Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment (OTLA) Action Research Project

Improving feedback for assessments

Basingstoke College of Technology (BCoT) – June 2022

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For further information regarding the Shaping Success Action Research programme and this project go to https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-8/.

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CONTENTS

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Basingstoke College of Technology (BCoT)

SUMMARY

This project aimed to explore whether feedback could be improved for GCSE and ESOL written tasks using a software extension called Mote. We predominantly chose a cohort of 16-19 year old GCSE resit learners for the GCSE research group. The ESOL group was a cohort of adults completing an ESOL Entry Level 2 Skills for Life qualification.

RATIONALE

Our intention was to identify a digital approach for GCSE and ESOL learners that would work for learner feedback, development and target setting. Learners do not often read the feedback provided in their books, or after assessments, and written feedback is very time consuming (we have over 100 learners each). We intended to create a digital learning feedback journal using Mote software. This tool allows teachers to add voice comments to Google documents. We were intending for learners to listen to the teacher feedback and then reflect and record what their next steps were.

Other Contextual Information

Our action research was part of the Education and Training Foundation's OTLA 8 Programme. It took place in the English department of our FE college, where we worked with two groups of 16-19 full time GCSE learners and one part time class of adult ESOL Entry Level 2 learners. GCSE learners were using the feedback given to set targets and understand any gaps in their learning. ESOL learners used the same feedback tool but were also able to read the transcript and then translate into their chosen language. BCoT has embraced technology during the pandemic and we used Mote previously on tasks submitted digitally. Our intention was to attempt digital feedback on handwritten assessments.

APPROACH

We knew that we wanted to improve and streamline marking and feedback processes but knew that some learners would be more receptive than others. All existing learners from BCoT had been used to online delivery (some had used the Mote tool before as a method of feedback). The majority of learners who were in their first year from leaving school had not heard of, or used, Mote before.

Due to the success of using online tools in the pandemic and trying to steer away from a school approach, we decided upon this new approach for written task feedback.

GCSE learners:

Two different groups of learners for GCSE were chosen. Both groups consisted of learners who had achieved grade 3. One class was working at a higher level than the other. In total 20 GCSE learners were chosen to be provided with online feedback. Not all learners engaged in the feedback given. Following an initial and diagnostic assessment, all learners had to complete three additional progress tests and a set of mocks throughout the academic year. We chose to:

- Provide a Mote audio recording for up to 3 minutes – the feedback followed the form of What went well (WWW) and Even Better If (EBI). It included how to answer certain questions, use different vocabulary and how to improve their responses.

- This was for all learners.

- This feedback was available as a transcript.

- This was listened to by learners and targets set.

- We followed the same process for all three progress tests.

Feedback from one of the GCSE learner A who gained a Grade 4 in the November exams:

> "I listened to my progress and targets from my verbal feedback. I was able to then share this feedback with both Emily and Jane during my extra English sessions… I think feedback from teachers will help me with getting the skills needed to find a part time job and improve my job at the radio station".

ESOL learners:

An Entry Level 2 class of 15 part-time ESOL learners were chosen. They completed a writing initial assessment in class. The teacher marked the spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) errors on their writing but did not write the customary feedback on their work. Instead, they recorded the feedback for each learner and produced an individualised QR code which was inserted into a presentation (see Appendix 3a). The presentation was shown in the next class and the learners were able to come to the board and scan their code (each code was labelled) with their phones so they could listen to the feedback on their phones. The feedback consisted of what went well and how they could improve on their next piece of writing. The focus was on constructive feedback. The learners then completed another writing activity and the teacher analysed this to ascertain whether they had taken into account the feedback given previously.

Functional skills English:

We also used Mote for a small number of learners resitting their Functional Skills English writing exams to pinpoint areas for improvement to assist them in the resit. The Mote feedback was sent as an MP3 recording to their learner email.

Feedback from Functional Skills learner C:

> "As a learner at BCOT, I was very impressed when I used Mote, it was incredibly easy to use

and the instructions were easy to follow. One of the things I like about Mote is that I can quickly clearly hear feedback. In my opinion, voice comments are more clearly understood because you can hear the teacher's tone of voice and the nuances of what they are saying. I would 100% recommend this product to teacher's and other learners".

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The methodology of the research changed during the project. We were hoping for an ongoing journal for learners, but we were unable to find a platform that provided this. Instead, we used Mote for the three progress tests for English and in preparation for the ESOL exams. As Mote was developed, we used the tool for additional things such as voice-based questionnaires, the use of QR codes and voice instructions. We found that most learners engaged with the tools offered, but we realised that some just could not show the ability, or the enthusiasm, to work on feedback. We have a number of learners that have sat the exam more than twice. Their confidence has been reduced as a result of them being expected to resit the GCSE year on year. A minority just found the Mote process too difficult to understand, or were not able to understand the correct tool to listen to the feedback offered.

Throughout the process we gained feedback from learners to assess the impact on their learning. The activities chosen worked with the two types of learners identified, but we now need to identify how we can implement this across the entire cohort. We need to ensure that the teaching and support staff are given appropriate training and support to enable them to deliver and assess in the future.

We have had a number of successes with the Mote feedback. The learners have enjoyed scanning the QR codes and listening to the feedback. We have some case studies where learners have stated that the feedback has directly impacted their learning and future skills. We have also managed to use Mote to embed in Google Slides as verbal instructions and for all class feedback.

There have also been barriers. Not all learners have the access to a QR reader on their mobile device. We do also embed feedback by using 'hypermotes' but then the learners have to log on to a laptop and find the document. This can be lengthy and confusing for some. It can take 10 minutes to listen to the document where it would have been instant for written feedback, or teacher 1:1 verbal feedback. Additionally, many learners do not have access to headphones and it can be the case that they would rather listen to it when they return home and they may forget to play the feedback. If we play it in the lesson, they can then hear 20 versions of the teacher giving individualised feedback.

