

Assessment and Feedback 2015

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Introduction and Background

Effective assessment and feedback procedures are essential to the enhancement of learning and academic practice; providing learners with a robust and standardised evaluation system, as well as timely and useful information about the strengths and weaknesses of their responses to assignments, can be a significant determinant of their academic success and satisfaction.

This project seeks to collate and analyse the quality of these processes across this university's departments and programmes to both gain an overview of the student response

and to identify specific areas for improvement.

While this report may highlight areas for improvement, it by no means indicates that the assessment and feedback procedures of all programmes are unsatisfactory. Additionally, given the diversity and size of the departments under scrutiny, recommendations may not always be universally applicable. However, the intention is that these findings should provide a starting point for discussion and review of existing procedures, in order to ensure continuous reflection on and improvement of our students' learning and performance outcomes.

Aims

The main aim of this project is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the assessment and feedback policies within each department at Goldsmiths. By collecting quantifiable data in the form of an online survey, we aim to identify the departments whose assessment and feedback policies are not reaching the standard that students expect to receive. With this in mind, we hope to find out why these issues exist and how students would like to see them addressed.

Once these issues have been identified, the overall aim of the project is to be able to suggest recommendations to improve assessment and feedback procedures across the University, based on the results received from students. To do this, we will analyse the data received via the online survey so that we are able to measure the satisfaction of students and review their suggestions for improvement. We aim to make suggestions university-wide, but also department-specific ones too wherever appropriate, as it is expected that not all policies will work university-wide as assessment styles vary accordingly.

We aim to collect data from as far reaching corners of the university as possible, on a manageable scale in order for us to analyse the overall satisfaction across all departments.

Methodology

To gather data for our feedback report we employed a questionnaire as a research method for collecting data. There are many advantages of using questionnaires as a research method, including:

Data collection – It was easier to collect the data, the responses were easy to read, and furthermore the data was easier to analyse than other qualitative techniques of data collection.

Cost – We used the online survey forum survey monkey, which is free and did not cost any money to create.

Sample size – The accessibility of the survey allowed for the potential of a large collection of data, thus the survey had the potential to provide more accurate results to draw conclusions from.

Anonymity – The survey allows the participants the opportunity to give more truthful answers since the data cannot be traced back to them. This anonymous confidentiality can increase the chances of the research being more accurate.

Nonetheless there are some weaknesses of questionnaires that are important to take into account when analysing the research method and the subsequent responses to be collected by the survey:

Sample choice – Although all the students at Goldsmiths had the opportunity to answer the survey, not all will. Due to this fact, the survey may represent the number of students who regularly check their Goldsmiths webmail. Thus, this sample may not be accurate and representative of the whole student body and may therefore be difficult to generalise the results to all students at Goldsmiths.

Rigidity – It is difficult to cover all possible answers and questions in a survey and furthermore some of the questions may be leading questions which could subsequently result in the data being gathered being specific (relevant) to the questions being asked rather than it reflecting an actual problem with feedback.

Consequently the research method that was employed resulted in data that was collected being quantitative and this has advantages and disadvantages. The quantitative research method allowed for numerical data to be collected therefore the data was not only easier to obtain but also easier to compare and correlate.

