what they perceive to be useful feedback (12 out of 12), can see how it adds value (10 out of 12) and it helps them to understand what is expected of them (9 out of 12), a small number may decide not to use it. This may be explained by a lack of understanding of the language of feedback, or a lack of awareness of how to use it (strategies to improve learning), or a lack of motivation on the part of the learner as was indicated by one participant's response during the interview:

"When we got our back our feedback we'd add in whatever, but there was things I would say ah sure I'll not bother, I'll not bother putting it in, you know, I kept thinking I just wanted to get it out of my way like."

Questions four, five, ten and eleven in this section of the questionnaire dealt with learners' engagement with the concept of feed-forward. Another frequency table was created to represent the responses (Table 4.2). The questions in this section dealt with learners' inclination towards the feed-forward aspect of feedback to ascertain whether learners were able to utilise feedback to continuously improve rather than view it in isolation.

Table 4.2 Frequency of participant response relating to the feed-forward aspect of feedback

| **Responses** | **Never** | **Rarely** | **Sometimes** | **Frequently** | **Always** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q4 Feedback is assignment specific | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 11 |
| Q5 Uses previous feedback in next assignment | 1 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 6 |
| Q10 Previous feedback is used to improve | 1 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 6 |
| | | | | | |

| **Q11 Response** | **Frequency** |
|---|---|
| Changes are made without any review | 8 |
| Assignment is reviewed and changes made | 4 |

Participants were asked to rate the statement that feedback is assignment specific and only refers to that assignment (Q4). Eleven out of the twelve participants indicated that this was always the case thus indicating a failure to recognise a feed-forward opportunities of feedback.

A review of the documentation was conducted at this stage. The learners were asked to submit their assessment sheets and tutor feedback sheets with their final draft. A total of 11 out of the 12 learners returned some of the documents with a total of nine returning all requested documentation. This included the feedback sheets for four written assignments for each participant. Content analysis was used to analyse the tutor feedback sheets. The tutor's comments and instructions were noted for each piece of assessment. Opportunities for feed-forward were difficult to identify as the feedback was very detailed and very specific to the assessment criteria and guidelines provided for the assignment. The evidence indicates that the feedback was predominantly corrective in nature. Feedback of this nature is at odds with what Butler and Winne (1995) posited when they said that feedback should be the catalyst for self-regulated behaviour. A content analysis of the open questions on the questionnaire, and

in particular the question relating to the purpose of feedback revealed that all respondents demonstrated a view of feedback that included improving marks or addressing gaps in knowledge in relation to a specific piece of work. There was no evidence that the learners held a feed-forward view of feedback.

However, when asked in the questionnaire if they considered previous feedback before starting their next assignment (Q5) 50 per cent of the participants (6 out of 12) indicated that they always did, one indicated that they frequently did, four indicated that they sometimes did and one participant never did. This would suggest that, even though they consider feedback to be assignment specific, most learners will still use it to improve their process to some extent in their next assignment. This was supported by the responses to question ten (Q10), which was included as a check question, where participants were asked if they used previous feedback to make sure that they did better next time. Here again six out of the twelve participants indicated that they always did, two participants frequently did, three sometimes did and one participant never did. A review of the documentation (tutor feedback sheets) revealed a small number of instances where comments were repeated for individual learners. The repeated comments were analysed to ascertain if they presented an opportunity to feed-forward. Those that did were then analysed to see if they were repeated for the same learner.

One participant was instructed to make use of the headings and subheadings from the tool in successive feedback sheets. The same participant was advised to refer to primary and secondary research throughout the assignment in successive feedback sheets indicating a failure to feed-forward. Another participant was advised to develop concepts and link to primary research in one assignment and then advised to reference primary and secondary

research and link to concepts in a successive assignment again indicating a failure to feed-forward from the first assignment. Although the feedback in these instances was assignment specific in terms of the concepts to link to the research, none the less, it did provide the learner with an opportunity to feed-forward that they failed to consider.

In question eleven (Q11) on the questionnaire participants were asked to indicate which statement best described their response to feedback. Eight out of twelve signalled that they make the corrections suggested by the tutor without any further review thus revealing a failure to engage with the feedback past the surface level. This once again provides evidence that the learners view feedback as being corrective in nature and fail to identify opportunities to improve their learning processes.

The next section of the questionnaire dealt with learners' engagement with the assessment criteria. Just over half of the participants (7 out of 12) indicated that they could make the links between feedback and the assessment criteria (Q1), four frequently did and one participant never did. Six out of the seven participants who indicated that they could always make the link between the feedback and assessment criteria also indicated that they always reviewed their assignment against the assessment criteria before submission (Q2). Likewise, the participants who indicated that they could frequently make the connection between feedback and assessment criteria either frequently or always reviewed their assignment against the assessment criteria before submission. Thus indicating that approximately half of the participants were already self-assessing to some extent. What is unclear is if they took any action at this stage to edit the piece themselves before submission of the draft.

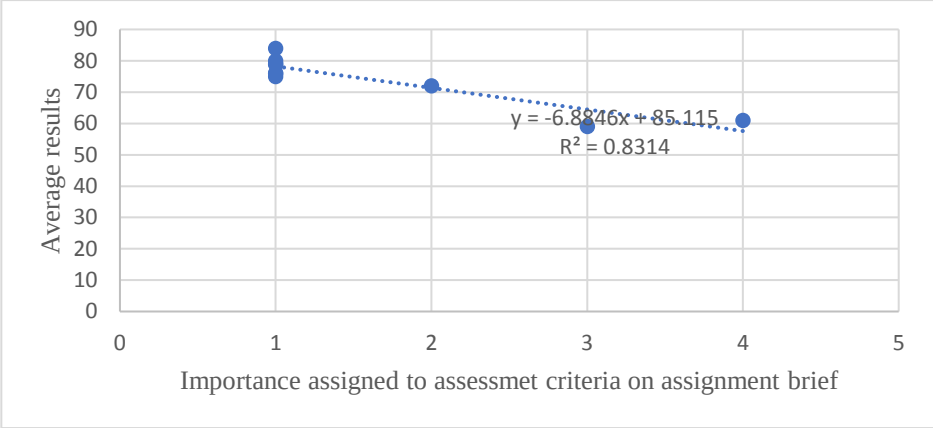
The final section in the questionnaire dealt with the learner engagement with the learning outcomes during the assessment process. The results here indicated that 25 per cent of learners only sometimes or rarely made the link between the learning outcomes being assessed and the assessment itself and only 42 per cent were able to always make the link. This phenomenon is something that may require further investigation as Mann (2001) warns that assignments that are not placed in context, that is, assignments that are viewed by learners as merely outputs to be produced rather that a demonstration of learning, will result in alienation rather than engagement of learners.

The next step in the analysis was to check for relationships or differences between two variables that are statistically significant (Briggs *et al*, 2012). The data was subjected to a number of bivariate analysis techniques. A paired t-test was used to check for a difference in responses before (questionnaire 1) and after the intervention (questionnaire 2). Responses to question ten were compared to check for a difference in the participants inclination to feed-forward using the paired t-test. While a difference was detected it was not sufficient to be considered statistically significant. Another paired t-test was carried out using Question 7 to check for difference in learner engagement with (use of) feedback. The difference here did not meet the required test, that is, the Calc-t was not greater that the Critical-t, however it was substantial and so warranted a closer look by the researcher. What was found was that responses to this question indicated that levels of engagement with feedback were already high and although there were improvements visible in the raw data the difference was not sufficient to reject the null hypothesis.

