

Case Study Title: From design to delivery: the inclusive assessment journey on the University of Aberdeen PGDE programmes

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Institution: University of Aberdeen

Subject area: Initial Teacher Education

Programme/Course: Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE)

Module/Unit: all

SCQF Level: Level 10

Assessment Name: all

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1. How would you summarise your practice case study?

Our case study pertains to assessments on our PGDE Primary and Secondary programmes at the University of Aberdeen, and the ways in which they have been designed, implemented and reviewed with inclusion and accessibility as core underpinning principles.

2. Why did you develop or enhance your assessment and what was your rationale?

During academic year 2018-2019, we worked on re-shaping and re-designing our programmes in preparation for their reaccreditation, and a core component of this was embedding inclusion and accessibility across all assessment design and assessment practices. We worked in collaboration with teachers, head teachers, representatives from local authorities, current and former students as well as our programme teams to consider the content, format and accompanying practices that would ensure our assessments were purposeful, supportive, flexible and inclusive of all. We worked collaboratively with partners to co-construct the architecture of the assessments, such as task descriptors, rubrics and accompanying guidance (Bovill, 2022).

Since then, we have implemented, continually reviewed, and enhanced our assessment practices, always evaluating them against our core principles of inclusion and accessibility.

This is particularly important for us on the PGDE programmes because of our diverse student cohort: our students have all undertaken undergraduate studies, but across a wide spectrum of academic disciplines at a wide range of academic institutions

around the world. Our students have a diverse range of backgrounds, contexts and protected characteristics and we wanted to ensure our assessments were designed with the needs of *all* learners in mind from the outset.

Furthermore, as teacher educators, a key feature of our practice is to model inclusion for our students, supporting them to bring inclusive approaches into their own practice in schools. Through inclusive design, we model to students the kinds of thinking processes and creative approaches they can take with their own learners in the classroom.

This principle of inclusion through design rather than inclusion through adjustments aligns with the work of researchers such as Nieminen (2023), who advocate for inherently inclusive assessments as an expected norm.

3. What enhancements or changes did you implement in assessment in making this more innovative, diverse or inclusive of diverse learner cohorts?

We made use of a number of key principles to shape our assessments and the practices which surround them:

- a) **Authenticity** – Our assessments link directly to practice and to students’ teaching placements, to ensure the relevance and value of assessments are clear to all, thus enhancing engagement with them. For example, students are asked to reflect critically on their own teaching practices, critically evaluate practices they observe, and make plans to enhance their own future teaching.
- b) **Compassion** – Our assessment timeline is designed to take into account competing pressures and student needs around placements, childcare, part-time work, specific learning differences, etc. We aim to proactively anticipate and mitigate against workload pinch-points by designing timelines in an inherently compassionate manner and ensuring extensions are available as required.
- c) **Choice and variety** – Students have a choice of approach with regards to their assessment, a choice of topic in many cases and a choice as to how they receive feedback (written or recorded verbal feedback). Alongside this choice, we provide exemplification and small group tutorials to ensure students are equipped to make informed decisions.
- d) **Clarity and communication** – We make use of clearly designed and constructed support tools such as clear rubrics and detailed assessment descriptors, which

are shared from the beginning of programmes and discussed with students explicitly. All assessments are explicitly discussed in assessment lectures and all task descriptors, guidance etc. written in student-friendly language and shared in multiple formats. We use a clear, standard feedback template for written feedback across the whole of the School of Education, to maximise clarity and consistency.

- e) Support for academic skill development – We offer Q&A sessions on all assessments, and workshops on academic writing as a built-in part of the programme. We offer recorded videos on discipline-specific skills (e.g. how to define key terms; how to reference sources, etc.) and collaborate with our Student Learning Service to offer optional literacy support. Scaffolding and skill-building are explicit parts of the programme design, and we explicitly name them as such to ensure students are metacognitively aware of their own professional and academic development.

4. What informed your approach to the changes you made, e.g. student feedback, observations of student difficulty, insights from literature or research findings, assessment pass rates etc.?

Our School of Education has a tradition of research and practice grounded in inclusion (Florian and Rouse, 2009) and the concept of inherently inclusive learning and teaching for all rather than adaptations for some. This broadly aligns with Universal Design for Learning principles, which also inform our approaches (CAST, 2024).

Alongside this, we make use of robust quality assurance and quality enhancement approaches, including strong student engagement with representative meetings and internal teaching review processes, to inform our ongoing work. We recently engaged with an institutional assessment review (Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment, or TESTA), using staff and student feedback to scrutinise and adapt all assessment approaches.

5. What key changes have you seen as a result of this change to your assessment practice?

Student feedback regarding assessments is very positive. Students see the value of the assessments on the PGDE programmes and generally feel supported in undertaking them. Pass rates are consistently extremely high.

6. How are you evaluating the effectiveness of these enhancements or changes implemented?

We make consistent use of review mechanisms such as student-staff liaison committee meetings, student feedback forms, external examiner feedback, internal review processes and team meetings to ensure ongoing enhancement of assessment content, design and implementation. We undertake research around assessment and accessibility within the teams (e.g. Young, 2024; Grieve and Hendry, ongoing) and use this to inform practices.

7. Tips for practitioners:

Do you have any tips for practitioners wanting to make similar enhancements or changes in their assessments that you could add in?

- a) Consider inclusion and accessibility at the design stage of all assessments
- b) Avoid in-person timed assessments unless fundamentally required
- c) Consider co-creation of assessment briefs and rubrics and ensure these are written in student-friendly language and shared timeously
- d) Consider opportunities for embedding choice (of mode of assessment, of topic, of mode of feedback, etc.) and consider how these choices will be supported
- e) Consider authenticity in the design of assessments, ensuring that the assessment process meaningfully benefits the students' learning
- f) Consider opportunities for evidence-informed review and enhancement, building this into assessment cycles