Benchmarking for improvement:
An introduction to NUS UK's resources for improving the academic experience

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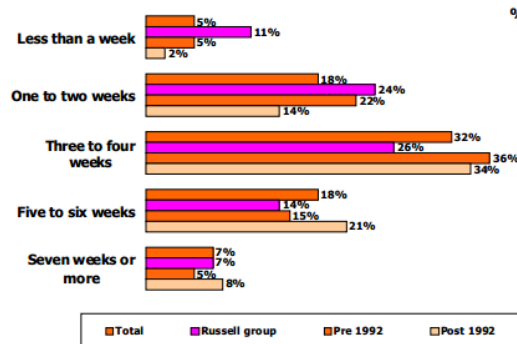
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Improving teaching and learning

- NUS work in this area primarily centred around the National Student Survey
- Strong focus on feedback and assessment as the lowest scoring area nationally
- Aim: to empower students' unions and students to lobby and campaign on teaching and learning issues

Previous NUS work
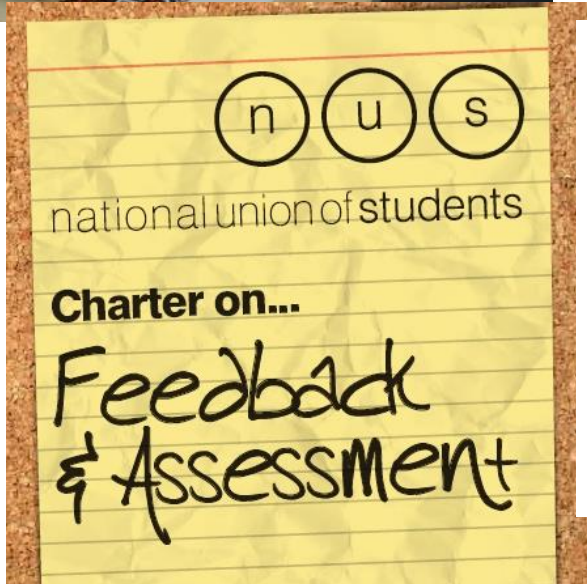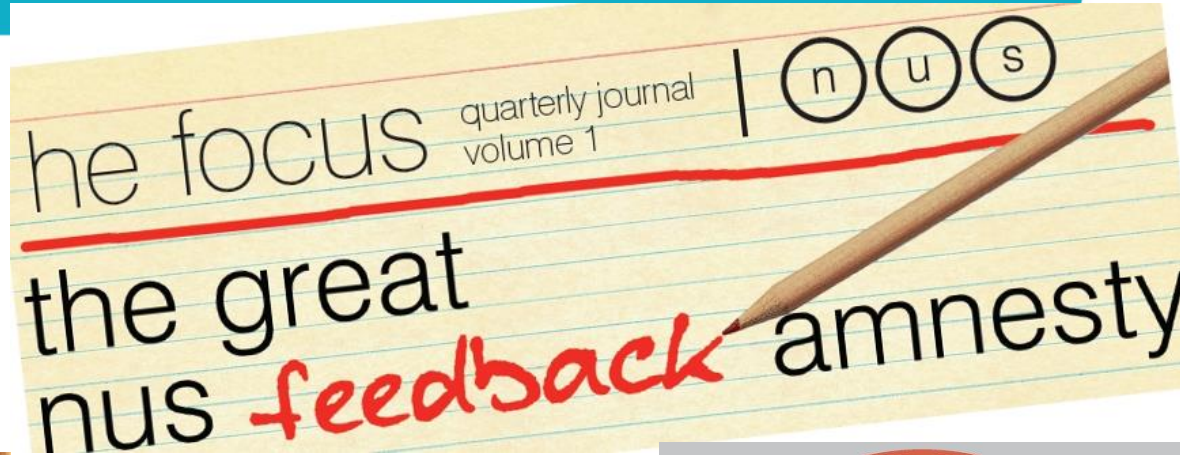
Charters, charters everywhere
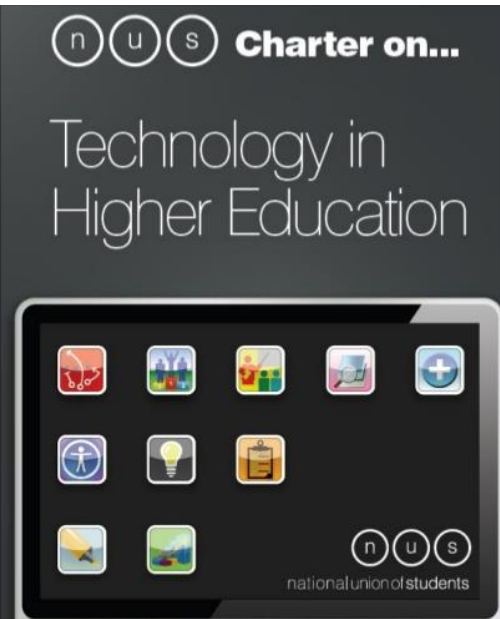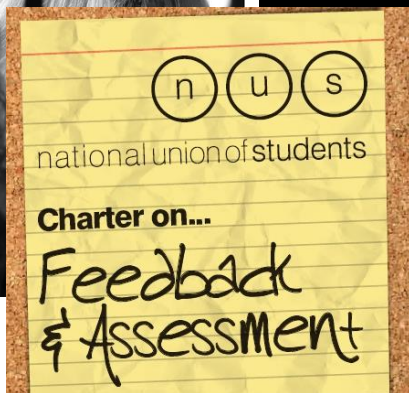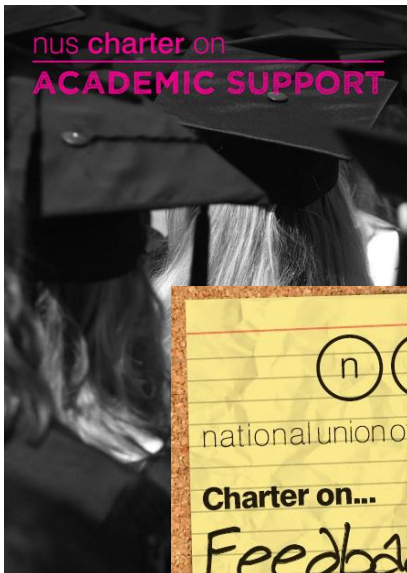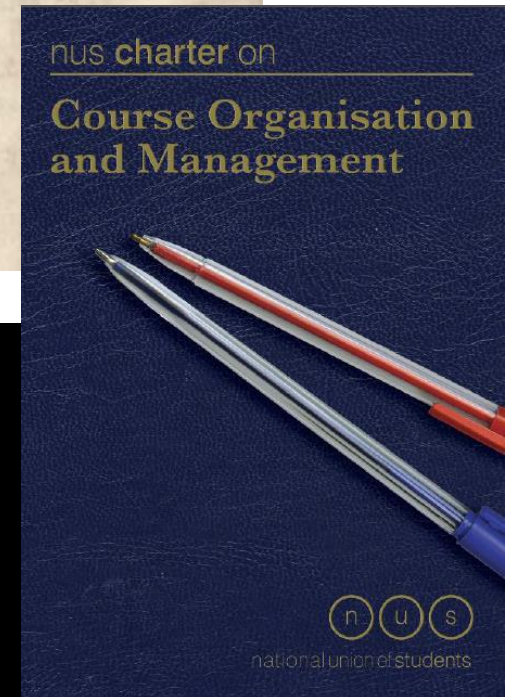
From charters to benchmarking tools

