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for Quality Assurance at Institutional Level“**

IBAR

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IBAR Project

Work-Package 7

Quality and Assessment – survey of institutions UK

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1. Introduction

This report presents data from four UK higher education institutions, three from England and one from Scotland, about the management of their internal quality assurance systems. The report was produced between October and December 2011 by the IBAR project team at the University of Strathclyde.

The report focuses on the policy and procedures for managing student assessment in UK higher education. It draws on data from four UK institutions and also examines the broader higher education policy and national quality management environment that influences institutional practice in this area.

This report will form part of the data informing a synthesis report for this work-package of the IBAR project that will make recommendations about future guidelines on assessment in the context of ESG1.

Currently, ESG1 includes the following standard about student assessment:

1.3 Assessment of students: Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently¹.

The ESG guidelines on assessment state that:

The assessment of students is one of the most important elements of higher education.

The outcomes of assessment have a profound effect on students' future careers. It is therefore important that assessment is carried out professionally at all times and that it takes into account the extensive knowledge which exists about testing and examination processes. Assessment also provides valuable information for institutions about the effectiveness of teaching and learners' support.

Student assessment procedures are expected to:

- be designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and other programme objectives;
- be appropriate for their purpose, whether diagnostic, formative or summative;
- have clear and published criteria for marking;
- be undertaken by people who understand the role of assessment in the progression of students towards the achievement of the knowledge and skills associated with their intended qualification;
- where possible, not rely on the judgements of single examiners;
- take account of all the possible consequences of examination regulations;

¹[http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20(2).pdf)

- have clear regulations covering student absence, illness and other mitigating circumstances;
- ensure that assessments are conducted securely in accordance with the institution's stated procedures;
- be subject to administrative verification checks to ensure the accuracy of the procedures.

In addition, students should be clearly informed about the assessment strategy being used for their programme, what examinations or other assessment methods they will be subject to, what will be expected of them, and the criteria that will be applied to the assessment of their performance.

2. National policy context

There has been considerable focus on the purposes and design of student assessment in UK higher education institutions in recent decades. There is general recognition that student assessment is required to fulfill a number of purposes and to serve the needs of multiple stakeholders: students themselves, university departments, professional and accrediting bodies, employers and the public.

The UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA and QAA Scotland) identifies the following four primary purposes for assessment:

- Promoting student learning by providing the student with feedback, normally to help improve his/her performance
- Evaluating student knowledge, understanding, abilities or skill
- Providing a mark or grade that enables a student's performance to be established. The mark or grade may also be used to make progress decisions
- Enabling the public (including employers), and higher education providers, to know that an individual has attained an appropriate level of achievement that reflects the academic standards set by the awarding institution and agreed UK norms, including the frameworks for higher education qualifications. This may include demonstrating fitness to practise or meeting other professional requirements².

As with other aspects of quality management in the UK, the expectation is that institutions have sole responsibility for the design of assessment and for the effective management of assessment processes. However, because institutions are required to defend their quality management practices to the QAA or QAA Scotland in periodic institutional audits (in England) or enhancement-led institutional review (in Scotland), the QAA code of practice on the assessment of students is inevitably commonly consulted as the primary document determining the design of institutional management of assessment. Commonly, institutional assessment policies reference the QAA code of practice and related QAA documents as sources for their own principles or as a source for more information. The QAA Subject Benchmark Statements are key reference sources at department or course level for defining assessment criteria. The Subject Benchmark Statements set out expectations about

² Source: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/COP_AOS.pdf

standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject.

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) is generally recognised as the UK-wide national body that offers academic guidance on the design of curricula and assessment as experienced by students. The HEA and the QAA work closely together to try to develop complementary, rather than over-lapping advice resources. There is some debate about the extent to which QAA is perceived as a body that generates guidance in assessment practices rather than codes of practice that are more prescriptive in nature.

Many principles of effective quality management of student assessment are well understood and almost universally applied across UK higher education. These include the alignment of assessment with learning outcomes, the creation of clear and well-publicised guidance on award criteria and assessment methods, systematic use of double marking, second marking or moderation of marking, the use of assessment panels or exam boards, effective documentation and management of assessment data (including the increasingly systematic use of technology to collect and store data on marks), and well-established mechanisms for dealing with exceptional circumstances, appeals and other difficulties. In general, student assessment is conducted with probity and rigour across UK higher education. Institutions are extremely conscious of the severe reputational risks associated with a failure of quality management of assessment and considerable attention is paid to these processes.

There is, however, recognition across the HE sector that some of technical aspects of (in particular summative) assessment are complex to administer and may not always operate as effectively as hoped. Reports from institutional audits and reviews suggest that universities do find certain aspects of quality management of assessment challenging. The most recent (2008) reports from QAA in England and Northern Ireland synthesising the findings from institutional audits relating to student assessment³ note the following challenges:

- **The development and use of consistent assessment policies**

There is evidence of variability of interpretation of institutional policies across faculties or departments in some universities. There is also evidence that institutions are required to accommodate variation in policy implementation to fulfill the requirements of professional bodies or other external accreditors. There is evidence of debate about the extent to which institution-wide assessment policies can determine the detail of assessment activities, given the need to assess according to subject or disciplinary norms. The extent to which disciplinary variation is apparent differs both within and between institutions.

- **The classification of undergraduate degrees**

Findings from institutional audits point to variation in the ways in which first degree classifications are calculated, both within and between institutions. Variations include weighting between levels, the rules used to calculate classifications and the weighting of placement training activities. Other differences include the ways in which departments implement local rules for compensation of fail marks in calculating the overall attainment of students.

³<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/AssessmentStudents.pdf>

In some cases, compensation arrangements differed year on year in the same departments. There is also variation in the extent to which boards of examiners use discretion to determine degree classifications. It should however be noted that a lack of absolute consistency across institutions might not be a barrier to fairness or parity for students and might be needed to ensure that disciplines are able to assess appropriately.

- **The operation of assessment boards**

There is variation in the extent to which assessment boards exercise discretion in decision-making and in many institutions there is a lack of explicit guidance about how boards should operate. Similarly, there is a lack of systematic documentation or scrutiny of the decision-making undertaken by boards.

