Project Title: **Improving student use of feedback on marked Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs)**

Keywords: TMA, feedback, student views, TMAs

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Improving student use of feedback on marked Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs)

Summary

The correspondence tuition that tutors provide, via the TMAs, is a key part of our teaching and support to students and represents a major investment of time and effort by tutors. Around 10%-15% of marked TMA scripts are not picked up by undergraduate students across STEM (the exact figure varies between modules) and the figure is slightly less across the undergraduate programme as a whole across the university. Considerations of rates of pickup by students could form a standard part of regular module reviews.

This project was divided into four main threads:

- Background information about TMA collection across the university.

- Views from students on four modules using a common, anonymous questionnaire.

- A series of activities with Associate lecturers (tutors) about the level of non-pickup by students and strategies to encourage pickup.

- Creation of material to encourage students to collect and make use of their TMA feedback.

Students on two statistics modules and two economics modules were involved in the project: level 1 modules M140 and DD126 and level 2 modules M248 and DD209.

Students value generic comments such as 'Make sure you do exactly what the question is asking', while they are irritated by repetition on the covering document (PT3) of comments already made on the script. If the PT3/script separation is to be retained under the new marking system (WISEFLOW), greater clarity is needed as to the roles of the two elements.

Training for new tutors needs to make even clearer the importance to students of encouragement and positive reinforcement – the fact that TMA marking is a form of teaching cannot be too strongly emphasised.

Completely generic, 'advice to students from students' material which we have prepared as part of this project, might be more widely adopted by other modules than the four we have targeted.

1.   Introduction

The project took place during 2021-22 and built on some earlier work. It involved one AL and one staff tutor as joint leads, and a further staff tutor plus 3 ALs carrying out various sections of the work.

While the broad question posed by the project is, of course, a university-wide issue, detailed enquiry was restricted to two modules in STEM and two in FASS, in each case one module at level 1 and one at level 2.

2.   Aims of project

The initial impetus for the current project came from the observation that a significant proportion of students never collect their marked TMAs from the eTMA system. The project aimed to obtain insight into the reasons for this, and to attempt to improve the rate of pick-up by:

1. providing information to enable tutors to make their comments more accessible and more helpful to students;

2. providing advice to students as to how they can use feedback even more effectively than is currently the case, and thus encourage them to pick up their marked work.

Deliverables from the project therefore included a series of activities with tutors, and the development of written material to be provided to students.

3.   University-level data and implications

3.1 Methodology

As a background to the STEM-focused project, University data, which already existed for students on undergraduate modules, were linked on a University server and analysed in SAS. The linked data enabled student characteristics and score on TMAs to be related to the propensity to pick up TMA feedback. No new linked data was stored.

The linked data provided insights into some current areas of investigation within the University, such as the use of extensions, the attainment gap for Black students, and the attainment gap for students from more disadvantaged areas.

TMA Scores were classified as

"Very High" if over 80%;

"High" if 60-80%;

"Mid" if over 40% but less than 60%

 "Low" if less than 40%

The category Black was a combination of the self-reported categories of Black_African, Black_Caribbean and Black_other.

3.2 Findings

3.2.1 Non-collection of TMAs by TMA number on a sample of modules

Table 1 shows the patterns are of non-collection on the four modules M140, M248, DD126 and DD209 and a number of other level 1 modules across the University. There are wide variations between modules which will reflect the wide variety of students and module styles. This means that generalisations across the University, apart from the fact that not all students pick up their script feedback, are unlikely to be helpful – each module needs to look at its own position.

Table 1: Non collection rates by TMA and modules

21J	TMA01	TMA02	TMA03	TMA04
M140	9%	15%	17%	21%
M248	7%	13%	14%	15%
DD126	11%	8%	20%	n/a
DD209	11%	13%	17%	20%
A111	2%	4%	4%	7%
K102	n/a	3%	3%	6%
B100	n/a	5%	7%	6%
S111	6%	10%	8%	14%

3.1.2 Non-collection of TMAs by extension status, level, quality of TMA, ethnicity and disadvantage area

Chart 1 shows that the non-pickup percentage of those TMAs where an extension was granted. In 21J this is higher than for TMAs as a whole and perhaps this group are perhaps less likely to pick up because of the time lag from when the study for the TMA was done. Equally the time pressures on the student that resulted in an extension being required may result in a non-pick up.

Access students are the most likely to pick up their marked assignments. Possibly this is connected to the telephone contact these students have with tutors, which reinforces the value of tutor comments.

The percentage of TMAs with 'low' scores which are not picked up is high at 27%. Many of these students, after submitting the scripts, may have decided to actively or passively withdraw. We have no mechanism to detect passive withdrawals until a student fails to take an exam or complete an EMA. However, the "mid" range scores may be a group worth concentrating on as it is likely that this group are active and could gain valuable insights form tutor comments.

Chart 1 also shows that Black students are more likely not to pick up their scripts. This perhaps bears further investigation.

Chart 1: 20121 J Undergraduate non-pickup figures by category
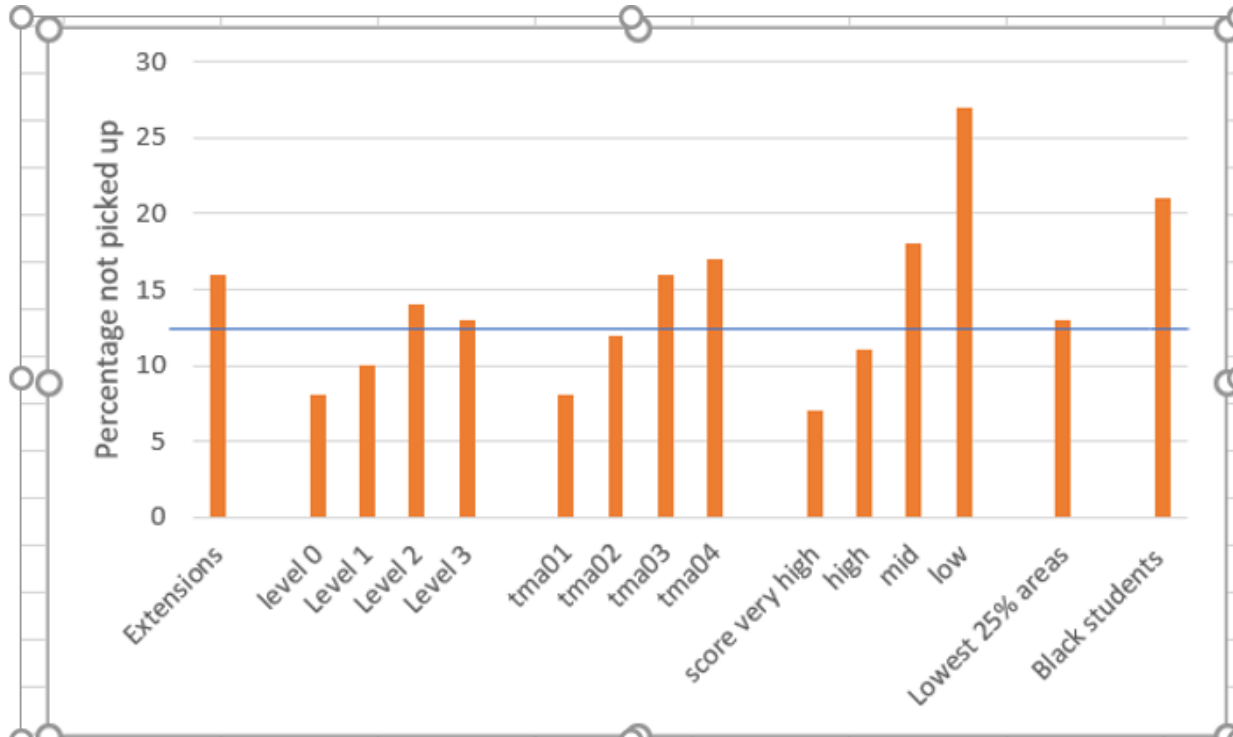
4. Outcomes of questionnaire to students

4.1 Methodology

A questionnaire, which students were asked to complete anonymously, was placed on the VLE of two statistics modules in STEM and two economics modules in FASS. The questionnaire was essentially the same for all four modules, albeit with minor changes to reflect the qualifications students were studying. The statistics questionnaires were placed on M140 and M248 and these were completed in December 2021. The chosen economics modules were DD126J and DD209 and students on these modules completed the questionnaires in February 2022. Overall, a total of 404 responses was received, representing a 14% response rate.

