
Going Global Partnerships

**Assessment & Feedback as
Tools for Learning:
A Toolkit for Academics**

December 2023

Introduction

This toolkit has been created for use across higher education providers in Jordan recognising that the challenges and opportunities focused on here are not peculiar to the Kingdom. Assessment particularly, and feedback to a lesser extent, have attracted huge interest globally over the years as higher education providers seek to ensure that graduates exiting from their programmes meet academic, and also, as appropriate, professional standards.

Its primary audience is the academic community whose members work closely with students to deliver the curriculum and to support learning. It should also be of value to individuals with lead roles in driving forward the development of innovative programmes of learning and to those with responsibility for the assurance and enhancement of quality.

The resources to which readers are directed, and the thinking which threads through the toolkit are not exhaustive. Rather they offer the means by which experienced academics can look to further enhance individual courses which together comprise programmes of learning. The toolkit is also designed to be of value to less experienced academics who are still honing their craft as effective educators. Ideally, the resources will be used by groups of academics as they come together to review the curriculum as is, and to reimagine what it might be so that assessment is experienced by students as an authentic challenge and feedback offers them the opportunity to learn.

The impetus behind the toolkit is a workshop organised by the British Council and supported by Advance HE. The workshop was designed in collaboration with a small group of academics and by a focus group discussion with students. Insights from the academic and the students created the framework for the workshop and the topics decided upon as focal points collaborative activities during the day. The same topics have informed the development of the toolkit. They are in outline:

- Assessment as a means to engage students.
- Assessment and its role in enabling learning.
 - To include formative assessment: strategies & practices.
- Assessment in the context of graduate skills.
- Feedback and its role in supporting the development of self-regulated learners.
- Technology – concerns and opportunities.
- Quality Assurance – enablers and barriers.
- External drivers impacting on how assessment is seen within the University.

The toolkit is deliberately brief with direction to useful resources provided. It is organised in five sections, each of which includes **reflective activities** designed to provoke thinking and to offer ideas on how assessment and feedback practices might be reimaged. Before you begin, think about how you will capture your learning from the reflective activities – don't lose the ideas which will come to you as you engage with them.

The toolkit can be worked through systematically or dipped in and out of. It can be used by individuals on their own or to support group-based discussion. Importantly, it could also be used

to guide conversations with students about how they see and experience both assessment and feedback within their programmes of study.

To launch the toolkit and to get a sense of its purpose, you are asked to contemplate the following quote. It comes from a UK context and is definitely provocative in that space. As you read, think about the extent to which its key messages hold true in Jordan, in your university. And as you contemplate, pull into the focus the role assessment and feedback have in ensuring that degrees – undergraduate and Masters – can continue to have value in a world where knowledge can be gathered and gleaned from other sources.

‘From time to time, a generation is faced with some very big choices. We are currently living through ones of these times. Failures in globalism, the rise of populism, existential pressures around climate and resources, embedded racism and inequities, the shift from the analogue world to the digital one and most recently, a devastating pandemic, all contribute to a potentially overwhelming sense of systemic change [...].

‘The choices that universities make at this time will play a critical role in determining which path we all take together as a society. On the one hand, universities might choose to stand back and be largely passive bystanders, remote from the world around them. On the other, universities will each embark on a deliberate evolution of their public purpose [...]. The latter transformation is an urgent change is both necessary and needed. Necessary as the social contract under which universities have their licence to operate from politicians and public alike, is broken. Needed as the external environment they exist within is at a moment of flux which both threatens and invites opportunity’.

Jonathan Grant (2021)
The New Power University
Pearson Education Ltd

As you now engage with the toolkit, keep the following questions in mind, understanding that being assessed is part of the experience of being a university student, and this is highly unlikely to change.

- From your perspective, do current assessment practices actually support student learning?
- And what about feedback practices?
 - What is their goal and impact?
- What can you change?
- What do you need to lobby for?

