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Inclusive Assessment
Edited by Wendy Miller, Jane Collings and Pauline Kneale

PedRIO paper 7

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Inclusive Assessment, PedRIO paper 7

Edited by Wendy Miller, Jane Collings and Pauline Kneale
Plymouth University, 2015

Contents

Editorial

This collection of papers developed from presentations to the conference held at Plymouth University in November 2014 on Inclusive Assessment, which drew an audience from within and beyond Plymouth in all disciplines. Inclusive assessment is a critical topic in higher education, as it seeks to finds ways to fairly assess students learning, but in doing so challenges people to review the effectiveness of processes and styles of assessment that are well respected and embedded in discipline practice.

In the first paper Kneale and Collings look at the process for making change at all levels within higher education, and reflect on activity in one institution. The contributions from Butcher *et al.* and Szkornik *et al.* then consider two identifiable groups of learners for whom inclusive assessment is important, the widening participation audience, and international students respectively. Each of these groups, as with other specific groups within higher education, benefits from a move towards greater variety and flexibility within assessment.

Bennett and Stevens explore the value of practise and pre-assessment through interventions that led to enhanced student satisfaction, and improvements between formative and summative assignment grades. The subsequent papers, by Iredale, Heggie and McPherson, and Murray, all discuss research that demonstrates the benefits of further involvement of students as participants in shaping assessment.

Lomas *et al.* discuss student and staff perspectives on changes in assessment at module level, and explore the remaining gaps between what is recognised to be best practice in literature and what happens 'on the ground.' Bissa addresses assessment in relation to employability, through a project that embeds relevant skills in the curriculum, looking at the effects on learning amongst a group of students with specific learning difficulties or disability, and with outcomes of an increase in student satisfaction and improved academic performance. The collection concludes with Magne *et al.*'s further exploration of gaps between aspirations for inclusive assessment practice and the reality of the assessment experience.

Other presentations in the conference covered inclusivity in dissertation work for art and design programmes, the relationship between inclusive assessment ideas and those of authentic assignments and assessments and the issues involved in moving the culture of assessment to this more inclusive space. There is much to be done in further developing inclusive assignments and assessments, ideas that are fundamental to inclusive teaching.

Wendy Miller and Pauline Kneale
PedRIO, Plymouth University

1. Developing and embedding inclusive assessment: issues and opportunities

Pauline Kneale and Jane Collings, PedRIO, Plymouth University
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> 'We need parity of assessment experience through strategic change, embedded, consistent practice rather than a 'bolt on' or 'ad hoc' provision' (Waterfield and West 2006)
>
> 'Students can escape from the effects of poor teaching, they cannot, by definition if they want to graduate, escape the effects of poor assessment.' (Boud 1995)
>
> 'The historically dominating role of assessment for selecting and disciplining students is at odds with a knowledge-based economy, which requires a learning culture of life-wide and lifelong learning.'   (Kvale 2007 p.57)

Let's be clear, inclusive assessment is not about 'easier assessments', the aim is to assess students equitably, and for them to achieve and demonstrate all aspects of their learning with as limited a hindrance from their personal circumstances as is practical. By assessing all students on the same basis, we hope to minimise discrimination, and students' feelings of isolation and 'separateness.' Some people will need specialist additional support, but these should be exceptions. Very importantly inclusive assessment must not compromise academic or professional standards. It should improve the chances for all students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills and to meet their learning outcomes.

This paper highlights the evidence and practise required to implement an inclusive approach, outlining the experience in one institution in moving towards the delivery of an inclusive assessment regime. It draws on results from student questionnaires and the National Student Survey (NSS) during 2013 and 2014, as part of the Plymouth University inclusive assessment project 2012-2015 which aims to achieve transformation through:
- Raising awareness of learners' issues.
- Providing options for assessment which are inclusive.
- Curriculum design that is mindful of inclusivity.

Challenging the established assessment practices in disciplines requires energy and enthusiasm. In essence, we seek to increase the critical mass of inclusive assessments across all programmes, making this approach the University norm.

(1) Background and Context

Inclusive assessment is a worldwide issue. In the US and UK, inclusive pedagogy emerged from the civil rights movement to promote equity for a wide range of cultural groups (Hockings, 2010). Monash University in Australia states 'inclusive assessment assesses ability, not the effects of

disability' and advocates inclusive teaching and assessment as 'benefiting all students: international, local, mature, as well as those with a disability' (Monash 2014). In the UK, Waterfield and West (2006) identified that an inclusive approach does not comprise academic or professional standards but improves the opportunities for students to demonstrate they have achieved the learning outcomes, using the same academic assessment wherever possible. Boud *et al*. (2010) envisioned guiding assessment thinking in light of the increasing focus on quality standards, and through addressing criticisms of current practice.

It has been argued that 'assessment practices in most universities have not kept pace with the vast changes in ... higher education' (HE Academy 2012 p.7). Currently most HEIs either use the *contingent approach* making special arrangements within existing systems or the *alternative approach,* which offers different assessment methods as a bolt-on for a minority of disabled students. MAP (modified assessment provision (Box 1)) needs are normally determined through a disability assessment, or in discussion with faculty staff where alternative arrangements are needed for students with family or other issues.

Box 1. Assessment approaches

Inclusive Assessment - refers to the design and use of fair and effective assessment methods and practices that enable all students to demonstrate to their full potential what they know, understand and can do. (Hockings 2010 p.2)

Modified Assessment - offers special arrangements or adjustments within existing systems, which may involve different assessment methods as a bolt-on for a minority of disabled students.

A number of studies highlight the assessment challenges students experience. Fuller *et al*. (2004) reports 34% students experienced difficulties in coursework, 30% difficulties in examinations and 12% difficulties in presentations. Hockings (2010) suggests through the design and use of fair and effective assessment methods and practices all students can demonstrate their full potential.

Fundamental to the university experience is encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning. Bloxham and Boyd (2007) advocates involving students as partners in creating assessment as a way to increase student engagement and deep learning. Boud and Falchikov (2009) suggest moving away from traditional assessment, which undermines students' capacity to judge their own work, to authentic, work- or research- relevant assessments that better prepare students for future employability.

The UK Quality Assurance Agency Quality Code makes it clear that: 'Through inclusive design, whenever possible and through individual reasonable adjustment wherever required, assessment tasks provide every student with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their achievement' (QAA 2013 p.19). The discipline QAA Subject Benchmark statements (QAA 2014) allow for and advocates

more flexibility in assessment than is generally recognised by university teaching staff. Examining a range of QAA Subject Benchmark statements shows they are consistently flexible in the choice of assessment methodologies. For example, 'The use of diverse assessment strategies should meet the varied needs of students and should provide the opportunity to incorporate innovative and original approaches' (Health Studies QAA Benchmark Statement 2008 p.6).

Assessments must enable students to demonstrate their achievement of learning outcomes, and where relevant the requirements of professional bodies to gain accredited status or exemptions. Professional body requirements are changing; the Solicitors Regulation Authority for example in November 2012 announced that time-controlled unseen examinations were no longer a compulsory requirement for a Qualifying Law Degree.

Hockings (2010) developed eleven principles to enable HEIs to consider the implications for policy and practice. These include the need for greater involvement of students in negotiating curriculum and assessment, adequate support for staff integrating new teaching and learning strategies, and the need to evaluate and improve inclusive learning and teaching strategies, policies and practices.

Student voice has been a key driver for change in assessment practices. Generally the UK National Student Survey (NSS) responses to the five assessment and feedback questions show markedly lower satisfaction rates than all other questions. The Annual Report of the National Student Forum (2009, p.7) highlighted the need for change, arguing that one of the key challenges for the future is to 'ensure a university-wide focus on assessment for, and not just of, learning' with emphasis on 'increased flexibility and innovation in course structures and modes of delivery.' Academics report that students often choose modules on the basis of assessment methods rather than module content, for example Boud and Falchikov (2007 p.580) asserted

> 'We face a system of assessment that has been subject to slow incremental change, to compromise and to inertia ... Assessment is not sufficiently equipping students to learn. We are failing to prepare them for the rest of their lives.'

(2) Plymouth Context

Inclusive assessment was first promoted at Plymouth University in 2006 through the Staff-Student Partnership for Assessment Change and Evaluation (SPACE) project (Waterfield and West 2006) to meet the needs of the diverse student population. The use of the term 'inclusive' has since become synonymous with accommodating students with disabilities, but should be seen in its wider context. The SPACE project identified the need to support students with disabilities and to provide satisfactory student experience for all students using an '*inclusive approach'* to assessment.

We argue that this comprehensive approach is critical to delivering an equitable student experience assessment across an institution, and its adoption requires institutional support. The ambition to develop inclusive teaching, learning and assessments that meet the needs of our diverse learners is embedded in the Plymouth University Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience Strategy 2013-2020. Delivery is inevitably iterative.

There are an increasing number of UK HE students with a declared disability. At Plymouth University 12.6% (2012), 8% (2013), and 13% (2014) of students have a declared disability, with over 8% requiring modified assessment provision (MAP). While a MAP may fit the legal requirement, it does not necessarily give the student an equivalent learning and assessment experience. A module with 250 students and a two-hour unseen examination will probably involve 30 students with MAPs. It may require alternative assessment activities for four or five students, and 20-25 students needing extended time to complete the examination, some of whom will need their own rooms, amanuenses, and invigilators. This complicates planning and delivery by teaching staff, and is challenging for people managing the examination processes. The module leader will compile different assessment papers, but in the classroom it is inevitable that the bulk of teaching and pre-test activity is focused on supporting the assessment set for the majority. There are excellent examples of tutors supporting students with specialised tutorials, but by moving to an inclusive assessment approach in which all students can participate, the requirement for many different alternative assessments is reduced or eliminated, and the 'MAP students' no longer feel excluded from the main group. Assessment administration is much less complicated, and pressure on the disability support service is reduced. Staff however, need support to enable them to design effective inclusive assessments.

(3) Designing inclusive assessment - some issues for programme teams to consider

Biggs and Tang (2007) suggested the first step in the design of inclusive assessment is to ensure assignments are aligned to learning outcomes and where applicable professional standards and assessment criteria (Figure 1).

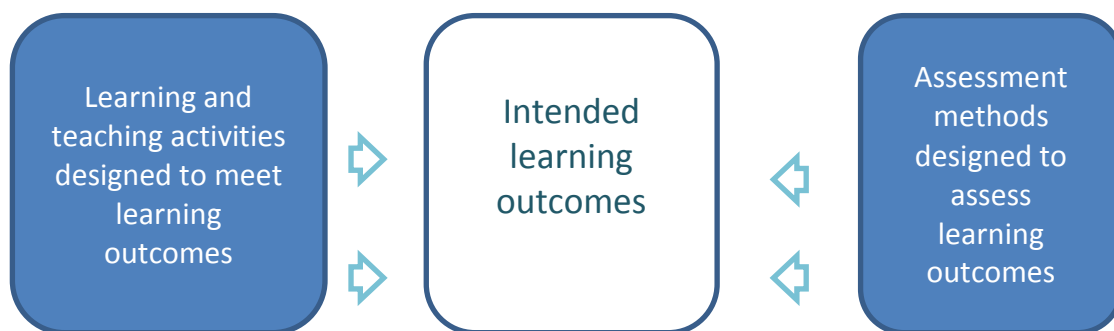**Figure 1. Aligned Assessment** *(Source: Biggs and Tang 2007)*

Assessment methods should where possible be authentic and reflect work-related challenges. Assessments in this style generally better engage students in learning, and learn from the assessment process. Sambell *et al.* (2013) reported student dissatisfaction with assessment that had little meaning compared to 'real life'. Or, as one student expressed it,

> '*We were always completing assignments that hundreds of students before you have done, why?*'

Boud and Falchikov (2007) suggested authentic assessment could be defined as assessment that is pedagogically appropriate, has a major influence on student learning and directs their attention to what is important. Sambell *et al.* (2013) argued assessments should be designed for students to demonstrate the skills, behaviours, knowledge, understanding and complexity of the subject rather than just reproducing knowledge.

Authentic assessments linked to current and recent debates or events can also counteract plagiarism issues. Plagiarism is often quoted by academic staff as their rationale for using traditional unseen examinations. However setting each student a slightly different assignment through a real life task or incident is more authentic, and can avoid opportunities for plagiarism.

Case Study 1

The BA History programme is assessed through a mix of coursework (essays, document analyses, portfolios, projects, and oral and group presentations) and in-class tests. A number of modules involve authentic, work-facing assessments including a number of archive-based studies.

> '*Staff enthusiastic, have great passion for the subject and are just an email away with quick responses to both emails and assignments; all filled with great criticisms and methods to improve our essay writing skills.*'

In planning an assessment programme with a range of assessment methods it is essential that students have opportunities to practice, rehearse and improve on these methods over time. Assessments should have simple or low modified assessment implications where possible (see Appendix 1, Assessment methods and their MAP implication, p.20), although scribes and enablers will still be required for students with complex needs. Consideration of the weighting of assessment elements and challenging custom and practice in the ratio of examination to coursework at 70:30 and 80:20 is another aspect of inclusive assessment.

It is known that engaging students in the assessment process contributes to deep learning (see e.g. Price *et al.* 2012). Extending this to choice of assessment methods allows students to take control of their learning and to play to their strengths. This approach was initially developed by Eastbrook, Parker and Waterfield (2005) at Plymouth University, and further developed by O'Neill at University College Dublin (UCD). As one Plymouth student reported,

> '*A choice of method of assessment would be welcomed instead of an overreliance on long essays and MCQs test. I would have preferred short answers tests.*'

O'Neill's students at UCD were offered a choice of assessment modes (O'Neill 2013). Initially students had three choices but following evaluation the choice was reduced to two to simplify the process for both staff and students.

(4) Options for inclusive assessment

Inclusive assessment is not 'easier assessment', and it should not give students the opportunity to avoid specific tasks which are fundamental to their development in their discipline. It is about enhancing practice to offer students greater opportunity to develop both skills and disciplinary knowledge in a supported and challenging environment. Students must demonstrate that all the learning outcomes, academic and professional standards have been achieved. This challenges Riddell *et al.*'s (2003) study where academic staff reported they felt adjustments to assessment would 'lower standards' and give 'unfair advantage' to disabled students. The first step is to map current provision and evaluate it against principles of inclusivity.

(a) Conducting a programme level review of assessment

Ideally, reviews are undertaken by programme teams to gain an oversight of a whole programme, spot duplication and scheduling issues, and check skills development against the programme learning outcomes. Three tools have proved effective in reviewing assessment practice at Plymouth.

1   The gap analysis pro-forma, which can be adapted for each degree programme to include discipline specific elements (Figure 1).

