It is well known to primary teachers that effective assessment of children requires a multi-faceted approach (Linfield 1994). Equally, written feedback on a piece of work is often not understood by the pupils themselves (Linfield, 1995). Arguably, as one proceeds through secondary and tertiary education, this situation changes little, with the best attempts to set ‘perfect’ assessments and give effective qualitative feedback, still leading to misinterpretation by students. It is also true that students often do not always recognise what is meant by the term ‘feedback’ and have difficulty in interpreting and understanding the feedback that they receive, even with the most careful and targeted advice in advance. (Sutcliffe et al 2014)

In 2010 the National Union of Students released a ‘Charter for Assessment and Feedback’ which outlined ten principles for effective assessment and feedback. Despite this charter, the National Student Survey (NSS) in 2014 still showed twenty-eight per cent of students were not satisfied. “Assessment and feedback was again rated the lowest by students, with just seventy-two per cent saying they were satisfied with this, the same level as last year.” (Grove 2014)

To Tutors, this may feel like Figure 1

So what can be done to enable effective assessment and feedback? Can we ‘tip the balance’?

### Discussion

Analysis of questionnaires included polarised views about what constitutes helpful feedback and showed that many students appreciated the chance to discuss feedback and raise queries. Of particular concern was a lack of perception by students of their own roles and responsibilities within the assessment/feedback cycle as well as a ‘notion of readiness’ to process both assignment guidance and later, related feedback. (Figure 2)

### Conclusions – Tipping the balance

The pilot study demonstrated that students did not necessarily have an understanding of key terminology linked to assignments and assessment criteria. Clearly, careful scaffolding of assessment procedures, including student and tutor responsibilities within the cycle, needs to be explored early in a degree, revisited and consolidated throughout the programme.

The research also reflected that where students considered feedback to be effective, face-to-face interaction with tutors was a key component. This enables questions to be raised and misunderstandings to be quickly addressed, before and during assignment completion, and after receiving summative feedback.

Universities have work to do to show students that feedback is not something that is simply received, but needs student interaction and engagement. For the higher education sector to move forwards, and for students to maximise their potential, we need to tip this balance of tutor and student support/engagement. It is clear that for many students there is a lack of understanding of both their role and that of the tutor within the assessment cycle.

In some ways these conclusions seem obvious. Yet pleasingly they are within our grasp. We can ‘tip the balance’ if students take an increased role and responsibility in the assessment and engagement cycle. However, the illustration for this is not polar ends of the balance shown in Figure 1 but one with tutor and student at the centre (Figure 3). Here relative roles and responsibilities come together. It is through shared responsibility, engagement and reflective practice, through all stages of the ‘Student and Tutor Engagement in the Feedback Cycle’ (Figure 2) that assessment challenges are likely to be overcome.

### References and Further Reading

- **Grove, J.** (2014) ‘Assessment and feedback was again rated the lowest by students, with just seventy-two per cent saying they were satisfied with this, the same level as last year.’ Available online: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2014/cl,162014 accessed on 15.07.14
- **Sutcliffe et al 2014**

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**References and Further Reading**

- **Grove, J.** (2014) ‘Assessment and feedback was again rated the lowest by students, with just seventy-two per cent saying they were satisfied with this, the same level as last year.’ Available online: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2014/cl,162014 accessed on 15.07.14

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