CASE STUDIES IN INCLUSIVE ASSESSMENT

Part of a QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project

Led by Teesside University

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Project Partners: Teesside University (lead), Oxford Brookes University, Greenwich University, University of Hertfordshire, University of Brighton, University of West of England, Kingston University, and Birmingham City University.

Introduction

The 8 case studies that make up this resource provide practical, subject-level, examples of a wide range of assessment approaches and specific interventions that have made a genuine difference to students' continuation and/or attainment during the 2019-2020 and 2020-21 academic years. Moreover, each case study has been developed as a means of animating evidence-based 'Inclusive Assessment Attributes' (see page 19) with a view to guiding practitioners and institutions as to how they might best engage with and articulate key aspects of embedding effective inclusive assessment at institution and practice level.

To this end, you are encouraged to consider the case studies captured here alongside the corresponding 'Embedding Inclusive Assessment: A Reflective Toolkit'. The Toolkit resource has been developed to support leaders, practitioners, and students in higher education to review, plan for, and evaluate enhancement-led inclusive assessment initiatives and interventions.

Contents of Case Studies Series

Case Study 1: **Chemical Engineering**

Context

The BEng, Chemical Engineering course is accredited by the Institution of Chemical Engineers (IChemE), on licence from the UK Engineering Council.

Class sizes range between 30 and 40 and typically comprise a combination of full-time students (usually students who join Foundation Year or Year 1 direct from 6th form) and part-time students (typically working in the chemicals industry as operators and sponsored to top up their studies from an HNC to the full degree). On recommendation from the PSRB for the course, several modules at level 5 were ran as non-compensatable because of aligned final year (level 6) modules to assure continuity and security of standards.

Typical pre-pandemic assessment arrangements involved a combination of Coursework focused on the application of core chemical engineering concepts (which were typically very mathematical in nature) in problem and/or scenario-based tasks, alongside traditional closed-book (in-person) examinations.

Actions

To ensure that assessments would be largely comparable across years, the course team wanted to keep changes to the format of assessments to a minimum. Coursework-based assessment were not modified and where assessments required students to use certain software, they were supported to complete the analysis work through expanded guidance, walk-throughs, and consideration of exemplar work.

Overall, the format (i.e., composition of core tasks) for examinations at course-level were kept consistent with previous years but were completed online by students. In 2019-20 and 2020-21, the University dictated that students be given a maximum of 2 days to complete examinations. For 2019-20 the Engineering Department decided on a model that saw examination materials being released to students on 9am on Day 1 and closing on 4pm on Day 2. In 2021-22, the department transitioned to a 9am-4pm on the same day model, to bring course practices in line with the sector.

To maintain a degree of continuity between year groups, the focus of examination question schedules was kept similar but within the included questions, the proportion of mathematical / discussion-based questions was altered from pre-pandemic designs with discussion-based question formats also included. To support students with the increase in discussion-based questions, seminar tasks and questioning were varied to include formative opportunities for students to work through and rehearse descriptive responses to set questions through flipped learning and information gathering, rather than the standard mathematical problem-solving type.

These alterations appear to have had a significant positive impact on student attainment particularly for black and mixed ethnicity students in the 2019-20 academic year (pandemic Year 1), rising 17pp to 90% compared to the previous year (2018-19) with overall progression rates remaining above 90%.

Challenges and Benefits

From a student experience perspective, the extended timeframe accompanying the alternative online examination format deployed certainly appeared to provide a more compassionate approach to assessing student learning:

> *"If you got a bit anxious or overwhelmed by it, you could take some time to take yourself away and to try calm down, refocus, move on and then come back to it." (Student 11)*

> *"The stress the 3-hour exam puts on people is completely unnecessary. I think it's more representative of a work environment as well and highlights people are capable of showing more when they have that bit of extra time". (Student 12)*

Following the initial iteration of the online examination model it became apparent that whilst the students had engaged with the new discussion-based elements of the exam paper, the course team hit upon issues of academic integrity at most levels.

> *"It became apparent pretty quickly that we needed to look at the structure and format of the questions we were using. We shifted to an emphasis on encouraging divergent, process-focused, answers". (Staff 2)*

The following year (2020-21) saw the re-design of questions such that the answers could not be prepared ahead of time. For example, a case study could be presented where the student was required to discuss what they would do differently to a scenario presented – thus requiring them to draw upon course content and then critically analyse the situation. To help students prepare for this, seminar activities covered industry-specific problem scenarios and the students had to discuss what went wrong.

