

Better together: An assessor support roadmap

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Funding information

Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Impact Acceleration Account, Queen's University Belfast

1 | INTRODUCTION

Assessors, in both clinical practice and academic settings, are pivotal in making judgements on learner performance to ensure members of the public are supported by graduates who are safe and competent practitioners. However, consistency of assessor judgements of learner performance has been a concern in directly observed clinical assessments such as workplace-based assessments (WBAs) and objective structured clinical examinations (OSCEs).^{1,2} A range of sociocultural factors could influence the consistency of assessor judgements such as assessors' beliefs about the purpose of an assessment, their perception of the usefulness of the marking criteria, their expectations of learner competence and their idiosyncratic judgement practices.³ These inconsistencies affect the high-stakes decisions made regarding learner progression or feedback provided that could impact their career development.

Engaging assessors in faculty development could enhance their capacity and confidence in making accountable judgements. However, this presents considerable challenges, and often assessors are required to attend mandatory training with limited relevance to their professional needs. To enhance the impact of support to assessors, we need to better engage assessors with faculty development that is relevant

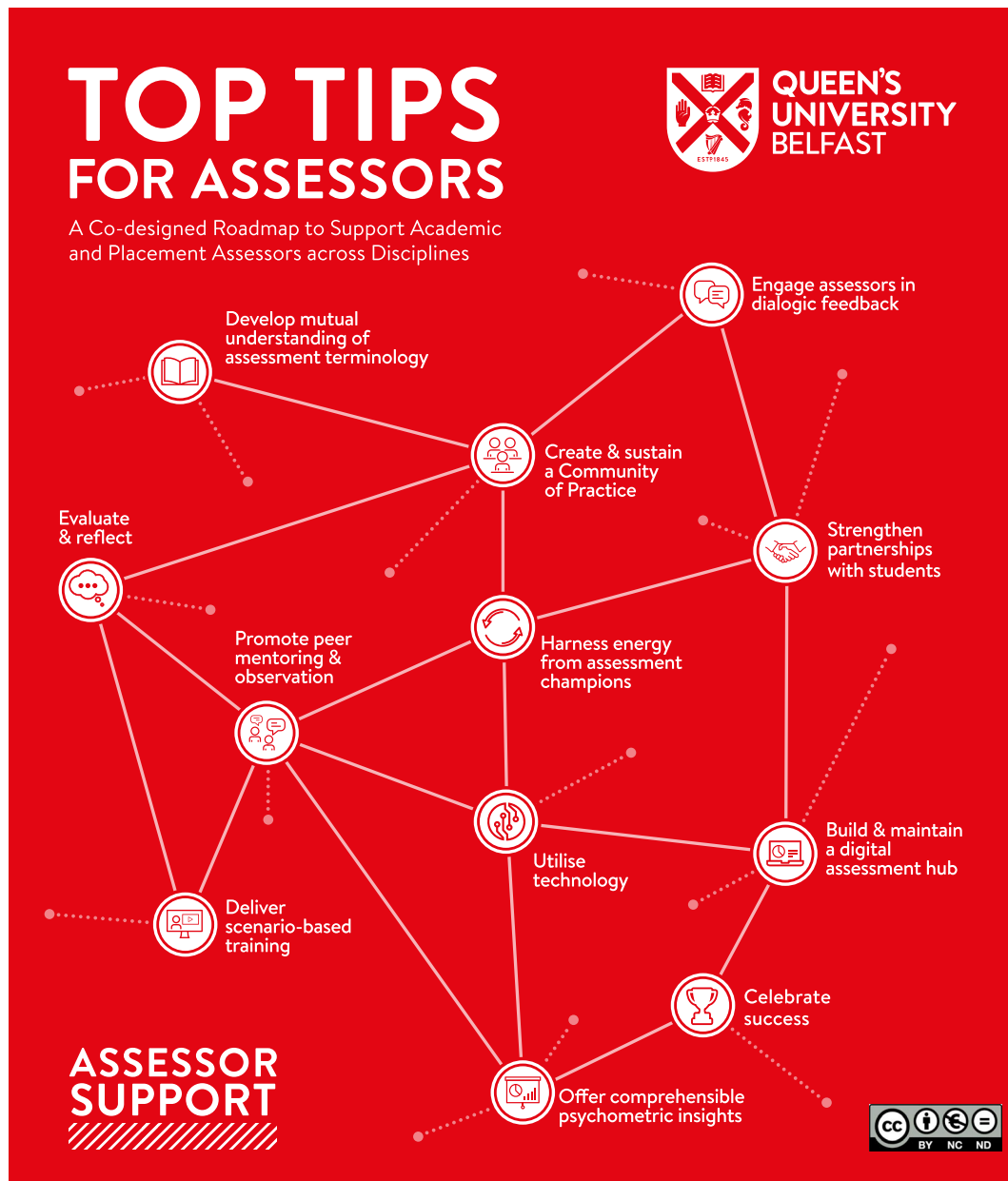
and tailored to their professional needs. The purpose of this paper is to outline the key signposts on a faculty development roadmap in assessment⁴ (Figure 1) that are critical to consider when developing 'fit-for-purpose' faculty development initiatives. The roadmap was co-designed with 20 assessors across medicine, nursing and midwifery, pharmacy and education and was launched in September 2021.

