Exploring critical incidents in assessment

Jen Harvey (DIT) and Marion Palmer (IADT)

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Introductions

- Jen Harvey DIT

- Marion Palmer IADT

Assessment Workshop

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Identify critical incidents in their own learning about assessment

- Use critical incidents to analyse assessment

- Consider the emotional aspects of assessment

- Review the assessment cycle to identify key points for lecturers and learners

Workshop Outline

Introductions
- Definition of a 'critical incident'

Sharing critical incidents (presenters/participants)
- Identification of key features from incidents
- Emotional impact of assessment?

Tailoring future solutions to address issues

Assessment within a wider context
Conclusions

Critical incidents in assessment

- Critical incidents are events that change the way you think.

- A critical incident in assessment might be an event - remark, action, observation - that changed the way in which you thought about assessment.

Critical incident #1

Running a 10 ECTS credit certificate in learning and teaching for lecturers/staff with a portfolio assessment.

Participants asked to select a topic and write 1000 words relating topic to practice. Draft papers submitted and were poor.

Analysis indicated assessment too demanding – selection of topic required knowledge of teaching and learning participants did not have.

Issues addressed

The following year:

- Changed in year two to a selection of readings and a reader response approach adopted
- Quality of work improved.

Critical incidents in assessment
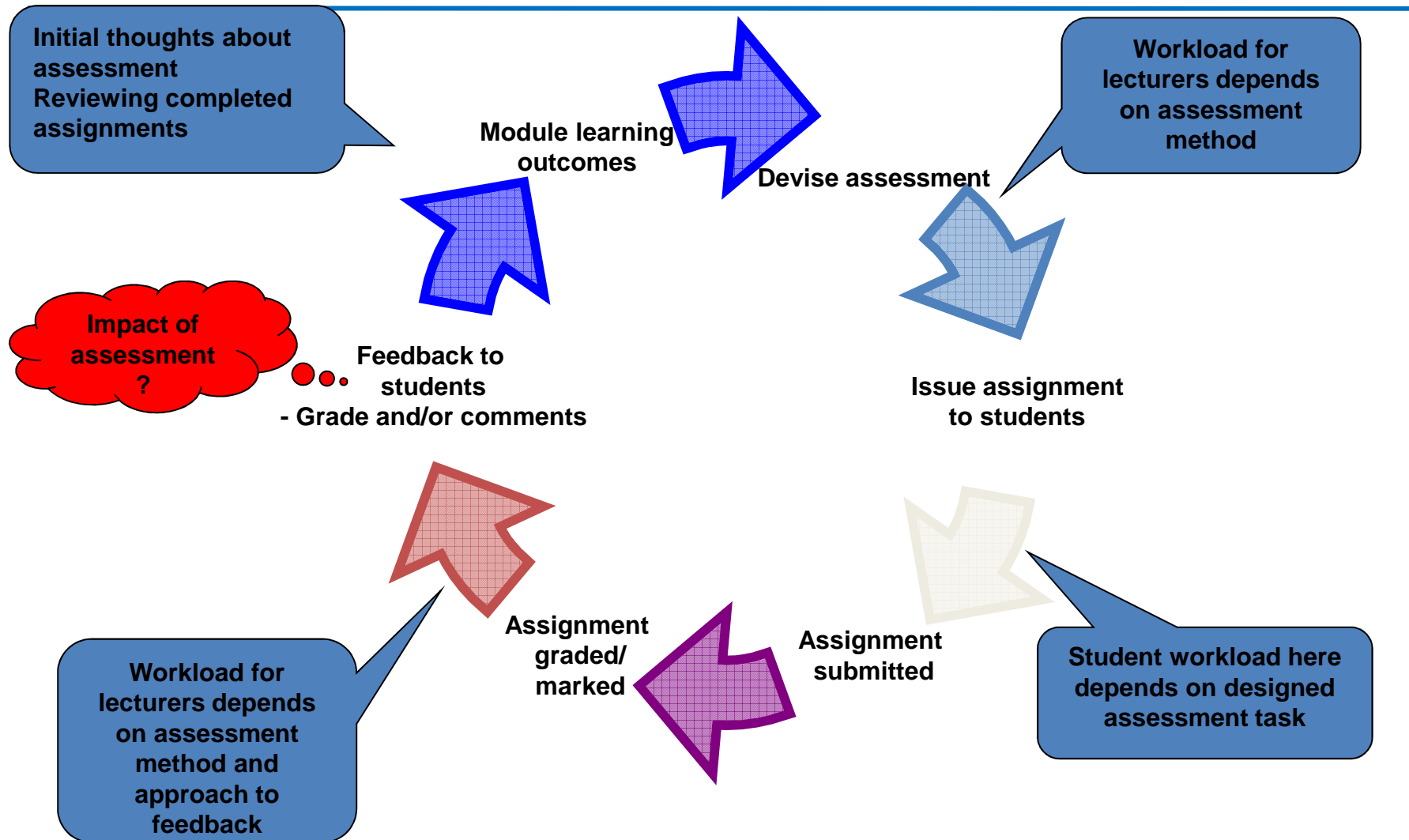## (adapted from Brookfield, 1990)

