

An Introduction to Assessment

The Higher Education Academy - HE in FE: Teaching and Learning

Written and prepared by Gary Hargreaves - EIAT Consultancy Ltd

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Introduction to Assessment

This introduction to the Good Practice Guide for HE in FE relates to Assessment for those who are:

- providing guidance
- delivering assessment strategies
- being assessed

The content reflects current advice, trends, issues and innovations in Assessment, and gives an indication of the range and diversity in assessment practices and assessment materials. The introduction contains references and examples, or links to sample materials as a reflection of what already exists and of work that is currently in development, including experimental practices.

This introduction is not meant to be a definitive guide. It poses further questions and relates to requirements that range from a local subject specific level to the wider quality assurance context. It attempts also to refer to common reference points set out by agencies such as awarding bodies and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). This introduction provides a starting point for the further sharing of ideas and good practice. It is hoped that it will contribute to the development and enhancement of assessment and assessment practices for Higher Education provision within FE institutions and associated providers.

Aims

- To create an introduction to assessment in a format that can be used for both web and printed media
- To identify models and examples of good practice in assessment and to make examples and case studies available
- To provide a starting point for further exploration and dissemination of work

Methodology

The process of developing this introduction has included:

- making use of existing research and developing research to identify examples of good practice
- working with practitioners, teachers, assessors and other relevant parties to establish, identify and source examples of good practice
- linking to other relevant work within the larger HE Academy frame
- collecting and analysing assessment materials
- organising and attending meetings with relevant providers
- exploring ideas through workshops and other forums attended by relevant practitioners and other stakeholders

HE Provision in Further Education

In Further Education, demands from funding bodies, external quality assurance, government initiatives and changing priorities have increased the tension between accountability and the need to achieve high standards. This is not unique to FE but has resonances with colleagues in HEIs who have traditionally sought to protect and control their and ownership of quality assurance and academic standards. However, still, and too often, is external audit seen as another layer of inspection despite assurances to provide 'peer review'. Assessment and the results of assessment often becomes the first focus for qualitative evaluation.

The provision of Higher Education programmes of study in Further Education institutions has many differences from that of other Higher Education institutions (HEIs). These differences often arise from a particularity of geographic, economic, industrial, or ecological history which meets the needs of communities that are as diverse as the physical environments where they exist.

The tradition of Higher Education courses in colleges is not new. For example professional vocational qualifications similar to the current Higher National Diplomas have been around in one form or another since the 1920s and became strengthened in the 1950s and 1960s by the dual demands of employers and a workforce eager to improve their employment prospects. Further Education has seen and coped with significant changes through the years, and the sector has had to be both reactive and proactive as learners and potential learners progressed through a college education that often saw individuals begin at level 1 and continue through to level 3 and beyond. Students wanted to stay on, as they responded favourably to the FE environment, and the experiences that were offered included convenience and locality with the ability to respond to the demands of workplace and prospects of increased employability. Colleges responded to this demand by working to provide a range of appropriate higher level courses appropriately resourced *"The environment is an essential part of the Confetti experience. The building has been designed to help people work, communicate, create and learn."*¹

It is, then, no accident that systems and protocols and approaches to delivery and assessment, already available in FE were adopted by teachers as HE programmes became available in colleges. Well defined mechanisms and quality systems were required as provision expanded to reflect employ needs. The introduction of robust internal moderation and verification protocols added rigour and equity across programmes and delivery since programmes were often taught by employers or professional practitioners who needed clear guidance on delivering higher level vocational awards. Bury College appointed their first Quality Manager in 1991, at a time when Quality Assurance was seen by lecturing staff as an unwelcome input from USA and the devil's work. Quality

¹ Confetti Insitute website/ prospectus http://www.confettistudios.com/index_ok2.php

Assurance, whatever the pedigree, was to become a necessary evil as there were some instances when lecturers would be delivering National Diplomas or A Levels in the morning and HND provision in the afternoon. Occasionally, existing assignments, originally developed for level 3 study were modified for the higher level programmes. Whilst this might not be regarded as good practice, it was often a pragmatic response that reflected the demands of an increased workload in teaching, coupled with the assessment and internal quality requirements in the FE sector. It was, in effect, a typical FE response to move quickly and respond to increasing demand, and quickly. The ability to react and respond quickly has continued to be a positive aspect of HE in FE where traditionally HEIs have been somewhat slow or even hesitant to respond to market forces, employment and student demands. Co-operation, association and the development of HE centres in partnerships with FE has changed the HE landscape and brought improvements, (like improved speed of curricular development) a variation to assessment practices to HE and FE that has been reciprocal. Key components in the teaching landscape are practices and methodology of assessment. FE has had a significant impact on the development of assessment, more of which we shall explore later. The emphasis in FE has been vocational courses of study and this was mirrored in the provision for taught HE programmes within the same institutions. A significant shift was to move away from the demands of employers as the traditional employment and manufacturing base declined and also to respond more directly to the more sophisticated needs of students and learners. There was no longer the same demand for higher level qualifications in paper making in Bury, Lancashire, textile manufacturing in Huddersfield, Yorkshire or shipbuilding on Teesside, or mining in Wales. Significant changes in manufacturing and industry coincided with incorporation (1993) as colleges strived to be independent and competitive as the result of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. As result of incorporation, cooperation was abandoned, innovation was stifled and the sharing of good practice was forbidden.