The questionnaire (see annex 1) had received all the required SRPP approvals. Students were clear that in completing the questionnaire they gave their permission for data to be aggregated and reported and also for individual quotes from free text responses to be used in the reporting and dissemination process.

Table 2: Student questionnaire completion rates

	Number of responses	Proportion of total responses	Number registered at start of module-Oct 2021	Number registered at 50% fee point (end Dec 2021)	Response rate – number of responses / end of Dec roll
DD126J	66	16%	731	653	10%
DD209	73	18%	451	409	18%
M140J	165	41%	1276	1110	15%
M248	100	25%	759	694	14%

Free text responses, whilst needing substantial analytical time and expertise to summarise and interpret, often provide much richer information than questions with pre-defined answers. The questionnaire therefore included a mix of pre-defined and free text answers. The mix of questions was designed to

a) determine how typical the respondents were, on key attributes, of the cohort as a whole (response bias).
b) determine how useful, on a four-point Likert scale certain features of feedback were to students.
c) enable free text responses to supplement and provide context to the pre-defined answer sets and
d) enable, through free text responses, students to give their views on a further limited set of topics related to marking and feedback.

The questions using a Likert scale were analysed by considering the percentage of responses that were the "very useful" category only. The Likert scale had typical responses of

- Very useful
- Quite useful
- Not very useful
- Not at all useful

OU students are traditionally very positive, hence the reason for undertaking the analysis using only the most positive category. Combining the top two categories was deemed unlikely to offer any differentiation between elements in the results.

The free text question responses were classified into the categories shown in table 3. Most of the free text comments were about the content of feedback.

Table 3: free text comment class and frequency

Class	All Responses	All L1	Stats	Economics	All L2	Stats	Economics
Content of feedback	141 (46.1%)	74	44	30	67	27	40
Marking	28 (9.2%)	11	7	4	17	9	8
Specimen solutions	28 (9.2%)	14	9	5	14	7	7
Format of feedback	23 (7.5%)	12	10	2	11	9	2
Wording	20 (6.5%)	9	4	5	11	6	5
My progress	17 (5.6%)	10	4	6	7	3	4
Speed	17 (5.6%)	9	6	3	8	2	6
Follow up	15 (4.9%)	4	1	3	11	1	10
Materials	8 (2.6%)	3	2	1	5	5	0
Assessment	7 (2.3%)	2	0	2	5	1	4

The raw answers to three of the free text answers

QA: *One thing which would make feedback on my TMAs more useful to me is…*

QB: *One thing that really irritates me about feedback is …*

QC: *One piece of advice about feedback I would give someone starting their first OU module is*

were reviewed to identify actionable themes and the positives identified by students. Answers were classified initially into three groups: 'positive comments', 'suggestions for the OU' and 'advice for other students. Comments which had more than a single meaning, were duplicated and classified accordingly into individual responses.

4.2 Findings

4.2.1 Usefulness of different aspects of feedback

The questionnaire contained a set of questions on various aspects of TMA feedback.   Chart 2 shows the percentage of responses in the "very useful" category for five of these questions.

Chart2: Types of comments student found very useful

Percentage of students reporting various aspects of feedback "very useful"
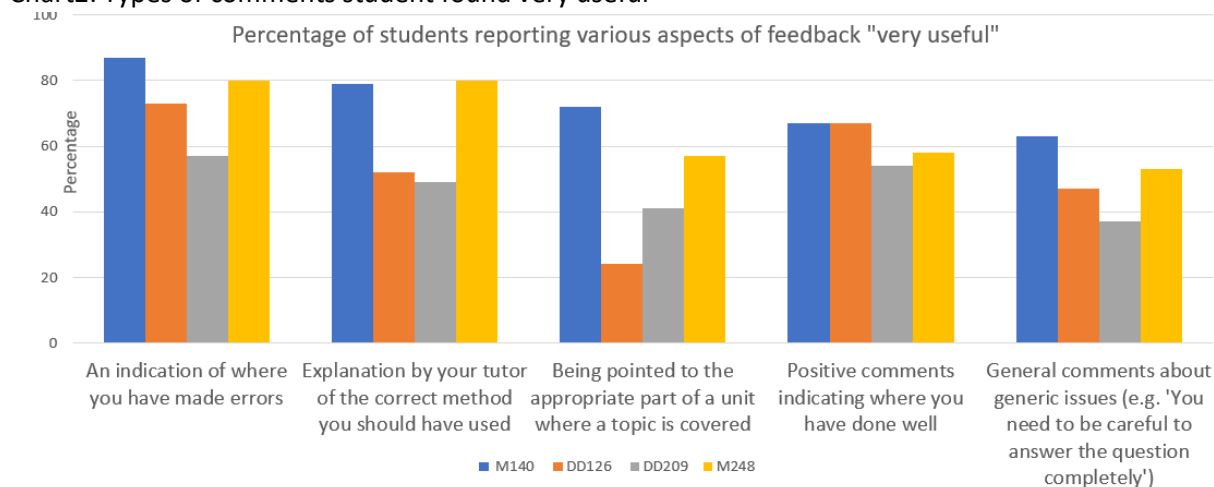
The higher usefulness the statistics students give to information about errors and correct solutions is perhaps a reflection of the nature of the two subjects. More surprising is the consistently high usefulness placed by all the students, regardless of level and subject, on the general and positive comments.

Free text comments from students indicating what would make feedback more useful included

- *What's expected of an answer. You get told what's wrong without being told what it should be. (Economics)*
- *complete ideal answers, some of the ones i got correct were quite long answers. I think they could've been condensed but not sure what points that I made were actually awarded the marks. (Statistics)*

but most of the comments were similar to this:

- *Cannot think of anything as feedback has been excellent (Statistics)*

4.2.2. Contact with the tutor

Students were asked two questions about contact with their tutor:

Have you ever contacted a tutor to discuss their comments on a TMA?

Do you think you would like your tutor to contact you to discuss your TMA feedback (Please be aware that this is an anonymous questionnaire so if you say YES we cannot arrange for your tutor to contact you - you will need to get in touch with them directly).

We would expect level 2 students to report a higher level of contact with a tutor simply because they have done more modules than level 1 students. Table 4 does show this effect for the M140/M248 pairing and the DD126/DD209 pair. It is also apparent from the table that the level 2 students are more likely to appreciate their tutor contacting them. Economics students are more likely both to initiate contact and to view tutor-initiated contacted favourably than statistics students.

Table 4: Direct contact by a student with tutor

	M140	DD126	M248	DD209
Q7: *Have you ever contacted a tutor to discuss their comments on a TMA*				
Yes	18 (11%)	17 (27%)	36 (40%)	40 (58%)
No	140 (89%)	47 (73%)	55 (60%)	29 (42%)
Q8 : *Do you think you would like your tutor to contact you to discuss your TMA feedback*				
yes	27 (16%)	18 (28%)	21 (21%)	29 (41%)
not sure	43 (26%)	30 (47%)	44 (45%)	22 (31%)
No	94 (57%)	16 (25%)	33 (34%)	20 28%)

Some students choose the Open University because the student does not want a high level of 1-1 contact. Chart 3 shows the number of students responding to the questionnaire who had initiated contact with their tutor and would / would not like their tutor to initiate a conversation. The symmetry of the diagram for DD209 indicates a balance between the numbers of students making / not making contact and wanting / not wanting contact from their tutor. In comparison the statistics students seem to favour not making contact and not wanting contact.

