

Feedback Challenges in Sprint-Based Assessments

A programme of re-imagining the curriculum has been undertaken in a computing school at a UK university. The aim of the programme is to furnish students with the employability awareness and skills required by industry-ready graduates to sustain careers in the computer industry. Employability is being enhanced by more closely aligning the teaching environment, including pedagogy, assessments and workspace, with that of a typical IT workplace environment.

Sprints are a common way to complete IT projects within the computing industry. A sprint is a set of tasks accomplished within a relatively short time period that produces a specified deliverable; a well-defined artefact that meets a specification. This paper reflects on an evolutionary approach to replace traditional assessments with sprint-based assessments on undergraduate and postgraduate modules. This research explores the role of formative and summative feedback in sprint-based assessments.

A series of pilots in the successive delivery of two modules trialed changes relating to the timing, format, method and mix of formative and summative feedback in flipped learning. All assessments were set by industry mentors who participated as the client in the assessment process. The pilots explore two delivery patterns; 48 hours contact time delivered across a 12 week semester and as 4 week block delivery. For example, in one pilot a module was delivered over 12 weeks with the single end of module assessment, replaced by a sprint assessment every three weeks. Oral formative feedback was provided in class each week. Students had a one-to-one progress meeting with the industry mentor before the submission of each sprint deliverable. Written formative and summative feedback were provided for each sprint. Data was captured from staff reflective diaries and student questionnaires for the analysis. The pilots highlighted a range of challenges in relation to the role and perceptions of formative and summative feedback.

In industry, sprints are intended to increase productivity and produce higher quality deliverables through improved focus and transparency of work tasks. In contrast, the pilot sprint-based assessments resulted in an increased workload for staff and students, and posed challenges regarding the volume, timeliness and purpose of feedback in sprints. A key finding from the pilots is that as the quantity of feedback increased, students' perception of the quantity of feedback received decreased.

Although formative feedback is good pedagogic practice, a significant proportion of feedback was not acted upon.

Sprints challenge students to focus intensely on tasks which changes the demand and nature of feedback required. This paper provides some interesting insights into staff and student perceptions of the role of feedback that will be of interest to educators trialing innovative assessment methods in project-based learning.