

Conclusions and measures of impact

The aim of this practitioner-led action research project was to study the effect of using an assessment, that was delivered with the support of people from the digital media/computing industry, with a designated cohort of students (2nd year BTEC Level 3 IT). No outcomes were assumed but areas of specific interest and measures to assess impact included a look at whether the style of the assessment encouraged students to meet deadlines more often for those who persistently miss deadlines for assessments:

- did at least 70% of those students who persistently miss deadlines meet all deadlines?

On analysis of hand-in rates, carried out before any interventions, **seven** students were identified as persistently missing deadlines. None of these students met every deadline for the project. However, **three** of the seven students did meet all but one deadline and all students met at least one deadline. The average hand-in rate, after the interventions, for the seven students who had a rating of 5 beforehand was 2.14

All students who had persistently missed deadlines met at least one deadline for this project and there was an improvement in rating of 2.86 (57%) on average hand-in rates.

- did all students who consistently met deadlines also meet all deadlines for this assignment?

All students who consistently met deadlines did meet all deadlines for this assignment.

Table 2 shows the number of students in each category of change. At the start of the project, students were given a rating between 1 and 5 to signify their record of handing in assignments on time. A rating of 1 signified a student who consistently met deadlines. A rating of 5 signified a student who persistently missed deadlines. At the end of the project students were given a rating to signify whether they had met the three deadlines for the various stages of the assignment project (requirements, prototype and finished site), this would be given a rating of 1. A rating of 5 would, again, be given to a student who missed all deadlines. A significant improvement was measured by a change of +3 in the rating category, a good improvement by a change of +2, some improvement was a change of +1, no change and negative impact was self-explanatory.

Change in deadline meeting rate		Notes
Significant improvement	7	
Good improvement	5	1 student left the course during the lifetime of the project
Some improvement	5	
No change	8	1 student left the course during the lifetime of the project
Negative impact	1	this student left the course during the project lifetime.

Table 2

- at least 70% of students report that the style of the assessment had an impact on the meeting of deadlines for this assignment

Twenty students completed the final online survey where they were asked to reflect on the impact of the project. Of these 20 students, 15 attended the first session, held away from college, where they learnt about refining requirements and searching for plug-ins. Of these 15 students, 12 were able to state that the session was useful either in terms of learning industry-related skills such as motivation, self-learning, speed of working, specific web-based skills. It is not possible to extrapolate from this to the whole sample as it is my suspicion that one or two students did not attend the session due to a lack of confidence in what was happening (ie an outsider running the session, an alien environment, a need to travel somewhere other than college). None of these students has any identified learning difficulties that might have impacted on their ability to participate but none have participated in any college organised external activity as far as I am aware.

Of the twenty students who completed the final online survey, 16 attended the Wordpress 'clinic' session. Of these students, 15 felt that they would not have been able to learn as much as they did without the help of James. Also, of those who attended the session, the average response to the question 'How much do you value the involvement of someone from industry in this Wordpress 'clinic' session?' was 1.8 (where 1 is very much valued and 5 is not valued at all).

When asked to reflect on why they had met or missed deadlines for this project, only one student referred to qualities specific to this style of assessment project:

"Because of the outside client, I felt more responsibility to meet deadlines"

The lack of evidence in this area is likely to be linked to how the question was asked. The question did not refer specifically to the style of assessment and therefore may not have solicited the required type of answer. This is an error in the design of the research.

More impact measures

Does the style of the assessment motivate students to perform at a higher standard, measured by the number who achieve criteria first time, who learn new skills independently to help them improve the quality of their work and who achieve grades higher than normal.

- an improvement of at least 50% in the number of students achieving pass criteria on first, draft submissions

From my own experience of assessing students' work at Level 3 for the BTEC Website Production unit, all students who finished the final website on time had produced a website of a standard that would meet the pass criteria for the unit. All had produced a website that met the basic requirements of the brief. Eleven of the 26 students had produced a website that was of a standard that could be put forward for judging by the client. No quantitative data on the rates of pass on first hand-in is available and no comment can be made.

There was an increase in the number of students who met the pass criteria for this assignment on first submission.

- at least 30% of students report that they have learnt, or practiced, new skills independently to help them improve the quality of their work

Students were reluctant to say if they had independently learnt new skills but my observation during classes was that this had been happening. There was a range of features incorporated into students' websites, a variety of themes, plug-ins, edited and used in different ways. Students came to each lesson having added more to their sites. Although, when I asked them informally they would often say that they had not done any extra learning.

The final two planned measures were not addressed by any part of the project, due to time issues.

- an improvement of at least 50% in the number of students gaining merit or distinction grades for this particular assignment (measured against an average number of high grades for a major unit assignment i.e. an assignment that targets pass, merit and distinction criteria).

This I have not been able to measure. The style of the BTEC assessment requires that extra written work is needed for a student to gain a merit or distinction grade. This is the final assignment for this unit and those students who have not already achieved merit and distinction grades through earlier assignments are reluctant to do the extra work required for this assignment. Students are over-burdened with work at this time of year and not all work has been submitted or marked. The assignment needs revisiting to ensure that the high grade work is incorporated into the main work done for the assignment.

- at least 70% of students report that the style of the assessment had an impact on improving the quality of their work and raising their achievement

This question was left unanswered. My own observation is that this has been the case but I have not collected reports from students. Again, 80% of students questioned stated that they valued the input of someone from industry in terms of being able to complete the website task and 12 out of 15 (80%) stated that they valued the skills learnt in the first learning session led by Ahmed.

At least 70% of students valued the style of the assessment, in terms of the involvement of people from industry and the real client, feeling that it helped them to achieve work of a quality that was higher than they otherwise would have been able to achieve.