

LTSN Generic Centre

Assessment Series No

2



Assessment:
A Guide for Heads
of Department

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Generic Centre Guides and Briefings

Welcome to the Learning and Teaching Support Network Generic Centre's series of Assessment Guides and Briefings. They aim to provide a series of overviews of important issues and practices in the field of assessment for the higher education community.

The Assessment Guides are intended for colleagues with particular roles and for students, as their titles suggest. The Briefings are primarily intended for lecturers and other staff involved in supporting learning.

The Assessment Series is a snapshot of a field in which development is likely to be rapid, and will be supplemented by specific case studies produced by the LTSN Subject Centres.

The series was developed by Brenda Smith and Richard Blackwell of the LTSN Generic Centre with the support of Professor Mantz Yorke. Experts in the field were commissioned for each title to ensure that the series would be authoritative. Authors were invited to approach the issue in their own way and no attempt was made to impose a uniform template.

The series editors are grateful to colleagues in LTSN Subject Centres and other senior colleagues who refereed the series, and of course to the authors for enabling its publication.

We hope that you will enjoy the Assessment Series and find it interesting and thought-provoking. We welcome your feedback and any suggestions you may have for future work in the area of assessment.

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Crafting a departmental assessment strategy

Summary

Crafting is a subtle art. It involves:

- doing some background research to find the appropriate materials and methods;
- the design of a product that is acceptable to its intended users;
- ensuring that the product fits its purpose - and works;
- considering ways of improving it.

In this briefing paper we provide a set of guidelines on crafting an assessment strategy. The paper does not consider the fine detail of assessing student learning nor does it consider the issues of national and institutional strategies. These matters are dealt with in other briefs and guides in this series. Rather this paper focuses upon the development, implementation and monitoring of departmental assessment strategies and it offers suggestions

and prompting questions that may help a Head of Department in his/her tasks as leader and manager of a department. (The term 'Department' is used throughout this paper to refer to any groupings of staff that are linked to the institution such as subject-based departments, Units, Centres or Schools). Put rather crudely, these tasks include '*doing the right things*', as the leader. Such as creating with members of the department, a viable and effective assessment strategy and '*doing things right*', as the manager. Such as ensuring there are role-allocations and mechanisms within the department that ensure that the assessment strategy is being carried out, monitored and developed. But before exploring the guidelines it may be useful to consider what a strategy is and why a departmental strategy is important.

What is an assessment strategy?

A strategy is a set of procedures for achieving a goal or purpose. The root in Greek is *strategia*, a device for winning a war. A strategy usually consists of a statement of purpose, the guiding principles to achieve that purpose and a set of procedures based on the principles. The procedures might include targets and dates for actions.

The primary purpose of an assessment strategy is to sustain and improve the quality of assessment in a given context. It provides a statement of the purposes of assessment, the guiding principles to achieve those purposes and the procedures that are derived from the principles. The procedures may contain realistic targets, timelines and an indication of any support needed. Clearly, the purposes, principles and procedures should be in harmony.

Purposes, principles and procedures

The purposes of assessment are to help students to improve their learning, to provide certification and to contribute to quality assurance. Each of these broad purposes may be sub-divided further (see Figure 1):

The second of these purposes tends to predominate with consequent disadvantages to the first. The third purpose is seen as increasingly important because of institutional and national demands of quality. Regardless of these demands, it is important for a department to know whether its provision for learning and assessment is effective. Indeed assessment and assessment strategies are central to high quality curriculum design and management.

The appropriate guiding principles of an assessment strategy are readily deduced from the particular purposes that have been identified. Thus, if one of the purposes of assessment of a department were concerned with 'licence to practice' then one would expect to see in the guiding principles a statement on the assessment of professional practice and a set of procedures for examining practice. Since degree awards (certification) are important in any degree programme, one would expect to see a guiding principle such as *'The Department is committed to providing fair and equitable assessment procedures that assess the intended learning outcomes of each programme.'* The procedures would then outline the methods of ensuring fairness and consistency in marking, the use of criteria, comparability of marking across modules and how students are informed of the assessment procedures.

