Inclusive Education Guide: Assessment

Overview
Inclusive assessment involves applying sound assessment design principles and making assessment practices fair and appropriate for all learners through the use of:

- A variety of valid assessment types and approaches;
- Explicit preparation and explanation of assessment formats, marking schemes and assessment criteria;
- Choice of assessment;
- Balanced timing (across semesters rather than all at the end);
- Technology;
- Non-discriminatory language and diverse examples;
- Formative assessment, including self-assessment.

An inclusive approach gives students opportunities to practice and evaluate their learning in different areas of the curriculum. Such approaches also induct students into the processes of assessment. Self and peer assessment (and formative work more generally) are particularly useful in this regard. Making expectations and instructions clear and explicit will benefit all students, especially those working in an additional language and those new to the UK HE system.

Planning Inclusive Assessment
Planning for inclusivity at the design stage of the programme, should reduce the need to make individual adjustments later. Questions might include:

- What is the purpose of the assessment: what aspects of the programme are being assessed? (For example, intended learning outcomes (ILO), knowledge, techniques/skills.);
- What assessment methods are appropriate for assessing these ILOs?
- Is it possible and appropriate to offer all students a choice of assessment methods/formats (though, no more than two formats are probably necessary)?
- Are there additional assessment types that could examine the relevant ILOs and increase the variety of assessment formats on the programme and possibly within the programme more broadly?
- How can formative assessment activities help prepare students for summative work? Are there opportunities for self and peer assessment in the curriculum?
Range of Methods and Formats
A broader range makes an overall assessment diet more inclusive. The variety of assessment methods should be considered at unit and programme levels to ensure that students have the opportunity to experience varied assessment formats as they move through the programme. Assessment methods can include:

- Exams – take home;
- Exams - essay, MCQ, short answer;
- Exams – open book;
- Presentation – group or individual;
- Viva voce/ interview;
- Computer-based assessment (simulation, MCQ, short answer);
- Report;
- Lab-based assessment;
- OSCE (Objective, structured clinical examination) Often used in medical exams, e.g. Pharmacy and Pharmacology have expertise and experience of this type of assessment;
- Practical observation;
- Performance;
- Reflective portfolio/diaries;
- Online texts such as blogs – collaborative or individual; multimedia web essay;
- Essay;
- Creative pieces (text, practice-based, online e.g. web page, App);
- Student designed assessment.

Offering a range of assessments means that all students have a better opportunity to demonstrate their learning and understanding of a topic. Additionally, given that assessment influences approaches to learning, a wide set of assessment types should encourage students to try out new ways of approaching their studies (for example, a presentation or viva may encourage different ways of engaging with material than an essay.)

Learning through Assessment

Self and peer assessment
Opportunities for self-assessment embedded in the curriculum are an excellent way to support all students and particularly those who wish to have extra practice on certain areas or skills. Developing online self-assessment exercises could allow students to practise aspects of the programme and gain feedback. Additional practice might particularly benefit those entering a programme using a non-standard route, those new to the discipline, and students working in an additional language.

Peer assessment offers an excellent opportunity to model inclusive practices with students. The importance of inclusive assessment and feedback can be discussed with students as they consider the assessment criteria and offer feedback to one another. Additionally, peer assessment is yet another opportunity for all students to enhance their understanding of assessment practices more broadly.

Formative assessment
Providing students with developmental opportunities across the semester to take assessment and receive feedback is part of an inclusive approach. There is an expectation (see Quality Assurance Code of Practice QA16: http://www.bath.ac.uk/quality/documents/QA16.pdf) that each unit has at least one formative exercise built into it. Making a range of exercises available for everyone offers a holistic approach rather than a deficit model.
Reasonable Adjustments
Students with particular needs, such as those with dyslexia, physical impairments or extenuating circumstances, may request adjustments to the examining process, and the Bath policy for such adjustments is here: http://www.bath.ac.uk/students/services/centre/disability-service/

However it is worth considering whether some variety in assessment, and/or the opportunity to take an alternative assessment, would reduce the need for adjustments in some instances. As Hockings (2010) suggests, ‘it is more time-effective and equitable to consider the inclusiveness of the assessment at the programme or unit design phase, rather than making individual adjustments later in the programme’.

Additionally ‘fixed’ reasonable adjustments can imply that there is a one-size fits all solution to the challenges experienced by certain groups of learners when ‘in reality students with disabilities fall along a continuum of learner differences and share similar challenges and difficulties that all students face in higher education’ (Healey et al., 2006).

