

# **Guide to Inclusive Learning and Teaching**



**Harper Adams  
University**

SEPTEMBER 2019

**Harper Adams University**  
**Guide to Inclusive Learning and Teaching**  
**Supporting the student journey, for *all* students**



Compiled by Lydia Arnold with advisory input from Jane Hill, Abigail Hind, Henry Keil and Jon Bentley.

4th Edition Revised August 2019.

# Contents

Introduction .....	4
Reasonable adjustments.....	5
Recognising diversity .....	6
Digital tools: The importance of making an accessible online environment .....	7
Microsoft accessibility checker .....	8
<b>Part 1: Creating Resources .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Presentations .....	11
Desktop checklist for creating accessible presentation slides .....	12
Sharing presentations on The Learning Hub .....	13
‘Must do’ checklist for teaching presentations .....	15
Produce accessible handouts and class resources .....	16
Desktop checklist for creating accessible handouts .....	17
‘Must do’ checklist for handouts .....	18
<b>Part 2: Make the most of The Learning Hub.....</b>	<b>19</b>
‘Must do’ checklist for Learning Hub Pages.....	23
<b>Part 3: Teaching for all.....</b>	<b>24</b>
Prior knowledge .....	25
Create engaging classes .....	26
Recording in Lectures.....	28
Inclusive language.....	29
Make space in a crowded curriculum.....	30
‘Must do’ checklist for teaching accessibly .....	31
<b>Part 4: Assessment .....</b>	<b>32</b>
Inclusive assessment.....	33
Planning assessments .....	34
Launching and supporting assessment.....	36
Focus on exams.....	36
Assessment criteria .....	36

What if I just can't design an assessment that meets everyone's needs? .....	37
Develop academic writing for success .....	38
Feedback .....	40
Formative assessment for feedback .....	40
Staged submissions .....	42
Summative feedback .....	44
'Must do' checklist for assessment and feedback .....	47
References .....	48

## Introduction

Inclusive teaching is teaching that is beneficial to the widest possible range of students. It is not about making changes to cater for a few students. Many of the methods employed in formal education are known to favour students with certain characteristics, but with increased diversity amongst the student population, teaching methods must be appropriate to enable **all** to succeed.

There is a legal obligation and moral duty to support all students who enter higher education. This requires us to ensure that methods of teaching and supporting learning are able to guide all Harper Adams University students to success. According to Gwen *et al.* (2017, p.5) “[inclusive] pedagogies should meet the diversity of learners’ needs, and should not create barriers for particular students or student groups”.

This booklet is intended to help tutors to think about how teaching and support can best address the needs of a diverse student population. It seeks to provide guidance, but also to encourage reflection and discussion. It is not intended to be entirely prescriptive; inevitably, for pedagogic reasons, alternative approaches to supporting students will sometimes be necessary. There are, however, a number of points that are a requirement of all staff at the university. **These points must be incorporated in to everyone’s practice to ensure fair access to learning.**

The essential points are signposted through the guide by use of this symbol:



These points are aggregated at the end of each section.

## Reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are bespoke arrangements that are put in place for students who require additional support or the adaptation of teaching or learning resources to ensure that they can access higher education and succeed. They include such things as providing extra time in examinations; the provision of specialist computer equipment; alternative assignment submission formats; an adapted timetable to ensure the distances between rooms are manageable (although noting that some rooms may still be inaccessible to some students); note takers in class; or, flexibility on punctuality requirements.

If teaching and support is inclusive then reasonable adjustments can be kept to a minimum. This is important because students themselves prefer to be included, rather than having attention drawn to any differences through adjustments. Being identified as 'different' can impinge both privacy and dignity. Moreover, there may be a significant financial cost to making reasonable adjustments, which could be avoided through inclusive approaches that anticipate diverse student needs.

**Reflect:** If your teaching or assessment practices involve an increasing or even static number of reasonable adjustment interventions, then this should be a trigger to ask 'how can I adapt my practice to become more inclusive and therefore avoid the need for reasonable adjustments?'. A static or increasing number of reasonable adjustments may be a sign that tutors are not anticipating student diversity. If year on year you have students needing extra time in examinations, ask 'is an exam really necessary to test the learning outcomes?'

## **Recognising diversity**

Students come in to higher education from a range of different backgrounds, some have undertaken A 'Level qualifications, some will have BTEC qualifications, some have completed an access course, while others have considerable industrial experience without formal qualifications. Some have rural backgrounds and have a great deal of exposure to applied practice, whereas others will not have this experience. Students may also have different cultural experiences and some will have specific disabilities. It is hugely important that tutors anticipate and plan for this diversity, which may be unfamiliar from their own time as a student. Planning for inclusivity should span the creation of resources, teaching and student engagement and assessment activities.

**Thought for diversity should be proactive and not reactive.**

## **Digital tools: The importance of making an accessible online environment**

It is a legal obligation that higher education providers make the digital environment as accessible as possible to all students with disabilities. In making the online environment accessible to students with specific disabilities there are benefits to all. For example:

- By 'tagging' images included in presentations, students with assistive technologies are able to understand what is being displayed as the screen reader uses the label provided to convey the information. At the same time, tagging images assists anyone who is browsing in a low bandwidth area with images switched off in their browser, as they can see what the image was mainly displaying.
- Clear labelling of topic headers in pages on The Learning Hub is very important to help students who are navigating web pages using their keyboard instead of a mouse, perhaps because of a disability related to fine motor skills. Clear headings are also very useful for students and staff who may be viewing pages on their phone or mobile device, as such signposting ensure key information can be more quickly located.

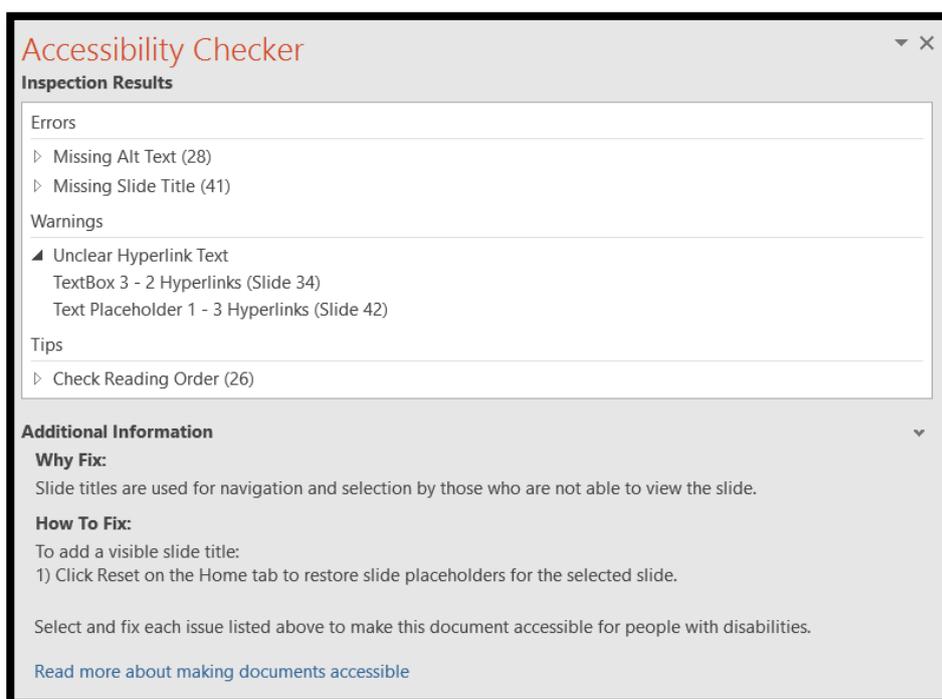
While legislation is driving changes for disabled students, these changes are clearly good for all!