2   The HE Academy (2012) 'A Marked Improvement' publication includes an assessment review tool, offering a practical method to take stock of current practice and plan for a targeted approach to strategic change. http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/assessment/a-marked-improvement

3   The NUS 'Assessment and Feedback benchmarking tool,' based on 10 principles of effective practice, which can be used to map practice and suggest areas for improvement. http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/open/highereducation/Feedback-and-Assessment-Benchmarking-Tool/

Figure 2. Gap analysis pro-forma (available at: https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/guidance-and-resources/assessment)

(b) Evaluation of assessment options

Developing a dialogue with module and programme colleagues that considers the many methods to assess learning outcomes as mapped in Appendix 1 (p.20) is crucial, along with asking which of these should be added to the gap analysis template. Involving students in this process is very helpful.

(c) Feed-in, feed forward, feedback module practise

By the point of summative assessment, students should have had plenty of opportunity to enhance their disciplinary knowledge and hone the associated skills to the required level through:

- A clear assessment brief, preparation for the assessment, and marking criteria in advance of the task.
- Opportunity to explore the assessment task with peers and a tutor (either in class or online), so that students can ask questions and clarify key elements of the task before they begin.
- Activities in the module which develop skills to perform well in the assessment task, with formative feedback supporting the process.

Figure 3 provides a framework for inclusive assessment discussions, illustrating the need for transparency in student and staff engagement in effective assessment practice.

Feed-in

Learning ethos, set up, briefing, preparation and practice

Feedback

End of task, written, verbal, mp3, You Tube marks and grades

Learning space

Feed-forward

Formative 'feedback', cues, discussion, mid-way reviews
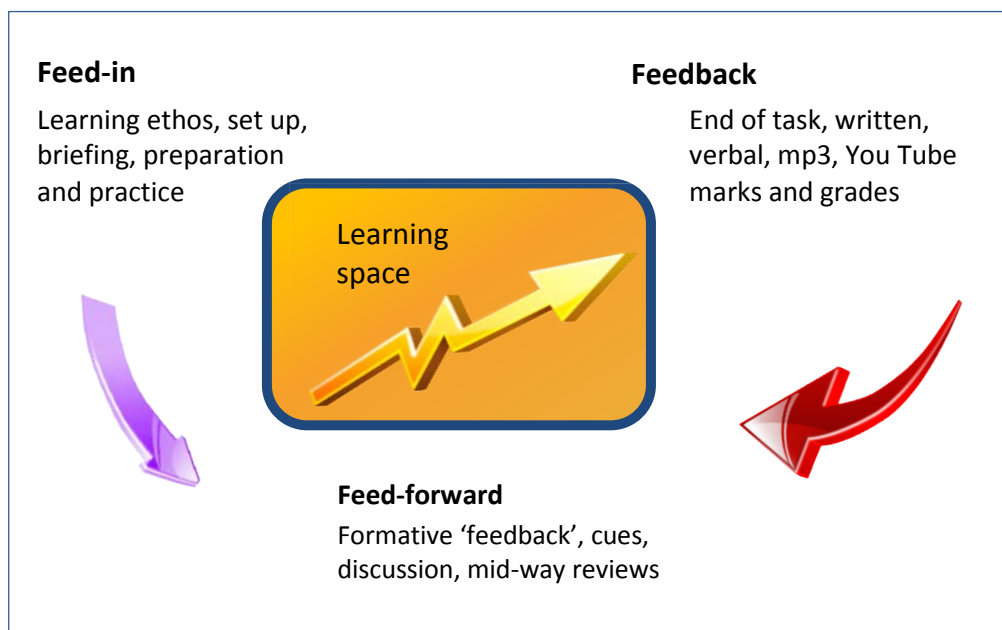
Figure 3. The inclusivity process (available at: https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/guidance-and-resources/assessment)

> *Case Study 2*
>
> The School of Tourism and Hospitality undertakes oversight and planning of assessment at programme level. As all their elective modules are taken within the School they have control over the balance of assessment methods and scheduling, which avoids overload for staff and students, and ensures that feedback is speedy.
>
> Detailed information about the assessment requirements is published in each module handbook and on the Digital Learning Environment.
>
> Before submitting course work students complete a reflection on the cover sheet which includes the marks they think their work deserves, the best and weakest aspect of their work, their attendance and the number of hours spent on the assignment. This enables staff to target detailed 1:1 feedback in addition to the written feedback.
>
> After completing short answer and MCQ exams students receive immediate feedback and model answers.

(d) Assessment options – student choice

Student choice (O'Neill 2013) enables selection of the style that accommodates different needs and circumstances. Where choice is offered, programme teams need to consider whether a student will cover all the necessary or required assessment formats during the programme. This is particularly relevant to programmes with associated professional body requirements.

Case Study 3

The Theatre and Performance degree attracts a number of students with profound additional needs, who have been able to successfully complete their degree without the use of alternative assessments. Where possible the assessments are aligned to work place practices. In a final module, Theatre, Society and Culture, three different modes of assessment are offered to all students. Students choose from the options: a performance, a presentation in a seminar or an essay. The selection of assessment options is evenly spread across the students and the feedback is extremely positive.

Case Study 4

Programmes in Education piloted the use of assessment choice during 2012/13. After some refinement, students are now able to choose from two assessment methods in each module. Assessed presentations are confined to smaller modules. Some assessments are conducted as early as possible in a module. This is to ensure early summative feedback in each module, through short assessments such as an annotated bibliography or an analysis of an article. The digital literacy pathway has developed a process where co-constructing the material to be assessed is part of the module and includes co-development of action research.

> *'Offering two modes for assignments has enabled me to demonstrate my strengths and achieve.'*

> *'Marking system has improved. This makes it very clear to understand where and why you achieved a good or poor mark.'*

(e) Improved assessment scheduling

An even distribution of assessment throughout the year offers students more opportunity to improve their learning from earlier assessments and to receive earlier and more frequent feed-forward and feedback; it supports an inclusive approach. Rust (2007) suggested too many summative assessments lead to an unreasonable student experience and overworked staff who are unable to see 'the wood from the trees'. Assessment scheduled throughout the year with fewer end of academic year summative assessments can reduce bottlenecks for both students and staff.

> *'We had three 4,000 word pieces of coursework with the same hand in date a week before examinations began, then two major exams on consecutive days.' (*

> *'We had three practical exams and two coursework due within three weeks. Lack of workshops, revision classes or any support for exams.'*

> *'Assignments have been spaced out reasonably well over the course of the academic year. I therefore have felt that my full attention has been paid to each one of my assignments, reflecting a fair result of my own personal ability.'*

> *'We need briefings that indicate an assessment schedule throughout the year so you can organise deadlines.'*

Effective assessment timetabling needs to be considered at programme rather than at module level. Mapping the style and timing of assignments will highlight periods where students experience over-duplication of assessment methods.

Avoiding over assessment is crucial. The Plymouth University Assessment Policy states there 'should normally be a maximum of two assignments per 20 credit module'. Conducting more frequent, formative assessments enables students to practice, rehearse and progress.

NSS scores at Plymouth University show that where staff timetable team marking and moderation, the students' experience is more positive. In practice, this means students hand in assignments on Wednesday evening, staff hold an intensive group marking and moderation session on Thursday and Friday, and on the following Monday students receive feedback and the provisional marks (which are confirmed later following external examiner and the exam board processes). This process assists students to feed-forward their learning. Students on programmes with this regime are very positive, and their NSS scores for assessment and feedback are consistently higher.

Case Study 5

The BSc. Maritime and Navigation Science degree programme offers inclusive, innovative and effective assessment practice which complies with accreditation from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. In the first year students are introduced through a detailed induction programme, to a range of assessment methods including practice based reports, practical skills, presentations, reflective portfolio, essays and in-class tests. Students have opportunities to practice and rehearse both practical skills, presentations and tests and are given formative feedback. In-class tests are one to two hours in length and the test room is invigilated for three hours negating the need for extra test rooms for students with extra time requirements. There is detailed assessment information, assessment and marking criteria, referencing and format guides, guidance on portfolio structure, and past papers available on the DLE. In the first year students' coursework and essays are marked electronically, providing personalised detailed feedback. Students receive three separate marks, for: research, referencing and report format. These three separate marks offer students advice on how to improve future assignments. In the third year there is one 'seen' examination which is set in September and sat in May. In February (students are informed of the dates in September) there is a take-home extended 27-hour exam (see Appendix 2, p.22; approximately eight hours' work). Each student is given a different accident scenario to investigate and produce an accident report, replicating professional practice. In the final year there are a number of 'direct entry' students who receive tutorials to enable them to quickly understand the assessment regime.

> 'All the staff are approachable offer good feedback and assistance when required.'

> 'The coursework due dates, although there are a lot of them, I feel are set out adequately with enough time between.'

(5) Challenge and develop staff and students

a) Creating policy

Brown (2013) argued that innovation and good practice should not be curtailed because regulations do not permit them; regulations should serve student learning. It is important to ensure all procedures (strategy, policy and guidance) are 'workable and student friendly'. An examination of regulations and guidance, and interviews with academic, professional staff and student representatives to map the current position, are critical to setting effective prioritised plans. The scope of investigation should move from University to module level (see Figure 4).

University	School	Programme	Module
• Strategy and Policy • Academic Staff support • Student study and learning support	• National benchmarks • Professional body guidance and codes of practice	• Mapping styles of assessment • Scheduling assessments	• Pre-assessment, feed-in • feed forward-feedback

Figure 4. Scope of investigation into assessment practices *(Source: authors)*

Outcomes from this mapping should include awareness of:

- Current university policies, and policies in other universities nationally and internationally.
- Student experience expectations locally and nationally.
- Discipline developments in recent years and current benchmarks and professional body guidance.
- Current assessment styles, schedules and examples of excellent practice and innovation.
- Examples of assessment issues raised by staff and students, expressed through student reviews, retention and progression data, and examiners comments.

The outcomes will vary between Schools, as discipline nuances emerge. This means challenging university policies as a first step but in practice, work can move forward in parallel. Areas of challenge and activity that may emerge could include:

1. A programme of updating and enhancing university policies, liaising with academic and professional staff, so that procedures are 'workable and student friendly,' and developing training that will lead to:

   o enhanced experience of assessment for all students;
   o reduction in the stress and anxiety experienced by disabled students in the assessment process;

- o assessment practices that are more aligned with workplace practices;
- o clarity for staff on the design and delivery of fair and objective *inclusive* assessments; and
- o cost savings from the reduction of any modified assessment provision examination adjustments and case conferences.

2. Creating a single online resources site for both students and staff that is easily accessible and contains all assessment related strategy, policy, protocol and guidance documents.
3. Developing a set of resources and workshop for programme and module teams to review their current practice. Identifying areas where learning, teaching and assessment guidance is not available and developing new resources.
4. Ensuring curriculum design and development aligns with inclusive assessment approaches and university norms through programme reviews (e.g. all 20 credit modules have two formative and a maximum of two summative assessments, with pro-rata norms for other modules).
5. Encouraging all staff attendance at programme and module assessment development workshops, including administrative staff and students should be considered.
6. Encouraging programme teams to review the scheduling of assessments, examinations and other tests. The aim is to achieve even distribution throughout the year and assessments appropriately paced throughout the programme with opportunities for feed-forward and feedback that will affect student performance.
7. Identifying through university data, the modules and programmes which would benefit from additional resource to help with revising curriculum and assessment activities to meet the 'inclusive assessment' agenda.

Chalmers (2008) argued that there is an inherent conservatism in universities towards new or alternative assessment. Norton *et al.'s* (2006) study into the attitudes of lecturers, found that the main barrier to good assessment and feedback practice was time and workload. They found this to be more evident in the attitudes of lecturers from applied disciplines such as maths or science, than disciplines such as English.

Raising the profile of inclusive assessment at Plymouth through university forums and committee meetings was helpful, as was encouraging analysis of corporate data to highlight schools and programmes with student profiles that include a high percentage of mature, international or disabled students, and those where student feedback highlighted dissatisfaction with assessment and feedback.

b) *Plymouth Context*

As part of an extensive consultation on curriculum design and updating the assessment policy, the University developed its inclusive assessment ambition which provides staff and students with a clear direction (Box 2).

All the university regulations were located on the external facing website to enable easy access for both students and staff through the Academic regulations pages:

https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/academic-regulations

All teaching, learning and assessment information for both staff and students was located on the Teaching and Learning website and cross-referenced to the Quality Handbook:

https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning

Overall, there has been a positive response to these webpages, exemplified by one faculty member:

> *'The Teaching and Learning website offers easily-accessible resources on a wide range of topics, clear links, detailed information on discipline-related funding opportunities and events'*

The previous Plymouth University Assessment Policy (2007) was reviewed in the light of other HEI's assessment policies (both UK and international), and moved from a paper-based 200 page assessment handbook, to a shorter, student- and staff- facing, flexible on-line resource that holds a wealth of guidance and resources linked to the policies. Over 250 staff and students were involved in the consultation, comment and discussion process.

https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/guidance-and-resources/plymouth-university-assessment-policy-2014-2020

The assessment policy is student-facing with information under five headings:

1. The purpose of assessment
2. If you are a student you can expect the following
3. The university expects students to
4. Our schools and staff should make sure of the following
5. The university will support this by

This format gives the sense of a contract between the parties, and has much greater practical clarity than its predecessors.

(c) 'Feed-in' – pre-assessment activities

Price *et al.* (2012) points out that good assessment design is not sufficient to ensure effective assessment and student satisfaction. Boud and Falichov (2007), Sambell *et al*. (2013) and Bloxham and Boyd (2007) all advocate the need for greater student involvement in the assessment process. Student anxiety can be reduced and engagement increased through comprehensive use of pre-assignment activities. These activities 'feed-in,' develop students' assessment literacy and, if delivered from early in the programme along with clear assessment briefing information, will promote inclusivity. Whalley and Taylor (2008) suggested the use of 'pre-flight tasks' as a technique to develop student assessment skills.

All students, but especially first year and direct entrants to later years, need to develop their assessment literacy. In each subsequent year students need to understand the different assessment requirements and the changes in expectations and standards between the levels of study. Assessment terminology needs unpacking for everyone, as does an understanding of the relevant academic regulations. Even the most able students need help to understand assessment and marking criteria, extenuating circumstances, referencing conventions, and what constitutes an assessment offence.

> *'The assignment topic was only mentioned for five minutes if that and we were told that we just had to find everything about the essay out for ourselves'*

> *'I needed more support when providing guidelines to assignments, including examples of previous years' work, examples of titles and essay format and style.'*

Students should have the assessment requirements from the beginning of each module. Ideally, this includes timetabled face-to-face sessions to discuss the standards, assessment and marking criteria, referencing convention, format, deadlines, information on permissible tutor support and dates and times of feedback sessions. Groups can discuss and peer-assess previous assignments or anonymised work from past examinations, using the marking criteria. These activities help students to understand assessment standards and the quality of work required to achieve different grades.

