

Three Panel Contributions
Keys to transforming assessment at institutional level:
selected debates from AHE2016
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10 minute presentation

Changing practice on feedback at an institutional level

Concentrating on giving students detailed and developmental feedback is the single most useful thing we can do for our students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, who may not understand the rules of the higher education game (Brown, 2015). As two researchers who have worked to change assessment practices at an institutional level at Northumbria (Sambell and Brown, Leeds Beckett (Brown) and Anglia Ruskin (Brown, working with Margaret Price and Sharon Waller on ARU's major assessment improvement strategy, we argue that changing feedback at an institutional level is possible if such change is approached strategically, supported by evidence-based scholarship and led with passion and persuasiveness. Building on our almost 20 years of work together, initially on the Impact of Innovative Assessment Project (Sambell et al, 1997), which included work on innovative feedback mechanisms, we will in this short session outline our strategies to build good practice across whole universities, and how we can review impact in the short, medium and long term.

References

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10 minute presentation

Half as Much but Twice as Good: Constructing Effective Written Feedback in Any Subject

Half as Much but Twice as Good: Constructing Effective Written Feedback in Any Subject Have NSS scores in assessment and feedback got you down? Have you got another 400 assignments to mark this weekend...and you're pretty sure most students won't even pick them up? Are some students just making the same mistakes over and over? We can help! The LEAF project (Leading Enhancements in Assessment and Feedback) was a two-year, multi-university project which looked at ways to make assessment practice simultaneously less overwhelming for staff and more useful for students across a range of subjects. This work at The University of Glasgow spanned in-depth reviews of assessment and feedback in History, Biosciences, Economic, Mechanical Engineering, Business Management. Our outcomes draw on desk-based reviews and staff interviews of full-programme assessment practice in the subjects above; student interviews, focus groups, and surveys in each; interdisciplinary coordination and evaluation across subjects; and finally on existing empirical research on working memory, expertise development, and knowledge transfer. While each subject we reviewed appeared at first to have very different assessment types, teaching structures, and content needs for delivering feedback, taking a step back and looking comparatively showed more similarity than difference. At the same time, students in every subject expressed serious concerns about the incoherent variation in feedback across their own subject, and even more so across subjects. In this short presentation we will focus on one of the key outcomes of LEAF, defining a simple, but powerful approach to improving both the ease and effectiveness of written feedback. We will discuss how feedback can be approached systematically to reduce the time it takes to mark assignments, while simultaneously helping students make better use of the feedback given. We will also discuss what is known as 'ipsative' feedback, which helps develop a portfolio of feedback over the student's career to see patterns of progress or problems that isolated feedback may not show.

Key references for this work:

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- Chi, M. T. H., & VanLehn, K. A. (2012). Seeing Deep Structure from the Interactions of Surface Features. *Educational Psychologist*, 47(3), 177–188.
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10 minute presentation

Changing colours: what happens when you make enhancement an imperative?

The TESTA Project started in 2009 on an opt-in basis at Winchester, with enthusiastic programmes signing up to take part. The TESTA process provides rich data surrounding the design of assessment and feedback across whole programmes through a variety of evaluative methods that focus on the student experience. As such TESTA acts as a catalyst for programme teams to make strategic changes to the design of assessment and feedback based directly on student feedback. For the programmes who engaged with TESTA it was highly effective, but many avoided engaging in case it brought unwanted suggestions of change. The external reputation of TESTA and internal glimpses of its value led our Vice Chancellor to mandate that TESTA should be undertaken on all re-validating undergraduate degree programmes. In 2014, our quality and enhancement units were merged into one department so that quality assurance could better serve enhancement. All re-validating programmes were made aware of the requirement to undergo TESTA as part of periodic review, but we feared that TESTA itself would change its colours; from an exciting enhancement initiative for enthusiasts, to a dull, homogenised tick box exercise with a whiff of managerialism about it. We were wrong. This presentation tells the story of why TESTA hasn't changed its colours, and explores how it has scaled up and become embedded in Winchester's revalidation process. Vitally, it asks the question why resistance to TESTA by fiat has been minimal. The answers are to be found in:

- programme buy-in to the approach as a self-evident 'good';
- its enhancement focus;
- its supportive and collegial process;
- programme teams take responsibility for reshaping the design in the light of TESTA.

As a result TESTA has had a direct impact on the re-design of programmes undergoing revalidation, predominantly through re-balancing formative and summative assessment, re-thinking assessment patterns to create planned cycles of learning for students across whole programmes, and providing students with more opportunities for formative feedback. Programmes who have undergone TESTA have commented on its usefulness in areas of student engagement, clarifying goals and standards, overcoming surface approaches to learning, and encouraging motivation among students. As well as its impact on the redesigning of programmes, TESTA has confirmed areas of strength, providing strong grounds for the continuation of good practice based directly on student experience and feedback. This presentation reflects on data provided by Programme Leaders surrounding the changes made to programmes resulting from TESTA. It demonstrates the effectiveness of using existing processes and systems to transform assessment and feedback across whole programmes in an institution-wide scale up. It answers the question why it has worked.