## Microsoft accessibility checker

Any material posted online (including on The Learning Hub) should meet [legally enforceable standards](#) to ensure that it is accessible by the greatest possible number of people. One of the easiest ways to ensure material is accessible is to use the Microsoft Accessibility Checker tool. This diagnoses and helps correct issues that may render teaching material unusable to individuals with specific disabilities.

The precise steps to use the checker tool will vary according to which version of Microsoft software is being used e.g. Word 2019, PowerPoint 2016. Guidance exists widely online; a web search for your version of the software will show the exact steps you need. The [Microsoft Support Page](#) may be especially helpful.

Once you have run the accessibility checker tool, you will be presented with a list of errors and warnings (as shown in the picture here). It is essential that you address the errors and consider the warnings. The checker itself provides assistance on how to address any problems that are identified within your documents.



As you use the checker, it quickly becomes apparent how to avoid errors and warnings; the first few times of use could cause some challenges, but once you become familiar

with which practices are problematic, you can anticipate and avoid them as a matter of routine. By example 'errors' include PowerPoint slides lacking titles and images lacking text to describe what they show. The guidance in this booklet will help you to minimise the number of likely errors in any documents.

The checker tool is easy to use after a few practices and employing its recommendations has benefits for all. One member of academic staff reported: "The first few times I put my slides through the checker I thought it would be a nightmare; I quickly started to realise what was OK and what was not. The changes mean that my material looks better for all, it is less cluttered and I don't spend my time finding pointless images which add no value. It took a little time at first but once I was educated about what makes an accessible document I can just work in that way. The resulting resources are more professional and clearer for all students, not just those with disabilities".

## **Part 1: Creating Resources**

## Presentations

Presentations, through such media as PowerPoint, are often a core element of teaching, and as such it is important that the material shown on screen is accessible and engaging.

### Harper Adams Student Comments

- When slides are crowded I often struggle to pick out key information
- Using Power Point slides that are not overcrowded is really important especially being dyslexic I find the layout, amount and colours of slides really important
- Having a PowerPoint with only pictures isn't helpful because when I go back to the resources I can't recall what the pictures meant
- Using slides that are not overcrowded means it's easier to retain the information and get the points from the slides
- If lots of information is on a slide we need more time to write it down and to take it on board
- I sat through a one hour lecture with 67 slides in it – it's just too much information to take in. I had no time to make notes or take anything in

There are many different ways to use presentation slides, for example: As a lecture structure to help the tutor manage the class; as a means to illustrate points being spoken about by tutors; and, as a tool to bring together different stimulus such as video clips and activity instructions. The approach taken will depend on the type of class, the students' needs and the tutor's own preferences. Following some simple guidelines can ensure students are able to make the most of presentations. These are deliberately offered on a single page in-case it is helpful to print this and pin it near to your desk.

## Desktop checklist for creating accessible presentation slides

- Use an **accessible theme** i.e. simple slides with high contrast between text and background.
- Use **dark fonts on a light background**.
- Use the **built-in slide layouts** when creating a new slide e.g. 'Title and Content' rather than creating your own layout with text boxes.
- Make sure each slide has a meaningful and **unique title**.
- Use an **accessible font** such as Arial or Verdana, or any Sans-Serif font.
- Use a **font size of 24 or bigger**; test whether your slides can be easily read from the back of your teaching room.
- Provide **minimal text** on each slide to avoid cognitive overload as students try to listen and read simultaneously. Typically this would be no more than seven lines of bullet points.
- Make sure diagrams and images are of a **clear resolution** to be shown on a large screen without distortion; consider a quick visual check from the back of the room.
- **Avoid reds and greens** where possible within presentations or on whiteboards; these colours are less accessible to students with visual impairments.
- Add **meaningful hyperlink** text e.g. [BBC Education](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education) rather than <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education>
- Add **ALT text** to all visuals, unless they are purely decorative, so that images can be described by screen reader technology. Use online help to identify how to do this.
- Use bullet points, simple diagrams and pictures, but **avoid unnecessary content** such as animated decorative images and pre-set slide transitions.
- Consider the use of video clips to engage learners. If the clip is not available then you can commission short videos from the e-learning team – for example, a short interview with an industry expert or highlights from a field walk.
- **Store video on a media server** (e.g. Panopto, Kaltura, YouTube) and add a link to the slide which points to the resource (this will help ensure playback works on different devices).
- Where possible use the '**notes**' field to add **text-based explanation** to the slides: this will be useful for i) people viewing the presentation online ii) anyone using screen reader software, and iii) revision purposes.

While slides are an important tool for teaching, try to build activities in to each session or even just periods of rest for students to take in what they have heard at least every 15 minutes or so. While evidence does vary about how long people can concentrate for, we know that it is very challenging to fully concentrate for an hour long session. Don't just read from slides (yes, our students tell us this does happen!). Talk around points on the slide and add detail. Share insights, experiences, stories and anecdotes.

### **Sharing presentations on The Learning Hub**

All students can potentially benefit from being able to access presentation slides before and after class.

#### Harper Adams Student Comments

- We value the lecture presentation slides in advance of the class session so that we can print and/or download to our own devices to assist with note taking.
- Having the slides in advance will not put us off attending classes if the session is engaging.
- Not all staff put material on the Learning Hub, when things aren't there it can make revising difficult.
- We expect full electronic access to all presentations to support their learning and we are aware that students in other institutions have such access.
- We prefer PowerPoint files to PDF files, as they can be customised for viewing and printing.

Sharing lecture slides (almost universally PowerPoint slides) before a class is widely believed not to negatively impact attendance (see for example Worthington & Levasseur, 2015). Sambrook & Rowley (2010) found that non-attendance was most likely to be linked to other factors such as illness or crisis, and slides were likely to be a helpful facility rather than a root cause of non-attendance. Research shows that sharing electronic materials before a class is seen as helpful to students' preparation for learning, which in turn encourages attendance (Billings, Gagliardi & Mazor, 2007; Sambrook & Rowley, 2010).

