Writing Digital Assessment Briefs for International Students

Assessment performance can act as a key indicator of a student's understanding of module content. This resource provides academics with practical guidelines to ensure that their digital assessment practices are transparent for all students, particularly those coming from different educational contexts.

Assessing International Students: Key Considerations

1. All students (both domestic and international) benefit from clearly signalling expectations in assessment practice at the outset of a module and across the semester.
2. International students studying through the medium of English may find certain types of digital assessments more challenging (e.g. those that place an emphasis on oral language skills). This can place additional stress on individual students and/or have implications for student workload.
3. Academic expectations for undergraduate students are very different to those completing postgraduate study. These differences can be even more apparent in learners with English as an additional language who are likely influenced by their previous educational experiences. They may also find it more challenging to access supports and services than domestic students.
4. For visiting students and students on one-year taught Master's programmes the student 'lifecycle' is compressed. These students have a shorter time frame to adjust to Trinity's digital assessment terminology and practices and may have a different understanding or experience of digital assessment based on their previous studies.
5. Group assessment can be challenging for students from certain cultural backgrounds (e.g. levels of assertiveness, levels of face-saving behavior). Students may benefit from explicit guidelines being shared by staff to develop ground-rules for group assessment (e.g. netiquette).
6. Consider emphasising the importance of self-directed learning throughout your module. International students may not be used to the level of autonomy in learning expected of Trinity students: it can be easier for students to 'mask' a lack of engagement in a digital learning context.

First steps with digital assessment for international students

- Is there clear alignment between the content of the digital assessment and the learning outcomes for your module or programme?
- Are instructions on how to complete and submit the digital assessment clear and prepared in plain English? Have these been shared with students both orally and in writing?
- Have you considered paraphrasing or glossing/clarifying acronyms and/or complex terminology? Slang and jargon (both academic and cultural) often need to be broken down for international students.
- Is your assessment achievable for all students in the cohort (e.g. where you are teaching students from mixed disciplinary backgrounds)?
- Might visual supports (e.g. graphs, diagrams, or images) be used to support and clarify assessment activities? These can be particularly helpful for students with English as an Additional Language.
- For group assessments, are students expected to self-select into pairs/triads/groups or are these groups to be teacher allocated?
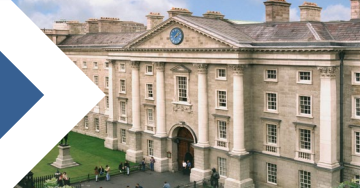
Timelining digital assessment
- How/where do assessment deadlines for 'your' module overlap with other deadlines for your programme? Students enrolled in multiple modules are likely to perform better where deadlines do not coincide.
- Are reading and assignments scheduled to build on each other throughout the module?
- Have students been able to become familiar with the format of the assessment, new areas of the VLE and corresponding submission processes (e.g. through mock assessments)?
- How easy is it for students to find information about module assessment expectations where they are late to register/join a module partway through the semeseter?'

Communicating assessment expectations
- Manage expectations from the outset of the course: help students to understand what to expect from the module, the timelines for assessment submission, grading and results.
- Discuss expectations for assessments: format, word count, plagiarism, and academic standards. Be aware that these may differ from country to country depending on academic culture.
- Clarify how marks are allocated, e.g. using a rubric that distinguishes between content, referencing and citations, and/or spelling/punctuation/grammar (where appropriate).
- Use realistic worked examples in tutorials that reflect continuous assessment or exam question standards.
- Clearly signpost to additional student services and resources as appropriate, e.g. to Student Learning & Development, the Gateway to Digital Assessment hub, Trinity IT Services.

During digital assessment 'windows':
- Flexibility in assessment deadlines may be required where technical issues apply (e.g. issues with access to recommended reading materials, submission processes) and/or for students studying in different time zones.
- Greater levels of academic support may be required for international students (e.g. clarification of question phrasing on 'exam' papers).
- Alternative file formats may need to be provided where students studying overseas may have trouble accessing digital assessment activities.

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