

LTSN Generic Centre


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15



Implementing an Institutional Assessment Strategy

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Introduction

In this briefing we share our experience of developing an institutional assessment policy. We discuss how we disseminated and implemented the policy and what worked and what did not.

We suggest, as a starting point, reading the LTSN Generic Centre Assessment Guide for Heads of Department which offers a set of guidelines on how to craft an assessment strategy, focussing upon the development, implementation and monitoring of assessment strategies. It can be downloaded from the Resources section of the Generic Centre website: www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre (January 2004).

Our experience will be of interest to educational developers, senior staff responsible for assessment, and groups and individuals charged with the development of an institutional-wide policy. Ideas and references to further materials are provided.

Liverpool John Moores University (JMU) continues to evaluate the effectiveness of its assessment strategy. What worked for us may not work for others, but we offer some ideas for debate about how the profile of assessment can be raised within an institution.

What were we trying to improve. Why did we embark on an institution-wide project to improve assessment?

Assessment was the key area for improvement. Internal analysis of the outcomes of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Quality

Assurance Agency (QAA) Teaching Quality Assessment visits had identified assessment as an area for concern – we were losing points. Issues highlighted were JMU specific, but also reflected the national concerns about assessment detailed in the QAA Subject Overview Reports, available from this link:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/revreps/subjrev/intro.htm> (January 2004). Typical criticisms of

assessment by external reviewers focused on mismatches between assessment and learning outcomes, absent or unclear assessment criteria and a lack of timely feedback that helps students to improve. In addition, there were pressures from students to introduce the anonymous marking of examinations. A further driver for change was the need to ensure that JMU's assessment policy and practice was compliant with the requirements of the QAA *Code of Practice on The Assessment of Students*, May 2000, available from link: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/COP/COPaosfi nal/contents.htm> (Accessed January 2004).

The Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy

The JMU Learning and Teaching strategy for 1999-02 was quite deliberately entitled the 'Learning, Teaching and Assessment' (LTA) strategy. 'Effective and Efficient Assessment' was the first and key theme of the strategy with a stated aim of 'providing an assessment system that enhances learning, maintains standards and is manageable within the JMU academic framework'. The rationale for this was the recognition of the centrality of assessment in student learning and that good assessment promotes effective learning.

Key principles of assessment practice focus on:

learning

- where assessment is built in at the curriculum design stage, appropriately matched to learning outcomes, with clear assessment criteria and good-quality feedback to students

standards

- which ensure transparency, consistency and rigour in marking and grading

management

- of assessment which is efficient in translating policy into practice with respect to JMU's assessment regulations, timings of assessment and workloads (of both students and staff).

Five key goals were identified to realise the strategy's assessment aims. For each goal there were stated objectives, identified means of achieving them, responsibilities for action and specific output measures. The goals were:

1. to enhance the role of assessment in the learning process
2. for each School to produce its own assessment strategy
3. provision of staff development support for all staff involved in assessment
4. to transfer and adopt good practice
5. to promote innovation in assessment and the appropriate use of Information Communication and Technology (ICT).

In summary, we were trying to ensure that:

- assessment principles are applied consistently across the University

- students fully understand our assessment practices and processes
- assessment is efficient and manageable
- JMU assessment practice is compliant with the QAA Code of Practice.

How to start?

We had set ourselves a complex task. We needed involvement from sufficient staff across the University to encourage ownership, stimulate debate and ensure that we had staff to work on the various aspects of assessment that required investigation. We also needed authority and drive to get beyond the talk. To ensure ownership across the University we set up an Assessment Review Working Group (ARWG) to establish agreed JMU assessment principles, to review assessment policy and practice in relation to the QAA Code of Practice and to make proposals on future policy and strategy in assessment. The group was chaired by the member of the University's executive with overall responsibility for the LTA strategy. Membership was representative of the University's Schools (Departments), the Students' Union, Learning Development (the central team that supports implementation of the LTA strategy) and staff responsible for staff development and for quality assurance and enhancement. ARWG met on average about once a fortnight over a period of nine months between September 2000 and June 2001 when its final recommendations were approved for implementation by the Academic Board.

