

# Reimagining assessment: making it real for students through authentic assessment

A workshop for GMIT, Sligo IT and Letterkenny IT (the CUA  
alliance) 14th October 2021

**Sally Brown @ProfSallyBrown**

[sally@sally-brown.net](mailto:sally@sally-brown.net)

**and Kay Sambell, University of Cumbria**

[Kay.sambell@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:Kay.sambell@cumbria.ac.uk) @kay\_sambell

**Milky way over Hadrian's Wall.**

(Image used with kind permission of @danielmonk91)





# The world changed in Spring 2020 and so did university assessment!

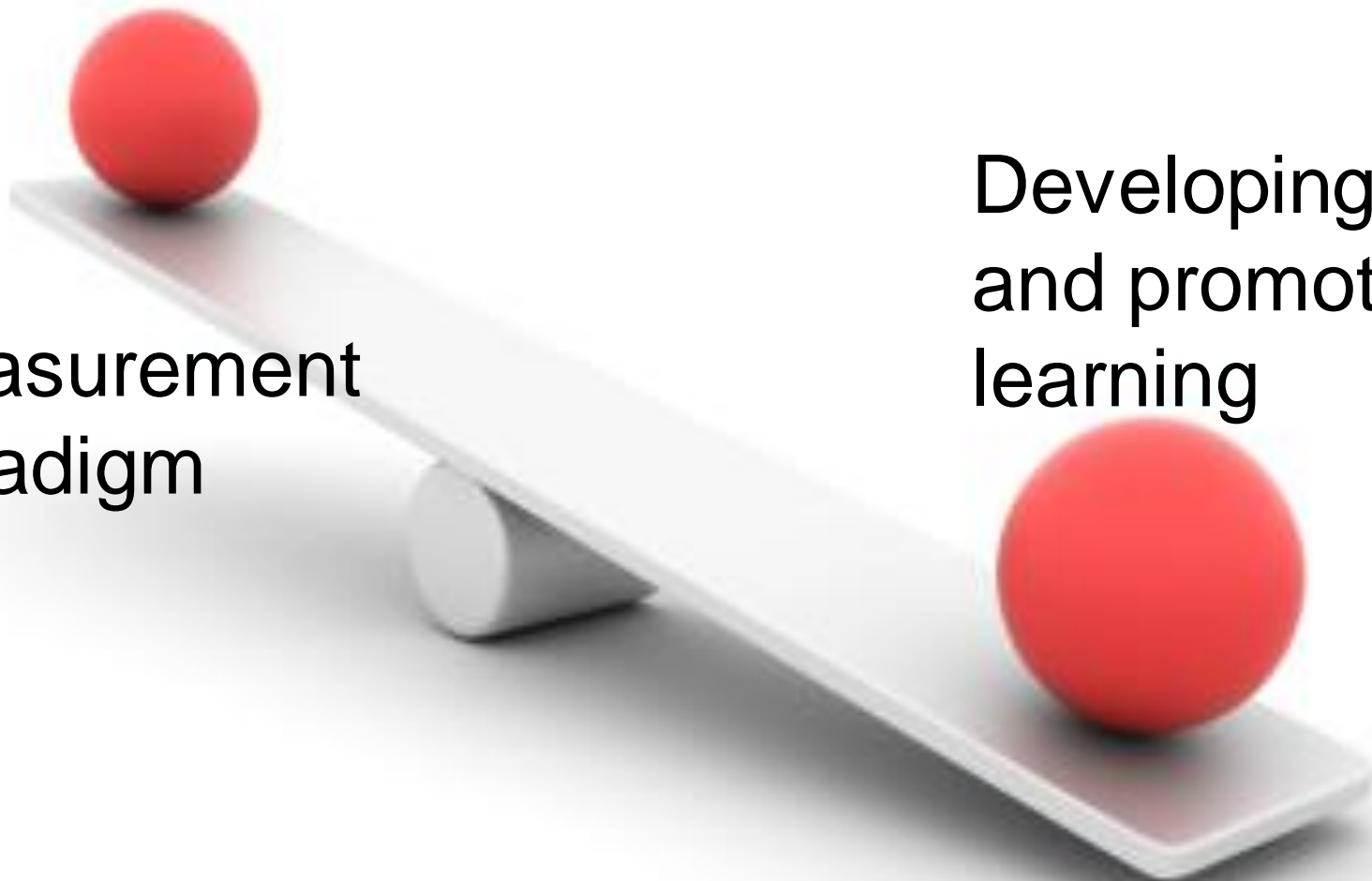
- In Spring 2020, just about every university globally was faced with a requirement to move from a substantial diet of unseen, time-constrained, invigilated **exams** in person to methodologies that could be undertaken remotely.
- The challenges for academics this year have been substantial;
- But now is our chance to really **shake up** higher education assessment, because going back to the old ways is just unthinkable and we may be able to make workloads more manageable but make assessment more fit for purpose in future



