**Timely Feedback Policy Guidance Document**

Guidance from the Dean for Taught Students, August 2022 - Timely Feedback Policy

Assessment and feedback are an essential part of the student experience and fundamental to the learning process; helping to promote learning and assuring academic standards and quality. The University's policy relating to feedback states that it should promote effective learning and support the academic development of students. It should also be formative, enabling students to learn from the comments received to address weaknesses and build on strengths, whilst being rigorous and impartial. The policy also requires students to be informed about how and when feedback will be received. Feedback should be given whilst the assessment/submission is still at the forefront of students' minds, and they are better able to understand the feedback, and learn the lessons to be applied in future work. The sooner students receive feedback after submitting work, the more effective it is for their learning.

Therefore, the Students' Guild/ Students' Union and the University of Exeter continue to see as a priority the turnaround of assessed work within 15 working days. The 2021 NSS results showed that satisfaction with the quality, quantity and/or timeliness of feedback had declined year-on-year over a five-year period; with a decline to 60.6% for the assessment and feedback section of the survey. There was a small improvement in the 2022 NSS results with the assessment and feedback section results rising to 61.9%, but it was our second-worst questionnaire category (behind Student Voice), and Question 10 ('Feedback on my work has been timely') had the worst results within that. It is crucial that there is an impactful commitment across all Faculties and Departments in the 2022/23 academic year; in order that we deliver the very best educational experience for our students.

***The key principles regarding feedback are:***

1) All feedback on assessment ought to be formative, even in the case of summative assessments (i.e. providing assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning). This ensures that students are able to consider and digest comments on their work and subsequently have a realistic opportunity to address weaknesses and build on their academic strengths. A primary focus should be enabling students to improve their performance in the future, whether in forthcoming assessments, in further study, or when faced with comparable tasks in graduate employment.

2) Clear communication of turnaround times and adherence to the times advertised is crucial as part of our moral contract with our students. It is essential that staff and students are clear about both the general structure and specific deadlines for individual pieces of work and the timing of feedback. The use of ELE to give students an overview of the year's programme of dates for hand-in and hand-back for each module is clearly best practice.

3) Feedback is to be provided within 15 working days[1], which includes all dates within term time, excluding University closure dates. It is not the expectation that academic staff are required to provide feedback outside of term time, nor is it expected that students should be available to receive feedback outside of term time. The exception to this is non-standard programmes with teaching and submission deadlines over the Summer, as well as referrals and deferrals completed in August. The 15 working day turnaround applies to these submissions unless otherwise stipulated by the Faculty. Calculations for feedback deadlines should reflect this principle in alignment with those set out below. A spreadsheet with dates is attached with this message to indicate the required turnaround dates for assessment submissions on programmes that adhere to standard University term dates, as outlined below.

For coursework submitted within the first two terms, the 15 working day turnaround is a universal requirement (unless, very exceptionally, an exemption has been granted – see question 10).

***Standard University Term Dates 2022/23:***

Autumn Term:               Monday, 26 September 2022 – Friday, 16 December 2022

Spring Term:                Monday, 9 January 2023 – Friday, 31 March 2023

Summer Term:              Monday, 01 May 2023 – Friday, 16 June 2023

4) Feedback can be provided more efficiently when marking criteria are: made clear in advance; specific to the task in-hand; and focused on assessing particular intended learning outcomes (e.g. reference clearly defined knowledge and skills). Feedback should be educative in nature, thereby proving helpful for students going forward. Feedback should justify the mark, thereby demonstrating that the marking and assessment is fair.

***General Queries:***

**Q1: Is it acceptable to return assignment marks to students without feedback, or vice versa?**

A: No. A student's mark is part of their feedback. Part of their feedback should justify the mark.

**Q2: Is a 1st mark acceptable on its own? Or do assessments need to be moderated within 15 working days?**

A: The mark returned should have been internally moderated (but not necessarily subject to External Examiner scrutiny).

**Q3: Does the 15 working day turnaround include time to administer submission of assessment and return to students?**

A: Yes. The 15 working day turnaround starts at the submission deadline and runs to the point when students are able to collect their marks and feedback, no more than 15 working days after the deadline set.

***Vacation[2] Queries:***

Submission dates for assessment submissions on programmes that adhere to standard University term dates should not fall outside of the term time dates indicated above unless exceptions/ mitigating circumstances are to be considered – Q10 and Q13 apply.

