

# Using Peer Review to Enhance Student Assessment Literacy

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## INTRODUCTION

Feedback is an essential element of effective learning, yet research shows that student engagement with feedback is often poor (Price *et al.*, 2010). Assessment literacy enables students to understand the purpose and processes of assessment in their learning by making the most of feedback. Peer review is an exercise that can be constructive in the development of assessment literacy, as it provides students with an opportunity to engage with assessment criteria and enables them to develop their own judgmental skills.

A peer assessment component was integrated into an academic writing assessment in a large second year course to enhance assessment literacy (~260 students: Biomedical Sciences 2). An inclusive approach where students took on the role of assessor to their peers was established (Figure 1) using Turnitin PeerMark on Blackboard Learn. Following completion of the course, students were invited to take part in a questionnaire.

## AIMS

The aim of the research was to introduce a significant peer review assessment and explore the student experience of using peer review to enhance understanding of the marking criteria used to assess a summative 1500-word essay.

## METHODS

Students used an online peer review feedback form based on the marking criteria focusing on academic writing skills (writing style and clarity, evidence of critical thinking and use of appropriate sources). Students were encouraged to highlight on their final essay submission coversheet an example of where they had responded to peer feedback, in order to improve their work.

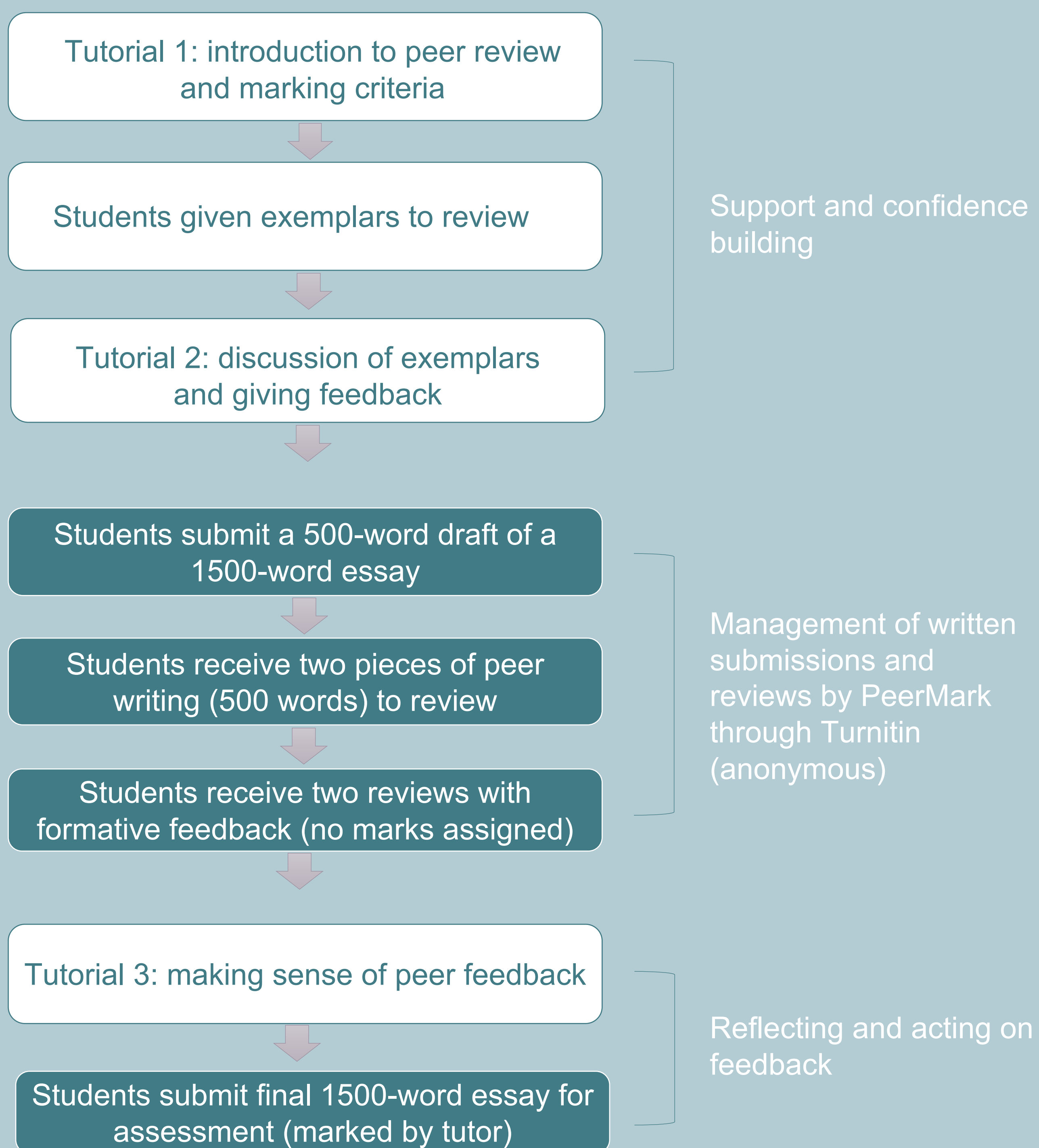


Figure 1. Process of peer assessment component.