Developing an institutional assessment strategy – did it work?

Yes?

The process was centrally co-ordinated by a small team who were well versed in the theories and arguments about learning and assessment and informed by stakeholders who represented a range of specific and important interests (the Quality Assurance view, research on assessment, the essential student perspective).

ARWG brought together staff who had varying degrees of knowledge about assessment principles and practices, and who came from different assessment cultures.

I most definitely had confidence in the process.

An ultimately effective process.

No?

“Due to the diverse nature of the group and their conflicting backgrounds and interests this process, at times, lacked focus”

“..it was all good stuff with very knowledgeable, enthusiastic and committed people giving their opinion but it was like an extended Groundhog day...”

“The biggest block to progress has arguably stemmed from a ‘lack of ownership’ of the teaching quality enhancement process” – non-ARWG member, Deputy Director of a School.

Maybe?

...in terms of setting good principles, it worked very well. The problem was that we did not get to grips with the different situations in Schools, caused by very different forms of assessment and staff-student ratios mainly.

A reasonable outcome but one about which I wasn't particularly euphoric.

It was a very long drawn out, frustrating but an interesting and ultimately effective process.

Most quotes are from members of ARWG.

Would we do it again?

The University's Academic Board approved the assessment policy in June 2001. The end result was a set of tangible outcomes that are now being implemented – so in this sense the process can be said to have been successful. However, the process could have been more streamlined. The positive benefits of drawing on a wide range of experience and perspectives created its own tensions. Debate was stimulated, but in consequence this often deflected the focus of the group. The operation of the working group might have been more effective if tasks had been broken down and investigated in greater depth. The work of the Assessment Review group could have been more effectively integrated at the local level drawing in local knowledge and expertise. However, what was important was the involvement of a senior member of staff with a University-wide remit who chaired the working group.

Implementing the assessment policy

As with any policy document there was a tremendous feeling of relief when it passed through Academic Board relatively unscathed. The job was done. Months of sitting round the table, working through the arguments, some with evidence, some without, obvious to some and totally new to others, had been worth it. However the task had really only begun.

On reflection, writing the policy was the easy bit – getting the policy implemented, not just by the enthusiasts but by everyone, would be infinitely more difficult. Hence a new group, The Assessment Task Team (TATT) was born.

Implementing the assessment policy: involvement and ownership

We wanted continuity of understanding but also needed a fresh impetus from people who were prepared to be proactive.

The membership needed continuity – the last thing we wanted to do was to re-open arguments about any of the recommendations. But we also needed renewed momentum and people who were prepared to do things, if we were to implement the policy.

Firstly, it was important to include those staff whose job it is to monitor, review and enhance the quality assurance processes and procedures. If the recommendations were not linked into standard JMU procedures, then implementation was not likely to be effective. Secondly, input from Schools/Departments was deliberately chosen to reflect different approaches to assessment and assessment cultures. Where we knew of existing successful practice we invited appropriate representatives from those Schools along with

individuals with creative and innovative solutions. These were the enthusiasts whom we hoped could carry the message into programmes and into action. We paid for the time of School input to the working group using HEFCE Teaching Quality Enhancement (TQE) money.

Six of the original Assessment Review group were included in the task team plus another nine staff. Thus TATT consisted of a mixture of staff from the Learning Development Team, School staff, staff development and quality assurance representatives.

Undertaking the review

An important aspect of the work was to ensure that all staff who would be affected by the various initiatives were aware of the projects under way. The highest priority was to raise awareness of the Assessment Review itself and of how this would require individuals, module and programme teams to review and perhaps change assessment practice. There was an immediate tension between those who wanted to get the recommendations 'out' immediately to the wider community and those who felt that such a document could not be distributed straightaway. The latter argued that the recommendations required copious guidelines and a softly-softly approach.

