A Marked Improvement (2012) tenets

**Tenet 1:** Assessment for learning

**Tenet 2:** Ensuring assessment is fit for purpose

UK Professional Standards Framework

**Alignment:** A3, A4, A5, K3, V1, V2, V3

Expert perspectives: what do we know?

"Inclusive assessment refers to the design and use of fair and effective assessment methods and practices that enable all students to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do" (Thomas and May, 2010, p. 13).

Over the years, views on inclusive approaches to curriculum design – including student assessment – in higher education have emphasised the significance of student diversity (Morgan and Houghton, 2011; Thomas and May, 2010; Waterfield and West, 2010). When considering student diversity, we may think of particular ‘groups’ or ‘sub-sets’ of students, such as students with disabilities or specific additional requirements (e.g. dyslexia) and how reasonable adjustments should be made. Students are individuals and should not necessarily be seen as belonging to particular groups, as we are all unique and hold different identities depending on context (Morgan and Houghton, 2011), and we must remind ourselves that diversity can relate to many characteristics and dimensions. As Thomas and May (2010) have summarised, these varied and changing dimensions can be educational (e.g. prior learning experiences, previous qualifications); dispositional (e.g. attitudes, preferences); circumstantial (e.g. family or caring responsibilities, in employment); and cultural (e.g. values, religion and belief). So, an inclusive approach to assessment is about designing assessment tasks that are “meaningful, relevant and accessible to all” (ibid., p. 9) underpinned by an understanding that students as individuals have strengths, qualities and skills that will be beneficial for their learning and for students they learn with.

More varied forms of assessment tasks than conventional methods (e.g. essays) should be judiciously designed and used across a course (Sambell, McDowell and Montgomery, 2013; Thomas and May, 2010; Waterfield and West, 2010).

Assessment design may prevent some students from fully demonstrating their knowledge and understanding, and range of attributes, practices and skills. An over-reliance on conventional forms of assessment, such as essays and exams, might mean that certain students in a diverse student group may be unfairly ‘disadvantaged’, as they do not have opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities (e.g. strengths in oral communication, or collaborative skills). A shift in emphasis away from assessment diversification towards employing a carefully designed and balanced range of valid assessment tasks across a course, allows students to engage in complex and challenging activities, effectively progress as learners, and develop their assessment literacy (see HEA, 2012; Price et al., 2012). Key syntheses in the field have highlighted how a wider range of assessment types can have positive implications for all students, while simultaneously reducing the need to modify particular assessments for specific individual requirements (see Thomas and May, 2010).

Inclusive assessment practice has strong links with assessment for learning principles and perspectives that promote the development of assessment literacy in students (Plymouth University, 2014–2020; Sambell, McDowell and Montgomery, 2013; Price et al., 2012). Sambell, McDowell and Montgomery (2013) show how assessment for learning in higher education is underpinned by the idea “that all assessment... should contribute to helping students to learn and to succeed” (ibid., 2013, p. 3).
They recommend guiding principles for assessment approaches that:

- involve authentic tasks
- foster students’ capabilities to evaluate their learning
- entail informal (e.g. collaborative working) and formal feedback (e.g. from experts or practitioners)
- provide possibilities for practise and to build confidence
- balance formative and summative tasks (Sambell, McDowell and Montgomery, 2013, p. 5).

Plymouth University has emphasised how development of inclusive assessment is improved by considering the following:

- the use of diverse and authentic methods (e.g. group work, ePortfolios, oral presentations), including formative activities
- how students are prepared for assessments (e.g. through an assignment briefing and discussion about criteria)
- the scheduling of assessments (e.g. effective ‘spacing’ of assessments across a course) (Plymouth University, 2014).

Recent work on assessment literacy has also emphasised the significance of focusing on dialogue and formative activities to prepare and support students to effectively undertake assessment tasks. In doing this, students can develop an understanding of assessment criteria and the required standards in their subject of study (Price et al., 2012).

**Review practice: what can we do?**

The following key points are derived from evidence-informed considerations and good practice sources (Ashford-Rowe, Herrington and Brown, 2014; Plymouth University, 2014-2020; Morgan and Houghton, 2011; Thomas and May, 2010).

**Consider and question the forms or methods of assessment and feedback that are used across a course. This involves revisiting:**

- the range of assessment types (e.g. reports, essays, exams, projects, presentations)
- the balance of formative and summative assessments, to ensure that students have opportunities to gain experience and practise in a variety of assessment tasks, such as team-based presentations
- the scheduling of assessments to ensure that tasks are effectively spaced within modules and across a course
- the forms of feedback used, and address, if necessary, an over-emphasis on written feedback, and also enable students to learn from more generic in-class feedback, or audio feedback, for example.

**Evaluate existing assessment tasks to inform the design of authentic assessments that are appropriately complex and challenging for students. This entails exploring:**

- innovative and engaging forms of assessment, for example:
  - writing a journal, blog or reflective diary
  - writing a briefing paper, newspaper article or action plan
  - working on a group presentation or conference poster
  - undertaking a case study analysis
  - organising and giving student-led seminars
  - developing information leaflets or learning packages (e.g. for students in schools or related to health promotion).

**Review how students are prepared and supported in undertaking assessment tasks. Develop a consistent and transparent approach across a course in which students have:**

- information and guidance on assessment processes and from whom to seek support if needed
- details about assessment tasks (i.e. briefs on the purpose and nature of the assessment, including what is expected and marking criteria used)
- interactive opportunities to interrogate assessment tasks and to receive feedback on formative activities.

**References**


The Anglia assessment album has been developed by Anglia Learning & Teaching, in collaboration with Dr Erica Morris, Professor Sally Brown and Professor Margaret Price.