Northumbria Research Link

LEGAL HISTORY AND STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

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Abstract: Assessment has been described by Graham Gibbs as "the most powerful lever teachers have to influence the way students respond to courses and behave as learners", but is legal education ready to embrace the possibilities of making law students active participants in the assessment process? This article explores our experiences of developing both peer assessment models and encouraging students to generate their own questions in the context of a module in Legal History on the undergraduate law degree at Northumbria University. In adopting innovative forms of assessment, it is important to understand why the new practices are being adopted and also to be able to justify those practices; hence, the article addresses potential benefits and pitfalls of student participation in peer marking or grading and explores how peer assessment models can be grounded in assessment and learning theory.

Keywords: *innovation in legal education; student-centred pedagogy; developing student autonomy; peer assessment; active learning*

I.   Introduction

Assessment has been described as "most powerful lever teachers have to influence the way students respond to courses and behave as learners".[1] Research suggests that the most successful students are actively involved in their own learning, monitor their thinking, think about their learning and assume responsibility for their own learning.[2] Involving students in peer assessment can promote active learning.[3] Yet, offering students a degree of ownership or control over the assessment process can also challenge the traditional role of the teacher. It may also, perhaps surprisingly, require considerable time and resources from the tutor.

   This article addresses our experiences as law teachers of making students active participants in the assessment process in the context of a Legal History module at

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1   Graham Gibbs, "Using Assessment Strategically to Change the Way Students Learn" in Sally Brown and Angela Glasner (eds), *Assessment Matters in Higher Education* (Buckingham: SRHE and the Open University Press, 1999).

2   Nadine Lambert and Barbara McCombs, *How Students Learn: Reforming Schools through Learner-Centered Education* (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2000).

3   Claire Brindley and Susan Scoffield, "Peer Assessment in Undergraduate Programmes" (1998) 3(1) Teaching in Higher Education 79.

Northumbria University. We outline our approach to involving students in setting their own assessments and in summative peer marking, in light of educational theory on assessment strategies, and examine whether such peer assessments can be a valid and reliable form of assessment. We also explore what role the law teacher should play in such assessments.

II.   A Brief Outline of the Legal History Module

This article relates to our teaching of a Legal History module in the School of Law at Northumbria University. Legal History is an optional module for students of the undergraduate law degree. Typically, there are between 28 and 45 students on the module each year. The module is taught in a traditional mix of lectures and seminars. It is summatively assessed by combination of written coursework assignment of 2,500 words and an oral presentation (here, we intend "summative" to refer to an end point mark, which influences student progression and may contribute towards their degree classification).[4] The written coursework accounts for 70 per cent of the total module mark. The oral presentation accounts for 30 per cent of the total module mark and comprises a mark accounting for 15 per cent of the total module mark assessed by the module tutor(s) and 15 per cent of the total module mark assessed by students, who provide a summative mark on the presentations of their colleagues.

The module handbook given to students contains details of these assessment methods. The learning outcomes for the module and the assessment feed into the assessment criteria for both the oral and the written assessments, which are made available to students in advance. We provide a two-hour seminar as an opportunity for discussion of the assessment and students' roles in it, and for students to discuss framing their research question and their experiences of the research process, permitting a degree of collaboration often prohibited in assessment preparation. The two-hour seminar also enables students to familiarise themselves with the assessment criteria before they actively engage with them during the peer marking process. It offers students an opportunity to raise questions on the feedback form/rubric that they will use to make their peer assessment, or on the process more generally, in advance of the assessed session, and they can seek advice from the module tutors at any stage.

III.   Student Involvement in Our Assessment Process

A.   *Devising a coursework question*

After choosing a different topic from an indicative list of broad subject areas, students then devise their own coursework question, an aspect which has confounded

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4   Paul Orsmond, *Self- and Peer-Assessment Guidance on Practice in the Biosciences* (Leeds: Centre for Bioscience, The Higher Education Academy, 2004), available at www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/sites/teaching-learning/files/self_and_peer_assessment.pdf (visited 10 April 2018).

some, conditioned to more traditional forms of assessment which present the question to be answered. As module tutors, we offer guidance as students refine their subject area and frame an appropriate question, but try to keep our intervention light touch. With a little encouragement — and the dedicated seminar — all students come to engage with the concept of taking control of their own coursework question. Students then research their question, affording an experience of independent research prior to embarking on a final year dissertation.

B.   Oral presentation

As a part of the assessment of the module, students make an oral presentation on their chosen topic; this will usually take place in the final seminar, around four weeks before the submission of the written coursework. Each presentation should be between five and seven minutes, and all are recorded. The content of the presentation is left to the students; they can discuss how and why they came to choose a particular subject area or coursework title; outline their research process; discuss any problems that they have encountered in the research process; and outline their proposed written coursework — there is a broad choice.

The presentation (but — significantly — not its content) is assessed by the module tutors and by the group of students equally and separately and carries 30 per cent of the mark for the course. This is broken down to comprise a mark accounting for 15 per cent of the total module mark assessed by the module tutors and 15 per cent of the total module mark assessed by the other students. The module tutor mark is an average of the marks awarded by both tutors. The student mark is an average of the marks awarded by all the students.

The feedback forms completed by the students include instructions; for example, reinforcing that students assess the oral presentation, rather than the legal content, and directing students to address specific areas that are being assessed. These are the structures of the presentation, in relation to which they are required to address whether it sets out clear objectives, shows a clear progression from one idea to the next, states conclusions, organises material effectively and comes to an effective stop. Students must also consider clarity of expression and are directed to ask whether the presentation expresses the key points clearly; makes explicit any qualifications to the key points; signposts each key point; and makes the purpose of the presentation clear. In addition, students must offer their opinion on the structure of the presentation: whether the presenter uses eye contact to interact with audience, appropriate vocabulary, uses pauses and silences effectively and varies intonation.

The feedback forms also include indicative ranges of marks, with examples of each grade band, to guide and make it clear how certain matters can be assessed. For example, students are advised how to distinguish a first class presentation, which will have excellent organisation of material, expression of all points clearly and succinctly and be a presentation of interest to the whole group of students (and tutors), from a third class presentation, which would offer some organisation of material, not always clear what was intended and of little interest to the group; or

a fail grade, which would have little or no organisation of material, often difficult to discern what was intended and a presentation of no interest to the group. The module tutors follow the same assessment criteria for the oral assessment and complete the same feedback form.