> *"Building in more opportunities for formative dialogue with students around seminar tasks that aligned to their tasks provided actionable insight for us as tutors to tailor support activities." (Staff 2)*

Including the discussion-based questions, alongside the formative opportunities to practice and rehearse their responses during planned seminar work, helped to check deeper learning and encourage students to present their opinion using their own words. Coupled with a range of asynchronous resources, students reported the alternative mix of assessment activities as providing a degree of personalised support that was much valued:

> *"From my point of view, it was still very challenging, but I think it was a massive improvement in terms of having more varied support because we were provided with videos and case studies, but you could also still get the benefit from a question asked in a seminar class" (Student 11)*

This case study aligns to the following inclusive assessment attributes:

Requires considerate policies and processes.

Communicates meaningfully.

Embeds support.

Enables personalisation.

Promotes authenticity.

Case Study 2: **Psychology**

Context

The BSc Psychology is accredited by the British Psychological Society. It is a broad programme, covering cognitive psychology, neuroscience, developmental psychology, and social psychology. The programme is taught alongside the BSc Psychology with Counselling, and both are rapidly growing; there were approximately 100 students per year five years ago, whereas now it is about 360. Some modules, such as introduction to psychology, are also taken by criminology, criminal psychology, and sociology students.

Most students on the programme have to fit their studies around caring responsibilities and part-time work. Staff characterized psychology students in general as lacking confidence; with many being motivated to study the subject to deal with anxiety issues. The programme had been moving in the direction of giving more assessment guidance for several years, e.g., marking criteria were made explicit and discussed in class on multiple occasions, as well as being available on the VLE.

Actions

Coursework was kept constant during the pandemic, although observational assessments (such as counselling triads) had to be undertaken online. Most in-person, time constrained exams were converted to take-home exams, whereby students had a week to complete the exam; with a few time-constrained online exams retained, for example for statistics.

Teaching systematically moved to a flipped model. There was pre-recorded content, followed by an online, live session where the content was discussed and interacted with. Seminars were recorded. Questions were taken anonymously using an online interactive tool, Mentimeter. The tool was also used for quizzes and to encourage interaction.

Additional support was offered via resilience and mindfulness workshops. The university put in place a 'No Detriment' policy and relaxed rules around gaining Extenuating Circumstances. Information was provided via programme leader updates, short videos on study choices and via the programme Moodle page. These alterations appear to have had a positive impact on improving continuation rates and closing continuation gaps for Black and mixed ethnicity students and those in quintiles 1-3 for Indices of Multiple Deprivation.

Challenges and Benefits

Staff observed that some students did not engage with the online teaching, as face-to-face teaching is integral to their engagement, motivation, and mental health. As a result, there were questions towards the end of the module that had already been covered multiple times – this made it hard to ensure students had engaged with assessment criteria and what was expected of them in assignments. There was less attendance monitoring, so there was less visibility if students didn't engage.

Students found it hard to navigate the expectations staff had around take-home exams, as a new assessment format, with a lot of flexibility:

"When you're used to a format, for me, it's 'OK, I have this amount of space to write about this section and this section'. I have it all sort of planned out in my head. I kind of know what information I'm going to be able to include. With the take home tests, I didn't know what would be best, what should be left out."

The students reported difficulty arising from lack of feedback on the take home exams:

"I think we've done three take home exams like this. The last one we did, we did get feedback. It was the first time we got proper feedback for it, … And I was like, Hang on a minute. All of this time we've been doing these assessments and not been able to improve because we haven't been told how."

Staff are not required to give feedback on exams and found it hard to give timely feedback when colleagues were ill, especially with the growth of the programme.

Students' mental health was a major challenge throughout the pandemic; and exacerbated by the lack of social interaction from online teaching and the increasingly anonymity that comes with larger student numbers. The take home exam format had the advantage of removing the high stress environment of time constrained in-hall exams. One student commented:

"I'd like a mixture [of assessment formats] because as much as I prefer essays over exams because I find them less stressful, I perform better in exams than in essays."

They also provided flexibility of timing around other commitments, such as caring and employment; choice of where they were done, how much effort students invested in them; and greater authenticity. The greater use of written coursework led to improved writing skills:

"To be honest, having so many essays, I feel more confident in doing essays, … if I open up an article, if I start reading it online. I can tell pretty much within the first few sentences Oh, this is no good, and I don't waste my time with it. That's I think that's helped with researching and things like that."

However, students called for greater diversity of assessment:

"For me personally, reading articles and writing essays, wasn't really helpful skill because my interests are more in counselling and social work. … I would like balance. Rather than just one way and just learning writing skills."

