A Marked Improvement

Transforming assessment in higher education

Contents

Synopsis

Across higher education, it is time for a significant reappraisal of assessment strategy, policy and practice through evidence-informed change. This publication has been developed by a group of experts in the field of higher education, working with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) to provide a strong rationale for transforming assessment in higher education, underpinned by an established evidence base. Importantly, this publication also provides an assessment review tool, which offers a practical method to take stock of current practice and look to a targeted approach to strategic change.

The publication builds on two decades of extensive support for teaching, learning and assessment in UK higher education, which has been provided by a range of organisations and initiatives. In relation to assessment, the HEA, its former subject centres and the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning have taken a key role in developing and promoting this expertise in assessment. Accordingly, the developed rationale and review tool are based on:

- *Assessment standards: a Manifesto for Change*[1] created by an international forum of experts on assessment in higher education brought together by the Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange (ASKe) Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Oxford Brookes University[1];

- work from the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Oxford Brookes University (ASKe) and the University of Northumbria (Assessment for Learning);

- previous work of the HEA, its subject centres, the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) and the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE).

The Manifesto has been the primary organising framework for the development of the review tool, with six tenets or evidence-based principles for assessment policy and practice.

The arguments and conclusions presented in this publication are based on the best research evidence available in the field of educational assessment. References in Section 4 provide key sources for the evidence, along with resources for staff in higher education.

---

1   ASKe (Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange) *Assessment standards: a Manifesto for Change; Feedback: an Agenda for Change*. Available from: http://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/Manifesto/ [25 September 2012].

Authors

This publication was developed through collaborative working and writing involving a group of experts in the field of higher education: Dr Simon Ball (JISC TechDis), Carolyn Bew (Higher Education Academy), Professor Sue Bloxham (University of Cumbria), Professor Sally Brown (Independent Consultant), Dr Paul Kleiman (Higher Education Academy), Dr Helen May (Higher Education Academy), Professor Liz McDowell (Northumbria University), Dr Erica Morris (Higher Education Academy), Professor Susan Orr (Sheffield Hallam University), Elaine Payne (Higher Education Academy), Professor Margaret Price (Oxford Brookes University), Professor Chris Rust (Oxford Brookes University), Professor Brenda Smith (Independent Consultant) and Judith Waterfield (Independent Consultant).

Acknowledgements

The structure of the publication	
Section 1: The rationale and groundwork for transforming assessment	1.1 Introduction: This sets the current context in higher education.
	1.2 A case for change: This outlines the wide-ranging economic, educational and reputational benefits of transforming assessment.
	1.3 Preparing to change assessment: This provides the considerations that institutions will need to address to support and manage a successful transformation to a different model of assessment.
	1.4 Conclusion: This emphasises that transforming assessment will entail changes related to assessment design, students, staff and infrastructure.
Section 2: *Assessment standards: a Manifesto for Change*	This section 'unpacks' the tenets of the Manifesto, providing an explanation of each and an evidence-informed rationale that underpins the proposed changes.
Section 3: Assessment review tool	This tool is for higher education institutions to benchmark the quality of existing assessment practices and consider how they might make relevant changes. It is organised in two parts, with stimulus questions for: • senior managers, such as deputy and pro-vice-chancellors and vice-principals; • a working 'review team' involving a dean, or head of department, curriculum leaders, course or programme leaders, educational developers, lecturers and students.
Section 4: An annotated selection of resources	This provides the evidence base for the rationale for change and the associated review tool, along with further resources for staff, which can be used to support changes to policy and practice.

Section 1: The rationale and groundwork for transforming assessment

1.1 Introduction

Assessment of student learning is a fundamental function of higher education. It is the means by which we assure and express academic standards and has a vital impact on student behaviour, staff time, university reputations, league tables and, most of all, students' future lives. The National Student Survey, despite its limitations, has made more visible what researchers in the field have known for many years: assessment in our universities is far from perfect. From student satisfaction surveys to Select Committee reports, there is firm evidence that assessment is not successfully meeting the needs of students, employers, politicians or the public in general. The rising demands of fee-paying students, the increasing financial pressures on institutions and the need to maintain the UK's international reputation for high academic standards are going to place extra strain on already vulnerable assessment practices. It is time for a serious reappraisal, and the purpose of this publication is to support that reappraisal of assessment policy and practice in higher education through evidence-informed change.

Assessment practices in most universities have not kept pace with the vast changes in the context, aims and structure of higher education. They can no longer do justice to the outcomes we expect from a university education in relation to wide-ranging knowledge, skills and employability. Modularisation has created a significant growth in summative assessment, with its negative backwash effect on student learning and its excessive appetite for resources to deliver the concomitant increase in marking, internal and external moderation, administration and quality assurance.

Assessment is also at the heart of many challenges facing higher education. A significantly more diverse student body in relation to achievement, disability, prior education and expectations of higher education has put pressure on retention and standards. In a massified higher education sector where tutor-student ratios have gradually been eroded, students can remain confused about what is expected of them in assessment. Efforts to make this transparent through learning outcomes, assessment criteria and written feedback have proved no substitute for tutor-student interaction and newer groups of students are particularly likely to need this contact. It is not surprising that students are dissatisfied with assessment and, undoubtedly, the student voice will become louder as fee increases bite.

Students have also noticed how assessment fails to meet their needs, particularly in relation to relevance to the world of work. As increasing numbers of students enter higher education with the primary hope of finding employment, there is a pressure to ensure that assessment can, at least in part, mirror the demands of the workplace or lead to skills that are relevant for a range of 'real world' activities beyond education, but this has been largely unreflected in the reform of assessment within many disciplines.

Perhaps most importantly, the integrity of academic standards is at risk as web technologies may facilitate plagiarism, retention imperatives have the potential to impinge on academic decision-making, costly fees raise student expectations, an expanding offering of measures seeking to apply reasonable adjustments, and a growing and diversified set of institutions makes comparability of standards increasingly difficult. UK higher education has enjoyed an excellent international reputation based on its academic standards, but at home the issue of standards is both fudged and challenged. Official inquiries have criticised the reliability of standards and the way we communicate

student achievement to the world through degree classification. Our highly respected external examiner system is "under strain"[2] and methods for determining students' results vary widely across subjects and universities.

Some progress has been made in assessment through the work of keen and capable academics and enterprising institutions. The HEA its former subject centres, the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme, Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, JISC and FDTL[3] have all played a significant role in this innovation. However, for the most part small-scale initiatives have not become embedded in institutions and are often the work of enthusiastic teachers, failing to become standard practice. University assessment traditions have not proved easy to transform through incremental adjustments. Piecemeal innovations, in addressing specific problems rather than the whole assessment framework, potentially create trouble for other parts of the system. Therefore, this publication recommends a radical rethink of assessment practices and regulations, capitalising on what existing experience we have of effective and efficient assessment to make it the predominant approach rather than the minority one. However, there are no quick fixes that will give rapid results in assessment, and therefore we propose a holistic and proactive approach rather than an atomised response to individual assessment issues.

While the views above have posited gloomy prospects for higher education assessment, there are plenty of reasons to be optimistic about the future in relation to what a radical shake-up of assessment could achieve. This is particularly important at a time of huge change for the UK sector. It is an opportunity to re-establish learning and standards rather than measurement and grades as central to effective assessment and, crucially, to return to a focus on students as learners. It is a chance to think about how we put the significant resources devoted to assessment to better use to support learning, safeguard standards, improve retention and increase student approval; to improve assessment's fitness for purpose generally. This publication aims to promote widespread development in higher education assessment practice by helping staff at all levels recognise the need for and the means to bringing about evidence-informed change.

The local context and individual perspectives

In drawing up this publication, the authors are aware that educational research and theory does not easily translate into simple prescriptions for educational practice. All assessment is situated in the local context, and in the particular traditions, expectations and needs of different universities, specialist institutions and academic disciplines. Theory and evidence has to be interpreted and applied within those parameters and cannot be applied simply or uniformly. Consequently, this resource does not prescribe standardised changes, but poses questions based on our knowledge of effective assessment practice, which can be used to evaluate and benchmark existing approaches and inform future developments. The growing evidence base of research on assessment provides a useful basis on which to build and review policy and practice, but it leaves the onus on institutions to develop and critically evaluate assessment processes and procedures, as they are used and developed within their local context, comprising students, tutors, resources, regulations, and disciplinary and professional requirements.

The publication is designed to be accessible to staff working at all levels in higher education both within institutions and in partner organisations; for example, those involved in employer-based teaching and mentoring. It has a particular emphasis on those who are likely to lead and implement change at institutional and programme level.

2   Higher Education Funding Council for England (2009) *Report of the sub-committee for Teaching, Quality, and the Student Experience: HEFCE's statutory responsibility for quality* (p31). Available from: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/ hefce/2009/09_40/09_40.pdf [25 September 2012].

