REAP Completion Report Principles of Marketing, Department of Marketing

Project Sign-off

1. Project achievements

A. Have all project activities or deliverables been completed? What, if any, work remains outstanding from your plans for this academic year?

The original transformational intention of this project was to improve the learning experience of the first year students. With a class size of 512 students this year it was necessary to provide greater interaction in lectures and focused opportunities for self assessment, delivery and use of feedback to enhance learning and peer interaction/collaborative learning by utilising a number of technologies. So the overall aims of the project included:

- Use on-line MCQ tests for better diagnostic testing to allow students to monitor and self-regulate their learning and for staff to monitor progress and use tutorials/lectures to address weaknesses
- Use of an on-line template with generic and tailored comments to provide better feedback support and savings in how feedback is delivered
- Increased usage of the VLE was expected to reduced tutorial work and the first year administrative load

Most of these aims have been achieved

The students have received a mix of formative and summative assignments aimed at promoting active learning and self assessment and motivate students towards greater engagement with course material. Paper-based summative class tests based on content from core reading materials was replaced with on-line versions delivered via the institutional VLE. In addition, staff used a databank of feedback responses that evaluated each element of the assignment and aimed to provide clear, consistent and readable feedback to students' written assignments. Assignments were submitted electronically, feedback comments linked to the text and a pro-forma with a menu of potential comments was created and modified by staff members. This feedback was delivered to students via the institutional VLE.

B. At the end of the project, do you feel you achieved the aims and objectives identified at the start? What is missing? What have you done that wasn't in your original plans?

The use of on-line formative and summative MCQ tests has been successful in terms of delivering a method which was efficient and secured student's participation and effort. The feedback provided to them and its quality was appreciated by students and they have responded by using it to improve other assignments. There is still room for further improvement. (Research into this is discussed in more detail in the next section)

The on-line template has been used by all tutors and has proven to be an effective means of giving students timely comments. There were some problems with the creation of comments but these have been partly addressed and will continue to be improved. The time and coordination required for this task was not fully appreciated at the beginning of the project.

The number of tutorials has not been reduced but students are being assessed and receiving improved feedback in a way that had not been done before. The use of electronic media has allowed

for the provision of better quality of written feedback and information to the students. Secretaries have benefited from a reduced administrative burden as marks go automatically onto WebCt and grade book. This data can also be used to monitoring student's progress over time. Students also register for tutorials using the VLE and this has reduced administrative work considerably.

The class coordinator introduced an additional summative task on-line which had not been included in the original plan: the 'Joker'. This was a piece of work that had to be produced using multi-media and uploaded on the VLE. The aim of this task was to give those students who had missed the exemption by a narrow margin an opportunity to gain extra marks and get exempted. Only a handful of students took this opportunity and of those, the majority of them had already been exempted (thought they did not know it at the time the Joker was submitted) This has created extra work for the course coordinator but the quality of some of the submissions is very good and will be used as an input to lecture material next year.

The only electronic method which the Department did not use was the EVS as the size of the class and room facilities proved a problem with this technology.

2. Impact on students

What has the impact of the project been on students? Have marks, attendance, retention, progression or other key indicators changed or improved (please give details)? Do students demonstrate differences in their satisfaction with the class or course? What evidence can you draw on (please give details)?

The overall results on retention will not be evident until the student register in September. The attendance to lectures has remained stable although as last year, numbers dropped considerably after the exemption list was released. Only one in three of those due t o do the exam were three for the revision lecture.

Some of the impact of the changes has been evaluated using quantitative and qualitative methods. Two surveys have been carried out by the REAP researchers and the Department. The REAP survey evaluated the overall assessment for the class. The Department's looked into the MCQ test and the use of WebCT and aimed to find information regarding the distribution of students' effort, quality of reflection, impact on other summative assessments, the gap between desired and current performance, attention of students to feedback, responses of students to feedback, motivation and self-belief. The questionnaire was delivered to students using SurveyMonkey after they had completed all their assessments and 265 (51%) responses were received.

The use of WebCT: This tool has been accessible, mostly free of problems, immediate, private and has meant an added tool to communicate with students beside lectures, tutorials, personal access to tutors and e-mails. The survey indicates that students feel confident using WebCT for their tests (90%) and had no problems in submitting their reports and essays (85%). Receiving feedback has also been positive and students commented on this in the qualitative research carried out by the tutors:

> '*Prefer using the online submission and also preferred having marks online too.*
> *The WebCt feedback can be printed out and brought to tutorial if there are any further questions'.*

The Word feedback document produced and delivered online on WebCt has been a success in terms of flexibility, readability and facilitating timeliness. Communication on the outcome of the assignments was prompt and reached students before the tutorial where the feedback was discussed. This should have added to the opportunity for reflection and learning.