We need to better engage assessors with faculty development that is relevant and tailored to their professional needs.

In the following sections, we will explore three key areas of assessor support associated with specific signposts on the roadmap (Figure 2), to guide the development of 'fit-for-purpose' faculty development in assessment.

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FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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FIGURE 1 A co-designed roadmap to support clinical and academic assessors across disciplines.⁴

2 | STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

2.1 | Create and sustain a Community of Practice

A Community of Practice (CoP)⁵ acts as a link to connect, engage and build capacity among assessors who are either university academics,

health practitioners or those working in both settings. Since there are common modes of assessment such as WBAs and OSCEs across health professions disciplines, an interdisciplinary CoP could further enable the learning about assessment across disciplinary boundaries. The CoP model facilitates the development of a socio-academic network,⁶ which is fundamental to creating collective learning materials, techniques and innovation in assessments. Identifying

transforming assessment practices to enhance the assessor and learner experience.

2.4 | Strengthen partnerships with learners

Learners are the ones who are directly affected by the assessment outcomes and have regular interactions with the clinical assessors during their placements. Positioning learners as partners helps develop strategies that address the assessment challenges in both the university and clinical settings. Through formal recognition of the learner involvement in transforming assessment practices, it provides them with a ‘voice’ in discussing assessment without the barrier of power imbalance. Assessment practice is a developmental process more than only a judgemental process for both learners and assessors. The partnership with learners will promote the notion of a learning community in which learners are actively involved in co-designing solutions to address the challenges in assessment.¹¹

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Case study Two pharmacy undergraduate students were awarded with the CW Young Fund for their summer studentships in 2022 to develop a glossary of key assessment terms for all assessors and students. They worked alongside academics, practice assessors and students from Nursing and Medicine to develop a comprehensive assessment terminology glossary. This will be used by assessors in practice settings with new placements coming on board for the new Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) degree in September 2023.

2.5 | Celebrate success

Celebrating success is an integral part of faculty development to share ideas and strengthen collaborations. It recognises an individual or a team's achievement and builds trust and confidence among assessors,

which is the foundation of enhancing the assessment experience. An annual showcase event to feature the contributions of clinical and academic assessors and highlight the success of assessor collaborations could further facilitate the connections among assessors to adapt assessment innovations in discipline-specific and interdisciplinary assessments. Celebrating success, acknowledging assessors' contributions and sharing ideas enhance job satisfaction, expand networks and build collaborations on assessment initiatives.

3 | FACILITATING KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND ASSESSOR FEEDBACK

3.1 | Develop a mutual understanding of assessment terminology

What are the differences between a ‘good’ and a ‘very good’ level of achievement? A mutual understanding of assessment terminology helps clarify the expected level of achievement and alleviates assessors' anxieties by knowing what they are supposed to assess the learners on. Clearly defining the competencies that are being assessed in each piece of assessment is a starting point to ensure the assessment terminology used represents the same meaning within a discipline. These competencies need to be meaningful to the assessors and learners. The mutual understanding and awareness of the shared assessment terminology will also facilitate providing feedback to learners in terms of how they can progress to the next level of achievement.