While there may have been patchy engagement with the online learning, the flipped teaching method led to staff reporting higher quality questions in class.

This case study aligns to the following inclusive assessment attributes:

Requires considerate policies and processes.	Embeds support.
Communicates meaningfully.	Enables personalization.
Develops assessment literacy.	Promotes authenticity.

Case Study 3: **Drama**

Context

Drama BA is a performing arts course, with assessments designed to evaluate students' creative and intellectual learning. pre-covid these would include a combination of coursework, such as reflections, essays or creative portfolios, and practical work, such as group or solo performances, or theatre productions where students can choose to act, devise, direct or design. Majority of modules had a practical element of performance, where a lot of the practice was concerned with audience participation or being live or being in the room.

Actions

Given the nature of the course, substantial changes had to be introduced during the pandemic. In 2019-20 all assessments were moved online, almost overnight. In 2020-21 the course was taught with a balance of 70% online and 30% face to face sessions, allowing some interaction and performance in physically distanced studio environments. As a result, there were some differences in the way that alternative assessments were set up, with the second years' changes incorporating learnings from the previous year.

For most of the 2019-20 practical assessments, the emphasis shifted from marking the product to marking the process. Live performances were replaced with creative artistic process elements, where lecturers tracked the development of the work students had completed. This was fine tuned in 2020-21 to incorporate recorded performances, or other audio-visual elements.

> "*So, they had to evidence it with video. And this is something that was carried over of course into 2021, but they had to use images, video scripts. It was really like a scrapbook body of work which attempted to represent the work they had done*".

A continuous dialogue and consultation process formed the basis for the changes. There were conversations about good practice within the team, but also consultations with students and with other colleagues in other universities. This encouraged staff to be more creative and innovative in their practice, while also remaining open and transparent to students about the changes they were introducing. The interventions enabled the course team to improve or keep stable the overall value-added score during the challenging pandemic period (+1.15 in 2019-20; 0.94 in 2020-21). In both years data relating to retention and proportion of good degrees was higher compared to 2018-9, and progression rates remained above 90% for L5-6.

Challenges and Benefits

One of the key issues that lecturers encountered was parity. Access to technology varied, with clear signs of digital poverty amongst some students. Since the course required the practice and sometimes the filming of performance in a physical space, some students' living conditions and spaces proved another challenge.

To make sure assessments were fair, the team agreed at the outset that assessments would not be judged on the quality of the films or editing: "*it was entirely on how students incorporated and used key theatre practitioners and techniques.*" Most conversations and

support centred on pastoral care "*communicating that they would not be penalised*". Additionally, lecturers marked student work as a team to reassure students. Lecturers also mentioned how the move to online, especially with the third-year students in 2019-20, was "incredibly challenging:"

> "*Students are thinking (…) 'is my degree, right?' they are panicking especially third years*"

> "*What we have is a module where they would be performing on the Rose Theater (…) their families would come and everyone. So, it's more of a celebration. That was taken away from them (…) The assessments were a challenge, but it was also that idea of they wanted to perform, and they weren't able to.*"

Finally, the course team found students struggling with mental health issues, particularly during the second year of the lockdown. Lecturers put in extra work with additional tutorials recognising that "*the confidence and mental health of the students was foremost*". They decided to minimise emails and text-based communication and instead have online, live conversations with students and encouraged students working collaboratively to do the same.

Despite the challenges, the pandemic also liberated the course team from disciplinary constraints, forced them to rethink their practice and be more creative and innovative in their teaching and assessment:

> "*Was a good thing because (…) we had to reconsider again what what we mean by performance. And once you start thinking like that, actually that becomes very freeing and liberating for us.*"

> "*A sense of liberation in terms of what you could do (…) this was an opportunity to play and explore. challenging narratives. Moving away from the idea of a theater space…*"

The changes necessitated by the pandemic accelerated significant developments in assessment strategy and enabled the teaching of skills, such as self-taping, or remote streaming of live performance, to adapt to a fast-changing industry.

> "*You know no man has auditions anymore, everything self-tape. (...) You'll have to learn about it. (…) And that's simply built into last year.*"

At the time of the interviews, the course team was preparing for a revalidation and desired to keep some of the changes:

> "*We are revalidating this year, so I am going to look into modifying, taking some of that (…) just because I have seen it. Some more creative exercise that also will teach them skills that will probably be more useful*"

This case study aligns to the following inclusive assessment attributes:

Communicates meaningfully.   Promotes authenticity.

Embeds support.

Fosters digital capabilities.

