



Faculty: Medicine

Department: Faculty of Medicine Centre

Programme: BSc Medical Biosciences

Level: Undergraduate

From Receiving to Using Feedback: Building Students' Feedback Literacy

1. Context and rationale:

The BSc Medical Biosciences (BMB) is an undergraduate programme in the Faculty of Medicine. Active learning approaches are central to the BMB's learning experience. Within higher education, feedback is a key mechanism for promoting learning, professional development, and academic success. However, students often require support to engage meaningfully with feedback and to use it to improve future work, particularly those transitioning to higher education. Developing students' feedback literacy encourages a proactive approach to feedback, enabling them to evaluate, interpret, and act upon feedback to enhance their learning. In doing so, students become increasingly self-regulated learners who take ownership of their academic development (Khuder, B, 2025). Equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and strategies needed for effective feedback engagement can maximise learning opportunities, reduce misconceptions about feedback processes, improve student satisfaction, and contribute positively to measures such as the National Student Survey (NSS).

With particular emphasis on first-year students transitioning into higher education, we designed feedback literacy sessions to support students:

- Differentiate between feedback practices and expectations in secondary education and higher education.
- Identify and analyse barriers that may hinder effective engagement with feedback.
- Recognise and develop strategies for the emotional responses associated with receiving and using feedback.
- Interpret and apply assessment support materials, marking criteria, and feedback comments to improve academic performance.
- Develop and implement practical strategies for managing, prioritising, and acting upon feedback.
- Reflect on and monitor their use of feedback to support ongoing learning and academic development.
- Use feedback constructively to inform future assessments and enhance self-regulated learning skills.
- Identify strategies to promote engagement, meaning-making and long-term use of feedback.

Feedback literacy session anatomy

The feedback literacy resources consist of two components that help students understand and effectively use feedback.

Component 1: Online learning materials (MedLearn)

The first component consists of online resources hosted on MedLearn. These materials introduce the key principles of feedback literacy, including the purpose of feedback, strategies for engaging with feedback comments, and practical approaches for applying feedback to future work. The online content is made available from Welcome Week, enabling students to access the resources early in the academic year and build a foundational understanding of feedback before they begin receiving assessment



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feedback. Students can access these resources throughout the academic year, allowing them to review at their convenience.

Component 2: Face-to-Face (F2F) workshop-style sessions

The second component consists of F2F, workshop-style sessions delivered later in the term. These sessions are interactive and include practical, hands-on activities that support students in engaging with and interpreting their own feedback.

Together, the two components are complementary: the online materials establish students' understanding of key concepts, while the subsequent F2F workshops provide opportunities to practise and apply these skills in a supported environment using their own feedback.

Although the online resources are available from Welcome Week, engagement with them is not a prerequisite for attending the F2F sessions. As a result, students may arrive at the workshops with varying levels of prior exposure to feedback literacy concepts. To ensure all students can participate meaningfully in the practical activities, key principles of feedback literacy are embedded within the F2F sessions. The workshops therefore combine the introduction and reinforcement of core concepts with hands-on activities that support students in interpreting, reflecting on, and applying their own feedback.

2. Description of the intervention:

The feedback literacy sessions are timed at strategic points during the academic year. For Year 1 BMB students, session 1 follows students' receipt of formative feedback on their first assignment, while the second session is at the end of the academic year and aims to consolidate feedback-engagement practices and develop lifelong strategies. For Year 2 BMB students, there is a single feedback literacy session integrated within a core module, which allows students to thoroughly analyse a piece of formative feedback.

All sessions are designed to be interactive, incorporating a range of hands-on practical exercises, with anonymised feedback excerpts and rubrics to support students in developing effective feedback-

engagement skills.

Year 1

Session 1: Understanding and engaging with feedback

The first session introduces students to the concept of feedback literacy through guided discussion and reflective activities.

Students explore differences in feedback practices across various educational settings, providing an opportunity to discuss expectations for feedback engagement in higher education. Emphasis is placed on the more nuanced nature of feedback in university settings, where students are expected to take greater responsibility for their learning, engage critically with feedback, and develop skills in self-monitoring and self-regulation. One of the activities in the session aims to raise awareness of common barriers to engaging with feedback, such as emotional responses, lack of confidence, uncertainty about how to act on comments, or focusing solely on grades. An outline of the activity is provided below:

Activity - Feedback Engagement Activity: Exploring Students' Experiences with Feedback

This activity encourages students to reflect on authentic experiences of feedback, identify common barriers to effective engagement, and develop practical strategies for making better use of feedback in their own learning.

Activity Overview

Students are presented with a selection of short quotes or excerpts that reflect different student experiences of receiving feedback. Working in pairs, students select one or more quotes and discuss the questions below:

Discussion Questions

1. What challenges are depicted in the quote that might prevent the student from engaging effectively with the feedback?
2. What advice would you give the student to help overcome these challenges and make productive use of the feedback?