Case study The assessment lead at the School of Nursing and Midwifery carried out a rubric development project with colleagues teaching undergraduate and postgraduate modules and a student representative using a consensus approach. The team first identified and defined a range of relevant domains: Acquisition and use of resources; Breadth/Depth of knowledge and understanding; Application of knowledge; Analysis and interpretation of data; Problem-solving and critical thinking skills; Professionalism; Communication; and Practical skills. Then, the team created specific criteria for each level of achievement of each domain to reflect the grading boundaries. A flexible rubric template has been developed that allows module leads to select the relevant domains to create a fit-for-purpose rubric for an assessment task. The template enhances the clarity and transparency of the marking expectations for students and assessors, which also guides the provision of student feedback.

Case study In pharmacy, we used the shared learning from the Community of Practice set up at our institution to develop training using real, recorded examples for our assessors who were new to the OSCE assessment cycle in 2022. We then followed up with the new assessors with statistical data on their performance compared to more experienced assessors. In addition, we invited the new assessors to the OSCE development days, standard setting meetings and scrutiny panels so that they could understand fully the decision-making process for OSCEs from start to finish. This has proven to be exceptionally useful for our new assessors, receiving positive feedback on the supportive nature of the process.

assessors with timely feedback on their marking behaviour in an assessment task. Some of the assessors also recorded a short video to explain the expectations of a piece of assignment, and the learners found it very useful and indicated that they had repeatedly watched the recording to guide them in completing the assignment. The assessors suggested that the same will work for both clinical and academic assessors to clarify the expected learner performance in an assessment task.

Purposeful use of technology could enhance the efficiency of assessment processes such as digitalising feedback to learners and assessors.¹⁵

4 | CAPITALISING TECHNOLOGY ON DEVELOPING RESOURCES

4.1 | Utilise technology

Purposeful use of technology could enhance the efficiency of assessment processes such as digitalising feedback to learners and assessors.¹⁵ The assessors indicated in the co-design workshops that their learners found the audio feedback more personal and specific to their individual assignment; therefore, they were more likely to listen to it. A short recording could be a viable alternative to provide

4.2 | Deliver scenario-based training

Scenario-based training (Figure 5) could be specific to a high-stakes assessment such as an end-of-programme OSCE or generic to a range of WBAs. The scenarios should also include different levels of learner performance for assessors to gain experience. The discussion is best facilitated as an interactive face-to-face or synchronous online session

