Planning and designing assessments

Inclusive assessment

Competencies are taught in practice and assessed in application. Assessment must be inclusive.

Inclusive assessment, marking and feedback ensures every student can achieve to the best of their ability irrespective of their background or individual characteristics. Inclusive assessment design facilitates student learning and assessment of specific learning outcomes/competencies of the module/programme, irrespective of the students' background or characteristics and is integral to our anticipatory duty to break down barriers to learning for students with protected characteristics. It aims to design ways of assessing students that are transparent in purpose, clear in delivery and allow parity of opportunity and experience. It anticipates where barriers to participation may exist and puts measures in place to address these.

Why is it important to introduce inclusive assessment?

Inclusive assessment allows more students to engage on equal terms with an assessment, provides a clear link between how students are assessed and taught, reduces the number of deferred assessments and mitigates the risk of students withdrawing. Inclusive assessment does not allow students to avoid types of assessment - it ensures students are fully supported before undertaking them.

Inclusive assessment, marking and feedback reduces the need to make reasonable adjustments to assignments / student feedback on a case by case basis and institutes our commitment to decolonising curricula. It supports students in developing their own, authentic academic voice, a voice that can communicate complex ideas with rigour and integrity – that celebrates, rather than obscures their particular background or characteristics.

[The University's Inclusive Assessment, Marking and Feedback Policy](#)

[Summative Assessment and Technical Proficiency in Writing in English guidance](#)

The Library Skills Team have produced a number of LibGuides for students on writing and assessment which can be found at this link: **https://libguides.hull.ac.uk/SkillsGuides**

For assessment to be effective for all involved, it should be **meaningful, equitable and manageable**. The following steps ensure academic standards, inclusion and student success work coherently together.

Meaningful

Congruent with the aims and competencies of the module and programme and supporting the achievement of these.

- Assessment should be constructed to align to the learning outcomes or competencies set out in the module of study, the programme and subject level benchmarks. It should enable students to demonstrate that they have met the aims and competencies through successful completion of the assessment task.

Aligned to subject-level benchmarks and/or PSRB requirements

- This ensures students grow the necessary expertise defined by their discipline or profession and can meet their graduate future with confidence.
- Module learning outcomes/competencies should reflect the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) subject benchmarks or stipulated professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRB) guidance.
- Some disciplines need technical proficiency in written English, as such it is included within subject bench marks or stipulated by a PSRB. In which case it will be a learning outcome/competence of the module/programme.
- However, students for whom English is a second or non-native language, with a disability or long-term health condition (such as a specific learning difference or neurological disorder) may be put at a disadvantage if technical proficiency in written English (punctuation, spelling, grammar, presentation) is assessed. Therefore, technical proficiency in written English **should only** be a learning outcome/competence of the module/programme if it is a subject benchmark or stipulated by a PSRB (see the [Summative Assessment and Technical Proficiency in Writing in English guidance](#))

Deepening disciplinary knowledge and developing skills in autonomous learning.

- As you plan and deliver your taught sessions, consider how they help students to acquire, build up and reflect on the knowledge, understanding and skills they will need to apply to the given assessment task. This could be through tasks and activities that provide opportunities to give [formative feedback](#).

Equitable

The reward is proportional to both the effort put in and the skills demonstrated, whether for individual or group assessment.

Assessment should allow students to demonstrate they have achieved the learning outcomes / competencies

- Assessment *for* learning is designed to support students exercising and evaluating how far they reach the module learning outcomes/competencies, assessment *of* learning determines how far a student has achieved module learning outcomes/competencies.
- Make explicit the module/programme learning outcomes/competencies to be assessed in assignment briefs. Make the assignment available to students in the module/programme handbook, VLE and feedback pro forma.
- Prepare students for assessment at the beginning of each module so students understand: assessment is *for* and *of* their learning; the criteria and marking rubrics used to assess and provide feedback on their work; the purpose, weighting and timing of assessment.

- Where technical proficiency in written English can be justified as a learning outcome/competence it **should not** be assessed under examination conditions **unless clearly stipulated for in subject benchmarks or by the PSRB**
- Correct spelling of technical terms may be justified in learning outcomes/competences for some modules e.g. where it is vital to spell technical terms correctly as defined by subject benchmarks and/or PSRB. Where this is highly relevant this may be assessed under exam conditions.

Assessment is designed so that it doesn't marginalise or exclude certain students and cohorts for whom certain assessment practices are unfamiliar or inaccessible.

- Using a penalty system can disadvantage some students, most usually those with protected characteristics, who may be penalised several times for multiple issues with their assessed work. These issues may often have a single causal link. In working to our values to be inclusive and empowering, this calls for a transparent and developmental approach to assuring assessment for and of learning.
- For example, the guidance on **overlength assessments** in the Assessment Procedures Code of Practice was updated in 2020 to ensure that students are not unfairly penalised when their assignments are overlength. When designing assessments where a learning outcome/competence includes adhering to a word count, the assignment brief must make clear the distinction between a guide (write/present up to x words/minutes; write/present between x and y words/minutes) and a precise expectation (write/present x words/minutes). This then means that the penalty system is replaced through the use of effective assessment design.