- **The security and reliability of assessments**

Although in general the security and reliability of assessment is not in question and many examples of good practice were noted, there is evidence of some weakness in implementation of moderation and/or double marking policies and in some cases concern that external examiners are not fully informed about their role. In some institutions there is variability in the arrangements for extensions, for identifying and dealing with instances of plagiarism, or for allowing for exceptional circumstances that affect student performance.

- **The use of assessment criteria**

Many institutions have begun to create university-wide assessment criteria with the aim of supporting staff to apply clear and consistent criteria across the whole institution. In other institutions, the perceived need for clear subject-specific criteria that align effectively with learning outcomes has been seen as more important than institution-wide guidelines. In all cases, the aim is to ensure that criteria are transparent, applied consistently and that students are well informed about criteria and how they are applied.

- **The provision of feedback on students' work.**

The timeliness and effectiveness of feedback provision has been a major theme of institutional audits. Although there are examples of good practice, there are also numerous examples of inconsistencies between and across institutions. Variations in practice can be confusing for students and lead to inequalities. Institutions have been encouraged to develop university-wide guidelines to ensure as far as possible greater equality of student experience.

More recent discussion events on student assessment hosted by QAA (October-December 2010) also called into question the objectivity of marking practices and the complexities of managing institutional grading systems including the aggregation of marks to produce degree classifications.

There is considerable on-going debate and discussion about the nature and purposes of student assessment and about how assessment practices might change to serve the changing needs of stakeholders. There is a recognition that designing good assessment that is properly aligned with the learning outcomes of modules or programmes and that, crucially, supports students to attain those outcomes is a complex and subtle activity and not always well-achieved. One dilemma is how to balance assessment *of* learning (or summative assessment) with assessment *for* learning (formative assessment). In part, this dilemma is a result of the massification of higher education. In larger classes, students are less likely to receive regular and

direct feedback from tutors and in many cases are less likely to have the opportunity to regularly practice important tasks or to work together in groups. Addressing the decline in formative opportunities created by massification has been a focus of much of the critical and scholarly attention paid to assessment in the last decade. Concern about lack of formative feedback has also been a consistent theme in the results of the National Student Survey (NSS), although there is a suggestion that the survey tends to focus attention on whether feedback has been delivered promptly by the tutor rather than asking how students are using feedback to improve performance.

In Scotland, the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) and QAA Scotland fund and co-ordinate work under the banner "Enhancement Themes". The Enhancement Themes are selected by the Scottish higher education sector and they provide a means for institutions, academic staff, support staff and students to work together in enhancing the learning experience. Each Theme facilitates both sharing and learning from current and innovative national and international practise. In addition, the Themes promote the collective development and dissemination of new ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching.

To date, there have been two themes focusing exclusively on student assessment, and a number of additional themes that have considered approaches to assessment in the context of other issues (for example, the First Year Experience and Employability). The most recent theme, *Graduates for the 21st Century*⁴, considered how institutions might integrate the learning from previous themes into their practice and included among its outputs new papers on student assessment and a paper on students' ability to construct and use feedback effectively.

The adoption of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) has created universal reference points for the maintenance and comparability of academic standards including assessment. The FHEQ states that:

“In considering the appropriate level for a qualification, higher education providers [should] consider:

- the relationship between the intended outcomes of the programme and the expectations set out in the qualification descriptors
- whether there is a sufficient volume of assessed study that will demonstrate that the learning outcomes have been achieved
- whether the design of the curriculum and assessments is such that all students following the programme have the opportunity to achieve and demonstrate the intended outcomes”⁵.

Institutional efforts to comply with these frameworks have included widespread restructuring of modules and programmes to standardise assessment credits. For many institutions, this has been an opportunity to reconsider the nature and status of assessment policies and in particular to introduce institution-wide reference points for

⁴See: <http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes/completed-enhancement-themes/graduates-for-the-21st-century>

⁵See: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/FHEQ08.pdf>

the design of modules and of student assessment.

A major driver for institutional strategy on assessment in recent years has been the results of the UK National Student Survey (NSS), which has been undertaken nationally since 2005. The NSS asks all full-time and part-time undergraduate students registered at participating United Kingdom institutions about their learning experiences during their final year of study. The NSS has highlighted that students are notably less positive about assessment and feedback on their assignments than about other aspects of their learning experience. As the results of the NSS are commonly used as one of the measures to calculate the positions of UK institutions in university league tables, poor scores in any area of practice are often of considerable concern to university managers.

3. Methodology

Institutions surveyed

The four institutions selected represent a sample of the variant types of higher education institution in the UK. After the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, polytechnics in the UK achieved degree-awarding status and became universities. Our sample was selected to demonstrate the diversity of higher education in the UK and to ensure that the data collected offered a rich picture of practice across the sector.

Our sample includes:

University A, a research-intensive large multi-discipline institution, formally dates from the start of the twentieth century, although it can trace its origins to earlier colleges. It is relatively large by UK standards with around 16500 undergraduate and 8000 postgraduate students. It features prominently in UK and QS university rankings and is a member of British and international groupings of research-intensive universities.

University B was a former polytechnic that opted to become a university under the powers of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. Subsequent mergers with colleges in the region added Nursing and Midwifery to the academic profile and three smaller campuses. The University has around 16000 students spread across five campuses. It also offers foundation awards in conjunction with partner further education colleges. Some 5000 students study in Europe and Asia for University B awards. There is a strong commitment to employment-related provision.

University C dates from the late nineteenth century. It became an independent institution in the 1960s. Further academic diversification occurred through growth and, in the 1990s, via merger with higher education colleges. Currently it has some 17000 students and a strong professional orientation. Distance learning students account for almost 20 per cent of the student enrolment. It has some world-renowned areas of research excellence.

University D is one of the newer universities in the UK, progressing from the status of a higher education college, to that of a University College and then full university

status in recent decades. Mergers during that phase also diversified the academic profile. It has around 8000 undergraduate students, of which 1300 are studying for further education qualifications. Almost half of the student population comprises mature students.

Conducting the research

Data collection for WP7 was conducted in three ways: firstly, as a desk study, using documents publicly available on the websites of the four institutions to uncover policies and information about institutional activities related to student assessment. During this first phase of data collection, a number of key individuals at each institution with particular responsibility for/or interest in student assessment were identified. These included senior managers at institutional level with responsibility for overseeing the management of assessment (for example, Head of Student Registry); senior academics with responsibility for overseeing assessment practices at School/Faculty level (for example, Deans of Faculty); staff with responsibility for support for enhancement of assessment practices (for example, Heads of Education Development Units) and students.