**Q4: How strict is the Timely Feedback Policy when considering vacation[2]? Is it 15 working days or 15 term days?**

A: When the work is submitted within two weeks of the start of the vacation[2], the deadline is the **later** date of EITHER:
- 15 working days[1] (defined as weekdays which are not designated university holidays); or
- The Friday at the end of the first week of the following term.

**Q5: Is staff annual leave treated the same as university vacation[2] periods?**

A: No. Work should be returned to students within 15 working days[1]*; staff should plan annual leave around teaching commitments including marking student assessments.*

**Q6: What about work that is scheduled to be submitted over the summer vacation[2] period?**

A: This should be returned to students in a timely manner, within 15 working days[1]. If staff are likely to be on leave and unable to mark and return student work, *then the submission deadline should be set on an appropriate date when staff can dedicate the time to marking and providing feedback.*

*Assessment Queries:*

**Q7: Are examinations included?**

There are two major university examination periods (January and May). For end of module examinations, the marks will require validation by External Examiners and this will determine the mark return period. Dissertations (and research projects designated as equivalent to dissertations) require double blind marking and will also be treated as end of module assessments. In the case of end of module examinations and assessments, there will be a published University-wide results release date (both after the January and May assessment periods and referred/deferred examinations) when marks will be distributed.

For the successful management of ensuring the extremely large bulk volume of examination marks can be recorded, processed and authorised in time for the University-wide results release to students, internal mark return deadlines will be set by Education Support teams. These internal deadlines will cater for elements such as size of cohort to be marked and date the examination was sat, so will vary by assessment. Due to the constraints of the examination and APAC period, the deadlines are likely to be less than 15 working days. These internal deadlines are the key return date for examination marks from academics and for which there should be appropriate planning to complete marking by those dates.

For all other assessments and in-class tests/ examinations, the mark should be returned in a timely fashion, within 15 working days of the original submission date after internal moderation.

**Q8: Are dissertations included?**

A: Dissertations (and research projects designated as equivalent to dissertations) would be treated like end of module examinations. Faculties should make this clear on their module templates for these module types. There will be a publicised results release date following APACs and this is the date when students will get their results/ feedback. Permission for this would not need to be sought from the Dean for Taught Students/ Students' Guild Vice-President Education/ Students' Union President Exeter in advance, provided that the return dates are clearly flagged up to students in advance. The release of marks for postgraduate students submitting dissertations may be delayed beyond the 15 working day deadline where marks need to be confirmed by External Examiners; which may not be possible within that timescale and the mark and feedback will be provided following the APAC meetings.

**Q9: Are PGT assessments included?**

A: Faculties should seek wherever possible to meet a 15 working day deadline; however, the answers to Questions 7 and 8 are also applicable to examinations and dissertations/ research projects on PGT programmes, whereby marks will need to be confirmed by External Examiners before release, which may not be possible within the normal timescale of 15 working days.

### *Exemptions/ Mitigation Queries:*

### Q10: Will you be considering exemptions? If so, on what grounds?

A: Exemptions can be applied for through joint consideration of a case by the Dean for Taught Students and the Students' Guild Vice-President Education/ Students' Union President Exeter. The grounds, as before, would be a case that the practical implications of applying a 15 working day turnaround would damage the pedagogical effectiveness of the marking process and so disadvantage the students. That is the only acceptable ground. Constraints with respect to staff workload should be addressed in advance by the Head of Department and Director of Education and Student Experience and, as noted above, staff should ensure that they plan and diarise marking time when setting assessment dates.

### Q11: Does this apply to assignments submitted during the Summer Term?

A: Where assignments are submitted in the summer term for consideration by an APAC scheduled to take place at the end of the same term, feedback may be returned to students along with the release of marks post-APAC. Where assignments are submitted for consideration by an APAC scheduled later in the year, the timely feedback policy will still apply, unless it is an examination or dissertation/ research project.

### Q12: What happens if a student has been granted an extension via the self-certification or evidence-based mitigation processes?