Also adding a further level of analysis, the lecturers distil the essence of the students' feedback forms and add a personal commentary as feedback to each student. Therefore, there is one overall feedback form per student, which comprises the total mark for the oral assessment and a summary of the feedback from both students and tutors. Currently, this feedback is not made available to the students until they receive their final mark for the module; however, we hope in future to offer a summary of the feedback from both students and tutors as formative feedback, before submission of the written coursework, to enable students to use feedback from the presentations more effectively.

C. *Written assessment*

After the oral presentation, students have approximately four weeks to complete and submit their written coursework, which accounts for 70 per cent of the total module mark. It is marked by the module tutors in the usual manner, against assessment criteria made available to the students in the module handbook distributed at the start of the module. This written element of the assessment focuses upon the student's understanding and knowledge of specific content area chosen by the student. Many students have commented how the oral presentation helped to clarify their thinking before completing the written piece.

Having outlined the mode of assessment of our Legal History module, we now turn to some questions.

D. *Why should we adopt innovative modes of assessment?*

Much educational theory advocates less teacher-focused and more learner-centred approaches. Comparison studies between students in lecture-based and active learning courses reveal significantly more learning gains in the active learning courses.[5] How a tutor teaches and how actively engages the student in the learning process can potentially positively or negatively influence how much and what students learn.[6]

In our module, we maintain a traditional lecture program, which we think is important. However, our approach enables us — to an extent — to move away from a transmission model of education. As lecturers, we may look to write assessments

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5   Leonard Springer, Mary Stanne and Samuel Donovan, "Effects of Small-Group Learning on Undergraduates in Science, Mathematics, Engineering, and Technology: A Meta-Analysis" (1999) 69(1) Review of Educational Research 21.

6   Nadine Lambert and Barbara McCombs, "Learner-Centered Schools and Classrooms as a Direction for School Reform" in Nadine Lambert and Barbara McCombs (eds), *How Students Learn: Reforming Schools through Learner-Centered Education* (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2000).

to help establish how far students have assimilated what we have taught them; in doing so, we often focus on our interests, eg, using assessments to establish what students have learned from our teaching. Allowing and enabling students to set their own assessment questions enable each student to develop a personalised response to their study of Legal History and their chosen subject area. Students become a part of the assessment process, rather than being subject to it. Their research and assessment are very much their own: no other students undertake the same research or learning process or address the same question. This can also help to encourage a sense of autonomy. This in turn can help to foster an increased belief in the student's own judgment and so increase confidence. In this way, student participation in devising their own coursework question can be seen as a part of a process of democratising education in which we as tutors act to facilitate their learning.[7]

Students devising their own assessment questions require certain information literacy skills, including framing questions, accessing and evaluating sources and evaluating content. This can help to develop skilled and flexible learners. Students can feel empowered to access a broader range of source materials than traditional textbooks, case law and statutes. The legal research aspect is important, we think. Our module offers an opportunity to incorporate the teaching and assessment of research skills into a substantive course. Such an approach may provide a means of addressing a point raised by the Legal Education Training Review: "It was widely recognised that legal research skills were not sufficiently acquired by the end of the [undergraduate law degree]."[8] The research exercise process can be useful beyond academia: skills of analysis, synthesis, report writing, time management, self-monitoring, goal setting, etc can be seen as "general transferable skills", ie, graduate attributes which are not specific to a particular discipline and can be used in a wide range of activities. Transferable skills are often what future employers look for when students enter the workforce.[9] Encouraging students to undertake some form of independent research-based work can help develop self-directed, lifelong learning skills (including a need to know more, knowing whom to ask or where to look for information and deciding when you should stop). In addition, engaging students in peer assessment involves making evaluative judgments, understanding assessment standards and giving feedback,[10] and so itself can develop transferable

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7 Carl Rogers, *Client-Centred Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications and Theory* (London: Constable and Robinson, 2003).

8 Legal Education and Training Review, "Setting Standards: The Future of Legal Services Education and Training Regulation in England and Wales" (letr, 2013) 44, available at http://letr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/LETR-Report.pdf (visited 10 April 2018).

9 Sean Kearney, "Improving Engagement: The Use of 'Authentic Self- and Peer-Assessment for Learning' to Enhance the Student Learning Experience" (2012) 38(7) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 875.

10 Chie Adachi, Joanna Tai and Phillip Dawson, "A Framework for Designing, Implementing, Communicating and Researching Peer Assessment" (2018) 37(3) Higher Education Research & Development 453–467, available at www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07294360.2017.1405913 (visited 10 April 2018).

skills, such as communication, critical thinking, collaboration/teamwork and self-awareness.[11]

We were keen to avoid, if possible, the unilateral assessment of student's work by their tutors.[12] Peer assessment is one means of achieving this. By peer assessment, we mean "an arrangement for peers to consider the level, value, worth, quality or successfulness of the products of outcomes of the learning of others of similar status",[13] in which "… students use criteria and apply standards to the work of their peers in order to judge that work".[14] Our module requires students to participate in peer marking or peer grading, which involves students summatively marking the work of their peers. This differs from peer review, which tends more to be used in a formative context, based largely around feedback, with the intention that by encouraging students to comment on the work of their peers, they can develop understandings which they could transfer to their own work.[15] Comparatively little research has focused specifically upon summative peer assessment; the observation of Kollar and Fischer that peer assessment is still in its infancy despite decades of research in the field, largely remains the case.[16] A review study in 2015 found that much research on modes of assessment included formative as well as peer assessment and self-assessment.[17] Peer assessment and self-assessment appear often linked in studies; for example, Reinholz addressed how peer assessment can support self-assessment.[18] Of studies on summative peer assessment, perhaps unsurprisingly many have sought to identify benefits and disadvantages associated with involving students in the assessment process in this manner (discussed below). However, Adachi et al[19] found that, despite compelling evidence of its potential effectiveness, uptake of self-assessment and peer assessment in higher education

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11 Chengqing Wu, Emmanuel Chanda and John Willison, "Implementation and Outcomes of Online Self and Peer Assessment on Group Based Honours Research Projects" (2014) 39(1) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 21; Daniel Reinholz, "The Assessment Cycle: A Model for Learning through Peer Assessment" (2015) 41(2) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 301; Joan Josep Suñol et al, "Peer and Self-Assessment Applied to Oral Presentations from a Multidisciplinary Perspective" (2016) 41(4) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 622.