HEIs need to ensure their staff have good assessment literacy skills. The way forward is to develop an institutional culture of assessment for learning rather than assessment as a proxy measure of achievement, and to provide comprehensive support through online materials and face-to-face workshops.

(d) Inclusive examinations

Many students are unprepared for the traditional handwritten university examination. There is a growing body of opinion that the handwritten, essay style, three hour unseen examination is becoming outmoded (University of Edinburgh Assessment Futures Group 2011). Further, Havnes

(2004) argues that exams assess surface learning but have a negative or limiting impact on student learning and Elton (2004) raises questions about their fairness and fitness for purpose.

Kneale and Collings (2013) found examinations involved additional enablers, invigilators and specialist rooms, and alternative methods of assessment (MAPs) which added expense and escalated staff workloads. Muldoon (2012) argues that ditching exams would remove a serious impediment to effective learning and release staff to engage in formative assessment practice which would lead to more meaningful effective learning.

The weighting of exams is an issue for future development. The traditional weightings of 80:20% or 70:30% exam:coursework appear to have no pedagogical rationale and no supportive literature. These disproportionate weightings offer advantage to students who are confident in an exam situation and do not give a fair representation; a weighting of 50:50% is a more equitable approach. The professional bodies for accounting (CIMA, ICAEW, ACCA) all specify the use of 50% weighting in their examinations for exemption.

> *'There was a lack of past papers or sufficient sample papers for exams. Some lecturers*
> *do not seem happy to answer questions in regard of exam format or past papers.'*

Inclusive examinations can be helpful where there are professional body and staff wedded to examinations. The principles of inclusive examinations are similar to inclusive assessments. These include: pre-examination briefing sessions, the use of assessed practice papers, improved scheduling of exams, the use of a range of different exam methods (see Appendix 2, Types of exams, p.22), reduced length of exam, a more equitable weighting of the exam, improved structure of the exam questions, and offering all students the opportunity to type exams.

(e) Feed-forward and feedback

Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement although the impact can be either positive or negative (Hattie and Timperley 2007). Students value feedback which is timely and prompt while the assessment they have just completed is still fresh in their minds and before the next assessment is due (Race 2011). Biggs and Tang (2007) maintain that when done well feedback is the most powerful enhancement to learning.

> *'Feedback on assignments needs improvement, often the better you do the more*
> *feedback you receive which is counterintuitive. Also marking should be more objective*
> *if possible because it gets confusing seeing feedback and having to decipher fact from*
> *personal preference.'*

Students learn from each assessment and understand how to improve their future performance and assessment grades. Students need formative feedback/ feed-forward during the assessment process, to understand how to evolve their work before submission (Brown, 2007). Dawson, Magne and Sentito (2009) suggest that feedback can raise self-esteem, encourage dialogue, clarify goals and standards and empower students to improve their own learning and achievement.

Where there are complaints about illegible handwritten feedback, alternatives are worth consideration (Ice *et al.,* 2007). Spoken feedback on Mp3/podcast or video format can be quicker, much richer and personalised. It enables immediate and generic feedback to be given to a module cohort, via YouTube or other social media. Where classes are very large this option can be a highly effective learning tool. Generic feedback must be offered in a supportive manner, sensitively, and with specific pointers on how to develop the weaker areas of a students' work.

Deciding how to offer feedback will be locally determined but ideally aim for:

- Generic feedback to the whole class as soon as possible, ideally within 48 hours by email, podcast or in class. Include short points that are valuable for everyone.
- Detailed feedback as soon as possible.

(6) Supporting the student experience

The wider student experience is supported by university, student union and external services. All HEIs have a range of support services generally including disability advice, student advice, counselling, study skills and learning development support including revision and exam technique, essay writing or presentations skills. It is however important to guide students to the appropriate support.

Personal tutoring is usually the most effective and sustainable first point of reference for individual students. Personal tutors who have a good relationship with their tutees can help students identify their problems and advise on individual learning activities, and refer people as needed to university support services. A student suffering from anxiety at examination time might be experiencing difficulties due to poor study skills, exam techniques, time management, require counselling or clinical intervention. Students are more likely to access support if they are referred to services and their progress is monitored by their personal tutor.

'I needed more support when setting assignments, i.e. how to structure essays and how specific I need to be within each module'

'The writing café sessions let me work at my pace, with useful comments that helped me to change the way I write my assignments.'

'The staff are very helpful whenever I have some sort of query, be it something to do with my assignment, or anything else, I always get a prompt reply from whomever I contact.'

The NSS shows that those seeking learning advice are generally the better performing students who want to do better. Learning support staff can provide valuable advice to academic staff in helping to understand where and why some students will 'misunderstand' assessment instructions and miss 'clues' in questions. For new (and perhaps more experienced) academic staff, attending an exams support workshop can be an eye-opening experience, and give valuable insights into additional assessment activities that will help the whole class.

The School of Law reviewed their assessment methods, introducing more regular in-class tests comprising of multiple choice and short answer questions, portfolios, presentations, case studies, open book and seen exams and changing the mark release process.

Marks are now released to students individually at one-to-one feedback meetings with personal tutors, in which any poor attendance and issues with study are discussed. Personal tutors signpost people to student skills support when appropriate. Early resits are now scheduled to enable prompt personalised feedback to be acted on in a timely manner.

> *'Staff give really useful feedback on formative work that is submitted and they are committed to helping you achieve the very best.'*

> *'Staff are really good at marking practice essays and questions and provide a lot of feedback.'*

> *'Prompt marking and interesting lecturers made the first term very enjoyable.'*

(7) In conclusion

In aiming to deliver inclusive assessments, we are seeking to achieve transformation of staff, through developing their greater awareness of issues for learners and options for assessment. It requires energy and enthusiasm to evolve processes that are established and effective for many.

The journey of embedding inclusive assessment will take time. Essential steps include:

- Recognising inclusive assessment is a shared university–school–staff–student responsibility.
- Workshops and training that is programme- and School- wide, taking account of disciplinary traditions, while challenging deeply held convictions about what assessment involves.
- Student engagement in discussions and decision-making.
- Personal tutors providing personalised support through discussions with students about their assessment challenges, and to assist where applicable in referring people to wider support services or resources.
- Awareness raising and development work with external examiners.

There will always be some students who will need alternative assessments, our ambition is to minimise these so that as few students as possible are treated differently in their learning and assessment experience.

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Assessing - Knowledge and understanding
Recalling, describing, reporting, recounting, recognising, identifying, relating and interrelating

Simple or MAP free	Complex MAP implications
Short answer questions / weekly short tests Multiple Choice Questions (Paper or computer aided) Essay Report (individual or group) Report of data analysis Encyclopaedia entry A-Z of… Wiki or website Viva voce Group discussion or debate Mooting (law assignment)	Examinations: unseen , open book, seen, case study, problem centred (formative or summative) In class tests Viva voce (for some students)

Assessing - Thinking critically and making judgements
Developing arguments, reflecting, evaluating, assessing, judging

Simple or MAP free	Complex MAP implications
Essay Report/portfolio Journal or reflective diary Present a case to an interest group Briefing / conference paper Literature review Written newspaper article Letter of advice to … Oral presentation to a small or large group or on camera	Examinations: unseen , open book, seen, case study, problem centred (formative or summative) In class tests Individual oral presentation for some students - group presentations for others

Assessing - Problem solving and developing plans
Identifying, posing or defining problems, analysing data, reviewing, designing experiments, planning, applying information

Simple or MAP free	Complex MAP implications
Report on cause and effect Research bid Field work report Case study analysis / Analysis of a problem Action plan Oral presentation to a small or large group or on camera Group plan, report and presentation Laboratory practical and report Group or individual poster Simulation exercise	Examinations: unseen , open book, seen, case study, problem centred (formative or summative) When a student is unable to participate in field trips Individual oral presentation for some students- group presentations for others

Assessing - Designing, creating, performing
Imagining, visualising, designing, producing, creating, innovating, performing

Simple or MAP free	Complex MAP implications
Exhibition Portfolio Oral presentation – group Project work Performance	Individual oral presentation for some students – group presentations for others

Assessing - Procedures and techniques

Working co-operatively, independently, being self-directed, managing time or tasks, organising

Simple or MAP free	Complex MAP implications
Laboratory practical & report (group or individual) Field work report (group or individual) Illustrated manual (group or individual) Produce a leaflet or poster (group or individual) Portfolio Observation of real or simulated practice Viva voce Video/podcast Demonstration Website or Wiki	When a student is unable to participate in field trips Role play Viva voce (for some students)

Assessing - Accessing and managing information

Researching, investigating, interpreting, organising information, reviewing and paraphrasing information, collecting data, searching and managing information sources, observing and interpreting

Simple or MAP free	Complex MAP implications
Report on data interpretation Report on applied problem/task Essay Task report Annotated bibliography	Examinations: unseen , open book, seen, case study, problem centred (formative or summative) In class tests

Assessing - Managing and developing oneself

Recalling, describing, reporting, recounting, recognising, identifying, relating and interrelating

Simple or MAP free	Complex MAP implications
Reflective journal/portfolio/diary Group oral presentation Report on group activity Website/wiki E-journal Podcast Blogs	Individual oral presentation for some students - group presentations for others

Assessing - Communicating

One, two-way, group, verbal, written and non-verbal communication. Arguing, describing, advocating, interviewing, negotiating and presenting.

Simple or MAP free	Complex MAP implications
Discussion/debate Oral presentation to a small group or on camera Real or simulated practice Court of enquiry Story boards Viva voce	Role play Individual oral presentation for some students -group presentations for others Viva voce (for some students)

Possible exam formats
Unseen/ closed book: Students have no sight of the paper's content prior to the start of the examination itself.
Open book: Participants can take a supporting text into the exam hall, but have not seen the questions in advance. Open books are designed to test students understanding of a subject and how well they can make an argument more than their ability to memorise facts.
Seen: A 'seen' examination is one where the examination questions are released to the students before the examination date. Students then prepare their answers before writing them in a formal invigilated examination environment.
Take-home - same day: A one-day take-home examination is handed out and returned on the same day, typically beginning at 8:30 a.m. and ending at 4:30 p.m. In the case of exams done in an online format, via computer labs or web browsers, the time limit may be a matter of hours from the moment of logging-in. Students need plenty of notice of the date.
Take-home – extended: An extended take-home examination is taken over a period of time to answer the questions, which may vary from 24 hours to a week.. Extended take-home examinations are open-book and allow for full discussion among students. Students need plenty of notice to of the dates to organise any personal commitments.
Multiple choice questions (MCQ): Multiple choice exams are often designed to test how quickly students can answer questions, as well as what they know. A twist on this would be to get students to write their own MCQs throughout the term and submit them to a question bank in the knowledge that the MCQ exam will include a proportion of questions from the student MCQ bank mixed with MCQs written by the tutor. MCQ questions can easily be an online exam through ICT software.
Short answer questions: As the name suggests, this type of exam consists of a series of questions that only require concise answers, usually in the form of a definition.
Problem- or case- based scenarios: Problem-based exams can take a variety of forms, such as mathematical problems that require the use of equations, formulae, or the application of scientific theories (such as those used in the disciplines of statistics, chemistry, engineering and physics). Case-based exams involve the presentation of hypothetical case studies that require the identification of problem/s and solutions. This can be done in writing or in an oral exam.
Practical examinations: In science disciplines, aim to examine students' ability to perform specific tasks in which to apply their knowledge of the subject to solving specific practical problems or performing specific tasks. Observations such as evaluating teacher performance in a school classroom, or the practical demonstration of skills e.g. social work students in a mock counselling session.

Observed Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs): Take place in the health disciplines to assess clinical competence.

Integrated Structured Clinical Examinations (ISCEs): Used in health disciplines to assess both clinical competence and professional skills.

Computer Aided Assessment (CAA): Computer aided assessment utilises software such as Moodle, Questionmark Perception QMP (an online assessment and reporting tool) or simulated environments. CAA can include electronic marking and reduce tutor workload, although the set up time must be taken into account.

Group exams: These could use a number of the formats already listed but in a group context. For example a same day takes home exam where students are given a project/problem at 9am and must hand in a group report / solutions by 4.30pm. This type of exam is authentic and can assess teamwork skills

Individual oral exams: Oral exams test knowledge and capabilities through spoken interaction between the student and the examiners. They range from a straightforward question and answer format, to problem-based or hypothetical scenarios that may evaluate a student's interpersonal communication, diagnostic or creative abilities. Typical formats:
o Viva voce: a panel of experts questioning a student about how they would deal with a particular patient or case - used in medicine and some other health disciplines. The viva may also be used as a verbal defence of a written research project or dissertation (commonly used in science disciplines) A viva is often paired with a substantial written or visual project which the student is invited to elaborate on or 'defend'.
o In modern foreign language programmes students deliver a presentation or participate in a conversation
o Auditions or performances often used in creative and performing arts

Group oral exams: A group is usually comprised of three to five students. The exam might include a group presentation, a group discussion with examiners or a group audition or performance.

Links to Plymouth University Online Resources

Teaching and Learning
https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/

Assessment
https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/guidance-and-resources/assessment

Inclusive Teaching and Learning
https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/inclusivity

Good practice case studies
https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/inclusivity/case-studies-of-good-practice

7 Steps Series
Topics include: Giving Effective Feedback, Inclusive Assessment, Peer and Self-Assessment and Personal Tutoring

https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/guidance-and-resources/7-step-series

2. The challenge of assessing reflection: The Open University's Access Programme

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The Open University's Arts and languages Access module (Y031) is a 30 credit, Level 0, multi-disciplinary distance learning course lasting 30 weeks. Presented for the first time to students in England in 2013, it has been available across the United Kingdom since October 2014. Y031 Arts and languages is one of a suite of three Access modules - the others cover Social sciences / Professional education (Y032) and Science, technology and maths (Y033) – designed to provide a supported, low-risk, low-cost pathway into OU undergraduate degree pathways. They are aimed at a Widening Participation audience, including students with low prior qualifications, students out of formal education for a long time, or students lacking confidence in relation to HE level study, and offer additional preparation to vulnerable learners in order to enhance retention and maximise success. Demographic data from the first three presentations suggest Y031 appeals to students from the lowest socio-economic status (the majority qualify for a fee waiver), with entry qualifications lower than the traditional two A-level equivalent, and a significant proportion (20%) declaring a disability.

The researchers are responsible for the presentation of the Arts and languages Access module as Access Director, Y031 Chair and Y031 Regional Manager. We know Access learners can be at risk of early withdrawal, lacking study resilience. We know tutor feedback is crucial to student success on Access, and that trusting a tutor is crucial to student persistence. We were keen to critically evaluate the extent to which the embedding of a range of reflective tasks (including two substantive assessed tasks) met the needs of entry level students, and were understood and valued by tutors on Y031. These tutors are a team of experienced part-time lecturers who support students via one-to-one telephone contact, and provide assessment feedback electronically. After successfully bidding to the Open University's Assessment Scholarship fund, we conducted a three-phase case study of the assessment of reflection with one cohort of Y031 students over a six month period in 2014.