Moving forward, we will continue to use Mote but will use it alongside other forms of feedback such as peer and self-marking. It is still a 'work in progress' as we have yet to find the right approach to using this for paper-based tasks. It works effortlessly when learners create a typed response using Google Docs as we highlight the text and then record the relevant feedback.

Lastly, we still need to work with how to store and track the progress made as a result of the recordings provided. We can see who opens the recordings - but need to understand how and why it may improve their English skills. We also need to understand the next steps in supporting learner progress. We have attempted this during the year but have not created an accurate tracking system.

Professional Development

Professional Standard	How our project outcomes demonstrate this standard
4. Be creative and innovative in selecting and adapting strategies to help learners to learn.	Our project gave learners different opportunities to engage with the feedback provided and understand how they could make changes to improve their writing. Strategies were put in place as a form of target setting. As a result of giving feedback for three progress assessments, learners were able to identify their target areas and undertake differentiated revision activities to enable them to succeed
9. Apply theoretical understanding of effective practice in teaching, learning and assessment drawing on research and other evidence.	We are always trying to improve our process for teaching, assessment and feedback. As Kay (2021) states: "Less is more…if teachers want learners to take notice of feedback, it needs to be short, specific and clear." "Keep it focused…on the task and let learners know specifically what they can do to develop their work." We wanted to ensure that we were providing this using the audio Mote feedback. As part of the feedback process we gave specific actions to enable the learners to improve.
18. Apply appropriate and fair methods of assessment and provide constructive and timely feedback to support progression and achievement.	We have learned that all learners react to feedback dependent on their individual learning preferences. For those learners who have difficulty reading, it was a huge advantage for them to listen to audio recording. For the ESOL learners it was a fantastic tool where they were able to hear the audio to improve their English skills, transcribe into their own language to improve their vocabulary and then listen over and over to support their progression.

Organisational Development

We went into the project with an ambition to change and streamline our marking process for all GCSE and ESOL learners; however, the numbers were too great. By choosing smaller groups of learners across different abilities we were able to identify who benefited from the project. It was great to see the ESOL learners embrace the feedback given and we feel this is only the beginning for them. Working with the ESOL department and understanding how the learners developed their skills will be ongoing after this project concludes. We were able to work closely with the Mote team to evaluate the correct tools for our learners and suggest improvements for future releases of the app. Elsewhere in the organisation, colleagues are using Mote effectively for digitally produced assignments and we will have shared our experiences using the same tool, but on paper-based assessments.

LEARNING FROM THIS PROJECT

We have enjoyed the project and have realised that Mote is a very useful tool for feedback. As the project developed, we soon discovered that we could use the tool for many other purposes.

The main challenge we found was the quantity of individualised feedback we had to record and share with the learners. Every GCSE lesson is three hours long and during that time a task is completed by the learners. At first, we found that we could not record the feedback on a weekly basis for these 20 learners for each lesson. When the lesson had finished, we then had to record the feedback. It was more time efficient to continue with our usual methods of in class feedback such as peer marking, all class feedback and face to face feedback as the teacher checked learners' work during class.

Instead, we chose to use the Mote feedback method on the three progress tests for GCSE. This was much more effective and straightforward as we had to provide clear feedback to enable them to improve their practice. Similarly, the same approach was used with the ESOL team as they delivered the feedback following the assessments that took place during the year. We were using this for the paper-based assessment and when learners received the marked paper they had the audio Mote feedback to listen to whilst looking through WWW/EBI.

We attempted to use a Google form for group feedback following one of the progress tests. Each question from the test had a Mote recording explaining what worked well overall as a class and what needed to be worked on. Learners were then asked to set a target for each question where they achieved less than 50%. Due to the length of the feedback the recordings lasted for about 15 minutes and many learners struggled to retain the information.

We loved using the QR codes and these became easier to use and embed for feedback following a number of meetings with the developers. In the ESOL classes, QR codes were displayed on the class whiteboard under each individual learner and they were able to scan and listen within the lesson.

We went on to use the QR codes for other tasks as well as providing feedback. Most recently, we developed Top Tips for English GCSE revision and these were added as QR codes and posted around the College and on the Google classroom.

REFERENCES

Kay, J., (2021). *Improving English and maths in further Education: A Practical guide*. 1st ed. London: Open International Publishing LTD.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The Project Team

Project Role	Name	Job Role	Contact
Project Lead	Laura Archer	GCSE English Course Director	laura.archer@bcot.ac.uk
Project Deputy	Maria Thorne	ESOL/FS Course Director	maria.thorne@bcot.ac.uk
Project Team	Carol Clifford	GCSE English teacher	carol.clifford@bcot.ac.uk
Project Team	Scott Hayden	Digital Innovation Specialist	scott.hayden@bcot.ac.uk
Project Team	Emily Horan	Study support adviser	emily.horan@bcot.ac.uk
Mentor	Sonia Thomas	OTLA 8 Project Mentor	soniathomasrsl@gmail.com
Research Group Lead	Sue Lownsbrough	OTLA Research Group Lead	sue.lownsbrough@gmx.co.uk

Appendix 2: Learner Case Studies

Learner Case Study A

Learner A is a GCSE learner who has just successfully gained a Grade 4 in his GCSE exam in November. He was an older learner with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and he was 24 when he completed his GCSE after a number of attempts. He was unable to read and had basic literacy skills when he joined the college 6 years ago. During his time at the college he moved from a Functional Skills Entry Level 2 qualification to a Functional Skills Level 1 English qualification. He then moved from a GCSE Grade 1 up to the recent Grade 4.