In one study (Sambrook & Rowley, 2010), as a result of advanced publication of notes online students reported:

- i) Better opportunity to retain content in the lecture when they had prepared;
- ii) Being more organised in note taking;
- iii) Being better able to pick out areas of the lecture where they will need further explanation – these points were especially important for international students and students with dyslexia.

Student feedback at Harper Adams has shown that advanced release of lecture slides:

- Helps students to prepare for lectures e.g. by enabling unfamiliar words to be looked up or by highlighting areas where prior reading might be helpful;
- Enables students to use the slides in a way that helps their learning (e.g. to download and annotate on a tablet device).

Additionally “[b]y posting slides before lecture, students have the opportunity to prepare in advance for class and perhaps feel more comfortable in volunteering thoughts and opinions” (Babb & Ross, 2009, p.878). Where slides show particularly tricky content it may be helpful to add an audio explanation or to offer a screen recording. This is a very quick process and support is available online and through the e-learning team.

The evidence of the value of advanced publishing of class materials is compelling. At Harper Adams all lecture slides must be put on to the Learning Hub 24 hours before the session in native format (usually PowerPoint and never PDF). Where for pedagogic reasons this is inappropriate, or where presentations are used for visual/media material rather than as a session structure or précis of ideas for, it is advisable to offer a summary of the class, which will aid prior preparation and/or note taking. While 24 hours is the expected minimum, an earlier upload would be desirable. Leaving hidden slides in the uploaded presentation can be especially problematic for revision; wherever possible ensure all the slides are available to students.

Any concerns regarding intellectual property should not impede the sharing of resources with students. If you have concerns around this point please seek advice from the eLearning team.

It may sometimes be necessary to provide printed slides, where this is required:

- Slides should be readable with no more than six per page.
- Remove any background colours, which make printed reading difficult.

#### **'Must do' checklist for teaching presentations**

- ✓ Follow the guidance to support the production of accessible presentations.
- ✓ Publish all slides on The Learning Hub a **minimum** of 24 hours ahead of a session, to allow students to access the material to prepare for class.
- ✓ Check the digital accessibility of your slides, and resolve any errors, by using Microsoft's Accessibility Checker before using or uploading them.
- ✓ Publish slides in the native format (e.g. pptx) so that students can adjust them to suit their individual study patterns. Do not turn slides in to PDF format.

## **Produce accessible handouts and class resources**

Before designing a handout or in class resource it is useful to clarify its purpose. Is the handout to aid note taking? Is it being used as a summary document? Is it being used to stimulate discussion or prompt follow up reading? Clarifying the purpose can help to prompt reflection on the most appropriate layout and structure. Following some simple guidelines can ensure students are able make the most of class resources. These are deliberately offered on a single page in-case it is helpful to print this and pin it near to your desk.

## Desktop checklist for creating accessible handouts

- Use **accessible sans-serif fonts** such as Arial, Calibri or Verdana, and avoid ‘fancy’ fonts like *Bradley Hand* or *Lucida*. Also avoid serif fonts (i.e. those with small lines at the end of each character) such as Times New Roman or Courier. These fonts can be visually distracting.
- Use a **minimum** of font size 12.
- Use **dark font colours** with a **plain light background**.
- **Avoid garish or unnecessary colour**, and avoid colour to convey meaning (as this may not be universally understood, or accessible to assistive technologies).
- **Avoid clip art** to brighten up the handout.
- **Add meaningful hyperlink text** e.g. [BBC Education website](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education) rather than <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education> (these are very difficult for screen reading technology).
- Make use of ordered lists to structure long text including bulleted or numbered points, not blocks of text.
- When using tables **avoid split or merged cells**.
- **Add ALT text to all visuals** within text unless they are purely decorative.
- Use wide margins, and left alignment; **do not justify text** as this can make text more difficult to follow.
- **Don’t use upper case letters for whole words**.
- **Avoid abbreviations**, unless these are explicitly stated upon first use.
- Use **bold for highlighting** rather than italics or underlining.
- Keep plenty of space for note taking and annotation. **Line spacing should be a minimum of 1.5 lines**.
- Wherever possible **release handouts at the start of a module** so that students can prepare for classes.
- If printed handouts are needed ensure line spacing leaves room for annotation and use soft colour paper, ideally cream or grey, rather than white.

### **'Must do' checklist for handouts**

- ✓ Follow the guidance to support the production of accessible handouts.
- ✓ Review the digital accessibility of your resources, and resolve any errors, by using Microsoft's Accessibility Checker before using or uploading them.
- ✓ Publish all handouts or in class resources on The Learning Hub to allow students to access the material for preparation and revision.
- ✓ Publish resources in the native format (e.g. docx) so that students can adjust them to suit their individual study patterns, or so they can optimise the text layout for use of screen readers.

**Part 2: Make the most of The Learning Hub**

The virtual learning environment provides a significant opportunity to support students.

Key benefits of integrated use of The Learning Hub include:

- Materials for class can be shared so that students can access them in advance, for preparation, for example to look up key terms or to support note taking.
- Students can access class materials in a way which suits their study routines e.g. on a laptop and in ways that suit their own viewing preferences e.g. adjusting the font size or colour.
- Students can engage with additional activities to reinforce concepts introduced in class.
- Media rich content can bring concepts to life.
- Glossaries can make key terms accessible to all students.
- Scanned book chapters can ensure all students have access to key resources, even when off campus (library staff can assist with, and advise on, the appropriateness of scanning; all scanning for The Learning Hub must be commissioned through the library to ensure that it is undertaken in a way that is accessible and compliant with copyright requirements).
- A bank of frequently asked questions can be used to resolve common errors or to add clarity around assessment.
- Links and resources can provide engaging illustrations for students from different backgrounds which may be difficult to deliver in mixed classes.
- It is important to attend to design aspects of any online spaces to ensure that they are accessible, usable and even enjoyable. Sometimes our wish to brighten up pages and provide variety can appear to students as chaotic design; consistency across module spaces is very important as students are to get in to good study habits without the stress of having to look for things or get used to different approaches.

Ideas for good design are listed below.