Case Study 4: **Social Work**

Context

The BSc Social Work programme is accredited by Social Work England. It is a full-time course with class sizes ranging between 30 and 40. Over half of the cohort are from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds (55%) and around one fifth are international students. The vast majority of the cohort is female (95%) and 40% of learners are mature students. Typical pre-pandemic assessment consisted of a combination of (in-person) exams (e.g., open book and questions relating to previously released case studies), and coursework including topic focused essays, narrated PowerPoints and in class presentations. Professional body regulations also stipulate the successful completion of practice-based placements (in a social work setting) as part of the programme.

Actions

Given the practical nature of assessments, the course team were able to keep changes to the format of assessments to a minimum during the pandemic. Assessments included online and narrated presentations, group work, case studies and essays. Following university recommendations, all in person exams were changed to allow assessment of outcomes in an alternative format. Where this occurred, exams were converted to a problem-based case study and students could choose to submit in the form of either an essay or report. A 'safety net policy' for grades and awards was introduced for academic years 2019-20 and 2020-21. Where necessary, the professional body relaxed rules on placement requirements to reduce the required number of placement days and/or enable online participation.

There was a greater emphasis on student consultation throughout the academic year. This focused on their timetable and the timing of assessments in order to support students on returning from placement as lockdown started. There was also a greater focus on the personal tutor role to ensure students had support as anxiety and mental health issues impacted more students during the pandemic. These modifications appear to have had a significant positive impact on overall student good degree attainment for the 2019-20 academic year (pandemic Year 1), rising 10 percentage points compared to the previous year, and a reduction in the White/BAME student attainment gap: 9% in 2019/20 compared to 24% in 2018-19.

Challenges and Benefits

Digital competency of both students and staff was initially challenging, specifically with the authentication required to ensure IT security. However, the benefits of becoming more digitally proficient has enabled more creative learning, teaching and assessment approaches to be adopted.

A further challenge was the use of online meeting spaces/classroom (MS Teams), which raised student expectations about availability of the course team members. However, the benefit of these online collaboration spaces for the course team resulted in improved communication and discussion around marking schemes and grade calibration. These were much more effectively managed, improving overall consistency in marking. Students

reported benefits in the offer of online assessment drop-in sessions incorporating improved access to learning support mechanisms:

> """…they did a lot to try and keep us in the loop where possible, gave us loads of other kind of resources as a reach out, you know, messaging emails, video calls, whether that be, oh, we'll do an open session to discuss the assignment…one thing that definitely helped was…I was able to access extra learning support. And so that was very beneficial because they were able to pick up on things like grammar and spelling and more structural, which definitely benefited me." (Student 3)*

The more flexible approach adopted around assessment deadlines, along with improved explanation and dialogue with students, helped alleviate their concerns, though there was a recognition of more to be done:

> *"I think we're getting there. I think we could still be more creative with our assessment types, but I think in terms of including the students, [they] were very much consulted a lot throughout the pandemic, so they felt they had control" (Staff 4)*
> *"…we did speak as a cohort, and we did manage to get some of our deadlines changed because we thought they were pretty close together and we found the uni [sic] very kind of accommodating as much as they could be." (Student 3)*

The shift from examination to problem-based case study was welcomed by students:
"I was never very fond of tests because it's so much pressure whereas, you know, an essay you can work overtime, and you can go back, and you can edit until kind of you know, as close to the date that you need. So, it did definitely meet my needs" (Student 3)

Meanwhile, the course team have reflected on some concerns expressed in the sector regarding examinations:

> *"…the only thing that concerns me I suppose coming from traditional assessment background, is not losing the rigour of assessments". (Staff 4)*

And concluded that:

> *"I think people often use rigour in the wrong way…Rigour is about ensuring that the students have genuinely met the outcomes you set them, and you can verify that, as opposed to making it hard for them to do that…" (Staff 4)*

The following year (2020-21) saw further refection on the assessment landscape and creativity/variation in assessment design. The number of essays were reduced, to be replaced with more work-place authentic methods including *viva voce* assessment.

This case study aligns to the following Inclusive Assessment Attributes:

Requires considerate policies and processes.   Fosters digital capabilities.

Communicates meaningfully.   Promotes authenticity.

Develops assessment literacy.

Case Study 5: **Law**

Context

This case study covers the Law element of the Undergraduate programmes offered by the Department of Law which comprise a single honors Law (LLB(Hons)) and a number of joint honors programmes. The PSRBs for Law are the Solicitors Regulatory Authority and the Bar Standards Board. Both PSRBs require the successful completion of an academic stage of training in addition to vocational training to become a solicitor or a barrister. For 19/20 and 20/21 this is achieved through the successful completion of a degree including successful completion of specified mandatory modules.