Results and findings

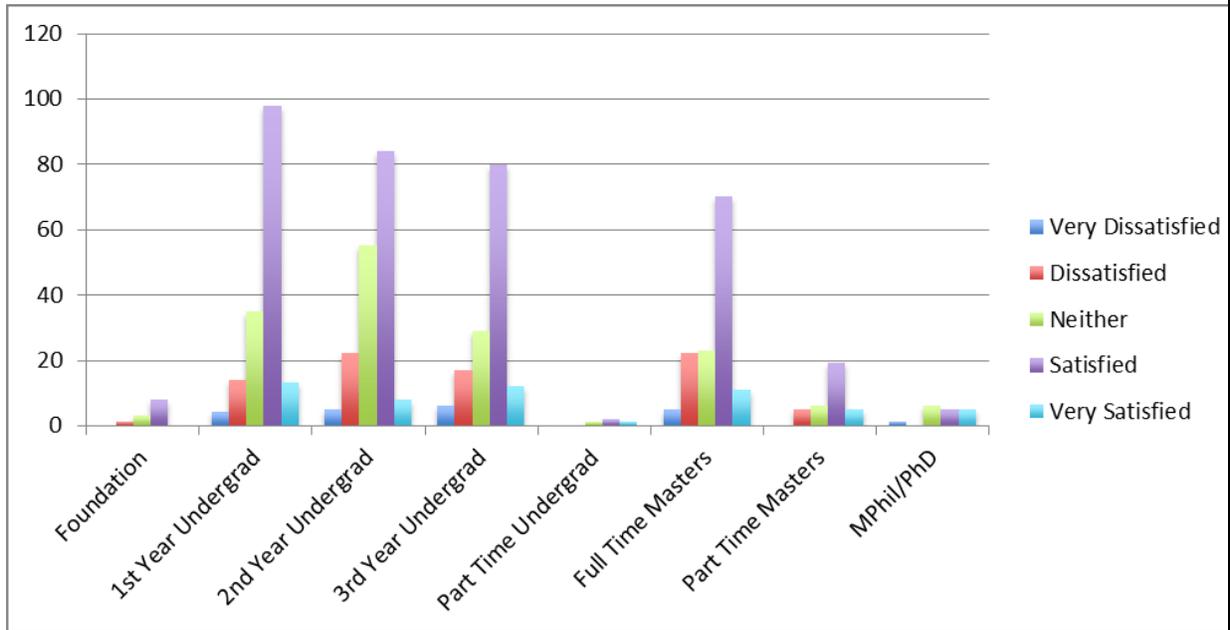
This section of the annual DSC report will attempt to provide a conclusive analysis of the data provided regarding the topic area of Feedback and Assessment. It will present a summary of the survey's data using percentages and graphs for quick understanding what the students had to say.

This section will further include the departments' responses regarding how assessment and feedback are handled. This information shall subsequently be utilized to gather a comprehensive understanding of the positive and negative practices, which operate within Goldsmiths relating to the area of Feedback and Assessment.

770 students have answered the questions within the DSC survey relating to Assessment and Feedback.

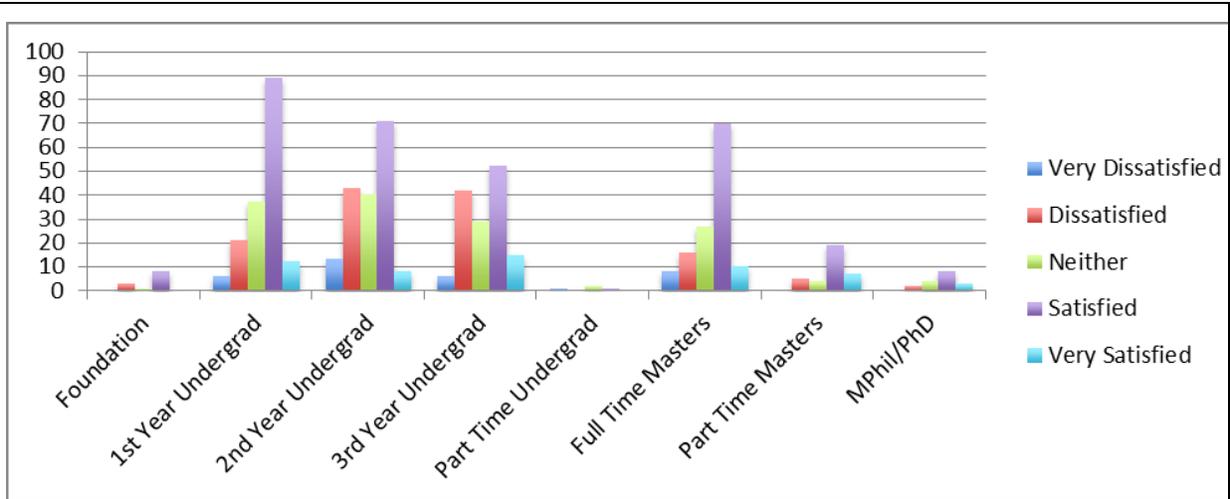
1) How satisfied are you with the methods of assessment used over the course of your degree?

This question provided a rather positive response by students with 8.1% being 'Very satisfied' and 54% being 'Satisfied'. 23% were 'Neither dissatisfied or satisfied', 11.7% were 'Dissatisfied' and only 3% were 'Very dissatisfied'. This indicates that over 60% of the students that completed the survey are happy with the way they are assessed throughout their degree. It may however be worrying that there are another 15%, which do not feel that way.



