

# Assessment Dilemmas

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At the PASS end-of-project event on 24/25 July 2012, participants were invited to submit their “assessment dilemma”. The questions were discussed in a “world café” style group session.

## How do we conduct peer assessment/review in online distance learning programmes where numbers are high and engagement variable?

- Posting on discussion board and must respond within a week.
- Is peer review a way to monitor student participation, or core to course?
- Who defines assessment criteria?
- Do you want them all reviewing everyone or perhaps put in smaller groups.
- Participation (attendance) counts – eg 10% for any response.
- Is peer assessment the best option in this context? Why do you want to do it? What is your aim/intended outcome? If it is not managed/monitored well, it will not be effective so be sure you can resource this appropriately.
- Tools include:
  - Skype/Elluminate
  - Wiki – with monitoring.
  - Web PA tool
  - Peenurse
  - E-portfolios
- See Zeller paper.
- See David Nicol’s work – PEER.
- Scaffold peer review activities increasing in complexity from yr 1 – 3.
- Make clear to students WHY.
- Design in to the assessment process to ensure engagement – marks for the feedback and how you’ve engaged.

## How is programme focused assessment managed? How many meetings? How much meeting/planning time?

- Build into established programme team meetings.
- Student involvement to provide feedback on programme integration.
- Lots to start with – probably!
- Look at University of Exeter PMS report.
- Make clear the objectives of the assessment.
- Talk as a team about the programme outcomes including LO.
- Do it in a day!

## How can we create space for failure and learning from failure in our assessment approaches?

- Regulatory frameworks – do they permit students to ‘fail’ a module and still progress.
- What does ‘failure’ mean? Fail the ‘task’ but not the module where reflection on failure is assessed component – where is the learning?

- Multiple opportunities for submission up to the point of success of driving test – plagiarism – students need to experiment to check what is OK but uni regs don't always permit.
- Create space to get it wrong in relation to plagiarism as a means of learning the rules.
- Opportunities for practice and rehearsal where space and time is provided for risk taking opportunities of variation and creativity in safe environment.
- Risk taking as a module outcome – space for risking things – assessment – must involve justifying taking risks.
- Less summative assessments, more formative tasks.
- Integrative assessment – joined up formative and summative social space for group interaction.
- Learning from failure is valuable.
- Space for practice.
- Reduce size – deeper, sharper.

### **How can we calculate/estimate word equivalency for non-standard assessment eg how long a presentation for a 3,000 word assignment?**

- Can't / don't / shouldn't.
- 3,000 word assignments not equivalent – false, misguided notion of consistency.
- ? consider student learning hours required.
- Learning outcomes – extreme alignment.
- Upper limit OK but what does it matter if they achieve the outcomes in less words/word equivalent/time?
- Perhaps something written in regs would be liberating with examples.

### **How can we innovate in an atmosphere of rigid QA processes?**

- Change the processes – tails wagging dogs etc
- Clarify what the processes REALLY are – are they so rigid, or is this a perception?
- Do we want to “innovate” or improve? What to enhance!
- Take a longer-term view re impact.
- Get students' ideas/involvement.
- Institutions questioning assumptions about modular structures and how these accommodate innovation.
- Staff – students – QA – Keeping everyone happy yet changing and innovating.
- Improving curriculum vs improving delivery.
- QA is a safety net, NOT a straight jacket – think about “Plan B”.

### **The role/issue of anonymous marking – how important is it?**

- Not important – red herring – not a solution to bias.
- Doesn't prevent bias in for eg BME - NTFS Coventry – Turnitin project - but can it reduce bias – research indicates ‘yes’ ?
- Are we separating student from work they produce?
- It can reduce subtle bias.
- Students perceive it helps reduce bias so why can't we do it for them?
- Price you pay for anonymous ‘feedback’.
- It is important to realise that having anonymous marking IS the ‘issue’ ...
  - Lack of dialogue;
  - Lack of transparency.

- Conversations of 'bias' suggest lack of professionalism of staff.

## Does integrative assessment in a less modular structure add any additional value to integrative learning in a module structure? What value is added?

- Value added (or not) depends on circumstances – other ways of meeting key goals for learning.
- Hard to understand what is meant by 'less modular structure'. Assumption that this refers to a programme with more core elements and limited choice.
- Could carry out a course 'audit' based on PASS Checklist (workshop slides) or TESTA to establish if any value would be added.
- Potentially less gain but still worthwhile?
- Could fail to connect learning across years – integrative assessment should mitigate against this.
- Synoptic assessment appears to be the way forward!
- Importance of programme team and developed view/or mindset, clear understanding of programme LOs.
- Programme focused instructions better than module focused – but this is still modular but the module is a smaller part of the bigger picture – emphasise the bigger picture.
- Couldn't really envisage 'less module' – module or not?
- Perhaps depends on students' experience. Integrated LTA – value added over integrated assessment only.
- M1,M2 – Capstone, Dissertation – end of year module.