3   The Fund for the Development of Learning and Teaching, funded by HEFCE and DEL.

1.2 A case for change

The following sets out the academic and business case for change. At a time when higher education is facing unprecedented pressures and transformations in economic, social, political and cultural dimensions, further changes need to be clearly justified. This sub-section aims to explain why the benefits of fundamental change in assessment are worth the effort given the inevitable consequent disruption. These benefits, which we expand on below, may include:

- improved potential for student learning;
- increased student satisfaction;
- improved value for money;
- assessment methods and approaches that are better able to assess the outcomes of a 21st-century education;
    - a dependable and fairer representation of student achievement;
    - greater confidence in academic standards and improved safeguarding of the reputation of UK higher education.

1.2.1 Improved potential for student learning

The most significant benefit to come from a radical reshaping of assessment is the advantage to student learning. Assessment shapes what students study, when they study, how much work they do and the approach they take to their learning. Consequently, assessment design is influential in determining the quality and amount of learning achieved by students, and if we wish to improve student learning, improving assessment should be our starting point.

A feature of modern modular course structures is that the majority of assignments have a summative function (assessment of learning), which may lead to students taking a strategic approach to their studies, potentially limiting their broader learning and independent thinking. Research evidence suggests that if the nature of the learning context is changed, and assessment is the most influential element of that context, there is a likelihood that students' approach will change with associated benefits for high quality learning.

The change that has the greatest potential to improve student learning is a shift in the balance of summative and formative assessment. Summative assessment has important purposes in selection, certification and institutional accountability, but its dominance has distorted the potential of assessment to promote learning (assessment for learning). The imperatives of summative assessment necessarily limit the use of assessment methods that have demonstrable value for learning, such as feedback on drafts, group assessment, peer learning and work-based assessment. The need to provide a reliable, verifiable mark for each individual for each assignment can either limit the methods we use or create justifiable concerns about consistency and fairness in marking. Peer assessment is a case in point. While the use of peer assessment may cause alarm in some external examiners and those focusing on academic standards, the ability to assess self and others is an essential graduate attribute. Studies consistently report positive outcomes for well-designed peer marking, including claims from students that it makes them think more, become more critical, learn more and gain in confidence.

A shift in the balance of summative and formative assessment towards the latter provides the scope to use a more valid and effective range of assessment tools. Assessment for learning is designed to be formative and diagnostic, providing information about student achievement to both teachers and learners, which allows teaching and learning activities to respond to the needs of the learner and recognises the huge benefit that ongoing and dialogic feedback processes can have on learning. This benefit is enhanced where feedback is embedded in day-to-day learning activities.

The learning benefits of well-designed assessment are also found when students are involved in assessment; using feedback, peer assessment and self-monitoring of progress as moments of learning in themselves. Students come to have a better understanding of the subject matter and their own learning through their close involvement with assessment. Assessment and feedback activity of this nature does not just contribute to learning at university, but develops learning and evaluative skills essential for employment and lifelong learning.

1.2.2 Increased student satisfaction

Radical reform to assessment should also be considered in light of the higher education White Paper – *Students at the Heart of the System*[4]. While there continues to be vigorous debate about the appropriateness of the proposed reforms, there is a clear emphasis on ensuring that the views of students are central to the future of the sector. Assessment in particular is consistently referred to as an area of reform, and with the move to more transparent information, the institutions that are best able to respond to the demands of students may well thrive in relation to student recruitment and satisfaction.

In particular, while many universities have taken action to improve their students' experience, scores for assessment and feedback remain low in the National Student Survey as students express concerns about the reliability of assessment criteria, challenge the fairness of their experience and say they are dissatisfied with the nature and timing of feedback. This is not surprising given the complex nature of most assessment and the limited time staff have to devote to marking and feedback. Research is increasingly demonstrating the importance of tutor-student dialogue in both understanding assessment expectations and being able to make use of feedback. Sadly, evidence suggests that replacing this dialogue with greater guidance or more detailed written feedback creates extra work for staff, yet may have limited influence on learning and achievement. In addition, it is well-recognised that students may have particular expectations of feedback as written comments on their assignments, rather than students realising that feedback on their learning can take a number of forms (e.g. written, audio, video) and be delivered in a range of ways (e.g. to an individual, small group or lecture class). So improving student satisfaction with assessment needs to be addressed in a different way. Such improvement is dependent on better and more inclusive assessment methods and practices that promote tutor-student and student-student dialogue, and that consider carefully how students can come to understand the tacit expectations of their tutors, providing feedback at a time and in a way that students can learn from it and use it in their future work.

Poor validity in assessment methods can also damage student confidence. For example, if examinations do not assess what they are supposed to be assessing, perhaps measuring memory as much as knowledge and understanding, then students may become dissatisfied. Students should experience assessment as a valid measure of their programme outcomes using authentic assessment methods, which are both intrinsically worthwhile and useful in developing their future employability.

A greater emphasis on student engagement with assessment, its guidance and feedback, is also likely to reduce student frustration when faced with low grades. Involving students in assessment has the potential to help them understand the nature of complex professional judgement, grasp the required standards of their discipline and better recognise their own levels of achievement. This may help to reduce expensive and time-consuming student complaints and appeals, and is likely to raise scores on internal and external measures of satisfaction. Furthermore, there are reputational advantages to having up-to-date and fit-for-purpose assessment practices as fee-paying students explore more closely what higher education institutions are offering in relation to teaching and learning.

---

4   BIS: Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2011) *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*. Available from: http://bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/h/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf [25 September 2012].

1.2.3 Improved value for money: maximising resources for learning

Assessment is resource heavy in the modern higher education institution. Transforming assessment policy and practice can bring cost savings in administration and quality assurance. These savings are generated by reducing summative assessment, improving failure rates and retention, and reducing instances of malpractice, non-submissions, complaints and appeals. It is important to note that most of the quality assurance and other procedures discussed in this section make demands on staff time without any attendant benefit for student learning.

The increasing size of student cohorts and a shrinking unit of resource mean that tutor time has become disproportionately spent on summative assessment. Students can be taught in larger groups, but each assignment or exam script still requires individual attention. This imbalance is exacerbated by modular structures, which the UK has adapted from other national systems, very few of which have our traditions of second marking, moderation, external examiners and assessment boards. Employing these safeguards for each element of summative assessment is creating an academic and administrative workload that is unsustainable. A shift from summative to formative assessment can reduce the costs involved in processing students' work and assessment records, prioritise quality checks for essential elements of assessment and redirect academic resources towards learning.

However, the high stakes nature of summative assessment can lead to expensive and time-consuming applications for extenuating circumstances, student complaints, appeals and litigation. The latter also runs the risk of generating adverse publicity. The pressure of high stakes assessment could also encourage plagiarism and poor academic practice among some learners with its high staff costs and adverse outcomes for students.

Poor experiences of assessment and lack of feedback early in programmes is associated with failure and high student attrition rates. In addition, where programmes plan for more formative assessment and feedback, there is a better chance that a greater proportion of students pass modules at their first attempt, thereby saving staff time in relation to demand for extra support, resits, appeals and complaints. Improved pass rates and reduced attrition bring obvious financial benefits for institutions and positive outcomes for students. Overall, a radical review of assessment can bring cost savings and better use of teaching resources.

1.2.4 Assessment that is better able to assess the outcomes of a 21st-century education

There is a perception, particularly among employers, that higher education is not always providing graduates with the skills and attributes they require to deal successfully with a complex and rapidly changing world: a world that needs graduates to be creative, capable of learning independently and taking risks, knowledgeable about the work environment, flexible and responsive. While we might argue with this view about the shortcomings of higher education, we can certainly improve the means by which assessment fosters and encourages those qualities in our graduates.

Traditional approaches to employability in universities have tended to sideline it to specific modules, work-based learning elements, personal development planning and careers guidance. The overall learning environment has not necessarily fostered employability, which is served by a more comprehensive range of learning opportunities in addition to those methods. These include enquiry-based learning, the opportunity to use knowledge in a range of challenging contexts, learning activities that are relevant and motivating, close involvement with employers and the opportunity to reflect on learning and action.

Subject benchmark statements, and other aspects of the QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education[5] actively support the broadening of the curriculum to embrace a wider view of graduate capabilities and some UK universities are fully embracing this

5   Further information available from QAA: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality [25 September 2012]

challenge. Examples include embedding the development of professional capabilities at all programme levels. However, unless assessment also changes to match these more expansive outcomes, the project will struggle. Teaching and assessment must be designed to support each other and assessment that is not clearly linked to planned learning outcomes is unlikely to do that.

Therefore, assessment has an important part to play in supporting this wider curriculum for 21st-century graduates. Much traditional assessment tends to focus on remembering and repeating conceptual knowledge and understanding, whereas employability is more likely to be predicated on students' ability to apply that knowledge in different contexts: solving problems, thinking critically, performing in professional settings or analysing case studies. If assessment continues to focus largely on knowledge acquisition and understanding, and less on the capacity to find things out and use the knowledge in context, then it will steer tutors and students away from learning for employability. Furthermore, in an environment where knowledge is advancing so rapidly, it is important to broaden the focus of assessment to embrace the skills of lifelong learning.