Chart 3:Tutor contact: Numbers of students by course and joint response to contact
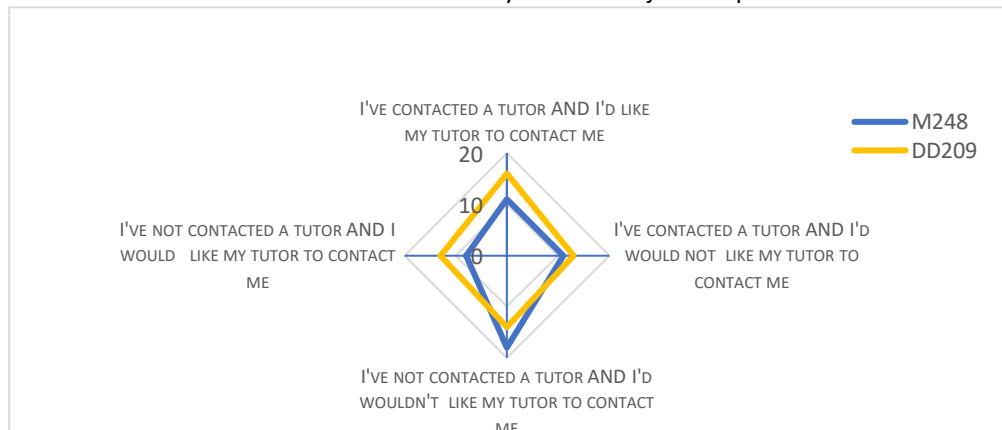
One of the free text comments is perhaps a good summary

> *"Often (almost always I think) tutors say that they are happy to talk through any comments that I have on the comments etc, this is enough because it leaves with me to decide what needs further discussion "(Statistics student)*

But it is a difficult balance as other students' comments included

- *"It is a one way street" (Economics)*
- *"Don't expect teaching or coaching from tutors, you are alone" (Economics)*
- *"it would help to have a chat with the tutor" (Stats)*

4.2.3. Collecting the TMA

The vast majority of students reported that they collected their TMAs pretty much as soon as they were aware the script was there. Free text comments indicated that very few students were aware of the app and a few reflected on the rather superfluous role of the PT3:

- *Awkwardness of accessing. Just email it. (Economics)*

- *how clunky it all is. it's 2021 and you have us downloading a folder with an html document to look at. (Stats)*

- *explain why feedback is split into summary and script comments - tutors can just repeat themselves (Stats)*

4.2.4 Knowing how well you have done
Students were asked
> *"Would you like to see a summary of the results for the TMA (for example minimum, median and maximum marks or mark distribution) posted on the student forum?"*

Student views were generally in favour of some summary information but around 15% were definitely not in favour.

Chart 4: Views on availability of summary results

Percentage in favour of summary results being made available on forum
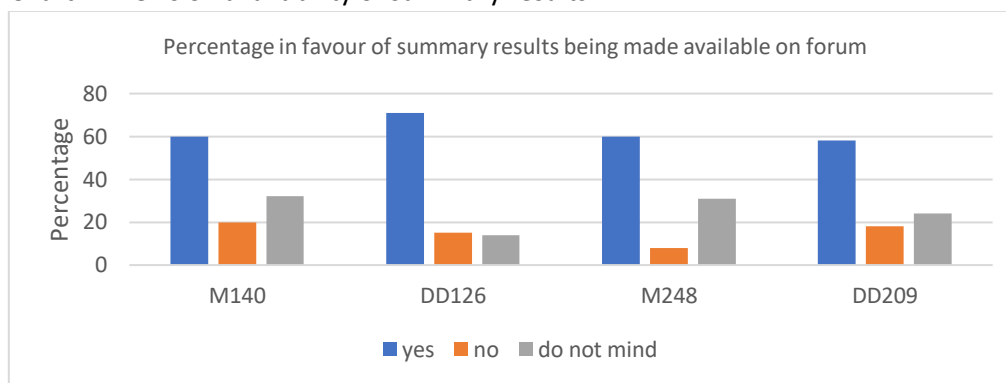
The question was then picked up by 17 students for further comment in the free text:

- *to see the distribution of marks across all students to understand performance against the rest of the class (Economics)*

4.2.5. Additional Free text responses

Table 5: Proportions of responses by group for Statistics & Economics students

	Positive	Suggestion	Advice	Non-actionable comment	Empty
QA	46 (16%)	173 (61%)	0 (0%)	10 (4%)	54 (19%)
QB	38 (14%)	125 (46%)	4 (2%)	21 (8%)	82 (30%)
QC	4 (1%)	8 (3%)	269 (93%)	0 (0%)	9 (3%)
All	88 (10%)	306 (36%)	273 (32%)	31 (4%)	145 (17%)
Stats	74 (84%)	158 (52%)	173 (63%)	3 (10%)	123 (85%)
Econ	14 (16%)	148 (48)	100 (37%)	28 (90%)	22 (15%)

Note: Rows and columns may not add up to 100% due to rounding and duplication of comments.

Statistics students are generally more positive, providing 84% of the positive responses. Economics students have far fewer pieces of advice for others, whilst the proportion of suggestions for the OU is roughly equally split between the two groups.

(see Annex 3 for further details)

5.   Tutor-facing work

5.1 Methodology

During 2021/2022 a staff tutor and two Associate lecturers ran a series of sessions to increase tutor awareness

In total three sessions were run at different events including the STEM teaching conference on 2 March 2022, a STEM-byALs-forALs session on 16 March 2022, and a Wales Online Cross-Faculty AL Development Event on 30 March 2022. An example abstract of these sessions can be found in Appendix 3.

Tutor feedback covered a range of areas from the form of the feedback through to ways to encourage students to increase their engagement with it.

5.2 Findings

5.2.1 The tutor's role in collection of feedback

There was wide variation among tutors in their approaches, and the extent to which they followed up and reminded students to collect their feedback. An example at the very proactive end of the spectrum was a tutor sending the students an email after TMA01 explaining when they can expect to receive the TMA back, advising what to do with the feedback, and inviting a conversation to discuss. However, tutors who always prompt students to collect their feedback are in the minority, see Chart 5below. It is debateable whether this should be seen as a standard part of the tutor's role or not. There is also a question whether the system should automatically remind a student after a certain period that they have not collected their feedback.

Chart5: Do you prompt students to collect their feedback

Legend: Always, Sometimes, Occasionally, Rarely, Never
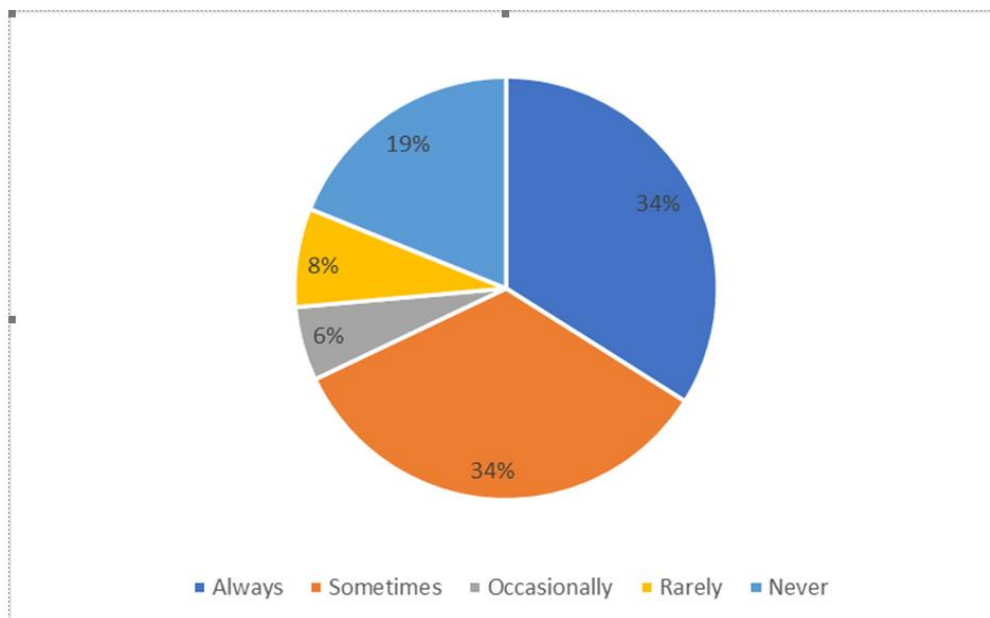
5.2.2 Systems

On a related point, there was a general lack of awareness among many tutors as to how they might discover whether students had collected their feedback, and what a tick next to the student's name on the eTMA site might mean. For example, did a tick mean that students had looked at the script *and* the PT3 form or just the PT3 form? There was also a lack of awareness about what the student sees and whether they can see their marks without downloading their TMA. Tutors also perceived a lack of understanding from students about the PT3 form and the script, with some students only looking at comments on the TMA or PT3 but not both.

5.2.3 Barriers to collection of feedback

In addition to a lack of understanding of systems, one of the key potential barriers to student engagement with feedback revealed by the survey was anxiety. The anxiety was attributed both to

uncertainty about using the systems and to previous bad experiences, feeling "told off/wrong". Whether returning students' assignments faster reduced the anxiety was an open question. It was suggested that there should be something included in the "preparation" for OU study which covered making the best use of the feedback, what the feedback will look like (which will also help address the systems points above) and encouraging students to get into good habits of collecting their work and not being scared of feedback.