Linear regression analysis was used to establish if there was a relationship between the participants perception of the relative importance of the assessment criteria and the academic

performance (results). Results were available for ten learners with corresponding questionnaires. Responses to Questionnaire 2, section B, question six were used in the analysis. The sample size was ten which is sufficient to give credibility to the results (Remenyi *et al*, 2011 p. 141). The variables used were the perceived importance placed on assessment criteria by the learner ( one being most important) and the mean result from the two modules completed during the research project. Figure 4.1 illustrates a relationship between the two variables with the relative importance placed on assessment criteria having a positive relationship with results; the more important the learner perceived the assessment criteria to be the better they performed (the result). At 0.00024 the probability that the relationship was due to chance is well below the 0.05 standard significance level for social research.

Figure 4.1 Relationship between engagement with assessment criteria and performance




In the interviews the participants were asked a serious of questions designed to explore the use of a range of the self-regulatory strategies identified by Zimmerman (1990 and 2000). The strategies were assigned a label to be used to code the data. An additional category was added to capture reactive statements made by the participants (Appendix 6). Reactive statements indicate that behaviour was initiated by someone other than the participant

themselves. Responses were digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Content analysis was then used to examine the texts for mentions of the strategies (strategy use) and the frequency with which the strategy was mentioned (strategy frequency). The number of times the individual strategies were mentioned by the participants varied considerably. A frequency table (Table 4.3) was created to illustrate the frequency with which each strategy was mentioned by the participants as well as the frequency with which the participant used reactive statements.

Table 4.3 Frequency with which strategies were used by participants

| | SG1 | SG2 | SG3 | SG4 | SG5 | SG6 | SG7 | SG8 | RST |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Respondent 1 | 7 | 10 | 5 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Respondent 2 | 4 | 7 | 3 | | 5 | 1 | | 2 | 11 |
| Respondent 3 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 2 | | 1 | 1 |
| Respondent 4 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 8 | 2 | | 3 | 4 |
| Respondent 5 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | | 1 | 3 |
| Total | 22 | 28 | 15 | 10 | 25 | 9 | 1 | 9 | 22 |

The results indicate that when using the tool all of the participants made use of the self-evaluation strategy (SG1), organising and transforming strategy (SG2), goal setting and planning strategy (SG3), keeping records and monitoring strategy (SG5), environmental structuring strategy (SG6) and seeking social assistance strategy (SG8) with varying frequency. All but one of the respondents used the seeking information strategy (SG4). The tool, by design, has had a direct effect on the participants behaviour facilitating and promoting the use of these specific self-regulation strategies. On the other hand the tool has had little effect on the use of the self-consequences strategy (SG7). This is not surprising as there is nothing within the design of the tool to promote the use of this particular strategy.

Respondent one demonstrated particularly high levels of motivation and engagement with the tool. One explanation for this could be the high levels of intrinsic motivation exhibited by this participant. Following the transcription of the interviews discourse analysis was used to investigate the text for meanings implicit in the data. This approach focuses on the implied meaning of the data rather than its explicit content (Denscombe, 2014). Looking at the data in context can reveal hidden meanings in the text. Participants were asked at interview what techniques they employed to motivate themselves when completing their assignments. Respondent one reported a lack of motivational techniques, however this was explained by the existence of high level of intrinsic motivation meaning that external motivational techniques were not needed in the completion of the assignments:

" I think I'm really interested in the course and the assignments interest me so I don't so far anyway, I don't have a problem of sitting down and doing them and you know putting in the hours."

Reactive statements, indicating a lack of personal initiative, were recorded for all participants at varying frequencies. Reactive statements are statements that indicate that behaviour is initiated by somebody other than the participant themselves. The evidence suggests that current practice in the assessment process included the tutor giving the participants the headings, subheadings and instructions on what needed to be included in the assignment. Therefore, participants were used to following the prescription of the tutor and the resultant behaviour was reactive in nature. Even though the tool is designed to minimise this behaviour, its introduction required the tutor to provide instruction on how to use it in the

initial stages, therefore it's not surprising to see evidence of a certain amount of reactive behaviour among the participants.

A further six statements were prepared to analyse the data based on a number of themes identified in the literature review as contributing to effective self-regulation (Appendix 7). Content analysis was used to examine the text for evidence of the themes, namely: dependence on the tutor (ST1), lack of understanding of feedback (ST2), belief that acquisition is systematic and controllable (ST3), participants are motivated towards a goal (ST4), evidence of feed forward (ST5) and engagement with the assessment criteria (ST6). The text was analysed for statements that either confirmed or confuted the statements. Occurrences that confirmed these statements were recorded as a positive value and statements that confuted the statements were recorded as a negative value and are displayed in brackets. A frequency table was created to illustrate the data (Table 4.4)

Table 4.4 Frequency with which the concepts were present at interview

| | ST1 | ST2 | ST3 | ST4 | ST5 | ST6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Respondent 1 | (1) | | 6 | 1 | 2 (1) | 3 |
| Respondent 2 | 4 | | 7 (1) | 3 | 2 (1) | 1 |
| Respondent 3 | | | 5 | 2 | 5 | 1 |
| Respondent 4 | 9 (1) | | 3 (3) | 1 | 1 | (3) |
| Respondent 5 | 6 | | | 1 | | (1) |
| Total | 17 | 0 | 21 | 8 | 10 | 6 |

Results indicate that dependence on the tutor (ST1) varied greatly among the participants following the introduction of the tool, with two of the five participants showing no signs of it at all. Interestingly three of the participants showed a high level of dependence on the tutor

with two of those showing no effective engagement with the assessment criteria (ST6). The tutor reported that the learners had gotten used to how it had always been done and that the tool was asking them to 'step outside of that comfort zone' and they didn't like it. However, it was acknowledged that changing the process also required the tutor to step outside their comfort zone with the tutor reporting that:

"I think when I came in with headings it confused them, they were listening to me and they weren't looking at the tool. I think that was something I learned, for me to take a step back and trust them. For me it was a trust, that I had to trust them, that they wouldn't go off on a tangent."

The interviews also provided evidence that too much external regulation can affect learners negatively, promoting reliance on the tutor even in self-regulating learners. Respondent one exhibited no dependence on the tutor following the introduction of the tool, however the participant's responses did indicate a previous dependence for example when asked why they felt that they had not engaged with the brief and assessment criteria in the past the participant responded:

"I don't think I realised how important the brief was, like I knew it was important but I think I kind of thought, oh well this is what we need when the tutor would be saying, you know, calling out the different headings."

Where negative responses were recorded participants either demonstrated a belief contrary to that identified in the literature, or demonstrated behaviour contrary to that expected in the particular situation, for example, respondent five failed to engage with the assessment criteria

(ST6) at a time when that would have been the expected behaviour. Respondent four exhibited a high level of dependence on the tutor which is supported by a lack of engagement with the assessment criteria (ST6) and confounded by a lack of conviction that acquisition is controllable (ST3). Respondent one, on the other hand, exhibited a high level of autonomy (ST1) and holds the view that acquisition is systematic and controllable (ST3). There was no evidence that participants had any difficulty understanding their feedback. This corresponds with the findings from the questionnaire on participants' perceptions of feedback.

