Development of a Context-based Formative Feedback Practice Framework: A Higher Education Action Research Project

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Development of a context-based formative feedback practice framework: A higher education action research project

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Abstract

Formative assessment (FA), and formative feedback (FF) as a central part of FA, in higher education (HE) is a complex and contested process with various definitions, ranging from the nebulous to the highly specific. This has made the practical task of enhancing FA and FF processes in undergraduate courses challenging. This paper reports on an action research (AR) project that sought to understand and develop FA and FF practices within an HE Institute of Education. Emphasis was placed on student experiences and perceptions, as well as the importance of considering learner opinions as a valid source of knowledge generation.

The starting point for the project was a theoretical exploration of the broader concept of FA, which highlighted the different interpretations within the literature. It also revealed the potential challenges surrounding its practical implementation regarding FF, particularly the divergences between students and lecturers regarding purpose and goals. Following an iterative AR process, the project used this starting point to develop project goals and ethos, collect and analyse data to audit existing FA and FF practices, and design and apply a framework for evaluating and evolving these practices. The paper concludes by reviewing the benefits and limitations of the AR project and offering proposals for further actions.

Introduction

What is formative assessment in higher education?

Definitions of what constitutes formative assessment (FA) in higher education (HE) range from the straightforward to the complex, with little consensus. Scriven (1967) is credited with coining the term when distinguishing between two types of assessment practices in HE: 'formative evaluation' and 'summative assessment' (SA). The conceptualisation of SA has traditionally been less ambiguous. It is generally understood as an assessment activity conducted at the end of a teaching period, aimed at judging proficiency through a summary of what has been learned (Scriven, 1967).

FA was initially positioned as 'assessment-as-learning' or 'learning-oriented assessment,' intended to account for ongoing learning progress and to inform curriculum and pedagogical development (Scriven, 1967). Over time, this conceptualisation has expanded to consider FA as more than a teaching tool, encompassing a series of complex dialogical processes between student and teacher (López-Pastor &

Sicilia-Camacho, 2017). It is now seen as a reflexive undertaking, wherein a teacher provides critical feedback to shape students' understanding and self-regulation while simultaneously reflecting on their own practice. From this perspective, FA involves "implications of critical analysis throughout the teaching process" (López-Pastor & Sicilia-Camacho, 2017, p. 91). Academics have argued that FA is not a fixed formula but rather consists of various processes for identifying what students can do, and effectively communicating this (Fook & Sidhu, 2013).

In its narrowest sense, FA supports students in meeting teacher-directed goals, often referred to as 'convergent assessment' (Torrance & Pryor, 1998). In its most comprehensive form, FA contributes to a broader "formative learning environment" (Clark, 2014, p. 29, in Koka et al., 2017). It is seen not merely as a means to achieve narrowly defined student learning outcomes, such as exam scores, but also as playing a critical role in helping students develop knowledge, personal perspectives on the world and their immediate community, and citizenship skills such as conflict resolution through non-violent, democratic exchange (Koka et al., 2017; López-Pastor & Sicilia-Camacho, 2017).

However, the notion of two absolute, contrasting perspectives on FA warrants caution. Lau (2016) argues that a false dichotomy has emerged between FA and SA, whereby FA is associated with a 'traditional' psychometric paradigm, viewing intelligence as fixed, and SA with a 'progressive' constructivist paradigm, viewing intelligence as malleable and contextual. Lau (2016) further explains that these associations often elevate FA over SA as the primary concern of HE pedagogy. It is also argued that FA and SA inform each other, interacting in ways that make a strict division between the two unhelpful (Lau, 2016). Arguably, FA cannot occur without SA, as formative feedback relies on an evaluation of performance at a specific point in time, which is inherently summative (Taras, 2005, as cited in Lau, 2016).

Given the theoretical variations in the conceptualisation of FA, the starting point for the AR project was to establish a precise conceptualisation of FA suited to our teaching and learning context. While morally commendable, the values-driven conceptualisations proposed by Koka et al. (2017) and López-Pastor and Sicilia-Camacho (2016) were considered too esoteric and therefore difficult to translate into practical action. Instead, we drew on the work of Fook and Sidhu (2013), rooted in Scriven's original framework for HE assessment processes (Scriven, 1967). Our conceptualisation of FA centres on the premise that it is not a series of prescribed tools but encompasses key processes aimed at understanding what students currently know and can do in relation to specified curriculum goals. It also includes the methods for communicating this to students to support their self-assessment and learning behaviours, alongside the reflexive development of teaching practice based on these elements.

The challenges identified in conceptualising, implementing, and improving formative assessment practices shaped the rationale for this study. These challenges are now explored in more detail through a review of the relevant literature.