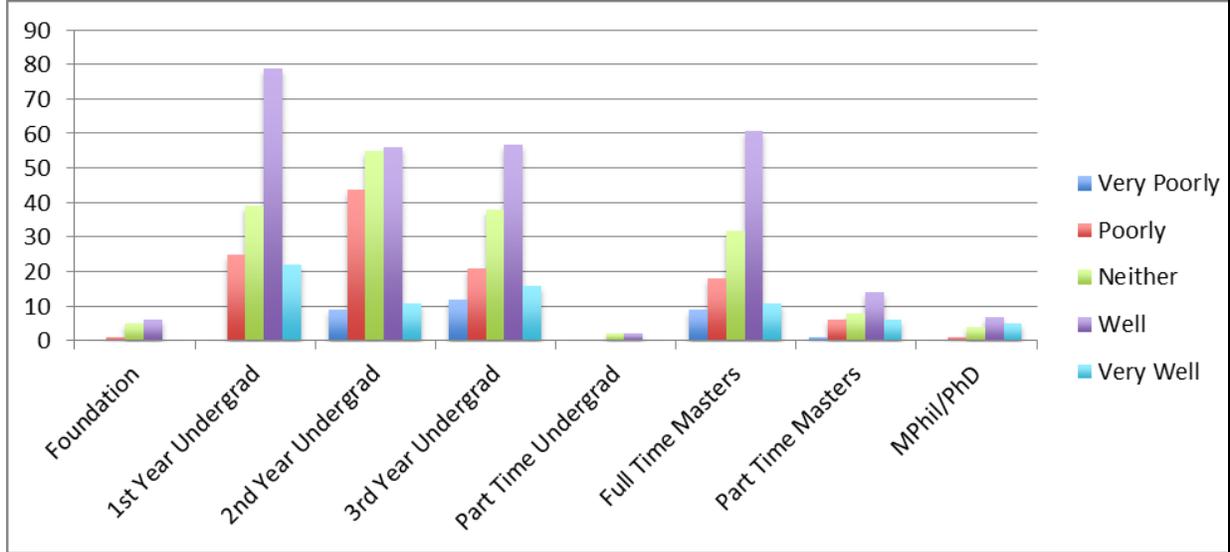
2) How satisfied are you with the time in which deadlines fall throughout the year?

This questions provoked rather mixed feedback across the student body. While 5.1% of students were 'Very satisfied', 46.4% of students were satisfied and 21.1% were 'Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied', 19.6% indicated they were 'Dissatisfied' and 5.1% were even 'Very dissatisfied'. Even though the positive response rate exceeds 50% in this case, the negative responses reached about 23% which may be a warning signal for how deadlines are spread out across the year.



3) How well do you find yourself able to use feedback on previous assessments to improve your academic work?

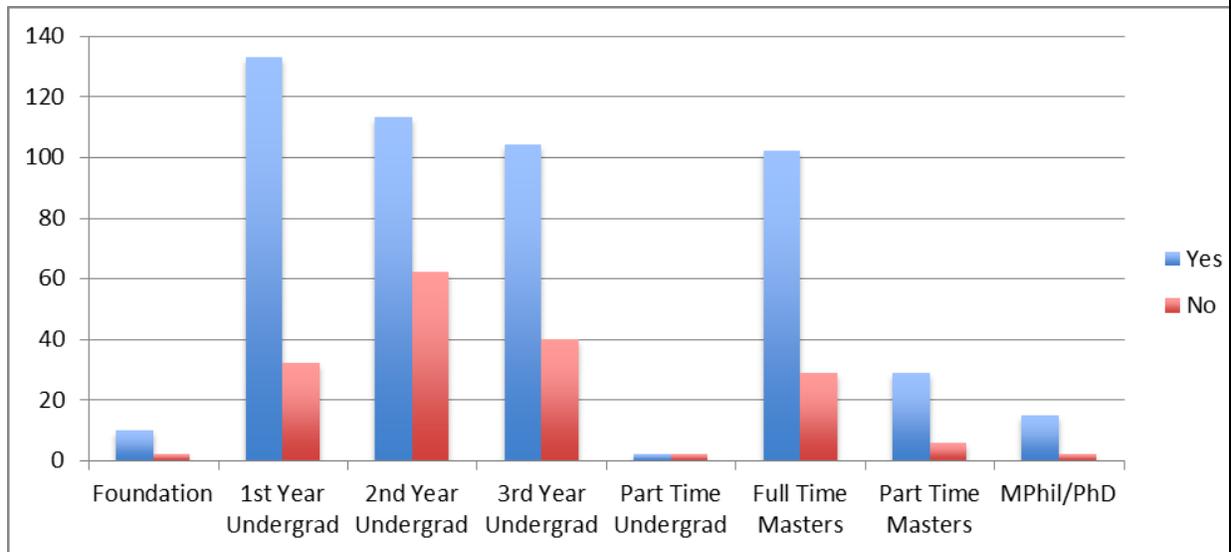
This question indicated a similar response rate to the previous questions, with above 50% of students feeling that feedback previously provided had improved their capability to do well in academic work. Those students who felt that it had helped either ‘Poorly’ or ‘Very Poorly’ made up 20% of the questioned demographic. It may again be relevant to consider which departments have utilized which forms and guidelines for feedback in order to indicate what could be done to encourage students’ ability to learn from previous assessments, across all departments.



