_____

Inclusive assessment in higher education: what does the literature tells us on how to define and design inclusive assessments?

Katrin Bain
London Metropolitan University, UK

Abstract

In recent decades the diversity of university students has increased, and it has been observed that degree results vary between student groups. This degree awarding gap is particularly high between White students on the one hand and Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority students on the other. Assessments are a key aspect of closing the degree awarding gap. A systematic literature review was conducted to explore 'What makes higher education assessments inclusive?' and 'How to design inclusive assessments in higher education?'. 14 articles were qualitatively analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Four dominant themes were found in the literature: defining 'inclusive', assessment, wider context, and student perspectives. In the literature a clear response to the first research question was found, defining inclusive assessment as the provision of assessments that allow all students to do well without receiving alternative or adapted assessments. The second question proved more difficult to answer. While some aspects of inclusive assessments could be identified, others are still unanswered. The results showed that assessments cannot be planned in isolation but need to be integrated within the wider course design. Only one of the articles included data on student grades and progression. The existing qualitative findings could be enhanced by parallel quantitative data to understand the impact of inclusive assessments on grades and their potential in closing the degree awarding gap. Ultimately, this paper will argue that the current literature concerning inclusive assessment is limited by the lack of data on student attainment.

Keywords: inclusive assessment; higher education; widening participation; inclusive education; attainment gap.

Introduction

Inclusive assessments are a small but important aspect of the wider field of inclusive pedagogies and inclusive learning and teaching spaces. In recent decades university students have become more diverse. Widening participation initiatives actively recruit non-traditional students, like those from lower socio-economic groups, first generation students, ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, mature, and international students (Tai, Ajjawi and Umarova, 2021, p.2; Gibson, Clarkson and Scott, 2022, p.543). Therefore, a wider range of student experience, skills, and abilities, lived experiences and cultural backgrounds can be found in the classroom and it has been observed that degree results vary between student groups.

This degree awarding gap demonstrates a phenomenon of differences in degree grades between student groups that cannot be related back to the individual's ability. The difference is particularly great between White students on the one hand and Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority students (BAME) on the other (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2015; Universities UK and National Union of Students, 2019). In social work these differences continue after graduation in the assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) where 53% of newly qualified social workers who fail the ASYE are BAME despite only 26% of all ASYE participants identifying as BAME (Skills for Care, 2021). The degree awarding gap also exists between students of higher and lower socio-economic status, between younger and older students, and between those with and without disabilities. Assessments are one of the key aspects of the awarding gap as '[s]tudents can, with difficulty, escape from the effects of poor teaching, they cannot (by definition if they want to graduate) escape the effects of poor assessment' (Boud, 1995, p.35). There is a wide range of literature on inclusive educational practices but only a small part of that focuses specifically on assessment design (Tai, Ajjawi and Umarova, 2021, p.3). The following literature review sets out to establish what makes assessments in higher education inclusive and how to design inclusive assessments in higher education, with the aim of eliminating the degree awarding gap and allowing all students to do well regardless of their background and protected characteristics (Equality Act 2010).

Methodology

This study aims to investigate two questions:

- What makes higher education assessments inclusive?
- How to design inclusive assessments in higher education?

To answer the research questions a literature review was conducted using a systematic approach (Aveyard, 2014). Two online databases were used to find literature: [University 1] Ebsco database and [University 2] E-Resources Catalogue. Several pre-searches were conducted to establish appropriate keywords to get relevant results, and to determine the range of available literature to develop inclusion and exclusion criteria. This led to the understanding that 'inclusive assessment' had to be in the title for the results to be relevant. It was also established that it is not necessary to limit by subject area or years (see Table 1 for full inclusion and exclusion criteria).

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
- Language: English. - All years and subject areas. - Higher education. - Inclusive assessment of students in modules.	- All other languages. - School context. - Inclusive design of student surveys. - Assessment outside modules. - General literature on assessment.

