

Section B: Case Study

Title: Transforming teaching, advancing learning, demonstrating impact.

Summary: *Pursuing academic excellence through the practical implementation of UK Professional Standards for Higher Education.*

What was done / Motivation and aims / Implementation

The case centres around delivery of Advanced Financial Accounting (AFA). AFA is the fourth and final financial accounting module in the BSc(Hons) Accounting Pathways programme. It is a technical module, looking in depth at accounting regulations and International Financial Reporting Standards. This is a testing module which traditionally had high failure rates and low marks.

Demand for accountants in Northern Ireland is currently at an all-time high, numbers on accounting programmes have increased dramatically, students studying AFA increased from 43 in 2018/19 to 83 in 2019/20.

The challenge I faced when I took over the module in 2017/18 was therefore to strive for teaching excellence, giving an exemplary student experience which would lead to high student attainment, while ensuring there was no 'dumbing down' of module content or examination standards. This was to be achieved in the face of increasing student numbers and no additional teaching hours.

In the face of such challenging circumstances I returned to the pedagogy of learning introduced to me through the PGCEP. The main areas I drew from were:

- Constructive alignment
- Technology enhanced learning

Constructive alignment

Constructive alignment (Biggs, 2003) is the premise that the curriculum is designed so learning activities and assessment tasks are aligned with learning outcomes intended from the course. I found a disconnect between the assessment tasks and the learning outcomes from the course. I therefore redesigned the assessment methods for the course, introducing assessed exam style questions in a supportive environment. The module has a weighting on 75% examination 25% coursework, a minimum 75% examination weighting is a condition for accreditation from professional bodies. Students completed a portfolio of exam style questions in groups during seminars, using notes and asking questions during completion. This helped remove the fear of the exam and ensured students were fully prepared for it.

I redesigned the materials, drawing up new visually attractive PowerPoint slides supported by more in depth text and directed reading. The materials were presented in a logical order, with each topic building on the last and a clear plan of what was to be covered in each week. All slides, questions and supplementary materials were combined using Adobe Acrobat DC into one easy to print PDF for the students, ensuring all students had the correct materials in class. In addition to references to research and texts, the materials had numerous real-world examples, these were supplemented in class by my professional experiences as a Chartered Accountant.

Technology enhanced learning

These measures improved the module but did not tackle increasing student numbers. As educators our primary purpose is to facilitate students acquiring knowledge using methods appropriate to both the subject and the individuals studying. The methods used can be considered in terms of richness and reach. One to one conversations and group discussions are rich in quality but lack reach as they can only be accessed by a handful of people. As student numbers increase lecturers must employ methods to reach a greater number of students. Traditionally this has been at the cost of the richness of the experience, but drawing on the work of Evans, P. and Wurster, T. (2000) in *Blown to bits, How the new economics of information transforms strategy*, I realised this need not be the case. Through technology we can achieve a new rich reach paradigm, learning experiences that are rich in quality but reach a large number of students.

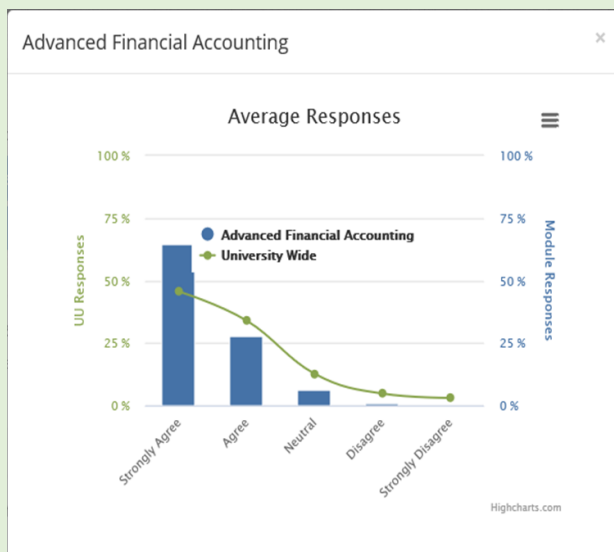
The technical nature of AFA lends it to the use of screencasts. I set about recording a bank of screencasts using Techsmith Camtasia, not of lecture materials, but of the technical questions students are expected to complete. These have great advantages over traditional paper-based solutions as, they demonstrate how the answer is arrived at, while narrative describes why a particular treatment was applied. Screencasts can also be watched numerous times, or if students are having difficulty with a particular section of a question it can be paused while they make notes.

