

# ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK TOOLKIT

## ASSESSMENT DESIGN

### DEVELOPING STUDENTS' ASSESSMENT LITERACY

**This guidance is linked to Principle 1 and 4 in the CU Assessment Strategy.**

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*...just as being literate enables one to read and appreciate Shakespeare's plays or Jane Austen's novels, so being assessment literate equips one with an appreciation of the purpose and process of assessment, which enables one to engage deeply with assessment standards, to make a choice about which skill or which area of knowledge to apply, to appreciate which are/are not appropriate to a particular task, and why. (Price, Rust, O'Donovan and Handley, 2012, p.10)*

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## INTRODUCTION

Much effort has been spent on ensuring the reliability of the assessment process in Higher Education, with the emphasis on clear and explicit criteria, as well as the alignment of assessment with course learning outcomes. While these are laudable objectives, research such as Francis (2008), Price et al. (2012) and Smith et al. (2013), and our own experience often tell us that these are not enough to communicate clearly to students what is required from them in any given assessment tasks. There are often complex and tacit standards, and criteria that are difficult to define explicitly through an assessment brief or rubric alone.

There is a need to move away from the passive student engagement model of simply presenting students with explicit criteria and expecting them to understand the standards required. A more active student engagement model where students are given the support and opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and competencies to self-regulate their progress and make academic judgements through a shared understanding with their tutors is needed.

To achieve this active engagement, assessment literacy is the key. Assessment literacy is defined to be an 'enabler or gateway/threshold' putting students in 'a position to progress, increase their learning and perform more effectively'. It encompasses the following:

- an appreciation of assessment's relationship to learning;
- a conceptual understanding of assessment (i.e. understanding of the basic principles of valid assessment and feedback practice, including the terminology used);
- understanding of the nature, meaning and level of assessment criteria and standards;
- skills in self-and peer assessment
- familiarity with technical approaches to assessment (i.e. familiarity with pertinent assessment and feedback skills, techniques, and methods, including their purpose and efficacy); and

- possession of the intellectual ability to select and apply appropriate approaches and techniques to assessed tasks (not only does one have the requisite skills, but one is also able to judge which skills to use when, for which task).

(Price et al. 2012, p. 10-11)

The list above might seem overly exhaustive, however, they are essentials for our students to comprehend 'the rules surrounding their assessment' (Smith et al., 2013) that are not often explicitly inducted to them. Research such as O'Donovan et al., (2004); and Smith et al. (2013) also found that the development of students' ability to judge their own work improve their students' learning outcomes.

The next section provides some practical examples of how to develop students' assessment literacy.

### HOW TO DEVELOP STUDENTS' ASSESSMENT LITERACY?

- The course team needs to have developed a shared understanding of the criteria and standards across the course and develop explicit opportunities for the development of assessment literacy within their course-based assessment strategy. E.g. are there formative assessment opportunities for students to gain and apply feedback? Are there specific assessment support sessions?
- Induct students into the role of assessment and feedback in relation to their learning, early on in the course. For example, include in your induction to the course the different types of assessment used in the course and the rationale for them. Some institutions have developed assessment and feedback leaflets, videos and or induction sessions where the purpose and rationale of different assessment methods. The process is explained to students during the first few weeks of the course or at specific points on courses, e.g. when introducing new and innovative assessment methods.
- Provide opportunities for students to actively engage with assessment standards, in order to develop 'assessor-like' thinking. (Sambell, 2010). For example, small group and tutor lead discussion of assessment briefs and criteria, practice marking using previous students' or mock assignment work, or even a simple ranking exercise using a set of rubrics. The prerequisite is a clear assessment brief and rubric that is shared with students (Please see guidance document on assessment brief, criteria and rubrics for more information).
- Repeated opportunities in using criteria through self and peer review exercise supported by continuous dialogue and discussion with students about assessment standards throughout the course. Similar to the development of language literacy, repeated practice is needed in order to become 'fluent' in assessment practices. For example, through the use of in-class activity followed by formative assessment tasks.
- Provide opportunities for students to incorporate formative feedback into their work and demonstrate how they have improved their work. E.g. use of self-evaluation forms or a simple reflective box highlighting feedback that has been incorporated in their summative work.
- Develop community of practice amongst students. E.g. use of second/third year students as assessors for first year students' formative work/in-class presentations or encourage self-generated learning groups.

## REFERENCES

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