Curriculum Redefined

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

How Might We:

Assessment

Contents

Overview

Assessment is a major part of the university experience for our students. It is how we measure their progress and achievement, and assessment should enable and support student learning. The institutional assessment strategy has been recently updated (June 2021) to reflect the changing landscape, and priorities.

The emphasis within the curriculum redefined project on authentic, inclusive, and fair assessment is embedded in the assessment vision and principles. Other aspects of the assessment strategy include:

- consideration of assessment at programme level
- constructive alignment between learning outcomes and assessment
- digital by default
- students as partners in assessment

There is extensive work within the University around assessment practice, and this links with many of the other strands of work, from compassionate curriculum to digital practice.

Authentic assessment

Authentic assessment is using knowledge in an applied and relevant setting. Authentic assessment is often conceptualized as assessments that are relevant to the workplace, and while this may be the case, it is not necessarily so. Instead, it involves moving away from closed-book, knowledge-recall examinations towards assessments that focus on the application of both skills and knowledge.

Inclusive assessment

Inclusive assessment is about making sure that all students can engage with the assessment, and that it is inclusive by design. This should result in a reduction in the need for extensions and other mitigation in assessment. This aspect of the strategy links with work on inclusive learning and teaching. The inclusive marking policy is currently being revised.

Fair assessment

Fair assessment is about the marks that students get genuinely reflecting the standards of their work. We can make assessment fair by providing clear guidelines and making sure that we teach all that we assess. Assessment is unfair when marks are inconsistent, or the assessment criteria are not clear. This links to ideas of revealing the hidden curriculum, and the values and knowledge that students bring with them to university.

Links to existing strategy and policy

University assessment strategy

Leeds expectations for assessment and feedback (LEAF)

University Strategy 2020-2030

Student Education Strategy

Mitigating circumstances guidance

Student voice

Assessment and feedback is where students succeed or fail.

Extensive work on student voice in this area has been conducted by Bridgette Berwick as part of the **compassionate curriculum work.** Assessment has a major impact on student mental health, with many students struggling during exam season. This in turn leads to an unsustainably high number of mitigating circumstances applications.

Students see formative assessment as important. For example:

"All feedback coming from marked assessments makes it really hard to improve"

Students do not always understand the purpose of assessments:

"Assessments and coursework feel pointless. You do them, get the mark and then they end up straight in the trash, while you come out not knowing that much more than when you started"

- What is the overall assessment experience of students on your programme(s)?
- How can you make your assessments more inclusive?

How might we...

Practitioner based tips

Consider the timing of assessments across the year

Assessment is a cause of stress to students, but also to staff. Often the timings of assessment mean that staff experience extreme pinch points, where a large amount of marking must be completed in a short length of time. While workload models might work on an annual basis, the lived experience of academics is that workload, and especially assessment workload, is not equally distributed across time.

Using more creative approaches to assessment should allow us to reduce these marking pinch points, which will make our lives more pleasant, but also will increase the quality of the marking and feedback provided to students.

Use meaningful formative assessment

Another aspect of the assessment strategy is to increase the quantity and quality of formative feedback, to improve student assessment literacy and attainment. This will also have benefits to staff, as summative work will be of a higher quality, and require less detailed feedback.

Formative assessment is an important part of student learning. As part of your learning and assessment design, you must embed genuine opportunities for formative assessment and feedback. The assessment should be relevant and helpful for completion of the summative assessment. For example, if the

summative assessment requires knowledge of facts, an MCQ (Multiple Choice Questions) might be appropriate formative assessment. However, if it requires application of knowledge to a problem, an MCQ is unlikely to provide an appropriate learning experience. Formative assessment should be thought of as assessment for learning, rather than assessment of learning, and it should help your students to develop a thorough understanding of the assessment, building their assessment literacy, and helping uncover the hidden curriculum of assessment. Peer assessment can be a useful way of delivering formative assessment and feedback, and this can also help to build a sense of community.

Program level assessment

Students experience programmes, not modules, and the adoption of module level assessment means that students are frequently overassessed, and bunching of assessment is more likely to happen. You should consider the whole assessment experience of students. When considering assessment, you will need to start with your module and programme learning outcomes. Assessment should be constructively aligned with the learning outcomes.

At programme level, think about the overall assessment experience of students. Students should complete the minimum number of assessments needed to asses the learning outcomes for the programme reliably, to reduce the burden of assessent for staff and students. You should understand how each module(s) contribute to the learning outcomes for the programes(s).

Implementing the assessment strategy

As part of curriculum redefined, and the new assessment strategy, there are several innovative assessment practices you might like to consider:

- Is synoptic (whole level, whole course) assessment possible?
- Could you use pass/fail and portfolio-based assessments?
- Could you take an **ungrading** approach?

In order that assessment is fair, there needs to be a shared understanding of assessment with colleagues, including regular conversations about standards. This should include discussing assessment, agreeing thresholds for classification, and checking consistency of marking and feedback across the programme(s).

Develop authentic assessments – which does not simply mean work-like assessments (McArthur, 2022). **Digital assessment** can provide excellent authentic assessment experiences.

You might like to consider:

- How do students know what you are looking for in your assessments?
- How do you know that you have a shared understanding of standards with students?
- How can you assess student's application of knowledge?
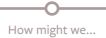- How can you assess relevant skills and competences?

More information

There are already extensive resources available at:

- **OD&PL Student Education Development**
- **LITE (Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence)** compendium of assessment techniques in HE (Higher Education)
- **Resource for Digital Assessment**

References

Assessment and feedback in a post-covid world

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Ferrell, Gill & Knight, Sarah (2022). Principles of good assessment and feedback. JISC, UK.

University of Bradford **Programme assessment strategies**

UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Assessment.

Inclusive assessment

Hanesworth, Pauline (2019). **Inclusive assessment: where next?** Advance HE, UK.