

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS
TAUGHT STUDENT EDUCATION BOARD
Leeds Expectations for Assessment and Feedback

Background

Since 2012 when the HEA published *A Marked Improvement* (HEA, 2012), the Academy has developed an assessment transformation framework (HEA, 2014), arguing that improved assessment leads to:

- *“improved potential for student learning;*
- *increased student satisfaction;*
- *improved value for money;*
- *increased suitability of assessment methods to the outcomes of 21st century HE;*
- *fairer representation of student achievement;*
- *greater confidence in academic standards.”* (HEA, 2014, p.2)

and that transforming assessment can have valuable implications which can promote consideration of:

- *“the balance of formative and summative assessments at the module and programme level; with formative assessment thoroughly integrated within learning and teaching;*
- *the use of diverse assessment methods to improve validity, authenticity and inclusivity, thus maximising their relevance to students and focus on assessing programme level outcomes;*
- *the opportunities for self-assessment and peer-assessment within the learning and teaching process to enhance students’ understanding and trust in assessment;*
- *the design of assessment approaches to foster student development in academic literacies and an understanding of good academic practice.”* (HEA, 2014, p.2)

In the past five years, the University has embarked on a major curriculum transformation project, the Leeds Curriculum affecting all UG programmes of study. Whilst Assessment and Feedback scores on the National Student Survey and our own Programme Survey have seen improvements, it remains the area most in need of focused effort, which may need to be radical. Globally, there have been major changes in the way students and people generally access and engage with information, presenting opportunities but also critical challenges with respect, for example, to academic integrity. The University wishes to develop new programmes, grow overseas activity in student education and must be sensitive to changes in the way disabled students are supported.

Acknowledging internal and external environments, the following sets out a Vision and Expectations for Assessment and Feedback at the University of Leeds. Both would be consistent with HEA’s aims with respect to assessment and feedback, the University’s work on the Leeds Curriculum, Digital Learning, and aims for programme developments and student support.

For the University of Leeds

Previous initiatives have focused on specific and single areas of assessment and feedback. The new expectations reflect but supersede all previous documents to create a holistic and complete approach to assessment and feedback at Leeds. Subsequent to approval of the Expectations, it will be necessary to

identify the measures necessary to provide assurance that particularly the attributes are demonstrated. The expectations assume that e-assessment will be a significant component in delivering the Vision, and that programme development, particularly interdisciplinary, blended, online and distance will be a significant imperative. The Expectations apply equally to UG and taught PG assessment and feedback; to extend further to PGR would require detailed discussion with key representatives from the PGR community.

‘Vision’

Assessment and feedback to successfully meet externally and internally measured thresholds, demonstrated by significant improvements in NSS and programme survey satisfaction with assessment and feedback, through embedding strong and consistent pedagogic practice with a long term commitment to maintain dynamism of the assessment culture across the Institution.

Principles

The strategy reflects the Vision must be robust and fit for purpose, yet sufficiently flexible to allow it to adapt in response to the changing higher education environment, demands and expectations of the 21st Century.

Assessment and feedback at the University of Leeds will be grounded in the Leeds Principles of Assessment and Feedback and specifically the strategy to achieve the Vision will consider:

- the nature of our assessment regimes, structures and processes;
- how we measure achievement;
- our assessors, and the expectations we place upon them;
- the scholarship and flexibility of our assessors;
- the understanding and confidence our students have of our assessment;
- the nature and value of all forms of feedback;
- how students engage with feedback to promote learning and achievement;
- the distinctive features of education at Leeds;
- assessment more effectively targeted at programme level learning outcomes;
- a level of appropriate assessment that is targeted, appropriate, relevant and timely;
- less assessment but with assessment more effective and targeted at learning outcomes;
- the use of appropriate, evidence-based tools to support valid, reliable and transparent assessment;
- and to promote the intellectual curiosity, creativity and ambition of students.

Our assessment and feedback environment is characterised by a set of **attributes**, be delivered for specific **purposes** and acknowledge relevant **contexts**.

Expectations

Attributes – the characteristics of assessment and feedback at the University of Leeds: *Validity, Inclusivity and Sensitivity; Reliability; Relevance/Applicability; Transparency; Readiness; Informative; Partnership*

- Validity, Inclusivity and Sensitivity: assessment should serve to demonstrate achievement or otherwise of learning outcomes. It should be differentiated as assessment for learning and assessment of learning but in each case be demonstrably linked with learning outcomes. Assessment must be sensitive to different learning needs, inclusive, culturally sensitive and must be able to differentiate between levels of achievement. In some circumstances, assessment may need to be tailored or personal to the student.
- Reliability: assessment must be replicable and rigorous.