Following completion of the course, an online anonymous questionnaire was conducted via Learn to evaluate the experience of all students undertaking the peer review activity. The questionnaire consisted of Likert scale questions (5-point) and free text boxes for students to provide additional comments.

## RESULTS

The overall student experience of the peer review exercise was very positive. The questionnaire responses and free text comments (n = 21) showed that:

- 71% of students found the feedback of their peers to be very useful or useful (Figure 2)
- 85% of students had a clearer understanding of the marking criteria (Figure 3)
- 95% found the online submission and receipt of peer review forms on Turnitin easy to navigate

Furthermore, 90% of students reported a positive improvement in their ability to self-evaluate and improve their own work as a direct result of the peer review process.

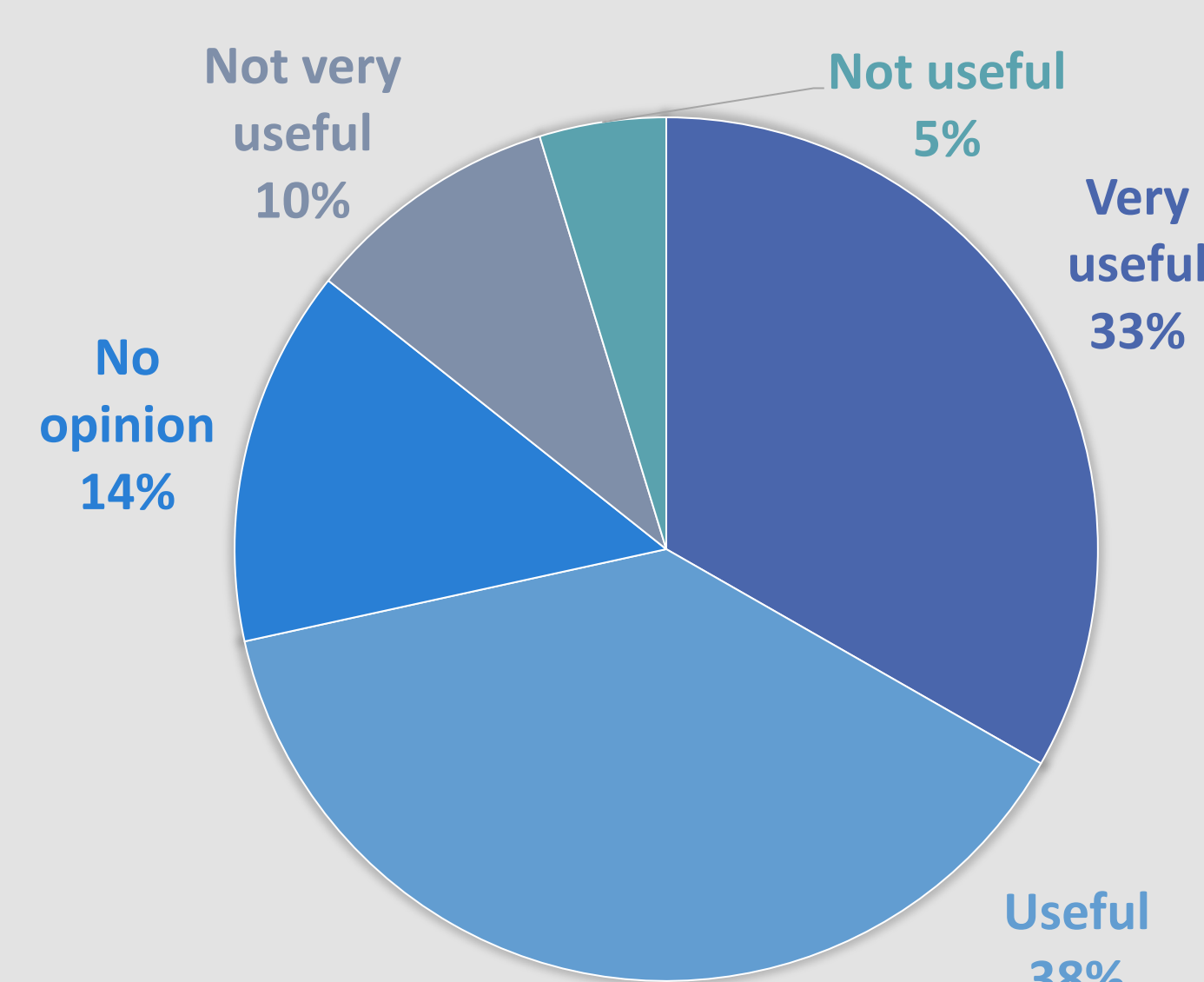


Figure 2. Effectiveness of the peer feedback I received was.....