12 David Boud, "Assessment and the Promotion of Academic Values" (1990) 15(1) Studies in Higher Education 101.

13 Keith Topping et al, "Formative Peer Assessment of Academic Writing between Postgraduate Students" (2000) 25(2) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 149.

14 Nancy Falchikov, *Improving Assessment through Student Involvement: Practical Solutions for Aiding Learning in Higher and Further Education* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2005) p.27.

15 David Nicol and Debra Macfarlane-Dick, "Formative Assessment and Self-Regulated Learning: A Model and Seven Principles of Good Feedback Practice" (2006) 31(2) Studies in Higher Education 199.

16 Ingo Kollar and Frank Fischer, "Peer Assessment as Collaborative Learning: A Cognitive Perspective" (2010) 20(4) Learning and Instruction 344.

17 Diana Pereira et al, "Assessment Revisited: A Review of Research in *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*" (2016) 41(7) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 1008.

18 See Reinholz, "The Assessment Cycle: A Model for Learning through Peer Assessment" (n.11).

19 Chie Adachi, Joanna Hong-Meng Tai and Phillip Dawson, "Academics' Perceptions of the Benefits and Challenges of Self and Peer Assessment in Higher Education" (2018) 43(2) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 294.

has been slower than expected. Much recent research has focused on the use of online peer assessment, often in relation to massive open online courses.[20]

We wanted to use peer grading in connection with an assessed oral presentation. In 2012, De Grez et al stated that: "assessment of oral presentation skills is an underexplored area".[21] More recently, a study indicated that in assessing oral presentation skills teacher feedback outperformed feedback from peers, peers guided by tutors and self-assessment.[22] A subsequent study in 2016 by the same authors examined feedback processes conducted directly after undergraduate students' presentations under several conditions: teacher feedback, peer feedback and peer feedback guided by tutor.[23] Their results indicated the importance of tutor-led guidance for students to increase the effectiveness of peer feedback: teacher feedback most closely corresponded to specified feedback quality criteria; peer feedback guided by tutor tended to score higher than peer feedback without such guidance. The research of Murillo-Zamorano and Montanero supported the idea that undergraduates' evaluations of their peers can be effective in improving oral presentation skills, especially if students are provided with guidance.[24] However, the study authors found that improvements in the peer assessment involving students receiving feedback as a part of a peer assessment with a rubric to offer guidance were not maintained in a follow-up re-test; they concluded that more than a single session of peer assessment with such guidance would be needed.

Although assessment of oral presentation skills remains an area relatively underresearched,[25] a number of studies have indicated that presentations as assessments lend themselves particularly to peer assessment.[26] Not only this but

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20 For example, see Hoi K Suen, "Peer Assessment for Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)" (2014) 15(3) International Review of Research on Open and Distance Learning 312; Martin Formanek, Matthew Wenger, Sanlyn Buxner, Chris Impey and Tenzin Sonam, "Insights about Large Scale Online Peer Assessment from an Analysis of an Astronomy MMOC" (2017) 113 Computers and Education 243; Mehmet Demir, "Using Online Peer Assessment in an Instructional Technology and Material Design Course through Social Media" (2018) 75(3) The International Journal of Higher Education Research 399; Thyago Tenório et al, "Dataset of Two Experiments of the Application of Gamified Peer Assessment Model into Online Learning Environment MeuTutor" (2017) 12 Data in Brief 433, offered a systematic review of the literature in this area.

21 Luc De Grez, Martin Valcke and Irene Roozen, "How Effective Are Self- and Peer Assessment of Oral Presentation Skills Compared with Teachers' Assessments?" (2012) 13(2) Higher Education Research & Development 129.

22 Stan van Ginkel, Judith Gulikers, Harm Biemans and Martin Mulder, "The Impact of the Feedback Source on Developing Oral Presentation Competence" (2015) 42(9) Studies in Higher Education 1671.

23 Stan van Ginkel, Judith Gulikers, Harm Biemans and Martin Mulder, "Fostering Oral Presentation Performance: Does the Quality of Feedback Differ When Provided by the Teacher, Peers or Peers Guided by Tutor?" (2016) 42(6) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 953.

24 Luis R Murillo-Zamorano and Manuel Montanero, "Oral Presentations in Higher Education: A Comparison of the Impact of Peer and Teacher Feedback" (2017) 43(1) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 138.

25 See, for example, the research undertaken by De Grez et al, "How Effective Are Self- and Peer Assessment of Oral Presentation Skills Compared with Teachers' Assessments?" (n.21).

26 Keith Topping, "Peer Assessment between Students in Colleges and Universities" (1998) 68(3) Review of Educational Research 249; C Philip Wheater, A Mark Langan and Peter J Dunleavy, "Students Assessing Student: Case Studies on Peer Assessment" (2015) 15(1) Planet 13.

also such assessment tasks can address legal content while providing a process for developing skills, aptitudes and competencies beyond legal education. Several studies have indicated that peer assessment of undergraduate oral presentations can lead to significantly improved performance, alongside increased confidence and sense of responsibility,[27] and can develop transferable skills for life.[28] Peer assessment, particularly of presentations, appears "extremely beneficial" for developing self-regulating skills.[29] Hearing and assessing each other's oral presentations enable students to learn from their own and others' strengths and weaknesses. The requirement to assess and give feedback may also increase attentiveness to others' presentations and possibly enhance motivation. Peer review potentially nurtures an impressively wide array of generic skills related to giving and accepting criticism, which are of fundamental importance in any professional workplace.[30] So, active and experiential learning may offer advantages in relation to employability and beyond.

Peer assessment has been used for summative assessment across a number of disciplines, including mathematics,[31] biosciences,[32] business and marketing,[33] medicine and pharmacology[34] and ecology and environmental science.[35] Oral presentations may be particularly suited to summative peer assessment, as the speaker needs to be able to communicate with their peers for their judgments have validity.[36] This would indicate that an assessment model such as that adopted for our module could well incorporate involving students in summatively assessing their peers' work.

Choosing innovative assessment strategies can provide the means to assess a broader range of skills, values or attitudes as well as legal knowledge. Many believe that academic study is focused too closely on substantive law content and that it could be enhanced by the active development of skills and competencies.[37]

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27 See Topping, "Peer Assessment between Students in Colleges and Universities" (n.26).

28 Keith Topping, "Peer Assessment" (2009) 48(1) *Theory into Practice* 20.

29 See Falchikov, *Improving Assessment through Student Involvement: Practical Solutions for Aiding Learning in Higher and Further Education* (n.14).