In the introduction a supposition was made that learners were not reviewing their work before submitting their drafts preferring instead to wait for the tutor to review the draft and tell them what was missing. There is evidence to support this supposition with participants indicating that they did not review their work themselves before submitting their draft with one participant reporting that:

"I wasn't doing that, I was just throwing it up."

However, there is evidence that having engaged with the tool participants did begin to self-evaluate. When explaining why there was initial resistance to the tool the same participant responded:

"Just the way you know the tutor was giving us the headings and all that, but I can see like by ticking as we are going down through, it's great. We tick the box and say, right that's done and that's done whatever."

There is also evidence that the tool resulted in an improvement in the drafts being submitted by participants who had actively engaged with the tool. One participant, however, indicated that they had received greater amounts of feedback following the introduction of the tool.

Upon further investigation it was found that this same participant had, during interview, exhibited the highest level of dependence on the tutor. This could be explained using Weinert, Schrader and Helmke's (1989) assertion that learners with low metacognitive awareness are more likely to become dependent on the tutor. According to Zimmerman (1990) in order to be self-regulating a learner must be metacognitively active in their own learning. So it is possible to infer that this participant is not yet capable of the metacognition required to effectively self-regulate.

There is also evidence that effective engagement with the tool has a positive effect on self-efficacy. When asked about their ability to identify any gaps in the assignment Respondent three indicated that they had initially only aimed for a pass, focusing on that section in the tool. However, in subsequent assignments they decided to focus on the distinction section of the tool thus exhibiting a belief that they were capable of achieving at that higher level.

There is evidence throughout the interviews that the learners initially failed to engage with the self-assessment tool. The tutor also reported a lack of initial engagement with the tool. A contributing factor to the initial resistance was a fear of change. A number of participants indicated that they liked the way the tutor used to provide the instructions for the assignments including the specification of headings and subheadings to be used. The participant responses indicated a resistance to the change, a finding that also reported by the tutor. Boud and Molloy (2013) hypothesised that the learners do not automatically possess the ability to self-assess and that it is something that will need to be taught if it is to be used. In this case the tutor was able to neutralise the resistance by providing effective instruction and support on how to use the tool. It was after this guided instruction that the learners were able to see the benefit in using the tool. Pintrich (1999) asserts that if learners can see value in the

learning they are much more likely to expend the effort required to complete the task and in doing so use a range of self-regulatory strategies. During the second module the tutor reported a widespread and positive acceptance of the tool. The participants also reported a widespread acknowledgement of the effectiveness of the tool as a support in the assessment process.

## CONCLUSION

This study was prompted by the supposition that the current practice of accepting full drafts of all assessment from learners at an ETB was promoting a dependence on the tutor and failing to avail of an opportunity to facilitate the development of the transversal skills that are increasingly becoming important outcomes of education and training. A self-assessment tool was designed to promote self-regulation among adult learners encouraging them to become independent learners and take responsibility for their own learning. The self-assessment tool was piloted with a group of QQI Level 5 learners and this research sought to evaluate its effectiveness.

Initial indicators from the analysis of the results suggest that the tool was effective in promoting the use of a number of the self-regulation strategies identified by Zimmerman (1990). During descriptions of how they had used the tool it became apparent that the tool was effective at promoting the use of self-evaluation strategies, organising and transforming strategies and keeping records and monitoring strategies.[11] These strategies incorporated behaviours that the tool had a direct effect on. The tool also appears to have impacted on the use of goal setting and planning strategy but to a slightly lesser extent. The remaining strategies of seeking information, environmental structuring and seeking social assistance were only minimally affected by the introduction of the tool. Use of the final strategy of self-consequences was not significantly affected. It can therefore be concluded that, although the tool was not as comprehensive as hoped in promoting self-regulation in the participants, it none the less had a significant impact on their use of self-regulation strategies. There was also evidence that introducing an element of self-assessment was resulting in participants

[11] Refer to Appendix 6 for a description of the strategies.

gradually taking responsibility for their own learning, by becoming less dependent on the tutor with regards to the content and structure of their assignments.

The research suggests that current practice had encouraged dependence on the tutor with learners looking to the tutor for instruction on the content and structure of their assignments. Learners were comfortable with this and consequently the introduction of the tool was met with some initial resistance. Cao and Nutfield (2007a) warn that learners' habitual use of ineffective strategies presents challenges to interventions designed to improve self-regulated learning. They investigated the factors that lead learners to develop self-regulation in learning and how these were transformed into the skills necessary to manage one's own learning. They posited that motivation was the main factor influencing the development of self-regulation in learners. The introduction of the self-assessment required additional effort from the learners, thus motivation became a key factor influencing their engagement with the tool. According to Camp (2012) the ability to self-assess should empower the learners and result in increased confidence in their own ability (self-efficacy) and increased motivation. This appears to be the case here with the tutor reporting a widespread acceptance of the tool by the start of the second module. Tai *et al* (2017) assert that learners who regularly partake in self-assessment develop their judgement of quality, which they claim 'transcends' the task at hand and can be used by learners in future tasks. It's also possible to infer that the same level of resistance would not be encountered if introducing the tool to a new group with no existing experience in the assessment process.

The results from the questionnaires and interviews indicate that participants did not have any problem understanding feedback, contrary to what was concluded in the literature review. However even with such high levels of engagement with the feedback, there was very little

evidence of feed-forward. The ability to use feedback to feed-forward is crucial in the development of self-regulation (Butler and Winne, 1995) and requires learners to view feedback as not just corrective in nature, but to use it to improve their practice. In order for this to happen the tutor would need to hold a socio-constructive view of feedback where feedback includes information aimed at improving student strategy (Hattie and Temperley, 2007) and the development of the learning process (Askew and Lodge, 2000). The review of the documentation (tutor feedback sheets) indicated that the tutor in this case held a cognitivist view of feedback (Askew and Lodge, 2000). The tutor fed messages back to the participants that focussed on content and addressing any weaknesses identified in the assignment. This feedback was very effective at addressing any gaps in the participants' knowledge however, it was not as effective at promoting self-regulation.

And finally the research revealed a substantial positive relationship between learner engagement with the assessment criteria and academic performance. Thompson (2016) posits that engaging with assessment criteria through self-assessment assists learners to make accurate evaluative judgements about their own work. This supports an intervention that facilitates and encourages increased engagement with the assessment criteria.

### 4.2 Limitations

- The sample size poses a limitation regarding the generalisability of the findings however the results would be transferable to learners in similar contexts. The participants in this study were all QQI Level 5 learners. Progression routes for Level 5 learners are predominantly outside of FET therefore transferability of the results would be limited to learners at this level.

- The use of self-regulation strategies had to be established through the learners self-reports at interview because most of the observable work was done at home. Winne *et al* (2000) cited in Puustinen and Pulkkinen (2001) posited that self-report tests do not necessarily give a reliable picture of self-regulation tactics that learners actually engage in. Whilst a qualitative approach to the research should go some way to limiting the effect on the research none the less the research findings would have been strengthened if the researcher was in a position to observe the use of these strategies.
- The tool was introduced over the course of module one. The tutor reported that this module was particularly difficult for the participants. The content was sensitive, completely theoretical in nature and aimed at creating awareness in the learners as opposed to knowledge that was directly applicable in their work. It is possible that this added to the initial resistance to the tool, however the nature of the assessment contributed to the learners recognition of the value of the tool and its eventual acceptance.
- Self-efficacy and self-regulation have been identified as having a particularly close relationship with one another in the literature. The study did not measure self-efficacy of the participants. A measure of self-efficacy would have been beneficial in the analysis of the results.

