## Formative e-Assessment Discussion task: “What are the main challenges?”

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| We divided into four groups of 3-5 participants to try to identify and rank what we considered to be the main challenges with formative e-assessment. Participants identified challenges and wrote them on post-it notes, then positioned these in order of importance on a flip-chart. The groups’ actual responses are typed up in the table below.  Here is one person’s attempt at collating these notes, as objectively as possible. Any further comments or suggestions are most welcomed at [j.dermo@bradford.ac.uk](mailto:j.dermo@bradford.ac.uk). |

## An attempt at a summary of the discussion points

One key question was “what constitutes effective feedback”? Does e-assessment really improve learning? Some wondered whether it was actually a good idea to provide a direct link to the correct answer – others pointed out that there was a general lack of reading around the subject by students, which needed to be considered when writing feedback.

Student engagement was identified as a key challenge, especially how to get students to engage with and reflect upon feedback, online and otherwise. It was also pointed out that we also need to have mechanisms to encourage discussion and create dialogue about the feedback. Also, automated feedback offers limited support for social learning and we need to maintain the personalised aspect of feedback to be able to motivate learners in need of support.

There was also discussion of mixed formative/summative assessments, where low stakes grades are assigned to encourage engagement with feedback, but may raise concerns about cheating.

Staff and institutional engagement were also identified as key issues: staff can be reliant on technical specialists, there might be ineffective tools available, and the technology might be a hurdle. As well as having to learn the specific e-assessment software, staff also need to develop skills in question design and understanding the issues related to formative feedback. All of this can be very time consuming, especially at first. It would help if we could share question banks with other academics, but this can be a challenge, too.

There was some concern that formative e-assessment may be more relevant in some subject areas than others, and that it may be difficult in more discursive subject areas. We also need to consider how to deliver feedback for open-ended questions and answers which are not black & white, but require interpretation. It is not always appropriate for the teacher to make assumptions about why a certain answer is wrong. Also, work-based learners may have different needs.

It was also pointed out that formative e-assessment should be viewed as part of a larger portfolio of methods of formative assessment, and we also need to consider the feedback we give to manually marked assignments, submitted electronically.

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| **Group A (broke down challenges into 3 areas)**  1. Knowing what is effective feedback  Getting students to recognise and reflect upon feedback – recognise that electronic feedback is just as valuable as other forms  Is feedback discipline specific? Delivering formative e-assessment for work-based learners  2. Staff engagement with technology  3. How to be supportive and avoid demoralising struggling students – personalising feedback  Mechanism / opportunity for students to discuss feedback  Feedback when there is not necessarily a correct answer |
| **Group B**  Engagement in feedback  Teachers are forced to make assumptions about why a student is wrong  Discursive subjects more difficult to provide automatic feedback  Limited dialogue potential  Not always supportive of social learning (but that may suit some students)  Time – especially at the start  e-assessment needs to be part of a larger portfolio of assessment methods (the full implications of e-submission and e-feedback or manually marked assignments have not been considered today) |
| **Group C**  Time to innovate to produce quality assessment and feedback  Expertise – dependent on IT experts, technological hurdle  Cheating – non engagement in formative exercises  Lack of engagement – student – staff – institutional |
| **Group D**  Large cohort – mixed formative/summative assessment  Upskilling academics – writing questions and understanding the issues is not easy  Using other academics’ questions  In effective tools  Lack of reading around the subject negates the whole process – need to get students to read more  Good idea? Link to chapter/page for answer  Interpretation – not all answers are black or white!  Come up with the “right” kind of question  Time and Reward: the need to create suitable e-questions from scratch and put into software is very time-consuming  Does e-assessment really improve learning? |