Assessment reform with these aims would benefit from increased involvement of professional, regulatory and statutory bodies; engaging with them to identify how professional and personal capabilities can be evidenced. It would build on existing efforts to design integrative and creative assessment that is more able to determine authentic achievement. It would resist grading performances that cannot easily be measured. It would help students understand the assessment process and develop the skills of self-evaluation and professional judgement. It would enable students to recognise what they have learned and be able to articulate and evidence it to potential employers. Improving assessment in this way is crucial to providing a richer and fairer picture of students' achievement.

1.2.5 A dependable and fairer representation of student achievement

A dependable and secure assessment system with demonstrably first-rate academic standards would contribute to the reputation of UK universities as providers of high quality higher education. This is particularly important in an increasingly competitive global market for higher education. However, as outlined earlier, academic standards are at risk for a range of reasons. Attention to assessment design, ensuring valid assessment of programme outcomes, recognising that not all useful learning can be objectively measured, developing tutors' assessment literacy and establishing appropriate methods to promote shared academic standards across disciplines and universities can all contribute to reversing the declining confidence in academic standards.

The way we currently communicate student achievement is in urgent need of modernisation. Disciplinary differences, for example in the proportion of first class degrees, are unwarrantable. The Burgess Group's final report *Beyond the honours degree classification*[6] clearly articulated the limitations of degree classification, although the simplicity of the upper or lower second makes it remain attractive to employers. The Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) provides a more sophisticated and valuable alternative for recording student achievement. A student's HEAR will include information describing their qualification: its subject, level of study and a brief description of the modules or units they have studied, with the individual grades they achieved. It will also cover extra-curricular achievements, which can be clearly evidenced through prizes and awards, representative roles and official posts, for example in a students' union. The report will supplement the traditional degree classification and will include the European Diploma Supplement. Following a trialling phase, Universities UK launched the final report of the Burgess Implementation Steering Group, recommending: "that the representative bodies commend the HEAR to be adopted sector-wide for students entering higher education in academic year 2012-13".[7] The

---

6   Universities UK (2007) *Beyond the honours degree classification. The Burgess Group final report*. Available from: http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/Burgess_final.pdf [25 September 2012].

7   Universities UK (2012) *Introducing the Higher Education Achievement Report: the final report of the Burgess Implementation Steering Group*. Available from: http://www.hear.ac.uk [check title, pnumber and date when report and site available from 2 October 2012]

implementation of the HEAR will make an important contribution to the better communication of student achievement.

While the HEAR should increase the chance for students to have their wider achievements represented, it has not set out to change the fundamental nature of higher education assessment. It will remain for institutions to address disciplinary differences in marking practices or problems in ensuring comparable standards across universities. Marks, as currently used, are often more a concrete representation of a tutor's broad judgement about a piece of work than they are a conventional numerical measurement. However, we use these marks formulaically in generating grades, artificially combining marks from different sources, which do not have equal weightings, meaning or validity. Thereby, this over-reliance on numbers can obscure learning and achievement in the search for credit equivalence and the end result is divorced from the aims of the original curriculum design. A review of assessment would reduce the proportion of work that is subject to this false maths; grading only that which can be safely graded and giving more credibility to students' results.

Equality legislation places a duty on higher education institutions to promote equality in order to tackle persistent and long-standing issues of disadvantage, such as attainment gaps between white, and black and minority ethnic students, and the low participation rates of those with disabilities. Assessment can take an important role in supporting this undertaking, particularly in enabling all students to successfully demonstrate their achievements. Inclusive assessment, for example using a variety of assessment methods, is designed to provide for all students while meeting the needs of specific groups. Preparation for assessment, assessment information, choice of tasks, use of formative strategies and reassessment policies are all aspects of assessment that should consider and contribute to inclusive practice. In addition, employing well-designed assessment strategies to promote retention is important in ensuring that widening access to higher education leads to widening achievement.

1.3 Preparing to change assessment

This sub-section outlines some key considerations that institutions will need to address in order to support and manage a successful transformation to a different model of assessment. The proposals in this resource require a cultural shift in beliefs about the purpose and nature of assessment in higher education, and this is most likely to be achieved with a well-planned and well-managed strategy.

1.3.1 Leadership

The most important factor in successful implementation of changes in assessment practices will be committed leadership. It is essential that the change is led by someone at the top of the organisation with appropriate authority and vision: a key manager who is prepared to open-mindedly consider the issues raised by the tenets of the Manifesto in the following section. Given that assessment permeates many areas of institutional life, the leader or leaders will need to understand its complexity, be able to live with a level of ambiguity and not be averse to a certain level of risk. The high stakes nature of assessment for individual students and institutional reputations means that it can generate anxieties regarding quality assurance and potential negative publicity. Furthermore, many aspects of assessment are mired in traditional approaches that will be hard to transform. Therefore, the leadership should be sensitive to these anxieties as well as local needs and context, but also willing to persevere in questioning taken-for-granted assumptions and practices.

The project leadership will need to have confidence in the ongoing support of, and regular interaction with, the senior team and strategic committees. They will be capable of adopting an inclusive approach; able to persuade many stakeholders that this transformation has multiple benefits for both students and staff as outlined in the previous section. They will be able to involve all relevant stakeholders in building a shared understanding of good assessment.

The leader or leadership team will need to be persistent, recognising that transformation will take time. Some changes may not work well at first, needing evaluation and refinement in order to operate effectively. It will be important for a leader to persevere with the goal over time, allowing for the reform to be thoroughly embedded in the culture and practices of the institution.

1.3.2 Students

Students have an important role to play in the success of this venture. They are likely to resist change unless they understand the reason for it and its benefits to them in relation to learning, fairness and relevance. Developing students' assessment literacy, that is their understanding of the language of assessment and assessment processes, will be important in gaining student support: they should be helped to understand the principles of sound assessment, the relationship between assessment and learning, and the nature of professional judgement. Students should be clearly informed about assessment safeguards, such as second marking, moderation and external examining. The evidence suggests that where students and students' unions are aware of the educational benefits of engaging with assessment, they are a great deal keener to be constructively involved and assist with the required change. The National Union of Students (NUS) has also contributed significantly to the national dialogue around assessment in recent years, including the publication of their own *Charter on Feedback & Assessment*[8], which complements this publication.

While it will be important to build assessment literacy into the curriculum, there are also good examples of university students' unions working with their institutions to promote better assessment, for example at Sheffield Hallam, Brunel and Queen Mary, University of London (QMUL). Such schemes have involved unions in the education of students about assessment, researching student views on assessment and feedback, joint assessment committees and campaigning to improve departmental and institutional assessment practice. In order to develop this type of strong partnership with students, student engagement processes at course, departmental and institutional level will need to be enhanced.

1.3.3 Resources workload management

Research consistently shows that assessment drives student effort, learning and achievement, yet resources and workload management traditionally focus on lecturers' class contact and course administration. The Open University, which consistently performs in the top ten of the National Student Survey, devotes well over half its teaching resources to assessment and feedback. Consequently, workload management needs to convey the message to staff that assessment planning, marking and feedback are crucially important to student achievement, and should be factored in to the system before major assessment changes are introduced. This is not a call for extra resources, but a plea to think differently about the integration of teaching and assessment. Staff need to have permission, even encouragement, to change their practice in order to build assessment and feedback into contact hours. They should be given the confidence to review the use of contact time to privilege learning rather than transmission of knowledge, and to avoid separating teaching from assessment. For example, immediate feedback given in class following a formative task or student presentations has benefits in relation to timely feedback on performance, while reducing additional staff workload in marking. Overall, assessment must not be under-represented in workload planning and resource allocation.

The distribution of workload and resources should also be considered in relation to the whole of a student's programme. This could mean, for example, that resources should be weighted towards first-year courses where they can have an important impact on helping students make a successful transition to higher education and prepare them for more independent learning. Effort could also focus more squarely

---

8   NUS (National Union of Students) *Charter on Feedback & Assessment*. Available from: http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/ news/article/highereducation/720/ [25 September 2012].

on the valid and reliable assessment of programme outcomes rather than poorer quality measurement of every individual module outcome. There is potential to reduce the quantity of summative assessment with its accompanying quality assurance load (second marking, moderation, external examining, assessment board time), which may free resources for use in formative assessment activity.

1.3.4 Staff development

Institutions will need a planned and sustained staff development strategy to support the implementation of change, underpinned by dedicated substantial resource for staff development. A key first step will be encouraging all relevant staff to review their own assessment practice. The tenets of the Manifesto and the associated assessment review tool of this publication provide a framework for this staff development activity, offering the opportunity for individuals and teams to examine their own assessment knowledge and beliefs, and explore the practical implications of the tenets for their specific context.

