



# Humanities

## An Inclusive Assessment 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.

### Academic Support, Communication & Curriculum Alignment

The development of academic skills, coupled with an awareness by the students of how and why those skills are being developed is an important enabler in several humanities programmes. In particular, the Covid period was an impetus for a fundamental change in how feedback is offered to students; providing choice in means of engagement and ensuring that it is developmental in nature so that a student is able to visualise their progression throughout their course. One programme described how they create a culture of academic work as a collaborative process, with multiple opportunities for formative feedback ensuring that the student is never “on their own” with their assignment. As a direct legacy of Covid, students are free to choose how they prefer to engage with feedback, be that via email or online/on-campus meetings. Furthermore, individual feedback is supported by whole-cohort feedback sessions, delivered by academic advisors at the beginning of each semester. This feedback is specifically designed to show how the cohort is progressing through the programme, and how their previous work will feed into later modules. This holistic “programme-level view” is seen as vital in allowing students to see their trajectory from level 4 to level 6.

Concurrently, the improved communication that was a Covid-era necessity has been continued and refined. Whilst availability of and communication about academic support to students has increased, so too has the sharing of information amongst staff. Lecturers described regular communications amongst the teaching team as a vital means of identifying individual students who might need additional support and taking a team approach to working with them. Increased collaboration amongst staff has also enabled better alignment of academic skills across the curriculum, and greater innovation in assessment design.

### Enablers



ACADEMIC  
SUPPORT



CURRICULUM  
ALIGNMENT



INNOVATION



COMMUNICATION



MENTAL HEALTH  
AWARENESS

**“The danger with a modular system is that the students can think the completed modules are no longer relevant to anything else, so it helps them to look at it as a whole. They will get that broader perspective and they don't feel like they're starting all over again with each new set of modules. They can see how worthy their previous work is and how it still can be relevant. “**

**“Ours is an essay-driven subject and we dropped all class exams a few years ago. We felt it put an awful lot of pressure on them and they couldn't take advantage of the feedback too.”**

**“The stakes for students are high. Their anxiety levels are high. So we have a couple of rules... One is that... no new modes of assessment get introduced. And the other one is there should be no one offs.”**

**“We've got a good relationship with the student body with quite a lot of communication and trust. That means we can discuss how well assessment practices are working, what was the student experience, do they feel the assessment works, etc.”**

## **Innovation & Mental Health Awareness**

Both staff and students identified a need to carefully balance innovation of assessment practices with an awareness of student mental health. On the one hand the move away from closed-book exams is universally seen as a positive step, reducing pressure on students; enabling them to demonstrate their learning in more authentic ways, and ensuring they can take full advantage of feedback. Conversely, there is a risk that too much innovation in assessment, if not appropriately introduced and supported, could actually increase anxiety for students.

To be effective, new modes of assessment must be introduced with clear scaffolding. In practice this meant they were accompanied by skills development activities embedded within modules, detailed information, advice and guidance, open communication channels and plenty of feedback. Students were given the opportunity to try out new forms of assessment in low stakes, early modules, and supported to develop their skills across the lifecycle of the programme. Student preparedness to engage with assessment is vital – they must know what the assessment task requires of them.

### **Guidance and Top Tips**

- One-on-one/ individualised/personalised support should be delivered via Academic Advising/Personal Tutoring and by lecturers through regular feedback during modules.
- Links/guides/signposts to resources should be consistently provided through multiple media in programme/module spaces e.g. handbooks, the VLE and in class
- Include in-class activities (e.g. Q&A sessions) ahead of assignments
- Provide continuous and useful feedback on drafts and resubmissions
- Build trust through continuous student engagement and acting on the student voice
- Scaffold assessment tasks and provide adequate guidance

**[Link to 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 Humanities.**

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