Webinar 17 September 2020 featuring Professor Sally Brown: Compassionate Assessment post Covid-19: improving assessment long-term

Webinar participants highlighted a number of links and references, which are shared below, along with participant's points of interest and views[1]. Participants' comments are anonymised.

Links and references:

- [Want to stop student cheating? Then stop giving tacit permission](#) : Times Higher Education article

- The Newcastle University Writing Development Centre [YouTube channel](#)

- Pitt, E., and Winstone, N. (2018). The impact of anonymous marking on students' perceptions of fairness, feedback and relationships with lecturers. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 43(7), 1183-1193

- Employers value creativity: Moore, T., and Morton, J. (2017). The myth of job readiness? Written communication, employability, and the 'skills gap' in higher education. Studies in Higher Education, 42(3), 591-609

- Emma Jones, Michael Priestley, Liz Brewster, Susan J. Wilbraham, Gareth Hughes and Leigh Spanner (2020) Student wellbeing and assessment in higher education: the balancing act, Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, DOI: 10.1080/02602938.2020.1782344

Views from webinar chat on challenges and practice tips also featured in the webinar discussions

Using more diverse assessments

Use exams when you have a jolly good pedagogic rationale for using them and only then.

One colleague told me she liked memorisation elements of exams because it helps protect people against dementia! Don't know if that's true, but exam benefits are definitely outweighed by the disadvantages.

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[1] Some minor text edits have been made to help text flow

We need to build creativity into our assessments - our students are so creative and this is drummed out of them in school in favour of rote learning.

Some challenges

There's a huge issue as the secondary school sector emphasises exams. Even more so since the Gove changes to the English National Curriculum... so we need to support and scaffold students to shift to new ways of approaching assessment

Giving students the confidence to incorporate their experience and ideas into their work is a challenge after A level.

This should make us take a close hard look at what and how we are assessing, and focus on what is absolutely essential to assess learning. Must move away from 'if it moves we must assess it' approach.

One key barrier is the perceived expectations from PSRBs. My regulatory want me to retain certain assessments'! How do we influence the PSRBs?

We've shifted to more authentic assessment with flexible submission formats, only 1 exam because the professional body requires it! We are finding the assessor load is quite high for our large cohorts though so it's good to hear Sally will be talking about compassion for the academics too!

Totally agree that we need to design inclusive assessments. In my mind we also need to be careful about how we articulate learning outcomes to allow for flexibility of assessment - but with PRSBs this can be more tricky.

Cramming marking within a pre-specified turn-around time is not an ideal practice as this affects staff physically with increased stress levels and also affects feedback quality. This is particularly problematic for staff dealing with large cohorts and requires more assessors and a standardised marking and feedback process in place.

Despite recent incentives to change, REF continues to dictate effort and time allocated to learning and teaching?

I wonder if you could say something about shifting mindset/evidence base re equivalencies? eg the pressure to convert a 30min presentation to 30min video - we've been arguing that the video could be much shorter and still have the same indicative effort for students. How do we get people to shift away from the X credits must = X length.

One issue of choice and variety in assessments: students feel unpractised at completing such assessments and may feel more anxious at confronting them as a result. They're used to exams and essays, so can feel less stressed by them, perhaps. How do we advise academics to prepare their students? Will academics need to focus on less content in order to develop students' ability to tackle innovative, creative assessments? Will staff have to produce lots of exemplars of good work?

Staff need support too

We've found that increased choices hasn't fazed the students but the staff have needed a lot of reassurance and development to support them through the change.

Some thoughts on plagiarism

We also have lots of staff who are concerned about unfair means in online or open-book assessment. How can we persuade them that exams or 'exam conditions' aren't the only way to avoid 'cheating'?

Breaking down assessments is both a safeguard against plagiarism, and pedagogically sound.

Cyber invigilation resources might be better invested in people and staff development!

The BAME attainment gap

There has been some debate about assessment and a difference in performance based on ethnicity. Coming from an education system which is very diverse - I don't subscribe to this - what are your thoughts?

We have initial data that suggests that moving MCQ exams online and presenting them as extended quizzes helped to close the BAME gap.

I was thinking more along the lines of my experience of a teacher and using all these types of assessment with all different types of students - and having good outcomes....

Anonymous marking

I've been trying to dissuade members of staff from embarking on research to determine whether anonymous marking has a positive impact on the degree awarding gap. My rationale is that my initial research proves that it doesn't. Have I not done enough research? Any indications to the contrary?

Employers' viewpoint

It can be really beneficial to work with employers to find out the sorts of skills that they might want students to have when they enter into employment and you can build the development of these into the assessment too. Unsurprisingly they don't necessarily want graduates to be able to memorise loads of stuff and pass exams...

Different approaches

Focus on the process of working through the assignment is as important as the finished product.

Students are familiar with certain assessment formats. Part of our strategy could be exemplars, class-based exercises to develop assessment literacy related to the different formats, also clarity on how the marking rubric applies to different assessment formats

The learning journey, with formative feedback, essential. Really love the idea of students reflecting on this journey.

Giving students examples of what their work could look like to set the standards is important for managing expectations on both ends.

Have you got any tips for supporting flexible assessments (not exams but presentations/portfolios/patchwork/case studies etc) at scale from the marker perspective?

Tips for less vocationally-focused disciplines: one assessment asked students to choose a poem not included in an edition and make a case to the publisher as to why it should be included in future editions. It challenged them to consider the criteria we use to evaluate poetry. The students chose brilliant examples including songs and spoken word poetry on

YouTube. Another example I've seen is to ask students to act as an editor of a historical text, making decisions about modernising spelling etc. and adding footnotes.

More transparent ways of working

Unhide the hidden curriculum! Be explicit - it's not spoon-feeding, it's just being open and honest!

For me compassionate assessment is also about more open practice (in line with pedagogy of care) where our thinking, purpose, value and acknowledging the nature of challenge is all made more explicit.