NOTTINGHAM
TRENT UNIVERSITY

Grading matrices: Making them work for staff and students

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Session Objective and Outline

Objective: To exchange ideas on how to use matrices to create a **shared understanding** of the assessment criteria and standards used to assess student work **within a course team** and **with students**.

Session outline:

Main functions of matrices and possible issues **-** Kamilah Jooganah

Developing matrices on the Doctorate in Business Administration course - Sue Kirk & Carley Foster

Task 1 - Creating a shared understanding of assessment criteria and standards amongst a course team. *Feedback*

Task 2 - Engaging students with matrices. *Feedback*
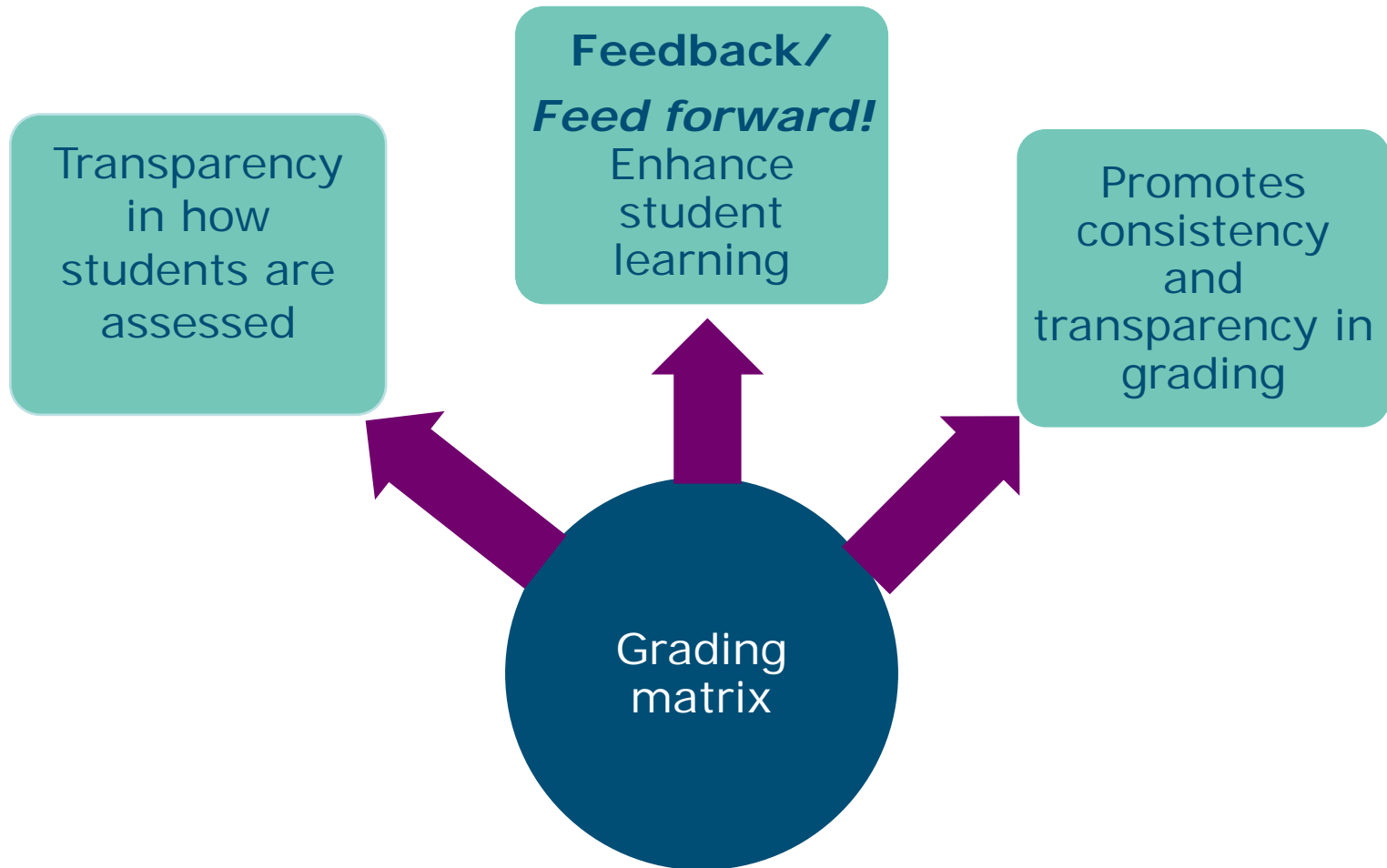
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Grading matrices

Quality Handbook

- Assessment criteria must be developed for **all tasks**
  - assessment criteria describe the qualities/dimensions to look for in student work when judging student performance against the learning outcomes.