Successes and lessons learnt:

When investing so much time and effort in the redesign of a module it is important to measure the impact this has on both student attainment and the student experience. A blunt measure of student attainment is provided by the module marks, but this misses much of the student experience. I again turned to technology, this time to capture the impact of the project, realising the student feedback survey was perfect to capture this information. The survey is often viewed as an event, something which happens at the end of the module. To effectively measure improvements in student experience I needed to obtain sufficient student buy in. To achieve this I changed the module survey from an event to a process. In week one I talk through prior results, showing a selection of student comments along with suggestions for improvements (see further information) and crucially, the actions I have taken as a result or the reasons I have not implemented suggestions. This demonstrates the importance of the survey and how it shapes the module. I then reference the survey at appropriate times during the semester and again when it is live.

The project has been extremely successful both in terms of student attainment and student experience. The average exam mark has steadily risen from 52% in 2016 to 58% in 2019 without any compromise to standards.

The student feedback survey has had extremely high completion rates (2019/20 69%) and consistently excellent results as illustrated below:



The students provided a wealth of qualitative responses, with 80% of respondents providing feedback, comments include:

What did you feel was particularly good about this module?

"Great notes, all notes available before very first lecture in a concise printing format, great feedback in relation to tests, constant small hints/reminders on how to pull up marks in class, taught at good pace for all students, students who messed about during class reprimanded"

"The availability of the screen casts"

"Easily my favourite lecturer, wish he taught me for every module, never had a lecturer as helpful and interesting. Knew exactly what I was going every single week and the way it is assessed assures that everyone is revising every few weeks which is much better."

"Mr McNamee uploaded plenty of questions for us to practice."

"Tutor was very prepared and made the extra effort to record screencasts for difficult exam style questions"

"I valued the screencasts and think they're very beneficial for revising"

"The learning is very well structured. Stephen is great at explaining things and going through questions. He really helps you understand why you are doing certain things. Screen Casts are also great useful tool."

"The portfolio coursework questions."

"Excellent module! Excellent teacher!"

"Coursework is well split up and prepares you for test"

"Great structure to the terms work and notes were good also really enjoyed the podcasts as they were extremely helpful"

"Stephen in the most engaging prepared helpful lecturer. He hasn't everything on blackboard and the weekly lecture notes printed off at week 1 is so helpful. He goes through questions thoroughly which helps you understand."

"Screen casts very helpful and he does try to lighten the lectures and work through the topics in a chronological way."

"I thought the module was very well taught. The lecturer went to great lengths to ensure understanding and there was ample material available to assist in studying this module."

"Layout of notes and lectures is very clear and constantly working through questions was beneficial for practice."

"Enjoyed the module and delivery was excellent."

"The wide range of screencasts available and past papers with answers that could be accessed on blackboard"

"The module was well organised and laid out, which helped in my understanding and learning of the content. Every topic had sufficient materials to aid at home work and the class tests ensured I worked continuously throughout the module, which will be of great help come the January exams. Stephen himself was very engaging in the lectures."

"Given all material at start of semester and was able to follow each week easily"

"Screencasts were very helpful, good structure to class, got class involved in answering questions and did well to keep class engaged most of the time."

"Screencasts - printing all notes at the beginning of semester and having all resources throughout"

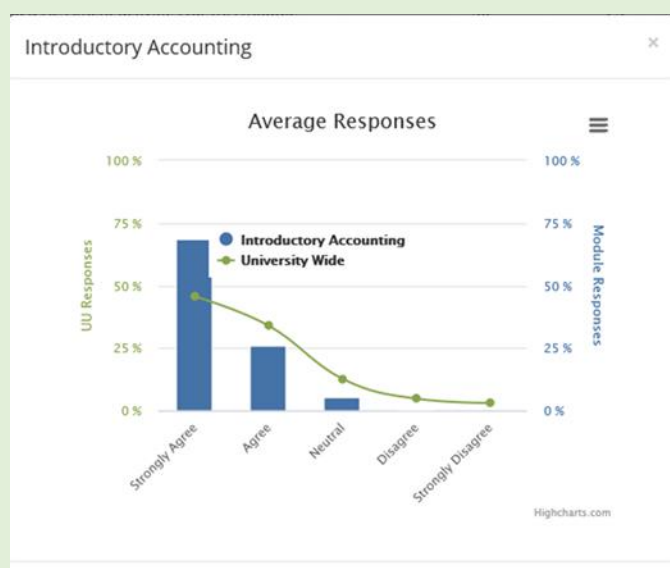
"Talking through the question on the board and completing the answer step by step for each topic made it easy to follow and understand how the numbers were calculated"

"Screencasts very helpful"

The increase in attainment and positive feedback is a natural motivator and inspires me to continue to develop the module further. In 2020/21 I plan to alter the class structure. At present the full cohort attends a lecture and is then split for seminars, going forward the cohort will be split and I will deliver the same blended lecture/seminar to each. This will improve the richness of the lecture but can only be implemented as the students have sufficient screencast resources to support their homework questions. While the driver for this change is to improve the student experience it also brings logistical advantages, reducing requirements for large lecture theatres, an important consideration in advance of the move to Belfast.

