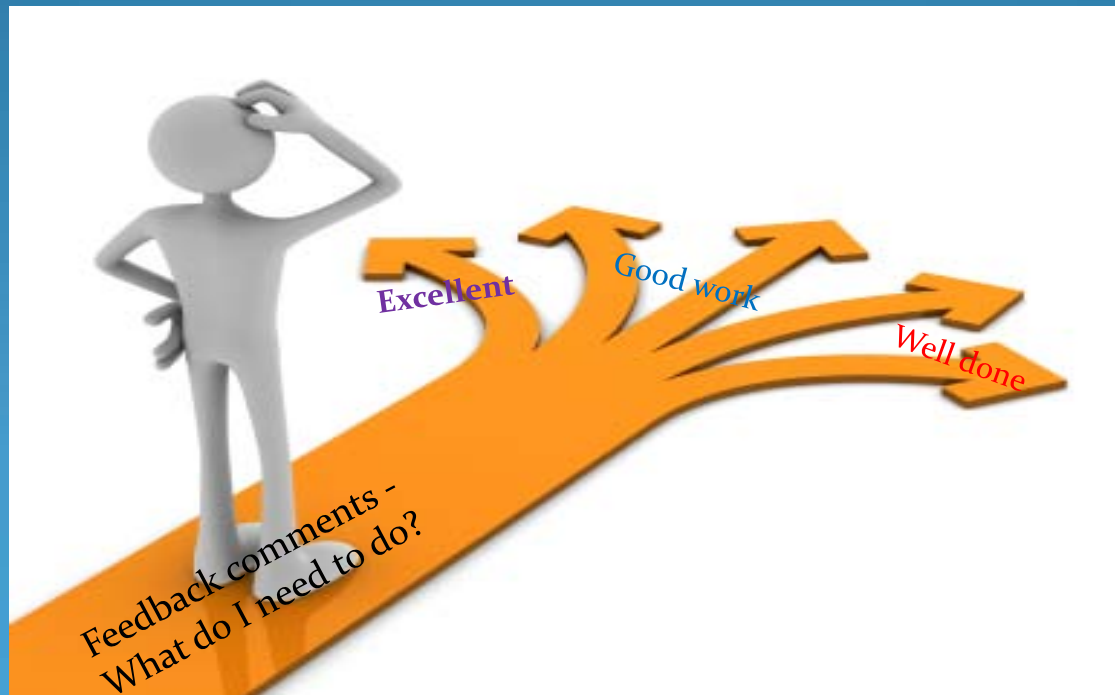


Using effective feedback to enhance the achievement of vocational business students:

LSRN Conference: 25th November 2010



Aims of the Study

- To examine student's perception of assessment feedback in the business studies department (learner voice).
- To establish whether there is a correlation between feedback and achievement from student's perspective
- To establish how feedback can contribute to profound subject knowledge and independent learning - both are essential features of Task Based Learning (A new initiative introduced by the college).

Rationale

- Student achievement is a major strategic issue influencing policy decisions in further education due to its close link with funding. Funding is based on a course, class or group and individual student's ability to meet learning objectives within a time-scale.
- This method of funding encourages colleges to enrol more students on programmes, retain students until completion of their studies and reward achievement.
- Student / Assessment feedback is an area identified for improvement in the business studies department during the recent Ofsted inspection (Ofsted report, 2010, p.7).
- The population and learning needs of students in the department is quite diverse retention and achievement is a perennial problem. Previous studies have confirmed that assessment is crucial to retention and feedback has a huge impact on this (Hattie and Timperley, 2007).

Theoretical perspective

- Most of the studies conducted to date on effective feedback and student achievement have applied different theoretical contexts.
- This was a small scale study which followed an interpretive paradigm to capture and interpret the student's perspective on written feedback. The objective is to understand the meaning from the student point of view (learner voice). According to Creswell (2007), this approach enables the researcher to find out what is happening and why it is happening.

