Learning & Teaching Conference 2010

Abstract 4A

Writing for Results - writing/reviewing skills development via Moodle
Presenter Quintin Cutts, FIMS
Co- authors Katie Grant and Bryony Randall, Education, English Literature

Learning to write clearly is an important graduate attribute. However, though staff recognise the need to provide writing skills feedback, time constraints make it impossible to do so satisfactorily and consistently. Through the LTDF-funded Writing for Results project, a Moodle system has been developed containing hundreds of exercises based on writing defects found in real, anonymised student essays. The exercises are grouped into categories from simple apostrophe use to more complex issues such as muddled phrasing, poor choice of words, argument quality and essay structure. A comprehensive introduction to each category emphasises that good writing is a learned skill, available to all. Key to Writing for Results is that all the material is discipline specific, thus addressing the common student misconception that there is only one, university-wide writing style, and also tutors' worries that their particular subject style might be ignored. To formalise the importance of good writing to students, a corresponding marking sheet, also tailored to each department, has been developed. Essay markers can, with ease, highlight writing skills problems on the marking sheet, with a related sign on the essay script. Markers can then concentrate on essay content, satisfied that writing skills problems have been properly addressed. Writing for Results is being trialled this year in English Literature, History, Computing Science, Earth Science and Philosophy. Over 800 exercises are available at http://khios.dcs.gla.ac.uk/writing using the standard Moodle login. By the time of the L&T Conference, it will be clear: whether the essay markers found the feedback sheets easy to use; usage statistics; student response (through feedback questionnaires); and the results of a four-week experiment to see how effective the exercises are. In the sense of transitions, this project underpins the transition from school-level writing to that expected of a university graduate, and has already been used with students in first year to those at Masters level. As for the conference themes, this project touches on all of them, bar perhaps enquiry-based learning.