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IMPROVING ASSESSMENT IN A COMPREHENSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE WAY:

Infrastructure, Strategy and Staff Learning.

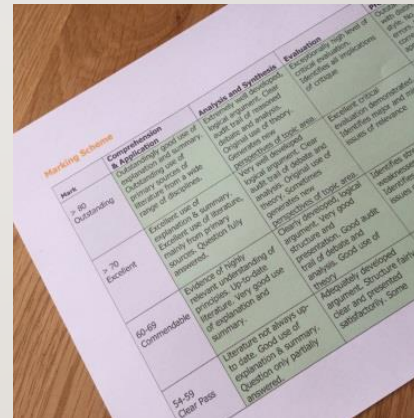


Sue Bloxham

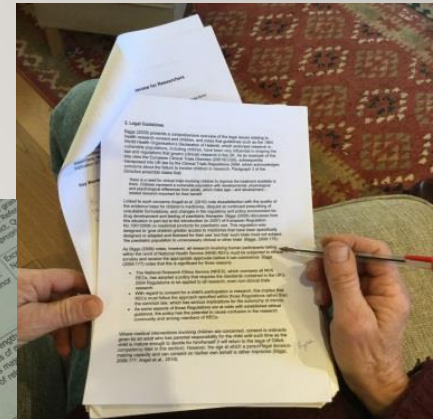
S.Bloxham@cumbria.ac.uk

STRUCTURE OF PRESENTATION

1. What makes for effective assessment – research trends
2. The state of current assessment practices
3. Barriers to implementing change in assessment and potential solutions
4. A framework for change



Criteria	Analysis and Synthesis	Evaluation	
> 90 Outstanding	Comprehension of key concepts and terminology. Distinctive use of analytical tools to analyse form and style. Choice of appropriate.	Consistently well-developed, logical and supported. Original use of theory. Consistent use of texts. Very well developed. Very good use of detail. Clear and logical. Original use of analysis. Sometimes.	Excellent critical evaluation demonstrated. Identification of strengths and weaknesses. Use of evidence.
> 70 Excellent	Excellent use of explanation. Use of literature. Material from primary sources. Question by answer.	Very good use of theory. Good use of detail. Clear and logical. Original use of analysis. Sometimes.	Excellent critical evaluation demonstrated. Identification of strengths and weaknesses. Use of evidence.
60-69 Good	Evidence of highly relevant understanding of literature. Up-to-date literature. Very good use of explanation and summary.	Very good use of theory. Good use of detail. Clear and logical. Original use of analysis. Sometimes.	Very good critical evaluation demonstrated. Identification of strengths and weaknesses. Use of evidence.
50-59 Satisfactory	Literature not always up-to-date. Good use of explanation and summary. Question only partially answered.	Good use of theory. Good use of detail. Clear and logical. Original use of analysis. Sometimes.	Good critical evaluation demonstrated. Identification of strengths and weaknesses. Use of evidence.



ASSESSMENT: WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS:

- assessment is used to engage students in productive learning
- feedback is used to actively improve student learning.
- students and teachers become responsible partners in learning and assessment.
- students are inducted into the assessment practices and cultures of higher education.

- assessment for learning is placed at the centre of subject and program design
- assessment for learning is a focus for staff and institutional development
- assessment provides inclusive and trustworthy representation of student achievement.



Assessment design

- Diversify assessment to improve validity, authenticity and inclusivity,
- focus on assessing programme level outcomes.
- Less summative, more truly formative, assessment integrated with teaching and learning.

Students

- Greater partnership in assessment, with a clear voice in institutional decision-making regarding assessment.
- Improve understanding of assessment expectations through greater opportunity for self- and peer review,
- support for study skills and academic integrity.

Staff

- Assessment literacy of academic staff paramount.

From A marked Improvement (2013)
HEA

Infra-structure

- technologies harnessed to enhance assessment practice, improve feedback and streamline assessment information and administration.
- students' achievements communicated in fair and consistent ways

CHANGING ASSESSMENT PRACTICE TO SUPPORT RETENTION AND DIVERSITY

- Ensure plenty of formative assessment and dialogue
- Help students 'understand the rules of the game'
- Resist the temptation to 'spoonfeed' students
- Help students develop academic and library skills
- Capitalise on the potential of students to help one another
- Consider how your assessment strategy and timing helps students with the transition to HE learning



BUT WHAT DO WE FIND?