Levels of strategies

Assessment strategies operate at different levels. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) code of practice on assessment (available at www.qaa.ac.uk) is, in effect, a national assessment strategy. This together with recommendations of the Funding Councils has led to the development of institutional strategies of teaching, learning and assessment (Gibbs, Habeshaw and Yorke, 2000) which are, in effect, central directives to departments. These directives usually require a department to develop its assessment strategy. The departmental strategy contextualises the institutional strategy into local, usually subject-specific, areas of learning. The departmental strategy, in its turn,



Figure 1: Purposes of assessment¹

Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide feedback to students to improve their learning To motivate students To diagnose a student's strengths and weaknesses To help students to develop their skills of self-assessment To provide a profile of what a student has learnt
Certification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To pass or fail a student To grade or rank a student To licence to proceed To licence to practice To select for future courses To predict success in future courses To select for future employment To predict success in employment
Quality Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide feedback to lecturers on student learning To improve teaching To evaluate a course's strengths and weaknesses To assess the extent to which a programme has achieved its aims To judge the effectiveness of the learning environment To ensure the course is credit worthy to other institutions and employers To monitor standards over time

may shape the programme strategy, the module strategy and even the strategy for a particular session. (Webster, 1997) The individual member of the department is expected to follow the departmental assessment strategy but an individual may have his or her strategy of assessing student learning - although most individuals do not articulate or declare their private strategies. Figure 2 (adapted from Yorke 1998b) illustrates a typical hierarchy of levels. Each downward level may have some leeway. Some

modular schemes cut across departmental boundaries. Such schemes sacrifice curriculum coherence for the students' freedom of choice and thereby present difficulties for assessment procedures, the management of assessment for degree awards and for assessment strategies. Paradoxically, the solution, which is often imposed, is standardisation of all modular assessments regardless of the content and intended learning outcomes of the module.

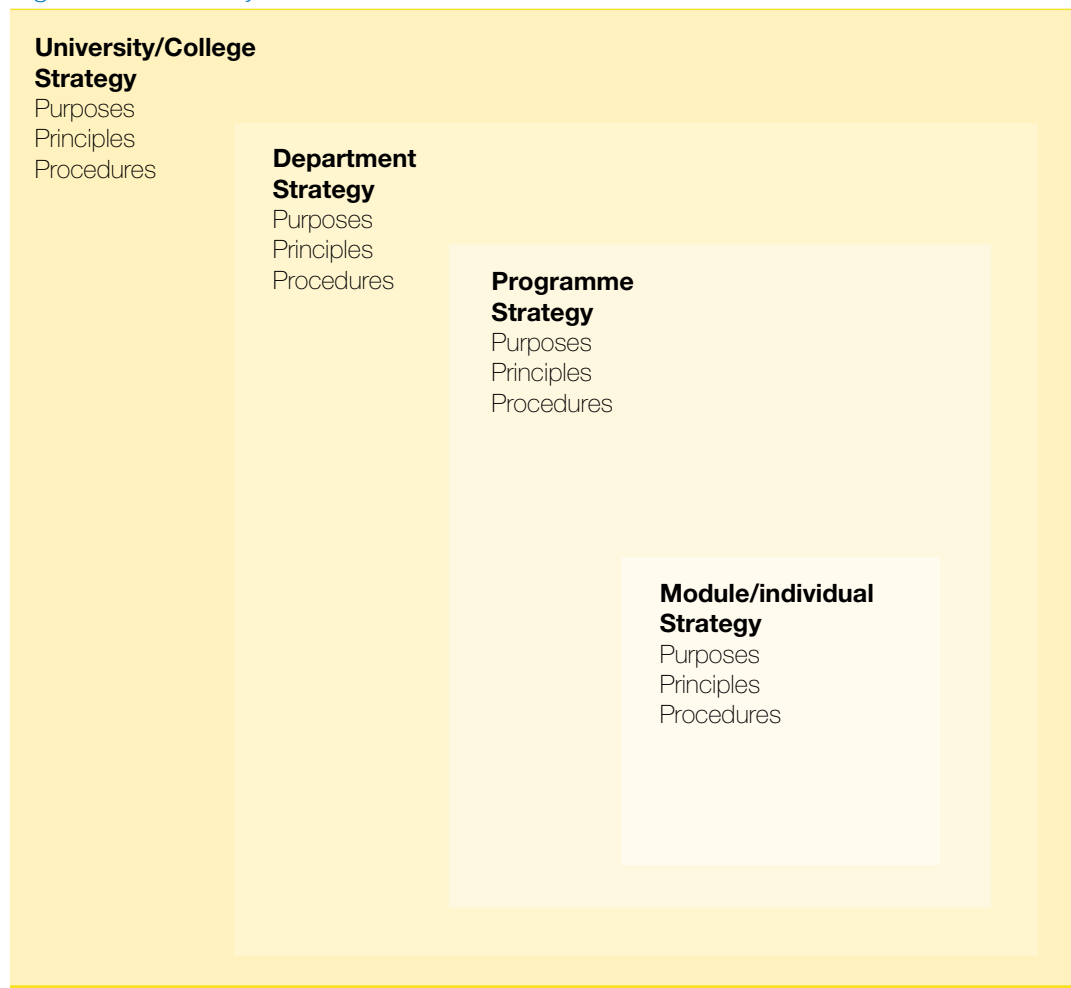
¹ For further discussion of the purposes of assessment, see Atkins, Beattie and Dockrell, 1993; Brown, Bull and Pendlebury, 1997; and Yorke, 1998a.

