

Using 'Grademark' Electronic Feedback in Historyⁱ

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1. Background – Managing Dissatisfaction in relation to Assessment & Feedback

Looping, scribbled marginalia, brutal textual striations of red ink, complex gridded taxonomies, or gentle words of one-to-one encouragement. However it is packaged, undergraduate students seem perennially 'dissatisfied' with academic feedback.

This is apparent, relatively speaking at least, according to the student satisfaction surveys at each scale and level of provision. The 2010 NSS sector results show that scores for "assessment and feedback" have gone up by 2% from 65% in the previous year to 67%, and, while this is a considerable achievement (it is the most significant increase across any of the seven categories), it builds from shaky foundations, with the scores for this category having been the lowest of all categories since the NSS started gathering data.ⁱⁱ

At a more local level, within the University of Leeds, the pattern is broadly the same, with scores for assessment and feedback over recent years improving from a low of 55% on 2007 to a relative low of 61% in 2008 and 62% in 2009. Leeds student newspapers and spokespeople grumbled again in August 2010, as the most recent NSS score showed "assessment and feedback" scores dipping to 61% and below the national average,ⁱⁱⁱ with Mike Gladstone, *Leeds University Union* Education Officer asserting that "We remain too far behind the average in assessment and feedback, with some schools scoring extremely poorly." Professor Vivian Jones, Pro VC for Teaching and Learning, admitted anxiety about assessment and feedback, too, revealing that she was "not comfortable that we are below the national average. That is not somewhere I would expect Leeds to be in any category".^{iv}

Satisfaction with teaching, as a comparative institutional example, has cruised at aloof heights of 83-86% during the same time period, and one of the key dilemmas at sector, institution and departmental level is why satisfaction dips between the two categories, considering that 'assessment and feedback' have long been understood to form part of the 'teaching' strategy of higher education, as well as being considered an administrative necessity and function.

We might speculate whether, from a student's perspective, teaching is drastically diluted at the point of feedback, whether it transforms into something less engaging and useful, or whether it is, more worryingly, not considered part of the teaching process at all. Does feedback only 'happen', for students, *after* the whiteboard has been wiped clean, after the Powerpoint has pulsed its last slide, after the tutor has exited the building, and the 'teaching' is done?

Reflecting on the other side of the feedback process - the tutor's role - this report will help explore ways in which teaching excellence can be made more explicit and engaging by structuring feedback in new ways, so that this perceived rupture (or rupture of perception) in between 'teaching' and 'feedback' is less severe.

Whilst any positive trend is encouraging – and the trends *are* broadly ones of improvement - student satisfaction in relation to 'assessment and feedback' is highly resistant to efforts at nurturing. A

recent HEA report has explored the history of this 'dissatisfaction' and ways of managing (as well as resolving) it.^v Williams and Kane's 2008 study, after mapping such variations as gender, age, full time / part-time study and institution in terms of student perception and responses, conclude that "promptness" and "usefulness" of feedback are the recurring priorities for the student, and therefore the areas ripe for improvement.

The authors investigate ways of improving the former, initially recommending standardised procedures, the auditing and monitoring of feedback systems across institutions, and the heightened use of class-time - and of students themselves - as catalysts for feedback delivery (increasing a sense of immediacy and student-involvement in the process). The creativity of the latter suggestions seems to be muted by the more commonsensical and bureaucratic prompts about auditing, monitoring and standardising feedback procedures. Though it varies considerably across departments and universities, hulking issues of staff workload and institutional systems dictate the 'promptness' of feedback to a large extent, whilst there is clearly greater flexibility and room for innovation in tackling the "usefulness of feedback". After setting the more specific (favourable yet still problematic) context of the School of History, this paper will explore one, innovative framework for doing this.

2. Foundations: Existing Academic Feedback in the School of History, University of Leeds

Efforts to improve the quality of feedback within the School of History at Leeds have been varied and rigorous over the period of my employment since September 2007. Feedback forms have been re-designed to allow a space for student reflection on the comments they receive (*School of History Learning and Teaching Committee*, Nov 2008). Marking criteria have been made explicit as part of the feedback form, to jolt students into consciousness of the values by which they are assessed (*School of History LTC*, April 2009). And perhaps more inventively, tutors have been encouraged to incorporate the language of those marking criteria within their feedback lexicon, to show correspondence between the generic criteria and their personalised responses to a students' work (*School of History LTC*, Oct 2009). The latter recommendation is less a case of asking tutors to 'parrot' the marking criteria in their feedback, as asking them to consult the criteria afresh, and find meaning across the discursive divide between 'dry' but standardised criteria and their more 'lively' but sometimes eclectic feedback style. It is often not only a case of *student* detachment from agreed marking criteria that has been the problem: sometimes tutors have alienated themselves from the criteria by which they are supposed to mark, too.

