Are there other ways to start thinking about assessment?

This document is intended to provide some reflective prompts to help you focus and clarify your starting point for assessment practice development. The items suggested are not exhaustive but we hope provide some food for thought.

What is motivating you to think about transforming assessment?

- Desire to provide more formative assessment
- Catering for increasing student numbers
- Preparation for Teaching Programme Reviews
- Desire to engage my students more with the course
- Trying to make the assessment process digital
- Concerns about marking robustness & reliability
- Current approaches need invigoration
- Seeking to introduce greater variety
- Concerns about NSS scores
- Move to online teaching
- Make assessment tasks more authentic
- Allow for flexibility of time, place, or style
- Finding ways to avoid re-sits
- Hoping to offer greater student choice

What is it, specifically, that you hope to achieve?

- Provide richer feedback
- Encourage students to engage with, and act upon, feedback
- Develop self-assessment and reflection
- Better overall course evaluations
- Promote more interaction between students
- Promote student time and effort on task
- Save staff teaching time
- Reduce the number of assessment tasks
- Enable more students to take the course
- Move away from a traditional exams
- Increase mean score for the class
- Develop a digital assessment workflow
- Actively assess aspects of generic graduate attributes not just discipline specific items
- Ensure that students have experienced a variety of assessment tasks
- Better alignment of assessment to course objectives
- Plug an identified skills gap

What do your students seek from assessment?

- To get the highest possible mark
- To pass with minimum effort
- To be stretched and challenged
- To gain new skills useful for employment
- To demonstrate engagement with the course
- To be asked to do things that feel meaningful and worthwhile
- To be engaged through fun and exploration
- To work collectively in solving problems
- To check progress compared to peers or recognised standards of achievement
- For effort to be recognised and valued
- To be rewarded for rejecting the easy option
- To be able to get help and support if needed
- For mistakes to be allowable, even desirable, and reflection encouraged
- For originality and creativity to be fostered
- To be allowed a choice about what, when or how the assessment happens

Online toolkit available at  http://www.ed.ac.uk/iaf/transfomring assessment
Are you making any assumptions? Why? How valid are they?

- Group or peer assessment is unreliable for generating individual marks?
- Invigilated exams are the only way to be sure who is doing the work?
- Moderation is a reliable way to ensure equity?
- Each module requires a discrete exam to be awarded credit
- Peer assessment is rarely suitable for summative tasks?
- Computer marked assignments can only be used for checking basic knowledge?
- It’s best to avoid giving borderline marks?
- Course design should involve only academics?
- Using open online assessment cannot be a rigorous approach to summative assessment?
- Assessment technologies are more trouble than they are worth?

You can’t transform assessment without examining your course design.

What are the broad aims of your course/programme?

- What is the underlying pedagogy or model for your course?
- How will you ensure the assessment(s) will be aligned with course objectives?
- How will you ensure the assessment(s) will be aligned with the learning activities?
- What opportunities will you provide for formative assessment?
- What opportunities will you provide for feedback?
- What are the key cognitive approaches the course aims to foster?
- Where are strategic priorities such as social responsibility reflected in your course?
- Which graduate attributes are fostered by your course?
- How much is your course intended to challenge and stretch the students?
- How independent do you expect the learners to be?

Assessment issues you might wish to consider

- Do you need to assess any practical skills?
- Do you need to be able to assess the processes followed/used by students?
- Should the assessment model real life contexts?
- Should the assessment be about demonstrating a way of thinking or a capability?
- Is a time-limited assessment appropriate?
- Is an open book assessment more appropriate in an Internet age?
- What type of assessments have the students already undertaken?
- Could (parts of) this assessment be shared with another course?
- Could the students decide when they feel ready to be assessed?
- Can the students negotiate/select part of the assessment task?
- How will you ensure students have an opportunity to reflect and build on formative feedback?
- How confident are you that you are assessing what you intend to assess?
What sort of problems might I encounter?

- Students apprehensive about unfamiliar activities
- Colleagues sceptical about deviating from routine
- External examiners who question a new approach
- Physical spaces geared for traditional activities
- Arranging additional training for invigilators
- Finding practice time (for you and your students)
- “The regulations” being assumed to prohibit new approaches
- Getting that bit of extra support/resource to pilot and get going

Characteristics of good assessment strategies

- The students can see the merit in the assessment and can engage with it
- They capture something worth learning, not just something easy to measure
- They promote valid inferences
- They support diverse student learning styles
- There is some provision for student choice
- They lead to the provision of feedback (for the student and for the course team)
- They align to the resources available, including student time

Involving your students

- Know your students, be realistic about their prior experience and skills
- Be open with your students that this is an innovation, seek and listen to their feedback
- Offer introductory, experimental and practice sessions
- Be willing to change your plans in response to student input
- Give students information about where and how they can get help if they need it
- Keep stressing how the learning activities you have designed lead into and align with the assessment
- Be a facilitator for their learning journeys, rather than always steering the boat
- Invite students to be co-designers of assessments and criteria
- Embed opportunities to improve independent research skills

Practical aspects to plan

- How will colleagues and prospective course participants know about the changes proposed?
- Do you need to request changes in rooms or timetables for classes or assessments?
- Which parts of the assessment process should be digital? Could it be 100% digital?
- Where possible pilot in advance with small groups and learn from what happens
- Plan your evaluation strategy in parallel with the transformation itself
- Do you need to be able to cater for increasing student numbers?
- Do you need to any published course description information?
- Does anyone need to agree/authorise your transformation?
- Make sure you include opportunities for students to practise
- Allow twice as much time as you think you will need
- Identify your targets and deadlines
- Test absolutely everything in situ

Always ensure, Never Assume

- That marking criteria are clear to all involved
- That assessment and its supportive processes are fair and equitable
- That feedback is prompt, meaningful and appropriately detailed
- That the learner understands the feedback

Online toolkit available at http://www.ed.ac.uk/iad/transforming as
Things you can do

- Create assessments that hinge on collaboration and peer feedback
- Empower students to seek feedback proactively
- Provide students with tools for self-reflection e.g. assignment exemplars
- Develop exemplars that illustrate marking thresholds and how they correlate with marking criteria
- Share information (such as learning analytics) with students to allow them to compare progress
- Provide opportunities for students to develop an understanding of their personal skills, attributes and experiences
- Use industry contacts to help design relevant and authentic assessments. Invite industry contacts to speak or form a discussion panel related to assessment plans
- Look for programme or school synergies across organisational boundaries
- Design variety into the formats of assessment and feedback
- Get learners to design tests and prepare answers

What will you do with the information collected?

- Make further changes to the course/assessment
- Analyse where a process needs to change
- Use it to contribute to a teaching programme review
- Present it for discussion at a board of studies or a learning & teaching committee
- Argue for additional resource in the future
- Try to persuade colleagues to try something similar
- Reflect on it privately
- Use it as the foundation for an application for a Principal’s Teaching Award
- Use as evidence in your own cpd portfolio
- Offer it as an exemplar in the IAD case studies collection
- Publish your findings in an educational journal

This resource was created at The University of Edinburgh as part of the HEA funded Transforming Assessment Project.

This document represents a snapshot of a more detailed online resource. The online version includes more questions and ideas for consideration, and provides links to detailed examples, resources and academic articles expanding and explaining these bulleted suggestions.

Online toolkit available at http://www.ed.ac.uk/ia/transforming assessment