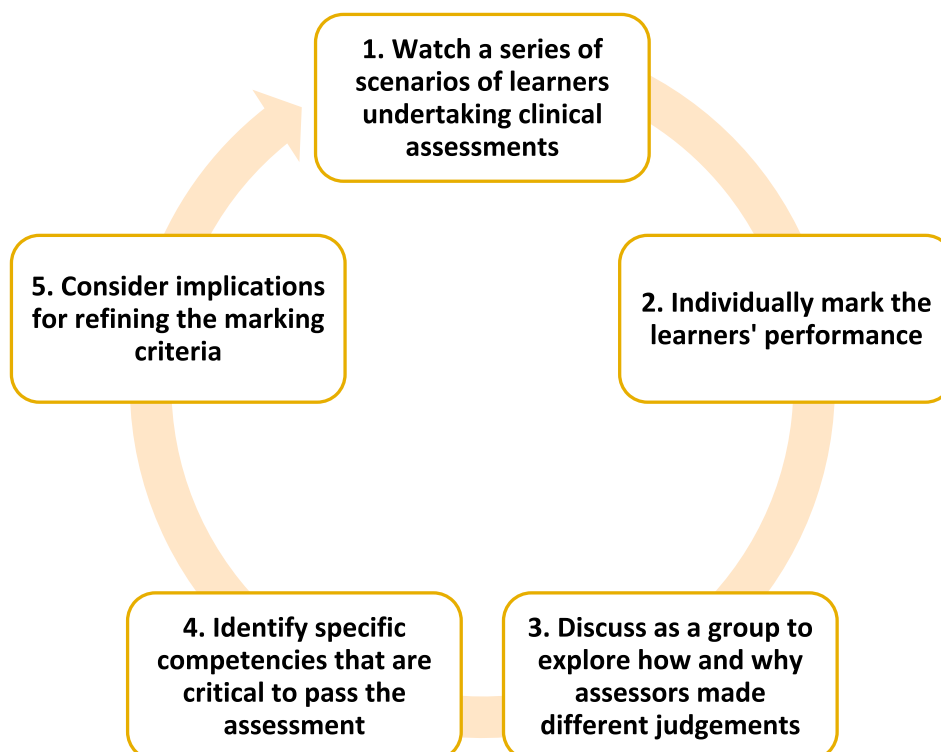


FIGURE 5 Key steps involved in scenario-based training.

which allows assessors to ask follow-up questions. Detailed discussion could help identify the specific competencies that are considered critical for learners to pass an assessment. The scenario-based training will also have implications for the future development of the marking criteria or guidelines for assessors, for example, some of the key points raised in the deliberation process could be clarified by refining the marking criteria. Participation in scenario-based training should be mandatory for new assessors. Ongoing participation is encouraged for the experienced assessors to keep well-informed of the assessment expectations.

4.3 | Build and maintain a digital assessment hub

Sharing knowledge, developing connections and co-designing resources are the main purposes of building and maintaining a central digital assessment hub for assessors across disciplines. Key considerations of setting up the digital hub are its accessibility and sustainability. The digital hub must be hosted on a platform that is easily accessible by both clinical and academic assessors to minimise technical problems and to synergise the expertise of both groups. This will facilitate further collaborations among assessors such as co-designing assessment resources. Another key point is the sustainability of the digital hub which requires a collective effort from a group of assessment champions to maintain its operation and update the information on the hub regularly. At our institution, we developed a blueprint of the digital assessment hub based on the ideas gathered in the Community of Practice. Assessors welcomed the idea of being able to access assessment resources from a central point. However, considerations need to be undertaken for the sustainability of a digital assessment hub in terms of updating information and the ongoing web hosting cost.

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5 | CONCLUSION

This paper presents a co-designed and evidence-guided interdisciplinary faculty development roadmap in assessment with 12 key

signposts under three main areas: strengthening partnerships with key stakeholders, facilitating knowledge exchange and assessor feedback and capitalising technology on developing resources. The key signposts are the suggested starting points, which are applicable and easily adaptable across health professions disciplines to support clinical and academic assessors addressing the assessment challenges. We encourage you to consider these signposts when engaging assessors with faculty development in assessment, which could be implemented separately, or mixed and matched, to suit the contextual environment and the assessors' professional needs. There is, in fact, no end point of faculty development for assessors. The key is to sustain the selected signposts and their associated initiatives to support assessors making accountable and credible judgements of learner performance to ensure health professions graduates are safe and competent to practise.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Wai Yee Amy Wong led the study conception with substantial contributions from Christine Brown Wilson, Gerard J. Gormley, Sharon Haughey and Sin Wang Chong to the design, data analysis and interpretation. Wai Yee Amy Wong wrote the first draft of the paper. All authors contributed to the critical revision of the paper and gave final approval to the submitted paper.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank our colleagues who contributed to the co-designing of the interdisciplinary assessor support roadmap that underpins the 12 signposts presented in this paper.

We also thank our students and colleagues involved in the project funded by the CW Young Fund: Catherine Carey, Ellen Gault, Karen Davidson, Brooklyn Davis, Jessica Quigg and Manh Toan Pham at Queen's University Belfast and Professor Kathryn Burnett at Ulster University.

In addition, we thank colleagues at Queen's University Belfast who contributed to the case studies including Dr Kathy Cullen and Dr Vikki O'Neill (Medicine), Dr Iseult Wilson and Dr Katherine Rogers (Nursing), and Dr Mary-Carmel Kearney (Pharmacy).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflict of interest to disclose.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data supporting this study cannot be made available due to consent not being obtained from the participants.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research was approved by the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Life Sciences Research Ethics Committee (MHLS 20_129), Queen's University Belfast.

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How to cite this article: Wong WYA, Gormley GJ, Haughey S, Chong SW, Brown Wilson C. Better together: An assessor support roadmap. *Clin Teach*. 2023. e13640. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tct.13640>