The second phase of data collection comprised telephone interviews with those individuals identified in phase one of the data collection who were available to speak to the team. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and focused on uncovering barriers to effective student assessment.

A third phase of data collection comprised desk-based data collection to inform a consideration of the sectoral and/or national policy context of access to higher education in the UK.

The most significant limitation on the data collection methodology is difficulty in identifying which institutional representatives to canvas. Assessment is an institutional process that almost everyone in the university is involved with or touched by and it is a process that most stakeholders have an opinion about. Assessment is also a process that operates at multiple levels and it is impossible for one individual to have an overview of all of the assessment-related activities at their institution. Similarly, practical considerations limit the number of stakeholders it is possible to speak to in a short research period. Perhaps most importantly, responsibility for the design and management of assessment remains a highly devolved process in UK universities. Assessment is widely understood as a primarily academic concern and assessment processes are highly aligned to local subject requirements and norms. Although there are institution-wide policies and guidelines for many aspects of assessment practice at all the universities canvassed, typically there will be considerable variation in the methods, design, criteria, timing and certain aspects of the management of assessment across each institution. Therefore, it is impossible to make definitive statements at institutional level about how assessment is conducted across the university, although it is possible to identify institutional aspiration and strategy.

4. Responses to the research questions

4.1 What is the institutional policy on assessment?

All of the institutions surveyed have detailed and publicly available policies or codes of practice relating to the assessment of students that are applied at institutional level. In some cases, separate codes of practice describe the specific assessment procedures applied to taught programmes at undergraduate and post-graduate levels, although at University C one policy covers both areas of teaching activity.

In general, codes of practice governing assessment practices are procedural in nature. They describe the management of assessment and define areas of responsibility, including the membership of examining boards and the appointment and duties of external examiners. They set out institutional expectations for the management of assessment at departmental or faculty/school level, including guidance on procedures for setting and marking assignments and examinations, for determining deadlines and extensions, for defining progression requirements, for provision of feedback and for the management of exceptional circumstances and of appeals.

At University A, the code of practice deals solely with the procedures for managing assessment. Other aspects of assessment policy, including statements on the purpose of assessment and the principles that inform assessment design are communicated to staff and students at department, school or college level.

At University B, a newly-developed institutional code of practice on assessment references the QAA Code of Practice on Student Assessment⁶ and makes explicit the general principles of assessment that inform institutional practice. These include the following statements:

“2.1 Assessment will be reliable

Reliability refers to the need for assessment to be accurate and repeatable. This requires clear and consistent processes for the setting, marking, grading and moderation of assignments.

2.2 Assessment will be valid

Validity ensures that assessment tasks and associated criteria will effectively measure student attainment of the intended learning outcomes.

2.3 Information about assessment will be explicit and accessible

Clear, accurate, consistent and timely information on assessment tasks and procedures will be made available to students, staff and other external assessors or examiners.

2.4 Inclusive and equitable assessment

The University is committed to the provision of an environment that encourages and properly supports a diverse learning community. The University will continue to work towards ensuring that assessment tasks and procedures are designed to be inclusive and do not disadvantage any group or individual (for example students with disabilities, students with varied cultural backgrounds). Programme teams should show that they are aware of the University's regulations on the assessment of disabled students. The equality impact

⁶ For the QAA Code of Practice (Section 6: Assessment of Students) for England and Wales, see: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/COP_AOS.pdf

assessment carried out early in the process of planning a programme should explicitly cover assessment as well as other aspects of the learning and teaching strategy for the programme.

2.5 Assessment will address all of the programme/level aims and outcomes

Assessment tasks will primarily reflect the nature of the discipline or subject but will also ensure that students have the opportunity to develop a range of generic skills and capabilities.

2.6 The amount of assessed work required will be manageable

The scheduling of assignments and the amount of assessed work required will provide a reliable and valid profile of achievement without overloading staff or students.

2.7 Formative and summative assessment will be included in each programme/ level

Formative and summative assessment will be incorporated into programmes/level to ensure that the purposes of assessment are adequately addressed. Many programmes will also wish to include diagnostic assessment.

2.8 Feedback will be an integral part of the assessment process

Students are entitled to feedback on all (submitted) formative and summative assessment tasks. The nature, extent and timing of feedback for each assessment task should be clear to students in advance.

2.9 Each programme/level will include a variety of assessment types

Variety in assessment (including computer aided, and self and peer assessment) promotes effective learning and allows a range of intended learning outcomes to be appropriately assessed. In addition, varied assessment tasks support a range of approaches to learning and ensure that inclusivity is planned for and addressed.

2.10 Assessment tasks will be designed so as to minimise opportunities for plagiarism”

As well as the QAA Code of Practice of student assessment, University B’s Assessment Principles and Policy statement also explicitly references the REAP project as a source of its principles of assessment⁷. The new policy has been developed as part of a strategic institution-wide effort to transform assessment activities at the university. This is partly in response to an institutional recognition that the former policy “wasn’t sufficiently embedded and there wasn’t a lot of staff engagement”, and partly in response to the institution’s National Student Survey results which (in common with many other universities in the UK) have been lower than hoped in the area of assessment and feedback. The new policy has been developed as part of a university-wide “dialogic” process involving a relatively large number of staff members participating in workshops facilitated by external experts. The aim is to foster widespread discussion about assessment practices and to encourage innovation.

At University C, the institutional assessment policy for taught provision includes both procedural guidelines and information on the general principles that inform assessment practice across the institution. Unlike the other universities in this study,

⁷The REAP Project (Re-Engineering Assessment Practices Project) was led by Professor David Nicol at the University of Strathclyde and managed by Catherine Owen. REAP tested new methods of assessment and defined a set of principles for good assessment which have been widely publicised in the UK higher education sector and internationally. See: www.reap.ac.uk for more information.