4) Do you find that you receive feedback from coursework according to Goldsmiths’ feedback policy?

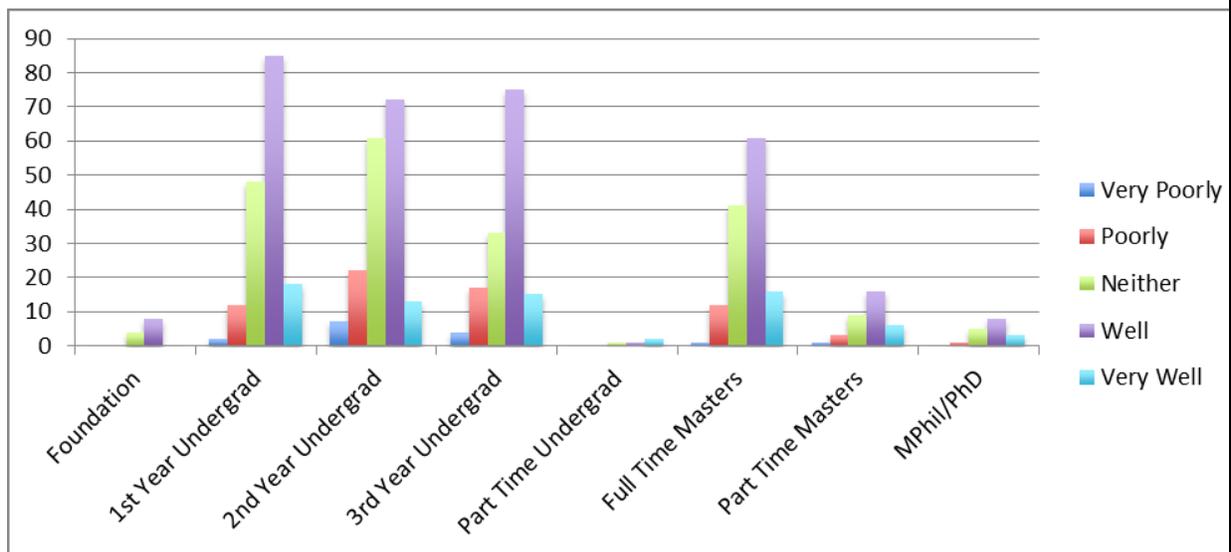
Out of the students who completed this section of the DSC survey, 74.4 % answered with ‘Yes’ and 25.6% answered with ‘No’. It is encouraging to see that the majority of students feels that their departments to adhere to Goldsmiths feedback policy. It may however be relevant to investigate whether

the 23.3% of students who did not feel this way belong to specific departments in order to find out why those criteria have not been met or what may be the reasons for students to feel this way.



5) How well do you feel course teaching prepares you for your assessment?

This question received an overall positive response with almost 60% of the students questioned indicating that they felt that course teaching prepared them either 'Very Well' or at least 'Well'. Only 11.8% of the student body did not feel that course teaching prepared them well for the assessment of their courses. It may again be relevant to review the part of the students who did not feel that they were well prepared for assessments regarding their specific departments. It may however also be relevant to find out how many students actually participate in lectures and seminars overall.



Selected comments given by students:

NB: The comments are anonymous, therefore we cannot identify which department they come from, the comments assembled in this section are concerning issues that seem to be widespread across different departments.

People have complained about the feedback not being consistent and detailed enough

'Feedback can be very vague, not enough consistency of marking standards throughout the department.'

'Some teachers seem to be unable to give constructive feedback and have a habit of just saying "that's great, keep working on it" and then negatively marking in the assessment instead of instructing and helping us to explore what we could be doing better to gain a higher mark.'