Section 1:

Assessment Practices: The way it is right now

As a way to come into thinking about current assessment practices in your own sphere of influence and more widely in your University, consider this view shared by [Raynak and Tkacs \(2021\)](#).

There is an underlying idea that assessment is just about testing. In other words, it's a means to a grade. There is another part of assessment, though, that's often overlooked: how it can be used for learning. And because learning is a process, educators must explore strategies for evaluating learning that actually help students master the content—not just regurgitate it.

Even before the pandemic, traditional exams had a bad reputation for being something that students would cram for, asking learners to rehash or recite information they would ultimately forget. But the changes in academia brought on by the pandemic forced educators to reassess both what they're expecting from their students and how they're measuring students' progress. To do this well, we believe educators must think about assessments as a learning tool.

Reflective Activity

To what extent is assessment connected only to grading in your context? Does it have other purposes, for example, enabling students to meet professional standards? What are its other purposes? How far, at this point, does assessment go beyond testing that knowledge has been acquired to preparing students for the world of work and global citizenship?

Try not to answer these questions quickly, instead review the courses that you teach, how is each assessed? What methods are used? Look carefully at the stated learning outcomes/objectives? Are the methods currently employed wholly aligned with those learning outcomes/objectives?

Finally, consider what the assessment methods in use right now communicate to your students about what is valued and what is important? If mid-term and final exams are the primary means of assessing and thereby grading students, what messages are being communicated to them?



Further reading on devising robust learning outcomes – [this resource](#) is helpful, providing in slide format and referencing John Biggs' work on constructive alignment, a key principle of effective curriculum design.

Still focusing on current assessment practices in your context, you are asked to review them through the lens offered by the [REAP project](#). Its aim was to identify principles which underpin good assessment design. Here are the four which focus on what assessment tasks should do.

Assessment tasks should: (engage)

1. Capture sufficient study time and effort in and out of class
2. Distribute students' effort evenly across topics and weeks.
3. Engage students in deep not just shallow learning activity
4. Communicate clear and high expectations to students.

Reflective Activity

Again, try not to respond quickly as you consider the way it is right now. Think carefully about how the assessment methods in place actually do engage students, thereby enabling them to learn.

As you reflect, think about the assessment methods picture created across the whole of the programme of study. It can be really helpful to students and to staff to be able to see that picture of what happens when across the weeks of each course as students progress through the programme.

As you review the whole picture, think not only about how assessment can burden students, so that they have no time to learn, but also about the impact of overassessment on academics. The need to reduce high-stakes (summative assessment) in favour of increasing formative learning opportunities is much written about in the literature.



Further reading on the burden of assessment practices and the potential for transformation.

Harland and Wald (2020) The assessment arms race and the evolution of a university's assessment practices.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2020.1745753>



Listen to Professor Kay Sambell talking about assessment for learning [here](#)

Section 2:

Reimagining Assessment: Formative and Summative

As you listened to Professor Sambell in the previous section, you will have heard her reference authentic assessment, a construct which has increasingly permeated the literature requiring us to rethink our approaches to assessment.

Authentic assessment has been variously defined. The [slide below](#) offers one interpretation of the thinking behind it.

THE DEFINITION OF AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

Source

A 'real-world' assessment is meant to focus on the impact of one's work in real or realistic--and often 'messy'--contexts.

In a 'real-world,' authentic assessment, there may or may not be mere writing or a hands-on task, but the assessment is meant to focus on the impact of one's work in real or realistic contexts. A real-world task requires students to deal with the messiness of real or simulated settings, purposes, and audience (as opposed to a simplified and 'clean' academic task to no audience but the teacher-evaluator).



Whatever the definition, at its core, authentic assessment directs us towards devising assessment challenges which reflect what students - when they graduate - need to be able to do competently and confidently in the world of work. It requires thought about how authentic assessment might take shape in Year 1 of their undergraduate studies through to their final year. Therefore, the approach needed is one which thinks about the programme as a whole and how its component parts – the courses – come together to support learning. Importantly, when thinking about what the authentic assessment tasks might be it is vital that you stay centred on the discipline – mechanical engineering, business management, health care – and of course the learning outcomes in place.