The first systematic search was conducted on 26 November 2021 in [University 1] Ebsco database. Title (exact) inclusive assessment AND any field 'higher education' led to 12 results (n=12). A second search with any field is (exact) 'inclusive assessment' AND any field is (exact) 'higher education' AND language German yielded one result of an English chapter in a German book. Within the results one was a duplicate and one was removed as it was a book

Bain

Inclusive assessment in higher education: what does the literature tells us on how to define and design inclusive assessments?

review that was not relevant to this study. On the 28 November 2021 I systematically searched [University 2] E-Resources Catalogue for Title 'inclusive assessment' AND keyword 'higher education'. This led to 28 results. Of those six were duplicates of titles found in the [University 1] database and two were duplicates within the database. I removed another 11 as they covered irrelevant topics. After reading the abstracts of the remaining 19 articles I excluded seven articles as they referred to assessments in schools not in higher education. This left 12 articles that were retrieved. One article could not be retrieved under the title found in the searches. The same authors published an article on the same topic in the same year that was used instead (Sharp and Earle, 2000). An initial read revealed that one article looked at higher education evaluation surveys that students completed rather than assessment of students, and another was a first-person commentary. Both were excluded. The remaining ten documents were selected for analysis (see Appendix for a full list). Of the ten documents, two are book chapters, and eight are journal articles. Eight of the documents are based on primary research, mostly case studies, and report results from projects the authors have been involved in. The other two are theoretical papers. The documents cover a wide range of subject areas including law, history, and drama.

On 13 February 2023 I repeated the search in both databases with the same keywords and a date range from 26 November 2021 to date to ensure that the literature is up to date. Both databases found the same five articles. Two (Tai, Ajjawi and Umarova, 2021; Gibson, Clarkson and Scott, 2022) are literature reviews and two (Nieminen, 2022; Paguyo, Sponsler and Iturbe-LaGrave, 2022) explore inclusive assessments from a theoretical, conceptual perspective. The final article (Reason and Ward, 2022) was included in the original research as a pre-print and is now published in the journal. The reference has been updated. No new primary research was found.

The articles were qualitatively analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. '[T]hematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.78). This method is particularly useful for inductive category building, which was used in this research: 'inductive analysis is therefore a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions' (Braun and Clarke, 2006,

p.83). Inductive category building was chosen as this is an exploratory research project that wants to give meaning to the 'buzzword' of inclusive assessment and fill it with content. Thematic analysis allows for the rich description of all elements in the data that make assignments inclusive and uncovers similarities and differences in how the term is understood. In Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis themes are developed through a six-stage process that was followed in this research. It starts with familiarisation with the topic and the reading and re-reading of the full data set. In this process an initial list of ideas and themes within the data is compiled. In a second step initial codes are generated. Braun and Clarke (2006) stress the importance of context by including the text before and after the coded section. In the third step the codes are sorted into potential themes before the themes are reviewed in the fourth step to ensure they accurately represent the data set. Themes are then named and defined. The initial codes were arranged into four themes: defining 'inclusive', assessment, wider context, and student perspectives. This is followed by the final analysis and write-up that is presented in the following sections.

Findings and Discussion

How is 'inclusive' defined and who should be included?

The first thing that stood out within the texts were the different understandings and emphases on what 'inclusive' means, or more precisely who should be included. For Collins (2010) it was the desire to offer on- and off-campus students an equitable and inclusive experience. Gibson, Clarkson and Scott (2022) focussed on distance learners with disabilities. Forsyth and Evans (2019) explored inclusivity in the context of history and how inclusive assessments could contribute to including all students within the context of widening participation. Jackson (2006), Keating, Sharp and Earle (2000), Zybutz and Rouse (2012), Morris, Milton and Goldstone (2019), and Reason and Ward (2022) focus on the inclusion of students with disabilities. While the authors emphasise different disabilities, like dyslexia or learning disabilities, they all use the social model of disability as the justification and starting point as to why inclusive assessment is necessary: 'either way, we were seeking to operate within a social model of disability and insisting that, like society in general, universities must adapt to enable everyone the opportunity to reach their full potential' (Reason and Ward, 2022, p.139). As will be discussed below, reasonable adjustments that are commonly granted to students

with disabilities are not seen by these authors as suitable to achieve that. Nieminen (2022) also focusses on the inclusion of students with disabilities but uses the resistance model of disability that builds on the medical and social model. The model accepts that accommodations might be necessary and that disability is socially constructed while adding 'the self-determination and agency of disabled people themselves' (Nieminen, 2022, p.4). The final group of authors (Kaur, Noman and Nordin, 2017; Kneale and Collings, 2018; McConlogue, 2020; Tai, Ajjawi and Umarova, 2021; Paguyo, Sponsler and Iturbe-LaGrave, 2022) had the widest understanding of inclusion, looking at diverse characteristics like gender, ethnicity, language, ability, experience, social background, disability, sexuality, and intersections between these characteristics. The authors also included mature students and international students in their considerations.

