

Healthcare Sciences: Inclusive Assessment of Case Study

What works?

When several enablers are aligned and adopted together in assessment design and delivery, they can have a significant positive impact on the outcomes for students.

Authenticity, Curriculum Alignment and Innovation

Nursing, midwifery and allied health courses, such as physiotherapy, are professional accredited vocational courses, where the authenticity of assessments is often baked-in, such as the OSCE (Observed, Structured Clinical Examination). With authenticity comes variety and choice in assessments which reflects the development of the skills sets required in a modern health care workforce. This variety supports diverse learners and allows students to demonstrate their knowledge in ways that best reflect their strengths and provide opportunities to extend their skills.

Alternative virtual assessment developed through Covid have proven to be more accessible to students who live further away from campus and therefore contribute to inclusivity. In addition, with the growth in digital literacies in both students and staff, alternative assessments such as blogs are also being offered by course teams. With the growth in virtual healthcare settings, assessments which evaluate online competencies will support students as healthcare professionals of the future.

A focus on authenticity also supports students to understand the importance of adhering to the principles of academic integrity in their assessments. Academic integrity is presented through the lens of professional behaviours of trustworthiness, ethics and morality. Technological innovations have also provided additional avenues to support the inclusiveness of assessment. Screencasts explaining assessment criteria can be made available on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), supporting students' understanding of their assessment. Personalised chat functions have allowed students to ask questions direct to their tutors. The answers can then be collated by the tutor so all students can benefit. Similarly, course teams are far more confident in providing academic support for assessment either through the VLE or through on-line tutorials, in addition to the on-campus sessions, which supports those students for whom getting to campus is difficult and expensive.

Finally allowing students to bring in their own authentic experiences in clinical practice to, for example, their assessed professional conversations facilitates a personalised approach to the assignment.

Enablers



Authenticity



Support



Curriculum Alignment



Innovation



Communication



Mental Health Awareness

“The variety of inclusive assessment types...directly reflects the requirements for professional registration”.

“We offer [variety] across...and even within the modules...There are many ways that the students demonstrate their knowledge.”

“It is about trying to offer different mechanisms and understand different ways of learning, to maximize the chances of assessment being a positive learning experience.”

“There are students who don't want to raise their hands up... we accommodate different communication channels to help... to cater to the needs of different students.”

Support, Communication and Mental Health Awareness

Predictably, the availability of extensive learning resources and explicit assessment guidance supports students to achieve. However, to be effective the support must be embedded in the mainstream academic delivery. Extra sessions, either formal or informal, attract low levels of attendance and engagement. Healthcare educators adopt various methods to develop students' assessment literacies in class such as embedding activities which support students to use marking criteria to effectively evaluate assignment extracts and, in so doing, consolidate their understanding of the marking criteria. Other teams offer alternative assessment briefs to include informative infographics or short videos introducing the assessment to support students to identify the key points. Alternative assessments developed through Covid which support the 'process' or 'practice' of completing the assessment are also effective and have been continued by many course leaders post-Covid. For example, building confidence in having professional conversations through asking students to pre-record their presentations and uploading them on to the VLE has proved successful in supporting students' oral competencies by encouraging students to practice their presentation several times before submitting the best iterations of their presentation.

Embedded academic support is crucial to student success, but healthcare educators also point to the importance of care and compassion in informing their approach to assessment and its juxtaposition to a traditional competitive approach. Acknowledging the importance of supporting students' mental wellness is a particular focus in healthcare courses where the students are combining academic study with clinical practice and where assessments need to be completed around practice commitments.

Guidance and Top Tips

- Provide authentic briefs and link to their experiences of clinical practice and professional competencies.
- Use technological innovations to support flexibility and learner autonomy
- Provide support in class, avoiding add-on 'remedial' sessions
- Communicate with care and compassion with a focus on mental wellness

"We provide clear and detailed assignment guidance... It's not just given verbal...it is written guidance. They can keep referring back to that guidance and we strongly encourage them to do so"

"Students are prerecording their presentation...they're not having to perform live, they can practice."

"We support them very well...they get a lot of care and looking after...we are like that as lecturers. We are midwives first...that what comes out to the students"

"The relationship we have with our students is really important for them to feel included and feel like we're listening to them.....I think the fact that we have a close relationship with the students makes a massive difference".

"If we as nursing lecturers, can't role model caring and compassion, then we might as well just...hand in our letters"

Inclusive Assessment Attributes

University Alliance Collaborative Enhancement Project: Supporting student progression and attainment through sustainable Inclusive Assessment Practice: What Works? This case study has been compiled based on evidence of inclusive assessment practice in Healthcare Sciences from the following project partners:

[Kingston, UWE, Brighton, Oxford Brookes, Hertfordshire]

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