Repositioning the assessment map in higher education: enhancing authenticity in a post-Covid world

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Based on work conducted with Professor Sally Brown, Independent consultant

The world changed in Spring 2020 and so did university assessment!

- Sudden requirement to move from a substantial diet of campus-based unseen, time-constrained, **invigilated exams** to methodologies that could be undertaken **remotely**.
- HEIs moved at breakneck speed to introduce **new ways of assessing**, while aiming to ensure
  - No student disadvantaged
  - Quality imperatives met
- Substantial challenges **pragmatically** met by ensuring the perfect did not become the enemy of the good

We produced the following resources on assessment during times of coronavirus

March 13th

Brown, S. and Sambell, K (2020a) 'Contingency planning: exploring rapid alternatives to face to face assessment'

April 2nd

Brown, S. and Sambell, K (2020b) Fifty tips for replacements for time-constrained, invigilated on-site exams

June 1st

Sambell, K., and Brown, S. (2020c)The changing landscape of assessment: some possible replacements for unseen, time-constrained, face-to-face invigilated exams

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT METHODS: EXAM-BASED

Take home/open book

Without reliance on memorizing, the focus moves from **recollection** to *usage* of information, so the formats are potentially much more authentic.

Can be implemented relatively easily in different environments and contexts.

Can allow students to make successively better drafts.

Can require **fewer 'reasonable adjustments'** for students who need these in traditional invigilated exams

Are more **accessible** for those who may typically struggle with the practical aspects associated with time-constrained paper-based written exams.

Can remove stress for students who don't thrive in the **'sudden death'** environment of the traditional exam hall.

Can help reframe learning for students who adopt surface approaches to learning in order to 'cram' purely for unseen exam questions, rather than assimilate knowledge for longer term application.
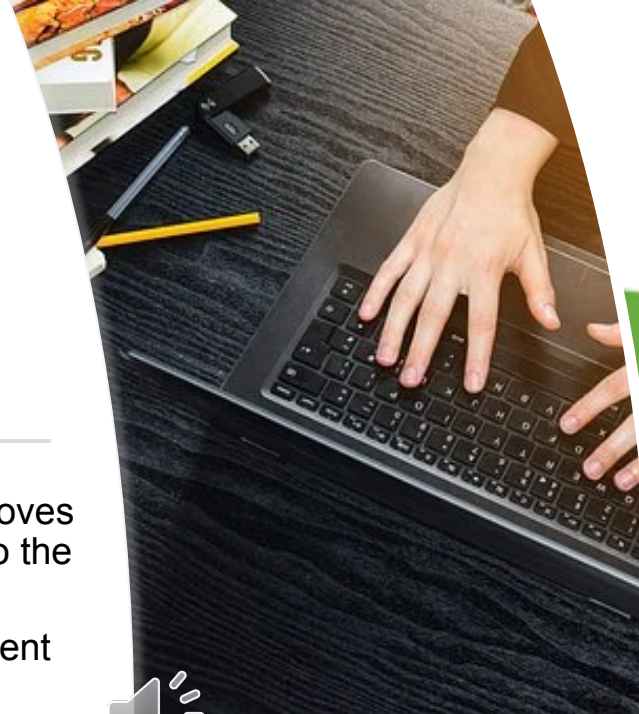
In-tray /in-box exercises

This kind of assessment is strong on authenticity, as it measures the **skills** the candidates will need in their **future** careers.

Students can demonstrate their fitness-to-practice by **justifying how they would decide** to do what they chose to do.

If the reading/preparatory opportunity is offered in advance and tasks/new incidents are represented in real time this approach mitigates against plagiarism and tends to be regarded as a fair judgment of students' abilities to **think on the spot**.

Pre-release also allows more time for reading, for those who require it (traditional in-tray exams expect students to read the dossier in the first part of a timed exam period).

ALTERNATIVE METHODS: ASSIGNMENT-BASED

Evaluative comparisons e.g evaluate 3 websites

Careful and challenging question-setting for tightly focused assessment tasks (see Hendry, 2020 for concrete suggestions) can focus students on achieving high-order learning outcomes while focusing on choosing personalised source materials to evaluate/review.

