



Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Business Management Accountancy and Finance

Teaching Research and Development Grants 2007/08

Interim Project Report

1. Proposed Project Title

How Students Work – an exploration of how Business School students in the IT age work together in individual assessed coursework assignments

2. Theme within which proposal is submitted (eg. Feedback on assessment)

Primary theme - Managing Plagiarism and developing academic integrity Secondary Theme - Responding to student needs
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3. Main Applicant Details

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Names and Institutional Affiliations of Project Team Members

Professor Keith Glaister, Dean, University of Sheffield School of Management Anna Sutton, Leeds Business School, Leeds Metropolitan University

4. Outline of Project progress to date (January 2008)

The project has made good progress to date, with positive meetings being held with the student focus group. This focus group of students comprised volunteers drawn from the Leeds University Business School (LUBS) Undergraduate Staff-Student Forum. This group met twice with the project leader to discuss how the questionnaire could best be framed and designed to explore the broad question of “how students work”, i.e. how do students compile assessed coursework and does this align with the expectations of staff.

The meetings were extremely fruitful in that the opinions robustly expressed by students were that a questionnaire would be the most appropriate means of collecting data, but that this should be followed up by at least one subsequent meeting with the focus group to discuss the findings and explore these in some depth. It was agreed that this approach would be appropriate.

Questionnaire design

The design of the questionnaire was the subject of substantive discussions; given that the broad objective of the project is “exploring how students work, i.e. how and to what extent they

exchange information (e.g. using blogs or e-mail) and construct assignments”, this was a key area to discuss with students. Initial thoughts were found to require substantial reconsideration and a single sided questionnaire with a series of questions which could be grouped into two different areas was thought to be a more appropriate format. These two areas were:

- How students work, e.g. do they “cut and paste” text into assignments;
- If and how students work together, e.g. do they exchanged completed assignments

The draft questionnaire was then drafted, refined and modified after being brought back to the focus group. Discussions with academic colleges in LUBS whose expertise is in questionnaire design and decision making resulted in some further slight modifications to questions 15 and 16. The final form questionnaire was tested on the focus group and subsequently used.

Questionnaire administration

The focus group further recommended that although the Questionnaire would be most appropriately distributed to LUBS Year 2 and Year 3 students at the end of Semester 1 (as scheduled in December) the pattern of assignments set for Year 1 students was such that the questionnaire would best be distributed and collected from Year 1 students at the start of Semester 2 (end on January/beginning of February). It was agreed to consider this and discuss it with the Module Leader for the first year module LUBS 1880 “Foundations of Management”, a career development module; the Module Leader suggested that the student’s academic and career development would benefit if consideration of the implications of the questionnaire results were to be integrated into the module. This was agreed and the questionnaire will be distributed and collected from LUBS Year 1 students on January 29-31.

Similar discussions with the University of Sheffield indicated that it would be more appropriate to distribute and collect the questionnaire to students from the Sheffield Management School at the start of Semester 2, i.e. in the first two weeks of February.

This rescheduling of questionnaire distribution and collection will not affect the overall timetable of the project; all responses for all questionnaires will be collected and collated for detailed data analysis by the end of February as in the original project plan.

Project deliverables

The first project deliverable has been delivered on time (attached as Appendix 1):

- A questionnaire which can be widely applied to generate comparative data;

The second project deliverable is already in preparation, arising from inputs from the focus group and initial results:

- Clearer understanding of the processes by which students construct notes and assignments from sources and how they exchange information;

Dissemination of results

Obviously, until the results and project report are available in April/May 2008, the results cannot be disseminated. However, the project was outlined to the Leeds University Directors of Learning and Teaching Workshop in December 2007 considering “Collaboration v Collusion” by the Project Leader and interest expressed in the outcomes. The project was also outlined to colleagues at the University of Leeds Learning and Teaching Conference in January 2008; again interest was expressed in the outcomes. The support of the BMAF Subject Centre was acknowledged at both these events. This has initiated a second deliverable “Outcomes will feed into University policy development through the Directors of Learning and Teaching Forum”

5. Initial results

Initial results from the project have been collated and the data sheets produced (attached as Appendix 2). An initial, unsophisticated, analysis of these, aggregating responses into “never” (1 on the Likert scale of 1-5) and others (2-5 on the Likert scale) allowed for an early evaluation of what students “do not do” and “do” without the more sophisticated statistical treatment which will be available when the data is transformed into an SPSS database. The latter will allow for an evaluation of frequency as well as more detailed comparisons of the responses of different groups.

From the initial evaluation of the LUBS Year 2 and Year 3 results (Appendix 2a) it would appear that the results are, in the main similar, with Year 2 student more likely to be part of an informal study group and exchange text and also more likely to let someone else see their completed assignment. It is interesting that between 29 and 39 percent of students let some see their finished assignment. The response to the cross-referencing question 16 is also interesting, indicating a consistent 80 percent who believe that “other students” exchange finished assignments whereas only 29 to 39 percent indicated that they do this themselves, an interesting dissonance.

