**Assessment Tips and Guidance**

***‘there is more leverage to improve teaching through changing assessment than there is in changing anything else’.[[1]](#footnote-1)***

In adopting a modular curriculum, it is important that a fragmented assessment strategy is not the consequence ([Bloxhax](https://www.cumbria.ac.uk/media/university-of-cumbria-website/content-assets/public/education/images/documents/educatiorsstorehouse/assessment/GuideToAssessment.pdf)). Current practice in the sector has increasingly moved away from assessment of learning and towards assessment as/for learning. However, it is important that all three aspects are considered. Jisc produced a [guidance document](https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/principles-of-good-assessment-and-feedback) in 2022 that teams will find really helpful; it has most things covered!

Principle 4 of our [Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy](https://www.hope.ac.uk/media/gateway/staffgateway/learningandteachingdocuments/LTA%20strategy%20Approved%20Senate%20June%2023.pdf) requires that the student experience for all students is enriched by authentic assessment and meaningful feedback. However, care should be taken to ensure that the amount of assessment at the programme, subject or module level is not excessive; this is not good for staff or students. External Examiners offer advice on whether over-assessment is an issue compared to other institutions. As a team discuss expectations in your discipline and consult your external examiner when determining what under/over assessment might look like; combined honours students may be particularly impacted if their subjects have different norms.

- Communicate to students the workload associated with a particular assessment.

- Consider using authentic assessment where the effort is considered rather than just the word count. A short article for the public may take just as long to prepare as a 3000-word essay for a specialist audience. This can produce a challenging assessment that develops a range of other skills relevant to future careers.

- Our LTA strategy requires that there are opportunities for summative and formative feedback. This can help students share out the workload better and enhance their experience of assessment.

A 30-credit module is associated with a notional total of 300 learning hours; this includes all of the things a student needs to complete including attending classes, preparing for sessions etc. According to sector norms 20-30% of a student’s time should be spent preparing for assessment. This would equate to between 60 and 90 hours of learning time spent preparing for assessment. These figures are at best notional because the student’s discipline, level of study and the nature of the assessment task will also be relevant.

Across the sector the learning effort associated with producing a 1000-word essay is often around 10 hours, and for a 30-credit module we have adopted a standardisation of assessment equivalent to the effort required to produce a 6,000-word researched piece of writing. **However, consideration must be given to the discipline, the nature of the task and the level of study**. The assessment load should normally be distributed into 2 assessment tasks, with no more than 3 assessments being set for a 30-credit module[[2]](#footnote-2).

When students are working on authentic assessments, particularly at Level 3, the assessment preparation time spent in reading/researching might be much greater than at lower levels. As a result, for authentic assessment briefs such as reflective pieces, public facing documentation, word counts may be adjusted to reflect the preparation effort. For assessments that involve practical assessments quantifying the assessment preparation time is a better indicator of effort than the wordcount; equivalency is the key here. Furthermore, authentic assessments that align with specific employment requirements, and the assessment of a range of hard and soft skills, can enable validity, student satisfaction and feedback relevant to both academic and employability skills. The permissible use of Generative Artificial Intelligence is also tackled through [authentic assessments](https://publications.aston.ac.uk/id/eprint/46508/1/Salinas-Navarro_et_al_AAM_Designing_experiential_learning_activities_with_generative_artificial_intelligence_tools_for_authentic_assessment.pdf) which require students to respond to creative briefs that are directly relevant to their aspirations.

Assessment strategies should also be designed to allow students adequate time to reflect on their learning before being assessed. The balanced distribution of workloads across the available study time is important for our cohorts; consistency of approach between modules is important to student satisfaction, inclusion and to avoid over-assessment. When scheduling assessments towards the end of a module it may be sensible to consider whether the format of the assessment can be selected to enable more rapid feedback and release of marks. For example, the use of a presentation/practical task/ computer marked in class assessment could generate an outcome more rapidly.

Inclusion is the cornerstone of our assessment strategy. Building formative feedback opportunities that enable students to focus on their strengths, and ways that they might improve, is important. Considering how and when to offer feedback is something teams will want to discuss. There is some interesting literature for digestion ([Tai, Ajjawi and Umarova 2024](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.2011441)). Opportunities to prepare students for assessments through the use of exemplars and focus on marking criteria should be included. There may be opportunities to introduce flexible assessment where students have options to select from a range of assessment modes; there are some interesting notes on [flexible assessment to engage and motivate learners](https://www.stlhe.ca/teaching-tip-tuesday/tip-3-use-flexible-assessment-to-engage-and-motivate-learners/) that teams might want to consider. They may be able to help devise the assessment.

**Take Homes:**

Inclusion – formative feedback opportunities, timing of assessments, workload, format including flexibility.

For/ As learning – emphasising the use of assessment to enhance student outcomes including their satisfaction and insights into future progression opportunities.

Assessment effort rather than word count: consideration must be given to the discipline, the nature of the task and the level of study when determining assessment load.

Transparency – staff and students developing a shared understanding and approach to assessment.

1. https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/3609/1/LATHE%201.%20Conditions%20Under%20Which%20Assessment%20Supports%20Students%27%20Learning%20Gibbs\_Simpson.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For the dissertation more of the learning time is spent on assessment and this explains why the word count of the final product is higher (8-10,000 words equivalent) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)