

Ideas on implementation of the University of Worcester Level 4 Assessment Principles

Assessment is fundamentally important to the student learning experience. We know it shapes student understanding of priorities in the curriculum and that assignments commonly provide some of the most memorable learning experiences at University. Assessment can also convey to students what we feel is important about learning and serve to shape their engagement with each other and the University community. In acknowledgement of this, University teaching fellows and learning and teaching co-ordinators came together in 2010, facilitated by the ADPU, to produce the following University principles, that assessment at level 4:

1. Is a key priority in the overall curriculum design process.
2. Is fundamentally concerned with assessment *for* learning.
3. Promotes provision of timely feedback that enhances learning.
4. Encourages dialogue and interaction with peers and tutors so that shared conceptions of the subject, criteria and standards are developed.
5. Prepares students for the methods and modes of assessment, as well as the technologies and ways of learning, at level five.
6. Provides students with some choice as to their mode of assessment, within an overall structure.
7. Enhances aspirational engagement and intrinsic motivation.

This guide provides some examples of practice which is being, or might be, developed at level 4 (first year undergraduate or HND) to further embed these principles.

Examples of possible level 4 assessment practice to address the principles

Assessment design at programme level

Principles 1 and 5 are clearly about the curriculum design process. They urge that assessment design is not left to be an 'add-on' to module design. Instead curriculum design at programme level needs to consider the learning, teaching and assessment diet holistically and how it articulates across the programme, both to enhance student engagement with learning throughout and to prepare students for assessment and learning at later stages of the programme.

Examples might include:

- i. Reviewing assessment at levels 5 & 6 and ensuring that students have the opportunity to practice each of the key types of assessment at level 4 and gain feedback on them.

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- ii. Building the programme so that key academic and study skills in the discipline are identified and their development systematically planned and built-in to assessment strategies across the range of modules at level 4.
- iii. Building the programme so that learning technologies and processes used at higher levels are introduced as part of the formative assessment process at level 4.
- iv. Planning the level 4 student experience to ensure students are inducted into a culture that has high expectations of active learning, 'time on task' and reflective development.

Including more formative assessment opportunities

Principle 2 asserts the importance of assessment *for* learning. Level 4 in particular lends itself to the extensive use of formative assessment, assessment which is integral to the learning process, aimed at encouraging 'time on task,' promoting conversation and dialogue about standards and expectations, and providing opportunity for supportive feedback. The development of more formative assessment addresses all the other assessment principles. The fact that it is formative means greater risks can be taken in developing exciting, experimental and engaging assessment approaches. Such assessment may be informal, and therefore a seamless part of the learning and teaching experience on the module, or formal and counted towards the module assessment load. Examples might include:

- i. Patchwork texts – staged assignments where the students complete and receive formative feedback upon a series of small formative tasks [the feedback on each piece could be from different sources – self, peer or tutor] which are then stitched together by a final commentary into an overall summative assignment.
- ii. Peer assessment - students have asked for greater opportunity to undertake marking exercises as a way to develop and discuss their understanding of assessment criteria and grade descriptors. Keeping this formative means it can provide quick feedback without being too 'high stakes.' It needs to be associated with the development of clear and specific grade descriptors.
- iii. Student designed assessment criteria – work with the students to develop their own set of assessment criteria within the framework provided by the university grade descriptors. This formative activity clearly helps develop understanding of the required standards.
- iv. Study diaries – where students are asked to keep a record of the study tasks they have been completing and to reflect on the learning process itself, developing skills of evaluation and critical analysis.
- v. Draft assignments – production of a draft assignment which is self assessed and also receives formative feedback from staff or peers. The final summative work to include a commentary on what was changed in the work as a result of the formative feedback. [Encourages engagement with the formative feedback]
- vi. Learning journals – keeping an ongoing record of their learning during the module, to be shared and discussed with others in the course of the module and presented alongside any final assignment. [Or extracts from the journal could be used in a summative commentary.]
- vii. Self assessments - can be applied to any assessment item to help the student develop their understanding of the assessment criteria and grade descriptors.
- viii. Portfolio assessment – where the student undertakes and receives feedback on a series of small tasks undertaken either within or outside formal sessions – such as lab reports, literature reviews, seminar summaries, study tasks, etc. but then selects their best examples of each type to submit for summative assessment at the end of the module.
- ix. Syndicate work – students work in groups to prepare a presentation, poster or learning materials on an aspect of the module for use by the wider student group. This helps develop friendship groups, promotes students recognition of each other as a key resource and prepares them for group working throughout the rest of the degree.
- x. Other ideas – quizzes, group competitions, on-line MCQs, debates, storytelling, diagnostic tests, learning styles and approaches to learning questionnaires, learning logs, skills profiles, self-evaluations, etc. etc.

Choice of assessment

Principle 6 urges that students be allowed some elements of choice in assessment mode or type within an overall structure. While working within a clear programme assessment strategy, this could be facilitated by:

- i. Offering the choice of assessment by course work or examination. Students complete work as they go along but have the opportunity at the end of the module to submit elements of this with a commentary or to undertake an exam. [Or they have the chance to recover failed course work by doing an exam – not necessarily an unseen exam.]
- ii. Choice from a range of assignment titles, types or modes of presentation.