Breaking down the tasks into manageable chunks

The recommendations were organised into specific tasks with achievable outcomes against a specific timescale. The sub group met independently and then reported back to the main group. The tasks set were to:

- work with staff responsible for the implementation of anonymous marking
- write briefing notes about the recommendations
- produce other guidance material – e.g. resource directory
- write updates and articles for the Learning and Teaching press (in-house publication) and the website
- continue to develop our new Learning and Teaching website and to include articles and case studies about assessment on it
- develop a short electronic questionnaire for staff to question their own understanding and use of assessment – with built-in links to helpful information and websites
- offer presentations and workshops in response to specific requests
- organise a conference on assessment
- make a video and use video clips on the website on aspects of procedure – e.g. how exam boards are run, how appeals are held, for staff and student use.

It was important to draw attention to the wealth of resources available that would provide ideas and guidance to staff who might need to adapt their practice in light of the recommendations. A key aim was to illustrate and, hopefully, inspire change by disseminating local examples of interesting and effective practice in which colleagues described the impact that a change in assessment practice had made on students' learning. A further aim was to nurture a culture of discussion and provide forums for staff in different departments to meet, discuss and share practice.

Briefing notes – guidance or regulation?

The production of briefing notes about the recommendations was the most problematic. Some information was sent out via the intranet and email but it was more difficult to decide on the timing and detail of information required.

Within the institution, tensions arose with guidance being interpreted as regulation. The solution suggested was the use of minimum standards along with guidance and examples, which leads you into the 'why aren't you doing this best practice?' Several meetings and several drafts of the booklet were produced which tried to reconcile these two opposing views.

Consultation was crucial albeit time consuming. If a particular member of staff was happy then s/he would be able to sell the briefing notes to the whole School. If the quality assurance people were happy and felt involved with the booklet, they were much more likely to actually use it when considering validation and review. Finally, agreement was reached.

The first section offers guidance for illustrative purposes, while section two offers a summary checklist to help staff review their assessment practice. The 32 page booklet was distributed to all staff involved in teaching or supporting learning and was available to download from the website: <http://cwis.livjm.ac.uk/lid/ltweb/index.htm> (January 2004).

Was the Assessment Task Team an effective way of working?

Yes?

This procedure was extremely effective and resulted in practical solutions to the recommendations of the assessment review.

I did think that having meetings focused on particular issues/tasks worked – e.g. Anonymous Marking, planning the assessment workshop, working on implementation guidelines.

I think that the TATT work has been very useful...all the issues raised and dealt with by the team must ultimately benefit the University and our students. The Assessment Conference was a great success so I do not think there is any doubt about the value and benefit of the TATT initiative...From a personal point of view it has shown me what is going on in the University and how issues are received and perceived by different people.

TATT was an opportunity to discuss assessment issues with colleagues from other Schools. There is a great sense that positive things are happening as a result of meetings.

No?

Progress with TATT initiatives is slow due to School commitments.

Progress was frustratingly slow and it would have been better for me if there had been someone who had substantial dedicated time to work on this.

Maybe?

I found myself imagining colleagues panicking as I read this [draft of the briefing notes]... I know we need this to be said, somehow, it just looks a tad daunting in black and white. I was trying to convey concerns about implementation and suffering from jaundice about lack of conformity. The plans for the implementation sound good.

Quotes are from members of TATT.

Did TATT achieve its aims?

Implementation

Most of our ideas for dissemination have been implemented:

- the briefing notes were produced, printed and distributed
- anonymous marking has been implemented without any difficulty
- a very successful conference on JMU assessment practice was held
- the website has a wealth of assessment information including the policy recommendations, the briefing notes and many case studies, articles and links
- intranet and email messages were sent
- the resource directory is being developed
- the electronic questionnaire is being developed
- as yet, the video has not been produced but we're still hopeful.

It is too early to judge whether the dissemination has been effective or whether the implementation of the assessment review has brought about an improvement in assessment.