- Ensure a tidy and consistent page layout (e.g. number of topics should match the number of teaching weeks).
- Make sure each topic header has a meaningful title ('Topic 1' is not helpful to students – whereas 'Topic 1: The Anatomy of a Pig' means information will be easier to locate).
- Organise content for example through appropriately labelled folders and the 'book tool'.
- Include a welcome message to the student group which gives key tutor information (name, contact details). Consider doing this through a friendly quick video to help students feel that they can approach you.
- Include an 'assessment centre' block within your module to gather key information about assessment. Placing this at the top of the module means that students will always know where to look for important assessment information. To see why this matters have a look at different modules and see how easy or difficult it is to find assessment information.
- An assessment centre might include a launch video, the assessment instructions or brief, an assessment forum for questions, a frequently asked questions page and tips collated as the module progresses. Such a facility helps students to quickly locate information; it can also save tutor time as questions can be answered for the whole group.
- Upload all learning resources, including teaching aids used in the classroom to help students prepare for classes.
- Avoid putting videos and pictures inside of tables as these are difficult for screen reader technologies.
- Consider whether activities such as post-lecture quizzes can be integrated in to the virtual space as a way of further engaging students with key content and particularly as a means of getting feedback on their performance.
- Consider whether media such as video or animations can reinforce tricky class concepts or may provide contextualised case studies for students who may have less experience. Videos can be commissioned from the eLearning team or linked from popular sites such as YouTube or Vimeo.

- Use a wiki to allow students to share good resources or key ideas between themselves. This may be tied in to a tutorial session e.g. everyone add a one sentence summary of their key learning point from this class – this can then be shared for revision.
- In the same way that teaching routines help students to be organised, consider employing a consistent strategy on how and when learning content is released, so students know when material will come online.
- If you have done in-class work, such as brainstorming, perhaps take a picture of the whiteboard board and add it to The Learning Hub space as a revision aid.

## **‘Must do’ checklist for Learning Hub Pages**

While there are many ways of using The Learning Hub, the following points represent the minimum standard for content.

### **Module pages on The Learning Hub must include:**

- ✓ An introduction from all tutors on the module containing their name, photo and contact details.
- ✓ An accessible page design with clear fonts, simple colours and logical organisation.
- ✓ Current module descriptor and teaching scheme.
- ✓ An assessment centre block within the first three ‘blocks’ on the page. This should contain the assignment brief or examination information and co-located support material.
- ✓ Where there is an examination, pages must include: i) Past examination papers, where available, that are made visible to students at least four weeks before the examination. ii) The rubric for forthcoming examinations (detailing the examination format), made available to students as soon as it is approved.
- ✓ Topic headers and file names must have a meaningful description.
- ✓ Images must always be ‘tagged’ with meaningful labels to make them readable by screen readers (using the ALT tag option when images are added to the virtual learning environment).
- ✓ An up-to-date reading list, ideally specific for individual topics.
- ✓ Where they are used, hyperlink text must be presented as meaningful text e.g. [BBC Education website](#) rather than <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education>
- ✓ Tables must not be used on Learning Hub Pages as these are inaccessible to reading software and mobile devices.

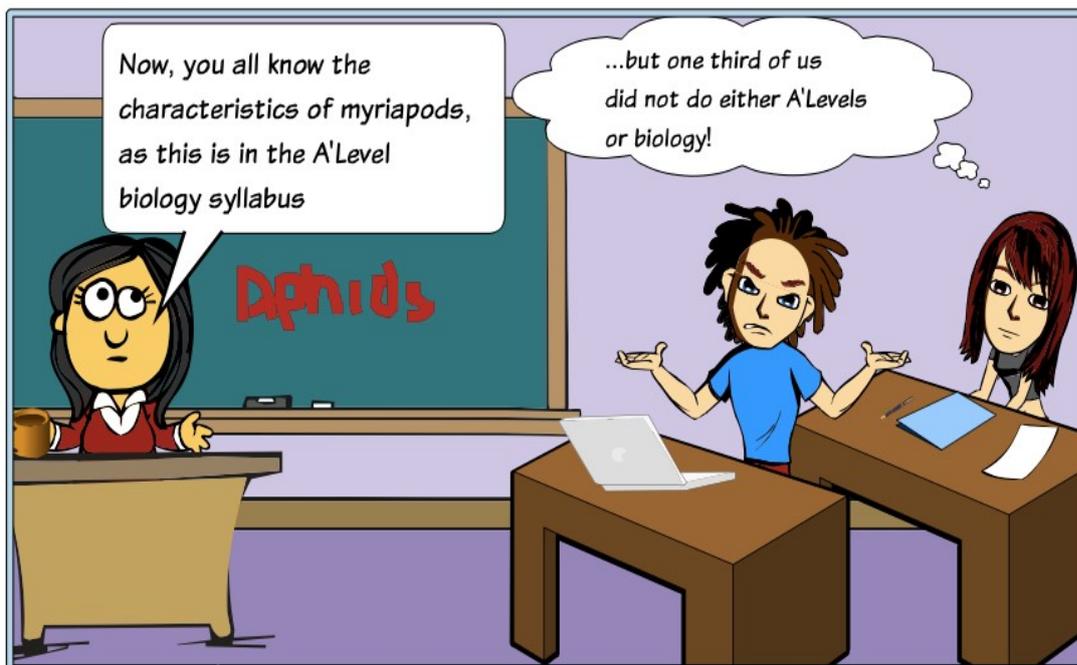
In addition as part of the University’s Peer Observation Pairs Scheme all staff are required to engage in reciprocal peer observation of both teaching and online spaces. Therefore it is a requirement that:

- ✓ All staff must annually engage in peer observation of teaching. Lessons learned through this process should then be applied to all online spaces. Guidance for this can be found separately in the Academic Quality Assurance Manual.

## **Part 3: Teaching for all**

## Prior knowledge

Sometimes it is easy to forget that members of the class might have had very different experiences of education before encountering your class. Students might come from a science or arts background, a vocational or more theoretical pathway or they might have been educated in a different country using very different methods or home-schooled . We can't always realistically address every student's exact needs, especially in large groups, but we can give everyone the best chance of engaging fully with the class.



- Consider the existing knowledge needed for the class and explain this to students at the start, or better, in advance of the class. This will allow students with different prior experiences to prepare or retrospectively address gaps. You may provide optional study materials through The Learning Hub for students who have different prior experiences.
- Be self-aware and recognise when we, as tutors are making assumptions about prior knowledge e.g. when saying “you’ll all have done this in A ‘Level Chemistry””, ask are these fair assumptions? Has everyone really had the same prior experience?
- Consider making ‘transmission’ content available before the class e.g. via a short video, so that the class can be used to explore, exemplify and undertake discussion or hands-on tasks. In this model of delivery students can prepare thoroughly if they

need to, and more lightly if they already have a secure knowledge in the area under consideration.

- Consider asking students themselves if there are parts of the class they found tricky; this can help diagnose where many students are struggling. For example, you might try the ‘muddiest point’ exercise where you ask your class *what did they struggle to understand in today’s session?* Get each student to write their difficulty on a post-it note and then address any significant misconceptions in the next class.

## Create engaging classes

Students value engagement and learn more effectively in interactive settings.

### Harper Adams Student Comments

- Engaging lectures help improve concentration
- If you make classes more interesting, students are more likely to participate and answer questions, especially if the lecturer conveys their passion
- Long lectures lose attention so the learning time is ineffective
- All lectures should be engaging – this should be standard

There are many ways to make engaging classes. Personal charisma and presentation style can help some tutors, along with a good student rapport, but there are also things we can do to more systematically develop student engagement.