- **Poor validity** in assessment methods – practices not kept pace with the outcomes we expect from a university education - remain dominated by unseen exams and essays;
- Poor **balance of formative and summative assessment** – restrictive use of formative assessment;
- **Growth in summative assessment**, with its negative backwash effect on student learning
- **Atomisation** of assessment to individual modules/ courses – not assessing programme outcomes,
- Many parts of the assessment cycle are **not informed by evidence**, e.g marking and moderation;

WHAT'S WRONG CONTINUED

- **Unsustainable feedback** practices;
- Students can remain **confused about what is expected** of them in assessment;
- **Poor comparability and reliability** in marking; standards are both fudged and challenged;
- **Integrity of academic standards** is at risk as web technologies and essay mills facilitate malpractice;

Is it surprising that we face:

- continuing poor student satisfaction levels for assessment and feedback?
- Increasing student complaints and appeals - many related to assessment (OIA 2012, OIA 2015)?

ASSESSMENT CHANGE IS SLOW

Lots of energy directed at changing assessment, particularly at institutional levels, but **limited change?**

The impact has mostly been at the level of **individual** academic staff.

University assessment traditions remain '**stubbornly resistant to change**' (Ferrell 2012)

Centrally imposed change



Active resistance,
cynicism



why



Change leaders not
understanding values, ideas
and experiences of those
who have to implement

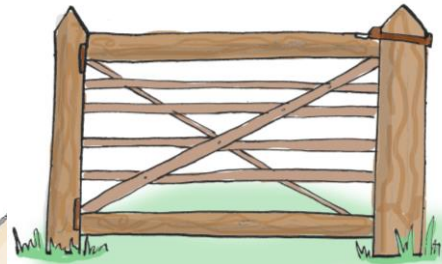
Response

Collaborative design and implementation of change

Respect 'autonomy, agency and knowledge' of
teaching staff (Jessop, in press)

Avoid change by coercion

Focus on individuals to drive change



Work groups filter and adapt proposals;
Outcomes unpredictable and not as intended

why →

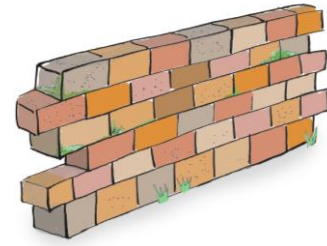
Individuals powerfully influenced by 'workgroup'
(Trowler et al 2005)

Response

Site for change should be immediate workgroup

Focus on 'everyday' teaching and teachers

Institutional policy and quality assurance



Restricts or directs change

why



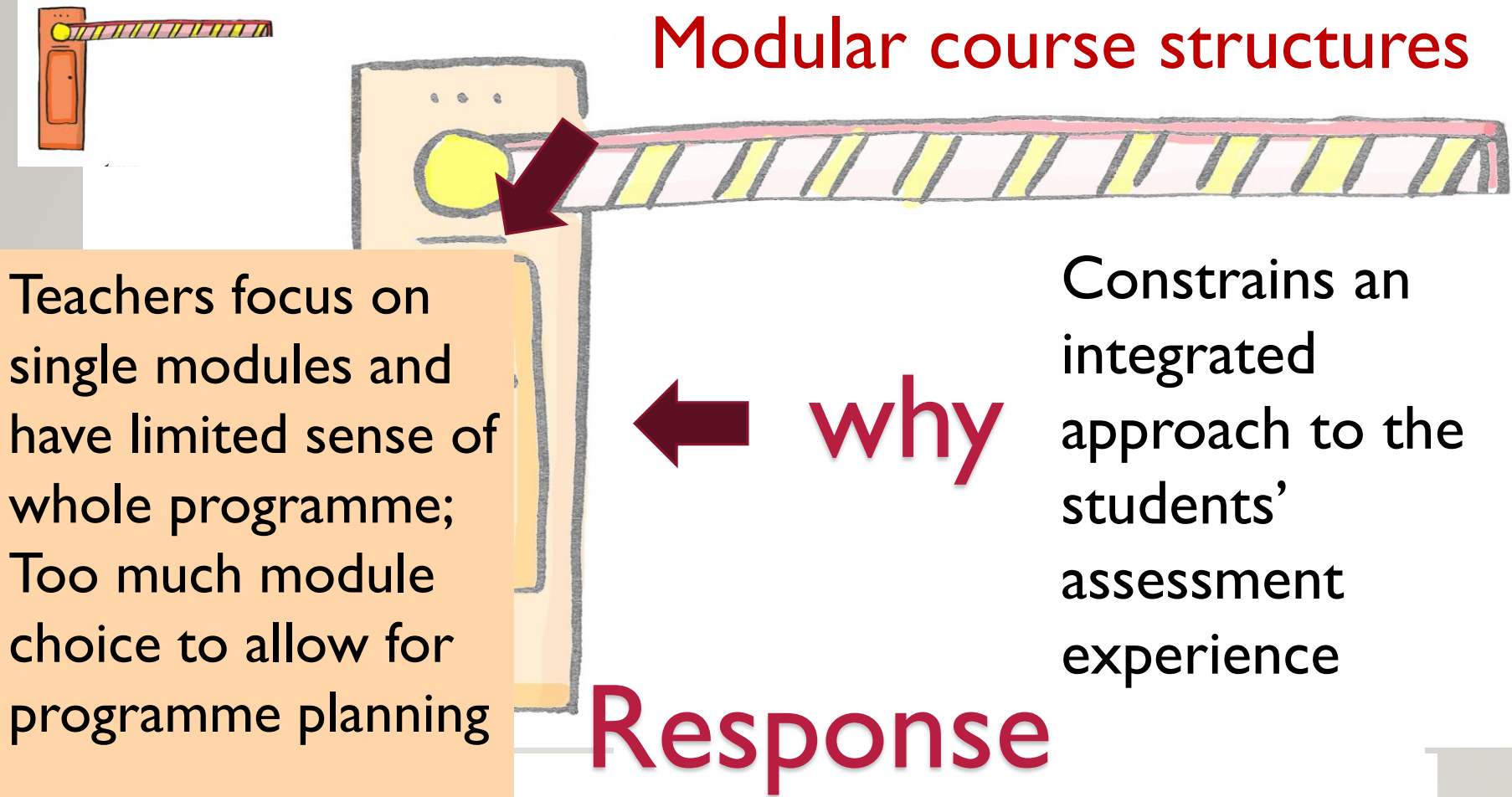
Implicit emphasis on summative assessment