This year, scanned, anonymised examples of feedback forms have been posted as PDF documents in the Module VLE sites, giving students a 'taster' of the feedback they are likely to receive.^{vi} They are, tellingly, exhibited as part of the "Learning Resources" of the module VLE, an attempt to normalise the student perception of feedback as a form of continuous teaching, rather than, as sometimes seems the case, its treatment as the oft-ignored, pedagogic residue of a forgotten assignment.

As the examples of scanned documents below demonstrate, feedback in this form, whilst following an agreed structure, will always vary in emphasis, quantity, form and legibility.

Student Name: **Anna Sclaris** Programme: **SS**
 Student ID: **20034408**

Bibliographic Exercise (20%) Grade
 Bibliographic Component

A bit, interestingly - though interestingly; means by a few minor errors (largely spelling paper errors!) 70

Evaluative Component

Ok as for ... but - possibly through the ... But in little ... 60

Book Review (30%)
 STRUCTURE AND FOCUS

Really the book

ARGUMENT AND ANALYSIS

but I ... argument is ...

PRESENTATION & LITERACY

... fine, ...

ACCURACY AND RANGE OF READING

Suffice: ... 60

WAYS TO IMPROVE

- Define your ...
 - ...
 - ...

MODULE CODE: **2180** TUTOR: **Hallett**

STUDENT NO: **200249699**

Essay title: **Convexo breaco**
 First internal examiner's feedback comments:

FOCUS ON THE QUESTION

Very good, with diverse forms of 'breaco' identified + interrogated; and the suspicions of the persecutors explained and to a large extent accounted for/rationalized.

ARGUMENT & ANALYSIS

Range and speculation of argument extremely impressive. Ideas of the Secret Tribunal, the crypto-Jews, the malicious/deceptive convert and the 'morshous' convesso well analysed. Also liked the discussion of Christians losing the "other"/"scapegoat" when the Jews convert. Sometimes

PRESENTATION & LITERACY

the narrative seemed survey-like, and you should try to punctuate more regularly with detail, case-study, rhetoric examples.

ACCURACY & RANGE OF READING

Very impressive range of articles found, read and referenced - this is a difficult area to find good literature on, and you managed very well indeed, going far beyond the reading list. Now, try to evaluate and critique these historians more explicitly - do you agree with their approach/evidence/conclusions?

WAYS TO IMPROVE

- This could raise the way to lit class standard.

STUDENT NO: **200171689**

Essay title: **Assess the significance of Gandhi's critique of modernity and the modern state in India before 194**
 First internal examiner's feedback comments:

FOCUS ON THE QUESTION

Superb focus.

ARGUMENT & ANALYSIS

Intriguing and well written introduction. I don't really agree with you that the significance of Gandhi's critique was in its symbolic value. It was a very practical approach too. However, this does apply for figures like Nehru and in general, I really liked the way you used the broader material, such as that on the Gujarat Patidars. Superb use of Watt and Rudolphs too. Came to a very good crescendo in the argument. Overall a clear first class essay, on the cusp of being high first.

PRESENTATION & LITERACY

Generally very readable. Some grammatical errors, and perhaps slight overuse of italics.

ACCURACY & RANGE OF READING

Reasonable good range of readings but very well selected and used.

WAYS TO IMPROVE

Perhaps could have a read a little more and employed primary sources a bit more directly.

STUDENT NO: **200251338**

Essay title: **Religious Wars**
 First internal examiner's feedback comments:

FOCUS ON THE QUESTION

Good embedded but relevant focus.

ARGUMENT & ANALYSIS

Argued with care and precision; a balanced and informed analysis.

PRESENTATION & LITERACY

No serious problems here.

ACCURACY & RANGE OF READING

Good use of extended reading. Care in thinking through implications of different authors' approaches and arguments.

WAYS TO IMPROVE

Perhaps shorten some of the politico-military analysis, to make room for a little more detail on (e.g.) how dynastic and Religious Wars might have hindered in backward recovery (for instance in Britain) area where disaster structure under ... (perhaps ... to be the key) was still weak.

Our feedback innovations aim to de-mystify the rationale behind the assessment and feedback process, and show students how individual tutors work from an agreed foundation of learning skills and values as they mark the work of developing Historians. Significantly in History, the students receive this feedback in the build-up to advice provided by another (perhaps pre-eminent) layer of one-to-one feedback sessions at the close of modules, typically scheduled during the penultimate or last week of a teaching Semester, where feedback on assignments and module progress is reinforced, developed and personalised by the tutor during a 10-15 minute session. These sessions, a

rare opportunity for face-to-face guidance, are encouraged through a sign-up system, rather than being compulsory, but tend to attract a high turnout, providing the tutor pushes them sufficiently.

To complete the stratified layers of feedback, Personal Tutors provide an academic overview of each student's progress in a designated meeting once a Semester, where feedback from across history modules and exams is perused for trends and recurrences, and a more panoramic and holistic impression of academic development is shared with the student.