30 Raoul A Mulder, Jon M Pearce and Chi Baik, "Peer Review in Higher Education: Student Perceptions before and after Participation" (2014) 15(2) Active Learning in Higher Education 157.

31 Shirley E Earl, "Staff and Peer Assessment — Measuring an Individual's Contribution to Group Performance" (1986) 11 Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 60.

32 Lorraine AJ Stefani, "Peer, Self and Tutor Assessment: Relative Reliabilities" (2016) 19(1) Studies in Higher Education 69; AC Butcher, LAJ Stefani and VN Tariq, "Analysis of Peer-, Self- and Staff-Assessment in Group Project Work" (2010) 2(2) Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice 165; see Orsmond, *Self- and Peer-Assessment Guidance on Practice in the Biosciences* (n.4).

33 See Brindley and Scoffield, "Peer Assessment in Undergraduate Programmes" (n.3).

34 See Hughes, case study 5, in Orsmond, *Self- and Peer-Assessment Guidance on Practice in the Biosciences* (n.4).

35 See Wheater et al, "Students Assessing Student: Case Studies on Peer Assessment" (n.26).

36 Douglas Magin and Phil Helmore, "Peer and Teacher Assessments of Oral Presentation Skills: How Reliable Are They?" (2001) 26(3) Studies in Higher Education 287.

37 Peter Devonshire and Ian Brailsford, "Re-defining Learning Outcomes: A Case for the Assessment of Skills and Competencies in a Law Degree" (2012) 25(2) New Zealand Universities Law Review 12.

We believe that our method of assessing this module encourages self-regulated learning. The student is no longer the passive recipient of knowledge but an active "doer", presenting, analysing, questioning, judging, offering and receiving feedback and combining ideas and information. Students gain a degree of ownership or control over the assessment process. This includes both the student's role in setting their own assessment question as well as student's participation in the summative aspect. This is a much more student-focused approach than a traditional lecture examination model.

IV. So, Why We All Are Not Doing It? Potential Pitfalls of Innovating in Assessment

What reasons might inhibit or deter lecturers from involving students in the assessment process? Tradition? Fear of losing control in handing over power in their relationship with students?[38] Or possibly more substantive doubts about peer assessment? Interestingly, Adachi et al noted that — while much research has focused on students' perspectives, performances and experiences with self and peer assessment in higher education[39] — the views of academics have received comparatively little attention.[40] The authors of the study sought to explore what academics see as the benefits and challenges of implementing self-assessment and peer assessment, through the analysis of interviews with 13 Australian academics. Although arguably too small sample from which to draw strong general conclusions, their analysis identified seven themes of benefits and five challenges, many of which accord with earlier studies, and our own experiences as academics.

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38 Oliver McGarr and Amanda Marie Clifford, "'Just Enough to Make You Take It Seriously': Exploring Students' Attitudes towards Peer Assessment" (2013) 65(7) International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning 677.

39 They cite David Boud and Nancy Falchikov, "Quantitative Studies of Student Self-Assessment in Higher Education: A Critical Analysis of Findings" (1989) 18 Higher Education 529; Winnie Cheng and Martin Warren, "Having Second Thoughts: Student Perceptions before and after a Peer Assessment Exercise" (1997) 22(2) Studies in Higher Education 233; Topping, "Peer Assessment between Students in Colleges and Universities" (n.26); Richard Tucker, Jan Fermelis and Stuart Palmer, "Designing, Implementing and Evaluating a Self-and-Peer Assessment Tool for e-learning Environments" in Christine Spratt and Paul Lajbcygier (eds), *E-learning Technologies and Evidence-Based Assessment Approaches* (London: Information Science Publishing, 2009) p.170; Keith Willey and Anne Gardner, "Investigating the Capacity of Self and Peer Assessment Activities to Engage Students and Promote Learning" (2010) 35(4) European Journal of Engineering Education 429; McGarr and Clifford "'Just Enough to Make You Take It Seriously': Exploring Students' Attitudes towards Peer Assessment" (n.38); Anna Planas Lladó et al, "Student Perceptions of Peer Assessment: An Interdisciplinary Study" (2014) 39(5) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 592.

40 For an exception, see Ngar-Fun Liu and David Carless, "Peer Feedback: The Learning Element of Peer Assessment" (2006) 11(3) Teaching in Higher Education 279.

A.   Student dislike of innovation

An unwillingness to engage with new methods of assessing is not confined to academics: most involved in higher education are aware of the student dislike of innovation. The level of student involvement in the process may appear initially too challenging for some. Students appear, initially at least, often to struggle with being offered a level of autonomy in assessment topic and question. Students may find a transmission model of education a seemingly "easier" option to one that more obviously requires their active participation. Peer marking too is likely to present a challenge to many. Students may feel embarrassed at assessing the work of other students they have studied alongside for years; a study by Falchikov of peer assessment in a small cohort of students would appear to indicate that this might be the case.[41] Students may also be uncomfortable at being assessed by their peers.[42] Students also need to be encouraged to "buy in" to becoming involved in peer assessment, if lecturers are to avoid the accusation that it means students are doing the lecturers job for them. A study involving undergraduates on a marketing module found that over half regarded assessment as a role for the tutor alone.[43]

A study indicated that when questioned after taking part in peer assessment on whether they had felt pressure surrounding their experience of peer assessment, 37 per cent of respondents indicated feeling some pressure generally, 32 per cent felt pressured by their peers, but only 8 per cent felt pressure came from their tutors.[44] The findings of Cheng and Warren[45] — which showed that students reflected a low level of comfort in a peer assessment situation and a low degree of confidence in their personal peer assessment skills — appear to indicate that low self-efficacy levels for peer assessment skills can affect the nature and quality of peer assessment.[46]

Lecturers may be able to allay such fears: Brown et al found that students became more confident with practice in using assessment criteria and making judgments.[47] Boud and Holmes argued, in relation to both self and peer assessment, that understanding the standards or being given an opportunity to engage with those standards is a critical part of learning how to assess oneself and one's peers.[48]

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41 Nancy Falchikov, "Peer Feedback Marking: Developing Peer Assessment" (1995) 32(2) Innovations in Education and Training International 175.

42 Simon Cassidy, "Developing Employability Skills: Peer Assessment in Higher Education" (2006) 48(7) Education and Training 508.

43 See Brindley and Scoffield, "Peer Assessment in Undergraduate Programmes" (n.3).

44 *Ibid*.

