When Feedback Fails: A Secondary Data Analysis of Barriers to Student Engagement with Formative Feedback in Linguistically Diverse UK Higher Education

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.1026EDU0678

Received: 12 October 2026; Accepted: 17 October 2026; Published: 02 November 2026

ABSTRACT

Purpose. Students in higher education consistently report that they value feedback, yet many do not act on it. This paper asks why students who value formative feedback still fail to use it, with particular attention to the linguistically diverse student population of UK higher education.

Design. The study uses a secondary research design with two strands of data, both limited to the last five years. The first is an integrative review and thematic synthesis of 16 peer-reviewed studies, reviews and conceptual papers published between 2021 and 2024. The second is a secondary analysis of publicly available UK sector data: item-level National Student Survey (NSS) 2025 results for assessment and feedback, and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data on the size and composition of the student body.

Findings. The synthesis generated three recurring barriers. First, the academic language of feedback is hard to interpret, because comments rely on terminology and on culturally specific feedback conventions that many students do not share. Second, feedback often lacks a clear action, because it is still framed as information to be received rather than a process to be acted upon. Third, students have little time or opportunity to act, because feedback is tied to end-point assessment and arrives too late to be used. NSS 2025 data are consistent with this picture: "How often does feedback help you to improve your work?" was the lowest-scoring assessment and feedback item (75.2% positive), below feedback timeliness (83.3%). Receiving feedback on time does not ensure that it can be used.

Contribution. The paper reframes feedback "failure" as a problem of design and conditions rather than student deficit. It proposes a three-stage Feedback-to-Action framework (interpret, translate, enact) and three low-cost practices for lecturers: ending every comment with "Your next action is…", using clearer academic language, and giving structured time to respond.

Keywords: formative feedback, feedback literacy, feedback uptake, student engagement, intercultural feedback literacy, National Student Survey, secondary data analysis, higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Feedback is an integral part of learning in higher education (HE). Written comments on drafts and assessed work is something that lecturers place a great deal of effort into in the UK and is one of the seven themes of the National Student Survey (NSS), the primary measure of the undergraduate experience, in the UK (Office for Students, 2025). However, often lecturers find themselves with the same comments coming back on a student's work assignment after assignment.

This is a conundrum. Students appreciate feedback and valuing feedback is not the same as using feedback. Recent research has started to focus on the nature of feedback as more than the teachers' feedback, but the students' response to the feedback (Winstone et al., 2022b; Nieminen and Carless, 2023). If this is the definition, then any feedback which is read and valued but does not result in any changes in the next piece of work is yet to be successful. The same disparity is evident in the national data. The NSS 2025 item that elicited the lowest positivity score of the five assessment and feedback items was how often feedback helps students

improve their work.The NSS 2025 item on how often feedback helps students improve their work was the lowest on the list of the five items on assessment and feedback (Robinson, 2025).

This gap will probably be greater in environments where languages are diverse. UK students are numerous and international. In 2023/24, 2,904,425 students were registered at UKHE providers (HESA, 2025) and around one in five students (679,970) in UKHE had a non-EU domicile (Universities UK, n.d.). There are many other students who are home students learning English as an additional language or are from a first generation to university family. Students' expectations of feedback are also informed by their past educational experiences and may not align with those in the UK (Rovagnati, Pitt and Winstone, 2022). Despite this, cultural and linguistic considerations in feedback have been given relatively little attention, including in very internationalised institutions (Pazio Rossiter and Bale 2023).

Research in recent years has shifted from questions surrounding teacher writing of comments to questions surrounding how students interpret and apply the comments (Carless and Boud, 2018; Nieminen and Carless, 2023) with the term feedback literacy commonly being used to describe the latter. This evidence is dispersed in the many studies, reviews and conceptual papers, and is not regularly combined with national survey information to address a practical issue: when can feedback go wrong for students and what can lecturers do?

The present paper attempts to fill this lacuna by secondary research and an evidence of past 5 years. It poses two questions: (1) What are the barriers to the use of formative feedback identified in the recent published research and in UK national data, particularly for linguistically diverse students in HE in the UK? (2) What are some ways that lecturers can implement these changes in their practice in order to move students from receiving feedback to taking action? The paper brings together the latest evidence, triangulates with the data from NSS 2025, suggests a Feedback-to-Action framework and presents implications for practice and further research.

