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# Moving forward through feeding back: a case study of assessment feedback in higher education.

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This thesis is dedicated to my husband Philip, to my daughters Sarah and Helen, and to the rest of my family in recognition of their love and encouragement. It is also dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Cherie Turnbull.

I declare that this thesis is my original work. It does not include material previously presented for the award of a degree in this or any other university.

## Abstract

This thesis examines the complex contexts and relationships around assessment feedback in higher education. Firstly, it examines tutors' experiences and reflections around the evolution of their assessment feedback practices in a changing landscape. Secondly, and based on the premise that contextual change can contribute to feedback dissonance, the thesis examines tutors' and students' experiences of the practical, pedagogic, and socio-affective dimensions of using audio-visual feedback technology to achieve feedback resonance. Findings show that tutors experience professional tensions between their feedback values and practice, and that audio-visual feedback technology can offer practical affordances, as well as a different pedagogic and socio-affective feedback experience. Students particularly welcomed the relational dimensions of the audio-visual medium and asserted positive impacts on their feedback engagement. They also reported practical challenges in the forms of additional time investment, navigational difficulty, and language accommodation. The research adds to the limited literature around tutors' feedback practice experiences, and makes a contribution to knowledge at the theoretical level by re-framing the work of Tuck (2012) in relation to tutors' feedback roles. At the practice level, the research contributes to knowledge around the uses of audio-visual feedback technology at both the pedagogic and socio-affective levels. The research extends knowledge in relation to international students' feedback engagement, and the potential of the audio-visual medium to mediate affective feedback response and to stimulate subsequent dialogue of a pedagogic and pastoral nature between tutors and students. The findings are significant in that they offer a response to growing feedback demands which can threaten tutor well-being, as well as exploring the pedagogic and socio-affective affordances of screencasting to build feedback resonance and reverberation.

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# Chapter One: Rationale, Context and Aims

*Working late one evening, I answered my door. A student I had taught some years previously was visiting to give a careers talk to undergraduate students. She was now a Senior Crown Prosecutor. While we talked, she asked me: "do you remember the feedback you gave me when I was a first-year student?" In truth, I did not. "You told me that my work showed promise. I have never forgotten that. I still have that feedback."*

## 1.1 Rationale for the research

I have spent over thirty years providing assessment feedback to students in higher education and was clear from the outset of my doctoral study that this was a part of my practice which warranted further exploration. In particular, I wanted to examine whether contextual changes in higher education were impacting on the tutor and student feedback experience. Much is made in the literature of the impact on tutor feedback workloads of increased student numbers, widening participation and a growing audit culture. Accordingly, I wanted to accommodate the voices of tutors, particularly in relation to their feedback values, since I felt they were insufficiently represented in the academic discourse. Students' feedback experiences may also be far from satisfactory: students are often reported as not accessing their feedback or, if they do, as struggling to engage with it due to its content, timeliness, or method of delivery among much else. Students often express dissatisfaction with their assessment feedback, and this is annually evidenced in the National Student Survey (NSS), where the responses around assessment feedback consistently show levels of student satisfaction well below that of other categories. Accordingly, I also wanted to hear students' views around feedback generally, as well as around learner-focused feedback models which might support their pastoral as well as pedagogic development.

This introductory chapter examines the policy context around assessment feedback in higher education; the importance of assessment feedback; the aims of the study; and finishes with a brief consideration of positionality, together with an overview of the structure of the thesis.

## 1.2 Identifying the policy context

Researching assessment feedback in higher education is timely given the continuing and wide-ranging contextual debates around, inter alia, increased participation in higher education; tuition fees and a posited marketisation of education; as well as the growing industry around higher education audit. Assessment feedback does not take place in a vacuum, but is given and received as part of a wider, complex academic environment. While contextual shifts can often lead to positive change, they can also lead to what Carless calls a "feedback conundrum" (2015:17) of how to develop effective feedback processes within a shifting educational landscape. Some of these contextual shifts will be considered briefly to set the landscape around assessment feedback practice.

### 1.2.1 Increased student participation and marketisation

The U.K. higher education sector continues to undergo profound change and the discourse around the interface between higher education and the marketplace continues to grow. A political agenda to move towards mass higher education and to widen participation in higher education in the U.K. has led to substantial rises in the numbers of students entering tertiary education (Nicol 2010). The total number of students in higher education in the U.K. in 2019/2020 stood at 2,532,385 (HESA 2021), and marks a continued increase in overall student numbers, following a brief drop in numbers related to the 2012 tuition fee reforms (Bolton 2019). Moving widening participation from the margins to the mainstream has also led some to assert that students entering higher education are now drawn from an increasingly diverse variety of prior learning experiences (Burke 2009), and that this brings with it challenges for tutors and students alike, including increased tutor workloads and issues around student assessment literacy.

In terms of the marketisation of higher education, Higgins et al writing in 2002 felt that there was little evidence of consumer-minded approaches on the part of students in higher education, but others writing since have reached different conclusions. Painting a bleak picture ahead and citing threats to scholarly standards, Cheng (2017), for example, asserts that the early stages of a dystopian picture are emerging, where U.K. higher education becomes part of a

global tradable service seen by students as a product rather than a developmental process, in respect of which concepts such as value for money and fitness for purpose, accompanied by passive student consumption, become the accepted norm. Cheng (2017) asserts that while an interest in the quality of education is both legitimate and desirable, the application of free market logic to the student-tutor relationship increases focus on grades, prioritises financial over educational outcomes, and switches focus from student effort in learning to a more passive reception of educational merchandise.

Higher education reforms continue apace and the introduction of tuition fees as well as increased student numbers have contributed to an academic discourse around commodification of scholarly activity. With levels of increased competition within the higher education 'marketplace,' and targets set and monitored for student admission and retention, agendas begin to emerge around contractual entitlement and value for money. Buttressed by the Consumer Rights Act 2015, the establishment of the Office for Students in 2017 to promote and protect the student interest, and the Competition and Markets Authority whose purpose is to promote competition for the benefit of consumers, there now exists a more complex framework against which the provision of an educational 'product' may be judged. While one may rightly argue for a sustained focus on quality in higher education, market values sit uncomfortably in areas of endeavour such as education, since the introduction of assertive and unpredictable competition into the sector risks defining higher education purely in terms of bargain and fitness for purpose, overlooking the democratic and emancipatory powers of higher education, as well as the developmental needs of academics and students.

Associated concerns around student complaint may be justified since, on the wider stage, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (the independent reviewer of student complaints in England and Wales) reported an increase of over 70% in the number of student complaints between 2016 and 2019 and, in 2020, complaints about law provision were ranked fifth highest by discipline (Office of the Independent Adjudicator 2019). Additional market mechanisms including student charters, the institutionalisation of complaints procedures, and the application of consumer law to the provision of higher

education may all serve to heighten consumerist approaches on the part of students (Nixon et al 2018).

While students may report increased motivation for their studies while paying for their tuition, there are concerns around the emergence of a student identity as customer or consumer of an educational 'product'. Some support the contention that students are not mere consumers, but "conscientious consumers" (Higgins et al 2002:53) who demonstrate a consumerist awareness but alongside intrinsic motivations to learn. Change has continued over the ensuing two decades and more contemporary voices express concern around a shift towards a student consumer identity of *having* or purchasing an education, rather than *being* or experiencing an education. Molesworth et al, for example, express concern that students may now be seeking to "'have a degree' rather than 'be learners'" (2009:277), running the risks of immoderately prioritising student satisfaction and promoting the belief that progress may be achieved with limited endeavour.

### 1.2.2 Higher education audit and performativity

The marketisation of higher education is associated with a culture of audit and performativity which can sit uncomfortably with students' educational endeavour: "audit-inspired processes serv[ing] to disturb, rather than enhance, students' full participation in educational practice" (Crook et al 2006:10). Shifts towards a performative atmosphere may also 'chafe' with the nature of tutors' work which has been "typically characterised as individualised, self-managed and intrinsically motivating" (Kenny 2017:899). This can produce professional tensions for tutors who may not have operated hitherto within a competitive paradigm. Some assert that these shifts run the risk of the demoralisation of academic workers. Sutton, for example, contends that "the soul of academic labour is being lost in performativity" (2017:625), threatening the concept of university education as a public good, where the 'love' associated with academic labour expresses itself in rich social connections which cannot be measured.

Recruiting and retaining students now carries a significant financial imperative, resulting in an unprecedented growth in activity around students' satisfaction with their educational experience. While it may be fair to assert that a student will, inevitably, experience low points as well as high points in her educational

journey, part of that experience will be to learn to develop robust responses to deal with challenge and failure, as well as success. Viewing the educational experience through a transactional lens, however, can lead to a blurring of the lines of responsibility for the outcomes of the complex and often unpredictable processes of learning. Students do not purchase degrees as they might other products. They are not 'consumers' in the traditional, economic sense, as Collini concludes: "[t]he paradox of real learning is that you don't get what you 'want' – and you certainly can't buy it" (2011:3).

A further danger of proliferating audit measures lies in the production of a dominant discourse of *measuring* learning, rather than promoting it, carrying the potential to inhibit pedagogical practice, which is not a risk-free activity. The influence of the annual NSS and other national and international league table rankings is itself becoming the subject of a growing international academic discourse, much of which is characterised by an understandable tone of angst around the maintenance of scholarly standards. Furedi, for example suggests that:

> 'it is widely recognised that student satisfaction is not an accurate measure of the quality of education…The necessity of giving students what they want is expressed most dramatically in the modifying of systems of assessment and feedback' (2012:5).

Against this backcloth of audit, a foreseeable body of literature is emerging which advocates the role of universities as *shapers* of student expectation, rather than mere reactors to it.

The landscape of higher education audit also includes the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) whose initial results were first made public in June 2017. The purpose of the TEF is cited as recognising excellence in teaching and student outcomes at higher education providers, and currently rates providers as Gold, Silver or Bronze for the quality of their teaching, learning environment and graduate outcomes (TEF 2020). Given the competitive market within which universities now operate, analyses of the outcomes of the TEF are eagerly awaited and, with the TEF still in its relative infancy, there has

been little time for an established body of scholarly debate to emerge around its impacts. Predictably, some see the TEF as servicing less the informed decision-making of potential tertiary students, than promoting a culture of performativity within the sector, resulting in what Collini terms "more gaming of the system" (2016:36). A review of the TEF, ranging from its naming to its rating system, is in progress and The Office for Students is consulting on a set of proposals with consultation due to close in March 2022.

### 1.2.3 Policy contexts and assessment feedback

These contextual shifts involving increased student participation, marketisation and audit structures can impact a number of pedagogic processes, including those which relate to assessment and feedback. In terms of increased participation in higher education, Winstone and Carless (2020) assert that it is difficult to implement effective feedback within the constraints of a mass higher education system. Due to increased class sizes and closer auditing of feedback practice, some fear feedback becoming a scripted organisational process leading to interpersonal dissociation between author and reader (Crook et al 2006), and Nicol (2010) argues that the growth in student numbers has meant that feedback is now detached from a supportive tutorial system. Rising student to staff ratios call into question what can reasonably and effectively be provided as part of the learning experience in general, and as feedback in particular.

In relation to the marketisation of higher education, the competitive economic, social, and political context of higher education has placed assessment and assessment feedback firmly on the higher education management agenda. Audit-based approaches to feedback in the forms of altered expectations around student satisfaction can encourage cultures of challenge and complaint, which can pose particular problems since the provision of feedback can be one of the most expensive components of a student's educational journey. The discourse around commodification of higher education and students' consumer identity has relevance for all tertiary learning, but finds particular resonance in relation to assessment feedback, where tutors often need to be critical of students' work in order to drive improvement. Commodification of feedback as a product rather than a process can challenge the use of feedback for intellectual and personal

transformation, which one might argue requires a 'being' rather than a 'having' mindset.

Audit scores for student satisfaction with feedback practice remain consistently low across the sector and indeed across the globe, despite sustained institutional efforts for improvement. As Boud and Molloy note: "[h]igher education institutions are criticised more for inadequacies in feedback…than for almost any other aspect of their courses" (2013:698), and feedback is often viewed as the 'Achilles' heel' of perceived quality in higher education. External drivers such as the political and institutional responses to the NSS have the potential to influence assessment feedback practice, and many assert that the NSS is deeply flawed (eg., Furedi 2012). In the U.K., the section of the NSS seeking data around assessment and feedback poses 4 questions:

Q8: The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance (unchanged)
Q9: Marking and assessment has been fair (amended 2017)
Q10: Feedback on my work has been timely (amended 2017)
Q11: I have received helpful comments on my work (amended 2017).

At a theoretical level, one might criticize the framing of these NSS questions as re-enforcing the idea of feedback as uni-directional and tutor-centric, rather than learner-centred. However, at a practical level, these questions evince almost universally lower ratings across the sector when compared to other sections of the NSS. The performance at national level in 2020 for this group of questions is stated at 73% with no change from 2019 (NSS 2020). For Midland University, (a post-1992 university which forms the site for the case study for the research), satisfaction for the group of questions for 2020 was 75%, with very similar performance over the preceding 2 academic years. For the relevant Faculty, 79%, and in its Law School, 69% (showing a rise of 8% on the previous year). These institutional figures show levels of satisfaction with assessment and feedback generally at lower levels than other areas of the survey, replicating a sustained trend at national levels (Medland 2014).

The metric for assessment and feedback used in the TEF appears to have often been instrumental in leading to a Silver, rather than Gold TEF grading for a number of institutions (Gillard 2018), and this forms part of the discourse around measuring rather than promoting learning. Ultimately, it may be said that the audit practices associated with the socio-political context of higher education have left both the tutor and student bodies dissatisfied with the practice of feedback, but for differing reasons, and that this dissatisfaction can affect the professional lives of tutors as well as the academic experiences of students.

Having considered the wider context of higher education and its potential effects on assessment feedback practice, I now turn to consider the importance of assessment feedback before outlining the aims of the study.

## 1.3 The importance of assessment feedback

Assessment is an important part of students' learning: "assessment rather than teaching, has a major influence on students' learning. It…has a powerful effect on what students do and how they do it" (Boud and Falchikov 2007:3). There is, however, considerable debate around how to make feedback on these assessments effective, some turning on what is meant by assessment feedback, and others on its purposes.

### 1.3.1 Defining assessment feedback

Even though feedback is "at the heart of pedagogy" (Black and Wiliam 1998:16), its meanings and functions are often implicit and can be poorly understood. In the field of education, many have adopted the view that all information given in response to an assessment could be termed 'feedback'. Others, however, (e.g., Sadler 1989) adopt a narrower approach, where feedback is only worthy of the name if the feedback 'loop' is completed, that is, the information given has made a difference to work which the student subsequently produces. This reminds us of the historical roots of the term 'feedback' involving loops of action, for example, in the maintenance of homeostasis or industrial processes. By the mid-20th century, the use of the term 'feedback' had expanded into the social sciences, and in education this emphasis on student feedback *action* is gaining ground. Boud and Molloy, for example, define assessment feedback as:

> 'a process whereby learners obtain information about their work in order to appreciate the similarities and differences between the appropriate standards for any given work, and the qualities of the work itself, in order to generate improved work' (2013:205).

They assert that information without action is mere "dangling data" (2013:2) which does not help to bridge what has become known as the feedback 'gap'. Effective feedback would therefore provide students with clear guidance and goals to identify what is needed to achieve an improved academic trajectory. This view of feedback as requiring student engagement has found new life in more recent literature around partnered feedback (e.g., Telio et al 2015) and pro-active feedback recipience (e.g., Winstone et al 2017a).

This definitional confusion arises in part from the conceptual complexity of feedback, having roots in behaviouralist traditions of teaching but developing alongside constructivist principle. Assessment feedback is accordingly a contested term, and conceptual developments continue to be tested in the literature to include not only feedback loops, but feedback spirals which snake through the curriculum with feedback scaffolded across modules and across years of study (e.g., Carless 2019). This can be seen as part of the wider discourse around sustainable feedback supporting longer term learning. Debates also persist around the relational and affective dimensions of assessment feedback practice. Throughout this thesis, the term 'relational' will be used to capture the complex inter-personal dynamic between tutor and student, while the term 'affective' will be used to describe the emotions, feelings and/or moods which may accompany the giving or receiving of assessment feedback. I would argue that these differing views of the nature of feedback are not just of theoretical interest however, since the ways in which tutors and students view feedback can impact its purpose and effectiveness.

### 1.3.2 The purposes of assessment feedback

Confusion around the purposes of feedback also persist. Price et al, for example, identify five not necessarily discrete functions of feedback to include "correction, reinforcement, forensic diagnosis, bench-marking and longitudinal development

(feed-forward)" (2010:278), to which one could add others including accountability, motivation, challenge, and support. Shute (2008), however, asserts that there are two fundamental functions of assessment feedback: the directive and the facilitative, and that most scholarly argument is around their balance. Boundaries between these differing functions of feedback can often be blurred, most especially between formative and summative feedback. Much is made of the dominance of the summative assessment paradigm, where summative feedback is often seen as providing judgement on student work, with formative feedback providing suggestions for improvement in the form of feedforward. Blurring of these boundaries is, however, common, with formative feedback often involving judgement or grading, and summative feedback often including feedforward.

While formative and summative assessment and feedback are all clearly important for the enhancement of student learning, research suggests that formative assessment is especially effective since developmental feedback is often a core element of it. Black and Wiliam's (1998) seminal review of formative feedback practice concludes that to improve learning, an emphasis on formative assessment and feedback is essential, not least since students often report it as the most effective type of feedback due to its prospective nature. Feeding forward can, however, be problematic within a higher education context involving increased semesterisation and modularisation, producing issues with feedback timing as well as reduced feedback opportunities. Coupled with a culture of assessment *of* learning, rather than an assessment *for* learning, formative feedback can fall casualty.

Since tutors may struggle with these conceptual issues around feedback meaning and function, it is not surprising that other aspects of the feedback process, such as the relational and the affective have been relatively neglected. The etymology of 'assessment' deriving from the Latin *assidere* meaning 'to sit down beside' demands first, viewing assessment and feedback as a process rather than a product, and second, viewing it as a process which is dialogic and relational. The socio-affective dimensions of feedback practice are, however, the subject of a growing discourse which asserts that feedback is, or should be, a human and relational process where both emotional and cognitive reactions are encouraged

to coincide and influence each other. The relational and affective dimensions of feedback have the potential to impact (positively or negatively) on a student's cognitive learning response, and the initial affective reaction to feedback may be of particular significance in affecting subsequent engagement. I would argue that feedback needs to be not only pedagogically useful, but also relationally sensitive, and that there is a need for further research around emotion and feedback receipt, and the potential for dialogue to mediate affective receipt and encourage active feedback recipience.

## 1.4 Aims of the research

Assessment feedback is important for learning gains (Evans 2013), but despite its pedagogic power, feedback remains a problematic practice in higher education with apparently variable outcomes: students repeatedly indicate lower levels of satisfaction with this dimension of their tertiary experience; and tutors express concerns around the strains which contextual change can place on their professional feedback practice. Feedback is also a largely tacit activity on the part of both tutors and students, and there is a lack of in vivo research around tutors' and students' actual feedback practices. As a result, a lack of understanding persists around why tutors feed back as they do, and what students subsequently do with that feedback and why. I wanted therefore to explore the premise that feedback dissonance exists due to contextual shifts, as well as to examine technology-based responses which might move tutors and students closer to feedback resonance.

Accordingly, this thesis seeks to examine feedback practice and to investigate how assessment feedback can help students in higher education to learn. This small-scale study seeks to examine first, the 'hunch in context' around which this work is based: that contextual change in higher education may be impacting negatively on feedback practice, leading to a de-coupling of feedback relationships. Second, since learning gains can be strongly influenced by the medium in which feedback is given (Hattie and Timperley 2007), and feedback should be given in a way that is appropriate to students' socio-affective as well as cognitive needs (Evans 2013), the study mounts an intervention interrogating the premise that audio-visual technology can offer pedagogic and socio-affective affordances which may assist in a re-coupling of feedback relationships. The

study therefore falls into two research areas: a posited contextual feedback issue; and a posited, no doubt partial, response to it. Since feedback should be a partnership, searching for an understanding of the feedback experiences of both tutors and students is a worthwhile endeavour. The ultimate aim of the study is to inform and influence pedagogic practice at institutional levels and beyond, and to make contributions to knowledge which are significant at both the theoretical and practical levels.

The marrying of the two research areas will therefore seek, in holistic fashion, to examine first, the contextual challenges which may threaten the inter-personal aspects of assessment feedback practice in higher education (at the macro, meso and micro levels), and second, to examine how the socio-affective dimensions and medium of feedback delivery may be used to redress balance in feedback relationships. An examination of the experiences of both stakeholders in the feedback relationship will be crucial to achieve a rounded understanding of the feedback landscape, as well as the potentialities and limitations of using different media to engage with feedback.

## 1.5 Positionality

My positionality is influenced by my professional role as a long-serving educator and provider of assessment feedback in higher education. I am also aware of a potential partiality due to my 'hunch in context' of a perceived strain on the part of academics in providing effective feedback in a fast-changing context. As a practitioner-based study, it is important to briefly discuss my own background, experience, and pedagogic beliefs since they necessarily impact on the research focus and design. I practised briefly as a solicitor before beginning to teach in higher education in 1988. My approach in teaching, as in legal practice, is person-centred and I chose to teach at an institution ('Midland University') where I hoped I could encourage social mobility and equality of opportunity. I would argue that feedback is an important opportunity to fuel this and to encourage students' personal as well as academic growth. I was clear from the outset that I would research some aspect of feedback practice, not least since it continued to puzzle me why some students did not appear to engage with their feedback.

I would contend that pedagogic research matters, although Cotton et al describe it as the "Cinderella of academia" (2017:1) and lament its liminality "sitting uncomfortably between teaching and research in universities, yet arguably not being valued in the assessment of either" (2017:2). As a practice-based enquiry, I did not seek to wed the research to any particular theorist or theorists, save hoping to retain a 'flavour' of a personal belief in person-centred learning practices based on social constructivism.

## 1.6 Structure of the thesis

To assist with the cognitive cartography of the study, Chapter One has set out an introduction to the context of the research and has outlined the aims of the research, while Chapter Two examines literature in the field in order to place the study, identify warrants for it and offer research questions. Chapter Three proposes a research design based around a case study methodology flowing from the interpretive nature of the research questions, proposes various methods of data generation, and addresses issues around the trustworthiness of the data and its ethical dimensions. Chapter Four shares findings in relation to the research questions and offers an analysis, while Chapter Five discusses these findings in the context of relevant literature, identifying where the findings align with, amend or challenge current thinking. Chapter Six offers some conclusions, as well as outlining the impacts of the study and the contributions it makes to theoretical and practice-based knowledge. This chapter also addresses the limitations of the study and identifies areas for further research enquiry. It was important to me to ensure that the account of the study was unsanitised throughout, in the sense that the narrative includes discussion around changes of direction during the study and difficulties anticipated and met.

Having considered the context and aims of the proposed research enquiry, I move to consider relevant literature to place the study within existing knowledge, and to identify gaps in the extant research providing warrants for the proposed research questions.

## Chapter Two: A Literature Review

This chapter examines what is already known and will concentrate on key themes and dominant discourses. As the analysis progresses, gaps or areas of limited analysis will be highlighted, providing warrants for research questions. The literature on assessment feedback in higher education is vast and moves apace. Much of the literature in the area is theoretical and/or empirical in nature, the latter tending to be dominated by small scale case studies deployed in a limited range of subject disciplines (Yorke 2003). The overwhelmingly qualitative nature of the methods employed is not surprising given the nature of the area of enquiry.

The following discussion seeks to examine two issues: tutors' feedback practice; and the use of audio-visual feedback technologies. A holistic approach to examining feedback practice will be adopted, encompassing not only the cognitive, but also social, affective, behavioural, and structural dimensions of feedback practice. This affords opportunities for a rounder analysis of why a student cannot and/or will not make use of her feedback, and highlights: "the importance of an integrated theoretical approach in seeking to better understand and develop students' regulation of assessment feedback from cognitive, metacognitive, and affective perspectives" (Evans and Waring 2020:2).

The discussion is structured into two main themes. In the first of these themes, I consider how we *construct* feedback relationships. I examine social constructivism as a way of understanding how learning happens through social interaction and, in the feedback context, how feedback may be viewed as a socially constructed activity involving feedback relationships, exchanges and ideally, dialogue. The discussion will then move to examine two important *shift*s in recent feedback literature: first, a shift from viewing feedback as a passive student process involving monologic transmission, towards a more pro-active learner-focused activity; and second, a shift around developing sustainable feedback practices which support longer term learning. I conclude this section by considering the core work of Tuck (2012) in relation to how tutors construct their feedback while navigating shifting contexts, feedback roles and values.

The second theme analyses literature around *audio-visual delivery* of assessment feedback and examines whether this medium offers a viable response to feedback tensions which may be produced by the contextual changes discussed in Chapter One. The literature in this area will be considered from the perspectives of the practical or technological; the pedagogic; the relational; and the affective.

The concluding section of this chapter draws together the warrants for further research which emerge from the literature, and uses these to create research questions for the study.

## 2.1 Constructing feedback relationships

Leary and Terry (2012) argue that when feedback comes from another person, the experience always includes interpersonal dimensions, and Telio et al (2015) assert that these relational aspects of feedback are under-explored. Assessment feedback is a human, relational activity occurring in a complex context which can produce bilateral strain as well as learning gains. The question of how such relationships are constructed therefore becomes relevant. The process of providing assessment feedback in higher education involves not only organisational activity by the university and tutor, which is received by the student at the cognitive level, but also involves crucial inter-personal and socio-affective dimensions. This multi-dimensional analysis of feedback echoes the 'feedback triangle' proposed by Yang and Carless (2013), and also the work of Ajjawi and Boud (2018) where feedback is conceptualised as comprising three dimensions: the cognitive (content); the socio-affective (relational); and the structural (curriculum/organisational). To understand more fully how these feedback relationships are constructed, I now consider social constructivism and its relationship with feedback dialogue.

### 2.1.1 Social constructivism and feedback dialogue

#### *Social constructivism*

When choosing theories which one might use to examine assessment feedback and learning, one might choose cognitivist, behaviouralist or other approaches. Since I am seeking to examine feedback relationships, it is appropriate to use

social constructivism as an analytical lens. For Duval et al (2017), social constructivism promotes the idea that learners are not passive, but rather there is "a focus on the individual as a constructive agent of learning…a recognition of the social and intersubjective nature of learning" (2017:23). Unlike Piaget's (1964) psychological constructivism, where the learner is the sole constructor of knowledge, the fundamental premise of social constructivist learning theory is that learning is experienced through language and interaction with others within social and cultural environments. Within a feedback context, a socio-constructivist approach reminds us that feedback is, or should be, a two-way process involving not only tutor delivery, but also student receipt and response.

Social constructivist perspectives place considerable emphasis on the power of feedback to support student learning (Evans and Waring 2020). The seminal work of Hattie and Timperley (2007) asserts the potential of feedback to enhance learning, enabling individuals to close the gap between current and desired achievement. In this way, the learner makes sense of what she learns from processes which occur first *between* people and then *within* herself. Vygotsky (1978) asserts that development occurs at two levels: first, through interaction with others; and second, via integration into the individual's mental structure. For him, instruction and development do not coincide, rather, instruction leads to development which lags behind. To help a student reach a higher developmental level, the teacher must give explanations (here feedback) within the learner's 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) in order for her to move to the next developmental stage. This concept of the ZPD assists our understanding of the developmental processes around assessment feedback. Vygotsky proposed that the ZPD is "[t]he distance between the actual development level…and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance" (1978:86). This distance is covered by the student with the (feedback) guidance of a more knowledgeable third party who works at a higher level than the student's current level of competence. While much of Vygotsky's work turns on learning in children, his ideas around learning through social activity have relevance to any study involving an analysis of feedback dialogue between individuals, including adult learners. In the context of assessment feedback, perhaps the most important message from Vygotsky lies in his emphasis on development as an independent *process* of learning (Moore 2012).

Adherence to a social constructivist view of feedback leads writers such as Nicol (2010) to suggest that feedback must be modelled to include dialogic opportunities which operate over time to facilitate this process of learning, and this concept of dialogue looms large in the feedback literature.

## *Feedback dialogue*

### Why feedback dialogue is important

While dialogue can be seen as just one part of a tutor-student relationship, its importance to learning lies in its creation of meaning-making trajectories (Esterhazy and Damsa 2017), and a "lack of feedback dialogue means that students never become fully aware of the potential contribution of feedback to their learning, and tutors never fully appreciate how their feedback is being used" (Orsmond and Merry 2011:134). At a national level, the U.K.'s Quality Code for Higher Education (QAA 2018) states that on-going dialogue is a key premise for effective and reflective use of feedback, and Carless' definition of feedback dialogue emphasises its social dimension as "interactive exchanges in which interpretations are shared, meanings negotiated, and expectations clarified" (2013(b):90). Carless builds on this in his later work (2015) where he asserts that dialogic feedback should be a process rather than a product, and an interaction which leads to reflection and action.

Dialogue also has a role in building trust. As Winstone and Carless (2020) note, submitting work for evaluation by another person involves opening oneself to judgement. They contend that very few of us would claim that we enjoy receiving critical feedback. This, they suggest, can be particularly problematic within a 'telling' feedback paradigm involving asymmetrical power relations. Building strong, trusting relationships within feedback practice therefore becomes important in fostering acceptance of feedback and action on it. Carless, who writes much on the concept of feedback and trust, suggests that engaging in feedback dialogues with students provides tutors with opportunities to demonstrate respect and empathy, which can lead to enhanced levels of trust in the tutor and her feedback, and may also have the potential to positively impact feedback use via the acceptance of critique (Carless 2013b). He concludes that

trust is an under-explored area impacting on teaching, learning and assessment, and this is echoed in the more recent work of Chong (2017).

Writing in the field of clinical legal education and feedback, Yeatman and Hewitt (2021) note the importance of good relationships and an atmosphere of trust in teaching spaces. They echo Carless when they assert that "[t]his does not mean that students are too fragile to be told that their work needs improving, but if we want them to receive the message and act on it, we need to build relationships of trust and respect first" (2021:13). Rowe et al (2014) note that the students in their study reported an increased volition to engage with feedback where a strong dialogic relationship with their tutor existed. This area of work finds resonance with the concepts of feedback partnership and educational alliance found in the work of Telio et al (2015).

As well as building trust, others assert that dialogue also has a role to play in building student self-regulation. Sadler (2010) argues that simply telling a student what is right and wrong with her work will not necessarily translate into any improvement of the work. Rather, a dialogue between the parties is needed, not only to elaborate on the feedback, but also to encourage the student to engage in self-evaluation of her work and to develop self-regulation. Rao and Norton (2020) note that Sadler (1989) asserted long ago that students must actively engage with the feedback process and that he represents a "forerunner of those who advocate dialogic feedback" (2020:161).

## Problems with feedback dialogue

While two monologues do not make a dialogue, any notion of fruitful dialogic exchange assumes a certain level of equality in the tutor-student relationship which many acknowledge to be complex (Price et al 2010), and high-quality dialogue may require power shifts. Difficulties in achieving this equality may involve issues around the relinquishing of power on the part of tutors, as well as the willingness of students to take more responsibility for learning from their feedback. Rao and Norton (2020) assert that since the feedback relationship will almost always in reality be unequal, an element of trust will once again be crucial.

In addition to challenges around power in constructing dialogue, there is much agreement within the literature that inadequate feedback literacy can also impact on students' abilities to engage fruitfully with feedback dialogue (Price et al 2010). To make use of dialogic exchanges, students need to understand how to use feedback, and feedback literacy training can argue for a less tacit place in the curriculum. Students who do want to act on their feedback often struggle to do so (Poulos and Mahoney 2008), and Evans and Waring (2020) agree that as part of a more general scholarly literacy, one must not forget that students need to learn *how* to learn, and to build metacognitive skills to assist them in learning to recognise not only what they do know, but also what they do not.

A number of problems around embedding feedback literacy training are, however, noted in the literature. Burke (2009) notes that students are rarely trained in how to use feedback, and Winstone and Carless (2020) express surprise that there are often limited opportunities to develop these skills via sustained and cumulative feedback practice. For Carless, this fragmented approach to feedback literacy results in "[m]any students becom[ing] progressively disengaged with feedback during their university programmes" (2015:32).

