




DIL: Guidance on motivating, encouraging and building students' confidence

Becoming an autonomous learner requires motivation and confidence. Staff members can play a key role in motivating, encouraging and building students' confidence as part of a directed approach to independent learner development. You may find it helpful to think about this 'scaffolding' as helping students to move through a series of stages of development of independence, such as novice, to intermediate, to expert, or from being active, to engaged, to fully autonomous..


This guide offers a range of practical ideas for staff to adopt, organised under six headings.




1. Provide inclusive transition activities for new students

	Detailed activities
	<p>Schedule tutorial meetings and optional support sessions at times when all students are able and likely to attend.</p>
	<p>Start the first sessions with new groupings of students with meaningful ice-breaker activities</p> <p>e.g. get each student to privately write an anonymous note on how they are feeling (in large classes students can do this in groups of around 6 to 8); fold notes and put into a 'hat'; then as groups, open the notes and discuss.</p> <p>No-one has to take ownership of their note (but they probably will once they start talking).</p> <p>Ask each group to report back (or produce a 'group note' for you) on what their top concern is right now, or to select one question they would like to have answered. Be sure to follow these up.</p>
	<p>Use your initial group tutorial sessions with new students to raise their (and your) awareness of how previous learning experiences may be shaping expectations of learning at university.</p> <p>This is especially interesting when you have very diverse groups, for example, students who went to school in a range of countries with different learning cultures.</p> <p>Ask students to work in small groups to take turns describing a typical class in their school – the size, what they typically did, what the teacher did, what preparation and follow-up homework they typically did, how they addressed their teacher in class, what the protocol was if they didn't understand something the teacher has said etc.</p> <p>Then ask them what they expect all these aspects to be like in university. Ask them to note any questions which arise, and end with a Q&A session.</p>
<p>Example</p>	<p>'This programme (attracts) mature students with family commitments and students commuting across (the county). With this in mind, the initial sessions are scheduled around the first year timetable and we aim for available periods between lectures, or over lunch. This is done deliberately to involve all first year students in the scheme. While attendance is voluntary, in these first few weeks attendance is over 90%.</p> <p>In our experience attention paid to facilitating purposeful study in initial induction period promotes autonomous study groups forming later in the course.'</p> <p>(Midwifery, Sheffield Hallam University) (Thomas 2015: 43)</p>