METHODOLOGY

Research design. This study is of secondary research type where the secondary data and published facts are used to address a fresh research question. Two strands of secondary data were used: (a) recent peer-reviewed literature on student use of feedback, and (b) publicly available UK sector statistics. The design was selected because of the following three reasons: Firstly the recent literature in the field of feedback uptake and feedback literacy is significant but lacks synthesis around the stages at which feedback does not take. Secondly, national datasets, like NSS, offer information on a larger scale which no single small study could provide. Third, the second approach can be used to validate the conclusions from the first approach and literature from the sector-wide patterns, which enhances the level of confidence of the conclusions.

strand a: integrative review. The first strand is of the Integrative review type which aims to synthesize, research, and conceptual papers about various studies, designs, and theories to obtain new insights into a topic (Cronin and George, 2023). Literature was found with the use of ERIC, Scopus and Google Scholar search engines. The search terms that were used had integrated feedback and uptake, use, engagement, feedback literacy, intercultural, second language and higher education. Sources included were those that were peer-reviewed, set in higher education, focussed on either understanding feedback, responding to feedback, or acting on feedback, and/or published in English in the past five years (2021 onwards). Studies that looked at the school environment, or automated feedback systems or peer review of research were not included. Sixteen sources were selected for synthesis (Table 1): six empirical studies, four systematic, scoping or critical reviews, and six conceptual papers. There were very few seminal works that are referenced but not included in the analysed corpus and so are cited only in a theoretical context (Sadler, 1989; Lea and Street, 1998; Carless and Boud, 2018).

Strand B: Secondary Analysis of Sector Data. The second strand is based on publicly available data from the NSS 2025, which is a survey of final year undergraduate students across the UK, with 71.5% of the sample responding (Council of Deans of Health, 2025). The five assessment and feedback items were based on published analysis of the 2025 results (Robinson, 2025); the wording of the questions is from the Office for Students (2025). The information on size and international composition of the student population was drawn

from HESA publications (HESA, 2023; 2025) and a Universities UK publication (Universities UK n.d.). These data were analyzed descriptively to determine if the patterns found in the literature are present at sector level.

Analysis. Thematic analysis of the published texts (Braun and Clarke, 2022) was used to analyse the 16 sources. The findings, arguments and conclusions of each source were coded, codes were clustered around candidate themes, and candidate themes were compared with the entire corpus. Initially, coding was done inductively and subsequently read against the sequence of feedback use described in the literature ranging from making sense of feedback to acting upon it (Sadler, 1989; Malecka, Boud and Carless, 2022). The NSS items were then matched with the themes obtained and an analysis of the consistency between the literature and the quantitative evidence was conducted.

Ethics and quality. The study uses only published and publicly available data and involves no human participants, so formal ethical approval was not required. To support rigour, inclusion criteria were set in advance, every source in the corpus is listed so that the synthesis can be checked, and the study's limitations are discussed in Section 6. All secondary data are cited to their original sources.

Table 1. *Corpus of sources included in the integrative review, 2021–2024 (n = 16), and the themes to which each contributed*

Source	Type and design	Key finding relevant to feedback use	Theme(s)
Henderson et al. (2021)	Empirical; large-scale survey of undergraduate students, Australia	Perceived usefulness of feedback declined at higher year levels; international and online students' experiences differed	1, 3
Nicol (2021)	Conceptual; synthesis of two research bodies	Students generate internal feedback through comparison; teachers should make comparisons explicit	2
Wood (2021)	Conceptual; model of feedback uptake	Dialogic, technology-mediated cycles create opportunities for co-regulated uptake	3
Hoo, Deneen and Boud (2022)	Empirical; intervention, analysis of 237 student journals	Self- and peer-assessment activities can develop students' feedback capabilities	2
Malecka, Boud and Carless (2022)	Conceptual; curriculum framework	Feedback literacy can be embedded through eliciting, processing and enacting mechanisms	2, 3
Rovagnati, Pitt and Winstone (2022)	Empirical; narrative inquiry, 10 international postgraduate students, UK	Prior feedback cultures shaped students' literacies, which did not initially support use in the UK	1
Shen and Chong (2022)	Review; qualitative synthesis of 14 studies of L2 learners	Engagement with written feedback is dynamic, contextual and individual	1
Winstone and Boud (2022)	Conceptual; critique of assessment design	Entangling feedback with grading means feedback arrives too late and justifies grades	3
Winstone et al. (2022a)	Empirical; analysis of items in 10 national student surveys	Surveys frame feedback as information transmission and neglect the student's role in using it	2
Winstone et al. (2022b)	Empirical; corpus linguistic analysis of feedback literature	Research still dominated by feedback-as-information, though shifting towards process	2
Boud and Dawson (2023)	Empirical; interviews and focus groups, 62 teachers, Australia	Teacher feedback literacy competencies are needed from course design to individual comments	2

