

# **Stakeholder Perspectives on Using E-Learning Tools for Essay-Type Assessment**

**Eva Heinrich, John Milne, Massey University**

## **What is it about?**

We use the term ‘essay-type assessment’ to refer to the formative assessment of coursework where students supply items such as essays and other forms of documents. This type of assessment is common across all disciplines and its educational value is firmly established. It challenges students to formulate their own thoughts and construct their own answers and is linked to higher level learning outcomes. The main challenges for the teacher are to know how to provide feedback that assists students in their learning and to find the time that is required for this individual attention. E-learning tools and approaches can support essay-type assessment. The main areas for such support lie in the management of assignment submission, storage and return, the assistance in providing individualised feedback to students, the coordination of marking teams and the communication with students.

## **Why is it important?**

Despite its value for learning, essay-type assessment is under threat. Growing class sizes over the last decade and the increasing focus on research outputs in measuring academic performance have led many academics towards ‘faster’ methods of assessment. E-learning has assisted this trend by providing automated tools for testing students, for example via web-based multiple-choice tests. While valuable in their own way these methods of assessment cannot cover the full spectrum of assessment and in particular fall short in supporting higher level learning outcomes. New e-tools that provide support to the human marker in assessing and facilitating higher level learning outcomes have become available but only a small number of academics use them.

Improvements in assessment should first identify the needs of all stakeholders involved, students, academics and institutions, and come up with solutions that satisfy all groups. E-learning tools will be a valuable part of such solutions. As often, the challenges lie not so much in development of the right technologies as in providing the necessary support structures and conditions for use.

## **How the session will be run?**

We will start the session by providing a brief overview on what we have learnt about the needs of stakeholders from the literature review we have conducted as part of our eCDF project. We then give an insight into the situation at our institution, Massey University, in regard to the use of e-learning tools for essay-type assessment, based on a survey. After this introduction the participants will discuss stakeholder needs based on their own experiences and on the situation at their institutions. We will conclude the session by sharing the outcomes of the group discussions.