

# **Developing aspirations in able first year students within a massification context: an exploratory study**

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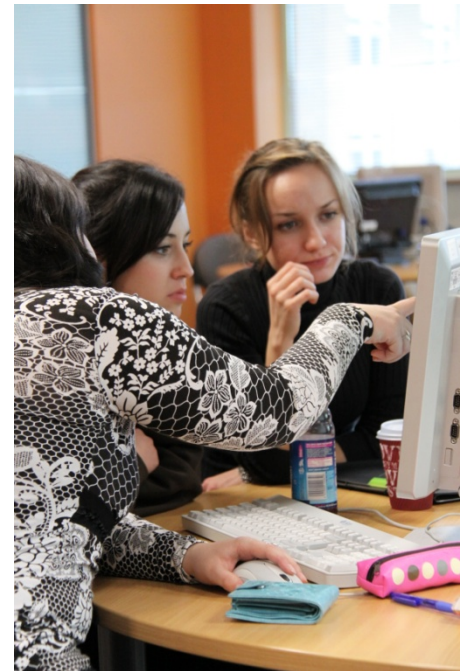
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# Background

Most students in UBBS complete first year “Business Pod” unit (module) worth 90 credits that aims to develop general understanding of business

- 470 students in 2013/14
- Heavy reliance on clearing with related challenges



# Student Experience



- 9 Learning Communities of 50 with two facilitators (Pod Tutors) – c24 tutors in total
- Tables of five students and lots of group work
- Workshop-style approach with supporting lectures
- Problem-based learning and lots of assessment points
- Dedicated teaching spaces designed to replicate a business environment





# Drivers for Change

“I spend all of my time focused on the disengaged and failing students, and I can’t spend as much time as I want on my ‘good’ students” 😞

New UBBS strategic objective:

- improve the number of students achieving higher classifications of degrees

# Starting Point

Informal questioning in class showed that an average of seven first year students in a cohort of 50 admitted to aiming to achieve a first class degree

- Not reflected in our graduate body  
(5% 1<sup>st</sup> Class, 41% 2.1)



# Initial Survey – June 2013

- 71% had already studied Business Studies
- 100% had used the online Learning Blocks to prepare before class
- 33% said that assessment criteria were fragmented and confusing
- 83% said that they wished they had been stretched more
- 100% said that they felt they could have achieved higher grades



# “Stretch”

Have I reached the  
outer boundaries  
of what I am  
capable of yet?





# Differentiation

As much as 90% of tasks in Higher Education are differentiated only by outcome

Kerry (2002:81)

‘Differentiation’ is the process by which differences between pupils are accommodated so that all students have the best possible chance of learning

- By task
- By support
- By outcome

TES (2014)

# The Project

Central UoB funding was obtained to test whether a range of Differentiation strategies could bring about improvements in stretch and therefore aspirations for a study cohort of 50 students



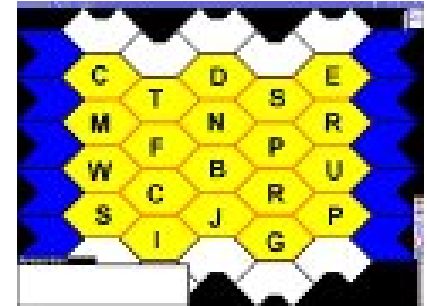
# Executing Differentiation

- Structural v Conceptual knowledge in lower levels of education
- With 24 tutors, needs to be scalable and pragmatic



# Classroom-based Strategies

- Snowball approach to questions
- Blockbuster opener
- Video directive handouts
- Peer presentation analysis
- Choice of approaches in some tasks
  - complete individually or in pairs
  - or taught session with Pod Tutor
  - or online AIR session



# Supporting Strategies

- Substantial online Learning Blocks
- Must, Should, Could assessment criteria
- End-of-unit email from tutors indicating projected degree





# Response to emails

Seems to be strongest where students were being told that they were working at 2.1 level:

“WOW, thank you very much for showing me this. I am extremely pleased with this and a 2.1, thats incredible!

“Really? My teacher in Sixth Form said I’d never amount to much. I cant believe I could really get a 2.1”

I'm really pleased that I've managed to work to a 2.1 this year. I didn't think for a second that I would be able to! :-)

# What did we find?

- Unit Survey shows uplift in levels of general satisfaction and a greater perception of intellectual stimulation
- Unit Survey also shows very few complaints of boredom
- Positive anecdotal responses to Must, Could, Should
- More prepared for their future studies?
- Differentiation approaches work for everyone!

# Next Year

- Introduction of Masterclass lecture series
- More activities with a choice of approaches
- Analysis of approach choice will inform future task design
- Increased use of Blockbuster quiz for structural and some conceptual learning

In 2016 we will be able to review the number/percentage of classifications awarded, and may re-survey students to gauge their longer-term view of the Business Pod unit

# References

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