FA in crisis

A key starting point for the project was to establish a robust conceptual understanding of formative assessment within our specific teaching context. A "crisis in implementation" has been identified (López-Pastor & Sicilia-Camacho, 2017, p. 79) due to increasing pressures on teaching and learning in HE, including competing demands to produce research. This crisis also stems from significant divergences at the point of reification, which further exacerbate challenges and disagreements at the practical level. Wheatley

et al., (2015) argue that differences exist in operational definitions of FA between students and lecturers. They suggest that most students are primarily concerned with SA and value FA only to the extent that it leads to improved SA grades. In contrast, staff tend to view FA as serving broader, more ambitious goals, such as deep learning and self-actualisation (Wheatley et al., 2015). This disconnect can create disparity in learning contexts, particularly between what students expect from a lecture or module and what is delivered.

However, when staff and students have historically been asked about the practical application of FA, both groups report that its primary function is to inform SA (Atkins et al., 1993). Barnett's (2007) commentary offers a bridge between the conceptualisations of FA, their applications, and students' expectations and feedback. Barnett asserts that judgment is central to academic life and that both FA and SA are practical tools, representing different forms of the broader academic judgment process. Nuanced debates over whether FA or SA is favoured, or whether one is 'in crisis,' are less relevant, as both contribute to motivating students' commitment to learning—an overarching goal of HE.

Furthermore, the disparity between lecturers' and students' perceptions and expectations may stem from differences in experience and training. This highlights why the applied foundations for FA are often considered unstable. This assertion is supported by Ejaz et al. (2022), who conducted a content analysis of the FA literature and reported that the primary factor influencing the adoption of FA by lecturers was their participation in Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

Recent studies on formative assessment have made significant contributions to the field by exploring innovative strategies and addressing challenges in implementation. For instance, Kruiper et al. (2022) highlight the potential of scaffolding strategies to enhance teachers' adaptive behaviour in formative assessment, while also stressing the need for further support and training to ensure effective integration. This work advances the literature by providing practical solutions for embedding theoretical frameworks into teaching practice. Similarly, Hanefar et al. (2022) examine the perceptions of teachers in Bangladesh, revealing that although formative assessment is recognised as vital for improving teaching and learning, contextual barriers such as workload, large class sizes, and resource constraints hinder its full implementation. Their findings offer valuable insights into the global challenges of formative assessment adoption. Grimalt-Álvaro and Usart (2023) introduce the concept of sentiment analysis in formative assessment, showing how it can enhance feedback and engagement through real-time analysis of students' emotions and interactions; although they caution against the technical complexity and biases inherent in current tools. Their work expands the potential of digital learning analytics in formative assessment. In line with this, Kaya-Capocci et al. (2022) propose a framework to support the integration of digital tools into formative assessment practices, offering a structured approach that links assessment strategies with technology functionalities. This framework provides a practical guide for educators seeking to leverage digital tools effectively. Lastly, Koka et al. (2023) emphasise the importance of immediate feedback and active student participation, demonstrating that formative assessment, when implemented with the right tools and strategies, can significantly enhance student learning outcomes. These studies collectively push the literature forward by addressing the theoretical and practical aspects of formative assessment, offering new insights into digital integration.

Effective elements of FA

The existing literature on FA has also explored its efficacy and the factors that contribute to it. Some scholars emphasise the importance of maintaining the ethos of FA. For example, Wheatley et al. (2015) argue that the critical element for the success of FA is ensuring that feedback is always integrated into curriculum delivery and pedagogical developments. This is supported by López-Pastor and Sicilia-Camacho (2017), who suggest that while it is widely accepted that FA positively impacts learning, there are too many variables and real-world factors to establish clear cause-and-effect relationships. Consequently, it is worth considering generalised principles when planning effective FA. They do, however, outline several key specifications thought to contribute to successful FA.

- Set clear goals that are understandable and achievable for students.

- Provide feedback that is timely, of sufficient quality and quantity, task-specific but also related to generalisable principles, and performance-focused rather than praise-based.

- Include a component that supports students' self-evaluation skills regarding feedback (also known as 'assessment literacy').

- Ensure feedback is dialogical, fostering two-way communication rather than a one-way transmission of information.

- Ensure FA is practicable, with tasks that are not overly time-consuming for either staff or students (López-Pastor & Sicilia-Camacho, 2017).

Research evaluating FA generally concludes that it has a positive influence on learning outcomes, such as improved SA grades, with low-stakes quizzing identified as one of the most effective strategies (Morris et al., 2021). Peer and lecturer feedback have also been shown to be effective, though implementation factors, such as the frequency and style of feedback, play a moderating role (Morris et al., 2021). However, the experimental literature is limited, with most studies focusing on the perceptions of lecturers and students, examining whether they believe FA to be effective and useful (Fook et al., 2013; Koka et al., 2017; Morris et al., 2021).

