A School-appointed 'Coursework Czar' reviews the setting of assessments

What did/do you do?

The School of Computing Science has appointed a "coursework czar" to act as an internal checker on the setting of all pieces of coursework.

Who is involved?

Dr. Lindsay Marshall serves as a "coursework czar" and reviews assessments as they are set by module leaders within the School.

How do you do it?

When setting a new piece of coursework, module leaders are asked to email a draft copy of the assessment to the "czar." The czar then checks to ensure that all assessments include thorough information in the following areas: 1) the "aims" (why students are doing the assessment); 2) the "learning outcomes" (what students should get out of the assessment); 3) any necessary specifications or background information; 4) guidance on mark allocation; and 5) clear information on the "deliverables" (submission procedure, type of file required, deadlines, etc). The "aims" and the "learning outcomes" cannot refer to assessment in and of itself either as a rationale for or objective of the piece of coursework. The czar also checks for correct spelling and grammar and ensures that any abbreviations or technical terms will be understood by all students.

Module leaders tend to receive more extensive comments on the first pieces of coursework they send for review – most often either because they lack thorough aims and/or learning objectives or because they provide information on mark allocation that is too precise or too vague. Subsequent pieces of coursework submitted tend to subscribe more closely to recommended formats and require less revision.

The objective is not to impose standard coursework formatting – both because that might be perceived as "boring" by students and staff and because it would not be pedagogically suited to a variety of module contents and forms – but to ensure that coursework instructions are clear and consistently comprehensive throughout the school. The czar is in the process of gathering a list of common coursework-setting principles to be compiled into a guidance document.

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Why do you do it?

The School felt that the appointment of a "coursework czar" would be a good strategy for improving student perceptions of assessment clarity and consistency.

Does it work?

It would be difficult to say if the appointment has had a direct impact on student satisfaction, but it has proven popular and not terribly time-consuming within the School. The czar noted that the process typically works to prevent potential problems from arising.