Spreading the word

The Assessment Review Working Group (ARWG) and TATT succeeded in setting up a number of initiatives, particularly linked to dissemination and the development of a pedagogic culture, that are continuing to be developed. From the very start of the LTA strategy we had a conscious policy of using a variety of methods to disseminate, involve and engage staff and students in the development of assessment policy and practices. In addition to the briefing notes, which included recommendations, the following methods were used:

1. The development of an internal learning and teaching magazine

This bi-annual institutional magazine was first produced in December 2000 and is distributed to every member of staff involved in teaching and supporting learning. One edition was on the theme of assessment. Instead of providing examples of interesting or effective assessment practice, the aim was to disseminate JMU case studies where the contributors had recently changed their assessment practices in response to staff or student needs. Authors had been asked to describe their own positive and negative experiences of the changes, and the nature of any impact (real or perceived) that this change had on their students' learning. Case studies included the use of role-play, strengthening links between theory and practice, the involvement of students in discussions on assessment, the provision of generic feedback, the enhanced integration

of home and visiting exchange students through assessment, and the use of a database to manage assessment across a School/Department. A version of this magazine can be downloaded from: <http://cwis.livjm.ac.uk/lig/ltweb/top/search.htm> (Accessed January 2004).

2. A revised website for learning and teaching

To acknowledge the wealth of internal and external resources available, the website of the Learning Development team was developed. It drew together all assessment (and other learning and teaching) resources to create a 'one-stop-shop' providing access to:

- all internal documents and guides relating to assessment practice
- JMU case studies of assessment practice
- links to external assessment resources (e.g. the LTSN Generic Centre Assessment Series)
- a comprehensive bibliography of recent research into assessment practice
- a guide to journals that publish articles on assessment practice
- an assessment discussion forum.

The assessment section of the website can be accessed at: <http://cwis.livjm.ac.uk/lig/ltweb/lt/> (January 2004). Links can be found from here to external websites such as the LTSN Generic Centre <http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre> (January 2004).



3. A themed conference: 'Assessment matters: at JMU and beyond'

A one-day conference was held to provide a forum for colleagues to describe and discuss developments in assessment practice. There was a strong focus on discussion especially with colleagues from different Schools/Departments. This highlighted a need for such meetings to be held with greater frequency in future.

4. Assessment directory

An ongoing development is the compilation of an assessment directory. This comprises two sections:

- i. Overviews of recent research in assessment. This consists of short (two-page) articles that highlight common themes associated with assessment (for example, assessment of problem-based learning, assessment of students with disabilities, students' perceptions of different assessment techniques) and a summary of the findings of recent empirical research studies that focus on each topic. The purpose of this is to promote scholarship by illustrating how awareness of existing research can inform practice and/or decision-making.

- ii. Mini case studies. The second, and larger, component consists of short case studies of assessment techniques arranged to complement the topics discussed in the preceding section. These are similar to *The ASSHE Inventory* which is available from [www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre > resources > assessment](http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre/resources/assessment) (Accessed January 2004).

5. Assessment workshops

One of our first initial awareness-raising initiatives was to organise a series of assessment workshops run by an external consultant and assessment expert. Workshop material was disseminated in hard and electronic copy, and two guides were produced which arose out of the workshops.

These were:

Guide to Writing an Assessment Strategy available from http://cwis.livjm.ac.uk/lig/ltweb/lta/assessment_guide/asg_00.htm (Accessed January 2004)

Guide to Writing a Feedback Strategy available from http://cwis.livjm.ac.uk/lig/ltweb/lta/01/fdbk_guide_01.htm (Accessed January 2004)

An evaluation of the workshops carried out a year after the events indicated that the ideas and material produced had an impact on assessment practice of individual members of staff. The impact on programmes or Schools/Departments is, however, more difficult to evaluate and quantify.

6. The merits of the different dissemination strategies employed

We recognised the need for a number of vehicles for dissemination. Dissemination has to be more than a one-off event or a publication that lies gathering dust before being put in the recycling bin. Although these one-off activities were, and are, important we also tried to involve staff and students in different ways. These included road shows, emails, the JMU intranet, word of mouth, workshops and meetings. Teaching awards were also offered for innovation or curriculum design and particular efforts were made to be both proactive and quick to respond when approached with queries or requests for help. Every member of the Learning Development team was a link person to a school and to an award holder. This helped to establish a two-way conversation between the 'centre' and the Schools.

