

Improving assessment literacy through institutional change

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Abstract

A large post-92 University in the UK carried out a review of the University's assessment policy and practice. This concluded that existing procedures worked adequately from the point of view of compliance with the UK Quality Code (QAA, 2013). However, they did not provide a framework for the consistent provision of information about assignment tasks, submission, feedback and moderation across the university; there was a wide variety of practice. Evidence from external examiner reports, academic appeals, and staff and student comments indicated that this lack of consistency could lead to confusion about expectations in relation to the assessment process.

It has been suggested that improved assessment literacy can also lead to improved assessment outcomes (Smith et al., 2011) and that it can improve the effectiveness of feedback (Price et al., 2010). The development of an institutional framework for the provision of information about assessment would enable more consistent discussion about all of these elements with both students and staff.

Outcomes

The University's Code of Practice for Assessment was rewritten to :

- Improve clarity
- Reduce confusion between requirements and academic decisions
- Support innovation
- Encourage use of best practice in all aspects of assessment

Simple structure was used to focus discussion and guidance about assessment, covering both procedural and academic aspects



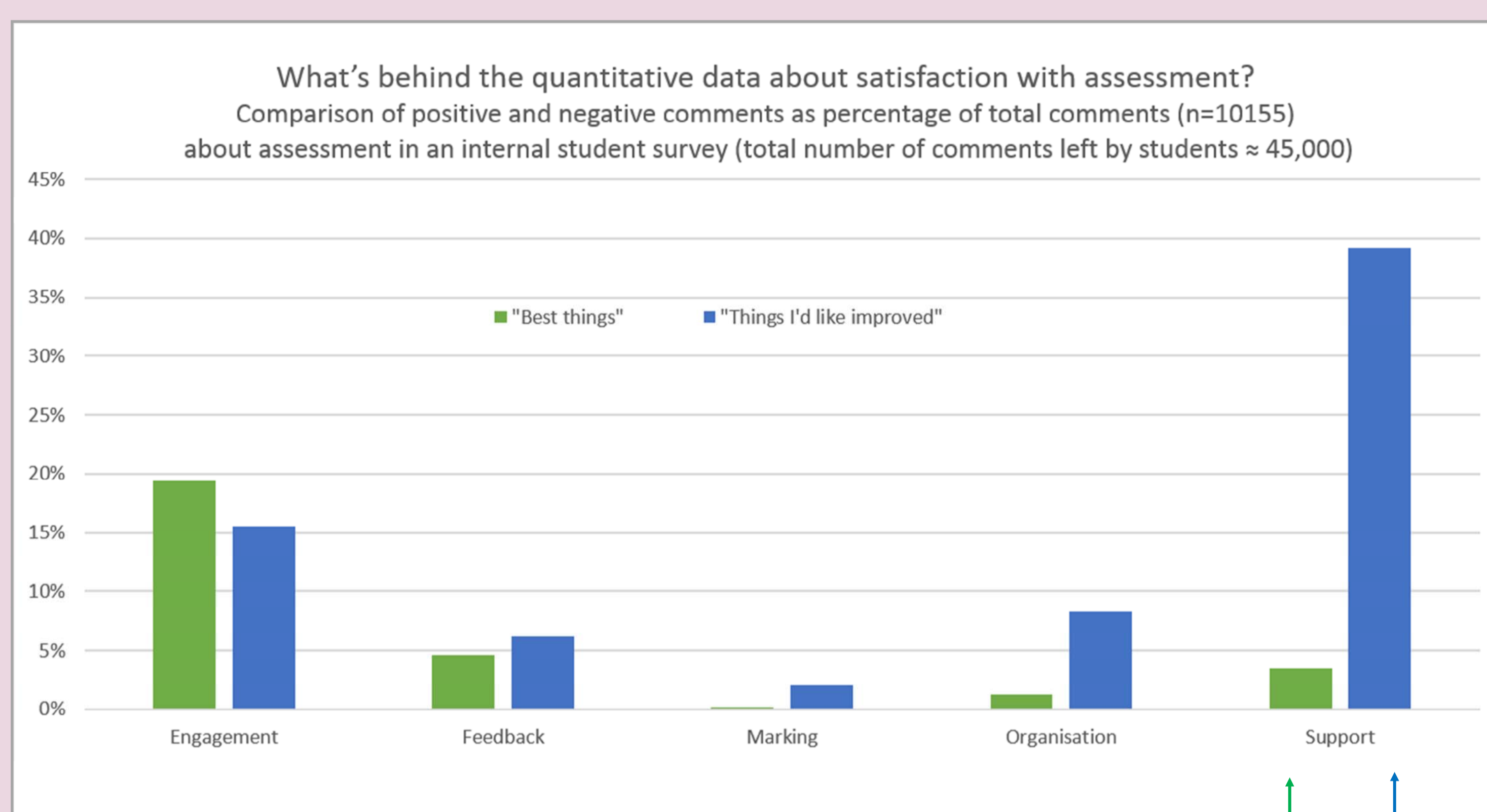
Supporting guidance:

- Website (9400 views in 2013/14, 11500 in 2014/15 so far)
- Podcasts
- Examples
- Programme planning templates
- Staff development sessions

Context

Assessment in UK HE can be anxiety-provoking. There are tensions between:

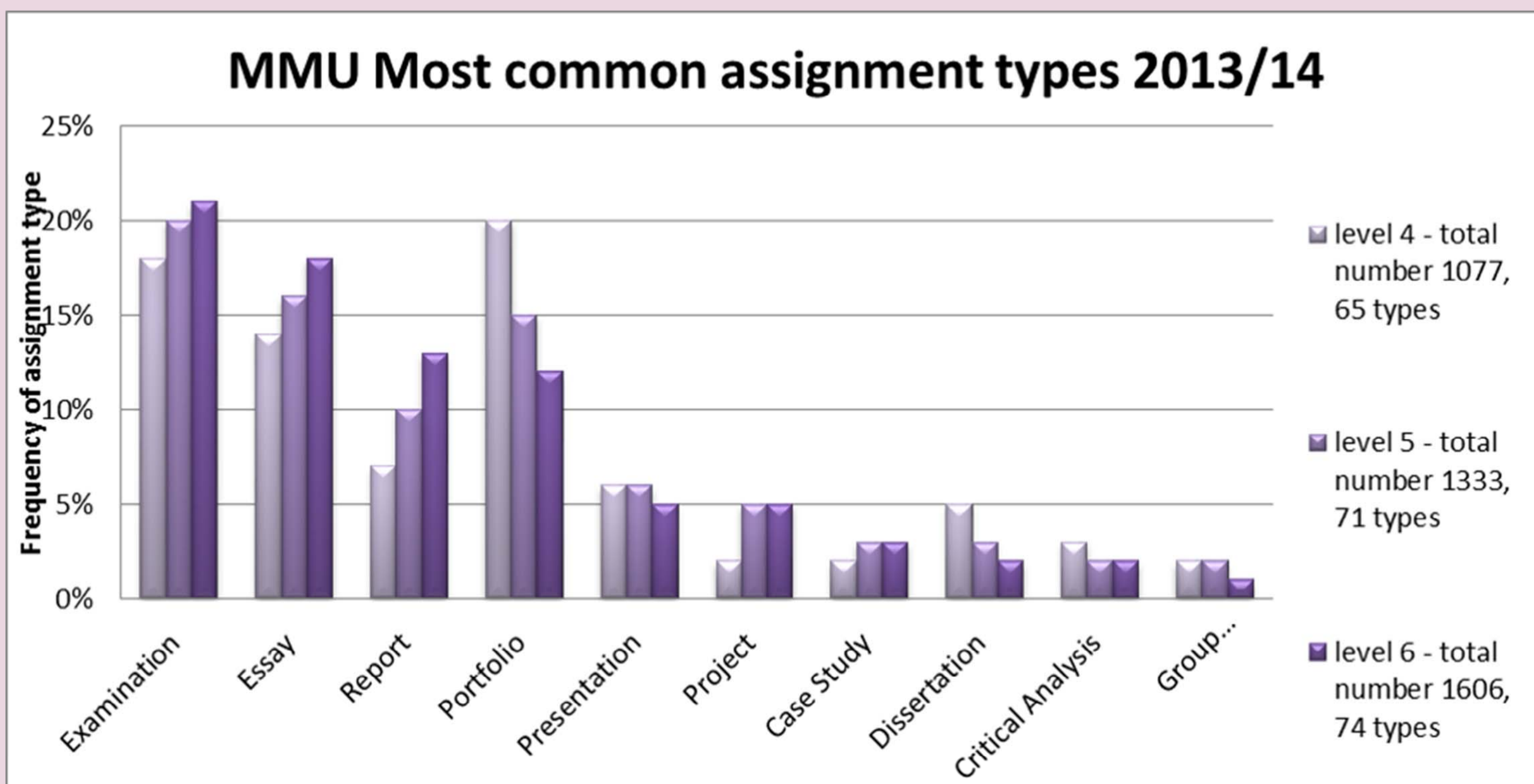
- Teaching and grading
- Standards and creativity
- Rules and regulations
- Freedom and responsibilities
- Satisfaction and challenge



Sample comment : "clear teaching with great knowledge on subject & advice regarding exams immediately from start of term."

Sample comments : "Little guidance has been given regarding the Coursework and given its obscure nature surely strong guidance is necessary!"

"The ability to have assignments during term before final exams and receive feedback on my progress and weak areas would be very helpful to me."



We found that it can be challenging to be innovative: it was safer to be traditional.