Our investigation centred around the following questions:

- How does the assessment of reflective tasks affect students' perception of and engagement with reflective tasks?
- How do tutors view the transition to a more formal assessment of reflective tasks?

These research questions were initially framed through a review of the literature in five key areas: (1) the importance of reflection in developing HE learners; (2) theories of active engagement and inclusion in HE assessment; (3) the importance of feedback in HE learning; (4) skills development in HE; and (5) challenges/benefits around the assessment of reflection.

It has been 30 years since key texts theorising reflection appeared and the influence of Boud, Kolb (learn from experience) and Schon (reflection for/in/on action) has been powerful, with a focus on learners self-questioning to affect future improvement in learning. Moon (2001, 2006), a prolific

advocate, argues for reflection as both an activity enabling ownership of learning, and a capacity facilitating metacognition. Race (2010) has positioned reflection as a key factor underpinning successful learning in HE, and Glisczinski (2007) highlights the role of critical reflection in transformative learning processes. However, many learners find reflection too vague, and lack appreciation of its potential value (Cowan 2014), leading to an absence of deep reflection - although this can be enhanced by 'nudging' learners to move from description to analysis. The assessment of reflection is a particularly contested area. Kirkwood and Price (2008) conclude that assessment influences not only what gets studied, but how it is studied, and as such, assessment literacy can be regarded as a key study skill for unconfident students (Butcher *et al.* 2010; see also: de Outer and Price 2014). While Gibbs (1999) advocates strategic uses of assessment to support learning, Bolton highlights a range of moral, ethical and practical issues associated with the assessment of reflection and argues that 'awareness of assessment can inevitably at best alter, at worst corrupt, any reflective [...] process' (Bolton 2010 p.146).

In critically evaluating the inclusion of reflective tasks in the formal assessment strategy of Y031, we were mindful the Access modules had been informed by the principles of inclusive assessment (see Hockings 2010) and utilised the assessment of reflective tasks as an embedded aspect of PDP. In seeking to establish principles of good practice in the development and assessment of reflective skills, the research conducted for this project involved three elements:

> An online survey questionnaire sent to students on the 13J presentation of Y031: This included a mixture of open and closed questions which aimed to establish how students experience reflective assignment tasks, how they view these tasks' learning outcomes and what they regard as effective feedback. This survey was sent out to all 337 students on Y031, and 113 responded (a 34% response rate).

> In-depth telephone interviews with tutors: These interviews, conducted with a sample of eight tutors, aimed to establish tutors' views on the benefits and challenges of assessing and providing effective feedback on reflective assignment tasks. Most Y031 tutors taught on the module's Openings predecessor Y180 'Making sense of the arts', which included reflective tasks on a less formal basis. The project aimed to establish how tutors view this transition to a more formal assessment of reflective tasks and how students experience this new assessment model.

> An analysis of samples of marked scripts: A sample of 72 marked scripts was examined (three scripts from each of the 24 tutors – one with a high, one with a low and one with a mid-range score). Feedback on both the scripts and on the assessment feedback summary was scrutinised.

The respective approach to each phase of data collection was led by one of the authors, and the subsequent analysis, was conducted collaboratively by the three authors. Three key themes emerged:

(1) Assessing reflection: some issues

Tutors lacked confidence in how to grade reflection, and in applying assessment criteria, finding it difficult and time-consuming. Some admitted not assessing reflection seriously, and providing little feedback on the learning plan.

Some tutors felt early assessment on Access was about encouraging students new to HE - assessment of reflection was in tension with that – should reflection be assessed at all? But others felt assessing reflection made students take it more seriously, enhancing study skills to progress into undergraduate study. Some tutors queried whether high-performing students reflected deeply.

Some students felt ambivalent with regard to the assessment of reflective tasks. However, only a very few were 'worried' by the fact that some of the reflective tasks were assessed, and very few felt that they could not answer the questions honestly because they were concerned about their grade. A small majority stated that assessing reflection made them spend more time, and made them think more carefully about their answers.

(2) Assessing reflection challenges Access students

Initially learners struggled to understand what was expected in assessed reflection tasks - most responding at a descriptive level, but with detailed written feedback and oral prompting from tutors, students identified the existing life skills they bring as transferable learning. Valuing these in an academic context brings study confidence.

Students tend to prioritise subject related content in assessment over reflection, and there is reluctance amongst some to engage with or see the value of reflective tasks. Some described them as '*a waste of time*' because they wanted '*to learn not navel gaze*'. However, other students felt that these tasks would '*help them a great deal in [their] future studies*'.

If students bring a negative prior educational experience, they need to trust tutors in a safe environment before engaging fully in assessed reflection tasks. This requires '*more than putting reflective questions into assignments*'. Such students responded positively to extensive feedback on the first task, resulting in higher grades on the next assignment.

Successful Access students became effective reflectors by the end: '*actively involved*' in learning independently. Some tutors saw this as particularly crucial for distance learners studying alone.

(3) The assessment of reflection needs to be embedded into the module design

The submission of a learning plan at the beginning of the course is useful for initiating contact. The course structure needs to prepare students for reflection, and enable tutor/student dialogue around 'good points'.

Students benefit from structured advice on how to reflect. Reflective tasks work best when they are presented as questions to be thought about (not just 'answered') and as part of a positive dialogical process rather than a 'problem to be solved'.

Examples of tutor best practice include the keeping of good tutorial records to target subsequent feedback to individuals and the provision of point-by-point feedback, guiding students towards analysis and engaging in a dialogue with the student.

The analysis of sample scripts and assessment feedback found that tutors had a particular 'style' of feedback that did not vary greatly between students, but may alter in the amount of praise or suggestions offered. Comments contained a summary of what the student had done, and was then contextualised with praise or with a suggestion of how the student could have extended their work. For the script comments, there was quite a wide variety between tutors and, again, tutors had a particular 'style' that was consistent for them, regardless of mark given to student work.

For internal purposes, we drew up a series of professional recommendations to enhance the assessment of reflective tasks. The following may have sector relevance:

- Enhance tutor skillsets: Set up CPD opportunity to enable tutors to explore best practice in the support for and assessment of reflection at L0, and how students might move from description to analysis.
- Enhance specificity of monitoring: Brief monitors to comment on good and inadequate tutor feedback on assessed reflection tasks and re-emphasise priority tutors should give to reflection.
- Clarify definition and amplify purpose: Insert clear definition of reflection (e.g. from Cowan 2014, Moon 2006) into assessment guides. Clarify why reflection is an important academic skill to take forward and how it is assessed in this particular module.
- Enhance support for students new to HE: Provide scaffolding questions/promptsto get students started on reflection as early as possible.
- Avoid task duplication: Review any overlap between assessed tasks.
- Specify the percentage awarded to reflection: State clearly in assignment and tutor guidance how reflection is assessed and what proportion of the overall grade is related to the assessment of reflection.
- Module design: Continue to include a mix of assessed and formative unassessed activities (as both have different benefits) that build on each other and on the interaction between students and tutors and emphasise the dialogical nature of reflection.

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3. Preparing international students for the diversity of assessment in UK Higher Education

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The internationalisation of UK higher education (HE) is of increasing importance as institutions seek to respond to national and international economic, social and political demands (HE Academy 2014). Within this content there is a pressing need to consider how international students coming to the UK are adapting to a very different educational system (Andrade 2006). Data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) show that for 2013-14 the number of students from China coming to the UK far exceeds that of any other country (HESA 2015). The cultural dichotomy between Asian and Western educational systems has long been debated in the literature (Ryan and Louie 2007), with the former based around a teacher-centred Confucian philosophy, whereby learning involves listening to the teacher, and the latter a more student-centred Socratic philosophy in which the students construct their own knowledge. As such, students from China typically have more experience of didactic, content-focussed assessments, such as multiple choice questions (MCQs), and less experience of writing extended Socratic-style assignments which require critical thinking and independent research. In addition to significant language and cultural barriers, students from China coming to study in the UK therefore face the additional challenge of adjusting to a more student-centred approach to assessment. Here we explore how the design of assessments in modules delivered in China can help to prepare Chinese students for the final year of study in the UK and help them to adjust to a more Socratic-style of learning and assessment.

(1) Curriculum context

In this case study, a range of modules in core Environment and Sustainability topic areas were developed by UK-based academics and delivered in English to students based at a partner university in China over a two-year period. Two of these modules were delivered by distance learning and the rest were delivered in person, face-to-face in China by UK-based staff (Smith 2014). The aims of these modules are threefold. First, to ensure that the students become familiar with the broad range of UK teaching and assessment methods. Second, the subject-specific nature of these modules helps to address any gaps in subject content and prepare students for material in their final year of study in the UK, and third, because the modules are delivered and assessed in English they provide significant additional exposure to 'academic' English. In addition to lectures, a format with which the Chinese students are most familiar with, we employ a diverse range of teaching and learning methods within these modules, such as small-group` discussions, study skills workshops, oral presentations, field courses and laboratory and practical exercises, of which the students typically have little prior experience of. A key objective is to ensure that students have opportunities to

engage with different styles of assessment and ways of working prior to their arrival in the UK where, providing they have achieved the required academic standards and level of English language skills in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), they study final year (FHEQ Level-6) modules alongside UK-based students.

There is a careful 'ramping up' of assessments throughout all of the modules delivered in China, in terms of both style and weighting, to progressively expose the Chinese students to the diversity of assessment in the UK. For example, in one of our Level-4 modules the initial assessment is a MCQ test, the style of which is very familiar to Chinese students. The second assessment requires students to write short, one or two sentence responses to questions and the third assessment requires students to write extended, short paragraph responses. Subsequent assessments in Level-5 modules demand more in terms of students' critical thinking and independent research skills, such as through the design of a research proposal. Feedback from students, combined with both formative and summative assessment marks, has enabled the teaching team to continuously evaluate and modify their teaching and assessment practices, particularly in those modules delivered in China, to assist the learning-style transition.

(2) Results

In 2013/14, twelve students from China successfully completed the UK-based final year of an undergraduate degree programme in Environment and Sustainability. Analyses of the students' summative performance in various modules shows that our Chinese student cohort consistently underperform relative to UK-based students, but this difference slightly decreases with progression from semester one to semester two (Figure 1). The semester one module mean mark for UK-based students was, on average, 15% higher than for the Chinese cohort. In semester two this difference had reduced to approximately 10%. We found that students performed better in more structured assessments such as technical reports and, perhaps surprisingly given their previous lack of experience in independent research, in their dissertations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they performed least well under examination conditions. However, in contrast to our initial preconceptions we found that giving students additional, lengthy explanatory instructions (in English) and greater choice of questions in examinations does not necessarily help them because it takes them longer to read and understand these. This is especially true in situations where time is limited. We also noted a small number of academic misconduct cases involving our Chinese students, with one or two students being disciplined for academic misconduct across more than one module. Across all modules a higher frequency of minor academic misconduct cases occurred in the Chinese cohort relative to the UK cohort.
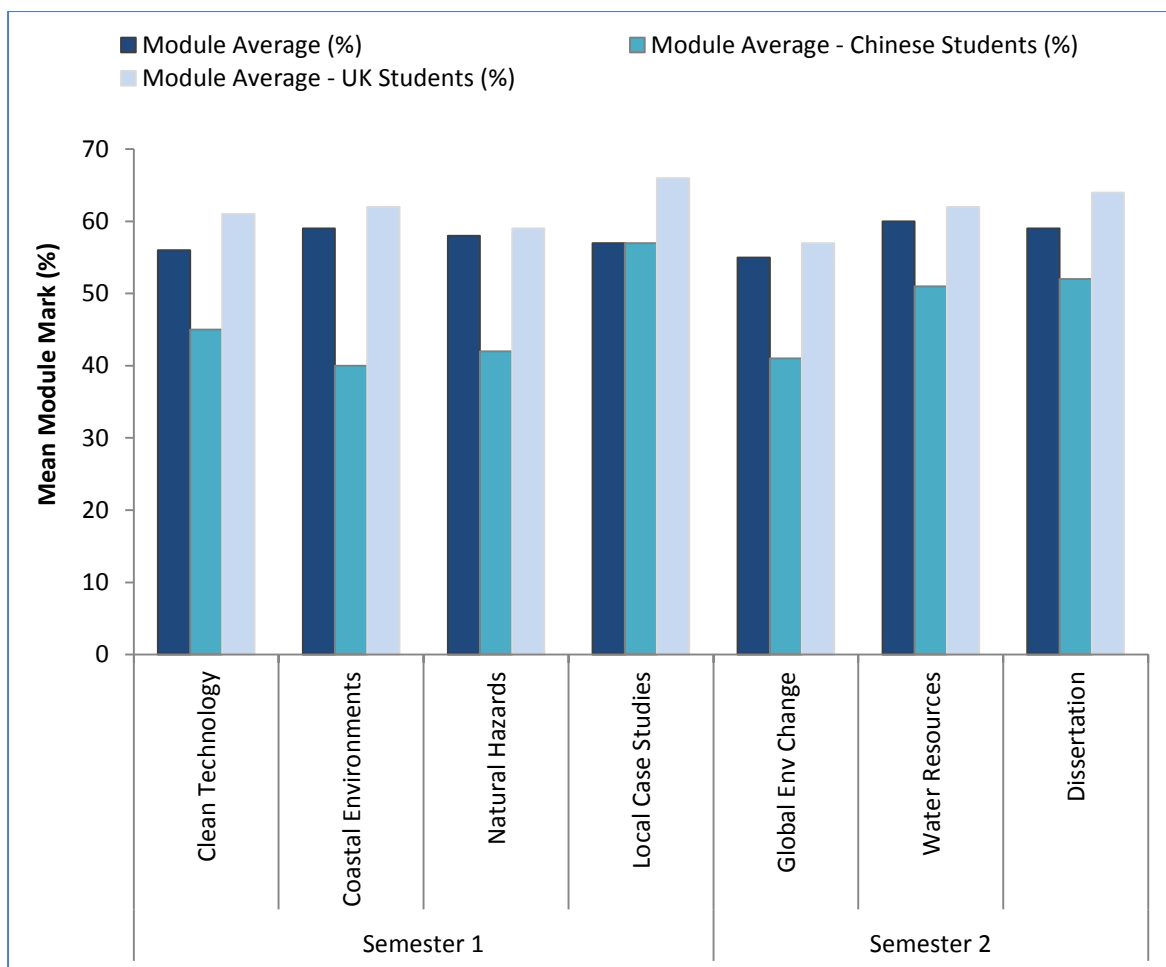
Figure 1: Students' summative performance in modules 2013/14

The Local Case Studies module is for students with direct entry into the final year (FHEQ Level-6) of the Environment and Sustainability degree programme in the UK. In 2013/14 this included our Chinese cohort plus one other international student. All modules are 15-credits with the exception of the Dissertation which is a 30-credit module.