## How can we develop staff to work in teams? How can we get academic staff out of a 'silo' mentality?

- How can we develop staff to work in teams?
- How can we get academic staff out of a 'silo' mentality?
- HEA project on reward and recognition of teams eg programme of year award? And possible team fellowships of teaching fellowships. Politics for commendations.
- Cross institutional and inter institutional projects can really help people work in teams.
- Promotion criteria in departments could privilege team working.
- PGCHE run cross-disciplinary ways IS important in setting up cross-disciplinary ways.
- We too often measure students' individually rather than team efforts so this impacts on staff.
- Brunel case studies rely on cross-disciplinary work.
- Are they really adopting 'silo' mentality?
- Various kinds of silo: module, course, subject, programme, HCI faculty notion (eg US/UK)
- We need to look at why they prefer to be in silos. Reasons include culture (research culture) in specific disciplines, comfort zone, control issues – walls, risk aversion, institutional policy and structures.
- When financial issues deter collaborative but as our careers progress individuals care less about the boundaries.
- What are limiting factors? An Assoc Dean cares about operational issues to improve student experience.
- Diversity in practice – silos glued together make for a programme de facto.
- External issues like NSS measure student experience encourage silo mentality.
- Leadership
  - Need to understand, see, reap the benefits.

- Set everything up as collaborative (long term strategy)
- Make it fun – more social engagement opportunities (cream cakes”)
- Emotional demands (Hochschild’s emotional labour) of working in a team.
- Create different spaces to encourage informal interaction.
- Have more informal meetings or splitting agenda so small groups can work on it in more detail.
- Encourage finance structures that create collaboration, not competition.
- Structures & Systems.
- Allow time
- Encourage networks.
- Create opportunities for cross-disciplines ie a PGCHE
- Programme team – module level silo
- Encourage staff to work on cross-discipline research to catalyse awareness and cross-discipline teaching.
- Communication: ensure mechanisms are in place to facilitate communication.
- Inspirational leadership.

### How can we achieve more formative assessment in larger cohorts without increasing workload (staff/student)?

- Use comment ‘banks’ (use similar comments for similar issues).
- Formative tasks not formative assessments – instant feedback in class possibly using technology eg clickers, phones and internet – e-portfolio where feedback from peers/tutor incorporated – interactive lectures – one to one peer assessment.
- Balance with less summative.
- Redirect students from non-productive activity to more worthwhile activity.
- Well created MCQs with automated feedback.
- Group peer assessment.
- Group feedback.
- Self evaluation – online self assessments.
- The whole point is to get students doing more!

### Is self/peer assessment the only way to achieve more formative assessment?

- Make much more assessment formative 75% - 100%
- What are the other ways?
  - Computer assisted assessment for personalised learning pathways 😊😞 (eg in industry or training).
  - Computers can bring assignments feedback etc together in environments that can be useful to students where technology supports this.
  - Feed forward as well as feedback.
  - Make feedback concise and targeted (tear off sheet attached to next assignment? Bath Spa, Plymouth)
  - Reengineer curriculum to give more time on feedback and less on curriculum delivery – use computers to deliver content.
  - Teach less.
  - Feedback more.
  - Use TED inspiring talks by top people.
  - Use OER

- Att drivers er NSS statements (Q9 in NSS)
- We have sacrificed ability and supportiveness of feedback in our search for validity and reliability which skews the processes.
- PASS has tried to get inside this process and view from new angles – challenge regulatory frameworks which constrict programme level assessment.
- Not necessarily:
  - Key thing is development of a transparent model for allocating assessment, feedback effort.
  - How much staff time is available?
  - How much student time is available?
  - What is the best way of strategically allocating effort so that students get timely feedback? Taking a model like this might result in tutors devoting a greater slide of time/effort to formative than summative.
- References:
  - Graham Gibbs: Summative assessment should be used (less often) sparingly and rigorously.
  - Sadler says students learn about criteria and selves by making judgements on own and each other's work.

### **My maths module is viewed by many students as a low-importance outlier of their course. Would a programme focused approach bring it into the fold?**

- We assume it's a maths module on a 'non-maths' degree, eg engineering, architecture, social sciences?
- Programme-focused approach may help as long as module contributes to programme learning outcomes. If it doesn't this needs consideration.
- The module should reference/be situated within other aspect of the course/relate to the discipline in an explicit way to be meaningful to students.
- Straight forward programme focus might be ensuring that the maths module relates to topics/contents etc from another module / the course more generally.
- Radical approach might be to overhaul the module eg integrate it within another module/modules, perhaps an integrative assessment across modules or years.
- Perhaps the module could be co-taught with a colleague who is a non-maths expert who can help ensure the links with the rest of the programme eg hairdressing lecturers at Exeter teach maths.
- Perhaps a preparatory session could situate the maths within the course objectives(?) ie rather than explaining the maths techniques in isolation explain to the student why they need the maths skills ie if they want to perform a certain task/answer a certain research question they will need to use maths as a means to an end.
- Importance of context – Yes – can help make relevant + use “Tiger that isn't” + “Bad Science” as prompt resources – see biomaths.wordpress.com
- Tension between 'remedial' ensuring all students at same level – and treating maths as a tool like IT or information literacy.

### **What can we do if summative groupwork assessment is 'not allowed in specific accredited programmes?'**

- Use group work and redistribute marks between group members using peer and self assessment

- Do work in groups, assess individually – including effectiveness as a team worker – do not assess the group output.
- Produce reflective piece on working in and contribution towards group for assessment.
- Is this a ref to the Danish question? Eg Group assessment 'banned' or institution regs preventing!
- Can you clarify with a professional body what they will allow?
- Could you assess individual reflection or outputs from group work?
- UTS web [resources on Group Assessment](#)
- [Learn Higher](#) Video Resources for students tackling group work issues.