*"People pick up on different things and so it was really good to have more than one person review my work and give me their opinions and thoughts on it. I also found it really helpful when it came to redrafting." - Student*

*"Reviewing another person's essay draft helped me understand the marking criteria as I had to think about exactly how they fulfil it or not, which helped me in reference to my own work." - Student*

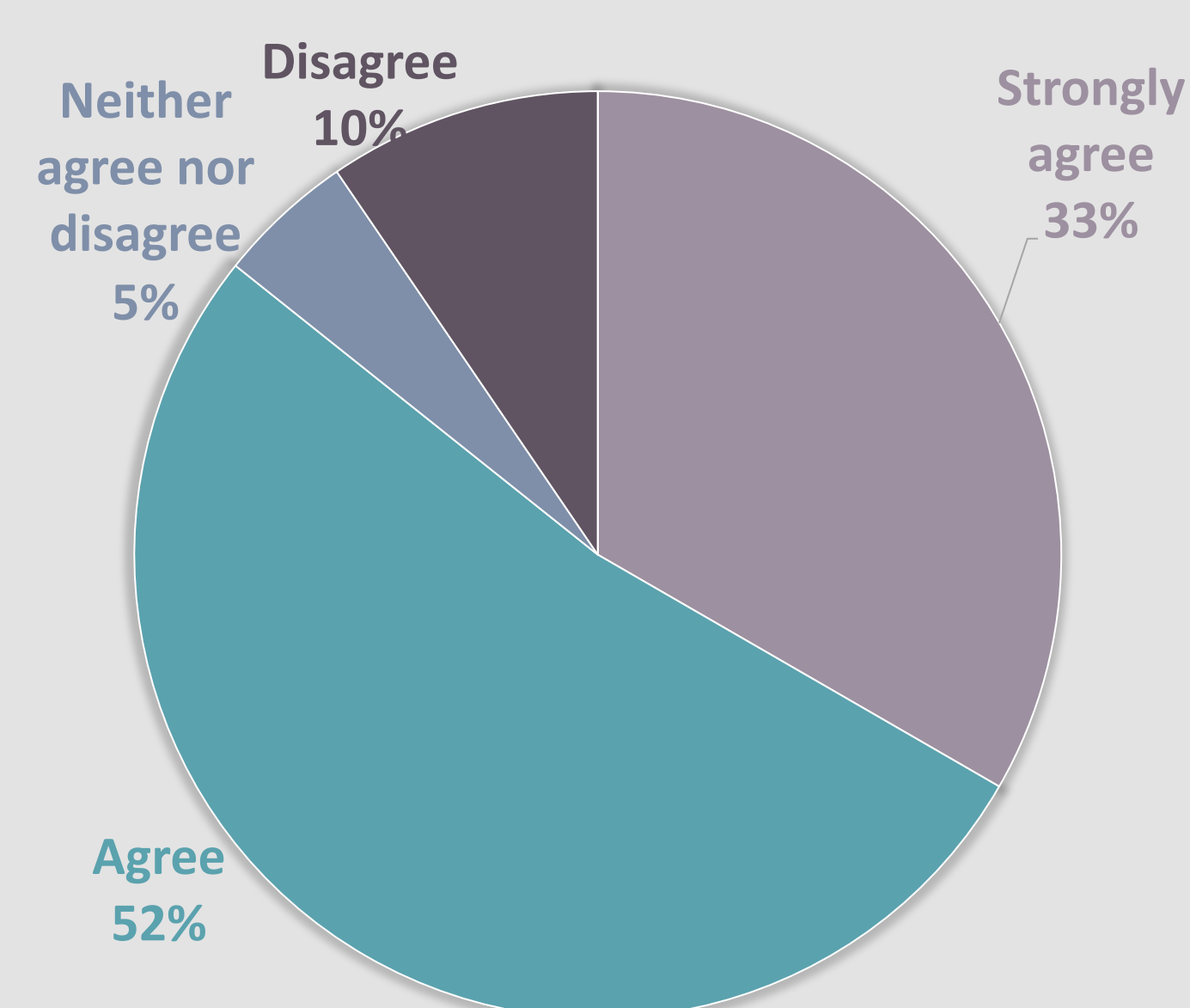


Figure 3. Taking part in peer review helped my understanding of the marking criteria.....

Some students reported a less positive experience, commenting that "The reviews of my peers conflicted with the review from the actual marker, thus pointing me in the wrong direction" and "I felt like I did not receive as much feedback as I gave".

The majority of peer reviews were constructive and detailed, but there was uncertainty from some students on the validity of the peer feedback and occasionally a student received conflicting opinions from the two reviews.

## CONCLUSIONS

The student experience of peer review was mainly a very positive one, specifically:

- Students **actively engaged** with the marking criteria through the process of reviewing the work of others.
- Students were **more confident** in using the new knowledge and understanding gained to re-evaluate and reflect on their own work.
- Awarding **marks for engagement** with peer review (rather than quality of review feedback) created a 'low-stakes' assessment, which students were comfortable with.

Although the response rate to the survey was rather low, comments provided were very much aligned with feedback received from meetings with the Year 2 Programme Student Representatives.

**Future development** will involve tutors reading the peer feedback for their tutorial group (15 students) before it is released to students. This will identify any inconsistencies or inaccuracies and ensure quality feedback is returned to all students.

## References

Price, M., Handley, K., Millar, J., and O'Donovan, B. (2010) Feedback: all that effort, but what is the effect? *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35(3), 277-289

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