Operationalising FA through formative feedback

While the project is focused on feedback, it is situated within the broader conceptual field of formative assessment (FA), of which formative feedback is an integral component. Feedback is widely regarded as the principal mechanism through which FA functions in practice (Sadler, 1989; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). In this sense, formative feedback is not a separate concern but the communicative engine of FA - the actionable, responsive dialogue that allows both students and educators to make sense of progress, adjust teaching and learning strategies, and co-construct meaningful academic development.

This conceptual link is evident in much of the literature on effective FA. Wheatley et al. (2015), for example, argue that the success of FA depends on feedback being meaningfully embedded within curriculum delivery, rather than being treated as an add-on or afterthought. López-Pastor and Sicilia-Camacho (2017) similarly emphasise the central role of feedback processes within FA but caution against over-simplifying the relationship between specific feedback strategies and outcomes, given the complex interplay of

contextual variables. Nevertheless, they outline several conditions under which formative feedback can best fulfil its formative function: clarity of goals, timeliness and task-specificity, emphasis on performance rather than praise, support for students' self-evaluation, and dialogical rather than transmissive delivery.

These principles align closely with the rationale for the feedback modalities chosen in this study - namely, peer feedback, screencast feedback, and self-assessment. Each modality was selected for its potential to operationalise these generalised specifications in a practical and relational way. Peer feedback, for instance, facilitates the development of assessment literacy and promotes clarity of standards through shared dialogue (Carless & Boud, 2018). Screencast feedback has been shown to increase personalisation, enhance emotional connection, and offer richer communication than written comments alone (Mahoney et al., 2019). Self-assessment supports metacognitive awareness and goal-setting behaviours, positioning students as active participants in the feedback loop (Panadero et al., 2018).

Summary

Formative assessment (FA) in HE is a complex process, with its definition and implementation widely contested. The challenges identified in the literature - how to conceptualise FA, how to implement it effectively, and how to enhance its efficacy - have also been encountered by the Institute of Education at the HE institution where the current study was conducted. Moreover, student feedback scores from the National Student Survey (NSS) and internal surveys consistently indicated that students often did not perceive feedback as formative or helpful across most courses. This issue served as the original motivation for an action research project aimed at understanding and improving FA practices within the institute.

Method

Action research methodology

Action research was deemed an appropriate methodology for this project as the investigators aimed to reflect on existing practices to enhance professional expertise and develop formative feedback exercises within an HE Institute of Education (Stringer, 2008). This approach provided a systematic framework for inquiry, where data analysis served as the foundation for understanding and trialing solutions (Efron & Ravid, 2019; Stringer, 2008). Given the project's focus on improving student outcomes, it was essential to involve students' experiences and perceptions at every stage of the research process. Educational action research consistently emphasises the value of learner perspectives as a valid source of knowledge generation and a basis for action development, further supporting the suitability of this methodology for the project (Efron & Ravid, 2019; Stringer, 2008).

However, action research has faced criticism for being poorly understood, which can result in imprecise implementation (Arnold & Norton, 2018). Projects may lean too heavily towards either action or research, leading to limitations in effectiveness when misapplied (Arnold & Norton, 2018; Efron & Ravid, 2019). To address this concern, Arnold and Norton's (2018) model of action research, specifically designed for HE, was adopted. This model integrates the "common steps" of action research, following a consistent pattern of planning, implementing change, and reviewing outcomes to facilitate learning (Arnold & Norton, 2018, p. 12). The process is iterative, comprising the following phases:

1. Identify an issue or challenge in practice

2. Review potential interventions and select a course of action

3. Implement the chosen action

4. Collect data and evaluate the action

5. Reflect on the learning gained

At relevant phases of data collection, ethical approval was received from the University of Worcester Ethics Research Panel, if data were to be considered for use in final publication reporting.

Research context and participants

The study was conducted within an Institute of Education at a medium-sized post-1992 university. Phase two, which involved piloting the Formative Feedback Practice Framework (FFPF), was carried out in a single department within the Institute of Education. The pilot focused on Level 4 students, comprising a cohort of approximately 20 individuals.