- iii. Choice of what elements of work to submit for summative assessment – see portfolio above – so summative assessment is based on best of one of two or two out of three, etc. e.g. lab reports.
- iv. An element of negotiated assessment - the opportunity to negotiate elements of the design of an assignment that addresses the learning outcomes. The presentation of a plan for this might be a key formative assessment, helping to promote dialogue about standards and criteria.

Relevant resources and references

The University of Worcester principles for level 4 assessment were built on well-established, evidence-based principles of assessment and learning in Higher Education. Key sources and reference points for these ideas were:

1. The fe, fi, fo, fun model of first year assessment and feedback that promotes

- a. *Feelings*
 - i. Friendship
 - ii. Self-belief
- b. *Fit*
 - i. Teaching shaped by assessment
 - ii. Interaction & dialogue
 - iii. Valued diversity reflected through choice
- c. *Formative activity*
 - i. Reflection and building on feedback
 - ii. Lifelong learning skills
- d. *Fun*
 - i. Efficient marking
 - ii. Engaging and enjoyable
 - iii. Learning through experimentation

These ideas are embellished upon in the UW Guide for staff, 2010, [Designing first-year assessment and feedback](#)

2. The 7 principles of good undergraduate education

- 1. Encourages contacts between students and faculty [academic staff],
- 2. Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students,
- 3. Uses active learning techniques,
- 4. Gives prompt feedback,
- 5. Emphasizes time on task,
- 6. Communicates high expectations and
- 7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

Chickering and Gamson 1991

3. The 7 principles of good feedback practice:

- 1. helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards);
- 2. facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning;
- 3. delivers high quality information to students about their learning;
- 4. encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning;
- 5. encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem;
- 6. provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance;
- 7. provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching.

Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick 2006

4. The 10 Conditions under which assessment supports learning

- 1. Sufficient assessed tasks are provided for students to capture sufficient study time
- 2. These tasks are engaged with by students, orienting them to allocate appropriate amounts of time and effort to the most important aspects of the course.
- 3. Tackling the assessed task engages students in productive learning activity of an appropriate kind
- 4. Sufficient feedback is provided, both often enough and in enough detail
- 5. The feedback focuses on students' performance, on their learning and on actions under the students' control, rather than on the students themselves and on their characteristics
- 6. The feedback is timely in that it is received by students while it still matters to them and in time for them to pay attention to further learning or receive further assistance

References

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- Miller, C. & Parlett, M. (1974) *Up to the Mark: a study of the examination game*, Guildford: SRHE.
- 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
- Snyder, B. (1971) *The Hidden Curriculum*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Good practice guides for staff including designing first-year assessment and feedback, giving feedback on written assessments and helping students learn from feedback are at:

<http://www.worc.ac.uk/adpu/staffguides.htm>

This guide was written and collated Dr John Peters. Please email j.peters@worc.ac.uk for further information.

7. Feedback is appropriate to the purpose of the assignment and to its criteria for success
8. Feedback is appropriate, in relation to students' understanding of what they are supposed to be doing
9. Feedback is received and attended to
10. Feedback is acted upon by students
Gibbs & Simpson 2004 and [Gibbs TESTA lectures](#)

5. The Re-Engineering Assessment Practices [REAP] project principles

1. Help clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards).
To what extent do students in your course have opportunities to engage actively with goals, criteria and standards, before, during and after an assessment task?
2. Encourage 'time and effort' on challenging learning tasks.
To what extent do your assessment tasks encourage regular study in and out of class and deep rather than surface learning?
3. Deliver high quality feedback information that helps learners self-correct.
What kind of teacher feedback do you provide – in what ways does it help students self-assess and self-correct?
4. Provide opportunities to act on feedback (to close any gap between current and desired performance)
To what extent is feedback attended to and acted upon by students in your course, and if so, in what ways?
5. Ensure that summative assessment has a positive impact on learning?
To what extent are your summative and formative assessments aligned and support the development of valued qualities, skills and understanding.
6. Encourage interaction and dialogue around learning (peer and teacher-student).
What opportunities are there for feedback dialogue (peer and/or tutor-student) around assessment tasks in your course?
7. Facilitate the development of self-assessment and reflection in learning.
To what extent are there formal opportunities for reflection, self-assessment or peer assessment in your course?
8. Give choice in the topic, method, criteria, weighting or timing of assessments.
To what extent do students have choice in the topics, methods, criteria, weighting and/or timing of learning and assessment tasks in your course?
9. Involve students in decision-making about assessment policy and practice.
To what extent are your students in your course kept informed or engaged in consultations regarding assessment decisions?
10. Support the development of learning communities
To what extent do your assessments and feedback processes help support the development of learning communities?
11. Encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem.
To what extent do your assessments and feedback processes activate your students' motivation to learn and be successful?
12. Provide information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching
To what extent do your assessments and feedback processes inform and shape your teaching?

<http://www.reap.ac.uk/resourcesPrinciples.html>