In addition to challenges around power and around feedback literacy, dialogic feedback models assume a contextual ability to provide dialogic opportunities. Carless (2015) argues that increased student numbers and tutor workloads threaten dialogic models of feedback, while Pitt and Norton (2017) assert that contextual shifts have led to a detachment or distance between tutor and students, and argue that dialogue has consequently become all the more important. As already noted in Chapter One, feedback practice exists as a pedagogic practice within an increasingly complex and competitive context, and reduced feedback opportunities (Blair et al 2013) and scripted feedback responses (Crook et al 2006) have the potential to threaten the dialogic dimension of feedback. As Crisostomo and Chauhan (2019) have noted "one would be hard pressed to find an instructor who would not want to give individualized…feedback to each student, [but] it is immensely time consuming" (2019:3). In 2002, Higgins et al noted that the changing landscape of higher education, in particular the growing number of students, was leading not only to

reduced face-to-face student-tutor contact time, but also to increased tutor workloads. More recently, Nicol (2010) asserts that reduced opportunities for tutor-student dialogue may impact feedback quality, and describes the modern practice of assessment feedback in mass higher education as "impoverished dialogue" (2010:501).

These systemic challenges around providing meaningful, individualised feedback involving dialogue have prompted some to propose models of feedback which come close to an 'opting-in' model, for example, as advocated by the action research of Jones and Gorra (2013), or an arguably utilitarian approach of "doing what is feasible and no more" (O'Donovan et al 2015:943). In their theoretical piece, O'Donovan et al argue that unless a scholarly and evidence-based approach is taken to the re-conceptualisation of dialogic feedback, then what they term "the limited and fragmented impact of pedagogic research on feedback practice" (2015:945) is doomed to continue and, one might argue, be forever reflected in the low NSS scores so often cited for assessment feedback.

## Reconceptualising feedback dialogue

Much of the literature on feedback dialogue advocates a move away from an authoritative model of gifting knowledge from expert to novice in a monologic context, towards an exchange of information in a dialogic relationship between tutor and student with feedback (e.g., Nicol 2010; Evans 2013). A dialogic feedback exchange would ideally be extended and cyclical throughout a programme of study, and would acknowledge that feeding back is not only pedagogical, but also relational, a point made with some force by Ajjawi and Boud (2018), who continue Boud's earlier work (Boud 2000) on moving feedback from monologue to dialogue. They conclude that their study strengthens the call for reconceptualising feedback as a social and relational process demanding dialogue. In arguing for a social constructivist approach to feedback, they follow in the footsteps of others (e.g., Beaumont 2011; McLean et al 2014) and note that the research on the relational aspects of feedback is almost wholly confined to the disciplines of medical education and psychology, identifying a potential warrant for research in legal education.

This social constructivist approach to feedback can be taken further and conceptualised as one based on a *co*-constructivist approach (Medland 2014). This partnership or 'educational alliance' as Telio et al (2015) have termed it, emphasises the social process element of the feedback relationship and echoes Carless et al's "joint conversations about learning" (2011:3). Understanding feedback as a process of dialogue moves one sharply away from monologue toward cyclical exchanges (Ajjawi and Boud 2018) which are student-centred and promote guidance (Beaumont et al 2011), self-regulation, and collaboration (Blair and McGinty 2012), as well as trust (Yang and Carless 2013) and a responsibility-sharing approach (Nash and Winstone 2017). Under this co-constructivist approach, students are re-cast as active agents in a dialogic process rather than event. Gravett and Petersen (2002) assert that feedback dialogue is much more than a tutor/student 'chat', but rather is a relationship formed, within which the parties think and reason together. Indeed, some would go further and suggest that the tutor may also learn from the student through shared experience and dialogue (Evans 2013). Thus, feedback becomes a truly co-constructivist and bi-lateral experience emphasising the dynamic nature of learning.

The results of such dialogue are thought by some to trigger students' internal dialogue and learning (Vygotsky 1986; Nicol 2010), as well as promoting an educational alliance critical for intellectual flourishing (Ajjawi and Boud 2018) to bridge the 'feedback gap' (Sadler 1998). While there is evidence that feedback is certainly valued by some students (Jones and Gorra 2013), there nonetheless exist high levels of student dissatisfaction with the practice (Medland 2014), which some assert can be met, at least in part, by a sustained dialogic process (Beiser 2005). If the contextual issues already noted contribute to a reduction in feedback opportunities with a "decoupling of tutor and student leading to a bilateral de-personalised experience" (Bailey and Garner 2010:189), then a re-conceptualization of feedback as a dialogic and relational activity may be warranted, and professional practice around the delivery of assessment feedback should become a search for pedagogic practices which re-cast feedback as a socially constructed and dialogic practice.

### 2.1.2 Shifting feedback relationships

Two shifts in the literature around feedback dialogue will now be considered: first, the move towards learner-focused feedback models; and second, the developing literature around sustainable feedback practices. These re-conceptualisations of feedback are considered relevant since the first aligns with a socio-constructivist view of feedback, viewing the student as the main actor in the feedback process, while the second seeks to develop sustainable feedback processes to support that role.

#### *Learner-focused feedback paradigms*

Feedback as mere tutor-telling is unlikely to yield effective learning for students (Sadler 2010) and "the literature has shifted to view feedback as a process that students do, where they make sense of information about work they have done" (Dawson et al 2019: 25). Building on the earlier work of others such as Sadler (1998) and Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick (2006), Carless (2020b) notes a shift, aligning with a co-constructivist approach to feedback, where the learner is cast as active in the feedback process, while the tutor's role switches to that of feedback designer and enabler. Examples of this shift from transmission-based feedback models include the work of Boud and Molloy (2012) who describe and critique what they term 'Feedback Mark 1' or transmission-based models, proposing a 'Feedback Mark 2' or learner-focused feedback model, which envisages cyclical dialogue across a curriculum, with the aim of achieving sustainable feedback practice. Their aim is to move feedback practice from telling to acting, with students as drivers of the feedback process, shifting conceptions of feedback from the mechanistic to the responsive, and focussing attention on the actions of students. Malecka, Boud and Carless (2020) note that learner-centred views of feedback are now being described as *new paradigm* feedback processes and would include the work of Telio et al (2015) on education alliance, and Nash and Winstone (2017) on responsibility sharing. The recent work of Winstone et al describes the move as one from: "feedback-as-information to feedback-as-process" (Winstone et al 2021:1).

These shifts towards learner-focused feedback are further exemplified in the recent work of Winstone and Carless (2020) on designing effective feedback

processes. They advocate a shift in the primary role of the tutor in the feedback process to one of holistic design, encouraging student enablement and engagement, and paying attention not only to feedback content and delivery mode, but also to the surrounding feedback learning environment including student feedback literacy. They conclude that if one shifts the focus onto learners and what they do with their feedback, it becomes necessary to address students' agency in engaging with feedback. Gravett (2020) agrees and asserts that new paradigm feedback models must address student feedback literacy to support how students make sense of and use their feedback.

Allied to this shift in focus towards students' feedback responses is the work of Winstone et al (2017a) in relation to building students' feedback recipience. They examine both cognitive and volitional barriers to feedback and assert that a holistic approach must be taken to reap learning gains, since they argue that there is little point in trying, for example, to motivate a student if she cannot understand her feedback. They conclude that studies looking at engagement with feedback are under-represented and represent a "blind spot" (2017b:17) in our feedback understanding, and that the research which does exist on student engagement with feedback is "highly fragmented and somewhat atheoretical" (2017b:31). Consequently, they propose the concept of "pro-active recipience" (2017a:2041) of feedback, exhorting us to view feedback as something that students not only understand, but also feel and do. Emotions are therefore important not just for building rapport (Dixon 2015), redressing power imbalances (Varlander 2008), or mediating understanding of feedback, but may also influence future engagement with, and use of, feedback. Accordingly, the relationship between affect and feedback engagement represents an area ripe for further research.

To what extent, however, have such theoretical paradigm shifts filtered into academic practice? Winstone and Boud (2019) reporting on a large-scale study in higher education in the UK and Australia analyse the extent to which new feedback cultures are being adopted, and assert that Australian educators appear to place greater emphasis on student feedback action than their U.K. counterparts. In addition, Winstone et al (2020) in a U.K.-only study found that most educators in their sample of two hundred and sixteen higher education

tutors still saw feedback predominantly as a uni-lateral transmission process. This should not be altogether surprising given that the paradigm shifts described in the literature are relatively recent.

Developments around feedback dialogue and learner-focused feedback design find synergies with the literature around sustainable feedback and student self-regulation. As Olave-Encina et al note "[a] paradigm shift on feedback has begun to consider students as active agents…contributing to students' self-regulation processes" (2021:1). Feedback which is 'done with' students rather than 'done to' them may therefore have the potential to foster self-regulation and more sustainable feedback effects (Conley 2020).

### *Sustainable feedback and self-regulating students*

A re-conceptualisation of feedback as a dialogic relationship has already been noted, but a question remains: what is the *purpose* of this dialogic relationship? One strand of literature posits that feedback must be 'sustainable', that is, designed to encourage and sustain a student's longer term intellectual development. Carless argues that one purpose of such sustainable feedback should be to empower students to become self-regulating learners (Carless 2006), and Boud (2000) notes that this is a challenge unless feedback becomes more learner focused.

In the seminal work of Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick (2006) which builds on the prior work of Sadler (1998), seven principles of effective feedback are proposed which are grounded in theories of self-regulated learning. They conclude that sustainable feedback must shift the feedback focus onto the student to help her self-regulate her work. Hounsell (2007) builds on this and asserts that feedback needs to equip students to learn prospectively. He distinguishes between what he terms "low value feedback" (Hounsell 2007:103) which is merely corrective and cryptic, perhaps accompanied by bald imperatives, and "high value feedback" which has "greater longevity" (Hounsell 2007:104). He terms this 'sustainable feedback' which recognises that feedback is needed not only to benefit the task in hand, but also has an eye to students' future performance. More recently, Carless et al (2011) define sustainable feedback as "dialogic

processes and activities which can support and inform the student on the current task, while also developing the ability to self-regulate performance on future tasks" (2011:397). Some students may be more effective at self-regulating than others, and Carless et al suggest that sustainable feedback will involve developing students' capacities to evaluate their own learning both in the short and long term. They conclude that while crafting such feedback might demand much of tutors, "the goal to prepare students for future learning must remain central" (2011:408).

The significance of enhanced feedback *use* via self-regulated student activity is highlighted by many who advocate sustainable feedback. Zimbardi et al (2017) assert that "the extent to which students interact with their feedback impacts significantly on their [academic] performance" (2017:641). Boud and Molloy (2013) describe the shift required as moving from a notion of feedback as *telling* followed by identifiable utilisation, to one of *seeking* followed by judgement and identifiable utilisation. I would argue for a re-conceptualisation of 'sustain*ing*' feedback, since this places the focus on the student as well as on the feedback, demanding that feedback aims to prospectively sustain the intellectual flourishing of the student over time, not by just feeding back or feeding forward, but by feeding *further.*

I argue that these shifts in designing feedback practice towards more learner-focused and sustainable models ask much of tutors in constructing feedback. In seeking to understand how feedback is constructed, not only by students, but also by their tutors, necessitates an understanding of the context within which the feedback is given, and how this context may interact with tutors' own perceived feedback roles and values.

### 2.1.3 Giving feedback: tutors' feedback values, roles, and experiences

A tutor may perceive her academic role in a number of ways: as academic; as researcher; as teacher; as professional; as manager, and she will need to negotiate these roles, some of which may align, while others may conflict. It has already been noted in Chapter One that contextual changes in the forms of increased participation in higher education, posited commodification of educational practice, and audit cultures may have led to what some have termed

"quietly overlooked tensions" (Isomottonen 2018:1) in professional feedback practice. If this is the case, then how this may, or may not, affect tutors' construction of their feedback becomes relevant.

There are fewer studies into tutors' feedback experiences and reflections than into students' (Evans 2013; Reimann and Sadler 2017), and this provides a warrant for future research. This is important since Bailey and Garner (2010) suggest that tutors' views on the purposes of feedback are highly variable, and others assert that there can also be a lack of alignment between tutors' and students' views about feedback practice (e.g., Orsmond and Merry 2011). Contextual changes in the higher education landscape may also have a role to play in impacting on academic tutors' feedback values and roles. As Boud (2000) notes, assessment and feedback often do 'double duty' in terms of both measuring achievement and promoting learning, so feedback roles are inevitably complex. Sutton (2017) contends that contextual change has not only re-ordered institutional practices, but also tutors' self-identities, by replacing academic values and commitment with contractual duties, and he laments what he sees as the replacement of academic judgement with standardized regulation.

Research around the changing nature of tutors' feedback roles and values is limited and warrants further research. Much of the literature notes, unsurprisingly, that different tutors display different approaches to, and beliefs about, feedback practice (e.g., Carless 2006). Tang and Harrison (2011) identify differing feedback beliefs ranging from those tutors who felt that feedback had no use at all (since they felt that students were only interested in their assessment grade), through to tutors who believed that feedback was critical to student improvement. By contrast, Li and De Luca (2014) suggest that tutors often agree that feedback should inform learning as well as justify grading, but that they find it hard to balance these roles in practice. Bailey and Garner (2010) also report tutor difficulties in providing useful feedback comments as well as satisfying institutional quality processes.

Research into tutor feedback values, roles and the social aspects of feedback practice is relatively nascent and has been developed, in part, by the important work of Tuck (2012). Tuck examines feedback-giving as a social practice and

suggests that her data (from a range of higher education institutions and disciplines), show tutors experiencing conflicting feedback values and roles: as *markers,* fulfilling institutional audit requirements; as *workers,* fulfilling contractual obligations; and as *teachers,* seeking to engage in developmental feedback dialogue. Tuck draws on the earlier work of Bailey and Garner (2010) and concludes that the response from her tutors to these conflicts was often to attempt to reconcile them by carving out "small spaces for dialogue with students" (2012: 209). Her analysis supports the conclusions of Bailey and Garner (2010) that tutors often feel constrained by institutional requirements around feedback, and that they struggle to balance their feedback values and roles. More recently, the empirical study of Winstone and Carless (2021) supports Tuck's findings, providing evidence of professional dissonance in the giving of feedback. In their study, tutors describe conflicts between their own beliefs about the centrality of student learning in the feedback process on the one hand, and quality assurance mechanisms on the other. Winstone and Carless conclude that "[s]uch dissonance arose from the pressure to secure student satisfaction and avoid complaints" (2021:1).

Carless (2015) argues that feedback activity and the tensions which can flow therefrom are largely tacit, and he notes that Tuck (2012) "claims that…feedback is a marginalised aspect of academics' work which is largely invisible in terms of recognition" (2015:190). The tacit nature of professional tension is examined by McNaughton and Billot (2016) who explore, at a more general level, how academics negotiate what they term "identity shifts" (2016:644) occurring during higher education contextual change. They conclude that a tutor's 'being' or values inform her 'doing' or role, and that non-alignment of values with role realities can have "deeply personal effects" (2016:646) which they feel are underplayed in the extant literature and warrant further examination. Their data suggest that while successful negotiation of these shifts may be essential for coherent professional biographical narratives, these negotiations are variable in their execution and can produce personal and professional ambiguities.

Such professional ambiguities and tensions are further discussed at the theoretical level, by Riivari et al (2018) from a Finnish perspective. They examine the concept of meaningful work in higher education, which they describe as a

relational phenomenon thriving on dialogue and interaction, which has subjective and objective dimensions involving conditions which they refer to as "having, loving and being" (2018:5). 'Having' is defined as the material conditions in which one works, including workspace, job resources and workload; and 'loving' refers to work-based social relationships which require interaction and dialogue. For those in Riivari et al's samples, 'loving' involved trust, interaction, and dialogue between tutors, but could arguably extend to student interactions also. 'Being' refers to the need for professional self-fulfilment and the possibilities for influence over one's own work. In the context of feedback, parallels can be drawn between Tuck's ideas of feedback roles of 'worker' and 'marker' with Riivari' et al's concept of 'having'; and Tuck's feedback role of 'teacher' with Riivari et al's concept of 'loving' with its emphasis on relational, dialogic activity.

If professional feedback strains do exist on the part of tutors, then one question which may legitimately be posed is: what can tutors do in response? One part of the literature around feedback practice concerns itself with the use of technology to deliver feedback. In recent years, a literature has grown, initially around audio feedback and later around audio-visual feedback technologies. A select review of this growing literature follows and is structured around its practical, pedagogical, relational, and affective dimensions.

## 2.2 Hearing and seeing feedback: assessment feedback and audio-visual delivery

### 2.2.1 Feedback forms

Assessment feedback in higher education has traditionally been given in the written form and/or via synchronous face-to-face conversations, the latter often held up as the 'gold standard' of feedback (Blair and McGinty 2012). Carruthers et al (2014) assert that synchronous dialogue is predominantly preferred by students, and Blair and McGinty (2012) acknowledge that this form of feedback practice can be very effective but may involve issues around power and status inhibiting the exchange, as well as contextual difficulties with providing this mode of feedback delivery for all. Mulliner and Tucker (2017) agree that students tend to prefer face-to-face feedback to written, but Winstone and Carless (2020)

caution that this view is variable and may depend on disciplinary as well as inter-personal factors.

Mahoney et al (2019) note that in recent years, tutors have experimented with audio and audio-visual/screencast technologies, and while these technologies continue to evolve, screencast technology currently involves audio feedback together with a recorded visual screencast, which may also incorporate a 'talking head' of the tutor appearing in the corner of the screen. Dixon (2017) asserts that most students prefer the synergies achieved through the integration of audio and text commentary, and Ice et al (2007) claim that this can be an important way to acknowledge learner difference. Ice et al (2007) conducted one of the first studies into audio feedback in higher education and found a striking preference in their study for voice over purely textual feedback. While many studies conclude that the students in their samples preferred audio or audio-visual delivery when compared to written feedback (Hattie and Timperley 2007), and the detail in relation to this is considered below, other studies, albeit a minority, find to the contrary. Borup et al (2015), for example, found that their students overwhelmingly preferred written feedback to audio-visual, valuing the efficiency of text over the argued socio-affective benefits of audio-visual. Others report easier navigation and the ability to skim-read through text to be of greater importance to their student participants (e.g., Borup et al 2015; Orlando 2016). Lunt and Curran (2010) conclude therefore that audio-visual feedback should not replace face-to-face nor written feedback opportunities.

While one might argue that technologically enhanced feedback may encourage students to adopt deeper approaches to, and greater self-regulation of learning, Evans (2013) in her meta-review concludes that the reported *impacts* of such interventions are highly variable. Winstone and Carless (2020) sound a different note of caution when they assert that contemporary higher education is characterised by a proliferation in the uses of technology, perhaps as a result of the belief that technology can transform education. They fear that technology can merely be used to replicate feedback as didactic, monologic 'telling', and Williams et al (2013) note that while learning technologies increase the ways in which students may receive feedback, they may not change its fundamental nature. Others advocate the need for a principled pedagogic approach to the use

of feedback technologies with measured evaluation, since "developments in technologically enhanced learning tend to be accompanied by hype and polemic" (Duval et al 2017:24).

Since Arnold (2014) asserts that there is in the literature a tendency to evaluate technological tools rather than to examine the experiences of tutors and students, the latter is attempted via a holistic evaluation below, which considers various affordances and limitations of audio-visual feedback technology.

### 2.2.2 Dimensions of audio-visual feedback practice

Although video-based learning has been used in education for many years and written and audio feedback have been well examined in the literature, audio-visual feedback has received rather less attention and warrants further research (Mahoney et al 2019). Kettle (2007) also notes that tutors' views on audio-visual feedback represents an under-researched area.

While most studies are supportive of the practice, with only a minority examining associated challenges/limitations, the existing research remains limited in that it largely consists of small-scale studies with self-reported data; may be open to the charge of suffering from novelty effect; and rarely addresses the impact of the medium on subsequent student performance. The audio-visual feedback medium, while arguably continuing the tradition of information transmission rather than dialogue (Carless 2020b), concurrently seeks to promote a social, interactional approach to feedback which chimes with the rich and still evolving body of work around social constructivist learning. Mahoney et al (2019) assert that the medium also attempts to create conditions for dialogue and feedforward, aligning with the sustainable feedback agenda where tutor feedback guides not only the task in hand, but also future learning. A selection of the literature dealing with the practical, pedagogic, relational, and affective dimensions of audio-visual feedback practice is considered below.

#### *Practical dimensions*

While many laud the flexibility of the audio-visual medium (e.g., Carmichael et al 2018), there are many potential challenges which accompany the use of

technology, including the risk that technology can complicate rather than simplify feedback processes, which may outweigh its potential benefits (Albinson et al 2020). While there are a variety of practical/technological issues raised by the literature, I will consider two, the first represents a dominant theme in the literature: the quantity of feedback given and whether tutors can save time in using audio-visual technologies to give feedback or whether it adds to their workload. The second represents an emerging theme around feedback workspace and recording processes.

## Quantities of feedback and tutor workload

Opinion remains divided on whether audio-visual technologies provide an efficient way of giving assessment feedback and whether they reduce or increase tutors' workloads (Hennessy and Forester 2014). The majority of the literature, however, asserts that audio-visual feedback can save tutor time, or at worst is comparable to the giving of written feedback (e.g., Mayhew 2017; Thomas et al 2017). Ice et al (2007) concluded that approximately 75% of tutor time was saved in their study, coupled with a 255% increase in the quantity of feedback provided. More recently, Henderson and Phillips (2015) suggest the practice takes about half the time for comparable written feedback, although Lamey (2015) suggests that to save time, effort is needed to avoid too much note-taking and multiple recordings.

A minority of studies contest these findings. Borup et al (2015), for example, assert that the process is time-consuming, and Mathieson (2012) argues that screencasting should not be used with larger cohorts. Although it is beyond contention that tutors can ordinarily speak more quickly than they can type, the issue of time saving remains keenly debated. Lunt and Curran (2010) estimate that one minute of speech takes approximately six minutes to write, but acknowledge that this time saving may be offset by the assertion made in many studies (e.g., Lamey 2015) that greater quantities of feedback and feedforward tend to be provided when tutors use the audio-visual medium. Gould and Day (2013) also note considerable inconsistency in the literature around recommended file length and therefore quantity of feedback. For example, Nortcliffe and Middleton (2011) advocate five-minute files, while Fitzgerald

(2011), despite warning against a superficial approach to feedback, recommends feedback files of two minutes. Others suggest that much longer files of ten to twenty minutes are required (e.g., Rodway-Dyer et al 2011). Appropriateness of file length will vary according to discipline and the assessment in question, however, Price et al (2010) rightly note that "'more' feedback does not always equal 'more' learning" (2010:278).

### Tutor workspace and recording processes

Some studies report practical difficulties in accessing the quiet spaces needed to make audio-visual recordings, whether at home or in the office (e.g., Borup et al 2015; Kay and Bahula 2020). When tutors can access appropriately quiet surroundings, some report frustrations with the recording process (e.g., Vincelette and Bostic 2013); having difficulty in becoming familiar with new technologies; or dealing with cumbersome technological issues such as uploading. Other studies, however, report tutors becoming more comfortable over time with the technologies, and becoming more adept at avoiding re-records, retaining small errors in delivery which are often seen as more authentic and less scripted (Borup et al 2014; Ardley and Hallare 2020). The need for suitable training and appropriate technical support is, however, often noted. Issues around audio-visual feedback and workspace represent an emerging area in the literature.

### *Pedagogic dimensions*

Savin-Baden (2010) claims that much of the literature around feedback and technology centres around practice rather than pedagogy. At the theoretical level, Carless (2015) argues for congruence between the use of technology and pedagogy, asserting that regardless of the medium of delivery, feedback should be dialogic, learner-focused and designed to promote feedback engagement. A number of scholars maintain that students generally have an open and positive learning attitude towards audio-visual feedback (e.g., Lunt and Curran 2010; Knauf 2015), and some studies suggest that giving audio-visual feedback can also prompt a renewed enthusiasm on the part of tutors, rather than "the characteristic dread or sufferance" (Henderson and Phillips 2015:63) associated with written feedback practice.

The potential pedagogical affordances of audio-visual technologies will first be considered, followed by posited limitations, noting that the literature in the main lauds the pedagogical affordances of the medium with relatively little being devoted to its limitations.

## Pedagogical affordances of the medium

### More feedforward

There is a reasonable consensus in the literature that the audio-visual medium lends itself to not only more constructive commentary, with studies reporting more positive comments in the audio-visual format (e.g., Thomas et al 2017), but also enhanced levels of feedforward and suggestions for improving future assignments (Lamey 2015). Killingback et al (2020) found that both the students and tutors in their study valued the enhanced levels of feedforward. Henderson and Phillips (2015) speculate that this may be less a result of the medium itself, and more the additional time it allows for providing feedforward as well as for feedback. Others welcome the enhanced potentialities for feedforward, noting that this may make the medium particularly well suited to the giving of formative feedback (e.g., Brearley and Cullen 2012; Dixon 2017).

### More explanatory comment and examples

A minority of studies including (e.g., Moore and Filling 2012), conclude that the content of feedback in the audio-visual form is much the same as in the written. The majority, however, assert that the medium strongly influences content, for example, that written feedback is more likely to be corrective and identify errors, while audio-visual feedback tends to contain more examples of how to correct practice (Cavanaugh and Song 2014). Ice et al (2007) found that their audio feedback contained five times as many adjectives when compared to textual feedback, and that this was associated with expressive language. Similarly, Henderson and Phillips (2015) assert that audio-visual feedback fundamentally shifts the focus of tutors' feedback from surface-level to more global explanatory comment. The medium may allow tutors to demonstrate more easily *how* to improve via the use of video tools, and some tutors report feeling 'freed' by using the tools (Henderson and Phillips 2015). At a practical level, it can also be "quicker and easier to 'talk' individual students through how a problem should be

solved" (Race 2001:163). This shift away from the corrective towards more global comment is thought by Vincelette and Bostic (2013) to be more suited to discursive feedback and so may be discipline sensitive.

### Personalised content

That audio-visual feedback provides more individualised or personalised feedback with less generic comment finds high levels of agreement in the literature (e.g., Borup et al 2014; Pitt and Winstone 2019), with one student participant explaining that "[i]t shows you *your* own problems as opposed to just general [ones]" (Jones et al 2012:601). Sutton (2012) asserts that some students see such personalised comment as an indication that their tutor cares about their work. However, other studies find more divided opinion within their student samples, with some preferring generic feedback and others valuing feedback personalised to their work (e.g., Dawson et al 2019).

What might be the *significance* of these posited differences in feedback content? Some studies suggest that students report enhanced understanding and better retention of their feedback, as well as enhanced engagement with it. These will be considered briefly in turn.

### Enhanced understanding and retention

A common problem associated with assessment feedback relates to misunderstandings of feedback content, impacting students' abilities to usefully respond. Several studies make claims for audio-visual feedback providing improved clarity, ease of understanding and fewer misinterpretations. Some attribute these to elaboration of content (Lamey 2015), some to the visual and aural cues aiding comprehension (Killingback et al 2019), and others to the audio-visual medium making the tutors' thought processes less ambiguous (Harper et al 2018).

Significantly, a number of studies lay claims around audio-visual feedback helping students not only to understand it better, but also to retain and recall it more effectively (e.g., Ice et al 2007; Munro and Hollingworth 2014). Some attribute this to enhanced reflection prompted by the medium (Henderson and Phillips 2015), while others feel that the dual coding of sight and sound assists

retention (Mathisen 2012). Mayhew (2017) in particular asserts that video feedback may afford significant gains for a broader spectrum of learners, using Mayers' (2014) work on the cognitive theory of multimedia learning, and the importance of dual coding for potential learning gains. A significant consequence of a clearer understanding and retention of feedback is that students may well *use* it more, and Cunningham (2019a) asserts that screencasting feedback can lead to fewer follow-up clarification queries.

### Enhanced feedback engagement

Several studies report that the provision of audio or audio-visual feedback increases students' engagement with their feedback (e.g., Lunt and Curran 2010; Zimbardi et al 2017). In the study of West and Turner (2016) the majority of the student sample felt that they spent more time reviewing audio-visual feedback than written feedback, and others have concluded that having to work differently with the feedback can foster students' deeper engagement with it (e.g., Orlando 2016; Dixon 2017). Students in the studies of Grigoryan (2017) and Zimbardi et al (2017) reported watching and listening to their feedback multiple times and engaging with it for longer periods. The work of Macgregor et al (2011) represents one of the few studies with contrary findings, its student sample reporting that they accessed their audio feedback less that their written feedback.

The social aspects of the medium are thought by some to positively affect students' engagement, with some students ranking screencasts above face-to-face feedback, since they report rewinding, pausing, and watching their feedback again later. Harper et al (2018) assert that this has the advantage of allowing students to work at their own pace, and Vincelette and Bostic (2013) argue that the medium also may allow students to avoid the perceived social pressures of a face-to-face discussion with their tutor. Technical challenges in dealing with the technology can, however, negatively impact feedback engagement according to Crook et al (2012), and some students report that having to work differently with audio-visual feedback can negatively affect their engagement (Henderson and Phillips 2015).

## Pedagogical limitations of the medium

The literature has less to say about the potential pedagogic limitations of the audio-visual medium. Recurrent themes, however, include navigational issues, with students reporting that they find it easier and quicker to locate feedback in the written form when accessing their feedback or returning to it at a later date (Henderson and Phillips 2015; Orlando 2016), or when having later dialogue with their tutor or peers (Arnold 2014). Dixon (2017) notes that there are only a small number of studies which highlight this issue, and that this issue relates more to audio-only feedback, rather than audio-visual, since students can use the visual cues to help navigate within the overall feedback. This navigational issue may, however, persist with audio-visual feedback due to its linear delivery, and Martinez-Arboleda (2018) asserts that access to a holistic feedback overview may be inhibited, raising structural concerns. Audio-visual feedback has also been criticised as hard to 'skim-listen' (Henderson and Phillips 2015), although Cann (2014) sees this as pedagogically advantageous. Denton (2014) notes with concern the possibilities of cognitive overload with feedback delivered in a linear, multi-media format.

While the personalised nature of audio-visual feedback has already been noted as a possible affordance of the medium, others disagree, including Borup et al (2015) who note that some of the students in their sample welcomed what they see as the superior specificity of textual feedback. Significantly, despite the claims made by some studies in relation to enhanced understanding and retention, Gould and Day (2013) assert that where there have been studies which address the impact of audio-visual feedback delivery, these impacts have been reported as only moderate.

It can be seen from the above discussion that there persist differences of opinion in relation to the pedagogical outcomes for audio-visual feedback delivery. Dixon (2015) notes that while many report the affordances of audio-visual feedback to be pedagogic rather than technical, its real effectiveness, he asserts, lies in the relational, where it can be used as an extension of a tutor's own teaching style.

### *Relational dimensions*

One growing theme in the literature on feedback is that students' judgements about the strength of their educational relationships and the trust they have in their tutors can influence their feedback acceptance and engagement (Telio et al 2015). In addition, students' emotional reactions can have a significant part to play in determining how they respond to their feedback (Pitt and Norton 2017), and this is considered in more detail later. That feedback is a relational as well as pedagogic activity can easily be overlooked in the business of higher education (Winstone and Carless 2020), and the most significant potential of audio-visual feedback may lie in its relational or pastoral, rather than pedagogic, possibilities (Dixon 2015). Technology can mediate the relationship between tutor and student, but Killingback et al (2019) rightly caution that feedback will only ever be as good as the person giving it, and that the relational affordances of the medium may also be constrained by anonymised submission.

In examining a portion of the literature around audio-visual feedback and its relational dimension, themes of tutor tone; imagined dialogue; perceptions of presence and connection; and perceptions of caring will be explored.

## Tutor tone

Mortiboys (2012) notes that we convey more than just the intended meaning of words when we feed back orally, and Orlando agrees: "[m]uch of communication is not in what we say but in how we say it" (2016:158). The use of nuance and variety of tone allowed by audio-visual technologies can be seen as more engaging, and many studies note that student participants report tone as assisting both their understanding (Harper et al 2018) and their motivation (Henderson and Philips 2015; Anson et al 2016). Ice et al (2007) note the benefits speech has of immediacy and fluidity, yet Dixon (2017) asserts that many studies overlook that using these forms of technology represents a return to the use of the *voice*, which he claims as a persuasive and powerful tool for learning and development. Students can gain encouragement from hearing the voice of someone they know due to the intimacy that voice can create, to which the printed medium may be less well suited (Cavanaugh and Song 2014). This,

of course, assumes a pre-existing positive relationship between tutor and student.

Tone of voice is not, however, without its challenges. Tutors' pedagogic diligence and approach can be manifested in whatever medium is employed. Higgins et al (2001) note that "while some…can be very authoritarian, judgmental and detached, others may be very personal and empathetic" (2001:55). In the study of Rodway-Dyer et al (2011), students reported audio-visual feedback comments as harsh, and both Moore and Filling (2012) and Borup et al (2015) note the issue of 'leakage' in tone: where a marker's tone can unwittingly transmit unwelcome emotions such as boredom, disappointment, or frustration, providing a "window into the teacher's feelings in ways that written comments cannot" (Anson et al 2016:395).