Carless and Winstone (2023)	Conceptual; teacher feedback literacy framework	Design, relational and pragmatic dimensions shape whether students can act on feedback	2
Leenknecht and Carless (2023)	Review; scoping review of 42 empirical studies	Students need training, support and psychologically safe environments to seek feedback	3
Nieminen and Carless (2023)	Review; critical review of 49 feedback literacy articles	Psychological framing risks placing responsibility on students rather than systems	1, 2
Pazio Rossiter and Bale (2023)	Conceptual; model of intercultural feedback literacy	Cultural and linguistic factors in feedback are routinely overlooked	1
Little et al. (2024)	Review; scoping review of feedback literacy interventions	Interventions improved perceptions, confidence and agency; stronger designs needed	3

Note. Theme 1 = academic language is hard to interpret; Theme 2 = feedback lacks a clear action; Theme 3 = little time to act on feedback.

Critical Literature Synthesis

It has shifted from a feedback as transmission model to a feedback as process model. Sadler (1989) has pointed to the importance of feedback for improving learning if the student is to understand the standard being aimed at, compare their work to that standard and take steps to reach it. This has been further extended in recent research. As students search for information to compare and contrast with their work, students are creating their own internal feedback, and teacher comments are just one source of those comments, argues Nicol (2021). The task for teachers is to guide the student to make the comparisons explicit and respond to them. Winstone et al. (2022b) conducted a corpus linguistic research and identified the language used for giving feedback in the literature, where the focus was on passing information to learners and where research shifted towards a learning-focused perspective.

Feedback literacy has become the primary lens used to describe the use of feedback by students. Carless and Boud (2018) described it as the understandings, capacities and dispositions required to make sense of information and to use this to improve work and listed four characteristics: (1) appreciation of feedback, (2) making judgements, (3) managing affect and (4) taking action. Based on the first 49 published articles, Nieminen and Carless (2023) identified two opposing interpretations of feedback literacy: the psychological, which sees it as an individual, trainable skill, and the socio-cultural, which sees it as located and shared. They indicate that the first approach may be seen as putting the burden of responsibility on the students for feedback problems, but does not question the assessment system.

That is why focus has moved in recent years onto the teachers. Carless and Winstone (2023) suggest the three aspects of teacher feedback literacy are design (organising feedback processes so that learners can act on them), relational (the interpersonal nature of feedback) and pragmatic (how feedback fits with the disciplinary and institutional life). Based on interviews and focus group discussions with 62 university teachers, Boud and Dawson (2023) outlined a competency framework indicating that feedback literacy is needed at each stage, from the design of the course to providing feedback on individual and personal work. Malecka, Boud and Carless (2022) suggest that student feedback literacy should be ingrained in the curriculum by three means: eliciting, processing and enacting feedback.

These conditions are directly related to language and culture. The academic literacies tradition suggests that student writing problems are not necessarily technical issues but issues of meaning making in the midst of conventions of a new discipline (Lea and Street 1998). Recent work pursues this to feedback itself. Pazio Rossiter and Bale (2023) suggest that intercultural feedback literacy is a new idea that emerged from a dissatisfaction with feedback, exacerbated by an absence of consideration for cultural and linguistic factors. Rovagnati, Pitt and Winstone (2022) demonstrate that international students' feedback literacies are influenced

by their experiences of feedback culture in their home countries. Linguistically diverse students, then, may find feedback, in the language and style of the feedback giver, to be an obstacle to applying it.