Over the pandemic Learner A was used to receiving Mote feedback. The majority of his feedback was created verbally. He received funded further one-to-one English support outside the lesson. He then became used to sharing his Mote feedback with his 1:1 English teacher, Emily, and another teacher Jane, whom he visited as part of the catch-up funded support. This enabled him to make improvements and was one of the approaches used to help him gain the grade 4 that he deserved. He showed resilience and determination and we are so proud that the project added to his success.

We chose to video interview Learner A and ask how the verbal feedback helped him gain the pass he deserved. His feedback was as follows:

> "I listened to my progress and targets from my verbal feedback. I was able to then share this feedback with both Emily and Jane during my extra English sessions" and "I think feedback from teachers will help me with getting the skills needed to find a part time job and improve my job at the radio station".

Learner Case Study B

With respect to Functional Skills English, we have the case study of Learner B, a part-time adult learner. Having been out of education for some years, Learner B decided to enrol in maths and English courses at college to pursue her dream of a career in Health and Social Care. She lacked a lot of confidence in writing when she joined the class – her spelling and ability to form paragraphs were holding her back. She failed her first Functional Skills Level 2 writing exam and was distraught, but determined to pass the second time. She submitted extra writing work and feedback was provided using Mote. The recordings were sent via email. Learner B found the feedback very helpful and she passed her exam the second time.

Her positive feedback to Mote is as follows:

> "As a learner at BCOT, I was very impressed when I used Mote, it was incredibly easy to use and the instructions were easy to follow. One of the things I like about Mote is that I can quickly clearly hear feedback. In my opinion, voice comments are more clearly understood because you can hear the teacher's tone of voice and the nuances of what they are saying. I would 100% recommend this product to teacher's and other learners."

Learner Case Study C

Regarding ESOL, we have the case study of Learner C, who is Portuguese. Her objectives for improving her English being to improve her job prospects. During our current course learners had opportunities to submit extra writing tasks which were marked and feedback given by Mote via a QR code. Following the feedback, Learner C submitted a further writing task and showed that she had made an improvement in her writing. She had been attending an Entry Level 2 class her writing level shows she is working towards Entry Level 3, which means she will be able to move to a higher class.

Appendix 3: Project Resources and Reflections

In this section, please find the following appendices:

Appendix 3a: Example of Mote QR codes.

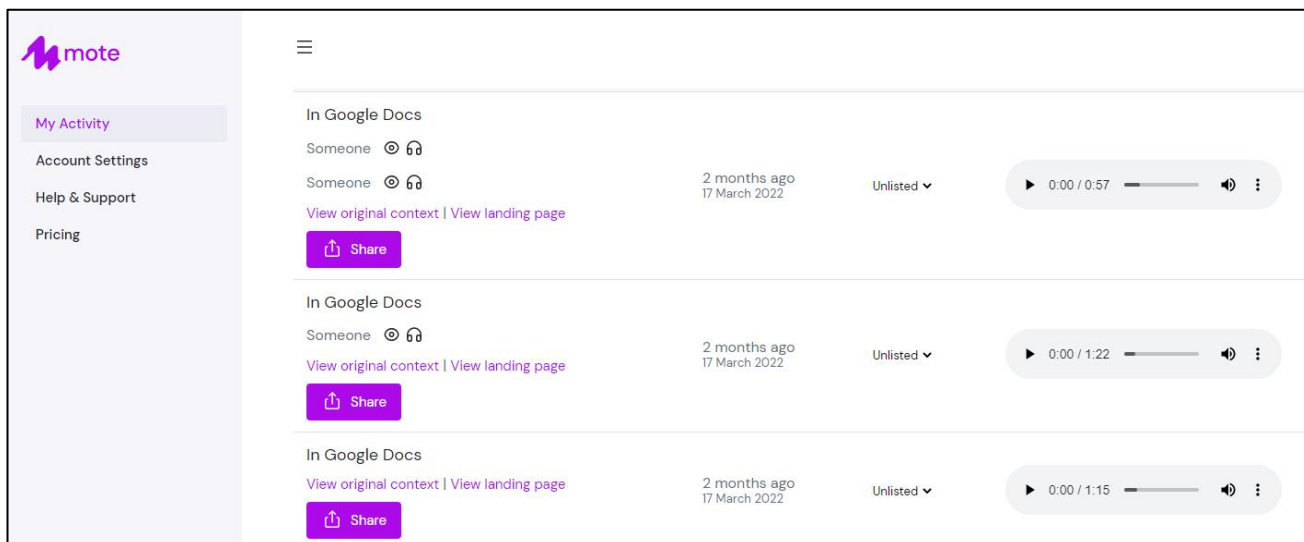*Appendix 3b: Example visual of embedded Gmail Mote feedback.*

Appendix 3c: Example of the teacher view to understand who has opened and listened to feedback.

Appendix 3d: Feedback for learners 19th November 2021Appendix 3e: Preferred feedback Staff 11th December 2021.

Appendix 3f: Learner Feedback on Mote.

Appendix 3g: All class feedback following the November exam.

Appendix 3h: Testimonial from 1:1 Study skills teacher.

Appendix 3i: Testimonial from 1:1 Scott Hayden (BCoT Digital Innovation Specialist).

Appendix 3a: Example of Mote QR codes

To listen to the recordings, please scan the QR codes below.

Figure 1. QR codes used with learners so they could access their Mote feedback.

