



## Case Study I: Developing a Systematic Programme-Focused Assessment and Feedback Strategy

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This case study describes the development and introduction of a programme-focused assessment and feedback strategy to the Humanities Programmes in Open Education, DCU. There are four online/distance humanities degrees delivered by Open Education, as part of the National Institute for Digital Learning in DCU; BA Humanities, BA English & History, BA Single Module, and the BA Humanities (Psychology Major).

The aim of this initiative was to design a systematic programme-focused assessment and feedback approach which ensured that students had a reasonable opportunity to meet all of the programme learning outcomes. The development of a programme-focused approach would ensure a wide variety of assessment types that were appropriate to the disciplines and had a customised appropriate feedback approach for each assessment. The development of the programme-focused assessment and feedback approach was underpinned by Hassan's (2011) "assessment drives learning" philosophy, coupled with an acknowledgement of the important role of feedback to the student experience (Simpson, 2014), and of the function of assessment as not just to measure learning but rather to encourage student engagement and development of learning (Boud et al., 2010).

There were four phases to the development of a programme-focused assessment approach for the humanities programmes:

1. The first phase consisted of auditing the programme learning outcomes and assessments. Then an assessment and feedback matrix was created for each programme, whereby the assessment was mapped to the modules and to the programme learning outcomes. The assessment and feedback matrix became the vehicle to encourage change and gain staff and student buy-in in the second phase of the project.
2. All stakeholders in the assessment and feedback process (assessment writers, tutors, students, subject leaders, assessment monitors, academics) were consulted about increasing the variety of assessment and mapping the assessments to the programme learning outcomes (see Figure 1).
3. In phase three of the project, information and training of staff and students was the main focus. This involved the creation of an online course, *Creating Assessments for Online/Distance Education Students*, and several supporting workshops which explored different assessment types, sample feedback files, designing rubrics and assessment and feedback principles.
4. The final phase focused on embedding the programme-focused assessment and feedback process into the programme's quality assurance processes, by working with the assessment monitors to ensure they were familiar with the different assessment types and feedback files.

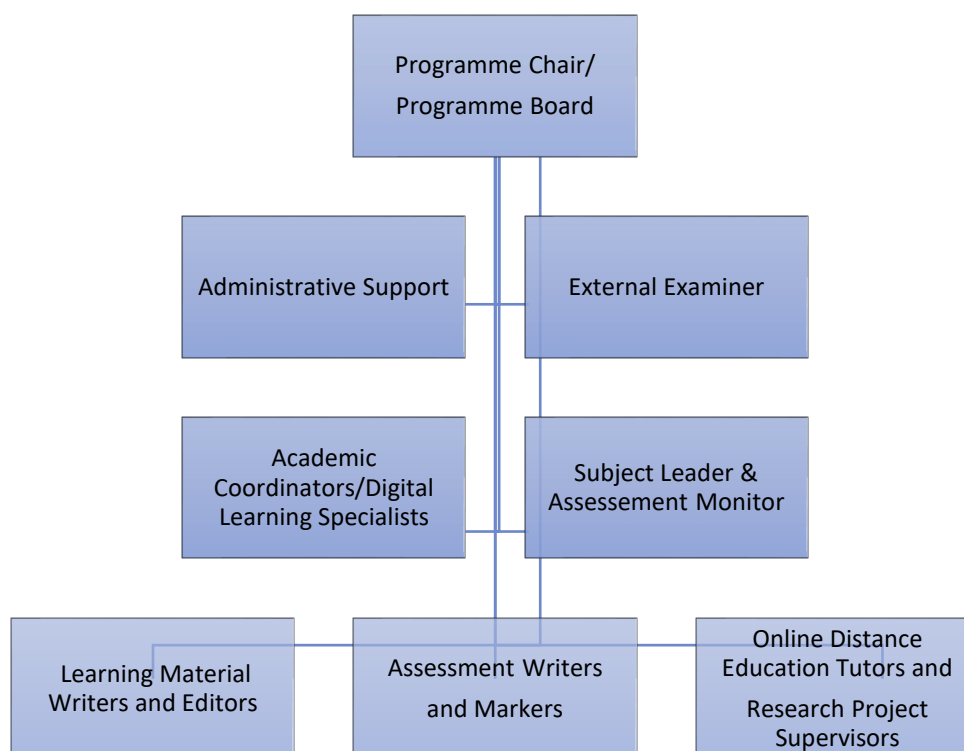


Figure 1 Online Distance Education Model

This project began in 2013, and is now in its fourth iteration and the assessment and feedback matrices have evolved and changed over the years and now include varied assessments such as reflections, ePortfolios, online discussions, peer review, presentations, research reports and group work, as evidenced [here](#) and [here](#).

### Some key suggestions

This case study exemplifies the possibility to build a programme-focused assessment and feedback strategy. Presented below are the key recommendations for other programme teams aiming to ensure students receive high quality feedback as part of a coherent programme-focused assessment and feedback strategy:

- Explicitly align assessment and feedback processes with both programme and module learning outcomes
- Provide supportive resources for assessment writers - important to provide templates and examples of marking guidelines, rubrics, and other types of feedback
- Provide support for assessment writers through communication and professional development
- Establish a formal link between assessment and feedback strategy and quality assurance processes
- All elements of a programme team's assessment and feedback strategy must remain under constant review and be adaptable to change as new technologies emerge

### References

Boud, D., Freeman, M., James, R., Joughin, G., Sadler, R., Dochy, F., ... Fitzgerald, T. (2010). *Student assessment for learning in and after courses*. Sydney: University of Technology.



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- Simpson, O. (2014). Technology supported assessment for retention. In L. Clouder, C. Brougham, S. Jewell, & G. Steventon (Eds.), *Captivation: Student engagement and development through assessment* (pp. 181–196). London: Routledge.

### Related publications

- Brunton, J, Brown, M., Costello, E. & Farrell, O. 2017. Developing a Systematic Programme Focused Assessment and Feedback Strategy. In: *Technology-Enabled Feedback Approaches for First-Year: Y1 Feedback Case Studies in Practice: Y1Feedback*. Retrieved from: <https://www.y1feedback.ie>
- James Brunton, Mark Brown, Eamon Costello & Elaine Walsh (2016) Designing and developing a programme-focused assessment strategy: a case study, *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, 31(2), 176-187, DOI: 10.1080/02680513.2016.1187593



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