Clearly, strategic approaches are part of the command-control culture that has penetrated higher education. Such an approach fits more easily the post-1992 universities with their history of Local Education Authority (LEA) management and the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). Pre-1992 universities still retain a measure of collegiality and departmental autonomy although the two 'systems' are converging and now overlap. The command-control culture may lead to greater consistency within and between institutions but it can also lead to resistance to change, subterfuge and the stifling of innovation. Departments have an important mediating role here. They can adapt the

institutional strategies to meet the needs of the subject area, the staff and students. They can provide a space where reflection can occur and where innovation and experiment can flourish. Heads of Departments can provide participative leadership, which encourages development and learning (Ramsden, 1998; Knight and Trowler, 2000). However, the extent to which departments can adapt institutional strategies is, of course, dependent upon the institutional culture. The issue of freedom versus control in the assessment of students is mirrored in the issue of freedom versus control of the management of assessment within departments and universities.



Figure 2: Hierarchy of levels



Why does a department need an assessment strategy?

What is assessed?

The short answer to this question is so that a department knows what it is doing with regard to assessment and why it is doing it in that way. A more extended answer would include how a department discovers whether it is doing what it claims to be doing and what mechanisms it has for improving what it is doing.

The reasons why a department needs to develop an assessment strategy may be, at the lowest level, because it has been told to develop one. More cogent reasons are to:

- provide opportunities to reflect upon the departmental approaches to assessment;
- deepen understanding and commitment of staff to the processes of assessment;
- help staff and students improve their approaches to assessment;
- provide support for the exploration of alternative approaches to assessment;
- ensure a degree of consistency in assessment procedures across the department;
- establish the priorities of assessment within the department;
- contextualise the institutional assessment strategy.

However any strategy needs to take into account the environment in which it is to be operationalised. The environment of higher education is subject to powerful, sometimes conflicting, demands. It is not necessary in this paper to rehearse these at length. They include demands for accountability and transparency; benchmarking, programme specifications and standards. Also issues relating to shrinking resources, increasing numbers of students; wider access combined with higher retention rates and higher standards of achievement; the problems of plagiarism; equal opportunities and the needs of students with disabilities; student choice and coherent learning experiences.

All of the above impinge upon assessment and therefore upon assessment strategies. Indeed, the above list together with the reasons for developing an assessment strategy, provides a useful starting point for discussion of an assessment strategy.

What approaches to strategy should one take?

The approach one takes to creating an assessment strategy is dependent, in part, on the size of the department and on whether one wishes to work *within* the existing culture or *on* the existing culture. Reviews of studies of innovation and change (e.g.; Berg and Ostergren, 1977; Power, 1994; Jones, 1996; Brown, Bull and Pendlebury, 1997) suggest that the more remote the source of directives or of quality demand are, the less likely they are to induce commitment and compliance. Higher rates of successful innovation are more likely to occur in collaborative learning cultures than in command-control cultures. The prediction from these studies is that an assessment strategy is more likely to be acted upon when *its problems and solutions* are owned by its users. Five broad approaches are possible. They vary along the dimension of control-freedom.