Why Feedback Literacy? Sitting the Explanation in Competition with the Rival Accounts

In order to be able to explain why feedback fails, feedback literacy has to be able to explain the problem better than other explanations. A deficit in student attitudes toward feedback may be interpreted as a student stating that they simply don't care. The recent literature suggests otherwise: designing interventions to build student confidence and sense of agency in the feedback process leads to improved students' engagement in the feedback process (Little et al., 2024), implying that students' engagement relies on the conditions that they are provided. A quality of comment account implies that better or more detailed comments will resolve the issue but this leaves feedback as information transmission – a type of feedback that is criticized by recent research (Winstone et al., 2022b). A timing only account identifies one important barrier, but is unable to account for cases where feedback is received at the right time but is not used, as shown in the NSS 2025 data in Section 4.

All these answers have a piece of the solution, and none of them is the complete path of a comment to changing the next work. A Socio-cultural rather than purely individual interpretation of the term ‘feedback literacy' can explain all three identified barriers in this synthesis: the interpretation of the comment, the translation of the comment to an action and the opportunity to perform that action (Nieminen, Carless 2023), and when combined with attention to language and culture (Pazio Rossiter, Bale 2023), all three barriers can be explained. It also holds teachers and students responsible (Carless and Winstone, 2023). Feedback literacy, therefore, is the lens that is used to interpret this paper; language, actionability and time are the conditions through which feedback works.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis resulted in three themes that represent different barriers between feedback received and feedback action taken. Table 1 indicates the sources that contributed to each theme. Themes are discussed below, and then compared and contrasted with NSS 2025 data.

Theme 1: Academic language is challenging to understand. They suggest that the role of interpreting feedback requires common language and common expectations, which many students lack because they are unable to use the language of feedback. In a narrative inquiry with ten international postgraduate students in the UK, Rovagnati, Pitt and Winstone (2022) discovered that the feedback literacies students had developed at their home institutions were not necessarily the same as those in the UK and, in some cases, were even different, and that the feedback literacies students brought with them did not immediately facilitate feedback use in the UK. Pazio Rossiter and Bale (2023) suggest that cultural and linguistic considerations are often neglected in feedback and that students and teachers should have intercultural feedback literacy. While examining 14 studies on L2 learners' responses to written feedback, Shen and Chong (2022) concluded that written feedback is dynamic, contextual and individual, and that it is influenced by a number of factors, which is much more than the feedback itself. Henderson et al (2021) identified how the experience of feedback for international students was different from other students in some significant ways, and how students should not be considered a homogenous group. These studies collectively indicate that a comment in standard academic language might not have the same significance for all readers. This barrier is at the first level of uptake, interpretation. If a student is unable to determine the meaning of a comment, then no further action can take place.

Theme 2: Feedback often lacks a clear action. Even where a comment is understood, the corpus suggests that it often does not tell students what to do next. Winstone et al. (2022b) found that the feedback literature remains dominated by a transmission view in which feedback is information given to students rather than a process they act upon. Winstone et al. (2022a), analysing the items of ten national student surveys, found the same framing at policy level: surveys mainly ask whether feedback was timely and specific, and largely ignore the student’s role in using it. Nicol (2021) argues that students improve when they are helped to make explicit comparisons between their work and reference information, which implies that comments should point clearly to what should be compared and changed. Malecka, Boud and Carless (2022) identify *processing* and *enacting* as distinct mechanisms that must be designed into the curriculum, while Carless and Winstone (2023) and

Boud and Dawson (2023) place responsibility for designing actionable feedback on teachers. Hoo, Deneen and Boud (2022), analysing 237 student journals from a self- and peer-assessment intervention, show that feedback

capabilities can be developed when activities are structured around them. This barrier sits at the second stage of uptake, translating understanding into a concrete step. It also suggests why feedback may help students to manage affect, one of the four features of feedback literacy, without supporting the feature on which improvement depends: taking action (Carless and Boud, 2018).

