

**Title:** **Has the feedback sandwich gone stale? Optimising the quality of feedback through the feedback profiling tool**

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### **Session Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Discuss the pros and cons of the feedback sandwich approach as a good practice
- Evaluate and reflect on their own feedback practice using the feedback profiling tool (modified from Hughes (2011))
- Discuss the findings from a TESTA project at University of Greenwich and reflect on their own feedback practice  
Consider ways the feedback profiling tool can be used within Educational Development activities to improve feedback practices in FE & HE settings.

### **Session Outline**

The aim of this session is to invite participants to rethink the traditional 'feedback sandwich' as a way to improve the quality of feedback, by critically reviewing its effect on students' engagement with feedback. The authors want to introduce the use of the feedback profiling tool (Hughes, 2011) The feedback profiling tool categorises feedback into praise, progress, critical feedback, advice and clarification (and its subdivisions). The tool allows tutors to look at their feedback from a different perspective, gain an in-depth overview of their feedback profile and can be a useful tool to challenge existing feedback practice and rethink what good quality feedback is.

The feedback sandwich, in which criticism is sandwiched between praises, is often advocated as good feedback practice (Robson, 2014). With increasing interests in and around the impact of emotions in feedback (Värlander, 2008), the focus of the feedback sandwich, where the tutors are reminded to provide praises as well as criticism would seem to be a good fit. However, the feedback sandwich is increasingly being criticised. Parkes, Abercrombie and McCarty (2013), for example, found that the feedback sandwich does not really impact students' behaviour and others such as Molloy (2010) criticise the feedback sandwich approach which they advocate disguises helpful information for students and it is based on a reductionist and behaviourist approach (Boud and Molloy, 2012).

Nevertheless, the traditional feedback sandwich is still seen by many tutors as a simple way to improve the quality of feedback. As educational developers, there is a need for us to

challenge this 'conventional wisdom' in order to make a real impact on the quality of feedback.

From our research through the TESTA@Greenwich project, the feedback we sampled often followed the traditional feedback sandwich approach, however, focus groups with students indicate that they feel that the praise from tutors is often meaningless. Students tended to value such feedback that counterweighted criticism of their work with advice on improvement. There is therefore a need to replace the use of the feedback sandwich. This paper proposes that educational developers could consider introducing the feedback profiling tool (Hughes, 2011) to academic colleagues as a way to trigger change in feedback practice. Having a feedback profile presented to the programme teams as part of TESTA@Greenwich process proved to be valuable in rethinking their feedback practice and how it aligns with student expectations. However, it is important to note the tool is not aimed at creating a 'perfect' feedback profile, but a way to initiate dialogues around assessment and feedback practice.

### **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

The outline of the workshop is as follows;

- Introduce the traditional feedback sandwich – discuss pros and cons along with some students' feedback and literature – (5 mins)
- Short introduction to the profiling tool – (5 mins)
- In small groups, participants are invited to build an 'optimal' feedback profile using the feedback profiling tool for two pieces of assessment (one from STEM and one from Humanities) - (15 mins)
- Discussion of the findings from TESTA @Greenwich focusing on what students expect from and value in feedback (using the feedback profiling tools) – the participants then go back to their 'optimal' profile and rethink it in light of the data (10 mins)
- Reflect as a group how the feedback profiling tool can support what we do as educational developers. (5 mins)
- Questions and further discussions (5 mins)

### **References**

Boud, D and Molloy, E (2012) *Feedback in Higher and Professional Education: Understanding it and Doing it Well*, Routledge, London.

Hughes, G. (2011) *Assessment Careers: enhancing learning pathways through assessment*, JISC funded project. Available online: [http://www.ioe.ac.uk/Study\\_Departments/LCE\\_AC\\_FinalEvaluationReport.pdf](http://www.ioe.ac.uk/Study_Departments/LCE_AC_FinalEvaluationReport.pdf)

Molloy, E. (2010). The feedforward mechanism: a way forward in clinical learning? *Medical education*, 44(12), 1157-1159.

Parkes, J, Abercrombie, S., McCarty, T. (2013) Feedback sandwiches affect perceptions but not performance. *Advances in Health Sciences Education*, 18(3), 397-407

Robson, L. (2014) Providing sandwiches: optimising feedback at the education picnic. *Brookes E-Journal of Learning and Teaching*, 6(2)

Värlander, S. (2008). The role of students' emotions in formal feedback situations. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 13(2), 145-156.