Despite such sophisticated provision, which puts the School of History at 75% satisfaction in the 2010 NSS (commendably 14% higher than the University average), improvements in student satisfaction in this area have been slow to consolidate and build. A promising leap of 4% from 2007 to 2008 (71 to 75%), was followed by a step from 75 to 76% between 2008 and 2009, but then by a backward step of the same distance this year.^{vii} Shrugs, grumbles and exasperations of "what else can we do?" tend to greet the recurring 'feedback' question, as it slots comfortably into yet another Learning & Teaching Committee agenda. However, innovation in feedback has worked in the past, and experimentation with the form and nature of feedback continues.

3. The 'Grademark' Feedback Project – Beginnings & Objectives

In line with a set of Schools within the University, History has implemented the "Turnitin" software package as a key prop for its Learning and Teaching system, first in 2006 as a stand-alone function accessible via the company website, and then from 2008 as an integrated aspect of the Blackboard VLE. In its early days – indeed for the first two years of its use – Turnitin was regarded almost exclusively as a vehicle to detect and discourage plagiarism. Acting as the School's reluctant "Turnitin Czar" from 2007 as part of my 'student development' remit, I would explain the step-by-step process by which all assignments had to be electronically submitted at massed meetings, hammering home the process and imprinting the penalties for failed submission on the permeable but flitting minds of Level 1 students, already immersed in or confused by the rigours of induction.

The software package itself worked well in terms of this limited functionality, proving highly efficient in locating plagiarism and malpractice in relation to online material and peer student submissions (both at Leeds and at other institutions that use the same software package). The gradual rolling-out of *Turnitin* submission has worked effectively to improve detection and deter plagiarism, acting, in the end, as an instructive tool to improve student practices of academic referencing, paraphrase and scholarly acknowledgement. It has perhaps even improved History students' processes of research and writing by making intellectually lazy or deceptive practices more obviously foolhardy and shallow to successive cohorts. Below is a screenshot of how Turnitin 'processes' each essay into a set of original and 'matching' material, so that the detector can trace shared material and possible plagiarism.

The screenshot displays the Turnitin Document Viewer interface. On the left, a document is shown with several segments of text highlighted in red and green. Each segment is accompanied by a small box containing a number representing the match score. On the right, a vertical list of matches is displayed, each with a number in a box, a percentage match, and details about the source document.

Match Number	Match Percentage	Source Document
1	5%	student papers from 23/11/09 Class 09/10(1) HIST1050 Intro: Historical Skills (4917) Assignment Essay Paper ID: 4654900
2	2%	student papers from 22/11/09 Class 09/10(1) HIST1050 Intro: Historical Skills (4917) Assignment Essay Paper ID: 4648188
3	2%	student papers from 23/11/09 Class 09/10(1) HIST1050 Intro: Historical Skills (4917) Assignment Essay Paper ID: 4655733
4	2%	student papers from 22/11/09 Class 09/10(1) HIST1050 Intro: Historical Skills (4917) Assignment Essay Paper ID: 4647159
5	2%	student papers from 22/11/09 Class 09/10(1) HIST1050 Intro: Historical Skills (4917) Assignment Essay Paper ID: 4651189
6	1%	Internet from 14/11/08 http://www.ucc.ie

Despite its obvious administrative and instructive benefits, plagiarism detection is, symbolically and emotionally, largely a 'negative' process of feedback, whereby malpractice and deception is first isolated, then discussed and punished. The positive by-products discussed above nearly always come at the expense of a period of detection, accusation and 'trial' which have sharp semantic and structural echoes of the legal and 'criminal' processes which lend it its dominant vocabulary. Both for the accused (the student) and accuser (the School / University), *Turnitin* had become a label for an upsetting - if largely effective and progressive- process of detection and corrective penalisation.

Hidden away within its resources, however, Turnitin housed a function that was to prove far more benign than the austere plagiarism-detection 'face' it had presented to most Leeds students who had encountered it. Uncovering its online marking facility in 2008, three tutors within the School (Dr Simon Hall, Dr Kevin Linch and myself) decided to play with the 'Grademark' feedback function, which allows the provision of electronic feedback at a number of e-textual levels and through a mixture of devices.