- Use **lots of interesting examples** within classes – this is particularly helpful for students who have less experience of the subject under consideration.
- **Control pace** so that students have time to write down important notes. Tutors may provide advice on essential points to note. Provide a few minutes without talking, to allow notes to be consolidated.
- **Avoid showing negativity** towards difficult or ‘dry’ concepts. This will turn students off from engaging with the topic and will make it feel impossible to master.

- **Add follow up resources or activities** to The Learning Hub on tricky concepts to encourage independent engagement and mastery (the eLearning team can help develop media rich materials including videos, interactive diagrams and quizzes).

As well as thoughtful presentation of material, tutors should incorporate active learning. A small activity every fifteen minutes can refresh concentration to aid engagement and learning. Activities might include some of the following:

- Ask students to **summarise the three most important points** from the lecture and share it on a Google Doc or similar;
- **Write out a theoretical idea** shared in a lecture, using their own words, then share their understanding with a neighbour;
- Allow for a period for **questions and answers** so that students can seek clarity on complex ideas or learn more about how theories work in practice based on the experience of the lecturer;
- Conduct a **quiz** to check understanding; this can be done using Apps such as Kahoot or Socrative. Lecturers can then use this feedback to revisit any areas where understanding is less secure;
- **Pose a question** and encourage students to offer a time limited free writing response to consolidate their thoughts. These can be collected back in, with any misconceptions addressed in future sessions.
- **Collate student opinions or experiences** which relate to a specific topic under consideration; this can be done using technology such as PollEv, where students effectively submit text to a class page to share their views, or simply use large paper or whiteboards – then take a picture and upload it to The Learning Hub.
- Use a **‘think, pair, share’** activity where students think about a problem initially on their own, then with a partner and finally share with the class. This can be a way for students to share and articulate their learning without feeling intimidated.
- Ask students to critique ideas shared with the lecture; ask them **‘what are the limitations of these ideas in practice?’** Again, technology can help collate the answers.

- Give a few minutes of **non-directed activity** for students simply to take a two minute break; - some may use to time to generate questions or write notes, others may just rejuvenate for a few moments;
- Ask students to produce a **one minute paper**. Students can write for one minute on the main 1-2 points of the class. This encourages more active listening in class and can allow misconceptions to be identified. These can be added to a Forum on The Learning Hub, by students, and act as a revision aid.
- Create a **microsummary** of the class or a specific section of the class. Summarise key points in two sentences or via Twitter. This can be good fun and can encourage students to really focus in on key points. These summaries can be shared via in-class technology or again by post-it notes that are collated and photographed.
- Encourage students to **actively take notes** e.g. create a spider diagram or concept map of this content.
- An exercise to get students to **correct the error** may be useful to some disciplines or situations such as calculations or procedural tasks.
- Encourage students to **make multiple choice questions** at the end of each session. These can then be added to The Learning Hub to help with revision. The online platform [Peerwise](#) may be useful to support this activity.
- Don't fill the whole class with delivery. Leave some time to allow students to discuss or ask questions. Each scheduled class should contain a maximum of fifty minutes structured teaching and learning activity.

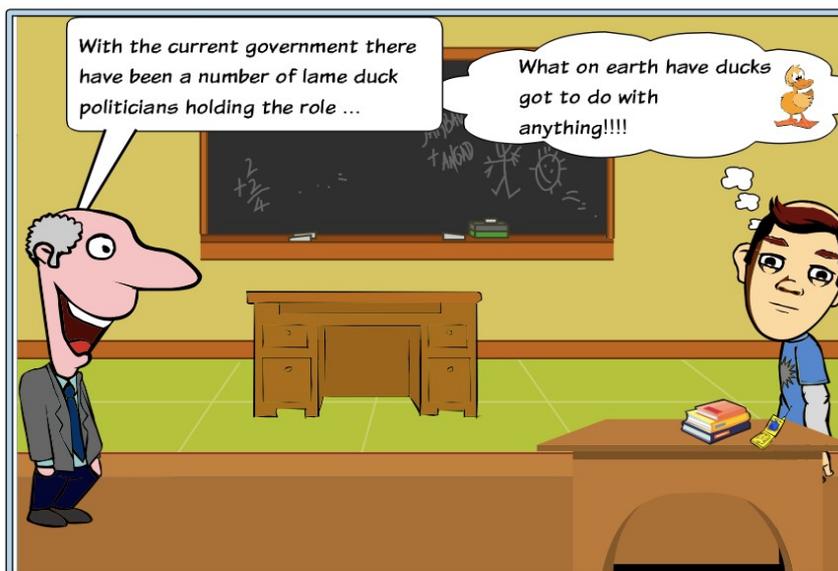
### **Recording in Lectures**

Most students possess smart phones or tablets, which can help their engagement with material presented in lectures or classes. All students are allowed by the university to produce an audio recording of lectures to assist their learning, so long as the recording is for personal use, is not redistributed and is deleted at the end of the module, as specified in policies located on the [University's Key Information Page](#). Tutors might help students make the most of this opportunity by actively encouraging session recording early on in courses to assist students with note taking skills and during sessions containing critical information such as assignment launches.

## Inclusive language

The way in which we use language can greatly affect how well students understand and how well they engage, consider:

- Speaking clearly, and not too quickly;
- Avoiding acronyms and abbreviations unless they are made clear on first use;
- Avoiding use of slang or colloquialisms, as these are difficult to understand;
- Offering a chance for students to ask clarifying questions at different points in class sessions. Be aware that students may not want to speak out and so it may be better to use other techniques to check their understanding, for example using post it notes or encouraging questions through a mobile phone app.



To support understanding of key terms it may also be useful to provide a **glossary** for students at the start of a module or topic. This could be developed with specific groups in mind, although there will be benefits of this intervention for all students. For example in an applied module it may be very useful to create a glossary of terms that may be familiar to students from a farming background, but less well known to students from an urban background (e.g. heifer, beater, set-aside).

## **Make space in a crowded curriculum**

Within the design of classes, schemes of work and courses, tutors may instinctively want to fill every session. While planning is important it is also important that time is left to respond and adapt teaching to the needs of a particular group, to address points of confusion or to revisit tricky concepts, or to focus on academic skills.

Ensure that space within the curriculum is left to help students make sense of key ideas and to revisit tricky content in different ways. For example, consider planning a class session which is led by student questions posted in advance on a forum, or ask students themselves to set the topics that they wish you to return to. Making space can also provide points of interest for students as it allows time to address issues arising in the media, or professional press, and topics that are of interest to them. Step back from focusing entirely on subject knowledge or content, and use class time to build fundamental academic skills, for example consider a session for first-years discussing the assessment criteria, perhaps using past examples of assessment or an early tutorial around note taking techniques. **This is not wasted time**; it is equipping students to become independent later in their journey.

