Contents

Inclusive assessment for student success

Briefing document prepared by Corony Edwards

'All participants need to be provided with equivalent opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and maximize their potential' Brown S. 2004: 83.

Headlines

- Giving all students equivalent opportunities is not the same as all students, whatever their strengths, weaknesses and abilities, being given an identical task.

- Preparation and practice, transparency, variety and choice are the key elements of inclusive assessment.

- Inclusive assessment does not compromise academic standards; it improves the chances for all students to demonstrate their ability to meet the learning outcomes (Waterfield and West, 2010).

- It is more time-effective and equitable to consider the inclusiveness of assessment at the programme and module design stage, rather than making individual adjustments later in the programme (Hockings, 2010), not least because inclusive assessment is just one aspect of inclusive curriculum provision.

- 'In designing, operating and evaluating assessment processes higher education providers [are expected to] take into account the entitlements of

their students, which may reflect a diversity of protected characteristics and prior educational experience, and promote the development of inclusive practice' (QAA UK Quality Code Ch. B6: 6).

1. The principle underpinning an inclusive curriculum

"… including assessment, is that it provides an accessible, engaging and relevant learning experience for all students, maximising retention and progression, while reflecting the needs of particular groups" (Robson 2005, in Bloxham and Boyd, 2007: 139). It is therefore more practicable than an approach which caters specifically to individual differences. It reduces the likelihood of certain groups or individuals being overlooked, stereotyped or perceived as 'problem' students.

2. The UK Quality Code

… Chapter B6, Indicator 5 states that 'Institutions [must] ensure that assessment is conducted with rigour, probity and fairness with due regard for security'. The need to ensure that the assessment process is sound and fair is closely allied to the need or validity and reliability highlighted above. In particular, this means ensuring that all students are treated equitably, and that they are all given equivalent opportunities to demonstrate their achievement of the required standards. Much of this is concerned with the institution putting in place procedures to address special circumstances… It is the responsibility of academic staff to ensure these policies are implemented consistently and to provide clear and accurate advice to students…' Apart from any other considerations, we therefore have a clear duty and mandate to make our assessment practices as inclusive as possible.
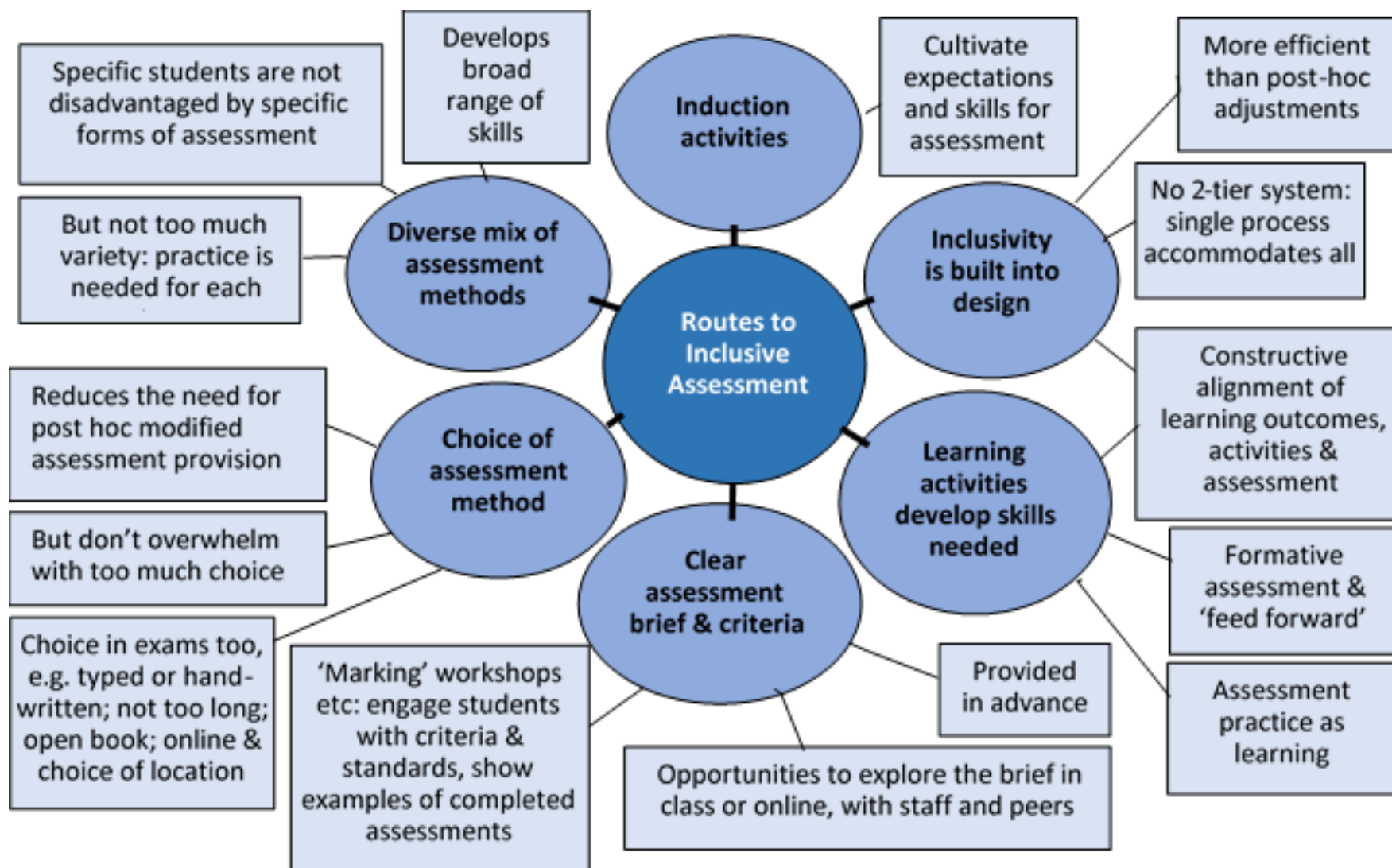
3. Routes to inclusive assessment:

