



national union of **students**

Assessment: from fairness to authenticity

Megan Dunn

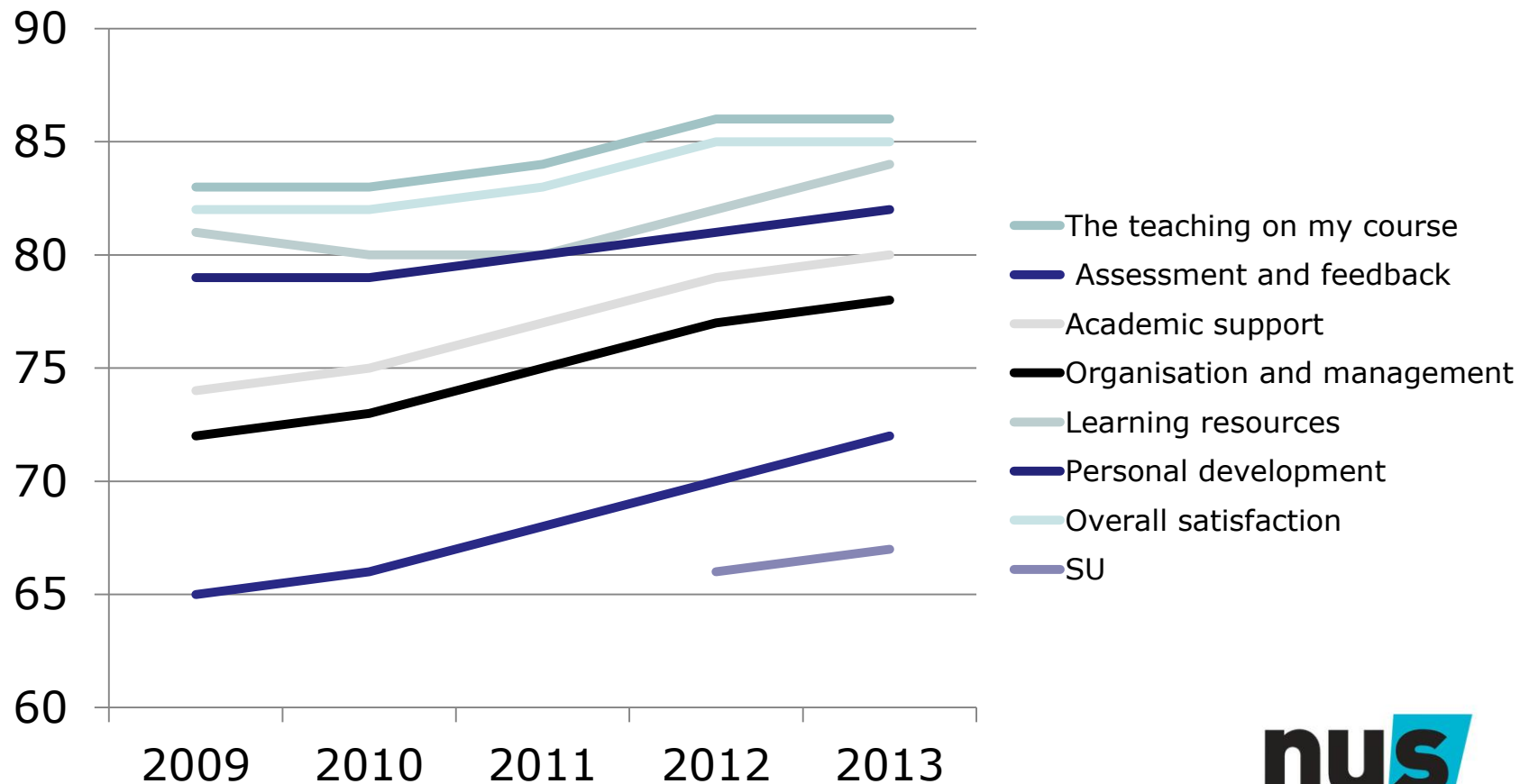
Vice President Higher Education

Aims of the session

- Understand NUS' previous work on feedback and national trends regarding assessment
- Understand the current debates on assessment in the academic literature
- Discuss interventions that could improve the authenticity of assessment

Why feedback and assessment?

National Student Survey (% agree)



What has NUS done so far?

