CADQ Guide

Assessment design

Students can, with difficulty, escape from the effects of poor teaching, they cannot (by definition if they want to graduate) escape the effects of poor assessment.[1]

There are many elements which need to be considered when designing assessment tasks, from thinking through the purposes of assessment and what is being assessed to understanding the broader course, School and NTU contexts in which the assessment will take place. Our intention in this document is to support the development of effective assessment using a whole course approach. For the purposes of this resource we are characterising effective assessment as that which

- incorporates learning opportunities which are appropriate to the discipline and/or future employment;
- encompasses principles or values which define the course;
- provides motivation for student learning;
- brings benefits for student learning;
- is a satisfying experience for students and perhaps also for staff;
- and, when used summatively, is appropriately discriminating in maintaining the standards of awards.

A distinction of crucial importance here is that between formative and summative assessment. Although there are many definitions of the terms, we are choosing in this context to define them as:

- *Formative task/assessment* is one which is developmental for students' learning but does *not* contribute to credit points.
- S*ummative assessment* is that which results in a final grade (and feedback) reflecting the standard of achievement of the student work against intended learning outcomes.

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[1] BOUD, D. 1995. Assessment and learning: contradictory or complementary? In KNIGHT, P. (Ed.), Assessment for Learning in Higher Education. London: Kogan Page, pp. 35-48.

Overview of the resource

This document will direct your attention to the most important aspects and where you can go to get further information about each aspect if needed. The various sections can be linked to via the contents section at the top of page 1

Designing assessment at course level

The NTU model of assessment is holistic and integrative across the course, rather than piecemeal across modules. Each course should have an explicit assessment strategy which provides information on the approach. The model has been influenced by the work of Graham Gibbs[2] and others who have found course level assessment design to be associated with positive student learning experiences.

Whole course assessment

Whole-course design of assessment is an integral part of course planning and design and is intended to help ensure a meaningful, coherent and progressive learning experience in terms of skills, competencies and academic connectedness. This means that:

- assessment tasks are explicitly related to intended learning outcomes and all course LOs are assessed. The assessment methods that are selected are the most effective in enabling students to demonstrate specific outcomes and enhance learning (*alignment*);
- assessments from different modules build on each other and create a coherent student experience of the curriculum *(coherence)*;
- assessment is integrated across a level (*horizontal integration*) and across years (*vertical integration*);
- there is a range of assessment types but this is considered at course level so that there are opportunities for students to master the required skills and learn from feedback (*balance*). There is also balance in terms of assessment load across the course, i.e., an avoidance of deadlines bunching at particular times of the year and of formative and summative assessment;
- there is sequencing throughout a course to allow progressively more challenge, supporting student development from novice to expert (*progression*).

Setting high expectations

Another element of the NTU model of assessment concerns the importance of setting and reiterating clear, high expectations regarding standards that students are expected to attain at the end of each module or level. It is important that standards are:

- decided at course level
- framed and discussed with students
- communicated through course documentation

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[2] GIBBS, G. and DUNBAR-GODDET,H., 2007. The effects of programme assessment environments on student learning. York: Higher Educations Academy. Available at: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/gibbs_0506.pdf [Accessed 17 September 2014].

One way in which high expectations can be made meaningful is by providing students with exemplars for all summative assessments and encouraging students to engage with these exemplars and with the criteria by which their work will be judged.

Further information on using exemplars: see the section 'beyond understanding tasks and marking criteria' in the resource 'Engaging students in the use of feedback'.

Further information on setting standards through feedback: see resources on 'formative assessment and feedback', 'peer feedback', 'feedback as a dialogical process' and 'engaging students in the use of feedback' and the CADQ case studies.

Formative assessment and feedback

There should be many regular formative assessment opportunities planned across all levels of the course. These formative opportunities may take place in class and, where appropriate, students can generate feedback on their own work or on the work of their peers.

Further information: see the resource 'Formative assessment and feedback'.

What is being assessed?

