

A synthesis of synoptic assessment

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Overview

- Context: priorities in higher education
- Defining synoptic assessment
- Transforming assessment
- Programme level assessment
- Developing student employability
- Synoptic assessment: features
- Conclusion and discussion



Context: priorities in higher education

Improving assessment practices

- National Student Survey
- Consistency and fairness in marking
- Re-conceptualising feedback
- Technology-enhanced assessment
- Electronic management of assessment

Employability development

- Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)
- Graduate attributes and skills
- Graduate outcomes, including good degrees
- Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DELHE)

Teaching Excellence Framework (Department for Education, 2016); New operating model for quality assessment in higher education (HEFCE, 2016)

Context: framework for curriculum refresh

All students will develop relevant professional attributes gained through meaningful work placement or experience embedded into the design, learning, and assessment of every course

- Early in the course, students are engaged in learning **core employability skills** (e.g. CV, interview, selection, search, networking) and in career planning activity.
- The course includes a number of opportunities for all students to translate theory into practice in a range of relevant **work-like contexts or simulations** (e.g. employer-led projects, activities with employer involvement, work that is held to professional standards).
- Later in the course, there is a **synoptic assessment**, allowing students to **combine learning** in relation to their employability from a **range of activities and experiences**, and which requires a **significant element of reflection** in relation to their future employability aspirations. This synoptic assessment is integrated into an appropriate module.

(Action CO101: Nottingham Trent University, 2016, p2; my emphasis added)

Context: framework for curriculum refresh

We will continue to address differences in attainment between and obstacles to equal access to opportunities across all student groups

- To what extent does the course design recognise that **students learn in different ways** (implementing a range of practices such as active learning, ongoing induction, co-curricular activities and pre-arrival and post-arrival strategies)?
- To what extent is developing **students' understanding of assessment practices** integrated into course design?

(Action CO303: NTU, 2016, p2-3; my emphasis added)

Defining synoptic assessment

‘Assessment through a task that requires students to draw on different elements of their learning and show their accumulated knowledge and breadth and depth of understanding, as well as the ability to integrate and apply their learning’

(QAA, 2016)