Formative testing: Three multiple choice practice tests were delivered to all students. The first test was taken by 66% of the class, the second by 51% and the third by 59%:

1. Frequency of tests: 62% of students did the practice tests three times or more with 15% doing it more than four times. The students who did it four times or more increased from 70% for the first test to 27 for the last.

2. Students also indicated that doing the practice test improved their chances of success with the summative test (88%)

Summative testing: The first test was taken by 500 (97%) students, the second by 481 (93%) and the third by 462 (90%). Research findings are as follows:

1. Students felt that the material and range of questions was comprehensive and reflected their expected level of difficulty (60%)

2. The formative element of the test (open book) was recognised as positive in terms of helping students to correct their own mistakes by 75%

3. Another issue that emerged from the data is that students discussed problem questions with their peers (55%) although only 30% consulted their tutors about them

4. The overall value of the tests for improving their learning was reflected in the positive views regarding consolidation of lecture material (70%) although a lower number of students applied the material from the tests for their essays and report (50%) 31% was neutral to this question. The material covered in the tests was the theory to be used in the assignments so this finding may indicate that students are not able to make the link between theory and practice

5. Furthermore, the feedback received in the summative tests helped students understand why they got the answer wrong (57%) and 70% indicated that they learnt from their own mistakes and helped them gain confidence in their knowledge (83.6)

The use of MCQ tests also aimed at developing the student's ability for self-assessment and reflection. The answers indicated that 52% found out the right answers to the questions that they got wrong. Students did not receive feedback for the Summative tests (only their grades) as these tests are delivered over a period of two weeks and the correct answers are not released until the tests are over in order to avoid plagiarism. The security of the tests over the two weeks is important and student can go over the questions they got wrong when they receive their marks.

Feedback: online-submission and delivery

Collection of data was done at two different stages: after students received marks for the first assignment and after they received marks for the second assignment. The data considered at this stage is only qualitative: from the open questions included in the surveys from REAP and the Department.

In terms of the value and effectiveness of the specific and standard comments the research showed that the feedback comments were found to be useful in helping students understand their learning particularly when these were personalised. This was particularly evident after the second assignment as tutors had edited the Word document and improved generic comments to enhance the language and tone used because the students had felt that the comments were too generic and 'not genuine' or imprecise after the first assignment. Some students felt resentful and did not trust standard comments unless they could understand how they were created. This indicates a need to explain that standard comments are used to provide relevant feedback when there are common issues which may apply to a large number of assignments. As long as students understand this and can recognise that general comments also apply to their own work then they will be able to see it as tool which can support their learning and strengthen their capacity for self-assessment.

There have also been added benefits which had not been expected: the opportunity to receive the marks in their private time and space was valuable to students as this does not expose them to unwanted scrutiny from their peers and does not undermine their self-esteem, particularly if results were not good or what they expected.

Satisfaction with the course overall is being evaluated at present by means of a questionnaire. However in the Department's survey students were asked to indicate if the feedback received was more and better than for other classes. 69% said that they received more feedback than for other classes. However a lower number of students indicated that this was better (54%) and 32% chose the neutral option. 70 students provided reasons for these answers: 43 thought that they received better feedback than for other classes because this was more detailed, comprehensive and more in-depth. From the14 students who had chosen the neutral option, 7 indicated that they got the same feedback as for other classes, in most cases they specified that it was as good as for other classes. Only 4 of the 14 said that the feedback had been generic. From these findings it can be concluded that overall the feedback given to students is better than for other classes.

We have also data for all marks and tests and the bank of comments given to students in the templates that will need to be analysed

3. Impact on staff

What impact has the project had on staff? Has workload changed significantly? Do staff members involved in the project feel differently about the class or course now that changes have been made? How?

The use of WebCT: The class coordinator has used this tool for uploading lecture and tutorial materials and also for student's informal discussion groups. In terms of tutors, there were some problems downloading and uploading material for the first assignment but this was addressed for the second assignment. The system is slow but has been used without any other problems and has not increased the overall workload of tutors.