Further education has largely reinvented itself, its either rebuilt or refurbished its premises and also its curricula. Mid Kent college in Chatham are about to transform the locality with an innovative new building at the Medway site that will share the innovation already adopted by the Universities of Kent, Christchurch and Greenwich, sharing a site and resources for the benefit of students and staff, employers and the community. HE is working with FE together *“The architects have taken a great deal of care to ensure the existing profile of the landscape is retained and much of the development will be glazed to give a sense of open space. The building will be naturally ventilated in as many areas a possible. It is planned that many of the facilities such as the theatre, cafes and holistic shops will be used by the community”*²

² <http://www.kent.ac.uk/medway-project/MKC.htm>

Perceptions of Assessment

Around 100 staff took part in a number of seminar events and conferences in 2006, during which they were asked about HE in FE in relation to their particular circumstances. Comments and viewpoints were collated to build up a reliable audit of perceptions.

Assessment in General

The following two summaries outline the basic perceptions about assessment for those involved in the provision of HE within FE institutions and providers.

What Assessment IS?	What Assessment IS NOT?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A measure of student learning • Compulsory • A distribution of marks • A worry for students • Evaluative of a learner • Evaluative of a teacher / instructor • Measurement • Mapping • Comparison • Grading • Feedback (Formative and Summative) • A closed loop - aid to further learning • Questioning techniques • A 'box ticking' exercise • Moderation and verification e.g. of ILOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not concrete • Not relevant to employer needs • Not true reflection of all skills gained • Not always consistent • Not easy to define • Not used well • Not appropriate at times • Not fun • Not varied • Not understood by staff, students or management

Assessment Negatives	Assessment Positives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An obstacle • Not consistent • Not always clear to students • It isn't competitive • Can be scary • Not always effective • Not informed by staff research & scholarly activity • Not always reliable • Not always recorded well • Can be 'destructive' if done badly • Can result in Universities withdrawing validation – or taking on the courses themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing good practice • Easy to understand • Structured • Varied • Planned • Linking theory to practice • Monitoring process • Constructive feedback • Everyone aware • Review

Issues with HE in FE

It was significant that, during the seminars and events in 2006, the focus of discussions would move from the consideration of assessment to the differences between HE provision at an HEI compared to HE delivered within FE institutions. These perceived differences were considered to have a major bearing on the nature and methods of assessment and the following points highlight some of the common threads of thought. Even though some of the points raised by colleagues and managers may be highly subjective, the perceptions may be important in considering the HE in FE experience.

- HEIs are perceived as having superior resources. FE is 'delivered on a shoestring'
- HEIs and HE in FE are not perceived as equal. FE is perceived as inferior
- HE in an HEI is more 'grown up'; (for example the difference between Ofsted and QAA, or the LSC and HEFCE)
- FE is highly regulated
- Staff are not on comparable pay scales in the two environments; neither do they have similar conditions of service
- Staff resources for HE in FE may be limited or differently organised to the staff available in an HEI

- Delivery in an HEI is perceived as less vocational than HE in FE
- More course work skills are developed in HE in FE provision
- Academic support for HE in FE is considered to tend toward 'spoon-feeding'
- HE in FE provision tends to be smaller but more intense
- HE in FE provides a unique progression pathway, within the same institution
- HE in FE is thought to embed learning skills before content delivery
- HE in FE is thought to provide training which is fit for purpose and industry related
- Exams are thought to be more prevalent in HEIs
- Autonomous learning is thought to be more easily attainable or available in HEIs
- HE cohorts in FE tend to be smaller than cohorts in an HEI

The HE Environment

A key feature of 'HE-ness' was considered to be the environment in which learning and teaching was taking place. This was perceived to have a major impact on the type of assessment that is appropriate, workable or even desirable in some institutions. The following were perceptions drawn from many staff across the HE in FE sector.

- HE students in FE were often more like FE students in the same institution
- HE was thought to have a stronger community
- FE was thought to be a more casual environment
- FE support mechanisms were thought to enhance HE students' experience in FE
- HE in FE was thought to be less isolating for the student
- HE students in FE were more likely to live at home
- FE colleges struggle to create an effective HE environment

'HE-ness' Negatives in FE	'HE-ness' Positives in FE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of planned capital allocation • Lack of employment security • Vocational programmes often delivered by part time staff • No or little research base in programmes or faculties • Invisibility within institution • Poverty of overall provision • Poor or incomparable conditions of service • Research environment is less evident than in traditional HEI • "Kudos" of qualification greater from an HEI (employers and students) • Not an obstacle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowering • Good employer links • Supportive • Responsive • Flexible for learners • High staff commitment • The future • Local provision • Students have more support and guidance in HE • HE is more vocational

Assessment in FE

During the perceptions audit, some particular issues and differences specific to assessment for HE provision in FE institutions were highlighted.

- Assessment schemes and rules for an awarding body in FE tend to be quite different from those set by an HEI
- The quality of feedback is different in FE compared to an HEI. There is a consistent view that feedback in FE needs to be 'more supportive'
- Internal verification & external verification or examination processes are different in FE compared to an HEI
- Staff teams in an HEI tend to be more focussed on particular programmes, which is unusual in FE

It is clear that there are significant and positive aspects to the study of HE in an FE environment. However there are a number of perceptions that require fuller study to ascertain validity and to determine if they are at all relevant to the overall learning experience. A subject of enquiry that is worthy of wider and more detailed consideration can be given here.

Assuring the Quality of Assessment

It is the responsibility of each institution to provide mechanisms and processes to ensure quality and standards. The external responsibility for quality assurance in colleges is with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), Ofsted/ALI. Each has different evaluative mechanisms that reflect a number of tensions, between that of the peer review (and the critical friend) and that of inspection. Processes range from short notice and immediate response and judgements to a good deal of notice and a lengthy review processes with delayed judgements.