Appendix 3b: Example visual of embedded Gmail Mote feedback
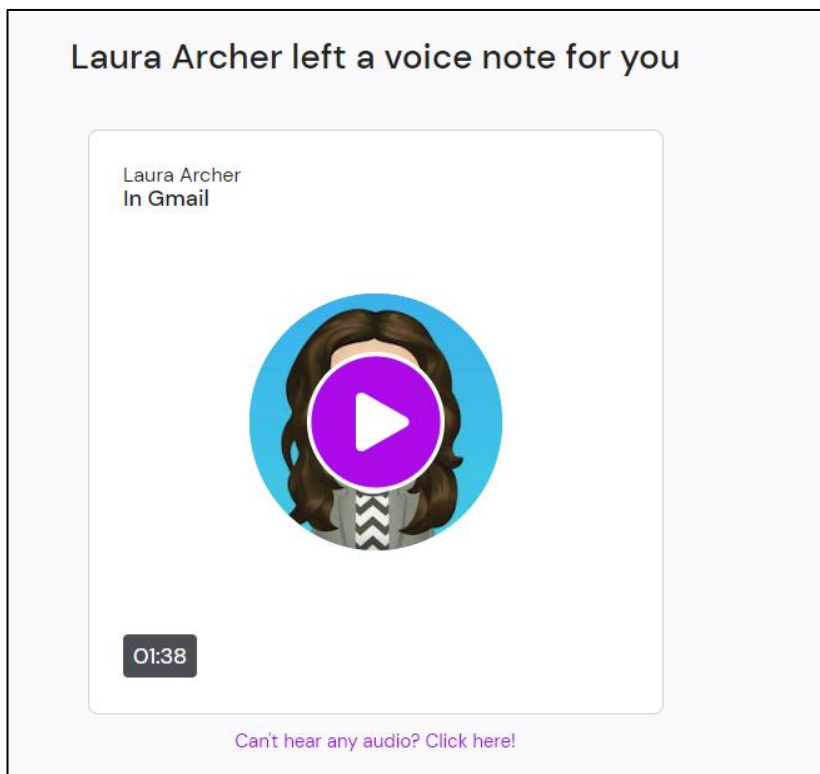
Figure 2. A visual example of how Mote feedback looks for learners in their documents.

Appendix 3c: Example of the teacher view to understand who has opened and listened to feedback

Figure 3. The teacher view helps teachers understand who has opened and listened to feedback.

Appendix 3d: Feedback for learners 19th November 2021

This Google form was distributed to GCSE learners. There were 174 responses about which feedback tool was preferred and why.

This questionnaire was developed and shared with the grade 3 learners. We had 174 responses from our 16-19 cohort. This was across classes delivered by three teachers.
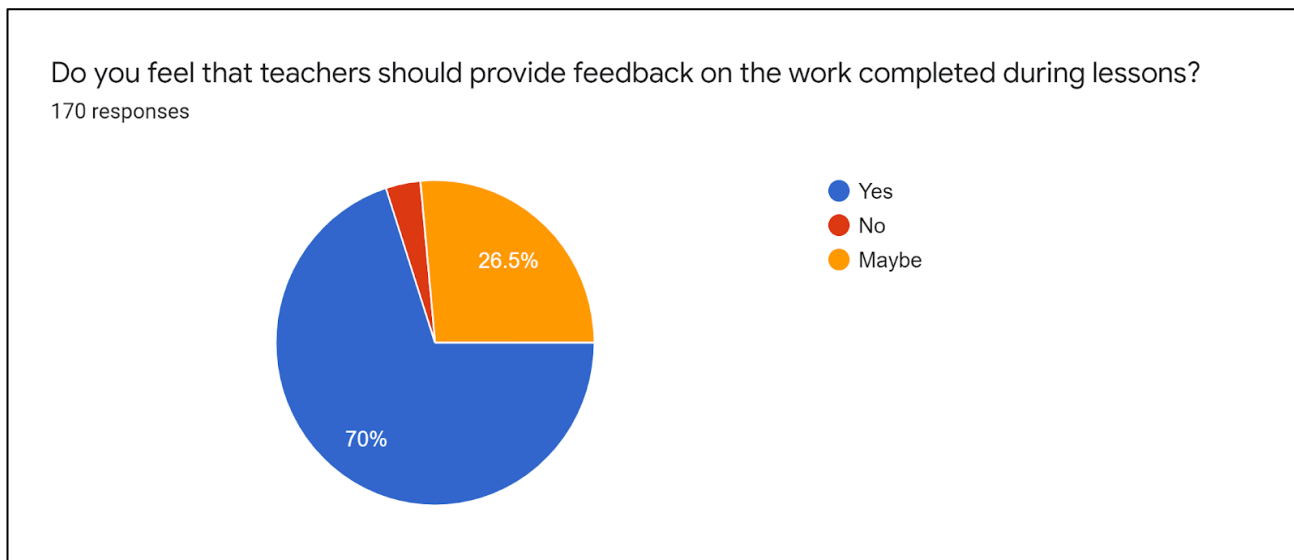
Figure 4. Should teachers provide feedback?