45 Winnie Cheng and Martin Warren, "Peer Assessment of Language Proficiency" (2005) 22(1) Language Testing 93.

46 See De Grez et al, "How Effective Are Self- and Peer Assessment of Oral Presentation Skills Compared with Teachers' Assessments?" (n.21).

47 Sally Brown et al, *Strategies for Diversifying Assessment in Higher Education* (Oxford: Oxonian Rewley Press, 1994).

48 David Boud and Harry Holmes, "Self and Peer Marking in a Large Technical Subject" in David Boud (ed), *Enhancing Learning through Self-Assessment* (London: Kogan Page Ltd, 1995).

Similarly, some academics advocated a greater role for students in assessment practices, including students actively using assessment criteria.[49] Perhaps, making students aware of the possible benefits is an important role for the academic here. Participants in peer assessment of clinical practice nursing found that their learning enhanced and that they gained confidence and an increased sense of responsibility.[50] There may be a motivational benefit too; after all, "seeing your peers are doing a much better job than you are even when subject to the same pressures is a powerful spur for improvement".[51]

B.   *Can peer assessments be a valid and reliable form of assessment?*

Here, we take "validity" to refer to the "adequacy and appropriateness of the task/test in relation to the outcomes/objectives of the teaching being assessed" and "reliability" as where "the assessment process would generate the same results if repeated on another occasion with the same group or if repeated with another group of similar students".[52]

Adachi et al noted that the idea that students' marking can be easily inaccurate and unreliable is deeply pervasive among academics.[53] Some studies have addressed issues concerning the reliability and validity of peer assessment methods.[54] In fact, there is considerable evidence that students can peer assess effectively.[55] Yet, academics still appear reluctant to allow students to engage in summative peer-grading; for example, Boud,[56] although a proponent of peer assessment, was not generally in favour of incorporating this in summative assessments, and, indeed, much research appears to focus on the role of students in formative assessment.[57]

Several recommendations emerged from the study by Mulder et al, and their implementation may help to improve student satisfaction with the peer review

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49 Dai Hounsell et al, "The Quality of Guidance and Feedback to Students" (2008) 27(1) Higher Education Research & Development 55.

50 See Topping, "Peer Assessment between Students in Colleges and Universities" (n.26).

51 See Hughes in Orsmond, *Self- and Peer-Assessment Guidance on Practice in the Biosciences* (n.4).

52 See Orsmond, *Self- and Peer-Assessment Guidance on Practice in the Biosciences* (n.4) p.15.

53 See Adachi et al, "Academics' Perceptions of the Benefits and Challenges of Self and Peer Assessment in Higher Education" (n.19).

54 For example, Kun-Hung Cheng and Chin-Chung Tsai, "Students' Interpersonal Perspectives on, Conceptions of and Approaches to Learning in Online Peer Assessment" (2012) 28(4) Australasian Journal of Educational Technology 4; Julia Kaufman and Christian Schunn, "Students' Perceptions about Peer Assessment for Writing: Their Origin and Impact on Revision Work" (2011) 39(3) Instructional Science 387.

55 See Topping, "Peer Assessment between Students in Colleges and Universities" (n.26) p.249; Ian Hughes, "But Isn't This What You're Paid for? The Pros and Cons of Peer and Self-Assessment" (2001) 3(1) Planet 20.

56 David Boud, "The Role of Self-Assessment in Student Grading" (1989) 14(1) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 20.

57 For example, see Topping, "Peer Assessment" (n.28).

process.[58] In particular, the authors recommended the inclusion of an expert reviewer and the use of structured review forms to help to reduce variation in review quality. In addition, briefing the students on how to carry out a review and what constitutes a good review in the form of training sessions was considered to have a crucial role in the success of the process. Gratifyingly, we had already incorporated these features into our module. Interestingly, a recent study involving over 200 students, which did not include such features, found that students felt they benefited from the experience regardless; however, the authors noted that the "discomfort some students feel about peer assessment seems addressable by practice and by training", making it *prima facie* evidence that training or other measures to further involve the students in the peer and self-assessment scheme might be beneficial.[59]

Giving students some sense of ownership of the assessment criteria has been shown to lead students to apply them more objectively.[60] Although we did not follow the suggestion that evaluation criteria could be developed in close collaboration with students,[61] we were careful to provide clear criteria and detailed guidelines, including descriptors and indicators, in the structured review and feedback forms that the students used in the oral assessment. We were mindful of the potential problems associated with being overly prescriptive in setting these criteria.[62] The extensive research of Falchikov and Boud (although in relation to self-assessment, many points apply equally to peer assessment) indicated that explicit criteria could lead to increased accuracy in rating.[63] However, that strength in quantitative differentiation in ratings might be achieved at the expense of qualitative feedback.[64] Studies have indicated that peer assessing was more "valid" when students were required to give a more "global judgment".[65]

The findings of Falchikov and Goldfinch indicate that in peer assessment validity in marking was also increased with student familiarity with the assessment criteria.[66] We dedicated time in the two-hour seminar preceding, the oral assessment to a discussion of the assessment criteria and the forms

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58 See Mulder et al, "Peer Review in Higher Education: Student Perceptions before and after Participation" (n.30).

59 Stephanie J Hanrahan and Geoff Isaacs, "Assessing Self- and Peer-Assessment: The Students' Views" (2018) 20(1) Higher Education Research & Development 53, 64.

60 Philip Race, "A Briefing on Self, Peer, and Group Assessment" (LTSN Generic Centre, 2001).

61 See Falchikov, *Improving Assessment through Student Involvement: Practical Solutions for Aiding Learning in Higher and Further Education* (n.14).

62 Royce Sadler, "Transforming Holistic Assessment and Grading into a Vehicle for Complex Learning" in Gordon Joughin (ed), *Assessment Learning and Judgement in Higher Education* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2008) pp.45–63.

63 Nancy Falchikov and David Boud, "Student Self-Assessment in Higher Education: A Meta-Analysis" (1989) 59(4) Review of Educational Research 395.

64 Peter Miller, "The Effect of Scoring Criteria Specificity on Peer and Self-Assessment" (2008) 28(4) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 383.