'Grademark' is a tool that, essentially, allows online 'marginalia', corrections and commentary on electronically submitted assessed work. As we saw it, examining the 'surface' of its functionality in 2007, electronic text feedback within Grademark had the potential advantages of being highly legible, adaptable and quickly accessible. Given that feedback would be another layer of text on an electronically submitted (and eminently storable) document, it could theoretically be easily saved, collated and consulted, both by students and staff. Initial excitement about Grademark emerged not only from the new possibilities the tool seemed to offer (and the impact this might have on feedback quality), but from the fact that this tool had crept up on us attached to a plagiarism detection tool that had told only a worthy and cautionary tale up to that point. It seemed a tool that could be creatively used rather than dutifully employed; a device for building rather than a weapon of interrogation.^{viii}

Inevitably, other tutors in the School were less sure about an online tool that seemed to add another layer of electronic innovation to a Learning & Teaching context enhanced (or cluttered) by the new Blackboard VLE (unfurling at exactly that time) and a raft of online tutorials and experiments directed at improving (or pointlessly complicating) systems of teaching, lecturing and attendance monitoring, as well as feedback. Notable and understandable concern came, in the Spring of 2008, from tutors whose screen-time had already expanded to fill extra days and weeks during recent years, and whose e-mailed concerns at this rumoured proposal mentioned eye-strain, repetitive strain injury and a worry that 'virtual' communication would again dilute traditional practices of face-to-face academic provision and feedback.

Clearly, the whole School was not going to jump happily on board this electronic platform. The trial would have to be piecemeal and limited - at least initially - powered by the qualified optimism of three tutors intrigued by a neat-looking, apparently nimble feedback function that had peeped through the stern façade of a bouncer-like plagiarism detection system ("If your style's not original, you're not getting in").

4. The Trial: Funding and Development 2007-2010

To work properly, trials of teaching software inevitably need time, and they often need money. We were successful in achieving both via internal and external funding in 2007-08. The Faculty of Arts *Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund* (TQEF) offered £1000 and this was supplemented by a *Higher Education Authority* (HEA) award of £3000, which gave external pedagogic blessing to the project. This allowed a (very small) fractional workload buy-out for the three staff involved over the three years of the trial, and money for surveying, collating and disseminating student and tutor responses to the Grademark system of feedback.

The trial's objectives, as outlined in both funding bids, were to "understand the technical, administrative and pedagogical issues involved in using the 'Grademark' tool to assess student work and to provide enhanced feedback".^{ix} Looking back, however, the preliminary question in the trialists' minds was almost certainly whether the Grademark feedback would work out as "enhanced" at all, from either the tutor or students' perspective: this was undiscovered teaching territory for us.

The trial first focused on the use of Grademark for assessment and feedback from the tutor's perspective, observing the issues in adopting the technology in terms of teaching administration and practice for the tutor. Key issues in question here were how successfully online essays would provide the malleable 'raw materials' for feedback (the online essay being quite a different visual and experiential 'object' to the hard copy) and whether the process of adapting to the structure and complexities of online marking - as a habitual practice rather than a one-off experiment - would be easy. Hovering around each specific and technical question we asked ourselves was the niggling and persistent issue of whether the system would add to, or possibly relieve, the tutor's workload, a particularly hot pedagogic potato, given that an estimated 25-30% of tutor 'teaching' time was already at that time being taken up by essay marking (*School of History LTC Away Day*, 2007).

As the students began to get a sense of the tool as 'receivers' of feedback, the trial aimed to "study the impact Grademark feedback has on student learning and awareness of feedback, examining student perceptions of the provision of academic feedback, and of the rigour, timeliness and usefulness of feedback". The aims of the trial, as we can see, were couched in the language of NSS questions *about* feedback, showing how the NSS was, in part, driving the rhetoric of, and the rationale behind, L&T experiments and improvement in the School of History in 2007-08. This in

itself is no bad thing, of course, so long as the driving force of the NSS criteria are counterbalanced by what tutors, as well as students, need in specific contexts of assessment and feedback. Would the School, with its staff and students habituated to layers of textual and face-to-face feedback, and already performing well above University and National averages, really benefit from a system of new, alien online feedback?

Over the next 3 years, students were 'Grade-marked' during five modules taught by three tutors spanning Level 1 (HIST1050 'Introduction to Historical Skills', HIST1300 'Primary Sources') and Level 2 (HIST2531 'The American Century', HIST2180 'Heretics, Witches & Conspirators', HIST 2530 'Web Research for Historians'). This sample seemed sufficient for to gauge the reactions of new University students, who were already being encouraged into more diverse online forms of collaboration and participation within the VLE, and so might acclimatise more easily to 'another' form of online provision. It also gave us the chance to survey a group of students who had progressed in the School for a year in receipt of the more standardised and conventional forms of feedback, and see whether they reacted positively or negatively to the variation in these modules.

5. Tutor use and Student Reactions 2008-10

The screenshot displays a Turnitin GradeMark interface within a Windows Internet Explorer browser. The browser's address bar shows a URL from submit.ac.uk. The page title is "GradeMark © by Turnitin" and the document title is "To what extent did the 'Rights of Man' repeat existing 17th and 18th century radical ideas?, by Anna Jamieson". The interface includes a menu bar (File, View, Tools, Help), a toolbar with icons for printing, commenting, and editing, and a status bar showing "Grade: 75/90".

