Proposal to the Learning and Teaching Development Fund April 2010.

Feedback calendars

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1. Summary

Feedback calendars are a novel but essentially simple administrative improvement to course documentation which hold promise of considerable gains. The idea is to announce at the start of a course the calendar of when feedback will be given, and of what kinds e.g. formative, summative, by staff or peers, etc.. Some prototype examples are available at: http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/rap/fcal.php

The 2009 NSS results for the psychology dept. put it 3rd equal out of 107 in the UK for overall course satisfaction, but nearly the worst for feedback (104th), yet about the best for course documentation. This suggests that quality of documentation may be much more important than is usually realised. Feedback calendars as an enhancement are promising because they address both documentation and assessment & feedback (A&F) simultaneously.

They are promising also in terms of potential indirect effects. They prompt staff to think about how feedback is supposed to help students, about the mix of formative and summative, and of staff and peer feedback; about group vs. individual feedback, and dialogue vs. one-way feedback. And similarly for students: One of the biggest indirect gains we may hope for is an increase in how proactive students are in using feedback since the calendar implicitly but clearly announces that feedback is an intentional and important part of the course.

The money will be to employ part-time assistance to support course team leaders Although the work involved is in reality trivial, experience shows that just having someone in charge of making it happen by reminders etc. makes a huge difference until it is both part of routine and shown to be important.

2. Aims and Outcomes

2.1 Specific aims

1.   To recruit numerous course teams, and carry through to deployment the creation of feedback calendars with them.
2.   To learn whether and to what extent they have a useful impact.
3.   To improve the prototype format.

2.2 Outcomes

1.   Deployment of feedback calendars in courses.

2.   Collection of evaluation data sufficient to allow course teams to decide on their value.

3.   Disseminating (by papers and/or reports) the degree of success achieved, and hence how worthwhile they might be for future adopters.

2.3 Bid evaluation criteria

1) Linkage to the Learning and Teaching Strategy: A promising, and if successful then highly cost-effective, way of enhancing assessment and feedback, and through that, "excellence in teaching". The hope too is that students will become more proactive about feedback, hence promoting "a student-staff partnership model that promotes student engagement with learning", hence in turn "enhancing the student experience".

2) Innovations to the learning experience: feedback calendars are a novel technique.

3) Demonstration of measurable outcomes: rate of adoption, and amount of value perceived by staff and students.

4) This project will integrate seamlessly into existing learning and teaching practice: it is at bottom a minor extension to course documentation.

5) Sustainability: there would be no problem in it becoming a routine part of course organisation, if and when course teams were convinced of its value. It is extremely cheap: the question to be established concerns the benefits.

6) Transferability – It applies to all courses (and possibly to all scales, from programmes down to small modules).

3. Previous Work

The specific inspiration is a single unpublished table from a course at Strathclyde University that used 2 columns (rather than 11) in a table.

David Nicol has for many years, in his educational developer role, urged course designers to map out explicitly what not just the teachers but the learners are meant to be doing at each point. Feedback calendars are partly a descendant of that thinking by listing what both students and staff do, and in what temporal relationships.

Nicol has produced a form of his principles of A&F for students: tips on how they can and should be proactive about feedback. See http://www.strath.ac.uk/learnteach/learning/students/assessfeedback/. He and I have run workshops with students on this, and they were well received.

Frank Coton's unpublished success in the engineering faculty suggests that there are big gains to be had in this area from discussing with students what the staff plan is about the importance of feedback and when it is provided. And that in fact, because staff seldom get across to students the point of feedback or even when it is being delivered, much of the expensive activity of staff in this area is in fact wasted; yet by better informing students, it can be recaptured, and led to students being more proactive.

4. Methodology

To create a feedback calendar:
- Look at easily available course documentation and start drafting it.
- Contact the course leader to fill in any missing bits of information.
- Send them the first-draft calendar and ask for corrective feedback
- Redraft it.

The overall plan is:
- To recruit course leaders, particularly those overseeing a whole year.
- If they are interested, then produce a draft calendar for their course.
- Then plan with them how they will use it (e.g. add to course documentation, put it on the web, ...).
- Then agree how it will be evaluated e.g. add a question to their normal course evaluation questionnaire.

5. Potential Applicability / Transferability

Feedback calendars can apply to all courses (and possibly to all scales, from programmes down to small modules).

There would be no problem in it becoming a routine part of course organisation, if and when course teams were convinced of its value. It is extremely cheap: the question to be established concerns the benefits.

6. Evaluation

To be negotiated with each course team. The objective is to do just enough to put them in a position to decide rationally whether it is worth adopting as standard practice. Example methods:

- Addition of a specific question in course evaluation questionnaires.
- Possibly obtain 5 minutes in a lecture in perhaps January and May to ask a few related questions e.g. on perceived benefit to students, and amount of difference it made.
- Survey staff for their perceptions.

7. Timetable
- April – July 2010 Before grant announcement, advertise for potential client courses
- July – Sept 2010 Draft and debug calendars for each course.
- July – Sept 2010 Agree deployment and evaluation plans.
- Dec-January Some evaluation of effect in first semester.
- March-May 2011 Some evaluation of effect in second semester.
- May-July 2011 Write up report.

8. Budget

A total of **£5,000** is requested. No other sources of funding are currently being used to support this work. In reality this will be used, up to the total, on a mixture of full and part time work; and a mixture of students (e.g. a summer studentship) and research assistants. This will depend on who is available. An indicative combination might be:

• 8 weeks at the pay rate for summer students of £250/week. Total of £2,000

• One person month of a Psychology Research Assistant. Grade 6, spine point 26. Salary costs = £2210.25 (1/12x26,523), Superannuation costs = £486.25(1/12 x 5,835), N.I. costs = £156 (1/12 of £1,869). Total = £2,852.05

9. Approval

Should this application be successful and granted funding, I give consent for this application to be published on the Learning and Teaching website.

10. Signature of Project Leader

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