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1. Introduction

This guidance is designed to support academic staff in providing inclusive assessment opportunities to all learners. Leeds Beckett University has a wide range of courses e.g., undergraduate and postgraduate degrees (including degree apprenticeships and online distance learning courses) with diverse cohorts which have a wide range of learning and support needs. The development of inclusive learning and assessment opportunities, to meet the needs of all our learners, is central to our [Education Plan](#), [Student Charter](#) and [Course Principles](#). The principles of fairness and equality are also enshrined in our academic regulations.

Our University's [Education Plan](#) sets out how we will support **all** learners to have an equal opportunity to succeed and flourish at our University. Our [Access and Participation Plan](#) provides our institutional context for inclusive assessment. The wider sector expectations set out in the UK Quality Code and the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#) inform our approach and guidance.

Our inclusive approach “necessitates a shift away from supporting specific groups through a discrete set of policies or time bound interventions, towards equity considerations being embedded within all functions of the institution and treated as an ongoing process of quality enhancement.” (May and Bridger, 2010, p.6).

This guide is part of a range of documents that support our inclusive approach. These include [Course Principles](#) (particularly Principle 2 – inclusive learning), the [Standards of Inclusive Practice](#) and the inclusive resource bank created by Student Services.

2. Principles of good inclusive assessment

What inclusivity is about and why it is important.

Good inclusive assessment practice must be underpinned by excellent teaching and engaging learners effectively, by providing accessible resources and learning opportunities. Inclusive assessment needs to be scaffolded by effective, collaborative, and equal learning opportunities with learners as co-creators, and taught with an approach that facilitates the development of a positive attitude to diversity and difference. Assumptions about learners' knowledge, lives, experiences and interests should be avoided, with opportunities provided for them to share their insights if they choose and if it is aligned with the purpose of the chosen teaching activity.

Inclusive assessment should:

- Be accessible and equitable for all learners.
- Be explicit and transparent.
- Fairly evaluate learners' ability to meet the learning outcomes, academic and professional standards.
- Support engagement in learning, student progression, and retention.
- Address the needs of our diverse population.
- Involve authentic, contextualised, meaningful, tasks and valid and reliable processes.

- Reduce the need for modified assessment e.g. alternatives/extra time.
- Allow staff and learners to develop a shared understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made.
- Develop and enable good academic practice.
- Enable learners to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes.

3. Assessment design

Good assessment design is important as it enables:

- All learners to demonstrate their learning and, through feedback and feed-forward, further their learning and development and
- evidence that a learner has achieved the intended learning outcomes of the course, apprenticeship, or module at the relevant academic standard for the award.

Inclusive assessment does not mean easier assessment - it does not compromise academic or professional standards but improves the opportunities for **all** learners to demonstrate how they have achieved the learning outcomes.

Assessment is a key driver for learning. Good assessment design starts with well-written learning outcomes and clear and transparent assessment criteria. Formative and summative assessment should accurately evaluate the extent to which the learner has met the intended learning outcomes. When choosing an assessment type consider whether it is appropriate for the learning outcome being assessed. Assessment design should be inclusive, anticipating learners' needs, and enabling them to undertake assessment equitably.

3.1. What to assess and how

When determining what to assess and how to do it, it is essential to align all assessment activities with the intended course learning outcomes. This ensures that each assessment serves a clear purpose and directly supports students' development toward the goals of the course, rather than contributing to unnecessary over-assessment. Careful selection of assessment tasks helps maintain a balanced workload for both learners and staff, while still gathering meaningful evidence of achievement. Moreover, a well-designed assessment strategy distinguishes between evaluating students' understanding of subject knowledge such as facts, concepts, and foundational theories, and their ability to apply that knowledge in practical, analytical, or real-world contexts. While subject knowledge assessments may take the form of quizzes or exams, knowledge application is often best measured through authentic tasks like projects, case studies, or problem-solving exercises. These activities can also help balance the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in assessment, both in terms of assessing students' effective use of AI, and also in distinguishing between the student input and the AI input.

3.2. Assessment Mix

Assessment **for** learning is designed to inform teaching and support the ongoing development of the learner. This is also termed ‘formative assessment’.

Assessment **of** learning is used to evaluate what learners have achieved at the end of a module, level or course. This is also termed ‘summative assessment. The work will receive a numerical mark or be graded as a pass or fail.

Each course should have a clearly articulated assessment strategy that explains what will be assessed, how it will be assessed, and when. This ensures that a learners’ performance is evaluated in a purposeful, reliable and fair manner.

Various assessment methods should be used as part of a course assessment strategy to ensure all learners have the opportunity to succeed. These could include the types of assessment we might all be familiar with, for example, examinations, individual presentations, and coursework. However, other forms of assessment include podcasts, vlogs, and online web spaces could also be used. Different types of assessment in different formats, styles and lengths may enable more learners to perform well and help them develop a wider range of skills.

While asynchronous methods, such as essays or pre-recorded presentations, allow for greater inclusivity/flexibility and help minimise issues with technology, they present an increased risk/opportunity of inappropriate usage of AI.