In terms of overall degree classification, Figure 2 shows that in 2013/14 all twelve Chinese students successfully passed the UK-based final year of the Environment and Sustainability degree. However, there is a notable difference in performance between our UK-based and Chinese-student cohorts with all of the Chinese students receiving a degree classification of 2:2, whilst 80% of our graduating UK-based students achieved a 2:1 or above.
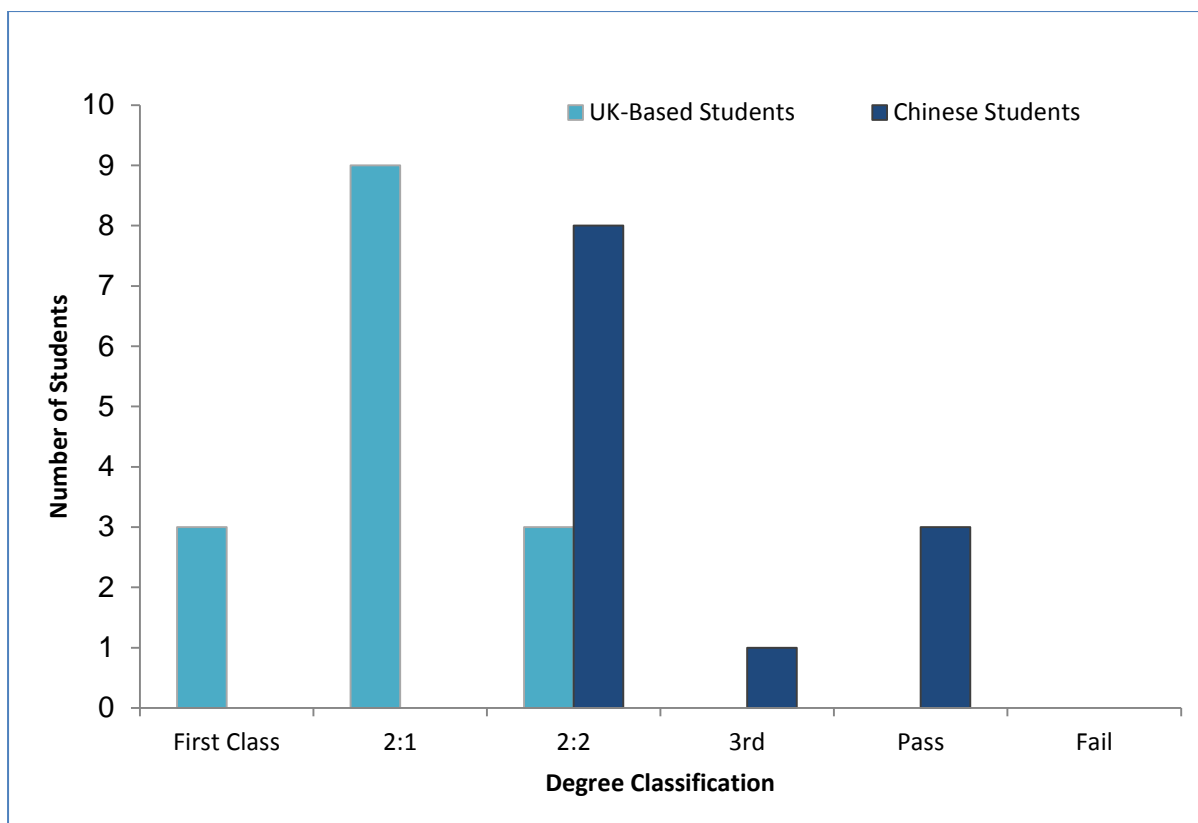
Figure 2: Overall degree classifications for the UK-based cohort and the Chinese cohort in 2013/14
Note that final degree classifications for our Chinese students are based solely on performance at Level-6, whereas for our UK-based students it is based on performance at both Level-5 (1/3 weighting) and Level-6 (2/3 weighting).

(3) Discussion and conclusions

Whilst there has been much discussion in the literature surrounding the experiences of international students studying in the UK, there has been less research conducted on the academic achievement of international students (Morrison *et al*. 2005). The finding that students performed least well in exams is however, not unexpected and is in keeping with the findings of previous studies which suggest that language problems have a significant role to play, particularly in examination situations where students are faced with significant time pressures (Smith 2011, Pilcher *et al*. 2013). English language problems therefore appear to be a significant barrier to achievement within assessment for students from China (Mathias *et al*. 2013). Although our Chinese students are exposed to 'academic English' through the modules delivered in China, completion of a 12- or 6-week pre-sessional English language course (depending on IELTS score), and an English for Academic Purposes' module that forms part of the programme, our results suggest that this is not sufficient. Whilst these provisions may all be beneficial, in reality it takes a much longer period of time for students to develop competence and understand the nuances of academic debate in a second language (Carroll 2005). In fact, problems with English language may also be accounting for the higher incidence of

minor-plagiarism cases amongst our Chinese cohort, despite specific training in referencing and intellectual property (Bretag 2007). This raises the question of whether the current requirement for entry into the final year of study in the UK in this programme, IELTS Level-6, is a suitable standard to which international students should aspire to in order to perform well. Poor performance in examinations also raises the issue of whether enough support is provided for international students. For example, there are many instances of UK-based students requiring adjustments in examinations and assessments to address specific learning difficulties, such as being permitted extra time or being allowed to use a dictionary, yet such adjustments are not commonly available for international students.

In contrast to their performance in examinations, the Chinese students' performance was strongest in structured coursework assessments, such as technical reports, and in their dissertations. Independent research demands a student-centred, Socratic approach to learning and it is therefore perhaps surprising that students from China performed comparatively well in this style of assessment. However, Confucianist philosophy does in fact promote the need for students to take ownership of their own learning and engage in critical thinking (Tan, 2014) and these widely accepted traditional values may account for the students' comparatively strong performance in this style of assessment. We also found that students from China were actually better than their UK-based counterparts in some aspects of numeracy, data analysis and data presentation. There is therefore potential for UK-based students to learn from their Chinese counterparts which, longer term, can help with the integration of students and the breakdown of barriers.

These results from our first cohort of Chinese students, suggest that exposing students to a diverse range of assessment types prior to their arrival in the UK has the potential to help them to adjust to a more Socratic-style of learning and assessment. However, there are still clear differences in attainment between the UK-based and Chinese-student cohorts taking the same modules and assessments. In particular, the students' more limited English language skills appear to be a significant barrier to attainment and bring into question whether the IELTS Level-6 demonstrates sufficient competence to perform well in a UK undergraduate degree. There is also a pressing need to give more consideration to additional support for international students, such as the use of dictionaries in exams, especially for students with learning difficulties. Whilst this case study has focussed on adaptations within modules taught in China, there is also a need to consider changes to assessments within modules taught in the UK. This could, for example, be by reducing the number of questions and limiting student choice, especially within exams, to enable assessments to be more inclusive of those with weaker English language skills.

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4. Inclusivity in the scientific curricula: barriers to participation in workshops and peer review to improve essay writing

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Essay writing ability is a core skill required for the majority of undergraduates in the UK. Essay writing from any discipline requires students to corral and organize information, synthesise ideas and facts from a range of sources, evaluate evidence and see both details and the wider context of the topic. Students' abilities in essay writing differ significantly between 'Arts' or 'Science' disciplines and these differences may arise from the disciplinary cultures and epistemologies of the subject areas (North 2005). For example, Biglan (1973) demonstrates a distinction between the sciences and arts based on the way that knowledge is constructed. When appraising evidence from a similar topic area, students on science programmes are less likely to present knowledge as constructed and contested, and are more likely to present it as plain matter of fact, compared with arts students (North 2005), and therefore they struggle with critical evaluation.

Although students on science degree programmes often have many opportunities to practice writing skills, they show limited improvement over time (Fritz *et al*. 2000). Staff may assume that students act on feedback, absorb writing skills passively as they read, refer to written guidelines, or use extra-curricular support (Fritz *et al*. 2000, Wingate 2010). However, performance is not improved by passive receipt of feedback (Fritz *et al*. 2000, Wingate 2010). The general persistence of problems with punctuation; citation; sentence and narrative structure; lack of strong, focussed introductions and conclusions; limited evaluation and critique, suggests strategies to support the development of essay writing skills are required for all students. In addition, essay writing assignments benefit students with particular thinking styles (Sternberg 1994), for example:; Conservative (prefer traditional approaches); Internal (like to work alone); Local (focus on details, and concrete examples) or Global (see generalities); and Executive (like structure). Clearly, support is needed to help students with other thinking styles to maximize inclusivity, both in the assignment and the support provided to improve essay writing.

Although specific writing modules are successful (Jerde and Taper 2004), they require substantial time investment (Guilford 2001), are additional to existing modules and are often focussed at graduate level (Iyengar *et al*. 2008) in science disciplines, where classes are small and/or aimed at getting work published. Writing workshops can be implemented within existing modules. By articulating and discussing concrete examples they may provide students with a greater level of insight into synthesizing information, constructing arguments and evaluating evidence, and facilitate learning by students with External (prefer interaction and discussion) as well as Internal thinking styles (Sternberg 1994). Peer review is another approach that can be used within existing modules and is a successful form of support (Guilford 2001, Iyengar *et al*. 2008) because students gain additional insights by being the reviewer, not just the reviewee (Lundstrom and Baker 2009). Peer review may be an effective mode of support for students with the thinking styles given above, but is likely to include those with Liberal (prefer new approaches); External and Judicial (enjoy evaluation) thinking styles (Sternberg 1994).

(1) Aims

We implemented two pedagogic interventions, a writing workshop and a peer review process, targeted at improving the writing abilities of students enrolled on an optional final year module within the Marine Biology suite of degree programmes at Plymouth University, UK. Participation in these activities by the students was voluntary. We investigated (1) the effectiveness of the two interventions in improving essay writing and (2) the reasons why students chose to participate or not in each activity, in order to help us understand how to encourage students to participate and maximize inclusivity with classes in subsequent years.

(2) Method

All students on the module were offered the opportunity to take part in a writing workshop hosted by the module lead, and/or participate in formative peer review. The writing workshop focused on how to structure a good scientific essay using examples and tips about good essay writing practice. Students who participated in peer review provided and received anonymous feedback on a draft essay prior to the summative deadline. All students on the module were given the opportunity to complete a questionnaire to probe students' attitudes towards the two activities, and the reasons that they did or did not take part in either activity.

(3) Results

(a) Participation

The overall cohort consisted of 72 students with 50% of the cohort taking part in some aspect of the study. Figure 1 details the numbers of students who took part in the study, and the activities that they took part in.
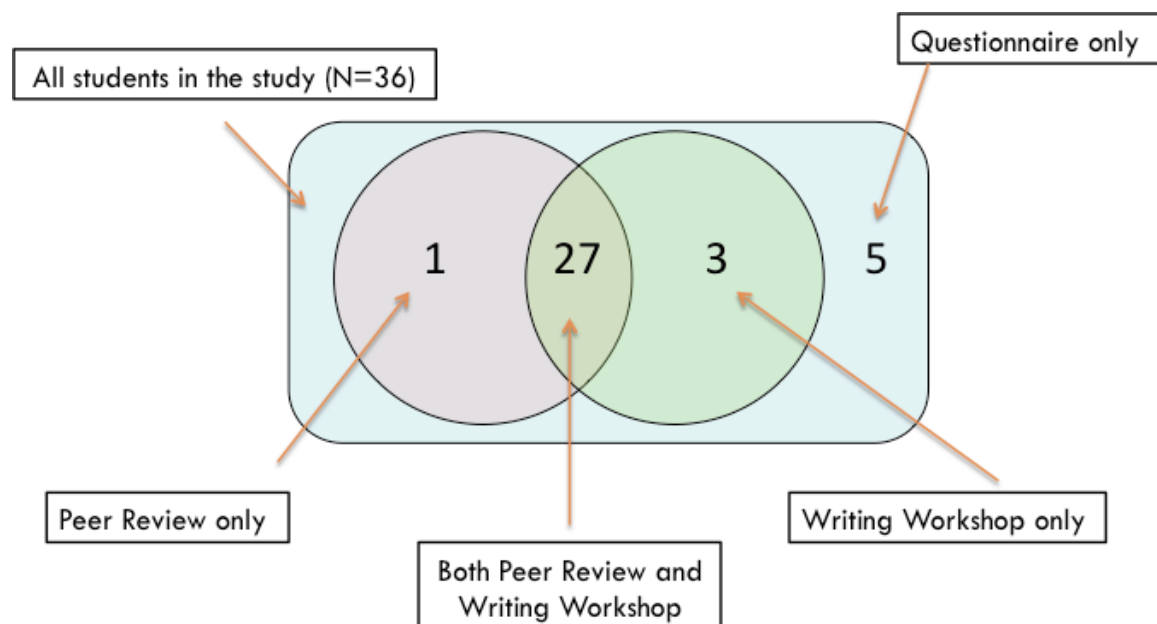

Figure 1. Participation in the study

(b) Value of workshop

Of the respondents who took part in the writing workshop (n = 30), 100% felt they could now better structure their essays; 96% stated that they could now write a better introduction and were able to evaluate and critique more effectively.

(c) Value of peer review

Of those students who took part in the peer review process (n = 28), 86% stated that they had received helpful suggestions to improve their essay; 96% felt that they received fair comments from their reviewer; 92% felt that *receiving* peer feedback was helpful and 93% felt that *giving* peer feedback was helpful to them. Of students who took part in peer review, 87% saw an improvement in their essay grade between their submitted draft and the final essay, as graded by staff.

(d) Barriers to participation

Only 14% (n = 5) of our respondents did not take part in either of the activities. The major reasons given for not taking part were related to time management, including not having enough time to produce a draft, and clustering of their assignments. Some students did not feel confident in providing feedback to a peer, and some students were not confident that the feedback from a peer would be as valuable as that from academics.

(4) Discussion: overcoming barriers to participation

The vast majority of students who took part in the workshop and peer review felt the support activities were of benefit to them. This is borne out by the apparent improvement from formative to summative assignment grades. Clearly the workshop and peer review in this format are worthwhile, achievable within a module and should therefore be incorporated in future years. We feel we have widened the group of students for which the assignment may be engaging, from the relatively narrow group of students who prefer traditional essay writing, by providing a considerable degree of essay topic choice, which should increase opportunities for creativity and a sense of ownership, and providing support for students with Liberal, External and Judicial thinking styles (Sternberg 1994).