University C has adopted an institution-wide 15-point literal marking scale that is used for every module offered by the university except for those modules that require only a pass/fail marking system. Adoption of a universal scale is one component of an institution-wide move towards a “common standard” for assessment at the university. The aim is to offer a more consistent student experience across the institution. In part, this is a response to the results of the National Student Survey (NSS) that has identified challenges in meeting student expectation in the management of assessment and recognition that students are aware of diverse practices across the university and may choose to interpret that diversity as “unfair”.

At University D, a new institution-wide assessment policy has been developed within the last year to replace a variety of “mainly standards-based” policies operating at school level. The new institution-wide policy is complemented by a guidance document that offers information to academic staff on effective assessment design and on the effective management of student assessment including submission, marking and moderation procedures. The senior member of staff responsible for the development of these two documents wanted to create different entry points into the same information for different members of the university community. In particular, the aim was to support academic staff members who might find a policy document “dry and boring to read” but would benefit from straightforward and clear advice on how to conduct assessment procedures.

One challenge for universities is how to balance the provision of advice and/or guidelines on practice that need to be interpreted and applied with appropriate variation at local level (reflecting the subject-based nature of assessment practice) and how to mandate procedures or practices that must be consistently followed across the whole university (for example, the use of second marking or moderation, or standard timescales for the provision of feedback to students).

4.2 How is the relevant information communicated to students?

The primary sources of information on assessment for students are module and/or programme handbooks. Handbooks are typically fairly lengthy printed documents that describe the components of modules and/or programmes, including the content and timing of lectures, tutorials and other taught activities, reading lists, information about departmental administration and the timing, weighting and criteria for assessment. Handbooks also typically include information about certain aspects of the quality management of assessment, including arrangements for marking, for managing late submissions, and for dealing with exceptional circumstances including appeals.

The provision of student handbooks is mandatory in all the institutions surveyed. Responsibility for the development of handbooks is devolved to academic staff in departments but all the institutions surveyed offer institution-wide guidance on how to develop good quality student information. For example, at University C, guidance to academic staff developing module handbooks includes exemplars and templates that can be customised for local use; work is currently underway to enhance this guidance. Specifically, there is recognition that students could benefit from more explicit information about the timing and content of assessment and, in particular, feedback

activities. One challenge that is common to universities across the UK is the management of students' expectations around learning and in particular about the amount, timing and purpose of feedback. University C hopes that the publication of more detailed and explicit information about feedback activities will help students to recognise the variety of feedback opportunities available to them and to reflect on how they might use this feedback to help them to improve their performance.

Handbooks are usually distributed to students just prior to the start of the academic year, although they are also increasingly available online through departmental websites or student/staff intranets.

Some interviewees commented that students do not always read information provided to them as carefully as academic staff might wish. Although one interviewee commented that students need to take responsibility for their learning - which includes reading the information provided - there is recognition that staff have a role to play in reinforcing messages about assessment and other aspects of learning. Typically, induction activities at the start of each academic year are offered to groups of students either as part of lectures or as add-on events. In addition, there is an expectation that students will be offered subsequent opportunities to discuss assessment and feedback throughout the module. Typically, this might include class-based discussions as assessments are submitted and/or returned, revision sessions prior to exams, and opportunities for individual discussions with course tutors or personal advisors. Institutions also offer opportunities outside the department for students to get additional advice and support for learning, including assessment. For example, at University D a central service staffed by academics and support staff helps students to negotiate all aspects of the undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum including assessment. This service offers one-to-one, telephone and e-tutorials to individual students and also delivers bespoke workshops for groups of students.

Student handbooks are increasingly used as vehicles for communicating expectations about good learning behaviours. In particular, offering clear information about plagiarism and other forms of cheating is seen as increasingly important. However, other forms of dissemination are also being prioritised. For example, at University D an interactive website offers students the opportunity to explore different issues around plagiarism. At the same institution, a video has been created to explain how assessment is managed at the university, including information about procedures that are often "invisible" to the majority of students, such as moderation and other quality-related activities.

At University B, students are currently being encouraged to create their own artifacts and dissemination channels to communicate messages about assessment and feedback in a way that is relevant to their peers. The university has appointed a student to manage a competition and offered prize money for the idea that best communicates to students the importance of seeking and using feedback. The competition is seen as a high-profile way of encouraging discussion about assessment across the institution.

Some interviewees expressed concern that the introduction of higher fees in England and Wales has created additional demand from students for information about how they will be assessed. One interviewee explained that:

“In previous years, there was the sense that assessment was a ‘secret garden’ that was only open to the cognoscenti – that is no longer acceptable. Students want to make pretty damn sure that they pass the assessment and they want much more information. They want prior feedback on essay plans and stuff – it puts a lot of pressure on tutors and I worry about the level of detail that you can offer to one individual without being unfair to the others”.

In order to cope with this additional demand, institutions are experimenting with innovative ways of providing “feed-forward” information to students, including the use of technology.

4.3 How are student assessment procedures designed to be fit for purpose (diagnostic, formative, summative)?

Responsibility for the design of student assessment in UK universities is highly devolved. Ultimately, the assessments that are undertaken by students are determined by the tutor(s) responsible for the module to be assessed. Although it is impossible to describe a single process by which assessment design occurs, common practice (often conducted at programme/course team level) is most likely to include a consideration of the QAA subject benchmarks for the relevant subject area, consultations with relevant professional bodies and other external stakeholders including employers and, increasingly, consideration of university-wide principles, attributes or other required assessment design components. It is important to note that subject benchmarks vary considerably in their nature and approach across subjects, which may be one factor in variation across institutions in the way in which assessment is approached.

The extent to which the universities surveyed seek to influence the design of assessment at institutional level differs, although all of the participating universities have institutional assessment policies and institutional strategies for student education, as well as policies operating at faculty or school level which are likely to make reference to different types of assessment and their purposes. In all cases, the UK National Student Survey (NSS) is a driver for changes at strategic level and at lower levels within institutions as departments, faculties or schools seek to improve their NSS scores.

4.4 How are student assessment procedures designed to measure the intended learning outcomes and other programme objectives?

University C’s assessment policy for taught provision describes a typical approach to the use of standards and benchmarks to determine assessment design:

“Appropriateness of assessment

2.1 Assessment should be designed to reflect the intended learning outcomes of the module, which in turn should take account of:

- o the intended learning outcomes of the programme;
- o relevant QAAHE subject benchmark(s);

- o the relevant level descriptors of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework;
- o any relevant professional / statutory body (PSB) requirements;
- o the principles of inclusive assessment practice.”

