*Include*All - Inclusive by Design: Assessment and Feedback

What are the key issues?

Nationally, within the NSS survey, responses to the questions relating to assessment and feedback show much lower satisfaction rates compared to responses to other questions. Indeed, the issue of needing to make assessment more accessible to students has been recognised in the sector for the past couple of decades. It is acknowledged that 'students can escape from the effects of poor teaching [but] they cannot, by definition if they want to graduate, escape from the effects of poor assessment (Boud, 1995). Students actively want to understand lecturers' expectations in assignments and exams.

Waterfield and West (2006) suggest that making assessment inclusive ensures it does not pose a disadvantage to any student or group of students. Ideally this should not be based on a compensatory approach but on the Social Model of Disability, endeavouring to remove inequalities and barriers.

With inclusive assessment all students should have a way of demonstrating that they have achieved the learning outcomes of their module/course. An inclusive assessment approach should not make assumptions about the needs of certain students; but instead consider the strengths and weaknesses of all students, utilising a wide range of options and if possible giving a choice of assessment methods (NUS, 2012).

What our students say
'The course content is varied and allows students to explore different avenues when completing assignments.'
(Level 6 BA Sports Development & Coaching)

What our students say
'Assignment feedback has been very useful and has helped me in improving my overall marks throughout my time as this university.'
(Level 6 BSc Hons PE & Youth Sports Coaching)

What are the implications for practice?

Here at Staffordshire University we are keen to make assessment more accessible to all students.

Our current Assessment Principles and Policy covers inclusive and equitable assessment and states that:

'The University is committed to the provision of an environment which encourages and properly supports a diverse learning community. The University will continue to work towards ensuring that assessment tasks and procedures are designed to be inclusive and do not disadvantage any group or individual (for example students with disabilities, students with varied cultural backgrounds). Programme teams should show that they are aware of the University's regulations on the assessment of disabled students. The equality impact assessment carried out early in the process of planning a programme should explicitly cover assessment as well as other aspects of the learning and teaching strategy for the programme.'

At Staffordshire University, we also advocate seven principles for good feedback

- Be an interactive process involving student-tutor and student-student dialogue

- Facilitate the development of self-assessment and reflection

- Clarify for students and staff, through dialogue, what good or bad performance actually is in the assignment or task

- Be developmental, progressive and transferable to new learning context

- Be ongoing and embedded in the learning process

- Motivate, build esteem and confidence to support sustainable lifelong learning

- Support the development of learning groups and communities.

What works well?

Some of this can be achieved by teaching staff making a few small changes to the planning and delivery of assessments. The following aspects of good assessment practice are therefore offered for consideration. Much of this is common sense, but might be of use as an aide memoire for individuals or subject teams to review their current practice:

- In planning and reviewing/monitoring of awards, include a variety of assessment methods across modules to do full justice to the students' diverse knowledge, skills, learning styles and academic background.

- Consider using more diverse modes of assessment which do not focus on writing e.g. practical's, presentations, posters.

- Incorporate the principles of good assessment (constructive alignment between module learning outcomes and assessment criteria, clear, transparent and explicit criteria and constructive feedback) so that assessment is for learning rather than an end in itself.

- If possible, include a choice of assessment methods so as to cater for students with different learning preferences. This benefits all students and will avoid having to formally make adjustments for students with different needs. Exams in particular can be resource heavy in terms of individual room requirements and invigilation.

- If exams have to be used (e.g. because of Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body requirements), try to design them as inclusive as possible by considering:

  o The length of the exam

  o The type (open or closed book)

  o Structure of each question

  o Weighting of all the questions

  o Can answers be typed (writing long-hand can be a barrier to success)

  o Open choice of questions

- Design assessments so that they are inclusive of cultural and experiential diversity.

- Schedule assessments with colleagues across your award so that assessment overload at particular times can be avoided wherever possible.

- Check the assessment brief for clarity of language to reduce barriers to understanding what to do.

- At the earliest opportunity within a module, explain the required assessments, Students often benefit from more preparation time; do not assume that just because assessments are documented in the handbook, the students will necessarily understand it.

- Ensure that students actually understand the assessment e.g. test their understanding by setting a task such as asking them to explain it to another student.