Students are likely to perceive that the task requires original thought and their own voice, so boosting a sense of academic integrity and authenticity, as well as allowing you to spot similarities.

Avoids students simply cutting and pasting from the wealth of material they can find, while allowing students the flexibility to source a variety of material (rather than rely on a few sources).

Patchwork assessment

- **Universal design principles** readily apply:-
  - Allows for diversity: enables students to meet relevant learning outcomes in a format of their own choosing, according to their own perceived areas of strength;

- Always **owned** by the student, who selects, critiques and justifies the work, making it an authentic and (inclusive) approach to assessment.

- Allows for **creativity** and **gradual** development - final 'stitching' patch encourages students to **integrate** their understanding of the whole module, or integrated across programme of study.

- Highly amenable to **digital production**, which enables sharing, discussion, peer review and developmental feedback processes to be threaded throughout.

- Flexible and evolving process which is responsive to change.

- Draws on personal knowledge, therefore harder to farm out to essay mills.

- Feedback, reflection and development of evaluative judgment/metacognition are integral to the design (see Ghandi, 2016).

Publications/ Rough guides

Students can often see the point of preparing outputs which have the potential for actually being used by the target group, as opposed to jumping through assessment hoops simply to please a marker.

Where these are applied (e.g. a guide for professionals, or members of public etc.) these can be highly motivating.

Drafts and finished versions are amenable to submit for review and constructive feedback from a range of audiences, including the intended audience.

Readily adaptable to promote and foster collaborative, asynchronous approaches to (online) working within peer groups, thus building learning communities (especially important when remote working likely).
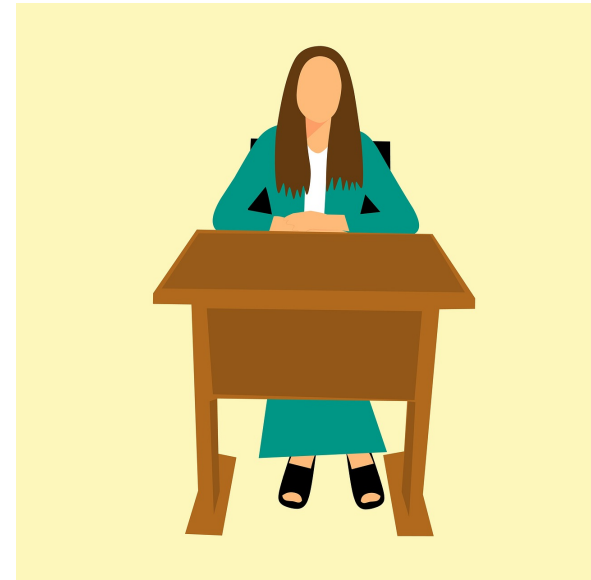
Briefing: working in your breakout rooms

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You will be in your allocated room for 15 minutes (and you will get a warning when the room is about to close and we reconvene)

Please **nominate one reporter** who will be in charge of filling in your group's activity sheet on your group's Google doc and reporting back to the main group.

TASK 1. (10 minutes)

All work collectively to discuss task 1 (authentic assessment alternatives chosen from the table in the pre-circulated paper).

- The reporter will capture your group's main points on the Google doc task sheet, and will be prepared to use this to briefly report back when we reconvene as a whole group.

- NB. Each reporter will have NO MORE THAN 1 MINUTE to report back in plenary so will report on one of the alternatives chosen.


TASK 2 (15 minutes)

Each individual group member can write directly onto the Google doc Task 2 box to add any suggestions (other tactics not mentioned in the table)

The opportunity for discussion is the most valuable learning aspect of the breakout room, so please enjoy, but the Google docs will be collated and shared after the session.

Group discussion and activity tasks

TASK 1.

