DRIVING BETTER ASSESSMENT PRACTICE AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL: Infrastructure, Strategy and Professional Development.

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ASSESSMENT IS FIRMLY ON THE INSTITUTIONAL AGENDA

Assessment has been firmly on the agenda of university senior management for several years now thanks to the influence of student surveys and university league tables (Medland 2016; 83),
MULTIPLE AND SUSTAINED EFFORTS TO IMPROVE ASSESSMENT
WHAT THE LITERATURE RECOMMENDS

‘...It calls for assessment to be a central aspect of curriculum design and development that is integral to teaching and learning, rather than an afterthought. It advocates the coordination of assessment across programmes of study, with an emphasis on methods that encourage the students to develop as learners.’

(Medland 2016:91)
In groups, consider the 4 elements of assessment which is fit for purpose on the handout:

Assessment design - Students - Staff - Infrastructure

For each one, thinking about assessment in your institution:

- In which aspects have you made most progress?
- Which aspects should be highest priority?
- Which aspects are most resistant to change?
WHAT’S WRONG WITH ASSESSMENT?

• **Poor validity** in assessment methods – practices not kept pace with the outcomes we expect from a university education - remain dominated by unseen exams and essays;

• **Poor balance of formative and summative assessment** – restrictive use of formative assessment;

• **Growth in summative assessment**, with its negative backwash effect on student learning

• **Atomisation** of assessment to individual modules/ courses – not assessing programme outcomes,

• **Many parts of the assessment cycle are not informed by evidence**, e.g marking and moderation;
WHAT’S WRONG CONTINUED

• Unsustainable feedback practices;

• Students can remain confused about what is expected of them in assessment;

• Poor comparability and reliability in marking; standards are both fudged and challenged;

• Integrity of academic standards is at risk as web technologies and essay mills facilitate malpractice;

Is it surprising that we face:

• continuing poor student satisfaction levels for assessment and feedback?

• Increasing student complaints and appeals - many related to assessment (OIA 2012, OIA 2015c)?
- Does this catalogue of shortcomings in higher education assessment influence your views about priorities for change?

- Thinking of your own institution or department, make a short list of either existing or proposed aims for assessment enhancement.
Centrally imposed change

Active resistance, cynicism

Change leaders not understanding values, ideas and experiences of those who have to implement change

Response

Respect ‘autonomy, agency and knowledge’ of teaching staff (Jessop, in press)

Collaborative design and implementation of change

Avoid change by coercion
Focus on individuals to drive change

Work groups filter and adapt proposals; Outcomes unpredictable and not as intended

Individuals powerfully influenced by ‘workgroup’ (Trowler et al 2005)

Response

Site for change should be immediate workgroup

Focus on ‘everyday’ teaching and teachers
Institutional policy and quality assurance

Restricts or directs change

why

Implicit emphasis on summative assessment

Response

Closer working between academic development and quality assurance

Ensure regulations and quality procedures support change
Modular course structures

Teachers focus on single modules and have limited sense of whole programme; too much module choice to allow for programme planning.

Constrains an integrated approach to the students’ assessment experience.

**Response**

Focus change at the programme level, looking at assessment across modules.

Consider reducing student module choice.
Multiple interests of, and influences on, staff

Individuals have different priorities for 'good' assessment and for use of their time.

Why

Response

Change should be collaborative,

Take into account the views of the multiple constituencies involved

Role in HEI influences viewpoint and perspective;

Conflicting demands on individuals
Institutional assessment discourse

Limits dialogue about formative assessment; focus on summative assessment

why

Dominant techno-rational, measurement discourse shapes assessment 'artefacts'

Response

Align messages of course approval and other documentation with proposed changes

Consider language of assessment debate
Assessment literacy

Unwillingness to change; Practices stay traditional; Unsophisticated implementation, e.g., formative assessment

Teachers disagree about the purpose of assessment; do not see the benefits of change; not familiar with and lack nuanced understanding of assessment concepts

Response

• Develop assessment literacy of stakeholders – staff and students

• Bring together those involved in teaching and assessment to review evidence and identify and prioritise areas that need change

• Work inductively from agreed problems to development of assessment knowledge and beliefs

• Share successful change examples once interest raised
Pressured environment

Unwillingness to change; Move towards automated assessment

why

High workloads, staff lack time for change

Response

Workload neutral change as minimum
Risk

Change perceived as risky; staff anxious; pressure to retain ‘tidy’ assessment system and ‘tried and tested’ methods

High degree of penetration in HEIs, therefore institutional change involves high numbers of staff and students; difficulty balancing autonomy and consistency

Response

Make proposed areas of change appear less or un-risky to managers, staff and students

Consider carefully the risks that might attend any assessment innovation so they can be prepared for

Use saturation CPD where it really matters, e.g. to ensure fair and consistent assessment procedures.
Complexity of assessment

Simple assessment policies poorly implemented, easily rejected

Assessment is enormously complex; Requires experimentation and persistence (see list on next slide)
COMPLEXITY OF ASSESSMENT

• Valid, authentic assessment needs to reflect 21st century graduate outcomes;

• feedback is demanding concept: sustainability, dialogue, ownership, self-regulation, partnership – complicated to communicate or embed in programmes;

• Trustworthy judgement and grading is being revealed as complex and, potentially, unattainable;

• Involving students as assessors perceived as both vital to learning-oriented assessment and as risky, unfair and difficult to persuade student participation.
Complexity of assessment

Simple assessment policies poorly implemented, easily rejected

why

Assessment is enormously complex; Requires experimentation and persistence

Response

Institutional level initiative should avoid determining specific assessment changes - focus on the general direction: creating principles and tools

Develop assessment literacy - of staff and students –

Use a scholarly approach
Building a guiding framework for institutional transformation in assessment

Key principles
Infrastructure
Strategy
Assessment literacy
Key principles

- A scholarly approach
- Respect autonomy, agency, discipline knowledge
- Collaborative change, taking into account multiple constituencies
- Teams control assessment, evaluation data

A guiding framework for institutional transformation in assessment

Strategy

Assessment literacy

Infrastructure

Teams control assessment, evaluation data

A guiding framework for institutional transformation in assessment

Assessment literacy

- Consider alignment of change with other policies/aims
- Check funding methodology supports assessment change
- Align validation and other documents with change
- Make areas of change appear less risky

A scholarly approach

Teams control assessment, evaluation data

A guiding framework for institutional transformation in assessment

Collaborative change, taking into account multiple constituencies

Respect autonomy, agency, discipline knowledge

A scholarly approach

Teams control assessment, evaluation data

A guiding framework for institutional transformation in assessment

Collaborative change, taking into account multiple constituencies

Respect autonomy, agency, discipline knowledge

A scholarly approach
In pairs or groups:
- choose either strategy, Infrastructure or assessment literacy in the framework to work with.

- Can you turn these ‘meta’ level ideas into one or two practical actions that might be relevant to your institutional context.

- Be prepared to share your ideas for action.
BIBLIOGRAPHY AND TEXTS USED TO CREATE THIS WORKSHOP


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