### Perceptions of dialogue/conversation

While audio-visual feedback is not dialogue, but asynchronous monologue, there is some suggestion in the literature that students can experience "imagined dialogue" (Mahoney et al 2019:170). Some students report experiencing audio-visual feedback as conversational in nature despite its asynchronicity (Grigoryan 2017), likening it to a face-to-face meeting with their tutor (Henderson and Phillips 2015). This perception of conversation or dialogue is suggested by some to be due to the increased use of phatics and salutations (Thomas et al 2017), or relationship-building comments (Borup et al 2015). Significantly, some studies have found that audio-visual feedback may also prompt *subsequent* dialogue with tutors (e.g., Thomson and Lee 2012; Mahoney et al 2019), with some students reporting feeling more comfortable in initiating this dialogue having received audio-visual feedback from the tutor in question (Anson et al 2016). In the study of Grigoryan (2017), students reported feeling that they have already 'met' the tutor in their audio-visual feedback.

### Perceptions of presence and connection

As well as perceptions of dialogue, there is evidence that the audio-visual medium can also produce perceptions of tutor presence, as well as connection between student and tutor. Borup et al (2012) assert that video communication

can have a substantial impact on establishing a tutor's social presence. Some conclude that this may lead to a virtuous cycle of enhancing relational aspects (e.g., Thomas et al 2017) via a "living voice" (Munro and Hollingworth 2014:865). Lehman (2006) has written on the importance of presence in on-line learning environments and describes presence as a "psychological state in which the technology becomes transparent to the user" (2006:4) via an illusion of non-mediation. Social presence theory posits that social connections gained from social cues such as eye contact and facial expressions can lead to greater engagement with the content. Some consider the 'talking head' image of the tutor to be particularly effective in conveying non-verbal cues in the form of facial expression and body language (e.g., Borup et al 2014), while others report it bringing its own challenges, for example, when giving or receiving negative critique. Accordingly, perceptions of presence can be seen as a challenge as well as a source of support (Henderson and Phillips 2015).

The significance of presence may come from its displaced nature: while the tutor's spoken words can evoke a sense of presence, a student may feel she receives it from a safe, displaced distance, and Hennessey and Forrester (2014) argue that this can lead to increased engagement with feedback. Dixon (2017) also argues that there is a strong recognition in the literature that technologically enhanced feedback has the potential to "cross formal boundaries and enable connections to be made across time and space" (2017:40), with students sometimes reporting a felt co-presence with their tutor.

These feelings of displaced, though enhanced presence are also reported by some as leading to increased feelings of *connection* between tutor and student (e.g., Cavanaugh and Song 2014; Parkes and Fletcher 2016), which are often valued by students (Killingback et al 2020). Some studies also report a feeling of connection on the part of the tutor too (e.g., Kay and Bahula 2020). These feelings of connection are linked in turn by others to rapport-building potentials (Dixon 2015), and Henderson and Phillips (2015) note that senses of presence and connection are often linked in the literature with students feeling more supported and motivated, often attributed by them to what they see as higher levels of emotional investment on the part of their tutors.

## Perceptions of caring

Perceptions of presence and connection are taken further in some studies which argue that audio-visual feedback produces feelings in some students that their tutor cares more about their work (e.g., Cavanaugh and Song 2014; Winstone and Carless 2020) and their learning and progress (Dixon 2017). This echoes once again Telio et al's (2015) concept of educational alliance, and Mahoney et al (2019) note that "[w]hen students judge an educational alliance to be strong…they report making more effort…to positively engage in future feedback interactions with the same marker" (2019:171).

As well as caring about the work of the student, there are also suggestions that, when listening to her audio-visual feedback, a student may feel that the tutor cares about the student herself. Mortiboys asks: "How often do your learners see you as 'human'?" (2012:123) and contends that a tutor showing feelings appropriately can affect the emotional climate around a student's learning. This can help to build the genuineness or transparency lauded by Rogers (1961) as essential to learning. Dixon (2017) contends that this is particularly important given what he sees as increasingly fragmented student support structures in higher education. This potential for audio-visual technology to build not so much dialogue, but *rapport* is seen by some as part of the relational affordance offered by the medium (e.g., West and Turner 2016; Dixon 2017). Others see reports of experiences of interpersonal warmth, despite the displaced presence of the tutor, as tempering the potential imbalance of power relations between tutor and student (e.g., Varlander 2008).

While Winstone and Carless (2020) assert that higher quality relationships between tutors and students can act as a "buffer against the negative emotional impact of receiving critical feedback comments" (2020:154), and Lizzio and Wilson (2008) suggest that this can lead to greater acceptance of feedback messages, for some students, the 'intimacy' of the medium is unwelcome and seen as *too* personal (Fell 2009) or intrusive (Gleaves and Walker 2013), and reminds us that one size will not fit all, and to employ judicious use of educational technology.

## *Affective dimensions*

### Feedback and emotional response

The "'felt experience' of the feedback process" (Taggart and Laughlin 2017:1) has in recent years attracted more attention in the literature on assessment feedback. Underlining its highly subjective nature, Forsythe and Johnson (2017) assert that "feedback is an emotional business in which personal disposition influences what is attended to, encoded, consolidated and eventually retrieved" (2017:853). If it can be agreed that emotions are intrinsic to learning, Varlander (2008) asserts that it may not be a step too far to assert that emotions can influence the ways in which students respond to feedback. Emotional reaction to feedback certainly assumes significance if it is accepted that emotions can affect students' abilities to accept, process and act on that feedback. Boud argues that "[t]eachers write and say things which can readily be taken as comments about the person rather than their work" (1995:45), and some consider this emotional aspect of feedback to be as important as the cognitive (e.g., Yang and Carless 2013; Chong 2017). Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick (2006) also recognise the affective dimension as important for motivation, with others building on their work to make a case for recognising emotions as strong mediators of not only cognition and motivation, but also of behaviour in the form of feedback engagement (e.g., Shields 2015; Winstone et al 2017b).

Dowden et al (2013), however, assert that a duality persists in higher education, where the cognitive 'trumps' the affective, despite a growing literature suggesting that emotion mediates cognition and can eclipse rational response. Some argue for a much more inclusive approach to feedback and emotional response. Varlander (2008) in particular argues that emotions should not be considered as hindering learning, but as a natural part of it, needing neither to be managed nor controlled. She notes what she sees as an adherence to such dualism even amongst those promoting a constructivist view of knowledge creation. For her, emotions are not something to be 'got out of the way' in order to return to the rational business of learning, but rather should be seen as helpful signals to assist a student learn better, justifying, she argues, devoting equal time to affective and cognitive goals. More recently, Jones asserts that law schools follow this "lure of Cartesian dualism" (Jones 2020:59) and are in danger

of failing their staff and students by prizing reason and rationality at the expense of emotion. Given the existence of an already established literature around emotions and learning more generally (Rowe et al 2014), it is surprising that the interaction between emotions and assessment feedback is a relatively under-researched area. This provides a warrant for further research.

Responses to feedback, whether positive or negative, may be highly nuanced, with affective responses mediated by a number of factors, including a student's disposition, her prior feedback experiences (Falchikov and Boud 2007), and, one might add, her state of digestion, resulting in a considerable variability of response (Yorke 2003). Feedback giving and receiving is a highly subjective process, and Stone and Heen (2015) note that feedback raises tensions between learning on the one hand, and being accepted on the other, and that it "can feel less like a 'gift of learning' and more like a colonoscopy" (2015:7). This multi-faceted nature of emotional response will make crafting emotionally sensitive feedback complex, but Beard et al (2014) have called on researchers to view students as affective beings, and to reach clearer theorisations around emotional responses to feedback.

Positive emotions including happiness and pride flowing from feedback can build confidence and self-regulation (Pekrun et al 2002), while negative emotions such as anger, shame and fear can contribute to avoidance and anxiety (Rowe et al 2014). Lizzio and Wilson (2008) conclude that encouraging comments seem to increase students' propensity to persist with their studies, and Carless (2015) asserts that students who feel positive about their feedback will demonstrate "self-regulation…related to deep approaches to learning, whereas negative emotions prompt…limited strategies associated with surface approaches to learning" (2015:36). Others point to the potentially long-lasting affective impacts of feedback: "individuals at any point on their path from novice to expert are able to recount a 'painful feedback anecdote'" (e.g., Molloy et al 2013:17).

One theorisation around the complexity and nuanced nature of emotional responses to feedback can be found in the control value theory of Pekrun (2006). Winstone and Carless (2020) identify this theory as offering some insight into the complex interactions which may occur between feedback and emotion. Pekrun

(2006) suggests that emotions differ not only according to their *valence*, but also their *activation potential.* Positively valenced emotions could enjoyment and pride which may also be positive in their activating effect on the student. By contrast, contentment, and relief, while positive in valence, might be negative in activation potential since they may not promote further action. Similarly, negatively valenced emotions such as shame and anxiety may be positive in activation potential, whereas hopelessness may not.

Crucially, while students' uptake of feedback may be variable, their emotional response can be affected by the medium by which, and the context in which, that feedback is given. The highly subjective nature of emotions means that, for example, highly critical feedback leading to anger might lead one student to lose motivation and another student to feel increased motivation. Rowe et al (2014) conclude that while tutors cannot control all variables affecting students' emotional feedback responses, practical lessons can be learned to help manage emotional response. They propose, for example, timely feedback to reduce anxiety; personalised feedback to promote gratitude; and feedback literacy training for students to promote confidence. Rowe et al's later work in 2015 suggests that tutors do use strategies to elicit positive emotional responses but are largely untrained to do so. While there are many studies examining the effects of negative feedback and rather less of positive feedback, fewer still pay attention to how the use of audio-visual feedback can affect, if at all, students' affective receipt of feedback, providing a warrant for further research.

The preponderance of the literature lauds the affective advantages of the audio-visual medium with relatively fewer studies reporting affective limitations. The main affective affordances noted in the literature relate to building confidence and motivation via the pastoral potentials of the medium, and to enhancing the receipt of critical feedback. These are considered below.

### Pastoral potentials of audio-visual feedback delivery

Anson et al (2016) report increased feelings of motivation on the part of their student sample having received their feedback via audio-visual means, and Harper et al (2018) assert that such feelings often apply equally to tutors as well

as students. Some studies report raised feelings of self-esteem and encouragement (e.g., Thomson and Lee 2012), while others report enhanced feelings of belonging (Killingback et al 2019). Such positive pastoral potentials are argued by some to promote inclusivity as well as academic and personal flourishing (Dixon 2015).

While Ryan and Henderson (2017) note that no single feedback design will lead to positive emotional responses for all, international students appear in parts of the literature as warranting particular attention. The term 'international student' is used to refer to a student who has moved from another country outside the U.K. to study full-time in the U.K. The sustained burgeoning of international student recruitment, at least pre-Covid 19, has led to considerable investment in strategies to enhance these students' learning experiences. Mortiboys (2012), however, identifies international students as a group requiring particular consideration since, whilst being no more of a homogenous group than any other, he asserts that research suggests that they are more likely to "have feelings of disengagement, constraint and vulnerability. They can feel intense loss of self-esteem and…confidence" (Mortiboys 2012:145). Ryan and Henderson (2017) suggest that there is scant research into the emotional and other experiences of these students in relation to their assessment feedback. Confirming Hyland and Hyland's earlier work (2001), Ryan and Henderson (2017) in their large-scale empirical study in Australia, found that international students were more likely to find feedback comments discouraging, upsetting or overly critical, and that this was regardless of language experience, but rather, they assert, was more likely to be due to unique cultural expectations and experiences. Olave-Encina et al (2021), also researching in the Australian context, confirm that international students' affective responses to assessment feedback can be particularly complex and often negative, and that building trust with their tutors is particularly crucial. Research is therefore warranted into the affective and pastoral potentials of audio-visual delivery of feedback for this particular group of students.

One further group of students who may benefit from the affective affordances of the audio-visual medium are students facing mental health challenges. While a detailed consideration of the growing body of work around student wellbeing in

higher education is beyond the ambit of the current study, it is worth noting that public and political concern around student wellbeing continues to grow, and assessment and feedback practices can have negative as well as positive impacts on student wellbeing. Jones et al (2021) in their empirical work developing a Student Minds' Mental Health Charter note that engagement with feedback can be impeded by mental health issues. In their study, participants noted that feedback which involved criticism, seen by them as not constructive, had the potential to negatively affect their mental health and be a trigger for pronounced affective reaction. Accordingly, the pastoral as well as pedagogic potentials of feedback media may be of significance for students facing mental health challenges.

At a more general level, West and Turner (2016) recommend further research into whether audio-visual feedback can be used to support inclusivity, not only of international students or those with mental health or other needs such as visual impairment or dyslexia, but of the whole student body.

### Accepting critique

In a related body of work, others assert that the audio-visual medium may not only have pastoral potentials but may also be a better vehicle for giving critical feedback to all students (e.g., Lizzio and Wilson 2008). Fong et al (2019) suggest that students accept critique more readily when delivered face-to-face than when delivered in writing, and while one may question whether audio-visual is equivalent to face-to-face, their meta-analysis reminds us that the socio-affective features of the feedback environment can have important effects on students' emotional response and intrinsic motivation. Audio-visual feedback can be 'gentler' than textual and "cushioned the blow a bit" (Killingback et al 2019:36). However, if a tutor has some tough critique to deliver, or delivers critique in an overly brusque way, others report that this could in fact be more difficult to hear than to read (Rodway-Dyer et al 2011).

Evans (2013) suggests that emotional response can impact both motivation and performance. In the context of assessment feedback, Pitt and Norton (2017) assert the need for students to feel sufficiently motivated to act upon their

feedback messages to close their feedback loops. Receipt of feedback comments often forms part of a complex social interaction in which not only emotion, but also power, identity and previous feedback experience may come into play (Ryan and Henderson 2017). Social events are a common context for emotional response, and Rowe et al (2014) suggest that this is particularly pertinent for feedback situations involving communication regarding a student's performance, progress, or learning. Forsythe and Johnson (2017) suggest that motivation is key for understanding to be converted into behavioural change, here leading to action on feedback. Jones et al (2012) conclude that although some students report valuing feedback irrespective of their emotional response to it, others clearly appear to be motivated or de-motivated by it. Jones et al (2012) conclude that feedback which is supportive and encouraging is more likely to lead to student engagement.

Many studies agree that student perception of feedback as negative can lead to a reduction in motivation and a consequential reduction in the later use of that feedback (e.g., Poulos and Mahoney 2008). Falchikov and Boud (2007) suggest that negative emotional responses to feedback can be sufficiently intense to have long-lasting effects and can have a "lingering" (2007:152) influence on students' personal as well as academic development. Pitt and Norton label this "emotional backwash" (2017:1) and suggest that emotional reactions can negatively impact upon both cognition and behaviour. Their data suggest that emotional reactions play a significant part in determining how students will act on feedback, and the work of Jonsson (2012) suggests that students with lower self-esteem may have a greater propensity to react harmfully to negative feedback. One of the responses to this issue of 'backwash' can be found in the work of Shafi et al (2018) who examine using feedback as a way of *managing* emotional response, and argue that what they term "academic buoyancy" (2018:415) is a key factor in academic success. Their work identifies what they consider to be the characteristics of this 'buoyancy', including having an internal locus of control and being improvement focused.

## Support and challenge

Allied to these debates around feedback 'backwash' and 'buoyancy' are discussions relating to the more general pedagogic tension between supporting

students on the one hand, and challenging them on the other, and this can have particular relevance to assessment feedback practice. The U.K. Quality Code for Higher Education asserts that feedback should build confidence via supportive feedback, but also makes it clear that feedback should include some element of personal challenge (QAA 2018 Part 3B). This recognises that a valuable part of learning is the struggle, both cognitive and affective, associated with learning and changing. In pedagogic terms, this can be represented as a tension between the desire to *support* the student and the desire to *challenge* her.

Alan Mortiboys (2012) opines that it would be disturbing if universities were emotion-free zones but asserts that in higher education this is often close to reality. This is echoed in relation to law schools in particular in the recent work of Jones (2020). Mortiboys argues that cognitive support for students is certainly necessary, but in no way sufficient, and that emotions in learning can be pathologized. Scholarly thinking about emotions has a protracted and contentious history demonstrating episodic shifts, but recurrently embracing the importance of the notion of the 'whole person' (Beard et al 2007). The ideas of Carl Rogers (1969) are important in this field and have been used in many different areas of education, Rogers concerning himself with the conditions he felt were needed by a human to grow and develop into a "fully functioning person" (1994:316). These conditions include genuineness or congruence; an empathetic understanding of the learner; and an unconditional positive regard of the other leading to acceptance and trust. In applying his person-centred approach to counselling to the field of education, Rogers sought to move the focus away from teaching and towards learning, and his seminal text Freedom to Learn (1969) focuses on the relationships formed with students, placing importance not merely on cognitive development, but on the development of the whole person.

Applying person-centred conditions for growth to the context of assessment feedback, Rogers asserts that unconditional positive regard and empathetic understanding on the part of the tutor will lead to trust between the parties and that "the likelihood of significant learning is increased" (1994:157), and his work foreshadows Carless' (2013b) later work on feedback and trust. Rogers does not, however, advocate protecting learners from the discomfort associated with

learning and growth, rather he acknowledges that "all personal growth is marked by a degree of disorganisation…the pain of new understandings" (1994:323). It is interesting to note that Rogers' shift from a clinician-centred counselling approach to a client-centred one, mirrors the shift described by Carless and Winstone (2020) and others from a tutor-centred transmission model of assessment feedback to one that is learner-focused. Rogers' approaches have attracted much criticism over time, in part as they are built on an arguably optimistic view of human nature that all are seeking, or know how to seek, self-actualisation. His person-centred approach to education is also costly to operationalise and perhaps under threat in increasingly performative higher education cultures.

Set against such person-centred approaches one also finds in the literature concerns about a growing, and for some, dangerous, therapeutic discourse in higher education. Ecclestone and Hayes (2019), for example, argue that it is wrong to expect universities to deal with the whole person, and emotions in particular, since they argue that this disempowers and infantilises young people, and detracts from what they see as the primary purpose of education: the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. They criticise universities for stepping back from challenge, which they assert is a central characteristic of disinterested academic enquiry.

Returning to the central tension of support and challenge in providing assessment feedback, Jones et al (2021) note that the tension of challenge versus threat looms particularly large in the arena of assessment and feedback. While Hyland and Hyland (2001) contend that supportive comments increase the likelihood of students accepting the challenging ones, Moffitt et al (2019) argue that the most effective feedback often needs to be challenging to students' sense of self or produce what others have termed "a temporary destabilisation of their world view" (Forsythe and Johnson 2017: 858). While it may be fair to assert that tutors should seek to avoid unnecessarily wounding their students in their feedback, it may equally be contended that students cannot and should not seek to escape the discomfort, frustration or disappointment which accompanies the receipt of what they may perceive as challenging feedback. Indeed, as Forsythe and Johnson (2017) suggest, while good quality, individualised feedback takes

time, few academics today will also have the time to sit down for long periods with anxious students and attend to their emotional needs. They do, however, express the hope that students will recognise that they need to be exposed to the emotional pain associated with growth or failure, which is a valuable part of human experience, and that a degree of stress and emotion is required to improve and to perform well. Accordingly, a *fusion* of support and challenge may be needed in giving feedback, where the affective is recognised and support offered, as a way of facilitating cognitive development via the acceptance of challenging feedback.

### Affective limitations

Rather less appears in the literature around the potential affective limitations of the audio-visual medium. Some assert that there are unwelcome emotional impacts via a more "visceral" experience (Henderson and Phillips 2015:59). Some students report feelings of awkwardness on listening to and watching their feedback (Henderson and Phillips 2015), anxiety (Cunningham 2019a), nervousness and discomfort (Kay and Bahula 2020), or stress (Stone 2014). A minority of studies also report that students find the 'talking head' facility too personal and confronting (e.g., Borup et al 2014). In addition, the dangers of 'leakage' have already been noted, where tutors when screencasting may have difficulty in concealing emotions which may be unwelcome to a student (Henderson and Phillips 2015), and which might include disappointment, frustration, or formulaic praise (Borup et al 2014).

## 2.2.3 Summary

There is some evidence from the literature that, while acknowledging its limitations, audio-visual feedback can offer pedagogic advantages, principally in the forms of enhanced feedforward and explanatory comment. This can, in turn, lead to improved levels of feedback understanding, retention and engagement. Relational affordances of perceived dialogue and tutor presence, connection or caring, together with affective effects of enhanced confidence and motivation may also have positive potentials for feedback acceptance and uptake. These potentials for feedback engagement may be of significance on a broader stage in relation to sustainable feedback practice, and richer conceptions of students as

affective and embodied selves, together with a clearer theorisation of the role of emotion in educational encounters may help students achieve improved self-regulation. The affective dimensions of feedback are under-researched and under-theorised in higher education. It is argued that it is important to understand the affective dimension in pedagogic encounters and that this may be achieved without a collapse into therapeutic discourse.

The research on audio-visual feedback generally suffers from a number of limitations including novelty effect for tutors and students; the involvement of the researcher in the feedback process; and a preponderance of self-reported data from small sample sizes. Mahoney et al (2019) report that their main concern with the current state of play of knowledge is that there is little research around *impact* on students' subsequent academic performance, with few studies reporting on whether the relational and other affordances of the medium translate into student action, changed behaviours or any measurable learning gains. They conclude that current findings on the impact of the medium are limited and inconclusive, and that merely viewing a practice through a socio-constructivist lens does not avoid the fact that many studies have "merely substituted one medium (written) for another (video)" (2019:170). Their central concern remains that audio-visual feedback, while perhaps creating an illusion of dialogue, may still offer limited avenues for students to respond and develop agency. The interplay between the cognitive, the relational and the affective assumes particular significance when it can be shown to affect not only how students think and feel, but also what they *do* with their feedback.

To conclude, theories around constructing feedback, including shifts towards learner-focused feedback design encouraging student self-regulation, are producing interesting tensions and challenges for tutors who design and deliver new feedback models within the shifting contexts of higher education. How to use educational technology in ways which are pedagogically as well as socio-affectively sound presents further challenge. One metaphor which can be used to try and capture these shifts and tensions is a musical one: how can tutors produce assessment feedback which both *resonates* and *reverberates* with students? Resonating feedback will chime with and be accepted by the student at the cognitive and socio-affective levels, and may be influenced by the means of

delivery and the extent to which the content is learner-focused. Feedback will reverberate, that is, last, where it is sustainable in content and delivery, and is pro-actively received by a student who has learned to become self-regulatory.

## 2.3 Warrants for further research and proposed research questions

This review of literature highlights several potential areas for further research, not all of which can be accommodated within the constraints of a research study for a professional doctorate. Since Sanchez and Dunworth (2015) contend that there remains a "great disconnect" (2015:458) between feedback theory and feedback practice, I use the most important warrants from the literature to frame my research questions, both on feedback practice and its theorisation.

The *first* area worthy of further attention relates to tutors' assessment feedback practice and how tutors perceive their feedback values, roles, and experiences, both generally and within the shifting contexts of higher education. It has been noted that there is far less research on tutors' feedback experiences than students', and the literature abounds with assertions that feedback has become an impoverished dialogic practice due to contextual change producing both pedagogic and relational tension. The research on tutors' feedback roles and values is particularly limited.

A *second* associated area for research relates to how tutors may respond to posited feedback practice tensions via the use of feedback technology. The use of technology to underpin feedback practice may prove fruitful for further analysis, since it is noted in the literature on audio-visual feedback that this method of giving feedback is considered by students more akin to dialogue, and may have an impact not only on their understanding of feedback, but also on their engagement with it.

Research in my own discipline of law, which appears rarely as a unit of analysis in the chosen literature is warranted, involving a consideration of both tutor and student views on the pedagogic aspects of giving and receiving assessment feedback. The socio-affective dimension of feedback is also ripe for further

analysis, most particularly since there is evidence that this aspect of feedback has received limited (albeit growing) attention. Audio-visual screencast technology will be used to generate data since there is a burgeoning interest in its use (Vincelette and Bostic 2013), and Mayhew (2017) asserts that screen capture is "highly underutilised in U.K. higher education" (2017:179). Data will therefore be generated around the practical, pedagogic, and relational dimensions of the practice, since it has already been noted that the relational aspects of feedback are generally felt to be under-researched, especially outside the medical disciplines (Dowden et al 2013). The affective dimension of feedback also warrants further review, especially in relation to its relationship with feedback acceptance and use. Formative rather than summative feedback will be chosen as the vehicle for feedback generation, since the literature suggests that many of the major pedagogic affordances of the audio-visual medium are around enhanced feedforward and explanatory comment. To lend further significance to the research, data will also be generated in relation to whether tutors and students feel that the audio-visual medium has potential for positive impacts on student engagement with assessment feedback.

The research questions which flow from these warrants are:

**Research question one:** How do academic tutors interpret and reflect on their assessment feedback practice values, roles, and experiences generally and in the changing contexts of higher education?

**Research question two:** How do academic tutors and students view the practical, pedagogic, and socio-affective dimensions of giving and receiving formative assessment feedback via audio-visual screencast technology?

Having considered the context and aims of the research project and some of the relevant scholarly literature, I now proceed in Chapter Three to offer a congruent research design for the study.

# Chapter Three: A Research Design

Since the proposed research questions anticipated an examination of participants' views around feedback contexts and media, a flexible, qualitative design was chosen to generate data which was anticipated to be of an interpretive nature. The research context was a new module's opening delivery on an undergraduate law degree programme, where formative assessment feedback on a portfolio assessment was to be delivered for the first time via audio-visual means. I adopted a broad case study design, with data generated using a variety of means. In relation to the first research question, individual and group data were generated from the tutor sample using semi-structured interviews and a focus group. In relation to the second research question, tutor and student data were gathered first, from time-sensitive on-line reflective journals to achieve contemporaneity; and second, from focus groups to achieve group discussion, and, in the case of the student sample, to address the issue of unequal power relations with the researcher. This data was supplemented as appropriate by documentary analysis.

There follows a justification for the adoption of a constructivist stance, together with a rationale for the use of a case study methodology. Methods of data generation employed, and the data analysis process are explained, together with the efforts made to ensure both the trustworthiness of the data and the ethical soundness of the study.

## 3.1 A conceptual framework

As Robson (2002) notes, there is no fool-proof way of generating sound research questions, and neither should the construction of a conceptual framework around those questions be a matter of fragmented thinking. It is therefore necessary to carefully articulate the ontological and epistemological positions associated with the research design, and to explain the aligned methodological stance taken. Ontology, as Crotty explains "is concerned with 'what is', with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality" (2003:10). The proposed research questions demanded a constructivist ontological stance, since knowledge about feedback practice and experiences would be constructed by the participants, and knowledge construed in this way would be value laden (Reichardt and Rallis

1994). Accordingly, the form and nature of the social world, and the phenomenon of feedback within it, would be created by social and contextual understandings, and the participants' subjective interpretations of reality would be indeterminate in nature (Bryman 2012) and re-created over time. Reality therefore cannot have the same meaning in the social as in the physical world (Pring 2004). A constructivist approach also had the advantage of anticipating reality as a process of becoming, rather than of being, and this is pertinent for both research questions: interrogating tutors' professional feedback experiences, as well as the tutors' and students' experiences of the audio-visual feedback intervention.

The epistemological position which flows most cogently from this ontological stance would be one based around social constructivism. Here, one comes to understand perceptions of reality via a search for the underlying meaning of phenomena (Cohen et al 2011), where multiple realities may be discoverable. The study anticipated the involvement of human beings as "conscious and purposive actors who have ideas about their world and who attach meaning to what is going on around them" (Robson 2002:24), producing meaning from an interplay between themselves and their social world (Gray 2009). A social constructivist stance also anticipates that contexts are fluid and behaviours heavily affected by those contexts.

Social-constructivist ontological and epistemological approaches should result in an adherence to an interpretivist paradigm which anticipates a world (and feedback within it) which may be said to exist, but as an invented social reality, where different people interpret differently the world in which they live, allowing for an analysis of behaviour-with-meaning (Hammersley 2012), together with a rich analysis of social context. The search for meaning was central to both research questions. An adherence to an interpretivist paradigm questioning participants' experiences tends towards an exploratory, meaning-making, inductive approach involving theory building, rather than deductive theory testing. However, both research questions could have been approached via a deductive theory-testing stance: in relation to the first research question, that contextual change may lead to fractured feedback relationships; and in relation to the second research question, that audio-visual technology can provide certain

feedback affordances as well as limitations. The approach taken may therefore be more accurately described as abductive (Thomas 2016), combining elements of both inductive and deductive approaches, drawing on and interrogating existing theory, but exploring further and building on current theory in the light of participants' experiences. This flexible approach to data generation aligned well with a case study approach which was thought particularly appropriate to examine the roll-out of audio-visual feedback on a newly designed law degree module.

## 3.2 Methodology: a case study approach

Case studies have a long history in social science and often seek to provide data for research questions framed as 'how' or 'why' questions (Yin 2009) as in the current study. Case studies often involve an examination of the blurred boundaries between a phenomenon (here feedback practice) and its context (here higher education): "case study research assumes that examining the context…related to the case(s) being studied are integral to understanding the case(s)" (Yin 2012:4). Case studies allow for flexibility and focus as well as contextual richness: flexibility since the research questions demanded an evolutionary approach, where sense could gradually be made of the participants' perceptions of experiences (Cohen et al 2011); and focus on one setting or singularity, allowing for intense observation of a unique example of real people in real situations, providing opportunities to focus on the perceptions of the actors. My aim was to illuminate a particular situation and generate data from a natural setting without seeking to control variables. Using a case study approach therefore to shine a "searchlight" (Thomas 2016:21) on a topic allows for richer, rounded data to be captured, leading to a deeper understanding of the issues and relationships involved (Robson 2002).

While a case study approach may often bring the advantages of contextual richness, flexibility, and focus, it may also bring limitations. Studies examining pedagogic practice often employ a phenomenological approach to yield depth of analysis of a lived experience, which could have been fruitful in examining the participants' experiences. However, the opportunity to focus on a new module's fresh approach to using audio-visual feedback technology represented a bounded

system more suited to a case study methodology. An action research methodology was also considered, but the time constraints of the study were thought to hamper the achievement of the requisite cycles of analysis ordinarily associated with action research.

Midland University is a post-1992 institution and its Law School provided the site for the case study, more particularly its LLB degree Year Two core module entitled 'Professional Skills and Practice.' This module was chosen since it was being delivered in a new format for the first time, it afforded access to the researcher, and its assessment provided a suitable vehicle for the feedback intervention, being a personalised career planning portfolio allowing for individualised feedback suited to the affective and relational dimensions of the second research question. A case study approach therefore provided an opportunity to analyse a phenomenon in context: a case of assessment feedback practice. The focus of the enquiry remained, however, less on legal education than on higher education in general.

The purpose of the case study was designed to be evaluative and exploratory, both testing and building theory, and to be a single and instrumental case study acting as a "wrapper" (Thomas 2016:13) to focus on an issue. The case study was limited to one site to achieve an intense, rather than comparative focus (Campbell 1975). A case study also requires a subject or lens through which to examine the case or object (here, assessment feedback practice). The subjects or lenses became the tutors' reflections on their feedback practice (research question one), together with all participants' experiences of using audio-visual feedback on the new module (research question two). The case was bounded in terms of time in that it was a single 'snapshot' of a particular assessment cycle; and was also bounded in terms of context, since the surrounding context of higher education formed a blurred boundary with the case (Yin 2012). In addition, the case was bounded by the use of only one particular type of digital technology, Screencastomatic, which was chosen since this technology had already been piloted on the law degree programme in question, training by the university's pedagogic development department was being actively promoted, and two tutor participants had prior experience using the technology, while two had not, promising a comparative opportunity. Ultimately, the research questions

provided examples of two emerging issues: tutors' evolving feedback practices; and the uses made of audio-visual feedback technologies. This 'newness' and its contextual boundaries made a case study approach a defensible methodological choice.

Having proposed an interpretive paradigm and a case study methodology for the study, I turn to explain the methods of data generation and analysis employed.

## 3.3 Data generation and analysis

### 3.3.1 Sampling

Denscombe (2013) notes that "[t]he basic principle of sampling is that it is possible to produce accurate findings without the need to collect data from each and every member of a…'population'" (2010:23). A sample is the "segment of the population that is selected for the investigation" (Bryman 2012:187), and the passage from population to sample must be as careful as the research context allows.