5.2.4 Tutors' perceptions of students views and behaviour

There is a range of views amongst tutors about students' behaviours and their rationale. Some tutors observed that it was always the same students that collected their feedback and drew the conclusion that some students were just not very engaged in their learning. There was also a question whether students' behaviour is driven by proximity to an exam or an EMA, with some students collecting all their TMAs before the exam. The categories of students who didn't collect were the strongest and the weakest; tutors interpreted this as indicating that the strong students were satisfied with their performance and the weakest the least engaged/most fearful. There was a general view that good students used the feedback more than the weaker students. For tutors, receiving appreciation from students for their feedback is very satisfying, but in many cases, there is no response from the students so it is difficult to know how they viewed the marking. Tutors felt that students cared more about the score than the feedback and there were frustrations that despite all their efforts some students simply did not engage with the feedback process. Related to this there was a view that students didn't take note of the study skills aspect of the modules.

5.2.5 Timing

Timing was identified as being an issue, from two points of view. First, there is the question whether students have sufficient time to engage with the feedback and build on it for the next TMA due to busy lives and possibly to taking too many concurrent modules. Second, by the time they receive the marked TMA they have moved on to the next topic and don't want to go back, or it is returned when they are preoccupied with another area of life, a TMA for another module, and so on.

5.2.6 PT3 forms and script comments

The way that feedback is structured and presented generated the most discussion amongst tutors, in particular the approaches taken to the PT3 form and how this relates to the comments on the script. Some tutors felt that the PT3 form was the place for more generic comments and feedback on learning outcomes, in contrast to the very specific comments on the script. Some tutors felt that for strong students the PT3 form should include comments on development opportunities, whereas others felt there was no point in writing much if the assignment was well done. In general, PT3 forms were viewed as being difficult to write and subject to a wide variation of approaches. Some tutors suggested that comments on the PT3 form should be relatively long - perhaps 500 words - whereas others questioned its value and whether it might provide too much feedback and viewed the script as the place for all the detailed feedback.

There was overall agreement that PT3 forms should include encouragement and general tips for improvement. The tone of feedback is important – it needs to be encouraging but also constructive. Students should be encouraged to get in touch if they want to discuss the feedback, but there is a question about how proactively this should be pursued – for example, should the tutor pose questions for the students, ask them to email to confirm that they have read the feedback, and so on? It is difficult for new ALs to develop an appropriate approach for the PT3 forms and more training on this would be welcomed. Tutors also had suggestions on how to make the feedback more engaging

including using the student's name more and generally personalising it, "talking" to them through the feedback

5.2.7 Monitoring

Unsurprisingly given the wide variety of marking approaches there are also a variety of approaches to monitoring. Some ALs found monitoring helpful and supportive but not all viewed it as such. There was also a view that the role and purpose of monitoring is not explained well enough for new starters.

5.2.8 Variation by module

There is variation in the engagement in feedback depending on the module, including how important TMAs are in the context of the module. In particular project modules seem to encourage more interaction with feedback, since the TMAs may be drafts of the EMA. When TMAs contribute relatively little to the overall mark, do students view these as unimportant rather than appreciating the formative side? It would be possible to use self-reflection questions in the TMA to focus on pieces of feedback provided by the tutor and ask students how they have developed their skills based on the tutor's comments – in fact, this already occurs in some modules.

5.3 Suggestions for action by tutors

A number of tips were suggested including

- Use the dummy TMA to show students how marking looks and the style of feedback the tutor will be using
- Check that students can read our handwriting
- Use the introductory tutorial to discuss feedback, its form and use, and the timing of marking
- Also use the tutor group forum to explain the importance of feedback
- Offer 10-minute marking feedback calls (to be taken out of TRA or TMA time)
- Hold monthly tutor group tutorials discussing general TMA feedback
- Ask students in tutorials what they think of the feedback
- Include discussion of feedback as part of study skills sessions

6. Student-facing work

The free text comments in the questionnaire responses provided a rich repository of views from students. In particular, the question 'One piece of advice about feedback I would give someone starting their first OU module is …' elicited a range of valuable suggestions. It was considered that this 'horse's mouth' advice might well carry more weight with students than more abstract advice from tutors.

It was therefore decided to compile a selection of these comments into a format which could be provided to students at an appropriate point in their study journey. Various formats were considered, with the final version being a fairly brief document covering the entire TMA process, from working on the questions to receiving, reading and making use of the feedback.

Of course, it is one thing to provide a document, quite another to ensure that students make use thereof. There is already advice in the materials for many modules on 'What to do when you get your TMA back', or something similar. However, this may well be overlooked or regarded as irrelevant at the point when the student encounters it. 'Just in time' is a good principle when providing information to students, and the authors regard the study planner as the ideal location for inserting messages such

as 'Have you collected your TMA?' We are therefore proposing to place the advice document at the relevant point in the schedule along with the reminder to collect the first marked TMA. This will of course require the co-operation of module chairs, plus university-level approval if the document is to remain for more than one presentation – this is in hand.

It was clear from a significant number of student comments that there is confusion about questions such as 'Do I need to pass all the TMAs?' Although students are provided with written information about assessment structures, tutors might find it useful to talk through the module requirements in the initial tutorial – this could reduce anxiety and pressure particularly on weaker students.

Another fairly frequent comment was along the lines of 'my mark didn't reflect the work I put in' or 'I was marked down because my answer disagreed with the tutor's'. This is a tricky one to address and needs to be looked at in the context of individual module requirements, but it would be helpful to disabuse students of the idea that we are giving 'marks for effort'.

A separate dimension of the student-facing activity involves the technology used to return marked TMAs and the corresponding PT3 to students. As has already been mentioned, many students are unaware of the existence of the app which would enable them to access results on their phone or tablet; the separation of PT3 and script was also heavily criticised (with some students just reading the PT3 comments, others not knowing that the PT3 exists).

Addressing these concerns would require action at university level, and in any case the process for collecting, marking and returning work is undergoing a radical change with the introduction of Wiseflow. It is therefore probably best to defer consideration of this aspect until the new system is fully embedded.

7. General conclusions and suggestions for further work

7.1 Possible actions at module level

- It is clear that there are wide variations in non-pickup rates between modules. Considerations of rates of pickup by students could form a standard part of regular module reviews.
- Module teams might consider whether a part of the allocated tutor time for the module should be devoted to contacting students after TMAs are returned – to discuss feedback and/or to ascertain why some students have not collected their marked work.
- Tutors should ensure that students understand the basis of marking and the assessment structure for their module, perhaps by including this in the first tutorial.
- We hope that the 'advice to students from students' material which we have prepared as part of this project, and which is completely generic, might be more widely adopted by other modules than the four we have targeted.
- Module teams may wish to consider whether to provide some brief information as to overall mark distributions for TMAs, such as the median, maximum and minimum mark, against which students can judge their own performance.

7.2 More general actions

- When the new WiseFlow system is introduced, the University should ensure that students find feedback – both script comments and more general comments – easier to access, bearing in mind that phones and tablets are for many students the preferred medium for doing this. Is the new system being 'road tested' by a sample of students?
- If the PT3/script separation is to be retained under the new system, greater clarity is needed as to the roles of the two elements. In particular, students are irritated by repetition on the

PT3 of comments already made on the script, while they value generic comments such as 'Make sure you do exactly what the question is asking'.

- Training for new tutors needs to make even clearer the importance to students of encouragement and positive reinforcement – the fact that TMA marking is a form of teaching cannot be too strongly emphasised. Comment on work done well, making it clear what is particularly good about it, is as important to students as the pointing out and correction of errors.
- Fuller use could be made of the monitoring process to gather and disseminate examples of exceptional practice. As tutors commented on wide disparities in practice between different monitors, there is perhaps a need for clearer information in monitor training concerning the purpose and scope of the monitoring process, and what is perceived as helpful feedback by students.

7.3 Suggestions for further work

The university-level analysis of non-pickup data has revealed some features relevant to other areas of current university concern. In particular, the reasons for much lower pickup rates by Black students and by those with extensions would benefit from more in-depth investigation.

List of deliverables

Training sessions for ALs: Three sessions delivered March 2022

Documentation for students to be placed on Maths&Stats school sire and/or study calendars: Collecting and using your TMA feedback – advice from your fellow students

Journal paper: in preparation

List of figures and tables

Table 1: Non collection rates by TMA and modules

Chart 1: 20121 J Undergraduate non-pickup figures by category

Table 2: Student questionnaire completion rates

University approvals

SRPP 20202/070

Annex 1: Questionnaire on feedback on TMAs (click here)

May I introduce both myself, Carol Calvert, and Clare Morris and the purpose of this questionnaire.