The main content area shows a student's essay text with several annotations:

- A "Floating quotation" tooltip is visible on the left, explaining that quotations must be linked to the student's own writing and not float independently.
- An orange box highlights the word "heralded" in the text: "...son inherit all wealth and property, heralded a social 'monster' as it evaded family justice. Although Paine relates these ideas to natural rights (Paine argues against every law of nature¹⁷), never before had they been so thoroughly discussed to this extent. The abhorrence with which Paine discusses the system of with- 'With what ideas of justice or honour can that man enter a house of legislation, who absorbs in his own person the inheritance of a whole family of children, or doles out to them some pitiful portion with the insolence of a gift¹⁸ - is rife with incredulity and gives a sense that these ideas have almost developed from merely social to intensely personal argument for Paine, indicating an obvious progression from existing ideas of the period. Thus, although we can see the roots of these animosities in the political dialogue of the period, Paine has elaborated them in such a way that his writings appear innovative."
- Orange shorthand marks are used: "WC" (with which) above "with which", "PV" (personal view) above "personal argument", and "PV" above "appear innovative".
- A "Float" icon is placed next to the word "legislation".

The bottom of the interface shows a taskbar with various applications open, including Microsoft Outlook, Grademark trial, Blackboard Academic Suite, and L&T Bulletin Marking Essays. The system tray shows the time as 15:49.

The above screenshot gives you a sense of what Grademark looks like, to both the tutor giving the feedback and the student receiving it. Written marginalia is replaced by a set of tools which allow both specific and repeated comments to appear as 'boxes' or 'bubbles' on the page, with shorthand 'quickmarks' appearing in orange to isolated generic grammatical, stylistic and

structural errors. The tutor, however, has the power to customise the system to his or her own needs, adapting the provided tools to more sophisticated functions, or simply choosing to type marginalia into the white spaces of the online text.

a) Tools used

Grademark is equipped with four tools to provide feedback to students:

- comments in the essay – equivalent to tutor’s comments / marginalia (speech bubbles)
- quickmarks – shorthand tags based on standard corrections plus common mistakes
- general comments on the essay - much like the comments section on our essay feedback forms
- rubric scorecard – and indication of where the essay was placed in each of our marking criteria

These were utilised in the trail as follows:

Module / Tutor	Assessment	Tools used	Students
HIST1300 / KBL	Assessed Essay	Comments Quickmarks General Comments Rubric Scorecard	13
HIST1300 / RH	Assessed Essay	Comments Quickmarks General Comments	16
HIST 1050 / RH	Assessed Essay	Comments General Comments	14
HIST2530 / KBL	Project proposal Website	Comments Quickmarks General Comments Rubric Scorecard	9
HIST2351 / SDH	10% online source commentary	Comments General Comments	40
HIST2180 / RH	Assessed Essay	Comments Quickmarks General Comments Rubric Scorecard	38

b) Usage and Experience

Using the system was reasonably straightforward from the tutors’ perspective, although in large, team-taught modules navigating through all the students to find the relevant essays proved time

consuming. Comments functions were easy to use and most closely aligned with current marking practices. Indeed, the layers of comments available proved appealing to users, and perhaps even provided a surrogate for the 'tactile' experience of inscribing marginalia on the page. The 'speech bubble' function felt especially useful, since it provides legible and well-packaged comments whilst appearing in an informal symbolic 'register' that mimics speech, allowing the tutor to combine a corrective tone with the more personable nuance of (potential) dialogue, as if anticipating student feedback on feedback.

The screenshot shows a portion of an essay about witchcraft. The text includes references to John Ferrall and Margaret Simons of Kent. A red highlight is placed under the sentence: "confident women by men in a position of power can be seen as evidence for this notion." Two speech bubble comments are visible: one at the top right and one in the middle. The top comment says: "very persuasive argument. However, was it just 'confident' women who were targetted for accusation - what do the case-studies suggest?". The middle comment says: "very useful quote and good use of Clark more broadly".

witchcraft by men. For example, in his book *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*,
highlights the case of Margaret Simons of Kent, who in 1581 was accused of witchcraft by
John Ferrall, the vicar of the parish. The accusation was born out of retribution
where Margaret chastised his son for threatening her dog with a knife.² Such pursuit of
confident women by men in a position of power can be seen as evidence for this notion.
Nonetheless, there is a significant historical debate concerning the focus upon women in the
area of witchcraft. Feminist historians such as Clark were part of a
larger campaign to strengthen patriarchal structures, and the
punishment of assertive women who challenged the traditional order.³ Clark goes as far as to
argue that "...witch hunting was in reality women-hunting..."⁴ Such an argument suggests that
the fear of powerful women fuelled the fear of witchcraft.

very persuasive argument. However, was it just "confident" women who were targetted for accusation - what do the case-studies suggest?

very useful quote and good use of Clark more broadly

The student user can choose to see all the 'bubble' comments at once, or run the cursor over each one to reveal the specific comment. The 'general comments' offered a simple and legible surrogate for the summative comments a marker will place at the end of the essay.