In respect of the tutor sample, since the second research question demanded that the tutors deliver the module and its assessment feedback, the sampling was purposive in nature and was "deliberately and unashamedly selective and biased" (Cohen and Mannion 2011:157). The tutor population constituted of all tutors teaching at the relevant time on the chosen module, excepting myself. This involved four full-time, permanent tutors and two hourly-paid visiting lecturers. All were approached via email attaching the Tutor Participant Information Sheet outlining the study, and only the visiting lecturers declined. The resulting tutor sample of four tutors were white, middle-aged, female, and ex-legal practitioners in the form of solicitors, and therefore formed a relatively homogenous group. Sophie, Lisa, and Ruth had all worked in higher education for more than fifteen years. By contrast, at the time of the data generation, Sarah had worked in higher education for less than six months, having previously worked as a solicitor in private practice. Sophie was a member of senior management of the Law School with responsibility for academic quality and had only taught at Midland University. Lisa had taught at one other university and spent most of her time teaching post-graduate legal professional courses, with

limited undergraduate teaching. Ruth had been teaching in higher education the longest across several universities and was close to retirement at the time of the intervention.

The student sample of fourteen was drawn from a population of approximately three hundred and fifty students registered on the module, in which legal and employability skills were taught and assessed. In keeping with the flexible design of the enquiry, a non-probability sample of students was sought. Since the second research question did not anticipate any particular characteristics for the student sample, a purposive approach was not appropriate. Accordingly, a volunteer or convenience sample was sought via in-class invitations with the hope of forming a small, varied volunteer sample. I attended module workshops to distribute copies of the Student Participant Information Sheet and to explain the proposed study. Students could then either sign up after the workshop or could express interest via email later. No incentives were offered.

The overall size of the student sample of fourteen students was small and is not claimed to be in any sense representative of the student population at large. This does not affect the reliability of the resulting data, since the paradigm within which the data are analysed is an interpretive one, and the student sample "simply represent[s] itself" (Cohen et al 2011:155). Since no claims are made for statistical generalisation from the data, it is argued that any concerns around cogency are limited. This sample can be open to the charge of self-selection, and potential bias in the data will need to be acknowledged. Of the fourteen students in the sample, three were male and eleven were female. One male student was visiting the Law School from Italy via the Erasmus programme, and six of the fourteen students identified as having English as a second language.

### 3.3.2 Methods of data generation

Case study methodology anticipates drawing on a range of data sources to allow for rich and triangulated analysis. The methods chosen also needed to allow for the exposure of issues which were not predictable at the outset (Yin 2009). The supporting interpretivist paradigm demanded processes where the participants could discuss the construction of their realities, which echoes Brinkmann and

Kvale's (2015) metaphor of qualitative methods as more akin to a traveller on a journey, than a miner digging for knowledge. Flick (2018a) suggests that interviews and focus groups are particularly well suited to this end. Semi-structured interviews were therefore chosen to discuss with tutors their reflections on their contextual feedback practice, as well as their experiences of the audio-visual feedback intervention. Later, they were given an opportunity to discuss their thoughts and experiences together in a focus group. Since I also wished to capture some contemporaneous reaction to their use of the feedback technology, the tutor sample were asked to complete on-line reflective journals just before and immediately after completing their feedback. The student sample were similarly asked to complete reflective journals immediately after receiving their feedback, and one week later to see if their affective responses had altered. Soon after, all student participants attended one of two focus groups where they talked together about forms of feedback and discussed their experiences of the intervention. Focus groups with the student participants were chosen in an attempt to mitigate issues around asymmetrical power relationships which may have been associated with one-to-one interviews with me, and also to provide the opportunity for them to discuss together their experiences to construct group views.

### *Reflective journals*

The students in the sample, together with their peers, submitted formative assessments on-line for formative feedback given by tutors via screencast technology. None of the students in the sample had received audio-visual feedback before, but listened to and watched their feedback, immediately completing their first reflective journal. This was designed to avoid staleness of recollection, and to capture, in a safe place, contemporaneous perceptions around socio-affective reaction. These reflective journals were designed not only to provide useful evaluative data in themselves, but also to inform the design of the later interviews and focus group meetings. All reflective journals were emailed to the participants well ahead of time.

The journals were event-contingent, with tutors and students being prompted to reflect around key moments in the feedback process: the tutors received

bespoke screencast training prior to delivering their feedback and were asked to complete Part One of their reflective journal before giving their feedback, inviting them to record whether they had engaged with the medium before, and whether they had any hopes or concerns around giving feedback via audio-visual means. This was important since two of the tutors had used screencast technology before and two had not. Once they had completed their feedback, the tutors were prompted to complete Part Two of the journal which asked them to generally describe their experience; to choose the 'best and worst thing' about it; to reflect on the quantities of feedback and feedforward they thought they gave; and to comment on the interpersonal aspects of the experience including their use of language and tone.

The students were asked to complete two separate reflective journals: the first was to be completed immediately after they had listened to their feedback, in Part One of which they were asked to reflect on their feelings when listening to their audio-visual feedback, and to give examples or quotes from their feedback as to why they had felt this way. They were also asked to highlight any relevant emotions from a list (which had been previously piloted), and to add in any additional emotions not listed, again citing supporting explanatory examples and quotes. They were also asked to write about how they normally felt when receiving written feedback. In Part Two, they were asked to reflect on the relational aspects of the feedback and how they had felt about their tutor while listening to it. In Part Three, they were asked for their views on whether they considered their feelings about their feedback affected their subsequent use of it; the quantity of feedback and feedforward they thought they had received; and the 'best and worst things' about the audio-visual feedback experience. They were also asked to disclose whether they had received audio or audio-visual feedback before, which none of them had.

All fourteen students completed their first journal. As expected, far fewer students (five) completed the second journal a week later, following one email prompt. The original intent behind the second journal had been to gauge whether affective response to feedback changed over the short term, however, the journals disclosed little of any relevance, and this aspect of the research was accordingly abandoned. In the second journal, students were also asked about

how they ordinarily used feedback, and what barriers they felt stopped them using feedback effectively. Finally, they were asked to explain how they had worked with the audio-visual elements of the feedback. With the benefit of hindsight, a better design would have limited the enquiry to one journal only with the student sample.

### *Semi-structured interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were held with the four tutor participants and this type of interview was suited to the small-scale research envisaged (Munn and Drever 1999), as well as to the nature of the research questions. Interviews supplemented the reflective journals to achieve depth of discussion, and a semi-structured mode was adopted since this "provides the best of both worlds…combining the structure of a list of issues…together with the freedom to follow up points as necessary" (Thomas 2017:206). While good quality interviewing can lead to spontaneous and rich discussion, the method has certain limitations including its time-consuming nature; the relatively unstructured nature of the resulting data; and the dangers of interviewer effect, particularly since the tutors were all well known to me. In addition, while I had considerable experience of professional interviewing in the legal field and of teaching the skill of legal interviewing, I was less well-versed in interviewing in a research context. Accordingly, I volunteered to be interviewed as part of a post-graduate student's research study and came to appreciate the importance of providing participant information well in advance; the agile use of prompts; careful checking of understanding; sensitivity; and the benefits of active listening and toleration of silence. The experience also highlighted the importance of using crisp, well-focused questions which were few in number and open-ended. Accordingly, the interview questions were designed to be short, clear, and unambiguous, and to avoid the use of multiple or jargon-based questions, or leading the participants. In interview, the questions were modified as occasion demanded (Robson 2002), re-phrasing and using a variety of prompts to encourage open-ended discussion (King and Horrocks 2010).

The interview protocol was careful to incorporate a clear explanation of the purpose of the interview (which had already been made clear in the Tutor

Participant Information Sheet), and to spend time building rapport, allowing the tutors to transition into the interview from their working day. Permission to record, confirmation of consent and assurances around anonymity and confidentiality were refreshed at the beginning of each interview. The first question explored the tutors' views around the purposes of assessment feedback, as well as their views around different feedback formats. Second, they were asked to talk about how they thought students used feedback and what might hinder this. Last, they were asked to reflect on their experiences of the audio-visual feedback intervention. The interviews were conducted one-to-one and face-to-face. Immediately after each interview, I audio recorded my thoughts on what I had learned from each interview, to inform later interviews or other parts of the research design. Participants were sent the transcribed data to clarify and validate as appropriate.

In keeping with the case study design, I also interviewed the module's external examiner, Peter. Although he did not review the intervention's screencast feedback (since this was formative in nature), a useful discussion was had since, at the relevant time, he had recently had his first experience of giving audio-visual feedback at his own Russell Group university. While little of his data was ultimately used in the study, the comparative discussion of feedback experiences between the two institutions was thought-provoking.

### *Focus groups*

Focus groups were held with the tutor and student samples after they had completed their feedback and reflective journals. Focus group enquiry aligns well with a social constructivist approach since it "presupposes that sense-making is produced collectively, in the course of social interactions between people" (Wilkinson 1998:186), and the method gives the researcher the opportunity to study how a group of individuals collectively makes sense of a phenomenon and constructs meaning around it (Bryman 2012).

A focus group created an opportunity for the tutors to come together, not only to discuss collectively their experiences around the audio-visual feedback intervention, but to provide the space for them to reflect together on their

feedback practice more generally, and so to generate data in relation to both research questions. In relation to the student sample, a focus group interview format was employed first, to facilitate group discussion and to act as a gentle spur to the reticent. Furthermore, since the participants were young adults discussing, in part, their feelings about feedback, the focus group interview was considered a more appropriate vehicle to achieve empowerment for a free and rich discussion (Robson 2002). True to the nature of focus group interviews, I planned to stimulate and sustain discussion via the use of focus materials and sought counsel from an academic colleague experienced in the use of focus group methods. I adopted his approach of supplementing group discussion with the creation of artefacts to record those discussions, since Denscombe (2010) suggests that this is useful in maintaining focus and capturing group views. The materials and activities were piloted with a group of students beforehand and amended as appropriate.

Careful consideration was given to the facilitation of the student group and, as part of this, Flick (2018a) advises mindfulness around environment. A quiet room was used which was scheduled for a day and time when the students would not be rushing from a class. Refreshments were provided and ice breakers used at the start to build cohesion and help students find their voice. Also, since the focus groups were occurring around the Christmas period, festive artefacts were used in the sessions, such as Christmas hats to record votes. At the start of each focus group, the aims of the research study were explained again, together with an explanation of how freedom of expression was encouraged and protected via a recognition of 'Chatham House rules'.

The students first engaged in a discussion around the benefits and limitations of written and audio-visual feedback. They recorded the products of their discussions on large sheets of paper and were asked to prioritise which they felt were most important to them. The second activity asked them to discuss their emotional responses, if any, to their audio-visual feedback. This was scheduled to come second since it was felt that a freer discussion may ensue at this point, given the more sensitive nature of the subject. The students were given slips of paper bearing the piloted emotions (which were the same as those in their reflective journals), and blank slips should they wish to record other emotions.

They were then asked to put whichever of these they felt they had experienced on receipt of their audio-visual feedback into envelopes, the contents of which were collectively counted. The students then discussed the three emotions which had received the most 'votes.' Voting was used to re-energise the group activity (Stewart et al 2007). Finally, they discussed as a group whether they felt these emotions would help or hinder their subsequent feedback engagement.

In the tutor focus group, which occurred shortly after the tutors' individual interviews, tutors were asked to engage in three separate discussion activities. First, they were introduced to Tuck's (2012) work, which was regarded as a core influence in the examination of the first research question, and were asked to discuss in turn each of her three feedback roles of teacher, marker, and worker, and whether and how these roles resonated with them. Second, they were asked to reflect on their current feedback practices and to discuss and record with stickers any contextual changes they felt affected their feedback practice, either positively or negatively. Last, the tutors were asked to discuss as a group their experiences of the audio-visual feedback intervention. All the focus groups were audio recorded and professionally transcribed and, immediately after each session, I recorded for later consideration my thoughts around the groups' dynamics, areas of convergence and divergence, and anything which was unexpected. At the end of each session, all participants were reminded of my contact details should they have any concerns or questions.

One advantage of using a focus group method is to gain insight into how the participants contest each other's views: "[t]his process of arguing means that the researcher may stand a chance of ending up with more realistic accounts of what people think" (Bryman 2012:503). Wilkinson agrees and describes the process as "structured eavesdropping" (1998:189), suggesting that the method can offer insights into commonly held assumptions which might not emerge in interview. This was considered important to examine both the tutors' views on their feedback practice, and all participants' views around the intervention. Focus groups also allow not only for efficient data generation and for inclusion (Robson 2002), but also for participants to build on each other's views (Stewart et al 2007). Given the area of enquiry around feedback practice, the use of focus groups was particularly well suited since an examination of *process* was involved.

Also, much feedback literature suggests that students rarely engage in metacognitive thinking or reflection around their feedback engagement (e.g., Orsmond and Merry 2012), and Barbour (2009) notes that the method can work well where the aim is to "explore people's perspectives on issues to which they have previously given little thought" (2009:87).

One limitation of the focus group method, however, involves having less control of the proceedings (Bryman 2012), which can often cover less material due to the element of group discussion (Robson 2002). The resulting data can also be difficult to transcribe due to participants speaking over each other. Accordingly, all focus groups were professionally transcribed. Barbour (2009) notes the particular challenges around synthesizing the data into group views, and this issue was met, in part, by the use of recording and voting exercises. Challenges can also present of an interpersonal nature, with group domination and conflict always a possibility (Robson 2002), although this was not seen as a significant issue within the groups. 'Group think' was anticipated as a particular challenge since the danger of participants saying what they think the researcher or other members of the group want to hear can be exacerbated in a group setting. This can be due to fears of peer disapproval (Barbour 2009), or the pressure to express only culturally expected (Bryman 2012) or intellectualized answers (Krueger and Casey 2015). To mitigate this difficulty, other sources of data were used in analysis to triangulate the focus group data, principally the reflective journals and interview data. One principal limitation of all the focus groups in the study were their small size: four participants in the tutor group, and seven and four students respectively in the student groups.

Unlike individual interviews, in group interviews the unit of analysis is the whole group view, rather than the views of its individual members (Cohen and Mannion 2011), and it is a collective response which is largely sought. Individual voices retain a position of importance, however, since analysis of individual response is necessary to examine group dynamics (Barbour 2009). I included in the design an observer to examine and report on the group dynamic, since the sessions were only audio and not video recorded. A member of professional support staff was approached who routinely worked with law students. It was felt that her neutral position in the Law School would suit the role well and she attended both

student focus groups, taking notes around group dynamics and critiquing my role as moderator. Her role was explained and, as Stewart et al (2007) recommend, she was seated away from the group to recognise her non-participatory role. Immediately after each session, she met with me to audio record her views.

My role of moderator was limited to creating a conducive atmosphere, introducing the focus materials, and to keep the discussion on track (Denscombe 2010). Since I had not previously been involved in a focus group, I volunteered beforehand to take part in a colleague's research focus group as a participant. From that experience I learned the importance of keeping activities simple and small in number; of having plans in place to encourage all participants to contribute and to facilitate inclusion; and the dangers of over-intervention. I thought it important to explain my role carefully in both the tutor and student groups since I had pre-existing, but different, relationships with the tutors and students. I used ice-breaking activities to attempt to form them as a group and to side-line my own involvement, taking the marginal rather than pivotal role as Thomas (2017) advocates. That said, I found it an interesting challenge to switch from my established tutor role to that of a moderator, and recognised myself in Barbour's comment that "[k]nowing when not to intervene is, in itself, a skill…One of the hardest things for the novice moderator is…taking a back seat and refraining from asking questions" (2009:106). I also found, however, that like interviewing, focus group facilitation to an extent remains a "contact sport" (Stewart et al 2007:12) requiring active listening and openness.

### *Documents*

Finally, as well as using reflective journals, interviews, and focus groups, and in keeping with a case study approach, a range of appropriate documentary evidence was consulted to provide a contextual background for the analysis of the data. These documents related to feedback strategy and practice within Midland University at university, faculty, and school level. In keeping with the interpretivist approach adopted, the documentary sources were treated as fluid, contextually influenced sources. The documents chosen for analysis were examined for recurrent themes in terms of organisational commitment and implementation of policy, including, for example, Midland University's 2025

Mission and Values Statement and its three guiding principles of: 1. Academic Excellence; 2. People and Values; and 3. Partnerships. Principle Two exhorts an emphasis on people in academic life and supports a person-centred approach to assessment and feedback, while Principle Three actively encourages partnerships not only with third parties, but also between tutors and students, supporting approaches around educational alliance and co-construction of knowledge.

All the data sources, once generated, required coding and analysis to achieve defensible findings which could be discussed within relevant literature. The study was designed carefully to maximise the reliability or trustworthiness of the data, and a balance was sought between rigour and consistency on the one hand, and flexibility and creativity on the other. The ultimate aim was to produce a research design which was sufficiently robust to be usefully replicable by others (Flick 2018b).

### 3.3.3 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness can operate at several levels including the theoretical and the evaluative, and reliability of both design and data interpretation is necessary to minimise errors and biases, to ensure that if the study were replicated, the outcomes would be much the same. This can pose challenges with the complex designs involved in case study research where multiple sources of data are being generated and analysed. Flick (2018b) exhorts us to demonstrate rigour by justifying not only our design choices, but also our approach to data analysis. Accordingly, a number of issues were anticipated in both designing the study and analysing its outcomes. First, a pilot involving student input was arranged well before the data generation phase; second, reliability measures were put in place in relation to both the design and operation of the data generation methods; and finally, steps were taken to increase my reflexivity while analysing the data. These are considered in more detail below.

#### *Piloting*

A pilot exercise took place six months before data generation to gain student feedback on the data generation instruments. A small number of law students were approached who had previously received feedback training and had tutored

first year students in feedback practice as part of a university initiative. It was thought that these students would form a particularly useful 'sounding board.' The three students who ultimately agreed to assist were interviewed and audio recorded separately. The research project and its associated research questions were explained to them, and they were shown a dummy screencast file giving audio-visual feedback, together with the draft reflective journals and focus group activities. For the reflective journals, they suggested more nuanced adjectival emotions for students to choose from and proposed a free writing section. They also made suggestions around the focus group activities and how these could be improved. In particular, their views around the practicalities of the activities were useful, suggesting the use of props to enliven and sustain the sessions. Their insights around the relational and emotional aspects of feedback were particularly valuable.

### *Data coding and analysis*

As a qualitative researcher, I considered carefully how to ensure the reliability of the data since it is easy to jeopardise its trustworthiness during analysis. Accordingly, reliable processes for data analysis were anticipated prior to its generation (Robson 2002), and pro-active measures to increase data trustworthiness spanned the project design and data analysis phases, ranging from choosing realistic timescales for completion of each stage of the project; piloting and careful, reflexive drafting of interview and focus group questions and activities; minimising drop-out rates amongst participants; interview pre- and de-briefing; and careful, iterative coding and triangulation of data.

### *Trustworthy methods*

In relation to the crafting of the methods of data generation, interviews can be affected by what is often referred to as the "interviewer effect" (Denscombe 2010:178), where data may be affected by the presence of the interviewer, potentially altering participants' behaviour or reactions. While a researcher cannot change who they are, awareness of this issue should lead to careful presentation of the researcher's self (Cohen et al 2011) and can go some way towards mitigation of any effect. This was particularly important since I was an insider to the context. Also, since the interview involved tutors talking about

their own feedback practices and feelings, this could have led to them telling me what they thought I wanted to hear (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009), or under-reporting certain issues (Cohen et al 2011). Again, this was mitigated by my behaviour in interview, together with the clarification of participants' rights to freedom of speech and anonymity, and post-interview participant validation of data.

In relation to the focus groups, these were chosen over individual interviews with the student participants to address asymmetrical power relations, to assist the students to find their voice, and to encourage each other to articulate their thoughts and facilitate freer discussion. As in the interviews, the outputs from the reflective journals were deployed in the focus groups to test and triangulate views expressed, to check understanding, and to encourage fuller debate.

The reflective journals were drafted with care and their content piloted since they, at least in part, enquired into the relational and affective responses of students to their assessment feedback. These sections in particular were piloted beforehand and amended as appropriate, and care was taken to keep questions simple and crisp, and to allow all participants to respond freely in their own words and in their own time. It was thought that the journals represented a sound method for capturing contemporaneous and trustworthy reactions to the intervention experience.

### *Trustworthy analysis*

There are many different approaches to qualitative data analysis, but "there are few well-established and widely accepted rules" (Bryman 2012:567). A professional transcription service was employed to transcribe the data and, in approaching the initial coding of the data to find meaning within it (Bailey 2018), I initially drew on my legal background seeking corroboration among the data and cross-examining the sources. I soon found, however, that this approach, while useful in helping to achieve criticality about the cogency of the data, and in refraining from making initial assumptions about it, was less well-suited to analysing data within an interpretive paradigm where I needed to be more open-ended in my enquiry. A thematic analysis was therefore used to identify, code,

and explore common themes and relationships. Iterative coding allowed for flexibility, without threatening the structure of the analysis. Accordingly, I used a thematic framework using a constant comparative thematic analysis, building codes or themes across the different sources of data to achieve an early, close familiarisation with the data. This was initially done in hard copy and was then supplemented using Nvivo. These initial codes were later iteratively grouped and re-grouped into higher level or overarching codes, with sub-codes to reflect relationships within and across the data sources. Bailey describes this as a process of "eliminating the chaff until the remaining portions are organized in such a way as to be useful for generating analytic insights" (2018:161).

The themes from the data were then analysed to transform the data into knowledge (Evans et al 2013). It was essential that both the context and the participants' voices should be neither lost nor diminished during this process, since Bryman (2012) notes that one of the key dangers at this point can be loss of context and fragmentation of data. The search for patterns was used to form conjectures about the meanings within, between and behind the data, and these conjectures were drawn together to form the basis of qualitative arguments from the case, rather than making claims around proof or causality (Richie et al 2014).

The coding and analysis began with the reflective journals, since initial themes were sought to influence the later interview and focus group questions. The interview data was analysed by noting clustering and patterns, as well as commonality and difference. When turning to the coding and analysis of the focus group data, I noted that compared with the fulsome advice available on how to conduct the groups, there was a relative dearth on how to code and analyse their resulting data (Wilkinson 1998). What guidance existed counselled a focus not only on the content of discussion and the frequency of points made (Stewart et al 2007), but also on its commonality, dissonance, intensity, or consistency (Krueger and Casey 2015). Accordingly, the initial coding and analysis was conducted within each of the focus groups looking for areas of unity, conflict, or shift, and also for the group view and group dynamic (Ritchie et al 2014). The data were analysed within each group, and then inter se. Once the first analyses of the journals, interviews and focus groups were complete, the

initial themes and arguments were then triangulated against the documentary evidence in a search for further themes and areas of harmony or dissonance.
The issue of possible 'Hawthorne effect' relating to the use of, what was for all student participants and two of the tutor participants, a novel feedback technology, was addressed via a triangulation of the data across the journals, interviews and focus groups, and a research diary was used throughout to also reflect on and attempt to address instances of personal bias resulting from the "halo or horns effect" (Cohen and Mannion 2011:246) or other sources.

### *Participatory bias*

I conducted the study as an insider-researcher which afforded me the usual advantages of time, access, and local expertise, but left me open to the criticism of potential partiality or bias due to my participatory position (Toy-Cronin 2018), particularly since I took part in the audio-visual feedback intervention and had inevitably formed my own views. Sustaining a completely disinterested approach in its purest form is never attainable in qualitative research (Thomas 2017), and is, some would assert, not desirable (e.g., Iphofen and Tolich 2018). Nevertheless, the study needed to evidence strategies minimising the influence of bias and positionality. Robson (2002) counsels the keeping of the fullest records for later contamination-checking to help maintain a reasonably objective researcher stance, however, even with the most robust challenges to bias in place and those biases acknowledged, Robson (2002) concludes that it is worth remembering that pre-conceptions and biases are not easily abandoned. This fundamental critique of interpretivism cannot be avoided, its effects, however, may be limited with sustained reflexivity. When entering the data analysis phase of the study, and most especially when operating within an interpretive paradigm, choices had to be made in interpreting the data. The most useful tool in attempting to achieve defensible reflexivity before and during this process was my research diary, in which I sought to challenge assumptions made both in the research design and in the analysis of the resulting data. I also brought to bear part of my legal training in an attempt to achieve a level of objectivity in questioning both design and data analysis. In addition, member checking was used in relation to the interview data, and themes from the reflective journals were also put to participants during the later interviews and focus groups to

check for clarity of understanding. Finally, the pilot project and the use of an observer to critique my moderator role in the student focus groups allowed for further objective input.

### *Case studies and generalisability*

The external validity of case study data may be open to question on the grounds of not only participatory bias, but also generalisability (Yin 2009). The desire for generalisability betrays roots in a positivist tradition (Schofield 2002) and is criticised by Lincoln and Guba as "oozing determinism" (2002:28). Accordingly, they propose instead concepts of "transferability or fittingness" (2002:40) when seeking to enquire whether case study data might reliably transfer to another set of facts.

Consequently, the task was to appropriately triangulate emerging data and establish converging lines of evidence to buttress findings. In particular, the maintenance of 'battle lines' between the data and one's interpretation of it was of critical importance. Theoretical or analytical (as opposed to statistical or predictive) generalisation from a single case study data is proper (Yin 2009), since one may make a "fuzzy prediction" (Bassey 2001:5) which can be tested by replication in subsequent studies. Statistical generalisation from the data would not only be indefensible, but also undesirable, since particularity rather than generalisability is one of the hallmarks of good case study research (Green and Caracelli 1997). The intention therefore was to adopt Silverman's (2000) concept of making a lot out of a little, and to generate findings with some significance as well as originality. These findings could then be applied to a wider audience via Lincoln and Guba's (2002) concept of fittingness, or Stake's (1978) concept of naturalistic generalisation, where findings are applied to another setting to assist understanding. In this way, the historic criticism of "'one shot case studies' being of almost no value" (Schofield 2002:73) can be challenged.

Having considered the sampling strategy, methods for data generation and some issues which may relate to trustworthiness of the data, I turn to consider the ethical dimensions of the study.

## 3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Ethics Committee for the School of Education at the University of Nottingham in 2018, and the study followed appropriate educational research ethical guidelines (BERA 2018). Senior managers within Midland University Law School approved and were supportive of the study. The view that unethical research is untrustworthy research coincides with my own professional ethical stance. I already had a background in legal practice where I was used to dealing with issues of professional integrity, including confidentiality and the right to informed consent, and I had also taught legal professional ethics for several years. I felt, however, that I needed to supplement this knowledge and experience with a better understanding of research ethics, and accordingly joined my faculty's Research Ethics Committee, where I trained and served as a primary reviewer of research ethics applications. The ethical dimensions of the study were given a privileged position throughout the phases of research design and data generation and analysis, since I felt strongly that professional integrity demanded something more than mere compliance with ethical codes. Ethical integrity was manifested in a number of overarching ethical principles applied to the study which were designed to protect and promote the human dignity of the participants including: non-maleficence and beneficent reciprocity; the right to autonomy and informed consent; and confidentiality and privacy.

### 3.4.1 Non-maleficence and beneficent reciprocity

My duty to protect the participants was a duty similar to that in English civil law, requiring not a complete avoidance of harm, but rather a minimising of reasonably foreseeable harm, balancing this against the seriousness and likelihood of possible harm to participants (Hammersley 2018). Since the research questions involved, in part, a consideration of socio-affective reactions to feedback, the well-being of the participants was important and demanded interactions based on sensitivity and respect. Attempts were made to remember that interviews and focus groups are a social, interpersonal encounter and not merely a data collection exercise (Cohen et al 2011). Also, since all student participants were young undergraduates, vulnerabilities due to youth were anticipated, and particular care was taken around the avoidance of unwarranted

intrusion and the maintenance of participants' dignity (Wellington 2000). As a result, questions and activities were designed to anticipate the potential sensitivity of discussion, to set safe parameters for the avoidance of stress, and to plan for appropriate responses in the event of disclosure. The risk regarding possible stress responses was thought to be low, and the Ethics Committee granting ethical clearance did not require the giving of details of support agencies in the event of distress. With hindsight, the provision of such details would have represented best practice.

While many ethical pinch-points can be anticipated by careful forethought and planning, others can arise unforeseen. As noted by Hammersley "while some decisions facing researchers can be preceded by substantial deliberation, others will have to be made on the spot, as they arise" (2018:23). This was the case with student Jenny who disclosed a life-long, neurological mental health condition in her reflective journals. Her comments about how she interacted with feedback due to the emotions she associated with the medium of feedback delivery suggested that she might be able to provide particularly insightful data. However, to protect her well-being, advice was initially sought from both the Chair of the Ethics Committee at Nottingham University and from my supervisor in relation to whether an approach was justifiable and, if so, the best way to make such an approach. Rather than make a direct enquiry of the student, I approached her via her personal tutor to minimise any pressure she might feel to comply. Fortunately, she was keen to participate further in the study and provided valuable data in a one-to-one interview.

Ultimately, it was hoped that the study could offer benefit to the participants and achieve some level of reciprocity. For example, participants can perceive benefit from the process of being listened to while discussing and reflecting on part of a life experience (Plowright 2011). The tutors welcomed the chance to reflect individually and as a group on their feedback practice; and similarly, some of the student participants expressed gratitude at the interest taken in their feedback experiences which were, for them, an important part of their undergraduate journey.

### 3.4.2 Autonomy and informed consent

As already noted, I operated as an insider researcher and needed to be alive to the potential associated risks which could impact on participants' rights to autonomy and informed consent. I acknowledged that I needed to take care in managing the potential blurring of relationships while moving in and out of professional and researcher roles (Carr 2006), since these shifts could provoke issues relating to pathologies of asymmetrical power relations (Plowright 2011). Such imbalances in power can affect the relationship between the researcher and the participants leading, for example, to feelings of an obligation to participate. In addition, the right to be protected from unwarranted intrusion is a part of participants' rights to autonomy, and good reasons must exist to enter their lives, since "[t]he question: "Is this research really necessary?" is essentially an ethical one" (Hammersley 2018:9).

These types of ethical concern inevitably face the teacher/researcher, however, appropriate care was taken in gaining access to individual student participants and to the tutors providing the feedback, and to the acquisition of their voluntary, informed consent. Approaches to the tutor participants was initially made via email, and the student population was approached in class. Consideration was given to the level of disclosure required to achieve full and informed consent for both legal and ethical reasons, and consent was achieved using institutional ethical procedures as a minimum. The documentation for compliance with data protection and privacy as well as the Participant Information Sheets clearly outlined the aims and scope of the research, together with the type of questions and activities to be anticipated, making it clear that participants could withdraw at any time without penalty. These were distributed to the whole populations of potential participants to give maximum notice, since I had learned from my earlier participation as a research interviewee that receiving the participant information just before interview did not represent best practice in giving time to weigh the decision to participate. Consent forms were sent to those who had expressed an interest, and an opportunity was given to ask further questions before consenting. At the beginning of the tutor interviews and the focus groups, participants were reminded of their ethical rights and the duties of the researcher. No inducements to participate, whether direct or indirect, were offered.

### 3.4.3 Confidentiality and privacy

The maintenance of confidentiality and respect for participants' rights to privacy both during and after the study were safeguarded via the appropriate use of pseudonyms in all transcripts and written artefacts, with any confidential data accessed by me only with participants' consent. It is fair to say that data generated from interviews were relatively straightforward to keep confidential since these involved one-to-one meetings, the results of which were carefully member-checked and protected via pseudonym. Similarly, the reflective journals were completed individually and any reference to their data involved the use of pseudonym. The focus groups, however, posed potentially greater challenges to confidentiality since they involved group debate and the formation of group views, any of which could be reported after the group to third parties. This danger was anticipated via careful briefings at the start of each focus group in relation to 'Chatham House Rules', and participants' understanding of their duties of confidentiality were checked before continuing. Barbour (2009) notes that the threat to confidentiality which focus groups represent cannot be evaded, only managed.

Having proposed a conceptual framework, case study methodology and aligned methods of data generation, together with the steps taken to enhance both the trustworthiness of the data and the ethical soundness of the study, I now turn to consider the findings in relation to the two research questions.

