EXTERNAL-FACING ASSESSMENTS: A TOOLKIT FOR STAFF

Title-page. External-facing assessments are fantastic opportunities for learning and student engagement:

- Pedagogy: directing work to an audience rather than submitting it for judgment fosters greater level of intellectual commitment to own work and its implications; it prepares students for a different level of scrutiny; over time, it fosters good practice in self-assessment and other core academic and work-related skills.

- Engagement: external-facing assessments are authentic to the discipline and to students' career aspirations; they improves presentation skills in varied and authentic ways; it opens students to new ideas at the same time as helping them foster a distinct and public identity; 'it's quite a particular experience, opening your work up for engagement and scrutiny but so rewarding, seeing people respond really takes it beyond the bubble of studying' (quote from a Slade student discussing their final degree show).

Definitions. What does 'external-facing assessments' mean?

- It means students producing work that will be seen by a non-academic audience. Could be a professional audience (perhaps with a background in the discipline), or the public; could be very small, or global (if online, for example).

- It means students receiving feedback from an external audience, whether formal (as part of the assessment process) or informal (outside the assessment process).

- In some cases an external body may also be involved in setting up the task, for example in providing data or scenarios that the students use in the course of the activity.

Putting it into practice.
Theme 1: Brief everyone very carefully!

- Ensure you are clear about what you expect the students to produce. This is important for both the students, the assessors, and the external partners. Examples of past work can be very helpful. Asking students and partners to give feedback on past work is a good way of helping to establish and share expectations.

- Brief the students very clearly about the audience to whom they will present their work.

Theme 2: Logistics

- The logistics can be complex, so keep the task and the assessment very simple.

- If there's a practical element, are the students prepared for this and will they have had the opportunity to practice? Does it involve technology or specific platforms? See https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/abc-ld/abc-ld-learning-types-tools/ for ideas of different tools for different kinds of activity.

- Be aware of how students might use social media to record and share their work. Could you capitalise on this, for example via a departmental social media account, or might students' use of social media pose risks in areas such institutional reputation or intellectual property?

Theme 3: Discipline and career

- Is there a neat alignment or well-trodden path between your discipline and given career and is this reflected in the learning outcomes and in the audience who will see your students' work?

- If so, do the students get an opportunity to engage with the public as well? Research shows that students are often more motivated by the prospect of presenting to the public than to more specialised professional audiences, even when they are really important for career prospects. As one Slade lecturer said, 'basically is a good reception worth more than a good mark?'

- If not, how might you make the activity relevant to students whose career paths may vary widely? Will the students know the audience and understand their expectations?

Theme 4: Making it visible

- An element of presentation and involvement of outside audiences helps to reify student work in a way that is different to the digital text-based environment of most academic work. Consider how 'making it visible' can work to really engage your students.

- External partners stand to gain from being involved in student activity that leads to a visible outcome. Remember that your department, your discipline, and the university can also benefit from student work that is tangible and visible.

Theme 5: working with external partners

- External partners important for authenticity, but must balance with students' learning needs

- Are external partners well briefed about the students, the level of study, the learning outcomes?

- Consider what's in it for the external partner: why they may be enthusiastic or reluctant; how comfortable they are; how available they are; exactly what demands you're making on their time.

- Consider including external partners in the working process, e.g. asking them to give interim feedback, and observing how students complete the task.

- Remember that relationship management is demanding on your time and energy!

Theme 6: engaging the whole student

- The activity will have an intellectual rationale but don't ignore the fact that students may be motivated by the prospect of how their work engages other people and is enjoyed by an audience. Be clear about where the balance lies between professional expectations, personal engagement, and developing a public persona.

- Engaging with external audiences raises the stakes for students but research shows that if the brief, logistics, rationale are carefully planned and students know what's expected of them, they may well respond well to the pressure and rise to the occasion.

- Give students multiple opportunities to engage with external audiences. Research shows that time on task is key to good learning, and enables students to put feedback into practice and foster core skills such as self-appraisal and time management.

6 STEPS:

1. Identify the core learning outcomes you want the students to meet. (But remember that some of the most significant outcomes are unexpected).

2. Identify an output directed at an audience that will allow the students to meet the learning outcomes. Maybe use an example drawn from your own professional practice.

3. Ensure everyone is well briefed: the students, the external partners, your colleagues, and the external examiner. Examples of work from previous years can help everyone understand their roles and your expectations.

4. Allow plenty of time for the task to run, and build in opportunities for interim feedback from peers, and/or external partners, and/or tutors.

5. Do everything you can to maximise the visibility of the final outcome and to ensure it is enjoyable for students, partners and colleagues.

6. Review the activity carefully and identify points of failure. Involve students and partners in your evaluation.

For more information

- Academic partnerships - see UCL Academic Manual ch.7.

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