Many students on the joint Honors courses elect to specialise in Law; these programmes are being treated as one because of the high number of shared mandatory modules. Therefore, departmental data on awarding gaps and continuation are a proxy measurement of the programme data. The cohort is large (over 900 students). Each year just under 25% self-identified as ethnic minority students.

The PSRBs do not permit mandatory modules to be compensatable. Students must achieve a pass in these modules to pass the academic stage of training. Pre-pandemic, assessments comprised largely of invigilated unseen traditional examinations and some assessed coursework including presentations.

Actions

During the COVID-19 pandemic, assessments in Law were adapted to allow remote assessment. For example, students were permitted to video presentations (previously given in person). Examinations were moved online with a longer 24-hour submission deadline.

New summative assessments worth only a low percentage of the total module mark, such as multiple-choice questions, were introduced on some modules to provide early and frequent testing of students' understanding of course content.

A range of support systems were available to students to help them with these changes. Some of these systems were not new, such as study skills support workshops from the library, whilst others were introduced for the first time during the pandemic. One of the new forms of support was pre-recorded videos from staff which tackled certain elements of the new assessments, or skills necessary for students.

There was also an increased focus on helping students to be able to answer questions effectively, in addition to understanding course content. Finally, there was an increase in communications to students about the range of assessments available during this time, as well as trying to be more transparent about the assessment rationale. Staff made efforts to reach out to isolated ethnic minority students to ensure that they felt supported.

Initially the department had an increase in awarding gaps in 19/20 with the ethnicity awarding gap rising sharply. However, after the interventions referred to above, it fell back to almost pre-pandemic levels. Non-continuation gaps for most ethnic minority students reduced dramatically in 20/21. This was particularly the case for Black students as none discontinued their first-year studies (compared with 10.7% of White students).

Challenges and Benefits

Students and some staff felt as though the 24-hour exam was a more authentic assessment of research. The 24-hour online exam had several benefits for students, including a noticeable decrease in stress for some as a result of the flexibility and longer time for completion. However, some staff reported concern that students would spend close to the entire 24-hour period working on their exam, which gave diminishing returns and caused increased stress for students.

> *"But then a lot of good students seem to spend the, like, almost the whole 24 hours on the exam. And I don't think that is helpful for them. […] You are just making yourself more anxious." (Staff 5)*

In addition, some staff identified barriers to access to online exams for some students, such as not having a quiet space to complete the exam or having an inadequate internet connection. These issues were exacerbated for students who could not afford to buy new computers or increase their data plans.

> *"You have families [...] didn't have enough computers […] trying to explain to some staff why it was a challenge was frustrating at times [...] Like oh you can get a notepad for £250. So, I'm like that's a lot of money." (Staff 4)*

A significant challenge for staff in the pandemic was ensuring academic integrity. Staff reported an increase in assessment offences, such as usage of essay mills, which they thought to be easier when the exams are done online.

Some students also felt less confident with the new or altered assessments, as they had gotten used to completing assessments in a certain way before the pandemic, which was then suddenly changed.

> *"Obviously like I was in my at the end of my first-year/beginning of second year, so it was a bit strange going from everything face to face and then you know, all of a sudden being plunged online" (Student 1)*

This case study aligns to the following inclusive assessment attributes:

Communicates meaningfully.

Provides formative opportunities.

Develops assessment literacy.

Promotes authenticity.

Embeds support.

Case Study 6: **Illustration**

Context

This case study presents examples of inclusive assessment practices implemented on the BA(Hons) Illustration. As a practical course, Illustration provided studio-based learning, with access to design libraries and archives. A key focus of the course is to introduce and develop student skills related to 'visual communication', engaging with theories and practices, and producing a range of assessed projects/artefacts.

Many attributes of inclusive assessment were in the process of being implemented within the Illustration course, prior to the lockdown. For level 6 students, for example, fostering digital capabilities in assessment had already been embedded into the course. In this case, the students were conversant with both analogue and digital submissions, consisting not only of physical work (such as models, canvas prints, or illustrations) but also digital portfolios consisting of written self-reflections by students detailing the process of producing their work. This balance between forms of submission was designed to offer students flexibility and personalisation in their assessments, with the learning outcomes met through multiple means. There was also an element of producing authentic assessment, with the digital outputting of work reflecting industry requirements.