### **'Must do' checklist for teaching accessibly**

- ✓ Engage with the guidance in this section to consider how your teaching may be developed and continually enhanced.
- ✓ Engage at least annually with the University's Peer Observation Pairs scheme and respond to any feedback or learning points.
- ✓ Permit students to make audio recordings of lectures using any appropriate device, unless there are sound reasons for preventing this e.g. to avoid recording other students discussing sensitive issues.

## Part 4: Assessment

## **Inclusive assessment**

Assessment can be a particularly challenging and stressful part of the student journey. It is therefore important that lecturers ensure assessment expectations are absolutely clear and that students are well supported.

### **Harper Adams Student Comments**

- We all come from different backgrounds and have different experiences at school or college. It's important that lecturers make clear what is expected as we have been used to different things.
- People learn in different ways. Different types of assessment help assess everyone's strengths
- Too many assessment hand-ins around the same time creates high levels of stress and means we have to choose to focus on one module over another. Sometimes I even have to choose between attending a class or completing an assessment.
- Assessment bunching means that feedback from one module can't help improve in other modules.
- Different types of assessment mean that different students can excel in different areas.
- While exams are suitable for some students, sometimes, for others they cause anxiety and do not give us all an opportunity to shine.

## Planning assessments

There are some design tips that can help make assessment more inclusive for all students.

- Assessments should be **planned with the student journey in mind**. Ask questions about the student's assessment diet across the whole course e.g. How many assessments will the student be working on at any given point? How many different types of assessment has the student experienced? Is there an over reliance on one type of assessment? This approach to assessment design does require discussion between course teams.
- Remember that **learning outcomes don't usually need to be formally assessed more than once**. If you are assessing the same learning outcome twice or more, be clear why this is the case.
- To make assessment accessible to all students, consider offering a **choice on how they present their work**, for example a report could be offered in a written form or as an audio file. **Choice can be built in to programmes as a norm, not an exception**. For example if students are being asked to 'discuss' a particular theme they may be assessed according to the structure of their argument, the range of themes addressed and the strength of the evidence used to support the discussion. The criteria would then not need to be different for an oral (voice recorded) or written submission.
- **Build in anticipatory flexibility in the assessment design**. A rigid assessment specification with absolute requirements, some of which may not be necessary to allow students to demonstrate the learning outcomes, will exclude some students. By example, asking a student with specific anxiety conditions to present to a class would be inappropriate and as such reasonable adjustments may be needed; far better to design the presentation assessment so that some students may choose to offer a virtual presentation where they are not under pressure.
- **A range of assessment types** should be used within a course to allow students to develop a range of skills and attributes. Alongside this variety though, it should still be clear to students how feedback from one assessment can help future work.

- Assessment should seek to **test the student's ability to meet the learning outcomes** and not some other unspecified thing. If for example a learning outcome asks students to be able to 'explain' or 'research' then clearly a multiple choice assessment will be unsuitable. Equally if the outcome asks students to 'build' or 'create' then an essay is not likely to be suitable as an assessment method.
- Sometimes it is just not possible to achieve the 'ideal' assessment scenario because of professional body requirements, for example, students are more likely to engage with an assignment when they understand the rationale for it. When assessment is introduced **be explicit about why a particular assessment type is selected.**
- **Be especially clear of the rationale for selecting an exam.** An examination, at a desk with time controlled conditions, without access to sources and collaboration does not reflect the real world. Ensure that exams are only included when it is absolutely essential.
- If a significant group of students may require reasonable adjustments, then re-consider the design to something which allows the maximum possible numbers of students to be included in the assessment process.

## **Launching and supporting assessment**

Assessment briefs should be clear and simple; class time should be devoted to launching the assignment and making the expectations of the task explicit. Because assignments are often launched a long time in advance of submission, it may be useful to create a short video, which explains the requirements of assessment. This can be done through screencast technology (e.g. [via Screencast-o-matic](#)), via audio embedded into a presentation, by a talking head video or through an audio file recorded on a smart phone. Videos can save time as students refer to it instead of making one-to-one contact for clarification.

## **Focus on exams**

Where exams are needed:

- Use practice papers which help prepare students for exams.
- Past exam papers must be made available on The Learning Hub.
- Ensure that the requirements for the exam are clearly specified (in advance).
- Employ a range of question types.
- Make marking criteria explicit; introduce these in class to reduce anxiety.
- Use formative quizzes on The Learning Hub or other tools to reduce exam stress.

## **Assessment criteria**

Students repeatedly emphasise the valuable role that clear, explicitly weighted criteria play in assessment and in their ability to understand feedback. Criteria need to be shared with students and working with criteria in class can support learning and self-assessment (and associated improvements in performance). Ways in which students can be encouraged to work actively with assessment criteria to help them get to understand assessment requirements include:

- Marking past examples of student work (exemplars) with tutor guidance using the assessment criteria;
- Rewriting assessment criteria in their own words so that any misunderstandings are addressed;

- Explicit question and answer sessions in relation to the criteria and assessment task;
- The creation of an ‘assessment commentary video’. Tutors can record their thoughts about the strengths and limitations of a piece of work and then students can watch this back to learn more about how their work will be marked;
- Peer marking exercises of draft work.

Assessment criteria should tell students what their performance in any specific assessment should include. The University’s Generic Assessment Criteria can provide inspiration as to the types of areas that might be included within assessment criteria, and they can help set the correct level, but **the criteria within an assignment brief should relate to that specific task, and must be realistic and achievable for the students on the programme.**

Marks and feedback should always relate to the criteria on the assignment brief. The feedback given to students should not disproportionately focus on one criteria such as referencing or report writing details but should comment on the range of skills and abilities prioritised by the criteria.

### **What if I just can’t design an assessment that meets everyone’s needs? <sup>1</sup>**

If the approach selected by the tutor is known to disadvantage specific students, and if these difficulties cannot be designed out for all students, then adjustments can be made which typically include revising the assessment arrangements or offering an alternative mode of assessment. In the case of the latter, the student is expected to meet the same academic standards as other students and all module learning outcomes must be assessed. Examples of reasonable adjustments include providing assistive technology such as a PC, voice activated PC or Dictaphone or pre-installed screen reader software in advance of examinations or allowing the assignment to be submitted in an alternative

---

<sup>1</sup> It may be helpful to also familiarise with the university’s assessment arrangements at [Annex 5.29](#) in the Academic Quality Assurance Manual. This document sets out procedural information around assessment but also signposts further good practice.

media, such as an audio file, or by question and answer, viva voce style. They may also include providing extra thinking or reading time in examinations.