65 See Orsmond, *Self- and Peer-Assessment Guidance on Practice in the Biosciences* (n.4).

66 Nancy Falchikov and Judy Goldfinch, "Student Peer Assessment in Higher Education: A Meta-Analysis Comparing Peer and Teacher Marks" (2000) 70(3) Review of Educational Research 287.

themselves, to ensure students familiarity with the process and their role within it. This would seem to accord with the advice to provide guidelines or training for reviewers and discussing the rationale for, and benefits of, peer review[67] and for tutors to spend time training and teaching students how to review effectively.[68] Students, therefore, had an opportunity to raise questions in advance of the assessed session. Interestingly, one study found that marks awarded by students who participated in preliminary discussions about the assessment criteria were significantly lower than the marks of students who did not take part in such discussions.[69] Perhaps, this can be set alongside findings in which overall the rubric sum score reported by teachers was significantly lower compared with the peer assessments.[70] Together, these might indicate that students who discussed the assessment criteria were able to engage in the peer assessment process on an informed level more akin to a tutor.

C.   *Student perceptions of peer competence in assessing*

Perhaps surprisingly, we have found that few students openly expressed concerns at the prospect of being assessed by their peers. However, we are not blind to the fact that some may question it. There is a general lack of research into student perceptions of involvement in summative peer grading,[71] a gap which needs to be addressed. However, there is some support for using peer assessment summatively.[72] Students may doubt the competence of their peers to undertake summative peer assessment (this may also be linked to students' perceptions that assessing is the job of academics). Students might fear helping their peers (who could also be perceived as their competitors) do better than themselves and having an impact on others' grades if the assessment was a summative task; others might even face the pressure of abusing the assessment in giving unfair judgments.[73] Again, lecturers may be able to address any such fears by taking time to encourage the students to gain confidence with practice in using assessment criteria and making judgments.

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67 Stephen Fallows and Balasubramanyan Chandramohan, "Multiple Approaches to Assessment: Reflections on Use of Tutor, Peer and Self-Assessment" (2001) 6(2) Teaching in Higher Education 229.

68 See Falchikov, *Improving Assessment through Student Involvement: Practical Solutions for Aiding Learning in Higher and Further Education* (n.14).

69 Mark Langan et al, "Peer Assessment of Oral Presentations: Effects of Student Gender, University Affiliation and Participation in the Development of the Assessment Criteria" (2005) 30(1) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 21.

70 See De Grez et al, "How Effective Are Self- and Peer Assessment of Oral Presentation Skills Compared with Teachers' Assessments?" (n.21).

71 As noted in Mulder et al, "Peer Review in Higher Education: Student Perceptions before and after Participation" (n.30).

72 Mike Keppell et al, "Peer Learning and Learning-Oriented Assessment in Technology-Enhanced Environments" (2006) 31(4) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 453.

73 See Adachi et al, "Academics' Perceptions of the Benefits and Challenges of Self and Peer Assessment in Higher Education" (n.19).

D.   Concerns regarding objectivity

In one study which explored how students regard peer review, and their perceptions prior to experiencing the peer-review process, some students taking part in the study expressed concerns that where the reviews formed part of a mark for the subject, students might give better marks to their friends (even though the actual review process was to be anonymous); however, their postreview comments revealed that these concerns were largely met after participating in the process.[74]

Clearly, involving students in a summative assessment process raises issues regarding objectivity. This is particularly the case perhaps for an oral presentation, where the identity of the presenter cannot be anonymised. These concerns may flow from both tutors and the students themselves. To date, we have not yet found this to be a significant problem. Students appear to take seriously their responsibilities in relation to their part in the summative assessment process. In fact, year-on-year, it is often striking how closely the marks awarded by the students for an oral presentation correlate with those awarded by the module tutors, which raises the important question of peer to tutor grade correlations.

E.   Inconsistent or arbitrary marking?

Hughes and Large used peer assessment for oral presentation skills of pharmacology students and found variability in the marking despite the use of clear and agreed marking criteria; the study found that some peer assessors seemed to have been influenced in their marking by factors outside those criteria.[75] While in general we have not found particularly extreme variations in the quality of the peer grading, we note the view that variation in emphasis or opinion is an:

> "appropriate, authentic and indeed a pedagogically vital facet of peer review [that] both prepares students for professional reality (particularly in publishing) and encourages them to develop means of assessing, organizing and rationalizing their response to such variation".[76]

Nevertheless, we think that this potential difficulty can be addressed in two ways: one is to collate the students' feedback and produce an "overall" grade; this can help to ensure that students receive fair and equal treatment. Second, we include our grade as "experts" in the assessment process. This may act as a "control", in as much as subjective marking can ever do so. Magin and Helmore found that the

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74 See Mulder et al, "Peer Review in Higher Education: Student Perceptions before and after Participation" (n.30).

75 Ian Hughes and B Large, "Staff and Peer-Group Assessment of Oral Communication Skills" (1993) 18(3) Studies in Higher Education 379.

76 See Mulder et al, "Peer Review in Higher Education: Student Perceptions before and after Participation" (n.30).

average scores of students in peer assessments were as reliable as those of a single tutor and suggested that in summative assessments the averaged marks of students and those of tutors could be combined.[77] This accords broadly with the approach that we have followed.

Among students, there may be a widespread belief that assessment by a teacher is more reliable and more valid. In fact, there is considerable debate about the interrater reliability of self-assessment and peer assessment.[78] One study found that some students appear to have remained somewhat sceptical about the peer review process, valuing the review of the tutor above that of other students.[79] However, there appears to be little research to test whether this assumption might apply equally to peer assessment. A number of correlational studies appear to indicate that peer assessment can be a relevant substitute for assessments by teachers;[80] that student assessors were as reliable as lecturers;[81] and that there was high precision in the marks generated by peer-assessed presentations.[82] Another case study involving a peer assessment process found that after moderation of the marks was carried out by the tutors, 93 per cent of the marks remained unchanged with only seven per cent of the marks requiring modification.[83] However, a contrary conclusion was reached by academics who reported that peer marks were on average five per cent higher than marks given by their tutors.[84]

The study by De Grez et al focused on the agreement between professional assessment and self-assessment and peer assessment of oral presentation skills and tackled some important questions: what is the level of agreement between undergraduate students' peer assessments and the assessments of university teachers in relation to oral presentations; what is the level of agreement between self-assessments and assessments by university teachers; and what are the student's perceptions about peer assessment. Their results are fascinating. They found that the average perception score about peer assessment reflects a predominantly positive opinion about peer assessment, and overall, they found that:

> "an accurate calibration of oral presentation performance and the standards suggests that a sufficient level of reliability can be attained when

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77 See Magin and Helmore, "Peer and Teacher Assessments of Oral Presentation Skills: How Reliable Are They?" (n.36).