# Chapter Four: Findings

Having proposed an interpretive methodology and congruent methods of data generation, I now proceed to consider in Part 1 the data generated in relation to the first research question: *how do academic tutors interpret and reflect on their assessment feedback practice values, roles and experiences generally, and in the changing contexts of higher education?* In Part 2, I consider the data generated in relation to the second research question: *how do academic tutors and students view the practical, pedagogic, and socio-affective dimensions of giving and receiving formative assessment feedback via audio-visual screencast technology?*

## Findings Part 1: Tutors' feedback values, roles, and experiences

### 4.1 Introduction

The tutors were asked to reflect on what they thought were the most important purposes of feedback, together with how they viewed their own (espoused) feedback values, roles, and experiences within the shifting landscape of higher education. The data were analysed for emerging themes and early in the analysis an issue around tutors' professional feedback tensions became clear. These tensions were expressed in a number of ways, in places taking the form of an apparent vocational tension where feedback values expressed as student-centred were described as acted out with difficulty. In other places, tutors expressed concern about changed processes around their feedback practice, citing workload and de-professionalisation as areas of major concern for them. These themes will be considered in turn.

### 4.2 Emerging findings

#### 4.2.1 Feedback values and professional practice tension

*"The students [are] the lifeblood, aren't they?" (Ruth)*

All four tutors in the sample gave voice to a professional, sometimes vocational, tension between their espoused feedback values on the one hand, and their espoused feedback practice on the other. When asked about their feedback *values* and how they viewed the purposes of assessment feedback, three of the four tutors concentrated heavily on student-centred feedback purposes and values. By contrast, when asked to describe their feedback *practice*, the

discussion centred around feedback as academic work or 'marking.' There appeared therefore to be a tension between feedback values on the one hand, and feedback practice on the other. It was striking that the experienced tutors (Sophie, Sarah and Lisa) used markedly similar language when describing in separate interviews some of their feedback practice tensions: Sophie and Lisa both talking of a 'perfect world' where they could give student-centred feedback, while Ruth's 'ideal world' seemed also much lamented. Ruth and Sophie also felt a professional tension resulting from not being able to 'please all the people all of the time.'

The tutors were asked to consider their feedback roles from a student-centred point of view echoing Tuck's [2012] feedback teacher role. In interview, the tutors attached differing levels of importance to the classic dual purposes of feedback: assessment and student development. Sophie talked in most depth about feedback purposes and this may have been due to her involvement in programme quality management. She was also the only tutor to discuss the assessment purpose of feedback in any detail. She was clear about what she saw as a distinction between assessment and student-centred feedback purposes. She saw summative assessment as serving largely institutional purposes of quality assurance, together with measurement of achievement of learning outcomes, while she described formative feedback as having a strong student-centred, developmental purpose, intertwining feedback on the task with feedforward. She talked honestly about the tension she sometimes felt between her role as Law School quality lead in safeguarding institutional standards, and her role as an academic tutor providing feedback: "I want to be in a position to justify that mark, but also know that I have provided feedback to help the student to develop." When pressed on the relative importance of the assessment and developmental purposes of feedback, Sophie chose the latter, using pastoral language such as "shepherding" and giving a "pat on the back" to her students. She also talked about feedback in a wider sense: having what she described as a potential "exponential impact" on the student beyond the assessment in hand. She was alone in linking the purposes of feedback with what she saw as some of the wider purposes of higher education, citing equality of opportunity and the enablement of students' personal development.

Ruth's views on the purposes of assessment feedback in interview also centred strongly around the developmental benefit to students. She focused much on the importance of motivating students and the giving of feedforward, using metaphors such as "stepping-stones" and "footpaths." A particularly strong theme emerged around her own professional values, with a sustained, occasionally nostalgic, narrative around changed feedback practice in higher education over the course of her long teaching career, often expressing concern: "I worry about education…. because I think we've stopped educating and started jumping assessment hoops."

By contrast, Lisa's views on feedback purpose appeared to centre more around assessment and the measurement of student progress. She felt that the main purpose of feedback was to help a student to pass the assessment and achieve learning outcomes. Unlike the other tutors, much of Lisa's teaching took place on a postgraduate professional programme for intending solicitors. She explained that feedback on this course was very different from that expected at undergraduate level, where she did relatively little teaching: "it's very different to the [law degree] … [the postgraduate] feedback literally would be the ticks they get against each question." She talked honestly about her postgraduate feedback practice, in particular the limited requirement for feedforward, and how this might have influenced her undergraduate feedback practice. In interview, she acknowledged that this was the first time she had reflected on the possible cross-over in her feedback practice between her undergraduate and postgraduate teaching. As well as focussing on feedback as measurement of progression, Lisa did, in union with Sophie, refer to a wider feedback purpose: contributing to what she termed students' "life-long learning." Compared to the other tutors in the sample, however, she said relatively little about feedback as a developmental, student-centred activity.

As a tutor very new to teaching (but similar in age and professional background to the other tutors), the feedback used in the study was only the second feedback given by Sarah. Understandably, she therefore had rather less to say about feedback purpose. When asked, however, she recognised the dual purposes of feedback, giving greater weight to student development over grade justification.

After their individual interviews, the tutors further discussed feedback purpose in their focus group. Acknowledging a tension between her feedback values and practice, Ruth noted: "I'd like to be the teacher, but I'm somewhere between teacher and worker, because…I know what I'd like to do, but I can't do it that way," and Sarah, as a new tutor, commented: "I think I still identify as a teacher because I probably haven't done as much as you [laughter]." This focus on feedback as work (which will be considered in more detail below) became more apparent when the discussion shifted from feedback values to feedback roles. When the tutors were asked to consider how they saw their own roles when giving feedback, and the practicalities of acting out their feedback values, the tenor of the discussion was firmly around their roles as markers and workers (particularly the latter), rather than their roles as teachers. As previously noted, there appeared to be a (varying) professional tension between the tutors' espoused feedback values, and those which they felt they routinely enacted, with Sophie and Ruth describing most professional tension arising from what they saw as their compromised ability to provide student-centred feedback.

One area in which the tutors were in agreement and where they felt that they were able to be reflective about their feedback practice related to their own concurrent experiences as students. It emerged during the focus group discussion that all the tutors were actively engaged as students themselves as part of continuing professional development, and they all felt this was having a positive effect on their feedback practice. Ruth and Sarah were studying for a post-graduate qualification in education, and Lisa had recently completed her Masters' Degree in Education. Sophie was pursuing a Doctorate in Education. They all felt that the experience of studying, being assessed, and receiving feedback was having a positive effect on their own feedback practice. With some enthusiasm, they described new feelings of empathy with their students and improved reflection on their own feedback practice: "[it] should make us better teachers, because we can be more evangelical about the benefits of feedback….It's made me a bit more forgiving" (Ruth); and: "seeing the impact of…positive or less effective feedback…I'm mindful of what I'm doing now…much more than I was before" (Sophie). When asked to prioritise which experience had had the most important *positive* influence on their feedback practice, the tutors

agreed that their own on-going experiences as students lent empathy as well as bringing a fresh eye to their feedback practice.

### 4.2.2 Workloads and accountability

*"All I see is workload…." (Lisa)*

The tutors were able to identify with apparent ease positive as well as negative feedback practice effects flowing from contextual changes to higher education. Examples of contextual change thought to have the potential for both positive and negative impact on feedback practice included widening participation in higher education, modularisation, and technological change. The feedback practice tensions already referred to were thought by the tutors to predominantly flow from external influences leading to increased student numbers and feedback workloads. The tutors were unanimous in citing increased student numbers and workloads as the most important negative contextual influence on their feedback practice. Less tension appeared to flow from internal shifts such as modularisation and changing learning technologies, the exception to this being internal marking deadlines and associated managerialism.

Considering Tuck's (2012) feedback roles once again, the tutors were also asked to consider whether they saw their feedback role, not as a teacher, but as a worker. Of Tuck's three feedback roles (teacher/worker/assessor) the tutors felt strongly that the role of worker had become more dominant in recent times. When discussing the contextual changes around their feedback practice, they described a change in the nature of their academic work in general, and their feedback practice in particular, towards a more process-oriented experience, where performativity was described as an emerging professional issue for them. The main issues discussed in relation to their perceived role as a feedback worker were increased student numbers and feedback workloads; feedback workspaces; external accountability; and modularisation. These will be considered seriatim.

The tutors in discussing their roles as feedback workers talked in some detail about feedback and workload intensification. While acknowledging the positive as well as negative potentialities of massification and a widening participation

commitment, they described pressures produced by increased student numbers and an adherence to what were described as "tight" assessment and feedback turnaround deadlines (in the relevant Law School a fixed deadline of 20 working days is applied to all feedback). Ruth expressed particularly strong views around student numbers, staff to student ratios and workload: "[it] means your feedback isn't ideal… because there simply isn't time… you try and put down what you thought was needed, rather than what you always wanted to say." Ruth, having the longest period of service in higher education in the tutor sample, referred back to when she felt she had more time for individual face-to-face feedback meetings with students: "I would have an afternoon put aside…for anybody who hadn't passed…to come and get feedback" (Ruth). She felt that such a model would now be untenable given the numbers she taught. Lisa, describing herself as "old school", also talked unprompted in interview about what she saw as problematic increased student numbers, and described the difficulties this produced in providing high value feedback, lamenting what she termed "a perfect world", echoing Sophie. In their focus group, the tutors collectively identified increased student numbers as the most significant contextual change negatively impacting their feedback practice. As Ruth noted, "[i]t's the numbers… that stops you doing feedback how you really want to do [it]… I don't know students' names and I can't remember when that changed." Sophie expressed the concern that having an average of forty students in her undergraduate seminars had the potential to drive down the personalisation of her feedback.

As well as affecting what they could and could not achieve with their feedback, the tutors were unanimous in their view that increased student numbers meant that when giving feedback, teaching came second place to what now felt to them like *working*: "You do feel it's a bit like a job…rather than that nice feeling of: 'I'm doing this to…support your learning.' It becomes more like work…It can feel like…a chore" (Sarah). This was echoed by Peter, the module's external examiner, who confirmed that he regularly completed his marking and feedback outside working hours, and that feedback was "highly time-consuming…[and] feels like very, very hard work". The tutors felt that difficulties with workload were exacerbated where a tutor taught on more than one programme, and also where feedback was being given while teaching was still progressing. Sophie,

Lisa, and Ruth as experienced tutors agreed that they prioritised their marking and feedback above other contractual demands, such as management or research, but asserted that they did this because of strictly policed deadlines, rather than from any pedagogical imperative, suggesting a concern around managerialism. They concluded that they were now viewing their feedback more strongly through the lens of work. Sarah, as a new tutor and marker, expressed concern at this, saying*:* "I think [feedback] should be a priority because…it's one of the core things, isn't it?"

The widening participation agenda while thought to have led to increased student numbers was also perceived to have had positive effects on feedback practice, challenging tutors to embrace a broader range of student ability and skills set. Sarah, for example, felt that a wider entry profile had the potential to lead to better feedback practice in supporting students in all aspects of their learning. By contrast, the other more experienced tutors expressed concerns around what they saw as a new pedagogic burden, for which it was thought they were ill qualified, in dealing with what they saw as challenging issues of student academic literacy. Ruth, for example, asserted a significantly increased workload produced by having to feed back to correct poor English, spelling and grammar: "I don't remember the range of students with such poor written English 20-30 years ago…[who] don't know an apostrophe from a colon." Providing a balancing voice, Sophie felt that regardless of the positive or negative impacts on academic practice, widening participation in higher education was part of the mission of the university, stating with feeling: "I think that's part of the feedback thing and that's the hill I die on."

As well as workload tension relating to student numbers, feedback time constraints and widening participation, the tutors also felt that increased feedback workloads were beginning to produce issues for them around their feedback workspace and feedback working boundaries*.* There was evidence that they felt that this was a recent change to the nature of their work, and had come about due to increased feedback workload, and using new technologies to give their feedback. All the tutors worked in shared offices, most sharing with over a dozen colleagues, and they agreed that they often needed to work from home or

in other quiet places to complete their allocations of marking, or to use newer feedback technologies effectively.

The tutors also discussed how contextual accountability structures might affect their feedback practice. They recognised that accountability for their feedback practice might operate in a number of different ways and at a number of different levels: at an internal level, in the form of feedback deadlines or the completion of standardised feedback pro-formas; or at an external level in the forms of the NSS and the TEF. External accountability structures were felt to have had positive effects on feedback practice and in a number of different ways. For example, it was felt that the NSS had led to increased awareness of the value of feedback for students' learning experience; more professional discussion around feedback best practice with associated training opportunities; and more variety in feedback methods and technologies. The tutors argued that this furnished potential opportunities to provide more efficient and effective feedback. One tutor did, however, express concern about the relationship between feedback and the NSS: "every NSS you'll get: 'we don't get enough feedback' and [we] know that we spend our lives trying to input more and more feedback [laughter]" (Ruth).

One part of the external accountability context, the TEF, was considered to have particular potential for positive effect on feedback practice. There was a feeling within the group that the TEF, while only one of a number of metrics, had a singular capacity to drive improvement in feedback practice via its focus on personalised learning. Sophie, in particular, who had led the Law School's TEF subject pilot in the preceding months, felt that the TEF presented the Law School with an opportunity to improve its feedback practice: "[TEF] started a dialogue… and it's enabled us to think about innovation."

Overall, it was clear that external accountability structures were seen as having a largely positive effect on feedback practice. It was also interesting to note that there was no specific mention of the potential impact on academic practice of the Office for Students, nor did the tutors talk much about internal accountability structures, save to briefly express concerns around deadlines for feedback

return, and what they saw as an increased managerialism around assessment and feedback generally.

While tutors felt that increased workloads were having a negative effect on their feedback practice, and external accountability measures a largely positive one, they identified modularisation as potentially having both positive and negative impacts. It was thought that modularisation, which had been introduced at the start of the academic year in which the data was generated, could have a potentially damaging effect on feedback practice, since it gave tutors less time to complete their formative and summative marking and feedback (thus affecting workloads), and also gave students less time to act on their feedback, formative feedback often being received only shortly before submission of the summative assessment. Conversely, it was felt that modularisation could also have a positive effect on feedback practice in that it created additional feedback points during the year, not only potentially spreading workloads, but also furnishing students with more opportunities for academic remedial work.

### 4.2.3 Marketisation and tutor de-professionalisation

*"We're not talking about a product; we're talking about people" (Sophie)*

A perceived marketisation of higher education was thought by the tutors to impact strongly on their feedback practice and to have led to a higher-risk landscape for them. In terms of feedback practice, this was thought to principally manifest in two ways: first, it was suggested by them that tuition fees were contributing to a student consumerist mentality resulting in grade fixation and a commodification of assessment feedback; and second, the tutors thought that this change was contributing to a growing complaint and challenge culture around both assessment grades and feedback. All the tutors felt that these shifts were threatening their academic professional status.

When looking at their feedback role as markers, the tutors talked about feeding back to justify their mark. All four tutors were clear that assessing was a part of their feedback role, however, it was unclear from the majority of the tutors' responses whether they felt that any mark justification was made on behalf of themselves, the university, or both, only Ruth expressing the view that when

acting as assessor she felt that she had to justify her mark to protect both herself and the institution: "I'm just covering my own back…they'll get more feedback from me to protect the institution…I'm making sure they can't troop in with a complaint" (Ruth). The tutors also considered potential audiences for their marking and feedback. In addition to marking and feeding back for a student audience, the tutors felt that there were other potential audiences for their feedback: their moderator; their external examiner; and, Sophie added, perhaps an even broader audience:

> 'but there's also a different audience, isn't there…? There's the possibility of being able to access information via a freedom of information request, and that's a different dimension now as an assessor to when I started off teaching' (Sophie).

Overall, there was relatively little discussion of the assessment purpose of feedback, and it seemed that the assessor/marker feedback role was overshadowed in discussion by that of the worker feedback role.

The main concern which grew out of the discussion of the assessor/marker feedback role related to the concepts of feedback commodification and feedback challenge and complaint. These concerns emerged with strength during both the interviews and focus group discussions. Tutors showed concern around reputational risk, and it became clear that this was keenly felt at a personal level. There was also evidence of concern around what was seen as a resultant and increasing de-professionalisation of their practice. Ruth expressed the strongest concerns around what she saw as her own growing defensive and strategic approach to feedback practice in the face of potential mark or feedback challenges: "there's a limit now…to what I will put in feedback, because I'm conscious of the student complaint procedure." She also stated that she had developed a practice of giving more feedback to students she thought more likely to later complain, and felt that such defensive feedback practice carried with it the danger of neglecting other students. All the tutors felt that tuition fees contributed to a culture of grade fixation and challenge, Ruth stating that she wanted to avoid a student returning to her saying: "I didn't get my money's worth because I only got three lines of feedback." Even Sarah as a new tutor

showed concern over the personal reputational risk associated with student complaint and challenge. By contrast, it was acknowledged by two of the tutors that the fear of student complaints might in fact drive up feedback practice standards: "I'd say some things have changed, things like litigation culture, so I do more feedback (laughter), so it's a bad thing driving it, but it's actually a positive outcome" (Ruth).

Both Ruth and Sophie saw tuition fees as encouraging a student consumerist approach and talked about what they saw as a growing conceptualisation of higher education as a bilateral bargain, contract, or product, leading to what Ruth viewed as unhealthy levels of student feelings of entitlement. Sophie acknowledged that the university did indeed have a contract with students, but felt that this should be seen as a two-way bargain and that managing expectation was crucial. Using fiscal language, she suggested that "we need to manage that…so that they understand that they are not being short-changed." She also felt that students were increasingly viewing themselves as consumers of a feedback product, rather than engaging in a feedback process, but, with feeling, she asserted that "we're not talking about a product, we're talking about people and people's education… so they don't…sit very easily for me." Sophie was also of the view that feedback commodification sat uneasily with students' ability to flourish academically and described the need to produce autonomous learners who gradually became less dependent on feedback as they progressed. She acknowledged, however, what she saw as the higher-risk landscape for students, which she asserted contributed to a culture of student vulnerability, which could encourage mark challenge: "consumerisation, which should drive up standards and you could say has done…also creates opportunities for litigation." She expressed concern that defensive practices which could burgeon as a consequence of a litigious culture also had the potential to stifle innovation in feedback practice. All three of the experienced tutors referred to what they saw as professional tensions resulting from this posited consumerist approach to assessment and assessment feedback, more than once referring to not practising in "a perfect world," and "not being able to please all the people all the time".

To conclude this section, it has already been noted that there is an emerging literature around contemporary change in the higher education context which has the potential to impact on assessment feedback practice. It can be seen that the views of the tutors around feedback purposes, values and roles were expressed as affected by the surrounding context within which they enacted their feedback practice. The data suggest that such contextual drivers have the potential to influence feedback practice for both good and ill. According to the tutor sample, the contextual drivers with most potential for *positive* feedback effect were external accountability in the forms of the NSS and TEF, together with their own concurrent experiences as students which they cited as the most important positive influence on their feedback practice. By contrast, the contextual drivers identified by the tutors as having the most potential for *negative* feedback influence were increased student numbers and feedback workloads, and feedback commodification produced, in their view, by tuition fees leading to consumerist expectations and a culture of challenge. When asked which of these was the most important negative influence, they chose increased student numbers. It is interesting to note that, overall, the tutors identified more positive effects of contextual change in higher education than negative. The findings which were represented with the most *strength* were those relating to professional tensions resulting from increased student numbers; and a de-professionalisation of feedback practice due to commodification.

## 4.3 Summary of Part 1 findings

1. *Professional feedback tension:* a professional, and in some cases vocational tension, arising from a conflict between feedback values and feedback practice, particularly experienced by tutors when attempting to deliver student-centred feedback to greater numbers.

2. *Workloads, work lenses and workspaces*: concerns existed around feedback workload linked strongly to rising student numbers, with emerging concerns around viewing feedback through a worker lens and management of feedback workspace.

3. *Commodification, consumerism, and complaint:* strong evidence existed of concern around a perceived de-professionalisation of feedback practice resulting from commodification of feedback accompanied by consumerist student approaches to learning.

4. *Positive external influences:* external accountability structures such as the NSS and TEF were viewed as largely positive drivers for change in feedback practice.

## Findings Part 2: Feedback forms and engaging with audio-visual feedback

The second research question seeks to examine whether using audio-visual technology to deliver assessment feedback may help address the feedback dissonance asserted by the tutor sample and asks: *how do academic tutors and students view the practical, pedagogic, and socio-affective dimensions of giving and receiving formative assessment feedback via audio-visual technology?* The data was again analysed thematically, and since the intervention using the audio-visual feedback formed part of a qualitative study, the analysis sought views less around whether the intervention had 'worked', but rather, the subjective views of the participants in relation to *how* they felt it had worked. These views will be considered by examining two themes: feedback forms; and student feedback engagement.

### 4.4 Feedback forms

The three experienced tutors in the sample noted that there had been significant shifts in assessment practice over recent years, but that feedback practice had, in their view, by contrast remained relatively static. On all the programmes supported by the tutors written feedback was overwhelmingly the norm, occasionally supplemented by face-to-face feedback meetings. The tutors and students felt that one-to-one feedback meetings were seen as a feedback 'gold standard' involving, however, issues of transience as well as scale with large cohorts. Some of the tutors asserted that if best practice demanded a variety of assessment, this varied approach should also be reflected in those assessments'

feedback. Consequently, it was mooted that students should be able to choose their feedback format, and Ruth was particularly keen that a choice of feedback format was offered to students to achieve inclusivity and support different learning needs.

The student focus groups were asked to consider the affordances and limitations of written feedback drawing on their prior experiences, and their views are considered below before turning to examine the data in relation to the screencast intervention.

### 4.4.1 Written feedback – affordances and limitations

There was a high degree of uniformity between the two student focus groups in identifying clarity, navigation, and language accommodation as the most important affordances of the written medium.

In terms of clarity, students felt that written feedback offered better opportunities to 'see' where mistakes had been made and improvements needed, with some students expressing strong views that they felt they needed something written to refer to when reviewing their work. They also felt that this speeded up the process of reviewing their feedback. Others asserted that clarity was enhanced as they felt written comments were generally more concise than those which were heard, with fewer verbal fillers.

Navigation or the ability to find feedback when reviewing work constituted a strong theme in both student focus groups. Students reported that written feedback allowed them to find feedback comments more easily, rather than having to search through an audio file. Significantly, some also felt that this would make re-visiting their written feedback more likely. They also found the summary of feedback and feedforward on their written feedback front sheets useful for reference when preparing for future assessments, and felt that this was lacking in the audio-visual feedback, raising issues around feedback structure.

Finally, in terms of language accommodation, the student sample of fourteen contained six international students. These students felt that the provision of

feedback in the written form allowed them to read, re-read and, where necessary, to translate more easily to achieve understanding: "if it's said in audio, sometimes I have to repeat it for a lot of times until I understand the words, but if it's written, I can just search it and understand it in a minute" (Katrina). Some students felt that the ability to see, rather than hear words, might be an advantage for other students too: "it's not even just specifically international [students], because…in audio feedback a tutor could say like an expression…you've not heard of…Those nuances of language that you might not 'get'" (Megan).

In relation to the limitations of the written feedback medium, the students identified issues relating to generic feedback, tone, and insufficient feedforward.

Tutor use of generic or 'copy and paste' feedback techniques in written feedback was discussed with some strength of feeling by the students and was seen by them as a negative practice: "I feel feedback in written work is often very reproduced, and not specific to my work. This can make me feel frustrated" (Marea). Other students asserted that they would always ignore generic feedback. By a sharp and perhaps predictable contrast, tutors were unanimous in their view that using pre-prepared, generic comments for commonly occurring issues was a legitimate feedback practice, if they accompanied other, individualised comments on students' work.

Both tutors and students were in agreement that written feedback could betray a tone which may not have been intended by the tutor. One student felt that she understood the difficulties tutors may face in conveying their intended feedback tone: "I feel as though tutors can come across harsh with what they are saying, but it is not their fault, it is just…in order to get their point across in as little time as possible" (Habibah). Other students, however, expressed strongly negative feelings related to what they perceived as unnecessarily harsh tone in written feedback: "I have felt belittled and mocked in some cases, as abrupt sentences come across as condescending in written form…I often feel…demotivated" (Megan). The emotional language used by the students in describing the hurt they felt on such occasions was notable.

As well as generic feedback and feedback tone, students agreed that they felt that written feedback, while lauded by them as benefitting from clarity and conciseness, often lacked the feedforward and guidance which they felt they needed to improve in the future. They reported written feedback as often being more about pointing out mistakes in their current work than providing feedforward and guidance on how to improve future work, and that vague tutor comments did not help them to improve. For some students, this lack of feedforward meant that they often felt they needed to seek further guidance in person from their tutors.

In summary, both tutors and students favoured one-to-one feedback sessions, seeing this form of feedback as a 'gold standard', but conceded that the practice was unsustainable for all students. Tutors felt that their assessment practices had developed swiftly over recent years, but that their feedback practices, by comparison, had remained relatively static and they had not reflected on this disparity before. When considering the affordances and limitations of written feedback, there was a high level of agreement amongst the student sample that the most important affordances were navigation/reviewability of work and language accommodation, while they felt that the most important limitations were insufficient feedforward and generic comment. The strength of feeling expressed by students in relation to both limitations was pronounced.

### 4.4.2 Audio-visual feedback – a screencast intervention

The second research question asks: *how do academic tutors and students view the practical, pedagogic and socio- affective dimensions of giving and receiving formative assessment feedback via audio-visual technology?* The data from both tutor and student samples in relation to the screencast intervention were analysed via the following themes: the practical; the pedagogic; the relational; and the affective.

#### *Practical aspects of giving and receiving audio-visual feedback*

Themes arising from the data included issues around tutor workloads and the workspace required to work with audio-visual technologies, and how students worked with screencast feedback, including content navigation, and flexibility.

## Tutor workloads and workspace

Tutors agreed that producing written feedback could be time consuming, and that providing feedback via audio-visual means had the potential to lighten feedback workloads. Sarah and Sophie had not given audio-visual feedback previously and both expressed concern in their reflective journals before using the technology, Sophie describing her feelings as "anxiety" and Sarah as "worried". Lisa and Ruth, however, had previously used screencasting and entered the intervention with differing views. Lisa had worked with an earlier version of Screencastomatic which she reported had led to much re-recording and, she felt, a consequential increase in her workload. Later, however, she noted that her experience with the newer technology was more positive. She maintained, nonetheless, that editing her feedback was still easier in the written form. Ruth had also used screencast technology before the intervention, and was positive about it both before and after giving her feedback.

There was a difference of view among the tutors around how they worked with the screencast technology, and whether it saved them time. All the tutors felt that their reliance on supporting notes reduced significantly as they progressed, though to differing degrees: "I got more confident with it…so [the] first ten...I almost wrote a script…the next five I was writing notes…and then the notes disappeared altogether" (Ruth). Sarah and Sophie also felt that their ability to work with reduced notes increased swiftly as they progressed through their feedback, and that they were saving time, and for Sophie as a member of senior management the potential efficiency gains of this were clear. For Sarah as a new tutor, this was only her second experience of giving feedback, and once she had completed her audio-visual feedback, she described her experience in mainly positive terms, commenting that she had drawn on her recent experience in legal practice of giving dictation. Other tutors noted that as they were not trained typists, they felt that there was the potential for them to save time by giving their feedback in the audio form. Only Lisa felt that she still needed to script a lot of her feedback before recording it, and consequently felt that audio-visual delivery created additional work for her: "I don't know if it's an age thing, but…I felt it…added to the workload…I tended to write a script before I actually gave feedback, so…I found it created more work" (Lisa). The main technological issue raised by the tutors in their delivery of the feedback related to the uploading of

the feedback files, which they all felt was cumbersome and time-consuming. Even with this difficulty, the tutors, save Lisa, still felt that they were saving time overall, thereby reducing their workload, with one tutor expressing particular regret in returning to written feedback.

While most of the tutors felt that audio-visual feedback saved them time, they all felt that physical workspace had become a challenge. All the tutors worked in shared offices and recording audio-visual feedback at work was, they felt, impractical. They cited difficulties in achieving the seclusion they felt they needed for audio-visual feedback, with some also experiencing difficulties recording their feedback at home: "if I'm at home I can get a bigger run…[but] because of the interruptions [there], it's quite tricky" (Sophie).

### Students working with screencast technology

None of the students in the sample had previously received feedback via audio-visual means and they were asked how they had worked with the feedback. Most of the students talked about listening to and watching the feedback and making written notes as they went along, some returning to it several times: "The first time, I listened to it just to see what was being said...I listened to it again and started making notes...Lastly, I went through the…feedback once more to make sure there wasn't anything I missed" (Habibah). Some students reported this to be a more time-consuming process than engaging with written feedback, with one student hinting at issues around cognitive overload: "It's a lot to take in all at once…and I've had to play it back several times to fully understand all the points that were made" (Tim). Tim did not elaborate on this comment, so whether his feelings were attributable to the quantity or richness of the feedback, or whether it required a different form of engagement or processing, or other influences were at play, remain open questions. The tutors, however, were optimistic that having to work in a different way with the feedback, perhaps involving additional engagement, might lead to additional student learning gains. There was, however, one note of reservation: that students might not compare audio-visual feedback with each other in the way they did with written feedback, and that this might negatively affect levels of peer feedback engagement.

Screencasting technology generally offers in addition to audio sound a small range of video-based tools, including the use of the cursor to show a student where the marker is in a student's work, highlighting sections of work either before or during the audio feedback, and the option of inserting a 'talking head' video of the tutor in a corner of the screen. The tutors were not guided on the use of tools before the intervention, and consequently used a variety of approaches, most using the cursor and some also highlighting text. Sarah particularly enjoyed being able to orientate herself in her students' work: "I liked that I could show the students where I was in their work by scrolling to the part I was talking about, and I understand students liked this as well" (Sarah). The 'talking head' facility was not used by any of the tutors who did not offer data explaining why they had chosen not to use this option, but the students offered their unsolicited and united view that they did not welcome the idea of seeing their tutor giving feedback: "Yes, I reckon if…I had a talking head in the corner, that would be hilarious, but I don't know how much I'd benefit from it (laughter)" (Megan).

The students reported navigational difficulties when accessing or returning to their audio-visual feedback files, and this was seen by them as a major limitation of the medium. Some did, however, report that the video tools helped them navigate their way through their audio files, using the cursor movement or highlighting as cues to where the audio feedback had progressed. Some of the tutors also reported similar difficulties when later reviewing feedback with students. However, one additional affordance of the visual element identified by both tutors and students was the ability to show how content could be moved around in the work to better effect, and this was thought to be particularly useful for the type of portfolio assessment which formed the vehicle for the intervention.

One positive practical aspect of working with screencast reported by the student sample was the accessibility of the audio element of their feedback. Some students felt that this fitted well with their busy lives outside university:

> 'I'm quite busy…and when I'm not at uni, I'm at work, so the last thing I want to do is come home and read what I've done wrong. Whereas I can

> just put my earphones in, cook my tea and listen to what I've done wrong (laughter)…So it doesn't get in the way of all the things that you've got to prioritise' (Megan).

Whether this purported increased accessibility led, however, to increased feedback engagement remained an open question.

### *Pedagogic aspects of audio-visual feedback*

The data from both tutors and students suggested that there were particular affordances and limitations of the audio-visual feedback medium which had the potential to impact on student learning. These included: the quantity of feedback which tutors felt they gave, and students felt they received; the amount of feedforward and explanatory comment given; personalisation of feedback; audio-visual feedback structure; and auditory receipt and student recall.

#### Enhanced quantity of feedback

All the tutors felt that they had given more feedback in the audio-visual form than was the norm for them in writing, some attributing this to the ability to be able to speak more quickly than they could type. Students were also asked in their reflective journals to consider the quantity of feedback they felt that they had received. Of the fourteen students in the sample, twelve reported in their reflective journals that they felt that they had received more feedback than was usual for them via written feedback, two felt it was about the same and none felt that they had received less feedback. This majority view was echoed in both student focus groups. There was also some discussion about consistency of file length and thus quantity of feedback. It was clear that there was variation between the tutors, and the files varied in length from four minutes to twelve minutes, with most files averaging around eight minutes.

#### Enhanced feedforward and explanatory comment

Many of the students felt that they received more feedforward, explanatory comments, and examples via audio-visual means than they were used to when receiving written feedback, and this may explain, in part, why they thought that they received more quantity of feedback overall. It has already been noted that

they felt that written feedback often lacked sufficient feedforward and guidance on how to improve: "audio feedback will tell you like *why* it's wrong…whereas in written it's just..."Oh, this needs improvement," but why?" (Megan), and a number of students highlighted enhanced levels of feedforward as one of the main advantages of the audio-visual medium. More detailed explanations around how to improve work seemed to be of particular importance to the international students in the sample: "There is opportunity to include much more specific and longer, more well explained pointers on how to improve work" (Janet). Significantly, some students felt that enhanced levels of feedforward and explanatory comment aided not only their understanding, but also played a positive role in their subsequent engagement with their feedback.