Response

Closer working between academic development and quality assurance

Ensure regulations and quality procedures support change

Modular course structures



Teachers focus on single modules and have limited sense of whole programme; Too much module choice to allow for programme planning

Constrains an integrated approach to the students' assessment experience

← why

Response

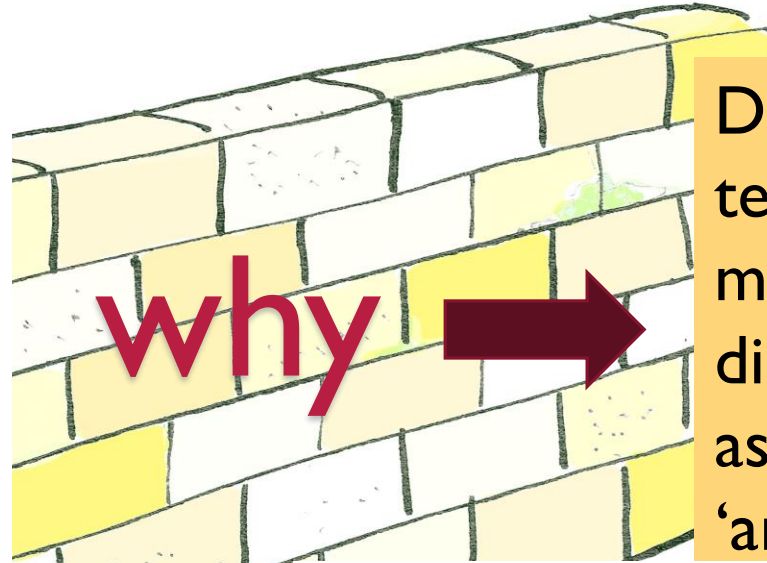
Focus change at the programme level, looking at assessment across modules

Consider reducing student module choice

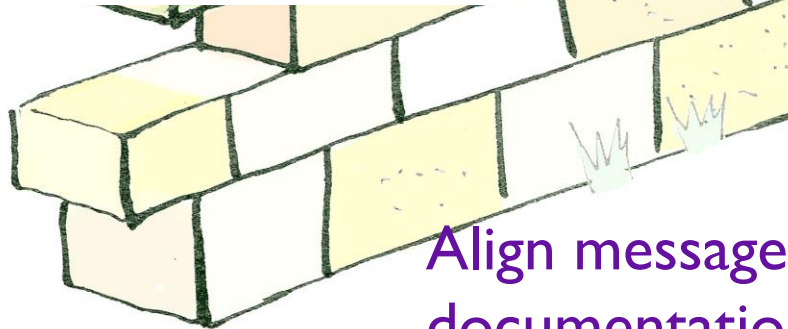
Institutional assessment discourse



Limits dialogue about formative assessment; focus on summative assessment



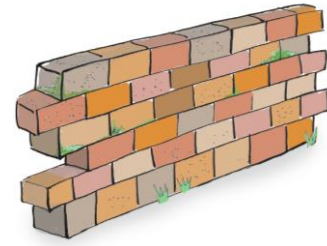
Dominant techno-rational, measurement discourse shapes assessment 'artefacts'