78 See Topping, "Peer Assessment" (n.28).

79 See Mulder et al, "Peer Review in Higher Education: Student Perceptions before and after Participation" (n.30).

80 See De Grez et al, "How Effective Are Self- and Peer Assessment of Oral Presentation Skills Compared with Teachers' Assessments?" (n.21).

81 See Stefani, "Peer, Self and Tutor Assessment: Relative Reliabilities" (n.32).

82 See Wheater et al, "Students Assessing Student: Case Studies on Peer Assessment" (n.26).

83 Anastasia Karandinou, "Peer-Assessment as a Process for Enhancing Critical Thinking and Learning in Design Disciplines" (2012) 9(1) CEBE Transactions 56.

84 Langan et al, "Peer Assessment of Oral Presentations: Effects of Student Gender, University Affiliation and Participation in the Development of the Assessment Criteria" (n.69).

comparable assessment results are reported by a teacher/expert, by peers,
or by the learner".

A point not to be overlooked of course is that even where there is a high correlation
between marks of peers and teachers, the underlying marks for different
components of an assessment may vary considerably.[85] Orsmond, Merry and
Reiling sought to examine the marking of individual criteria to determine whether
the tutor marks and the student marks were congruent; they found an overall
agreement of 18 per cent, with many students overmarking.[86] However, when
students were carefully briefed on the marking criteria and the peer assessment
took place under examination conditions, the marks fell within normal distribution
patterns. Importantly, the students found the exercise beneficial, helping to
develop their critical engagement and ability to order their work in a structured
fashion. Similarly, a case study involving first year students on a biology degree
using marking criteria that had been discussed in advance found that when the
student marks were amalgamated, the overall peer assessment marks awarded
were "remarkably consistent" with marks from the tutor.[87] That guiding students
through a peer assessment process can help to address questions of reliability
appears borne out by a meta-review of 48 quantitative peer assessment studies
which found that when comparing student and tutor marks, well-designed peer
assessments tended to produce more valid results.[88]

As noted above, we have found that marks awarded by the students for an
oral presentation often correlate quite closely with those awarded by the module
tutors. Using aggregate peer marks should defend against the odd "rogue" marker.[89]
However, difficulties posed by significant deviation between student and tutor
marks should not be overlooked. We have discussed whether in such circumstances
instead of taking an average of the students' marks, we could take a median mark
which might help to remove any "outliers" or seemingly anomalous or arbitrary
marks. An alternative approach to deviation between student and tutor marks was
proposed in another study: where student marks were within five per cent of the
tutor marks, they proposed accepting the student marks; where student marks
differed by more than five per cent from tutor marks in a predictable direction (eg,
always higher) then a correction could be applied; where there was a more than five
per cent deviation with no predictable direction, then all the scripts may need to be
tutor marked.[90]

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85 See Hughes and Large, "Staff and Peer-Group Assessment of Oral Communication Skills" (n.75).
86 P Orsmond, S Merry and K Reiling, "The Importance of Marking Criteria in Peer Assessment" (1996)
    21(3) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 239.
87 See Orsmond, *Self- and Peer-Assessment Guidance on Practice in the Biosciences* (n.4).
88 See, for example, Falchikov and Goldfinch, "Student Peer Assessment in Higher Education: A Meta-
    Analysis Comparing Peer and Teacher Marks" (n.66).
89 See Falchikov, "Peer Feedback Marking: Developing Peer Assessment" (n.41).
90 See Wheater et al, "Students Assessing Student: Case Studies on Peer Assessment" (n.26).

We also find persuasive the view that focusing too much on the correlation of marks may rather miss the point of involving students in the assessment process, in that it is arguable that "the processes here are at least as important as the actual judgments".[91] Boud and Falchikov found that Australian students thought that traditional university education models did not provide opportunities to acquire skills of self-assessment and peer assessment.[92] This view seems to accord with a possible rationale for peer assessment, "to encourage independence in student learning and to connect [students] to the assessment of their academic progress".[93] Students who rely on tutors for the assessment may struggle to develop their powers of self-assessment.[94] Perhaps, encouraging students to participate in a peer-to-peer process involving active engagement with assessment and feedback could offer a greater understanding not only of assessment but also how feedback is constructed and offer insights into the feedback process itself; if so, it has the potential to address a significant source of student dissatisfaction with the university experience.

F.   *Time and resource implications*

It would be naive to assume that significant time and resources would be necessarily saved by involving students in peer assessment. While some studies show that self-assessment and peer assessment can save time for academics,[95] others confirm our experience that designing and implementing peer assessment can be complex and time consuming.[96] As noted by Wheater et al, "the success of peer-assessment depends greatly on how the process is set-up and managed".[97] Tutors must identify which modules might be suitable to incorporate peer assessment. As noted by Hanrahan and Isaacs, "peer- and self-assessment still will need to be implemented on a case-by-case basis in varying subjects and contexts".[98] Falchikov identified features indicating where peer assessment might be appropriate, including situations intended to promote learning; those requiring

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91 Keith Topping, "Self- and Peer-Assessment in School and University: Reliability, Validity and Utility" in Mien Segers, Filip Dochy and Eduardo Cascallar (eds), *Optimising New Modes of Assessment in Search of Qualities and Standards* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003) pp.55–87.

92 See Boud and Falchikov, "Quantitative Studies of Student Self-Assessment in Higher Education: A Critical Analysis of Findings" (n.39).

93 Mark Langan and Phillip Wheater, "Can Students Assess Students Effectively? Some Insights into Peer-Assessment" (2003) 2(1) Learning and Teaching in Action 43.

94 David Boud and Nancy Falchikov, "Aligning Assessment with Long-Term Learning" (2006) 31(4) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 399.

95 See Boud and Holmes, "Self and Peer Marking in a Large Technical Subject" (n.48) p.63.

96 Nancy Falchikov, "Product Comparisons and Process Benefits of Collaborative, Peer Group and Self Assessments" (2012) 11 Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 146; Anne Nortcliffe, "Can Students Assess Themselves and Their Peers?: A Five Year Study" (2012) 1(2) Student Engagement and Experience Journal 2047.

97 See Wheater et al, "Students Assessing Student: Case Studies on Peer Assessment" (n.26) p.13.

98 See Hanrahan and Isaacs, "Assessing Self- and Peer-Assessment: The Students' Views" (n.59) p.67.

students to take on responsibility for their learning; and those allowing students to use assessment criteria.