Image from: www.freeimages.co.uk

e-portfolios: previous explorations

e-portfolios: process and product

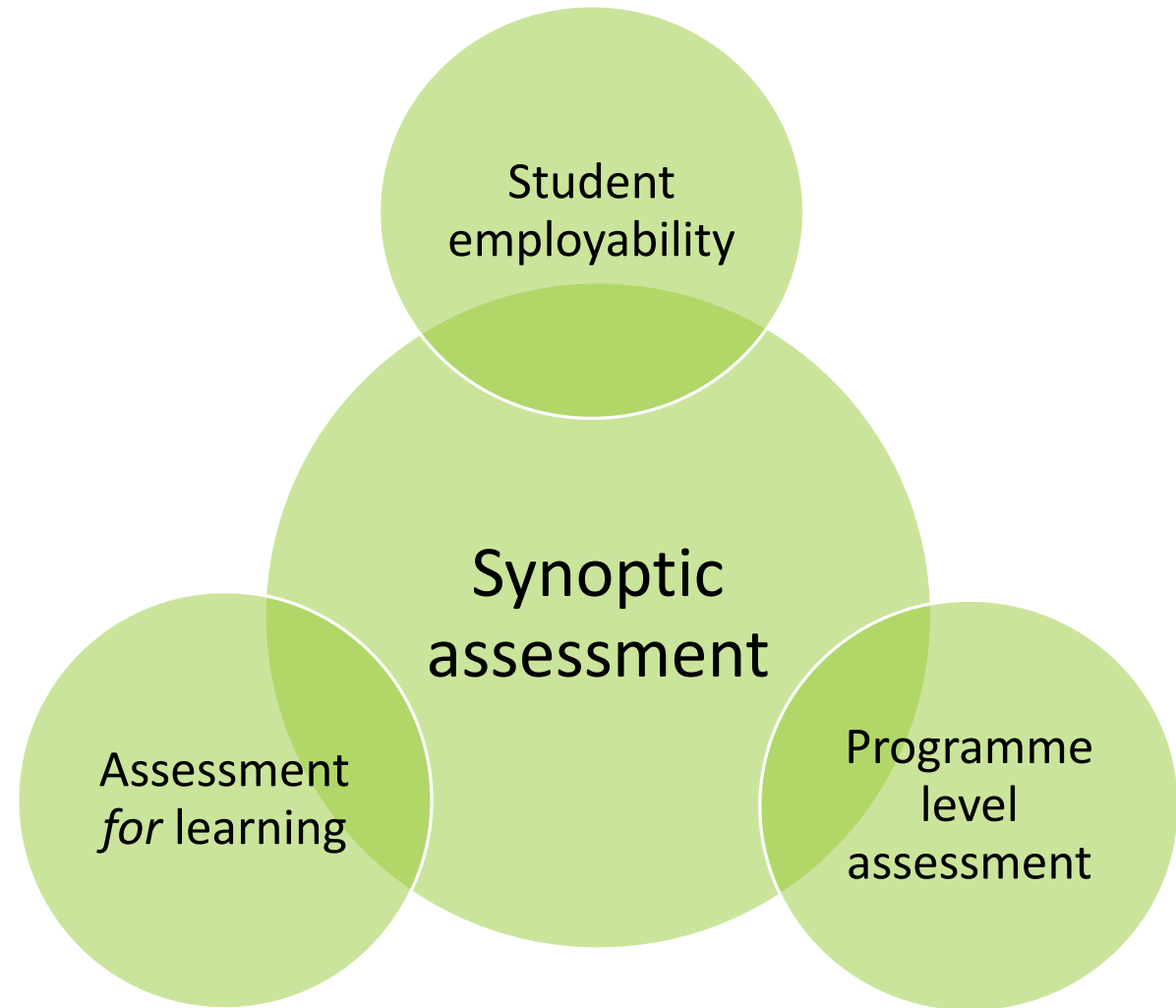
‘Behind any product, or presentation, lie rich and **complex processes** of planning, synthesising, sharing, discussing, reflecting, giving, receiving and responding to feedback. These processes – which we refer to as “e-portfolio-based learning” – are the focus of increasing attention, since the process of learning can be as important as the end product’

(See JISC, 2012)

Synoptic assessment

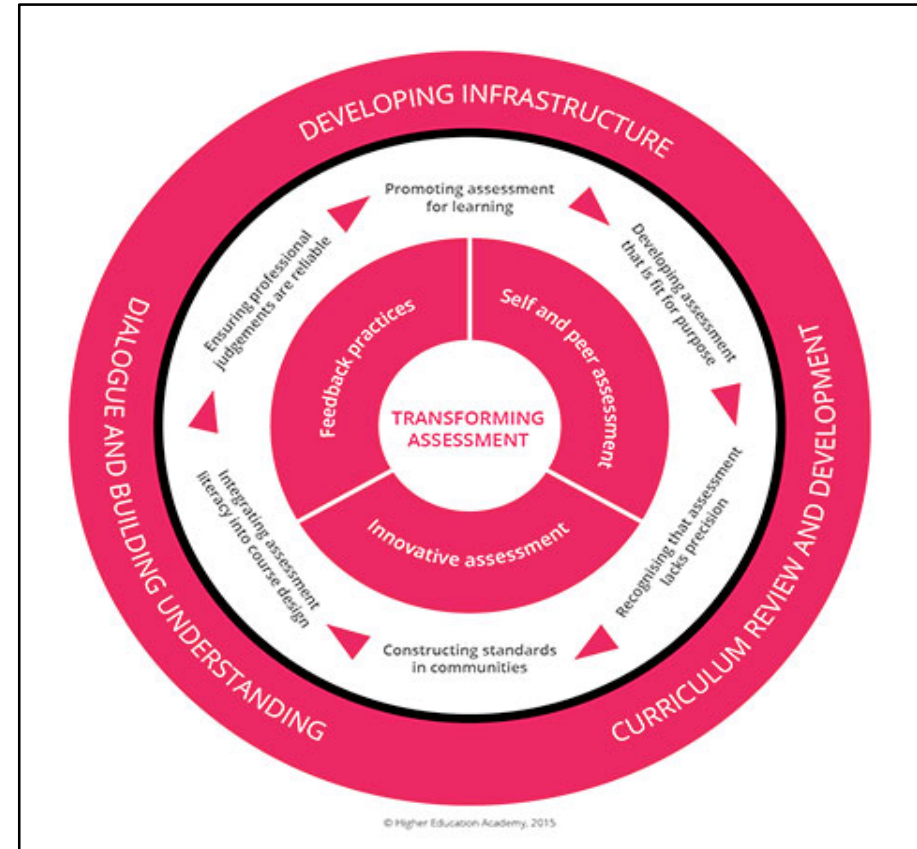
Related to theory and evidence-informed perspectives:

- Assessment *for* learning
- Programme level assessment
- Developing student employability



Transforming assessment

- Assessment standards: a Manifesto for Change (ASKe)
- A Marked Improvement (HEA, 2012)
- FrameWORK for [Transforming assessment in higher education](#) (HEA, 2015)
- Six interrelated tenets
 1. Assessment *for* learning
 5. Integrating assessment literacy into course design



(Higher Education Academy, 2015)

Assessment *for* learning

Principles or conditions

- ✓ Authentic and complex tasks
- ✓ Supports students to evaluate their progress and learning
- ✓ Involves informal feedback (e.g. through peer discussion)
- ✓ Entails formal feedback (from tutors and experts)
- ✓ Opportunities for practise and developing students' confidence
- ✓ Balancing formative and summative tasks

(Adapted from Sambell et al, 2013, pp. 6-7)

Authentic assessment tasks

- Engaging, meaningful and relevant
 - Related to 'real world' activity
 - Personal ownership and involvement
- (Sambell et al, 2013)

(Intrinsic) validity: 'tasks are assessing the stated learning outcomes'
(see Boxham and Boyd, 2007, p34)

Diversity in assessment



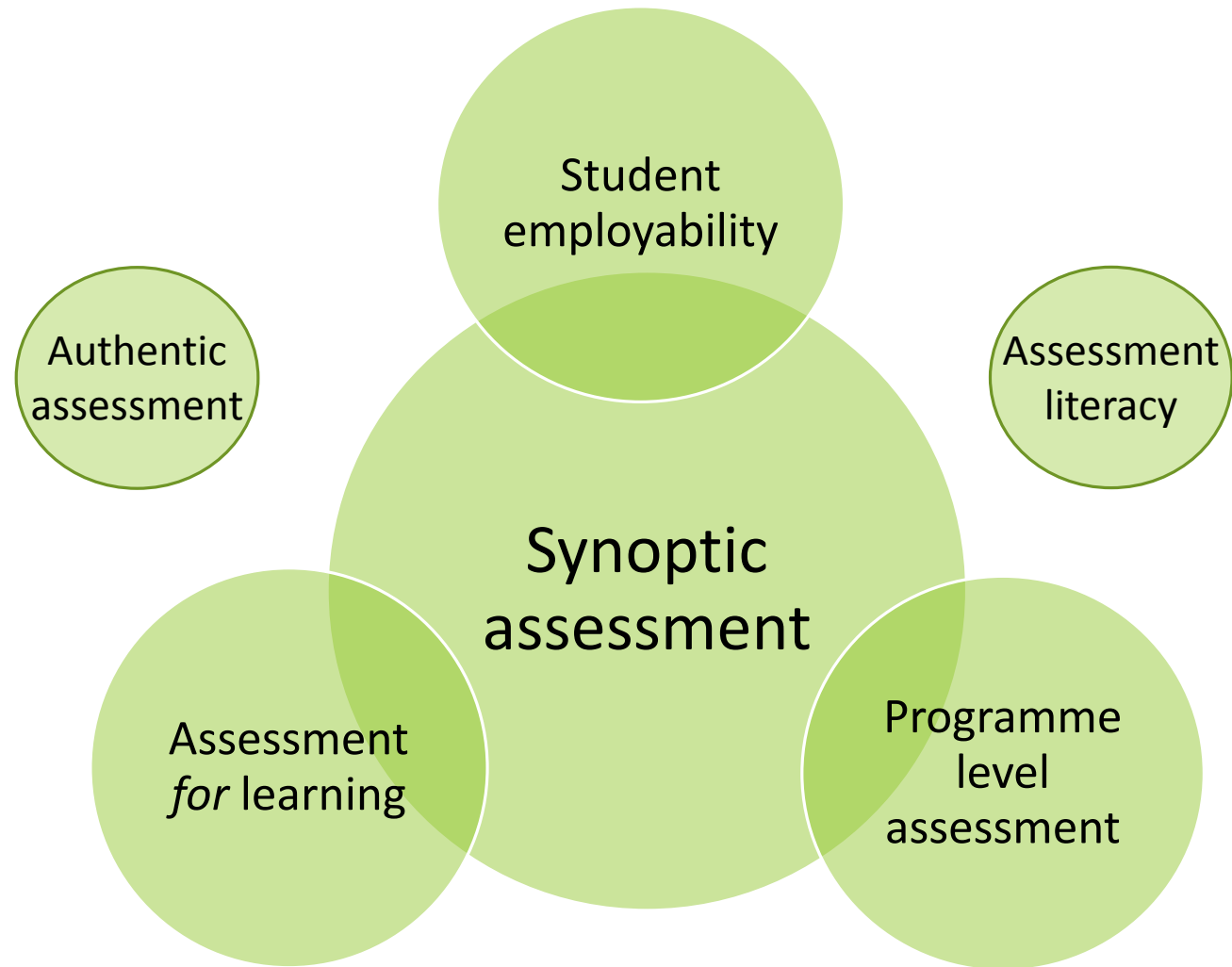
- Journals, blogs or reflective diary
- Newspaper article
- Action plan
- Group presentation or poster
- Information leaflets or learning packages
- Live projects

