
Diagnostic self-testing for students in Contract Law

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Area of Focus

The module lead for Contract Law developed a diagnostic test for students to gain understanding of exam competencies and to measure their own areas for improvement.

Context

In this compulsory first-year module, 150 out of the 600 students were struggling with the exam assessment, resulting in failures and low grades. After an initial analysis of students' performance on the Contract Law module, the module lead found that most of the struggling students are from BTEC backgrounds and BME backgrounds, and lacked significant experience of sitting exams.

Approach

An initial focus group with students indicated revealed that students wanted support with exam preparation, and that they struggled to identify their individual areas of strength and weakness regarding their performance.

Interventions

The module lead decided on a diagnostic approach in order to support students to ascertain their own level of understanding, and to identify gaps in their knowledge and skills. The diagnostic test took the form of a multiple-choice quiz, and a follow-up study skills session. The quiz was designed to show students and the teaching team what areas the students need additional support with—as opposed to what they think they need support with. The online quiz was set up to provide instant personalised feedback. This is an essential component of the exercise, since the feedback advises students which topics they need to revise further.

The module team used data on student responses from the quiz to formulate three study skills sessions. These focused on revision techniques for exams and revision for overall content of the module. Importantly, these extra sessions were integrated into the timetabling of the module and embedded within the learning and teaching content as opposed to being offered as 'additional' or 'optional' sessions. In this way, students are more likely to attend, and to see the relevance of the sessions to their current study needs.

Initial Outcomes

The sessions were well attended, particularly by members of the target groups (BME and BTEC-entry students). Student feedback from the events has been positive. While exam results were not available at the time of writing, the module lead is optimistic that pass rates will be improved in comparison to previous years.

Challenges and next steps

In future the module lead is considering running the test even earlier in the module. This can ensure timely identification of needs and problems and will enable students to reflect on and enhance their learning practices from an early stage in the module.

One of the main challenges for the module lead was the time it took to design and construct the quiz from scratch and check its accuracy. Now that the groundwork of the design and content has been done, other module leads can use and adapt this template for their subject-specific modules. There were also technical issues with putting the diagnostic test online, but these teething problems were rectified in consultation with colleagues in CADQ: the quiz now displays clearly and accessibly on electronic devices.

The pilot has attracted interest in the Law school and was presented as a case study at NTU's 2019 Course Leader Conference: as a consequence, the school plans to roll out this practice across other modules.

Contact details

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