Methodology

- Qualitative analysis: Interviews were conducted with 4 groups of students (there were approximately 20 students in each cohort). The students were interviewed by members of staff who didn't teach the group. The objective was to elicit as much information as possible in a non controlling way.
- Quantitative analysis: questionnaires were distributed to 100 students (approval was given by the college to conduct the study)
- Students were chosen across 3 levels (1-3) (80% responded).

Rationale for Using Research Tools

- The reason for using both questionnaires and group interviews was to obtain different perspectives from the students and to examine data trends:

The key questions asked during the survey:

- Did students have the opportunity to discuss their work with the teacher?
- How effective feedback could influence their achievement?
- The type of feedback given, was it specific or generic?

Demographic information regarding respondents

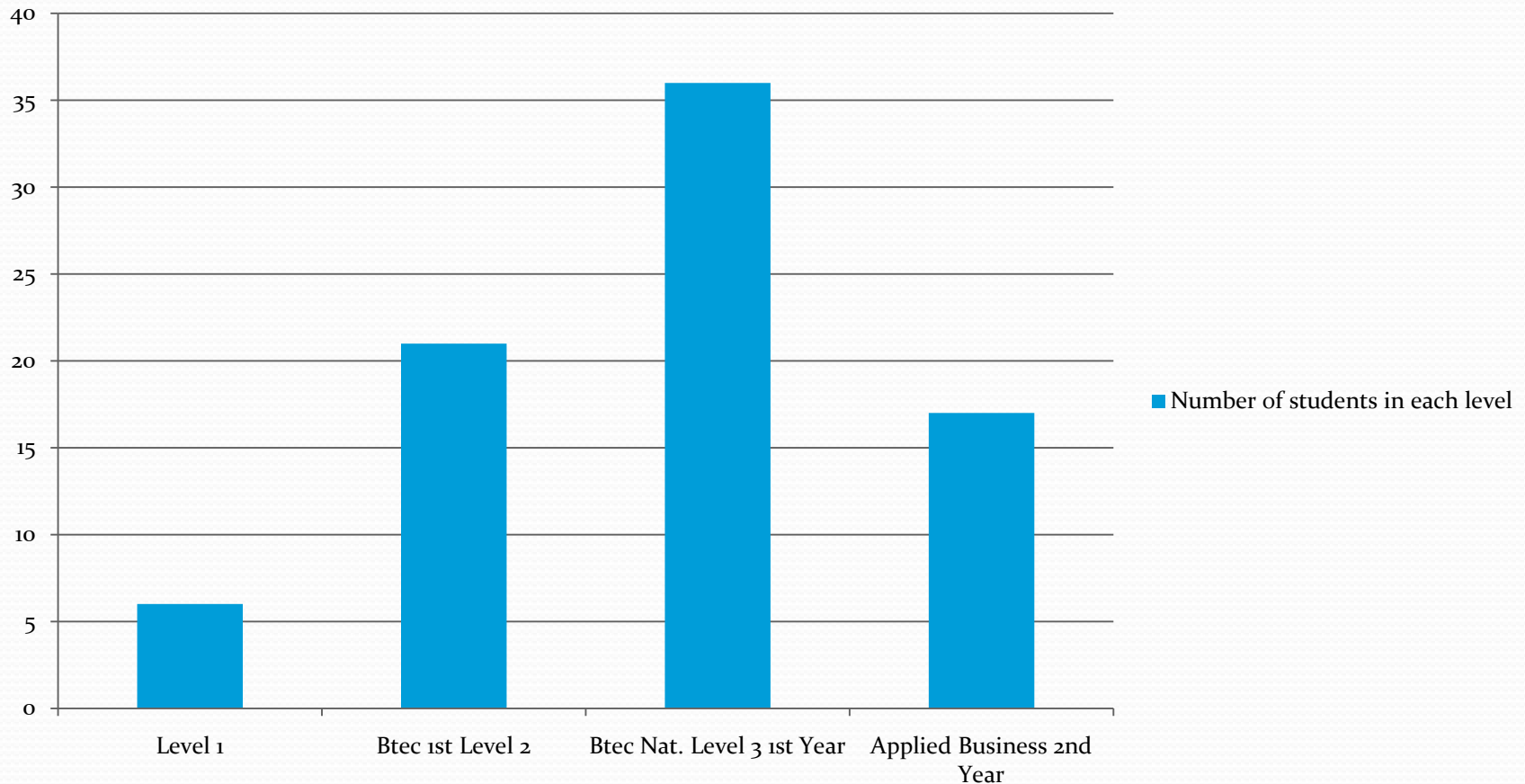
Gender

Male	38	48%
Female	42	52%
	<hr/>	
	80	100%

Age Group

16-18	56	70%
19 and Over	24	30%
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	80	100%

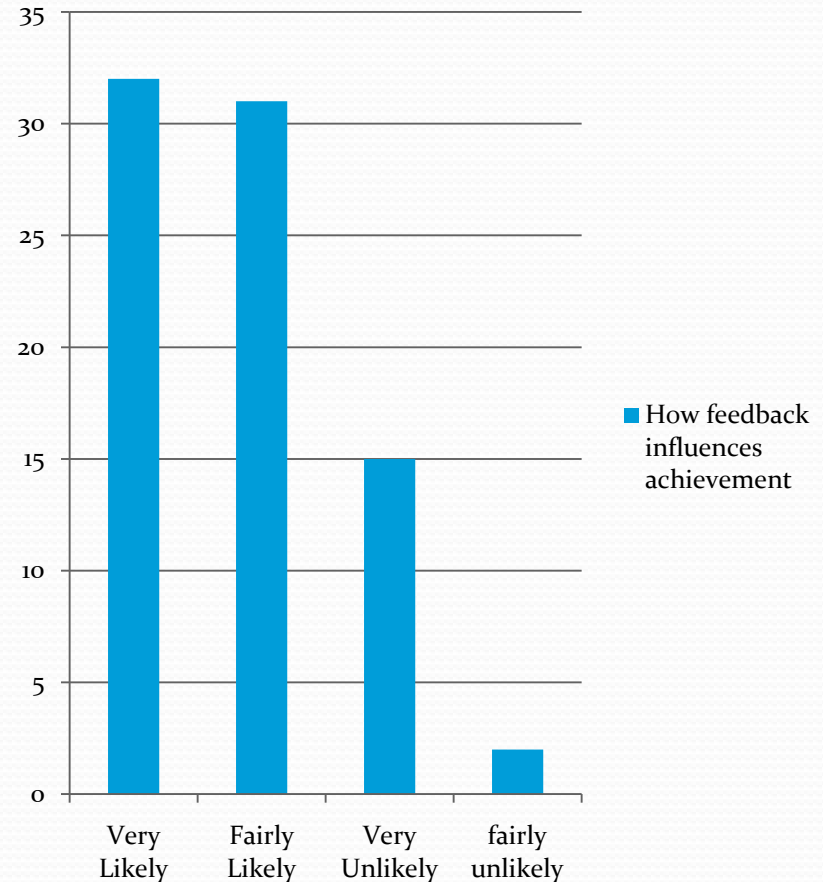
Students across all levels in the business department who took part in the survey





Findings

- Students believe that feedback can influence their achievement: 63% of the students confirmed this.
- 69% of the students confirmed that they only focused on the grade.

