

CRADLE suggests...

Assessment for inclusion



WHAT IS ASSESSMENT FOR INCLUSION?

University credentials are designed to demonstrate learner achievement. Yet while assessment results *should* be based on ability rather than personal circumstances, there is increasing awareness that this is frequently not the case. Legally, universities are obliged to recognise some categories of student equity (e.g. those with disabilities) and give them specialised support in assessment. Usually, this amounts to peripheral adjustments, access to unique software (e.g., text to audio), or extra time. Whilst this might mitigate some disadvantages, assessment ultimately determines student retention and success at university, and students from equity backgrounds continue to graduate at lower rates compared to the general population.

Assessment for inclusion seeks to ensure that no student is advantaged or disadvantaged in assessment other than through their ability to meet appropriate necessary standards. It focusses on assessment design fundamentals which better support all students to demonstrate their achievements, addressing structural and sociocultural barriers.

THE RESEARCH

The CRADLE team have conducted research on assessment for inclusion. It has explored diverse students' experiences of assessment and considered how good assessment design can contribute to inclusion. A co-edited open-access book brings together different ideas and perspectives on inclusion and assessment from international researchers, educators, and students. From this body of work, we highlight some recommendations which educators can apply to their practice.



SUGGESTIONS FOR DESIGNING INCLUSIVE ASSESSMENT

Recognise that student diversity can interact negatively with assessment

Each university student has unique characteristics, which are not always readily apparent to educators. These may involve labels such as 'disability', 'culturally and linguistically diverse' and 'low-socioeconomic background'. But students might not use these terms to describe themselves and their capabilities. Nor might these be the biggest influence on learning. All assessments should be designed on the assumption that students' backgrounds and circumstances will impact on their participation in assessment and that tasks and processes should consider these. For instance, students with poor internet connections, with specific medical conditions, with caring responsibilities, part-time work, non-traditional educational backgrounds, non-English speaking backgrounds, and/or from overseas.

students might have strengths in different formats. Instead of trying to achieve 'sameness' in an assessment task, support students to demonstrate their learning and capabilities across multiple formats that permit them to meet the learning outcomes.

Review the inclusivity of the processes involved in assessment tasks

The activities required to complete an assessment task can have an impact on inclusivity: will all students, no matter how diverse, be able to engage fully in all aspects of the task? Does the task require a particular piece of software or equipment, or attendance at a particular location or time which is difficult to access? Does it require a particular practice which not all students are familiar and practised with (e.g., a debate, or a particular form of writing)? Identify what scaffolding might be required to prepare all students and to support them to engage appropriately in the task.

Centre for Research in Assessment and Digital Learning

CRADLE suggests is a series of briefings from the [Centre for Research and Assessment in Digital Learning \(CRADLE\)](#), which translates our own research into practice-based possibilities.

Allow students to demonstrate learning outcomes in different ways

All students are required to meet the same standards, but they don't necessarily need to do so in the same way. Requiring only one format for a task may advantage or disadvantage any given student. For instance, communication might occur through written, spoken, audio, or video formats – and different



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Consider how the entire experience of assessment may inadvertently exclude some students

Students experience assessment as more than the work they did, or the product they submitted. Aspects such as instructions, topics, workshops, criteria, interactions with teachers, examiners, other students, the timing of the submission, and the spaces (virtual or real) they perform their assessment in, all contributed to students' overall perceptions of inclusion in assessment. For example, students with rostered shifts might lose a day to work on their assessment since the 5pm deadline falls when they are at work. Consider which components of the assessment experience might act as barriers for students, and what could be modified to be more inclusive.

Discuss inclusive assessment practices with staff and students

Students in our research described the burden of negotiating accommodations according to their legitimate legal rights. They spent additional effort responding to requests for additional documentation and negotiating a new deadline which took time and energy away from their learning. Open discussions with staff

(including tutors and invigilators) and students on how diversity might interact with assessment and what can be done proactively to accommodate diverse needs. Though there will still be queries about inclusion to manage, orienting towards inclusion in principle will contribute towards building a safer environment in which to raise queries and concerns.

Evaluate and improve assessment designs by involving a diverse range of students

Instead of trying to guess at what might be inclusive, involving students in decisions about their assessment tasks can reveal elements which can disadvantage certain students. Working with students on creating rubrics, communicating criteria, using peer formative feedback, or choosing final task formats can open discussions, and develop their assessment literacies. Furthermore, consider what other data might help you understand the unintended consequences of assessment as part of regular evaluation processes. Collaborative efforts can then be made to develop more inclusive assessment strategies.

FIND MORE

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3. Tai, J., Ajjawi, R., Bearman, M., Dargusch, J., Dracup, M., Harris, L., & Mahoney, P. (2022). *Re-imagining exams: How do assessment adjustments impact on inclusion?* <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/exams-assessment-adjustments-inclusion/>
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5. Tai, J., Mahoney, P., Ajjawi, R., Bearman, M., Dargusch, J., Dracup, M., & Harris, L. (2022). How are examinations inclusive for students with disabilities in higher education? A sociomaterial analysis. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 48(3), 390–402. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2022.2077910>

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