Following the pair discussion, key themes are shared with the wider group to identify common patterns and effective approaches to feedback engagement.



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Students are also invited to reflect on the role of emotions in receiving and responding to feedback, considering how emotional responses can impede engagement if not recognised and managed effectively. Students are then provided with examples of strategic approaches to engaging with feedback and managing emotions.

The session also introduces the concept of the feedback loop. As part of this, students complete activities that demonstrate how assessment rubrics can be used to interpret and contextualise feedback. Students work with formative feedback they have received from one teaching module, categorising comments into meaningful groups to make it more manageable and actionable.

Session 2: Feedback Management and Application

The second session focuses on practical approaches to organising, analysing, and applying feedback.

Students are introduced to a range of feedback categorisation tools, including tagging systems, colour-coding methods, and skills-based classification frameworks. Using exemplar feedback, students apply these techniques to identify patterns and priorities within feedback comments.

The session also introduces the concept of a feedback portfolio, a central repository for feedback collected across modules and assessments. Students learn about the usefulness of a feedback portfolio, particularly for identifying recurring themes that can inform their future learning and assessment performance.

This session also includes a panel discussion with Year 3 BMB students, offering an opportunity to explore the longer-term value of feedback. Panellists discuss how feedback skills translate into professional environments and share their individual approaches to engaging with, organising, and applying feedback throughout their studies.

Year 2

Session: Feedback Analysis and Action Planning

The Year 2 session is embedded within a core teaching module and is closely aligned with assessment activities.

Students work directly with the formative feedback received on a lab report. Through structured activities, they categorise feedback comments, identify priority areas for development, and create a targeted action plan outlining how the feedback will be used to improve their subsequent summative assessment.

This approach supports students in moving beyond simply receiving feedback towards actively interpreting, prioritising, and implementing feedback to enhance future performance.

A detailed plan for this session is outlined below.

Year 2 Session Plan

Engaging with feedback from a formative assessment of writing a scientific report for the Lab Pod 2 module

Assessment & Formative Feedback Design Module

The Lab Pod 2 is a Year 2 core module, requiring students to undertake a hypothesis-driven project in teams of six, supervised by Teaching Fellows assigned to individual teams. The module spans the entire academic year and is assessed with a Technique Theory exam (10%), an Experimental Planning exam (40%) and an in-course assessment (ICA), which consists of a written scientific report, accounting for 50% of the total module mark.

Assessment Type

The F2F session focuses on the formative assessment for the ICA, which involves a scientific report structured with the key sections typical of a primary research article. This formative assessment is linked to a summative assessment that evaluates students' ability to write up their research project as a scientific report.

Feedback Format

For the formative assessment, students receive detailed written feedback for each discrete section of the report, along with an overarching summary comment and a student-requested feedback component.

Student-requested feedback: A distinctive feature of this feedback design is the inclusion of a student-initiated feedback component. Students are invited



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to identify and request feedback on up to three specific aspects of the report that they found particularly challenging during the writing process. This mechanism is intentionally designed—it positions students as active participants in the feedback process and fosters a sense of ownership.

Purpose & Rationale

The F2F session is designed to support students in meaningfully engaging with formative feedback on their scientific report by equipping them with practical strategies for interpreting, prioritising, and acting on feedback. By embedding structured feedback engagement within the Lab Pod 2 curriculum, this initiative contextualises the feedback and seeks to reduce the gap between providing and acting on feedback by dedicating specific time for students to engage with it.

The session aims to:

- To support students in actively engaging with written formative feedback rather than passively receiving it.
- Introduce practical categorisation tools to help students break down feedback into manageable and actionable components and prioritise comments to act on.
- Foster peer learning by creating opportunities for students to share feedback with one another, offering alternative perspectives and reinforcing that peers are a valuable source of support.

Session logistics

Group size: Lab Pod 2 teams of 6 students

Session duration: 50 minutes

Platform: Feedback is accessed via Turnitin

Staff support: Teaching Fellows on the module who are also the assigned supervisors

Session structure

Pre-Session preparation: Students are asked to read through all their feedback before attending the session to make the most of the F2F time and have an overall orientation of their feedback.

Overview of the F2F session

1. Introduction – feedback categorisation tools
2. Part 1 - Structured individual engagement involves offering students a clear framework and dedicated time to process feedback systematically.
3. Part 2- Peer dialogue leverages the social dimension of learning to broaden interpretive perspectives and normalise engagement with feedback.
4. Part 3 - Expert facilitation enables Teaching Fellows to clarify, contextualise, and extend students' understanding of feedback in real time.
5. Consolidation – guidelines on how to continue engaging with feedback independently in the future.