Adachi et al[99] noted that involving students in summative assessing requires academics to develop a thorough plan (including contingency plans) for troubleshooting (eg, conflict resolution among team members for teamwork); moreover, implementing peer assessment, and dealing with issues and concerns arising as it unfolds, can eat into academics' already limited time.[100] In the study by Adachi et al, one of the most prominently raised challenges that the academics faced related to the lack of time, and the cost needed to make self and peer assessment successful, several of the respondents noted that implementing self and peer assessment successfully takes effort and is context dependent. We concur with these findings. It should be apparent how often we have noted above that as tutors we needed to set aside time to allay student fears or concerns about their "non-standard" involvement in the assessment process, to guide students through the assessment criteria and feedback forms, etc. This took place not only in specific timetabled sessions; we also encouraged students to email us their concerns, using the module Blackboard site to widen the discussion where necessary.

The extent of our involvement might be criticised for removing one of the potential benefits of peer assessment, ie, shifting part of the responsibilities for assessment and feedback from teacher to student and thereby reducing teaching workload. However, our assessment model did not seek to substitute students' assessment for tutor time: we did not want to "pass on" our marking to our students or use them as "surrogate assessors for teachers", a criticism levelled at some peer assessment approaches.[101] We regard our involvement as critical to the willingness of students to engage in our innovative assessment regime: tutors intending to incorporate peer assessment must be prepared to dedicate valuable contact time to managing what are inevitably inexperienced assessors. We believe that familiarising students with the unfamiliar aspects of our assessment regime, and assessment criteria for the peer assessment process in particular, should add positively to students' overall satisfaction with the module. Tutors contemplating incorporating some form of peer assessment into their teaching will find that many examples of specific documentation to prepare students for peer marking and other useful suggestions for managing student participation and expectations surrounding peer assessment are available.[102]

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 99 See Adachi et al, "Academics' Perceptions of the Benefits and Challenges of Self and Peer Assessment in Higher Education" (n.19).

100 Maggie Berg and Barbara K Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

101 David Nicol, "Developing the Students' Ability to Construct Feedback" (QAA Enhancement Themes Conference, Heriot-Watt University, 2–3 March 2011).

102 See Orsmond, *Self- and Peer-Assessment Guidance on Practice in the Biosciences* (n.4).

G.   *What role should the teacher play in such assessments?*

There are undoubtedly some possible pitfalls to involving students in innovative assessment practices. However, to an extent, these difficulties are within the gift of the tutors: to be forewarned is to be forearmed. Therefore, we believe that the tutor has a vital role to play in involving students in the assessment process, perhaps especially where a level of peer assessment is involved. Motivating students to engage with the process maybe the most important — and perhaps the most difficult — aspect of the tutor's role. As one of the interviewees in the study by Adachi et al observed: "You actually have to take the students on a journey and help them to understand why they're doing it and that it is part of the learning process and the importance of it."[103]

We saw our main roles as encouraging and supporting our students, offering guidance where necessary and providing opportunities and fora for discussion. For the written assignment, some students needed help in framing their research question, perhaps indicating how conditioned students may be to their teachers dominating the assessment process. Otherwise, we tended to encourage students to view the written assignment as their independent research project and to encourage their autonomy and a sense of ownership of their chosen subject area.

It is in preparing students for the peer assessment process for the oral assessment that we saw as one of the most important aspects of our role. Students can learn by assessing,[104] and peer assessment has often been linked to "deep learning".[105] But, students need to understand their role within innovative assessment practice, why and how they are to be involved; they must be given opportunities to discuss their participation and to raise any concerns. To make peer assessment work successfully, tutors must explain clearly to students what it is, why they are being asked to participate in it and what their role will be. Time must also be set aside to enable students to acquire the necessary skills to fulfil that role. The guidance given to students in advance on what they are assessing, and how they should decide what sort of marks to award we saw as particularly important. We also contribute to the assessment process by joining the review of the oral assignments and take sole responsibility for marking the written assignment.

While we have not carried out a detailed prereview and postreview questionnaire on the peer assessment aspect of our module, feedback forms completed by students at the end of the module year on year indicate to us that students were generally pleasantly surprised by the process. Students indicated that they learnt both from providing and receiving reviews and felt that the process improved their work. Students were also relatively confident in the competence of their peers to provide

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103 See Adachi et al, "Academics' Perceptions of the Benefits and Challenges of Self and Peer Assessment in Higher Education" (n.19) p.301.
104 See Topping, "Peer Assessment between Students in Colleges and Universities" (n.26).
105 See Race, "A Briefing on Self, Peer, and Group Assessment" (n.60); Sally Brown and Peter Knight, *Assessing Learners in Higher Education* (London: Kogan Page, 1994).

constructive reviews. Future possibilities might include undertaking a case study to explore the student experience of the innovative aspects of the module and to contribute to the relatively limited research into student perceptions of involvement in summative peer grading in particular.[106]

V.   Conclusions

In universities, assessment is most usually perceived as the exclusive role and responsibility of academic teaching staff; opportunities for students to benefit from peer grading or marking in higher education remain limited. Yet, we believe that academics should be prepared to explore a more innovative and inclusive approach. We have found that involving students in the assessment process in this way is rewarding for us as tutors. Although undoubtedly time consuming, especially in the time taken to familiarise students with the process and their roles within it, it offers variety and the unexpected that we believe makes it worth the extra effort.

Our aim is to provide our students with opportunities to construct knowledge and participate more actively in the assessment process. In adopting innovative forms of teaching and assessment, it is important to understand why the new practices are being adopted and also to be able to justify those new practices. Instead of "teaching", we hope that our module "allows students to learn". We sought to encourage a more active involvement of students in their own learning process and to encourage our students in their self-regulated learning. We believe that a good assessment regime can include not only multiple assessments but also multiple assessors. Participating in peer assessment has advantages for students, encouraging their development of self-appraisal, evaluative, analytical, critical and reflective skills. We believe that offering innovative and differing approaches to learning and teaching is vital if we are to engage increasingly diverse student populations and support and prepare students for diverse paths after graduation. Our approach need not be limited to teaching an undergraduate English law degree: it could be adopted — and adapted — anywhere tutors are interested in and able to explore innovations in their teaching. We hope that our experience might encourage more lecturers to offer students greater autonomy and more active roles within the assessment process, as there are benefits for all in doing so.

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106 See also the suggestions for further research in Hanrahan and Isaacs, "Assessing Self- and Peer-Assessment: The Students' Views" (n.59) p.67.