# AfL: **rethinking** assessment to ensure we strike a better balance

Measurement  
paradigm

Developing  
and promoting  
learning



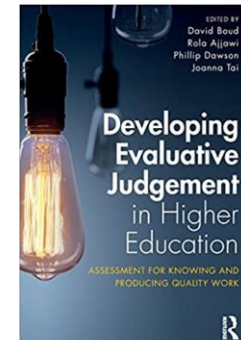
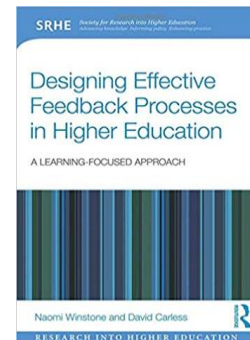
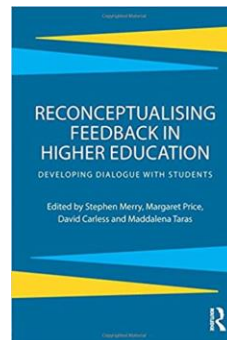
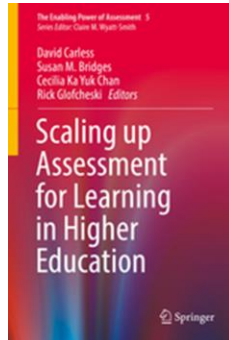
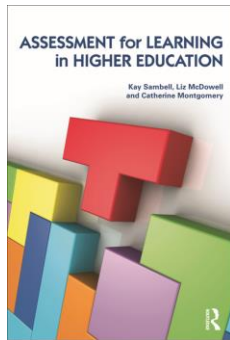


Can we **re-engineer**  
and **re-energise**  
future assessment  
and feedback  
practices....

- **Student Engagement**
  - Students supported to act as participants/partners in learning, via active involvement in and commitment to study?
- **Student Empowerment**
  - Students supported to exercise increasing levels of control over own learning via self-monitoring and self-regulation?



**Energise & engage** by  
designing more **authentic**,  
learning-oriented assessment  
tasks



**Enable** student  
engagement with  
guidance and **feedback**  
processes

**Empower** learners to  
develop **evaluative**  
**expertise** and self-  
regulation



# THE COVID COLLECTION (<https://bit.ly/3mMAEFP>)

Our resources around assessment during times of coronavirus give more detail of our approaches:

- Sambell, K. and Brown, S. (23 March 2020) 'Contingency-planning: exploring rapid alternatives to face-to-face assessment'.
- Sambell, K. and Brown, S. (2 April 2020) 'Fifty tips for replacements for time-constrained, invigilated on-site exams'
- Sambell, K. and Brown, S. (1 June 2020) 'The changing landscape of assessment: some possible replacements for unseen time-constrained face-to-face invigilated exams'
- Brown, S. and Sambell, K. (17<sup>th</sup> August 2020) Writing Better Assignments in the post-Covid Era: approaches to good task design
- Brown, S. and Sambell, K. (21<sup>st</sup> August 2020) Changing assessment for good: a major opportunity for educational developers
- Brown, S. and Sambell, K. (19<sup>th</sup> March & 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2021 & 13<sup>th</sup> August) Compendia of examples of authentic assessment in practice from diverse disciplines







Universities started thinking about changing assessment due to Covid: let's not go back to an over-reliance on traditional exams!