Existing staff development activities should also focus on raising the profile of assessment and standards, and integrating them with other related topics, such as inclusive practice. It needs to be thoroughly incorporated into programmes for new lecturers, mentoring of staff and personal development reviews. Activities such as co-marking, moderation, engagement with external examiners, course committees and assessment boards should be regarded as opportunities for building confidence in standards through the calibration of individual's standards with those of their colleagues and with the wider subject or professional discipline. In particular, new lecturers should participate in assessment communities such as 'marking bees' where module teams co-mark student work to support staff learning of appropriate assessment knowledge and standards. Contribution to assessment development should be reflected in reward and recognition policies, and university strategies for staff accreditation within the *UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education*[9] should clearly point to the importance of assessment.

This development of assessment literacy among staff needs to be followed by practical support for implementing change. For example, academic developers can work with course teams to rethink programme assessment in preparation for course approval or revalidation.

1.3.5 Regulations and guidance

All those involved in drawing up regulations and managing the quality assurance of assessment in a university, including heads of department, quality managers and validation panel members, will benefit from familiarity with the assessment tenets to enable them to develop regulations, guidance and practical 'case law' that are conducive to effective change. It is important to recognise the power of regulation and guidance as levers for enhancement and to use them as a force for positive change. Poorly conceived regulation can focus staff on minor details of assessment, diverting attention from assessment as a whole process. It can also lead teaching staff to rest heavily on summative assessment or reject more diverse methods with benefits for learning or inclusion because, for example, they are not easily subject to external moderation. Effective assessment usually involves a trade-off between validity, reliability and manageability, the character of which will necessarily vary for individual tasks and examinations. A programme approach to assessment can ensure a balance of these three principles as long as regulations and guidance do not privilege one over the others.

It is also important that regulations and guidance are clearly understood and do not provide either real or perceived barriers to making fundamental change in assessment practice. Simple guidance, such as recommended word counts can be interpreted rigidly by validation committees and limit the ability for course teams to adopt more valid, inclusive and authentic assessment methods. Inflexible regulation can offer staff

---

9   *UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education* (2011) Available from: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf [25 September 2012].

reasons to resist change: they can curb innovation, such as student involvement in assessment and they can absorb staff resources in procedures, such as second marking and moderation, which could be better employed in supporting learning. Regulations must also take into account the demands of current assessment practices including technology-enhanced learning, group and peer assessment.

Fundamental changes to assessment will only be successful if course approval (validation) panels, particularly their chairs, are both aware of and fully committed to the tenets ensuring sufficient challenge to limited or traditional conceptions of assessment. An early step in implementing change will be the staff development of these key personnel. This will help ensure that validation and review processes interrogate the range and purpose of assessment within a programme and its alignment with the tenets.

1.3.6 Using technology-enhanced approaches to improve assessment

Effective use of information systems and learning technologies is a precursor to change in assessment policy and practice, efficiencies in staff time and a better experience for students. A range of technologies can be employed to systematise and improve the administration of the whole assessment cycle from submission of work to assessment boards (involving submission, marking and feedback), and including easy access to student work for external examiners. By harnessing relevant technologies, the student experience can be enhanced through better access to assessment information, a broader range of tasks, automated or speedier feedback, student-student and student-staff dialogue regarding assessment, and support for peer and group assessment. For example, the use of web tools, such as blogs, forums and wikis involving group work and collaborative activity can offer innovative opportunities for assessment tasks. Software applications have the potential to present complex data and scenarios to students for more authentic coursework and examination purposes, and text-matching tools, such as Turnitin can have a key role to play in supporting the development of academic writing with a focus on plagiarism prevention. Assessment methods that use technology are often more adaptable for students with specific learning needs or disabilities and are therefore more inclusive. Universities are supported in technologies for inclusion in learning and teaching by JISC TechDis[10].

Although software applications for enhancing assessment in higher education are well-established, it is clear that there is need for institutions to continue to adopt robust technological solutions to support assessment and feedback. Despite higher education institutions having a range of technologies available for assessment purposes, there is variation across institutions as to whether these technologies are integrated[11]. This can have implications for the student experience. It is vital that institutions work to ensure that the technical infrastructure and systems are in place, and that technical staff and learning technologists can work in partnership with teaching staff to successfully deploy relevant technologies. Regulatory frameworks also need to embrace the demands of technology-enhanced assessment, particularly in relation to online submission, security and data protection.

1.4 Conclusion

This opening section has provided the rationale and background to this publication. It has established the context for transforming assessment and sets the scene in relation to the business case for change and how institutions might prepare for it. While we have made the point above that a new assessment approach for higher education will need to reflect different institutional contexts and priorities, this publication has a vision for

---

10 Further information on JISC TechDis available from: http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/ [25 September 2012].

11 Ferrell, G. (2012) *A view of the Assessment and Feedback Landscape: baseline analysis of policy and practice from the JISC Assessment & Feedback programme*. A report for JISC. Available from: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/assessmentandfeedback.aspx [25 September 2012].

what that future might look like. Broadly speaking, it proposes that assessment that is more clearly fit for purpose will entail changes related to assessment design, students, staff and infrastructure, as follows.

1.4.1 Assessment design

Our approach would see assessment methods diversified to improve their validity, authenticity and inclusivity, making them clearly relevant and worthwhile in the eyes of students. Grading would focus on fewer and more challenging summative assessments, which can be effectively measured in a quantitative way, and there would be an increase in truly formative assessment that is thoroughly integrated with teaching and learning.

1.4.2 Students

Students would be offered greater partnership in assessment, with a clear voice in institutional decision-making regarding assessment. Efforts would be made to increase their understanding and trust in assessment through greater opportunity for self- and peer review, providing them with information about assessment safeguards and by engaging them in enhancing assessment policy and practice. Inclusive assessment would be promoted and embedded in policies and practice to enable all students to demonstrate what they are capable of.

1.4.3 Staff

The assessment literacy of academic staff would be paramount. Our approach would value professional judgement and recognise that academic standards cannot easily be made transparent. On the other hand, confidence in that judgement would be boosted by introducing consistent methods to share and safeguard these, often tacit, standards.

1.4.4 Infrastructure

Our vision for assessment would see technologies established and effectively harnessed to enhance assessment practice, improve feedback and streamline assessment information and administration. Regulations would be reviewed to promote assessment change and students' achievements would be communicated in fair and consistent ways.

With this vision in mind, the following sections provide the reader with principles, a review tool and further resources to evaluate and support the development of assessment. The challenge is significant, but the potential benefits are equally great. The HEA welcomes feedback on this publication and, through its staff, activities and resources, will endeavour to support institutions in this venture.

The HEA would like to hear from higher education institutions who have used the review tool, and to report on its value for their context and suggest improvements – visit http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assessment for more information on how institutions can feedback.

Section 2: Assessment standards: a Manifesto for Change

In 2007 and 2009, the Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange (ASKe) brought together international experts, producing *Assessment standards: a Manifesto for Change* for higher education[12]. Significantly, this Manifesto encapsulates an evidence-informed approach for transforming assessment, and is "a first step towards bringing about necessary changes in policy and practice". The six tenets of the Manifesto provide an organising framework to take forward these changes, and this section unpacks each of the tenets, with an explanation of each and associated key points.

This work to thoroughly 'unpack' the tenets informed the development of the review tool in the following section: the tenets and their key points were recast to form the stimulus questions of this tool for higher education institutions.

---

12 ASKe (Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange) *Assessment standards: a Manifesto for Change.* Available from: http://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/Manifesto/ [25 September 2012].

Tenet 1: Assessment for learning

The debate on standards needs to focus on how high standards of learning can be achieved through assessment. This requires a greater emphasis on assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning.

Explanation

Learning and assessment should be integrated and fully aligned. Assessment is a crucial aspect of the process by which students have a high quality learning experience. It should not just be used to evidence that learning outcomes have been achieved.

Key points

- Assessment must be designed to develop high standards of learning. Students' learning is enhanced when assessment builds on previous learning and requires demonstration of higher order learning and integration of knowledge.

- A high quality learning process requires a balance between formative and summative assessment ensuring that summative assessment does not dominate. One of the roles of formative assessment is to give students opportunities for preparation and practice before they are summatively assessed.

- A range of approaches to feedback in addition to tutor comments on submitted work need to be in place. Students need to develop the capacity to use feedback effectively.

Tenet 2: Ensuring assessment is fit for purpose

When it comes to the assessment of learning, we need to move beyond systems focused on marks and grades towards the valid assessment of the achievement of intended programme outcomes.

Explanation

While assessment continues to have a role in accrediting achievement, current systems that focus on marks and grades need to be reviewed because in many cases they are statistically and intellectually indefensible. Systems should focus on the demonstration of the development and achievement of intended programme outcomes.