Design and procedure

Figure One provides an overview of reflections and actions taken at each phase of Arnold and Norton's (2018) action research model. The research phases are also elaborated here.
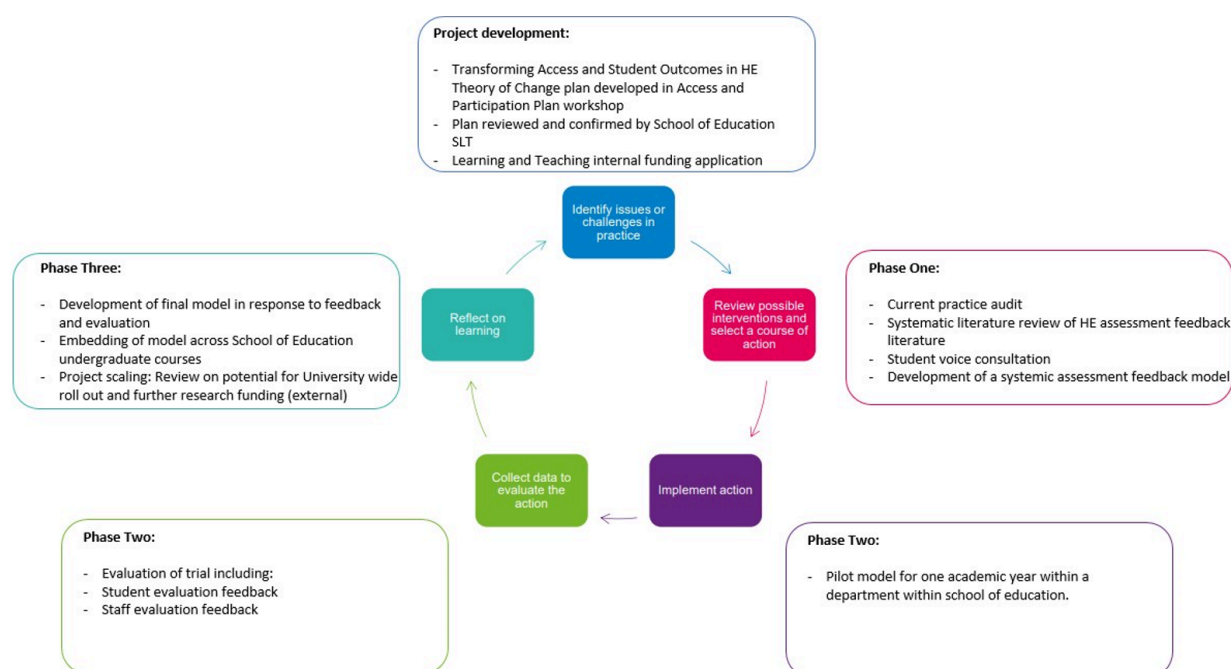

Figure 1 Overview of Arnold and Norton's (2018) Action Research Model

Project development (identifying challenges in practice)

At the start of the action research process, core values were established to serve as guiding principles throughout the research phases.

- Reflective, not directive: The aim was to guide and inform teaching practice rather than prescribe what all staff should do. Recognising that effective teaching and learning are context-specific, and that each practitioner brings unique skills, knowledge, and experience, the project sought to encourage personalised changes in practice rather than enforcing a one-size-fits-all approach.

- Collaborative: Collaboration was a key priority. At critical stages of project development, the views and feedback of key stakeholders, including staff and students, were actively sought to shape the direction of the project.

- Iterative: This value was central to the action research methodology, allowing for reflection and the development of actions informed by perceived changes and their ongoing impact.

The development phase of the project also involved situating the study within the broader context of the University's priorities, particularly its Access and Participation Plan, which aimed to raise academic standards for marginalised students. This alignment enabled the project to secure £6,000 of internal funding, which supported the project coordinators in conducting the research over three years.

Following this initial phase, the project's aims were defined as:

- Developing and implementing consistent, school-wide processes for formative feedback to enhance academic writing;

- Ensuring all students receive adequate support to develop their academic writing and achieve success;

- Reviewing the impact of the implemented processes and assessing the levels of engagement from both students and staff.

Phase one (review possible interventions and select a course of action)

An audit of current formative feedback practices was conducted across the Institute of Education, with surveys distributed to course leads and academic support staff (see Appendix I). Eight course leads and two academic support staff responded, and the data was analysed using content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). This audit provided a crucial appraisal of existing practices.

A systematic review of formative feedback in Higher Education was planned to ensure evidence-informed actions by consulting both research literature and contextual practices. However, funding delays made this inaccessible. Instead, work by Advance HE on assessment practices, including formative (FA) and summative assessment (SA), was used as a foundational resource (Advance HE, 2019; Pitt & Quinlan, 2022). Key recommendations relevant to this action research project included:

- Integrating well-designed group work across programmes.

- Emphasising feedback as part of an ongoing, positive relationship.

- Supporting diverse student experiences and preparedness to engage with feedback.

- Increasing and scaffolding peer assessment and feedback opportunities.

- Leveraging educational technologies to provide immediate, personalised, and asynchronous feedback.

Advance HE's framework for systemic institutional change also informed this project at the practice level, particularly principles such as aligning learning and assessment, integrating assessment literacy, adopting dialogical approaches, and using technology to enhance formative feedback.