- The time/place/ duration constraints carry high risks issues etc prevent the traditional exam being taken, and thereby risk business continuity interruption, which would require on-the-hoof mitigations.
- Traditional exams lack relevance to students' future lives in employment, entrepreneurship and civil society, since they are not in any meaningful way a valid representation of what work or life challenges typically require.
- The range of activities that students are asked to do in a traditional written exam are very limited, writing with a pen individually in silence, with no reference to wider resources.
- In employment and wider contexts, however, most will have internet access



# Backwash: impact of inauthenticity on students' approaches to learning

“The ‘idea of the exam’ can have a negative backwash effect on learning, so instead of promoting the kinds of learning that are useful for longer term (integration of knowledge, sophisticated cognitive abilities, lateral thinking, critical lateral, imaginative thinking) students see them as ‘memory tests’, or ‘going through the motions’, reproducing whatever information they assume their lecturers want to hear or see”

(Sambell et al, 2013)

*‘It’s poor learning which you quickly forget. You just try to remember for the exam, then flush it out of your mind ready for the next exam’*





# More diverse exam formats.....

- Take home exams

- Sambell & Brown, (2020) 50 Tips for replacements for on-site, time-constrained invigilated exams
- Wood, G (2020) Preparing students for open book and take-home exams
- Villaroel et al (2020) Using principles of authentic assessment to redesign written examinations and tests



## Key question post pandemic: How can we re-energise assessment so it becomes become more authentic?



- ① **The use of activities that are interesting, meaningful, relevant and have long term value**
- ① **Feel intrinsically useful and worthwhile**



# After Arnold (2021) we see authentic assessment activities as...

## Characterised by

- Realism;
- cognitive challenge;
- and evaluative judgment

## Relevant to

- self (student's individual aspirations)
- discipline community
- or professional community/future workplace settings.

## Benefits include....

- interesting and rewarding;
- driver for learning
  - motivating students;
  - developing higher order thinking skills;
  - developing a wide range of skills
- opportunities for inclusive practice;
- promote academic integrity;
- link well to real-world challenges
  - (if associated with industry, professions or civic groups)



# Do our assessment designs promote the kinds of learning that are desired for the longer term?

## DEEP APPROACHES?

Encourage students to genuinely understand the subject as opposed to juggling formulae or performing tasks in an isolated, formulaic or unconnected way?

## SENSE OF BECOMING?

How far do the tasks help students feel they are starting to act as a participant in the disciplinary community?

## Authenticity

## PERSONAL INTEREST & OWNERSHIP?

E.g. issues *they* have identified, element of choice of topic or method?

## FIDELITY? INHERENTLY MEANINGFUL?

Sense of audience, meaningful outputs, plausible contexts?

Involve learning to plan and monitor progress prior to completion, & involvement in feedback processes?