Before going into the next activity, attention is drawn to the difference between formative and summative assessment. Again, there are many interpretations of what each is, and their purpose.

	Watch this video . Its explanation should be helpful to you.
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Reflective Activity

You've already thought about the way assessment currently is in your sphere of influence and in your institutional context more widely, now let's push forward the idea of authentic assessment and how it might take shape in your subject area.

Questions for you to consider include:

What does/ might authentic assessment look like in YOUR context?

What are the opportunities for students and potential challenges for staff?


What are/ might be the enablers and barriers from a quality assurance perspective?

Once you've had a chance to imagine what authentic assessment could be in your sphere of influence, it is suggested that you might consider yet more options (see below). They could well inspire you.

Two things:



(1) it could be that you have identified possible quality assurance barriers to the ideas you have. If so, take your questions/ concerns to best forum in which they can be discussed. It will be different in each university, but don't imagine that change is not possible. Assessment practices are going to have to develop to keep pace with what industry and wider society need.

(2) Start to share your ideas with colleagues, test them out and focus on determining the effectiveness of the changes you have been able to initiate within the framework of what is permissible from the quality assurance perspective.

	Explore this resource . It should inspire you to think imaginatively about authentic assessment in your own practice. Adapt the ideas; extend the resource within your University.
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In closing this section of the toolkit, an earlier point is reemphasised. The assessments we devise give messages to students about what we think is important. And they will concentrate their energies on what counts – the grade. So make sure that the assessment methods decided upon do indeed drive learning.

The question you might have is whether, or not, authentic assessment pushes assessment by examination to the side and out of the picture. The quick answer is not necessarily. It depends on the purpose and format of the exam. However, examinations which simply require knowledge to be regurgitated may not be fit for purpose. One benefit of the COVID-19 pandemic is that we had to rethink timed, unseen examinations. But there was always a risk that we would go back to the way it was leaving the learning behind.

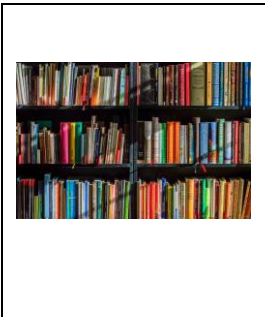
	<p>For further reading on alternatives to timed, unseen examinations, explore here – look for the resource dated April 2nd 2020, and take the opportunity in a quiet moment to follow some of the other links. They too should inspire you.</p>
	<p>For further reading on sustainable assessment, that which seeks to ensure student learning is long term rather than confined to a given course or the programme of study itself, read Boud and Soler (2015).</p>

Section 3:

Generative Artificial Intelligence – Ally or Enemy?

This a huge subject and it is fast moving. Technological innovations are making this possible that we probably never dreamed about. New tools emerge before we have had the chance to consider the value of the ones we already have.

If this is a new topic for you, or one you might need to explore a little more, this one might be helpful – see below. Its focus is on ChatGPT, but the points raised are capable of wider application.

	<p>Baidoo and Ansah (2023)</p> <p>Education in the Era of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI): Understanding the Potential Benefits of ChatGPT in Promoting Teaching and Learning</p> <p>https://doi.org/10.61969/jai.1337500</p>
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To initiate reflection, and to force engagement with something we might want to run from, but cannot be avoided, consider this excerpt from a [paper](#) written by Hie and Thouray (2023) entitled How AI Is Reshaping Higher Education and if you can read it in full.

With the rise of generative artificial intelligence, students need to develop new skills — and educators need to embrace new ways of teaching. Because artificial intelligence will likely become the primary way humans access information, professors must prepare students to use the technology effectively in their lives and careers. Students will especially need to learn skills related to effective prompt engineering, which refers to the ability to craft questions that elicit the most useful answers from AI platforms. The more comfortable that faculty become with using AI, the better they will be at teaching students how to use this skill ethically and effectively in the years to come.