We deliver GCSEs to resit students and it is important that they understand where their target areas are. This can then enable them to improve their skills and future practice. Out of the 170 responses for this question 70% of all learners agreed that teachers should provide feedback. Another 26.5% responded with a 'maybe'. We have a number of reluctant learners who do not always see the benefit in gaining personalised feedback.
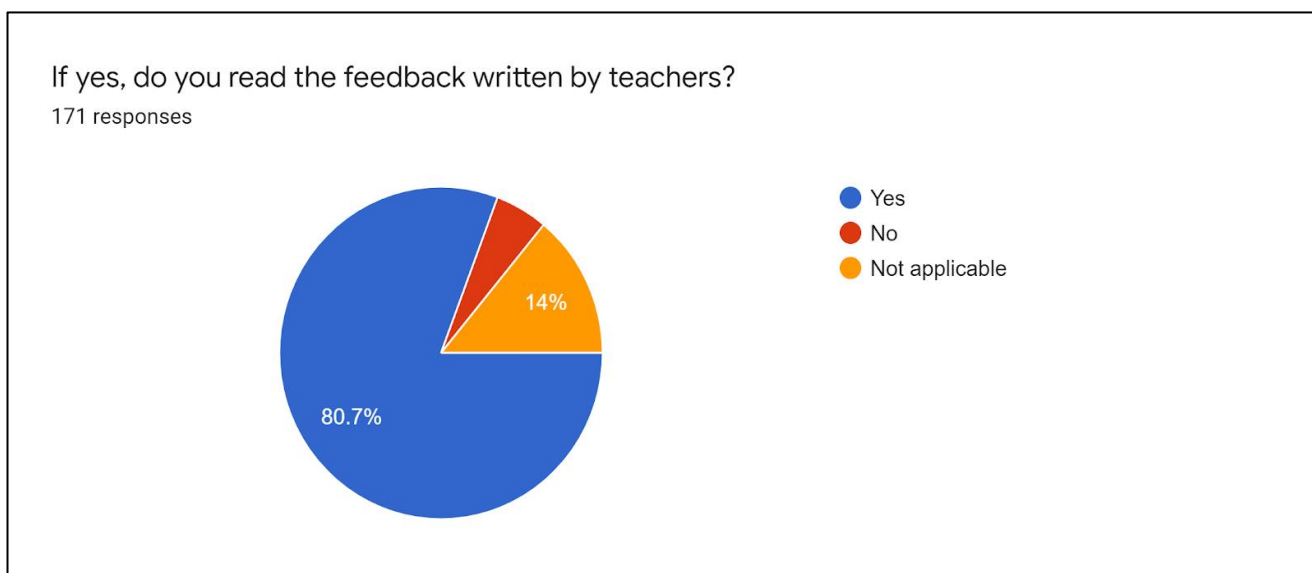
Figure 5. Percentage of students who say they read teacher feedback.

It was clear to see that out of those that received feedback the majority of learners read the feedback provided. When talking further to those 9 learners, who said that they did not read the feedback, it was usually due to not being able to read and understand the teachers' handwriting.
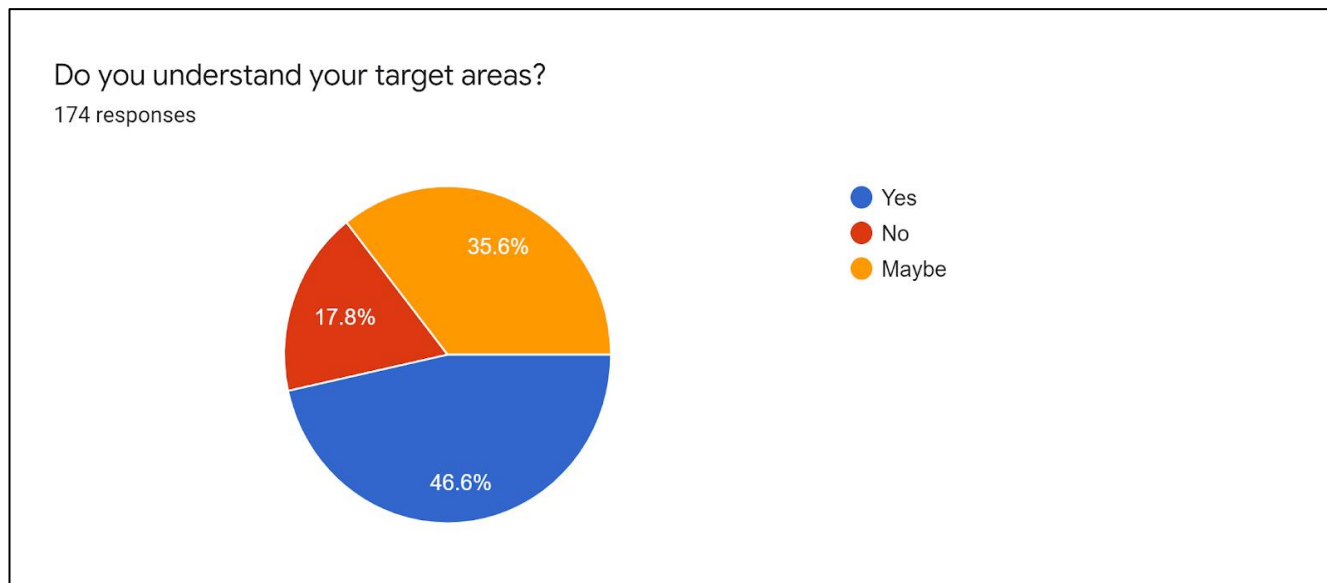

Figure 6. Learners' understanding of their target areas.

