

Developing innovative assessment approaches for work-based learning and widening participation



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Description

The Institute established a Widening Participation sub-Committee of Senate (WPSC) in 2005 to monitor the WP strategy and action plan. Part of the work of the WPSC is to help support colleagues in developing inclusive pedagogical and assessment practices.



The Graduate Diploma in Professional Studies (GDPS) offers a wide range of accredited CPD modules, including outreach and distance modules where the learning takes place in schools. It contributes to widening participation through its flexible framework, which develops modules to fit in with the needs of schools and teachers. However, feedback from module participants and tutors have identified two key challenges; firstly creating an assessment framework that actively supports work-based learning whilst being accessible, inclusive and participatory and secondly the need to offer mixed

modes of learning that support innovative assessment practices.

As a result, a small working party was set up in 2004 –2005 to consider innovations in assessment in relation to award-bearing CPD modules.

There was a significant concern that current practices in assessment might serve to be exclusive and might impede teachers' participation in accredited CPD and in completing the assessment task. The Innovations in Assessment Working Party broadened its scope in 2005 –2006 to consider the work of colleagues across the Institute, particularly the work being developed through the restructured PGCE, to create the space for developing innovations in assessment in the context of the Institute's WP strategy.

This project supports the Innovations in Assessment Working Party by examining the assessment practices and frameworks being developed in relation to award-bearing CPD modules that support work-based learning. It evaluates the innovative approaches introduced on case study outreach modules, which take place in schools such as Sotogrande International School, where work-based learning is embedded in the culture of the school and highly valued.

The assessment practices being developed on the case study modules (for example, on-line

learning networks, peer group assessment, reflective journals and portfolios) are examined to consider how they contribute to work-based learning and widening participation.

The project explores ways in which to extend and develop such assessment practices further through the use of new technologies. Tutors' and students' experiences of these assessment practices are being explored through qualitative interviews.

The case study modules aim to enable teachers to draw on their learning in a way that explicitly contributes to their classroom practices, their students' learning as well as to the overall development plan of the school. The case study modules are likely to include:

- Teacher-as-Researcher
- Teacher-as-Author
- Supporting Young People's Learning
- Online Education and Training
- Managing a New Development
- Investigating Learning and Teaching



The project also involves conducting a comprehensive literature review of assessment practices in higher education to draw on the insights of colleagues who have been developing work in this area, including for example Brown and Glasner (1999), Crème (2003), Crème and Lea (2001) Falchikov (2005) and Schwartz (2002). This provides an important framework for analyzing the data from the project and offers further insights for the development of innovative assessment practices on accredited CPD modules.

Methodology

This qualitative project involves interviews with students and tutors participating in award-bearing CPD modules. The modules are being selected for their inclusive practices in pedagogy and/or assessment and the Responsible and Module tutors are being interviewed about the module design in relation to assessment and how students are supported in completing their assessment task(s).

Students are being interviewed about their experiences of assessment processes and what they find particularly challenging. They are also being asked to consider the ways that the assessment criteria and tasks supported work-based learning and contributed to their continuing professional development. In total, 6 different award-bearing CPD modules are identified, 12 tutors are being interviewed (2 per module) and interviews are conducted with 24-30 students (4-5 students per module). Additionally, all students on the 6 modules are being asked to keep reflective journals of their experiences of the assessment process.

Outcomes

This project aims to learn more about students' and tutors' experiences of different assessment practices. The project contributes to wider discussions about the links between assessment and widening participation (Lillis, 2001) to understand why some students feel excluded by or unable to participate in the assessment process.

This project identifies the structures and practices that support students in producing coursework and the processes that they value and recognize as useful to their continuing professional development, practice and critical understanding. It explores the relationship between the different assessment tasks and teachers' professional practice, making the links between theory and practice explicit.

The production of a comprehensive literature review on assessment in higher education is of significance in framing the data analysis. It also contributes to the work of the Innovations in Assessment Working Party to develop inclusive and participatory forms of assessment. Indeed, this project is particularly timely as the restructuring of the PGCE involves colleagues in new developments around assessment and so the findings from this project inform those changes.

The work is being disseminated in the following ways:

- Formal presentations and reports to the Widening Participation sub-Committee, CPD sub-Board and Innovations in Assessment Working Party
- Articles to be submitted to British Educational Research Journal and Teaching in Higher Education

- A seminar hosted by the WLE, Centre for Excellence
- End of project report, including a comprehensive literature review on assessment in higher education.

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