### 4.3 Recommendations

- The findings of the study support the introduction of a self-assessment tool to promote self-regulation in adult learners in a similar context to those who took part in the study. However, it is recommended that learners should receive guidance on the use of the tool that includes guidance on the effective use of the range of self-regulation strategies identified as being affected by it. This should be done using guided practice

at a point in the process when the learners are ready to self-assess, that is, when they have a draft of their assignment ready for evaluation.

- The introduction of the tool should be accompanied by a strategy designed to promote the development of the other strategies but especially the goal setting strategy. The literature indicates that the use of goals is a prerequisite in the development of self-regulation affecting learners motivation and effort.

- It has been established that feedback is a vital factor in the promotion of self-regulation in learners. It is recommended that a feedback strategy based on the socio-constructivist view of feedback be developed and introduced to complement the introduction of the self-assessment tool.

- Given the extent of the relationship between self-regulation and self-efficacy it is recommended that a strategy designed to promote self-efficacy in adult learners be developed and implemented. Providing the learners with the skills to be able to self-regulate is not enough, they need to believe that they are capable of applying them successfully if they are to be motivated to use them.

- Further consideration should be given to the link between learning outcomes and assessment. A large number of learners are failing to recognise that in their assessment they are ultimately demonstrating their mastery of the learning outcomes being assessed and, as Mann (2001) warns, this can result in alienation rather than engagement of learners.

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# APPENDICES

Appendix 1

| **Assessment Criteria** | **Excellent** | **Good** | **Satisfactory** | **Unsatisfactory** | ***Having reviewed your assignment indicate which grade band you feel you fall into.*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| % & Grade Range | (Distinction 80-100) | (Merit 65-79) | (Pass 50-64) | (Fail 0-49) | |
| Introduction /identifying aims<br>(6 marks) | Comprehensive introduction clearly stating aim and providing an overview of what the reader can expect to learn from the assignment. Demonstrates well developed ideas presented coherently. | Good introduction identifying the aim of the assignment. Main points of the assignment are presented in a logical and organised manner. Reader has a good idea of what to expect from the assignment. | Adequate introduction identifying the aim of the assignment. Some attempt to introduce the main points to be made in the assignment. Evidence that there has been some attempt to organise ideas in a logical manner. | Introduction fails to illustrate the aim of the assignment. Very few, if any, of the main points are presented in the introduction. Lacks organisation and structure. | |
| To demonstrate an understanding of the selected intellectual disability<br>(6 marks) | Intellectual disability accurately and comprehensively defined. Multiple disability accurately defined. Demonstrated and understanding of the appropriate and inappropriate terms used to label people with an ID. Accurate description of the selected disability provided including its impact on the individual: causes, diagnosis, symptoms and management. Accurate description of the impact on the individual: physical, social, emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of a person with an Intellectual Disability. | Intellectual disability defined. Multiple disability defined. Consideration given to the appropriate and inappropriate terms used to label people with an Intellectual Disability. Broad knowledge of the selected disability with more significant depth in some areas. A good understanding of the impact of the disability on the individual. | Intellectual disability adequately defined. Some attempt to define multiple disability. Showed awareness of the appropriate and inappropriate terms used to label people with an Intellectual Disability. Limited but passable knowledge of the selected disability. Some evidence of understanding of the impact of the disability on the individual. | Inaccurate definition of intellectual disability. Failed to define multiple disability. Little or no awareness of the appropriate terms used to label people with an ID. Little or no knowledge of the selected disability evident. Limited evidence of understanding of the impact of the disability on the individual. | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Detailed exploration of its impact on family /local community /society<br>(6 marks) | Thorough and detailed exploration of its impact: on family in terms of physical, emotional, financial demands and relationships considering positives and negatives; on local community with consideration given to social issues and availability of support services to facilitate inclusion; and on society including economic, promoting autonomy, access to assistive technology, employment and education. Consideration given to current and past attitudes to intellectual disability with reference to social and medical models. Demonstrated an insightful awareness of own attitude i.e. beliefs, feelings and behaviours, towards an individual with an intellectual disability. Includes reference to and consideration of a wide range of appropriate legislation. Includes reference to a range of primary and secondary research. | Extensive exploration of its impact on: family with consideration of both positive and negative impacts; local community with consideration of social issues and support services; society with reference to economic, the promotion of autonomy, assistive technology, employment and education. Makes some reference to legislation in a range of appropriate areas. Demonstrated an awareness of own attitude towards an individual with an intellectual disability. Includes reference to primary and secondary research. | Good attempt to explore its impact on family showing an awareness of both positive and negative impacts; local community showing an awareness of social issues and support services; society showing an awareness of issues that can hinder inclusion in a range of areas. Shows an awareness of the presence of legislation in a range of appropriate areas. Demonstrated some awareness of own attitude towards an individual with an intellectual disability. Some attempt to reference primary and secondary research. | Little or no awareness of the impact of the selected disability on family, local community or society. Little or no reference made to relevant legislation. Little or no awareness of own attitude towards an individual with an intellectual disability. Limited research evident. | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Investigation carried out as part of research (6 marks) | Secondary research: Impressive range of relevant sources consulted and referenced accurately. Primary research: techniques chosen were appropriate to subject. Relevant target sample chosen and research administered appropriately. Consent was explicitly sought in line with best practice. Relevant data acquired from research. | Secondary research: Relevant resources consulted and referenced. Primary research: evidence that consideration was given to appropriate techniques. Relevant target sample chosen and research administered. Showed an awareness of the importance of obtaining consent. Relevant data acquired from research. | Secondary research: A range of sources consulted and some attempt to reference. Primary research: some evidence that consideration was given to appropriate techniques. Target sample had some links to subject. Some attempt to obtain consent. Sufficient relevant data acquired from research. | Secondary research: Little or no evidence that relevant sources were consulted. Primary research: inappropriate techniques chosen for research. Target sample had only minimal links to the subject. No awareness of the necessity of consent evident. Little or no relevant data obtained. | |
| Comprehensive analysis of subject matter (6 marks) | Thorough analysis of data including visual (graphical) representations were appropriate. Analysis provides a clear explanation of the findings with evidence of critical thinking. Research evaluated and judgement made on the impact of the selected disability on the individual, family, community and society. Referred to findings in support of arguments/points made. Demonstrated an in-depth understating of the subject matter. | Good attempt to analyse the data including some visual (graphical) representation. Analysis provides an explanation of the findings with evidence of critical thinking. Research evaluated and some attempt to make judgement on evidence. Some attempt to support arguments/points with reference to findings. Demonstrated a good understanding of the subject matter. | Some attempt to analyse data. Analysis attempts to explain findings with some evidence of critical thinking. Adequate attempt made to evaluate the research. Evidence available in support of arguments/points made. Evidence of a limited understanding of the subject matter. | Poor analysis of data with little or no evidence of understanding. No credible evidence to support arguments/points made. | |