Using the **table of alternative options** in Sambell and Brown (2020c), and working with your colleagues, can you **identify three approaches** that you could adapt or repurpose to foster authenticity in your own assessment environments? Please be prepared to feed back on your group's reasons for your choices. (10 mins)
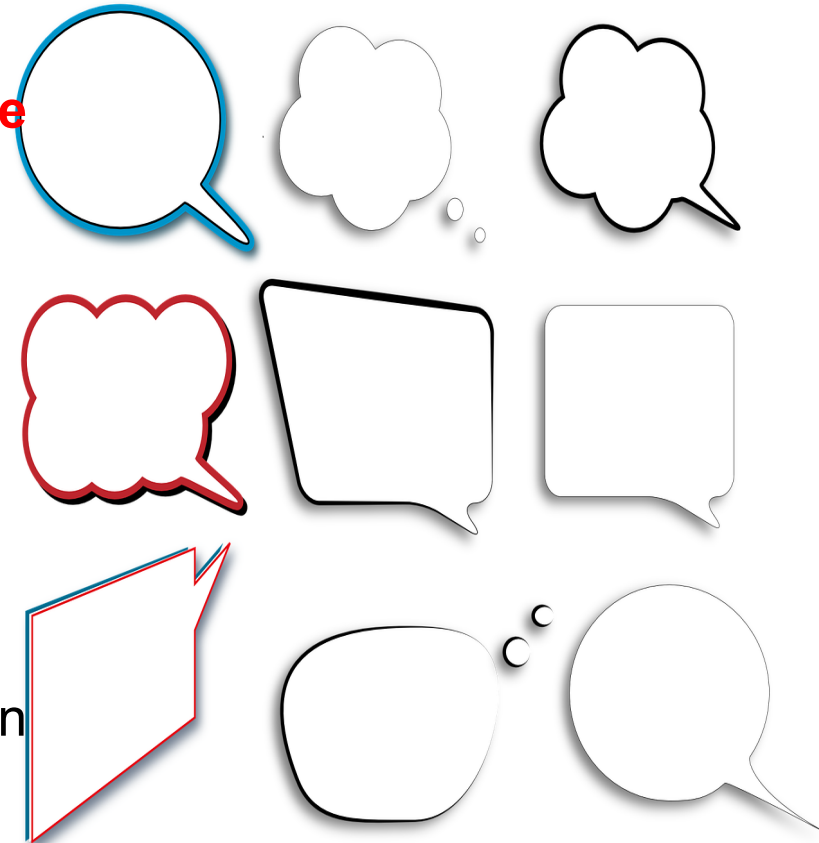
TASK 2.

Talking with your colleagues, are there areas that you think are currently **missing** in our table, and could you **prepare to feed back** on any **additional alternatives** that you could initiate (or that you have already tried)? (5 mins)

REPORTING BACK TO THE WHOLE GROUP

Conclusions: involving students as partners

Arguably many of these innovative approaches can offer greater possibilities for students to contribute to the assessment design, development and quality assurance processes, which offers significant benefit to both staff and students. Students we suggest can in redesigning assessment post-Covid19, potentially:

- Help us **design briefings** that are clear, meaningful and recognizably authentic, thereby helping to avoid excessive numbers of queries from students who don't understand what is required.

- Advise us about **special difficulties** students might have complying with requirements, that might not be obvious to the assessment designers.

- Provide feedback on formats and approaches that require **technologies** and applications that students may not have at home (good broadband, exclusive use of laptops, the correct software, quiet places to work etc.).

- Advise on the extent that **feedback** could be helpful on replacement assessments: in many ways many innovative approaches will have more in common with course work than traditional exams, so feedback will be especially relevant.

This session's assessment design has not in all cases permitted this, but we argue that in making assessment work for the best in future scenarios, we would do well to enlist students to assist us in these and other ways.

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Thank you! Please join us at the next

Assessment in Higher Education (AHE) Conference

June 30th-July 2nd 2021, Manchester, UK.

Keynote speakers: David Boud,
Naomi Winstone
Paul Ashwin

Keep an eye on the AHE website
https://aheconference.com/ 🐦 @Aheconference
(click on manually to advance this slide)

Sources: (all of which include full reference lists and useful further resources)

- Brown, S. and Sambell, K (2020a) 'Contingency planning: exploring rapid alternatives to face to face assessment'
- Brown, S. and Sambell, K (2020b) Fifty tips for replacements for time-constrained, invigilated on-site exams
- Sambell, K., and Brown, S. (2020c)The changing landscape of assessment: some possible replacements for unseen, time-constrained, face-to-face invigilated exams.

All available for download from our Coronavirus Assessment Collection at

https://sally-brown.net/kay-sambell-and-sally-brown-covid-19-assessment-collection/

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