
Supporting academic staff to enhance assessment practices across a whole School

Staff training on assessment practice, and development of task-specific grading criteria, have led to a notable improvement in students' assessment literacy.

Area of Focus	To promote positive interventions into assessment practices on all courses focusing on clarity of assessments for students in ADBE.
Content	Student voice through formal and informal channels raised issues regarding assessments such as a lack of clarity around deadlines and formats; and in some cases, confusion about what was actually being assessed.
How	The team took a collaborative approach involving discussions and ideas-sharing between course team members, the School's Success for All Educational Developer, a Language Centre tutor providing language and study skills support, and relevant members of Library staff.
Interventions	The online resource comprises a series of training videos with associated activities, aimed at refreshing colleagues' knowledge of assessment practices. These focus on practices such as: scaffolding skills development and incorporating more formative support prior to assessment; creating activities to engage students with feedback; and using task-specific grading matrices—all strategies which can support students from a variety of Success for All groups. The resource also contains a specific section on inclusive assessment. Material also covers why we assess student learning, as well as the purpose of moderation and quality processes. This online training was made compulsory for all permanent teaching staff within the School, to be completed over the summer, along with the implementation of task-specific grading criteria for assessments in 2018/19. In September workshops were run to support staff to implement relevant changes to assessments and practices. Teams worked closely together to improve assessments across courses.
Initial Outcomes	<p>In the current academic year, lecturers have noticed improvements in student assessment literacy—with language used in the grading criteria being reflected in student work. Course teams are working more closely together around assessments and marking, and student complaints around assessments have decreased.</p> <p>By using an online format for staff training attendance was near 100%. Staff expressed appreciation for the flexibility of completing the personal development at a time and location which suited. However, the face-to-face sessions were also vital for the implementation, for staff to receive peer support, feedback and discussion. As a result, the school has seen a significant increase in the availability and accessibility of student-facing documentation for modules, most notably a 294% increase in the grading information for assessments as well as clear learning outcomes, exemplars of previous students' work, and information on what the marker is expecting.</p>

Staff have reported that since this training initiative they have:

“written GBA guidance criteria for students/staff for the assessments for my module, so students know what they are expected to do, and staff can grade the work consistently.”

Another member commented:

“It helped me to formalise TSGC [Task Specific Grading Criteria] rather than change practice (i.e. recognise and communicate more clearly what we were already doing).”

In conclusion, where staff included clearly understandable task specific grading criteria in their assessment briefs, student satisfaction with the clarity of the marking criteria provided in advance increased by 3.5pp.

The initiative won the NTU Team Award for Enhancing the Student Experience.

Challenges and next steps

It has been noted from the School that using a hybrid delivery approach—incorporating both eLearning and face-to-face methods—proved successful and could be replicated within NTU and across other Higher Education institutions. The School Learning and Teaching manager shared the findings of this project at the Advance HE Annual Learning and Teaching conference at Northumbria University on 3rd July 2019.

In terms of future improvements, the School acknowledges the more difficult challenge of engaging more sessional and hourly paid staff in this training and will work with HR on this issue in terms of payment and employment contracts.

Contact details

Nick Prior, School Learning and Teaching Manager, ADBE

nick.prior@ntu.ac.uk

Naomi Jordan, School Educational Developer, ADBE

naomi.jordan@ntu.ac.uk