Inspera on-Campus - Birmingham - Key Takeaways

Version 1.0

Transforming to Digital

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What are the main challenges when introducing a new digital platform to academic staff?

- **Time** (or lack thereof). Learning to use a new platform takes a time investment from academic staff. Many academics feel they simply do not have the time to spare to effectively learn a new platform on top of their day-to-day responsibilities (teaching and/or research taking priority). This is particularly true when considering the workload allocation models within UK HEIs that may not budget for time allocated to learning a new platform (CPD).
- **Digital capabilities of academic staff**. It is taken for granted that academic staff members and colleagues have the digital literacy skills required for introduction of new digital tools or platforms. This can result in certain academic staff from being precluded from new systems or digital processes if not supported correctly. This in turn can add cost and complexity to a digital transformation project.
- **Confidence of direction**. Some academic staff may feel resistant to a new digital platform if they are not confident that either (i) it will meet their requirements or (ii) the platform will be used enough, or long enough, for them to get a return on the time invested to learn how to use it effectively.
- **Not articulating the benefits of digital**. It was acknowledged by the group that HE professionals may not always be eager to or good at promoting the benefits of new digital platforms. This means there can be a lack of excitement or confidence that a new platform will be able to improve their delivery of research, teaching or assessment.
- **Change fatigue**. In recent years, and certainly due to the pandemic, many academics have had to change their ways of working and embrace new digital technologies. This has often been a 'transfer' of work from analogue to digital rather than a full 'transformation' of the underlying processes. Academics want a period of stability so that they can get a return on the time invested for more recent business change initiatives they have been forced to embark on.
- **Lack of or inappropriate infrastructure**. Digital transformation projects need to be supported by appropriate IT infrastructure in order to be

How might the resistance barrier be lowered, and how can engagement be increased?

- **Time allocation**. If universities placed a greater value on the time investment needed to learn and adopt new digital technologies it would be easier to allocate the time. This is no quick-fix given the budgetary constraints and the tuition/research incomes of a university.
- **Clearer guidance**. Sometimes academic staff members are not sure about the scope or processes that a new digital platform is covering. If clearer guidelines were implemented regarding which platforms are used for which processes, it could improve user experience.
- **Support for digital skills**. Building a common baseline of digital skills within a university, and then offering help for any individuals who need support in achieving the baseline. This can help reduce the impact of incorrect assumptions in digital literacy.
- **Sell the benefits**. User champions from the academic community clearly and confidently articulating the benefits of digital platforms can help overcome resistance in those who are not automatically convinced of the logic to adopt a new platform.

How do you reach the stage where use of the new digital platform is 'business as usual'?

- **Realistic time expectations**. Do not assume that a platform is BAU the first time it is used in a 'live' scenario. It takes consistent, sustained and varied use of a platform before it is fully embedded as the default platform in support of a digital process.
- **Showcase results and celebrate milestones**. Celebrating the successful adoption of a new platform can help build momentum and win over the hearts and minds of academic staff.
- **Start with the easy stuff first**. Adopting an agile methodology around digital transformation can help to achieve early success. It means that you can build confidence and expertise amongst academic staff before attempting more challenging and time consuming elements of the transformation process. Once the project moves on to the more complex transformation, academic staff will be more confident and better equipped for the change.
- **Normalise the platform**. Showcase the platform in a real world setting as often as possible. Utilise user champions from the academic community (as opposed to external specialists) as a way to help this normalisation. Even simple tactics such as demonstrating the platform live rather than using slides or documents to articulate the benefits or workflows can help to reduce anxiety amongst academic staff.

Other notes

- There is an assumption that digital transformation automatically means that it is more accessible (both for staff and students). This is not always the case, and digital poverty remains an issue for both staff and students.

Harnessing the power of feedback for student engagement

Moderators: Dr Linda Lefievre and Mark Hancock, University of Birmingham

What is effective feedback?

- What is feedback used for?
    - **Justification**. Feedback can be used to justify a grade or mark for a student. This helps ensure that a student's perception of their performance and skill level is aligned with that of the academic. This type of feedback is often used for summative assessment.
    - **Formative**. Feedback can also be used as an effective tool *for* learning. Academics can highlight what a student has done well or less well during an assessment. This means that the student can then focus on areas of knowledge gap or continue to leverage areas of strength.
- What can negatively impact effective provision in feedback?
    - **Bias in feedback**. Feedback can be biased towards an individual academic's preferences, as opposed to the agreed skills framework. This is particularly keenly felt when there is not enough structure in the marking/grading process.
    - **Lack of holistic feedback**. Feedback is often provided disparately, by individual academics on a module by module basis. This makes it difficult to identify trends that a student may experience across the programme.
- Providing effective feedback is a **time consuming process** for academic staff. It is therefore costly for institutions to provide flexible and personalised student feedback methodologies.
- **Traditional forms of feedback** are largely confined to written responses to assessment submissions.

Should we uncouple the concept of assessment and feedback?

- **Course design**. Institutions are looking at building more continuous feedback approaches into course design. This means that students can receive feedback throughout the learning process.
- **Use of self-reflection**. Self reflection can be a valuable tool to build into course design. It can help students to learn critical analysis skills as well as improve feedback literacy.

Could an online assessment platform improve students experience of feedback?

- **Alternative forms of feedback**. Assessment platforms can help support institutions to provide alternative forms of feedback above and beyond written feedback. These include:
    - **Audio feedback**. Many individuals who used audio feedback were able to save time and students preferred. Some individuals believed it was easier to provide more balanced feedback using audio recordings.
    - **Screen capture**. It is possible to provide screen capture recordings to students as feedback.
- **Automated feedback**.
    - **Algorithmic**. Assessment platforms can help academics to provide automated feedback through:
        - Comment libraries
        - Pre-build automatic feedback for MCQ or auto-marked questions
    - **AI generated**. AI models (such as Chat GPT) can be used to provide feedback, or augment human generated feedback. There is a debate as to the value and validity of AI generated feedback and it may only apply in certain contexts.

Other notes

- Adaptive testing can be used as a method to personalise a test to a student's given skill level. Whilst not a traditional form of feedback, some adaptive testing approaches are able to provide feedback based on item performance data against large cohorts.