

## Symposia Abstract Book - Main Abstract Book with Submissions and Programme (All Symposia)

Making the language of assessment inclusive ( 0388 )

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**Rationale Text:** This symposium draws together the initial outcomes from a QAA-funded collaborative enhancement project investigating the language of assessment, focusing on issues of inclusivity and shared (or lack of shared) understandings of terminology found in documents which communicate to students about expectations of assessment processes (including module documentation, assessment briefs and criteria and grading descriptors). The maintenance of national standards across the higher education sector relies upon alignment by each HEI of their local standards with the descriptors set out in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, subject benchmarks and other national reference points. However, research evidence (e.g. Bloxham & Price, 2015; Hudson, Bloxham, den Outer & Price, 2015) does not support the existence of a sector-wide shared understanding of standards amongst academics, let alone students, for whom the language of assessment often remains unintelligible. Their resulting concerns around unfairness, inconsistency and a lack of transparency are reflected in NSS scores. This project, involving the Universities of Brighton, Greenwich, Hertfordshire and the West of England, is a critical enquiry into what we term the “mysterious quotients” of commonly used assessment terms. Results will inform the development of a toolkit for staff and students to support dialogue, transparency and shared responsibility in the assessment process. **Project Methodology** The project has been designed as a staff-student partnership, involving student research partners at all the following stages: 1. Linguistic analysis of student-facing documentation (module documents, assessment briefs and criteria, grading descriptors), alongside national and institutional reference points (e.g. subject benchmarks, FHEQ, institutional grading descriptors) 2. A survey of students studying modules across 17 subject areas, informed by the document analysis, investigating the understanding of commonly used terms 3. Focus groups with students and staff in each institution facilitated by student researchers to explore in more depth how commonly used terms deployed by academic staff are interpreted by students. 4. Creation of a toolkit reflecting the conclusions of the previous stages of our research, which will be available to the sector online as a resource for colleagues wishing to engage in further dialogue with students around assessment. This symposium will consist of a number of inter-connected papers, showcasing aspects of the project and the interim findings, including the results of the document analysis and our staff-student partnership experiences. Each paper includes reflections on the implementation and evaluation of cross-institution working.

## Linked Submissions:

Making the Language of Assessment Inclusive – Reflections on Staff-Student Partnerships ( 0398 )

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**Research Domain:** Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

**Paper Abstract:** A key feature of the QAA funded collaborative project ‘Making the language of assessment inclusive’ is its commitment to staff-student partnerships in carrying out our research. These partnerships are formed both within each participating University, and cross-institutionally, with staff and students forming collaborative workstreams, which change and develop to meet research needs throughout the life of the project. In this paper, we turn the spotlight upon our processes for collaborative working, and the challenges and successes of these partnerships in the first six months of the project. We explore our methods for creating and sustaining a culture of partnership between the cross-institutional project team, informed by Healey et al’s (2014) framework for engaging students as partners. Finally, we share our approach to evaluating the extent to which staff and students genuinely share power and control of our cross-institutional research using a Ladder of Participation model (Arnstein, 1969; Feeney et al, 2020).

Separated by a Common Language of Assessment? Undertaking a Linguistic Analysis of Assessment Documentation ( 0442 )

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**Research Domain:** Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

**Paper Abstract:** Assessment and feedback are a key part of the student experience in higher education. Despite advances in practice in recent years, universities still frequently receive low student satisfaction scores in this area. Reasons for this may include discrepancies in the understanding and interpretation of the language used in assessment. As part of a wider QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project, this paper reflects on the process of performing linguistic analyses across a broad range of assessment documentation with four partner institutions in the UK. Corpus linguistic analyses were undertaken using Sketch Engine to identify frequently used and salient terms in assessment documentation across the partner institutions. This informed the next stages of the project to measure student comprehension and levels of understanding of the language identified. This paper presents the findings of the linguistic analysis and reflects on the

process of working in collaborative partnership across different institutions.

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Making the Language of Assessment Inclusive – Introduction to the Project and Literature ( 0486 )

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**Research Domain:** Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

**Paper Abstract:** This presentation outlines the rationale and methodology for a QAA-funded collaborative enhancement project being undertaken by the Universities of the West of England, Brighton, Greenwich, and Hertfordshire. The impetus for this project is that whilst the Advance HE Degree Standards Project seeks to address concerns in the HE sector around a lack of consistency in the embedding and interpretation by academics of the descriptors set out in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and a perceived trend towards grade inflation, students are equally uncertain when it comes to the interpretation of the language of assessment for a variety of reasons (Richards & Pilcher, 2010). The project is a critical enquiry into what we term the ‘mysterious quotients’ of commonly used assessment terms and phrases and will ultimately inform the development of a toolkit for staff and students to support dialogue, transparency and shared responsibility in the assessment process.

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Making the Language of Assessment Inclusive: Assessing students’ familiarity and confidence with assessment terminology. ( 0487 )

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**Research Domain:** Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

**Paper Abstract:** This paper reports on work-in-progress in developing a framework of high frequency terms in assessment and feedback to identify the troublesome phrases in terms of an erroneous assumption of a shared understanding of their meaning and use. This understanding gap contributes to a power balance dynamic in the staff-student relationship in the assessment space creating barriers to attempts for partnership in co-creating and evaluating learning. This paper is one aspect of a QAA funded collaborative enhancement project and focusses on a survey completed with staff and students to identify key troublesome terms both in terms of understanding and associated confidence in interacting with them in the assessment space. The findings will be used to inform the development of a ‘mysterious quotient’ table of terms that

often lack shared understanding and a toolkit to support staff-student dialogue aimed to support student partnership approaches in assessment.

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