Clare and I are both longstanding tutors and we are both statisticians. I am also a staff tutor. We are undertaking a piece of work to try and make feedback more useful to students, and to enable tutors to provide improved feedback to students. This questionnaire is a part of that work; the wider work also includes talking directly with tutors and students.

The questionnaire is completely anonymous; however, we would like to make use of selected quotes from students' responses in preparing advice to other students. There will be no way in which these quotes can be linked to their author. Your completion of the questionnaire will be taken to indicate that you are happy with this arrangement.

If you have any questions about this, or about any other aspect of the work, please do contact me on carol.calvert@open.ac.uk. Many thanks for showing an interest in completing the questionnaire.

Carol and Clare

1 You might be studying this module as a part of a named qualification or as a standalone module. Please choose the option from the drop-down menu that best describes your qualification aim.

- ☐ 1.Studying as a standalone module
- ☐ 2.Studying as part of a Maths or Maths and statistics degree
- ☐ 3. Studying as part of an Economics or Economics and mathematical sciences degree
- ☐ 4.Studying as a part of the Data Science or Computing degree
- ☐ 5.Studying as a part of the Open degree or the Combined STEM degree
- ☐ 6.Studying as a part of a Diploma or Certificate programme
- ☐ 7. Other not specified

2 How many modules have you already completed with the Open University?

- ☐ 1. I have not yet completed an OU module
- ☐ 2. I have already completed two or more OU modules

3 Your marked TMA has three distinct elements: a mark, a set of comments on the front page (PT3 comments) and comments on the script itself. We would like to ask you about how you access each of these and then ask you for any other comments you have about **accessing marks and feedback.**

So the mark itself first.

Do you look at your TMA mark as soon as you know it is available?

☐ 1.Usually Yes
☐ 2.Usually No

4 Do you always download your marked TMA?

○ Yes ○ No ⦿ No answer

Question #5

5 When do you usually download your marked TMA

☐ 1.Immediately I know it is available
☐ 2. Within a few days of when I know it is available
☐ 3. Just before I start on the next TMA

6 When you download your marked TMA there are the PT3 (front sheet) comments and the comments on your actual script. There is an OU mobile device app that you can use to see some of these. Can you use the free text box to tell us how you make use of these comments and if you use the app to download any of them? (The box will expand to allow you to write as much as you want.)

[   ]

7 Have you ever contacted a tutor to discuss their comments on a TMA?

○ Yes ○ No ⦿ No answer

Question #8

8 Do you think you would like your tutor to contact you to discuss your TMA feedback (Please be aware that this is an anonymous questionnaire so if you say YES we cannot arrange for your tutor to contact you - you will need to get in touch with them directly.).

☐ 1.Yes
☐ 2.Not sure
☐ 3.No

9 Is there anything else you would like to tell us about accessing your marks and feedback?

[   ]

Questions 10-14 are about how useful you have found each of the following aspects of feedback on your TMA.

10 An indication of where you have made errors

○ Very useful
○ Quite useful
○ Not very useful
○ Not at all useful
◉ No answer

11 Explanation by your tutor of the correct method you should have used

○ Very useful
○ Quite useful
○ Not very useful
○ Not at all useful
◉ No answer

12 Being pointed to the appropriate part of a unit where a topic is covered

○ Very useful
○ Quite useful
○ Not very useful
○ Not at all useful
◉ No answer

13 Positive comments indicating where you have done well

○ Very useful
○ Quite useful
○ Not very useful
○ Not at all useful
◉ No answer

14 General comments about generic issues (e.g. 'You need to be careful to answer the question completely')

○ Very useful
○ Quite useful
○ Not very useful
○ Not at all useful
● No answer

15 If you have completely omitted part of, or a complete, question do you find it useful if

☐ 1.Your tutor gives a complete answer
☐ 2. Your tutor points you to a comparable examples in the units
☐ 3.Neither

16 Do you look back at the feedback on your previous TMAs when working on the next one?

☐ 1.Always
☐ 2.Sometimes
☐ 3.Never

17 Would you like to see a summary of the results for the TMA (for example minimum, median and maximum marks or mark distribution) posted on the student forum?

☐ 1.Yes
☐ 2.No
☐ 3. Do not mind

18 Please complete the following statement

One thing which would make feedback on my TMAs more useful to me is

[ ]

19 Please complete the following statement

One thing that really irritates me about feedback is

[ ]

20 Please complete the following statement

One piece of advice about feedback I would give someone starting their first OU module is

21 Many thanks for your time in completing this questionnaire and is there anything else you would like to say about the feedback you get on TMAs?

Annex 2: Collecting and using your TMA feedback – advice from your fellow students

Reading the feedback on your marked TMA can be a bit nerve-racking, but it can also be a really important part of your learning. A recent survey produced a great deal of valuable advice from students, which we're sharing with you here. All the quotes in red are taken directly from comments by students – and they're just representative examples of topics which were mentioned dozens of times. This is the voice of experience!

Some preliminary advice – doing and handing in the TMA

Complete the dummy TMA

Make sure to read all the guidance about submitting TMAs well in advance

Attempt the TMA as soon as possible, and work on it as you go along, straight after completing the relevant unit.

Make sure to keep in mind when your assessments are due in, you don't want to have to rush anything.

Plan your time and keep disciplined! Once you fall behind, it's tough to get back on track, so don't let it happen.

Make a plan and keep it realistic

Read the question, answer the question, then read the question again! – but don't over-think it.

Know that the time you spend on learning will pay off and don't give up.

Do what it says on the tin and you can't go far wrong

Picking up your marked TMA…

Download the pack [*that is, your marked script plus the summary sheet*] from the website to save alongside the submission.

Print them so easier to refer to. Use for revision.

keep all feedback downloaded to use later, keep it stored

… reading and making use of the feedback…

Read the feedback initially then go back the next day once emotions surrounding marks have subsided. read, and review, then revisit the comments a few days later

Read through the comments thoroughly and talk to a friend or family member about any mistakes you have made (or things you are particularly proud of), and how you can improve. This helps to keep the feedback in your head, so you have it at hand when tackling the next TMA.

Look at the feedback as soon as possible so that you can keep on top of any errors/feedback for completing the next TMA and improving your marks.

even if you score highly there is value in reviewing the feedback as tutors will also comment on things such as the style and formatting of the document which can be useful when setting out future assignments.

Focus on applying the feedback given rather than focusing on your assessment score

Take any general advice on board. It can provide easy extra marks throughout the rest of your studies if you fix general issues on how you show your working or answer written questions.

Make use of it. You might be annoyed at first to have dropped marks, but turn it into a positive and learn from your mistakes

Take your time to consider the feedback - then redo that part using the feedback provided

Take notes of your feedback to refer back to

go back to it as many times as needed

read the feedback numerous times to take it in properly to be able to use it effective in future TMA's because it is a brilliant resource to support you to improve

have the feedback handy for the next attempt at an TMA.

…maybe feeling a bit upset by the comments…

Don't take it personally, use it as fuel for doing even better in your next assignment.

It's for your own good. If you don't know where you are going wrong, how do you expect to improve?

accept it constructively, it is really helpful

Don't get too hung up on it

Try not to get too upset if your mark isn't as high as you'd hope or wanted

[remember] that it is given to encourage and help them

Making a mistake and receiving feedback for the mistake is an efficient way for an improvement. So, appreciate it rather than being disappointed

Take your time to process the feedback, don't allow your emotions to cloud your judgement.

And if you don't understand something your tutor has written…

don't be afraid to ask your tutor for clarification, especially if you think they're wrong! (you may need help realising you've gotten the wrong idea about something)

Don't be shy to ask for help from your tutor

Make the most of having an assigned tutor

If you want really clear feedback, you should ask clear questions to your tutor yourself.

Finally…

re-read the feedback from previous TMAs before submitting the next to ensure that you have learned from past mistakes and the feedback was not given in vain

And above all, remember…

TMAs are about much more than marking!

Annex 3 Free text analysis

This document collates the information contained in responses to three questions in the TMA Feedback survey, by classifying responses into a set of broad classes, with further sub-classifications based on each class. The questions used are:

- QA   One thing which would make feedback on my TMAs more useful to me is…
- QB   One thing that really irritates me about feedback is …
- QC   One piece of advice about feedback I would give someone starting their first OU module is…

METHOD

The raw answers to QA, QB & QC were reviewed to identify actionable themes and the positives identified by students. Answers were classified initially into three groups: 'positive comments', 'suggestions for the OU' and 'advice for other students'. These are reviewed below, with more granular classifications within each group. Comments which had more than a single meaning, were duplicated and classified accordingly into individual responses.