Reflective Activity

At this point, how is AI impacting on your teaching and assessment practices? What have you introduced? What might you need to do? What are the challenges for you? And the opportunities? How might AI enhance students' ability to learn – to be work ready and a global citizen – stimulating their capacity for critical thinking and its application?

As a way to support you, the following two slides are shared with the kind permission of their author, Jonathan Bassindale (need full title).

www.britishcouncil.org

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Assuring Quality

To utilise generative AI while maintaining education quality, we must:

- **Maintain human oversight:** Teachers must review/edit all AI -generated materials.
- **Focus AI on enhancement:** Use AI to improve —not replace—human teachers.
- **Develop standards:** Establish clear guidelines for the appropriate use of generative AI in education.

How might we harness AI (and other innovations to come) while assuring the quality of student learning?

- **Implement Responsibly:** Generative AI holds promise for education, but it must be deployed carefully and responsibly. Educators should maintain active oversight and have final say on all AI -generated content.
- **Focus on Enhancement:** The ideal role for AI is enhancing human teachers rather than replacing them.
- **Develop Robust Governance:** We will need new policies, standards and oversight processes as we adopt generative AI. Accountability and transparency should be top priorities.
- **Keep Students in focus:** The technology is exciting (and scary!) but the focus must remain on how generative AI can improve outcomes and experiences for students. Privacy, emotional development and individual needs should come first.
- **Prepare Students for an AI -Driven World:** As future workers and citizens, today's students must understand AI's risks and benefits. We should equip them with digital literacy and critical thinking skills needed to navigate an AI -powered world.

Reflective Activity

In the light of the call to action highlighted in the slides, what do you need to lobby for in your institution and who exactly do you need to lobby?

Section 4:

Ensuring the Transparency of Expectations: For Students and For Staff

This section is short, but no less important within the context of the toolkit as a whole. It invites you to consider the extent to which the assessment methods you have decided upon are absolutely clear in terms of what is required to (a) the students and (b) colleagues who may be teaching the course with you and/ or assessing student work.

The word **transparency** is key both in terms of understanding what the assessment is – its purpose and alignment with the learning outcomes – and how it will be assessed.



It may be that as you reflect on your current practices you can see ways to enhance them within the framework of quality assurance requirements which must be adhered to in your University. In the event you can see that changes to those quality requirements would benefit from further enhancement you need to decide who to speak with in the first instance. Don't let the opportunity to develop your practice and wider practices within the University disappear.

Reflective Activity


Inspired by the thinking of O'Donovan et al (2004), use the following spectrum of possibilities to reflect on what it is that you currently do to ensure students understand assessment requirements before they are assessed. As you review the options in the Table below, bear in mind that not all of them might be appropriate in all cases. Your judgement as an academic is important; so too evaluative data gained from students in respect of what they didn't know/ understand prior to being assessed.

	I do this	I don't do this	I don't this, but would like to develop this practice
Learning outcomes are published, readily available to the students and clearly aligned with the assessment method in use.			
Grading criteria are in written format.			
Grading criteria are in written format and shared with students.			

Students have access to a written briefing document detailing what is required of them.			
Students have access to a written briefing document detailing what is required of them and are invited into discussion about the assessment requirements.			
Students have access to either an audio or video recording which mirrors the written briefing document detailing what is required of them.			
Students are actively encouraged to discuss assessment requirements with their peers.			
Students have the opportunity to self-assess against the grading criteria as part of a formative learning opportunity.			
Students engage in grading practice using anonymised samples of past student work.			
Students are provided with exemplars of coursework/ exam answers.			
Students are provided with exemplars of coursework/ exam papers which reflect a pass, a good pass, and an excellent pass.			

