ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE
11 March 2021   Agenda Item 8

COVER SHEET

ASSESSMENT RUBRICS

Presenter: Professor C Turner

To consider a paper (min 20.71 refers).

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

Assessment rubrics; timing of design, construction, usage and quality assurance

This paper proposes changes to the **timing of assessment rubric construction** and the mechanisms by which they may be quality assured.

1. Remove requirement for rubrics to be submitted along with revalidation documents
2. Student facing assessment briefs and assessment and feedback rubrics to be designed and monitored as part of the internal assessment design and moderation process in advance of module delivery
3. External Examiner system used as quality assurance oversight

The requirement to submit assessment rubrics at the point of revalidation has proved to be problematic in recent times. In the context of the revalidation process and the production of revalidation course documents, the addition of fully formed rubrics for all modules would appear to contrast with the evidence-base outlined below which suggests that assessments should be authentic, co-designed, and not recycled year on year. The further requirement to have rubrics signed off or endorsed by CHERP has also proved to be unsatisfactory insofar as commentary on isolated rubrics disconnected from their context is of limited value and does not recognise the facilitative role CHERP plays in assessment design support from the early stages of curriculum design for staff teams.

This paper seeks to establish a shared frame of reference for the design and delivery of assessment in keeping with SLaTE, and in so doing, contribute to the consistency of approach across the institution to enhance equity, (Pokorny and Warren, 2016). The change proposed here would shift the quality assurance of assessment briefs and rubrics from a five-year timescale to a yearly exercise that spreads and considers the workload for staff, thus enhancing quality and positively impacting upon health and wellbeing and in particular

contributing to the mental health pillar of the university's Employee Wellbeing Strategy, (Ulster, 2019 p.7).

In a constructively aligned curriculum, (and constructive alignment is expected by QAA), assessment design is a process that occurs as a result of the articulation of learning outcomes. According to the QAA advice and guidance document, (QAA 2018 p.3), assessment design and delivery is a core practice of higher education institutions. Guiding principle #2 in the advice and guidance provided by QAA states that assessment should be reliable, consistent, fair, and valid.

This can be achieved, in part, by the early construction of an assessment brief that clearly states the assessment criteria and an assessment and feedback rubric that uses the criteria to display standards of achievement, to enable evaluative judgements about student performance that has validity, reliability and transparency, (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007, Biggs and Tang, 2011).

To promote a student-centred approach to assessment, inclusivity, and quality; the QAA guiding principles#3 #4 and #5 suggest that, ideally, assessment criteria are constructed holistically in conjunction with students. This is congruent with guideline 6 of the Best Practice Guideline on Universal Design for Learning, (UDLL 2016).
Taking this into account an assessment rubric would be best designed before the assessment is due to be delivered at the beginning of a module. This enables assessment to be current, authentic and increases the likelihood of student involvement in construction and/or editing of the criteria and the feedback provided therein in keeping with Ulster's Assessment and Feedback principles, (in particular principles 1, 3 4 and 7), (Ulster, 2011) Furthermore, authentic assessment is an approach to design out plagiarism and makes it more difficult to rely on contract cheating (QAA, 2020)

Consequently, the requirement for assessment rubrics to be submitted along with course documents at the point of revalidation invalidates these approaches and excludes the students who will be the recipients of the tool. This also runs the risk of hampering course

team efforts to meet expectation B1 of the Quality Code, (QAA 2015), by reducing opportunity for an iterative approach to course design.

At this stage an alternative approach to presenting the assessment strategy in the revalidation document could be.

At Revalidation:

- A requirement for a tailored narrative explaining the process observed to link outcomes to assessment, feedback and teaching and learning activities in section B of the revalidation document
- A requirement to indicate which outcomes are assessed by which assessment method in the module descriptor

During Course Delivery:

- Internal assessment design, construction and quality assurance takes place in the run up to module delivery to ensure that assessment briefs and rubrics are available to students at the beginning of a module
- Briefs and rubrics (ideally once seen by students) are sent to External Examiners as part of normal module QA process, normally by week 3 as described by the External Examiner Handbook, (Ulster 2020 p.18). This timeline and process will require some consideration and further work to define.

This approach would also be in keeping with the QAA expectation of, "*ensuring external referencing is used to ensure the integrity of awards and the quality of provision*", (QAA2018 p.1), and facilitates assessment having a top-down approach that cascades from the programme outcomes to the modules below.

To facilitate this approach CHERP provide assessment design and redesign information and support as routine elements of the PGCHEP and MEd. In addition, the following alternative actions may be possible subject to review:

- CHERP to run assessment and feedback design support sessions
- CHERP to compile a database of rubric examples of different kinds of assessment thus creating a curated resource for educational development and quality assurance

Learning Enhancement will take forward discussions with Faculties about the current internal moderation procedures and policies and their interaction with External Examiners in light of this to establish if these require formal review.

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