

# SEDA Autumn Conference 2024



**Session Title:** Assignment brief auditing: An example of cross-institutional practice to boost assessment literacy

**Session Type:** Practice Papers (20 minutes)

**Main presenter(s):** David Holland, University of East Anglia

**Co presenter(s):** Jeremy Schildt (head of learning enhancement, UEA), Zoe Jones (Learning enhancement, UEA), Pablo Dalby (Learning enhancement, UEA, National Teaching Fellow). NB: 'learning enhancement' is the UEA's institutional term for academic development

**Session Summary:** This presentation entails sharing the outcomes of a collaborative project between the UEA's Learning Enhancement Team and School of Psychology to critically review the school's 35 summative assignment briefs. The project also involved student input and yielded 16 recommendations for improvement of the briefs, which highlighted areas of strong practice as well as potential areas of inaccessibility or confusion for students.

**Session Outline:** Assessment concerns can dominate student experience to the detriment of learning (Biggs, Tang, & Kennedy, 2022), and failure to support the development of student assessment literacy can impair the sense of belonging, particularly in those from marginalised groups (Donovan & Erskine-Shaw, 2019). Assessment briefs are essential in formalising expectations of academic assignments and also serve as the basis for advising interactions which support the assignment preparatory work of students and the development of their wider academic literacy. Despite the fact that unclear briefs can frequently prove to be the catalyst for student anxiety, stress, and panic, they are extremely under-researched (Walsh, 2021). This novel quality assurance project explored the student experience of assignment briefs in the School of Psychology at the UEA through a partnership between the school's assessment lead, student representatives, and the institution's Learning Enhancement Team. Exploratory work led to a set of 26 criteria (e.g., accessibility, clarity, inclusion of key information) which were then used to evaluate the school's 35 summative assignment briefs. We then used an interactive process to produce 16 recommendations which highlighted areas of strong practice (e.g., highlighting examples of how marking criteria could be met) and also recurrent issues which required remedy (e.g., lack of clarity, over-complexity, poor organisation). In this session we will share the full outcomes of the review, critically discuss their implications within the current higher education climate (e.g., inclusivity), and propose future directions for this novel practice of assignment brief auditing.

**References:** Biggs, J., Tang, C., & Kennedy, G. (2022). Teaching for quality learning at university (5th ed.). McGraw Hill.



Donovan, C., & Erskine-Shaw, M (2019). 'Maybe I can do this. Maybe I should be here': evaluating an academic literacy, resilience and confidence programme. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44(3), pp. 326-340. <https://doi-org.uea.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/0309877X.2018.1541972>

Walsh, E. (2021). The role of effective communication on students' emotional response to assessment: Written assignment brief. *La Revue LEeE*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.48325/rleee.005.02>.