Key points

- There needs to be recognition of the difficulties inherent in marking systems, and the imbalance between validity and reliability needs to also be addressed through an increased emphasis on assessment validity.
- Programme learning outcomes should reflect what students should achieve. Assessments should be set to enable students to demonstrate that they achieved the learning outcomes, through a variety of routes best suited to their individual needs.
- There should be a focus on programme outcomes because the qualification students are awarded should reflect their ability at the end of the programme, rather than an accumulation of marks.
- The validity of the assessment process can be promoted through effective collaboration between all those who teach on a programme, all orientated towards the assessment of programme learning outcomes.
- Assessment methods should not be chosen for reliability alone, although reliability is an important consideration.

Tenet 3: Recognise that assessment lacks precision

Limits to the extent that standards can be articulated explicitly must be recognised since ever more detailed specificity and striving for reliability, all too frequently, diminish the learning experience and threaten its validity. There are important benefits of higher education which are not amenable either to the precise specification of standards or to objective assessment.

Explanation

It is not possible to specify precisely all meaningful learning or assessment outcomes. Precise definition could narrow the learning experience and achievement. There are some aspects of learning that cannot be reasonably assessed.

Key points

- To share standards in higher education, there has been an overemphasis on detailing criteria and levels. Using explicit criteria cannot capture all the different aspects of quality.
- Outcomes of high level complex learning can be assessed using professional judgements. These judgements should be based on associated criteria and standards, which are socially constructed and understood within a discipline community.
- Standards are best demonstrated through discussion around anonymous exemplars of different responses to the same piece of assessed work.
- Learning is a transformative experience that goes beyond the perimeters of assessment. The effects of assessment extend over and above the intended outcomes.

Tenet 4: Constructing standards in communities

Assessment standards are socially constructed so there must be a greater emphasis on assessment and feedback processes that actively engage both staff and students in dialogue about standards. It is when learners share an understanding of academic and professional standards in an atmosphere of mutual trust that learning works best.

Explanation

Both staff and students need to develop their own understandings of what is required from, and entailed in, the assessment and feedback process. They are not passive recipients of the process, but will actively engage with it over time, building their knowledge and experience. For effective learning and assessment to take place there must be an acceptance of differing interpretations and understandings. A common understanding of the meaning of standards – both academic and professional – requires mutual trust and dialogue between staff and students.

Key points

- It is important that staff and students establish a shared understanding of standards both academic and professional. A common understanding and sense of value and trust can be fostered through social and collaborative activity among those within appropriate communities.
- To understand standards students need to engage with a community that develops those standards within the discourses and practices of the appropriate disciplines and professions. This might happen at different points in the assessment cycle and in a range of ways. These different aspects may include:
  - What is meant by standards?
  - How are they measured?
  - How do the criteria used to mark assessments relate to standards?

Tenet 5: Integrating assessment literacy into course design

Active engagement with assessment standards needs to be an integral and seamless part of course design and the learning process in order to allow students to develop their own, internalised conceptions of standards and to monitor and supervise their own learning.

Explanation

Courses and assessments need to be designed in ways that help students to achieve understanding of the recognised standards. Understanding will also help them to become autonomous learners who can readily reflect on and review their own progress, development and learning. Appropriately involving students in the design of courses will help this be more easily realised.

Key points

- Assessment literacy is essential to everyone involved in assessment practice. It takes time to develop understanding and skills in assessment. These can be gained by active involvement in an educational community in which students are contributing partners.
- Students are able to realise complex and sophisticated outcomes when they have the opportunities to learn about, understand, internalise and apply the relevant standards. This can be achieved through observation, modelling, discussion, reflection and practice.
- Assessment literacy is an iterative process, and therefore course design and implementation should provide unhurried opportunities and time – within and across programmes – to develop complex knowledge and skills, and to create clear paths for progression.
- Encouraging self- and peer assessment, and engaging in dialogue with staff and peers about their work, enables students to learn more about the subject, about themselves as learners, as well as about the way their performance is assessed.

Tenet 6: Ensuring professional judgements are reliable

Assessment is largely dependent upon professional judgement and confidence in such judgement requires the establishment of appropriate forums for the development and sharing of standards within and between disciplinary and professional communities.

Explanation

Assessment of high level complex learning is largely dependent on holistic judgement rather than mechanistic processes. Academic, disciplinary and professional communities should set up opportunities and processes, such as meetings, workshops and groups to regularly share exemplars and discuss assessment standards. These can help to ensure that educators, practitioners, specialists and students develop shared understandings and agreement about relevant standards.

Key points

- Although assessment standards provide a foundation for the process of assessment, they are not easy to express. To alleviate this, academic, disciplinary and professional communities might set up opportunities and mechanisms to regularly discuss assessment standards.
- Because consistent and effective assessment standards play a vital part in informing student learning, it is crucial that these are developed and maintained.
- The sharing and demonstrating of professional judgements related to assessment standards is the prime responsibility of discipline or subject communities.

Section 3: Assessment review tool

The following tool will enable your higher education institution to review current policy and practice in assessment and feedback, with a view to radically rethinking the institution's assessment strategy. The stimulus questions of the tool provide a valuable way to initiate discussion, capture and rate the extent of relevant evidence, and identify and develop actions, based around approaches to assessment and feedback that are relevant to your institution.

The tool offers an opportunity for your institution to reflect on what is working well, but then to take an honest and open look at what needs to change in different areas of institutional activity.

3.1 Employing the tool

It is recommended that the review tool is applied as follows:

> Part A is designed to be used by senior managers, such as deputy and pro-vice-chancellors and vice-principals to address strategic institutional issues that will enable a focus on radical changes across an institution.

> Part B is designed to be used by a working group involving a dean, or head of department, curriculum leaders, course or programme leaders, educational developers, along with lecturers who deliver the curriculum, and students. This working group can provide the necessary range of perspectives to address assessment issues at the faculty, school, college or department level.

A review of assessment policy and practice can therefore engage a range of colleagues with differing responsibilities that contribute to the total student learning experience. In applying the tool it is likely that in practice a working group is set up for each particular faculty or school, but this will depend on institutional and local need. It is also recommended that students are included to give as full a picture as possible of existing practice and to help triangulate the evidence. In the case of Part B above, it is noteworthy that the above roles are, of course, often mixed, with staff both leading programmes and teaching, for example.

Through the use of the tool, the review process is intended to recognise local autonomy and context, raise awareness, engage a wider constituency, and facilitate dialogue and development within and between different units across an institution. Developed actions from the review process can be used to inform teaching, learning and assessment strategy and to refine, revise or develop, as appropriate[13].

The review tool is devised for senior managers and working groups to capture and rate the extent of relevant evidence, enabling any necessary changes to be prioritised in the form of actions. In addition, the process can help to highlight effective practices for dissemination both internally and externally. In allocating a rating it is important that evidence is identified that justifies the assigned rating to ensure, as far as possible, an accurate picture.

---

13   Some institutions may have a separate assessment strategy, while others will integrate assessment issues within a teaching and learning strategy.

Clearly, the 'findings' of Part A and Part B, or the outcomes of the process in the form of evidence identified, ratings and actions should be 'brought together' to inform the development of institutional assessment strategy. How this process is undertaken and realised will depend on institutional context and priorities: the two parts of the review tool might be used concurrently by senior managers and working groups at the faculty, school or department level, or Part B might be used as a 'starting point', completed by different departments or faculties, providing 'evidence' for change, which can also drive changes at the level of the institution. It is recommended that quality teams are also involved in the review process, and contribute to discussion and associated developments, as they can provide valuable perspectives on existing policy and practice.

3.2 The scope of the tool

It is important to emphasise that the tool has been developed by 'recasting' the tenets of the Manifesto, so that higher education institutions can effectively take forward radical change in assessment strategy. It is recognised that there can be related institutional issues concerning inclusive assessment and academic integrity, which are beyond the particular focus of the Manifesto and associated review tool. To enhance institutional policy and practice in these areas, it is recommended that the following resources are consulted:

• Setting the agenda for Inclusive Assessment: an auditing tool is designed to enable the review of assessment strategies, so that inclusive practice can be developed[14];

• Policy Works provides good practice guidance for institutions to support academic integrity, and develop procedures to manage unacceptable academic practice in students (e.g. plagiarism, collusion, data fabrication)[15].

The HEA would like to hear from higher education institutions who have used the review tool, and to report on its value for their context and suggest improvements – visit http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assessment for more information.

14   Waterfield, J. and West, B. (2011) *Setting the agenda for Inclusive Assessment: an auditing tool*. PASS: Programme Assessment Strategies. Available from: http://www.pass.brad.ac.uk/wp5-tool.pdf [25 September 2012].

15   Morris, E. with Carroll, J. (2011) *Policy works: recommendations for reviewing policy to manage unacceptable academic practice in higher education*. The Higher Education Academy JISC Academic Integrity Service. Available from: http://www.heacademy. ac.uk/resources/detail/academicintegrity/policy_works [25 September 2012].

Part A: Addresses strategic institutional issues in assessment and feedback

This part can be used by senior managers to address strategic institutional issues for radical changes across an institution.

