

## Review of Assessment – Discussion Paper

### Summary

This paper has been prepared by the Associate Dean (Education) for Arts and Social Sciences in consultation with the other ADEs, the Academic Lead for Assessment and Acting Director of LEaD. It has emerged from a range of discussions around assessment issues across the University.

The paper seeks to briefly outline our current position and suggests one option for developing a review process across the institution. The purpose of the paper is to provoke a discussion about assessment and its significance rather than make a specific decision about a single course of action.

If Education and Student Committee agrees with the outline proposal set out in the paper, it is recommended that this is taken forward by the above group with relevant colleagues in Student & Academic Services. It is proposed that a further discussion takes place at the next meeting of Learning Enhancement & Development Advisory Sub-Committee, and that a final proposal for taking forward the work is brought to the next meeting of Education and Student Committee.

### Recommended action

Education & Student Committee is asked to **consider** the paper.

## **Review of assessment – discussion paper**

### **Introduction**

This paper has emerged from a range of discussions around assessment issues and targets across the University. The paper seeks to briefly outline our current position and suggests one option for developing a review process across the institution. The purpose of the paper is to provoke a discussion about assessment and its significance rather than make a specific decision about a single course of action.

### **The Problem**

Student dissatisfaction with assessment remains one of the persistent themes across all sources of feedback. Evidence from national surveys (NSS and PTES) is mirrored by results and comments at module level and forms a significant component of student feedback through liaison committees. Perceptions of misalignment also emerge within academic discussions at School PARCs and through the Periodic Review process. The emergent view amongst staff charged with quality within Schools is that there is no clear process for ensuring the quality of assessment and whilst it can form part of programme development and amendment the risk of poor practices and poor alignment is significant. From a historical perspective, there is no evidence that the University has ever undertaken a comprehensive review of assessment practice and this can be contrasted to at least 3 separate University reviews of assessment regulations in the past 10 years.

Some examples of risks

- Quality - misalignment means that modules are not assessing the outcomes needed to demonstrate student achievement through benchmarks. Student achievements (degree classifications) could be distorted by misaligned assessment.
- Satisfaction - Students are being over or under assessed against the learning outcomes. The assessment process appears to students to be incoherent and unstructured – the same outcomes are being assessed in different places at the same time and at several times across the same programme. There is no explicit rationale to the assessment process
- Retention - There is no linkage between assessments at different levels and therefore progression is difficult to demonstrate it becomes difficult for staff or students to manage genuine progression. Some assessment tasks have disproportionate impact on retention and there is no consistent process to explore or review this.
- Employability - Feedback to students is piecemeal and task specific, preventing students from recognising the development of underpinning (or generic skills).

Whilst there are many examples of specific review activities there is no consistent review process nor is there any clear guidance to staff or students about assessment practice.

### **Outline Proposal**

Given the size of task (the sheer number of programmes, modules and separate assessment components) it is tempting to see this as a new project or initiative. Whilst such an approach would have benefits in terms of seeking support, a further “new” project would need to be approved and resourced. Rather than develop a new initiative one alternative would be to seek to use existing polices and mechanisms and to focus attention on the issue of assessment.

*Peer review* – the policy of peer review is itself under review and a number of areas have been highlighted as either absent or implied within the current policy and guidance. One of these areas is the evaluation of assessment. It would be possible to make this inclusion more explicit and, through staff development, use this mechanism to focus attention on assessment at module and component level.

*Programme Evaluation* – in 2015/6 the evaluation process for programmes was amended to provide a clearer focus on contribution towards the hubs within the new Student and Education Strategy. This more explicit linkage is seen as a major step forwards in integrating strategy at programme level. Alongside a focus on individual peer review of assessment it would be possible to include assessment as a key theme for programme evaluation in 2016/7.

*Periodic review* – once again the existing quality assurance mechanism could be used to focus attention on this issue either as a university wide theme – or as part of a 5 year cycle of interim activities

*Staff development* – finally greater emphasis needs to be given to the assessment process within academic staff development. The balance between pedagogic and technology related activities should be revisited to ensure that staff have appropriate opportunities and support to deliver high quality meaningful assessment and feedback.

Clearly such an approach would need to be approved by this Committee and Senate but the benefit is that this does not create new policies or processes and whilst there are resource requirements these could be met by a prioritisation of existing activities.

## **Discussion**

Do we need to undertake a review of assessment?

- If so what priority do we assign and how does this fit within our current strategic hubs (success and retention issue linkages)? How important is this to student success?

Is peer review the most appropriate mechanism to evaluate (and improve) our assessments?

- Should we look at other options - an external review, using existing internal systems LEaD, can we assess the benefit of staff engagement factored against staff time and other priorities (REF)?

How would we engage students?

- Are the current structures and mechanisms (SSLCs) adequate for this sort of engagement?
- How do we prepare/ enable students to contribute to the process?

Do we have the resources – academic professional and managerial - to achieve a significant positive effect?

- How will we evaluate this as a “project”? Can we assess the degree to which this would involve new work – what does the experience of personal tutor policy revision tell us about engagement and implementation?
- How can we manage this through existing structures – Senate Boards of Studies, Teaching and Learning Committees etc.?
- What approach should we take to this – by programme type, by School through pilots?