The following diagram is based mainly on ideas presented in '7 Steps to Inclusive Assessment' by Plymouth University (2014), and provides an overview of the principal approaches to, and benefits of, adopting inclusive practices.

There are more ideas and links to resources at jisc.ac.uk/guides/transforming-assessment-and-feedback/inclusive-assessment and jisc.ac.uk/guides/making-assessments-accessible.

You can read some case studies at plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/3/3026/Space_toolkit.pdf

Routes to Inclusive Assessment (central concept)

Induction activities
- Cultivate expectations and skills for assessment

Inclusivity is built into design
- More efficient than post-hoc adjustments
- No 2-tier system: single process accommodates all
- Constructive alignment of learning outcomes, activities & assessment

Diverse mix of assessment methods
- Develops broad range of skills
- Specific students are not disadvantaged by specific forms of assessment
- But not too much variety: practice is needed for each

Learning activities develop skills needed
- Constructive alignment of learning outcomes, activities & assessment
- Formative assessment & 'feed forward'
- Assessment practice as learning

Choice of assessment method
- Reduces the need for post hoc modified assessment provision
- But don't overwhelm with too much choice
- Choice in exams too, e.g. typed or hand-written; not too long; open book; online & choice of location

Clear assessment brief & criteria
- 'Marking' workshops etc: engage students with criteria & standards, show examples of completed assessments
- Opportunities to explore the brief in class or online, with staff and peers
- Provided in advance

4. Inclusive assessment in practice – preparation (by staff)

4.1. Introduction

'Studies into widening participation and student retention … advocate greater use of formative assessment (Knight and Yorke 2003, Yorke 2001). Formative assessment that is integrated into programmes, rather than offered as an optional extra, ensures that all students get feedback on their learning (Yorke 2001) without fear of failure.' Hockings 2010: 40

- **Build inclusive and formative assessments in as part of your inclusive curriculum design** at programme and module level. For example, design year-long modules in year 1, with limited summative assessment in the first term. Use coursework to assess rather than exams.