The tutors also reported giving more feedforward and explanatory comment: "written feedback can often constrain…instead…I was able to [say] these are the reasons why, and perhaps I haven't done that with written feedback… It was possible to offer a different kind of explanation" (Sophie). In particular, the tutors felt that they gave more examples to students in their feedback when using audio-visual means: " I was making suggestions, "you could try this" …whereas I may not have given quite so many specific examples…if I was writing them all out" (Sarah). Sophie also felt that she could achieve a synergy between her teaching, which was by nature audio-visual and explanatory, and her screencast feedback.

### Personalisation of feedback

Students reported more personalisation in their audio-visual feedback, viewing this in two ways: personalisation of their feedback in *relational* terms (which will be considered later); and personalisation of the *content* of their feedback, which will be considered here. Both these forms of personalisation were cited by students as among the most important perceived advantages of the audio-visual medium.

Students welcomed what they saw as a more tailored approach to their feedback, for example, "It…feels a lot more specific to my work…the feedback is tailored specifically to me, written feedback is often very generic" (Megan). This personalisation for them happened when tutors used specific examples from their

work or made specific suggestions for improvement. For some students, the significance of this perceived tailoring was that they felt that this showed that the tutor was interested in their work. It has already been noted that students expressed strongly negative feeling around tutors' use of generic feedback, which they saw as a major limitation of written feedback, and this may be why the personalised nature of audio-visual feedback was so important to them. Significantly, for some, it seemed to affect whether they would later use that feedback: "If I feel that the feedback is specific to my work, I will feel more inclined to use it than if the feedback was generic to all students" (Naman). Tutors, by contrast, expressed concern that they were not able to use generic feedback when working with audio-visual technology as they might when giving written feedback, reporting that they spent time making the same points many times over to different students. They felt that this could lead to an increase in workload for them.

### Feedback structure and audio-visual delivery

One further pedagogic issue raised by the tutors concerned the structure of their audio-visual feedback, and how to replicate their existing written practice of summarising feedback and feedforward points onto a standardised front sheet. Since the tutors were not using the Law School standard feedback front sheet as part of their audio-visual feedback, there were reservations about how to structure their feedback and feedforward: how to highlight the main feedback and feedforward messages they wished to convey; and how to achieve structural consistency between students' work. Of the tutor sample, Sophie was the most concerned about feedback structure. Lisa also felt that her feedback messages became muddled in the audio-visual form, contrasting with her normal practice in written feedback, where she would extract her feedforward comments and place these at the end. The other tutors agreed that using audio-visual means could lead to a lack of feedback focus and a loss of central feedback messages. The students, however, felt that their feedback and feedforward messages had been separated out *more* effectively than via written feedback, representing a sharp contrast. It was thought that issues of structural maintenance could be addressed either by building in a more choreographed structure of delivery via tutor guidance notes (see Appendix 1), or via hybrid feedback where tutors

could, in addition to their audio-visual feedback, offer a written summary highlighting the main feedback and feedforward messages.

### Audio-visual receipt and student recall

There was a difference of view between both tutors and between students in relation to feedback format and learning gains. Avoiding specific discussion around 'learning styles,' some students felt that *hearing* the feedback aided their understanding:

> 'I believe it's in the nature of a person that they learn faster by…listening to someone rather than reading, because from birth a child does not learn from reading actual written feedback (laughter), they learn from what they…hear' (Howard).

This view was supported in part by the tutors: "I'm a bit of a convert to the screencast feedback because…it will appeal to people who learn by listening, and as part of a rich pattern of delivering feedback it's got a real value" (Sophie). Another tutor felt that it helped her students to hear her feedback, since if she spoke to them afterwards about it, the subsequent conversation would more closely mirror her audio feedback. For some students, the significance of this issue related to their powers of recall: "I still remember the feedback I received from the audio…It's just easier to remember because you've heard it, and it's almost like having a conversation" (Megan).

Both tutors and students unsurprisingly expressed other views, that for them or for others *seeing* feedback might be more beneficial than hearing it: "I prefer written feedback as I cannot learn or take in mind easily over audio" (Magda). Ultimately, the data was of a highly interpretive nature and reflected the parties' subjective views, accordingly, it was no surprise that both tutors and students were expressing views across the piece in relation to preferred modes of receipt. Significantly however, both students and tutors reported a reduction in the number of feedback queries following the audio-visual feedback. Sophie also reported that while specific queries around the feedback task itself had been reduced, she felt that the relational aspects of her audio-visual feedback had

encouraged some students to subsequently seek her out for pastoral support.

### *Relational aspects of audio-visual feedback*

Two relational themes arose for consideration from the data: tutor tone and language; and perceptions of presence, connection and caring.

### Tutor tone and language

Tutors were aware of the danger of written feedback failing to clearly convey the meaning they intended: "it's very easy to misinterpret tone with written feedback…It's a bit like emails, you think you're sending something perfectly pleasant and the person on the other end is mortally offended" (Lisa). The tutors felt that audio feedback enabled them to convey their meaning more clearly by the use of tone, and they hoped that this could help to achieve more positive learning outcomes: "I would hope that…this type of feedback using a variety of tones would enable the feedback to be received…in a positive and constructive manner" (Sophie). Sarah, Sophie, and Lisa independently asserted in interview that they felt that tone was of real importance in avoiding feedback misunderstandings between tutor and student.

Tutors were asked to consider how they had used tone in their audio feedback. Lisa, who in the main was not an advocate of the medium, felt that tone was one of its prime advantages. Ruth felt that she could be more positive and encouraging using her voice. Sarah, as a new tutor, also felt that she could be more encouraging via audio: "it seems to me it is hard to convey a tone in writing, or at least to convey the tone you intend. I think I was more encouraging and used a more upbeat tone than I could have conveyed in writing" (Sarah). She also felt, along with other tutors, that this was of particular use when giving critical feedback. As well as using tone to encourage and reassure, Sophie felt that using her voice allowed her to 'humanise' her feedback: "It did make me conscious of the tone of my delivery…With anything in writing there's a coldness to it…but you're able to humanise it…is humanity too strong a word?" (Sophie)

One perceived difficulty with the tone of voice, however, was that tutors felt that there was a danger of 'leakage' in their voice tone, for example, if they felt bored or frustrated with the work they were reviewing: "some of them were very 'samey', so how do you then…remove any tone that's like: 'oh no, not again!'" (Sophie). It has already been noted that students reported tone as one of the limitations of written feedback, expressing concerns around harshness and the potential for misunderstandings. While they were not asked specifically about tone and audio feedback, a number of them volunteered that this was of importance to them: "[a]udio feedback largely depends on the spoken manner of the marker…. [you] can judge the marker according to their tone of voice" (Howard). Significantly, some students also indicated that if they could hear emotion in their tutor's tone that this aided their recall.

In terms of the language used by the tutors, while the students made no comment on this, the tutors felt that they used less formal and more conversational language when speaking than when writing: "The opportunity to 'talk' to someone via audio feedback removed the more stilted aspect of written feedback" (Sophie). For some, these apparent differences in tone and language led on to other relational perceptions: of presence, of connection and of care.

### Perceptions of presence, connection, and care

The perceptions of presence and connection described by the tutors and students concerned three principal areas: first, perceptions of presence and audience; second, perceptions of connection between tutor and student in relation to the work submitted; and third, much stronger data relating to a more personal, and potentially pastoral connection, this time between the tutor and the student herself, with some students reporting that they felt that the tutor was interested in and cared about them as well as their work.

In relation to perceptions of presence via audio-visual feedback, both tutors and students reported increased feelings of awareness of the other during the giving and receiving of the feedback. For example, tutor Sophie reported an enhanced awareness of her 'audience': "remembering that…there was somebody there…I was able to make the point in the same way that I would have done if the student was in front of me and we were having a discussion" (Sophie). There

was also a wealth of data from the students, particularly in their reflective journals, that despite the asychronicity, they had experienced a feeling of presence on the part of the tutor: "I feel…as if I was being talked through my assessment one to one" (Tim), and this was echoed when the students came together in their focus groups. For a small number of students, this led on to something approaching an illusion of dialogue, albeit a one-sided and asynchronous one: "Yes, I felt that she kind of anticipated what I was going to say…so I felt like I was arguing with her through my computer screen" (Megan). From a tutor's perspective, Sophie felt, however, that perceptions of dialogue were an illusion, "it's not a conversation and it's not dialogue, because it is by its very nature, one sided…Having asynchronous 'dialogue'…isn't dialogue" (Sophie).

In relation to connection to their *work*, students were asked how interested they felt the tutor was in their work. Some students felt that the tutor was interested in their work due to the detailed comments made, others merely stated that they felt their work was valued by the tutor. Tone was once again important, here signalling interest in their work: "It's the tone of voice and the way they say the feedback. It's kind of like they care about your work, like they want you to improve" (Alia).

There were, however, more significant data around a perceived connection not to the work, but between the tutor and student. It has already been noted that there were some data suggesting that the *content* of the feedback given via audio was more personalised, in the sense of more tailored to the work. Here, the suggestion from some students was that the feedback *approach* was more personal and, in some cases, created a feeling of connection between the tutor and the student. While acknowledging many potential influences on students' perceptions of connection with their tutor, including student disposition, previous relationship with their tutor, and tutors' pedagogic styles, some students reported feeling more connected with their tutor due to a perception that a barrier between them had been removed: "I feel that it removes the wall that tends to be built up through the words…used in feedback when it is written" (Alia). For others, the feelings of connection came more from a feeling of being better understood by their tutor: "I want to say I feel more understood with audio feedback" (Emilio). It was interesting to note that Emilio, an Italian

Erasmus student on a six-month placement in the Law School had never received feedback, written or audio-visual, at degree level before, and particularly valued the feelings of connection he felt with his tutor in his audio-visual feedback. For other students, their perceived connection flowed from feeling that their tutor cared, this time not about their work, but about them, and this featured particularly strongly in the reflective journals of the international students in the sample. Some students reported that hearing concern in their tutor's voice was of particular importance to them, and, significantly, stated that this would influence whether they would later use that feedback.

While the overwhelming majority of students welcomed what they saw as a more personal approach in audio feedback, one student voiced in strong terms her dislike of this personal dimension of the medium. As part of a spirited focus group debate, she argued that, for her, this was too personal: "I found it overly personal at times…That did kind of bother me…I would rather it be impersonal and anonymous" (Marea).

The tutors giving the audio feedback welcomed what they saw as the enhanced relational possibilities of audio delivery: "because I'd call them by their name… it gave me a bit more of a connection with them…It's a human thing, isn't it?" (Sarah), and Ruth wondered whether students receiving her written feedback might not feel it was from her at all: "It's not really my tutor, it's some handwriting on the bottom of a script" (Ruth). All four tutors felt that the personal nature of the feedback had made the process more enjoyable for them.

Some of the tutors also identified this perceived connection as having *pastoral* potentials and this was raised independently by them in their focus group. Sophie, for example, who along with Ruth used much pastoral language in her data, welcomed the chance to offer more support to students through her feedback, and, as already noted, reported that she felt that connections made during her audio-visual feedback had led to a small number of students later seeking pastoral help from her.

### *Affective aspects*

In this section, I move from a consideration of the social or relational dimensions of audio-feedback to analyse its affective aspects, acknowledging that the relational and emotional often interact. Consideration will be given first, to tutors' views around students' emotions on assessment feedback receipt. I then move to analyse the data from the student sample around their reported emotions generally on receiving written feedback and, more particularly, on receipt of their audio-visual feedback in the intervention. Finally, I will consider the data relating to emotions and receiving feedback criticism.

All the tutors acknowledged that feedback receipt was an affective as well as a cognitive experience. For some, this was thought to be the result of the judgements involved in the feedback process, for example: "it's a proper mixed bag of emotions…some downright fear and anticipation…within that, the sense of disappointment and upset" (Sophie). Others thought that the higher risk landscape of higher education could produce feelings of vulnerability and had the potential to affect the emotions attached to assessment and feedback. It was acknowledged, however, that this would depend on the individual student. Of the tutors, Sophie had the most to say on this subject, and, drawing on her own feedback experience as a doctoral student, asserted that learning inevitably involved vulnerability. She wondered whether tutors generally needed to be more aware of the affective dimensions of the feedback process. These concerns about students' affective reactions to feedback were reflected in the student sample, who reported feelings of anxiety or sadness around feedback (and more so when related to summative, rather than formative, feedback), while on other occasions happiness, relief, and satisfaction. The students also acknowledged that different students may have different affective responses to feedback and deal with those responses in different ways.

A focus of the enquiry, however, was around the students' affective response, if any, on receipt of their audio-visual assessment feedback. The students completed their first reflective journal immediately on receipt of their audio-visual feedback and were invited to highlight from a list of twenty-four piloted emotions, adding others if they wished. The student sample was small and so no quantitative significance is attached to the level of their responses. Their related

narrative comments were, however, of qualitative interest. Of the sixty-nine highlights, sixty-two fell into what may be termed the 'positive' emotions of: *reflective; encouraged; motivated; pleased; happy; challenged; hopeful; content; proud; satisfied;* and *surprised*. The emotions receiving most attention were *reflective, encouraged,* and *motivated.* The emotions *challenged, surprised,* and *satisfied* were acknowledged to potentially have both positive and negative meanings. The 'negative' emotions of *confused* and *worried* were highlighted twice each, and *sad, frustrated,* and *de-motivated* once each by the same student. In their focus groups the emotions felt which were voted as being most important were *encouraged* and *reflective* coming joint first, with *bored* coming second.

In relation to the reported feeling of being *reflective,* students acknowledged that their coursework had been a reflective piece and that reflection was a useful response to formative feedback in particular. Some students felt that the process of reflecting on their feedback was different via audio: "I started looking back at my work and…hearing it and looking at it at the same time is just different to when you're reading it" (Megan). With regard to the reported feeling of being *encouraged* the students felt that their audio-visual feedback was less judgemental overall, speaking more to the positives than the negatives of their work, which some of them found encouraging. This was also reflected by some of the tutors: "It's far easier to say…'well done you'...perhaps the positivity element can come through more in audio feedback than written feedback" (Lisa). The significance of feeling encouraged was, for some, that they felt that this increased their feelings of motivation: "I felt that my tutor was reassuring and friendly…which added to the motivation" (Habibah).

For other students, the encouragement which they felt they received was less to do with increasing their motivation to act on their feedback, but was welcomed rather for itself, with some students expressing feelings of being *supported*, for example: "Yes…I put the most effort into this assessment (laughter), but I think it was because I felt a lot more supported through the audio feedback" (Alia). The tutors also welcomed the opportunity to offer encouragement and support in their feedback: "I felt I could communicate with people…supportively, and for me that was the very best part of the feedback" (Sophie).

A small number of students reported feeling *bored* when listening to their screencast feedback. The focus group discussion was strongly associated in this regard with the length of the audio files, which was described in some cases as off-putting. Some reported not wanting to listen for what they felt was too long, for example: "[f]ive minutes of sitting there and you could have just written it down for me. I prefer written feedback (sighs)" (Janet). The tutors were alive to the issue of file length and loss of student interest, and Sarah wondered whether there might be an optimal time threshold beyond which students might struggle to engage. Other than feelings of boredom, no reference was made by the students to negative feelings around their audio-visual feedback receipt. The only exception to this was from one student who reported feelings of sadness, frustration, and de-motivation. She reported feeling de-motivated as she had to re-draft her work, and frustrated due to feedback comments made on her spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

One area which attracted more discussion than any other in relation to feedback and affect related to the receipt of feedback criticism. All the tutors talked unprompted about this, stating that they felt that it was common for students to resist criticism. For example," [i]f they think they've been criticised…I think they may have an emotional reaction…Taking constructive criticism is quite an art in itself, isn't it?" (Sarah). Sophie talked again about the vulnerabilities associated with the receipt of critical feedback and felt that tutors could offer challenge as well as support, using audio to 'soften the blows' of criticism: "[i]t made it easier to deliver feedback that might have seemed 'colder' in writing….being both supportive and offering the necessary criticism to enable development" (Sophie).

Others in the tutor sample felt that gauging students' affective reactions to feedback generally, and to criticism in particular, was a difficult task, and could be influenced by many different factors, including pre-existing relationships between the tutor and student, as well as the disposition of the individual student: "[feedback] that upsets somebody who's a fairly strong and robust character… would probably devastate a more sensitive student" (Lisa). Lisa felt that *hearing* criticism, might be more difficult for some students than receiving it in writing: "nobody likes to be criticised and to hear it…it's not nice getting

criticism 'face to face', it's easier to handle in writing…you can…have time to think" (Lisa).

The students reported conflicting feelings between the desire to improve (acknowledging the need for criticism to aid their development), and the desire for praise. Some students felt that their emotions on receipt of criticism could cloud their cognitive response and, agreeing with tutor Lisa, felt that if their audio feedback contained a lot of criticism, this might be difficult to accept: "Imagine…eight minutes of 'this is wrong, this is wrong'…(laughter)…probably wouldn't be very motivating…I do think there's a level of delicacy…needed with it" (Marea). Other students disagreed, aligning with tutor Sophie, and felt that audio-visual delivery might help them to accept critique more readily: "[r]eceiving the feedback felt a lot more personal, making the improvements needed seem less like failing, and more like a helpful suggestion" (Jenny), and: "I do feel like they were trying to soften blows" (Habibah).

In an attempt to gauge the strength of student feeling, the students were asked to prioritise in terms of importance to them the affordances and limitations of audio-visual feedback. Here there was less agreement than in relation to written feedback, but the majority felt that the most important affordances of audio-visual feedback were: personalisation of feedback content; and, in particular, the personal connection felt with their tutors, while the most important limitation was inconsistency between tutors in terms of the feedback file length.

### 4.4.3 Summary of the findings of the screencast intervention

In summary, audio-visual feedback can be seen to entail a number of potential affordances and limitations. In terms of practical use, the majority of the tutors felt that the technology saved them time, reducing their workload and they felt that they had learned, over time, to work efficiently with the technology, although they expressed concern over workspace issues. Both tutors and students felt that some of the navigational difficulties produced by the audio-visual format were ameliorated to some degree by use of the screencast visual tools, and the students welcomed the accessibility or flexibility of the medium. The main practical message from the student sample related to a perceived increased time investment, which they felt was needed to engage in a different

way with the screencast feedback. While they did not welcome this, the tutors by contrast interpreted this need for increased engagement more positively, expressing hope that it could lead to increased student learning gains.

In pedagogic terms, in relation to the perceived quantity of feedback given, the tutors were unanimous that they gave more feedback, feedforward, explanatory comment and examples. The students echoed this and prioritised this as of particular importance to them, asserting increased levels of understanding and feedback engagement. Tutors, however, voiced concern around a perceived loss of feedback structure and loss of focussed feedback message. The students felt differently, lauding the structure of audio-visual feedback over written. In terms of personalised feedback, students felt keenly that their audio-visual feedback was more tailored to their work than written feedback, and, significantly, they felt that this could affect whether they subsequently acted on that feedback.

In relational terms, tutors reported using more encouraging language and tone when giving feedback via audio, and felt that the significance of this lay both in reducing misunderstandings and in motivating students. They reported enjoying the relational aspects of audio delivery and showed an interest in its pastoral potential. Both tutors and students reported an increased awareness of the other while using audio-visual means. While there was relatively little evidence that this created an illusion of dialogue, there was strong evidence from the student sample of heightened feelings of presence and connection with their tutor, in places taking the form of reported feelings of feeling more understood and cared for, which some asserted translated into better motivation and feedback engagement.

As far as the affective dimensions of the intervention were concerned, tutors were clearly alive to the affective as well as cognitive responses that might be produced by their feedback, but they felt that it was difficult to anticipate how individual students might respond emotionally to their feedback. The students reported strongly positive emotions associated with audio-visual feedback, which were in stark contrast to the emotions they reported as ordinarily associating with the receipt of written feedback. They particularly highlighted feeling *encouraged* and *reflective*, while some also reported feeling *bored*, associating

this with audio file length. The affective consequences of hearing criticism via audio, rather than seeing it in the written form, produced a division of opinion amongst both the tutor and student samples, with some feeling that it may be more difficult to hear criticism via audio, while others felt that audio offered the opportunity to soften critique.

The findings of the screencast intervention can be summarised as follows:

1. *Working with screencast feedback:* tutors reported saving time screencasting their feedback, though they experienced challenges in achieving feedback structure and finding appropriate workspace. Students reported additional time investment in working with their screencast feedback and, while welcoming the flexibility of the medium, reported issues around navigation and language accommodation.

2. *Pedagogy and screencast feedback engagement*: students reported repeated accessing of their screencast feedback. They also associated tutors' more positive and encouraging tone and language along with enhanced personalisation, feedforward, and explanatory comment with improved engagement, understanding and recall.

3. *Presence, connection, and care:* both tutors and students reported feelings of social presence and connection when working with screencast feedback, some students associating this strongly with feelings of tutor care which they reported as positively impacting on their motivation and feedback engagement.

4. *Affective affordance*: students strongly associated positive emotions with screencast feedback, which stood in stark contrast to the largely negative feelings they associated with written feedback.

5. *Pastoral potentials:* screencasting may offer positive potentials for both pastoral care and inclusivity, particularly for international students and students facing mental health challenges.

## 4.5 Student feedback engagement

Having discussed issues relating to feedback relationships in the forms of written and audio-visual feedback, I now turn to consider the *consequences* of those feedback relationships for feedback engagement. Full engagement with, and use of feedback should involve, at a cognitive level understanding the feedback, at an affective level accepting the feedback, and finally, at a behavioural level using the feedback to improve current or future work, thus closing the feedback 'loop'. Tutors were asked to consider what they thought might constitute barriers to student feedback engagement, and these are considered below. Issues relating to inclusivity, and the relationship between audio-visual feedback delivery and feedback use are considered thereafter.

### 4.5.1 Barriers to student feedback engagement

When asked, tutors asserted that they knew little about what could constitute barriers to student feedback engagement. During discussion, however, they identified several potential barriers to feedback engagement including feedback literacy, transition into higher education, criticism resistance, and students' non-academic responsibilities.

In relation to student feedback literacy, Ruth felt that students suffered from what she termed "feedback blindness", not recognising feedback outside of one-to -one feedback meetings, despite what she described as a practice of deliberate institutional highlighting of feedback which accompanied management of the NSS process. In relation to student transition into higher education, all tutors felt that there was a need for early feedback literacy training and that students were used to higher levels of feedback in sixth form or college: "I watched my sister marking…she teaches English at a secondary school…there's a whole cycle, she gives feedback, they respond to that feedback, she looks at it again" (Sophie).

The tutors also felt that barriers to feedback engagement could be of a more affective nature, in particular in the form of criticism resistance. While acknowledging that responses to feedback were highly subjective and subject to many influences, they felt that a negative reaction to critical feedback could lead

to non-engagement or, at best, procrastination. Sarah felt that both cognitive and affective dimensions could affect feedback engagement, and asserted that if a student either did not understand her feedback and/or did not accept it, this could contribute to a lack of feedback engagement. Some tutors went further, asserting that there had been a recent shift away from what they termed "emotional resilience", with the result, they felt, that some students were now less able to accept critical feedback.

Finally, the tutor sample were alive to the non-academic demands on students' time and acknowledged its potential effects on feedback engagement. Sophie's comment is typical of the rest of the sample: "They're busy individuals…juggling a lot of things…they're working, they're looking at caring responsibilities, they're commuting… I think it's a complex picture" (Sophie).

### 4.5.2 Inclusivity, well-being, and student feedback engagement

During the generation of the data, it became clear that the use of audio-visual means to deliver feedback may have positive impacts in terms of inclusivity and well-being, in particular in relation to stress and mental health, and for those for whom English is a second or additional language.

In relation to the receipt of feedback and possible stress responses, it was no surprise that some students mentioned how stressful they found the process of receiving and engaging with feedback:" I have not referred back to last year's feedback once…the comments sometimes stress me out and I don't feel encouraged when reading them back" (Habibah). It has already been noted that the tutors expressed difficulty in anticipating the affective needs of individual students due to increased student numbers and anonymous submission. Sophie and Lisa asserted that it was simply not possible to anticipate students' feedback responses, since they both felt that, in the main, they did not know students well enough to be able to gauge their affective needs.

However, beyond what might be termed reasonably foreseeable stress responses to feedback, lay issues of mental health and well-being. One student in her reflective journal disclosed specific issues around anxiety and feedback: "Normally it's difficult to envision what the feedback wants from you…Often this sets off my anxiety as I'm left unsure of where improvement is needed" (Jenny).

Jenny disclosed in her journal that she suffered from bi-polar disorder and often did not access written feedback at all since, in her experience, it often triggered anxiety associated with her mental health condition, which was otherwise well controlled. Ethical advice was sought, and an approach was made to the student via her personal tutor, and she agreed to be interviewed.

In interview, Jenny talked openly about her experiences with written feedback, which she felt often lacked detail and feedforward, and led her to feel anxious as she was often unsure how to improve. She felt that the main advantages of audio-visual feedback for her lay in increased feedforward, more example-giving, and the video aspects of the technology, as she felt that these enabled her to better understand how to improve. She also talked about the relational aspect of audio-visual feedback and used the term *reassuring* a number of times during interview. She felt that her audio-visual feedback had been critical, but that it had been easier for her to listen to it: "listening to it makes it a lot more personal…it feels a lot less like failing." When asked whether hearing criticism rather than reading it might ever be more difficult for her, she felt that if she had been mentally unwell on a particular day, that might be the case. She suggested that feedback could be a particular challenge for students with mental health conditions, and both its content and mode of delivery could involve unique difficulties which could threaten engagement. Jenny's views suggest that using audio-visual means for feedback may involve issues of socio-affective as well as pedagogic importance for students facing mental health challenges.

As well as mental health concerns, the students in the sample also felt that audio-visual feedback had the potential to discriminate against those students for whom English is an additional language. Concerns were raised around the difficulties of checking the meaning of words which were heard rather than seen, and that if a more conversational style of delivery were used in audio format this might include more difficult use of idiom or nuanced language. This limitation appeared to be tempered, however, by the relational affordances which were particularly welcomed by these students.

The data suggest that feedback barriers and inclusivity challenges have the potential to impact on students' engagement with feedback. Since engagement

with feedback is of prime significance when considering the effectiveness of feedback practice, further tutor and student views were sought specifically in relation to how audio-visual delivery might impact later feedback engagement.

### 4.5.3 Audio-visual delivery and student feedback engagement

As already noted, feedback only fulfils its full pedagogic potential when a student engages with it, in the sense of understanding it from a cognitive perspective, accepts it from an affective perspective, and then uses it to improve current or future work. While generating the data, it became clear that the tutors felt that students did not use their feedback as often as they felt they should, but the tutors were unclear how they could increase levels of feedback use. While the research questions did not seek to examine the impacts on student performance of screencasting feedback, there were data around how the students *felt* that screencast feedback might impact not only their feedback experience, but also their engagement with and future use of their feedback. The potential practical, pedagogic, and socio-affective impacts of audio-visual delivery on feedback use are considered below.

One *practical* issue which was thought to have potential positive impact on subsequent feedback use related to its flexibility. As has been noted, some students reported that they were more likely to access audio-visual feedback in the first place, and to listen to it more frequently since they felt it was more accessible. Whether this increased access would lead to an increased use of that feedback however, remained an open question.

In relation to the *pedagogic* aspects of giving feedback via audio-visual means, the perceived increase in overall quantity of feedback and feedforward, together with increased elaboration were reported by some students as aiding understanding and recall. Significantly, they also felt that this made it more likely that they knew how to use the feedback advice in the future, and student Jenny felt that this had particular significance for those students with a mental health condition. The students were also clear that the video tools showing where a tutor was situated in their work made it easier for them to enact subsequent improvements. Tutor Sarah wondered whether the act of watching and listening to the audio-visual feedback, perhaps multiple times, might lead to more use of

the feedback, but there was no discussion around whether repeat accessing of feedback would be influenced more by the feedback medium or other influences, such as the pedagogic disposition of the student. Personalisation of feedback was strongly associated by both tutors and students with increased feedback use. Tutor Sophie felt keenly that being able to give more personalised feedback would lead to greater use, and it has been noted that this found strong echoes within the student sample. She also hoped that a student, having listened to feedback, rather than having read it, might feel more willing to approach her tutor to seek further advice.

In terms of the pedagogic *limitations* of the audio-visual medium, students felt that written feedback was quicker to work with and therefore was more likely to be re-visited and, it might be argued, used. Also, navigability was seen by them as a major limitation of the screencast medium, to the extent that they agreed that this would lead them to re-visit audio-visual feedback less often than written feedback, raising the question whether this might negatively impact future feedback use. It has been noted that some of the students felt that audio-visual feedback produced language difficulties for those for who spoke English as an additional language, although there was no direct data on whether this might impact on feedback use. Tutors showed concern that audio-visual feedback was more difficult not only for them to structure, but also might make it more difficult for students to share with each other for discussion. These again may have potential for negative impacts on feedback use.

In *relational* terms, both tutors and students reported enhanced perceptions of presence and connection. The data was most pronounced and significant, however, in relation to enhanced feelings of connection between tutor and student, with students asserting that barrier reduction and increased feelings of being understood and cared for would positively affect subsequent feedback use. Tutors also hoped that encouraging language and tone, together with the pastoral dimension of audio-visual delivery, could positively affect feedback use. Even Lisa, as perhaps the least enthusiastic disciple of screencasting, felt that her more positive language made it more likely that a student would listen again to what she had to say.

In *affective* terms, some students were very clear that as well as the cognitive, the affective had a significant part to play in their use of feedback. Naman, for example, explained that "[m]y feelings towards the feedback are very important and are a big factor if I were to use the feedback in the future" (Naman). Students reported mainly negative feelings associated with past written feedback, principally feelings of hurt, anger or shame, with little mention of positive emotions. When attempting to describe which affective responses they experienced on receipt of their audio-visual feedback, there was a high level of agreement with students prioritising *reflective*, *encouraged*, and *supported*, together with *bored*. In their focus groups, they were then asked to consider which emotions might make it 'more likely' or 'less likely' that they would *act* on their feedback. Once again there was a high level of agreement between students who concluded that first, feeling *reflective* would increase their chances of using the feedback, as they felt that they would be actively engaged in thinking about and reflecting upon the work. They also felt that feeling *encouraged* and *supported* would increase the likelihood of feedback use. For example, "when someone tells you something…[in] an audio recording, there are these emotions connected to the actual feedback which…encourages one to do something about it" (Howard). The only emotion which was chosen by the students as associated with being 'less likely' to act on feedback was the feeling of being *bored* with the audio-visual feedback. It has already been seen that this was strongly associated with file length and, in a limited number of cases, with poor recording quality. The students were divided on the question of whether hearing as opposed to reading criticism would negatively impact on their feedback engagement.

Returning to the musical metaphor introduced in Chapter Three, I argue that both the *resonance* of feedback, that is, the extent to which a student understands and accepts her feedback, and its *reverberation*, or the extent to which it has a sustaining effect via student engagement with it, may be affected by its mode of delivery as well as by its content. In the next chapter I discuss the findings in relation to both research questions to place them within relevant literature. I also demonstrate where the findings support, complement, challenge, or amend existing knowledge, as well as where the data make a contribution to knowledge or provide some new insight.

# Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings

## Discussion Part 1: Tutors' feedback values, roles, and experiences

It will be remembered that in her important work Tuck (2012) interviewed her tutors about their feedback-giving roles and practice and clustered her data from them first, as teachers; second, as workers; and third, as markers or assessors. In the present study, feedback purposes and values were discussed individually with the tutors in interview and later explored together in a focus group. Their feedback practice experiences in the changing contexts of higher education were discussed solely in the focus group. Consideration of the data from the study will build on Tuck's approach and be re-framed around the '3 Ps' of 'person', 'process' and 'product' using the feedback foci of: *person-centred; process-driven;* and *product-centric.* I would argue that this approach allows not only for a fuller consideration of the feedback context, but also for a fuller foregrounding of the tutors' espoused feedback values, roles, and experiences.

### 5.1 Person-centred: tutors' feedback values, roles, and professional practice tensions

Research into both sides of the feedback relationship is important to understand the needs of those who give and those who receive feedback. However, it has already been noted that there is less research into tutors' feedback experiences than students' (Evans 2013; Pereira et al 2016). The data from the current study show that tutors' feedback values and the contexts within which they practise can impact their feedback approaches and experiences. While much could be said about tutors' role identities, for example, whether they view themselves as teachers, researchers, professionals, or managers (all contested terms), the focus here is less on identity, and more on tutors' espoused views of their values, roles, and experiences in the social practice of their feedback-giving.