To make the support more inclusive, the barriers to participation that students identified were addressed in the following year. Firstly, the summative deadline was shifted to prevent clashes or clustering with other modules across the programme. Secondly, the time provided for students to produce a draft essay, peer review and final draft was increased to around one month each, by shifting the timeframe earlier and minimizing time available for selecting an essay title. Thirdly, to overcome students' concerns with confidence in giving and receiving feedback from a peer, the module leader used an induction session to provide the results from the initial survey, demonstrating the value previous students placed on taking part in the intervention. Finally, the writing workshop included extra time devoted to giving and responding to feedback, and involved a greater degree of discussion and student participation in evaluation of examples.

There remains a concern in endeavouring to maximize inclusivity, in that 25% of the cohort did not participate in either intervention and failed to respond to the questionnaire; their reasons for lack of participation are unknown. Although both essay-writing support activities described here could be made compulsory, this may be counterproductive for students who feel their essay writing is good enough, or for whom time management and the lack of confidence in their own or others' abilities continue to be problematic. We have attempted to further maximize inclusivity by providing support in other ways, including clear signposting to internal Learning Development workshops and tutorials, and by providing an online FAQ section on the module DLE site. We intend to make an online questionnaire available in future to solicit opinion from the 'unseen' students on the module, to establish whether other barriers for participation in essay writing support exist.

(5) Summary

This study has demonstrated the successful implementation of formative peer review and writing workshops within a final year module in a science degree in terms of improving essay writing ability. Student feedback has been largely positive, and many of the barriers to participation have been identified and attempts made to overcome them. The future challenge is to solicit opinion from students who choose not to participate and broaden support in other ways to maximize inclusivity in both the assignment and support offered.

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5. The Architecture of Inclusive Assessment: A College Based Higher Education Experience

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According to Waterfield and West (2010), inclusive assessment has become 'taken-for-granted' and alongside the quest for improving student experiences has created a 'Just Do It' institutional approach. This is especially the case when viewed from the perspective of the widening participation agenda, implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), equality agendas and QAA Codes of Practice. However, when the perspective changes to that of the teacher-student relationship power relations are revealed that challenge the nature and design principles of inclusive assessment.

(1) Confidence, knowingness and risk

The architecture of inclusive assessment, made visible through module specifications is likely to involve a quest for what Smith (2006 p.23) terms as 'knowingness', where institutions, through course and module validation processes, aim to ensure that students are able to meet the learning outcomes that have been set for them before knowing *them* as individuals. In the search for evidence of what is known about a topic there is often a lack of what Smith (2006 p.23) calls 'contingency and finitude' and consequently this may actually work against inclusivity, rather than be a support to it. It is worth noting that for educational institutions, confidence, as a function of knowingness is also relative to the culture and dominant discourses of the field of study. We argue, following Wain (2006), that institutions, fearing uncertainty and risk, are far from confident in what Smith (2006 p.23) called their 'knowingness'. They are constantly seeking reassurance through 'the language of skills and competencies, of measurable outcomes and transparent transactions in their decisions' (Wain 2006 p.39).

There could be a paradox in that the purpose of inclusive assessment requires a certain degree of openness and risk whereas institutions may be risk averse and therefore favour a very bounded (competence based) approach.

> 'In short, the modernist – some would say Enlightenment – quest for equity and efficiency drives contingency from the university. Along with contingency much else disappears: principally the possibility of a relationship between a particular teacher and a particular pupil of the kind that Plato presents so carefully and movingly in the early dialogues. Such a relationship is, as Rorty writes, a matter of ''the sparks that leap back and forth between teacher and student'' (1999 p.126). Such sparks are the source of the realization of forms of human freedom that otherwise cannot be imagined.'
> (Smith 2006 p.30).

Introducing the concept of knowingness challenges many of the unspoken assumptions around inclusive assessment, thus reflecting the 'causal elasticity' and ambiguity identified by Waterfield and West (2010). Graham and Slee (2013) identify dangers in such an approach whereby we tinker at the edges producing an appearance of inclusivity whilst the centre, the invisible constructions, from which exclusions arrive, remains invisible. Whilst co-constructing assessment criteria with BSc final year undergraduate students may be seen as tinkering at the edge, it was an exciting opportunity to share a dialogue about academic language and expectations alongside students' own ideas of what they wanted to achieve through a specified form of assessment. Both limitations and opportunities often unknown to students were opened up to debate, resulting in student-produced assessment guidelines. A space was created for traditionally marginalised voices, acknowledging different student identities, and a shared learning space.

(1) Architecture and visible forms of power: living in the space

The history of Park Hill estate in Sheffield provides an analogy for the forms of power that can be analysed through architecture. In this major housing project, the architects felt a great sense of democratic idealism during the design of the Park Hill estate. However it was only in the act of 'living in' these structures that the social and emotional costs became clear. In a similar way the architects of inclusive assessment (teachers and curriculum developers) make power visible through their curriculum design. One example is the way that assessment is codified in course and module specifications. They are visible because they become the way that we recognise the field of action in relation to assessment. They are both necessary to and a function of the curriculum. In this paper we argue that before we begin to design inclusive assessment we need to acknowledge that students do not have easy access to these visible forms of power. Participation and decision-making are not accessible by all, so the resultant products and processes such as inclusive assessment practices are restricted to those with access. To be able to challenge these practices following the experience of inclusive assessment practices students and teachers need to use their voices in a mobilising action through visible channels. However, the dialectical dilemma here is that students are diverse, and representation channels are often complex and take time. Students may struggle to articulate the social and emotional costs arising from their experiences, and may lack the resources, organization and agency to make their voice heard. If others speak for them, they may, themselves be caught up in the visible forms of power. The following section illustrates this point as it reports the experience of living in the space of inclusive assessment with students from the perspective of the teacher. The case study forms part of an emerging research question, so is not intended to develop an argument at this stage in the research, rather it serves as an illustration of the premise surrounding visible forms of power.

(2) A case in point

Whilst teaching and preparing students for assessment on a BSc first year Health and Community Studies course it became apparent that the students didn't appear to want a different form of

assessment. They had anticipated written assignments and the openness of an innovative assessment method (mind mapping) appeared to be viewed as a nuisance, an added risk in what the students' considered to be a high stakes context. Their previous experience of conventional assessment methods (essay based) appeared to be their overwhelmingly preferred default assessment mode and they expressed perplexity and anxiety when presented with the very different choices involved in making a mindmap. A small number of them reported that they didn't want to learn something that they hadn't expected and didn't know was going to happen. They stated that it felt too risky. Paradoxically, the freedom originally envisaged became more disciplined and bounded as they strived for familiarity, simplicity and structure in support of their choices. Subsequently, I likened my role to that of a choice architect (Thaler and Sunstein 2009) providing a structure around the what, the how and why of mind map design, colour, branches and content in order to simplify their choices and collaborating with them in making difficult choices easier.

A further concern was that having experienced assessment variability and flexibility in the first year of the course, we were placing the students in a liminal space. A space of transition betwixt and between traditional written forms of assessment and the experience of diverse assessment practice. I likened it to Deleuze and Guattari's urban nomads (1988 p.482), in that we were student and academic nomads in a shared space where we were looking to translate complex language and social practices.

(3) Discussion

It is clear that inclusive assessment is an issue of increasing importance in the current debate around inclusion and inclusive practice in curriculum design. Despite lacking a single clear definition (Waterfield and West 2010) inclusive assessment provides us with a philosophy, a way of thinking about student diversity together with a practical approach to implementing change. In creating a new paradigm for student assessment where disability is viewed as a 'normal phenomenon of human diversity' (Eagleton 2014 p.2), inclusive assessment reflects the Universal Design (UD) approach to architecture proposed by architect and wheelchair user, Robert Mace in the 1920's.

However, the nature of inclusive assessment is far more complex than described in many of the implementation practices and guides, and analysis of power relations is a way into having conversations, disturbing academic and learner scripts and taken-for-granted assumptions (Hargreaves 2003). The use of the term 'inclusive' might itself be problematic as it is derived from a base of exclusion, disability discrimination, and is too close to the concept of inclusion to facilitate easy differentiation and articulation. However the process of deliberation 'turning things over in one's mind, looking at the situation from different angles' (Eraut 2000 p.128) may result in a true shared perspective of inclusive assessment.

(4) Summary and conclusion

In this short paper we have explored the concept of 'inclusive assessment' through the perspective of the lived experience of teaching a level four module within an undergraduate degree programme. We have outlined how visible forms of power impact on the student experience, students' levels of

confidence and their reported aversion to risk-taking. During the discussion we acknowledge the context that presses us relentlessly towards inclusive assessment and caution about it becoming an ideological bandwagon without consideration for the relations of power inherent in architecture and design of inclusive assessment practices. Those reading this paper may like to consider these conclusions:

- That implementation of inclusive assessment is not commensurate with fairness and does not necessarily lead to an elimination of reasonable adjustments.
- That diverse assessment practices can become markers and symbolic representations of inclusivity where there is a strengthening of participation and transparency, thereby deriving shared meanings based upon fairness and student choice in the design of inclusive assessment practices.
- That inclusive assessment is not of itself an inclusive pedagogy.

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Powercube site: http://www.powercube.net/

6. From outcomes to outputs: shifting the culture of assessment in the 21st century learning environment

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The challenges facing Higher Education in the 21st century are myriad. This is centrally evident in the interrogation of 'traditional' learning, teaching and assessment modes and methods, and pedagogic practices, which are coming under greater scrutiny as the sector attempts to reposition itself across a dynamic, complex and contested political and socioeconomic landscape. Questions are increasingly asked around the extent to which Higher Education equips graduates with the skills, competencies and capabilities to succeed in a contemporary world increasingly characterised by uncertainty, unpredictability and 'super-complexity' (see Barnett 2000, Barnett and Coate 2005). These questions are also evident in the critique of the separation and hierarchisation of research and learning and teaching within Higher Education, where undergraduate students, the professionals and leaders of the future, are kept at 'arm's length' from the work of research (Brew 2006). Beyond this, there is a clear challenge facing Higher Education in the area of inclusion and the demand for universities to develop strategic approaches to inclusivity that enable and support a culture of inclusion (Thomas and May 2010). A key question for educators then is, 'how can these challenges be addressed in the context of the curriculum and assessment?'

The following case study considers this question in relation to the design and implementation of a student-led, interdisciplinary inquiry-based learning module on a BA Social Science programme. On this module, students were identified as partners in learning and firmly located at the centre of the learning, teaching and assessment experience. The paper will outline and reflect on the way in which the reconnection of teaching and research was used to frame a rethinking of assessment, and provide evidence drawn from student feedback on the learning experience that highlights the potential to engage inclusive practice and to influence culture shift in learning and assessment.

(1) Researching the Social World: shifting the culture of assessment

Researching the Social World was developed around a series of open-ended formative group-research activities building towards the production of a collective research output. Learners were located at the centre of an assessment process that encouraged them to move beyond the boundaries of 'traditional' assessment formats, which are often prescriptive and tied to restrictive learning outcomes, towards the production of open-ended assessment outputs that supported originality, encouraged creativity and stimulated criticality (on this, see the work of Neary 2010). The Xerte Online Toolkit, a powerful but accessible and inclusive technology, was identified as an appropriate platform to facilitate this experience (see http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/xerte).

Brew (2006) observes that the transition to an 'experiential' learning environment can be a 'mystery' for those students whose learning experience has thus far been conducted within the instruction paradigm. In addition, learners who hold 'strongly reproductive conceptions of learning' may be hesitant to embrace change in the learning environment (see Levy and Petrulis 2012). Student feedback collated suggests that an initial degree of apprehension was evident. Several learners found the shift in the learning environment daunting at first, with some finding it '*intimidating and scary*' and '*hard to grasp*'. The shift from a structured, passive learning environment was reported as '*unnerving*', with the reduced level of guidance being identified as '*challenging*'. One respondent noting that '*getting to third year and all of a sudden having less guidance is a shock*'.

However, as Barnett (2000 p.155) argues, 'enabling students to live at ease with this perplexing and unsettling environment' is a key task for higher education in the 21st century, and whilst there was a sense of 'unsettling' at the outset, it soon became apparent that the development of a collaborative learning environment through the development of student-centred pedagogies enabled students to embrace this challenge (see Thomas and May 2010). A sense of '*let's work together',* as we are '*all sort of in the same boat*' soon became evident. Students used their experience of learning in partnership to influence the learning experience for themselves and others; traditional hierarchies were broken down with academic staff and students working collaboratively. As one respondent noted, there was '*a lot of collaborating with my peers, not only in my group, but with other members of the class and the lecturers.*' As a result, one student commented, '*students were learning just as much as the lecturers who wanted to hear my ideas and work together, we were all learning together.*'

To facilitate ongoing peer-support and peer-assisted learning, a learning ambassador and champion framework was established (see McCarroll 2014). What was interesting about this was that whilst the focus initially centred upon the production of the Xerte learning object, it quickly spread to other activities within the module (see McPherson and Heggie 2014). As one student observed:

> '*Although this type of peer support was only intended to be used for using Xerte as a tool, it quickly became the norm for students to utilise support from each other when it came to the academic content of our assessments too.*'

As Keenan (2014 pp.5-10) observes, engagement in peer-led learning promotes ownership, facilitates collaboration, improves confidence, encourages a sense of belonging, and helps create an academic community of practice. All of these factors are evident in the student feedback. Respondent comments noted that the learning environment '*empowered students to take control of their own learning experience*', with the '*closer integration of staff and students*' being cited as a key factor, which, as one student observed, was '*conducive to an environment of personal/ academic development which has encouraged my engagement with not only this module but my course in general*.'

Whilst 'disrupting' traditional assessment regimes can contribute to the development of a more inclusive and collaborative learning environment, students have a key role in the success of any change. As the HE Academy (2014 p.14) notes, learners are more likely to be resistant towards change unless they fully understand the 'benefits to them in relation to learning'. Adopting the

principles of inclusivity through involving students as 'active partners at all stages in the process of assessment' is argued to be one way to navigate this potential barrier (Thomas and May 2011 p.14). Learning in partnership empowered students as collaborative co-creators and change agents by facilitating the joint ownership of the assessment process. Students '*enjoyed learning freely and openly*' and '*having an input in the module outcomes*', such as through the co-creation of marking rubrics. This instilled a sense of responsibility, which came from being part of the decision-making processes, allowing, as one student noted, '*to communicate to the lecturers what I would like to be assessed on and what I thought was important to be assessed on*'.