In focusing on each stimulus question below:

- Rate the extent of evidence, in which 1 = none or very little, 2 = some but insufficient, 3 = just adequate, 4 = considerable but still some gaps, 5 = full and comprehensive.

- What evidence is there to support your rating? Consider and provide evidence of existing policy or practice.

- What further evidence is needed? Develop appropriate actions (e.g. in relation to enhancements) based on the ratings indicated (i.e. lower ratings of 1, 2 or 3 entailing particular consideration of necessary actions).

Tenet 1: Assessment for learning
To what extent do your institutional quality and management processes...

A1.1
Give appropriate priority to testing the standards, design and validity of assessment?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

A1.2
Ensure an appropriate balance between summative and formative assessment?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

A1.3
View assessment and feedback across programmes in relation to the student learning experience?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

A1.4
Promote the engagement of students in the assessment process to ensure their understanding of the role of assessment in learning?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

Tenet 2: Ensuring assessment is fit for purpose
To what extent do your institutional quality and management processes...

A2.1
Emphasise assessment for learning over systems focused on marks, grades and reliability?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

A2.2
Focus on the valid assessment of intended learning outcomes?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

A2.3				
Give priority to programme learning outcomes?				
1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

Tenet 3: Recognise that assessment lacks precision
To what extent do your institutional quality and management processes...

A3.1
Emphasise supplementary support (e.g. exemplars) to communicate assessment standards beyond the use of explicit assessment criteria, levels descriptors, etc.?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

A3.2
Recognise that it is not always possible to specify or assess important consequences of education?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

A3.3 Recognise the role of professional judgement in assessment alongside explicit standards?				
1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

Tenet 4: Constructing standards in communities
To what extent do your institutional quality and management processes...

A4.1
Foster collaboration and the development of a common understanding of professional and academic standards?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

A4.2
Support an infrastructure that recognises the importance of the creation and maintenance of disciplinary communities?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

A4.3 Facilitate dialogue between staff and students within those disciplinary communities?				
1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

Tenet 5: Integrating assessment literacy into course design
To what extent do your institutional quality and management processes...

A5.1
Require the progressive development of students' assessment literacy in meeting assessment standards enabling them to apply and reflect on these standards?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

A5.2
Ensure that programmes integrate support and opportunities for students to practise monitoring and supervising their own learning?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

Tenet 6: Ensuring professional judgements are reliable
To what extent do your institutional quality and management processes...

A6.1
Support colleagues in shaping their professional judgements in collaboration with their disciplinary and professional communities?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

A6.2
Foster a culture in which potential bias is recognised and addressed to safeguard the reliability of professional judgements?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

A6.3
Promote a culture that encourages colleagues to substantiate their professional judgements collaboratively through open and honest discussions?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

Part B: Addresses issues in assessment and feedback at the faculty, school, college or department level

This part can be used by a working group involving a dean, or head of department, curriculum leaders, course or programme leaders, educational developers, lecturers and students.

In focusing on each stimulus question below:

- Rate the extent of evidence, in which 1 = none or very little, 2 = some but insufficient, 3 = just adequate, 4 = considerable but still some gaps, 5 = full and comprehensive.

- What evidence is there to support your rating? Consider and provide evidence of existing policy or practice.

- What further evidence is needed? Develop appropriate actions (e.g. in relation to enhancements) based on the ratings indicated (i.e. lower ratings of 1, 2 or 3 entailing particular consideration of necessary actions).

Tenet 1: Assessment for learning
To what extent...

B1.1
Are you confident that assessment tasks demand high standards of learning?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

B1.2
Is assessment for learning given emphasis in relation to assessment of learning?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

B1.3
Do you ensure an appropriate balance between summative and formative assessment at the programme level?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

B1.4
Is assessment and feedback planned within and across programmes to ensure appropriate student preparation and practice before summative assessment takes place?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

Tenet 2: Ensuring assessment is fit for purpose
To what extent...

B2.1
Is there an emphasis on assessment for learning over systems focused on marks, grades and reliability?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

B2.2
Does the assessment design process ensure valid assessment of the intended learning outcomes?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

| B2.3 | | | | |
Is the trade-off between reliability and validity of assessment debated?				
1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

| B2.4 | | | | |
Are assessment decisions in relation to design, development and variety made within a programme context and focused on programme learning outcomes?				
1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

Tenet 3: Recognise that assessment lacks precision
To what extent...

B3.1
Is there acknowledgement of the limitations of explicit assessment standards?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

B3.2
Is there an exploration of the impact of explicit assessment criteria on assessment practice and the work of students?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

B3.3
Is there recognition that it is not always possible to specify or assess important consequences of education?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

B3.4
Is it acceptable for the role of professional judgement to be part of the assessment process, alongside the use of explicit criteria?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

Tenet 4: Constructing standards in communities
To what extent...

B4.1
Are there opportunities to engage in dialogue about standards among staff?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

B4.2
Are there opportunities to engage in dialogue about standards between staff and students?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

B4.3				
Are students encouraged to participate in disciplinary communities?				
1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

B4.4				
Do local disciplinary communities play a role in facilitating collaboration about assessment standards?				
1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

Tenet 5: Integrating assessment literacy into course design
To what extent...

B5.1
Is there a recognition of the benefits of assessment-literate students?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

B5.2
Is there an emphasis on building students' assessment literacy through a learning process in which they internalise, apply and reflect on assessment standards?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

B5.3 Are students supported to practise monitoring and supervising their own learning?				
1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

Tenet 6: Ensuring professional judgements are reliable
To what extent...

B6.1
Are opportunities taken to share the rationale for assessment judgements among colleagues to give confidence in such judgements?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

B6.2
Are there support mechanisms, such as mentoring to help staff build confidence in the formation and reliability of their assessment judgements?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

B6.3
Are professional judgements made within the wider context of disciplinary and professional communities?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

B6.4
Is the potential for bias in professional judgements acknowledged?

1 none or very little	2 some but insufficient	3 just adequate	4 considerable but still some gaps	5 full and comprehensive
Evidence				
Actions				

Section 4: An annotated selection of resources

4.1 Core texts in support of the tenets

Boud, D. and Falchikov, N. (2006) Aligning Assessment with long-term learning. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education.* 31 (4), 399-413.

This paper highlights the need for assessment reform to support graduates in their future lives. It is suggested that through changes in learning and assessment practices, students can become assessors within the context of participation in practice. It is this kind of highly contextualised learning that enables them to meet the challenges of lifelong learning. This links to the tenets relating to valid assessment (tenet 2), socially constructed standards (tenet 4) and assessment standards as an integral part of the programme (tenet 5).

Gibbs, G. and Simpson, C. (2004-5) Conditions under which assessment supports students' learning. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.* 1 (1), 3-29. Available from: http://www.open.ac.uk/fast/pdfs/Gibbs%20and%20Simpson%202004-05.pdf [25 September 2012].

This article focuses on the evaluation of assessment arrangements and the way they affect student learning out of class. It is assumed that assessment has an overwhelming influence on what, how and how much students study. The article proposes a set of "conditions under which assessment supports learning" and justifies these with reference to theory, empirical evidence and practical experience. These conditions are offered as a framework for teachers to review the effectiveness of their own assessment practice.

Strong correlation can be seen to the themes of assessment for learning (tenet 1), valid assessment (tenet 2), dialogue about standards between staff and students, including feedback processes (tenet 4), and active engagement through integrating assessment literacy into course design (tenet 5).

James, M. (2006) Assessment, teaching and theories of learning. In: Gardner, J. (ed.) *Assessment and Learning*. London: Sage, pp. 45-60.

James, M. (2012) Assessment in harmony with our understanding of learning: problems and possibilities. In: Gardner, J. (ed.) *Assessment and Learning*. 2nd ed. London: Sage, pp. 187-205.

The chapter in the first edition examines the implications for assessment practice of three clusters of learning theories: behaviourist, cognitive and constructivist, and sociocultural. However, it is suggested that sociocultural theories have not yet led to well-worked-out forms of assessment. Key elements of a sociocultural approach to assessment are: collaboration, authentic tasks, holistic assessments and self-assessment (tenet 3 and tenet 5).

The second edition chapter offers a revised focus and outlines the problems and possibilities of developing assessment practice congruent with sociocultural learning theory. Although there is potential for development of assessment based on sociocultural perspectives, which would have greater validity, reliability of assessment results remains an issue (tenet 2).

Joughin, G. (2010) The hidden curriculum revisited: a critical review of research into the influence of summative assessment on learning. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. 35 (3), 335-345.

The author critiques three classic studies frequently cited in support of the view that assessment has a strong influence on students' learning, often at the detriment of learning for learning's sake. Given the limitations of the research projects, it is questioned whether the outcomes provide enough evidence for the claims that have supported research on the relationship between assessment and learning. Joughin calls for a new research agenda that would include a more evidence-based approach to research on alternative assessment designs and their relationship to learning. This text is a good introduction to further development of the argument for assessment for learning (tenet 1).