Actions

Following the implementation of lockdown restrictions, several changes to teaching and assessment were actioned, including: i) the closure of the university's art studios, ii) a shift to online teaching for workshops, seminars, and tutorials, iii) the suspension of analogue/physical assessment submissions, and iv) the implementation of digital submissions for all levels (which were already in use for level 6 students). In terms of assessments, students were required to submit a digital portfolio of work, consisting of photographed images of their work demonstrating their skills and processes, alongside written self-reflections of the design process.

Challenges and Benefits

While the implementation of pandemic restrictions arguably accelerated pre-planned assessment changes at all the course levels, there were, however, particular challenges when actioning these attributes across levels 4 and 5, where physical submission points were still standard practice. As such, students' understanding of producing digital portfolios, alongside the digital skills required, was limited:

> "They had to learn quite a lot about how to put together a digital portfolio; so how to display their work, how to show their processes, how to demonstrate their learning outcomes."

Developing assessment literacy regarding digital submissions was therefore vital to ensure that students could effectively meet their learning objectives. This was achieved through a rigorous system of support for students, consisting of online seminars, workshops, and one-to-one tutorials with both staff and technicians. This increased digital literacy was seen as beneficial to the standard of work produced:

> "so even […] maybe some of the weaker students that were […] working in ink or […] drawing, it was then […] how can you process that through Photoshop to make it graphically stronger? [H]ow can you push it beyond just being a in a pencil?"

However, some students experienced issues regarding access to digital technologies (referred to throughout the pandemic as 'Digital Poverty'):

> "because of everything being online, all of a sudden, we had to make PDF's where we took photos of all of our work and presented them in a very specific way. A lot of people didn't have good enough cameras. I know I had to use my like phone and at the time I had a really rubbish one."

Other students felt that the quality of their technology produced difficulties when their work was being assessed:

> "if I showed them something on a screen it will be pixelated. They wouldn't know if I've screen printed it, painted it, used inks or used pencils or whatever 'cause it's so blurry."

While this was perceived as a quick transition, the implementation of digital submissions for levels 4 and 5 was, nevertheless, described as a "learning curve" with some processes adapted during the academic year. For example, a certain degree of tolerance was given to level 4 students regarding their use of alternative software platforms when submitting their work (such as the use of MS PowerPoint). Tolerance in relation to the students' use of digital technology (e.g. laptops, mobile phones, cameras) was also granted when producing assessed work. A key issue here was ensuring that all students had access to adequate technology to produce a digital portfolio:

> "so it was understanding their diversity of digital skills and also what they have access to […] we then officially said […] students have to have certain technical kit […] all students then had to have access to a computer, a camera to photograph their work […] memory storage […] it became much more embedded into the course"

Overall, students were satisfied with the support available to them:

> "I quite liked having a one on one with the tutor for like 2 hours […] it [was] good to actually get to talk through some things, some points."

While discussion with students about the impact of such changes in relation to student outcomes was minimal, student outcome data do suggest that these changes are correlated with an increase in attainment and continuation after the first year of the pandemic, particularly for some underrepresented groups. There was a 5-percentage-point (pp) increase in the overall percentage of students being awarded a good degree and an 11pp increase in the percentage of students continuing at the University in the following academic year. Furthermore, the degree awarding gap between white and black, Asian and minority ethnic students decreased by 40pp, whereas the gap between IMD Q1 and Q5 students decreased by 11pp.

This case study aligns to the following inclusive assessment attributes:

Communicates meaningfully.	Fosters digital capabilities.
Develops assessment literacy.	Enables personalisation.
Embeds support.	Promotes authenticity.

Case Study 7: **Education**

Context

The subject area of Education explored in this case study comprises the programmes BA (Hons) Education Studies and BA (Hons) Primary Teacher Education, the latter being an accredited provision leading to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Assessment adaptations during the pandemic included alternative placement provision in the digital environment and identifying alternative pathways for the meeting of professional standards and competencies for trainee teachers.

Class-sizes average 25 students (predominantly full-time undergraduates in the age range 18-22) and a smaller proportion of mature and part-time students. Characteristic assessment regimes pre-pandemic were written assignments of 3,000 words; in-person presentations; and portfolios involving reflection on practice and placement experiences.

Actions

The major assessment adaptations during the pandemic involved truncation of written assignments (word allowances typically reduced by 1000 words), with online discussion activities and written postings being reclassified as written assessment; conversion of in-person presentations to online presentations including narrated slideshows; and innovation in the practice/placement components of the portfolio so that virtual placements and online 'micro-teaches' were now ruled as in-scope, with relevant PSRB-approvals. These actions required scaffolding, support and new resource-generation by course teams: the online learning platform was reformatted so that online presentations, asynchronous activities, and associated Q&A boards became a signature feature of each module, and resource packs were created to support students in engaging with 'virtual placements'. There was also an increase in the extent of support around assessment with regular online drop-ins and tutorials scheduled to support assignment progress. Beneficial impacts were suggested by the subsequent attainment data with the number of 'good awards' rising from 90% to 91% in the first pandemic-affected year.