### **Develop academic writing for success**

Students' ideas about academic practice are influenced by their cultural background and prior study experiences. Misunderstandings about how to write essays or reports and how to use literature and references are often the result of students having received different advice in previous courses of study, or in some cases no advice at all. Confusion can be exacerbated as different tutors have different assessment requirements at different times, the discipline context and the professional requirements. It is essential to support the development of academic writing competences alongside the development of subject knowledge.

- Recognise and talk about differences in academic practice that are encountered and explicitly address differences in how students might have worked in other courses or modules.
- Direct students towards study skills resources within their feedback.
- Be clear about specific requirements of any assessment task, particularly when a format is new to a student or where the format of the task varies from the institutional report-writing guide.

While the university has guides for specific types of reports and essays, these documents are not intended to limit the styles of writing that are used on the student journey. Staff are encouraged to go beyond these standardised formats and consider other genres of writing which may be appropriate to their discipline or professional area, including web based publications, professional documentation such as a report in the style of a client commissioned consultancy, articles for the professional press, journal articles, a resource for teaching the topic under consideration, a resource for the general public or technical notes.

Students must be clear of any specific requirements for layout and format, and writing or presentation conventions associated with their assessment task. Staff are therefore required to make this information explicit on an assignment brief. If the format is to play a role in determining marks then this must also be signalled in the assessment criteria. As

well as signposting this information, it is also helpful to provide class time and resources online to add clarity.

To help students better understand the conventions of good academic writing, which may be unfamiliar to many, and to reduce the stress associated with assessment submission, tutors can proactively use Turnitin. This is the tool that allows all assignments to be text matched against potential source material. It is not just there to use as a diagnostic for plagiarism, it is also a powerful tool to help students to think about how they can develop their academic practice.

- Where appropriate, encourage students to make a draft submission through Turnitin so that they can review their academic practice, and see where they may not be summarising or paraphrasing ideas from literature with sufficient originality<sup>2</sup>. This is possible through the Good Academic Writing space on The Learning Hub (signposted from the landing page), which contains a practice submission box (called the 'Try it out' area).
- Encourage students to use the resources in the 'Try it out' area to address issues and seek tutor or academic guidance support where issues are recognised. Consider this as an in-class activity in early submissions so that students can ask questions.
- When designing curricula ensure that there is sufficient time to allow students to practise writing of different types. Coordinate the support for a student's development of writing across a course and not only within a module.
- Support students to work with different types of academic writing; discuss the differences between different formats and the requirements of different audiences. Recognise and discuss how the expectations may vary from one module to another.

---

<sup>2</sup> This facility is open to students during all levels of study.

## **Feedback**

Twenty years of research has shown that feedback is the most effective intervention a tutor can make to influence learning. Feedback is not just the comments given at the end of module. The most valuable feedback is given before submission and may take many forms e.g. a conversation, feedback on a draft, a structured workshop to help students give and receive feedback to each other. When considering feedback think about both formative and summative feedback.

### **Formative assessment for feedback**

Students are more likely to succeed, and have lower assessment anxiety, if they have opportunities for formative assessment, i.e. practice assessment opportunities that give students the chance to get feedback or to consider their own performance and identify ways to improve. Perhaps most importantly, these practice opportunities need to clearly link to the types of assessment that the student will complete.

For example:

- If a student is writing a report for their module assessment, tutorials might be used to draft the structure of key sections of the report. Then students can be guided through the assessment criteria to trigger thoughts about how their early draft might be developed.
- If a student is creating a mini-research project they might present their project verbally so that they can gain feedback on their ideas before they begin to write.
- With a large classes consider feedback triads, where, after a class session around the criteria and assessment requirements, students review the draft work of two others in the class. A short statement of how work was revised after peer feedback (giving and receiving) can be required in the assessment submission to ensure that full engagement takes place.
- For small and medium sized groups consider offering feedback on draft work using a screencast technology. This means creating a quick video with some hints and tips for each student. It can be a very quick feedback mechanism as it reduced any need for typing. This feedback can then be used to inform revision and further action.

- For examinations, it may be appropriate to run mock exams which have an aspect of peer feedback or quizzes, where the questions are of a similar type to those that will be presented.
- Always consider the use of peer feedback (i.e. activities to generate between your students). To ensure students get the most possible learning in these situations it is important to be clear that the greatest benefit in peer feedback is in giving feedback, rather than receiving comments. By encouraging discussion and the practising of assessment critique, students develop skills that they can apply to their own skills. Be clear with students about this process, so that they can get the most from it.

## Staged submissions

The university's assessment policy is such that undergraduates should not normally experience more than 12 pieces of summative assessment within any academic year, however to allow students to make the most of feedback tutors may choose to use a locally managed 'staged submission' approach for coursework. This ensures that feedback can be generated (by tutors or by other students, or even by students themselves) in time to have an impact on assessment performance.

In a staged approach students submit part of a piece of work in advance of the final deadline, or they may engage in peer-feedback or self-review exercises using draft work or plans. For example they may hand-in the literature section of a project for feedback before submitting the entire project; they may share a plan for a design project before proceeding to build the item; or, they might feedback on each other's draft CVs or cover letters using some pre-set criteria.

Stages in assessment should not increase the overall assessment burden - they simply shift the distribution of work more evenly across the academic year by motivating engagement, while also providing coordinated points for the use of feedback. Recognising that feedback can be a huge commitment for staff, staged assessment design can, and should, make effective use of learning from peer feedback opportunities as well as staff-to-student feedback.

A staged submission may be entirely voluntary and have no role in determining grades, or learning from the staged assessment can be rewarded in the grading process of the final assessment judgement.

Because staged assessments are **not** additional formalised assessments in their own right i.e. they are not on an assessment schedule and they do not have a grade to be added to SITS, there is no scope to use mitigating circumstances or other formal processes for lateness, non-submission or poor performance. In a staged assessment students ultimately retain a degree of control in how they engage with the stages available to support their success. This is especially important for those who have circumstances which require flexibility e.g. those who have caring responsibilities, those who may be experiencing episodes of acute anxiety, or those who are encountering difficulties in their personal life.

Nevertheless there are some strategies that can be used to reward learning from the staged assessment to motivate ongoing engagement. These include:

- Give no marks for the actual initial staged submission, but include marks in the final submission for how well learning from feedback in a formative step has been used.
- Have a criteria within the assessment rubric for demonstration of thorough planning, and thus base the attribution of marks for that criteria on the recognition of early submission or the giving and receiving of peer feedback (which could be captured as an appendix).
- Give no marks for the staged submission, but ensure that seeking and using feedback is incorporated as a pass-fail element within the criteria i.e. it is needed to pass the module, but not graded. If students have not been able to engage in the recommended process for generating and using feedback, they maintain some flexibility to seek other sources of input.

