Offering Electronic Assignment Feedback

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Extended Abstract

This session reflects on the experiences of staff delivering accountancy and computing modules, in Worcester Business School, who participating in the University's assignment feedback pilot in Semester 1, 2009/10. The lecturers involved are concerned that many students do not collect marked assignments and so they do not benefit from the constructive feedback that is intended to support and inform their future work. The intention is that electronic feedback will offer richer and more accessible feedback

In total 27 modules across the University signed up to the pilot in semester 1 2009/10, of which 21 modules completed the pilot. These modules uploaded feedback in a variety of formats that students could download from their University SOLE page. Disappointingly only 50% of students viewed their feedback. Feedback from students on the pilot was positive, however, the very low response rate render this feedback statistically insignificant.

The assignment on the accountancy module, BUSM3501, was submitted by 55 students and required them to perform calculations and to produce evaluative comment. The previous marking practice was to offer handwritten summary comments, annotate the script and to attach an exemplar calculations hardcopy. For the pilot, this feedback still included script annotations, although less of them. The major difference was that summary feedback comments were word-processed and could be viewed online and the exemplar calculations hardcopy was replaced with a spreadsheet that enable student access to the underpinning formulae. 85% of students viewed their feedback online and 70% of students collected their annotated scripts. Interestingly, 62% of students collected their assignments for this module in 2007/08. The view of the module team is that this approach offers students, feedback legibility, tailored schedules in excel and a permanent electronic copy, however, they do acknowledge that students who prefer hardcopies need to print these off. The module team managed efficiency gains through the use of bank of comments, the ease of amendments and the easy access to electronic IRF. The productivity of the module team was hampered by the lack of a batch upload facilities, but appreciate that this is a prototype system. They also expressed concerns about the impact on ETM entry and the immediacy of feedback publishing

The assignment of the computing module, COMP2133, was submitted by 13 students and required to develop a multi-media application using the scripting language Lingo. The previous feedback approach was similar to that adopted to BUSM3501 and entailed handwritten summary comments and script annotations. For the pilot, the summary comments were replaced by individual Flash movies for each student that entailed a synthesised voice over a number of standard PowerPoint slides. The movies were created using Adobe Captivate that requires the narrative to be typed into the PowerPoint Comments window, prior to synthesis. The need to type phonetically to achieve clarity of voice clarity prove challenging. Although a formal request for feedback

from students was made, the response to this was disappointing. Informal anecdotal feedback from a couple of students was, however, positive. Although 77% of students viewed their feedback online, only 31% collected their assignments (compared with 64% of students collected their assignments for this module in 2007/08). This drop is in contrast to the experience with BUSM3501, but the issue surely requires further research if we believe that reflecting on the detailed annotated comments on scripts can impact positively on future student achievement. The COMP2133 module team reported similar issues to the BUSM3501 team e.g. lack of a batch upload facility. Additionally the team indicated that this approach taken 10-15 minutes extra per script. The team did acknowledge that a portion of this extra time could be attributed to the movies being created using a laptop without a freestanding mouse and also suggested that the average time taken would reduce with increased module numbers.

Both module teams are of the view that the feedback offered with richer and more accessible, but have not yet obtained a significant quantity of student feedback to support this assertion. The overall experience of staff was positive, but they suggest that the system requires development to include facilities such as batch uploading. There is a concern that the additional time required to engage in this type of feedback might deter its adoption for modules with larger student numbers. The COMP2133 module team were concerned by the apparent drop in students collecting their scripts.