Student Voice (SV) data was gathered through course representatives, who completed surveys aligned with those given to staff (see Appendix One). Representatives were briefed on the project during a school-wide meeting, and responses were analysed using content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Triangulation of these data sources led to the development of the initial Formative Feedback Processes Framework (FFPF) (Figure Two).

Phase two (implement action, collect data, and evaluate the action)

The first iteration of the FFPF was piloted over one academic year across two undergraduate degrees. The pilot included:

- Group peer feedback: Students attended a 1-hour workshop on writing introductions, drafted their own, and engaged in small group peer evaluations using marking criteria;

- Screencast feedback: Students received 4–6 minute screencasts providing detailed, personalised feedback on draft assignments;

- Self-assessment development: A proforma helped students collate feedback across assignments. In a seminar, they identified patterns of strengths and areas for improvement and received goal-setting training.

The pilot was evaluated through student feedback from course representatives, grade profile analysis, and progression tracking as part of Teaching as Usual (TAU). Staff reflections and evaluation outcomes informed the development of the second iteration of the FFPF, detailed in 'Findings and Reflections: Phase Two.'

The selection of feedback activities trialled within the FFPF was informed by key principles emerging from the feedback literature. Peer feedback has been shown to foster assessment literacy and deepen student understanding of marking criteria through collaborative dialogue (Carless & Boud, 2018). Screencast feedback offers enhanced personalisation and emotional resonance, supporting relational dimensions of feedback engagement (Mahoney et al., 2019). Self-assessment tools, meanwhile, are closely linked to the development of metacognitive skills and learner agency (Panadero et al., 2018). Together, these modalities were chosen to support a transition from feedback as transmission to feedback as learning, in line with the dialogic paradigm (Pitt & Quinlan, 2022).

Phase three (reflect on learning)

In phase three, the final iteration of the FFPF was implemented across all departments in the Institute of Education. To support this rollout, the following CPD training was provided:

- An online learning page with FFPF resources;

- A CPD reflective course featuring instructional videos and activities to enhance teaching practice;

- A one-hour training session during an institution-wide development day.

Management actions to support and evaluate the framework included:

- Sharing project outcomes at an SLT team meeting;

- The Deputy Head of School recruiting volunteer course and module leads for Level 4 to oversee FFPF implementation;

- Leads developing case studies to reflect on their FFPF use and highlight key changes in practice.

Ongoing monitoring of outcomes was integrated into Teaching as Usual (TAU) and Evaluation as Usual (EAL), with student retention and progress data analysed in annual course progress reports to assess the project's impact.

Findings and reflections

Phase one

The development of the project drew heavily on Pitt and Quinlan's (2022) systematic review of assessment practices, which distinguishes between two paradigms of feedback. The first paradigm, 'feedback as telling', focuses on educators delivering information to students, while the second paradigm, 'feedback as learning', emphasises how students actively process and engage with feedback as part of a broader, dialogic teaching process. Research within the first paradigm has shown that improving the quality of feedback can yield modest academic gains. In contrast, research within the second paradigm demonstrates that embedding feedback into an interactive learning process leads to significant improvements in student performance. Crucially, feedback is most impactful when formative, provided early and frequently, and embedded across learning tasks in various modalities, including peer assessment, screencast feedback, and elaborative, rather than purely corrective, feedback.

An audit of current formative feedback practices in the School of Education identified two main themes: Embedded Processes and General Processes. Embedded processes referred to systems supporting assessment and teaching, particularly in relation to SPaG (spelling, punctuation, and grammar). These included using Turnitin QuickMarks to highlight errors, with additional comments provided for recurring issues. Feedback on formative assessments was seen as a key strategy for addressing SPaG skills, with errors highlighted and students signposted to relevant resources. Some courses also provided examples of correct SPaG use when errors were flagged. General processes related to strategies used to deliver feedback, such as ensuring sensitivity to students' emotions, avoiding overwhelming them with corrections, and offering detailed explanations for errors to promote deeper learning. Signposting to services and resources, such as writing workshops, academic librarians, and online tools, was also a common practice.

The audit revealed that current practices predominantly align with the 'feedback as telling' paradigm. Lecturers typically provided formative feedback through instructional comments on drafts, highlighting

errors and successes, and directing students to additional support. In some instances, this was supplemented by direct teaching, such as first-semester writing workshops for Level 4 students. When delivering feedback, educators were mindful of students' emotional responses, with several respondents (n=3) emphasising the importance of providing detailed, specific explanations for errors rather than general comments. For example, feedback might explain the principle of having one key critical point per paragraph rather than vaguely advising students to reconsider paragraph use.

Student voice data further informed the project, highlighting three key themes.

- Personalised, direct feedback was perceived as the most useful.

- Students desired dedicated time for feedback.

- Consistency in feedback practices was seen as essential.