The finding that professional feedback tensions can exist due to a clash between feedback values and higher student numbers aligns with much extant literature. However, in terms of tutors' feedback *values*, the data show that there was limited variance in the tutors' views around the purposes of feedback. This runs contrary to some literature which suggests that a wide variance in tutor view is to be expected (e.g., Bailey and Garner 2010). Most of the tutors in the present

study prioritised developmental, student-centred feedback purpose, with only slight variation of view around other feedback purposes, such as mark justification. This majority preference for more student-centred approaches to practice, here feedback practice, finds echoes in the work of Rogers (1994). It must be acknowledged, however, that the sample from which the data comes is small and relatively homogenous, and that the relevant data may represent the tutors' espoused, rather than actual, views and practice (Argyris and Schon 1974).

The crucial work of Tuck (2012) provided the starting point for discussion with the tutors in the sample around how they viewed their feedback-giving values, roles, and experiences. Tuck's view that the feedback roles of teacher, worker and marker can produce professional dissonance for tutors was strongly borne out by the data. When acting or attempting to act as *teachers,* Tuck's description of tutors experiencing "disengagement and weariness" (2012:217) found resonance in the data, but this was thought by the tutors in the study to be caused mostly by increased student numbers, rather than the internal institutional quality assurance constraints identified by Tuck's participants, and is more reminiscent of Nicol when he asserts that "most teachers feel overwhelmed by the workload associated with providing…feedback when numbers are large" (2010:511). This concern around student numbers arose again when the tutors were asked to discuss acting as feedback *workers.* It has been seen that there is strong data in the study (which will be considered in more detail below) that the tutors were beginning to view their feedback more as work than as teaching. As Tuck notes, analysis of feedback-giving as work has been "relatively absent from previous studies" (2012:215), but the data here support her view that feedback practice is in danger of becoming a work-dominated aspect of academic practice.

Finally, when considering their roles as feedback *markers,* the tutors in the study made relatively little reference to this part of their feedback role. In terms of audience, the data support the findings in Tuck's study that, when marking, tutors engage in "complex addressivity" (2012:214) and are aware of their wider feedback audiences. However, the only concerns arising in the study from the marking aspect of feedback-giving related to marketisation and student complaint, which are considered further below. This is in sharp contrast to the

participants in Tuck's study, for whom internal institutional feedback rules loomed large and were thought to have a large effect on their feedback practice as markers.

In relation to all three roles of teacher/worker/marker there is evidence in the data of conflict and concern, and Tuck's crucial conclusion that tutors struggle with conflicting feedback roles "to build fruitful pedagogic relationships" (2012:218) finds support. The evidence of professional, and in some cases vocational tension, supports the view of Isomottonen (2018) that tutors may find themselves: "'squeezed between' two stakeholders: students and administration" (2018:2).

Carless' (2015) assertion that professional feedback tensions are largely tacit was borne out by the data where the tutors in the study stated that they had not previously reflected on the changes in their feedback practice, but welcomed the opportunity to do so. While feedback values and roles may produce professional tension for tutors, the extent to which these values and roles come into conflict with the feedback context within which the tutors operate is signalled above and considered in more detail below. It was no surprise to hear tutors expressing concerns over their workloads. However, for these professional tensions to be expressed in vocational terms is perhaps more concerning and aligns with the recent work of Winstone and Carless (2021). The tutors' comments around feeling unable to produce the feedback they would wish, and lamenting a system perceived as lost, support the work of Bailey and Garner (2010) where they suggest that tutors experience conflicts between their perceptions of feedback purpose, their pedagogical intentions, and the requirements of the system within which they operate.

## 5.2 Process-driven: feedback workloads, work lenses and workspaces

The data supported the view of Tee and Ahmed (2014) that "teachers view [feedback] as an enormous drain on their time" (2014:3). The tensions referred to by the tutors in the sample seemed to flow principally from trying to maintain their feedback practice against a landscape of growing student numbers. This chimes with the work of Sutton (2017) and Kenny (2017) who assert that sector changes have led to increased workloads and increased stress for academic

tutors. The tensions described by the tutors also align with the recent work of Jones et al (2021), who describe assessment and feedback workloads as a threat to tutors' wellbeing. As well as concerns about feedback workloads generally, there was also evidence of two emerging shifts in feedback practice on the part of the tutors: first, as already noted, that they were increasingly viewing their feedback practice less as teaching and more through the lens of work, supporting Tuck (2012); and second, that they were beginning to experience practical issues around feedback workspace caused, as they saw it, by increased student numbers, as well as by the increasing use of newer technologies to deliver feedback. This concern around feedback workspace represents an emerging issue.

These tensions around work practices find interesting echoes, at a more theoretical level, in the work of both McNaughton and Billot (2016) who note tensions between tutors' 'being' values and 'doing' roles, and of Riivari et al (2018), who discuss the concept of meaningful work as a relational activity through the lenses of 'having,' 'loving' and 'being'. In the feedback context, there was evidence from the tutors in the study that they experienced what some term "obstructed values" (Wilson and Strevens 2018:344). This suggests a vocational concern arising from perceived threats to the practice dimension of 'having,' representing material work conditions in the forms of increased workload and changing workspace, together with threats to the 'loving' practice dimension representing, inter alia, opportunities for dialogue. For some of the tutors, these threats represented a challenge to their 'being,' in Riivari et al's (2018) sense of self-fulfilment, or ability to influence their own professional practice.

## 5.3 Product-centric: feedback commodification and tutor de-professionalisation

Since the introduction of tuition fees there has been an understandable concern around academic standards and the possible effects of a consumer mentality on learning and teaching. Collini's view that "the model of the student as consumer is inimical to the purposes of education" (2011:3) has at its heart a concern around student ends-focussed expectations. There was evidence within the data that the tutors felt that commercial adages such as 'value for money' and 'the customer is always right' could not, and should not, translate to the complex and

often unpredictable landscape of learning and personal development, where criticism and perseverance, for example, may be what is needed, but not wanted. This chimes with the work of McArdle-Clinton (2008) who asserts that students do not simply 'purchase' degrees as they might regular products, but are required to meet certain levels of attainment, and so are not 'customers' in the traditional sense.

It has been seen that there was strong evidence of concern among the tutor sample that some students were engaging in consumerist approaches to learning in general, and to feedback in particular. This supports the work of Cheng who suggests that marketisation of higher education risks not only the emancipatory power of higher education, but also what he terms "the people-building purpose of higher education" (2017:3). This re-focusing to product rather than process becomes, in the context of assessment feedback, an issue of commodification. Nixon et al (2018) take the discussion around commodification a stage further and, while welcoming accountability structures which improve institutional responsiveness and the quality of educational offering, note that there remains little empirical evidence on the impact of the changes wrought by marketisation. They do, however, suggest that a novel shift is occurring where the student in a marketized context operates, not just as a passive consumer of education, but rather as an active *customer*. This, they suggest lies at the root of a new and disturbing pattern of student complaint.

It has already been noted that the data from the study suggest strong tutor concern around student challenge and complaint, and, in some cases, evidence changed academic behaviour to accommodate what some saw as a more litigious climate. This echoes, at the theoretical level, the concerns of Molesworth et al (2011) and Ecclestone and Hayes (2019), as well as the recent empirical work of Winstone and Carless (2021) who found strong evidence of complaint concern among their tutor sample. Winstone and Carless (2021) also suggest a creeping re-conceptualisation of the concept of 'double duty' of feedback (hitherto taken to refer to the feedback double duties of student assessment and development), towards double duties of student *satisfaction* and development. This shift was evidenced by the tutors in the current study where they reported changing to more defensive feedback practices. The dissonances identified by Winstone and

Carless (2021) present challenges not only for tutor well-being, but may also encourage transmission-focused, as opposed to dialogic, feedback practice.

A shift in power from provider to consumer has the potential to create reduced responsibility for learning and can encourage passive, instrumental learning attitudes, less responsibility-sharing and higher feelings of entitlement (Bunce et al 2017; Nash and Winstone 2017). Some of the tutors in the study reported students displaying what they saw as feelings of entitlement, and it would have been interesting to pursue this further to see if the tutors recognised any of the more nuanced student consumer approaches described by Tomlinson (2017). In any event, a shift towards students seeing themselves as customers rather than scholars was clearly a matter of concern to the tutors in the study, and they expressed unease around a de-professionalisation of their practice due to a perceived commodification of their assessment feedback. Their concerns around consumerist student approaches to learning in general and feedback in particular aligns with the work of both of Cheng (2017) and Nixon et al (2018). The tutors' perceptions of rising levels of student feedback complaint support the work of Nixon et al (2018) once again, with personal reputational risk cited as a particular professional concern for them.

## 5.4 External accountability structures and positive feedback effect

Universities' concern for students' feedback experience has become central to the task of improving the student experience as a whole (Price et al 2010). However, the accountability structures built to achieve, or at least measure this experience can come into conflict with building students' engagement with feedback. While the tutors in the study expressed concern around feedback workload and feedback commodification, their feelings around external accountability structures in the forms of the NSS and the TEF were largely positive. It has been seen that that the tutors viewed both the NSS and the TEF as having only positive potentialities for assessment feedback practice, with no real concern expressed for potential negative effect on feedback practice. This was out of step with the tenor of much of the literature around the NSS and TEF and its potential negative impact on academic practice generally. This was surprising since as Medland (2014) notes, since its introduction in 2005, the NSS has become an important element in quality assurance processes, but has also become part of

what she terms "entrenched…notions of measurement within quality assurance frameworks" (2014:12). Such measurement of learning, she asserts, runs counter to notions of learning as a developmental process. The data also stand starkly in contrast to the work of Furedi (2012). His view that the NSS is having a "corrosive impact on the internal life of academia" (2012:5) was not reflected by the tutors in the study, although it must be acknowledged that the tutors' discussion around the NSS was brief, and other views may have emerged had time allowed.

The ranking for assessment and feedback is often lower than other areas of the NSS (Blair et al 2013), and this was the case for the LLB law degree programme which forms the site of the study. Here the NSS scores for assessment and feedback in the year 2018/19 (the academic year in which the data were generated) were noticeably below the scores for the other NSS sections for the programme, and represented the highest fall in scores across the NSS sections for the programme from the previous year. Assessment and feedback had already been on the programme's action plan for improvement for several years, and it is therefore interesting that the tutors' views around NSS and its potential effects on feedback practice remained positive.

In relation to the TEF, once again the tutor hopes for impact on feedback practice were overwhelmingly positive. It should be noted, however, that, at the relevant time, three out of four of the tutors had had no direct experience of preparation for TEF submission, with only one, Sophie, being actively involved. Once again, only limited time was devoted to discussion around TEF. That said, the tenor of the comments about TEF was framed in optimistic tones around the opportunities offered for personalisation of learning and feedback, and for delivering feedback in new ways.

To conclude, it may be helpful to be reminded of the warrant identified in Chapter Two that tutors' feedback practices and experiences represent an under-researched area. The proposition that there is professional dissonance resulting from fractured feedback relationships and practices linked to massification and marketisation is strongly borne out by the data in the forms of feedback value tension, as well as a perception of feedback de-professionalisation.

## Discussion Part 2: Feedback forms and engaging with audio-visual feedback

The discussion above suggests that evidence exists of a potential for interpersonal dislocation in feedback practice. The question posed as a consequence was: can the use of audio-visual technology contribute positively to the practical, pedagogic and socio-affective dimensions of feedback practice, and does it bring with it any relevant limitations? While acknowledging the 'halo effect' of using a novel technology (Lunt and Curran 2010), the literature concludes in the main that audio-visual feedback is welcomed by students (Sopina and McNeill 2015), and that they report generally higher levels of satisfaction with it when compared to written feedback (Voelkel and Mello 2014). At a general level, this was borne out by the student sample. While tutors' views on audio-visual feedback are currently under-researched (Kettle 2007), many studies do show that tutors similarly tend to support its use (Mahoney et al 2019), and the tutor sample largely aligned with this view, some reporting renewed enthusiasm for feedback practice, echoing tutors in the study of Henderson and Phillips (2015).

Returning to the musical metaphor proposed earlier, the findings will be discussed in relation to tutors' and students' audio-visual feedback experiences, and how audio-visual feedback resonates or fails to resonate with them from practical, pedagogic and socio-affective perspectives. I will also discuss the extent to which it was felt that the audio-visual feedback reverberated and affected students' continuing engagement with their feedback. Existing literature will be considered to show how the findings align with, complement, challenge or amend existing knowledge, as well as identifying where the data make a contribution to knowledge.

### 5.5 Practical dimensions

The issue of whether the use of audio-visual feedback saves time for tutors remains hotly contested in the literature. While the tutors in the present study acknowledged technological challenges aligning with Cann (2014), and cumbersome uploads were seen as a limitation of the medium echoing the work

of Cunningham (2019a), three of the four tutors felt that they saved time when providing audio-visual compared to written feedback, and this aligns with the majority of studies (e.g. West and Turner 2016), while challenging the work of a minority (e.g. Borup et al 2015). The variations in tutor approach in making notes before recording and its reported effects on time saving were similar to the practices of the tutors in the study of Vincelette and Bostic (2013). These issues of how the tutors worked with the technology and the time taken to do so, raise fundamental questions about the nature of feedback given in this way. All the tutors reported giving more feedback and feedforward, but most of them still felt that they were saving time overall, but as can be seen from the findings in relation to the pedagogic aspects of the medium, there is evidence that not only does the quantity of feedback differ, but also its quality, requiring students and tutors to engage differently with it. The narrative in the literature around potential time-saving benefits of the medium therefore represents only part of the landscape, and gains appear to exist not only in terms of tutors' time, but also in the fundamental nature of the feedback itself.

As well as time, space appeared as an issue in the findings and suggested that accessing quiet workspaces to deliver audio-visual feedback can be a practical struggle for tutors. This aligns with the work of Vincelette and Bostic (2013) where tutors reported needing to "set aside space and time" (2013:168) to allow for the performance elements of the medium. The increased trend for shared office space within Midland University's Law School, together with greater space management pressures and fewer fallow quiet spaces, seem to have produced practical feedback challenges for the tutors. The performance demands of the medium appear to have produced novel issues in finding appropriate workspace not only in the office, but also at home, and these issues continued to be reported while the tutors worked at home during the lockdown periods of the pandemic.

In addition to issues around time and space, the accessiblity of audio-visual feedback was lauded by a number of students, and there was evidence that some students in the study found the technology "an engaging digital form" (Dunne and Rodway-Dyer 2009:175), and that using the technology to access their feedback found some synergy with their private lives, which some have

termed the 'Martini effect' (Quinn and Oldmeadow 2013). That student Megan reported accessing her audio-visual feedback on her mobile telephone while cooking her tea resonates with some of the student sample in the work of Vincelette and Bostic (2013). Carmichael et al term this "ubiquitous learning" (2018:8) and the findings are in stark contrast to the recent work of Kay and Bahula (2020) who criticize the accessibility and flexibility of screencast technology. In terms of possible reverberation and effect on student feedback use, audio-visual delivery can clearly offer opportunities for students to engage more with their feedback by offering increased flexibility (Carmichael et al 2018), with some suggesting that accessing feedback via devices such as mobile telephones which may normally be associated with the informal, personal and familiar, may reduce not only techno-anxiety on the part of the learner, but also reduce barriers to learning (Dixon 2017).

## 5.6 Pedagogic dimensions

With the caution in mind from the literature that feedback practice should be driven by pedagogy, rather than technology (Stodberg 2012), how do the pedagogic affordances and limitations of audio-visual feedback noted in the study fit with previous findings in the literature? The quantity of feedback, its quality and possible pedagogic consequence will be considered below.

All four tutors reported giving more feedback via audio-visual means when compared to their written feedback practice, supporting a number of studies (e.g., Thomas et al (2017). Three of the four tutors asserted that this increase was achieved without increased input of time supporting the work of Ice et al (2007). Twelve of the fourteen students reported receiving more feedback aligning with Dixon (2015) and others, but noted that the amount of feedback and file length were variable as in the study of Gould and Day (2013).

There was strong evidence that the amount of feedback was increased at no extra cost in terms of tutor time, and so offered affordances in terms of efficiency, but what about the *effectiveness* of the feedback in the audio-visual form? The students felt that written feedback was clearer to them, in the sense that it was generally more concise, aligning with the work of Borup et al (2015), while challenging other studies (e.g., Kay and Bahula 2020). It may be that the

students welcomed written feedback in fact as simpler, demanding less engagement of them, and the conciseness they describe may represent a desire for less or easier feedback. There was, however, strong data from them reporting better understanding when working with audio-visual feedback which they felt resulted from enhanced levels of feedforward, explanation, and example-giving. In relation to feedforward, this aligns with the work of several studies including Carruthers et al (2014), and some of the tutor sample agreed that this made the medium particularly suited to the giving of formative feedback (Gould and Day 2013), to the more discursive disciplines, or to the reflective type of assessment used in the study (Gleaves and Walker 2013).

The data also supported the view that audio-visual means provided not only more feedforward, but also more explanation (Cavanaugh and Song 2014), more elaboration (Lunt and Curran 2010), and more example-giving, supporting the majority of prior studies (e.g., Gould and Day 2013). Overall, there was relatively little reflection on the part of the students that the audio-visual feedback was asking them, perhaps forcing them, to work with their feedback in a different way, perhaps requiring deeper engagement. The exceptions to this were a recognition that it was taking them longer to engage with the feedback and, for one student only, that it was more cognitively demanding. These were seen by students as negative aspects of the medium and were described by some as leading to boredom. Despite this, most of the students strongly associated this different shape of feedback and feedforward with enhanced feedback use, resonating with the literature around sustainable feedback practice. The enhanced personalisation of feedback content reported by some students aligns with the work of Borup et al (2014) and, importantly, was again strongly associated by the students with higher levels of feedback engagement.

These pedagogic affordances may have several potentially significant consequences for learning, including increased engagement with feedback, enhanced understanding and retention, increased reflection and motivation for study, and increased opportunities for subsequent pedagogic dialogue. These will be considered briefly in turn.

In relation to students' engagement with feedback in the audio-visual form, several students reported watching and listening to their feedback repeatedly supporting the findings of a number of studies (e.g., Zimbardi et al 2017), while challenging the work of a minority, such as Macgregor et al (2011). Students in the present study also reported spending more time subsequently reviewing audio-visual feedback, aligning with the study of West and Turner (2016). Once again, this suggests that students were engaging with their feedback differently, perhaps over a different time period. Some students also asserted that they preferred screencasts to face to face feedback, since they felt that they gained benefits from rewinding, pausing, and re-viewing their screencast feedback, supporting the work of Harper et al (2018) where students welcomed their screencast feedback, reporting that it allowed them to work at their own pace.

Misunderstandings of feedback content can impact students' abilities to respond usefully to their feedback (Mahoney et al 2019). The students in the study, while feeling that written feedback was generally clearer in the sense of being more concise, asserted that this was counterbalanced by the enhanced feedforward, explanatory comment, and example-giving of their screencast feedback, which they felt helped them to better understand where they needed to improve. These students reported increased levels of understanding and asserted that this could positively affect their subsequent feedback use, echoing the work of several studies (e.g., Voelkel and Mello 2014). That some tutors reported a subsequent reduction in feedback clarification queries may lend weight to the assertion that there may be positive effects on feedback understanding, supporting the work of Cunningham (2019a). Again, there was relatively little consistent reflective comment from the students around the substantive differences between the written and audio-visual media and the relative pedagogic effects for them. There did, however, appear to be convincing evidence that they were working differently with their audio-visual feedback, and that they were describing some learning gains.

Some studies suggest that audio-visual feedback helps students not only to engage more with their feedback and understand it better, but also to retain and recall it better (e.g., Munro and Hollingworth 2014). In relation to the aural and visual elements of audio-visual feedback, there was evidence that some students

saw each modality strengthening the other, and aiding recall. Overall, however, the analysis showed that there was not a consistent view whether aural and visual feedback content would better assist retention and recall, and this division was apparent both between students, and between tutors. This division of opinion questions studies such as Munro and Hollingworth (2014), who assert that hearing feedback was more memorable for their student samples than just reading it. Also, at the theoretical level, the data questions the works of Mathisen (2012), Mayer (2014) and Mayhew (2017) around the cognitive theory of multimedia learning, as they assert that the dual coding of sight and sound assists retention. The data also question the more recent empirical work of Tyrer who asserts that "the relationship between the auditory, visual and textual elements in multi-modal screen feedback enriched the feedback process" (Tyrer 2021:1), and she concludes that it is the richness and complexity of the resulting feedback, which is important, describing this as "semiotic companionship" (Tyrer 2021:20). It was interesting to note that both the tutor and student sample showed themselves aware of the different ways in which students may learn, lending weight to the view that, despite those who assert that rigid interpretations of learning styles are inappropriate (e.g., Paschler et al 2009), students may nevertheless express preferences for learning material in a particular format.

Some students, in particular the international students in the sample, were very clear that audio-visual feedback, for them, led to higher levels of both reflection and motivation. In terms of reflection, this aligns with the work of Ice et al (2007) who assert that their students internalised and reflected on the content more fully than written feedback. In terms of motivation, significantly, several students felt that enhanced understanding led to higher levels of motivation, supporting the work of Anson et al (2016). They asserted that this could, in turn, have a positive effect on their feedback engagement.

There was also data from tutor Sophie that her audio-visual feedback had generated subsequent conversations with her students of both a pedagogic and pastoral nature. She wondered whether this could be due to enhanced psychological approachability and a reduction in social distance associated with the medium. If so, this would align with the views of both Brearley and Cullen

(2012) and Mahoney et al (2019) and may signal interesting shifts in the tutor-student relationship.

The above pedagogic affordances in relation to enhanced engagement, understanding, retention, reflection, and motivation may be tempered by the *limitations* of the audio-visual medium. The tutors articulated difficulties with structuring their feedback, echoing the work of Martinez-Arboleda (2018), and with achieving clarity of feedback message. The students voiced concern around language accommodation. Navigation and reviewability were noted by both tutors and students as posing challenges in the audio-visual form, with most students in the study preferring written feedback in this regard, which they felt was easier and quicker for them to navigate. This aligns with many of the studies in the area (e.g., Pitt and Norton 2017). However, this may raise issues around specious engagement with written feedback, and it can be argued that the multi-modal nature of audio-visual feedback can require deeper engagement due to the cognitive demands it may place on students to navigate it, both initially and when returning to it later. That students have to work differently with audio-visual feedback, in that they are not able, for example, to 'skim listen' to their feedback, and that this may foster deeper engagement, are themes in the work of Orlando (2016), and the tutors' view that this different type of feedback engagement could be pedagogically advantageous supports the work of Cann (2014).

Some students in the study agreed that they worked differently with their audio-visual feedback supporting the work of Orsmond and Merry (2008), and that this involved additional engagement from them. This aligns, at least in part, with the work of Dixon (2017) who suggests that while initial playback may involve superficial cognitive effort, subsequent use requires concentration and reflection. This challenges the view of some, including Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012), who consider that students process audio information more easily. Students in the present study, however, did not welcome spending more time and cognitive effort engaging with their feedback, and intimated that the additional effort required in this regard could negatively affect their feedback engagement. One student went further, suggesting that audio-visual feedback could lead to

cognitive overload, supporting on this point Kay and Bahula (2020), and Denton (2014) who asserts that this represents a potential danger to learning.

## 5.7 Relational dimensions

Mahoney et al (2019) assert that the principal potential of audio-visual feedback lies in its relational possibilities, which may serve to strengthen tutor-student relationships. This relational aspect of the practice will be discussed from the points of view of tutor tone and language; perceptions of conversation or dialogue; and perceptions of presence, connection, and care.

Students in the study suggested that their tutors' tone of voice and the language they used could produce feelings of enhanced encouragement and motivation, and they felt that this could have positive effects on the alleviation of stress, supporting the work of Dixon (2017), as well as on their feedback engagement. The data also suggested that tone and language were of particular importance to the international students in the study, as well as to student Jenny when she describes how she navigates feedback in the context of her mental health. However, the tutors' acknowledgement of the danger of possible accompanying tonal 'leakage' supports the work of Moore and Filling (2012), who for this reason counsel caution in the use of the medium.

Perceptions of conversation and dialogue on the part of students when engaging with audio-visual feedback are noted in some of the literature (e.g., Grigoryan 2017), however, this found resonance with only a small number of students who reported perceptions of conversation or dialogue with their tutor. For example, while seeming to be aware of the limitations of the medium in terms of asynchronicity, student Megan reported feeling that she could argue with her tutor through the screen while listening to her feedback, which Dixon terms a "perception of propinquity" (2017:125), a proximity, but also an illusion of audience which involves what Laurillard (2002) terms a "vicarious experience of discussion" (2002:98). Overall, however, there were relatively little data relating to perceptions of conversation or dialogue, but stronger data in relation to perceptions of presence, connection and caring.

In terms of perceptions of presence, some students reported feeling that their audio-visual feedback was akin to 'meeting' with their tutor. This aligns with the works of Grigoryan (2017) and Kay and Bahula (2020) who assert that audio-visual feedback has the potential to produce perceptions of social presence. Tutor Sophie also reported enhanced feelings of 'audience', echoing Lehman's (2006) work on the potential of the medium to produce an illusion of transparency or non-mediation. This 'presence' can make screencast feedback a "more human space through the greater use of voice" (Middleton 2009:144), and tutor Sophie often used this type of language to explain her views on the relational affordances of the medium. Significantly, there were strong data from both tutors and students that perceptions of presence led on to perceptions of connection between tutor and student. In the study of Borup et al (2014), a student participant describes tutors as normally being "behind a wall" (2014:243), and students in the present study echoed this language, talking of walls and barriers being removed by the audio-visual medium.

These perceptions of presence and connection were taken further by some of the students who described enhanced feelings of care on the part of their tutors. For some, this took the form of caring more about their work and academic progress supporting the study of Knauf (2015), while for others the caring was more about their welfare, with some students asserting strongly that they felt more supported by their tutors, echoing Dixon's 2015 study. For Carless (2013b), the significance of these perceptions of care lies in the building of communication trust, and Dixon (2017) asserts that this can also lead to a "reciprocation of care" (2017:124) on the part of the students towards their tutors, acknowledging what they see as extra tutor feedback effort. The additional significance of these perceptions of connection and care may also lie in their potential to positively affect later feedback engagement, and this seemed to be particularly the case for the international students who reported feelings of enhanced encouragement and motivation.

This personal dimension of the feedback process was welcomed by all bar one of the students, and this reflects the majority of studies (e.g., Gould and Day 2013). The exceptional response of student Marea illustrates that some can find the audio-visual medium *too* personal (Fell 2009) or intrusive (Gleaves and

Walker 2013). Indeed, Henderson and Phillips (2015) assert that the relational aspect of the medium can translate into anxiety on the part of some students. The remaining students, however, challenged this view, and student Jenny in particular asserted that audio-visual feedback could help relieve her anxiety, with the caveat that her response could be dictated by her mental health on a particular day.

Perceptions of presence, connection and care have led some to laud the audio-visual medium for its rapport-building or pastoral potentialities (e.g., Dixon 2015). This was borne out by tutor Sophie's data in particular when she reported an increased number of students to whom she had given audio-visual feedback later seeking her out for pastoral advice, and Knauf (2015) asserts that audio-visual feedback can contribute to the development of an inclusive university. That the international students in the study felt less anxiety in relation to their audio-visual feedback builds on the work of Olave-Encina et al (2021), who suggest that such students' relationship with assessment feedback is largely negative, and that building trust and connection with tutors is crucial. Also, student Jenny's feedback experience suggests that there may be similar affordances for students facing mental health challenges, developing the work of Jones et al (2021) who examine assessment and well-being and assert that feedback is becoming a pastoral as well as pedagogic practice. The findings develop their work by examining the pastoral potentials of the audio-visual feedback medium for student well-being.

The relational affordances of audio-visual feedback noted seem to run counter to the assertions of those such as Selwyn (2014) who, rightly challenging the view that all educational technology must be embraced, argues that learning technologies can be synthetic and de-humanising. While learning technology can certainly be argued to have the potential to de-humanise learning, the data in the study suggests another view: that audio-visual feedback technology can instead be used as a *response* to these concerns.

## 5.8 Affective dimensions

Acknowledging that the relational and affective dimensions of feedback often overlap, Molloy et al (2013) assert that "feedback is an inherently emotional

business [that] can have a lasting impact beyond its intent" (2013:51). Many of the student participants talked about how they responded to feedback (both generally and in relation to the feedback in the study) at both cognitive and affective levels, asserting that their emotional response could eclipse their rational response, at least in the short-term, aligning with the work of Dowden et al (2013). The tutors showed themselves alive to the affective dimensions of their feedback practice and acknowledged the vulnerabilities associated with their judgements. This challenges the work of those such as Mortiboys (2002) who asserts that the affective dimension in higher education is tacit, where emotions are "generally overlooked" (2002:7). Despite their affective awareness, the tutors felt that they were, however, not well placed to anticipate students' affective reactions to feedback, supporting the work of Rowe et al (2014), and the students acknowledged that their affective reactions to feedback could be variable. They noted in particular that their reaction could depend not only on the valence of the feedback, but also on its activation potential supporting the control value theory of Pekrun (2006) citing, for example, 'challenging' feedback, which, they felt might be seen as negative in valence, but positive in activation potential. Significantly, they felt that the *medium* of feedback delivery could affect how they viewed both its valence and activation potential, lending weight to the work of Winstone and Carless (2020).

The students associated largely positive emotions with their audio-visual feedback, principally feelings of encouragement and being supported which some asserted led to increased feelings of motivation. This lends strength to the work of Winstone et al (2017b) who assert that feedback is not only something which students understand and do, but is something which they also *feel*. The data from the students around the effect their emotions could have on their feedback engagement also aligns with the work of Shafi et al (2018), who argue that emotional response can be used to positively affect engagement with feedback, moving students towards what Winstone et al term "pro-active feedback recipience" (2017b:2041). This finds support in the student data where students suggested that feeling encouraged and supported would positively impact both their motivation and feedback engagement, and Gould and Day (2013) cite encouragement as crucial for academic flourishing.

These student reports support some of the tutors' views that they felt they were commenting more on the positive aspects of students' work and using more encouraging language (Lamey 2015). This also aligns with Midland University's Marking, Moderation and Feedback Policy, Principle 9: "[F]eedback…should be presented in a positive, supportive way." The student reports of associating largely positive feelings with audio-visual feedback challenge the recent work of Kay and Bahula (2020) who assert that evocation of negative emotions is a danger of the audio-visual medium. The only associated negative feeling reported by students was boredom, which they associated with file length and felt could negatively impact their feedback use. This suggests that there may be lessons to be learned in relation to thresholds for feedback file length. In relation to the international students in particular who reported feelings of support and encouragement from their screencast feedback, the study extends the work of Ryan and Henderson (2017) who found that international students experienced a largely negative relationship with written feedback, often reporting feeling discouraged. It also extends the work of Olave-Encina et al (2021) whose study suggests that international students' responses to feedback are often strongly influenced by their affective reaction.

There was strong evidence from the students that they often experienced negative feelings on receipt of written feedback, and this echoes the recent work of Jones et al (2021) concerning the significance of emotional reaction on feedback receipt, as well as that of Pitt and Norton (2017) around their concept of feedback "emotional backwash" (2017:1). Some of the tutors viewed these reactions as a lack of emotional resilience on the part of students, but the receipt of critique was an important area for the student participants in emotional terms, and the strength of student feeling associated with feedback criticism lends weight to the concept of "felt disrespect" (Taggart and Laughlin 2017:1). Both students and tutors remained divided in relation to whether they would prefer reading or hearing critical feedback, some asserting, however, that audio-visual feedback could 'soften the edges' of critical messages, the only caveat being that severe critique might be, for some, more difficult to accept aurally. This softening of the edges of critique supports the recent work of Tyrer (2021) for whom "spontaneous feel" (Tyrer 2021:13) of both tone and language were important in facilitating acceptance of critique. On a broader stage, the findings serve to

affirm the work of both Carless (2013b) who positions the building of feedback trust as crucial to feedback engagement, and of Fong et al (2019), who propose that the medium of feedback delivery is crucial to its acceptance and use. Taken together at the affective level, the data supports the assertion of Borup et al (2012) that audio-visual feedback technologies can lead to feelings of not just connection, but emotional connection too.

To conclude, while the subjective experience of receiving feedback is important, feedback should also *resonate* with students in such a way as to facilitate acceptance, and promote action thus achieving *reverberation*, reminding us of the historical conceptualisation of feedback as cyclical. This lies at the heart of the sustainable feedback agenda noted in Chapter Two. That feedback should be sustainable in the sense of having lasting reverberations on student learning is not only affected by the content of feedback, but also by its means of delivery. While it is fair to say that the data from the study around the *effect* of audio-visual feedback on students' subsequent feedback engagement was more limited than that around their subjective experiences with the medium, it is clear that parts of the data suggest that audio-visual feedback may help students to engage more fruitfully with their feedback over the longer-term.