The interest in inclusive assessment for students with disabilities was fuelled by the 2001 Special Educational Need and Disabilities Act and the 2005 Disabilities Discrimination Act. A further motivation for making assessments more inclusive are the low satisfaction scores of students within the National Student Survey (NSS). The NSS is conducted annually with final year undergraduate students and the results have a significant impact on rankings and recruitment: 'in the UK, assessment is the element of higher education that receives the lowest satisfaction scores from students' (Reason and Ward, 2022, p.140; see also Morris, Milton and Goldstone, 2019; Kneale and Collings, 2018). In Morris, Milton and Goldstone's research more students with additional learning needs than without were not satisfied with current assessment practices (2019, p.439).

While the authors looked at different student groups, they all agreed that inclusive assessment needs to be suitable for and should be offered to all students: 'inclusive assessment processes provide for all students whilst also meeting the needs of [a] specific group.' (Morris, Milton and Goldstone, 2019, p.437). Inclusion in this context therefore means the provision of assessments that allow all students, including the groups listed above, to do well without receiving alternative or adapted assessments. The next section looks at assessments in more detail.

Assessment

The search for inclusive assessments is rooted in the observation that within current assessment practices some student groups either do not perform as well as others or require adaptations to balance out disadvantages. For disabled students and those with additional learning needs reasonable adjustments aim to mitigate this. Reasonable adjustments include measures such as extra time, or a quiet exam room, and are granted to disabled students who have disclosed and proven their disability (Tai, Ajjawi and Umarova, 2021). Nieminen writes: 'in higher education, disabilities are largely seen as deficits that need to be accommodated, rather than understanding them as something that enriches academia' (2022, p.1). Sharp and Earle rightly see adaptations of this kind as exclusionary and problematic:

> The principle which underlies all such practices, would seem to be compensation. It is not argued that these alternative forms of assessment are, in any sense, equivalent to those which non-disabled students must undertake, but instead that they are justified on the basis that disabled students possess disadvantages for which they are entitled to be compensated. This principle is evidenced by the fact that such an alternative form of assessment would not be offered until the candidate had successfully demonstrated that his or her disability justified it. (2000, p.195).

They go on to state that if equivalent assessments tested identical skills and knowledge then it should be offered to all rather than just to students who have proven a need for adjustments. This is the first characteristic of inclusive assessments: all assessment variants are offered to all students and the assessment enables all students to do well. Inclusive assessment therefore is an alternative to reasonable adjustments (Kneale and Collings, 2018; McConlogue, 2020). Staff in Morris, Milton and Goldstone's research stated that they rely on central services like the Disability and Dyslexia Service to mitigate the impact of disabilities (2019, p.441). They also acknowledge that waiting times are long and some students, for example young carers, students with anxiety and students with English as and Additional Language do not fit the service well while still needing support or adjustments. Inclusive assessments as an alternative to reasonable adjustments have the advantage that the responsibility for assessment is clearly with the lecturer and in the classroom. All students can be successful regardless of diagnosis.

The texts offered no straightforward answer as to how to design assessments that allow all students to do well. The following sections will address some of the contradictions and tensions inherent in the discussion around inclusive assessment.

It is worth considering why assessments are part of higher education degrees:

> There are several reasons which could be advanced in favour of this requirement, but perhaps the most important is that higher education, like other forms of education, functions to ensure that individuals entrusted to carry out certain roles, do in fact possess the skills and knowledge necessary to do so. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of professional qualification, where practitioners are expected to be competent in their field of practice; indeed where considerable harm may result if they are not. (Sharp and Earle, 2000, p.192).

If we accept this argument, then assessments 'should genuinely test the skills and knowledge in question and nothing else' (Sharp and Earle, 2000, p.193). Often assessments test two things: the professional skills and knowledge being assessed, and the skills and knowledge required to master the assessment instrument itself (Sharp and Earle, 2000; Morris, Milton and Goldstone, 2019). Sometimes the assessment format, like an essay or presentation, prepares students for the future workplace:

> writing essays might be the most authentic preparation for the myriad workplaces that need people to absorb, synthesise and evaluate diverse sources of information to prepare recommendations or draw strategic conclusions. (Forsyth and Evans, 2019, p.757).

