

You shall go to the ball...

The concept of assessment literacies and the importance of providing students with opportunities to develop their understanding of the assessment process and their ability to go about it in an empowered and proactive manner has been well rehearsed (e.g., Rust *et al.*, 2003; HEA, 2012).

However, it is also important that the tools they use, the tasks they are required to complete are well designed, fit for purpose and inclusive.

To-date, relatively little attention has been given to the impact of the design and presentation of assessed tasks, described as the 'Cinderella of the assessment cycle' by Gilbert and Maguire (2011).

Mind the gap...

Aspects of the design and presentation of an assessed task can profoundly affect students' ability to engage usefully with it, requiring them to expend valuable cognitive and emotional resources on understanding the task that would otherwise be better spent on completing it (Gilbert and Maguire, 2011).

Our experience suggests that students from widening participation backgrounds are likely to be at a particular disadvantage, with subsequent impacts on retention and academic success. This is exacerbated by such issues as the 'discourse gap' (Wilkins, 2005) between staff and students.

It's not you, it's me...

Students from widening participation backgrounds are more likely to attribute difficulties in understanding an assessed task to their own perceived shortcomings, with consequent impact upon their confidence and ability to engage with that task; others are more likely to situate the difficulties within the task itself and approach it in a more confident and empowered manner (Rochon and Knight, 2013).

Targeting students' experience of assessment

In order better to develop an understanding of the student experience of assessment and those affordances (Norman, 2013) of assessed tasks that either encourage or constitute barriers to effective engagement, an initial analysis of assignment briefs from first year modules in nursing and business degrees will be conducted.

This analysis will form the basis for interviews to be conducted with students from these subject areas of on their experience of these assessments and how they were designed and presented to them. Both cohorts are large and represent diverse populations from which representative samples may be drawn.

Where are we now

This is the first phase of a series of planned investigations into students' experience of assessment.

Further phases aimed at better understanding the affordances of assessed tasks and how these impact upon students ability to engage with them are planned.

Among these are prototyping activities around identified features of effective assessment design, using well-established principles of user-centred design.

Moving forward

The project represents one of a range of assessment related activities planned at Bucks in the coming academic year that have derived from Bucks New University's involvement with the TAPS scheme (HEA, 2014).

These include assessment literacy development projects (e.g., developing a repository of exemplars of student work for use in teaching and learning activities and research activities around self and peer assessment) and an engagement with feedback practices across the institution, among others.