Theme 3: Little time to act on feedback. The third barrier concerns opportunity. Winstone and Boud (2022) argue that assessment and feedback have become entangled, with six consequences: students focus on grades rather than learning, comments justify grades rather than support learning, feedback arrives too late to be useful, feedback is subordinated to other processes in course design, documenting feedback is overemphasised, and anonymous marking downgrades it. Where feedback is delivered with a final grade at the end of a module, students have little opportunity to use it. Malecka, Boud and Carless (2022) and Wood (2021) both propose ways of creating that opportunity within the curriculum, through planned enactment activities and dialogic, technology-mediated feedback cycles respectively. Little et al. (2024), in a scoping review of interventions, found that structured activities can improve students' perceptions of feedback, their confidence and their sense of agency, while Leenknecht and Carless (2023), reviewing 42 empirical studies, conclude that students need training, support and psychologically safe environments to seek and use feedback. Henderson et al. (2021) also found that students' perceptions of the usefulness of feedback declined as they progressed to higher year levels. This barrier sits at the third stage of uptake, enactment, and it shows that part of the problem is structural rather than individual.

Table 2. *NSS 2025 assessment and feedback items: UK positivity scores mapped to the synthesis themes*

NSS question	Positivity (%)	Related theme
How well have assessments allowed you to demonstrate what you have learned?	84.4	General context
How fair has the marking and assessment been on your course?	83.5	General context
How often have you received assessment feedback on time?	83.3	Theme 3 (time)
How clear were the marking criteria used to assess your work?	78.1	Theme 1 (language)
How often does feedback help you to improve your work?	75.2	Themes 1–3 (use of feedback)

Note. Source: Robinson (2025), analysis of UK-level NSS 2025 results; question wording from Office for Students (2025). Respondents are final-year undergraduates across the UK.

Triangulation with national data. The NSS 2025 results are consistent with the three themes (Table 2). The item most closely linked to whether feedback is used, "How often does feedback help you to improve your work?", received the lowest positivity score in the assessment and feedback theme at 75.2%. Timeliness, by contrast, scored 83.3%. This gap of 8.1 percentage points matters. If timing were the main problem, the two items would be expected to score similarly; instead, a substantial share of students receive feedback on time but do not find that it helps them to improve. This supports the argument that time is necessary but not sufficient, and that interpretation and actionability must also be addressed. The second-lowest item, clarity of marking criteria (78.1%), is consistent with Theme 1, since unclear criteria and unclear feedback language both reflect tacit academic expectations. Subject-level variation is also large: positivity on the feedback-to-improvement item ranged from 81.4% in design, creative and performing arts to 61.2% in medicine and dentistry (Robinson, 2025). This suggests that local feedback practice and course design shape outcomes, and therefore that changes to practice can make a difference. At the same time, the NSS items themselves reflect the transmission framing criticised by Winstone et al. (2022a), as they ask mainly about what students receive. The feedback-to-improvement item is the closest the survey comes to measuring use.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the issue may not be feedback itself, but whether students can understand, interpret and act on it. Each barrier corresponds to a stage that a student must complete for feedback to change their work: they must interpret what the comment means, translate it into a specific action, and enact that action in a subsequent task. These stages closely parallel the processing and enacting mechanisms proposed by Malecka, Boud and Carless (2022). A breakdown at any stage is sufficient to stop the process. Figure 1 presents this as a Feedback-to-Action framework and links each barrier to a practical response for lecturers.