Discussion boards and conference events provided forums for those staff who are particularly enthusiastic (or just curious) to find out more about what is going on around the University. Naturally, the main weakness with over-reliance on this form of dissemination is that only a relatively small proportion of the University staff participate.

The website offers accessible and comprehensive information and is effective at directing the user to the information sought. But again, frequent use is likely to be restricted to the minority and even with these staff, a conscious effort is needed to enter the website unless bombarded with reminders as to new content.

In contrast, the institutional teaching magazine reaches all staff involved with teaching. Most staff will flick through and read headlines, which makes them aware of the main developments.
<http://cwis.livjm.ac.uk/lig/ltweb/top/search.htm> (Accessed November 2003).

It has taken a conscious effort to employ a range of different vehicles for dissemination and awareness raising. We think that we have been more effective than the 'one size fits all' approach but are still in the process of evaluating our success in reaching all parts of the institution. In particular we want to make more efforts with students and with our franchise partners.



Has it been a success?

What has worked at institutional level

- The assessment task teams have produced tangible outcomes e.g. assessment recommendations, anonymous marking policy, requirements and briefing notes, and assessment conference
- The 'multiplier' effect – having a range of approaches and strategies, not just one (e.g. working group, task group, funding for School initiatives and small scale assessment projects, sharing practice events, press, website and the teaching awards).
- Range of in-house expertise – on the whole we made effective use of people with specialist experience and expertise. It worked best where we asked for very specific and achievable contributions.
- Providing practical help and guidance – we tried to focus on practical support strategies, for example, the guide to writing an assessment strategy, press and website case studies and articles etc. In addition. the assessment conference focused on how people had addressed issues and problems – rather than 'preaching' at people or talking to the converted.
- Communication – we tried hard to communicate developments through the press, email, list servers, announcements on the JMU intranet and website. For example, the requirements and guidance booklet was sent to all members of staff who teach and support learning, with trailer 'adverts' on the intranet and via email to all programme leaders, School learning and teaching co-ordinators, School directors etc.
- Feeling valued – by raising the profile of teaching and learning initiatives, especially those connected to assessment, some staff have felt that their work is being valued for the first time. We have been able to fund initiatives and buy staff time. Presenters at the two conferences were surprised and pleased to be rewarded by receiving book tokens as a gesture of appreciation. 'It (the LTA strategy) has given people a sense of self-worth about the work they are doing' one member of staff said.
- A set of institutional recommendations. Finally, we have got a definitive set of recommendations to work to.

What has worked at School/Department level

- **Local initiatives**
The most successful strategy has been that of promoting local determination of tactics for addressing assessment issues. Schools/Departments have had access to TOE funding to help them address local issues that they have identified. This works particularly well when it has been seen as a solution to school or programme concerns.
- **Strategic management of assessment**
Strategies that have had the most impact have been where assessment has been viewed as a strategic management issue to be addressed on a School-wide basis. The most notable example of this is the appointment by one School of an Assessment Co-ordinator at Principal Lecturer level to take forward School-wide initiatives. This appointment of a permanent post is unique to the School of Biological and Earth Sciences, but so far four Schools have seconded or appointed staff on a part-time and temporary basis to undertake assessment reviews.

What has not worked

- **The Review was not as comprehensive as it might have been**
It did not comprehensively address issues of assessment overload. The group was conscious of a separate major review also taking place at the same time within JMU about the modular framework. This stifled debate about some issues, such as assessment overload, as the issue seemed to be linked in many people's minds to the framework regulations covering module length. Whilst there were some links between the two reviews, there was not an integrated approach to the issues that affected assessment. As a result, there are still issues unresolved such as overload and grading of assessment. The University plans to look at these areas in the near future.
- **No detailed research or evidence-based policies**
Pressure of time and the QAA agenda dominated our consideration of assessment issues. We could have made more use of in-house expertise, but there was always a tension between actions driven mainly by



educational research and principles and action driven by a desire to be seen to be compliant with the QAA Code of Practice.