- **Integrate assessment literacy into courses**: 'Active engagement with assessment standards needs to be an integral and seamless part of course design and the learning process in order to allow students to develop their own, internalised, conceptions of standards and monitor and supervise their own learning.' (ASKe Assessment Standards Manifesto for Change Tenet Five: Price et al 2008)

- **Recognise that some students come to university better prepared than others** for the types of assessment they will encounter, depending on their pre-university education opportunities. Plan deliberate steps to redress any difference in 'assessment-readiness' (see below).

- Check that the learning outcomes and assessment modes selected do not unnecessarily present a barrier to students with disabilities (Bloxham and Boyd 2007: 147).

- Consider using 'Setting the agenda for Inclusive Assessment: an auditing tool' to undertake a thorough review of your assessment practices: pass.brad.ac.uk/wp5-tool.pdf

4.2. Preparation (for students)

- **Induction and transition activities should include early assignments** to help integrate students into academic life and instil good study habits (Cook et al 2005, in Bloxham and Boyd 2007: 141), as well as allowing formative feedback to be given at an early stage, and providing early opportunities to recoup failure.

- **Communicate positive expectations** that students can and will succeed.

- **Start early with manageable tasks designed for success**, e.g. design into the first term/year a succession of small, staged formative assessments, with gradual progression of challenge, independence and effort needed, supported by in-class preparation and practice. These could be accumulated into a portfolio or patchwork for summative assessment at the year end.

- **Incorporate academic integrity training** into the curriculum, and specifically as part of the preparation for assessment.

4.3. Variety and choice

'[There is a] need for … a variety of assessment so that students, whether disabled or not, have the opportunity to choose the form of assessment that enables them to demonstrate their learning most effectively.' Hockings 2010: 40

- **Clearly expressed learning outcomes** (and hence assessment criteria) may be amenable to assessment in a variety of modes, e.g. demonstration of having met the outcomes might be achieved equally well through a conventional essay, website, oral presentation or poster. Consider the range of modes that could enable students to demonstrate achievement of the outcomes for each module, and offer a choice of two modes for some assignments (O'Neill, 2011). The University College Dublin Student Information & Equity Template, downloadable from ucd.ie/teaching/resources/assessment/howdoyouassessstudentlearning/ illustrates how you might present the choice to students to help them make an informed decision, and show how equity will be achieved.

- Over the course of a programme, **ensure that students are assessed via a variety of modes** (spoken and written, group and individual etc). This not only ensures that the assessments will suit at least some of the students (and staff) some of the time, it also provides for the assessment of a broad range of generic skills and graduate / employability attributes.

4.4. Transparency

- **Involve students in writing and reviewing assessment criteria and briefs** to ensure they are expressed in accessible, transparent language, and that any essential jargon is clearly explained, while still communicating high standards.

- **Work with students on understanding assessment briefs and marking criteria**:

    'Assessment standards are socially constructed so there must be a greater emphasis on assessment and feedback processes that actively engage both staff and students in dialogue about standards. It is when learners share an understanding of academic and professional standards in an atmosphere of mutual trust that learning works best.' (ASKe Assessment Standards Manifesto for Change Tenet Four: Price et al 2008);

    'Explicit articulation on its own is not enough to share or engage students with the assessment standards and the community in which they are established, and without this engagement, students are less likely to achieve academic success.' (Price et al 2008).

Jessop and El Hakim (2010), pages 2-3 and 5, offer some great practical activity ideas.

- **Transparency includes being honest with students**. Bloxham (2009: 217, in Hockings 2010) advocates that we should 'induct students into the subjective nature of marking, increasingly expecting them to demonstrate why they think they have met the criteria' to achieve 'assessment as learning'. It gives students the opportunity to learn what a good exam answer, essay, project or piece looks like within a given context.

Recommended resources, including video:

teaching.unsw.edu.au/assessing-inclusively

plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/inclusivity

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