The quickmarks provided an easy way to comment on common mistakes in essays and have the capacity to link to websites or resources to further explain the error or provide ways of improving, for example linking to the MHRA style guide for the incorrect citation quickmark. In the example below, the tutor provides quick notification of a missing reference, the use of a passive voice, and the need to insert a word. Such quickmarks can be supplemented by more specific advice, and links to good practice, but also act as a 'quick-fix' to alert students to repeated flaws in essay practice.

Parliament led to the detection of the former royalist among Catholics and they lost their property. In society, moreover, reflecting the anxiety among citizens, the hatred to Catholicism was heightened during this crisis of 1640s, so 'a whole series of local communities was seized by hysterical fears that an armed popish rising was imminent'.⁸ Catholics in the Elizabethan and Stuart period, therefore, were always vulnerable to attack due to the political tumults and it cannot be denied that monarch or leading politicians regarded religion as one of the most important elements to guide the Nation.

Thirdly, Catholicism was considered to be a threat in culture. It was symbolised as the cause of social discord. For instance, what Protestants did was to associate Catholicism with Satan or such kinds of imaginary evil, which contributed to agitate people's fear and hatred to Catholicism. In a ballad by Christopher Wilson, popery was accused parallel with other things

Understanding and utilising the quickmarks takes some time, and requires the establishment of a system. For example, should a marker use a quickmark every time a student puts punctuation in the wrong place in a quotation? This, by its volume, may dilute a bigger flaw in the essay which is only commented on once or twice. More problematically, perhaps, quickmarks also encourage the marker to concentrate on negative aspects of the essay as the list of points is entirely focused on things that are wrong in an essay. This may give the student the impression of more 'harsh' or negative marking, even if the process of correction is helpfully rigorous. It is possible to customise quickmarks, so we are considering discipline-specific additions that rewarded positive aspects of the essay. Quickmark does have a very useful statistical tool that provides information per student and by assessment of these quickmarks, which is useful diagnostic tool and could inform skills development / training programmes for students. 'The rubric scorecard' provided a simple way to indicate to students how they did in each of the four elements of our marking criteria.

After some practice, it was possible to mark a 2,000 words essay in about 35-40 minutes, which matches the approximate time we took to mark an essay 'conventionally', with rigour. However, the time spent acclimatising to and adapting the tools to the needs of the particular assignment probably added about a third to the total time. Familiarity with the system will lead to savings of time, but it was the opinion of all three tutors that Grademark should not generally be considered (or promoted) as a time-saving feedback device.^x

Pondering the expansion of Grademark use within the School, we realised that, apart from inevitable resistance from colleagues, and a widespread contentment and/or inertia in relation to current procedures, there could be problems integrating online marking with School feedback processes. Within its current functionality, there is not a simple printout of 'general comments' and the grade which could be used in place of the feedback form. There may be ways round this, but a basic solution is to cut and past the relevant information into our existing forms. Clearly this replication is time-consuming, and the issue of duplicating and layering feedback content confusingly is clearly an administrative issue to be resolved. From the perspective of School policy, then, Grademark was a welcome and intriguing experiment, but is not (at least in the current context) an 'alternative' feedback system to be rolled out across all modules.

c) Student experience

At the close of each module, we sent students a survey allowing them to rate their experience of the feedback system, and inviting them to identify the functions they found most useful. Variations in response levels mean that our results are uneven and partial across the modules. They are also perhaps subject to the contextual bias that those happier with their feedback (and more comfortable with the electronic medium) would be likely to engage in an electronic survey of and dialogue about that feedback. The 'headline' results are distilled below:

Level / Module (questionnaire returns)	'Better' or 'Much better' than convention al feedback	'Very easy' or 'Easy' to use	Ranking of tools' usefulness	
			To understand mark	For future work
L1: HIST1300 KB (10)	90%	90%	1. Comments in Essay 2. General Comments 3. Quickmarks 4. Rubric Scorecard	1. General Comments 2. Comments in Essay 3. Quickmark 4. Rubric Scorecard
L1: HIST1300 RH (4)	75%	100%	1. General Comments 2. Comments in Essay 3. Quickmarks	1. Comments in Essay 2. General Comments 3. Quickmarks
L2 HIST2530 KB (6)	83%	100%	1. Comments in Essay 2. General Comments 3. Rubric scorecard 4. Quickmarks	1. Comments in Essay 2. General comments 3. Rubric scorecard 4. Quickmarks
L2 HIST2351 SH (25)	92%	92%	1. Comments in Essay 2. General Comments	1. Comments in Essay 2. General Comments
L2 HIST2180 RH (10)	100%	100%	1. Comments in Essay 2. Quickmarks 3. General Comments 4. Rubric	1. Comments in Essay 2. Quickmarks 3. General comments 4. Rubric

The overall student satisfaction with Grademark feedback was, as the results show, extremely high. Scores for “ease of use” were, for us, surprisingly strong, since the steps involved for the student in accessing and displaying the different levels of feedback seemed relatively sophisticated. In most cases, we had given the class a ‘showcase’ of how to use the tool, but the response was still more positive than we expected. The most important and telling results show student preference for electronic feedback over conventional forms of written or printed feedback. This is striking, with the ‘free comments’ listing legibility, detail and accessibility as the key reasons for satisfaction.