'Feedback could be more in-depth. Also, there seems very little consistency of marking criteria throughout the department.'

'Feedback is always focused on the negatives - tutors manage to find 10 fallacies in my essays and maybe one good comment if I'm lucky. Sometimes I feel as if I'm not liked by certain tutors. I also find that certain tutors teach their subject with western achievements as the main, 'significant' contributor to human intellectualism - demeaning my culture, and others like me who have had the unique opportunity to have several nationalities and can see how their own native culture has shaped human understanding today. However, given that I am not a postgraduate (nor an owner of a doctorate) I don't feel as if I have the 'authority' to be able to contest with certain points, for fear that tutors will think I'm too under qualified to make any valuable points. / / I also believe that certain tutors can be very condescending and have made me feel humiliated on several occasions (bear in mind I suffer with anxiety).'

'Some feedback - varies with each lecturer - some are very good, is very vague and although I understand they have a lot to mark, a more personal feedback would be appreciated. '

Deadlines should be carefully rethought

'Assessment during winter holidays is frustrating as we can't access the library if we have left the country.'

'Please no deadline in the first week of the term! Leads to nobody having time to prepare for classes!'

'The hand in date needs to be changed so that it doesn't have 4 weeks of xmas or spring break before it during which students cannot get feedback on drafts, questions etc. Setting a draft hand in date before the end of term is often not realistic'

'Assessment should be more spread out. Chunks of coursework shouldn't be handed all at the end of the year which essentially equates to make or break. The coursework should be more evenly spread and and dissected into smaller chunks.'

'Deadlines need to be more spaced out. By having all of the deadlines occurring on one day, it becomes difficult to to manage workloads.'

'With the new changes in the course structure (10-week courses), we now have examined essays to hand in at the start of the spring and summer term. Essentially work load has been doubled from previous years. In the past, I would hand in a non-assessed coursework at the start of spring term and an assessed piece at the start of summer. Now I have to submit the non-assessed work in the middle of the term on top of the assessed work at the start of the next term. It's a lot to handle.'

Students would like to see the assessment criteria being changed

'Would be good if the final grade included a small (maybe only 5-10%) mark for attendance and engagement in class. If it is true that Goldsmiths are now accepting applicants with 2 Cs at A level then this may bring down, already poor attendance and engagement in seminars, thus de-valuing the degrees of current and previous students. '

Departments business manager responses to the following questions:

- 1) What forms of assessment are used in the department (e.g. essays, exams, presentations, practical work etc.)?
- 2) How do students access their feedback? (e.g. access the VLE)?
- 3) Is there additional support available to prepare students for the assessments?

Media & Communications: (Luize)

- 1) Essays, exams, and also creative pieces of work for their practice modules, these can include radio shows, journalism work, creating a website etc
- 2) Written feedback for coursework ; feedback for assessed work accessed on the VLE
- 3) Students have the opportunity to book one-to-one tutorials with their seminar leaders for advice on upcoming work.

Institute of Management Studies: (Ollie)

- 1) The IMS department utilizes various forms of assessment. The department aims to use both academic and applied forms as assessment. Business reports, case study assignments, presentations, designing

training sessions, and procurement bids make up the assignments that are designed to reflect real-world tasks. These are assigned either as individual assignments or, quite often, as group work. The department also assigns academic essays, written examinations and a dissertation as more traditional academic style assessments.

2) Students access their feedback via the VLE, which contains written personal feedback and numeric scores. One to one feedback is available by appointment.

3) The extra support involves a study skills session, designed to teach students what the department expects in the assignments and how to prepare and plan for them. Prior to the deadline, a tutorial or seminar that focuses on how to approach the piece of coursework is provided to students. For statistical assignments, labs are run in which students are taught with computers along with the necessary software. For dissertations, students choose a supervisor who advises them on a one to one basis. The postgraduate Management of Innovation course involves an additional dissertation workshop. For exams, the departments provides exam revision tutorials and past exam papers to look at. The undergraduates also have the option to take practice exams.

STACS (Jamie)

1) Essays, exams, presentations, portfolio, DVD, art-work, performance and they have to attend placements.

2) Students will receive their feedback via the VLE and some programmes have feedback meetings with students at the end of the academic.

3) We provide Academic Skills, sessions on placement portfolio, research skills and tutorials.