Summary Checklist and Key Questions
Are formats/methods, procedures and expectations explicit? These might include:

- Do students know what is meant by assessment formats and terms such as ‘essay’ ‘exam’ ‘viva’, ‘argument’? The term ‘essay’ for example can mean different things in different disciplines and students might have varying understandings of the term depending on their prior learning. Are there sample assessments available from previous years?
- What does the range of marks signify? (For example, for students coming from some international education systems, a 70% would be a poor mark.);
- What is the marking scheme and assessment criteria and how they will be applied? Are they stated clearly? Will students receive the criteria in advance of assessments and have a chance to discuss and seek clarification?
- Do students understand how to submit assessed work?
- What are the procedures for requesting an extension?
- What does a successful assignment or presentation look like? Are models available?

Timing:
- Are assessments spread across the semester or academic year rather than all assignments and exams occurring around the same time?
- Does someone have an overview of assessment deadlines across a programme to prevent logjams for students with particular unit combinations?

Feedback:
- Are students given detailed, formative feedback early in the unit/academic year to allow them to draw on it for future work?
- Do they learn to make critical judgements about their own work through self-assessment?

Variety and choice:
- Is there a variety of assessment formats used across the programme?
- Do students have choice in how they are assessed? Can they help contribute to the design of assessments – perhaps by nominating their own, additional criteria or creating their own question or choosing a format for their assignment?
- Can students be offered alternative methods to assess the same learning outcomes?
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Inclusive language and examples:
- Do assessments use non-discriminatory language and images that embrace diversity? Do they contain inclusive examples or case studies?

Preparing and engaging students:
- Are students well-prepared for different forms of assessment? Do they have a chance to discuss formats in advance so that they understand what is expected? Do they have a chance to practice the assessment types? Can they see worked examples of what a successful response to the assessment would look like?
- Are students consulted on their experiences of undertaking assessment? Is this part of a general evaluation of the programme?
- Do assessment questions enable students an opportunity to draw on examples from their own experience?
- Would any student feel excluded by the timing/scheduling of the examination? The subject content? The assessment format?
- Is ‘inclusivity’ a topic that students have the opportunity to discuss in their assessments?

Summary
Assessment is a central and critical part of students’ learning and experience while at university and it is one of the areas that learners are most anxious about. We also know that assessment is a key driver in how students approach their learning; therefore, extending the range of assessment types may stimulate more varied approaches to learning by all students.

Inclusive practice is part of good assessment design, generally: making expectations, instructions, marking schemes and assessment criteria explicit, realizing that some students will be facing certain formats and processes for the first time, offering students opportunities to engage in formative work, increasing the variety of assessment, offering choice where appropriate and using inclusive language and examples will benefit all involved.

References
http://www.assessmentfutures.com/


https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/inclusion/Disability/Inclusive_curriculum_design_in_higher_education

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/resources/detail/evidencenet/Inclusive_learning_and_teaching_in_higher_education

University of Plymouth (2014) 7 Steps to Inclusive Assessment.
https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/2/2401/7_Steps_to_Inclusive_Assessment.pdf
Checklist

Programme designers
- Do students experience a variety of assessment formats across the programme?
- Is there a progression of assessment types within the programme? (For example, if students are expected to write a dissertation in year 3, will they have had experience of shorter written assessments in years 1 and 2 on which they can build?)
- Can students make choices about how they are assessed? Is there programme-level guidance on choice and flexibility surrounding assessment?
- Are there development opportunities for staff who are designing and delivering assessments, so that they can discuss the merits of different formats/methods and share experiences of innovative approaches?
- Is formative assessment (including self and peer assessment) used across the programme? Can students practice the assessment formats in advance of summative work?
- Is the language and terminology used for assessment clear, non-discriminatory and consistent across the programme? For example, does ‘essay’ have the same meaning across the programme, and, if not, do students understand what is expected in each case?
- Is the marking scheme consistent and clearly communicated across the programme?
- Is the assessment criteria consistent and clearly communicated across the programme?
- Is the assessment distributed across the semester, so that students are not overloaded at particular times of the academic year? Is this distribution monitored at programme level?

Academics
- Is there a good range of assessment formats across the module or unit?
- Are students offered a choice of assessments within the unit?
- Are inclusive practices for group-based assessment modelled for students? These might include
  - ensuring that all students have the same opportunities to participate in discussions and decision-making;
  - negotiating ground rules and learning agreements;
  - using clear language for instructions and general communication;
  - ensuring that out of class meetings occur in times and places that are convenient for everyone;
  - acknowledging that diversity within a group is a strength that can be drawn upon in the assessed project/groupwork;
- Do students understand how the marking scheme will be applied and what is expected of them?
- Do they understand the assessment criteria?
- Can students nominate additional criteria against which they would like to be marked?
- Is formative assessment used to help students prepare for summative assessment?
- Do students have opportunities for self and peer assessed work?

Students
- Do students take advantage of optional, formative assessments?
- Do students ask questions if they are uncertain about the terminology or general expectations associated with assessment?
- Do students work inclusively when undertaking group assessments? Do students collaborate fully with their peers in group work?