Appendix 2

| **Assessment Criteria (Module Descriptor)** | **Assessment Guidelines (Main Points)** | **Very Good** | **Good** | **Satisfactory** | **Poor** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | (Distinction 80-100) | (Merit 65-79) | (Pass 50-64) | (Fail 0-49) |
| Discussed the philosophy and principles of palliative care (10 marks) | Discussed the philosophy and principles of palliative care. Discussion demonstrates an in-depth knowledge of the philosophy including the concept that palliative care is taken to the patient. Discussion demonstrates an in-depth knowledge of the principles including how the care is delivered and the main goals within palliative care.<br><br>Provided examples (minimum two) from own experience illustrating where and how the care was delivered. Reflected on new learning and how it will inform future practice in the area of palliative care. | | | | |
| Summarised the structure and organisation of palliative care services to include the role played by the multi-disciplinary team and diverse family structures in the provision of care for a terminally ill person (10 marks) | Provided a comprehensive list of the palliative care structures in own area (Donegal) including hospice care and, were relevant, cross border services available. Consideration given to the levels of care, knowledge of staff at the different levels and location. Clear understanding of the role of each of these structures in the delivery of palliative care. Clear understanding of the role of the various personnel (multi-disciplinary team and family) that provide palliative care.<br><br>Provided examples (minimum two) from own experience illustrating the level at which the care was witnessed and who was involved (were family involved?). Reflected on new learning and how it will inform future practice in the area of palliative care. | | | | |
| Recognised the role of the support worker in the promotion of key issues such as life quality, self-esteem, respect, privacy and dignity in palliative care work (10 marks) | Demonstrated a thorough understanding of the role of the support worker in the promotion of key issues in palliative care work. Consideration given to the Activities of Daily Living. Discussion included an in-depth explanation of how life quality, self-esteem, respect, privacy and dignity were /would be promoted by the palliative care worker.<br><br>Provided examples (minimum two) from own experience illustrating where and how this happened. Reflected on new learning and how it will inform future practice in the area of palliative care. | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Explored different attitudes to death and dying to include an understanding of individual patterns of grief, bereavement and loss (10 marks) | Thorough and detailed description of the stages and different types of grief. Explored a range of different attitudes to death and dying. Demonstrating an insightful understanding of possible reasons for the different attitudes including culture, age, religion, beliefs etc.<br><br>Provided examples from own experience illustrating situations where stages or patterns of grief were identified. Reflected on new learning and how it will inform future practice in the area of palliative care. | | | | |
| Employed a range of communication strategies and processes which are central to the work in palliative care (10 marks) | A range of appropriate communication strategies considered for use in palliative care including the palliative care specific strategy: acknowledge, validate, normalise and a warning shot. Consideration given to the setting.<br><br>Provided examples (minimum two) from own experience illustrating what strategies were employed or witnessed in palliative care situation. Reflected on new learning and how it will inform future practice in the area of palliative care. | | | | |
| Responded appropriately to the needs of the person who is confused in the last days of life (10 marks) | Provided a detailed explanation of the causes and signs and symptoms of confusion in the last days of life including terminal delirium and terminal restlessness. Suggested response demonstrates an understanding of the needs of a person who is confused in the last days of life including recognition of the onset of the delirium and how to ensure effective management (reporting it to the relevant people).<br><br>Provided examples (minimum two) from own experience of where they have seen someone confused. Explained how he/she responded or witnessed others respond. Reflected on the appropriateness of the response including the importance of a calm environment. Reflected on new learning and how it will inform future practice in the area of palliative care. | | | | |
| Worked effectively and with great sensitivity in relation to the dying person and their significant others in a palliative care setting (10 marks) | Provided examples (minimum two) from own experience illustrating how he/she worked effectively and with great sensitivity (empathy, compassion, effective listening, verbal and non-verbal communication) in relation to the dying person. Provided examples from own experience illustrating how he/she worked effectively and with great sensitivity in relation to other members of the palliative care team including family, neighbours, visitors and carers. Reflected on the appropriateness of the response. Reflected on new learning and how it will inform future practice in the area of palliative care. | | | | |

| Band | Criteria |
|---|---|
| Excellent | • Comprehensive response – addresses all of the main points in detail<br>• Deep understanding of the topic evident in the response<br>• There is clear application of theory (to practice)<br>• Information is very clear, well organised and presented<br>• Information sources have been acknowledged (where appropriate) |
| Good | • Good response – addresses all of the main points but lacks detail in some areas<br>• Good understanding of the topic evident in the response – lacks depth in some areas<br>• Some application of theory to practice evident<br>• Information is clear, well organised and presented<br>• Good attempt to acknowledge information sources (where appropriate) |
| Satisfactory | • Adequate response – addresses most of the main points – some detail missing<br>• Reasonable understanding of the topic evident in the response – surface level understanding – lacks depth<br>• Attempts to apply theory to practice with some success<br>• Information is well presented however it lacks organisation in some areas<br>• Some attempt to acknowledge information sources (where appropriate) |
| Poor | • Response fails to address the points<br>• Little or no understanding of the topic evident in the response<br>• Fails to demonstrate application of theory to practice<br>• Information presented is unclear and with little or no organisation<br>• Fails to acknowledge information sources |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Structure and Form** | | |
| 1. | Have you checked your assignment for spelling and grammar? | ☐ |
| 2. | Did you use the spelling and grammar function in a word processing application on your computer? | ☐ |
| 3. | Did you proofread the assignment? | ☐ |
| 4. | Did you ask someone else to proof read the assignment? | ☐ |
| 5. | Does your assignment have an introduction, main body and conclusion? | ☐ |
| 6. | Does the introduction introduce the reader to what you are going to discuss in the assignment (the aims)? | ☐ |
| 7. | Does the introduction outline how you are going to make your point or argument? | ☐ |
| 8. | Does the main body of your assignment contain an number of paragraphs? | ☐ |
| 9. | Does each paragraph contain one main point or argument? | ☐ |
| 10. | Did you clearly state the point or argument you are trying to make in the first sentence of the paragraph? | ☐ |
| 11. | Did you back up your point or argument with evidence and/or examples? | ☐ |
| 12. | Do your sentences start with a capital letter and end with a full-stop, exclamation mark or question mark? | ☐ |
| 13. | Do your sentences contain one complete point? | ☐ |
| 14. | Have you checked for the following: | ☐ |
| | • Run-on sentences (two complete sentences that you failed to separate with a full-stop, exclamation mark or question mark) | ☐ |
| | • Sentence fragments (unfinished sentences – do not contain a complete idea) | ☐ |
| | • Rambling sentences (a number of separate sentences connected by a clause e.g. and, then etc.) | ☐ |
| 15. | Is there clear signposting between paragraphs? (Is there a link from one paragraph to the next?) | ☐ |
| 16. | Does your conclusion reiterate the point that you were trying to make? | ☐ |
| 17. | Does your conclusion contain a summary of how you made your point/argument? | ☐ |
| 18. | Have you referenced other people's work/ideas throughout your assignment? | ☐ |
| 19. | Have you included a comprehensive reference list /bibliography at the end of your assignment? | ☐ |
| **Content** | | |
| 20. | Referring back to the assignment brief have you adequately addressed the guidelines/scenario? | ☐ |
| 21. | Is there something in your assignment to cover each of the assessment criteria? | ☐ |

**Dialogue**

What was the main point/idea/argument that you were trying to make in your assignment?

Paragraph 1
What was the main point/idea/argument of this paragraph?

What evidence did you present in support of your main point/idea/argument?

What examples (if any) did you provide in support of your main point/idea/argument?

How did you link this paragraph with the next one?

*Repeat the above for paragraph two and any subsequent paragraphs in your assignment*

What do you feel you did well in this assignment?