- NTU's generic grade descriptors should be **contextualised** to disciplines and assessment tasks. The handbook states that this information is commonly made available in a matrix.

- Course leaders should maintain oversight of matrices at each level to ensure consistency, clarity and appropriate contextualisation to task.

NTU Quality Handbook

Part C: Course design, management and enhancement.

Section 15: Assessment (2014: 10)

Matrices: The key functions

Transparency in how students are assessed

Feedback/
Feed forward!
Enhance student learning

Promotes consistency and transparency in grading

Grading matrix

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Creating a shared understanding

- Matrices can help to ensure that the **same criteria** is used amongst all assessors.

- Matrices can help to ensure that assessors **treat criteria in a similar fashion** (e.g. where the relative degree of importance of each criterion is conveyed through a weighting).

- When matrices are contextualised, this **can help to minimise the differences of interpretation regarding the standards** student work needs to evidence to be awarded a certain grade/grade within a particular grade band.

- A matrix that is contextualised can also **make explicit a subject discipline's 'episteme'** (Perkins, 2006), that is knowing how to conceptualise and approach problems within the paradigm of a subject (e.g. what counts as a valid inquiry and 'evidence' would differ between an anthropology and mathematics).

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Creating a shared understanding: Some of the issues

- Contextualising a matrix is difficult – making tacit knowledge explicit is challenging. E.g. *What makes a piece of work a 2.1 as opposed to a 2.2?*

- Even after a matrix is constructed, there could be differences between assessors in terms of interpretation of criteria and standards.

- Constructing a matrix is an iterative process and only improved on when staff and student feedback on it. **Hence pre-marking activities with colleagues and sharing a draft matrix with students is vital to minimise differences in interpretation**.

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Developing grading matrices: An example from DBA

Dr. Carley Foster

&

Dr. Susan Kirk

What is a DBA?

- A DBA is a hybrid between a taught programme (with assessments) and a final thesis (externally examined)

- It is a 4 year programme

- It was re-designed and revalidated in December 2014

- New course learning outcomes, module learning outcomes and assessment criteria (pass/fail only) were needed

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Challenges & Benefits

- Translating CLOs to MLOs to assessment criteria

- The same CLOs appear in each module specification, need to show progression

- Translating academic terms into descriptors that students and supervisors understand e.g. academic writing – needed to be broken down into referencing, argument, structure etc.

- To overcome these challenges, we recommend:
  - Involving CADQ
  - Involving module teams and course teams
  - Benchmarking against QAA standards & other relevant QA standards (e.g. AACSB) & comparable course internally

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Challenges & Benefits

• Benefits:

- A clearer articulation of the MLOs and assessment criteria to enable transparency and comparability in marking benefitting both students and supervisors

- Easier to defend marking decisions made

- Useful to explain and rationalise approach to external parties e.g. HER, accreditation panels etc.

The process of development and refining is on-going as we will run calibration events to 'test' the assessment criteria & will seek both staff & student feedback going forward

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Task 1: Engaging course teams with matrices

- Discuss your experiences of using matrices.

- How have you used matrices to create a shared understanding of assessment criteria and standards in your course team? If not, how do you think it may be possible to do this?

- What methods could you use to maintain oversight of matrices at each level to ensure consistency, clarity and appropriate contextualisation to task?

- 1 person in each group keep notes

- 15 mins for task

- 15 mins feedback

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Matrices: Building assessment literacy in students

- Matrices can help to **build assessment literacy in students.** They can make clear to students the criteria and standards that will be used to assess their work.

- Engaging students in a dialogue around matrices can help to **minimise disjunctions regarding staff and student expectations on assessment.** This is especially needed when students first join university. *Will students know what critical analysis means or how to construct an argument?*

- **Matrices should be part of the formative process**. E.g. applying a matrix to an exemplar essay.

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Task 2: Engaging students with matrices

- Discuss your experiences of engaging students with matrices on your course. What works and what can be improved?

- When students use a matrix to assess their own performance and that of others this can help to build their assessment literacy (Smith et al., 2013). With this in mind, what tasks could you use to engage students with matrices as part of the formative process?

- 1 person in each group keep notes

- 15 mins for task

- 15 mins feedback

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Further resources

- GBA SharePoint Site ('Resources to support staff')

- https://portal.ntu.ac.uk/pva/GradeScheme/SitePages/Home.aspx

- Extension: **82571**

- Email: **Kamilah.Jooganah@ntu.ac.uk**