It was positive to see that the majority of learners understood their target areas. Those that replied with a maybe went on to reply that there were often a number of target areas and they were unsure which target to work on first.
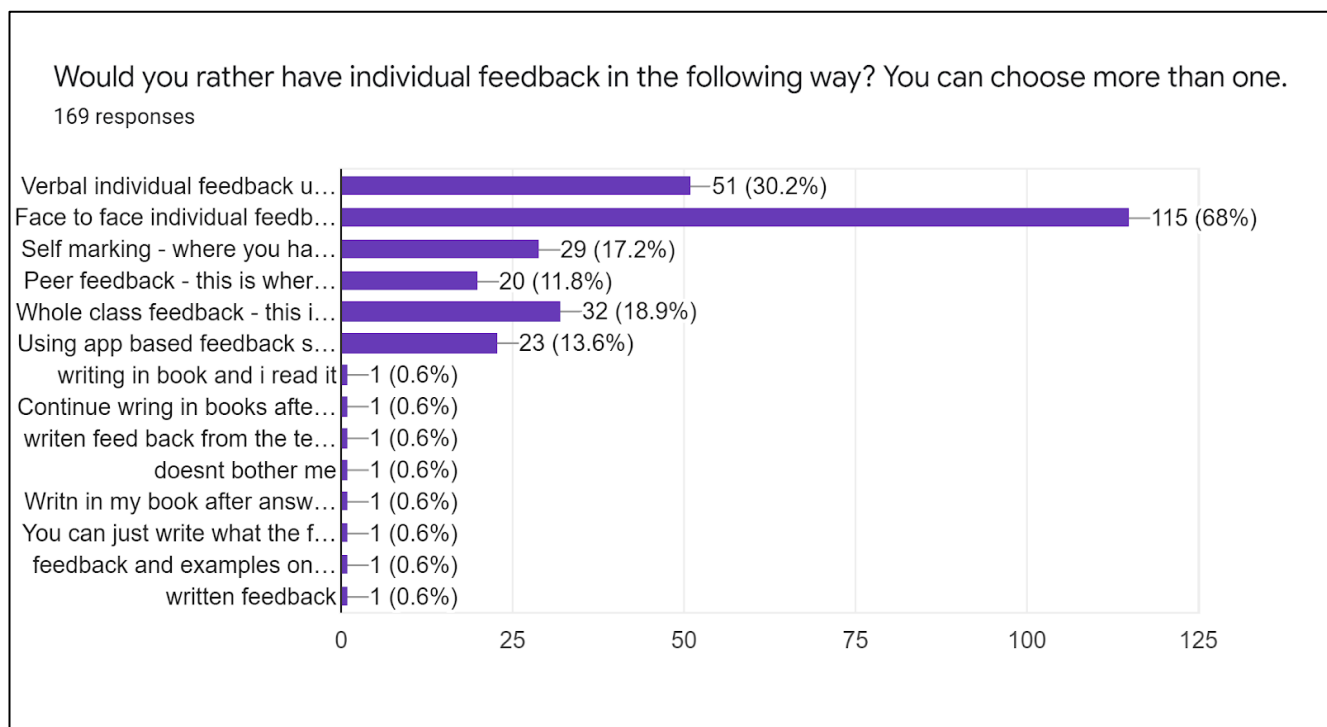
Figure 7. Learners share which forms of feedback they prefer.

As you can see we try to vary the feedback given to all learners and Mote is difficult to use every lesson for all learners. Learners like usual face to face feedback during the lesson on tasks that have been completed in class. When digging deeper we could establish that learners enjoyed the Mote based feedback following the progress tests. They could then go back and relisten at their own convenience.
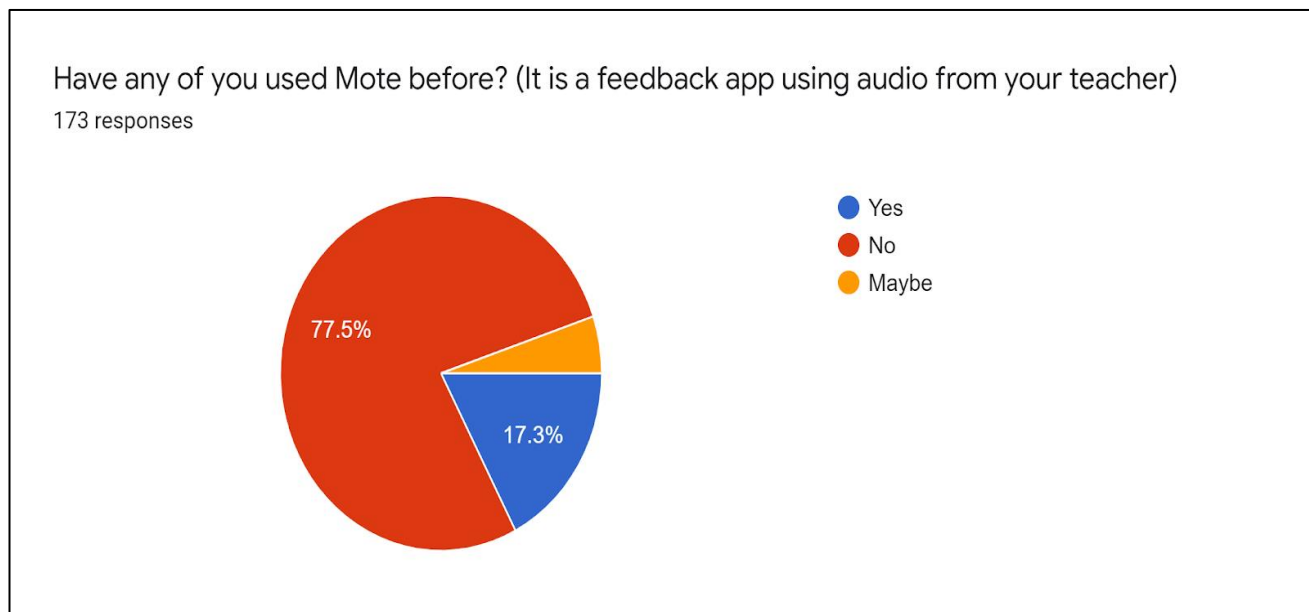

Figure 8. Understanding how many learners were familiar with Mote.

When we introduced the concept of using the Mote feedback tool only 17% had already used this before. Instead of delivering training and support to all learners we then chose our cohort carefully.

Here are some of the comments received from learners:

- It is a good idea created for teacher to communicate with voice which I prefer.

- I thought mote was helpful when giving feedback.

- I love it, and I find it really useful actually so thank you!

- It is a good idea created for teacher to communicate with voice which I prefer.

- good but surprising.