Copy directly the institutional strategy

This approach is very easy to produce but it may be difficult to manage. It may not take account of the particular features of the department, it may not be sufficiently specific, it may not be acceptable to staff - and it may not work.

A strong directive by the Head of Department

The Head of Department, or a small group of senior colleagues, write the assessment strategy and promulgate it. This approach *may* work in some departments, particularly if the directive includes targets to be achieved. But it may lead to superficial compliance ('change but no change') and little commitment.

A target-based strategy

This approach is based on discussions within the department that lead to a set of agreed targets for the department. The approach provides some freedom within a structured framework. It is likely to gain commitment and compliance. It is more difficult to produce but it is relatively easy to manage.

A guidance-based strategy

This approach provides a light structural framework within which the members of the department agree to work. The approach provides a high degree of freedom. It requires mutual trust and professional responsibility. It can lead to innovative approaches but it runs the risk of becoming unclear. It is relatively easy to produce and manage but it may not be consonant with the expectations of the central management of the University.

An abstentionist strategy

This approach leaves all the decisions to another, usually, lower level. Control is minimal and freedom is maximal - until a crisis occurs. Then there is often a reversion to the strong directive.



Preparing to develop a strategy

There are two components in the preparation of an assessment strategy: the people involved and the task. There is a conflict here that is not unlike the control-freedom conflict that resonates through assessment and its management. It is relatively easy to write an assessment strategy but it can then be difficult to persuade people to use it. It is relatively easy to talk to people about the possible contents of an assessment strategy but it can then be difficult to write an acceptable, coherent strategy. As usual, the middle way is more effective and efficient. Hence we advocate an approach that takes account of the views of participants and the contents of the strategy. The approach will also need adapting to the particular needs, culture and values of a department.

Who should develop the strategy

There are four common approaches to preparing the draft strategy:

1. Do it yourself

This approach may work if there is already a shared, deep understanding of approaches to assessment within the department. It is time-consuming for you. It runs the risk of not being accepted and it does not involve the users of the strategy.

2. Use the existing committee structure

If the committee is well regarded in the Department, then this approach may work. If it is not, it is unlikely to engender widespread commitment.

3. Persuade a member of the department to write the draft

The success of this approach is dependent upon the expertise and credibility of the person

in the department. The approach can work well if the 'writer' consults with influential members of the department. It can be particularly efficient in small departments but it is a time-consuming task for one individual.

4. Create a working group

The choice of the working group is crucial. It should reflect the groupings within the department. Consultations with the groupings (course teams, subject areas) within the departments should be undertaken. In a large department, it may be necessary to have a co-ordinating working group and subgroups or task forces that are led by members of the co-ordinating group. The working group should be provided with a clear brief, otherwise it may produce an interesting set of insights rather than a strategy. The ability of the group to work together is probably more important than their initial knowledge of assessment strategies. The process of producing the draft is lengthier but the final assessment strategy is more likely to be accepted, valued and used.

The choice of people is related to your choice of process and the time available. If your view of the assessment strategy is that it is but another chore of policy production, then 'who does the draft?' is not a critical decision. If, however, you want the process to involve elements of learning, development, and renewed commitment to assessment then you need people who can facilitate these elements.

Do the research

Begin with the departmental documents on assessment. You will find in them the department's implicit assessment strategy, and if you are lucky, the makings of an acceptable assessment strategy. Then look at the strategies of other departments in the university,

the institutional strategies and the assessment strategies of cognate departments in other universities or colleges. Section 6 of the code of practice of the QAA (www.qaa.ac.uk) deals with assessment and other parts of the code deal with relevant issues such as equal opportunities and the needs of disabled students. Most of the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) Subject Centres contain useful suggestions on assessment, which may help in the formulation of your assessment strategy. Professional bodies in your subject area may have requirements that need to be taken into account. You will find useful the articles by Mutch (2002), Yorke (1998b), the section in Brown and Knight's text on managing assessment (Brown and Knight, 1994), the section on 'Leading Assessment' in Knight and Trowler (2001), the recent texts by Biggs (1999) and the other guides in the LTSN Generic Centre Assessment Series.

