



Case Study 3: University of West of England, Bristol

Developing our Community of Practice: Navigating Generative AI in Higher Education

What issue were we trying to address and why?

In my role as Digital Assessment Lead at the University of the West of England, I work within the Digital Learning Service focusing on supporting the transformation of assessment experiences for learners across the entire university.

With both "assessment" and "digital" in my job title, early 2023 saw me receiving a growing number of support requests from academics concerned about the impact of generative AI on assessment. These requests made it clear that we needed to address this challenge head-on.

What we did

Feeling unprepared and uninformed on this topic, I started reaching out to different areas of the university and across the sector to understand their stance on the subject. What I quickly realised was that we were all in the same boat - nobody had the answers. The development of generative AI was moving at such a pace that keeping up seemed impossible.

The only realistic option was to become comfortable with this discomfort and adopt an experiment, fail quickly and learn fast approach to navigate this journey. Taking this approach, we decided to form a Community of Practice focused on the use of generative AI within teaching, learning, and assessment. This would give us a space to explore and share scenarios where generative AI was being experimented with and evaluated across the university.

Who was involved.

Our Community of Practice for generative AI has around 90 staff members from across the university. It's inclusive - any staff member who has an interest and curiosity about how generative AI is changing their current and future practices can join.

The Community of Practice meets roughly once every half term to share updates and case studies from across the university. Between these meetings, we encourage members to share and promote both internal and external opportunities to learn more about how this technology is developing.

Measures of success.

Since we launched the community in May 2023 (after getting it approved by Academic Board) we've had 12 meetings, averaging about 6 sessions throughout the year. What's really encouraging is that we're getting consistent attendance - around 35-40 people turning

up to each online recorded meeting, out of our total membership of about 90 staff. People are also actively using our community space between meetings to share ideas and continue discussions, which shows this isn't just a "turn up and tick the box" kind of collective.

But the real success stories are the live changes we're seeing across the university. Early on, we had a session with our Head of Risk, Resilience and Assurance looking at risks and opportunities around generative AI. What came out of that was a clear recognition that we needed better governance structures university wide. As a result, we now have a Generative AI Governance Board for Learning, Teaching and Assessment - something that came directly from our community identifying the gap.

We've also been able to influence actual implementation decisions. When we had Anthology come in to demo the Blackboard Ultra AI functionality, the feedback from our community members directly shaped what happened next with evaluating and implementing these tools.

The cross-pollination of ideas has been one of the most valuable parts of the Community of Practice. When the College of Health and Social Sciences shared their whole-college approach to categorising different types of acceptable AI use and giving students clear guidance in assessment briefs, you could see the lightbulbs going on for people from other colleges. That approach is now being planned for rollout in more parts of the university - which is exactly the kind of collaboration work we were hoping the community would support.

How do you plan to develop the intervention/activity?

As the Generative AI Governance Board starts evaluating what changes we need to make to policies and processes, our Community of Practice is evolving into something even more valuable - a cross-university consultation group that can provide real on the ground input into institutional decisions. We're also becoming the go-to vehicle for disseminating messages back out to staff, which means we're creating a proper two-way communication channel between senior leadership and the people actually using these tools day-to-day.

We've recently taken a step back to review our founding principles to make sure they're still pointing us in the right direction for where the university wants to go. That review process has been really insightful – it has generated feedback showing we need to spend more time on the ethical consideration of generative AI use. People are telling us they want more focus on how we maintain that human balance alongside responsible AI use.

This feels like a natural evolution for us. In the early days, we were very much in "what is this technology and how do we not panic about it" mode. Now we're moving into more comfortable territory - we understand the basics, we've seen some practical applications, and we're ready to address the harder questions about ethics, equity, and ensuring AI enhances rather than replaces human judgment and creativity.

So, our development plans are about deepening the conversation. We want to bring in more voices around digital ethics, explore case studies that highlight both the benefits and the potential pitfalls, and make sure our community becomes a place where people feel equipped to make thoughtful decisions about AI use rather than just technically competent ones.