- **Relevant/Applicable:** assessment should where realistically possible, resemble the sorts of task that might be required of a flexible, reflective and adaptable graduate in the discipline. This clearly will depend on level and readiness, but the aim should be that at least towards the end of a programme of study, assessment should be sufficiently authentic to prepare students for [graduate] employment, further study or research.
- **Transparency:** assessment tasks must be understood by students and staff, aligned with collectively agreed and shared assessment criteria, which should relate explicitly to learning outcomes, and where possible be specific to the assessment tasks set.
- **Readiness:** assessors (be they academic, PGR, or external assessors) should be appropriately trained, and students should be appropriately inducted in order to be prepared for, and confident within, the assessment culture at the University of Leeds. This readiness extends to both assessment formats (e.g. essays, examinations, etc) and to the delivery tools to support such formats, such as e-assessment. Training should consider calibration, benchmarking and standard-setting where appropriate.
- **Informative:** assessment should lead to feedback which is useful to students to support learning (where they are now) and promote achievement (how to progress), and to assessors to ensure alignment with grades or marks, and possibly to other stakeholders (e.g. employers).
- **Partnership:** assessment and feedback is a joint activity, between students and staff, serving purposes for both in maintaining and strengthening standards, confidence, and rigour. Peer- and self-assessment are valuable tools to be considered.

Purposes – the reasons for undertaking assessment and feedback:

- to promote engagement and learning in our students;
- to promote good academic practice, characterised by academic integrity, fairness and critical thinking;
- to inform our students about their progress in achieving programme learning outcomes;
- to inform us about the progress of our students in their academic development and in achieving programme learning outcomes;
- to support student satisfaction with their learning experiences;
- to confirm standards are comparable with those elsewhere in the sector and required by; benchmarks and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs);
- to confirm that student learning and achievement is aligned with FHEQ descriptors;
- to reinforce the strength of the programme of study as the major unit of consideration and to support staff understanding of programme design;
- and to demonstrate the distinctive features of education at Leeds (such as the Leeds Curriculum).

Leeds is committed to providing an exceptional student experience across all of our disciplines. To deliver this experience, the Leeds Expectations for Assessment and Feedback must recognise the contexts that influence us.

Contexts – assessment and feedback must reflect the internal and external influences that apply at the level of the programme, discipline and institution:

- different disciplinary requirements as set out in Benchmark statements and by PSRBs where relevant;

- digital learning and literacies more widely to reflect the changing nature in the way people access and engage with information;
- transnational education as creative programme developments extend further overseas;
- value for money as students increasingly meet the costs of their education;
- and assessment and feedback considerations in the wider HE sector and specifically work undertaken under the auspices of the HEA.

The 'Leeds Expectations for Assessment and Feedback' were formally approved by the Taught Student Education Board at its meeting held on 29 June 2016.

The Assessment Strategy Group is confident that the 'Leeds Expectations for Assessment and Feedback' defines a shared assessment context and promotes the larger narrative on assessment and feedback, both internally and externally.

Faculties and schools will be consulted and asked how they could evidence the expectations, with a particular focus on the agreed Attributes, and highlighting appropriate additional purposes and contexts. The responses will be considered by the Assessment Strategy Group, to help inform the development of a framework by which to evidence the expectations.

Guidance for faculties and schools to accompany the 'Leeds Expectations for Assessment and Feedback' is now available along with an example assessment mapping template.

References

The Higher Education Academy (2012). *A Marked Improvement: Transforming assessment in higher education*. HEA: York.

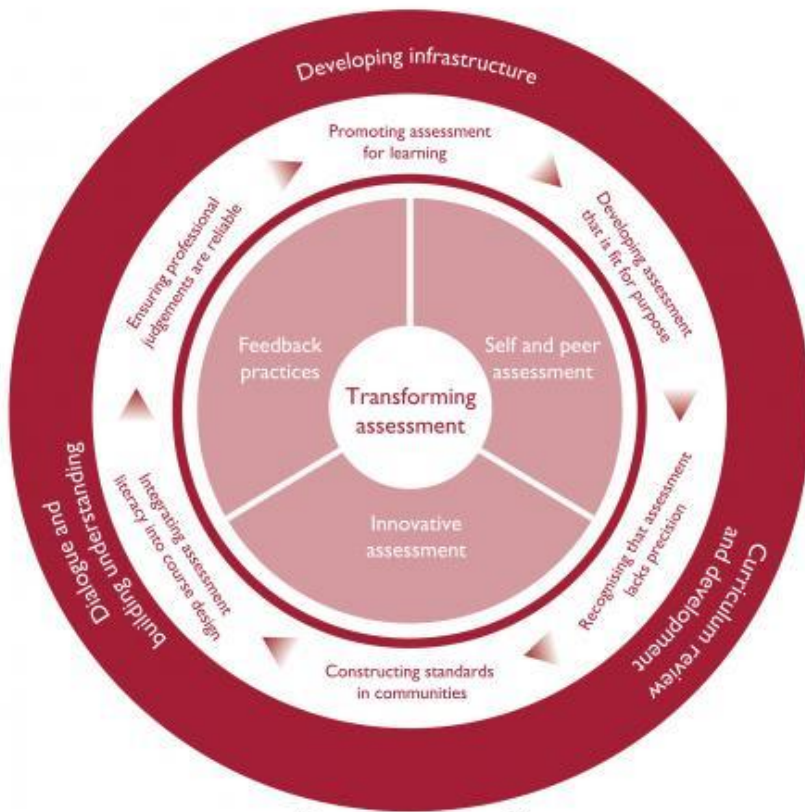
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