Where the assessment instrument is not relevant to the professional skills and knowledge that the assessment tests, a choice of assessment formats can be offered (Keating, Zybutz and Rouse, 2012; Gibson, Clarkson and Scott, 2022). Choice is a frequently mentioned but not uncontested characteristic of inclusive assessment (Tai, Ajjawi and Umarova, 2021). It is stressed that choice in inclusive assessments should not lead to easier assessments: 'equity

Bain

Inclusive assessment in higher education: what does the literature tells us on how to define and design inclusive assessments?

in assessment choice is key, so it is important to create a range of assessments of similar complexity and involving similar effort and time from students' (McConlogue, 2020, p.145).

At the same time inclusive assessments should enable students to play to their strengths. Usually, tasks that play to one's strengths are perceived as easier which would suggest that it is inevitable that choice in assessments will lead to students finding assessments easier. It is also worth considering that some students already find traditional assessments easier than others, and if done well, choice could enable all or at least more students to find a format that suits them and that they might perceive as easier. The concern about the standard of inclusive assessments goes beyond choice.

> Inclusive assessment is not 'easier assessment', and it should not give students the opportunity to avoid specific tasks which are fundamental to their development in their subject discipline. It is about enhancing practice to offer students greater opportunity to develop both skills and disciplinary knowledge in a supported and challenging environment (Kneale and Collings, 2015). Students must demonstrate that all learning outcomes, academic and professional standards have been achieved (Kneale and Collings, 2018, p.31; see also Morris, Milton and Goldstone, 2019).

The authors use universal design principles (Morris, Milton and Goldstone, 2019; McConlogue, 2020; Tai, Ajjawi and Umarova, 2021) and authentic assessment principles (Kaur, Noman and Nordin, 2017; Kneale and Collings, 2018; Forsyth and Evans, 2019; Morris, Milton and Goldstone, 2019) to design inclusive assessments. Authentic assessments are aligned to employability skills so that the assessments are meaningful to the students. Understanding authentic assessment as aligned to workplace skills can be problematic if existing social structures should not be replicated, but equally students should be given the best possible employment opportunity (Forsyth and Evans, 2019, p.751). This consideration is very relevant at a time where universities are potentially more inclusive than society. Forsyth and Evans are rightly considering: 'in seeking to transform, not just replicate, the discipline, we are compelled to reconsider some of the attributes of "authenticity" and reflect on whose "authenticity" we value, and to which our assessments must align' (2019, p.749).

Bain
Inclusive assessment in higher education: what does the literature
tells us on how to define and design inclusive assessments?

Again, choice and customisable assessment are seen as one way to ensure assessments are suitable for and meaningful to a diverse student body. However, ensuring task equivalence is complicated as the same academic standards need to be addressed in all tasks (Jackson, 2006; Kaur, Noman and Nordin, 2017; Kneale and Collings, 2018; McConlogue, 2020). Grading non-traditional, non-written assignments can also be challenging, even though Jackson (2006) suggests that this could be learned from art, media and design where these formats are regularly used. While the above does not offer direct instructions on how to design inclusive assessments or present assessment formats that can be considered inclusive, it does offer a framework for questioning existing practice and to think about how inclusive assessment could look within one's module. The next section considers inclusive assessment from the students' perspective.

Student perspectives

One of the weaknesses of the analysed primary research papers is that they did not include any information on whether student grades have improved, or whether the degree awarding gap has been reduced or closed. In their literature review Tai, Ajjawi and Umarova found that few studies address student attainment and the results of those which do are inconclusive (2021, p.4). This is a major omission given that grades are one of the most important outcomes of assessments, and how inequalities beyond the university years manifest. Some articles did not include any reference to outcomes whereas five articles included the student perspective.

The students who experienced alternative assessment formats and were interviewed or surveyed afterwards are divided. Students in Morris, Milton and Goldstone's research are in favour of choice to be able to play to strengths (2019), and students in Jackson's research were positive about practical assessments (2006). Two thirds of students in Forsyth and Evans' (2019) research thought authentic assessments were as good or better than traditional ones. They liked that the task was engaging, that they owned the work, and that they produced something of which they could be proud.

On the other hand, students had concerns about the fairness of different assessments, for example an essay and a presentation being offered as equivalent (Forsyth and Evans, 2019). The students perceived some assessment formats as easier than others.

> Interestingly, there was wide variation in which mode of assessment students felt was the most challenging, with the four suggestions (presentation, oral examination, written assignment, or exam), being equally weighted as challenging, in the responses (Morris, Milton and Goldstone, 2019, p.443).

