

Title: **Assessment for Student Engagement**

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

On completion of the session, delegates will be encouraged to:

- Identify connections between, and problems associated with, assessment and student engagement
- Design and implement assessments that enhance engagement and work against alienating pressures

Session Outline

Assessment is a key driver of students' learning activities. However it is far from clear in what way this works in practice. Do our assessments motivate students towards rich and engaged learning, or do the unintended consequences (Rowntree, 1987), and the inherent alienating forces (Mann, 2001) encourage learning that is risk-avoiding, instrumental, and ultimately unsatisfactory for student and tutor alike?

We gathered evidence from student focus groups, and this tells us that the student is certainly engaged by assessments, but often in the 'wrong' way. Firstly, many students appear to have the primary focus of 'getting a 2:1'. Secondly students misunderstand their teachers' aims for learning and assessment. Furthermore this misalignment of purpose develops right from the beginning of a course (and may even begin to form *prior* to entering Higher Education). Taken together, these problems produce an approach towards assessments that frustrates teachers, and causes anxiety for students.

Design (Ramsden, 2003), and, particularly, implementation are key in producing assessment experiences that encourage learning and maintain student engagement. Our own research, backed by an extensive review of the work of others, identifies that the students' perception of fairness is important. To ensure that fairness is apparent, and misunderstanding avoided, we propose that, at the heart of good assessment practice, lies the development of appropriate trust relationships and meaningful discourse.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

- Learning Outcome 1: Presentation of our findings and ideas (no more than 15/20 minutes) – recognising the connections between, and problems associated with, assessment and student engagement
- Learning Outcome 2: Delegates will be invited to contribute by concentrating on approaches to assessment implementation that may enhance student engagement and work against alienating pressures (25/30 minutes)

Evaluation

Evaluation of the session will be by asking each delegate to respond in writing to open-ended questions that will be posed at the close of the session. The questions (the detailed wording of which are yet to be formulated) will relate to (a) the delegates experience of the session, (b) whether (and in what way) they may like to be involved in future work in this area.

References

Mann, S. J. (2001) Alternative perspectives on the student experience: alienation and engagement, Studies in Higher Education 26(1): 7-19.

Ramsden, P. (2003) Learning to Teach in Higher Education. London, RoutledgeFalmer.