- **Involvement with students**
We were full of good intentions to get the students involved. The demand for anonymous marking was felt by some staff to be as a result of a misunderstanding by students of how staff assess. The Students Union did contribute substantially to the assessment review and, in part, to some of the other initiatives. However, in the same way as we need to get the message across to all staff, not just Directors and Teaching and Learning Co-ordinators (TLCs), we still need to get the message across to all students. This may seem to be very ambitious but it does tie in with a number of other initiatives about student learning and study support with which JMU is involved.

What we hope will work

- **Implementation of the Assessment Review recommendations**
There is much work still to be done on implementation. We feel that we are on a winner with the briefing notes. It is early days but we have had a few queries and requests for more copies which indicate that the booklet has been read, so that is a start! We need to work with Schools/Departments and our quality assurance staff to evaluate the implementation and feedback.

Where to next?

The revised Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy for 2002-05 continues to have a focus on assessment as an integral feature of course design.

The main emphasis is on implementation support for the Assessment Review recommendations. We will try to ensure that these are integrated into the University's standard quality assurance processes and procedures.

We aim to continue and develop dissemination through the JMU website and press and sharing practice events. Previous dissemination activities have focused largely on awareness raising. We now want to place more emphasis on dissemination for *use* and *embedding*. For example, we want to find ways of spreading work done in one particular School on mapping and scheduling of assessment across the University so that it becomes standard practice.

If we had to start again we would work in the same way. We believe it was an effective way of developing and implementing an assessment strategy. There are a few changes that we would make to the process. We would try to make greater use of in-house experts and try to be even more involved with activities and 'champions' in

Schools/Departments so that our ideas were informed by, and tied in with, activities, developments and realities in the Schools. Dissemination would have been improved if our involvement with students and collaborative partner institutions had been greater and more widespread.

At certain stages of the process different tactics were required. Thus at the early stages of developing a policy there was a need to include a wide representation of staff with different backgrounds, expertise and assessment cultures. Consultation and involvement with staff is crucial to success, and time spent genuinely involved in discussion and debate should reap dividends at the implementation stage. It will take longer to produce the policy or recommendations initially, but the policy then will have a greater chance of being implemented rather than ignored later on.

In conclusion, therefore, we would recommend:

- in-house experts and local 'champions'
- local consultation, not just 'representatives' and involve individuals in specific projects or tasks
- paying for staff time for those undertaking specific projects
- a senior member of staff to champion
- wide consultation



- focussed task-oriented meetings once initial discussions had been completed
- a variety of methods to disseminate policy
- involving key staff crucial to implementation
- involving students
- involving collaborative partner institutions
- explicitly valuing those staff who make a contribution
- providing clear, concise guidance on implementation of the policy with further support materials, illustrative examples etc.
- in-house examples where possible with 'official' links between named members of the central team and schools/departments.

Dreams and reality

We believe that we have made a significant start in changing attitudes and practice towards assessment and towards learning and teaching in general. There are now projects – not just lone innovations – and articles for the Press that arrive unsolicited. 'We were surprised to find like minded-souls outside our subject' said one respondent to our external evaluator. There is an awareness and discussion about assessment and teaching issues that another respondent described as 'a change of consciousness and culture'. Implementation and change does not happen overnight or even within an academic year but we think we have made significant progress.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Approaches to improving assessment at School/Department level

It has been a stated goal of the JMU Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy that each School should develop its own assessment strategy using funding made available to them from the HEFCE TOE funding. This was allocated to Schools on a formula-funding basis using student FTEs and was dependant on production of a School learning and teaching plan that prioritised activities against criteria based on the University's LTA strategy. Over the two-year period 2000-02 all of JMU's Schools have undertaken initiatives that have focused on improving aspects of assessment at local level. Some examples of strategies employed by Schools are:

- undertaking complete reviews and mapping of assessment across Schools and programmes
- development of a School assessment database to provide information for students on assessment tasks, timetables, submission dates
- school initiatives to address specific assessment issues such as policy and practice for project/dissertation supervision, marking and moderation practice, surveying best practice in the assessment of learning contracts and student-led assessment, piloting of School-wide assessment feedback sheets

- development of use of ICT in Assessment, such as electronic feedback and on-line assessment
- school 'awaydays' to discuss assessment issues and to disseminate and share practice.

