Collaborative Enhancement Project 2022/2023

Optionality in Assessment: Case Studies

Case Study 11

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Institution: University of Manchester

Discipline/Field of Study: Interdisciplinary and Education

Type of Assessment: Format is flexible, suggested formats are variations on a blog post

Credits: 10 – Interdisciplinary / 15 – Education

Level: Level 4 – Interdisciplinary / Level 7 - Education

Unit Type: Optional unit available across a range of programmes

Type of Optionality: Submission format, submission dates, negotiated assessment task/question, team OR individual approach to assessment, feedback format, choice of 'who' they publish their work as and Choice of licence under which they share their work

Assessment Details:

We (University of Manchester Library Credit Bearing Teaching service) are submitting one form for two units, including five pieces of assessment – covered in this document. As the assessment information is presented online, we have given links to supplementary information. For convenience we have also tried to include the most relevant supplementary links below.

All links have been publicly archived between May and Aug 2023 (using archive today and in most cases also the Wayback Machine) to capture them at the time of the study. We have provided archive links for this reason, but you can also view them live. Please note that pages are hosted on Medium, which displays the 'first published' date on the page, however pages are generally updated annually, and these dates do not reflect this.

We have also included links to all publicly shared student assessed work (which is almost all student assessed work) past and present, as we refer students to this when preparing for assessment, and in some cases ask them to build upon and reference it. These links go to live feeds which are ever-changing – we have not archived these publicly (although can provide a historical snapshot on request if needed).

Here we discuss two units both employing similar teaching and assessment approaches relating to optionality in assessment. The units are taught at different levels, and cover different topics, which results in some context-led differences, however they have some fundamental things in common including: a deliberate aim to practice authentic assessment, a strong focus on skills in learning outcomes and marking criteria, a decision to facilitate peer learning and peer creation of unit materials, flexibility to learn at own pace and to have a great deal of choice in which topics to explore. Some skills areas relevant to the topics are present in both units, e.g. publishing, ownership/authorship, openness and privacy. In terms of practical skills, participants may develop similarly in these areas and may be assessed similarly. In both units, participants explore some of these areas academically as well as practically, and this exploration is facilitated and assessed differently, reflecting the different levels. Being critical is a key component in both units and allows participants to be assessed on their engagement of a topic, while having a great degree of freedom in choosing the topic. The depth of criticality expected is different.

a. Instructions for completing the assessment.

UCIL26002: Digital Society
- Instructions (unit level): archive | live
- Instructions (first assessment): archive | live
  - Student submissions (first assessment): live
  - Informal podcast/video/transcript intro to first assessment: archive | live
- Instructions (second assessment): archive | live
  - Student submissions (second assessment): live
  - Informal podcast/video/transcript intro to second assessment: archive | live
  - Research tips for second assessment: archive | live
- Instructions (third assessment): archive | live
  - Student submissions (third assessment): live
  - Informal podcast/video/transcript intro to third assessment: archive | live

EDUC63252: Open Knowledge in Higher Education
- Instructions (both assessments): archive | live
  - Student submissions (first assessment): live

- o Student submissions (second assessment): [live](#)

b. Marking rubric

Assessment rubrics
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UCIL26002: Digital Society
- Marking criteria (all three asssessments): [archive](#) | [live](#)
- Learning outcomes (unit level): [archive](#) | [live](#)

EDUC63252: Open Knowledge in Higher Education
- Marking criteria (both assessments): [archive](#) | [live](#)
- Learning outcomes (unit level): [archive](#) | [live](#)

c. Teaching materials:

Teaching materials
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UCIL26002: Digital Society
- Introductory information for students on how the unit runs, including the 'course publication', an online magazine mostly written by students, which forms the course materials and includes almost all past and present assessed work: [archive](#) | [live](#)
- Excerpt from course introduction email (2022/3, similar each year, not shared publicly):

"We all have different experiences of that we think of as 'digital society' which are all valid, as well as mixes of knowledge and skills, all of which will help us explore this unit in an interesting and relevant way. So, we thought that if we believe in the value of everyone's experience, and peer learning, why should all the course materials be written by staff?

So, not only are the materials public, but you are going to contribute to them. By the end of this unit, together you will own some of the content. This year and in the future, your

contributions will help others as they explore the topics. If you don't want to use your real name, that's fine, you can write anonymously if you want, and only we will link your writing to your student account (so we can mark your coursework). If you are worried about the exposure of writing online, even anonymously, this is something that will be covered in the course, because it is relevant to the topic, but I will say this now: We have a zero-tolerance approach to harassment and will take serious action to fight it. If you feel anyone (on this unit or anyone at all) is being disrespectful towards you, let us know right away.

