

The use of Peer assessment at the Open University

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Executive Summary

This project undertook an investigation of the use of peer assessment in distance teaching. After reviewing evidence from within and outside the institution a number of pilot studies were undertaken. The Workshop tool in the Moodle VLE was evaluated. Feedback from students on their experience of using peer assessment/review and the Workshop tool was very positive.

A user guide has been developed with LTS for Module teams to use the workshop tool. A number of modules have started to use the workshop tool for peer assessment.

Aims and scope of your project

At the time there was very little use of peer assessment/review across the Open University, despite widespread use across the sector. We had very little institutional knowledge of;

- the advantages and disadvantages of peer assessment/review;
- how it can be applied to distance learning
- automated systems for delivery

We carried out a series of pilot studies on a number of courses across the University, but mainly in Science and MCT, on the use and advantages of peer assessment/review in distance learning

The project aims were;

- To develop expertise within the Open University of good practice in peer assessment/review
- To develop systems for automated peer assessment/review based on the new version of Moodle
- To disseminate good practice in peer assessment/review across the faculties.

Activities

We carried out a literature review of peer review/assessment and in particular it's applications to distance teaching. (see Appendix 1)

Carried out a review of what peer assessment was undertaken already at the Open University (See Appendix 2)

Carried out a review of online peer review/assessment tools used in other universities (See Appendix 3

We carried out four pilot studies run by ALs with relatively small numbers of students. Modules include, S104, ED209, T320 and A850 using e-mail to deliver the peer assessment

We analysed the results of the pilot studies to identify the questions to be asked in a more focussed set of pilot studies using the Moodle workshop application.

We then carried out another set of pilot studies run by ALs using the Workshop tool in the Moodle VLE. The modules that participated were S390 S366, TU100, T320 and Y181. In all cases we obtained feedback via questionnaires from the student and reports from the ALs to inform our future work.

Findings

The findings were summed up in a PowerPoint presentation that has been presented in a number of faculties.

- Overall, the level of feedback was good considering the lack of experience and training of those involved.
- In terms of feedback most peer markers usually wrote some encouraging and helpful but short comments on every answer.
- Comments were quite helpful and positive explaining why they had given or not given a mark.
- Occasionally a student did not get round to marking or providing feedback on their peers work and there was no explanation given by this student.
- When the peer group were asked if they would do anything differently about half said that they would probably provide a bit more feedback.

All students said that they found answering the questions very useful to their study of the module - typical student comments are;

“Yes, as it helped to consolidate my revision. It threw light on my areas of weakness”.

“Absolutely, answering questions makes me think about the links between things as well as making me review material”.

Likewise they all said reviewing other students work was very useful to their studying of the module.

“Yes. It gave me a chance to compare how I had answered the questions with how others studying the same material had presented their answers. I think there was some learning from this which should hopefully help me improve my exam effort”.

“I now realise how difficult marking is. I have a greater empathy for my Tutors now”!!

Some of the students felt a little uncomfortable or unqualified to provide feedback but on balance more were happy to respond in this way as they had a mark scheme and it was anonymous feedback.

“The fact that we were given a marking scheme helped tremendously, although at times I felt I might be applying it too rigidly, and did not feel to have any scope for discretion. I was comfortable giving feedback knowing that this was a trial but would have felt a little under qualified had it been a live situation”.

When asked about anonymity about half felt that this would not make any difference and they would respond in the same way, whilst the other half said they would feel more pressured and perhaps not participated.

“Probably would not have participated if not anonymous”.

“Personally no, although I can imagine some people would prefer it to remain anonymous. In knowing who the other participants were in a general discussion forum could take place to mull over the results”.

When asked about how they felt about being assessed by another student;

“I thought it was useful. I had used the marking scheme to self-assess and the results from my peers were similar to my own marking of my work. The feedback was useful as it will make me think harder about how I word my answers – I lost a couple of points for missing out key words which I had considered self-evident”.

..... and on giving feedback

“most people are more comfortable giving anonymous feedback so the remarks I received would be a more accurate representation than it otherwise would have been”

“I didn’t give much feedback – only on the first question which I felt harsh in down-marking because Mendel’s name wasn’t mentioned. I would probably give more feedback if future”.

“No, I am quite comfortable. I would enjoy doing this again in the future – we do something similar on the forum but without an answer mark scheme to help us”.

In response to specific questions on the workshop tool all students said it was generally ‘easy’ to find the workshop application and the majority found it ‘straightforward’ to use the workshop application on the VLE.

“In the main, straightforward. It did help to print out a hard copy of the book answers when it came to the marking phase as having to scroll up each time was a little cumbersome”.

Half the students typed their answers directly on the VLE, and the other half typed them first and then pasted them in.

In terms of how easy the students found the workshop application to assess other peoples work, they generally reported that it was easy, except perhaps if they had had to assess more than three scripts

“As stated in Q10, the referral back to the book answers was a little awkward so I printed out a hard copy of these. I think if you had more than three papers to assess then the workshop application might have got a little unwieldy, but for this amount of work it was fine”.

Overall to quote one student;

“I thought it was a brilliant idea and hope it is used in my last two modules of my degree”

The main challenges within the project related to my time. I had hoped to find someone within the Institution who would become the peer assessment champion who could take over this work – I am still looking, although would be happy to share the information with whoever is interested.

