

# Graduate Attributes Spotlight

## Assessment and Feedback

Assessment is an important, yet complex part of the learning and teaching process within universities. A range of assessment methods are used throughout the University, but in the past we have often relied on examinations as a way of testing whether students have achieved the desired learning outcomes. This is sometimes termed assessment *of* learning.

However, assessment is a strong motivator for students who are often keen to discover how they can maximise assessment grades. We can tap into students' assessment motivation by designing assessment methods that not only assess student's performance, but which also require students to learn simply through the process of completing the assessment. This approach is often termed assessment *for* learning (Hounsell et al, 2007).

Whilst examinations using different question types could be very appropriate as an assessment *of* learning, there are many other methods of assessment that can be used that might maximise learning as part of the assessment process, including for example: essays, research projects, book reviews, laboratory reports, critiques of research papers, group projects or oral presentations. Using a range of assessments across programmes will enable your students to more effectively develop a broad range of knowledge, skills and graduate attributes.

### Overview

Consider designing assessments that are relevant and authentic in your discipline, i.e. assessments that replicate the kinds of knowledge and skills students will need in future work contexts. If you have clearly articulated within the learning outcomes which graduate attributes you wish your students to develop, this should guide you in choosing assessments that align with these intended learning outcomes.

Formative assessment (assessment that does not count towards the final mark, but which aims to provide students with feedback on their performance and progress), can help support students to develop a range of graduate attributes. The quality of the feedback on assessments that staff provide to students is a critical factor influencing whether students are able to understand how to further develop their knowledge and skills. Sadler (1989) suggests that as a minimum, good feedback should provide students with:

1. a clear outline of what a good assessment performance is;
2. a judgement on the quality of their current performance;
3. clear guidance as to how to bridge any gap that exists between (2) and (1).

Feedback may be written, oral, formal or informal, but it must be constructive, even where students need to hear that their work is incorrect or needs improvement.

Peer assessment is sometimes used as an approach that can help students to develop a better understanding of what is required in assessment processes. Through marking or providing feedback, students gain a better understanding and ownership of marking criteria and learn to articulate what makes a good, poor or average performance. Some students and staff raise legitimate concerns about

### Approach

peer assessment related to reliability, favouritism and contribution to final grades. This explains why often peer assessment is used for formative assessment.

Self assessment is another useful way for students to take greater responsibility for their own learning, develop self-regulation skills and reflect more deeply on their learning (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006). Asking students to complete a self-assessment of their own work and to submit this along with their assignment can be a useful way to highlight similarities and differences between the student and tutor feedback. This fosters students' insight into their own performance, and therefore providing an opportunity for staff and students to discuss potential areas, skills and attributes that could be improved and ideas for how improvements could be made. Peer assessment can help develop skills for self assessment and vice versa.

In designing assessments and providing feedback:

1. Use a range of assessment methods in order to give students the opportunity to develop different types of knowledge, skills and attributes
2. Provide students with Sadler's 3 key elements of feedback whenever they receive feedback;
3. Try to relate your feedback and suggestions for how students can improve their work to the process of developing their graduate attributes within your programme and the broader discipline.
4. Build in formative assessment opportunities for students to develop their knowledge and skills and receive feedback on their progress
5. Consider where you can build in peer and/or self assessment into your courses. Use this as an opportunity to discuss assessment expectations, marking criteria and development of graduate attributes with your students.

For example, to support students to become effective communicators and experienced collaborators, you might:

- Set up a group briefing session at the start of any assessed student group work, setting out some of the advantages and disadvantages of group work and some ground rules prior to work starting. Be clear whether you are assessing the team working processes within the groups
- Set up a group debriefing session after group work takes place so that students can discuss and learn from their experiences
- Design a group work project which involves the tutor setting up the groups so students gain experience of working in a group with people who they might not normally choose to work with. Ensure that some of the marking criteria relate to how the group has worked together.
- Ensure that individual and group assessments require different types of communication skills to be demonstrated. Ensure that marking criteria reflect any marks you are giving to students related to sophisticated levels of argument, defence of any particular conceptual position being taken, or eloquent synthesis of material.

<p>Hounsell, D., Xu, R. and Tai, C.M. (2007) Integrative assessment: balancing assessment <i>of</i> with assessment <i>for</i> learning. Quality Assurance Agency (Scotland).</p> <p>Lines, D. and Mason, C. (2005) Enhancing practice: assessment. Quality Assurance Agency (Scotland).</p> <p>Sadler, D. (1989) Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems, <i>Instructional Science</i>, 18 119-144.</p> <p>Nicol, D. and MacFarlane Dick, D. (2006) Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: a model and seven principles of good feedback practice. <i>Studies in Higher Education</i>, 31 (2) 199-218.</p>	<p><b>Resources</b></p>
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