Knight, P. (2002) Summative Assessment in Higher Education: Practices in disarray. *Studies in Higher Education*. 27 (3), 275-286. Available from: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075070220000662 [25 September 2012].

The article begins with a view of learning and of what its assessment entails, arguing that it is helpful to distinguish between assessment systems primarily intended to provide feedout and those intended to provide feedback. Attention is then concentrated on summative, feedout, or high stakes assessment, which is supposed to be highly reliable. A number of difficulties with current practices are identified, leading to the claim that high stakes assessment in first degrees is in such disarray that it is difficult to know what grades or classifications mean, and it is risky to treat them as reliable. This links with the tenets relating to professional judgement and sharing standards (tenet 6) and actively engaging in dialogue about them (tenet 4), while also acknowledging the issue of the extent to which standards can be articulated (tenet 3).

Knight, P. (2006) The local practices of assessment. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education.* 31 (4), 435-452.

It is argued that assessment discourses are essentially local discourses. The case is developed by distinguishing between three forms of assessment: background assessment, warranting achievement, and learning-oriented assessment. It is argued that the different forms of assessment support different degrees of confidence in locally constructed judgements of achievement (tenet 4 and tenet 6).

McDowell, L., Sambell, K. and Davison, G. (2009) Assessment for learning: a brief history and review of terminology. In: Rust C. (ed.) *Improving student learning through the curriculum.* Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, pp. 56-64.

'Assessment for learning' was promoted in the UK by the Assessment Reform Group; however, a member of the group, Paul Black, has called the term ''a free brand name to attach to any practice''. In a review of the terminology, it is proposed that an integrated model of assessment for learning includes a feedback-rich environment, active participation by students, development of student autonomy, a reduction in the dominance of summative assessment, and the use of authentic and complex methods of learning and assessment (tenet 1).

Nicol, D. and MacFarlane-Dick, D. (2006) Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: a model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in Higher Education.* 31 (2), 199-218.

The research on formative assessment and feedback processes is reinterpreted to show how these processes can help students to take control of their own learning (i.e. become self-regulated learners). This reformulation is used to identify seven principles of good feedback practice that support self-regulation. The shift in focus, whereby students are seen as having a proactive rather than a reactive role in generating and using feedback, has profound implications for the way in which teachers organise assessments and support learning.

The seven principles are consistent with assessment for learning approaches (tenet 1), facilitation of teacher and peer dialogues (tenet 4) and development of self-assessment skills (tenet 5).

Orr, S. (2010) 'We kind of try to merge our own experience with the objectivity of the criteria': The role of connoisseurship and tacit practice in undergraduate fine art assessment. *Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education,* 9 (1), 5-19.

This article, which reports on fine art lecturers' assessment practices, explores the challenges associated with the assessment of creative practice. Creative disciplines are premised on the assumption that students will produce work that is creative and to some extent, unanticipated. As a result, there is a degree of indeterminacy in the learning outcomes (tenet 3). There are two key areas explored in this article. Firstly, the paper builds a case for researching and understanding assessment practices within the disciplines. Secondly, drawing on Wenger's research, it offers a rendering of the ways that creative practice lecturers work in, and rely on, communities of practice to secure assessment standards (tenet 4). By applying the tenets' principles to the disciplinary context of fine art, this article offers a template for articulating assessment rigour in creative disciplines (tenet 6).

O'Donovan, B., Price, M. and Rust, C. (2008) Developing student understanding of assessment standards: a nested hierarchy of approaches. *Teaching in Higher Education.* 13 (2), 205-217.

This article reviews approaches to sharing standards in assessments and highlights the limitations of making standards explicit for coming to an understanding of them. A 'community of practice' approach to defining and sharing standards is offered as the way forward. The authors propose three practical ways in which such a community approach within the assessment environment may be prompted and enhanced, which is through the use of a social learning space, social learning and collaborative assessment practices within curricula, and developing student 'pedagogical intelligence'.

This links with constructing standards through processes of assessment and feedback (tenet 4) and active engagement with standards (tenet 5).

Price, M., Rust, C., O'Donovan, B., Handley, K., with Bryant, R. (2012) *Assessment Literacy: The Foundation for Improving Student Learning.* Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange (ASKe), Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford Brookes University.

This book examines the role of assessment literacy in improving learning. Its emphasis on how to develop students' assessment literacy aligns with the holistic change proposed in A Marked Improvement and it provides arguments that support all the tenets. The book views assessment literacy as a gateway for students (and staff) leading to greater learning through assessment. A key element of assessment literacy is understanding the purposes, nature and standards of assessment, which are developed through active involvement in assessment practices (tenet 1), active engagement with assessment standards (tenets 3, and 5) and involvement in dialogue about assessment (tenets 4 and 6). Approaches to developing assessment literacy at all stages of a programme are covered in the book.

Sadler, D.R. (1987) Specifying and promulgating achievement standards. *Oxford Review of Education*. 13 (2). Available from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1050133 [25 September 2012].

This paper picks apart the labels of criterion and standard, and puts forward the case for assessment that draws on professional judgement. The key themes of numerical cut-off, tacit knowledge, exemplars and verbal descriptors are discussed in detail. Matters of the fallibility of teachers' judgements, how judges 'know' standards and the unreliability of assessment due to personal differences, are just as relevant now as they were at the time of writing, and these relate strongly with the challenge of being able to specify assessment outcomes (tenet 3), engaging in dialogue over standards (tenet 4) and the dependence on professional judgement (tenet 6).

Sambell, K., McDowell, L. and Montgomery, C. (2012) *Assessment for Learning in Higher Education.* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

This book is a valuable resource for practice and policy in assessment and addresses all of the tenets. In particular, it draws on the experience of the Assessment for Learning (AfL) CETL, supporting the shift in emphasis from assessment of learning to assessment for learning (tenet 1) and the rebalancing of formative and summative assessment. Examples illustrate ways in which assessment can be valid, authentic and fit for purpose (tenet 2) and actively engage students, so that they develop assessment literacy (tenet 5). In each chapter, the book supports putting assessment for learning into practice through the presentation of a rich array of examples, from a wide range of disciplines, that are readily transferable. These draw on extensive practice and research, and they foreground student voices. Key theoretical perspectives and debates are identified and discussed. Readers are prompted to interrogate their own practice using key critical questions.

Shay, S. (2005) The assessment of complex tasks: a double reading. *Studies in Higher Education*. 30 (6), 663-679.

This article considers assessment as a socially situated interpretive act and focuses on processes of judgement in marking, drawing on Bourdieu's theory of social practice. There is a comprehensive description of a practical example of a 'double reading' process where assessment of a student performance is seen as both objectively (relating to structures and values of the wider society) and subjectively grounded. The role of an academic community of practice in judgements on student performance is discussed. This theme strongly links with both the extent to which standards can be articulated (tenet 3) and sharing professional judgements (tenet 6).

4.2 Resources for leaders and senior managers

Boud, D. and associates (2010) *Assessment 2020: Seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education.* Australian Learning and Teaching Council. Available from: http://www.iml.uts.edu.au/assessment-futures/ [25 September 2012].

These propositions from Australia contain similar ideas as those expressed in the *Manifesto.* The development of these propositions was undertaken in consultation with academics and leaders of the vast majority of Australia's higher education institutions, and the resource includes examples of practical initiatives and case studies.

Brown, S. (2011) Bringing about positive change in higher education: a case study. *Quality Assurance in Education.* 19 (3), 195-207.

This article discusses some of the key levers university managers can use to bring about change in teaching, learning and assessment practices, with reference to changes in a particular institution. Using a range of interventions, this article describes how a concerted effort was made to improve classroom teaching, assessment and feedback, and the ways in which actions taken in response to student feedback were reported back to students.

Campbell, S. (2008) *Assessment Reform as a Stimulus for Quality Improvement in University Learning and Teaching: An Australian Case Study.* Paper presented at the OECD IMHE 2008 General Conference, Paris, France, 8-10 September. Available from: http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/60/9/41203854.pdf [25 September 2012].

Improving assessment quality and practice is a particular challenge for higher education leaders. Internationally, assessment practice is seen as in need of improvement; at the same time there is a preoccupation with league tables and standards. This article describes an assessment reform process at the University of Western Sydney. This year-long process entailed the simultaneous development of a new assessment policy, an assessment guide, and communities of practice around assessment. The reform process had effects beyond pedagogy and impinged on management processes, curriculum renewal, attitudes to student centredness, higher education scholarship, governance arrangements, professional development, and industrial relations. In summary, it is argued that student assessment reform is a strong lever for quality improvement in learning and teaching, and beyond, and that it poses challenges for higher education leaders in a broad range of management domains. These themes provide a strong association with the tenets of valid assessment (tenet 2), 'standards sharing' (tenets 3 and 6) and the processes of assessment and feedback (tenet 4).

Gibbs, G. (2005) *Being strategic about improving teaching and learning.* Keynote paper delivered at the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) 2005 Conference, Sydney. Available from: http://conference.herdsa.org.au/2005/knote_gibbs.pdf [25 September 2012].