One consequence of the adoption of the FHEQ and the SCQF frameworks is the increasing tendency for universities to develop institution-wide outcomes and principles to guide assessment. Common institution-wide guidance and/or policies refer to the timing, nature and scale of assessments in alignment with the FHEQ or the SCQF. For example, University B has adopted a seven-point typology of awards derived from the level descriptors from the FHEQ. The purpose of this university-wide typology is to assist programme designers “to express at an appropriate level, the challenges of their own fields of study”. Each institutional outcome (“knowledge and understanding”, “learning”, “enquiry”, “analysis”, “problem-solving”, “communication”, “application” and “reflection”) is described at FHEQ levels four to six for undergraduate programmes and at level seven for masters-level study.

For example, at level 6: “analysis”, students should be able to:

“describe and comment upon current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship and critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgments.”

The extent to which each academic programme (and the modules which comprise the programme) adhere to this typology is determined as part of the standard validation process for new modules and programmes.

At University B an additional set of institution-wide outcomes that inform curriculum design is also in place. These are described as “looser”, “top level” attributes that are intended to define the particular qualities of a graduate from this institution. In developing these outcomes, the university has been influenced by work in Australia to describe and nurture distinctive “graduate attributes”, or the qualities, skills and understandings that a student should develop during their time at university. Attributes that influence assessment design include “global citizenship” and “work-readiness”. These attributes are intended to operate at programme-level and their implementation is monitored via programme validation processes.

The multiplicity of reference points and of stakeholders in assessment design creates considerable challenges for module and programme tutors and for those involved in validation and moderation activities. A number of interviewees noted the tendency for academic staff members to react to this perceived complexity by being conservative in their choice of assessment method. One interviewee remarked that “people always want to use essays and exams because it smacks of academic rigour and because they know how to do them”.

In some institutions and in some disciplines there has been an increased debate about whether these “traditional” forms of assessment are sufficient to prepare students for employment. At University C, institutional ambitions to extend opportunities to students to engage in more “authentic” forms of assessment that replicate workplace experiences have been challenged by the expansion in student numbers. Similar

logistical challenges face other institutions. A number of interviewees noted the tension between offering “authentic” forms of assessment and maintaining the “academic-ness” of programmes. Whilst at least one interviewee was a compelling proselytiser for the exploration of new assessment forms, others are concerned to ensure that the distinctiveness of higher education is maintained. One interviewee remarked that “you need to be able to defend the robustness of the academic award, you need academic assessment tools”. Another interviewee remarked that: “We are not offering advanced NVQs⁸. Our assessment has to reflect advanced scholarship... that is the key”.

Whilst the use of learning outcomes is now almost universal in the design of modules and programmes in UK universities, interviewees expressed some cynicism about the relationship between learning outcomes and high quality learning experiences. Learning outcomes are broadly recognised as a risk minimisation strategy that protects the institution as much as the student and as a mechanism for providing a standardised and predictable learning experience rather than one that might be more open-ended, flexible or emergent. There is some concern that the introduction of higher fees in England and Wales is creating increasingly strategic students who are focused solely on passing the assessment rather than on “learning” in a broader sense.

4.5 Are student assessment procedures undertaken in accordance with the officially stated examination rules/regulations by qualified personnel?

Interviewees all reported high levels of confidence in the management of assessment, including the design of assessments, validation of modules and programmes, the arrangements for submission, marking, provision of feedback and use of external examiners.

The definition of “qualified personnel” might be considered controversial from some perspectives. Responsibility for the design and management of student assessment in UK universities is largely devolved to academic staff members who are experts in their fields of study but who may not describe themselves as experts in teaching and learning. All new academic staff in UK universities are required to undertake probationary training, which will include courses on aspects of teaching and learning. The scope and content of these courses differs between institutions but typically completion of probationary training also confers professional recognition as an Associate of the Higher Education Academy (HEA).

All of the institutions surveyed offer staff involved in teaching the opportunity to study for a Masters level Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice. Typically, the aim of these programmes is to provide a comprehensive preparation for the learning and teaching aspect of an academic role, and to relate this to wider responsibilities associated with professional practice such as research and academic leadership. At University C, there has been an institution-wide ambition to require every academic staff member to complete a PG Cert in Academic Practice. Although this is still seen as a highly desirable aim, the University has recently pulled back

⁸National Vocational Qualifications are competence-based qualifications offered primarily through Further Education colleges in the UK. Students undertaking NVQs learn practical, work-related tasks designed to help them to develop the skills and knowledge to do a specific job effectively.

from making participation mandatory in response to “the national mood about the relative importance of teaching and research”.

Typically, universities will also offer short courses as part of continuing professional development (CDP) for all staff. At University A, a half-day course on student assessment delivered twice a year offers:

- Consideration of the theory behind assessment and its application in practice
- Exposure to a range of assessment strategies
- Understanding of how to control variability in marking
- Exploration of issues in assessment and marking
- Insights into effective feedback and its use in encouraging learning
- An opportunity to share experiences and practice with colleagues

The pressure on academic staff and their departments to perform well in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) is widely recognised as one of the biggest barriers to the development of enhanced teaching expertise in all institutions.

Other barriers that are relevant to individual institutions include the relative experience of academic staff and the relative age of the institution. One interviewee who had worked at two very different types of institutions was struck by the different cultures around assessment operating in each:

“At the other place [an ancient university] there was the feeling that ‘we’ve been doing this stuff for decades, we know exactly what we are doing and it’s all fine’. Our university is still quite new and there is less confidence. You need to tell the staff to do things that actually are just common sense really; and if you don’t tell them specifically to do certain things, those things often won’t happen.”

Interviewees shared a view that designing good assessment that is responsive to the changing needs of learners is complex, requires considerable thought and expertise and is often best approached collaboratively within a subject-based community of practice. A challenge for institutions is how to create these kinds of nurturing conditions in a context of increasing fiscal constraint, staffing cuts and conflicting demands on staff time.

