



Associated Assessment and Feedback Policy Principles:

AD2: There is a course-wide emphasis on assessment for learning

AD3: Assessment practices are designed to ensure all students have equal opportunities to demonstrate achievement.

AD4: assessment approaches value student diversity by enabling appropriate opportunities to personalise the learning journey.

AF2: Feedback is designed to be accessible, relevant and timely.

Focus Questions

- Why is inclusivity in assessment important?
- What are the key considerations for inclusive assessment design?
- How can assessment practices be reconfigured so as to be accessible for all students?

What do we know? Contemporary perspectives

Considering the highly diversified nature of our student populations in higher education (HE) and the central role assessment plays in driving student learning, inclusive assessment ought to be a primary consideration in the development of assessment strategies. However, research evidence suggests that assessment remains a major factor in the exclusion of students in HE, with little evidence of universities adapting their assessment approaches to cater for diverse student cohorts ([Gun et al., 2015](#)).

When considering issues of student diversity and inclusivity, our thinking might naturally turn to particular 'groups' or sub-groups', such as students with disabilities or specific additional requirements (e.g. dyslexia) and how alternative assessment arrangements might be provided. Recent research illustrates a shift in emphasis away from such procedural approaches to inclusivity and diversity toward an alternative 'capabilities' approach (see [Hanesworth, 2015](#)) that has influenced the development of a broader interpretation of inclusivity in educational practice. Underpinning this broader view are values of equity and fairness, where students' differences are considered and valued within the mainstream curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Teesside's own [Principles of Inclusivity](#) support the development of inclusive practice that proactively eliminates discrimination, promotes equality of opportunity and fosters good relations in a manner that values and responds to student diversity. Valuing the diversity of our students, in this broader view, is about recognising that, to varying degrees, the nature and quality of student learning hinges on a combination of a students' prior learning experiences, their individual attitudes and preferences regarding learning, the extent to which they have external familial, caring or additional employment responsibilities, and their own personal values, religion and beliefs (Gun et al., 2015; Hanesworth, 2015).

We as educators need to take steps to ensure that across a programme of study, no learner is disadvantaged by the nature and pattern of assessment, and has the opportunity to engage in diverse forms of assessment practice that maintain academic standards and recognize different backgrounds, learning needs, preferences, and motivations. Students can feel alienated when they find assessment tasks refer to cultures, experiences, gender and race that are not their own. Assessment tasks should, therefore, only be selected on the grounds that they can be assessed equitably. This is underpinned by an understanding that students as individuals have strengths, qualities, and skills that will be beneficial for their own learning, as well as that of their peers.

What can we do? Reviewing practice

Over-reliance on conventional forms of assessment, such as essays and exams, can mean that certain students in a diverse cohort may be unfairly disadvantaged, as they do not have opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities (e.g. strengths in oral communication). Useful guidance produced by [Plymouth University](#) outlines three main considerations for developing inclusive assessment strategies:

- The use of diverse and authentic methods (e.g. collaborative project work, e-portfolios, oral presentations), including formative activities.
- How students are prepared for assessments (e.g. through an assignment briefing and discussion of criteria).
- The scheduling of assessments (e.g. effective sequencing and distribution of assessments across a course)

Principles of good assessment design such as constructive alignment, clear and transparent criteria, and timely and constructive feedback remain key considerations when designing inclusive assessment. The most effective inclusive assessment strategies will utilise a variety of fair and accessible approaches to assessment, employing a carefully designed and balanced range of valid and flexible assessment tasks that enable all students to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do.

Using a variety of assessment rather than relying on one or two signature assessment methods ensures each student has the opportunity to enhance their strengths and challenge their less-developed learning and skills, helping to develop a broader range of potential learning outcomes. It is important to give careful thought to how combinations of different assessment methods and tasks might meet the learning needs and preferences of diverse student groups, including those studying at different locations, from different cultural/educational backgrounds, with additional learning needs, or with protected characteristics. Responses of students to each activity enables us as educators to identify the extent to which some methods work better for particular groups of students and to pinpoint any barriers to learning that might need to be addressed.

Some useful prompts for thinking proactively about promoting equality of opportunity through inclusive assessment design include:

- Does assessment on your module provide every student with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their achievement?
- Are assessment tasks appropriately and reasonably challenging for all of the students in the cohort?
- To what extent are students encouraged to bring their own backgrounds and experiences to bear on assessment tasks?

Incorporating choice and flexibility into assessment design can empower students to take responsibility for their learning. This can be effectively achieved by identifying which aspects of the assessment process lend themselves to greater involvement from learners. For example, students might be involved in designing aspects of an assessment task (through choice of topic or assessment method), provide feedback to peers on draft work, or use assessment to develop learning resources for fellow students. Involving learners in such ways can increase their sense of responsibility and confidence, improve the quality of their work, and provide important, timely, information to tutors for improving assessment tasks ([Evans, 2013](#)).

- To what extent do students have choice in the topics, methods, and criteria, of assessment tasks on your course/module?
- Do you provide an appropriate amount of formative assessment as part of module assessment processes to meet the needs of different levels of student development and achievement?

Useful Resources

Jisc (2015). Inclusive Assessment; transforming assessment and feedback with technology. Accessible at: [Jisc Guide](#).

Miller, W., Collings, J. & Kneale, P. (2011). Inclusive Assessment, PedRIO with Plymouth University. Accessible at: [Paper 7](#).

Nelson Laird, T. F. (2011) Measuring the diversity inclusivity of college courses. *Research in Higher Education*. 52, 572-588.

Waterfield, J. & West, R. (2010). Inclusive Assessment: diversity and inclusion – the assessment challenge. Accessible at [PASS](#).