Authentic assessment related to future outcomes, work-related learning, and advanced problem-solving help to build graduate and apprentice skills. All case studies, assignment titles, and project work should reflect the diversity of society and the global context.

A good assessment strategy should ensure that all learners have multiple opportunities to engage with practising assessments at every level. In the first year, it is good practice to expose the learners to formative (assessment for learning) “bite sized” chunks of all the assessment types which they will need to undertake across the whole course, then there are no surprises for them, and they will feel better prepared. This is also important for apprentices and mature students, who may not have experienced assessment in an education setting for a significant period of time.

3.3. Assessment alternatives and equivalence

Giving students assessment choice

Adopting a full flexible approach and breadth to assessment at the outset may mean we do not have to offer alternatives. If an alternative is required then design it in at the outset so that all students are enabled to have an equivalent assessment experience, e.g. for presentations offer in person face to face as well as synchronous online.

Offering a range of alternative assessments can empower students to take responsibility for their own learning and accommodates students’ interests and diverse circumstances. Offering a range of assignment titles also helps capture students’ interests and allows them to perform to the best of their ability.

Consider the balance of the hours, effort and standards between the different assessments and indicate how each of these will enable the learning outcomes to be met, and the relevant assessment criteria to be applied.

Consider offering an appropriate choice of assessment methods at each level, and ensure the methods use the same detailed assessment criteria, for example, a presentation or written work. Be mindful not to include choice in every assessment as some students may then actively avoid an assessment which develops a core skill, such as presentation delivery. To support students who are less confident in certain assessment types, you can direct them to the resources and workshops offered by [Skills for Learning](#).

Equivalence

It is sometimes difficult to establish university-wide assessment equivalence because of the variation between subject disciplines. However, the course teams will consider matters of equity between modules as part of their course design and development, reflecting upon the number of credits assigned to a module being based on the estimated notional learning hours (where one credit represents 10 notional hours of learning).

3.4. Assessment scheduling

Scheduling and Workloads

Inclusivity may be achieved through careful scheduling of examinations and submission deadlines. This may involve, for example, consideration of religious festivals and observances or taking account of students' caring responsibilities or school holiday commitments and employment commitments, such as on Degree Apprenticeships.

A heavy assessment workload leads to surface learning and increased staff workload. It can also have a negative impact on student wellbeing (Wass et al., 2018).

Re-assessment

Wherever possible, re-assessment must be conducted using the same method as the original. Academic staff will design and prepare original assessment and re-assessment concurrently giving due consideration to aspects which may be difficult to replicate on re-assessment such as group work. Resources to support this can be found in the [Inclusive Course Design Tool](#).

3.5. Assessment standards and Academic Honesty

When designing alternative assessments, ensure the standards are maintained in terms of the quality, scope and academic outcomes.

Good academic practice is a fundamental part of promoting effective student learning. It is an important part of all our students' understanding of the assessment process, the nature of academic standards and the role of academic judgement, as well as how to engage effectively in learning through reflection and dialogue with staff and peers.

Resources to support good academic practice are available through [Skills for Learning](#) and colleagues in this team may provide support to students throughout the year in-line with the teaching and learning on their course.

Where students are suspected to have breached our regulations through misdemeanour or misconduct, we will investigate, and penalties will be applied which are proportionate to any found or admitted breach. Each School has appointed an Academic Honesty Lead(s) to manage suspected cases. Where students have fallen short of our expectations, we will provide opportunities for further learning, where it is appropriate to do so.

Where investigation of a more serious case is required, this is managed by the University Academic Misconduct Board. Staff development in Academic Honesty is offered by Academic Quality Enhancement, by visiting the [Academic Honesty webpage](#).

4. Types of assessment and inclusivity enhancements

4.1. Synoptic Assessment

Synoptic assessments, which require students to draw together learning from across modules or topics, can be a powerful tool for fostering inclusivity. By inviting learners to demonstrate understanding and skills in an integrated, holistic manner, synoptic assessment can offer flexibility in how students evidence their achievement. This can be especially beneficial for those with diverse learning needs, backgrounds, or commitments outside of study, as it enables a variety of approaches.

Designing synoptic assessments with inclusivity in mind means providing clear guidance on expectations while allowing for multiple modes of submission, whether written, oral, visual, or digital. It also involves structuring assessment tasks to avoid disproportionately favouring particular styles of learning, instead celebrating a wide range of competencies. Synoptic tasks can help reduce assessment overload by consolidating multiple learning outcomes into a single, meaningful piece of work, promoting deeper engagement and synthesis rather than surface learning. This can support appropriate use of AI tools and support students to work gradually on the assessment rather than the pressure of a single deadline.

4.2. Self and peer assessment

Self and peer assessment can be used to support students to develop their understanding of the basis on which academic judgements are made. Asking students to self-assess before submission can enable the tutor to focus feedback on those students whose self-assessment differs from theirs.

Clear guidance must be provided on what the students are expected to do and where peer assessment is taking place. It can be helpful to keep it anonymised where possible to reduce the chances of peer pressure and expectations.

