REFLECTING ON CHANGE AND THE MANAGEMENT OF NON-STANDARD SUBMISSIONS IN TYPOGRAPHY
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OVERVIEW
Online submission, feedback and marking has been adopted within the Department of Typography over the last four years. This case study outlines the experience of change and the management of non-standard kinds of submission. It also considers the impact of these changes, in particular, how the shift to online assessment has triggered pedagogical debate and reflection.

OBJECTIVES
Typography has been keen to continue to support the move from offline to online submission, feedback and grading, where possible. In particular, the Department has wanted to ensure a more consistent and streamlined approach to managing assessment, especially given the range of diverse submission types within Typography programmes. The Department were also very keen to ensure that online marking tools allowed colleagues to provide feedback that supports students’ design literacy. In this respect, markers aim to give feedback designed to allow for openness in the ways students think and that builds students’ confidence to develop their own design judgement.

CONTEXT
The University has a long-term vision to move toward online assessment, where practical, and improve underlying processes. In 2015–6, the Department of Typography adopted a policy of either online submission or dual submission (where students are asked to submit both an online digital ‘copy’ and in material form as relevant to the particular deliverables of different design briefs) across the undergraduate degree. Paper-based feedback forms were replaced with online rubrics. The Department mainly made use of Blackboard as a marking tool but with some further use of Turnitin, particularly for essay based assessment. The Department
has undertaken this change in the context of growing student numbers, increasing diversity of student cohorts and growing numbers of international students. The trends have increased the need to adopt more efficient and streamlined assessment processes.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

Over the past four years the Department has supported student online submission and the increased use of marking tools. In 2014, The Head of Department and I initially worked together to explore different online tools to find sustainable assessment practices for increasing cohorts. We liaised with our IT partners who encouraged us to work with Maria Papaefthimiou – as they were aware that the University was setting up a new TEL team. Maria introduced us to Blackboard rubrics, which we piloted for both practical and written forms of assessment.

These early initiatives were reviewed ahead of our decision to adopt online assessment for all undergraduate coursework (with a few exceptions such as technical tasks, examinations and tasks where self or peer assessment plays a particular role in the learning process). I then translated our paper-based forms into a set of Blackboard rubric templates for colleagues to work with and provided a workshop and video resources to support the transition.

For almost every submitted piece of work, students receive feedback from colleagues using either Turnitin or the Blackboard marking tool. Each piece has an online submission point so that colleagues can provide feedback online, often using the rubrics function within the Blackboard marking tool.

One of the challenges faced by the Department has been managing non-standard types of submission. Typography employs a particularly broad range of assessment types including self- and peer-assessment and group work. It also handles a range of different physical submissions such as books or posters and assessment involving creating designs like websites and app prototypes that exist only in digital form.

Because of the nature of the work, dual submission is common. Our policy of online submission for written work and dual
submission for practical work ensures that – regardless of the nature of the work – students receive feedback and grades in a consistent manner throughout their degree.

More recently, we have introduced some new practices that support the development of professional skills and enhance the transparency of group work. For example, professional practice assignments use a project management app, Trello. Students are assessed on their usage and the content (including reflection) they input into the app. The tutor can, for example, set up a Trello group and monitor group activity. Some practical modules require students to use prototyping software or create videos. In these cases, it might be easier for students to share links to this content either by submitting the link itself online to Blackboard or to a dedicated Typography submission e-mail address monitored by administrative colleagues (although this second approach may change as we work with the EMA Team).

A second issue faced by the Department during implementation, as a result of the significant diversity of assessment, is that the management of online submission can become confusing for students in terms of what exactly they should submit and how. The diversity of assessment allows students to demonstrate a range of learning outcomes and broad skills base but the Department has had to ensure that students fully understand the range of submission practices. This challenge exists both in Part 1 when students are being introduced to new practices and in Parts 2 and 3 where a single design brief may have multiple deliverables. We are continually working to find the best balance between ensuring the kind of submission is always appropriate to the learning outcomes, provides students with experience in industry standard software and tools, and is accompanied by clear guidance about submission requirements.

**IMPACT**

The shift from offline to online assessment within the Department has led to a range of changes to the staff and student experience:

1. Online feedback for students has meant that they now always know where their feedback is. There is no need for them to contact their tutors to access content.
2. For some staff, the use of online marking and feedback has meant spending some time getting used to the interface and learning about the functionality of the tools, particularly the Blackboard marking tool. There have been some issues surrounding the accessibility of rubrics within Blackboard and their consistent use, which the Department has had to work through. In general colleagues are now reporting that online marking has significantly reduced marking time, especially where more detailed rubrics have been developed and trialled in the current academic year.
3. The Department has spent time thinking carefully about the consistency of the student assessment experience and making the most of the functionality of the tools to make marking easier and, potentially, quicker. As a result, there is a sense that the practices adopted are more sustainable and streamlined, which has been important given rising student numbers and increasingly diverse cohorts.

**REFLECTIONS**

Over the last year, following recommendations from Periodic Review, the Department has been trialling different practices such as the creation of much more detailed rubrics. As noted above, detailed rubrics seem to reduce marking and feedback time, while providing students with more clarity about the specific criteria used to assess individual projects. However, these do not always accommodate the range of ways in which students can achieve the learning outcomes for creative briefs or encourage the design literacy and independent judgment we want students to develop. We are also working on ensuring that the terminology used in these rubrics is mapped appropriately to the level of professional skill expected in each part of the degree. The Department is currently looking at the impact of this activity to identify best practice.

Typography is keen to continue to provide a range of assessment options necessary for developing professional skills and industry-relevant portfolios within the discipline. We are committed to complementing this diversity with an assessment and feedback process that gives students a reassuring level of consistency and enables them to evaluate their performance across modules. There is some scope to develop the marking tools being used. It would, for example, be very helpful if Blackboard could develop a feature where students can access their feedback before they can see their marks or if it allowed colleagues to give a banded mark.
(such as 60-64), which is appropriate formative feedback in some modules. In addition, Typography students have reported that the user experience could be improved and that the interface could be more intuitive. For example, it could contain less layers of information and access to feedback and marks might be more direct.

More broadly, the shift from offline to online practices has been one driver for the Department to reflect on existing assessment practices. In particular, we have begun to consider how we can better support students’ assessment literacy and have engaged with students to review new practices. Their feedback, in combination with our broader engagement with the new Curriculum Framework and its impact on Programme Level Assessment, is informing the development of a new set of rubric templates to be adopted in autumn 2018.

**LINKS**

For further information please see the short blog, ‘Curriculum Review in Practice Aligning to the Curriculum Framework-first steps started at:

Curriculum review in practice Aligning to the Curriculum Framework – first steps started By: Jeanne-Louise Moys, Rob Banham, James Lloyd

We’re all hearing about the University’s new Curriculum Framework in meetings and training. But how do we start to put this process of alignment into action for individual programmes? Three Typography & Graphic Communication (ThaCC) colleagues decided to thrash out a clearer strategy for achieving this objective for our BA Graphic Communication programme.

Background

In ThaCC, we’re currently working on ways to develop more sustainable assessment and feedback practices for increasing numbers of students. In autumn, Jeanne-Louise Moys...