Response

Align messages of course approval and other documentation with proposed changes

Consider language of assessment debate



Assessment literacy




Unwillingness to change;
Practices stay traditional;
Unsophisticated
implementation, e.g,
formative assessment



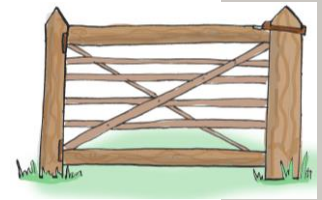
why

Response

- Develop assessment literacy of stakeholders – staff and students
- Bring together those involved in teaching and assessment to review evidence and identify and prioritise areas that need change
- Work inductively from agreed problems to development of assessment knowledge and beliefs
- Share successful change examples once interest raised



Teachers disagree about the purpose of assessment; do not see the benefits of change; not familiar with and lack nuanced understanding of assessment concepts



Pressured environment



Unwillingness to change;
Move towards automated
assessment

↓
why

High workloads, staff
lack time for change

Response

Workload neutral change as minimum

Risk



Change perceived as risky; staff anxious; pressure to retain 'tidy' assessment system and 'tried and tested' methods

why



High degree of penetration in HEIs, therefore institutional change involves high numbers of staff and students; difficulty balancing autonomy and consistency

Response

Make proposed areas of change appear less or un-risky to managers, staff and students

Consider carefully the risks that might attend any assessment innovation so they can be prepared for.

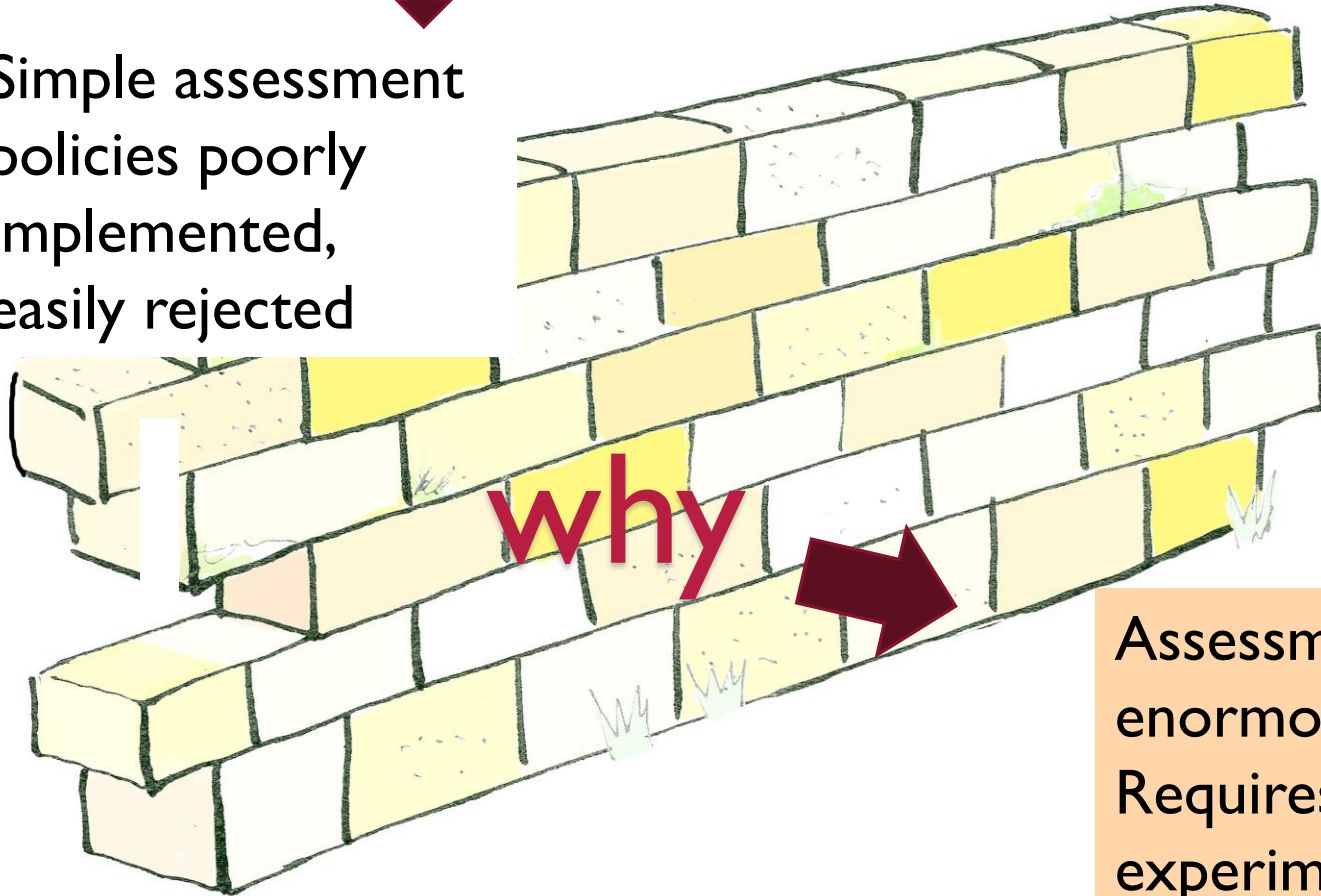
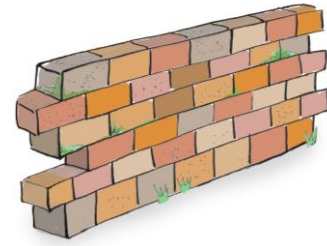
Use saturation CPD where it really matters, e.g. to ensure fair and consistent assessment procedures.



