

Student  
perceptions of  
support for digital  
assessments

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Project Snapshot  
September/2024



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

## Project Overview

Chase, Ross and Robbie (2017) acknowledge issues of scale and the need for cross-institutional collaboration in designing digital assessment, suggesting guidelines for clear and authentic assessments with adequate scaffolding. Care needs to be taken around how authentic assessment intersects meaningfully with digital (Nieminen, Bearman and Ajjawi, 2023), including designing assessments to address digital literacies outcomes and situate students within the context of the digital world. Janse van Rensburg, Coetzee, and Schmulian (2022) highlight the need for graduate competence in using digital tools and techniques, and that students participating in their study felt positively about digital assessment but did not have the capacity or support to fully embrace creating digital media.

This project aims to evaluate the effectiveness of provision from the library digital learning advisors at the University of Leeds, who have been collaborating with academics and other professional services teams to embed digital capabilities teaching for taught modules employing digitally creative media production methods for assessment, including podcasts, videos, websites, zines and databases. An iterative approach has been taken to design and development of the formal instruction, including deconstructing examples of the media, practical introductions to software and principles, with follow-on informal signposting and access to relevant materials, support, and equipment.

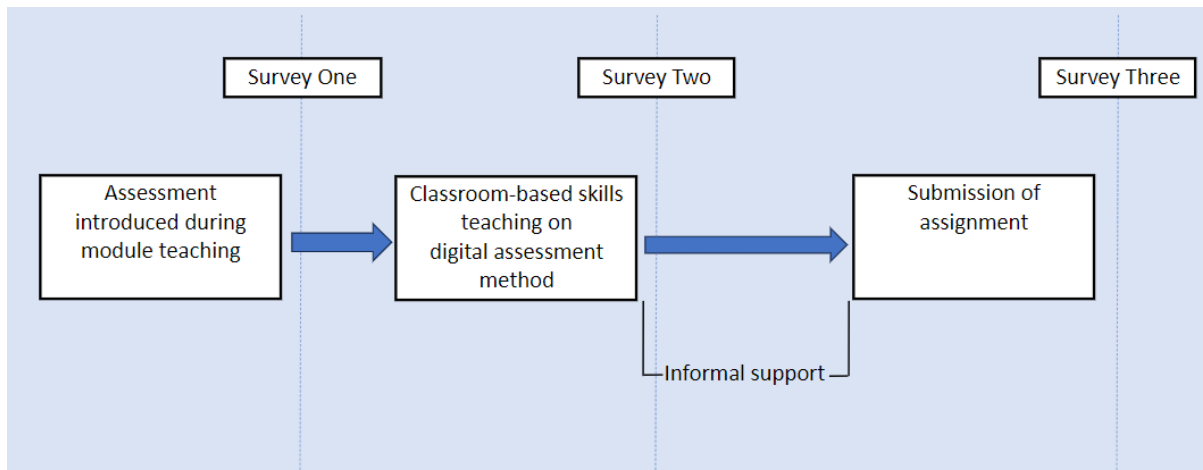
## Project Objectives

- Understanding the starting points of students undertaking modules with a digitally creative assessment methods, such as podcast and video production, to assess how digital inequality may impact on inclusive assessment, and how digital capabilities provision might help students develop their skills, confidence levels and technology acceptance.
- Gaining insight into which areas of the pedagogical approach to digital capabilities development have worked to support students, and where improvements can be made.
- Gauging the support, resources, equipment, and spaces students on digital assessment modules require to develop media for their assessments, and identifying any barriers that impact on student capacity to access on campus provision.



## Methods

A longitudinal mixed methods survey was used to track the views of students participating in digitally creative assessments at the module start, after formal digital capabilities teaching, and after the assessment process.



Metrics were adapted from the technology acceptance framework UTAUT (Venkatesh, Thong and Xu, 2012), and relevant external factors defined in Almaiah, Alamri and Al-Rahmi (2019). Referencing these papers allowed for the development of an evaluation method that considers factors including perceived awareness of the media, self-efficacy, performance expectancy, effort expectancy, resource availability, behavioural intentions around future media creation, and hedonic motivation – was it fun to do!

Qualitative survey questions aimed to illuminate overall perceptions of completing a digital assessment, as well as views on the support offered and accessed, and whether there were any perceived barriers to access to on-campus provision to support digital creation, including commuting, part-time work, caring responsibilities, or disabilities impacting the capacity for extra-curricular campus attendance.

## Key findings

- Students began with low levels of experience in the method of assessment, but practical classroom-based skills teaching led to increases in students' perceptions of their self-efficacy that were maintained during independent completion of their projects, with the offer of additional support on hand.
- Students increasingly perceived digitally creative assignments to be supportive of their development needs from the start of the module to the end, and were hopeful that using the digital assessment method would be beneficial in terms of achieving their academic goals for the module.

- Students could see the benefit of using digitally creative techniques for their skills development and enjoyed the task, and although this translated into a desire to complete digitally creative assignments in future, this did not translate to intentions to use in a wider personal or professional context.
- Students were generally interested and motivated to undertake a piece of work that was different from assessments they'd had previously, but there were worries about being able to learn to use the technology, understanding the marking criteria and how they might differ from a written assignment, and being aware of how to do well.
- Students who responded to the survey after submission of the assignment indicated that they'd enjoyed the creativity, and the sense of achievement felt more than it did after submitting an essay.

## Implications for practice

- Given the general low levels of experience with digitally creative methods of assessment, implement classroom-based skills teaching or online resources as standard to provide a grounding for the task that addresses the hidden curriculum concerns of skills development to alleviate pressure on students for additional independent skills learning alongside subject content;
- Adapt teaching and learning to place more focus more on why the assessment method has been implemented and the wider use value of learning to create media;
- Identify opportunities to co-develop rubrics that would provide a consistent understanding of expectations for media production that account for resource accessibility, whilst maintaining flexibility in criteria in terms of academic expectations around formality, language use, etc.

## Challenges

The project encountered challenges with facilitating participation, which were two-fold:

- Identifying relevant modules taking the collaborative approach to digital assessment, as these modules tended to be skewed to semester one, before ethical approval had been gained for the project;
- Students were reluctant to complete surveys – the infamous survey fatigue affected data collection, both in terms of numbers and detail in qualitative responses.

The small scale of the research has meant that, although the project identifies initial trends, it has served more as a proof of concept, to be expanded to understand significant factors in student perceptions of digital capabilities provision.



Understanding time constraints as a researcher and for participants has been a learning experience, a year passes quickly, and students may be time poor during assessment periods. The research design also needed to balance measuring the longitudinal effects of provision against gathering rich qualitative data more effectively.

## Outputs

There will be outputs from this project later this year, when this document will be updated.

## Next steps

As mentioned above, there have been some limitations in understanding findings that mean an extension of the project to cover more modules would be useful as a future undertaking, as well as amending the research design to gather more qualitative data through focus groups conducted after the modules have been completed.

Extending the project will mean that statistical analysis can be undertaken to understand longitudinal progression through assessment, and the impact of barriers to campus access on perceptions of fairness with assignments requiring specialist equipment and software. The inclusion of focus groups will also allow for a richer understanding of progress through the module and bring further insight to student perceptions of digital assessment.

**Call for collaboration: Do you have a module with a digitally creative assessment? If so, please get in touch at [h.e.towler@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:h.e.towler@leeds.ac.uk)**

## Bibliography

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