	Positive	Suggestion	Advice	Non-actionable comment	Empty
QA	46 (16.3%) ▼	173 (61.1%) ▲	0 (0%)	10 (3.5%) ▲	54 (19.1%) ▼
QB	38 (14.1%) ▼	125 (46.3%) ▲	4 (1.5%) ▲	21 (7.8%) ▲	82 (30.4%) ▼
QC	4 (1.4%) ▲	8 (2.8%) ▲	269 (92.8%) ▲	0 (0%)	9 (3.1%) ▼
All	88 (10.4%) ▼	306 (36.3%) ▲	273 (32.4%) ▲	31 (3.7%) ▲	145 (17.2%) ▼
Stats	74 (84.1%)	158 (51.6%)	173 (63.4%)	3 (9.7%)	123 (84.8%)
Eco	14 (15.9%)	148 (48.4%)	100 (36.6%)	28 (90.3%)	22 (15.2%)

Table 1: **Proportions of responses by group for Statistics & Economics students.** Rows and columns may not add up to 100% due to rounding and duplication of comments. The arrows indicate a change relative to the previous (Apr 21) report.

Overall, positive comments are reduced compared to last year, with suggestions forming the greatest group. This might reflect the challenges of the Covid pandemic. Stats students generally are more positive, providing 84.1% of the positive responses. Economics students have far fewer pieces of advice for others, whilst the proportion of suggestions for the OU is roughly equally split between the two groups.

STATISTICS	Positive	Suggestion	Advice	Non-actionable comment	Empty
Q3	42 (23.1%)	91 (50%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.1%)	47 (25.8%)
Q4	29 (17.4%)	65 (38.9%)	4 (2.4%)	1 (0.6%)	68 (40.7%)
Q5	3 (1.6%)	2 (1.1%)	169 (92.9%)	0 (0%)	8 (4.4%)
All	74 (13.9%)	158 (29.8%)	173 (32.6%)	3 (0.6%)	123 (23.2%)

Table 2: **Proportions of responses by group for Statistics students only.** Rows and columns may not add up to 100% due to rounding and duplication of comments.

Pleasingly, for Stats students, the majority of comments are advice for other students, with suggestions coming a close second.

ECONOMICS	Positive	Suggestion	Advice	Non-actionable comment	Empty
Q3	4 (4%)	82 (81.2%)	0 (0%)	8 (7.9%)	7 (6.9%)
Q4	9 (8.7%)	60 (58.3%)	0 (0%)	20 (19.4%)	14 (13.6%)

Q5	1 (0.9%)	6 (5.6%)	100 (92.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.9%)
All	14 (4.5%)	148 (47.4%)	100 (32.1%)	28 (9%)	22 (7.1%)

Table 3: Proportions of responses by group for Economics students only. Rows and columns may not add up to 100% due to rounding and duplication of comments.

Economics students had a much greater proportion of suggestions to make, which might reflect differences between mathematics and economics as subjects. There were a reasonable number of advice responses, but a surprisingly small number of positive comments.

POSITIVE COMMENTS

Comments across all three questions that were assessed as being positive were compiled into a phrase cloud (Figure 1) to indicate the adjectives used.
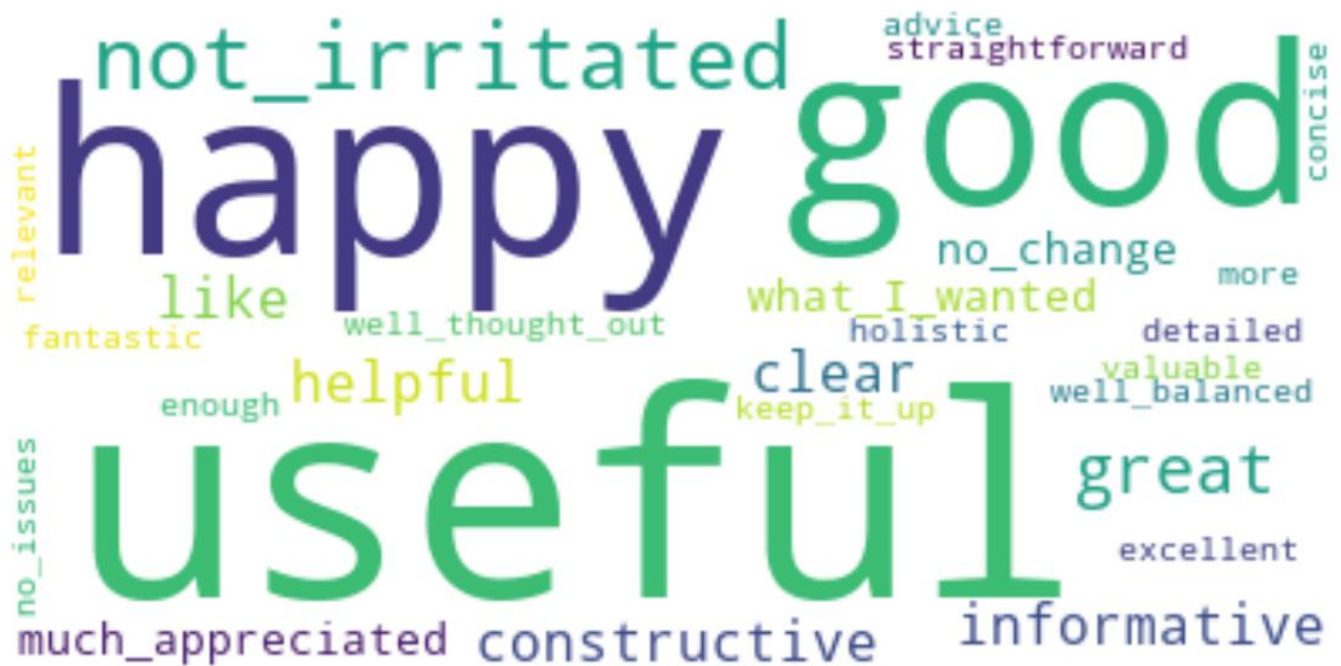
Figure 1: Phrase cloud for positive comments. The relative size of each phrase reflects its frequency in the total collection.

SUGGESTIONS TO THE OU

Any singleton comments were excluded at this stage, to keep the complexity manageable – they have been added back in for individual classes below. Comments were classified further into an overall 'class' (see Table 4) and then into specific comment types for each class. Each class is discussed below together with examples of responses.

Class	All Responses	All L1	Stats	Economics	All L2	Stats	Economics
Content of feedback	141 (46.1%)	74	44	30	67	27	40
Marking	28 (9.2%)	11	7	4	17	9	8
Specimen solutions	28 (9.2%)	14	9	5	14	7	7
Format of feedback	23 (7.5%)	12	10	2	11	9	2
Wording	20 (6.5%)	9	4	5	11	6	5
My progress	17 (5.6%)	10	4	6	7	3	4

Class	All Responses	All L1	Stats	Economics	All L2	Stats	Economics
Speed	17 (5.6%)	9	6	3	8	2	6
Follow up	15 (4.9%)	4	1	3	11	1	10
Materials	8 (2.6%)	3	2	1	5	5	0
Assessment	7 (2.3%)	2	0	2	5	1	4

Table 4: Comment class and frequency. L1 & L2L3 refer to the frequency of class responses for L1 or L2L3 students respectively. 'Materials' and 'Assessment' are new classes for this 2022 report.

Content of feedback is consistently the biggest of all the classes, indicating that students feel most strongly about the actual content of the feedback they receive. The proportions of classes is reasonably similar to the previous report, although many proportions are reduced. L1 students are keen to receive feedback on their progress relative to their peers. Both L1 and L2L3 students have views about how TMAs are marked, forming the second biggest groups. L2 students are keener on following up TMA feedback than L1; and have more responses for course materials and assessment.

Content of feedback

46% of all responses concerned the content of feedback, described in Table 5.

	All Responses	All L1	Stats	Economics	All L2	Stats	Economics
Detailed feedback	54	30	20	10	24	10	14
Specific feedback	32	20	10	10	12	3	9
References to material	15	9	6	3	6	5	1
Improve my answer	9	3	0	3	6	0	6
Positive feedback	8	5	3	2	3	0	3
Holistic feedback	5	2	0	2	3	1	2
Omitted questions	4	0	0	0	4	3	1
Improve on success	3	0	0	0	3	1	2
Further reading	3	1	1	0	2	2	0
No feedback	2	1	1	0	1	0	1
Summary of areas to improve	2	1	1	0	1	0	1
Summary of TMA performance	2	1	1	0	1	1	0

Table 5: Content of feedback class responses and frequencies. Singleton comments have been excluded.