F2F Session delivery

Introduction - Feedback categorisation tools (5 minutes)

To support students in organising and prioritising their feedback, two complementary categorisation tools are introduced during the session. These tools were selected to offer students a choice of approach, accommodating different learning preferences and levels of prior experience with feedback engagement.

Tool 1 – Simple categorisation framework

A three-part framework designed to be accessible and straightforward, particularly for students new to structured feedback engagement:

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Category	Description
What did you do well?	Strengths and positive feedback to be acknowledged and maintained in future work
What can be improved?	Areas identified for development in the summative submission
Action plan	Concrete, specific steps the student will take to address areas for improvement

Tool 2 — Feedback Matrix Framework

A more nuanced four-quadrant framework that encourages deeper critical engagement with feedback:

Category	Description
Habituate it	Feedback reflecting consistent strengths — behaviours to embed as standard practice
Celebrate it	Particularly commendable elements worthy of explicit acknowledgement
Explore it	Feedback requiring further investigation, clarification or contextualisation
Act on it	Clear, prioritised actions to implement directly in the summative assessment

Part 1: Individual Reading and Categorisation (10 minutes)

Students begin the session with a period of independent engagement with their feedback:

1. Students access their written feedback comments via Turnitin
2. Given the time constraints of the session, students are directed to select one section of the report on which to focus
3. Students apply their chosen categorisation tool to the feedback comments for that section, organising comments into the relevant categories

Part 2: Peer Group Discussion (10 minutes)

Students share their reflections within their teams of six:

1. Each student is invited to share one to two feedback comments from their selected section with the group
2. While discussing, students should consider:
 - What new insights or alternative approaches does hearing others' feedback offer?
 - Are there common themes or patterns emerging across the group's feedback?
 - Where differences exist, what might account for them and what can be learned from them?

Students may opt not to share their specific feedback comments; in such cases, they are encouraged to share themes and contribute to discussions.

Part 3: Supervisor-Facilitated Discussion (15 minutes)

The assigned Teaching Fellow supervisor engages directly with each group to:

- Facilitate discussion of the themes that have emerged from the group discussion
- Clarify feedback comments that students have found ambiguous, confusing or difficult to interpret
- Support students in identifying priority areas to focus on in their summative submission

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Consolidation & Independent Follow-Up (10 minutes)

Following the session, students are provided with clear guidance on how to continue engaging with their feedback independently:

- Extend the categorisation process to the remaining sections of the report, applying the same framework used during the session
- Prioritise feedback strategically, recognising that not all comments will be actionable within the timeframe of the summative submission
- Pay particular attention to student-requested feedback, reflecting on whether the additional guidance received addresses their identified areas of difficulty
- Consult assessment rubrics and marking criteria to contextualise and interpret feedback comments more effectively
- Contact their supervisor directly if further clarification is required following the session

3. Impact:

Each session is evaluated using an end-of-session survey. The post-session survey responses indicate that students valued the sessions for providing opportunities to revisit and reflect on their feedback, receive practical guidance on engaging with feedback, and hear insights from third-year students who shared their experiences and advice, which they found authentic.

Some of the specific student comments on what they found helpful from each Year 1 session are provided below:

Session 1: “Going to rubric/ feedback loop/assessing feedback along with the rubric” ; “Reflecting on emotion and understand feedback is useful”; “Reviewing MCB feedback with a new perspective at the end”; “Looking at formative work in context of this session”

Session 2: “The panel questions with the 3rd year students was super insightful”; “Hearing the third years’ experiences, how they handled the feedback throughout their time at Imperial “; “The idea of a feedback journal”; “Learning how to categorise

feedback”; “It really inspired me to take an active role in looking for feedback”.

4. Challenges and lessons learned:

Challenge: Low Attendance at standalone feedback literacy sessions

A key challenge encountered with the feedback literacy sessions has been the consistently low attendance at the standalone Year 1 sessions. A possible explanation is that students perceive themselves to already possess adequate feedback literacy skills and therefore do not recognise an immediate need for additional support. Although these sessions are scheduled in the timetable, students perhaps do not perceive them as core teaching sessions and are reluctant to travel to campus solely for this purpose. Students may struggle to understand what feedback literacy means, and they do not always appreciate the value of feedback as a learning tool.

Actions Taken

Several approaches have been implemented to improve attendance and engagement. These have included:

- Scheduling the sessions on the same day as other teaching activities to increase convenience for students.
- Promoting the sessions through programme communications and student bulletins.
- Highlighting the benefits of feedback engagement and the development of feedback literacy skills within advertising materials.
- Renaming the sessions from the generic title ‘Feedback Literacy ‘ to a more descriptive name that is self-explanatory and accurately reflects their content.

Despite these efforts, attendance has remained lower than anticipated, suggesting that logistical adjustments alone are insufficient to drive student participation.