Politics (Rebecca)

1) Essays and exams; group projects and presentations

2) VLE, rarely written feedback

3) Revision lectures before exams, study skills seminars

English and Comparative Writing (Jamie)

1) Essays, creative work and exams; performative assessments; presentations; dissertation

2) Comments and feedback provided, mostly written feedback

3) Book sessions with professionals, academic writing sessions, study skills sessions, being able to look at past exam questions, dissertation supervision

Psychology (Muhammad)

1) Exams in summer term (mostly); coursework essays, lab reports,

2) The feedback is mostly given via the VLE (Turnitin)

3) Mentor groups, revision lectures, tutorials, example

Visual Cultures (Hanouska)

1) Online/written feedback is currently the only standard feedback method available to post graduate visual cultures students, with individual tutorials available generally upon request.

2) VLE and also written feedback

3) Tutorials can be arranged

For GLEU (Ceiren)

- 1) The assessment consists of individually negotiated written work for each of the 4 modules on the pg cert. This gives the students maximum flexibility to choose their topics. There are essays, case studies and a small research project with data collection, so varied innovative assessment is used.
- 2) They receive both written and face to face feedback on their work, in tutorials.
- 3) Feedback can be provided for all draft work

For CELAW: (Ceiren)

- 1) Presentations, researched essays, exams,.
- 2) Written feedback and from this year on also
- 3) The nature of our department is that our full time programmes are for International students whose first language is not English and who require a preparatory year before proceeding to either undergraduate or postgraduate study. As such preparation for assessments is in-built into the teaching. Our department also offers all Goldsmiths students one-to-one tutorials with two Royal Literary Fellows. Students can book a 1-2-1 appointment of 45 mins duration where they are able to get guidance on improving their writing skills.

Anthropology: (William)

- 1) Coursework essays, presentations, reports, exmas, film or sound pieces, portfolios, dissertation
- 2) VLE and written feedback
- 3) Revision sessions before exams, study skills sessions

Education: (William)

- 1) The departments use assignments, examinations, presentations and portfolio's for assessment purposes
- 2) On the VLE
- 3) Additional classes to help with assessments; help with the dissertation module. Students are welcome to book

All students can book slots with their personal tutor or head of year to discuss any issues they are having with regards to assessments .

Student are also emailed regarding any sessions the PAL teams have set up with room numbers

Design : (Rebecca)

- 1) Coursework, presentations/vivas or exhibitions, sketchbooks and journals.
- 2) In person (during studio sessions and tutorials or directly following presentations); written feedback.
- 3) Students receive tutorial support to support their work for assessments.

History : (Muhammad)

1 Summative assessments: exams; essays; dissertations; blogs; video film; reflective journal; exhibition; scrapbook, book reviews.

Formative assessment - Presentations, draft essays; group work, mock exam

2 Via the VLE.

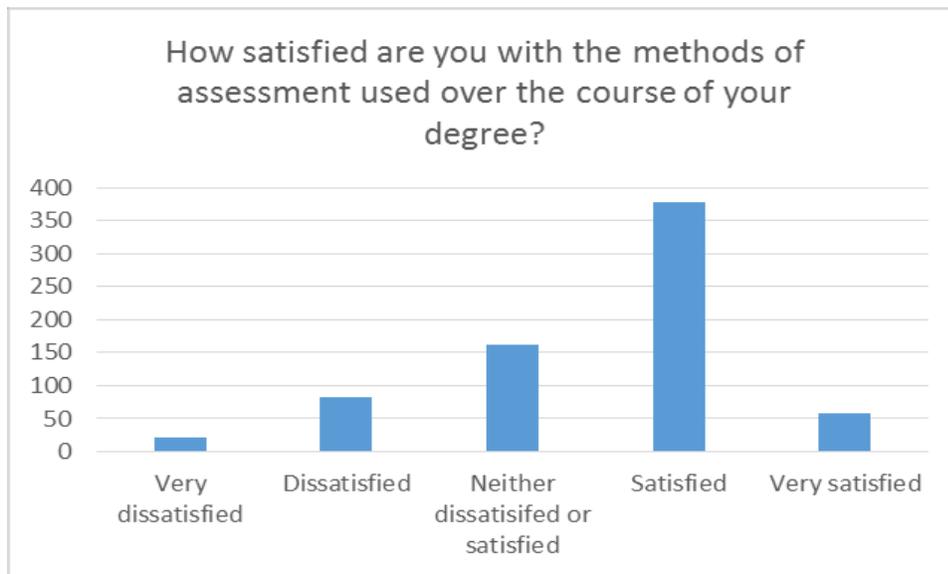
3 Discuss work with personal tutors

NB: Not all the departments' responses or information have been included due to various issues eg. communication problems.

