

Session title: Enabling staff to showcase innovation in any format: Research findings from the application of a flexible summative assessment on a PG Cert HE.

Session type: Research paper (20 mins plus questions)

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Session summary:

This paper explores academic and professional services staff experiences of an open format flexible summative assessment approach, as part of the Postgraduate Certificate Higher Education (PGCHE). The PGCHE is a taught development pathway available to early career University of Portsmouth staff with teaching responsibilities. The findings demonstrate the impact of the flexible assessment brief in relation to accessibility and student engagement and how this approach has ultimately influenced their own academic practice.

Session outline:

A flexible assessment allows learners to select their preferred method of assessment to evidence how they have met the Learning Outcomes attached to their programme of study. Small scale studies have already identified the potential benefits of using this approach, which aims to develop a more student centred and personalised educational experience (Wanner, T., Palmer, E., & Palmer, D. 2021, Rideout, C.A. 2018). Nieminen (2022) has described the rationale for Assessment for Inclusion (Afi) which has five practical principles; rethinking accommodations, anti-ableist work, celebration of human diversity, student partnership, and interdependence which are focused on fostering inclusion by designing assessments which are inclusive for all students from the outset (opposed to a traditional approach to assessment types where reasonable adjustments are made retrospectively). By acknowledging the diversity of student bodies which are accessed via the PGCHE cohort, there was an opportunity for academic staff to be exposed to, and gain awareness of, alternative ways to adapt and tailor student assessment.

The primary objective of this study was to evaluate a recent innovation in staff development, where the summative assessment of the Research Informed Teaching module (Project Output) offered a high amount of flexibility in format. Previous years saw students studying the module being asked to conduct a small sociological education research study, which was written up as a short academic article. Due to prior challenges with this assessment for lesser-experienced sociological-related staff, this assessment was revised in summer 2022, allowing students to submit their curriculum enhancement in a format of their choosing. The change of assessment methodology was deliberate, allowing PGCHE students to have an opportunity to use an assessment format which could be tailored to meet their individual requirements (opposed to being constrained by a predetermined submission type) whilst also showcasing a more inclusive approach to assessment.

References:

Nieminen, J.H. (2022) Assessment for Inclusion: rethinking inclusive assessment in higher education, *Teaching in Higher Education*, DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2021.2021395

Rideout, C.A. (2018) Students' choices and achievement in large undergraduate classes using a novel flexible assessment approach, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 43:1, 68-78, DOI: 10.1080/02602938.2017.1294144