This perception can be seen as supporting the aim of inclusive assessments to allow students to play to their strengths. Students also raised concerns about how alternative assessments are marked, especially if part of the grade included peer feedback as they were worried about favouritism (Kaur, Noman and Nordin, 2017). Creativity put pressure on students who were expecting an essay or research and caused anxiety for some (Forsyth and Evans, 2019). Some students in Kaur, Norman and Nordin's (2017) research were unhappy with how time consuming the assessment group work was. They also felt it was not their role to ensure everyone can participate:

> some unexpected attitudes were identified through the data. One student mentioned that 'Giving opportunity to everyone in the group to participate was [a] very challenging task and tiresome for us, it is not our fault that some people are not fluent in English, why do we have to suffer, they deserve to lose marks?' Another one wrote, 'It is sometimes not fair to make us work harder to demonstrate our understanding just to accommodate those who can't show their understanding in [a] straightforward manner'. (Kaur, Noman and Nordin, 2017, pp.766-767).

Some students seem to have an expectation of what university work involves and what legitimate assessments are, and do not see alternative formats as equally valid.

> Students' prior educational experiences frequently lead them to anticipate conventional assessments at university. Survey respondents expressed anxiety about an authentic assessment that does not feel sufficiently like an assessment. This affective

component of traditional assessment is rarely mentioned: the experience of completing an essay or exam – regardless of its benefit to learning or self-betterment – legitimises, in part, the assessment form (Forsyth and Evans, 2019, p.758).

To overcome the resistance of students to new assessments formats, students can be eased into it by initially giving new formats a lower weighing. Time is needed to develop assessment literacy in class (Kaur, Noman and Nordin, 2017, p.768), for example through regular formative feedback (Gibson, Clarkson and Scott, 2022). Another way to overcome resistance is to include students in the assessment design and co-construction of rubrics so they understand the requirements, and then give them opportunities to apply them by assessing their own and their peers' work (Nieminen, 2022) (discussed below).

Students have a pre-existing perception of what university is and how knowledge is assessed and can sometimes find it difficult to recognise creative assessments as equally valid. Students in Keating, Zybutz and Rouse's (2012) research agreed that they need more training to develop skills for alternative assessments. This links back to the concerns some students had on how time-consuming inclusive assessments are. Module leaders need to ensure that assessments develop transferable skills that prepare students for the workplace and develop necessary academic skills. In situations where traditional assessment formats are most suited to this, they can be adapted to be more inclusive:

> care over scaffolding and support for their projects is essential. We need to retain traditional assessment but treat it, we suggest, as authentic. As indeed it is: essay-writing is exactly the same as what many, perhaps even most, professional historians actually do. The question to ask of traditional assessment is defined by student observations of authentic assessment: how can essay-writing be about student becoming, rather than merely demonstrating familiarity with a lecturer's selected topics. This issue warrants future exploration. (Forsyth and Evans, 2019, p.758).

The above quote indicates that inclusive assessment cannot be designed separately from the module content and the wider context. The next section discusses this in more detail.

Wider context

The findings above suggest that the inclusivity of assessment cannot be judged by the assessment task alone. Assessments need to be integrated into the wider context of the module, university, and external stakeholders.

External stakeholders like The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) or regulatory bodies like Social Work England for social work were seen as a hindrance to change (Jackson, 2006). Looking at the Social Work England standards that need to be met they stipulate the 'what' but not the 'how', giving educators discretion as to how courses are structured and assessed. The wider societal context and employment requirements can also slow down the progress towards inclusion (see above). Here a process of critical questioning of the status quo can help in establishing what is fixed or needed, and what can be changed and adapted.

At the university level, quality assurance systems were seen as a barrier to change and the validation/re-validation of courses considered a 'paper exercise' rather than a chance to make substantial changes towards inclusion (Jackson, 2006). A university-wide initiative can create the institutional framework for change. Plymouth university rewrote the university's assessment policies and turned a 200-page handbook into a short, easy to understand online resource that is accessible to all (Kneale and Collings, 2018). It is important to understand the structural inequalities inherent within higher education institutions: Kneale and Collings (2018) insist that inclusive assessments should not compromise academic or professional standards. Whereas Reason and Ward (2022) and Nieminen (2022) point out that university standards and processes are designed from an ableist perspective and benchmarking against these standards can be exclusionary. Similar arguments can be made for other protective characteristics including racism built into structures. New policies and frameworks might not instantly alleviate inbuilt practices, but offer a better standard to calibrate to.

Across the course, assessments need to be scheduled to ensure an even distribution throughout the year to allow students to receive early feedback and learning and prevent an accumulation of assessments at the end of term (Kneale and Collings, 2018). The university should also provide training for staff who have limited experience and lack confidence in

designing inclusive assessments (Jackson, 2006; Kneale and Collings, 2018; Morris, Milton and Goldstone, 2019).