- Translate principles into practice
- Demonstrate tangible steps for improvement
- Draw more on academic literature
- Greater focus on staff-student dialogue and partnership

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Benchmarking tool

Assessment and feedback benchmarking tool

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Principle	First steps	Developing	Developed	Refining	Outstanding practice: Partnership
1 **Diverse forms of assessment designed to assess a range of skills and knowledge**	There is little variety in the forms of assessment used on each programme. Assessment is not clearly linked to learning objectives and little thought has been given to the skills and knowledge tested. Summative assessments may require different skills than those developed during the course.	Some thought has been given to how the mode of assessment is chosen to best demonstrate the learning outcomes of the course. Students are adequately prepared for summative assessments with the skills they learn on the course.	Assessment methods are chosen through a clear link to the learning outcomes of the course. Several different types of assessment are used throughout the course, e.g. exam, written essay, poster presentation, group presentation, reflective log.	Programmes are planned so that the diverse forms of assessment will cover skills that are desired in the wider world, e.g. by employers. Students have some choice in the assessment methods they are offered.	Students are empowered and given the tools and support to co-design their assessment methods in partnership with academic staff. Programmes are planned holistically to assess a broad range of skills and knowledge through a variety of forms of assessment. Students are able to articulate the skills they have developed through the various forms of assessment on their programme.
2 **Assessment criteria**	Assessment criteria are vague, confusing and often contradictory. They are hard to find and students are not directed to them.	Assessment criteria are mostly clear and detailed enough to be of use, but students may not know about them or use them.	Assessment criteria are clear and easy to understand, and students are aware of where to find them. They are clearly linked to the learning outcomes of the course.	Assessment criteria are linked to learning outcomes and referred to throughout the course. Students fully understand what is expected of them in order to achieve each grade.	Assessment criteria are clear, easily accessible and linked to learning outcomes. Students fully understand and are supported to use them. They are designed in partnership with students to ensure accessibility.
3	Submission procedures are inflexible, complex and inaccessible, usually involving a set date and time to return paper copies to the institution. There is	Submission procedures are relatively simple, although largely paper-based. Year abroad students may experience problems depending on which	Submission is largely electronic, although some departments may do things differently. Feedback may or may not be provided online. There is	Submission is electronic where possible, and feedback is provided online. Submission processes are the same across all departments.	Submission is simple and flexible, through an online system that confirms receipt and delivers online grades and feedback. Accessibility for students is