(See Anglia Learning and Teaching: Inclusive assessment snapshot, 2016)

Synoptic assessment

Related to theory and evidence-informed perspectives:

- Assessment *for* learning
- Programme level assessment
- Developing student employability



Assessment literacy

Appreciation of how assessment relates to learning

Understanding of the assessment process, principles and terms

Grasp of nature and meaning of assessment criteria and standards

Effectively developed through a programme-based strategic approach

Skills in self- and peer-assessment

Awareness of technical approaches for assessment

Capacity to use appropriate techniques for tasks

(See Price et al, 2012)

Assessment at the programme level

- ‘Side effects’ relating to modularisation (Gibbs, 2006)
- Programme or course coherence
 - Quantity of assessment
 - Balancing formative and summative
 - Variety in assessment
- Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment (TESTA)
 - Methodology, providing baseline data
 - Programme assessment audit
 - Assessment Experience Questionnaire
 - Focus Groups
 - Informing design of interventions

Programme Assessment Strategies (PASS)

Types of programme-focused assessment: for example

- Assessment by submission of personal evidence
 - Student work demonstrating that they satisfy all the programme level learning outcomes
- Integrative level or year assessment
 - As part of the programme assessment, students complete assessments that demonstrate they satisfy all the learning outcomes specified for one level or year of the programme

See: <http://www.pass.brad.ac.uk/definitions.php>

Developing student employability

JISC-funded Collaborate project

University of Exeter

Work-integrated assessment:

‘tasks and conditions ... closely aligned to what you would experience within employment’

Dimensions model can be used in stages to enhance assessment design:

Analysis – Design – Evaluation

Dimensions

- ❖ Multiple assessment points
- ❖ Varied audience
- ❖ Real-world problem or data
- ❖ Collaborative working
- ❖ Light structure
- ❖ Peer and/or self review

<http://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/development/academic/resources/assessment/wia/>

Synoptic assessment

Features

Integrative: connecting and 'pulling together' elements of learning

Accumulated knowledge and understanding

Breadth and depth of a subject

Themes or issues across a subject

(Gibbs, 2006; Patrick, 2005; QAA, 2016, 2006; Southall and Wason, 2016)

'The assessment for two or more modules may be combined to form a single assessment ... may help students to make connections between modules ... increase the level of student engagement ... provide teaching staff with the opportunity to adopt a holistic approach to delivering modules'

(Gorra et al, 2008)

Conclusion and discussion

Synoptic assessment can be designed as a key part of assessment *for* learning and to enable students to develop attributes and skills for employability

Macquarie University, Australia – [Joining The Dots: Where Portfolios Meet Programmatic Assessment](#)

In designing, using and evaluating synoptic assessment:

- What might we need to consider with regard to helping to ensure inclusive assessment practices?
- How might marking practices be developed?
- What kinds of issues might be raised by students?

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