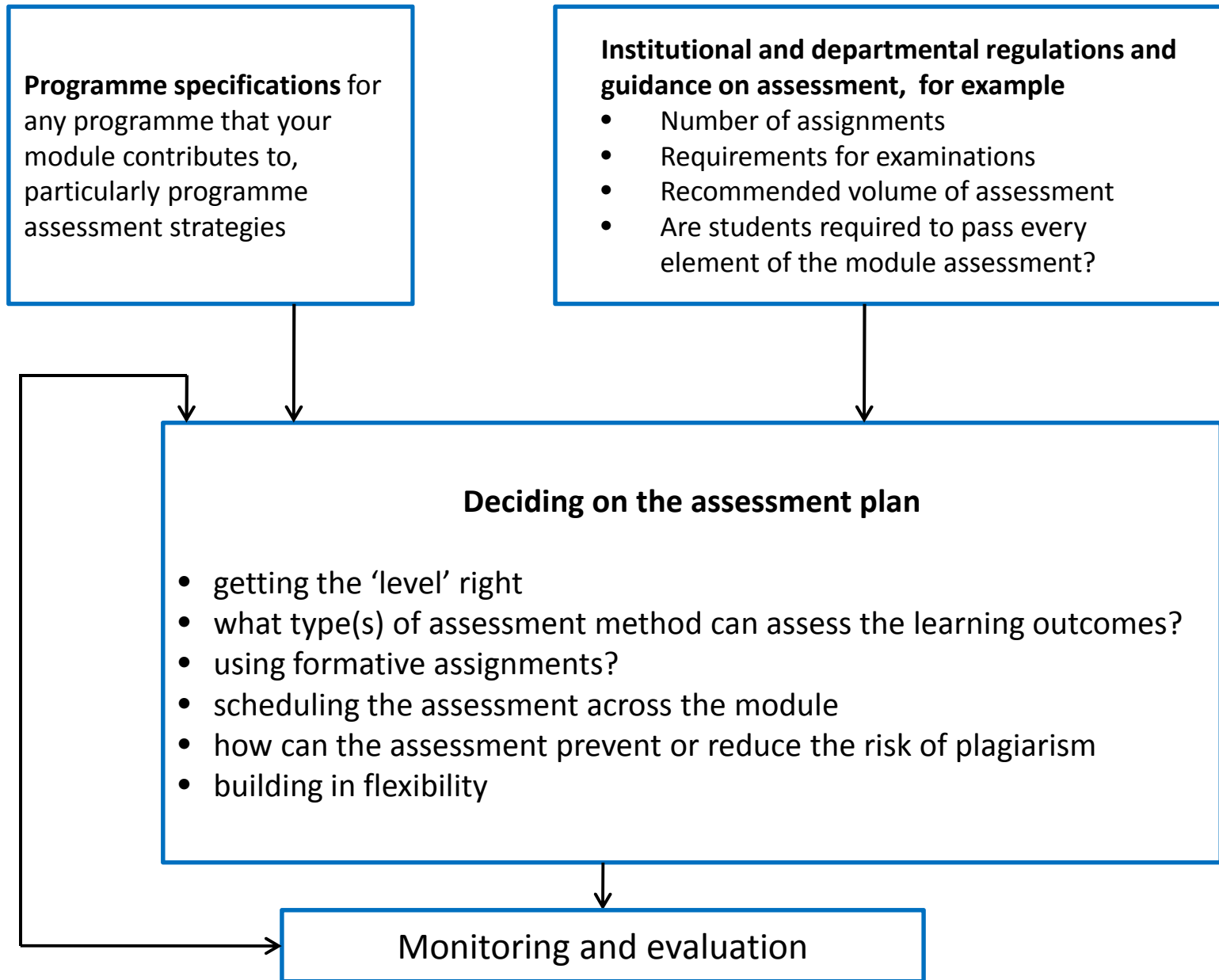Think back over your experience as an assessor/examiner.