Initial comparison of UK and International student responses (Appendix 2a) indicates that international students are more likely to cut and paste text into their final assignment, to exchange finished assignments and in general to work together. They also use social networking sites to exchange notes to a greater extent.

More detailed data analysis will enable a better understanding of what the results indicate and also the statistical significance of any differences – this will be carried out in March 2008 as planned.

d) Methodology and Timetable of Activity (Max 200 words - 199)

Please provide the expected start/end dates and identify the stages of work to be completed within this.

Qualitative data will be collected through focus groups followed by quantitative data collection with a questionnaire and statistical analysis; well-established methodology which the project team has used successfully in previous projects. Optical Mark Reader (OMR) format questionnaires with a Likert scale to assign numerical values to responses will be used to obtain and collate undergraduate student responses to questions on how they work together and exchange information; data analysis will be by the creation and interrogation of an SPSS database.

1. Consultation through focus groups to compile a draft questionnaire; **September – October 2007 - COMPLETED**
2. Production and testing of questionnaire; **November 2007 - COMPLETED**
3. Refinement in response to feedback to provide a final form questionnaire in OMR format; **November 2007 - COMPLETED**
4. Distribution and collection of the questionnaire to the target groups (Undergraduate students in the Faculties of Business at the University of Leeds and Sheffield); **December 2007 – COMPLETED for LUBS Year 2 and 3; rescheduled for LUBS Year 1 and Sheffield School of Management (see notes above, questionnaire administration);**
5. Data collation using automated OMR equipment and software (available at no cost to the project); **January – February 2008 – ON TARGET;**
6. Data analysis including comparison of the results from different years and Schools; **March 2008 – ON TARGET;**
7. Reporting the findings and producing a project report; **April - May 2008 - ON TARGET;**
8. Dissemination of the results; **May-September 2008 - ON TARGET;**

6. Anticipated benefits for learning, teaching and assessment practice in the subject area(s) (Max 150 words – 149 words)

The project addresses a problem identified from real plagiarism cases which is likely to increase. Exploring “how students work” is particularly germane as Business School students come from diverse educational experiences in different disciplines and countries. Project design allows exploration of differences in the views of various groups of respondents. Greater understanding will provide mutual benefits for student learning and teaching practice.

Providing well-founded information will give those setting and marking assessed coursework a clearer understanding how students work together and construct assignments, facilitating reflection on what is expected of students in the context of collaborative working on individual assignments and should initiate deeper consideration of what is acceptable.

The ensuing knowledge of “how students work” will enable advice and learning skills packages to be accurately tailored to student needs and targeted at an area identified in previous work as one where students would benefit greatly from additional guidance.

Dr David Taylor, January 2008

Appendix 1 Questionnaire in OMR format

Appendix 2a Overview of results to date (January 2008)

Percentage other than "Never" i.e. percent who do

2. I prepare notes by transferring text using "cut and paste".
3. I work directly on screen from electronic copies of source material when preparing notes and drafts.
4. I "cut and paste" text into my final assignment.
5. I do not make notes or drafts; I work directly on the final assignment.

6. All my notes and drafts are hand-written, only my finished assignment is word-processed.
7. When I research an assignment on the internet I do this with others and we discuss it together at the same time.

8. I put notes in social networking sites (e.g. Facebook) where others can access these.
9. I am part of an informal study group with other students where we exchange ideas about our work.
10. In my study group we exchange word-processed text e.g. by e-mail
11. I exchange completed word-processed assignments e.g. by e-mail with other students before submitting them.

12. I let someone I trust have my notes or draft work to help them with their assignment.

13. I let someone I trust have my completed assignment to help them with their assignment.
14. I ask other students to proof read my finished assignments to check the grammar and English.
15. I believe that other students exchange notes and draft work before handing in their own assignments.
16. I believe that other students exchange completed assignments before handing in their own work.

N = number of respondents

Y2 UK	Y3 UK	Y2 INT	Y3 INT	ALL Y2	ALL Y3
53	55	63	84	54	61
82	81	89	82	83	81
21	24	47	45	24	29
50	38	47	67	49	45
90	77	79	76	88	77
69	55	79	75	70	61
5	6	26	22	8	9
50	36	58	62	52	43
52	30	47	49	51	35
34	26	42	38	35	29
59	50	58	65	59	53
38	26	47	40	39	29
66	62	58	61	64	65
86	90	74	80	84	88
81	82	74	73	80	80

128 176 19 55 148 231

Appendix 2b – Raw Data for Year 2 and Year 3.