4.3. Group work

Collaborative working on group projects prepares and develops students effectively for the workplace and builds interpersonal skills (Spencer-Oatey, H., & Dauber, D. 2016). The principles of group work apply whether it takes place in a physical classroom or an online environment. The use of group work needs careful management and design, including

being aware of the diverse needs of the student group, as part of a balanced assessment strategy for the level/course. There can be concerns about using group work for summative assessment especially where marks can contribute to a student's degree classification. It may be more useful to be used as part of the formative developmental work for an individually marked summative project, or as part of the module assessment.

If students are working in groups, then the process needs to be managed proactively and carefully by the tutor. Clear guidance should be issued well in advance of the timetabled assessment deadline date, which outlines the expectations of the tasks, the nature of the group and student roles. It should include how the process of conflict management is addressed by the group, leadership issues, the generation of ground rules and clear timescales. Setting clear check-in points to ensure groups are progressing and identifying issues early can also help. Individual assessment tasks can be included from a group project task if desired. More information can be found on the [groupwork document](#).

If groupwork is set up and managed entirely online, then there are additional resources written by the Educational Enhancement Unit about activities which can be used when working with students in online groups. See [online synchronous engagement](#) via the Teach Learn website.

4.4. Presentation

To ensure that presentations as a mode of assessment are inclusive, it is essential to provide students with clear, accessible guidance on expectations and criteria, allowing for equitable preparation regardless of prior experience or confidence levels. Flexibility in the mode of delivery, such as permitting pre-recorded, in-person, or online presentation, can accommodate diverse needs and alleviate anxiety for some learners. Offering opportunities for rehearsal, peer feedback, or access to support resources, can further empower students to demonstrate their knowledge effectively. When using pre-recorded or online presentations as a form of assessment, staff should be aware of the possibility that students might use AI to prepare their content and script. Thus, it is important staff provide guidance on what is and what is not an acceptable use of AI for the specific assessment task.

Inclusive assessment design also considers group dynamics, ensuring that roles and responsibilities within group presentations are transparently communicated, so every student can contribute meaningfully.

5. Assessment in practice

5.1. Preparing students for assessment

Pre-applicant documentation should be clear about the assessment approaches used in the course so students can make an informed choice before applying. If collaborative work is part of the course activity this should be made clear.

Staff at Open Days, Applicant Days and induction sessions should be prepared to answer questions about the assessment strategies for their courses.

Clear outlines for each assessment should be issued in the module handbook, uploaded to the appropriate part of MyBeckett and highlighted in taught sessions. This may include:

- the assessment criteria
- its type and weighting
- the choices available
- the marking schemes and grading criteria
- the format feedback will be given in
- the word count for written assignments
- the formative assessment and support available in each module
- the timetabled dates of any assessment sessions
- referencing convention
- the format and location (e.g., Turnitin) for submitting the assessment
- the submission dates and resit submission details
- the point of contact for any queries relating to the assessment.

All students should have information as far in advance as is feasible to allow them time to prepare and plan around other commitments and assessments. Give students as much information as possible as early as possible. Having a course assessment strategy, with staggered deadlines across modules, will help students to plan better.

Disability Advice provide [guidance on how to create accessible and inclusive information](#).

5.2. Using Assessment Exemplars

Using examples of good assessment outputs may help clarify student expectations about what is required for a particular standard and their performance expectations. They can be used in different ways.

You may want to ask your students to “mark” and review a series of assessments against the marking criteria. This can be done on a similar topic to the actual assessment task.

It is essential to do this if students are undertaking a new form of assessment or are being assessed at a particular level for the first time. Staff sometimes feel that uploading exemplars can reduce student creativity and diminish enthusiasm, therefore it may be better to discuss the examples and how these outputs relate to the marking criteria in a transparent group setting, allowing students to ask questions.

Providing suitably anonymised excerpts (with the student’s permission) from different transcripts written to varying standards can be helpful in assessment tutorials. Students can work together to discuss the marking criteria and the different levels of expectation for each banding (Kean, 2012).

5.3. Writing assessment guidance for students

Assessment questions/tasks should be written in [plain English](#), avoiding jargon, acronyms and localised language. They should be appropriate to the level and subject of study (aligned with the [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#) expectations), achievable

and clear, the [taxonomy](#) to help with this.. The meaning and clarity of the assessments should be tested within your course team colleagues and seek feedback from your External Examiner before sharing any assessment briefs with the students. Assessment information should be clearly identifiable within the MyBeckett VLE and Module Handbooks.

Information and instructions for students would benefit from including guidance on essential and desirable activities students can undertake to enhance their assessment success. This may use language such as “You must... You should... You could ...”. Differentiating learning speed and challenge within module handbooks will also help to support all students’ learning needs more effectively and may help them achieve better assessment marks.

For example, directing students to more focussed reading can help. Add comments in the session’s activity sheets and module schedules e.g. “If you want to learn more about this... read XXX”, or “if you have struggled with the concepts in this session then re-read XXXXX.” The Centre for Learning and Teaching and your academic librarian can help with this (see [Personalised Learning](#)).

For further information see the [Inclusive Assessment Talis list](#).