The Digital Society online publication is set up in the Medium blogging platform. It's a bit like an online magazine that lots of people (you the students) can write for. The course leaders are editors and we have written some of the content. We have used Medium for Digital Society for several years successfully and you will be able to view comments and assessed coursework of students from previous years that you can explore and be inspired by."

- Guidance on publishing blog assessments (unit level) including choices around how students author, license and share their work: archive | live
  - Guidance on copyright, licensing and attribution: archive | live
- Guidance on writing blog assessments (unit level) including referencing and use of media: archive | live
  - Advice on using screenshots in blog assessments: archive | live
  - Advice on using images in blog assessments: archive | live
  - Advice on referencing in blog assessments: archive | live
  - Advice on editing/formatting in blog assessments: archive | live

EDUC63252: Open Knowledge in Higher Education

- Explanation of our choice to host the course as an online publication mostly made up of students' work (predominantly assessed work): archive | live
- Guidance on publishing blog assessments (unit level) including choices around how students author, license and share their work: archive | live
  - Guidance on copyright, licensing and openness: archive | live
- Example blog assessment submission (written by staff, see also the many student-written assessed blog posts in our assessment information document): archive | live

d. Other links or pertinent information

In UCIL26002 (Digital Society, a 10-credit interdisciplinary unit which any undergraduate student can take), students have commented how much more freedom they are given: creatively (the blog format allows them to experiment and express themselves more than more rigid essay formats), in terms of their exploration of topics, and in other ways such as the flexible structure of the unit. "I've really enjoyed being able to write again with a bit of a freedom to voice personal opinions and use my authentic voice rather than conforming to the formal tone of academic essays" –2021/2 S2 student "I've found writing in this style extremely refreshing and feel like I'm able to express my thoughts effectively whilst adding a creative element too. I now really enjoy writing blog posts and have actually started writing my own blog as a hobby!" – 2020/1 S2 student "[The unit] somewhat re-ignited my love for creative writing. The blog post style assignments was such a nice change from 'classic' academic essays I tend to write all the time, and I feel like blog posts are more relaxed, and you can let your creative side out more!" – 2020/1 S2 student (anonymous comment made on topic post) While almost all students submit in the blog format, they are not strictly required to; some students prefer not to publish their work online and so submit a Word document directly, or publish a blog post privately and share a link to it. Of those who do publish, they have the option of blogging in their name, or a pseudonym, and they can change this throughout the course and afterwards. In assessments on this unit, students

choose what they will write about, with increasing freedom as they progress: in the final submission they choose to explore any aspect of digital society by their own definition, not limited to the (mostly staff chosen) weekly presented topics but inspired by their own experiences/ideas and those shared by their peers. "[I appreciated] the freedom to write about a field of personal interest (namely in digisoc2), as it allowed me to develop my understand of a topic of my own choosing from an academic standpoint." – 2020/1 S2 student (comment made in assessed work) All marking criteria and learning outcomes are designed to support this freedom; they are largely skills-based (e.g. critical thinking) and do not make reference to specific topics, giving students the freedom to focus on whichever topics they choose, meeting the learning outcomes and satisfying the marking criteria as they follow their own path. For example, in our outline of the learning outcomes for the course, we state, "Your experience and existing knowledge is valuable … share your experience, knowledge and views with other students, and respectfully listen to theirs ... Everyone's experience of 'digital society' will be different, and you can learn from this" In EDUC63252 (a 15- credit optional unit on the staff-facing Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education), we follow the same approach as outlined for Digital Society above: learners write about their own ideas and experience, choosing assessment topics with complete freedom, as long as they can talk about them with reference to ideas of openness in education; and we suggest a similar blog format for both assessments (the second being framed as a potential opinion piece for The Conversation). As with Digital Society, the blog format is only a suggested format, however in comparison, in this unit we strongly encourage learners to consider alternative formats and approaches to assessment, partly mirroring a philosophical choice at the PGCertHE programme level. Consequently, we have seen much variety in formats, including: a participant publishing their work in Times Higher Education instead of the course publication, participants writing journal articles, a participant submitting a support/advice post for other learners on the course, a participant submitting a knitting pattern as part of their work, and we have also worked with participants to agree flexibility to the assessment brief beyond the publication format, for example participants working collaboratively, spreading work between this and other units, and in one case a participant rewriting the assessment brief to demonstrate certain learning outcomes as part of their submission.