Transferability:

This practice is absolutely transferable. While I have referred to AFA I have applied the same process for Introductory Accounting and Financial Accounting, with 2019/20 module feedback provided below.



What did you feel was particularly good about this module?

"Pace of learning, periodic class tests and portfolio questions. Level of detail provided by Stephen and structure was perfect for my style of learning "

"Screen casts on example question benefited me greatly "

"The screencasts were particularly helpful especially coming up to a class test or portfolio question. "

"Module content was very informative was great knowing week to week workload and what to expect "

"The seminar classes straight after the lectures were great to put what we had learnt into practice. Knowing how to answer the questions properly and in the correct format took a lot of pressure off myself and made this module very enjoyable."

"Learning what accounting is about and learning the basic concepts"

"Every part of this module"

"The well made work plan that was always followed so we knew exactly what we would be expecting in each class to then prepare"

"The enthusiasm from tutors during lectures and seminars."

"Enthusiasm of lecture + good blackboard resources, detailed teaching plan."

"All of it "

"Whole aspect. Enjoyed it a lot as well as finding it challenging "

"Learning basics for accounting "

"Well Structured, relevant tests and excellent lecturer "

"Each class was well set out with theory covered and then straight into questions to cover the theory which helped give a more thorough understanding of the topics"

"Used practical examples "

"Very engaging, lots of practice questions which was very helpful"

"Stephen's enthusiasm and knowledge of the module and his ability to teach the course using a simplicity that worked. "

"All presentation slides were useful and can easily be used for future reference. Notes which were provided were also excellent. "

"The teaching style was very proactive and engaging throughout the course of the module. This hands on approach assisted learning massively (e.g. example questions weekly) made it easier to stay on top of the course content and the portfolio questions ensured active engagement on a regular basis in advance of the class tests. Holistically, gave a steady and knowledgeable base to work on from in future more advanced modules. Great module."

"The way it was delivered "

Financial Accounting

Average Responses



What did you feel was particularly good about this module?

"The way the course was taught was excellent, especially with the supplementary pack. This made the course very practical. "

"Everything was good about the module, the presentation was very good, the lectures were excellent, while lectures are on the lecturer ensures that no one is left out, he goes round to see what we are doing and makes the necessary corrections were needed, I think I will rate him 100%"

"Question templates helped in answering questions, screencasts really helpful."

"The work packs were very useful and had all the information needed. "

"Clear teaching which made it very enjoyable"

"That examples were given at each step throughout, the screencasts available "

"The class was extremely well-organised and everything was explained thoroughly from start to finish with examples worked through at each stage, anyone who was seen to be struggling in the slightest was given all help needed and resources were fantastic, preparing us for both classes and self-study for Christmas exam through screencasts, textbook examples and portfolio questions. Tutor was reasonable, friendly and enthusiastic."

"Practice in class "

"Good lecturer"

"Tutor made it very interesting by using lots of good examples and trying to engage the class. Tutor does a walk-through step by step in each class on how to complete questions, allowing no student to fall behind. Screencasts for past paper questions were extremely helpful for revision."

"Lots of examples to practice"

I am presenting the case at the UUBS learning and teaching event in June 2020 and have been approached by a number of colleagues for advice on screencasting. This surprised me as I had not yet shared my experiences, it transpires students who completed my modules approached them requesting similar resources for their subject.

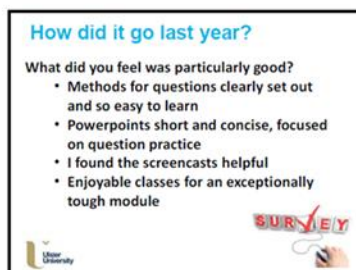
I would advise colleagues to embrace the challenge of academic excellence, base your modules on sound pedagogy and use technology to enhance them. While recording screen casts can be daunting initially it soon becomes second nature and the rewards, not only for the students in terms of attainment and experience, but also for yourself in terms of self esteem and personal reward make it truly worthwhile.

Further information:

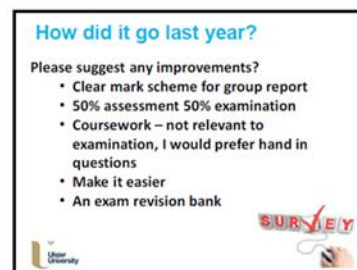
Student feedback survey slides



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