Challenges and Benefits

Some of the challenges reported were largely logistical relating to equipment and connectivity ('The bandwidth of some of the students' access to the internet is so intermittent, everything had to be provided as downloadable materials.' (Staff 1) - while others were of a more pedagogic and assessment-based character. For example, while one staff interviewee valued the increased creativity that students demonstrated in the diversified online presentation and portfolio context ('they can create the resources in any way they want to' (Staff 3), another noted the considerable scaffolding that this could require if learning outcomes were to be met in full:

> *"The flexibility for [the students] was making those choices; the duty of the tutor there is to make sure they are making intelligent choices".*

Likewise, not all students and staff welcomed the truncated wordage on assignments, feeling that this was not always beneficial. Where the opposite adaptation had been made and the length of a written task was increased due to the unviability of a practice/placement component, one student was conscious of this affecting her approach to the task:

'With an adapted word count I changed my perspective on the assignment. Higher word count makes you focus more on the written work and on making sure there was substantial research to back up what I wanted to make as a resource.' (Student 1)

In respect of perceived benefits, there were seen to be gains in terms of student confidence and self-efficacy where previously synchronous student presentations were now reconceived as asynchronous:

"This is actually less frightening and less confronting. Or those students who suffer from anxiety or who are being taught in English as an additional language, then it gives them time to process. So, for those students, that's something I've adopted since Covid." (Staff 1)

Insights also included the observation that discussion of assignment tasks in the online learning environment could result in a helpful profile-raising in terms of guidance, orientation and support around assessment:

"Individual students ended up getting a lot more support and choice of how to access that support through the online channels." (Staff 2)

"On a discussion group everybody could see [the questions and answers] so everybody sees the same answer about the assessment." (Staff 1)

A striking example of where an assessment practice innovation could be experienced variously as a respective challenge or benefit was the question of revised and flexible deadlines for assignment submissions. Student responses suggested that this flexibility was positive for the cohort:

"I know that other people, especially parents; they were home-schooling their children during the pandemic so having this opportunity to extend a hand-in date was really beneficial to them." (Student 1)

By contrast, one member of teaching staff reflected that this flexibility made the administration of marking and moderation additionally complicated:

"It was really complicated for lecturers to mark assessments because there was a whole rack of ways in which you can have an extension. Sometimes on the VLE there would be six different entry times and it was confusing for both staff and students." (Staff 2)

The case study thus shows that while some assessment innovations and adaptations were variously experienced and received by students and staff, areas of ongoing learning and enduring impact on practice were identified by all parties.

This case study aligns to the following inclusive assessment attributes:

Develops assessment literacy.

Embeds support.

Promotes authenticity.

Case Study 8: **Psychology with Criminology**

The BSc (Hons) Psychology with Criminology course is made up of various modules and students are able to select a combination of their choice. Cohort size approaches 300 for popular modules and this can impact on teaching and assessment approaches. Around 50% of the students on the course are from an ethnic minority background, and 35% are from IMD quintile 1. Pre-pandemic assessment involved a combination of assessed group presentations and traditional closed-book (in person) examinations.

Actions

Despite the urgent need to revise assessment methods at the onset of the pandemic, the course team endeavoured to maintain consistency across the various modules and standardise the appearance of information on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

At the start of the pandemic, during the 2019-20 academic year, all exams were moved online via the VLE. Each student took three exams and the 2-hour length of these remained unchanged. However, students were able to take each exam within a 48-hour window and guidance was provided that they should write in the order of 2000 words. Some students with support statements were able to submit coursework as an alternative.

Due to potential technological difficulties with groupwork, all presentations were changed to individual work and the format of submission became flexible (e.g., PowerPoint, audio, poster).

At institution level, a no detriment policy was introduced with the intention that students would not be disadvantaged by changes in assessment, compared to previous achievement. Additionally, requirement for evidence to obtain a support statement (for alternative / extended assessment) was suspended. Furthermore, procedure for approval of minor changes to courses was relaxed.

In the following academic year, 2020-21, further planning was possible and increased contact hours provided, as part of an extended academic year, with a focus on assessment literacy tuition and opportunity for formative feedback mid semester. Despite the extended teaching, this was found to be well received in small 'chunks' rather than traditional long lectures.

