

ASKe

Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange

The manifesto

1. The debate on standards needs to focus on how high standards of learning can be achieved through assessment. This requires a greater emphasis on assessment *for* learning rather than assessment *of* learning.
2. When it comes to the assessment *of* learning, we need to move beyond systems focused on marks and grades towards the valid assessment of the achievement of intended programme outcomes.
3. Limits to the extent that standards can be articulated explicitly must be recognised since ever more detailed specificity and striving for reliability, all too frequently, diminish the learning experience and threaten its validity. There are important benefits of higher education which are not amenable either to the precise specification of standards or to objective assessment.
4. Assessment standards are socially constructed so there must be a greater emphasis on assessment and feedback processes that actively engage both staff and students in dialogue about standards. It is when learners share an understanding of academic and professional standards in an atmosphere of mutual trust that learning works best.
5. Active engagement with assessment standards needs to be an integral and seamless part of course design and the learning process in order to allow students to develop their own, internalised conceptions of standards, and to monitor and supervise their own learning.
6. Assessment is largely dependent upon professional judgement, and confidence in such judgement requires the establishment of appropriate forums for the development and sharing of standards within and between disciplinary and professional communities.



Assessment standards:
A manifesto for
change

The Weston Manor Group

Background

Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange (ASKe), the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Oxford Brookes University, has established a broad international forum of experts on assessment in higher education (the Weston Manor Group) in response to both the conclusions of the Burgess Report and wider concerns about current practice. Burgess pronounced the honours degree classification system 'no longer fit for purpose' and identified a range of problems, including the reliability and communication of assessment standards. However, his report proposes a solution that focuses on communication of outcomes rather than on how assessment standards are established and shared.

Learners who engage in assessment are entitled to fair and transparent assessment practices and standards. However, it is the view of the Weston Manor Group that assessment standards reside in the practices of academic

and professional communities and in the nature and level of tasks in which learners engage, rather than being fully describable in statements of learning outcomes or marking criteria.

The role of assessment standards is twofold: firstly to support the learning process by guiding the appropriate design of assessment tasks, and how they are undertaken, and the provision of feedback; secondly to provide benchmarks to guide the assessment of learning achieved. Currently, the Weston Manor Group believes, there is an

over-emphasis on the latter – ie the measurement of learning – often at the expense of the former, assessment for learning.

Building on a growing consensus of informed expertise, the Weston Manor Group, in November 2007, sought to address these concerns by drafting the manifesto (overleaf). This manifesto is offered with a view to stimulating debate across the sector and, more importantly, as a first step towards bringing about necessary changes in policy and practice.



The ASKe directorate

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Supporters of the manifesto

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