- Signposting to resources and support was highly valued.

The triangulation of findings across phase one activities revealed that consistent formative feedback practices were already in place, focusing on instructional feedback delivered through comments on written tasks and supplemented by occasional in-session teaching. However, these practices primarily adhered to the 'feedback as telling' paradigm. There was significant potential to transition towards the 'feedback as learning' paradigm by expanding the range of formative feedback modalities and fostering a more interactive, dialogical approach. The aim moving forward was to establish a consistent, dedicated feedback structure that could be personalised where practical, offering students richer opportunities to engage with and learn from feedback across their academic journey.

Phase two

The outcomes of phase one shaped the development of the FFPF in phase two. A framework was chosen as it provided a structured yet flexible approach to fostering widespread change in teaching practices while aligning with the project's reflective, non-directive, and collaborative values. Figure Two illustrates the first iteration of the FFPF, designed to provide consistent, varied formative feedback opportunities through multiple modalities. Each component was informed by evidence-based literature and aimed to support a 'feedback-as-learning' approach.

Evaluation of the FFPF trial revealed the following key student perceptions and outcomes.

- Confidence: Consistent feedback through multiple modalities offered bite-sized, specific guidance, increasing students' confidence over time.

- Assessment literacy: Students reported a better understanding of marking criteria and developed self-assessment skills.

- Self-organisation and motivation: Structured formative activities helped students organise their work and increased their motivation to engage with assignments.

- Emotional resilience: Students highlighted the relational and emotional aspects of feedback. Having varied feedback activities throughout a module taught them 'not to take it personally'.

- Dialogical impact: Screencasts and in-person lecturer-led activities were particularly effective in addressing the emotional and relational dimensions of feedback, likely due to their more dialogic nature.

These findings demonstrate the FFPF's potential to promote deeper student engagement, confidence, and resilience in the feedback process.
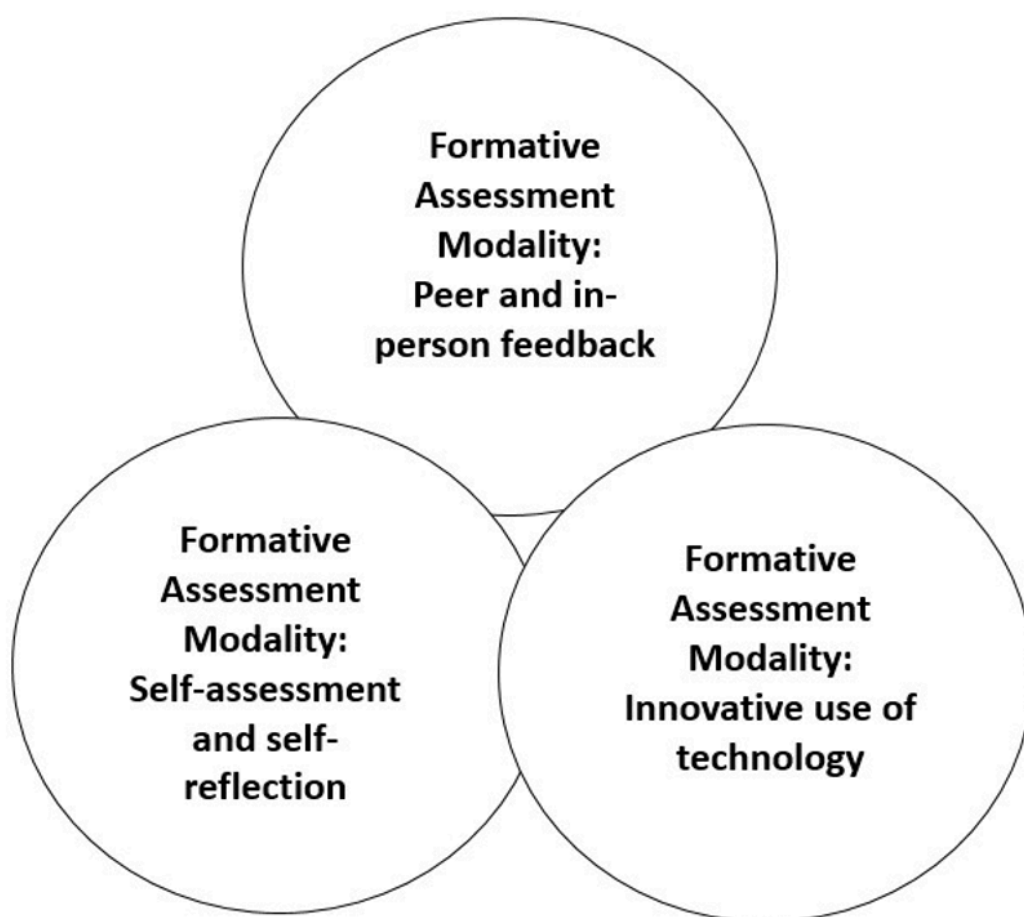

Figure 2 First iteration of the FFPF

Phase three

The trial and evaluation in phase two concluded that the FFPF served as a flexible tool to support lecturers in reflecting on and developing their formative feedback practices. Students provided positive feedback on its implementation, with some emerging evidence suggesting it may contribute to improved academic attainment. A key development point from phase two was students' emphasis on the importance of the emotional and relational aspects of formative feedback. This insight informed the redevelopment of the

FFPF in phase three, ensuring these relational factors were proactively incorporated before its rollout across the Institute of Education. Figure Three illustrates the second iteration of the framework.

