**Assessment: for much more than awarding a mark**

**Examples of practice from ODL**

### Online Assessment Portfolio

- Innovative online discussion forums are tailored to each course and contribute to 40% of the course marks.
- Discussions can enhance engagement, allow sharing of practice and co-creation of content. Giving everyone a voice develops an inclusive learning environment.
- Examples of assessed discussion activities:
  - Open questions for free discussion (only with small groups)
  - Short summary postings from each student, with responses from others and followed by wider discussion
  - Summary postings are used to share case studies, interview findings and website reviews for example
  - Students are assigned sides to argue in debates or stakeholder positions for role play
  - Discussions with invited expert alumnus or guest lecturers

### Written Assessment Portfolio

- Written assignments vary from course to course to develop student competence in a wide range of communication methods and purposes, and contribute to 60% of the course marks.
- Assessments usually have an element of choice so students can tailor the content to direct their own assessment journey, to make assessment relevant to their interests or employment. Assessing a variety of key writing styles prepares graduates for future in conservation sector.
- Examples of written assessments:
  - Essay, technical report and research paper
  - Grant proposal, abstract and letter to editor
  - Poster and infographic
  - Alternative powerpoint for lay/professional audience
  - Reflective writing and self-assessment

### What do we do?

**MSc Biodiversity, Wildlife and Ecosystem Health**

- Running for 8 years > 100 graduates
- Diverse student backgrounds, high proportion changing careers, all part-time, most combining study with work and many have specific interests.
- Short, intense courses need to convey complex topics and have maximum learning impact.
- Carefully developed learning materials are enhanced with discussion and peer engagement.
- Assessments take both written and online forms.

**Is a mark not enough?**

**What else can assessment do?**

- NO! Assessment is a journey not an end-point and feedback is key.
- Assessment can help build confidence, competence and key graduate attributes in our students.
- It can promote engagement and build community through sharing knowledge, ideas and practice.
- It can be the basis of an authentic, inclusive learning environment.

### What else can assessment do? (cont.)

- Assessment can help build confidence, competence and key graduate attributes in our students.
- It can promote engagement and build community through sharing knowledge, ideas and practice.
- It can be the basis of an authentic, inclusive learning environment.

**Evolution and Biodiversity**

**Case Study**

**Rationale:** this is the first assignment in the first course so we want it to be accessible, relevant to each student and organised to build a wide range of shared examples.

**Written Assignment**

- Students choose species of interest to them, giving them ownership and encouraging engagement
- The basic brief is very structured and simple, giving weaker students or those new to this field a chance to succeed (inclusive) and build confidence
- Ways to gain higher marks are signposted so experts can explore the topic in greater depth and demonstrate their abilities

**Online Assignment**

- Students present a summary post about their species and peer discussion follows. Sharing examples encourages collaborative learning and builds community as people get to know each other
- Small groups create an inclusive environment where all can contribute and experts can shine

**Conservation Ethics**

**Group Research Project**

**Rationale:** this is the final course in year 1 and we want students to develop relevant research skills and encourage collaborative working.

**Online Assignment**

- Small groups discuss and develop a research question and agree a research strategy, working collaboratively so that everyone has an input and data is shared. This prepares graduates to build similar working arrangements.
- Inexperienced students learn from peers, and experienced students share practice. Close group working develops online community

**Written Assignment**

- Students used shared data to prepare an individual research paper, developing graduate skills in quantitative data analysis and scientific writing
- Inexperienced students can develop their understanding of how research is developed and published, and competent students apply prior learning and demonstrate potential

**Conservation Psychology**

**Research and Application**

**Rationale:** this is an elective course in a relatively new field. We want students to develop relevant research skills and apply their learning to a real-world problem.

**Online Assignment**

- Students conduct an interview using a semi-structured interview technique on a topic of their choice, then present their findings to the group for discussion
- Students develop confidence in conducting their own research, develop skills in qualitative data analysis and practice communicating their findings to their peers

**Written Assignment**

- Students are asked to use their learning to write a conservation campaign for a real organisation
- Students in the wider MSc programme are asked to propose an organisation/campaign that would be suitable, making this an authentic assessment for a real-life application that involves the whole MSc community