- Topic of debate since 2005
- 2008: Great NUS Feedback Amnesty
- Ten Principles of Effective Feedback
- 2009: Exam feedback sticker campaign
- 2010: Assessment feedback form
- 2012: Relunched Feedback Amnesty
- 2013: Benchmarking tool



Assessment and feedback benchmarking tool

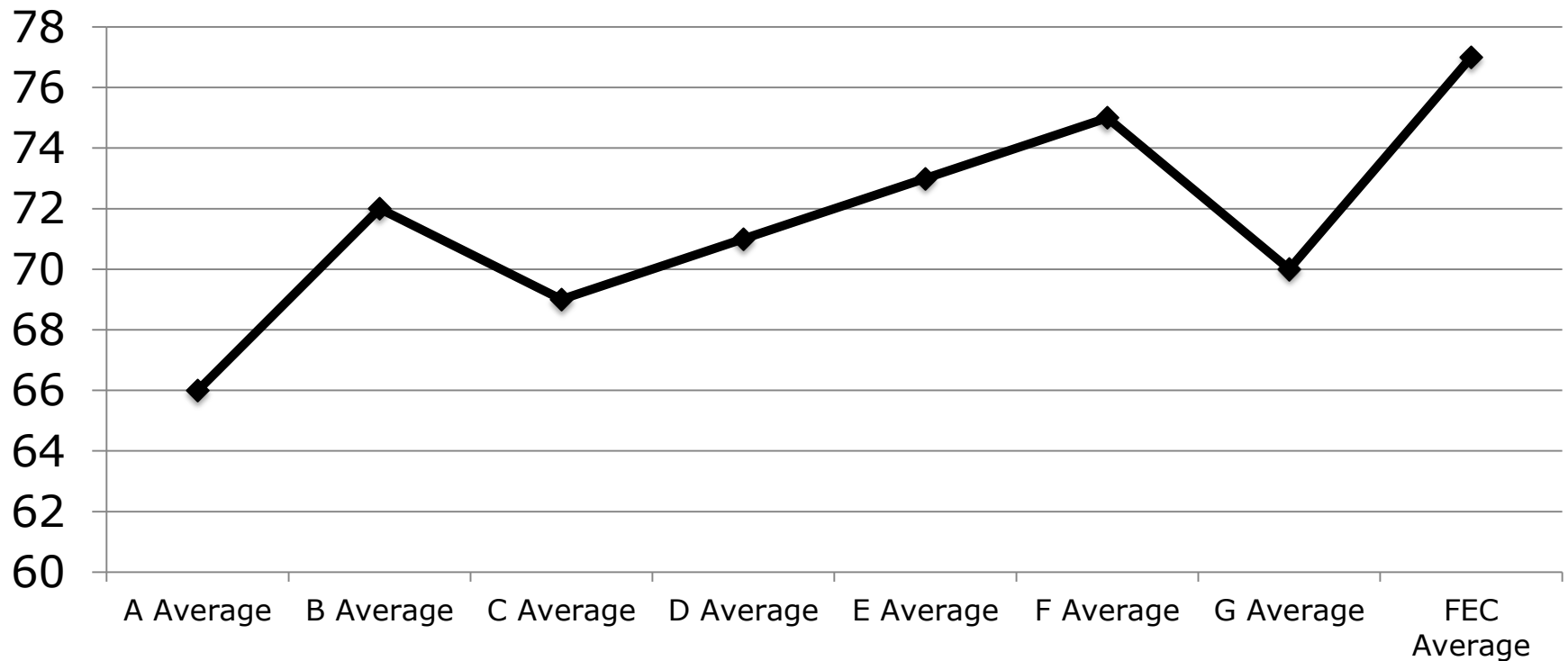


Principle	First steps	Developing	Developed	Refining	Outstanding practice: Partnership
1 Diverse forms of assessment designed to assess a range of skills and knowledge	There is little variety in the forms of assessment used on each programme. Assessment is not clearly linked to learning objectives and this thought has been given to the skills and knowledge tested. Summative assessments may require different skills than those developed during the course.	Some thought has been given to how the mode of assessment is chosen to best demonstrate the learning outcomes of the course. Students are adequately prepared for summative assessments with the skills they learn on the course.	Assessment methods are chosen through a clear link to the learning outcomes of the course. Several different types of assessment are used throughout the course, e.g. exam, written essay, poster presentation, group presentation, reflective log.	Programmes are planned so that the diverse forms of assessment will cover skills that are desired in the wider world, e.g. by employers. Students have some choice in the assessment methods they are offered.	Students are empowered and given the tools and support to co-design their assessment methods in partnership with academic staff. Programmes are planned holistically to assess a broad range of skills and knowledge through a variety of forms of assessment. Students are able to articulate the skills they have developed through the various forms of assessment on their programme.
2 Assessment criteria	Assessment criteria are vague, conflicting and often contradictory. They are hard to find and students are not directed to them.	Assessment criteria are mostly clear and detailed enough to be of use, but students may not know about them or use them.	Assessment criteria are clear and easy to understand, and students are aware of where to find them. They are clearly linked to the learning outcomes of the course.	Assessment criteria are linked to learning outcomes and referred to throughout the course. Students fully understand what is expected of them in order to achieve each goal.	Assessment criteria are clear, easily accessible and linked to learning outcomes. Students fully understand and are supported to use them. They are designed in partnership with students to ensure accessibility.
3	Submission procedures are inflexible, complex and inaccessible, usually involving a set date and time to return 'exam crates to the institution'. There is	Submission procedures are relatively simple, although largely paper-based. Year abroad students may experience problems depending on which	Submission is largely electronic, although some departments may do things differently. Feedback may or may not be provided online. There is	Submission is electronic where possible, and feedback is provided online. Submission processes are the same across all departments.	Submission is simple and flexible through an online system that confirms receipt and delivers online grades and feedback. Accessibility for students is