The class coordinator has had to upload the MC tests questions and this added considerable time to his work in the first year of the project. The time spent on setting up MC tests will at least pay dividends next year and the year after - only minor changes will be required. From 2009 we will be using a different book. The Jokers will be used for one more year at least: if they are not done by those who would benefit from them exemption wise then they will be dropped - they are an excellent tool against those who complain about being on 59% and also a further leaning opportunity.

Feedback: online-submission and delivery

Tutors have been able to add and adapt the Word feedback document and comments to make these more appropriate in terms of subject and personal content without a major increase in workload. Most of them feel the changes to feedback are positive if the opportunities for personalised feedback can be improved further.   The problem is to relate and convert the criteria into relevant comments.

Some of the students' comments indicated that they had not all discussed the criteria with their tutors and this variability in the discussion of criteria for the assessment may yet indicate that the process is still not fully open to or understood by all the tutors. They may not have been properly trained or that like the students, they had not fully participated in the generation of the criteria and feedback comments. Tutors are still looking for better integration between tutorials, lectures and assessment.

There is still a lot to be learned in this respect as providing feedback remains a time-consuming and labour-intensive process. The process started with REAP support and funding is now embedded in the course and will continue to be improved for next year in terms of design, integration and student's and tutor's participation.

4. Impact on costs

How do you think that the changes you have made will affect the efficiency of class or course delivery in the future?

The time spent in receiving course work and providing feedback on-line is being more efficiently used, paper is also being saved. Time spent on overall planning, organisation and preparation of materials will improve efficiency in future iterations, at least for the next two years.

Have costs been reduced? Or has quality improved significantly with no additional long-term costs

As indicated before although staff workloads have not been reduced, the Department is providing better quality assessment and feedback. These changes to the first year class will be maintained over the long term at no additional cost. Costs of time to disseminate and adopt changes in other classes will have to be considered for the next academic year. REAP funding has been used to buy up time for the Senior Tutor and the Learning and Technology officer and this needs to be reconsidered.

5. Sustainability

Explain how current project activities will continue in the department. The Department has taken the decision to introduce the use of the template and bank of comments for some of the second year classes. This means that each class coordinator has to design appropriate generic criteria and comments for the topics they plan to use for assessment.

What measures are in place to ensure that activities are embedded? Who is responsible for ensuring sustainability? The use of online tests and feedback is now part of the first year class offering and the management in the department is supporting the adoption of the online activities in other core and elective classes.   The involvement of management (HoD, Teaching Director, Undergraduate programme director) is crucial to the sustainability of the transformations to support the Lecturer and Senior Tutor.

6. Plans for further development
Are other courses or classes in the department planning to change their assessment practices as a result of your work (please give details)? Second year and large elective classes will use the feedback process piloted in the first year class.

What do you think would need to change in your department if your REAP-supported ideas were fully adopted across all courses and years? Effective assessment should be put at the centre of the learning experience. In order to achieve this, the Department has to develop a strategy for assessment which drives and integrates all classes. Time has to be provided to staff to allow such change to occur.

7. Lessons learned
What changes contributed most to improving the quality of student learning? The use of formative tests to support summative tasks and the provision of improved feedback using the VLE has changed the nature and quality of the first year class.

What changes contributed most to reducing costs? Administrative time has been saved by using WebCT

What implementation issues were most important? Engagement, training and participation of students and tutors in the design and delivery of feedback need to be given more attention. The problem with inaccurate data from WebCT/Registry caused concerns since according to their list we should have 587 students. The real number seems to be about 512. The format of MC questions is not necessarily compatible with WebCT and manual checking by the course coordinator was required

If you could start again, what would you have done differently? What lessons would you pass on to other departments undertaking similar projects?

Provide more time to discuss the stages of the process and involve all people concerned well in advance. In terms of technology, it is important to check for inconsistencies. Students assigning themselves to tutorials works pretty well and they have no problems with WebCT to download materials, even very large files like the commentated revision lecture. We have not experienced technical failures when using WebCT to administer MC tests on a mass scale.

8. Future Research

Have any issues emerged from the project which merit further investigation or future development work by your department, by CAPLE or by other organisations?

We have now a bank of data relating to students' marks, survey results and comments from every tutor involved which need to be analysed for use in developing further enhancements.

9. Dissemination

List the dissemination that has been done (or is being done) since January 2007 about project findings and outcomes, e.g. journal articles, conference presentations. Please give details.

The Senior Tutor attended a conference organised by BMAF in Birmingham (May) to present findings related to the bank of comments and feedback. It was well received and it needs to be improved to submit for publication. We are also going to prepare papers based on the Departmental survey as well as on the REAP researchers findings.