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Exploring Authentic Assessment Practice at a UK University: Barriers and Enablers

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Abstract

There is broad consensus in the HE-sector about the need for assessment reform. Students expect assessments that are meaningful (Pegg, 2012). We know assessment is central to the student experience; improving assessment has a big impact on it (Walsh, 2021; Ramsden, 1992; Boud and Falkichov, 2006). We are teaching larger, more diverse cohorts; a context in which both staff and students may not be best served by traditional assessments. In addition to this, generative AI becoming widely accessible to students has quickly outdated traditional modes of assessment, and staff on the whole do not feel well equipped to handle this change (Dilling and Owen, 2024, Corbin et al, 2025). All of these are excellent reasons to rethink assessment practice, and simultaneously the reasons that it is hard to do. To support the transformation of assessment practice, I have undertaken research into the staff experience of authentic assessment, with the aim of finding the enablers and barriers to the implementation of it. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with staff experienced in designing, implementing supporting authentic assessment, the research investigates the realities of embedding authentic approaches in diverse educational contexts. Participants represent a spectrum of academic and professional roles. It offers insight into both successful strategies and obstacles encountered throughout the assessment cycle at individual and institutional level, and importantly, the staff experience of these. This session aims to inform ongoing conversations around curriculum innovation and to support the wider adoption of authentic assessment in higher education.

Keywords: Assessment Design; Curriculum Design; Higher Education; Staff Experience; Education Reform