The shift from outcomes to outputs harnessed a sense of creativity and self-directed learning that many noted was absent from their experience of higher education. Moving beyond 'traditional' assessments '*pushed the boundaries of our creative minds, something that an academic piece hadn't done so before.*' One theme emerging from the feedback was the extent to which the increased focus on creativity made it '*possible for students to move beyond their comfort zone with tasks and experience new ways of producing work*', resulting in an learning environment which was '*more fluid and creative, allowing more independence while encouraging us to find our own way through the module with little guidance'.* All this is neatly summarised by one student who noted that Researching the Social World:

> '*provided a fresh way of thinking about assessments as we did not have to stick to the traditional forms which we are used to, such as, essay writing, we were instructed to create a Xerte instead. This was hard to grasp at first as we are so used to being assessed on our essay writing technique. Using the Xerte to build our assessment was an excellent way to express our creativity*.'

(2) Conclusion: students as 'change agents' in reshaping the learning and assessment landscape

This paper began with laying down a challenge to 'traditional' learning, teaching and assessment modes and methods, and pedagogic practices. It argued that learning in partnership provides a template for sustainable and inclusive curricular development, which addresses the multifaceted challenges facing Higher Education in the 21st century. However, it was recognised that the transition from an instruction to a discovery paradigm, from passive to active learning, from outcomes to outputs is not without challenges. As the case study demonstrates, learners will comfortably push the boundaries of their own and others' learning. If learning in partnership is to be inclusive and sustainable, what is required is a safe and supported learning environment. Students have a key role in the success of any change, and are more likely to be resistant if the benefits to their learning are not evident. The key to the success of this pilot project was that students were empowered as collaborative co-creators and change agents, which in turn instilled a sense of ownership and promoted a culture of inclusivity that is only possible by fully embracing students as active partners in learning.

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7. A traffic light system of assessment in Year 1 BA Sports Coaching

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A new module, Thinking and Learning in Sport Coaching in the BA Sports Coaching degree programme set out to equip students with critical thinking skills, strategies and resources. The aim was multi-dimensional. In addition to scaffolding student learning to equip a developing coach with a skill set for the various roles deployed within a sports setting, the course also aimed to provide opportunities for students to practise skills that would be of benefit to them in other modules in the first and following years. Mastery assessments across the first seven months of the module were designed to build group and individual efficacy covering important skills found in academic, personal, professional and field development (Schellhase 2008). A team-based approach was adopted for Part 1 to enable weaker students to remain proactive across the learning process and to extend the mentoring skills by stronger students. In the previous year, marginalization was targeted as a potential cause of loss of students (be it in attendance and/or simply active participation). To help us retain the desired full attendance and provide some more tangible in-class support, team captains were nominated weekly by their teams in a rotation such that teams could work across the themes and take the respective assessments when they felt ready. In so doing, all members were supported across the class experiences (lectures, workshops and fieldwork) and were provided with the opportunity to lead and be led. Moreover, teams contributed to the scope and sequence of the assessments designed for Part 1 (the first 40% of the class). A further 10% was attainable for those who then transitioned to the individual summative plenary of Part 1 by presenting their class portfolio (online and hard copy). Not all students had organized their materials within their portfolios and this incentive was to encourage all to examine and organize their files so as to have all resources prepared for their Part 2 report (50%). By Part 2, all had practised with the tools and skills (across the five mastery based assessments) required to complete the leadership based final report; a solo endeavour. The aspiration was to increase student and class autonomy and efficacy with regard the ownership of both the learning and the assessment process. Each assessment was reviewed by a team prior to its publication (formal setting online). This 'buy in' aimed to improve student awareness of their role and enhance their personal experience at this initial stage in their Higher Education.

(1) Theory behind team based learning and the creation of a significant learning experience

Team based learning (TBL) is a collaborative approach designed to transform the use of small groups in teaching at the higher education level (Michaelsen, Bauman-Knight and Fink 2003). One important caveat is that the student needs to be 'ready' for class and that there is a strategy embedded to assist in this. Team and individual readiness assessment tests explicitly encourage the student to read with goal-directed purpose prior to the beginning of the class. Points are awarded both on a

team and individual basis. In this case, a degree of student-to student and student-to teacher communication was both necessary and appreciated as class members aimed to gain as many points for the theme at hand before the lecture and task series begin. Students could challenge a score and argue their case (in writing and verbal argument if adopting the structure we required in theme 1; academic development). This made for a more informed and interactive class when the actual main lecture occurred. Students were encouraged to attend class via follow up emails to remind them that their attendance was important to me as the teacher, as well as useful for them for their other modules. This coaching leadership style blends well with the ethos of the class. The approach we adopted across TBL appears to sit well with the course design proposed by Fink (2003). To create a series of significant learning experiences certain criteria need to be present. Students are engaged in their own learning, and a high energy is associated across this process; the process needs to link to important outcomes in that the student is changed. This change ought to continue beyond the remit of the class and what the students learn ought to have a high potential for being of value in life after the end of the module. Such was the collective belief and aspiration of this new module, with the course progressing through 12 steps, supported by Bloom's taxonomy and delivered through a TBL system.

(2) Taxonomy of learning (Fink 2003)

The module structure was based upon the taxonomy of learning by Fink (2003), adapted from that of Bloom (1956). Foundational knowledge, application, integration, human dimension, caring and learning how to learn served as the platform for this autonomy-based module. Thereafter the 12 steps framed the module's creation (see Box 1).

Box 1. The Twelve Step Module (Fink 2003)

Initial Phase
1. Identify important situational factors
2. Identify important learning goals
3. Formulate appropriate feedback and assessment procedures
4. Select effective teaching and learning activities
5. Integrate the components

Intermediate Phase
6. Create a thematic course structure
7. Select a teaching strategy
8. Integrate 6 and 7 to create overall set of learning activities

Final Phase
9. Develop the grading system
10. Debug the possible problems
11. Write the course syllabus
12. Plan an evaluation of the course and of your teaching

The module's inception last year has provided the opportunity to reach Steps 10 and 12, completing the experiential cycle for both teacher and class and enabling me to present a more dynamic and improved course to the current year's second cohort. With a lot of proactive encouragement through the coaching leadership style (Goleman 2000), the module is being shaped and effectively run by teams through its mastery-based assessment sequence across Part 1 (September-February). Such is the shift of the control of assessment in this paradigm and indeed a proportion of each class, that it may be challenging for students and teachers more accustomed to a traditional learning model. This 'resistance' also bears consideration, with patience and perseverance needed to construct a new culture of integrated collaboration through the class sequence. Preparation must be very detailed and occurs before classes and then the flow is essentially dictated by class members. A strong awareness of class members is essential and, to assist with this, we 'played' through various cohesion-building and trust-building exercises (gym and outdoor based) and created a class- and team- based full value commitment (FVC). We used this FVC to help teams remain mindful of their respective responsibilities and as a 'contract' to return to the class-created expectations.

The final stage, Part 2 (mid-February-March), provided the opportunities for class members to engage with course material at their desired level of field application (via leadership scenarios through their own coaching) and depth of academic integrity as it pertained to their own report.

(3) Conclusion

Feedback from our class will be of interest in terms of application beyond the class and its relevance in relation to the rest of the degree structure. Indeed the module bears quite a worrisome weight in that it seeks to prepare the students for learning across the breadth of the degree. However, we will follow these ideas through in the class research methods module in their second year, and then their final year dissertation (special project) modules. This process develops 'buy in' at this early stage of their development to prepare them for their next academic steps. From a personal standpoint, I hope that students are able to value themselves, and from a collective standpoint they then seek to respect the learning domains, the collaborative learning experienced, and their evaluations of these is enhanced.

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8. Applying inclusive practice assessment design to physiotherapy

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The principle of embedding inclusive practice in learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) is widely supported and encouraged: by the Higher Education Academy, through a long history of project initiatives and through its UK Professional Standards Framework; by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Quality Codes, where institutions are expected to 'promote the development of inclusive practice' (QAA 2013 p.4); by many Universities' Corporate Plans and LTA Strategies; and indeed, by many academic staff on the ground (for example, according to research (Smith 2009), over 90% of Sheffield Hallam University academic staff supported inclusive practice in principle). Yet in spite of this wide-ranging and high-level support, so little extensive or embedded change occurs in practice. As Hockings (2010 p.1) states:

> 'Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education refers to the ways in which pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all. It embraces a view of the individual and individual difference as the source of diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others.'

(1) The project

Taking the above definition as a starting point, an education developer in a central department and a module leader in a Faculty at Sheffield Hallam University began a collaborative project to freely adapt a single module to be as inclusive as possible. The project was proposed to the Sheffield Hallam University Faculty of Health and Wellbeing Disability Working Group, outlining two clearly identified aims:

- To improve the student experience through the embedding of inclusive approaches to learning, teaching and assessment in a module.
- To evaluate the impact on the staff experience of applying inclusive approaches to learning, teaching and assessment to a particular module.

The module selection was voluntary to avoid any suggestion that the project was aimed at improving a 'failing' or 'problem' module. Once selected, all aspects of the module, from learning and teaching practice to assessment tasks and documentation, were examined and reviewed by the developer and the module leader in a series of meetings. All subsequent changes were discussed and agreed for all areas. The module leader then informed the rest of the module teaching team of the proposed changes via a series of planning meetings, and students were informed via induction sessions and introductory lectures. At the completion of the module focused evaluative interviews were undertaken with six students and six staff on a voluntary basis, to obtain feedback and provide understanding of how the changes were experienced.

For the purposes of this paper, only the changes to module assessment will be outlined, which are as follows.

1. The assessment criteria and learning outcomes were re-written in plain English.
2. Additional face-to-face formative sessions were included in the module timetable. These were designed to replicate the final summative task, using an identical type of case study. Previously, formative work had been in the form of e-tivities.
3. The summative exam task itself was shortened from one hour to 45 minutes. Keeping each individual exam slot to one hour enabled any additional time (usually 25%) to be built into the exam timetable for all students whilst still respecting any other specific learning contract (reasonable adjustment) requirements.
4. An element of choice was introduced to the exam timetable. Students were asked to email a number ranging from 1-100 to the module leader. Low numbers were taken to indicate a preference for an earlier assessment timeslot, whilst higher numbers were taken to indicate a preference for a later timeslot.
5. The practice of allowing notes which could be taken into the exam was adapted to include notes in a format of preference (e.g. video or audio files on computer as opposed to written text). Internet access was not allowed.
6. Students could complete the tasks in any order. They could move back and forth through the process as they wished and were allowed to leave tasks to return to them at a later time.
7. There was a move away from each examiner requiring all students to perform a fixed number of tasks, to a model where the examiner was able to vary the number of tasks according to whether the student had already met the learning outcomes.

(2) Evaluation outcomes

Six student participants were recruited for semi structured qualitative interviews which were recorded and audio-transcribed. There were four males and two females. During the course of the interviews three volunteered information that they had Learning Contracts (LC) (i.e. they have a disability requiring reasonable adjustments to be made) in place and three did not - they were not asked the question directly.

It was noticeable that those with a LC were more aware of the changes made and were able to volunteer their experiences without prompting. They said they found the changes '*reassuring*' and '*interesting*', whereas those without a LC indicated that they had largely forgotten what changes were made saying that they '*didn't notice it*' or '*Nothing sort of jumps out at me, I couldn't tell you that anything were [sic] different*.'

Once reminded about the specific changes made to the assessment the student responses were at worst non-committal: *'… not too much of a difference really - I didn't notice it*,' but taking comments from five of the six students we found a positive appreciation of a variety of benefits depending on the change referred to. The flexibility of exam time constraints led to this for a disabled student:

'I have to eat every half hour or so and there was no problem asking them if I could do that in the exam, whereas for the other module, they weren't very happy about that, because they thought it wouldn't be fair that I'd had a few minutes break to have a bit of food.'

and the reduction in pressure and stress was also appreciated by the non-disabled students:

'... I felt, go, go, go, pressure in that situation. Whereas in the MSK module it was a bit more relaxed ...'

'I think just having people who haven't been diagnosed but still need that extra bit of time and support, I think that's really good. Then if they finish early it's no problem is it?'

The principle of enabling choice as to the time slot for an exam was also valued:

'That was lovely yeah ... some people are morning people, some people are afternoon people, some want them all done at the beginning of the week, some want them spread out ... .'

Our conversations with teaching staff were even more striking. At the outset, there were clearly a number of concerns articulated that some of the proposals which affected learning and teaching (although less so with the changes to the assessment task) would have a negative impact on both staff and students. However, these were then not realised. The feedback related to the assessment task, however, highlighted how positively the proposals were viewed: 'Yes, excellent, I thought this was a really good move.' Furthermore, staff, like the students, felt the whole assessment process was less stressful:

'I think it takes the pressure off all the students knowing that there is a little bit of run-over time.'

'… it made the process for us less stressful.'

They were clear too about the benefits in terms of equal opportunities:

'… it gives them an equal opportunity to shine and to show us their best and manage their nerves and anxieties. So, yes, lots of advantages I think.'

At the same time being clear that those opportunities were not giving anyone an advantage:

'A student that doesn't know something generally won't know it fifteen minutes later, so I don't think that it gave anybody any advantage at all.'

(3) Conclusions

This project received very little by way of negative feedback. What there was came from staff in advance and was primarily focused on their perception of likely issues which in practice didn't arise. Students were either unaffected and unaware or very pleased with the inclusive changes so it is possible to conclude with confidence that the student experience was, at least, marginally improved.

Teaching staff were more positive overall, expressing clear feelings regarding the assessment experience that evidenced an improvement in both the student and their own experience. They cited improvements in equality that reached beyond disabled students and has led to a transfer of those benefits into other areas and other modules

> '… we've certainly implemented this same thing with a vengeance in the … practice-based learning course.'

The project outcomes have led to further change as this extension of inclusive practice provision was fed into the course revalidation documents and resulted in the team being commended specifically on this by the external evaluator.

It appears that relatively small and easily achievable changes in learning, teaching and assessment practice can facilitate the application of inclusive practice principles more broadly. Left to their own initiative to embed or attempt inclusive changes, the majority of otherwise supportive teaching staff may perceive potential difficulties and problems that will lead to them putting aside any attempt at such change. However, lived experience of inclusive practice change can lead quickly to more widespread change in other areas, acting as reassuring evidence that difficulties will not arise and benefits can accrue to both staff and students.

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9. From employability to inclusivity

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This paper charts the consequences relating to inclusivity in the curriculum for students with specific learning difficulties (SpLD) / disabilities of a project that embedded employability skills in the curriculum through non-traditional assessments. The first part of the paper presents the *Employability-Centred* curriculum, while the second part of the paper concentrates on the effects of the non-traditional assessments on students with SpLD/disabilities.

The School of Classics in the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (previously, University of Wales Lampeter) started embedding employability skills in the curriculum in 2009/10. The aims of this project, *The employability-centred curriculum,* were, and are: firstly, to provide graduates with a set of skills that make them more employable in the long-run; secondly, to embed these skills in the curriculum, rather than follow a bolt-on approach; and, finally, to preserve and increase student satisfaction rates (see e.g. Waterfield and West 2006).