QAA *“has responsibility to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education.”*³ QAA supports those responsible for delivering Higher Education programmes by providing a range of mechanisms including direct review, enhancement and a range of publications. The most significant publication is the *Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education*.

*“Academic quality is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided for them.”*⁴

QAA Code of Practice outlines in 10 sections the precepts for what is seen as good practice in Higher Education. *“The Code of practice assumes that, taking into account principles and practices agreed UK-wide, each institution has its own systems for independent verification both of its quality and standards and of the effectiveness of its quality assurance systems.”*⁵

Section 6 covers Assessment of Students in the revised edition of the Code of Practice, published in September 2006.

QAA Code of Practice Section 6: Assessment of Students

The revised section of the code of practice places more emphasis on learning as part of assessment processes. *“The way in which students are assessed fundamentally affects their learning. Good assessment practice is designed to ensure that, in order to pass the module or programme, students have to demonstrate they have achieved the intended learning outcomes.”*⁶

In this section of the Code of Practice, QAA state that assessment *“describes any processes that appraise an individual’s knowledge, understanding, abilities or*

³ The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education: an introduction - <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/qaalntro/intro.asp>
also available in print

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ QAA Code of Practice Section 6: Assessment of Students, para 13 (September 2006)

skills. There are many different forms of assessment, serving a variety of purposes. These include:

- *promoting student learning by providing the student with feedback, normally to help improve his/her performance*
- *evaluating student knowledge, understanding, abilities or skills*
- *providing a mark or grade that enables a student's performance to be established. The mark or grade may also be used to make progress decisions*
- *enabling the public (including employers), and higher education providers, to know that an individual has attained an appropriate level of achievement that reflects the academic standards set by the awarding institution and agreed UK norms, including the frameworks for higher education qualifications. This may include demonstrating fitness to practise or meeting other professional requirements.”⁷*

QAA subscribes to a convention of types of assessment as being formative, summative and diagnostic and the combinations and variations of these can then be expanded into the most commonly used assessment methods. The Code of Practice also includes other aspects related to assessment, such as:

- Recording, documenting and communication of assessment decisions
- ICT and assessment and its role in supporting assessment
- Assessment panels and examination boards
- Assessment regulations
- Appeals against assessment decisions
- External examining, internal verification and quality assurance

Types of Assessment

Diagnostic, Formative and Summative Assessment

A variety of assessment is sought after by both assessors and students. The mix will vary and be dependent on the intended learning outcomes and the units or modules in each programme. It is clear from the comments from a range of subject centres, specialist programmes and students that there is a fair degree of common ground and acceptance that assessments can be both imaginative and

⁷ QAA Code of Practice Section 6: Assessment of Students, para 12 (September 2006)

responsive and provide both an evaluative and learning function. HEFCE lists 47 types of assessment evidence as well as the following examples of commonly used assessment methods:⁸

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • examination • case study • essay • reports • posters • role play • applying understanding to a particular situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practical • observation • group work • peer assessment • dissertations and projects • recap quiz • presentations • vivas
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The Decline in Formative Assessment

Whilst most institutions, including HEIs, have striven to provide a rich and varied approach to assessment, there is still a widely held belief that summative assessment (and in particular, exams) provides the mainstay of all assessment. It may be that exams provide a very useful function, particularly with the rise of student numbers, and large teaching groups and the necessity to provide equitable assessment that is both cost effective and qualitative. End of course, or programme exams resulted in a marked decline in formative assessment. With an increased concern about the integrity of continually assessed course work, and a rising tide of lobbyists claiming ‘plagiarism’ combined with the necessity to combat cheating, although well intentioned it may well be misguided, and lead to a decline in the variety of assessment tools available and, in particular, to the decline in formative assessment.

“A traditional characteristic of teaching in higher education in the UK has been the frequent provision of detailed personalized feedback on assignments. The archetype has been that of Oxford or Cambridge University where students wrote an essay a week and read it out to their tutor in a one-to-one tutorial, gaining immediate and detailed oral feedback on their understanding as revealed in the essay. This was almost the only teaching many Oxbridge students experienced: teaching meant giving feedback on essays. This formative assessment was quite separate from marking and at Oxford and Cambridge the only summative assessment often consisted of final examinations at the end of three years of study that had involved weekly formative assessment.” [sic]⁹ Gibbs and Simpson (2004) present a formidable research paper that is well worth reading in its entirety.

⁸ HEFCE 2003. Supporting Higher Education in Further Education Colleges: A Guide for Tutors and Lecturers. Download from www.hefce.ac.uk

⁹ Gibbs & Simpson 2004 University of Gloucester, Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (LATHE) Issue 1, 2004-05 eds. Gravestock & Mason O'Connor, *Conditions Under Which Assessment Supports Students' Learning*

Assessment for Student Learning

Gibbs and Simpson (2003) make the assumption that “assessment has a profound impact on how much effort students put into learning”¹⁰. This led to the articulation of a set of eleven ‘conditions under which assessment supports student learning’

Conditions for Learning include

Student learning is best supported when the following conditions are met:

- Assessed tasks capture sufficient student time and effort
- These tasks distribute student effort evenly across topics and weeks
- These tasks engage students in productive learning activity
- Assessment communicates clear and high expectations to students
- Sufficient feedback is provided, frequently enough & in enough detail
- The feedback is provided quickly enough to be useful to students
- Feedback focuses on learning rather than on marks or the students
- Feedback is linked to the purpose of the assignment and to stated criteria
- Feedback is understandable to students, given their sophistication
- Feedback is received by students and attended to
- Feedback is acted upon by students to improve their work or their learning

These assessment conditions were based on research in assessment theories and case studies drawn from schools and HEIs. A striking feature of this study is the overwhelming importance placed on the nature and quality of feedback. Six of the 11 conditions refer explicitly to feedback and issues related to feedback frequently were raised as an important aspect of assessment in workshops and focus groups throughout the project in 2006.