Consult colleagues

The consultations may consist of an audit of assessment methods and procedures, informal discussions, open ended questionnaires, seminars or an away day. An audit can unearth good practices that other members of the department are not aware of and, of course, it can identify areas of weakness. You will probably receive comments on assessment over-load. After all, British students are probably the most assessed in Europe and British academics are the most evaluated. You may also receive comments on the pressures of the research assessment exercise. These issues are not irrelevant to the development of a viable assessment strategy. To pretend otherwise is a foolish management ploy.

Who will be consulted?

Do a draft discussion paper

Typically, the draft might contain:

The department, its programmes and the background of its students:

This section provides the context of the strategy. The context should be one of the shaping forces of the strategy. If there is a high proportion of mature students who have recently returned to study then one would expect the strategy to take this feature into account. If failure rates were a problem, one would expect to see a section in the strategy on additional support and assessment for students in difficulty.

The purpose of the departmental assessment strategy

This could be an expansion of the general theme of sustaining and improving the quality of assessment in the department.

The purposes of assessment

The purposes given in Figure 1 might provide a useful starting point. They could be presented in a separate section or as part of the guiding principles.

The guiding principles:

It may be useful to invite a few colleagues to brainstorm the guiding principles and then summarise them as a set of principles. The principles are often statements of implicit values. These statements might include the following:

- The purposes of assessment;
- The purposes of feedback;
- Equality of opportunity;
- Justification of the balance between course work and examinations;
- Justification of the range of assessment methods used;
- Staff development;
- Support for students.



The key procedures:

The procedures should be in alignment with the principles. Some of the procedures might include targets, timelines and support available. For example, if criteria for assessment are not yet fully integrated into assessment procedures, then one might include a statement such as:

- *Procedure:* All assessment tasks must be accompanied by clear criteria that outline what a student has to do to achieve a given grade. Such criteria must be contained in the documentation that accompanies the module. They should be available to the student at the beginning of the module. Reinforcement and clarification of such criteria through discussion in lectures and seminars is recommended.
- *Target:* All programmes and modules should have criteria for assessment grading by the next review of this strategy in October 2002. A review of practice should be carried out and a report submitted to the Departmental Committee by September 2002.
- *Support:* A seminar on writing criteria for grading will be held in February 2002.

The procedures outlined in the assessment strategy might include some or all of the following:

- designing assessment tasks and examinations in relation to programme, level and modular outcomes;
- timing, setting and return of assignments;
- use of criteria for marking and feedback;
- processes of marking and moderation;
- awards of degrees and certification;
- dealing with plagiarism;
- role and responsibilities of students;
- role and responsibilities of academic staff;
- role of examining boards and external examiners;

- rights of appeal;
- analysing the achievements of students at different levels;
- range of consultations on the assessment process and assessment strategy;
- reporting and reviewing the assessment processes;
- implementing recommended changes in the assessment processes and strategy;
- contingency planning - what will be done when things go wrong.

Each of the above sections contains issues and associated value judgements, which it is not possible to cover in a short paper. Appendix One contains a set of prompting questions, which will help the working group(s) to explore some of the underlying issues.

Obtain comments and redraft the strategy

The draft should be circulated and discussed in a seminar, or at an away day, so that everyone in the department has an opportunity to comment and clarify the procedures. It is often useful to discuss role allocations, responsibilities and reporting procedures at such meetings. This is a dangerous phase in the process of development and implementation. There may be attempts to smuggle in existing, favoured, but unsatisfactory, approaches. Some members of the department may try to block the strategy. Some common tactics for resisting change are given in Appendix 2. In re-drafting, one can lose the key features of the original so it is important to compare carefully the original draft and the final version.

The final version and its implementation

The final version of the assessment strategy may have consequential effects upon programme descriptions, handbooks of modules and other documents. So once the strategy has been established, then each module and course team should check their documents to ensure consistency. This process can deepen understanding of the strategy as well as ensuring the strategy is incorporated into the *modus operandi* of the department.

