

AHE (Assessment in Higher Education)

## **Transforming Feedback 2018 Panel Review**

Panel Chair - Prof Sally Jordan (Open university, UK)

This is a joint webinar organised with the Assessment in Higher Education conference secretariat. This 1 hour session will feature selected speakers from the Assessment in Higher Education conference (Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2018 Manchester, UK).

---

### **Invited Speaker at International Webinar 11<sup>th</sup> July 2018**

Dawn Theresa Nicholson

[d.nicholson@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:d.nicholson@mmu.ac.uk) Manchester Metropolitan University

### **Frequent rapid feedback, feed-forward, and peer learning, for enhancing student engagement in an online portfolio assessment**

#### **Abstract**

This paper presents outcomes from a 3-year initiative to enhance student engagement through weekly summative and formative feedback. The research concerns a first year undergraduate, tutorials-supported, academic skills module, with an assessed online portfolio. In phases 1 and 2, half the student cohort submitted a printed portfolio, while half completed an online portfolio. In the final phase, all students completed an online portfolio (c.190 students). The research design has enabled a robust comparison of the influence of assignment mode on the efficacy of marking and feedback, attainment, student engagement, and tutorial management. The aims were to enhance student engagement, improve digital literacy among staff and students (Clarke and Boud 2016), and to raise employability awareness by developing a showcase of skills for prospective employers (Simatele 2015). The online mode challenges the orthodox approach where the classroom is the focus of learning, to a student-regulated mode, where learning is facilitated by tutors' regular, individual, written feedback. Thus frequent and interactive feedback, including elements of feed-forward and peer learning, help develop students' thinking and learning skills (Clark 2012).

Qualitative analysis reveals that the provision of rapid and regular feedback on work is the aspect most valued by students. Tutors valued the ability to track students' progress by accessing online portfolios and providing rapid feedback on completed work. Feedback and progress tracking is easy to give and to receive online (Heinrich *et al.* 2007), but also creates accountability that is often absent in relatively remote institutional monitoring systems (Stork and Walker, 2015). Some tutors found the marking and feedback process easier online and that there was a positive impact on tutorials, while others found the process more challenging. The online approach had an adverse effect on face-to-face meetings for some, highlighting the need for guidance on tutorial management. Quantitative analysis of student grades tentatively indicates higher attainment levels in the online mode, where progress tracking and regular feedback occur.

There are some tensions between meeting the desire to provide very regular, rapid feedback, and associated practical constraints. Barriers sometimes presented through non-engagement of learners, likely influenced by an array of external as well as internal pressures. Nevertheless, engagement on the whole was much improved. There were also constraints due to limited digital literacy, and tutors'

workload pressures. The findings suggest that personalised progress tracking, prompt, regular feedback on tasks, and multiple opportunities for group-based discussion of feedback, can promote student engagement in both self-regulated and face-to-face learning activities.

Clarke, J. L., Boud, D. (2016). Refocusing portfolio assessment: Curating for feedback and portrayal. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*. Online:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2016.1250664>, 1-8.

Clark, I. (2012). Formative assessment: assessment is for self-regulated learning. *Educational Psychology Review*, 24(2), 205–249.

Heinrich, E., Bhattacharya, M., Rayudu, R. (2007). Preparation for lifelong learning using ePortfolios. *European Journal of Engineering Education*, 32(6), 653–663.

Simatele, M. (2015). Enhancing the portability of employability skills using e-portfolios. *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 39(6), 862–874.

Stork, A., Walker, B. (2015). *Becoming an Outstanding Personal Tutor*. Critical Publishing, Northwich.