Manageable

The completion and marking of the assessment should be achievable for both staff and students in a timely manner.

- Attention should be given not just to the assessment task but also the quantity and timing of assessment so that students aren't overburdened. This is where a programme focussed approach to assessment design is key.

Achievable in a way which causes minimal stress for all involved.

- Student feedback often shows a feeling of overwhelm at key assessment periods which can impact negatively on their mental health and on retention and attainment. It can also be stressful for assessors to attempt to mark and release feedback on 200 assignments in a short time frame.

Assessing Competence Based Programmes and Modules

Competencies are the culmination of the knowledge, understanding and skills of a specific discipline that enable a student to successfully address a given practice or task: they are complex and practice based. As such competencies must be assessed in a different way to learning outcomes: **they must be taught in practice and assessed in application**.

This is in keeping with the QAA guidance on assessment, which advises the constructive alignment of module content to assessment (QAA, 2018, p 4). The assessment of competence should involve

authentic activities that require students to apply their knowledge and understanding and skills through 'real-world' activities in the context of their disciplinary area. To that end pedagogic strategies such as research and/or problem-based, or experiential learning and learning through role play or simulation are particularly useful.

Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities are a requirement of the Equality Act 2010. Reasonable adjustments are made to a provision, or practice; physical features; and auxiliary aids. In some circumstances a student may need reasonable adjustments made for a short-term condition.

The University makes mainstream and individual reasonable adjustments. Mainstream reasonable adjustments are those more readily incorporated into inclusive curriculum design that benefit all students. Individual reasonable adjustments are discrete individualised interventions required to overcome disadvantage associated with a student's disability and need. We aim for assessment practices to be inclusive, so the need for discrete interventions are the exception.

Where can I find further advice and guidance about reasonable adjustments?
Advice on reasonable adjustments, including guidance for specific cases is available from the Student Services Directorate (https://www.hull.ac.uk/choose-hull/student-life/student-support or contact-studentservices@hull.ac.uk)

Collaborative Provision: All partner institutions must have in place comparable arrangements to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made.

Reflect

Look at a piece of assessment from a module on which you teach (or all the assessment across a programme) and determine its alignment to:
- The programme learning outcomes or competencies
- The University of Hull Graduate Attributes
- Any professional accreditation requirements

When choosing an assessment task and type, consider the following:
- Is this task a good use of time? Is it creating an unnecessary burden? (for staff and students)
- Who benefits from this task? Do any of the requirements create or perpetuate barriers for students with specific learning difficulties?
- Which purposes of assessment does this task address? (e.g. is it to support student learning, to judge the quality of student achievement, for accountability etc). Can you justify an assessment that only judges student achievement (e.g. does this come from a validating body?)
- How will programme/module competencies be applied and assessed? Are there other tasks that would achieve these better or more easily?
- How does this task connect to the module and programme- their aims and outcomes/competencies; other assessments on the programme?
- What do learners think this task is for? How and when will the assessment aims be communicated?

- Will students have had the opportunity to use these skills and abilities in the programme or module e.g. through formative assessment?

Further Reading

Boud, D. (2000) Sustainable Assessment: Rethinking assessment for the learning society, *Studies in Continuing Education*,22:2,151-167 https://doi.org/10.1080/713695728

Hanesworth, P., Bracken, S. & Elkington, S. (2018) A typology for a social justice approach to assessment: learning from universal designand culturally sustaining pedagogy, *Teaching in Higher Education* 24:1, pp98-114 https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2018.1465405

Mcarthur, J. (2016) Assessment for social justice: the role of assessment in achieving social justice *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 41:7 pp967-981 https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2015.1053429

Pugh, S (ed) (2019) *A compendium of assessment techniques in higher education: from students' perspective* https://teachingexcellence.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2018/10/PUGHcompendiumcomplete.pdf (a useful collection of different assessment tasks, explained and explored by students)

QAA (2021) A Launch Pad for Future Success: using outcomes based approaches to scaffold the pandemic year and build for the future. Brifeing note here: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/using-outcomes-based-approaches-to-scaffold-the-pandemic-year-and-build-for-the-future.pdf and access to full documents and case studies from here: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/news-events/news/a-launchpad-for-future-success-qaa-latest-resources-supporting-assessment-design

Ward, E. (2020) Rethinking assessment inclusive practice in HE https://www.hull.ac.uk/choose-hull/study-at-hull/teaching-academy/news/rethinking-assessment-inclusive-practice-in-higher-education

https://www.imperial.ac.uk/staff/educational-development/teaching-toolkit/inclusive-learning-and-teaching/making-assessment-and-feedback-inclusive/

7 steps to inclusive assessment: https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/2/2401/7_Steps_to_Inclusive_Assessment.pdf

Giving formative feedback prior to submitting summative tasks- a quick guide, Edinburgh Napier University