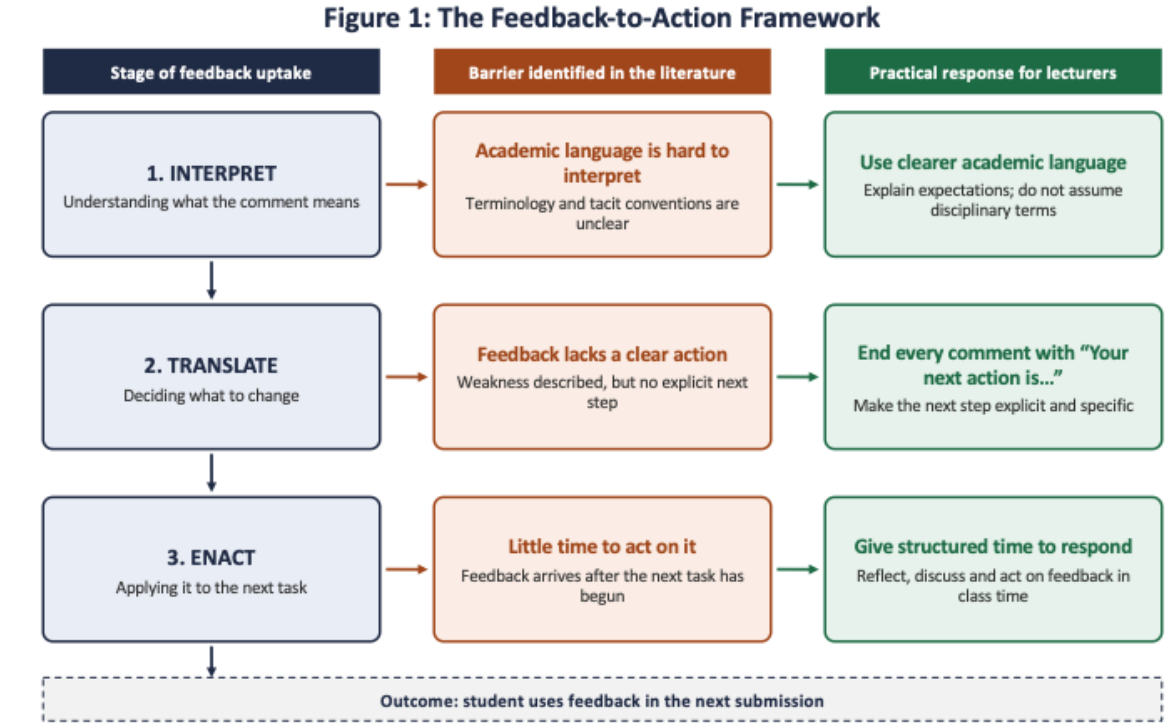


Figure 1. *The Feedback-to-Action framework: three stages of feedback uptake, the barrier identified in the literature at each stage, and the corresponding practical response for lecturers.*

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the integrative review (2026).

Principle 1: Academic language is more simple. When addressing an interpretation barrier, lecturers should consider what they would like their students to know before expecting them to know it. In practice, this means that abstract labels will be replaced or supplemented with a brief explanation or example, e.g., instead of "be more critical", a comment might be "Compare what these two authors argue and say which you find more convincing and why. This is not a rule to reduce standards. It refers to the need to make the tacit knowledge of those standards explicit, and in line with the need for intercultural feedback literacy among students and teachers (Pazio Rossiter and Bale, 2023). This can be supported also at programme level by shared, a student-built, glossary of common feedback terms.

Principle 2: End comments with "Your next action is…". The translation barrier was challenged and for each piece of feedback, one clear and specific action step will be provided. The phrase is meant to be easy to understand. It makes it impossible to describe the piece; requires writer to start giving directions for improvement; provides the student with a starting point. This implements feedback-as-information to feedback-as-process (Winstone et al., 2022b), the explicit comparisons Nicol (2021) suggests, and directly addresses the "taking action" aspect of feedback literacy (Carless and Boud, 2018). It's also a simple statement of the design aspect of teacher feedback literacy (Carless and Winstone, 2023).

Principle 3: Provide time to respond, in a structured manner. To overcome the enactment barrier, lecturers should create opportunities during class for students to gain insights, discuss and implement feedback. These can take the form of brief in class exercises where students consider what they need to do next and start implementing it, feedback discussion with peers, self- and peer-assessment exercises (Hoo, Deneen and Boud,

2022) or dialogic cycles of feedback with the support of technology (Wood, 2021). Whereas giving feedback a separate position within the learning cycle, and providing it when there is still a next task to apply it to, means that feedback has its own place in the learning cycle (Winstone and Boud, 2022). By making this time part of teaching, it can indicate to staff that feedback is not an extra, but a part of learning.

The Focus on Feedback-to-Action (F2A) differs from current models in terms of focus, not in type. More recent models of feedback literacy are attempts to capture what students and teachers require, and how they might be provided for, through the curricular experience of feedback (Carless & Winstone, 2023; Boud & Dawson, 2023). The present framework is more limited and pragmatic. It identifies three areas where feedback can fail, backs them up with recent published literature and information from the national data, and correlates each of these with a low-cost action point that an individual lecturer can implement in the moment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If it is not incorrect feedback, but rather if it is correct feedback and students are not able to benefit from it, then there are several implications.