Forbes & Spence (1991) reported on a study of assessment on an engineering course at Strathclyde University. *“When lecturers stopped marking weekly problem sheets because they were simply too busy, students did indeed stop tackling the problems, and their exam marks went down as a consequence. But when lecturers introduced periodic peer-assessment of the problem sheets — as a course requirement but without the marks contributing — students’ exam marks increased dramatically to a level well above that achieved previously when lecturers did the marking. What achieved the learning was the quality of student engagement in learning tasks, not teachers doing lots of marking. The trick when designing assessment regimes is to generate engagement with learning tasks without generating piles of marking.”*¹¹

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ ibid

The new section 6 in QAA code of practice recognises that assessment does, can and should be encouraged to support student learning “*Examples of assessment that support student learning include:*

- *designing a 'feedback loop' into assessment tasks so that students can apply formative feedback (from staff or peers) to improve their performance in the next assessment*
- *setting assessment tasks such as extended assignments that involve students researching a topic and producing work based on their research*
- *the use of peer assessed activities during formal teaching sessions where students, either in pairs or groups, comment constructively on one another's work. This technique enables students to understand assessment criteria and deepens their learning in several ways, including:*
 - a *learning from the way others have approached an assessment task (structure, content, analysis) and*
 - b *learning through assessing someone else's work, which encourages them to evaluate and benchmark their own performance and to improve it.*

Peer assessed activities can be used in a variety of learning situations, including practical work and in large or small classes
- *the use of self-reflective accounts, or other types of student self assessment*
- *involving, for example, employers, patients or clients in providing part of the feedback to students on their performance*
- *enabling students to experience a range of assessment methods that take account of individual learning needs and, where appropriate, encouraging them to reflect on and synthesise learning from different parts of their programme. In some circumstances, synoptic assessment may help to support these aims*
- *where oral examinations take place, ensuring that opportunities are available for a student to practise and receive constructive feedback, and that the practise and feedback are timed to enable students to refine their work and, if necessary, to further develop the personal skills needed to present their arguments effectively*
- *including students in any evaluation of assessment practices.”¹²*

¹² QAA Code of Practice Section 6: Assessment of Students, pages 10 & 11 (September 2006)

Designing Assessment

There are growing demands that assessment needs to be designed as a core constituent to support learning and as a component of teaching. This will inevitably have a significant impact on course design, approval, review and evaluation and may challenge the assumptions made by internal quality systems and external bodies, such as QAA, where assessment is largely concerned with standards, compliance and regulations. The work of Elton and Johnston (2002) has already challenged the appropriateness of QAA premises on assessment.¹³ Further work is ongoing as part of a Higher Education Academy funded project using a revised form of the Assessment Experience Questionnaire AEQ to study the impact on student learning of assessment regimes.¹⁴

The test is to design programmes of study and courses that are flexible enough to keep their currency, and yet challenge students, meet the desired outcomes and at the appropriate level, and without appearing to be vague or without substance or depth. Assessment led curricular design may enable that possibility as the cart (assessment) pulls the horse, not the donkey (assessment) pushing the cart. This throws up all kinds of possibilities, least of all writing out plagiarism.

The Language of Assessment

HEFCE advise that, *“Course teams need to think about the language used to write assessments so that students will understand what they have to do. An assessment couched in the language of academic discourse might be appropriate to a final year student but can be very intimidating to one starting a higher education course. A planned approach to introducing the language of the discipline progressively will give students a better chance of achieving the learning outcomes. Learning support staff are often called upon to deconstruct or interpret assignment briefs because they are not written in language students can easily understand. This can also happen when the brief is overly long. Some of the time spent agreeing an assignment is usefully spent reviewing the language as well as the assessment design. A clear, concise style will make students feel comfortable with what they are being asked to do. Straightforward language can still require sophisticated activities.”*¹⁵

Diversity in Assessment

There is a growing body of research that explores approaches to assessment in a diverse culture and community. With increased participation in Higher Education programmes of study from international students, students with disabilities, learning difficulties, mature students, part time students, and non traditional students, institutions need to address a wide range of issues. Smailes

¹³ Elton L and Johnston B (2002) *Assessment in Universities: A Critical Review of Research*. Report to the Generic Centre of the LTSN network

¹⁴ Dunbar-Goddet H and Gibbs G (under review) A methodology for evaluating the effects of programme assessment environments on student learning. European Association for Research into Learning and Instruction, Assessment Conference, Northumbria.

¹⁵ HEFCE 4.6 2003

& Gannon-Leary (2006) have identified these issues in their own diverse community in North East England.¹⁶ This research makes clear and useful recommendations, including suggestions which are specific to assessment and can be summarised as;

- Expand upon assignment tasks e.g. explain the purpose, decode the title and provide detail
- Give signposts for planning e.g. breakdown into stages, space the workload, set different deadlines for individual tasks
- Provide examples of previous student work to illustrate the use of materials, selection and how arguments can be built
- Provide examples of poor work to demonstrate issues, such as use of material that is lacking in authority or poor referencing

Innovation and Creativity in Assessment

Whilst a creative approach to assessment is a natural part of delivering higher level subjects in the arts field, innovation and creativity have, potentially large part to play in helping to address some of the issues in assessing and assessment, particularly in the HE in FE sector.