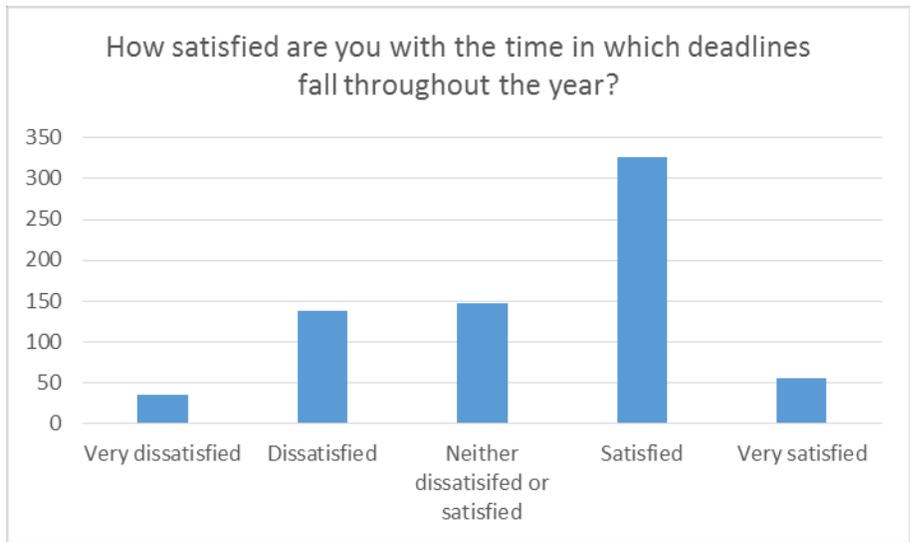
Conclusion and table of recommendations

Overall the survey shows that students are quite positive about the topic assessment and feedback. However, the positive response rate was not 100%, therefore there are particular areas of improvement.

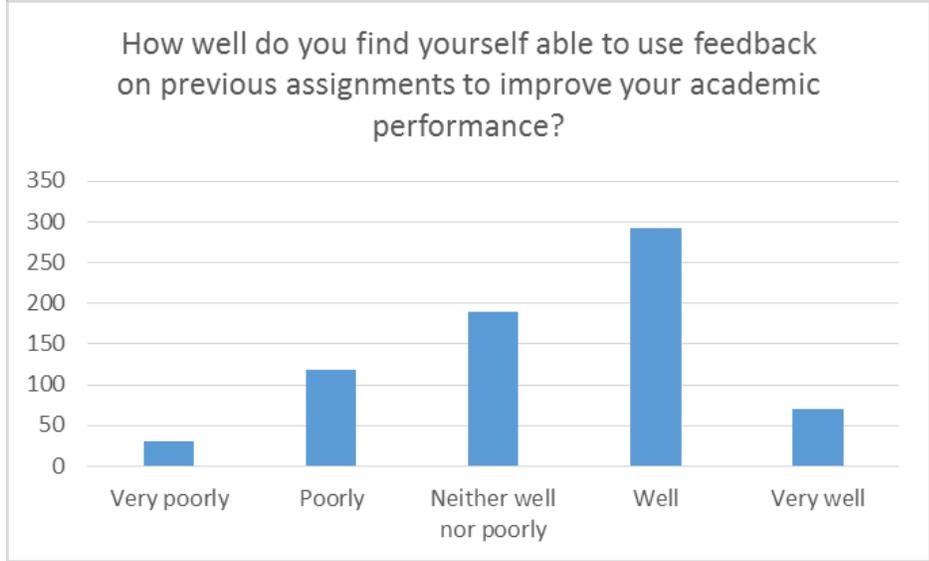
Over half of the people that fulfilled the survey have said that they are satisfied with the ways how they are assessed.