What impact has this had?

At the end of each academic year Schools complete an evaluation and progress update on their implementation of the LTA strategy. They are asked to identify their key success stories.

Some examples in the area of assessment are:

We have completed a review of assessment throughout the school and will present a unified assessment strategy for all our programmes for discussion by staff with a view to adoption next academic year...we will be attempting to tie assessment tasks through to programme objectives as key skills...this was made possible by emoluments to staff to provide the time for mapping for assessment and key skills.
(School of Biological and Earth Sciences)

...the LTA strategy has enabled us to bring about tangible improvements in a number of areas: establishing a cross-school dialogue on the topic of assessment...documented good practice in assessment...shift in level 3 assessment profile.
(International School)



Developing the assessment strategy has promoted useful discussion by both students and staff about emerging areas of teaching practice, including the teaching and assessment of ICT skills and the timing and type of feedback which is most effective for students.

(School of Media, Critical and Creative Arts)

The Assessment awayday was a real success as it was the first activity of this type that the School has run. It has inspired and encouraged the School to plan more such events

(School of Engineering)

The bulk of the School TQE money has been used to pay a 0.4 post to do aspects of the assessment review. A recent revalidation panel commended some of the material provided. This material has underpinned our awaydays and given impetus to the development of School-wide strategies for learning and teaching and particularly assessment

(School of Biomolecular Sciences)

Appendix 2

School of Biological and Earth Sciences: a School approach

The School's approach was to develop an assessment strategy that gives a practical demonstration of principles embodied in theoretical description of assessment and its practice as formulated by the QAA/JMU.

Liverpool John Moores University operates a modular degree scheme. All modular systems have a fundamental drawback in that their assessment is additive and incremental by programme. Most work on assessment is concentrated at the modular level. Assessment by level and by programme goes by default as the addition of separate modular assessments.

In order to develop an assessment strategy a review is necessary of all assessment types, deadlines and module workloads. Assessment can be categorised by type and by level and the principles of good assessment practice applied.

Categorisation of assessment allows the discovery of inconsistencies within the assessment structure. These can be corrected by level and programme giving a joined-up programme assessment structure.

The School of Biological and Earth Sciences modular assessment review began in September 2000 and finished in March 2002. Modular leaders were contacted directly and asked for details of the module assessment. The coursework component of assessment was the most variable. The development of consistent and appropriate categories was the critical task.

Categorisation of assessment showed the distribution of assessment types by programme and level. These information recommendations were made regarding the number of coursework assessments per module and examination format.

One of the most important outcomes of the assessment review was the realisation that students did not have the opportunity to develop required assessment skills. A programme of study skills was implemented at Level 2 to increase students' essay-writing skills and the format of the terminal examinations at Level 2 was amended to provide students with the opportunity to develop essay writing and interpretative skills that they would require at Level 3.

The process was made transparent through the development of an assessment database that allowed the production of assessment profiles for individual programmes and students. Programme assessment profiles were given to programme teams who could then review the programme aims with respect to the assessment tasks. This closes the loop between aims at the programme level and module learning outcomes. Student assessment profiles were distributed to students via the School's personal tutor scheme. Personal tutors were asked to check how students were managing assessment tasks for the semester.

The process of auditing assessment has brought it to the forefront of teaching and learning development within the School. For the first time a complete overview of assessment for all our programmes is available. Assessment is no longer revelatory for students but is anticipatory, allowing better time management, and hopefully this will result in increased student retention and enhanced student learning.