Assessing Process or Product – The Tingle Factor

Paul Kleiman (2005) and Jo Richler of PALATINE are exploring how the application of assessment in creative subjects like performing arts and art and design can be applied across all subject disciplines. Their 'creative continuum'¹⁷

Figure 1 outlines four cornerstones;

- Replication
- Formulation
- Innovation
- Origination

Kleiman and Richler demonstrate that the continuum provides a means to consider creativity, in an educational context, in a way that shifts and widens the focus away from the 'high-end' creativity that tends to be the sole consideration when creativity is discussed. It also has some profound and interesting

¹⁶ Diversity – What's the problem? A guide to reducing student barriers to learning Inclusive Approaches in a Diverse Community Joanne Smailes and Pat Gannon-Leary, Northumbria University paper presented Galway Conference June 2006 download http://www.nuigalway.ie/celt/newsite/news.html#conf_papers

¹⁷ Kleiman (2005). The continuum is adapted from Fennell, E., (1993) *Categorising Creativity in Competence & Assessment* No. 23, Oct. 1993, Employment Dept.

consequences for the design, delivery and assessment of educational programmes.

Error! Objects cannot be created from editing field codes.Figure 1

“Most, if not all courses of study, when mapped against the model, would reveal content and delivery that ranges from replication to origination. In fact replication and formulation lie at the heart of much higher education, and the assessment systems used to test them may well be antithetical to the development and enhancement of creativity.”¹⁸

One of the interesting features of the continuum is that a great deal of what is considered 'high-end' creativity in fact meets the criteria for replication and formulation. It is one of the great fallacies that arts activity the 'creative arts' inherently involves high-end creativity. Certainly there is scope in arts-based activities for innovation and origination, but much arts activity is in fact replicative and formulaic. For example, a musician in a symphony orchestra is expected play the notes as written and to follow the instructions of the conductor. Despite the high level of skill required, there is little scope or expectation of innovation or origination.

In terms of assessment, *replication* and *formulation* are relatively straightforward. Replication, for example, can be assessed via a teach-it, test it, tick it methodology, and the traditional examination and, to a lesser extent, the academic essay, are best suited to the replication or formulation of existing knowledge, rather than the development and encouragement of innovation and origination.

On the other hand, the assessment of innovation and, particularly, origination, is inevitably problematic, particularly in a system based around pre-determined learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The key to assessing innovation and origination may lie in the roots of the word assessment i.e. *ad sedere* which means 'to sit down together'. Forms of assessment, such as negotiated assessment, peer evaluation or assessment, viva / oral examination, which allow for some form of dialogue between the assessed and the assessor, and in which the student becomes an agent in their own assessment, rather than an object of assessment, provide the means to conduct assessment that is informed and meaningful.

Using such forms of assessment also provides a means to distinguish between the assessment of process and the assessment of product. One of the interesting features of creative activity is that *“there is no correlation or definitive line of determination between a 'good' creative process and a 'good' creative product”*.¹⁹

¹⁸ Kleiman 2005

¹⁹ *ibid*

The forms of assessment used also need to be aligned with (but can also be misaligned with) the purpose of the programme of study. One way, but certainly not the only way, to represent the differences between different types of institutions, courses and approaches to learning, teaching and assessment can be found in Figure 2. The horizontal axis is the continuum between, at one end, the professionally-focused, specialised course, often situated in a conservatoire, and, at the other end, the academic, research-focused, non-vocational course, often found in a traditional university. The vertical axis represents the continuum between a focus on contemporary performing arts and a focus on the classical repertoire.

Most courses/departments/institutions could be placed in one of the four quadrants formed by the axis. For example, an institution like the Royal Academy of Dance, would be placed firmly in the Professional/Vocational, Traditional/Classical quadrant, whereas an institution such as the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA) would be placed firmly at the Contemporary end of the vertical axis, but more towards the centre of the Academic, Vocational axis, with a bias towards the vocational. What is important is that the assessment methodologies and approaches may differ between each quadrant.

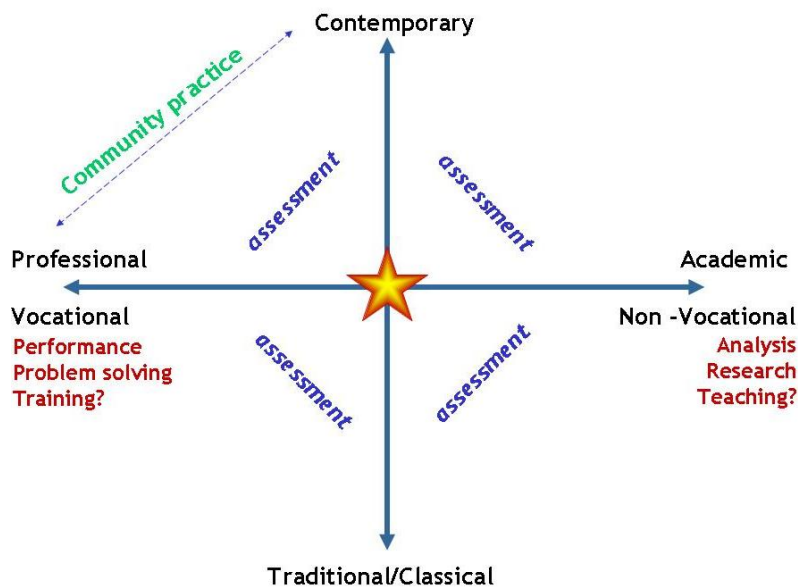


Figure 2

Figure 3 explores the horizontal Academic/Non-Vocational, Professional/Vocational axis in more detail, and highlights the different expectations and the different assessment methods that might be available. For example, in vocational, professionally-focused courses, there has been,

traditionally, little emphasis on academic abilities and achievements. Students are judged on their ability to 'walk the walk' i.e. to be a successful and skilled performer. As the courses become more academic, students are expected to perform well both vocationally and academically i.e. 'walk the walk' AND 'talk the talk'. The nearer one gets to the academic, non-vocational end of that particular axis, the more academic ability and skills start to dominate i.e. the students' ability to demonstrate and articulate their knowledge and understanding in written and aural formats (e.g. examination, essay and viva).