It remains important that the assessment load for students remains manageable and so we have a collective responsibility to ensure that any staged assessment designs simply seek to enable students the best opportunity of success; they must not increase the volume of assessment required nor should they act as a barrier for students whose life circumstances require that they may not be able to fully engage in producing their assessment on the same timeline as other peers.

## Summative feedback

Harper Adams Student Comments:

- We appreciate when staff can provide face-to-face feedback.
- It is useful to know in advance when feedback is going to be returned.
- Sharing past assignments and feedback is very useful to learning.
- Abbreviations and underlining are in themselves not helpful forms of feedback.
- They like different types of media in their feedback - such as video or audio.
- We won't always say when feedback is poor as we don't want to challenge lecturers
- Don't tell us what we did wrong, we need to know how we can succeed.

If you must handwrite feedback, make sure it is legible. Typed feedback alone though is not a guarantee that students will engage with feedback provided or that feedback will be of a better quality. Typed feedback only addresses the legibility challenge.

It is important to ensure that feedback gives assistance to students while remaining manageable for staff. Winstone *et al.* (2016) suggest that when time is limited, feedback on the following aspects are most valued by students:

- Highlight the skills needed to improve
- Explanation of why the mark was appropriate with reference to the grade descriptors
- Comments on writing and how to improve
- Identifies things done well.

Additionally:

- Students should be supported to use feedback and to make the most of it.
- Take care to use words that are likely to be understandable by students; try to avoid 'eduspeak' like 'criticality aware' without being really clear what this means.
- If you are annotating scripts, be explicit with your comments: Underlining, question marks and exclamation marks do not explicitly identify what the issue is. Annotations can be cryptic to students.
- Even if students have got relatively high marks, it is still important to identify how they can improve and where marks were lost.
- Identify what students did well so that students can become more aware of what good performance looks like.
- Use your feedback to signpost help. If for example academic writing is an area where attention is needed then writing workshops can be flagged.
- These three comments from tutors all address the same issue but hopefully it is clear which version is most useful to students:
  - 'Address your use of literature!'
  - 'Summarise literature – too many direct quotes'
  - 'You should use less direct quotes, to show that you understand the key points from the literature you are using. If you are struggling to put literature in your own words then look at this resource on summarising or paraphrasing techniques ...'
- Consider whether your feedback is 'in time' to be useful before the student's next deadline date. This is something that can be coordinated with other module tutors.
- Consider whether there are opportunities for interim whole group feedback, which summarises the main issues from the work marked to date (perhaps after 20% of work has been marked). By example, if after marking a portion of the assignments for one group, you may notice a recurring issue with a lack of synthesis in literature, or the failure to be critical of non-peer reviewed sources, or an error in health and safety procedures used in an experiment. Instead of leaving the feedback until assignments are returned, a class debrief can alert the

group to any issues that should be addressed or worked on before handing in another piece of work in a different module.

- Consider posting common errors or points for consideration on The Learning Hub so that these can be incorporated in to other ongoing work if appropriate. An audio file with these can help students connect to the material.
- Consider how marking grids, rubrics and checklists can help deliver feedback. For example you might return a rubric to students with highlighter on the points that apply to the work considered. You might encourage students to peer-assess or self-assess using a rubric format.
- Ask students how effective your feedback is; how it can be made more useful to them?
- Consider asking students how they prefer their feedback – via screencast or in written form, for example. Knauf (2016) reminds us that students often respond well to audio feedback types since hearing rather than only reading comments can assist some students with assimilation.
- Consider using some different technologies to better engage students with feedback, to assist with consistency and legibility, to make efficiencies in feedback or to increase the personalisation of feedback<sup>3</sup>.
- With larger groups it may appropriate to ask for draft submissions and give plentiful feedback on the understanding that the final submission will only be returned with a grade. This strategy allows feedback to be created in time to be useful. It is important that students understand that this is a shift in when they get feedback, for good reason.

---

<sup>3</sup> It is clear from research and experience at Harper Adams that technology can help achieve any of these benefits but it is unlikely that all can be achieved at once! There will always be tensions within technology use for example between personalisation and efficiencies, between consistency and personalisation. All of the variables should be weighed up in considering the best choice of technology.

### **'Must do' checklist for assessment and feedback**

- ✓ When designing assessments reflect on how accessible the design is. If a significant group of students may require reasonable adjustments, then re-consider the design to something which allows the maximum possible numbers of students to be included in the assessment process.
- ✓ Where the assessment is an exam, be clear why this is the best or only way to assess the learning outcomes. Where possible look for other assessment types which are more inclusive for students.
- ✓ Ensure that assessment criteria are always explicit and weighted. Use a task specific (i.e. bespoke) rubric wherever possible.
- ✓ Articulate any specific presentational requirements on the assignment brief and reiterate these in class.
- ✓ Use a formative assessment strategy for every piece of summative assessment i.e. something that allows students to practice, gain feedback and prepare for the precise form of assessment employed.
- ✓ Use typed feedback to ensure that students can read any written comments.
- ✓ Ensure formative feedback is actionable, manageable and timely (i.e. in time to be useful).
- ✓ Ensure that summative feedback helps students understand where they gained and lost marks, and provides guidance on what could be done better in future assessments.

## References

- Babb, K. A., & Ross, C. (2009). The timing of online lecture slide availability and its effect on attendance, participation, and exam performance. *Computers & Education*, 52, 868-881.
- Billings-Gagliardi, S. & Mazor, K. (2007). Student decisions about lecture attendance: Do electronic course materials matter?. *Academic Medicine*, 82(10 SUPPL.), S73-S76.
- Frank, J., Shaw, L., & Wilson, E. (2009). The Impact of Providing Web-Based PowerPoint Slides as Study Guides in Undergraduate Business Classes. *Journal Of Educational Technology Systems*, 37(2), 217-229.
- Knauf, H. (2016), 'Reading, Listening and Feeling: Audio Feedback as a Component of an Inclusive Learning Culture at Universities', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 41 (3), 442-449
- Gwen, L, Elizabeth, M, Eddie, F, Tara, N, Mei, Q, Milton, N, Frits, R, & Lianne van, D (2017). 'Moving Towards Inclusive Learning and Teaching: A Synthesis of Recent Literature', *Teaching & Learning Inquiry: The ISSOTL Journal*, 5(1), 1-13.
- Sambrook, S., & Rowley, J. (2010). Student attitudes towards and use of webnotes. *International Journal of Management Education (Oxford Brookes University)*, 8(2), 31-41.
- Winstone, N, Nash, R, Rowntree, J, & Menezes, R. (2016) 'What do students want most from written feedback information? Distinguishing necessities from luxuries using a budgeting methodology', *Assessment & Evaluation In Higher Education*, 41, 8, p. 1237
- Worthington, D. L., & Levasseur, D. G. (2015). To provide or not to provide course PowerPoint slides? The impact of instructor-provided slides upon student attendance and performance. *Computers & Education*, 8514-22.