Complexity of assessment



Simple assessment policies poorly implemented, easily rejected



Assessment is enormously complex; Requires experimentation and persistence
(see list on next slide)

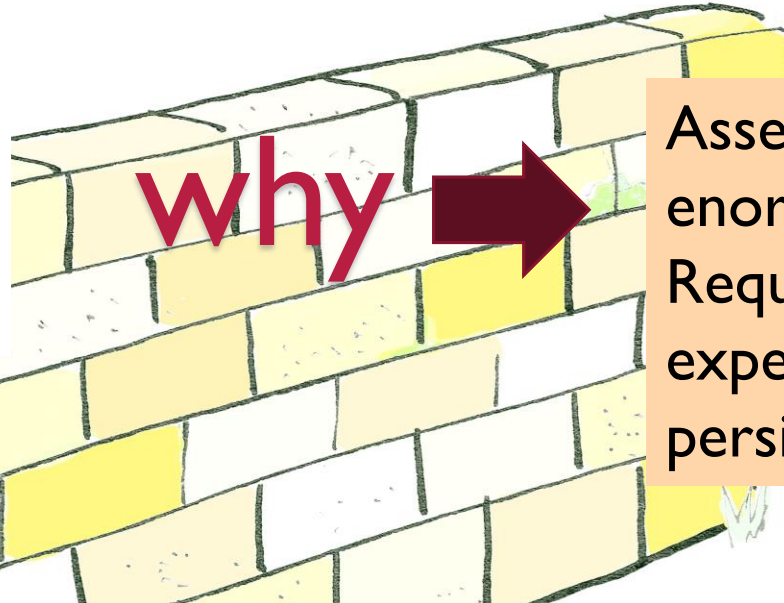
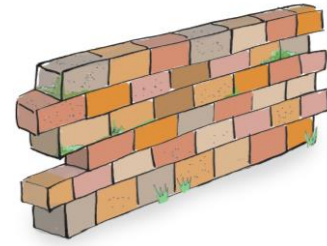
COMPLEXITY OF ASSESSMENT

- Valid, authentic assessment needs to reflect 21st century graduate outcomes;
- feedback is demanding concept: sustainability, dialogue, ownership, self-regulation, partnership – complicated to communicate or embed in programmes;
- Trustworthy judgement and grading is being revealed as complex and, potentially, unattainable;
- Involving students as assessors perceived as both vital to learning-oriented assessment and as risky, unfair and difficult to persuade student participation.

Complexity of assessment



Simple assessment policies poorly implemented, easily rejected



Assessment is enormously complex; Requires experimentation and persistence

Response

Institutional level initiative should avoid determining specific assessment changes - focus on the general direction: creating principles and tools

Develop assessment literacy - of staff and students –

Use a scholarly approach

Building a guiding framework for institutional and departmental transformation in assessment

Key principles

e.g. the importance of collaborative change

Infrastructure

e.g. align QA documentation with change aims

Strategy

e.g. implement change at 'work group' level

Assessment literacy

e.g. prog. teams gain evidence of the student assessment experience



Key principles

A scholarly approach

Teams control assessment evaluation data

Respect autonomy agency discipline knowledge

Collaborative change, taking into account multiple constituencies

Strategy

A guiding framework for transformation in assessment

Infrastructure

Align validation and other docs with change

Assessment literacy



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