4.6 To what extent are the procedures dependent on the judgment of a single examiner?

It is increasingly uncommon for UK universities to accept the judgment of a single examiner in any assessment. This extract from University A’s policy on the assessment of taught modules describes typically pragmatic arrangements:

“All assessment that contributes to a module mark must be moderated, where moderation is defined as some form of independent academic checking in addition to the technical check of marks. Moderation may involve looking at pieces of assessed work (e.g. double marking) or it may involve analysis of marks for the cohort for that assessment. The amount of moderation may vary

dependent upon the nature of the assessment, the contribution made to the module mark and the overall contribution of the assessment to the degree classification or to the achievement of the award. It is expected that there will be more rigorous moderation of the later stages of programmes.”

University A’s policy subsequently offers detailed definitions of different forms of checking procedures, including forms of double marking to be used where assessments “contribute significantly to the final award”. It is expected that clear procedures are in place at departmental level for the resolution of discrepancies or disagreements between markers.

In other institutions participating in this study, work is underway to enhance the information available to second markers, external examiners and members of exam boards to clarify their role(s) and to provide them with clear guidance on differing forms of moderation or scrutiny. However, it is important to recognise that guidelines for good practice in moderation and other forms of assessment scrutiny are not always solely generated at institutional level, but are the result of innovations within departments, faculties or schools. University D’s position is typical: the expectation is that schools will adhere to university-wide guidelines as a minimum standard, but will “go above and beyond as they see fit”. One challenge for universities is how to identify and share innovative practice so that similar enhancements can be made in other parts of the institution.

At University B, opportunities for improvement in the way that external examiners are used were identified in the most recent (2010) QAA audit of the institution. The audit report concluded that overall effectiveness of the University’s practice in relation to external examiners is limited, as the University does not share full external examiner reports with student representatives. The audit team recommended that it would be desirable for the University to review its approach in this area. The University has subsequently adopted a new institution-wide policy (Summer 2011) on second marking, which is published as an annex of the institutional assessment policy. The new policy is pragmatic about the challenges in implementing a standardised university-wide procedure for second marking. The University’s policy notes that variety in practice is “to a significant extent the result of three main influences: differences between disciplines, differences between material being assessed, and resource constraints such as adverse student-staff ratios, highly specialised material, and absolute volumes of marking. In these circumstances, it is not only impossible to aim for detailed standardisation of second marking practice, but is not academically justifiable. In addition, it must be acknowledged that second marking is expensive even in a financially benevolent environment.”

The University therefore makes the following recommendations:

- The University should accept variety in second marking practice by recognising the varying demands of different Subject Areas and the different requirements of various types of assessed material.
- Variety should exist within a range of practice defined by models of second marking, which are accepted within the University and within Subject Areas.
- Subject Areas and Faculties should be required to choose the most

appropriate practices for their programmes from these models using agreed criteria. Such choice should be published, formal, recorded and reaffirmed or changed as part of regular award reviews.

- Proposals to the University for the establishing of new awards should indicate as part of their statements on assessment arrangements for the second marking of examinations and coursework.

The above should apply to all appropriate aspects of student assessment including conventional examinations, formally assessed coursework such as projects or dissertations, and laboratory or other practical work.

The policy also includes definitions and examples of different types of checking procedures. There are some variations both across and within universities in the definitions used for different forms of checking or scrutiny of marking. The terms “moderation”, “double-marking” and “second marking” are not always used consistently. Some institutions reported that there was a need for more work to ensure that all academic staff are properly informed and trained to use different forms of checking appropriately. There is widespread suspicion that students are poorly-informed about how these processes operate and why they are important.

4.7 Do student assessment procedures have clear and published criteria for:

- **Marking?**
- **Student absence, illness or other mitigating circumstances?**
- **Informing students on the type, method and criteria for assessment?**
- **Student class participation?**
- **Exam enrolment?**

At all the participating institutions, it is expected that designated sub-units of the university (most often faculties or schools) will have clear and consistent criteria for certain aspects of the management of assessment. These are likely to include marking practices (for example, the use of anonymous marking and moderation), managing the submission of assessments and protocols for delivering feedback, determining progression requirements including the calculation of aggregated marks, managing exceptional circumstances (for example illness, late submissions, extensions), handling instances of plagiarism or other forms of cheating and determining actions in the case of student absence, withdrawal or failure. Separate enrolment for exams is not required once students are enrolled on a module.

The extent to which the detail of these protocols is determined at institutional level or left to the discretion of sub-units differs across universities. At all the institutions surveyed there is an expectation that sub-units are able to defend their practices and there are regular opportunities to check that protocols are being applied effectively (for example, the reports of external examiners and exam boards are sent to central institutional committees and/or senior officers for scrutiny and it is normal practice for sub-units to make annual reports on teaching and learning activities, including assessment).

Despite institutional scrutiny mechanisms, high levels of discretion at local level can lead to discrepancies in the ways in which procedures are applied. There is a suspicion that some departments do not always apply procedures for managing absences or illness of students consistently.

Some aspects of the management of student assessment are increasingly mandated at institutional level. Reports from QAA audit teams show that the timeliness and quality of feedback did not always match student expectations as specified in university assessment policies. The National Student Survey is an important driver for many institution-level policies. In particular, all of the institutions participating in this study now stipulate the maximum period allowed for marking and provision of feedback to students, which has been identified as an area of concern in a large number of universities. Allowable timescales differ, but typically institutions require that feedback is provided to students within 3-5 weeks.

One common concern identified by a number of participants in this study is the lack of understanding amongst students of the reasons for relatively long lead times for the production of final marks and feedback. In particular, students are often completely unaware of the process of moderation and/or second marking. Attempts are being made at some universities (in particular at University B and University D) to provide more accessible information to students in order to manage expectations about the production of marks and feedback.

4.8 Are student assessment procedures subject to administrative verification checks? If so, how are these checks made?

In addition to the academic procedures including moderation, external examiners and exam boards that provide checks and balances on the management of assessment, administrative processes operate at department and school/faculty levels to ensure that student marks or grades are recorded correctly and that data on awards is stored and used appropriately. Universities in the UK are subject to data protection legislation, which limits the use of personal data, including data on awards.

All UK higher education institutions are required to submit data to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), including data on assessment and teaching for new programmes as part of the Key Information Set (KIS) for that programme. Information about assessment methods includes the credit value for each module of the programme, how much credit is assigned to individual summative assessments and what kinds of assessments are offered. The three KIS categories for assessment are: “Written”, “Coursework” and “Practical”.