Awarding gaps for the course were halved for students from IMD quintile 1 backgrounds and were slightly reduced for students from ethnic minority backgrounds in 2019/20, with a further reduction in the gap in the following academic year. Continuation gaps also closed significantly for students from ethnic minority backgrounds, though for IMD quintile 1 these have fluctuated.

Challenges and Benefits

Staff initially found the rapid changes to assessment to be challenging but were helped by the large course team adopting a consistent approach that may have taken longer to agree on in normal circumstances. The move to online exams and presentation submissions increased marking and screen time. In the case of presentations, the requirement for students to also submit a transcript was found to be useful. The institution's assessment

timetable and exam board dates were unchanged although, to some extent, the pressure was reduced when the following academic year was extended.

It became apparent that many students suffered from digital poverty, including sharing a family laptop (if available) in congested circumstances or reliance on a mobile phone as primary device. This was particularly noted by a mature student who gave priority to her children's home-schooling needs. The impact of this was reduced by a combination of flexible assessment and submission methods together with the institution's provision of laptops and emergency funding. It was appreciated that the institution would, "work something out" (Student 2).

When it became possible to return to campus, an assessment centre was made available so that students had the option to sit exams on university computers, within their assessment window.

Staff noted that online (typed) exam scripts were easier to read than handwriting and that assessed presentations did not always need to involve PowerPoint: "*They can talk, they don't need PowerPoint"* (Staff 1). However, one mature student commented that she could "write faster than type" (Student 3). Overall, staff noted that flexible assessment approaches had been well received and, anecdotally, appeared to have reduced anxiety despite the course traditionally having a large proportion of students with support statements. One student appreciated that online assessment had been necessary and the institution accommodating, describing the approach as *"spot on assessment"* (Student 1).

Both staff and students focussed on the increased time spent on academic literacy support as part of disciplinary teaching and expect this to continue. Staff took time to explain the changes to assessment and the flexible methods of submission as well as some aspects of academic writing. Opportunities were also provided for students to ask questions about the assessment. However, it was also noted that care and planning are required to ensure that the same 'skills' content is not repeated in all the modules taken.

Students felt academic support had been effective, noting the later introduction of mid module formative feedback, and the revised approach to support statements.

> *"Able to think more creatively, how to contribute knowledge - without a letter" (Student 2).*

It was commented that, *"assessment is not separate from the classroom"* (Staff 2) and that assessment should be of the module rather than memory.

> *"Multiple ways to submit created a sense of ownership and community" (Staff 2)*

> *"Expectations were clear, we were encouraged to be different" (Student 2)*

> *"We could think about concepts and how to articulate and condense them" (Student 2)*

This case study aligns to the following inclusive assessment attributes:

Requires considerate policies and processes.   Provides formative opportunities.

Develops assessment literacy.   Enables personalization

Embeds support.

Inclusive Assessment Attributes

Inclusive assessment …	
Embeds support	Academic and wellbeing support is integrated within teaching and assessment. It is easily accessible, dialogic, responsive, and considerate of individual student needs.
Develops assessment literacy	Students are actively engaged with assessment processes with a focus on clarifying learning outcomes and expectations. Students and staff share an understanding of the purposes, requirements and approaches of assessment.
Provides formative opportunities	Assessment is framed as a developmental process within which students engage in formative tasks and receive timely, relevant, and manageable feedback. Students feel safe to fail, knowing they will be supported to learn from the experience.
Communicates meaningfully	The assessment process is clear and transparent to all developed through a constructive dialogue between staff and students. Different levels, and modes, of communication are managed to ensure timely and accessible information.
Enables personalisation	Assessment is designed to facilitate ownership and flexibility in how students demonstrate learning outcomes. Students feel empowered to make informed choices over what, when, and how they are assessed where appropriate.
Fosters digital capabilities	Assessment design is alive to the opportunities of different technologies. It creates a culture in which students and staff can develop and extend their digital capabilities, facilitating learning and teaching in diverse contexts and environments.
Promotes authenticity	The assessment tasks are relevant to students' subject areas, employment sectors and contexts of further study to which students will progress. The assessment culture encourages multi-modal and creative assessment design.
Assumes considerate policies and processes	The design of assessment policies and processes are informed by an awareness of student needs, understanding of external pressures, and insights into structural and societal barriers.
Requires continuous reflection	Assessment is continuously reviewed and critiqued, using feedback and discussions with students, staff, and key stakeholders, to ensure ongoing enhancement of policies, practices, and processes.

Case studies have been compiled by the following University Alliance institutions

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