Interpreting these results, we should take into account the likelihood that the tutors involved in the trial were likely to offer more rigorous feedback than average *in any form*, but the free comments indicated that students also preferred this form of feedback compared with conventional feedback *given by the same tutor* – an important additional factor.

In terms of the multiple functionality of Grademark, and the perceived ‘usefulness’ of its functions, more nuanced results emerge. Whilst the innovation of the whole ‘package’ is celebrated, students tended to favour the functions that acted as refined surrogates for traditional forms of feedback, over the tools that delivered newer forms of feedback. ‘Comments in the Essay’ and General Comments’ - essentially tools that replicate and enhance marginalia – were in every case-study but one regarded as the most effective feedback tools, with the ‘quickmarks’ and ‘rubric’ jostling for third and fourth place. This would suggest that students appreciate innovation that builds on recognisable and well-trodden pathways of feedback,^{xi} more so than that which arrives in stranger guises and carrying information that is more alien. It will be interesting to see whether the more

habitual use of “quickmarks”, and greater familiarity with their generic functions, will change student perception in this case.

Within the ‘free comments’, there were several comments about electronic feedback being ‘quicker’, which might be interpreted as being easier to access after release, since it did not require students to collect feedback forms either from outside offices or at the next seminar. Most students had not received feedback electronically before, but nearly all recognised key benefits of it – clarity and legibility, and the benefit of specific, targeted comments that can help with future scholarship.

A number of the students made it clear that whilst appreciating the accessibility and legibility of Grademark, they did not want electronic assessment to replace one-to-one meetings with module tutors. In one module, the tutor used one-to-one meetings to ‘project’ the Grademark feedback in the seminar room and work through the essays with the student, explaining the comments and quickmarks. Whilst time-consuming, this merger of face-to-face and ‘virtual’ feedback worked with particular success, offering a profitable case-study of blended teaching and learning at its best.

d) Adapting Grademark

As the trial progressed, and tutors got more confident with the repertoire of Grademark functions, we were able to adapt elements of the tool to a ‘School-style’, linking the more generic feedback it offers to the specific guidance we need at institutional, departmental and subject-specific level.

(i) Customising Grademark

The Grademark tool gives options to copy and adapt existing quickmarks and develop new ones (the built-in quickmarks cannot be edited). These allow tutors to develop more specific advice for students, tailored to particular stylistic or discipline-specific conventions. Especially useful is the ability to edit quickmarks relating to presentational issues or matters about referencing, as they can include linked ‘urls’ to online material that give more detailed explanations about what they should do or how things should be presented. For example, we created our own ‘referencing error’ quickmark to replace the generic ‘improper citation’ quickmark, to reflect the fact that we use the MHRA style guide and the guidance the University of Leeds library had developed about using this style:

Ref. Err quickmark:

‘Incorrect reference:

You must present your references according to the MHRA style guide.

Training is available from the library to help you manage your references.

http://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/200232/referencing/832/what_is_referencing/5

was used to replace

Improper Citation quickmark:

‘Improper citation:

Improperly cited material. Please use the link below to find links to information regarding citation styles:

http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_article_what_is_citation.html’

Other quickmarks we developed included: numbering error (not matching the style guidelines about the format of numbers and ordinals); using an apostrophe for abbreviations (using don't, for example); and quotation format errors. These quickmarks enable a marker to easily identify specific problems in presentation and style, and give the student the resources to work differently next time.

So far, mostly these in-house quickmarks have been about style and presentation, although in the future others could be developed about essay writing, such as advice about using evidence or the relevance of the evidence to the analytical point. Because these quickmarks would be standardised across all coursework, there would need to be department-wide agreement to the principles behind these comments first.

(ii) *Rubric score: a diagnostic tool?*

As part of the trial we also utilised the rubric scorecard, a means of conveying to the student broadly where they came in relation to marking criteria and grade descriptors. This is presented to the students and the marker as a grid, with the criteria heading on one axis and the different levels of achievement on the other. In our case there are four criteria: focus on the question, argument, presentation, and accuracy and reading.

This tool can be used to actually work out a grade, with 'points' allocated for the different criteria and levels of achievement, but as we were using this for essay we switched off this option and used it as a 'qualitative rubric', so providing another mechanism for feedback for the students. Although not as highly rated by students in their evaluation of the tool, it does provide a good overview of the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of coursework, utilising the language of the marking criteria and offering a visual format that may appeal to some students.