- I find it helpful for me to find out what I did well and what needs improvement.

- easier than just comments.

- good and easy to use.

- I found it really helpful.

Appendix 3e: Preferred feedback Staff 11th December 2021

This Google form was distributed to the three full time teaching staff. The questions asked what their preferred method of feedback was and why.

What do you find most effective and why?

3 responses

Written/verbal. Because it enables learners to be aware of target areas.

written feedback and Mote caters for different learner needs (visual and auditory)

verbal individual - makes more of an impact on learners; personalised - targets specific needs/ areas

Do learners act upon feedback given? Why?

3 responses

Tes because the targets are individual, accessible and attainable.

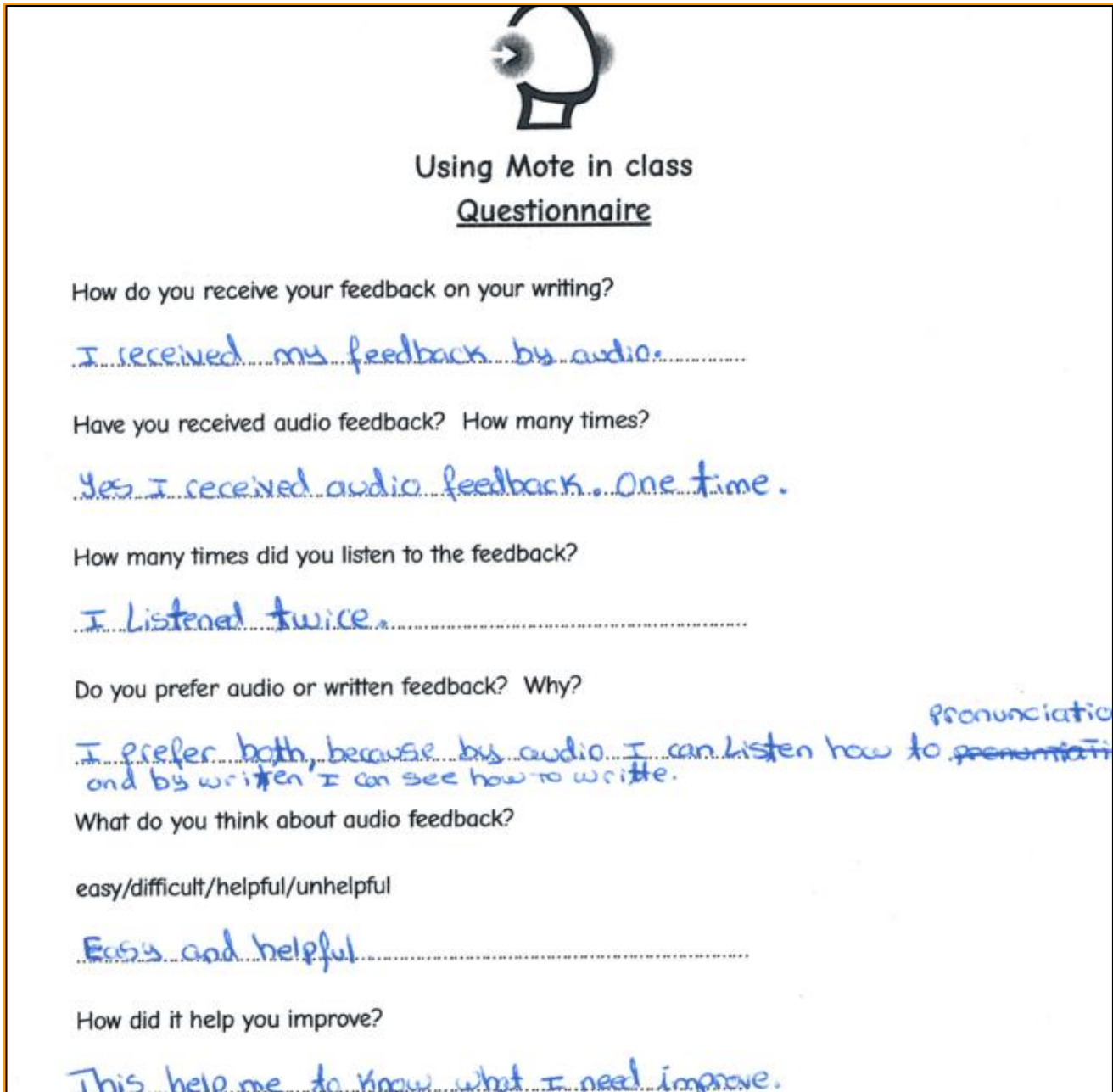sometimes they do, especially the written feedback

sometimes

Figure 1. Teacher reflections on feedback methods.

Appendix 3f: Learner Feedback on Mote

A form to ascertain learners' feedback to Mote was distributed to an Entry Level 2 class of 15 part-time adult learners. From the completed forms we can see a mixed reaction to using Mote for feedback with some learners saying that they would like to receive feedback in both written and audio formats. The feedback on the whole was positive about audio feedback.

An example of a completed form:

Using Mote in class
Questionnaire

How do you receive your feedback on your writing?

I received my feedback by audio.

Have you received audio feedback? How many times?

Yes I received audio feedback. One time.

How many times did you listen to the feedback?

I listened twice.

Do you prefer audio or written feedback? Why?

I prefer both, because by audio I can listen how to pronunciation and by written I can see how to writte.

What do you think about audio feedback?

easy/difficult/helpful/unhelpful

Easy and helpful

How did it help you improve?

This help me to know what I need improve.

Figure 9. Learner feedback on mote.