Alternative assessment formats such as assessed role play, for example, are resource-intensive. There is a risk that certain assessment formats will not be supported, even if they have the potential to foster inclusivity due to resource constraints (Tai, Ajjawi and Umarova, 2021, p.11). Inclusive assessments therefore need to be part of a wider university strategy to ensure adequate resources.

On the module level

> assessment must feel meaningful to the students being assessed. They must understand its processes, its vocabulary, its purpose. Without this, assessment becomes something done to students in a mysterious and almost violent manner. (Reason and Ward, 2022, p.141).

Therefore, assessment literacy needs to be developed within the module (Morris, Milton and Goldstone, 2019). Assessment literacy is 'the competency among students to be able to judge the quality, completeness and accuracy of the work they produce' (Kaur, Noman and Nordin, 2017, p.758). This can include formative feedback, understanding the learning outcomes and marking rubrics, and marking or giving feedback on each other's work in class (Collins, 2010; Keating, Zybutz and Rouse, 2012; Nieminen, 2022). Students' confidence in inclusive assessments needs to be built up and they need to be reassured that the alternative assessment formats have the same academic value (Jackson, 2006). Inexperience with new assessment formats might lead to students initially underperforming (Kaur, Noman and Nordin, 2017): 'in planning an assessment programme with a range of assessment methods it is essential that students have opportunities to practice, rehearse and improve their performance over time' (Kneale and Collings, 2018, p.36). Including students in the design and development of marking criteria can build confidence (Kaur, Noman and Nordin, 2017; Nieminen, 2022; Reason and Ward, 2022). Kaur, Noman and Nordin (2017) suggested giving alternative assessments a smaller weighting initially and increasing this over time until it has the same value as traditional assessments. Kneale and Collings (2018) found that fast

assessment feedback either on the same day or within a few days had a positive impact on students' learning and was reflected in better NSS results.

With all these requirements on embedding inclusive assessments within the module it is important that the assessment is aligned with the learning outcomes and module content. There is otherwise a danger that the focus on assessment literacy or the development of creative skills distracts from the module content. Assessment should support learning in the module, not be the focus of the module.

Conclusion

The articles in this research make a strong case for inclusive assessment as an alternative to reasonable adjustments. The demand that all assessment variants are offered to all students and that assessments enable all students to do well is simple and compelling. On the surface it looks like a straightforward solution to widening participation, lowering the degree awarding gap, and the inclusion of students with disabilities and specific learning needs. The previous sections have shown that the implementation of this is tricky.

This literature review set out to investigate the following two questions:

- What makes higher education assessments inclusive?
- How to design inclusive assessments in higher education?

The first question could be relatively easily answered as meaning the provision of assessments that allow all students to do well without receiving alternative or adapted assessments. The second question however proved more difficult to answer. Whilst some aspects of inclusive assessments could be identified, this research also showed that many questions around inclusive assessment are still unanswered. Staff and students raised concerns and the articles gave the impression that the existing frictions require a longer negotiation process before inclusive assessments are equally accepted forms of assignments. The biggest weakness of this review is that only one of the articles included data on student grades and progression. The qualitative findings could be enhanced by

parallel quantitative data to understand the impact of inclusive assessments on grades and their potential for closing the degree awarding gap. Without this data the effectiveness of inclusive assignments as they were presented in this review cannot be assessed. Quantitative primary research is required to fill this gap. Further research is also required to establish whether choice and more creative assignments alone can really foster inclusion and reduce the degree awarding gap. The more promising approach to inclusion seems to be the focus on in-module learning, scaffolding, regular formative feedback, and supporting students to develop skills over time. This is something that can be immediately integrated in all modules. While this literature review did not offer the evidence-based specifics on inclusive assessment design I had hoped for, it has been a good starting point to understand the current state of research and can be used as a springboard to conduct primary research to fill in the gaps.

References

Aveyard, H. (2014) *Doing a literature review in Health and Social Care: a practical guide.* 3rd edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Boud, D. (1995) 'Assessment and learning: contradictory or complementary?', in Knight, P. (ed.) *Assessment for learning in higher education.* London: Kogan, pp.35-48.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp.77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Collins, P. (2010) 'Inclusive team assessment of off-campus and on-campus first year law students using instantaneous communication technology', *The Law Teacher*, 44(3), pp.309-333. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069400.2010.524032.

