INTRODUCING ONLINE ASSESSMENT IN IFP MODULES

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OVERVIEW

In Spring 2015 online submission, grading and feedback was introduced by Dawn Clarke to two modules within the International Foundation Programme (IFP). This proved to be a significant success for both students and markers.

OBJECTIVES

Colleagues within the IFP wanted to improve the student assessment experience. In particular we wanted to make the end to end process quicker and easier and reduce printing costs for students. We also wanted to offer some consistency with undergraduate programmes. This was particularly important for those students who stay in Reading after their foundation year to undertake an undergraduate degree. We were also keen to discover if there would be any additional benefits or challenges which we had not anticipated.

CONTEXT

No IFP modules had adopted online submission, grading and feedback until Spring 2015. We were aware of a number of departments successfully running online assessment within the University and the broader move towards electronic management of assessment within the sector as a whole. We introduced online assessment for all written assignments, including work containing pictures and diagrams, onto the IFP module 'Politics' (PO0POL) and 'Sociology' (PO0SOC) in 2015.

IMPLEMENTATION

We made the decision very early in the process that we would use Turnitin Grademark within Blackboard Gradecenter. This was consistent with existing use in the Department of Politics.

We created a set of bespoke instructions for students to follow when submitting their work and when viewing their feedback. These instructions were based on those provided by the Technology Enhanced Learning Team but adjusted to fit our specific audience. These were distributed in hard copy and we spent some time in class reviewing the process well before the first submission date.

Submission areas in Blackboard and standard feedback rubric sections were created by the Departmental Administrator who was already highly experienced.
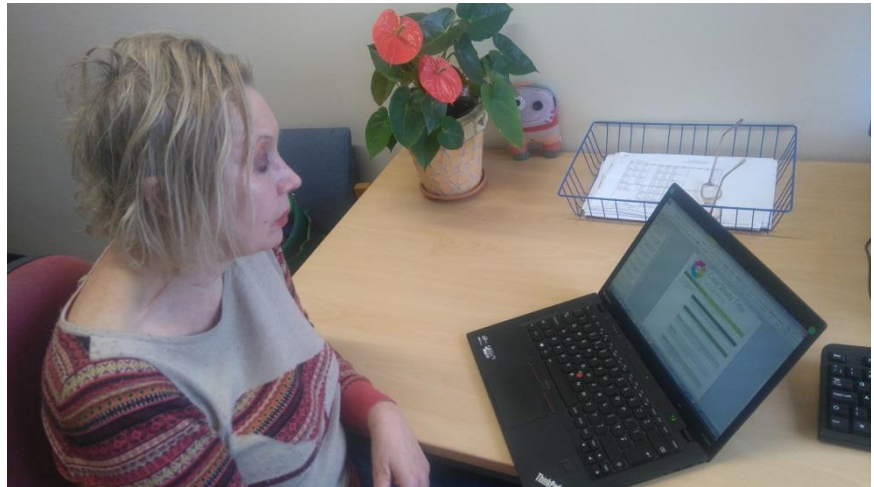
IMPACT

Overall the end to end assessment process did become easier for students. They didn't have to travel to campus to submit their assignments and they enjoyed instant access to Turnitin.

Turnitin itself became a very useful learning tool for pre degree foundation students. It not only provided initial feedback on their work but prompted a dialogue with the marker before work was finally submitted. For students right at the start of their university experience this was extremely useful.

It was equally useful to automate deadlines. Students very clearly understood the exact time of the deadline. The marker was external to this process allowing them to adopt a more neutral position. This was more transparent than manual systems and ensured a visibly consistent experience for all students.

In addition to this, because students did not have to print out their assignments, they became much more likely to include pictures and diagrams to illustrate their work. This often improved the quality of submission.

All students uploaded their essays without any additional help. A small number also wanted to upload their own PowerPoint presentations of their in class presentations at the same time which meant that we needed to work through the difficulty of uploading two files under one submission point.

Moving to online assessment presented a number of further challenges. In particular, we became aware that not all students were accessing their feedback. Arranging online access for external examiners in order to moderate the work presented a final challenge. We then worked to address both of these issues.

REFLECTIONS

It would be really helpful to explore the student experience in more depth. One way to do this would be to include a section specifically focused on feedback within IFP module evaluation forms.

In the future we would like to make use of the audio feedback tool within Gradecenter. This will maximise the experience of international students and their chances of developing language skills.