The assessment and feedback lifecycle

Rod Cullen talked to us about the thinking behind the development of the assessment and feedback lifecycle.

Manchester Metropolitan University

My name’s Rod Cullen. I’m a senior lecturer in learning and teaching technologies at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Our thinking around the development of the assessment lifecycle goes right the way back to the beginning of our thinking about electronic management of assessment - what actually happens to an assignment from the stage where it’s actually designed all the way through to the stage where it’s actually delivered to a student. We thought it would help us to think about whether there were any consistent things that happen to every piece of assessment. So we felt that we would be able to say things like, look, this is how an assignment gets set and this is where the information needs to come from. This is where the information needs to go to. This is who receives it. And in that way that we could have a much more in-depth conversation with everybody who was involved in the process to be able to streamline it as a piece of assessment worked its way through all of the systems and processes that we had in place.

It started off as a doodle on a white board one morning and then it fell out as a logical circular eight-stage process very, very quickly. We spent some time talking to colleagues about it and it just seemed to resonate with everybody.

I don’t think we specifically see EMA as being any different from any other aspect of information management within the institution.

There are a whole range of benefits associated with effective electronic management of assessment, but I’ll add a caveat to that, that if it’s done wrong it can cause as much chaos as it brings benefits if it’s not done well because if the information’s not correct and it’s feeding into lots of automated systems that can introduce issues and challenges. When it’s done well, it’s things that we often refer to as hygiene factors, which are things like just the simple fact that a student can go into an individual area in Moodle and see exactly where their assessment
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Submission dates are and, having submitted that, they can see when to expect to receive feedback from their tutors. When things have been marked, they can see a provisional mark for their assignment and it’s all in one single place, so the student doesn’t have to get sent round the houses to find things.

Since 2008 we’ve seen year on year improvement in our NSS results around assessment and feedback to the point where we’re ahead of the sector now. But that’s really been about a concerted and focused effort on improving these hygiene factors around electronic management of assessment.

We got some funding from Jisc to have this look right at the very beginning. The development of the assessment lifecycle was probably one of the best morning’s work because we’ve had a huge amount of mileage out of it.

Other universities and colleges have found the assessment and feedback lifecycle equally useful

University of Sheffield

My name’s Bryony Olney. I work for the University of Sheffield and I’m the learning technologist for the Department of Urban Studies and Planning.

When I first started, March last year, I was dropped into looking at EMA and the EMA lifecycle and implementing a pilot.

The eight stage lifecycle that Jisc has produced for electronic management of assessment was absolutely fantastic as a starting point. It very clearly broke down the stages that EMA covers and the size of sort of each segment was sufficient enough to almost be a project in its own right, so it was very manageable to apply that eight stage process to the work that I was doing.

What sits behind those eight segments, the guidance, the advice, the questions that you need to consider for each of those segments, was just great and really helped me direct the planning aspect of the project that I was doing and make sure I was asking the pertinent questions. If I’m aligning a project that I’m doing, however small or big, to what Jisc is doing, I’ve always got a benchmark that I can refer back to so I can understand where we are against the rest of the sector and how much further we have to travel. So it was a great barometer for the EMA journey that the department is going through.

Sheffield Hallam University

My name’s Jon Childs. I’m the Programme Manager for a piece of work in Sheffield Hallam University called the assessment journey programme.

When we were developing the programme there was a piece of work in terms of defining the programme’s aims, its scope, and at that point we were working very closely with Jisc around the work you’d done on the EMA project and a lot of the learning from that helped shape the programme’s activity. Primarily the thing that’s been significantly helpful is the Jisc assessment lifecycle. So that’s formed quite a significant heart of the programme in terms of allowing us to shape the work of the programme and develop resources around that model. We’ve
drawn that in and that’s become something that’s run through the programme, and now we’ve actually
developed our own toolkit based upon that lifecycle.

It’s been hugely helpful in terms of shaping and structuring the programme of work to help hang that off a
meaningful and coherent model as the lifecycle gives us, as well as a communication tool in terms of having
something that’s clear, that’s meaningful, that has been hugely useful in promoting and shaping what the
university does in regards to assessment. It’s run right the way through from defining the work to now into
delivery and a meaningful model for staff.