

Title: “You made me fail my students!”: tensions in implementing new assessment procedures

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Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Evaluate the role of a model like the assessment lifecycle in supporting educational development

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

- Assessment procedures
- Academic decision-making around assessment

As part of a three-year project to consider the introduction of the electronic management of assessment, partially supported by JISC through their Assessment and Feedback Programme from 2011 to 2014, a large university carried out a review of existing arrangements for the management of assessment. This review showed that there were a number of aspects of procedures which could be enhanced whether or not assessment was managed electronically or in more conventional ways (Forsyth, Cullen et al. 2015).

In addition to a review of processes and regulations, the project team gathered and analysed a range of views about assessment management: from students, teaching staff and professional services teams. This analysis showed that a lack of consistency of information about assignments could sometimes cause confusion for both students and staff, and could make it complicated to organise assessment across a programme. A lot of effort was going into tasks such as providing tailored advice for students, avoiding clustering of assignments, and planning coursework submission and resits.

An assessment management system seemed to be the answer; such a system would aggregate relevant information such as assignment type, size, special requirements, submission date, and feedback return date, and send it to the people who needed it, when they needed it. Such a system would need to encompass a wide range of approaches to assessment design and delivery (Price, Carroll et al. 2011) and take into account the limitations of generic marking and moderation procedures (Bloxham, den-Outer et al. 2015; Bloxham, Hughes et al. 2015). This paper considers the tensions of designing a system which

supported academic choice about assessment design, marking and feedback, but allowed the collection of consistent information about what was happening to around 400,000 individual assignments each year. It focuses on the ways in which change was agreed and communicated to staff and the impact of the implementations so far.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The outline of the workshop is as follows;

The session will begin with a short introduction to the views of students and staff about existing arrangements for assessment management (10 minutes), followed by a discussion about how staff and students should be involved in decisions about each part of the assessment lifecycle and what the parameters of those discussions should be (15 minutes). This discussion will be followed by a short presentation of the system we have adopted (10 minutes), followed by a chance to discuss the key elements and how they could be adapted in different contexts (10 minutes).

Key questions:

Who needs to be involved at each stage of assessment management planning?

Should assessment design be constrained by central regulation?

What should be in an assignment brief?

Is it possible to have institution-wide marking criteria?

How should a feedback plan be structured?

How can feedback be captured and used to support students?

References

Bloxham, S., et al. (2015). "Let's stop the pretence of consistent marking: exploring the multiple limitations of assessment criteria." Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education: 1-16. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2015.1024607>

Bloxham, S., et al. (2015). "What's the point of moderation? A discussion of the purposes achieved through contemporary moderation practices." Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education: 1-16. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2015.1039932>

Forsyth, R., et al. (2015). "Supporting the development of assessment literacy of staff through institutional process change." London Review of Education **13**(34-41).

Price, M., et al. (2011). "If I was going there I wouldn't start from here: a critical commentary on current assessment practice." Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education **36**(4): 479-492.