The Implementation of "Fit to Submit" checklists as a part of an assignment

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Introduction

In 2017 the Business school took part in a pilot scheme to implement Fit to Submit checklists into the curriculum in order to eliminate the attainment gap for BAME students. The outcome was that the high functioning students used the checklist and the less engaged students did not use it at all. Therefore it widened the attainment gap rather than narrowed it. The result at the time was an attainment gap of 14%.

The Literature

There is no single clear cut cause for the disparities in attainment (Cousin & Cureton 2012). The literature delivers clear evidence of negative differential outcomes for some BME groups in attainment, continuation and completion rates (Robinson and Delgado-Fuentes 2019, 36) Berger & Wild (2017) said that it was time that Higher Education Institutions fundamentally rethought the way in which curriculum delivery takes place for the benefit of all. The Disparities in Student Attainment project (DISA) found that: "students classified as BME tend to have 'spiky' patterns of achievement in terms of low to high module marks" (Cousin and Cuerton 2012). It was this concept that led to this initiative.

According to Tatsi and Darby (2018) the UWL attainment gap in the 2017/18 academic year was 19.4%. This led to the university launching a Student attainment project (SAP2) in collaboration with the University of Derby and Solent University. One part of the project was to introduce checklists to students, one of which was the Fit to Submit Checklist. Mutton and Plowden (2016) found that Fit to Submit checklists were popular because of their simplicity of use and that it was translatable across a range of subject areas. Cousin & Cureton (2012) also stated that student uncertainty about the rules of academic engagement ranged included a lack of understanding about the importance of grammar and spelling and that this lack of social capital makes it difficult if not impossible for students to succeed.

Fit to Submit: Assignment Checklist

This brief **assignment checklist** is designed to be given to students to help them avoid some of the most common mistakes they make in their coursework.

This **coursework checklist** is to help you avoid some of the most common coursework mistakes. Students often lose marks by forgetting some of the essential elements of coursework.

Have you read the module study guide? If not, do it now.

Section 12 of each module study guide outlines the details for each assessment. For coursework this includes the assessment criteria, the marking criteria and the word count (or equivalent). This information is also available in Blackboard in *Assessments*.

TICK

- ☐ Have you kept to the word count? You will lose marks if you do not. 10% under or over the word count is usually OK. *If you are not sure, check with your tutor.*
- ☐ Have you read and understood the assessment criteria?
- ☐ Have you **met** the learning outcomes? You will lose marks and your work may even be failed if you have not.
- ☐ Have you demonstrated that you can write *critically*? Show you have *supported* your arguments using academic literature; you have presented ideas and information which *challenges* thinking, and you have offered discussion points which *extends* your own or others' viewpoints.
- ☐ Have you maintained an *academic tone* throughout your work? Have you tried to avoid using the same words over and over again?
- ☐ Have you checked that the referencing/bibliography in your assignment is in line with your course requirements?
- ☐ Have you proof-read your work and used spellcheck software to check your spelling and grammar? Have you made sure your font size, colour, style, line spacing and margins are appropriate to the work as specified by your tutor?
- ☐ Can you confirm that the work submitted is your own and not plagiarised?

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The Intervention

In the pilot year the Checklist was used in the Professional skills module where it was given to Level 4 Business students at week 2 and again just before the coursework assessment was due. It was found that this benefitted the stronger students who attended regularly and were most engaged but did not benefit those who were less engaged. This widened the attainment gap regardless of culture and ethnicity. Most checklists were left behind at the end of the seminars where they were discussed.
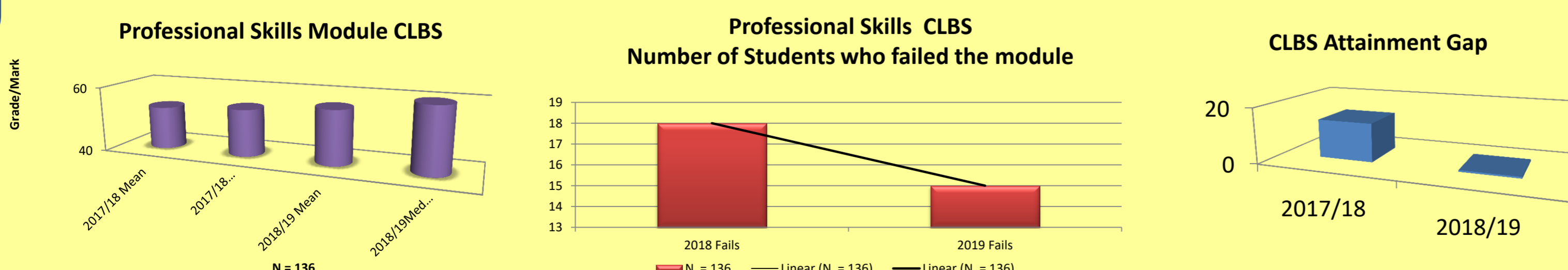**I decided to use the checklist in a unique way.**
I added the Checklist to the submission criteria for the assessment and allocated marks for its submission and evidence that the student had used it in their work. So if students attached the checklist to their assignment and it was clear that they had followed the guidance in it, then they could receive 10% of the mark for the assignment. The checklist was still introduced twice during the module and added to the learning materials on Blackboard. Students were reminded on a number of occasions that they could get marks for completion and submission.

Evaluation/Outcome

The results show a slight improvement in the mean and median mark range for the same module with the same assignment with and without the intervention. Perhaps the most significant figures are the number of fails and the attainment target which both improved hugely after the intervention was out in place. The reduction in the attainment gap is influenced by many factors of which the Fit to Submit is only a part. Other interventions included improved personal tutor support, diverse learning resources and the use of formative assessments on the module.
The evaluation shows that the literature in relation to attainment and Fit to Submit is accurate in that the intervention does reduce the attainment gap.

Professional Skills Module CLBS

N = 136

Professional Skills CLBS Number of Students who failed the module

N = 136 — Linear (N = 136) — Linear (N = 136)

CLBS Attainment Gap

2017/18   2018/19

Recommendations

- Fit to submit checklists should be introduced at Level 3 and Level 4 as a part of course induction

- All students are routinely asked to complete the checklist and submit it as a part of their first assignment in the university

- A significant mark should be allocated for submission and attaching it to a first assignment, but there must be evidence that it has been followed (20%)

References
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