- Describe an incident that you recall as being either particularly rewarding or particularly distressing for you as an assessor.

- Identify the features of the incident that made you feel this way.

- Did this experience provide you with any insight(s) into effective assessment practice?

Sharing experiences

- Positive /negative features identified from your experiences.

- Are there common themes?

- What can we learn from these experiences?

- Contextualising insights within the assessment cycle.

Assessment cycle for lecturers (and students)

Initial thoughts about assessment
Reviewing completed assignments

Module learning outcomes

Devise assessment

Workload for lecturers depends on assessment method

Impact of assessment ?

Feedback to students
- Grade and/or comments

Issue assignment to students

Assignment graded/ marked

Assignment submitted

Student workload here depends on designed assessment task

Workload for lecturers depends on assessment method and approach to feedback

Programme specifications for any programme that your module contributes to, particularly programme assessment strategies

Institutional and departmental regulations and guidance on assessment, for example
- Number of assignments
- Requirements for examinations
- Recommended volume of assessment
- Are students required to pass every element of the module assessment?

Deciding on the assessment plan

- getting the 'level' right
- what type(s) of assessment method can assess the learning outcomes?
- using formative assignments?
- scheduling the assessment across the module
- how can the assessment prevent or reduce the risk of plagiarism
- building in flexibility

Monitoring and evaluation

Designing a module assessment plan (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007)

Assessing across a programme
(Bloxham & Boyd, 2009)

1. Developing programme learning outcomes
   - with consideration to external stakeholders, institutional goals, employability skills, categories of LOs
2. Mapping programme outcomes across a programme
3. Making assessment fit for purpose
   - balance assessment of learning /assessment for learning
4. Provide for progression
5. Match assessment and learning activities
6. Identify constraints on assessment
   - regulations guidance, assessment workload/scheduling, bunching of assessment, staff workload, passing all components, involving students etc

Common weaknesses in assessment
(Brown, 2002):

- tasks do not match the stated outcomes;
- criteria do not match the tasks or outcomes;
- criteria are not known to students;
- students do not understand the criteria;
- overuse of one mode of assessment such as written exams
- overload of students and staff;
- insufficient time for students to do the assignments;
- too many assignments with the same deadline;
- insufficient time for staff to mark the assignments exams;
- absence of well defined criteria so consistency is difficult
- unduly specific criteria which create a straitjacket for students and make marking burdensome for lecturers;
- inadequate or superficial feedback provided to students;
- wide variations in marking between modules and assessor
- variations in assessment demands of different modules.

Exploring the 2008 UK National Student Survey Assessment and feedback issues

Effective practices identified:

- setting realistic targets/turnaround times
- adequate study time before examinations
- clear schedule of assessments/feedback on assignments
- monitoring /timetabling assignments more evenly
- more timely feedback through class activities
- feedback provided in alternative forms
- standardised feedback systems forms/ grids
- provide timely feedback eg indicating how future improvement might be achieved
- use of one-to-one tutorials for feedback on assessed work.

Feedback is most effective when…
(Holden, 2010)

- It is not a monologue but based on interaction between students and tutors
- Its is not just a product related to assessment but integrated into the processing of learning
- It is not an end point but is linked to opportunities for future learning
- Students have an opportunity to evaluate their own and others work and to give feedback to others
- It helps close the performance gap based on assessment criteria and an understanding of quality
- It is personalised and in a form that a student can understand
- When it is seen as a shared responsibility between staff and students

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Thank you.
Comments and feedback welcome

Jen.Harvey@dit.ie

Marion.Palmer@iadt.ie