The tool can show subtle differences and areas where students can work on, such as improving their presentation, or developing their analysis, and in a fairly time efficient manner once the rubric is set up. The only difficulty that can arise comes with the relationship between the feedback given through the rubric scorecard and the final grade when different markers interpret the rubric in different ways. However, this can be ameliorated by stressing that the rubric is an indication only, and not a formula for the mark.

5. Conclusion

Grademark electronic feedback has been a pedagogic experiment that has been successful, especially in terms of student use and perception. The perceived clarity and usefulness of the tool has particular consequences for making students think of feedback as a continuation of 'teaching'. This, perhaps, is because the explicitly instructive and corrective nature of its tools emphasises the dynamics of improvement and development in a way that 'textual' feedback does not. Most importantly, the tool seems to accommodate the academic content that existing forms of feedback provide, whilst adding legibility and offering other, more mechanically useful, functions which relate to more formal skills to do with grammar, structure and composition. From the student's perspective, certainly, there was barely a murmur of 'dissatisfaction' with this form of electronic feedback, apart (instructively) for the repeated assertion that this should not 'take the place' of the one-to-one feedback that was also supplied. As tutors, we shouldn't hope to hide behind the pulsing orange icons and the friendly speech bubbles.

Tutor responses to use have been positive, too, with two of the three tutors integrating electronic feedback into their teaching beyond the structural and temporal frame of the two-year trial. Issues of time, workload and even health and safety (in relation to the strain of extended screen-time) complicate this picture, however, and there is unlikely to be a consensus on the particular benefits of the tool, even within this small sample of users. More broadly, residual concerns about the superfluity of new forms of feedback, and the reluctance to innovate beyond conventional formats, tend to counterbalance the impetus, at all levels, to find new solutions to an old problem.

ⁱ Sections of this article have been adapted from Linch, K., Hall, S. and Hallett, R.; 'Marking Essays and Using Grademark' in the *University of Leeds L&T Bulletin* (May 2010) and the Funded Project Statement of the HEA History, Classics & Archaeology Subject Centre at http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/hca/projects/detail/round_7_enhancing_student_feedback_in_History accessed 21/06/11

ⁱⁱ NSS statistics for national and University levels are drawn from <http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/> accessed 23/09/10

ⁱⁱⁱ NSS statistics on assessment and feedback relating specifically to the School of History at Leeds can be found at <http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/nStudentSurvey.do> accessed 27/06/11

^{iv} *Leeds Student*, September 2010, at <http://www.leedsstudent.org/2010-08-24/ls1/ls1-news/university-disappointed-with-two-percent-drop-in-student-satisfaction-levels>, accessed 25/06/11

^v James Williams & David Kane; *Exploring the NSS: Assessment and feedback issues. (full report)*, HEA, 2008, accessed at

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/nss/NSS_assessment_and_feedback_issues.pdf 21/06/11

^{vi} This initiative forms part of Dr Kevin Linch's UTF project measuring and improving student academic experience, details at http://www.leeds.ac.uk/sddu/lt/fellowship/2008_09/k_linch.html accessed 27/06/11

^{vii} School of History action plans in relation to NSS results, including detailed responses to assessment and feedback results can be found at <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/respondingtoyourfeedback/arts/history.html> accessed 24/06/11

^{viii} Turnitin also like to think of Grademark as their hidden gem, promoting users' blog comments which see their plagiarism detection system as a 'gateway' to the more powerful benefits of the online marking system. Peter Conrick, a Washington School tutor, is cited arguing that "the anti- plagiarism function is a gateway and it helps me in making the final calls about plagiarism, but the real value of Turnitin is Grademark. I find that I actually spend more time on each paper because it is so easy to write and interact with the student's work". <http://blog.turnitin.com/2010/07/beyond-plagiarism/> accessed 26/06/11

^{ix} A summary of the HEA trial objectives can be found at the HEA website at

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/hca/projects/detail/round_7_enhancing_student_feedback_in_History. accessed 21/06/11

^x This conclusion contradicts some of the more hubristic reviews made at some other institutions, whose rhetoric seems to mimic the language of Turnitin's self-promotion. Royal Holloway's E-learning site celebrates Grademark as an "innovative paperless marking and feedback tool that allows tutors to leave the days of red ink and stacks of papers behind... a highly accessible, time-saving alternative to traditional pen and paper grading". <http://www.rhul.ac.uk/registry/educational-development/e-learning/technologies/turnitin/turnitin-grademark.html> accessed 27/06/11.

^{xi} The way Grademark successfully analogises rather than revolutionises conventional, hand-marking is something also commented on by Peter Henderson of Newcastle University, in his brief article, 'Electronic Grading and marking – A note on Turnitin's Grademark function' in *History Australia*, Vol. 5, Issue 1, March 2008, at http://turnitin.com/resources/documentation/turnitin/sales/GradeMark_Monash.pdf accessed 27/06/11