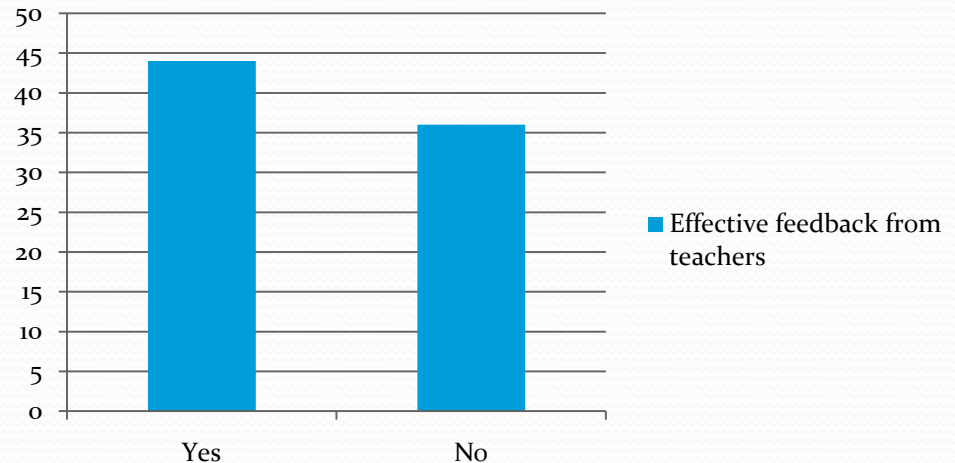


Findings

There was a positive correlation between all 3 levels and type of feedback received. The table shows a Pearson correlation of 0.41. This indicates that some students find feedback from their teachers useful and can use it to enhance their grades irrespective of levels. 36 said no (45% of the population) 44 said yes (55% of the population)

Correlations			
		teacher feedback is usually helpful	programme level
teacher feedback is usually helpful	Pearson Correlation	1	.041
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.720
	N	80	80
programme level	Pearson Correlation	.041	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.720	
	N	80	80

Students response to teacher feedback



Findings

The views of students differ regarding the type of feedback they have received. 31 students confirmed that feedback has been specific and 49 students think that feedback is generic.

In applying a χ^2 analysis (chi-square) to these data (where $n=80$), there was no statistical difference between the views of male and female students ($\chi^2=1.093$)

Count		type of feedback given		Total
		specific	general	
gender	male	17	21	38
	female	14	28	42
Total		31	49	80

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.093 ^a	1	.296		



Recommendations

- The learning needs of students in the department is quite diverse and include a high percentage of passive learners who are very dependent and expect support from their teachers. Such students should be encouraged to have one to one feedback. (One of the teaching sessions could be used for this purpose). Motivating a student toward better performance requires detail feedback (Ackerman and Gross,2010).
- Students should be encouraged to read feedback comments to check understanding. Clear instruction on how to make use of feedback comments should be provided (Rae and Cochrane,2008). Majority of Students are likely to have difficulties interpreting the comments (Osmond and Merry, 2010).
- Giving specific feedback would initiate a learning conversation between the student and the teacher. Engaging in such dialogue enhances the overall quality of student's educational, personal and professional development (Partington,1993). Learning conversation can form the basis for skills development and can be used to develop an action plan. According to Sadler (1983), feedback can only be effective if it focuses on growth rather than grading.
- Showing exemplar pieces of work to students would help set the required standard. This would also close the gap between what the students know and what they are expected to know (Juwah et al 2004).
- Assessment item and criteria need to be clearly presented and communicated.



Recommendations

- Students with higher abilities should not be given minimal feedback.
- Use more assessment sandwich advocated by Brown (2006)
- Allow two to three weeks window to return assessed work with specific comments.
- Encourage students to comment on / evaluate their own work. This enables them to manage their learning (essential for Task based learning) and can also influence how students feel about themselves (Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick, 2006). Encouraging students to evaluate their work can promote lifelong learning skills (Osmond and Merry, 2010). The lecturer can motivate and encourage them to achieve this vital skill.
- Most students confirmed that they do not read the feedback comments. Therefore, marks should be given incrementally (allow one resubmission).
- Use email frequently as a method of giving feedback. Improves feedback delivery and communication (Rae and Cochrane, 2008).
- Feedback should be provided within the learning environment. This could be the classroom or anywhere that learning normally takes place.

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For Listening