The components of the FFPF are designed to function both independently and in combination, allowing flexible adaptation to different teaching contexts while maintaining overall coherence. While each modality - peer feedback, screencast feedback, and self-assessment - can be implemented as a standalone activity, the framework is most effective when these elements intersect to support a dialogic, iterative approach to learning. For instance, peer feedback can prime students for deeper engagement with lecturer feedback, while self-assessment encourages students to synthesise insights across multiple feedback sources. This layered design reflects the project's emphasis on feedback as an integrated process rather than a series of isolated events, aligning with research on formative feedback as relational, cumulative, and developmental.
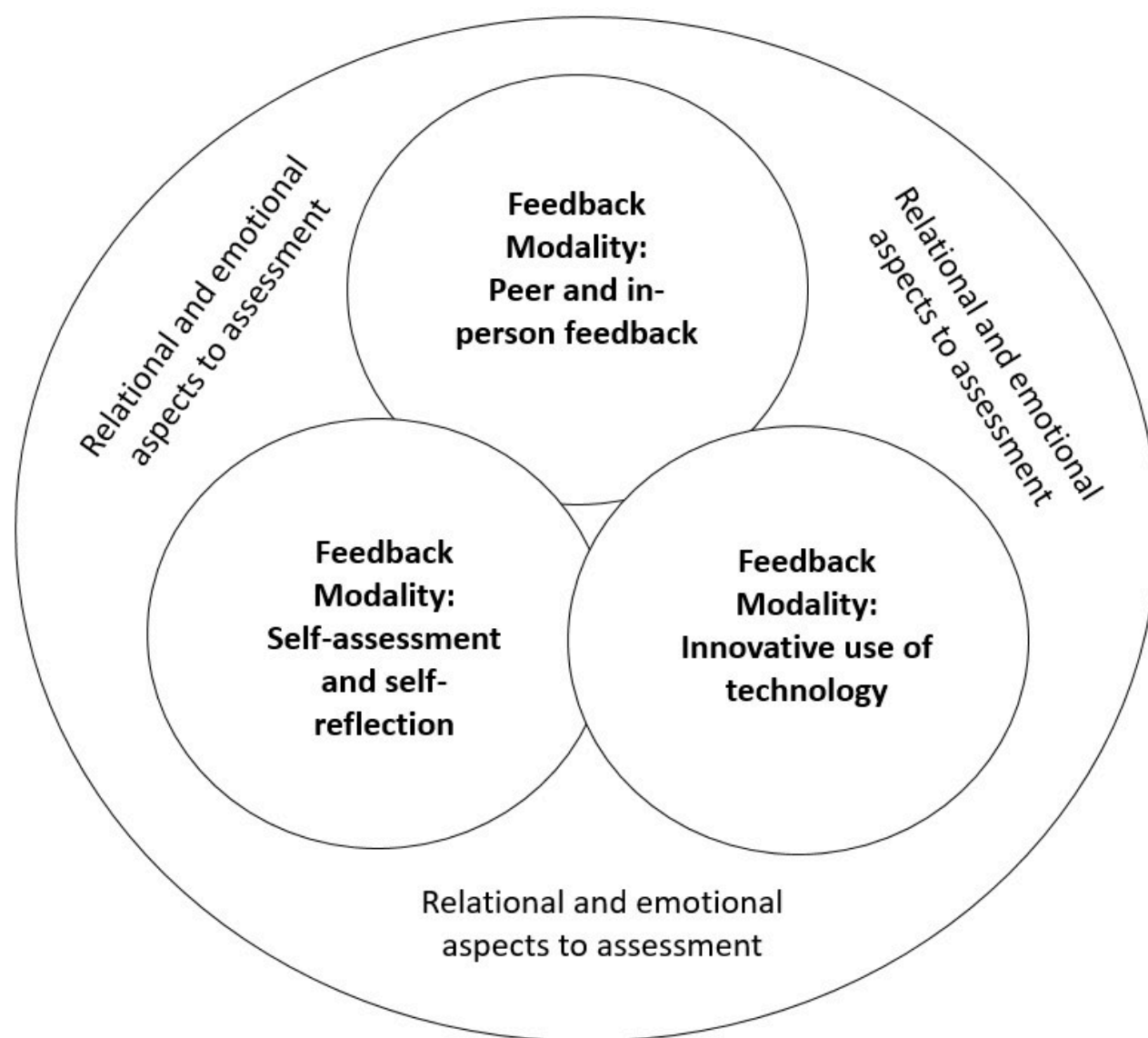