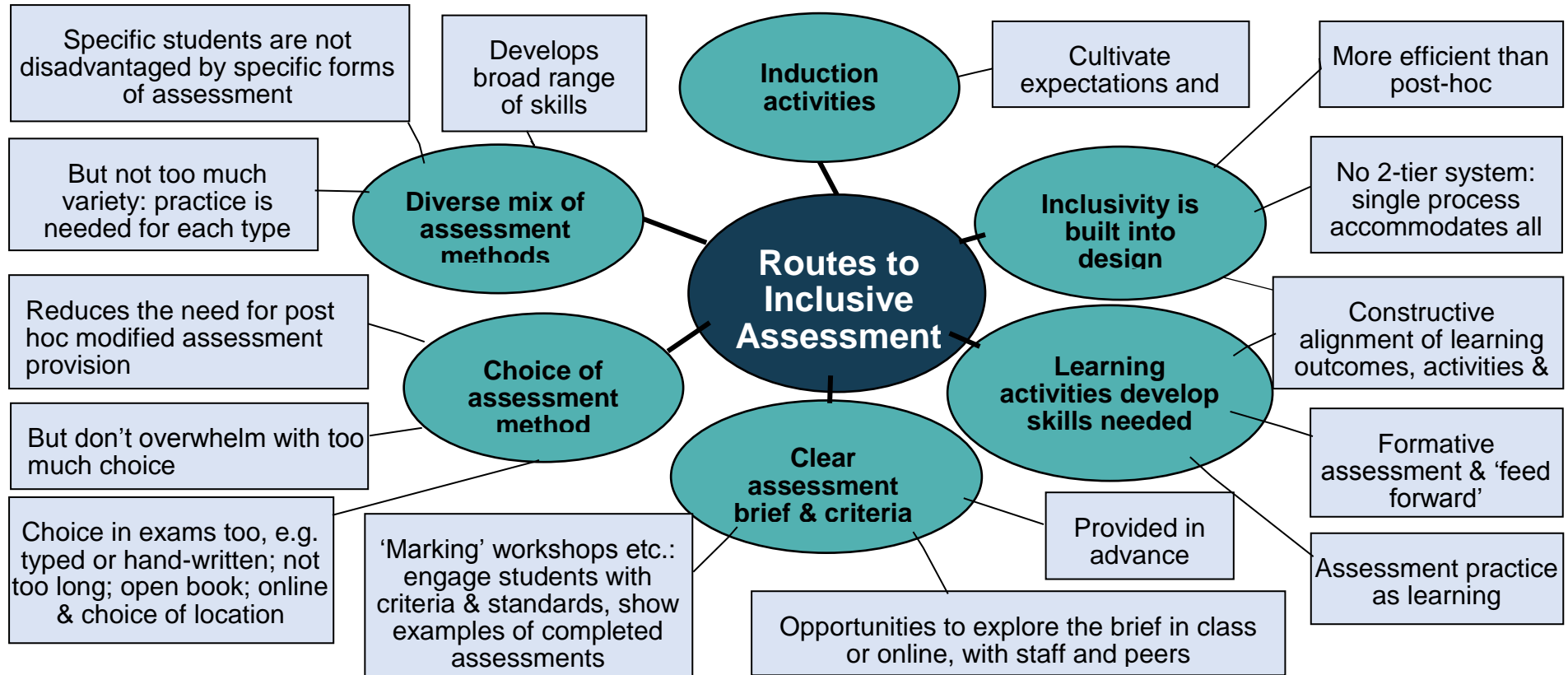
2. Encourage peer support

	Detailed activities
	<p>Mobilise peer learning communities by helping students to form and work in small study groups.</p> <p>Run group tutorials (rather than 1 to 1) and use these tutorials to organise students into small study groups or ‘teams’ (some students do this without intervention, but by giving the direction in group tutorials, no student will be left out).</p> <p>Give each team a small task to complete together. The first task might be one they can complete in the tutorial, where you are on hand to answer questions and help, e.g. start by getting them to race each other to find key information in their course handbook, or to look at the way references have been (incorrectly) cited in an extract from a student assignment and agree on a correct form of citation.</p> <p>Progress to tasks that they will need to meet outside the tutorial to do. Where possible, link the tasks directly to their course on a ‘need to know’ and ‘just in time’ basis – so look at the assessment schedule, and plan small group tasks to analyse and discuss an assessment task and the assessment criteria at around the time the students will be starting work on that assignment.</p>
	<p>Encourage students to take up peer mentoring opportunities and in later years, to volunteer to become a peer mentor.</p> <p>Take tutorial time to brainstorm the benefits to both mentees and mentors.</p> <p>Invite in a more ‘senior’ student mentor to answer questions.</p>
	<p>Use tutorial time for students to work on their personal development plans and aspirations.</p> <p>Periodically revisit these to note progress and get constructive feedback from peer ‘coaches’</p>

3. Be transparent about pedagogy

	<p>Detailed activities</p>
	<p>Describe, explain, and justify learning outcomes, activities and assessment to students; make explicit links to employability and lifelong learning.</p> <p>Encourage students to query and discuss not just what they are learning, but why they are learning the way they are, and what they feel about this.</p>
	<p>Build ‘mini-reflections’ into classwork and coursework to raise students’ meta-knowledge – ask students to think of ways a learning activity might be good practice and preparation for ‘real’ life.</p>
	<p>Make assessment more transparent.</p> <p>Assessment is a major source of anxiety for students, so deploy students to critique assessment rubrics; allow class time to discuss and ‘unpick’ assessment tasks, to make sure students know exactly what they have to do and to what standard.</p> <p>Conduct peer marking workshops using anonymised, real work from previous years to help students to decode the assessment criteria and appreciate standards.</p>
	<p>Develop task planning skills:</p> <p>When you set an activity or task that is to be completed independently, either individually or in groups, dedicate some class time for students to discuss their strategies for tackling the task effectively (so they pass on independent learning skills to each other) and to collaboratively plan how they will undertake the task (good for those at the novice stage of independent learning – this will support them as active learners).</p> <p>Depending on whether they are at the novice, intermediate or expert stage in relation to the particular task in question, you can provide hints and prompts, and monitor their suggestions to check they aren’t missing anything important, or suggesting unsuitable strategies.</p> <p>After a few times of doing this in class, set ‘task action planning’ as a preliminary stage to be completed out of class (i.e. independently), but with a few cues or prompts to help student to plan thoroughly, and pointers as to where to get advice on their plans if they need it (their peers? You? Central services? Online guides?).</p> <p>Once at the autonomous stage, students should be in the habit of task-planning and need no longer be directed to do this.</p>


4. Build confidence and foster student success through inclusive assessment design



Avoidable failure undermines confidence and motivation. Inclusive assessment design and practice removes unnecessary barriers to success, and provides all students with the opportunity to demonstrate that they have met learning outcomes to the best of their ability. This diagram summarises the various opportunities to make assessment inclusive. Diagram based on ideas presented in '7 Steps to Inclusive Assessment', Plymouth University (2014). For a short overview and practical ideas on how to assess students inclusively, see the briefing document 'Inclusive assessment for student success' included in this toolkit.

