**Utrecht University: assessing international students task**

Because universities have growing diverse populations of students, we need to develop good inclusive assessment practices to include international students who may have language concerns, unfamiliarity with Dutch assessment systems and cultural issues. According to Thomas and May, inclusive assessment ‘refers to the design and use of fair and effective assessment methods and practices that enable all students to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do’ (Thomas and May, 2010, p13). This workshop activity is designed to help colleagues consider how to make assessment as inclusive as possible.

**Task**

Please review the semi-fictionalised emails below, identifying the key issues raised and suggesting how best the university staff concerned should respond to ensure inclusive outcomes.

1. “Dear Dr G, I am writing on behalf of my cousin who is studying on the Law course for which you are listed on the website as leader. As a refugee, Prina has only been in the country for three years and he has made enormous progress in learning English, but his written work is causing him some problems still. He tells me that he keeps getting essays back with many, many corrections of his English and this is bringing down his marks badly. How can you help him? Yours sincerely Brena Farhi”
2. “Dear Dr J, The university is just not thinking about the needs of its students. Once again you’ve set us a three-hour assessed practical starting [late on a Friday afternoon during Ramadan] or [on a Saturday morning which is Sabbath]. When are you going to stop discriminating against us?” Ali/Eli”
3. “To the course leader for the International Business programme: I am very unhappy: I came to the Netherlands to study with an outstanding record in my own country: I am the best in the region and have been supported by my government to study here. Now I find I am expected to do assignments for which I feel unprepared: at home I was very good at written exams but now you are assessing me through oral skills which is much harder for me than for my fellow students. Please provide me with a written alternative task, yours Injana”
4. “To the school director. We are taking too many international students on this course who in my opinion are just not up to the standards we need. Why are we recruiting students who lack basic skills of the kind essential for our graduates who just can’t pass the course. We must stop doing this! Dr W”
5. “Miya, please send me your project report electronically so I can review it. It is so helpful seeing what you did on the course last year, and I am sure it will help me do mine this year too. I am very frightened that I won’t pass and I need all the help I can get. I will be very grateful to you, Jara”

**Facilitator Discussion points**

1. The key purpose of inclusive assessment is to help students to perform to the best of their abilities through assessment that is inclusive and support their learning and future employment (see Plymouth University Guide). However, inclusive assessment does not mean giving some students an easy time: it is essential for university standards and for students themselves that inclusive assessment fairly evaluates students’ ability to meet the module and programme learning outcomes, academic and professional standards. It is equally important that fellow students understand this requirement and its implications.
2. Many of the issues that impact on international students’ academic performance are linked to cultural and other non-academic matters, so university teachers do well to become familiarised with a such background factors.
3. While being an international student should not be in itself a cause for concern or specialist intervention, it is clear that language concerns need to be considered when designing inclusive assessment.
4. It is possible to meet the special needs of very diverse students (Grace and Gravestock, 2009), by using imaginative and creative approaches.
5. Students understanding of the conventions required for academic writing may not be as advanced as you might hope. It is a good idea to clarify expectations for students about matters such as referencing and good academic conduct.

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