This paper provides an excellent overview of the numerous challenges faced by universities, sympathising with the difficulties of institutional change and the time change takes to become embedded. While the focus is on research-intensive institutions, the references to methods of change and practical considerations in teaching, learning and assessment make this a valuable resource for decision-makers and a useful starting point for the debate on standards (tenet 1). Additionally, some of the approaches provide useful discussion points in considering how to implement strategic change in assessment practices.

Price, M., Carroll, J., O'Donovan, B. and Rust, C. (2011) 'If I was *going* there I wouldn't start from here': a critical commentary on current assessment practice. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education.* 36 (4), 479-492.

This paper was initially prepared to foreground an internal document providing diagnosis and recommendations for change to assessment strategy and policy in a post-1992 university. It draws on a wide body of literature and research studies to distil and discuss key issues that should inform assessment decisions. These key issues provide a framework to examine assessment policy and practice, and enable the alignment of assessment policy with the beliefs and values of an institution.

Sadler, D.R. (2005) Interpretations of criteria-based assessment and grading in higher education. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education.* 30 (2). Available from: http://sus.slu.se/kurser/betygskurs/criteriabased_assessment_sadler.pdf [25 September 2012].

The increasing use of criteria-based approaches to assessment and grading in higher education is a consequence of its sound theoretical rationale and its educational effectiveness. This article is based on a review of the most common grading policies that purport to be criteria-based. The analysis shows that there is no common understanding of what criteria-based means or what it implies for practice. This has inhibited high quality discourse, research and development among scholars and practitioners. Additionally, the concepts of 'criteria' and 'standards' are often confused and, despite the use of criteria, the fundamental judgements teachers make about the quality of student work remain subjective and substantially hidden from students' view.

This is a useful paper to improve understanding of the notions of criterion-based assessment and standards, which link to the tenets of 'standards sharing' and reliable professional judgements (tenet 4 and tenet 6).

4.3 Resources for educational developers and practitioners

ASKe 1, 2, 3 leaflets are practical guides on the assessment themes of the Manifesto. Available from: http://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/resources/index.html.

Examples of how each tenet of the Manifesto is being implemented through a variety of projects and initiatives are available from: http://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/Manifesto/TheAssessmentManifesto.html.

The Centre for Excellence in Assessment for Learning, set up in 2005 at Northumbria University, carried out pedagogic research into areas of assessment, developing an evidence base and good practice resources, which are available from: http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/cetl_Afl.

Bloxham, S. and Boyd, P. (2007) *Developing Effective Assessment in Higher Education: a practical guide*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill, Open University Press. Available from: http://www.mcgraw-hill.co.uk/openup/chapters/9780335221073.pdf [25 September 2012].

This publication reviews the reasons for change in the current higher education context, including a review of the conflicting purposes of assessment. It then discusses the practicalities and challenges of placing assessment practices at the centre of teaching and learning strategies. It examines how the various roles of the student, teacher, marker and moderator are affected, with clear signposting to the need to develop a holistic and coherent assessment strategy. As this book is comprehensive, all tenets can be seen as linked to the discussion.

Brown, S. and Knight, P. (1994) *Assessing learners in higher education*. London: Kogan Page.

This early contribution to the assessment debate includes one of the first references to 'assessment for learning' in the higher education environment. It outlines a wide variety of assessment methods 'on the page' and 'off the page' that are still useful to curriculum designers today, arguing that the selection of methods and approaches for assessment should align closely with purpose, timing, agency and context.

Carless, D. (2007) Learning-oriented assessment: conceptual bases and practical implications. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International. 44 (1), 57-66.*

This paper reviews the idea of learning-oriented assessment, which aims to stimulate good learning, develop autonomy and self-direction, and provide effective and timely feedback. An example of a module that provided a good balance between formative and summative assessment is described. Summative assessment is based on two coursework tasks in the middle and end of the module. Formative assessment is built around this by feedback given in tutorials two weeks before the first assignment is due. Written feedback is returned promptly after submission, alongside class time for a tutor-led discussion of issues for students to consider in their second assignments. Students are required to participate in activities to develop their understanding of assessment criteria and self-evaluate the work they hand in.

Ecclestone, K. (2000) Assessment and critical autonomy in post-compulsory education in the UK. *Journal of Education and Work.* 13 (2), 141-162.

This paper problematises the concept of autonomy and provides a theoretical base for considering autonomy and its relationships to motivation and assessment. Three versions of autonomy are identified and it is proposed that they are all required for effective learning. Procedural autonomy is about student self-management within a structured learning and assessment context. Personal autonomy is evident when students are able to act as reflective learners, undertaking self-regulation and self-direction within a supportive learning environment. Finally, critical autonomy focuses on a critical approach to subject matter and established knowledge. It is argued that the development of autonomy requires structured assessment for learning with embedded formative and diagnostic assessment.

JISC: historically, the acronym stood for 'Joint Information Systems Committee' but JISC's role has evolved beyond that of an 'information systems committee'. It continues to champion the use of digital technology in research, teaching and learning (http://www.jisc.ac.uk/).

The JISC Assessment and Feedback programme, which runs until August 2014, "is focused on supporting large-scale changes in assessment and feedback practice, supported by technology, with the aim of enhancing the learning and teaching process and delivering efficiencies and quality improvements". Further information on this programme is available from: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/assessmentandfeedback.aspx, including summaries and proposals of funded projects.

The JISC publication, *Effective Assessment in a Digital Age: A guide to technology-enhanced assessment and feedback* (2010) provides a range of case studies, along with supporting online resources, and is available from: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/elearning/digiassass_eada.pdf [25 September 2012].

Knight, P.T. and Yorke, M. (2003) Authenticity in assessment. In: *Assessment, Learning and Employability*. Maidenhead: SRHE and Open University Press, pp. 97-107.

In this chapter, authenticity in assessment is viewed as a way of promoting and valuing genuine learning, specifically in relation to employability. Summative assessment of authentic activity, such as learning on work placements often proves problematic. Issues of validity and reliability are significant. The concept of 'ecological validity' is used to evaluate authentic assessment. Portfolios are used as an example of authentic assessment as they enable students to make claims to achievement in different ways, with different types of evidence. Care must be taken to safeguard the authenticity of portfolios for assessment as a student may be rewarded for their good skills in 'presenting text' rather than a genuinely good performance of the desired skills in the programme.

Rust, C., Price, M. and O'Donovan, B. (2003) Improving students' learning by developing their understanding of assessment criteria and processes. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education.* 28 (2). Available from: http://oxfordbrookes.academia.edu/ChrisRust/Papers [25 September 2012].

This paper reports on the findings of a two-year research project, which had as a focus, the development of students' understanding of assessment criteria and the assessment process through a structured intervention. This intervention involved both tacit and explicit knowledge transfer methods. The conclusions drawn from the evidence are that student learning can be improved significantly through such an intervention, with possible lasting and transferable outcomes.

Sambell, K., McDowell, L. and Brown, S. (1997) 'But is it fair?' An exploratory study of student perceptions of the consequential validity of assessment. *Studies in Educational Evaluation.* 23(4), 349-371.

This research is an in-depth study in a range of subjects of traditional and more innovative assessment methods. It looks broadly at the impact of assessment practices on students' perceptions of learning and on their learning behaviour, termed 'consequential validity'. Key findings were that students felt that many traditional forms of assessment had a negative impact on learning, were artificial or meaningless, and inaccurate measures of learning, and therefore 'unfair'.

Van den Berg, I., Admiraal, W. and Pilot, A. (2006) Peer assessment in university teaching: evaluating seven course designs. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education.* 31 (1), 19-36.

Peer assessment is understood to be an arrangement with students where they assess the quality of their fellow students' writings and give feedback to each other. This article discusses the use of peer assessment at the course level and reviews seven case studies. The aim is to agree an optimal design after a consideration of the range of factors involved, including quality of activities, interaction between students in oral peer feedback, learning outcomes and evaluation of peer assessment. This article may be of assistance to explore the type of peer assessment most suited to a particular faculty or programme, and links with 'standards sharing' and the processes of assessment and feedback (tenet 4).

Contact us

The Higher Education Academy
Innovation Way
York Science Park
Heslington
York
YO10 5BR

+44 (0)1904 717500
enquiries@heacademy.ac.uk

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) is a national body for learning and teaching in higher education. We work with universities and other higher education providers to help bring about change in learning and teaching. We do this to improve the experience that students have while they are studying, and to support and develop those who teach them.

Our activities focus on rewarding and recognising excellence in teaching, bringing together people and resources to research and share best practice, and by helping to influence, shape and implement policy - locally, nationally, and internationally.

www.heacademy.ac.uk | Twitter @HEAcademy

To request copies of this report in large print or in a different format, please contact the communications office at the Higher Education Academy: 01904 717500 or pressoffice@heacademy.ac.uk