What areas are you concerned about in this assignment?

What areas would you like your tutor to focus on and/or assist you with in this assignment?

Appendix 4

Date: 25 January 2018

## Letter, information sheet and consent form for questionnaire.

Title of project: To explore the validity of a self-assessment tool in the development of transferable skills including writing skills and self-efficacy.

Dear XXXX,

My name is Tina O'Donnell, and I am a student of the Master of Arts in Learning and Teaching (MALT) programme at the School of Business at Letterkenny Institute of Technology.

I am researching the validity of a self-assessment tool in the development of writing and self-efficacy skills for my masters dissertation. I am aware that your group are taking part in the pilot project introducing the new self-assessment tool and therefore I am inviting you to take part in the above research project. However, it is important that you understand what this study entails before you decide whether or not to participate. Please feel free to ask me any questions in relation to the project.

You will be asked to complete a questionnaire in advance of the introduction of the tool and again at the end of the module. The questionnaire is designed to explore your attitude towards and engagement with assessment feedback. I am asking for your consent to include these questionnaires in my research.

You can contact me by email at XXXXXXX or by phone at XXXXXXX

If you are satisfied with the information provided, and are willing to participate, please tick the boxes on the consent form attached, sign it, and return it to me at XXXXXXX.

With Thanks,

Yours Sincerely

Tina O'Donnell

## Information Sheet for questionnaire

### A description of the study and why it is being conducted

The study will take place in the Donegal Education and Training Board XXXXX (XXXX) in XXXXXX. The key themes I will explore are: self-assessment, self-efficacy, dialogue, feedback and writing skills. The research is being conducted to explore whether or not the introduction of an element of self-assessment will help develop a student's writing and self-efficacy skills. The primary focus of the research will be to establish the validity of the self-assessment tool introduced and to make recommendations for revisions before it is rolled out across the wider FET service at Donegal ETB.

### Why have you been chosen?

You have been chosen, as you are part of the group piloting the tool.

### What will happen, and what will you be required to do?

Firstly, your participation is entirely voluntary. In fact, even if you consent now, but change your mind, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any explanation until the data are analysed and about to be written up.

I am asking you to participate in a questionnaire to explore your opinion on the effectives of the feedback you receive regarding your assignments. It will also explore your engagement with this feedback as well as the assessment criteria. Remember, you have the right to cease participation at any time and without the need to provide a reason.

### Benefits of the study

The self-assessment tool that you are piloting has been designed to develop students' writing and self-efficacy skills. It is hoped that this study will test the validity of the tool and identify revisions and improvements that will help to ensure the validity of the tool when it is rolled out across the FET service at Donegal ETB.

### Confidentiality

All data generated in hardcopy will be held securely in a locked cabinet and no names or identities will be used. Softcopy data will be stored on a password protected computer which is used exclusively by the researcher, and all individual documents will be password protected and encrypted. The data will be kept securely for the duration of the project. Once the project is deemed to be completed all softcopy will be deleted. Any hardcopy will be shredded.

### Use of data and dissemination of results

The content of the interview will be used for my MALT dissertation; all references to it will be on an anonymous basis. The results of the research may also be used as part of Donegal ETBs QQI Self Evaluation and form part of their improvement plan.

**Supervisor details:** Bronagh Heverin | e: bronaghheverin@lyit.ie

## Consent Form for questionnaire

Title of project: To explore the validity of a self-assessment tool in the development of transferable skills including writing skills and self-efficacy.

Name of researcher: Tina O'Donnell

If you are in agreement with the statements below, please tick the boxes.

- I have read the attached information letter, which explains the research project named above. Yes ☐
- I understand that the letter is asking me to participate in a questionnaire. Yes ☐
- I understand that all the information gathered will be kept strictly confidential and that my name will not be included in any reports. Yes ☐
- I understand that participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time until the data are analysed and about to be written up. Yes ☐
- I understand that this research will be published in form of a masters dissertation. The results may also form part of the Donegal ETB QQI Self Evaluation plan. Yes ☐

Also, please tick one of the following boxes to indicate whether or not you agree to taking part:

☐ I AGREE to taking part in the above research

☐ I DO NOT AGREE to taking part in the above research

Signature:_____ Date:_____

Name:_____

Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

**Questionnaire** **Insert your reference here _____**

Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible:

These questions and statements are designed to establish the participant's attitude and engagement with the assessment criteria and feedback.

1. What is feedback? Briefly describe in your own words what feedback is.

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What is the purpose of feedback? Why does your tutor provide feedback?

_____

_____

_____

_____

*Attitudes and engagement with Feedback*
Please rate the following statements from 1 **Never** to 5 **Always**".

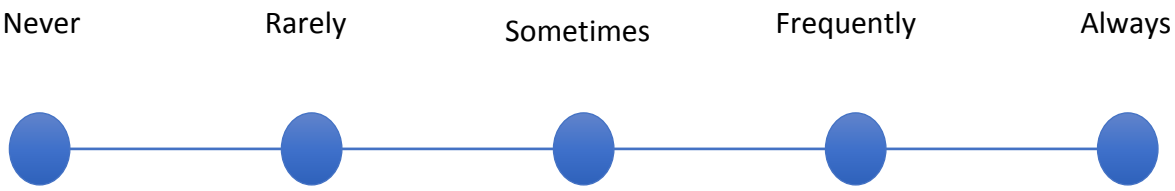
1. My tutor provides useful feedback on my drafts.

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Always

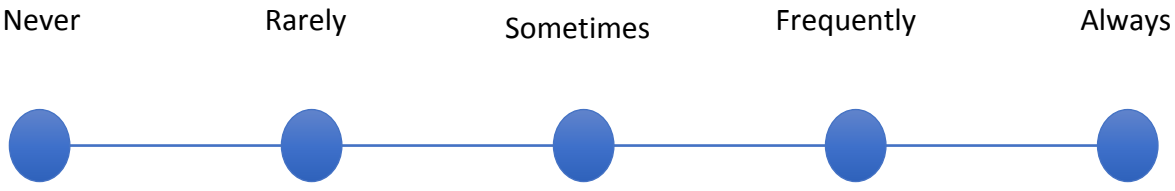
2. The feedback provided by the tutor helps me to understand what he/she is looking for in the assignment.

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Always

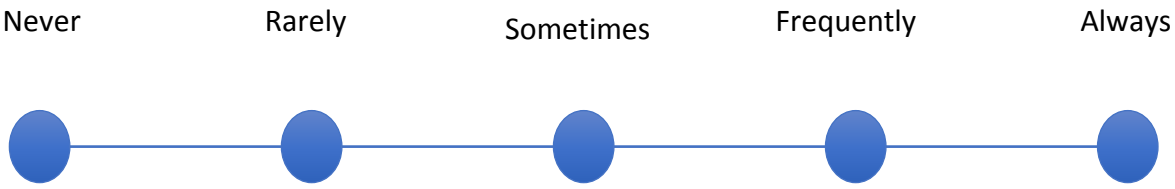
3. The feedback I receive is in line with what the tutor originally asked for.