You might then consider publishing the strategy on your web site and linking it through hypertext to other relevant documents. This approach has been used successfully in the Business School at Nottingham Trent University. Staff and students can access the strategy and then go to particular sections that they are interested in. These link to other course documents and to other sites such as the University's Office of

Programme Quality and Management, the LTSN in Business and Management, the LTSN Generic Centre and the QAA site. Whatever approach to dissemination of the strategy is adopted, do make the document user-friendly. Finally, it is worth noting that implementation requires time to think and adapt. Either one can provide the time in the developmental phase or during the implementation phase. Moving directly from writing the strategy document behind closed doors to its implementation may not be a short cut. Ideally, the seeds of implementation are sown in the consultations with colleagues so the seeds grow gradually through the development of the assessment strategy. By the time it has been published, it should have been understood and accepted.



Monitoring and evaluating the assessment strategy

Monitoring the strategy is the point where leadership in assessment merges into management of assessment. 'Doing things right' takes over the priority from 'doing the right things'.

The assessment strategy should have indicated the roles and responsibilities of the people and committees involved in implementing and monitoring the strategy. The task of the Head of the Department is then to ensure that the strategy is working through reports, meetings and discussions. Existing reporting arrangements may be suitable but one should check these and, if necessary, create new ones. A common weakness here is the failure to close the feedback loop. External examiners and students may have commented on an aspect of assessment, it may have been considered, and even acted upon, but the stakeholders are not informed.

Evaluation provides a measure of the match between the 'espoused' assessment strategy and 'the strategy in action'.² The evaluation may be based upon the analyses of student achievements, students' views and the views of other stakeholders, such as external examiners, members of the department and, perhaps, employers. The evaluation is primarily concerned with the questions:

- Is the strategy working?
- How has it made a difference to the quality of assessment in the department?
- Does it need improving?
- What support is needed to improve it?

The evaluation should lead to consequential actions. These are usually concerned with changing the assessment strategy in action but, *in extremis*, one might need to change the espoused assessment strategy.

The above suggestions will help you to craft an effective departmental strategy and, in so doing help to improve the quality of learning and assessment of students in the department. As Rowntree wisely observed in his seminal text on assessment:

'If we wish to discover the truth about an education system, we must look into its assessment procedures. What student qualities and achievements are actively valued and rewarded by the system. How are its purposes and intentions realised? To what extent are the ideals, aims and objectives professed by the system ever truly perceived, valued and striven for by those who make their way within it? The answers to such questions are to be found in what the system requires the students to do in order to survive and prosper. The spirit and style of student assessment defines the de facto curriculum.' (Rowntree, 1987:1)

² See Argyris (1999) for a discussion of 'espoused' theory and 'theory in action'. This gap between 'rhetoric' and 'reality' in assessment was recently identified in a national survey of the values and practices of assessment in Dental Schools. Thirty-six out of fifty one significant (or higher) differences between the values espoused and the actual practices were identified (Manogue et al., 2001).

Appendix One

A checklist of questions and comments

The following set of questions and comments may provide a useful basis for discussions of the departmental assessment strategy with regard to programmes and modules³. All the questions contain implicit values and there are no ideal solutions. Any suggested solution needs to take into account: the degrees of freedom allowed by the institution; whether the department can negotiate different approaches

from those of the institution; the existing approaches in the department; the customary approaches to assessment in the subject across other universities; the range of students participating in the programmes and the extent to which the department wishes to be innovative in its approaches to assessment.

The questions follow the broad pattern of purposes, the department, principles and procedures.

Purposes of the strategy

Generic purpose of strategy	What is the generic purpose of the assessment strategy? This might be a simple statement along the lines of sustainability, maintenance, improvement etc.
Generic questions	Five useful questions of assessment are: What kinds of things do you want students to learn? What opportunities for learning will be used? What methods of assessment? What criteria? How will you evaluate the success of the methods? <i>See the Guide for Lecturers for a discussion of these questions</i>
Purposes of assessment	What are the purposes of your assessment procedures? Figure 1 provides a starting point



³ Programmes in this document is used to refer to undergraduate degree courses and modules to any unit of study that contributes to the undergraduate degree programme, including short courses.