This is necessarily schematized, and in many cases there is both overlap and simultaneity. For example, a music conservatoire with an excellent record of getting graduate musicians into professional orchestras may also have an excellent and successful academic track record.

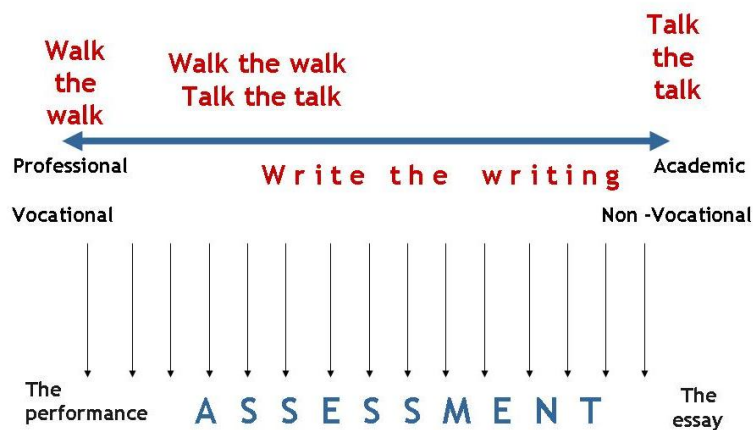


Figure 3

These examples use references to the performing and creative arts, but through our work with a variety of practitioners, and in a wide range of specialist subject areas there are clear resonances. One delegate whose background was biosciences immediately was able to see the connections with assessment, teaching and learning and their relevance and vocational applications.

Feedback in Assessment

Feedback is a vital part of the assessment process and is an essential part of;

- Marking and grading
- Learning
- All assessment processes
- Feeding forward

- Evaluating and measuring student performance
- The conduct of assessment practices and processes
- Student conduct in assessment
- Improving students learning
- Improving assessment processes
- Improving course and programme design
- Improving and enhancing teaching and learning

One current theme and observation during our consultation period was that the timing of feedback was crucial, and it was often difficult to give feedback swiftly. Phil Race argues that *“feedback (on paper and face-to-face with whole groups) can often be given to students within 24 hours of them engaging with the work they hand in for assessment.”*²⁰

Phil Race gives a raft of useful guidance on both assessment and assessment feedback. All institutions have their own internal policies on teaching learning and assessment; however, the general principles are that assessment should be valid, reliable and transparent, in other words, fit for purpose. Self assessment, face to face feedback (group and one to one) and learning from feedback are just some of the themes featured in this article.

Mind your language!

Whether the feedback is face to face or through another medium, written and electronic and especially the latter two, it is essential that the approach to individualised feedback needs careful consideration in order that we avoid, negative, thoughtless feedback.

“Damaging students' motivation is not the best way to get them to improve. It's therefore useful to remind yourself how strong some words and phrases can be when viewed by students as critical comments not just on their work, but on their very being. Some words and phrases to avoid include:

- *failed - for obvious reasons*
- *useless - a very demeaning adjective*
- *disastrous - seems irredeemable!*
- *error - somehow this comes across more punitively than "mistake" or "slip"*
- *failed to grasp the basic point - probably the most insulting feedback message imaginable; the word "grasp" is particularly demeaning somehow.*

It's worth saying once more that written (word-processed, printed) feedback is now regarded as important evidence of the quality of your teaching. Remember to make the feedback humane, useful and helpful to students. Also remember to

²⁰ Race, P and Brown, S (2001) *The ILTA* Guide - Part Two Inspiring Learning about Teaching and Assessment*. The Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education in association with EducationGuardian.co.uk Tuesday December 18, 2001 Guardian Unlimited

link your feedback consciously to the assessment criteria and to students' achievement of the related learning outcomes. That way you're not only covering your back in the context of external scrutiny of your professional practice, you're also reinforcing to students that the assessment criteria and learning outcomes are useful to them as indicators of where the goalposts are, and the standards to aim for." [sic]²¹

QAA recognise that "timely feedback" is a feature of good practice and "an important purpose of assessment is to enable students to obtain feedback on their learning and to help them improve their performance.... in one such case students had observed that the character of the feedback they received increased their confidence in the 'transparency of the assessment process'."²²

*The case for regular feedback is no more evident in distance education where "feedback on frequent assignments is the main interactive component of teaching and the Open University has placed great emphasis on frequent assignments, training and paying tutors to provide comprehensive feedback, and monitoring the quality of this feedback. For some Open University students this is their only contact with their tutor. They can cope without much, or even any, face-to-face teaching, but they cannot cope without regular feedback on assignments."*²³

Managing Assessment

Strategies for managing assessment are particularly relevant to the HE in FE sector for two main reasons. Firstly, many of the higher level qualifications delivered in FE, for example the HND, have a weight of assessment higher than that for many programmes delivered in HEIs. In many cases, this means that in order to fulfil the requirements of the awarding body, students may be required to submit more coursework in FE than in a HEI, which in turn will increase the assessment workload. Secondly, teaching staff in FE tend to have higher levels of contact time than that of their HEI counterparts; in some cases this can be over double the number of contact hours per week of a university lecturer.

