Assessment Issues

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1. Problems/issues we are trying to address/overcome:

1.1 Failure to ensure the assessment of the espoused programme outcomes.
1.2 Atomisation of assessment focused, at the micro-level, on what is easy to assess; failure to integrate and assess complex, higher-order learning; the sum of parts not making the intended whole.
1.3 Students and staff failing to see the links/coherence of the programme.
1.4 Modules are too short to focus and provide feedback on slowly learnt literacies and/or complex learning.
1.5 Students and staff adopting a 'tick-box' mentality, focused on marks, engendering a surface approach to learning.
1.6 Tendency to assume that 'one size fits all' when it comes to module assessment (with implications regarding cultural differences and students with disabilities).
1.7 Overuse of (institutional) rules focused on standardisation that impede innovative development of progressive and integrative assessment.
1.8 Too much summative assessment, leading to overworked staff, and inability to 'see the wood for the trees' in the accumulated results.
1.9 Questionable statistical practices*.

2. Major problems/issues in what we are trying to achieve:

2.1 Student (lack of) motivation to undertake solely formative work leading to loss of the potential benefits of coursework, and possible reduction in student engagement and lack of feedback on progress
2.2 Persuading, and perhaps finding resources for, module/unit leaders to work together to take a programme view
2.3 Lack of a core framework of modules within some programmes to provide a common student learning experience on which to base integrative programme based assessment.
2.4 How to assess integrated learning from across units/modules
2.5 Credit structures linked to units/modules and assessment regulations
2.6 Possibly implications for academic year structures
2.7 Ending up with 'high-risk' assessment

3. Potential benefits, if successful:

3.1 Integrated learning and assessment at the meta-level, ensuring assessment of programme outcomes

3.2 Students taking a deep approach to their learning
3.3 Increased self and peer-assessment, developing assessment literacy
3.4 Greater responsibility of the student for their learning and assessment, developing self regulated learners
3.5 Reduced summative assessment workload for staff (especially connected with QA)
3.6 Possibly smaller number of 'specialist' assessors leading to greater reliability
3.7 Possible greater opportunity to allow for 'slow-learning'
3.8 Possible link to, and enhancement of, PDP, leading to greater preparedness for CPD processes after graduation

*Questionable statistical practices

There are a number (Rust, 2007) which include:

- The fact that, usually, outcomes judged against different criteria are then aggregated together into one single number/mark which obscures the differing levels of attainment against each.
- Some marks may be what Sadler calls transactional and/or bestowed credits & debits (Sadler, 2009) – e.g. marks for attendance or penalties for something that has not been done – and have nothing to do with judgments of knowledge, skills or abilities
- The fact that these scores/marks for individual assignments are then added to others from other assignments, and further aggregated, and then this process is further repeated with scores/marks from different modules. This is done regardless of what they were assessing (and is essentially adding apples to pears) and regardless of what the range of marks were in any given case. These practices are statistically indefensible.
- These practices also operate ignoring what we know about the distortion of marks by the type of assessment (e.g. students are known to be more likely to score more highly on coursework than in examinations) and the actual subject discipline/s studied (Yorke et al, 2002; Bridges et al, 2002). Maths students, for example, are more than three times more likely to get a first than history students, and this is simply because good work in maths cab get 100% while good work in history may only get 72% but the central university system will treat these marks in exactly the same way, regardless of this fact.
- And it also well documented that the idiosyncratic institutional rules can cause up to a degree classification difference with the same set of student module outcomes (e.g. Armstrong et al, 1998)

Details of references are available on the PASS web site.