Forsyth, H. and Evans, J. (2019) 'Authentic assessment for a more inclusive history', *Higher Education Research & Development*, 38(4), pp.748-761. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1581140.

Gibson, P., Clarkson, R. and Scott, M. (2022) 'Promoting potential through purposeful inclusive assessment for distance learners', *Distance Education,* 43(4), pp.543-555. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2022.2143321.

Jackson, C. (2006) 'Towards inclusive assessment', *Educational Developments,* 7(1), pp.19-21.

Kaur, A., Noman, M. and Nordin, H. (2017) 'Inclusive assessment for linguistically diverse learners in higher education', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 42(5), pp.756-771. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2016.1187250.

Keating, N., Zybutz, T. and Rouse, K. (2012) 'Inclusive assessment at point-of-design', *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 49(3), pp.249-256. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2012.703022.

Kneale, P. E. and Collings, J. (2018) 'Towards inclusive assessment: The journey at the University of Plymouth', in Auferkorte-Michaelis, N. and Linde, F. (eds) *Diversität lernen und lehren - ein Hochschulbuch*. Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich, pp.31-43.

McConlogue (2020) *Assessment and feedback in higher education: a guide for teachers*. London: UCL Press.

Morris, C., Milton, E. and Goldstone, R. (2019) 'Case study: suggesting choice: inclusive assessment processes', *Higher Education Pedagogies*, 4(1), pp.435-447. https://doi.org/10.1080/23752696.2019.1669479.

Mountford-Zimdars, A., Sabri, D., Moore, J., Jones, S. and Higham, L. (2015) *Causes of differences in student outcomes*. Available at: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/23653/1/HEFCE2015_diffout.pdf (Accessed: 19 January 2023).

Nieminen, J. H. (2022) 'Assessment for Inclusion: rethinking inclusive assessment in higher education', *Teaching in Higher Education*, pp.1-19. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.2021395.

Paguyo, C. H., Sponsler, L. E. and Iturbe-LaGrave, V. (2022) 'Centering theories of learning to design humanizing pedagogies and inclusive assessments', *New Directions for Student Services*, 178-179, pp.175-183. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20438.

Reason, M. and Ward, C. (2022) 'Improving, achieving, excelling: developing inclusive assessment processes for a degree-level learning disability arts programme', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 27(1), pp.137-146. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2021.1997581.

Sharp, K. and Earle, S. (2000) 'Assessment, Disability and the Problem of Compensation', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 25(2), pp.191-199. https://doi.org/10.1080/713611423.

Skills for Care (2021) *Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) child and family Annual report to the Department for Education April 2020-March 2021*. Available at: https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resources/documents/Regulated-professions/Social-work/ASYE/Child-and-family/Quality-assurance/ASYE-child-and-family-annual-report-2020-21.pdf. (Accessed: 9 March 2023).

Tai, J., Ajjawi, R. and Umarova, A. (2021) 'How do students experience inclusive assessment? A critical review of contemporary literature', *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* pp.1-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.2011441.

Universities UK and National Union of Students (2019) *Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student attainment at UK universities: #CLOSINGTHEGAP*. Available at: https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/bame-student-attainment.pdf (Accessed: 9 March 2023).

Appendix: Literature used in analysis

Reference	Method	Inclusion focus	subject area	country
Collins, P. (2010) 'Inclusive team assessment of off-campus and on-campus first year law students using instantaneous communication technology', *The Law Teacher*, 44(3), pp.309-333. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069400.2010.524032.	In depth description of one course that offers inclusive assessment for online and on campus students.	Equitable and inclusive experience of on- and off-campus students.	Law	Australia
Forsyth, H. and Evans, J. (2019) 'Authentic assessment for a more inclusive history', *Higher Education Research & Development*, 38(4), pp.748-761. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1581140.	Small survey of students (N=18), questionnaire with 13 questions, open ended question, thematic analysis, 16 students have doen assignment 1, 2 assignment 2 and 8 assignment 3.	Inclusive history: whose stories do we tell? From which perspective? Decolonisation of history. Authentic assessment in history.	History	Australia
Jackson, C. (2006) 'Towards inclusive assessment', *Educational Developments*, 7(1), pp.19-21.	Workshop, focus groups with staff and students, audits of current assessment methods.	Students with dyslexia.	Hospitality, Leisure, Sport, Tourism	UK (Southhapmton, Oxford, Bournemouth)
Kaur, A., Noman, M. and Nordin, H. (2017) 'Inclusive assessment for linguistically diverse learners in higher education', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 42(5),	Design-Based-Research 114 participants, teachers on Ma in Education, diverse languages, data collection over 2 semesters.	Diverse student body: race, culture, language, gender ability, skills, prior experience.	Education	Malaysia