5. Create an open, supportive and respectful atmosphere

[where students feel they can safely participate, engage and take risks]

	Detailed activities
	<p>Start the course with a short group activity to collaboratively develop a set of 'ground rules' for participation in class (or in online fora etc)</p> <p>Include not only items that relate to students' behaviour and attitudes, but also your own, e.g. say that you will prepare thoroughly for sessions (and expect students to do the same), that you will value all contributions and questions (and will never deem a question to be 'stupid'), that you will facilitate sessions so that everyone gets a chance to contribute, that you will take action, and will expect others to do so, to protect people's dignity and right to be treated equally if you see this being threatened, etc.</p> <p>These behaviours may seem obvious to you, but they won't necessarily be obvious to students. By including your own commitments among the group ground rules you are signalling that you respect your students and see them as partners in the classroom</p>
	<p>Create opportunities for discussion and questions in class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build in either pre-planned mini-tasks for completion in pairs or groups, or just 1 minute 'pauses' at key points in a lecture for students to consider what you've just presented and ask for clarification, repetition of a point etc. • For the latter, avoid 'hovering' expectantly – turn your back for a moment, or check your notes, to give students time to think without feeling under pressure. • Get them to think about this in pairs or small groups (see next item). <p>Encourage them to jot down their question (post it or on Padlet etc.) so you can collect these and later review any that there wasn't time for in class</p>
	<p>During in-class or in-lecture interactive stages, avoid putting students 'on the spot'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a question or task to be considered in pairs or small groups (in private) before getting some students to report back (in public). Shy and anxious students, and international students who lack confidence in their spoken English, will especially appreciate this approach. • Ask students to write questions or concerns on anonymous post-its to leave on a sheet by the door as they leave. • Use response systems like Turning Point or technologies like Nearpod and Padlet to gauge the group's level of knowledge or understanding, or to post anonymous answers or queries (as for the post-its above). Where responses to your questions are split, get them to discuss the discrepancy in pairs/groups, then run the question again.



Design a staged assessment strategy that supports student success:

- During the first semester of year 1, include a series of small and achievable tasks that together comprise the first summative assessment of the course (several small, low stakes assessments feel less risky than one large, high stakes assessment).
- Gradually increase the size and challenge of the tasks throughout year 1.

Make sure that there is time between each formative task to check and give feedback (and feed forward) before students tackle the next.

Follow up on preparation and homework tasks

- If you have asked students to do preparation or 'homework', set aside a few minutes at the start of each class or lecture for students to make comments, raise queries, or do a quiz on the work.
- This acknowledges their effort and puts a little gentle peer pressure on those who haven't done the work, to do so in future.
- Use the 'private then public' group discussion or 'anonymous notes' techniques suggested above to encourage participation.


If you have asked them to post you a note with any queries or clarifications needed, be sure to follow up promptly.

Reflect on the 'atmosphere' you create in class (or online) and in feedback through your own behaviours and use of language. How might it make students feel?

- What techniques do you use to establish trust and rapport with individual and groups of students?
- Do you show your human side?
- If you don't know or are unsure of something (maybe a tricky student question), how do you respond? Do you say you're not sure and invite the students to suggest how you (together) could find out?
- If you like to use humour in class, could a jovial quip be interpreted as sarcasm by some? Humour is great for creating rapport, but it can be very culture-specific.
- Do students feel encouraged through positive feedback, and know that you value their effort and participation as well as getting the 'right' answer? (Do you say 'thank you' for contributions rather than just taking the role of the 'judgmental expert' by saying 'good' etc?)
- Where do you stand or sit in the group and what does this say about how you see your role in relation to the students?
- Do you know your students' names?
- When a student gets something wrong or produces below-standard work, does your feedback criticise the work or the individual?

Do you actively promote the idea that experimenting and testing ideas and hypotheses are central to higher education learning, and that this is what academics do when they undertake research? And that more often than not, things don't go as anticipated (the answers seem 'wrong') and these outcomes are learning opportunities, not failures?

6. Signpost support

	Detailed activities
	<p>Use tutorial time to get students to review feedback on their formative and summative assessments.</p> <p>Identify any recurrent themes in the comments in terms of what they need to improve.</p> <p>Point to resources, tools, workshops etc that can support this aspect of development (or better, get them to get online to find these for themselves, with your or their peers' guidance).</p>
	<p>As a course team or department, create a 'crib sheet' for tutors of all the different types of student support you know about, and the relevant contact details.</p> <p>Some of this will be centrally provided (see myuni.swan.ac.uk/) and some will be local or even specific to a particular course. Keep it on your noticeboard or computer desktop for easy reference.</p> <p>This exercise, if done as a course team, can reveal some interesting things – sources of support or online self-access resources that not everyone was aware of, or gaps in provision that you need to address. It becomes even more interesting if you co-opt a student partner or two (second or final year) onto the group.</p>
	<p>Use tutorials with new students to explore some of the support available, especially for the development of academic skills. Do this as part of the session where you get students to work on personal development plans (see 'peer support' above).</p>
	<p>Do include links and contact numbers for student support services in your course handbooks, but don't assume that students will have read and absorbed this information.</p>



Directed Independent Learning Toolkit

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