4.9 How do student assessment procedures reflect on students’ knowledge and skills gained at the secondary education level?

This question was difficult for institutional participants in this study to answer. The overwhelming feeling is that assessment must be designed solely to reflect the specific learning outcomes of modules and programmes and should not be dependent

on any prior learning or experiences, which may vary considerably from student to student and could be seen as a barrier to fairness.

Although the percentage varies, all of the institutions participating in this study have a significant proportion of undergraduate learners who have not come to the university directly from school. At University D, about 40% of undergraduate learners are not recent school leavers.

More generally, there is a perception that more recent school-leavers are not always well prepared for the requirements of university assessment. In particular, there is anxiety about the efficacy of mathematics teaching at secondary level, which in some cases is perceived as inadequate to prepare students for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) subjects. In other discipline areas, common assessment forms, particularly essays, may prove challenging for first year students who have had little experience at secondary level of creating extended pieces of writing.

4.10 What is the role of external actors, including QA agencies, in student assessment procedures?

In the UK, the QAA does not play any active role in the management of student assessment in institutions. QAA scrutinises university processes as part of regular audits or reviews and provides public assurance that these processes are conducted fairly and robustly. Institutions are autonomously and solely responsible for the design and management of their awards within the context of the relevant reference points agreed by the sector.

In England and Wales, the QAA works with the higher education sector to develop reference points and resources, which institutions use to guide their policies for maintaining academic standards and quality. These reference points have to date been known as the Academic Infrastructure and include the Framework for Higher Education Quality (FHEQ), subject benchmark statements, guidelines for programme specifications and the code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (which includes a dedicated section on student assessment). A new UK Quality Code for Higher Education will replace the Academic Infrastructure from the 2012-13 academic year. The Quality Code is designed to give all higher education providers a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the academic standards of their higher education awards and programmes and the quality of the learning opportunities they provide.

In Scotland, QAA works in a similar way with institutions under a separate Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF). The framework includes a national programme of enhancement themes, two of which have focused exclusively on the enhancement of student assessment. As part of the external reviews run by QAA Scotland that involve all Scottish higher education institutions over a four-year cycle, universities are required to demonstrate how they have engaged with these themes to enhance student education.

Other external bodies are very significantly involved in the accreditation of certain vocational courses, including law, nursing, teaching, dentistry and medicine. In

recent years, increased focus on graduate employability has led to enhanced relationships with non-accrediting employers who may be asked to contribute to validation of new modules and programmes or to provide placements or other assessed activities for students.

Interviewees noted that external professional bodies are sometimes perceived as conservative and a constraining influence on innovations in student assessment. However, evidence from validation boards and other interactions with professional bodies does not usually support this view.

Interviewees did express some concerns about the increasing role of industry professionals in some student assessment. One interviewee emphasised the importance of “enculturating” external professionals in “academic assessment” rather than in competence-based judgments.

4.11 Have there recently been significant changes made in student assessment procedures to improve their effectiveness?

The current focus on the results of the NSS and the impact of higher student fees and budget constraints have all created momentum behind efforts to revitalise assessment and feedback activities at all of the institutions surveyed, but the detail of these institutional efforts varies.

At University A, much of the current focus on assessment is directed towards rationalizing university systems to create greater coherence in practice across schools and to streamline decision-making processes at institutional level. The University has recently introduced annual programme reviews, which offer more regular opportunities for academic staff to scrutinise and to revise assessment practices.

At University B a university-wide strategic initiative is addressing all aspects of student assessment practice, but with a particular focus on student’s experience of assessment and feedback. The University’s new Vice-Chancellor is leading the initiative. An important driver is the need for the University to attract and retain students by enhancing its scores on the National Student Survey. The initiative currently comprises a number of related strands of activity: an “assessment academy” for senior policy makers and academic staff led by external academic experts on assessment and feedback which is generating new assessment policies at institutional and school/faculty level; a benchmarking exercise which is collecting data on current assessment practice across the institution and identifying examples of good practice; and a publicity and dissemination drive aimed at students which is offering a cash prize for the best student-generated “artifact” that exemplifies the importance of asking for, and using feedback; and funding for staff-generated innovative projects in assessment.

At University C a working group of the University’s Learning and Teaching Committee is currently investigating opportunities for enhancement of student feedback across all undergraduate taught provision. Work is focusing on three main areas: enhanced professional development for academic staff to support the development and embedding of new practices; revised and enhanced institutional

processes including the adoption of common standards to encourage parity of experience across the institution; and enhancement of the information and support available to students about assessment and the experience of learning at the University.

At University D a new assessment policy has been adopted across the whole institution during the last year, which replaces a variety of school/faculty policies previously operating at local level. Adoption of a central policy has been uncontroversial and the document draws on previously established good practice within university sub-units. The University is focusing on the development of systematic and strategically focused institution-wide staff development to raise academic standards and to enhance alignment between subject, department, faculty/school and institutional priorities. The University has recently adopted an electronic submission and feedback system and offers innovative forms of 'drop-in' support activities for staff members on all aspects of quality management, including the management of assessment.

A considerable challenge for institutions engaging in strategic changes to the way that assessment is conducted across the university is evaluation of the impact of those changes. At University B, part of the strategic initiative to transform student assessment has included a benchmarking exercise to identify current assessment practice. The need for this exercise illustrates how difficult it can be for centrally-located university managers to understand how the highly-devolved practice of assessment is conducted at module and programme level. At the same institution, there has been some (not uncontroversial) discussion about including a consideration of how student assessment is conducted as part of regular staff appraisals, drawing on data from student surveys.

The study identified some differences in institutional approaches to the way that assessment procedures are mandated and some recent changes at three institutions (B,C and D). These universities have adopted new assessment policies that are designed to support a more consistent student experience across the whole institution and to promote good assessment practice, including new ways of providing feedback. At University A, the prevailing culture in assessment design and management remains highly-devolved and at the discretion of academic staff within the usual context of validation and monitoring.

The new initiatives pursued by institutions B, C and D represent a shift in the territory covered by institutional assessment policies. As well as mandating procedural activities related to the management of assessment they also set out expectations for the *design* of assessment, previously seen as purely the responsibility of academic staff at local level. An important driver for this shift in responsibility is the increased use of student experience data in national league tables. As one participant in this study noted: "we are in the business of attracting and retaining students and we need to make sure that we are offering what students want to see".

