



Position Statement for Higher Education Academy Panel: Student input to assessment design & strategy

Should learners be involved in designing assessments and strategy?

By

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When asked to comment on this proposal, my immediate reaction was “Why don’t we ask them?” My involvement in the recent JISC funded Learner Experience of E-Learning (LEX) study has convinced me that students have a sophisticated level of awareness of their own learning, and that we as tutors would benefit greatly if we took more time to listen to their views. As the quote below illustrates, students fit learning expertly into their increasingly complex lives, using technology seamlessly to access information, communicate, and underpin their widespread support networks.

“I’m addicted, it’s the first thing I turn on in the morning ...I think in the future people won’t cope without their laptops. My main use of it I guess is social networking. It would be MySpace and Messenger and e-mail and things like that, and then secondary would be information gathering My home page is the technology website and current affairs, news. I have alerts coming into me so I get information and then I use search engines for academic purposes.” (Emma, undergraduate business student, from LEX Final Report, 2006)

Based on this evidence, universities and colleges are a long way behind in integrating technology to enhance learning, teaching and assessment. Apart from a few shining beacons of excellence among innovation champions, our teaching and learning approaches are in need of a radical overhaul while assessment strategies remain mired in the red tape of quality assurance, accountability and plagiarism fears. As one student perceptively commented:

“[E-learning] doesn’t help you in your exam periods because it’s not a traditional form of assessment.... It’s harsh for the tutor to say you’ve got to do this piece of coursework on the internet and type it up and use these specialist programmes, but then your exam’s something you’ve got to write ... so I think that’s a disadvantage.” (Alan, final year undergraduate student, from LEX Final Report, 2006)

If students were asked to design assessments, perhaps these aspects would be on their wish lists:

- If technology is good enough for learning, it should be good enough for assessing learning.
- We want tutors to use appropriate technologies to provide us with timely, meaningful, and consistent feedback in a form that we can easily access.



- We don't need to be assessed on facts which we can find on the internet; we need experience in applying knowledge through collaborative problem solving and authentic, peer-reviewed learning activities and assessments.
- Both formative and summative assessments should be available in a way that fits easily into our busy lives.
- We're always connected and are highly skilled networkers. We want learning activities which allow for this and assessments which acknowledge the skills we use.

Research is telling us that students' behaviour and expectations are changing rapidly. Indeed the LEX study found evidence to suggest that learners are deliberately taking ownership of their learning by personalising their approach to learning activities. Involving students in assessment design is simply the next stage in an evolving process. It is such an obvious strategy for encouraging deeper student engagement with their learning that we ignore it at our peril.

REFERENCES

Creanor, L., Trinder, K., Gowan, D. and Howells, C. (2006). *L E X Final Report*. Available at: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning_pedagogy/elp_learneroutcomes.aspx

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