Consequently, not only can there be more assessment that needs to take place, but there may be less time available to do it. This requires careful management and examples of good practice are particularly pressing to address these issues.

The main aspects of curriculum design that affect the management of assessment are:

- The timing of assessment
- The amount of assessment
- The type of assessment

²¹ Race, P and Brown, S (2001)

²² QAA 2006 Outcomes from institutional audit - Assessment of students QAA 097 0106

²³ Gibbs & Simpson 2004

Because the assessment workload needs to be managed carefully, one particular set of issues facing the HE in FE sector is associated with the management of the flow of coursework *before* assessment.

Pre-Assessment Issues

There are 3 main factors which affect the flow of coursework, in whatever form, from student to assessor:

- Non-submission
- Poor submission
- Answering the 'Wrong' Question (i.e. missing the point)

When students do not submit work to a given deadline, it creates issues with the management of the assessment process, as time has been allocated but assessment cannot take place. The situation is made worse when the work is eventually submitted, because the assessor has to use time that has not been allocated to assess the work, maybe even 'stealing' time from a later assignment.

Setting Up Patterns of Expectation

Confetti Institute of Creative Technologies operates a remarkably simple but effective strategy to combat non-submission that works on the principle of prevention rather than cure. During the first day of enrolment, the students are asked to bring something in to the very first taught session the following week. Different lecturers ask for different things and some even set short tasks, but the key point is to create a contract between student and provider that highlights *physically* the need for each student to make a submission to a specified deadline, even if the submission requires little or no effort. A simple example might be to require that a Music student bring in a 'representative' recording to their first taught session for discussion. As long as, over time, a student begins to *expect* that they will need to bring material to college, which may be completed coursework, this helps to address any issues with submissions before they become problematic.

This strategy of requiring that all students bring *something* to the first taught session, and the challenge delivered to non-submitters at such an early stage in the programme, has proved to be effective despite its simplicity.

The second pre-assessment issue of poor submission can also work against the effective management of the assessment workflow. Large proportions of poor quality submissions can waste valuable assessment time, which is made worse through the required re-submission(s) and re-assessment(s).

Contextual Awareness

Castle College Nottingham, has a specific task used in some of its HE provision to help address the issue of poor submission. The basis of the approach is that the more students understand the process of assessment, the higher quality their submissions will be. In fact, if the approach is effective, the quality of the

submission should become increasingly independent of the actual process of assessment, thereby making the assessment more concerned with the work being , rather than the criteria used for assessment.

To create an understanding of the assessment process, or an increased 'contextual awareness', each student is given the task of providing evidence that they exist. This assignment leads to some interesting submissions and students generally find it fun to think about and locate or create the evidence required. Submissions have included passports, birth certificates and other documentation, a lock of hair, signed witness statements from parents and other significant others and a whole host of other creative approaches to this challenge. At the same time, of course, each student is also learning the importance of appropriate evidence which will fulfil given assessment criteria.

After this project, it is an easy task to draw parallels with finding evidence that one exists to finding evidence to fulfil an explicit assessment criterion. This directly improves the ability of learners to appreciate the quality of work required for submission and why some evidence may not fulfil a particular criterion.

The third pre-assessment issue where students answer the 'wrong' question can waste time in that the submission may or may not contain sufficient evidence to enable accurate assessment, but the search for appropriate evidence still needs to take place. What tends to happen is that appropriate evidence is either too scant or even non-existent, and both scenarios require re-submission.

Plagiarism

The management of plagiarism is an important aspect when considering assessment. No matter how robust an assessment strategy might be, if the work being assessed does not belong to the student being assessed, the situation is clearly untenable. Advances in e-learning and e-assessment produce some interesting questions about authenticity and plagiarism which need to be addressed.

This is an area where good practice needs to be shared, and particularly relevant for HE in FE with its already strong widening participation and inclusion agendas.

As Smailes and Gannon-Leary point out, *"Plagiarism is an issue of increasing concern amongst academics often expressed in relation to international students. However, Introna et al (2003) point out that this assertion raises an issue of potential discrimination since detection of plagiarism may be easier in respect of their work than in that of a 'home' student. In addition, a neglect of appropriate referencing, among international students is frequently a reflection of other cultures' differing academic practices. In some cultures, knowledge is considered to be in the public domain while other cultures believe, according to Ladd and Ruby (1999), alteration of an authority's original words to be disrespectful. Unacknowledged verbatim reproduction of texts and lecture notes is, therefore,*

expected practice in some Eastern cultures according to Ballard and Clanchy (1997).”²⁴

Smailes and Gannon-Leary recognise that for many international students there appears to be *“a cultural divide between academic practices used in their home country and what is expected in the Western academic environment. International students make substantial personal and financial commitments and investments when coming to a UK university and only small modifications to academic practice are required to improve the learning environment.*

Students with disabilities appeared to express many of the same concerns as international students and given the student numbers we can infer that students with dyslexia indicated a number of barriers to learning which with slight modifications on the part of the lecturer may be significantly reduced.” [sic]²⁵

Assessors, whilst acknowledging all these concerns, have also to take account of the rise in access by students to online essay writing facilities and methods of combating plagiarism with software detection services. However, if candidates are determined to cheat (and we should remember that they are still in a minority) if they can they will. We should remember that cheating is not a new ; it just appears to be more prevalent as we move to more varied and course work styles of assessment. For example, there is a well established tradition of students persuading others to write essays on their behalf.

