CADQ Guide

Esubmission of coursework

There are a number of reasons why you might be considering a move to e-submission of coursework; chief among these might be a desire to use technology to reduce feedback turnaround time. The information that is provided in this resource was generated during an evaluation of a series of NTU School-based pilots (2010-11). It is intended to inform you of some of the benefits of e-submission and to raise your awareness of some of the considerations.

We found that there are a range of benefits that provide a rationale for moving to electronic submission of coursework as the sole mode of coursework submission. These benefits are also well evidenced in the literature.

Esubmission offers benefits in the following areas of assessment and feedback:

the process and management of submission of coursework: collection, distribution and storage

- paperless submissions: administrators, academic staff and students benefit from the reduction of paper in the process and the concomitant reduction of space needed to house or store paperwork;
- time-savings: scripts are immediately available for marking resulting in efficiency gains in the turnaround times in the delivery of scripts (to markers and at the stage of return to students). The NTU evaluation showed that this process might otherwise take from 24 hours to four days for paper-based submissions;
- safe back-ups: records are available online and the system is routinely backed up;
- better tracking and storage than paper records (in School offices and then archives): receipts are available electronically and records are automatically kept;
- potential to share information more easily with greater transparency: this is true not only for colleagues who are moderating but also external examiners could be given access to Learning Rooms;
- returning feedback and marks electronically: this might open up further possibilities for both staff and students for the management of achievement and feedback data.

The enhancement of marking – if e-marking

- automatic checking of word counts;
- automated plagiarism checks using Turnitin.

Enhancement of the student experience

- in our research NTU students reported a positive and hassle-free assessment submission experience;
- they also save time and money on printing;
- electronic feedback improves legibility.

Benefits for the environment

- savings on the NTU carbon foot-print: A tentative calculation by an NTU colleague in NBS showed that around 500 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide could be saved if 4.5% of modules in that School used e-submission.

Considerations for switching to esubmission

If you are considering a switch from paper-based submission to e-submission then there are a number of important considerations which need attention, particularly if the intention is to have electronic-only, rather than dual submission. The major considerations are managing the process of e-submission, staff roles and responsibilities, choice of tools, staff and student training needs and finally a transition strategy. These points are explained here in the NTU context.

Managing the submission process

Before you embark on the process of esubmissions you should give careful consideration to the full assessment cycle, from the creation of a Dropbox in Learning Rooms through to the students receiving feedback and then the possibility of further uses of achievement data and work samples for quality assurance. Developing an effective process requires a certain familiarity with the tools available in NOW to consider their suitability and fit for local practices and regulations. It is advisable that you allow time for this planning and exploration and that you involve academic and administration teams in the planning process.

Decisions made at the start of this planning process are crucial as they will frame or limit choices at the later stages. For example, Dropboxes are easy to set up and use but to be effective they require strategic decision-making in setting them up. Creating programme-specific guidelines will likely require consideration of School policies and practices:

- Creating a folder structure and Turnitin self-check: the structure of folders can be basic (main submission and late submissions folder) or advanced (plagiarism check folder; main submission folder, Turnitin enabled; late folder; extensions; referrals). In addition, you will need to consider the use of Turnitin in your Programme for student self-checking or formative purposes.
- Dropboxes will need to be set up with a check box for students to confirm the originality of the work submitted.

Another aspect that need to be considered at Course-level in order to maintain consistency in the student experience are the tools which markers will use in the post-submission stages. At present, some stages such as marking and feedback provision can be conducted using a number of different tools (MS Word, NOW feedback area, Grades Tool, Rubrics tool).

There are a number of assessment processes (for example, granting extensions, conducting and recording moderation, archiving, external examining) that are not currently supported by tools available in NOW. These processes might involve hard copies, however, to

maximise and capitalise on efficiency gains in using technology you might want to consider establishing electronic-driven processes (e.g., through email or the creation of dedicated spaces in NOW).

Roles and responsibilities

Once the process is established you will then need to assign roles for emergent duties. The effective and efficient management of electronic assessment submission will require academics and administrators to liaise and share responsibilities (e.g. set up, monitoring, retrieving records) at all stages. Electronic submission will automate some aspects of the process but setting up, checks and monitoring duties require human input.

Training

The key to successfully switching to esubmission is communication and the training of staff and students. Academic and administrative staff and students will need to be trained and to have time to become familiar with the tools, systems and processes which will be used.

The main area that administrative staff will need training on is the use of Dropbox. They may also benefit from an awareness of the set of tools which will be used for feedback and marking (Grades Tool).

Academic staff will need training on the various tools that they will need to use in the submission, marking and construction of feedback. The tools in NOW they need to use are: Dropbox and the NOW feedback area. Depending on your choices they may also need training in the Grades Tool.

Students will need to be trained on how to use the submission tool. In addition, they should also be given support on compressing file sizes (important if image are involved). More generally, presenting Word documents for on-screen reading might also be an area of training. This could involve the inclusion of overviews, contents lists, an index, splitting essays into shorter sections in electronic documents. Students will need guidelines on: file types, naming files, file sizes, the chosen folder structure in the Dropbox and the uses of those folders.

Transition to esubmissions and e-marking

While dual submission of assessment (i.e. both paper and electronic) is possible and perhaps a sound transitional option, for the real efficiencies of esubmission (such as have been outlined above) to be felt there would need to be a commitment to e-marking. While much of the literature reports time-savings from e-marking, our research in Schools at NTU led us to feel that results are more mixed; variation arises from the tool used, the marker's experience and the kind of work that is being marked. However, importantly for other benefits to be realised, e-marking is a necessary part of the process. Obviously a process of electronic submission only, if not accompanied by e-marking would result in the costs of printing (including staff time spent on this) being shifted to Schools. It should be noted that due to the difficulties of on-screen marking of longer texts, paper submissions will not disappear completely and will be necessary in certain contexts (e.g., Master's level dissertations and PhD theses).

It may seem obvious but the most challenging aspect of e-marking is the requirement to read on-screen and the degree to which this is felt to be challenging will vary from person to person. The NTU School-based pilots of e-marking (2010/11) showed that attention

needs to be paid to marking loads, especially for those colleagues who are e-marking for the first time. For this group marking loads might need to be reduced as we found that on-screen marking requires a period of adaptation and productivity might drop slightly when first e-marking. In the case of experienced e-markers, limits remain on how much marked can be done on-screen. Findings from pilots showed that experienced markers may feel comfortable marking up to 5,000-8,000 word assignments.

The issue of marking load may suggest a strategy of re-engineering the assignment load at programme level, factoring in alternative assessment methods where suitable. This would decrease the amount and load of on-screen reading for marking. Additionally, consideration might be given to the goals of marking and feedback construction, with a discussion of how much feedback is supportive and how much is excessive.

Given the range of tasks which are needed to ensure an effective shift to esubmission and marking, you may feel that it is appropriate to have a period of transition with dual submission providing an interim position. In a transition period where marking on a programme may be electronic or paper-based then issues of consistency will come to the fore and so need to be addressed and the student experience will need to be managed in this context