Programmes and Students

Programmes	You may have different modes of study in your department (full-time, part-time, sandwich, block release), as well as different levels (undergraduate, postgraduate and professional). Each programme and level might have very different needs in terms of assessment. These should be taken into account when providing the guiding principles.
Subject	What are the customary approaches to assessment in your subject? Are there debates on assessment in your subject? Do you wish to modify or extend the usual approaches?
External bodies	How do the views of employers and professional bodies affect your approaches to assessment?
Students	These may come from diverse backgrounds. What is the profile of the students who take your programmes? Do the assessment procedures take these into account? Do your assessment procedures take into account the needs of mature students during their first year of study? Are there special provisions for students with disabilities? How do you minimise plagiarism?
Levels and student development	Do you use different methods of assessment at different levels? One may use the same method but set more demanding assessment tasks or one can vary the methods. If the latter, how do you prepare the students for the new methods? For example, if projects or dissertations are set at Level Three (final year of the course), how do you prepare students for these tasks?
Assessment loads	What is the assessment load on students and staff in the programmes? Are they comparable across modules? Are they comparable across programmes? How do you arrive at comparability? Some departments use, as a rule of thumb, a three-hour paper is equivalent to a 3000-word assignment. The issue is fraught with difficulty.
Use of resources	Assessment needs to be feasible and practical. How much time is spent by members of the department on assessment including preparation of assessment tasks, marking, checking results, and preparing reports and attendance at meetings? Are there alternative methods that could assess the learning outcomes but which are less burdensome for staff and students. These are explored further in other publications in this series. Are the physical resources sufficient to support the methods of assessment? For example, do you have sufficient equipment for assessing students' presentation skills?

Guiding Principles

There are a variety of issues involved in the formulation of guiding principles. Here are a few of the many that could be considered.

Intended learning outcomes

A vexing problem.

If you attempt to assess separately every learning outcome of every module then you will almost certainly overload students and staff. It may be better to take the view that assessment of programme outcomes is the key approach and that these outcomes should be taught, practised and assessed at each level of the programme rather than in every module. Within each module, try to design assessment tasks that assess directly or indirectly a cluster of module learning outcomes. One can use matrices of programme outcomes, modular outcomes and methods of assessment to identify the matches between the outcomes and frequencies of assessment.

Course work versus examinations?

A perennial argument.

There are various methods of examination and course work. (See the guides in this series). Which do you favour and why?

Diversity or consistency?

The proportions of course work and written examinations in programmes vary widely. Some begin at Level One with more course work and move towards a project/dissertation and more written examinations in the final year of the degree (Level Three). This approach, it is argued, provides support in the early stages and tests the students' performance in the later stages.

What is the underlying rationale of your approach?

What is more important: diversity of approaches or consistency within the programmes?

Should the approach or the rationale be changed?

The important point is to fit the assessment methods to the learning outcomes being assessed.

Assessment methods

A list of assessment methods is given in the Guide for Lecturers. Which assessment methods does the department use and why? Are your assessment methods appropriate for the learning outcomes of the programme?

Bear in mind that within assessment methods there are variations of tasks. For example there are different types of essays and practical examinations.



<p>Equity</p>	<p>Equitable treatment of students is primarily a matter of consistency of marking within and across modules. Related procedures are the use of criteria, internal consistency of a marker, consistency of marking of the module team and the programme teams. Variations in the marks awarded in modules can affect the classification of degree awarded.</p> <p>What procedures do you have for ensuring consistency of marking within and across modules? Are they working?</p> <p>What analysis is conducted of student performance in different modules?</p>
<p>Staff/educational development</p>	<p>What support or training in marking is provided for new staff, part-time staff and teaching assistants?</p>
<p>Minimising discrimination whilst maintaining standards</p>	<p>This issue has many ramifications. Evidence indicates that some modes of assessment have a gender bias. Men usually do better in multiple choice questions and women often do better in course work. Students with disabilities have special needs. You might check whether the modes of assessment in your courses are having differential effects on different groups of students. You would then need to consider whether your assessment methods need to be changed. To what extent should one take account of these features when judging student achievement? Debates on this issue can become lively, even irrational.</p>
<p>Helping students learn</p>	<p>Feedback is central to helping students to learn.</p> <p>What kinds of feedback do you provide, (e.g. rating schedules, marking schemes, written comments, tutorials, and overviews of the performance of the class on the assignment)? Are the overviews provided in class or on the Web? Does the feedback improve student learning? Are students taught how to use feedback? Is the use made of this feedback monitored? If reflection is a valued characteristic, how is it taught and how do you provide feedback on levels of reflection?</p>

Procedures

Here are a few questions on procedures that should be considered

Design of assessment tasks and examination questions

What procedure do you have to ensure the tasks and examinations fit the learning outcomes?