Bain

Inclusive assessment in higher education: what does the literature tells us on how to define and design inclusive assessments?

pp.756-771. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2016.1187250.				
Keating, N., Zybutz, T. and Rouse, K. (2012) 'Inclusive assessment at point-of-design', *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 49(3), pp.249-256. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2012.703022.	Case Study: inclusive assessment at point-of-design, student group: specific learning differences and no other known disabilities, small sample (10 students), questionnaire and focus groups.	No adjustment for disability necessary.	Performance Arts	UK (London)
Kneale, P. E. and Collings, J. (2018) 'Towards inclusive assessment: The journey at the University of Plymouth', in Auferkorte-Michaelis, N. and Linde, F. (eds) *Diversität lernen und lehren - ein Hochschulbuch.* Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich, pp.31-43.	Case study of Plymouth inclusive assessment project 2012-2016, interviews and consultation meetings with 250 academics, students, and student union officers, student representatives to review assessment practice in 2012. Mainly structure.	Students with diverse learning needs, higher level of students with declared disabilities, lower NSS scores in assessment questions, mature students, international students, disabled students.	All	UK (Plymouth)
Chapter 9 in: McConlogue (2020) *Assessment and feedback in higher education: a guide for teachers.* London: UCL Press.	N/A	Social background, disability, gender, race and sexuality and intersections between them.		
Morris, C., Milton, E. and Goldstone, R. (2019) 'Case study: suggesting choice: inclusive assessment processes', *Higher Education*	Case Study, action research, questionnaire + semi-structured interviews.	Universal design, no adaptation for students with additional learning needs necessary.		UK

Pedagogies, 4(1), pp.435-447. https://doi.org/10.1080/23752696.2019.1669479.				
Reason, M. and Ward, C. (2022) 'Improving, achieving, excelling: developing inclusive assessment processes for a degree-level learning disability arts programme', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 27(1), pp.137-146. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2021.1997581.	Focus groups with current academy students a 3 learning disabled artists that completed programme previously to establish what assessment meant to them.	Learning disabled and autisic students; "Inclusive approach - offering all opportunities to all students" (7).	Drama (degree level learning disabilities programme)	UK (York)
Sharp, K. and Earle, S. (2000) 'Assessment, Disability and the Problem of Compensation', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 25(2), pp.191-199. https://doi.org/10.1080/713611423.	N/A	Students with disabilities.		UK (Coventry)
Tai, J., Ajjawi, R. and Umarova, A. (2021) 'How do students experience inclusive assessment? A critical review of contemporary literature', *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* pp.1-18. https://doi.org/10.108	Literature review of 13 papers, all empirical studies, published between 2015-2020.	Gaining understanding of students targeted in inclusive assessment, outcomes of inclusive assessment on students and recommendations in literature about designing		International

0/13603116.2021.20 11441.		inclusive assessments.		
Paguyo, C. H., Sponsler, L. E. and Iturbe-LaGrave, V. (2022) 'Centering theories of learning to design humanizing pedagogies and inclusive assessments', *New Directions for Student Services*, 178-179, pp.175-183. https://doi.org/10.100 2/ss.20438.	Theoretical.	Create an understanding of inclusive assessment as a suite of tools to design spaces and relationships that facilitate powerful learning.		
Nieminen, J. H. (2022) 'Assessment for Inclusion: rethinking inclusive assessment in higher education', *Teaching in Higher Education*, pp.1-19. Available at: https://doi.org/10.108 0/13562517.2021.20 21395.	Conceptual, theoretical.	Students with disabilities.		
Gibson, P., Clarkson, R. and Scott, M. (2022) 'Promoting potential through purposeful inclusive assessment for distance learners', *Distance Education*, 43(4), pp.543-555. https://doi.org/10.108 0/01587919.2022.21 43321.	Literature review.	Distance learning students with disabilities.		

Author details

Katrin Bain is a senior lecturer in social work at London Metropolitan University where she teaches research methods and relationship-based approaches for social change. She has a particular interest in the implementation of the university's Education for Social Justice Framework and in creating inclusive learning spaces. She is a social pedagogue and her research examines the representations of parents in policy, organisation, and statutory social work practice.

Licence