The methodology was to identify key skills that employers of graduates required (Lowden *et al.* 2011), but which were not already covered in the existing curriculum. The nature of the subjects taught in the School of Classics (Greek, Latin, Ancient History, Classical Studies) already trained the student-body in skills such as analysis, compilation of information, and critical attitude. A series of practical skills were identified, specifically: written communication to various audiences (i.e. not only academic), oral communication, group/team work, creative thinking and application. Assessments that gave the students the opportunity to gain and enhance skills in these areas were to be included in the curriculum. Further, the inclusion of such skills as part of the formal assessment for modules, and, indeed, for the whole degree, provided, and provides, students with the necessary evidence to showcase their competence to employers through applications and references.

The project was originally piloted in a handful of modules across all levels of undergraduate study in 2009/10. It was deemed successful, as students in the modules not only were satisfied, but also identified the assessments as increasing their employability. The external examiners' comments for the project and the results of these non-traditional assessments were uniformly positive. Until 2009/10, all assessments in the School of Classics in non-linguistic modules followed a set pattern of 50% traditional essay, and 50% traditional unseen examination.

The types of assessments were:

1. Alternative written work, specifically reflective journals, reflective reports, reflective essays, replies to scholarly articles, replies to other students' arguments.
2. Creative portfolios.
3. Oral presentations.
4. Creation of webpages/websites.
5. Groupwork, resulting in group essays, group presentation, and group poster exhibitions.

6. Take-home examinations (the students receive the examination paper at 9.15am and have to return a completed essay by 3pm on the same day). The aim of this assessment is to recreate the work-place pressure to complete an assignment or report in one's area of expertise within a business day.

The project continued past the pilot stage, and continues still, with a slow cascading across the whole of the curriculum. It is currently at its highest stage with 72% of the module portfolio of the School (including linguistic modules) at the latest validation (2014) being assessed by coursework, of which 49% are non-traditional assessments. At the same time, 28% of modules are assessed by examination; this percentage includes take-home examination assessments. As an example, in the current academic year (2014/15) out of 24 non-linguistic modules across levels 4-6, 31.6% of assessments are traditional essay assessments, 16.3% are traditional unseen timed examinations, and 51.7% are non-traditional assessments, which includes two take-home examinations.

Student satisfaction in modules with non-traditional assessments has been high since 2009/10, even as the modules including non-traditional assessments have increased in number. Student satisfaction in all modules with non-traditional assessments was over 90%.

Surveys of students in 2009/10 and 2012/13 with the specific purpose of identifying the students' relationship to non-traditional assessments showed clearly that students thought the assessments made them more employable. Interestingly, the percentage of students that thought that the assessments made them more employable was higher in 2012/13 (91% of respondents), than in 2009/10 (70% of respondents). This reflects the greater understanding of employability skills amongst students over time, as well as the greater interest towards employability at application stage.

One of the main effects of the project has been the creation of a more inclusive assessment regime in the School. Preliminary sample data shows that the non-traditional assessments have had a considerable effect upon the success of students with disabilities and learning difficulties. The sample data is part of a larger dataset in the process of being fully collated; this data covers all of the students from the 2014 cohort (graduated) and will be used to evaluate the full effect of the non-traditional assessments on different cohorts.

The sample comprises of 17 students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) and/or disabilities that required study support. The students graduated in July 2014, having started their degrees two years after the beginning of the original pilot for the Employability-Centred Curriculum. These students studied during the cascading of non-traditional assessments, but before the high point of cascading in validation 2014.

Comparing the results of the students with SpLD/disability with those of students without SpLD/disability shows that there are some differences in the two cohorts in relation to types of assessment. Four comparisons are made between types of assessment, and the average marks of the two parts of the cohort (SpLd vs. non-SpLD) in those types of assessment:

1. Examination vs. essay.
2. Take-home examination vs. traditional unseen examination.
3. Group work (irrespective of type) vs. individual work.
4. Oral work vs. written work.

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Both cohorts do better in essays than in examinations; however, the mark loss is greater for students with SpLD/disability (-3.4 marks) than for students without SpLD/disability (-2.5 marks). Both cohorts also do better in take-home examinations, than in traditional unseen timed examinations, although the mark loss in traditional timed unseen examinations is marginally greater for students without SpLD/disability (-1.6 marks), than for students with SpLD/disability (-1.3 marks). Again both cohorts perform better in group work assessments than in individual assessments. However, students with SpLD/disability perform considerably better in group work assessments than in individual ones (mark gain +2.66), compared with students without SpLD/disability, who only do marginally better in group work (mark gain +0.2).

The trend is not the same in the comparison of marks of oral work versus written work (coursework only). There students with SpLD/disability do better in oral work rather than in written work, with a mark gain in oral work (average) of 4.5 marks. Students without SpLD/disability, on the other hand, do, on average, better in written work with an average mark loss in oral work of 1 mark.

Average marks, however, only tell part of the story for students with SpLD/disability. Examining the individual student mark profiles shows that for students with SpLD/disability having a greater variety of assessments, rather than the traditional pattern (50% traditional essay and 50% traditional unseen examination), meant an average mark gain of 1.99 marks. As students have a considerable element of module choice, the profiles are not identical in terms of modules or assessments, but all of the students in the sample had taken a number of modules with non-traditional assessments. While the average gain was 1.99 marks, a further break down shows that 76.4% of the sample gained marks overall, ranging from +0.9 to +6.6, while 23.7% of students lost marks overall, ranging from -0.2 to -1.5. Interestingly, for the students that lost marks overall, the loss did not mean a change of degree classification, whereas for those who gained marks, 23.5% changed degree classification (always in comparison with what their marks would have been under the traditional assessment pattern, and based upon their marks in essays and traditional timed unseen examinations). This sample analysis shows rather clearly that students with SpLD/disability benefitted from the inclusion of non-traditional assessments in the curriculum.

On a final note, if the students in the sample had the opportunity to choose their assessment pattern to reflect their 'best' assessment types (but still doing other assessments to improve their skills), then, in comparison to the existing patterns of assessment, then they would gain on average 3 marks, and 29% of them would change degree classification. If compared to the traditional assessment pattern (essay and examination), then the gain would be 5 marks, and 47% would change degree classification. A basic analysis of the students' results showed that for 70% of the students in the sample, their 'best' assessment types could have been predicted from their performance in their first year of study.

The analysis above shows that both students with SpLD/disability and students without SpLD/disability benefitted materially from the inclusion of non-traditional assessments in the curriculum. Students with SpLD/disability generally benefitted more substantially than students without SpLD/disability. The Employability-Centred Curriculum intended to enhance the skills of graduates; it has also served to provide students, both with SpLD/disability and without, with the opportunity to improve their academic performance.

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Inclusive assessment

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'Inclusive assessment does not compromise academic standards. It instead improves the chances for all students to demonstrate their ability to meet the learning outcomes.'
(Plymouth University 2014)

Gibbs and Simpson (2005) tell us that assessment is the most critical influence on what and how well students learn, yet NSS scores relating to assessment and feedback consistently give cause for concern (Williams and Kane 2008). This paper investigates the mismatch between the aspirations of effective assessment practice and the reality of the assessment experience. The aim of the research project was to elicit student and staff perspectives on: the design of assessment; to what extent assessment is effective; and ideas that might help to improve assessment practice and experience. More specifically, interview questions included a number of questions focusing on inclusivity. This provides a shift from earlier notions of providing alternative assessment for students with particular needs, towards an inclusive approach which considers how to support *all* students towards a successful outcome (Magne 2012). Employers were also interviewed to explore what graduate skills they most value, and how this is considered within assessment design. Short video and audio clips were produced from interview data to use in staff development activities.

(1) Background

Hounsell (2007) calls for 'integrative' assessment arguing that assessments should take into account the different ways in which we learn, rather than privileging certain skills such as individual performative and written expression which may not enable all students to play to their strengths. According to multiple intelligence theory (Gardner 1999), traditional tests of intelligence do not sufficiently encompass the wide variety of abilities humans display highlighting the need for assessment models which take into account other learning styles. Whilst Fuller *et al*. (2004) argue that little progress has been made with regards to allowing students to demonstrate mastery using alternative forms of assessment, this research project aimed to move on from the notion of providing alternative assessments for the few: instead it aimed to garner student and staff experience of assessment with a view to thinking more creatively about how assessment can be made more inclusive for *all* students. This aligns with Plymouth University's aim to move away from a 'contingent' approach (special provision), instead supporting institutional transformation to potentially benefit all students through an inclusive approach.

Riddell *et al.* (2002) emphasise that success in HE may have a lifelong impact on a student's earning capacity and location in the labour market, yet disabled students often encounter more barriers to learning at university and achieve poorer outcomes with regards to the final degree classification. The development of inclusive learning and assessment opportunities to meet the needs of diverse

learners is central to the Plymouth University Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience Strategy (Plymouth University 2013).

Inclusive assessment is described by Hockings (2010 p.2) as:

> ' … the design and use of fair and effective assessment methods and practices that enable all students to demonstrate to their full potential what they know understand and can do.'

Crucially, inclusive assessment is not about 'making things easier'. It is about designing useful, authentic assessment activities and elements of feed-in, feed-forward and feedback (Brown 2007) which enable students to achieve the demands of their programme. It is argued that this requires a transformative, institutionalised approach, which is strategic and embeds consistent practice rather than 'bolt on' or 'ad hoc' provision (Waterfield and West 2006)

Central to an institutional approach to inclusive assessment is the need to create an awareness and understanding of the potential benefits for *all* students (Powney 2002). Part of the aim of the materials developed from this research is to enable academics to explore the needs of learners with a view to anticipating their varied needs and designing assessment that is accessible QAA (2013).

(2) Project methods

A literature review was undertaken in order to identify the key salient issues around inclusivity. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen Plymouth University students, thirteen Plymouth University staff, and five graduate employers. Participants were identified through an 'opportunistic' or 'snowballing' sampling strategy, viz. via the Students Union and Disability Assist, the Employability Services, as well as from personal contacts.

Initial data analysis was undertaken using a thematic analysis approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967), drawing on the literature review and using NVivo to code the interview transcripts. Systematic analysis was then applied to draw out more detailed findings from the initial overarching themes. From this second stage of analysis, extracts from the interviews that illustrated the salient issues were selected, and were edited into short video and audio clips as staff development resources. These are now available on the Plymouth University website, having gained permission from each interviewee to use their respective extracts. https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/inclusivity

(3) Initial findings

Several key themes emerged from the interviews with students that reflect existing findings in the literature. The interviewees' descriptions of different challenges expanded on current understandings further and pointed to issues that remain to be addressed in higher education.

For example, bunching of assignments is still an issue:

> *'… everything was before Christmas all bar our dissertation and then we had a period of time where we had nothing it all, which was nice but I think they could have spread it out a lot more. It would have taken quite a lot of pressure off us. They do tend to clump them all together in quite a short period of time, which then makes it difficult either get it all done in time.'*

A solution to bunching is suggested by some to be a programme-level assessment strategy (Hartley and Whitfield 2011). This has implicit challenges given modular degrees, with the need to co-ordinate a disparate and varying number of course blocks. However, as recognised in the literature, assessment design at Programme level helps students see their progression and the links between different modules, rather than as a 'scatter gun' approach that ticks boxes (*ibid*.).

The issue of feedback that fails to feed-forward (Gibbs 2010) occurred several times, for example, *'I got a vague sentence which didn't tell me how to improve it'*. In comparison, students valued constructive comments they had received: '*The best bits of feedback were the ones that sort of give you a hint. … on what you could talk about a bit more.'*

The challenges of stress and anxiety were also mentioned frequently. Notably, these included exam stress, partly due to the feeling of being watched, but also the nature of a 'timed environment'. Perhaps yet to be reported elsewhere, was one student's viewpoint that modified provision arrangements were not always helpful, in that by seating students in a separate room, their '*anxiety feeds off each other*.'

There were also frequent mentions of '*not liking stuff*' and '*finding it scary'*, for example, on a law course where role-play interviews were required without preparation. The research data clearly indicates that inclusive assessment does not suggest that student anxiety should exempt students from any specific type of assessment. However, it does challenge academics to consider: what is being assessed in the assignment; how they set up assessment; what kind of briefing is offered; the opportunity for students to practice or rehearse; the use of formative feedback; and how to build students' confidence in and familiarity with each assessment format.

Whilst Gibbs (2010) cautioned against a 'bewildering variety of assessment formats', some students in this research reported their appreciation of variation, recognising that '*everyone has different learning styles*'. Although often cited as the least favourite form of assessment, largely due to the stress and anxiety involved, several were clear that they also valued exams. For example, *'I like exams more than coursework … it challenges you to know almost everything and have to apply it I think that is what intrigues me about exams I really like them, I don't like coursework it takes forever, exams I just sit down and revise and do it.'*

Interviews with staff also revealed mixed feelings about exams as a form of assessment. Reasons for retaining them included: to meet the needs of professional bodies; the benefit of simulating situations in future work roles, such as the ability to sit down and focus for two or three hours; or applying problem-solving skills in novel scenarios. Conversely, staff recognised that the format of exams or unseen tests could be flexible. Rather than just testing memory, exam formats can include open book, take home, problem-based, or seen.

Assessment design was seen to be an issue best addressed at programme level, with a recognition of the need for a variety so that students '*don't get through entire degree only by doing one thing*.' Creative ways to cope with marking time should also be considered. One interviewee reported how careful assessment design had '*stripped out*' unintended requirements for additional expertise beyond that of the stated learning outcomes. Others reported the value of including students in design or choice of assessment, as well as of taking time for feed-in and discussing the assessment parameters.

The graduate employers participating in this study all emphasised that they look for 'soft skills'. They were satisfied that the academic qualification gave graduates the subject knowledge, but they also seek commercial awareness, 'common sense' and 'people skills' in their future employees. Whilst partnerships between universities and employers are improving, employers feel that with greater involvement they could strengthen the message about the importance of soft skills. Work experience was often valued for developing these attributes.

(4) Conclusion and next steps

The sample size of this project was limited, but the messages from students, staff and employers were clear. As with larger studies, these findings suggested that assessment design should: be considered at programme level, include variety; assess key learning outcomes; and think not just in terms of the discipline but also the wider skills that employers are looking for. This research has shown that whilst many examples of practice which meet these aspirations do exist, there is still a significant mismatch between experience on the ground and acknowledged principles of inclusive assessment. The perspectives of the interviewees who took part in this project are presented in the video clips at https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/inclusivity. This online resource will be used to assist in staff development to kickstart critical conversations about the challenges, benefits and nuances of inclusivity and inclusive assessment. They are part of a larger resource on the inclusivity agenda. Early evaluations suggest that these resources provide a foundation for rich discussion supporting, programme, curriculum and assessment development.

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