Here are some suggestions for combating plagiarism are suggested:²⁶

- Design out plagiarism, change titles of assignments, topics and essays frequently
- Introduce individualism e.g. portfolio, reflective practice, an annotated bibliography as a supplementary exercise
- Explain that views on texts can be legitimately challenged - give examples of two texts that offer alternative viewpoints or explanations

²⁴ Smailes & Gannon-Leary Galway June 2006

²⁵ ibid

²⁶ ibid

Concluding Commentary

There is a wealth of information and good practice in assessment across all sectors including subject centres and institutions from primary education to Higher Education. The answers to our quest for good practice in teaching and learning including assessment often lie in the in “*classroom next door*”.²⁷

The advances in technology and use of creativity have brought a learning revolution to the classroom for example Kingswood School, Hull has developed an advanced learning curriculum arising from the need to come out of three years of special measures. This has not just led to improvement but progression and a rich and stimulating curriculum that is understood and supported by teachers, students, parents and the wider community.

The mix and integration of industry and FE from colleges like Castle College and the Confetti Institute marry business with education, providing programmes of study that replicate industrial practice in a learning and assessment partnership. Projects such as the new build Mid Kent College working with the University of Kent at Medway (mentioned earlier in this paper) are becoming more common place. Huddersfield University has expanded its provision and has worked closely with Institutions like Barnsley College and Oldham College and now University Centres in Barnsley and Oldham are thriving examples of expansion with a clear response to local needs and widening participation. These are just a few examples of how higher education in further education is being supported by good educational and business practice working together with industries and HEIs.

Recent developments in the 14 – 19 curricula aspire to bring, together schools, colleges, universities and employers. This revolution in education could have a significant contribution to good practice between organisations and also promote a better understanding and sharing of a more common language and between education and employers. The prospect of colleges having their own foundation degree awarding powers seems certain. The Further Education and Training Bill introduced to the House of Lords on 20 November 2006 will develop Foundation Degrees. The Privy Council will be enabled to grant a further education institution the power to award foundation degrees.²⁸

The development of The Institute of Educational Assessors (IEA) is providing additional mechanisms for sharing good practice in the development of assessment tools such as;

- 1st Steps in Assessment (A Guide for PGCE students)
- Toolkit for Assessment

²⁷ Andrew Thomson, Chief Executive, QIA, TES 14 September 2005

²⁸ Queens Speech Nov 2006 and The Further Education and Training Bill introduced to the House of Lords on 20 November 2006

One thing is clear, HE in FE could do much more to disseminate good practice through their websites and sharing materials through closer collaboration within their own institutions, other institutions and HEIs. HEIs are quite good at sharing their protocols, policies and teaching and learning materials but again they could do more give more open access to their websites and portals. We could learn much more from our international colleagues who often have a much more open policy many US Educational institutions have modular material on line with open access.

The HE Academy's HE in FE enhancement programme continues to develop resources although a more sustained commitment to longer term funding would be welcome. Currently HEA subject centres are beginning to provide some support that is targeted specially at HE in FE. The Higher Education Academy is seeking resources that may be appropriate for inclusion in a repository of research on HE in FE and will be accessed via its website.

More information can be found -

The HE in FE Research Coordinator
The Research Centre
City College Norwich
Ipswich Road
NORWICH NR2 2LJ

Tel: 01603 773364

Fax: 01603 773425

Email: theresearchcentre@ccn.ac.uk

Other useful information can be found –

FE Now Autumn 2006 has an article on assessment by Kate Hilpern.

From little acorns towards a strategy for spreading good practice within colleges, Philip Cox and Vikki Smith Learning and Skills Development Agency 2004, also available at <http://www.lsda.org.uk/files/PDF/1393.pdf>

At Oxford Brookes University there is now a centre for excellence in teaching and learning – Assessment Standards and Knowledge exchange (ASKe)
www.business.brookes.ac.uk/aske.html

The Learning Skills Network (LSN) provide a wealth of free advice, consultancy and published materials to assist Colleges and, although targeted at the 14 -19 learning programmes, they do have resonances with teaching and learning and assessment.

An extensive appendix of other useful research materials, papers and publications is held by EIAT Consultancy and it is hoped that this could be made available and added to through the HE in FE enhancement an improvement project.

Recommendations and next steps

It is clear that there is an appetite for support, research and continual development. Here are some areas that could be considered for further development and improvement to enhance teaching and learning;

- Encourage centres to share good practice
- Facilitate more network and training events regionally and nationally
- Update HE development and training managers
- Engage with other agencies that can provide additional useful resources e.g., LSN, IEA
- Engage directly with assessors, not just through management or colleges assessors (by the very nature many HE lecturers are temporary/part time or sessional.)
- Provide links to and from the HEA website
- Provide a complimentary guide to feedback or as substantial comment of the introduction to assessment
- Develop an assessment checklist for use by assessors with links to existing and developing resources e.g. research Norwich, IEA, and LSN.
- Investigate methods of Assessing collaborative learning
- E-Learning, e-portfolios development and the use of such technologies
- Research would helpful on staff and student perception HE in FE
- Link to subject centres and explanation about what they can do

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Concluding remarks

It is clear there is a good deal of excellent HE work going on FE institutions and it is time that this is celebrated more widely and overtly. The HE Academy has made a significant contribution to this process and we hope this will be sustained and developed through continued collaboration, networks, subject centres and individual colleagues to support students and teaching staff in making assessment relevant, worthwhile and tool for improvement and enhancement in the processes and delivery of teaching and learning.

Written by

Gary Hargreaves EIAT Consultancy

Editors Darren Bourne, Gary Hargreaves and Sue McGregor

Additional contributors Darren Bourne & Jo Richler

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