# Chapter Six: Contributions, Impacts and Conclusions

This chapter draws together the contributions which the study makes to existing knowledge, both theoretical and practical, and considers the practice impacts already made. The chapter concludes by noting the limitations of the study, identifying some possible areas for future research, and offering some concluding remarks.

## 6.1 Original contributions to knowledge

### 6.1.1 Tutors' feedback practice

The study took place at a particular point in time, when on-going reform of the higher education sector continues to exert pressure in various forms upon universities, their staff and their students. The first research question sought to interrogate how academic tutors interpret and reflect on their assessment feedback practice values, roles, and experiences generally and in the changing contexts of higher education. Three main contributions to knowledge are made by the study in this regard: firstly, the study extends the work of Tuck (2012), which remained a core influence throughout, since the tutors in the present study stated that their shift to viewing feedback via a work rather than a teaching lens was precipitated by increased student numbers, and less by the managerial demand noted by Tuck's tutors. The research also builds on Tuck's work where the tutors, when considering their feedback marker role, voiced fewer concerns than Tuck's sample around managerial constraint, instead expressing strong concerns about student feedback complaint and what they saw as associated personal reputational risk.

Secondly, while the work of Riivari et al (2018) is not central to the findings of the study, but rather of interest in the analysis of the contextual feedback landscape, the application of their concepts of 'loving', 'having', and 'being' to Tuck's 3 feedback roles of 'teacher', 'marker' and 'worker' is original, and the data suggest that tutor feedback practice tensions as 'worker' and 'marker' have the potential to threaten tutors' abilities to be 'loving' or relational in their feedback, and to achieve their 'being' or professional self-fulfilment. Thirdly, the re-framing of Tuck's work into the '3 Ps' of person, process and product is an original, contextual re-conceptualisation of her work. The identification of a

practice tension around feedback workspace also represents an emerging area. In general, the shifting context provides further originality and significance, while adding to the general dearth of research on tutors' feedback practice.

### 6.1.2 Audio-visual feedback practice

A second, key question for the study was how academic tutors and students viewed the practical, pedagogic and socio-affective dimensions of giving and receiving formative assessment feedback via audio-visual screencast technology. The research examined whether the use of audio-visual feedback technology had any potential to address the professional feedback tensions described by the tutors in the study, and whether it showed any promise or limitation as an alternative model for one-to-one feedback meetings or written feedback. Overall, in relation to this second research question the study aligns with much existing research regarding audio-visual feedback practice, with some peripheral challenge.

Many of the findings *align* with existing literature particularly in relation to its pedagogic and relational aspects. Principally, the study supports prior work in relation to the advantages of flexibility, tutor time saving, enhanced levels of feedforward and other explanatory comment, increased perceptions of social presence, connection and caring, and reported increased student understanding and motivation. The findings also support the proposition that feedback generally can produce negative emotional 'backwash,' and aligns with existing work in relation to the limitations of navigability and reviewability of the audio-visual medium.

The findings *challenge* prior work which suggests that negative emotions or anxiety are often associated with the receipt of audio-visual feedback; and that tutors in higher education are not aware of the emotional dimensions of their feedback practice. The findings also partially challenge prior work which asserts that multi-media feedback assists student recall and retention.

The study has produced *original* data and makes a contribution to knowledge in two principal areas: first, that the relational affordances of audio-visual feedback were of particular importance to two groups of students in the study: the

international students; and a student experiencing mental health challenges. In both cases, the data suggested positive impacts on these students' feedback engagement. In relation to the international students, the study extends the work of Ryan and Henderson (2017) who found that international students experienced a predominantly negative relationship with their (written) feedback, reporting feeling discouraged by their feedback. It also extends the work of Olave-Encina et al (2021) who conclude that emotions can play a particularly significant role in mediating international students' responses to their feedback. The current study builds on both these works by placing them first into a U.K. context (both studies originate in Australia), but also into the more particular context of the relational and affective dimensions of audio-visual feedback. That audio-visual feedback may also offer socio-affective affordances for students with mental health issues builds on the work of Jones et al (2021).

Second, the research makes a contribution to knowledge as the data suggest that audio-visual feedback has potential in stimulating subsequent tutor-student dialogue of a pastoral as well as a pedagogic nature. This extends the work of Dixon (2015) from audio only into audio-visual feedback. The study also builds on his work by identifying that the audio-visual medium may have pastoral potentials in encouraging subsequent dialogic opportunities. This may be of significance in terms of building both pastoral care and inclusivity.

The study can, however, make no claims around the student performance impacts of audio-visual feedback, and this is the case for much of the research in the area. The students in the study did, however, make strong claims (albeit of a self-reported nature) that they engaged more with their feedback in the audio-visual form, and that they were more likely to subsequently use that feedback. It would have been interesting to have explored whether the students felt that the relational dimensions of the medium could impact on the trust they felt they had in their tutor, and on their own ability to accept critique from her.

Many express optimism around the interface of learning and technology and laud its potentials for enhancing learning. There persist, however, concerns around the skilfulness of the use of educational technologies and insufficient focus on pedagogy. In shifting contexts, educators must take particular care to weigh the

seductive elements which technology can offer, for example, of enhanced personalisation or time gains, against the risks of mechanistic pedagogy and a de-humanisation of education. Selwyn (2014), for example, advocates a technological pessimism, to protect against what he sees as the dangers of de-humanisation and commodification of education. He also warns against what he elsewhere terms the "Trojan Mouse" (2011:57) approach of using technology as a solution in search of a problem. If it is accepted that using technologies can de-humanise educational relationships as Selwyn suggests, then there is perhaps "an implicit irony that increased use in the form of audio[-visual] feedback may help to alleviate this" (Dixon 2017:57). The claims of those who advocate a wariness of educational technology do not weather well when measured against the current study, which suggests that prudent use of technology in education can yield considerable benefit.

The relationship between feedback and well-being is an emerging area in the literature which directs us to think more about the personal effects of feedback. Students in the study made it clear that they wanted feedback which was dialogic and sustainable, but which also felt personal to them at both the pedagogic and relational levels. The strength of feeling expressed around the receipt of critique suggested that while they recognised that feedback must include correction, they also sought relationship with their tutor and dreaded what might be termed 'unnecessary wounding'. This suggests that the *ways* in which tutors feed back are important, including not only what is said, but how it is said, and the medium used to say it. Assessment design and practices clearly have potential to impact not only at the pedagogic level, and the interface between the pedagogic and the pastoral is becoming interestingly blurred. The recent work of Hill et al (2021) suggests that we view this as an increasingly important area of staff and student feedback literacy. In the specific context of legal education, where it may be argued that, historically, particular pride has been taken in separating reason from emotion, a small, but growing body of discourse around well-being and legal education is emerging which asserts that emotions have a pivotal role to play in legal education, not only for the emotional well-being of students, but also in relation to the work and well-being of their tutors (Jones 2018).

## 6.2 Practice impacts

Several recommendations for feedback practice arose from my research and I disseminated these as well as I could in the middle of the Covid pandemic disruption. I also embedded several initiatives into the feedback practice of the Law School at Midland University.

In relation to dissemination, I led a research seminar for Law School colleagues on feedback paradigm theory and arranged a feedback training session for colleagues with Alan Mortiboys who writes on feedback and emotional intelligence. I shared my initial findings with colleagues at our Faculty Learning and Teaching Conference in July 2020, and later with the wider university community, with a specific focus on using feedback technology in a time of Covid to encourage inclusion and support good mental health. I also shared my findings with fellow EdD students at the Nottingham University Student Summer Schools, and an abstract was submitted to the East Midlands Doctoral Network in September 2020 on sustainability and equality in teaching and learning. I was approached to submit an article for The Law Teacher journal's well-being edition, and this was published in September 2021 and entitled: "Feeling feedback: screencasting assessment feedback for tutor and student well-being" (Turnbull 2021).

In relation to embedding changes to feedback practice, based on my initial findings, I helped to introduce audio-visual feedback as standard practice for all formative assessments on our law degree programmes during the academic year 2019/20. The effectiveness of this was due to be analysed via tutor and student focus groups, but was overtaken by the Covid pandemic. However, the School-wide screencast training which had been arranged to support this new feedback initiative proved serendipitous in allowing colleagues to swiftly record teaching material, as well as providing feedback during the first Covid lockdown. Lessons are still being learned regarding the relational affordances of the medium, and this is paying unexpected dividends with regard to supporting personal tutoring.

During 2020, I was closely involved in the design of a new undergraduate law degree programme welcoming its first students in the autumn of 2021. Using some of the findings from the study, I embedded a central concept of support

and challenge throughout the degree, and incorporated a feedback spiral curriculum which winds across the three years of the programme. Within this, using the research of Tee and Ahmed (2014), I designed a 360-degree feedback model incorporating tutor, peer and self-feedback. Using new feedback forms, students reflect on their formative feedback and how they have used it in their summative work, and request targeted feedback from their tutor. A new first year module was also designed incorporating assessment and feedback literacy training. I met with the Head of Student Disability for Midland University to scope the possibility of allowing students with certain disability support summaries to choose their medium of feedback receipt, (as anticipated by Principle 10 of the National Union of Students' Charter for Assessment and Feedback 2010), and discussions in this regard are ongoing. The research findings also influenced a new Faculty Marking, Moderation and Feedback Policy incorporating a new principle that feedback should be presented in a 'positive and supportive way'. Finally, I have led research seminars on the Screencasting Guidance Note (see Appendix 1) which was used in the study and which incorporates its main messages in relation to screencast use, building on the work of Dixon (2017).

## 6.3 Limitations of the study

While qualitative enquiry is less about finding 'right' answers and more about sharing trustworthy knowledge, small scale studies such as the one conducted bring their own limitations. As has already been noted, the size of the tutor sample was very small at four and was relatively homogenous. The student sample was also small at fourteen and was self-selecting, but no claims are made for statistical generalisability. The data is of a self-reported nature, but this is very common in studies of this type, and the research questions demanded an analysis of participants' reported perceptions and experiences. In addition, the student participants may have had limited reflective capacity impacting their ability to fully engage with the questions posed. Also, given that they were commenting on feedback experiences, one might question whether they possessed sufficient feedback literacy to be able to respond in a meaningful and objective way. Nevertheless, the qualitative nature of the enquiry invited an authentic response from students who were likely, because of their youth, to be developing such capacities.

As for many similar studies, the criticism can also be made that this research adds little to the understanding around students' actual use of feedback and the impacts of feedback on subsequent academic performance. However, this was never an aim of the study. The dangers inherent in insider research have already been rehearsed in Chapter Three, as have the threats to reliability posed by both the 'Hawthorne effect' and the novelty effect for some of the participants in using a new or relatively new feedback technology. In addition, as in all interpretivist studies, participants' expressions of their experience are mediated, inter alia, by their memories and is always subject to interpretation, raising the spectre of double hermeneutics.

## 6.4 Areas for future research

Understanding why feedback is not always acted upon will remain an important area for future research, since feedback lies at the heart of pedagogy. While I hope that this study stands as a piece of valuable research in its own right, it may also have the potential to be regarded by others as a pilot for further research. Similar future studies may serve to shape student and staff expectations around developing learning milieux which facilitate fuller engagement with feedback. Areas ripe for further study include tutors' perceptions of their changing feedback roles in other disciplines, institutions, or jurisdictions; the perceptions of screencast feedback on more traditional types of assessment or in different disciplines; and the impact of audio-visual feedback technologies, if any, on subsequent performance. Further work around both multi-modality and affective receipt are arguably overdue (Paterson et al 2020), as is a broader consideration of key domains of influence to increase student engagement and satisfaction with feedback (O'Donovan et al 2021). Finally, further research may be warranted around the uses of video-based feedback to support inclusion, building on lessons learned during the Covid pandemic (Ryan 2021; Kaplan-Rakowski 2021).

My own plans for future research growing out of the current study include firstly, reviewing the workings of the new 360-degree feedback model and feedback literacy training programmes introduced on our LLB degree from autumn 2021. Secondly, I plan further qualitative research analysing the feedback perceptions of international students, since this is an area recently noted as ripe for further

enquiry (Ryan 2021). If time permits, I would also welcome designing a comparative case study enquiry into student perceptions of feedback and marketisation, as well as enquiring into the potential for synergy between audio-visual feedback practice and pastoral care.

## 6.5 Reflections and conclusions

### 6.5.1 Personal reflections

Areas of particular personal interest arose during the study. First, that students used passionate language about their affective relationship with their feedback, and that they appeared to be seeking closer relationships with tutors for both pedagogic and personal support. That these assertions were made with most force by the international students and student Jenny in relation to her mental well-being seemed significant. At a more general level, I entered the study interested in assessment feedback in higher education and that has not changed. Maintaining an open mind around audio-visual feedback has been a struggle on occasion, since I enjoyed giving feedback in this way, feeling that I could give more feedback and give it in a more encouraging way. I also enjoyed the conversational experience, and these were biases I had to acknowledge and manage. The internal assessor for my EdD mini viva was kind enough to give me feedback via audio-visual means to provide an opportunity for me to *receive* feedback in this way. I noted in my research diary my largely negative reactions to working as a student with the feedback: I felt that I needed something written down to carry forward to future work; and I struggled with navigating the feedback, having to make fulsome notes to remind myself to which parts of the work the feedback applied. This went some way to tempering my enthusiasm for the medium, and I was interested as the study progressed to see to what extent the student participants aligned with or challenged my own views.

Taking part in doctoral level study has been a healthy reminder of the stresses of being assessed and receiving feedback, and I hope that I can better empathise with my own students around these experiences. When discussing my research with students other than those in the study, I was touched that some students took the time to tell me that they valued my interest in their feedback experiences. Maintaining objectivity throughout has been a central challenge,

given that I was working from a premise or 'hunch in context' that feedback was becoming an ever-increasingly stressed activity for tutors. It is difficult to distil lessons learned from a process which has lasted over six years, but I have particularly valued re-learning how much others can teach me, and I am grateful for the support I have been given during my period of study and research. Learning to be as fully reflexive as one can has been both challenging and emancipatory (Dixon 2017), and I have come to think in new ways which I have no doubt has improved my practice both as a tutor and as a legal thinker. I sincerely hope that I have given the participants sufficient room to tell their stories. As Shipman notes: "research in the field is a pilgrimage. The pilgrims seek enlightenment, they tell stories, they exchange their knowledge for a research degree" (Shipman 2014:47).

### 6.5.2 Conclusions

The vocational imperative for this work has been that tutors' and students' intellectual and personal flourishing are of importance to me. Shute (2008) likens feedback to a good murder where the learner needs her 'MMO': her motive (a desire for feedback); her means (the ability to use it effectively); and her opportunity (feedback opportunities to use what she has learned). By contrast, Denton and McIlroy (2018) use a fire analogy where effective feedback forms the fuel, the learning climate (including the medium of feedback delivery) forms the oxygen, and the student's assessment literacy forms the ignition. Whether feedback is like a good murder or a raging fire it can clearly exert a powerful influence on learning, and since this influence can range from the destructive to the inspirational, a clear articulation of the theory and the practice around feedback is warranted, including, I would argue, a re-conceptualisation of feedback practice as inclusive and person-centred, demanding relationships built on trust.

Assessment feedback remains a significant issue in higher education as it is often poorly understood and executed, and the relationship between feedback and improved student learning continues to be anything but straightforward. The literature relating to assessment feedback has witnessed a number of shifts in thinking over recent years: some around theoretical conceptions of feedback; others around the socio-affective dimensions of feedback practice; and others

again around how students engage with and use their feedback. Many of these developments in thinking are complementary to each other.

However, while much is written about assessment feedback, our ability to maximise its benefits remains a continuing challenge, and the fundamental question persists: how can feedback be used to help students to flourish at both the academic and personal levels? Ideally, those designing programmes of study would ensure effective feedback training for both tutors and students, which would lead to the giving of effective feedback and its effective use by the student. However, responses to the feedback question will occur at the macro or contextual level, at the meso or institutional level, and at the micro or programme/individual level, and this is precisely what makes feedback practice so hard to develop. Doing what can reasonably be done to eliminate the 'circuit breaks' in the feedback cycle can achieve a pedagogy of the possible (Dixon 2015). The search must therefore be for better, not perfect, feedback systems and practices which are brave enough to embrace inclusive, person-centred and emotionally literate approaches to learning, since it is an impoverished model of learning which values knowledge exchange and cognitive development alone.

Future feedback models need to acknowledge that a 'feedback repertoire' is required, embracing the cognitive and the socio-affective and deployed in pastorally sensitive learning environments. Returning to the musical metaphor previously proposed, feedback needs to achieve both resonance and reverberation with students, encouraging them to accept and to respond pro-actively to their feedback: thinking, feeling, and acting to close their feedback loops, while, on a wider stage, growing both intellectually and personally. Designing effective feedback regimes is notoriously difficult and implementation of new pedagogic practice is often fraught with challenge as: "[t]here is no such thing as a single 'magic bullet'. The 'magic' of the bullet is highly context dependent, and so the bullets must be fashioned according to local circumstances, the shooters and the targets" (Krause-Jensen 2010:64). That said, there is much to be gained from both tutors and students remaining reflexive in their feedback practice, and from crafting feedback environments which allow for high challenge to be received in an atmosphere of trust.

A future feedback model based on resonance and reverberation (which in itself is a novel construction) could be structured in its first stage as *preparing for feedback resonance*: preparing stakeholders for feedback resonance via transition training for students, together with feedback literacy training for tutors and students. The second stage could be designed for *achieving feedback resonance* via first, feedback *structure* which would spiral throughout the curriculum; second, feedback *content* which would be sustainable and forward-looking; and finally, feedback *delivery* which would be sustaining in nature and may involve a multi-media approach. The third stage could be *achieving feedback reverberation*, that is, feedback which 'closes the loop,' and is used by students not only to improve their current work, but their future work also.

My argument, proposed at the outset of this thesis remains that within the contemporary socio-political and professional contexts of higher education feedback has become a fractured practice, and the data offer support for this contention: tutors report professional feedback tension, increasingly viewing their feedback via a work lens, and fearing feedback commodification and complaint. The data from the study also support the proposition that audio-visual feedback technology may offer pedagogic and socio-affective potentials which may help to heal some of these fractures. In particular, the student reports of feelings of presence, connection and care may be of significance in building trusting relationships which can facilitate the giving and acceptance of feedback critique, as well as building pastoral care and inclusivity. Attempts to improve feedback practice in this and other ways must, however, not merely be used to rescue assessment and feedback from its persistent Atlas-like position in NSS results, but rather to "make students intellectually autonomous and render their tutors ultimately redundant" (Carless et al 2011:4).

This study is a response to the calls for further research into the area of assessment feedback practice and for an evidence-based approach to its re-conceptualisation. It offers a window onto how theory and practice may influence each other in this area of academic endeavour. My hope has been to contribute to the scholarly debate around encouraging the academy, within its fast-changing context, to re-orientate assessment feedback as a compassionate, inclusive, and person-centred process, since: "what can change the life of a

student is the presence of one…figure who shows an interest, who the student would say ‘gets me.’ You need a conversation for that” (Turkle 2015:248).

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1

## Screencasting Feedback

## A Guidance Note

*This Guidance Note has been compiled using data from EdD research on audio-visual feedback conducted during 2018/9.*

1. **Before you start…**

- Attend training on the use of Screencastomatic.
- Scan through the student's work initially and make brief notes for yourself of the main points for feedback, and/or highlight areas of the student's work as an aide-memoire.
- Ensure you have a full-page setting and that you have chosen the correct place to start giving your feedback.
- Ensure that you will be undisturbed by putting up notices on your office door and silencing your 'phone.
- Consider doing a dry run to test sound level and quality.

2. **As you start your screencast feedback…**

- Salutations: start off by identifying yourself with your full name. Remember: the student will not necessarily know who is giving the feedback and may not recognise your voice.
- State the student's full name too and, if you wish, refer to them by their first name throughout the feedback.
- Thank them for their submission and state at the outset the strengths of the work. The aim is to be encouraging as well as critiquing, especially in formative work.
- Before you start commenting on the work, explain to the student that you will be talking throughout, and that you will be using the cursor to show where you are in their work, and that you might also be highlighting parts of their work.
- Give the student a rough idea of the likely length of the file.
- Tell the student that they can pause as needed to make their own notes and advise them to listen to your feedback more than once.
- Finally, give them a quick overview of the structure of your feedback: tell them that you will be pointing out strengths and weaknesses throughout the work as you go, and that you will draw together the most important feedback points at the end, together with your feedforward.

3. **Feeding back on the work…**

- As you move through the student's work, ensure that you are fully using the audio and visual tools.
- Be as specific as you can about the strengths and weaknesses of the work and identify any that may be recurring. It can help as you move through the work to make a brief note of these to pull together at the end.

- Tone: in line with the faculty's feedback policy, try to be encouraging throughout your feedback – this is possible even in the face of delivering highly critical feedback.
- How as well as what: when you are giving feedback, do consider telling the student not only *what* can be improved, but *how*.

**4. At the end of your feedback…**

- As you will not be completing the written submission sheet, the idea is to give the equivalent via audio. Therefore, as concluding *feedback,* pull together the main strengths and weaknesses of the work; then give the student the most important *feedforward* messages.
- Valediction: it's a nice idea to thank them for their submission and wish them good luck with their summative assessment, or good luck for their next semester/year of study.

Before you start, you may wish to consider some of the more important affordances and limitations of screencasting your feedback:

***Affordances***

- Clear and specific – you can use the video tools to show where you are in the student's work.
- More feedback and feedforward including examples/explanations – overall, you are likely to give more feedback/feedforward than you would in the written form, and there is evidence to suggest that this form of feedback delivery may save tutor time, especially once a tutor becomes practised with the technology.
- Relational connection - helped by a conversational and encouraging tone, students often report feeling a closer connection between the tutor and their work, and a closer connection between themselves and their tutor. This can positively affect both their motivation and their subsequent use of the feedback. You may find that you can deliver more effective and challenging feedback critique.
- Pastoral potential –audio-visual feedback may also have pastoral and inclusivity potentials for students, and there may be particular benefits for international students, or those transitioning into university, or onto new programmes of study.

***Limitations***

- Navigation/reviewability – students report more difficulty in locating feedback in the audio-visual form. Enhanced use of video tools can temper this.
- Structure - there is a danger of losing the main feedback/feedforward messages when screencasting your feedback. This can be ameliorated by pulling together your main feedback messages at the end.
- English as a second language – particular difficulties are reported by students for whom English is an additional language, so please ensure that you speak clearly and at an appropriate pace.

## Appendix 2

## Schedule of Tutor Interview Questions

Q1. What, in your view, are the purposes[s] of assessment feedback?

Q2. To achieve those purposes, what is the best medium/format in which to give assessment feedback?

Q3. Now thinking about the specific format of audio-visual feedback, what did you think about your intervention experience of using the technology to give your feedback?

Q4. I am interested in students' responses to feedback and how they use feedback. Thinking of **any** type of feedback eg written, audio etc, how do you think students generally **respond** to feedback?

Q5. What do you think **stops** students using feedback in future assessments?

Q6 How could we use audio-visual feedback to help students to use their feedback?

## Appendix 3

## Schedule of Focus Group Activities

### (A) Tutor Focus Group

#### 1. Feedback identities

<u>Introduce Tuck's feedback identities</u>

Which, if any, of Tuck's feedback identities resonates with you the most?

#### 2. Your current feedback practice

In recent years, which contextual changes, if any, have affected your feedback practice [both positively and negatively] and why?

Try to prioritise and reach agreement on which are the 'top' 1 or 2 affecting your feedback practice the most [both positive and negative].

#### 3. Future feedback practice

Introduce the concept of feedback as ideally both 'efficient and effective'

Discuss what they think each of these terms means; and then use stickers for ideas on how to achieve each.

Efficient AND effective – how can they then bring these together?

How, if at all, can **audio-visual** feedback help us to achieve efficiency and effectiveness? Discussion….

#### 4. Audio-visual and written feedback

Discussion around having given audio-visual formative and written summative feedback in the PSP module.

## (B) Student Focus Group

**Exercise 1 - Feedback formats – written and audio-visual**

Introduce the exercise……What do they think about different **formats/ways** of feeding back to them…… consider:

- Written feedback [previous experiences]
- Audio-visual feedback [in PSP]

The best/worst things about getting feedback in writing;

The best/worst things about getting feedback via audio-visual.

Individual choice, then as a **group** try to decide:

(i) which are the **most important** 2/ 3; and
(ii) can they agree on a top 1 for each?

**Exercise 2 – Audio-visual feedback and emotional/affective responses**

Now they should think about their **own** PSP audio-visual feedback.

### (a) Emotions in the hat exercise

*Powerpoint Q = "Which emotions did you feel when listening to your audio-visual feedback?"*

Use bags with cards with same adjectives as in reflective journals – 1 bag each. Use hat in centre of table for the emotions/feelings they associated with the audio-visual feedback. They do a **tally up** and this is **recorded** on a tick sheet. Then **group** discussion around the **2/3** most common and **why** they think this is so.

### (b)Emotions and accepting/using feedback – 2 more hats

*Powerpoint Q = "Taking one emotion card at a time, discuss whether feeling this emotion would make you more or less likely to USE the feedback. "*

Use 2 further hats - 'more likely' and 'less likely'. They take each emotion card and decide **as a group** whether this emotion would **help or hinder** them in using the feedback and they place the card in the appropriate hat. They discuss as they go along.

## Appendix 4

## Reflective Journal Template

### (A) Tutors' Reflective Journal

*This research project is about audio-visual feedback and your expectations and experiences of giving it. Please complete Part 1 **before** starting your audio-visual feedback on your PSP formative assessments, and then complete Parts 2 and 3 once you have finished your feedback.*

### Part 1 - Your expectations about giving feedback via audio

1. Have you used audio-visual feedback before? Yes / No (highlight one)

2. Whether yes or no, please explain your expectations, whether positive or negative, of using audio-visual to give assessment feedback.

| Please type below: |
| --- |
| |

Please stop here and complete the rest once you have finished your audio-visual feedback. However, feel free to read ahead and keep relevant notes as you are doing your feedback for insertion later.

### Part 2 - Your experience of giving feedback via audivisual means

3. Having used audio-visual feedback, please write about your experience below.

| Please type below: |
| --- |
| |

4. Please write about the best thing and the worst thing about giving audio-visual feedback.

| The best thing: |
|---|
| |

| The worst thing: |
|---|
| |

5. Do you think the **quantity** of feedback you gave was…… (highlight one)?

| More than usual | About the same | Less than usual |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

6. Do you think the amount of **feedforward** you gave [i.e. advice to the student on how to improve] was……. (highlight one)?

| More than usual | About the same | Less than usual |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

**Part 3 - Your experience of the *interpersonal* aspect of audio-visual feedback**

7. Do you think you used different **language** than when you give written feedback? If you can, please give examples.

| Please type below: |
|---|
| |

8. Do you think you used a different **tone** than when you give written feedback? If you can, please give examples.

| Please type below: |
|---|

9. Would the language and tone of your audio-visual feedback change if you were feeding back anonymously? Please explain your thoughts below, giving examples if you can.

Please type below:

**Other Comments**

10. If there is anything else you would like to add about your experience of having just given audio-visual feedback, then please do so below.

Please type below:

## (B) Students' Reflective Journals

### Student Reflective Journal 1

*This research project is about audio-visual feedback. Does it affect your feelings about your feedback and about the tutor giving it? Does it affect how you use your feedback to improve future assessments? Please listen to your feedback on your PSP formative assessment for the first time and then complete this journal.*

**Part 1 - How you felt about your feedback**

1. Please click and drag into the box the emoticon that best describes your overall reaction to your audio-visual feedback.

2. Please give examples and quotes from your feedback to explain why you felt this way.

| Please type below: |
|---|
| |

3. Please highlight any of the emotions below which describe how you **felt** when you were listening to your feedback.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| happy | sad | pleased | angry | motivated | demotivated |
| hopeful | downhearted | reflective | bored | encouraged | judged |
| proud | ashamed | satisfied | humiliated | content | worried |
| challenged | confused | thoughtful | frustrated | surprised | shocked |

Other emotions:

| Please type below: |
|---|
| |

4. For the emotions you highlighted or typed in for question 3, please give examples and quotes from your feedback to explain why you felt this way.

| Please type below: |
|---|
| |

5. How do you normally feel about your feedback when you receive it in written form?

| Please type below: |
|---|
| |

**Part 2 - How you felt about your tutor while listening to your audio feedback**

6. Highlight the number below which describes how you felt about your tutor when you were listening to her feedback. [*For example, for the first line, 1 would mean that you felt the tutor was friendly and 5 that you felt she was distant, with 3 meaning that you felt neither.]*

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tutor was friendly | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Tutor was distant |
| Tutor was interested in my work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Tutor was not interested in my work |
| Tutor was encouraging | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Tutor was not encouraging |

Other feelings about your tutor:

| Please type below: |
|---|
| |

7. Please give examples and quotes from your feedback to explain why you felt this way.

| Please type below: |
|---|

8. How do you normally feel about your tutor when you receive written feedback? You could think about past written feedback you have received.

Please type below:

## Part 3 - Using audio-visual feedback to improve your future assessments

9. Would your **feelings** about your Professional Skills and Practice feedback affect whether you would **use** it in the future? Please explain below.

Please type below:

## Part 4 - Some concluding thoughts

10. Please write in the boxes below the best thing and the worst thing about getting your feedback via audio-visual means.

The best thing:

The worst thing:

11. Do you think the quantity of feedback you received was… (highlight one)

| More than usual | Less than usual | About the same |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

12. Had you ever received feedback before via audio-visual means? Yes / No

If yes, please describe your previous experience below. If no, just ignore the text box.

| Please type below: |
|---|
| |

**Student Reflective Journal 2**

*Please listen again to your audio-visual feedback on your PSP formative assessment, have your first research journal to hand, and then complete this second journal.*

**Part 1 - How you felt about your feedback**

1. Please click and drag into the box the emoticon that **now** best describes your overall reaction to your audio-visual feedback.

2. Have a look back at which emoticon you chose in your **first** research journal. Is it different this time? Is it the same? Please explain below.

| Please type below: |
|---|
| |

3. Please highlight any of the emotions below which describe how you **felt this time** when you were listening again to your feedback.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| happy | sad | pleased | angry | motivated | demotivated |
| hopeful | downhearted | reflective | bored | encouraged | judged |
| proud | ashamed | satisfied | humiliated | content | worried |
| challenged | confused | thoughtful | frustrated | surprised | shocked |

Other emotions:

| Please type below: |
|---|
| |

4. Have a look back at which emotions you chose in your first research journal. Are they different this time? Are they the same? Please explain below.

| Please type below: |
|---|
| |

**Part 2 - How you felt about your tutor while listening to your audio-visual feedback**

5. Highlight the number below which describes how you felt about your tutor when you were listening again to her feedback. *[For example, for the first line, 1 would mean that you felt the tutor was friendly and 5 that you felt she was distant, with 3 meaning that you felt neither.]*

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tutor was friendly | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Tutor was distant |
| Tutor was interested in my work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Tutor was not interested in my work |
| Tutor was encouraging | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Tutor was not encouraging |

Other feelings about your tutor:

| Please type below: |
|---|
| |

6. Now have a look back at what you chose in your **first** research journal. Are the numbers different this time? Are they the same? Please explain below.

| Please type below: |
|---|
| |

## Part 3 - Using audio-visual feedback to improve your future assessments

7. What do you **do** with your assessment feedback once a module is finished? [*For example, think about the feedback you had on your first year modules last year. Have you used/do you plan to use any of that feedback to improve your second year assignments?*] Be as honest as you can here!

| Please type below: |
|---|
| |

8. Now think about what you **should** do with your assessment feedback. Can audio-visual feedback help you to achieve this? Please explain below.

| Please type below: |
|---|
| |

9. What **stops** you using feedback to improve future work?
*Please highlight* any of the comments below which you think might stop you using feedback.

- I don't understand the feedback
- I am hurt by, or angry about the feedback
- I don't agree with the feedback
- I don't feel a connection with the tutor giving me the feedback
- I don't see how assessment feedback relates to future assessments
- I have modules that are only one semester long, which makes it hard to use feedback on that semester's other assessments.

Add your own reason below if you wish:

| Please type below: |
| --- |
| |

10. Please tell me how you **worked with** your audio-visual feedback – did you just listen to it? Did you listen to it and make separate notes? Did you listen to it and make notes on a hard copy of your portfolio assessment? Other?

| Please type below: |
| --- |
| |