The biggest groups of responses are 'detailed feedback' and 'specific feedback', similar to last year's report. There are interesting differences between the Stats and Economics students at L1 and L2, suggesting that feedback may not be detailed or specific enough in the L2 Economics modules. L2 students are keener to know where they can improve answers; how to stretch themselves even when they have done well, and particularly to gain guidance on tackling questions they omitted from a TMA.

Only two students indicated that they didn't receive any feedback and two noted they wanted a summary of TMA performance – suggesting that they aren't aware of the PT3 cover sheet.

Raw Responses

- *The comments in the Assessment Summary tell me what parts I need to work on but I feel like they don't give me enough of an explanation for me to understand how to improve (Economics)*

- *Examples of what I could have included, if my answers are right but could have been expanded then what else I could have said to make the answer complete, what important points I have missed completely, advise on referencing and what I could have included as a useful quote. (Economics)*
- *lack of comments on where i was going right. (Economics)*
- *If my tutor included more links to module materials to show me which topic I got things wrong in (Economics)*
- *"must do better" comments without advise on how to do better!! As if I'm not trying my hardest anyway!*
- *My tutor seems to get distracted. I would just like to know whether my answer is correct or not, and if not, what the correct answer is and where I can read more about it. More than this should not be necessary and makes the feedback very depressing overall. (Economics)*
- *There is barely any feedback and if there is, it doesn't help you improve for future tma's (Economics)*
- *more explanation of the fundamental concepts behind the answers (Statistics)*
- *dyslectic people sometimes approach questions in a different way. (Statistics)*
- *a specific comment, not relevant to all tmas: my last tutor made a few comments about how the module was so easy that he found it difficult to teach and assess. he found it difficult to relate to the needs of his students. and in admitting that, he also undermined my confidence because the material was not easy for me. (Statistics)*
- *a short summary of which aspects i should focus on to improve (Statistics)*
- *get feedback on general weak points that tutor might have noticed over the duration of the module - e.g. if it appears that basic algebra seems to be the a point to improve on or read the tasks more carefully (Statistics)*
- *i also recieved no guidance from the questions i left blank even after saying i left it blank because i didn't know how to do it. (Statistics)*

Marking

9.2% of all responses concerned how TMAs are marked, described in Table 6. This area is more prominent than in the 2021 survey.

	All Responses	All L1	Stats	Economics	All L2	Stats	Economics
Quality of marking	12	6	4	2	6	3	3
Consistency of marking	10	3	2	1	7	2	5
Marking scheme	4	1	1	0	3	3	0
How to use marking scheme	1	0	0	0	1	1	0
More strict marking	1	1	0	1	0	0	0

Table 6: Marking class responses and frequencies.

The two main categories of suggestion here are consistency and quality of marking, similar to the 2021 survey. Students this year however highlighted being taught about how to use the marking scheme, as a specific actionable suggestion. L1 students were preferentially interested in getting details of the marking scheme, specifically only Stats students. Stats students also made comments about the quality of marking, with consistency a distant third. L2 students made markedly different comments: primarily around consistency and quality of marking, with Economics students equally or more concerned about these categories than Stats students.

Raw Responses
- **Quality**: Students here commented largely about errors in marking, such as missing answers to questions; apparent contradictions between TMA feedback and teaching materials; subjective awarding of marks
  - *when a tutor "can't be bothered" or has too much on to mark properly. i'm asking for proportionate amount of time, not excessive, but some tutors (not on this course) clearly didn't want to be marking. so comes down to quality of tutor. (Stats)*
  - *tutors to understand that if someone has more advance knowledge and answer something else to look at the answer and not correct according to their own solution. (Stats)*
  - *Where it appears the essay hasn't been read properly (Economics)*
  - *when one tutor says one thing on a tutorial but then it says something different when it's marked. (Economics)*
- **Consistency**: Here students commented about inconsistency between tutors, or when deductions are perceived to be 'subjective' (which might relate more to the explanation given or lack thereof)
  - *No standardisation between tutors. Even in terms of what's expected from references seems to differ between tutors. While some will give in depth comments on the TMA, some will give very minimal feedback which isn't constructive for future assignments. (Economics)*
  - *another tutor might have given you a better mark (Stats)*
- **Marking scheme**: Comments for this category are largely consistent in terms of wanting better understanding of how marks are awarded for each part of an answer. It's interesting that only Statistics students made this comment.
  - *to know what the marks actually mean and what is expected (ie, work quality etc) if one gets marks within the different grade boundaries. (Stats)*
  - *if there were a mark scheme included - e.g half mark for formula x; half mark for selecting correct value for p; half mark for correct substitution etc (Stats)*
  - *my main issue with tmas have been how marks are deducted based on the mark scheme. (i.e. an answer being technically correct, but not on the mark scheme, so marks were awarded.)} (Stats)*

Specimen solutions

9.2% of all comments indicated a desire to see specimen solutions or full solutions to TMA questions, described in

	All Responses	All L1	Stats	Economics	All L2	Stats	Economics
Specimen solutions	28	14	9	5	14	7	7

Table 7: Specimen solution response frequencies.

Responses were evenly divided between L1 and L2L3 students. L1 stats students were more interested than Economics students, possibly because of the introductory nature of M140. At L2L3, students were evenly divided.

Raw Responses
- *If the tutor gave the best answer so I could compare what looks best. (Economics)*
- *What's expected of an answer. You get told what's wrong without being told what it should be. (Economics)*

- *complete ideal answers, some of the ones i got correct were quite long answers. i think they could've been condensed but not sure what points that i made were actually awarded the marks. (Statistics)*
- *solution or if there are steps that i have missed (Statistics)*

Format of feedback

7.5% of students had suggestions for how feedback is delivered, described in Table 8.

	All Responses	All L1	Stats	Economics	All L2	Stats	Economics
downloading feedback	14	7	5	2	7	5	2
handwriting	6	3	3	0	3	3	0
feedback format	2	1	1	0	1	1	0
coloured text	1	1	1	0	0	0	0

Table 8: Format of feedback responses and frequencies.

- As for last year, the greatest number of responses concerned the eTMA system. There is also clear dissatisfaction with handwritten comments, higher than last year; illegible feedback doesn't aid development so recommend that all feedback be typed.

Raw Responses

- **Downloading feedback**:
  - *Awkwardness of accessing. Just email it. (Economics)*
  - *having to download a folder to see it, not very accessible from my phone. why can't we see the feedback from all modules online? (Stats)*
- **Handwriting***:
  - *handwritten marks/comments with a mouse so the writing is difficult to read (Stats)*
  - *sometimes it is difficult to read the handwritten annotations in the tma itself. i appreciate tutors don't have the time to typeset any mathematics but general textual comments would benefit from being typed. (Stats)*
- **Format:**
  - *explain why feedback is split into summary and script comments - tutors can just repeat themselves (Stats)*

Wording

6.5% of suggestions related to how tutors phrase their feedback, described in Table 9.

	All Responses	All L1	Stats	Economics	All L2	Stats	Economics
Choice of words	9	3	2	1	6	5	1
Be constructive	8	4	0	4	4	1	3
How I present the TMA	2	1	1	0	1	0	1
Clarity	1	1	1	0	0	0	0

Table 9: Wording of feedback responses and frequencies.

Opportunities here are to ensure that comments are objective and relate to the question or mark scheme; avoid patronising language; be clear and unambiguous; ensure that criticism is developmental and encourages learning. Use of the 'feedback sandwich' approach may be beneficial – mixing developmental criticism with positive comments – and quality of language could be included in

monitoring reports (might be already?). This feeds into the desire for detailed and specific feedback above.

Raw Responses

- **Choice of words:**
  - *Being told that my question about a comment on my TMA feedback is about something trivial. That may or may not be the case but it isn't trivial to me.. (Have only experienced this once though) (Economics)*
  - *too personal feedback or too positive comments that can appear condescending (Stats)*
- **Be constructive:**
  - *Point out where I went wrong and give me the right answer rather than just telling me something is wrong. (Economics)*
  - *when it isn't clear or constructive. (Stats)*
- **How I present the TMA:**
  - *Constant comments about writing, as I feel this is purely down to tutor opinions. I have had feedback of a good nature and bad from tutor's and feel that this is purely personal point rather than a constructive comment. (Economics)*
  - *if they would like use microsoft word the equation editor is quite annoying and i am suggesting to use snip for ios. there are more options in the market. writing the equations takes more time than solving. (Stats)*

My progress

5.6% of responses related to how the student was progressing in their module, described in Table 10.