Principles

Levels of Practice

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Outstanding practice: Partnership

Each of the "outstanding" practices involve staff and students working in partnership. This partnership needs to be meaningful in order to work, which means that both groups must listen and be willing to compromise. Some of the principles may be mutually incompatible in some institutions: for example, it may not be possible to achieve "outstanding" in both feedback timeliness and feedback quality if the institution cannot afford more staff time for marking. Have honest conversations with institutional staff about what is and isn't possible.

Benchmark Your Institution

- Which box best describes your institution's approach to each principle?

- Where are the lowest areas?

- Where is the best practice?

- Does this tally with what you already know?

Planning Your Intervention

Things to bear in mind:

- You may not be able to achieve "outstanding" in everything at once. What are your priorities?
- You will only achieve your goals by working in partnership with staff. How will you approach them? Who do you need to talk to?
- You (or your officers) may not agree with all the principles. That's OK – make them work for you.
- What is the impact on postgraduate students who teach?
- Are you the most appropriate person to tackle these issues? Devolution and empowerment?

What's important to students?

Feedback and assessment: what's important to students?

- Diverse forms of assessment designed to assess a range of skills and knowledge
- Clear, accessible assessment criteria linked to learning outcomes
- Simple, flexible, online submission processes
- Workload spread evenly across the year
- Anonymous marking of summative work
- Consistency across markers and use of the full range of marks
- Feedback in time to act on it in the next piece of work
- Detailed, constructive, high quality feedback
- Formative assessment as part of learning
- Opportunities for self-reflection and peer learning

Organisation and management: what's important to students?

- The chance to input on decisions around course organisation and management
- Consistent, accessible processes and procedures
- Facilities equipped for learning
- Accessibility embedded in all processes
- Additional costs minimised or mitigated
- Relevant, accessible information and resources
- Student-centred timetabling and workload distribution
- Flexible, informed choice of modules or options
- Well supported on placements
- Changes well managed and communicated to students

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Learning resources: what's important to students?

- Sufficiently funded and resourced
- Costs minimised and impact of costs on assessment is minimal
- Resources equitably available and inclusive (inc specialist provision for disabled students)
- Flexibly available – e.g. online access, opening hours of libraries or labs
- Students are supported to use resources and improve their digital and information literacy
- Chance to make joint decisions with staff about learning resource provision
- Institutions use innovative resources and encourage going beyond the canon, including resources that speak to a diversity of backgrounds
- Resources structure and facilitate active learning

Academic support: what's important to students?

- Proactive support tailored to each student's needs
- An integrated approach – departments that talk to each other
- Coherent institutional policies that are consistently applied
- Staff are well supported and rewarded
- Regular, structured interactions based on mutual expectations
- Proactive monitoring of student progression
- Support for learning to learn effectively
- Opportunities for collaborative learning and formal or informal peer support
- Clear, accessible, up to date information on academic support provision
- Trust, respect and an effective working relationship

Using the benchmarking tools

- We aim for broad applicability across types of institutions, different demographics and disciplines…

- …but the tools aren't the last word.

- Disagreeing with some of the principles or practice is OK!

- Starting conversations between students and staff is the main goal.

- Use them at any level:
  - Students' association and university executive
  - Faculty or department staff-student liaison committees
  - Course teams and class reps or all students

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Where to find them

Feedback and assessment:

http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/open/highereducation/Feedback-and-Assessment-Benchmarking-Tool/

Organisation and management:

http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/open/highereducation/Organisation-and-management-benchmarking-tool/

Learning resources:

http://beta.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/learning-resources-benchmarking-tool

Academic support: coming soon!

Questions?

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