Some universities and colleges talked to us about how they have been using our resources to help improve assessment and feedback processes and make better use of IT systems.

University of Hull

My name is Joel Mills. I'm a Technology Enhanced Learning Advisor at the University of Hull.

EMA is important for the university to bring the processes of marking and assessment up-to-date and in line with expectations of students in terms of timeliness of feedback and the expectation in which they get their marking back to them.

We should be looking at EMA as a way of improving workflows for people to free up time for them to be doing other particular tasks, but also to provide data and information in a way that people want the information.

What we’re looking to do is to bring a more standardised approach to EMA and we’re constantly reviewing our tools and processes to make sure that the tools that we bring to the staff and the students provide the most effective opportunities for assessment using electronic methods.

We contributed to some of the Jisc resources so the whole idea of process mapping using swimlanes and Visio charts to understand where the strengths of our existing EMA processes were and where we needed to address some of the issues so some of the tools that were there in the toolkit were in use by us already. Where we have found the toolkit particularly useful is understanding the bigger picture.
Manchester Metropolitan University

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

We have worked extensively in terms of sharing what we’ve been doing around electronic management of assessment, and entering into discussions with other colleagues particularly around process maps related to the fact that off the shelf software products don’t really reflect the kind of processes that we have in place or that we see in place within UK higher education. So really simple things like second marking and moderation and stuff like that, that off the shelf software just doesn’t seem to quite fit the bill and you quite often find yourself wrestling with that.

Through refining our thinking in terms of discussions, we’ve got a much better understanding of those processes now, and I think that’s also reflected in the kind of process diagrams that Jisc have produced to share with software vendors relating to the actual assessment process.

In terms of using the Jisc resources, the way that I envisage us using them in the future really is to help us to share our central understanding of the processes more widely across the institution. There’s a core team at the centre of the institution who probably have a very good handle on everything as it joins together. What became apparent when we’ve worked with the tools with colleagues in different part of the institution was that there are lots of snippets of the processes that are very well understood, but not necessarily everybody has the full picture because our faculties all tend to do things in slightly different ways.

It’s been a useful opportunity to reflect on where we’re up to in terms of getting that message out across the whole institution and implementing a consistent approach to EMA.

Sheffield Hallam University

My name’s Brian Irwin. I’m the Head of Digital Capability at Sheffield Hallam University.

In terms of the benefits that we see EMA bringing, a big one for the institution is efficiency. We have a lot of inefficiency in our existing processes around the work getting handed in people needing to process all of that work very manually, logging in a system, passing it around between people, so there’s a lot of time where work is being transported around, marks are being copied multiple times. So some of the benefits we hope to bring would be to free up some of that time the professional services staff have right now, so they could focus other student experience and support type activities.
University of Southampton

I'm Bill Warburton, CAA Manager, Southampton University.

I'm interested in the potential of applying workflow based approaches to EMA. One example is preventing students from seeing their grade, the number part of the feedback from the tutor, until they've read and had a chance to reflect upon the written feedback provided by a tutor to help them adjust the way that they think about and produce their next piece of work. You wouldn't release the mark to them until such time as they had produced their own fed forward feedback on the tutor's feedback. It's the kind of thing that you can do relatively easy with a workflow based approach in EMA.

Because I'm employed by the IT department, one of the things that I have to worry about is implementing this technology in an effective and reasonably economical manner. We would see it as part of the process of refining down the very large number of IT systems which we currently use for activities such as EMA. Because it's central and important people have all got their own ways of currently doing it. We did an audit recently of the number of IT systems that we had and found that there were hundreds.

Different departments have a long history of doing things in their own subject specific way. The danger is that if you allow umpteen different ways of doing it, some of them at least will be less fit for purpose than others and it's difficult to manage it in such a way that the student experience is not impacted in some way. If we don't grab the bull by the horns now then we will end up living with a number of different ways of doing it.

What you want to do is get people to agree on the basics of what they all need to do and then use that as a set of requirements to specify an e-assignment system, whether that means bending into shape something which already exists or starting again from the beginning. The Jisc toolkit for finding out where people are and what they need to do in terms of EMA we expect to be extremely valuable.

One thing which has been missing, certainly here so far and from what I hear from people I liaise with in other institutions elsewhere also, is an initiative like this which comes from something with the clout and the credibility of Jisc to get people's attention altogether on this problem. A large part of the value of this exercise is getting people to focus on a standardised logical and effective way of finding out what they need to do because you can't start specifying systems until you know.