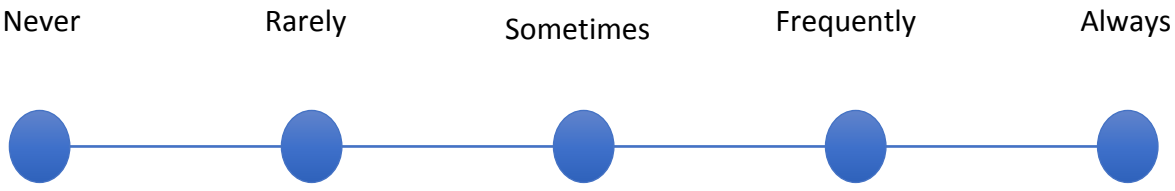

4. Feedback is specific to each assignment that is it refers to this specific assignment only.



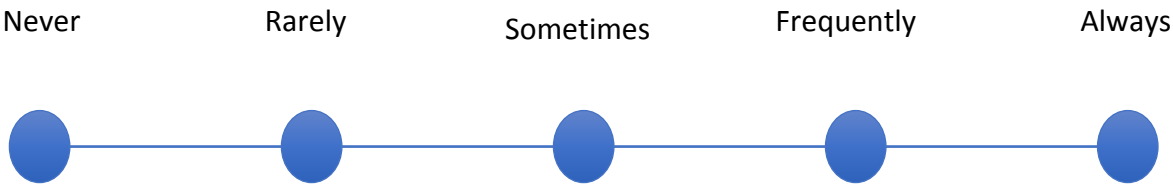

5. I consider previous feedback before starting my next assignment.



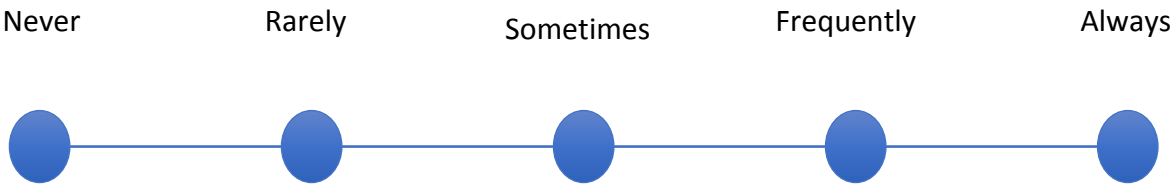

6. I can see how the feedback received will add value to my assignment.



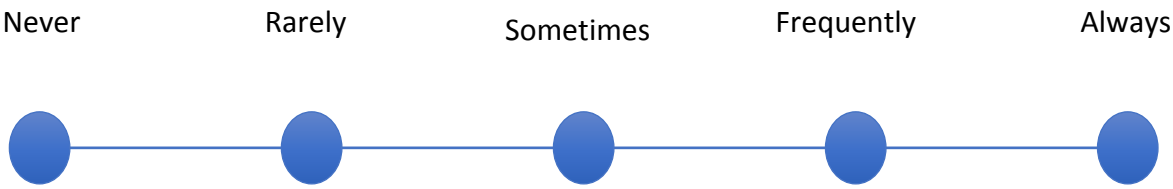
7. I use all of the feedback that my tutor gives.



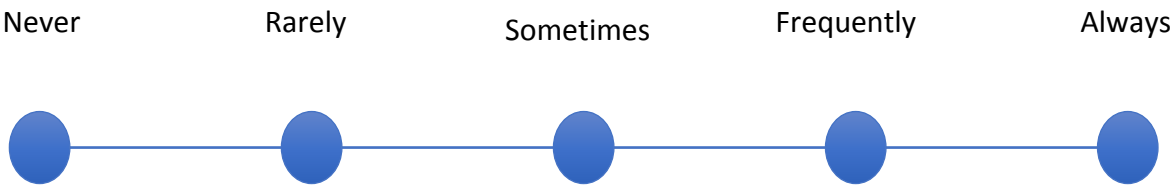

8. It is clear from the feedback what I need to do to add value to my assignment.




9. The feedback gives me a better understanding of what is expected of me (what the tutor wants).




10. I use previous feedback to make sure that I do better next time.




11. Which of these statements best describes your response to feedback?

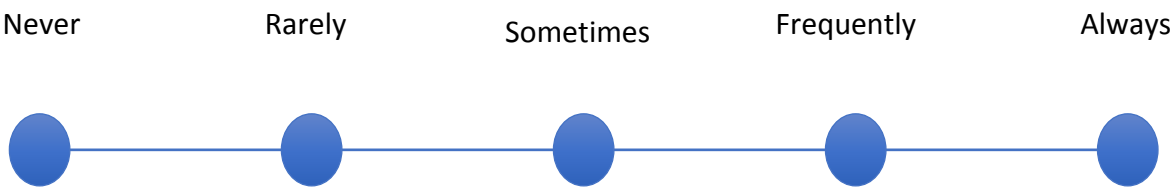
A) I make the corrections suggested by the tutor and submit the assignment

or

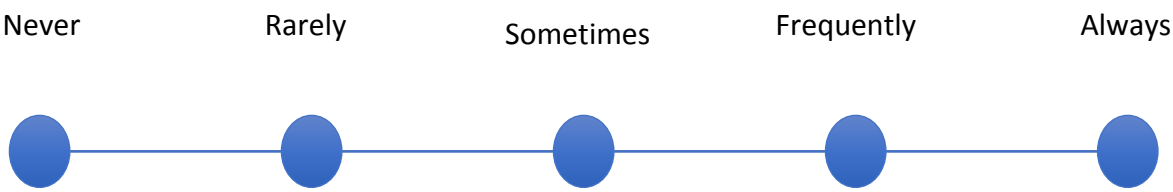
B) I review my assignment in light of feedback and decide what amendments are necessary

*Attitudes and engagement with Assessment Criteria*

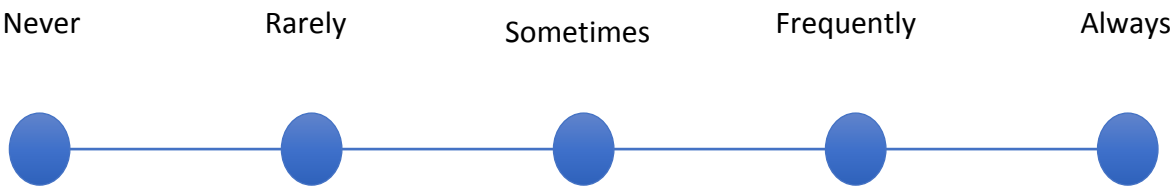
1. There is an obvious link between the feedback received and the assessment criteria or assignment guidelines.



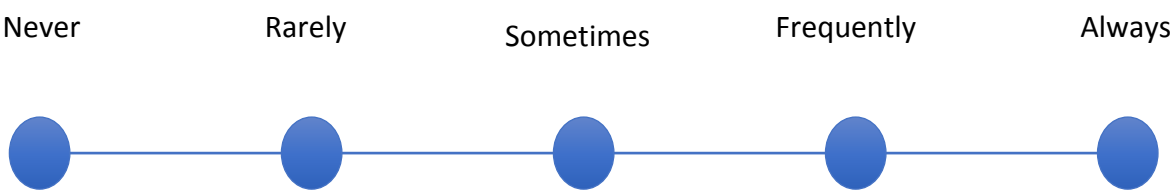

2. I always review my assignment against the assessment criteria before submitting my draft.




3. The assessment criteria help me to understand what is expected of me.




4. I use the assessment guidelines to figure out what is expected of me.



5. Please rate the following items from the assignment brief in order of importance with **1** being the **most important** and **6** being the **least important**:

| | |
|---|---|
| Title of the assignment | ☐ |
| The weighting of the assignment (%) | ☐ |
| The learning outcomes being assessed | ☐ |
| The guidelines or scenario | ☐ |
| The assessment criteria | ☐ |
| The signed declaration | ☐ |

6. Briefly explain what the assessment criteria is?

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. Briefly explain why you think the assessment criteria is included in the Assignment Brief?