Figure 3 Second iteration of the FFPF

Final reflections and further actions

Final reflections

The Formative Feedback Processes Framework (FFPF) makes a timely and scalable contribution to the sector, offering a concrete route to improving feedback quality, student engagement, and academic development. The project aimed to address persistent concerns highlighted in student feedback, including low ratings of feedback as formative or helpful, as reflected in NSS results and internal surveys. By implementing the FFPF, which underwent iterative development and trialling, the project made significant strides in improving formative feedback practices across the Institute of Education.

The action research methodology was well-suited to the project's objectives. Its reflective approach enabled a thorough evaluation of existing practices, incorporating student experiences and perceptions to inform meaningful interventions. The methodology's collaborative and iterative nature ensured that changes in practice were tailored to individual and departmental contexts, fostering buy-in from stakeholders and aligning with the project's values of reflection, collaboration, and adaptability.

The structured application of Arnold and Norton's (2018) action research model further supported the project's success. By guiding the identification of issues, the review of potential interventions, the implementation of targeted actions, and the evaluation of outcomes, the model provided a clear framework for systematic inquiry. This approach resonates with Pitt and Quinlan's (2022) findings on the importance of treating feedback as an ongoing, dialogical process that emphasises student engagement and relational aspects of learning. The emphasis on collaboration also aligns with the literature advocating for the integration of student voices and stakeholder feedback to inform teaching practices (Clark, 2014; López-Pastor & Sicilia-Camacho, 2017).

While the project captured rich qualitative insights into student perceptions, confidence, and engagement with formative feedback, it did not include a controlled evaluation of impact on academic attainment. Although grade profiles and progression data were monitored as part of routine evaluation, the absence of a formal baseline or comparator group limits the extent to which claims can be made about measurable outcomes. Future iterations of the framework may benefit from incorporating more systematic tracking of attainment and retention to evaluate the effectiveness of the FFPF at scale.

In summary, the project's reflections and findings contribute to the growing body of research highlighting the role of structured, iterative, and collaborative frameworks in advancing formative feedback practices in higher education. It also reaffirms the importance of addressing both the informational and relational dimensions of feedback to create impactful and student-centred learning environments.

Proposed further actions

Building on the project's success, several actions are proposed to sustain and further enhance formative feedback practices at the Institute of Education. Firstly, it is essential to continue collecting and analysing data to evaluate the long-term impact of the FFPF on student outcomes and satisfaction. This ongoing evaluation will identify areas for refinement and inform future iterations of the framework.

Although the FFPF was developed within a single institutional context, its values-led, modular design enables adaptation across a range of HE settings. Its emphasis on dialogic, relational feedback and varied modalities means it can be tailored to local needs and priorities. For example, the framework could be integrated into academic writing support schemes, aligned with programme-level assessment and feedback strategies, or used to guide CPD initiatives focused on feedback literacy. Institutions seeking to improve consistency and student engagement with feedback may also find the FFPF a useful foundation for developing contextually relevant approaches. As such, it offers a flexible tool for sector-wide enhancement of formative feedback practices.

Further still, the evolving role of artificial intelligence (AI) in HE also warrants consideration when designing formative feedback practices. For instance, while low-stakes quizzes are known to support learning, their effectiveness may be undermined if students use AI tools to bypass genuine engagement. Similarly, feedback on surface-level issues such as SPaG may need to be reconsidered in light of AI-assisted writing tools. These developments highlight the need for formative strategies that prioritise critical thinking, dialogue, and deeper learning processes.

The dissemination of project findings and the FFPF will also be prioritised. Sharing successes and lessons learned with other departments and institutions across the University will contribute to broader improvements in formative feedback practices. This dissemination will be integrated with the CPD resources developed during the project, ensuring that the knowledge gained is accessible and actionable for educators.

By implementing these actions, the Institute of Education can cultivate a culture of effective formative feedback that supports students' academic development and success. This action research project has established a strong foundation for ongoing advancements in formative feedback practices, driving improvements in teaching and learning within higher education.

Biography

Dr Alexandra Sewell is is a Senior Lecturer and HCPC-registered Practitioner Psychologist at the University of Worcester. She researches 'inclusive voice' and marginalised perspectives, has co-authored and edited key Inclusion textbooks, and sustains an independent educational psychology practice.

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