So far I have shared the findings with Robin Goodfellow in IET for a presentation he was doing on peer assessment. I have also had interest from Jeff Johnson who has been doing some work in this area.

Impact

The biggest impact of this work has been within the Open University. I have given numerous presentations to colleagues in other Faculties on the use of peer assessment and the workshop tool.

S815 is using peer assessment in 2014. SX*390 has expressed an interest in using it to develop the students abstracts. It is being used in a number of modules in Social Sciences.

The University recently agreed a number of principles for assessment of which number 6 is “Students should be given opportunities to engage in and develop their skills in peer review and self-assessment.”

They commented;

“Developing the skills of peer review and self-assessment are key graduate attributes. All qualifications should offer students opportunities to develop these skills under guidance from ALs as part of the assessment strategy. These opportunities should be planned across a stage and qualification where possible although it is recognised that this may be difficult where modules are used in a large number of qualifications. In both peer review and self-assessment students should have opportunities to provide written and oral commentary and should justify their evaluative decisions. Such processes do not need to include decisions on grades or marks. Producing and receiving feedback reviews are different learning processes with different benefits and students

should have opportunities to undertake both. To achieve this early teaching of review and evaluative skills should be introduced in all qualifications and developed throughout the qualification pathway. Due care should be taken in the design and updating of the tasks to provide anonymity where appropriate and minimise plagiarism.”

As well as persuading LTS to release the workshop tool to all modules I have subsequently worked with LTs in developing a guide on workshop for Module teams to use. These can be found at;

Online Learning Systems Guide (staff):

<http://learn3.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=38923>

OU Computing Guide (tutor/student):

<http://learn1.open.ac.uk/admin/tool/redirector/redirect.php/workshop>

Deliverables

Appendix 1 - eSTeEM peer review literature search

Appendix 2 - eSTeEM peer review external use of tools

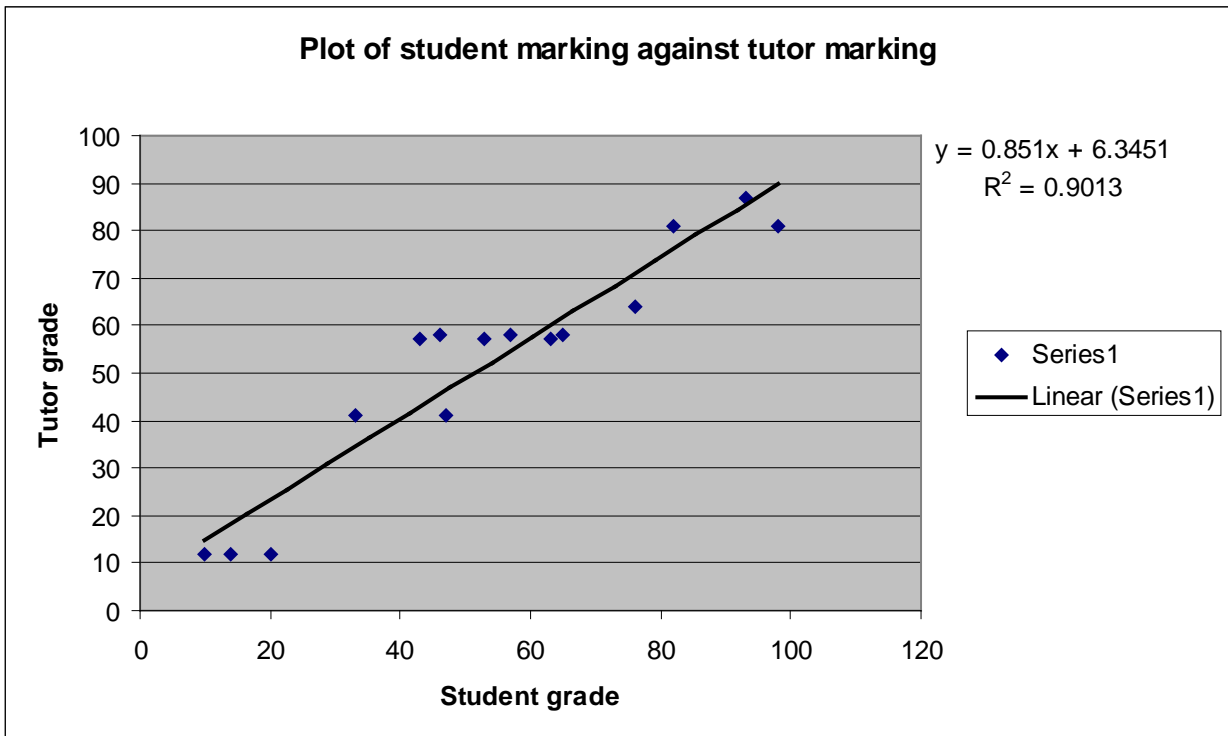
Appendix 3 - A recent PowerPoint presentation

Appendix 4 - A description of the workshop application

A collection of reports from the ALs who ran the pilot study.

Tables and Figures

No tables or Figures have been included. Figures are available in the documents in the attached file. One Figure that is worth repeating here is the experience from S104.



Only six of the fifteen marks awarded by the peer group deviated 8% or more from that awarded by the tutor

Student marking wasn't far from Tutor marking – if anything they were more generous