Who's affected?

Assessment and feedback (% satisfaction)



What aspect of assessment?



Current debates in the academic literature

Feedback as a part of learning


- Previous campaigns have often focused on processes rather than educational outcome
- Move from universities as the “gatekeepers” of knowledge and the only providers of feedback to a more dialogic approach
- As well as providing feedback, academics need to facilitate students’ use of feedback as part of learning
- Self-reflection may not come naturally and may need to be explicitly facilitated
- Feedback is not an end goal, but an ongoing developmental conversation

Communities of practice

- Separate communities of practice exist between staff and students and they communicate in different languages
- Conversations need to happen between staff and students to ensure a shared understanding of the assessment criteria
- Tutors perceive their feedback to be more detailed and useful than students do
- Students may misunderstand the intention of tutor feedback, and read it selectively or apply it wrongly

Authentic assessment

- A concept born from the narratives of student engagement, education as transformation and employability
- The notion that all assessments should relate to the “real world”, rather than be tasks that are removed from any context where the learning might be used in the future
- “Assignments or assessment tasks that call upon students to construct their own meaning or knowledge through in-depth disciplined inquiry”



“Unlike conventional paper-and-pencil tests that focus on knowledge reproduction and low-level cognitive processing skills in artificial, contrived contexts, authentic assessment tasks underscore knowledge construction, complex thinking, elaborated communication, collaboration and problem solving in authentic contexts.”

Koh, Tan and Ng (2012) Creating thinking schools through authentic assessment: the case in Singapore. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*
May 2012, Volume 24, Issue 2, pp 135-149

Four aspects of authenticity

1. Problems rooted in the real world
2. Learning through inquiry and thinking skills – metacognition (thinking about your thinking)
3. Discourse among a community of learners, cooperative and peer learning
4. Empowered through authentic learning – personal connection, student centred learning

Rule, A.C. (2006). Editorial: The Components of Authentic Learning. *Journal of Authentic Learning*, 3:1, 1-10

Why authenticity?

“The higher the level of authentic learning that focuses on higher levels of thinking, disciplined in-depth inquiry, substantive discourse, and connections to the real world, the higher the level of all students’ performance regardless of achievement level or demographic characteristics”

Avery, 1999 and Newman & Associates, 1996, quoted in Rule, A.C. (2006).
Editorial: The Components of Authentic Learning. *Journal of Authentic Learning, 3:1, 1-10*

Discussion in groups

1. What is/are the purpose/s of summative assessment?
2. Who should decide what is authentic?
Authentic to whom?
3. Does using authentic assessment necessarily mean that outcomes are directly related to employment? Should it be?

What can you do to improve assessment authenticity at your institution?

What could NUS do to support you?

Key points

- Feedback and assessment have been issues for students for many years
- We're bringing the campaign away from focusing on process to being more integrated into broader work about how students learn
- Much of the academic literature focuses on feedback as a part of learning, developing communities of practice and authenticity
- Authenticity (real world problem solving, learning by inquiry and through discourse, empowering learners to have a personal stake) has been proven to improve learning outcomes
- Authenticity is particularly timely given the current emphasis on student engagement and partnership

More information

Previous NUS work on feedback:

<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/archived/learning-and-teaching-hub/assessment/>

Benchmarking tool:

<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resourcehandler/a8b81c81-3e09-4798-bb38-b19d20d77c04/>

Koh, Tan and Ng (2012) Creating thinking schools through authentic assessment: the case in Singapore. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability* May 2012, Volume 24, Issue 2, pp 135-149

Rule, A.C. (2006). Editorial: The Components of Authentic Learning. *Journal of Authentic Learning*, 3:1, 1-10