When are the examination questions set and submitted for approval?

Timing of information given to students

When are students given the assignments, the date of submission and the examination timetable? Are students asked to keep a copy of work submitted?

Are these tasks published, for example, in the student handbook?

Marking times and feedback

What is the timetable for marking assignments and examination scripts? Is there sufficient time for marking the assignments and examination scripts and for moderation? To whom do students hand their assignments and is this recorded?

Are students always given written feedback, and does the feedback help them to learn?

How do you ensure high quality feedback from all staff?

Are the systems working?

Criteria

Do all assignments have criteria?

What kinds of criteria are used in the department? Do the students know and understand the criteria and marking schemes?

Are the criteria published?

What is the rationale underlying your use of criteria?

How do the criteria relate to levels of progression and learning outcomes?

Moderation

How are assignments and scripts moderated? What methods do you use? Despite the fashion of 'double blind mark everything', there is no evidence that the process is any more reliable than sampling based on double marking (Murphy, 1979; Newton, 1996). Double blind marking of assignments is often not practical or useful for developmental purposes.

Is there sufficient time for moderation?



<p>External Examiners, Examining Boards and record keeping</p>	<p>What are the roles of External Examiners and Boards of Examiners? Could the system be improved? Is there an induction process for new examiners? Who organises the papers for the meetings of the Boards? How? Where and how are records kept? Are External Examiners informed of any actions taken (or not taken) as a result of their report?</p> <p>Do tutors have easy access to records of student achievement? Are there appropriate data systems in place? Are they consonant with the University system?</p>
<p>Appeals</p>	<p>What is the appeals procedure? Is it time-consuming? Could it be improved?</p>
<p>Plagiarism</p>	<p>What is the current procedure for handling plagiarism? How could plagiarism be minimised in the department? (See the Guides for Senior Managers and Lecturers and the Briefing on Plagiarism in this series.)</p>
<p>Reporting procedures</p>	<p>How is the assessment strategy to be monitored and evaluated? What are the roles and responsibilities of members of the departments and the committees? What is the flow-line of reporting procedures? Does it work?</p>
<p>Staff development</p>	<p>What support will be provided to staff for the development and implementation of the strategy? Administrative and technical staff, as well as academic staff and teaching assistants may need mentoring, briefings or workshops. Who will provide them and when?</p>

Appendix Two

Thirty Ways of Avoiding Change

1. We're already doing it.
2. We've already tried it and it didn't work.
3. We've never tried anything like it before.
4. The reduction in our funding prevents it.
5. Have we really got the time for this?
6. Of course if we had the right staff.....
7. We would like to but the Dean/Director/
Vice Chancellor/QAA/HEFCE would never
let us.
8. This sort of thing has been turned down
before.
9. What a good idea - let's set up a working
party.
10. There's a working party/government
committee looking at just this area.
11. Isn't there a report coming out on this soon?
12. Isn't this something really for HEFCE to look
at?
13. The idea is very good in principle but it
wouldn't work in this Dept./Faculty.
14. Our research will suffer.
15. It's a good idea but the timetable won't
allow it.
16. Ah - this is something to put to the
Academic Audit Unit.
17. Have you looked at the cost effectiveness
factor?
18. That's just not possible. There are other
factors, which I am not at liberty to
disclose.
19. Well it might work in the States but I don't
think . . .
20. It's not necessary in this
Dept./School/Faculty/ University/College.
21. You should read the comment on this in
the minutes of the Faculty Board of 1968.
22. Our Heads of Departments are far too
busy for this sort of thing.
23. Look, we're just about to re-organise the
curriculum review and assessment
structure.
24. Look, we've just re-organised the
curriculum review structure.
25. I don't think the Examinations Unit would
cope with that.
26. Our staff are over stretched as it is.
27. Bring it up at the next meeting.
28. Why don't we talk about it when I get back
from South America?
29. And who did you say came up with this
idea?
30. It will lower academic standards.



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