Here are the questions asked:

Entry Level 2 ESOL learners were asked 7 questions about the Mote feedback they had received on their writing. Eight students completed the questionnaire and their responses are attached to this appendix. Please note that these learners have an elementary level of English and therefore their responses contain a number of grammar and spelling errors. The analysis of their responses is as follows:

Question: Do you prefer audio or written feedback? Why?

Analysis:

- 38% preferred audio feedback stating it was, 'easy' and 'practical'.

- 50% preferred both audio and written because it's helpful for both 'pronunciation' and 'I can see how to write' and 'it will be clearer'

- 25% preferred written feedback because 'it is easy to read'

"But audio is more (sic) better for me, because it is listen any time, free time, on the way anytime we can listen"

<div align="right">(Entry Level 2 ESOL Learner).</div>

Question: What do you think about audio feedback?

Analysis:

- 88% said it was 'easy' and or 'helpful'

- 12% said it was 'difficult'

Question: How many times did you listen to the feedback?

Analysis:

- 25% listened once.

- 50% listened twice.

- 25% listened three or more times.

'I listen (sic) to the (sic) my feedback so many times, that means every day on my class.'

<div align="right">(Entry Level 2 ESOL Learner).</div>

Question: How did it help you improve?

Analysis:

- 88% said that it did help them improve with positive comments such as:

- 'I always try to fix mistake.'

- 'It's (sic) helps me correct my spelling, grammer (sic) writing.'

- 'I can exercise the listening.'
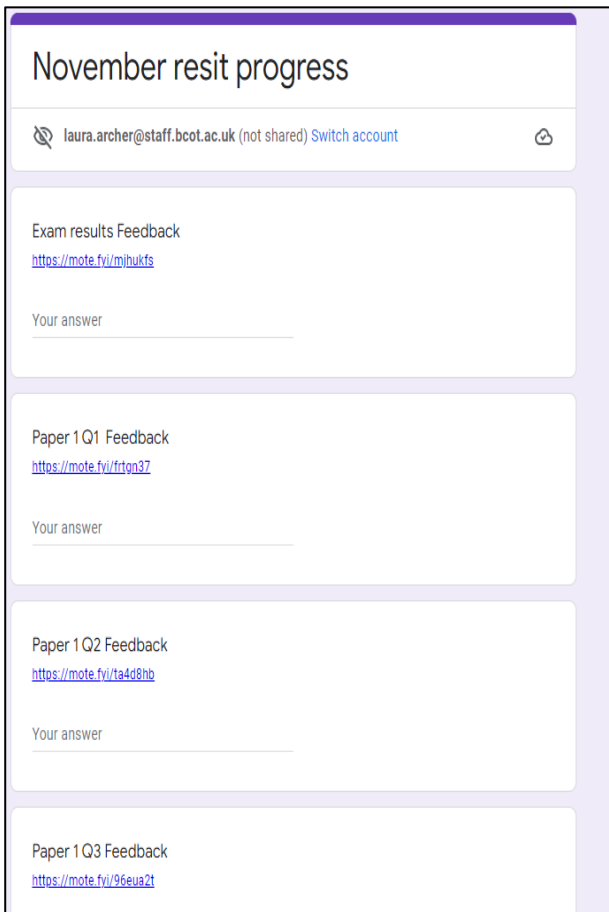
- 'This help (sic) know what I can improve.'

Conclusion

The above shows that overall the introduction of Mote as a tool for giving feedback has been successful in that 88% of learners found it 'easy' and or 'helpful', all learners listened to the audio feedback, and 75% of learners listened to it twice or more. They find audio feedback accessible and it helps them to improve their writing skills.

Appendix 3g: All class feedback following the November exam

This Google form was distributed to GCSE learners. who sat the examination. Learners found it difficult to go on and write a target but did listen to the feedback provided. We had around 180 learners who sat the exam. Only a small proportion of those were in the sample group.

Here is an example of part of the feedback form:

Figure 10. Google Form with embedded Mote feedback for learners.

Appendix 3h: Testimonial from 1:1 Study skills teacher

Emily Horan - Specialist Support Tutor

Mote has been a valuable feedback tool for a number of my learners. It is particularly useful for learners who benefit from verbal communication rather than written. They are able to gain a greater understanding of how they can progress and improve through hearing their teacher's tone of voice. Learners like receiving personalised feedback and it engages them. During 1-1 sessions I am able to listen to audio feedback with learners and pause it where necessary to clarify points and check their understanding.

Appendix 3i: Testimonial from 1:1

Scott Hayden (BCoT Digital Innovation Specialist)

The BCoT Digital Strategy has a focus on Digital Wellbeing and using tech to enhance the crucial human element in our teaching and learning, so Laura and Maria's innovative use of QR codes with English and ESOL learners is a great example of how edtech can be used to enhance the C.O.R.E (Compassion, Originality, Responsibility, and Empathy) skills we value most. Learners using a digital device intentionally with a purpose to hear their teacher's voice in a personal and caring way helps the feedback to resonate while also streamlining marking for teachers and strengthening the relationship with the learner.

Appendix 4: Participants and Stakeholders

No of learners?	30	No of staff?	15
No of organisations?	2	No of employers/ stakeholders?	10

Appendix 5: Research/ Evaluation Approach

Participant/observer (e.g. practitioner reflective accounts, logs)	X	**Interview/survey** (e.g. polls, questionnaires, learner interviews)	X
Observation of practice (in person, video, observation notes)	X	**Document analysis** (e.g. learner work, session plans, annotated resources, policies)	
Custom test/assessment (of knowledge, skill, attitude, participation) for your 'intervention'		**High-stakes learner assessment** (e.g. A Level results, End Point Assessment, BTECs	
Before/after assessment (e.g. measures of progress or change in attainment, participation)		**Comparative trial** (e.g. comparing participants' outcomes against a 'control' group	
Other (specify):	Action Research.		

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