	All Responses	All L1	Stats	Economics	All L2	Stats	Economics
peer comparison	16	9	3	6	7	3	4
overall performance	1	1	1	0	0	0	0

Table 10: Student progress responses and frequencies.

As for last year's report, the greatest group of responses are for students to understand how they are progressing against their peer group; Economics students at both levels were keener than Stats students for this. This is clearly a recurring theme that should be incorporated into the eTMA system replacement project.

Raw Responses

- *to see the distribution of marks across all students to understand peformance against the rest of the class (Economics)*
- *how this result contributes to my overall score, weightings considered. (Stats)*

Speed

5.6% of responses related to how quickly marked TMAs were returned to students, described in Table 11.

	All Responses	All L1	Stats	Economics	All L2	Stats	Economics
Speed	16	8	6	2	8	2	6
Fixed date	1	1	0	1	0	0	0

Table 11: Speed of TMA turn-around responses.

Almost all students wanted their feedback more quickly – which might reflect the longer turn-around times used during the Covid pandemic. It's difficult to suggest how to change this without

fundamentally changing the Associate Lecturer role, e.g. by moving to full-time staff; however this class represents a minority of all responses.

Raw Responses

- *Not knowing when it comes; sometimes v quick and sometimes not! (Economics)*
- *it generally has quite a long turn around time compared to other OU modules I have studied (Economics)*
- *having my marked tma returned more quickly! (Stats)*
- *the time is took to obtain the feedback. was really nervous about my first tma feedback and had to prompt the tutor to provide me with feedback (Stats)*

Follow up

4.9% of responses were for follow up with a tutor to discuss feedback, as shown in Table 12 below.

	All Responses	All L1	Stats	Economics	All L2	Stats	Economics
Discuss with tutor	15	4	1	3	11	1	10

Table 12: Follow up response frequencies.

The proportion of responses here is markedly greater than in last year's report. The main theme from comments here are tutors contacting students individually to review their feedback; this would be impractical for a group of 20 students, but no harm in ensuring that the PT3 reminds students that they can contact their tutor to discuss feedback.

Raw Responses

- *Being able to discuss the comments with my tutor (Economics)*
- *Don't expect teaching or coaching from tutors, you are alone. (Economics)*
- *Its a one way street (Economics)*
- *online tutorials are generally pedantic and it's next to impossible to gave any sort of discussion. (Economics)*
- *a chat with the tutor (Stats)*
- *having a tutor go through the questions after the tma is marked to act as a review. students might not understand how to answer a question, and written comments might not help as much. tutor (Stats)*

Materials

A new comment type for all 'course materials' responses was created this year, comprising 2.6% of responses, described in Table 13.

	All Responses	All L1	Stats	Economics	All L2	Stats	Economics
More questions	5	1	0	1	4	4	0
More materials	2	1	1	0	1	1	0
Poor materials	1	1	1	0	0	0	0

Table 13: Course materials responses and frequencies.

Although admittedly small numbers, comments here were largely around seeking additional practice questions, and specific comments about more videos or poor-quality module materials. Providing a pool of past questions and those prepared by tutors, for all tutors to use, may well address this.

Raw Responses

- *Providing more examples of other TMA's to compare (Economics)*
- *especially one question with unimodal and bimodal that a confusing video on website could cause to write different answer that what expected. unuversity has to replace that video and renew with another one concentrated on peak values ! (Stats)*
- *indicate how to access past papers (Stats)*

Assessment

A small proportion of responses (2.3%) specifically related to module assessment strategies, hence these were created as a separate class and described in Table 14.

	All Responses	All L1	Stats	Economics	All L2	Stats	Economics
Help for future TMAs	5	2	0	2	3	0	3
Formative assignments	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
Module assessment	1	0	0	0	1	1	0

Table 14: Assessment class response types.

This class of responses is almost exclusively from Economics students, suggesting that they are struggling with the type of TMAs set in those modules and potentially not focusing on generalising their feedback. Only a single Stats student indicated they would prefer summative assignments, indicating general satisfaction with the formative strategy used in M140 and M248.

Raw Responses

- *Feedback which would help me on my next TMA not just directly linked to questions on current TMA being marked (Economics)*
- *Suggestions on how I can improve on future assignments (Economics)*
- *Targets by the tutor for what they think I need to work on most for the next TMA (Economics)*
- *if they actually count towards the grade - this is not the case for current modules m248 or mst224 (Stats)*

ADVICE

As with suggestions above, comments assessed as 'advice to other students' were classified into common types, which are shown in Table 15:

	All Responses	All L1	Stats	Economics	All L2	Stats	Economics
Use the advice	120 (42.3%) ▼	67	47	20	53	34	19
Tactics	44 (15.5%) ▲	27	17	10	17	8	9
Feedback is a gift	32 (11.3%) ▲	19	10	9	13	8	5
Seek clarification	29 (10.2%) ▼	13	7	6	16	7	9
Be organised	25 (8.8%) ▼	15	12	3	10	6	4
Review your errors	15 (5.3%) ▼	11	11	0	4	2	2
Stay positive	10 (3.5%) ▼	3	2	1	7	3	4
Put the time in	3 (1.1%) ▼	2	2	0	1	1	0
Read the question	3 (1.1%) ▼	2	2	0	1	1	0
Check everything	2 (0.7%) ▼	2	2	0	0	0	0

| Practice makes perfect | 1 (0.4%) ▼ | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 15: Advice to other students classifications and frequencies.

The most common advice is to make use of the feedback that's provided, with 42.3% of students making this comment. More specific comments included to seek clarification if the feedback doesn't make sense (10.2%), and to review errors (5.3%) to help with learning or identify weak areas. This supports the positive comments noted elsewhere, in that most students find feedback useful. Stats students were markedly more likely to give advice than Economics students.

Having a receptive mindset also featured – with comments such as 'stay positive' (3.5%), particularly for L2 students, and viewing feedback as a tool for enhancing learning (11.3%). This would be rather more difficult for the OU to help with, but potentially of use to peer-assisted learning schemes or the Personal Learning Advisor Service.

L1 students especially recommended tactics for tackling TMAs, notably starting the TMA early and answering relevant TMA questions after completing module units. Being organised with regularly setting aside time to study, and ensuring that students put enough time into study, were another theme. L2 students also rated seeking clarification about feedback slightly higher than L1.

I can see an opportunity here for tutors to provide a 'how to make use of my feedback' communication, perhaps coincident with TMA01 returns, drawing on the common themes above. Accepting feedback as a positive learning tool is an active process for students to develop, so tutor feedback should be given in this same spirit, avoiding negative or unhelpfully critical language.

Annex 4: Tutor sessions

The title for the workshop is "Feeding forward on feedback: encouraging student engagement"

The abstract is: -

Feedback from tutor marked assessments (TMA's) are a major component of the distance student learning experience. However, a significant proportion of students do not pick up their marked TMA's and hence miss out on these invaluable insights to inform their ongoing learning. In 2019, this represented around 10% for all 19J modules across the University – so around 40,000 uncollected scripts which is an enormous amount of work from tutors.

An eSTEeM funded research project (Calvert and Morris, 2020) and limited to statistics modules within STEM, focused on gaining insight into the reasons why students do not take access their feedback and use this in their subsequent learning and assessments. Common reasons for failure to pick up included forgetfulness, unawareness of availability, fear of reading negative comments and lack of student learning engagement.

During this online session, the technological approaches to monitor assignment pick-up will be demonstrated. Additionally, participants will be encouraged to research details of the pick-up rate on their modules, consider opportunities to implement such technological approaches and encourage timely forward activities with their students.

Reference:

Calvert, C. and Morris, C. (2020). "Improving student use of feedback on marked TMAs". An OU eSTEeM funded project Final Report, August 2020. Available at https://openuniv.sharepoint.com/sites/units/lds/scholarship-exchange/documents/student use of tma feedback.pdf [Accessed on 24/1/22].

Appendix 4: Polls in AL sessions - individual responses to polls available on request only

How do you encourage students to use their feedback as feed forward?

What do you take away from this session?

What key words would you associate with assignment feedback and feed forward?