- Build in formative assessment opportunities so that students can practise and receive feedback on the necessary skills or learning tasks.

- Allocate time for an assessment preparation session. An effective use of such a session would be to:

  o Prepare example answers for each of the broad assessment grades and incorporate a session into the module where students mark these (thereby getting used to the criteria and requirements)

  o Reiterate good referencing and critical analysis practice to pre-empt any problems with plagiarism (particularly if international students are part of the cohort – see Enhancing Practice: Teaching across cultural

and linguistic boundaries). Ideally academic skills should be built into programmes early on and Information Services has advice for students www.staffs.ac.uk/support_depts/infoservices/learning_support/refzone/plagiarism/

- o Sign-post to any additional student-support resources, indicating the timeline which these need to be accessed for positive impact on the next assessment.

- Annotating reading lists to indicate which texts are essential and which desirable and if possible specific chapters or sections. This helps students who find scanning text difficult, for instance students with dyslexia, students who are visually impaired using very large print, students using screen reading software. It also helps students whose first language is not English and students who are new to academia.

- Where courses lead directly to qualifications and have core competencies specified by professional bodies, essential, non-negotiable skills or knowledge need to be highlighted clearly, preferably before the course starts.

- However professional bodies also have to take the Equality Act 2010 into account and are usually open to testing in different ways or finding alternative ways to achieve learning outcomes. There are recognised adjustments now for assessments such as OSCEs.

- Generally being less rigid within the programme specification, building in flexibility in terms of expectation, gives greater scope to achieving the course requirements in alternative ways without compromising legitimate, justifiable competence standards. The adjustment is to the way the students are assessed not the competency.

Further hints, tips and background reading

University policy: [Reasonable Adjustments in Assessment for Students with Disabilities](#) and [Assessment Principles, Policy and Procedures](#)

Boud, D. (1995) *Enhancing Learning Through Self-Assessment*. London: Routledge.

Carroll, J. and Ryan, J. (eds) (2005) *Teaching International Students: Improving Learning for All.* London: Routledge.

NUS (2012). *Liberation, Equality and Diversity in the Curriculum*. London: National Union of Students.

QAA (2013) *UK Quality Code for HE: Part B: Chapter B6 – Assessment of Students and the Recofgnition of Prior Learning*. Gloucester: Quality Assurance Agency.

Waterfield, J. and and West, B. (2006) *Inlcusive Assessment in HE: A Resoruce for Change.* Bristol: Hefce.

Wray, M. (2013) *Developing an Inlcusive Culture in HE: Final Report.* York: Higher Edcuation Academy.

Checklist for reflection: Assessment

Have you:

Made sure that the assessment methods you have chosen are accessible to students who learn/communicate in different ways or at least do not disadvantage them?	✓
Considered introducing a choice of assessments?	
Considered involving students in the design of assessment and agreeing marking criteria?	
Checked the language used in the assessment to make sure that it is not a barrier to students understanding what to do?	
Checked assessment requirements so that they are understood by all students?	
Explained fully about the assessment, avoiding assumptions that because it is written in the module guide, the students will automatically know what to do particularly for students whose first language is not English?	
Built in formative assessments to a) test ongoing understanding and b) receive formative feedback and c) prepare students for the summative assessment?	
Devoted some of your teaching time to preparing the students for the assessment and ensuring they understand the requirements?	
Explained what plagiarism is, how it is sometimes interpreted differently in certain cultures, given guidance on how to avoid it?	
Provided or signposted to guidance/study skills support for any students who have not recently done a formal assessment?	
Provided examples of assessment/answers which meet the different grading criteria?	

If assessing by examination, given hints and tips on revision, particularly to students whose previous educational experience was not assessed through examinations?	
Thought about the timing of hand in deadlines and exams to take account of the needs of carers and with an awareness of religious observance?	

Reflection into action

Having reflected on the above, my key priorities for making my teaching more inclusive are:

Changes I would like to introduce	By when	Indicators that it has made my practice more inclusive

This document is part of an inclusive practice 'toolkit' - *Include*All. The whole Toolkit, as one complete document or as separate documents, can be found on the University website at www.staffs.ac.uk/inclusivepractice .

It is split into four sections: Core Concepts; Inclusive by Design; Enhancing Practice; Checklists for Self-reflection.

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