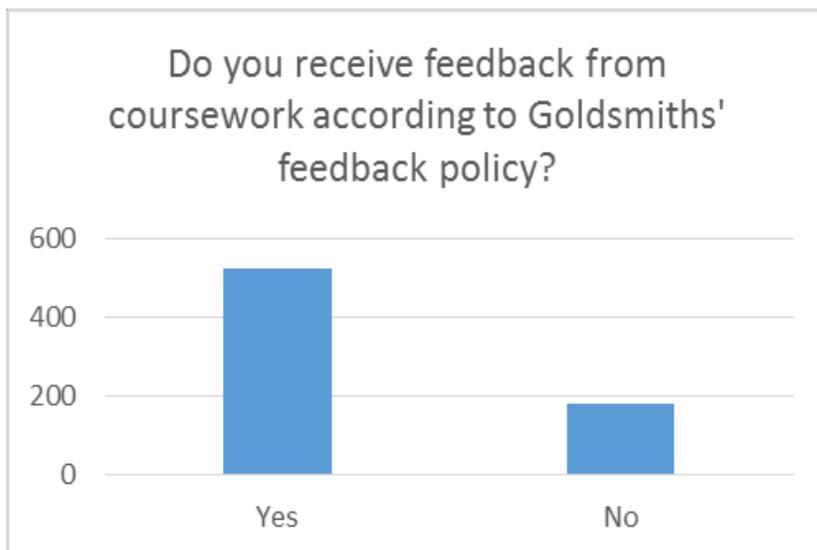
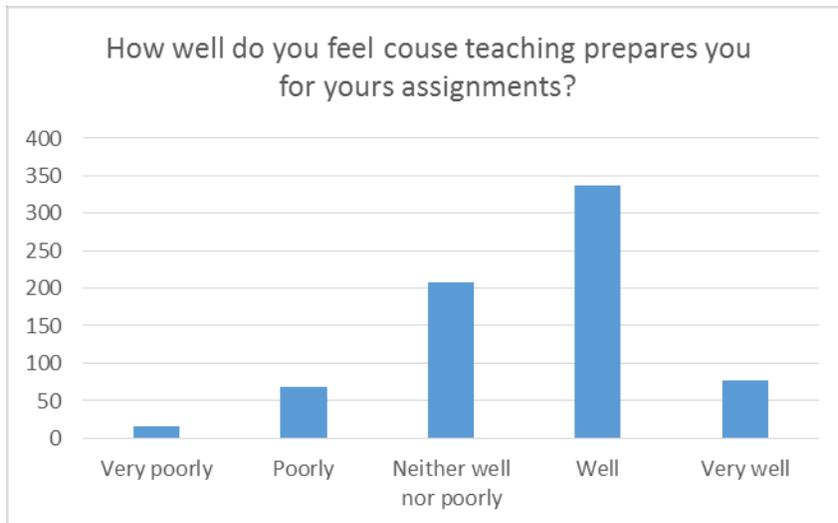
Students are not happy about how the deadlines are spread across their year, with a negative response rate of 23%.



Over 50% respondents think that the feedback they get is helpful and guiding them towards better marks and improvement for the next assessment.



The largest positive comment part was received when asked whether teaching prepares students well for assessment and 60% of students said 'Yes'



It is overall noticeable that some departments lack diversity of assessment, mostly for marked work it is essays, however, it would be better to enable a mix of assessed work, eg. a shorter essay with a journal etc.

Students feel like they are not being encouraged enough to go to the tutorials. Tutorials can be helpful but are found to be too short. It would be great to have more tutorials before big deadlines

Students have said that they would like to get a mock mark for their coursework essays, so that they know before submitting the actual examined essay, what mark they are on. First years find it confusing to use the 'Turnitin' system and think that they are not being briefed enough about submissions at the start of the year.

To encourage students to participate in seminars a good idea would be to give some weight of the final mark according to the participation in seminars.

Revision sessions before exams are crucial to prepare people better, therefore encouraging departments to do so during the last weeks of term is key.

There have also been complaints about inconsistency in feedback within the department – when getting the feedback the student should be able to understand what positive and also negative aspects were there in the piece of work to ensure better understanding about how to improve and what is being done right.

Students are very happy if study skills sessions are organized by the department during 1st year Autumn term, so that they can get insight about how to structure a good essay, how to reference etc.

Recommendations:

- Organise study skills sessions for students regarding information about essay writing, referencing and time keeping
- Ensure that there are not multiple essay deadlines on the same day
- For Autumn deadlines : either push them back for after Christmas holidays or before (when term ends)
- Check whether the guidelines for marking are the same for more consistent feedback
- Encourage markers to provide not only negative feedback, but also emphasise positive points
- Assess students not by only essays and exams, but introduce different forms of assessment such as presentations and creative work
- Encourage markers to give detailed feedback for the student to know which points exactly need improving