	<p>Read the O'Donovan et al (2004) paper in full to explore further the assumptions we might have about what students do/ don't understand and how we might make assessment requirements more tangible.</p> <p>Know what I mean? Enhancing student understanding of assessment standards and criteria</p> <p>https://doi.org/10.1080/1356251042000216642</p>
	<p>Read more about rubrics by accessing Ragupathi and Lee's (2020) chapter entitled Beyond Fairness and Consistency in Grading: The Role of Rubrics in Higher Education to examine the beneficial role rubrics can play in ensuring that the process of assessment and grading is transparent and supportive of student learning.</p>



	<p>Watch this video. It summarises the value of rubrics and then offers different examples to illustrate how they might be used depending on the subject area and the assessment task.</p>
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Section 5:

Feedback as Learning:

A necessary but commonly overlooked part of effective assessment practices

The opportunities to provide students with feedback which supports their learning are many in number and can be part of formative learning and/ or an outcome of summative assessments. But giving feedback can present as a burdensome process. And frustratingly students – in formative learning situations – do not always realise it is happening and in relation to summative assessment, it can be experienced as coming too late.

It is a thorny problem for academics who are committed to enabling students to learn through a feedback mechanism which in effect closes the learning loop, while at the same time providing the platform for future learning.

Like assessment, a lot has been written about feedback, especially in relation to formative assessment. Despite what we know, it still proves to be an area of dissatisfaction for students, and an ongoing challenge for academics in terms of getting it right.

Reflective Activity

To get thinking started, consider the following questions, evaluating the way it is right now in your direct sphere of influence and more widely in your University, and then thinking about how practice might be enhanced.

How is feedback operating right now to facilitate student learning?

What is working and how do you know?

How are feedback practices supporting the development of self-regulated learners?

How might practices be enhanced?

The [REAP project](#) was introduced earlier in this toolkit with a focus on assessment. Just as it aimed to identified evidence informed assessment principles, it also generated seven principles associated with good feedback practice which together combine to empower learners.

1. Clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards)
2. Facilitate the development of reflection and self-assessment in learning
3. Deliver high quality feedback to students: that enables them to self-correct
4. Encourage dialogue around learning (peer and tutor-student)

5. Encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem
6. Provide opportunities to act on feedback
7. Provide information that teachers can use to help shape their teaching

Reflective Activity



Go back to your review of your own feedback practice, and consider the extent to which any, or all of the principles feature in what you do.

Reflect on whether any of the principles could be used to further develop what you already do.

Ensuring feedback practices which are effective because they do support students to learn is both a challenge and an opportunity and will be shaped by the discipline. The example highlighted below comes from within the creative industries, but it has the potential to be adapted into other disciplinary contexts.

	<p>Richard Firth, Ruth Cochrane, Kay Sambell, Sally Brown</p> <p>Using a simple feedback stamp to provide incremental feedback on work-in-progress in the art design context.</p> <p>https://staff.napier.ac.uk/services/dlfe/Documents/11%20Using%20a%20simple%20feedback%20stamp.pdf</p>
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The example above concerns feedback in a formative context while learning is still progressing within the course. But it is teacher led. The following website is worth exploring because it facilitates thinking in respect of how students might become self-regulated learners, developing a reliance on themselves rather than academics. Do take the opportunity to follow up some of the resources highlighted within it.

	 <p>UNLOCKING THE POWER OF INNER FEEDBACK Comparison changes everything</p> <p>https://www.davidnicol.net</p>
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In summary, as a way to bring this toolkit to a close, assessment without feedback is a wasted opportunity and needs to be designed into the curriculum. Taking time to think about how feedback will operate across the years of an undergraduate programme and in Masters level provision will reap dividends, for students and for academics because we'll move thinking away from loop closing – which is indeed valuable – to feedback spirals, a means as Carless (2018) maintains to foster iterative longer term learning. By thinking in this way feedback practices really can become integral to the development of work-ready graduates and global citizens.

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