Each module should have a set of learning outcomes (LOs, informed by subject benchmark statements, the institution and the School subject team) which describe what students should have learnt on completion of the module and are congruent with the course learning outcomes. There should also be a set of teaching and learning activities (TLAs) which will help students to achieve the learning outcomes, and an assessment task (or more than one). On a well-designed module these elements will be aligned such that students have a clear sense of what their goals are, how they will achieve them, how they are to be assessed and how these connect to other module and course goals. Assessment tasks are explicitly related to intended learning outcomes and the assessment methods that are selected are the most effective in enhancing learning and in enabling students to demonstrate specific outcomes.

Students must be informed about the assessment on their course and the feedback that they can expect in the Assessment and Feedback Plan (AFP). This will include information at course-level about the assessment types used on each module, dates for submission of work and return of work and feedback. Information on the feedback is expected to include a rationale for how and when feedback will be provided, the type or format that feedback will take and indications of formal opportunities students may have to reflect on their feedback.

Further information: see the resource '*Overview of constructive alignment*'; see also *Academic Standards and Quality Handbook*, Section 15 for assessment principles and policies; Section 16 for Common Assessment Regulations. An example of an AFP is available.

Is your assessment inclusive?

Inclusion is about the right of *all* students to gain access to the same learning opportunities at university; all students should be provided with the support they need to enable them to achieve and to be valued for who they are, regardless of difference or impairment. Designing assessments for inclusion will mean consideration is given to both the type and range of assessments across the course, as each assessment type (e.g., examinations, essays) will advantage some students and disadvantage others.

NTU also makes provision for students with disabilities: *modified assessment* involves making an alternative version of an assessment available; *reasonable adjustments* allow students with disabilities to undertake the standard assessment in a different way, e.g., allowing more time for an examination.

Further information: see the resource '*Inclusive assessment design*'. To discuss assessment design and inclusion contact Michaela Borg (CADQ). For further information on adjustments to a specific assessment, made for an individual student, please contact the Disability Manager, Student Support Services.

Can technology help you with the assessment?

There are many ways in which technology may help with assessment. For example:

- You can use CBA (computer based assessment) to set questions which are marked either automatically or by the tutor.
- You can set up a discussion board to answer questions that students may have or to facilitate peer support.
- You can require electronic submission of coursework and mark and return feedback electronically.

Further information: Technology Enhanced learning and teaching (TELT) resources are accessed via the staff tab on NOW and provide information on CBA, esubmission and other topics. On the CADQ website there is a resource '*Online submission of coursework*'.

Grade-based assessment

From 2012-13, NTU is using Grade Based Assessment for undergraduate work. The assessment of student work at undergraduate level is based on 17 grade bands, each of which has a general marking descriptor. The descriptors represent a set of common characteristics expected of work at each of the different grade bands and may be contextualised to disciplines by Schools and/or Academic Teams. The use of assessment matrices is recommended in order to ensure that feedback given is aligned with assessment criteria.

Further information: Speak to your School Learning and Teaching Coordinator or visit the NTU SharePoint site at https://portal.ntu.ac.uk/pva/GradeScheme

Graduate attributes

Courses should facilitate acquisition of the NTU Graduate Attributes as and where appropriate within TLAs and/or assessments. An assessment like any TLA may therefore involve learning transferable skills for employability, or considering disciplinary connections with topics such as internationalisation or sustainability. Consideration of the attributes at course level may help to ensure full and coherent inclusion.

Further information: see the resource '*Designing for sustainability in the curriculum*', or contact your School Employability Coordinator.

Designing out academic misconduct

Plagiarism can be tackled at the course design stage, assessment design stage and also through communication with students throughout a course. Elements of the NTU assessment model may help in this, for example setting high end-of-level standards,

providing exemplars, and the use of more formative and less summative assessment should support the valuing of original work. More self and peer feedback and appropriate range of assessment types should also contribute towards discouraging plagiarism, as they should allow students more time to become familiar with standards and to practice different assessments.

Further information: see the resource '*Plagiarism and other academic misconduct*' which includes strategies for encouraging originality and designing out plagiarism