_____

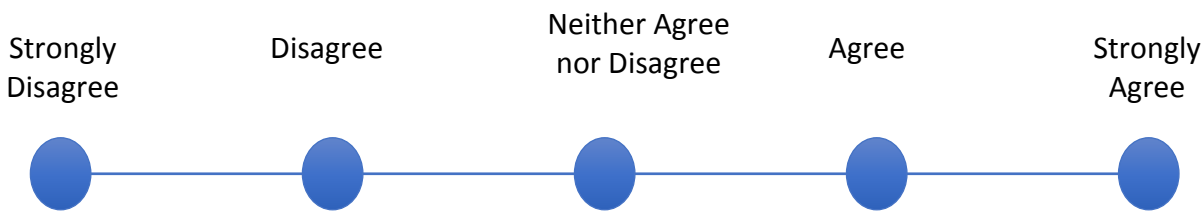
_____

_____

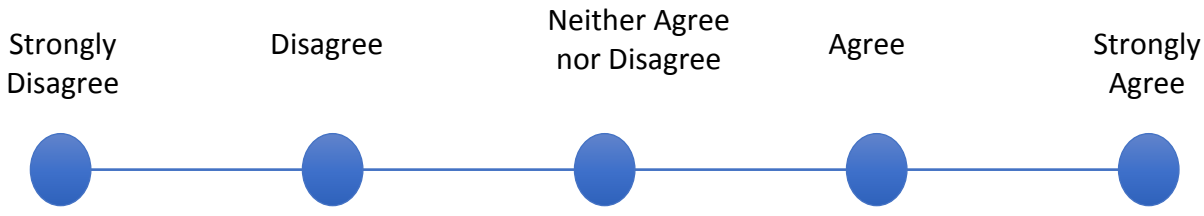
_____

*Attitudes and engagement with Learning Outcomes*
Please rate the following statements from 1 **Strongly Disagree** to 5 **Strongly Agree**

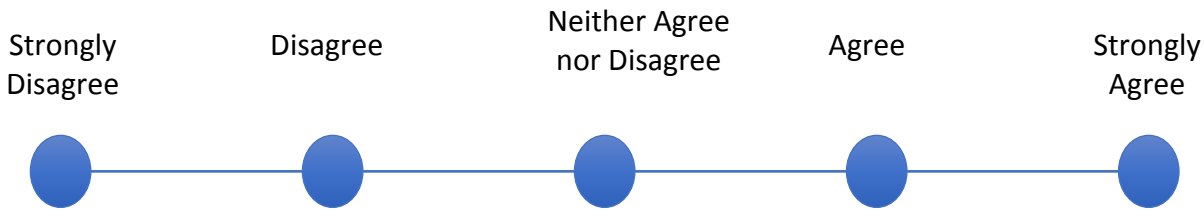
1. I think about the learning outcomes being assessed to figure out what the tutor is looking for.




2. I think about the learning outcomes being assessed to figure out what should be included in my assignment.




3. I use the assessment criteria to help me figure out what should be included in my assignment.




4. I use the Scenario /Guidelines to help me figure out what should be included in my assignment.

If you would like to provide any additional information please do so below

A number of recipients will be selected for follow up interviews, please indicate below if you would be willing to take part in a one-to-one interview if you are selected.

Yes I would be happy to take part in an interview if selected ☐

No I would prefer not to take part in the interviews ☐

Appendix 5

**Semi Structure Interview Schedule** **Ref:**

**Date:** **Start Time:** **Finish Time:**

Welcome and Thanks

Q1 – Can you talk me through what you do when you get your assignment brief from the tutor? How do you approach your assignment?

| Strategy | Prompt | Evidence | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| SG1 | How did you get on with assessing yourself? Do you look over it again before you hand it in? Do you ever find that you get the same feedback over and over again? Do you always approach your assignment in the same way? | | |
| SG2 | How do you get the information from your head or notes and turn it into and assignment? Have you any techniques that you use to get you organised? | | |
| SG3 | When do you do your assignments? Do you have a set time or a time that works best for you? How do you make sure that you have enough time to get it done? With so many things competing for your time how do you make sure you get everything done? | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| SG4 | Where do you normally get the information for your assignment from? Do you always use that same method? | |
| SG5 | Do you keep notes yourself? Do you ever look over previous assignments or feedback before starting your assignment? | |
| SG6 | Where do you do your assignments? Why there? | |
| SG7 | How do you motivate yourself to do your assignments? What about when there is something that you would rather be doing, how do you get yourself to do your assignment then? If you're finding an | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | assignment tough or boring how do you get yourself to just do it? | |
| SG8 | If you run into problems with an assignment what do you do? If there was something that you didn't understand what would you do? If you were stuck on an assignment what would you do? | |

**Other observations or Field Notes:**

Appendix 6

| Code | Strategy | Definition |
|---|---|---|
| SG1 | Self-evaluation | Statements indicating that participants self-evaluate throughout e.g. I check to see, I go back, |
| SG2 | Organising and transforming | Statements indicating that participants attempt to arrange instructional materials throughout e.g. I do an outline, I write down the headings, |
| SG3 | Goal setting and planning | Statements indicating that participants attempt to plan to allow time for completion etc e.g. I start my assignment right away, I set aside two hours a night |
| SG4 | Seeking information | Statements indicating that participants refer to a number of non-social sources to seek information for their assignment e.g. I read over class notes, I go to the internet |
| SG5 | Keeping records and monitoring | Statements indicating that participants attempted to take notes or review previous materials to contribute to performance e.g. I write down what the teacher said in class, I checked to see where I went wrong last time |
| SG6 | Environmental structuring | Statements indicating that participants attempted to arrange their physical environment to make learning easier e.g. I study in my room, someone took the kids away, I had a desk |
| SG7 | Self-consequences | Statements indicating that participants used the promise of rewards or punishment to motivate behaviour e.g. I told myself when I finished this I would have a cup of tea, if I don't get this finished then I won't go to x |
| SG8 | Seeking social assistance | Statements indicating that participants elicited help from peers, teacher or others e.g. If I ran into trouble I would email the other students, If I didn't understand something I asked the teacher, |
| RST | Reactive statements | Statements that indicate that behaviour is initiated by somebody other than the participant themselves e.g. I did what the teacher said, I followed the teacher's instructions, I just try harder, I just do it |

Appendix 7

| Code | Concept | Definition |
|---|---|---|
| ST1 | Dependence | Statements that indicate that participants are dependent on the tutor |
| ST2 | Assumptions about Understanding | Statements that indicate that participants don't understand feedback messages |
| ST3 | Control over acquisition | Statements that indicate that participants hold the view that acquisition is systematic and controllable |
| ST4 | Evidence of goal setting | Statements that indicate that participants are motivated towards a goal |
| ST5 | Feedforward | Statements that indicate that feedback is used in such a way as to improve self-efficacy or self-regulation in participants. |
| ST6 | Engagement with Assessment criteria | Statements that indicate that participants are engaging effectively with the assessment criteria |