



# Position Statement for Higher Education Academy Panel: Student input to assessment design & strategy

By

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As a student representative, it's my job to pass student opinion on to senior academics and University management in an attempt to effect positive change for students within our University policies and strategies. Having the task of conveying what's seen by some as radical - and these days, mostly always controversial - student opinion doesn't always make me very popular with certain academics, but overall I think the University is a better place, and better decisions are made when students are involved and engaged in every aspect of University decision making.

Initially, my task and involvement with the Assessment committee at Strathclyde was no different to my involvement with any other committee; my main objective was to ensure that the Students Representative Council policy of anonymous marking (where possible) for all coursework, was adopted and supported across the University. I've campaigned on this issue for over a year, and it's something I believe very strongly in.

It wasn't until I first sat on the Assessment committee though, and began to have an input into assessment strategy, that I realised that there are decisions be made about assessment at Strathclyde which will have a far greater impact on student learning than anonymous marking could ever have.

The debate about how far to involve students in assessment design and strategy could have some very exciting results for students as learners. The notion of providing us with choice about our type of assessment, the criteria and even the weighting individual pieces of summative assessment provide for our final mark opens up endless opportunities for student empowerment and engagement with our learning. I'm not a student who wants to be spoon fed, so I'm thrilled at the concept of possibly gaining more responsibility for my learning.

Normally, when I promote student involvement around the University, it's usually to ensure that whatever decisions are about to be reached are being run past the appropriate parts of the student community, and that the students will be happy with the end result. But when it comes to devising assessment, I think we have to be far more proactive, and engage with our students from the start - at the initial, conceptual stage of Assessment design.

I don't think its enough to run finalised assessment guidelines and criteria past the class reps for approval at the department meeting anymore. How much do we as students actually learn about our subjects from writing the twice yearly essays? And how much do the tutors actually find out about our knowledge of our subjects or about how much we've engaged with the curriculum all year? Is it fair that after all the extra books I have read, classes I've attended, knowledge I've built up, and skills I've gained this semester, that I get just as good a mark for my coursework as the student who barely turns up, knows little about the subject, but can swot up on the lecture notes, skims four books in a day and happens to be very good at writing essays? I would hope that my degree will not just be a measure of my essay writing skills. (if so, I'm scuppered already.) If you work hard, take responsibility for your learning, and engage with your subject but are not rewarded (in your opinion) appropriately, it can seem very unfair, and worryingly can lead to demotivation further down the line.

Rethinking how students are assessed, and involving our students in this process could go some of the way to solving this problem. Why not give me the chance to set my own essay



question? To decide which pieces of my work go towards my final mark? To let my class decide whether we should each deliver a presentation or write an essay? We all learn in different ways, gain and require different skills from our time at University, why not let our assessment practices reflect this?

In my capacity as a project worker on the QAA first year experience theme, its been my job to look into student engagement and empowerment across Scotland. These are obviously key concerns for our sector at the moment. What better ways to engage with and subsequently empower our students than by asking them to help design their own assessment, and engage with assessment strategy?

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