Appendix 3

The International School - A School approach

In the International School a variety of languages are taught, ranging from English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) to French and Japanese. It is generally accepted that approaches to learning and teaching within these distinct languages vary.

In order to arrive at a workable assessment strategy that could be successfully implemented across languages and throughout the School, a number of initiatives were taken, the first being to prioritise assessment via an Assessment Fellowship in the School, funded by TQE money. The aim of the fellowship was to map current School assessment practices onto the University's Learning and Teaching and Quality Assurance goals in order to establish areas of match.

To ensure total staff involvement explanatory School-wide emails were sent out and language cohort meetings held. Agendas were agreed for each meeting and information gathered was collated and circulated for approval. Interestingly, colleagues often sought individual meetings to air personal concerns and views. These were later aired in workshops and School Forum sessions.

Colleagues varied in their response to the assessment initiative. Many appreciated the chance to share ideas and gain an insight into the problems faced by colleagues in other languages. *Discussions flagged up problems with current assessment practices and encouraged a collaborative approach to seeking solutions.* Some felt they were being 'indirectly appraised' while some saw this as management manipulating them into a more restricted method of teaching and thinking. *A more standardised approach to assessment is nothing more than straight-jacketing. It won't work.*

Whatever their views, examples of good practice that could be shared across languages emerged. Also, a greater awareness and acceptance of different approaches to assessment were being discussed school-wide. At colleagues instigation, workshops were arranged to examine these new approaches in more detail and a School Forum was designed as a genuine opportunity for open discussion.

An assessment strategy has now been devised which addresses both staff and students' needs and can accommodate the growing demands of a wider student intake. Implementation started in September 2002 with the language of assessment being more commonly heard and the issues associated with it less cloaked in mystery.

Appendix 4

An individual viewpoint – how the policy has affected an individual member of staff

I started as a Lecturer in Physical Chemistry in JMU's School of Pharmacy and Chemistry (PAC) in September 1998, after previously working in a Further Education (FE) college. My first involvement with the JMU Learning Development Team (LDT) was the part-time Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCert). As part of the JMU Learning and Teaching (LTA) strategy, all new staff are encouraged to undertake this Staff and Education Development Association (SEDA) accredited course. I found the programme to be of great assistance. Before starting the PGCert, I was apprehensive about HE teaching, in particular the size of the classes and my level of subject knowledge. Interactions with colleagues on the course made me realise that these are common concerns, and my confidence in my teaching increased as I became exposed to novel teaching and assessment strategies.

As part of my studies on the PGCert, I began to investigate the possibility of using software to assist in the generation and dissemination of feedback to students. Details of the 'Electronic Feedback' software have been shared with JMU

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colleagues in a series of workshops in the LDT publication and on the LDT website. The recent JMU Assessment Conference, organised by the LDT, gave me an opportunity to relate the latest developments in the software. This is in addition to an annual workshop on the method that I deliver to the current PG Cert students.

Although I am an active researcher in my subject specialism, chemistry, my Computer Assisted Assessment (CAA) is increasingly high profile. I successfully applied for a JMU teaching-related research award in early 2002. This has provided technical support for my work and funding for an international conference. My article on the plagiarism detection capability of the latest version of Electronic Feedback has been accepted for presentation at the International Conference on Information and Communication Technologies in Education amongst others. Contacts made at these events have led to presentations of my work at nine UK HE institutions to date.

In 2001, I was appointed as assessment co-ordinator on the School's LTA group. Through this group, funding has been made available to promote a number of initiatives within the School, including an assessment database that I am currently developing. As a member of the Assessment Task Team (TATT), I am working on an electronic questionnaire that will interrogate teaching practice. Staff would then be directed to appropriate LDT WebPages where they would find bespoke advice.

In summary, the JMU LTA strategy has had a positive impact on my work. My CAA research has attained a higher level of legitimacy and it has been possible to disseminate this work to a wider audience. Research is presently underway to ascertain the impact of the Electronic Feedback software, but anecdotal evidence indicates that it has already been of assistance to dozens of staff at both JMU and in the wider HE community.



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