Lessons Learned

Experience from delivering these sessions has highlighted the importance of timing, relevance, and perceived value in student engagement. Students



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appear more likely to engage with feedback literacy activities when they can clearly see the impact of these activities on current assessments and their relevance to their academic development needs.

The low attendance suggests that students may not fully appreciate the benefits of feedback literacy sessions until they have received and reflected on their own assessment feedback. This reinforces the need to situate feedback literacy activities at points in the curriculum where students can immediately apply the concepts and strategies being discussed. This is consistent with previous literature suggesting that contextualised study skills resources enhance student motivation, promote metacognitive engagement, and facilitate the transfer of learning to new contexts (Hattie, Biggs and Purdie, 1996)

Future Developments

Future iterations of the sessions will seek to enhance relevance and engagement by:

- Scheduling the sessions during less busy times in the academic term to minimise overlap with other academic commitments.
- Delivering the sessions after students receive their first summative assessment feedback instead of formative feedback.
- Linking feedback literacy activities to assessments, such as oral presentations that recur at multiple points within and across academic years, creates meaningful opportunities for students to apply feedback to subsequent tasks and reflect on their progress. Encouraging students to maintain a feedback portfolio further supports this process by enabling them to document feedback, track actions taken, and evidence their development over time. Focusing on progress against each student's previous performance will help students recognise their achievements, build confidence in their abilities, and develop stronger self-regulation, feedback engagement, and assessment literacy skills.
- Emphasising the practical value of feedback engagement as a tool for continuous improvement and academic progression.

By strengthening the connection between feedback

literacy activities and students' immediate assessment tasks, it is anticipated that students will better recognise the value of the sessions and be more motivated to attend and engage actively.

5. Transferable tips:

Embed feedback literacy within the curriculum.

Developing feedback literacy is an ongoing learning process rather than a one-off intervention. Integrating feedback literacy building activities within modules and assessment design can help students see feedback engagement as a normal and valuable part of their learning journey, rather than as an additional standalone activity. For example, these sessions can be embedded within a core module delivered across multiple terms, providing repeated opportunities for students to engage with feedback literacy resources, use these resources to interpret and act on feedback, apply feedback to their assessments, and reflect on outcomes. This structured and iterative approach promotes a continuous cycle of learning, development, and improvement. Its effectiveness can be evaluated through confidence surveys administered at the start, midpoint, and end of the module, measuring students' confidence in using feedback literacy resources to engage with, apply, and benefit from feedback in their assessments.

Ensure relevance and clear purpose. Students are more likely to engage with feedback literacy initiatives when they understand their purpose and can see a direct connection to their academic success. Explicitly communicating how the skills developed will support assessment performance, future learning, and professional practice can increase motivation and participation.

For example, when a module incorporates an ipsative feedback approach, feedback literacy sessions can help students engage more meaningfully and proactively with feedback. By supporting students to interpret, act on, and reflect upon feedback, these sessions strengthen feedback engagement as a core element of the assessment process. Tracking progress against each student's previous performance shifts the focus from comparison with peers to individual



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growth, enabling students to recognise their development over time, build confidence in their learning, and develop greater self-regulation and assessment literacy.

Align sessions with assessment timelines.

Scheduling feedback literacy activities or signposting at key points in the assessment cycle, such as shortly after feedback is released and before subsequent assessments, enables students to apply strategies immediately and reinforces the value of engagement with feedback. For example, when feedback is released, explicitly signposting students to the programme's core feedback literacy resources can encourage more effective engagement with feedback. By highlighting the practical tools and guidance available, students are reminded that support is readily accessible, helping them feel more confident and empowered to engage with feedback constructively and independently.

Provide opportunities for practical application.

Multiple opportunities for activities that require students to analyse, categorise, prioritise, and act upon their own feedback can help bridge the gap between understanding feedback and using it to improve future performance. Practical opportunities for feedback application can be embedded throughout a module by designing activities that require students to actively use feedback to improve future work. For example, students could complete a feedback action plan identifying how they will address key feedback points in their next assessment, submit a brief reflective statement explaining how previous feedback informed their approach, or participate in a workshop in which they revise sections of an earlier assignment based on feedback received. By moving beyond simply receiving feedback and providing structured opportunities to act upon it, this approach positions feedback as an integral part of the learning process and supports sustained academic development.

Evaluate impact and drive continuous enhancement.

Regularly gathering student perspectives on feedback literacy sessions can provide valuable insights into their effectiveness and inform ongoing improvements. For example, end-of-session Mentimeter-based short surveys, short reflective activities, or module

evaluations can capture students' experiences of the session and perceptions of content value. Reviewing this feedback alongside engagement data—such as attendance at feedback literacy sessions, using analytics to track use of feedback resources, or completion of feedback action plans—can help identify strengths and areas for development. Using these insights to refine and enhance feedback literacy activities ensures that the approach remains relevant, effective, and responsive to evolving student needs.

References

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