A:
**Deadline:** The timely feedback deadline will be calculated from the point of the extended submission deadline rather than from the original submission deadline. Work will only be considered to have been returned late if returned more than 15 working days after the extended deadline.
**Good Practice:** In order that students can benefit from timely feedback aligned to the planned module delivery, every reasonable effort should be made to return work on the pre-published feedback date to all students who submit work on the original submission date or within the 15 working days immediately following it. Nevertheless, it is recognised that this may not be possible with regard to submissions for which an extended submission deadline has been approved. This is because of factors, such as (i) the number of students who have been granted an extension; (ii) the length of their extensions, and (iii) the flexibility/capacity of the academic member(s) of staff.

### Q13: What happens if a student submits work late without mitigation?

A:
**Deadline:** By handing in late, without mitigation, the student has forfeited the right to receive feedback within 15 working days. The timely feedback guarantee therefore does not apply to unauthorised late submissions. Notwithstanding this regulation with respect to the guarantee, it is important to recognise that students submitting work late are likely to be experiencing significant disruption to their study that may be outside their control. Furthermore, it is important that staff should return the marks/feedback for unauthorised late submissions by any deadline set by the APAC, and if this is not possible they should inform the Chair of the APAC at the earliest opportunity.

**Good Practice:** In order that students can benefit from feedback aligned to the planned module delivery, staff are encouraged to make every reasonable effort to return work on the pre-published feedback date to all students who submit work on the original submission date or within the three week period immediately following it (including work submitted late without mitigation). Nevertheless, it is recognised that this may not be possible with regard to unauthorised late submissions because of factors, such as (i) the number of students who submit late; (ii) the extent of the delay to their submissions, and (iii) the flexibility/capacity of the academic member(s) of staff. It is expected that it will normally be possible to return work within 6 weeks of the original submission date.

The following table summarises how the policy applies to coursework submitted late (with and without mitigation):

| Submission date | Action by marker | What constitutes a 'late' return |
|---|---|---|
| Original submission date | Return marks/feedback on published feedback date* | Any marks/feedback released more than **15 working days after** the original deadline date |
| Original submission date plus 72 hours under new self-certification mitigation rules | Return marks/feedback on published feedback date if possible, or as soon as possible after that, but within 72 hours | Any marks/feedback released more than **15 working days after** students' **revised (i.e. extended) deadline'** |
| Original submission date plus up to three weeks in exceptional circumstances | Return marks/feedback as soon as possible and no later than 15 working days after the students' revised (i.e. extended) deadline | Any marks/feedback released more than **15 working days after** the students' **revised (i.e. extended) deadline** |
| Coursework submitted late without an authorised extension, but up to 24 hours after the original/revised submission deadline | Return marks/feedback as soon as possible, but this work is not included in the Timely Feedback guarantee. Work submitted up to 24 hours late without an authorised extension will be capped at the pass mark. | Markers should return marks by the **deadline set by the APAC**. (It is expected that it will normally be possible to return work within six weeks of the original submission date.) |

| Coursework submitted late without an authorised extension, and more than 24 hours after the original/revised submission deadline | Return marks/feedback as soon as possible, but this work is not included in the Timely Feedback policy. Work submitted beyond 24 hours without an authorised extension will be capped at zero. | Markers should return marks by the **deadline set by the APAC**. |
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\*Published feedback date is the feedback due date as determined by the Timely Feedback policy.

### Q14: What happens if a significant proportion of students are granted extensions or submit late?

The expectation is that markers will meet the pre-published feedback date for all students who submit by the original submission deadline, even in circumstances in which a significant proportion of the student cohort receive an extension (see Q12) or submit late (see Q13). However, if a marker feels that the proportion of authorised and unauthorised late submissions may impact the reliability of the marking/moderation processes with regard to those students who submitted by the original date, then the Module Lead may apply to their Head of Department and Director of Education and Student Experience for approval to extend the marking period up to 20 working days after the original submission date. Approval would not need to be sought from the Dean for Taught Students/ Students' Guild Vice-President Education/ Students' Union President Exeter for marking extensions granted on these grounds, but a record must be kept of all such instances for onward reporting (as necessary). Each request must be judged on its own merits, bearing in mind (i) the number of students on the module; (ii) the proportion of students who have extensions/submitted late; and (ii) the extent of the delay to their submissions. In all cases, any delay in the return of marks/feedback needs to be communicated empathetically to students and the reasons for the delay explained carefully.

**Professor Rob Freathy**

**Dean for Taught Students**

[1] Working Days refer to week days within University term time, not including Bank Holidays

[2] Vacation refers to dates outside of university term time, including Bank Holidays