For lecturers. Use of feedback should be anticipated in the writing of feedback. The three practices outlined above can be implemented by lecturers with minimal additional workload, without explaining key academic terms assuming students understand them, without change in students' next actions and without additional teaching time for short feedback activities. Lecturers may also want to directly ask students what they mean by a comment, as misunderstandings are not always apparent until they are posed in this way.

For programme/module leaders. Assessment schedules should be structured to ensure that formative feedback is given prior to the start of the next related tasks, and that feedback is not provided only at the end of assessment (e.g. with a mark) (Winstone and Boud, 2022). Certainly, due dates can be staggered, and you can use draft submissions and cross-references across a module to provide time and opportunity for students to act. Programme teams may choose to establish a common language to feed back on the programme, including a glossary of commonly used terms, so that students are given consistent messages throughout the programme.

For academic support services and institutions. The development of staff on feedback should emphasize less the quantity of feedback and more the quality of feedback, that is, writing feedback that is accessible and meaningful for diverse groups of learners, as well as teacher feedback literacy frameworks (Boud and Dawson, 2023) and on intercultural feedback literacy (Pazio Rossiter and Bale, 2023). Institutions could consider looking at the feedback-to-improvement item when assessing NSS results, as this is the most direct item available to determine if feedback is being used or not, rather than at the NSS results theme score.

For further research. Four questions emerge. Firstly, should feedback include an explicit next step, does this make any difference to students' follow-up activity? Secondly, what are the different meanings that are found in the same feedback terms across different language/educational backgrounds, and in which terms are the differences the greatest? Third, what are the different types of ‘structured in-class time' that are best suited to support the uptake of feedback, in light of the demand for more robust intervention designs (Little et al., 2024)? Fourth, is there a difference in timeliness that feedback must be able to help or hinder student progress in the NSS according to student characteristics (e.g., domicile, first language)? The fourth question would call for disaggregated data from the NSS, which would be an extension of this secondary analysis.

These recommendations may be phased. A short testing of the “Your next action is…” format is possible in the short-term (one teaching block) as an individual lecturer option, and a brief in-class feedback activity can be incorporated. Programme teams can review the timing of assessments in the medium term (one academic year) and create a common feedback glossary. In the longer term, these can be incorporated into staff development and tracked as a measure by the feedback-to-improvement item.

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to understand why students who value formative feedback still fail to act on it. Using a secondary research design that combined an integrative review of 16 sources published between 2021 and 2024

with analysis of NSS 2025 and HESA data, it identified three barriers: academic language that is hard to interpret, feedback that lacks a clear action, and too little time to act. These barriers correspond to three stages of feedback uptake, namely interpreting, translating and enacting, and a failure at any one of them is enough to stop feedback from changing a student's work. National data support this conclusion: feedback helping students to improve was the lowest-rated assessment and feedback item in the NSS 2025, despite higher ratings for timeliness.

The paper makes two contributions. Conceptually, it reframes the failure of feedback as a problem of design and conditions rather than student motivation, and it links recent evidence on feedback literacy, intercultural feedback and assessment design through a Feedback-to-Action framework. Practically, it offers three simple changes that lecturers can make immediately: using clearer academic language, ending every comment with "Your next action is…", and giving structured time to respond.

Important limitations apply. As a secondary study, it depends on the scope and quality of the original sources and could not ask new questions of students directly. Restricting the corpus to the last five years ensures currency but excludes earlier empirical studies, and the integrative review was structured but not an exhaustive systematic review. The corpus may also reflect publication bias towards English-language and Anglophone research, and several sources are conceptual rather than empirical. The NSS data are reported at UK level and are not broken down by language background, so the link to linguistic diversity is inferred from the literature rather than measured directly in the national data. The proposed practices have not yet been formally evaluated, and future research should test whether they improve students' use of feedback over time.

Perhaps the more important question for the sector is not "Why don't students use feedback?" but "How can we help students use feedback more effectively?" Feedback that students cannot understand, translate or find time to apply is unlikely to improve learning, however carefully it is written. Making feedback usable may therefore matter as much as making it good.

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