4.12 What are the main strengths of assessment procedures at the institutions surveyed?

Interviewees reported high levels of confidence in the effective management of student assessment at their institutions. Assessment is perceived as robust, fair and undertaken by highly committed staff members. The management of awards, including the process of gathering, collating and distributing marks, managing progression and ensuring that data is stored and used appropriately is also perceived as a strength. Interviewees did not report any concern that higher education budget cuts would have an impact on the effective management of these processes.

At University A, responsibility for assessment practice is highly devolved to school and/or college level and departments and interviewees found it hard to comment on strengths at institutional level. However, the institution does operate a central educational enhancement group, which provides a platform for the dissemination of good practice operating at local level to the rest of the University. The University has been commended by the QAA for the robustness of its central quality management processes and for its particularly well-managed and effective use of external examiners.

At University B, institution-wide commitment to staff development is viewed as an important component of educational quality. Interviewees commented that “the university takes teaching very seriously”. The University is currently running an institution-wide strategic initiative, which is leveraging a variety of innovative activities to transform the way in which assessment might be conducted at the institution in future.

At University C, interviewees commented on high levels of “ownership” amongst academic staff for the quality of student assessment and an “ethos of quality” that permeates the culture of the institution. That ethos is perceived to include an institution-wide commitment to the idea of enhancing the student experience, including assessment and feedback. The university emphasises the professional development of academic staff as an important part of nurturing this ethos. The University has been commended by the QAA on its approach to the enhancement of learning. Examples of this ethos permeate University policies: for example, University C is keen to encourage developmental and constructive culture around the process of checking students’ marks. Moderation is recognised not only as an element of assurance of standards and quality, but as a form of peer support and staff development for academic staff.

At University D considerable effort has been made to create accessible and useful documentation and support resources for staff and students to “demystify” the process of assessment and to improve the transparency of a variety of assessment-related processes including moderation and feedback.

5. Major findings and policy recommendations

5.1. Identification of barriers to implementation of student assessment procedures with relevance to supranational level

One consequence of the adoption of the Bologna Declaration in UK institutions is the increased status of national frameworks (FHEQ and SCQF), which have created another layer of reference points for the design of assessment and encouraged the development of institution-wide common standards for assessment. Potential positive outcomes should include enhanced transparency and better information about the skills and attributes gained by students at different levels of study and enhanced opportunities for students to transfer learning. However, the multiplicity of reference points facing academic staff designing assessments can create unhelpful complexity, reduce autonomous academic expert input into the design of learning activities and reduce the possibility of offering open-ended, emergent learning experiences. There is also some evidence from this study that over-use of reference points can create compliance cultures in validation procedures and act as a barrier to reflection and innovation.

5.2 Identification of barriers to implementation of student assessment procedures with relevance to national level

A major driver of current institutional activities to improve assessment and feedback is the National Student Survey (NSS). The questions on assessment and feedback included in the NSS have been criticised because they place too much emphasis on procedural aspects of assessment management (and in particular on the timeliness of feedback) rather than asking students whether they were able to use feedback effectively to improve their learning. There is some concern that improvements to the turnaround time for feedback may pose a threat to the robustness of quality processes including moderation and/or second marking.

The introduction of higher student fees in England and Wales is already having an impact on some students' perception of the role of assessment in learning. Universities participating in this study have reported an increase in student challenges to assessment decisions and in student demands for enhanced information prior to assessment submission. This is creating additional workload for academic and administrative staff as well as creating a more generalised concern that students are increasingly focused on "gaining a pass" rather than on getting the most benefit from the whole of the learning experience.

The all-consuming demands of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) are perceived as a barrier to CPD in teaching and learning for many early-career academics. Institutions participating in this study have cut the number of credits required to fulfill probation and reduced ambitions to mandate universal staff participation in PG Cert programmes.

Recommendations:

- The UK sector should consider the impact of the National Student Survey and similar instruments on institutional practice. A re-consideration of the questions asked about students' experience of assessment might offer new and more effective opportunities to improve practice.
- There may be a need to engage in new UK-wide debate about the role of assessment in light of the impact of higher student fees and changing student expectations of higher education.
- Institutions may benefit from sector-wide support and discussion about how to initiate and evaluate the impact of university-wide changes to the way assessment is conducted.

5.3 Identification of barriers to implementation of student assessment procedures with relevance to institutional level

Although the institutions participating in this study were confident that budget cuts and increased pressure on staff time would not have a negative impact on the procedural aspects of assessment management, there is some concern that staff CPD is under threat and that time pressures are a considerable constraint on the development of effective cultures for innovation and the dissemination of good practice in assessment. To some extent, the NSS has been a useful tool to focus strategic attention on assessment and feedback, but it could be argued that approaches to enhancement of these processes that are designed merely to improve survey scores are in danger of being short-termist, mechanistic and atomistic in the broader context of the student learning experience.

A number of participants reported emerging conversations about the extent to which "traditional" forms of assessment serve the needs of students and employers in an increasingly challenging economic environment. There is evidence of institutional anxiety about the perceived value of academic programmes and the potential to lose "academic-ness" in the pursuit of employability and skills training for the workplace.

There is some concern that the impact of higher fees in some parts of the UK will create more strategic learners who are increasingly likely to question the outcomes of assessment and to require enhanced support in order to gain qualifications. There is a need for institutions to be more effective in the ways in which they communicate with students how assessment is managed to ensure high quality and what the students' role in assessment should be.

One very significant challenge for institutions is how to create a common student learning experience across the institution whilst simultaneously maintaining and encouraging academic ownership of assessment. Work at some universities to transform the nature of scrutiny and management activities (for example, seeing moderation and second marking as a developmental activity) is a good model for engagement.

Recommendations:

- Institutions should consider ways to encourage and support communities of practice on assessment, to encourage reflection and evaluation of practice and to nurture professional approaches.
- Institutions should work to foster policies and procedures for student assessment that reduce the bureaucratic burden on academic staff and instead provide opportunities for staff to innovate and to draw on professional expertise.
- Institutions should explore ways of helping students to understand assessment processes and to understand their role and responsibilities in assessment.