

Assessment: what is the effect on achievement and progression?

Students are assessed in a variety of different ways in the further education system – from written examinations, multiple choice and practical tests, to project work, presentations and observations by assessors. What effect do these different methods have on learners? A comprehensive study – the first to compare and contrast assessment practices across different settings (school sixth forms, FE colleges, workplaces and adult learning environments in various parts of the UK) – set out to find the answer.

Whilst a broad range of assessment methods were seen as appropriate by most learners, extensive written work was disliked and largely avoided, except by those studying at A Level. Multiple-choice online tests were especially popular. Externally set and marked examinations were valued because of their perceived higher status, but too much external testing was disliked and avoided. Encouraging learners to choose awards which suit their approach to learning and assessment is likely to increase their chances of success.

Making clear the criteria by which learners will be judged has benefited learners in terms of retention and achievement. It has also helped to create a strong culture of support. Across every sector, tutors take their responsibility to promote learning, increase motivation and encourage achievement very seriously. Detailed tutor support in the form of exam coaching and practice, drafting and redrafting of assignments, asking leading questions during workplace observations and identifying appropriate evidence to record in portfolios is widespread throughout the sector and is effective in helping learners to achieve and progress.

The researchers warned that the downside is that assessment procedures and practices may come to dominate the learning experience. They concluded that resisting the replacement of 'learning' with 'criteria compliance' is the greatest challenge confronting assessment in the sector.

How can you make sure that your assessment practices are appropriate and don't dominate learners' experiences?

Torrance, H. *et al.*(2005) The impact of different modes of assessment on achievement. Learning and Skills Research Centre: www.lsrc.ac.uk/publications/index.asp