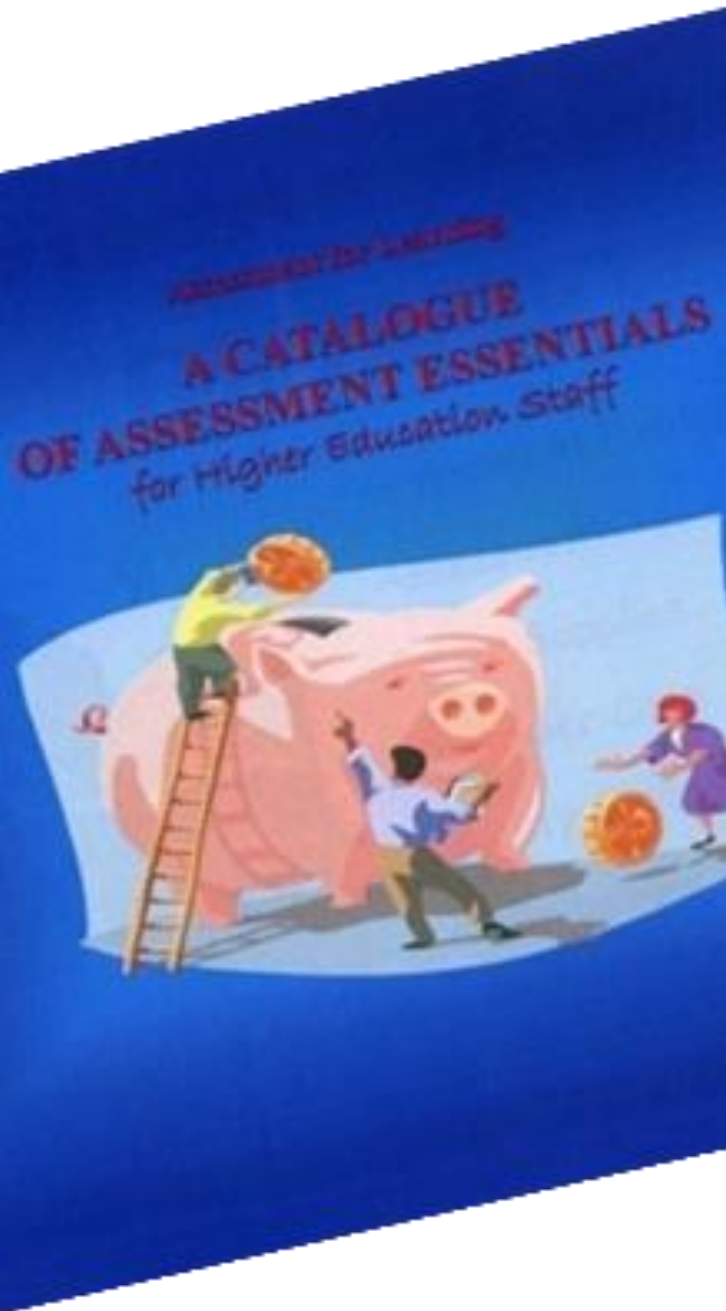
# Examples of some alternative assessment formats



**\*In-tray activities** **\*An electronic or hard copy portfolio,** **\*A viva voce or individual oral test,** **\* A virtual Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE),** **\* Patchwork assessments,** **\*Blogs,** **\* Articles or other types of publications,** **\*Video/audio recordings/ podcasts,** **\* Reflective journals,** **\*Rough guides, leaflets and other public documents/outputs,** **\*Annotated publications,** **Evaluative comparisons and judgments,** **\* Creative artefacts,** **\*Presentations, or** **\*Performances (see Sambell and Brown, (2020c) for descriptions and pros and cons of each of these).**







## One example- creating educational guides to AfL

*"I'm bored with writing essays. There's **no obligation**, you're writing for a **set task**..and once that's been achieved then that's it. You just copy down the books in a different language"*



*"I put so much effort into this, read loads, you had to. With this you can't just sit there and take the notes, you have to **make sense** of it...to produce something that **gets the message over**."*

*"It's thinking.....It's more **analytical**."*



# An Example: traditional assessment

Thanks to  
Associate Professor (Engineering Education) and  
Director, Center for Engineering Education  
Innovation (E2I), Hong Kong University of  
Science and Technology, Ben Y B Chan

Identify five serious contingencies that could occur on site over a period of construction and identify the main actions that would need to be taken in response to these incidents which would need to be undertaken by the Civil Engineer to prevent and mitigate disaster.





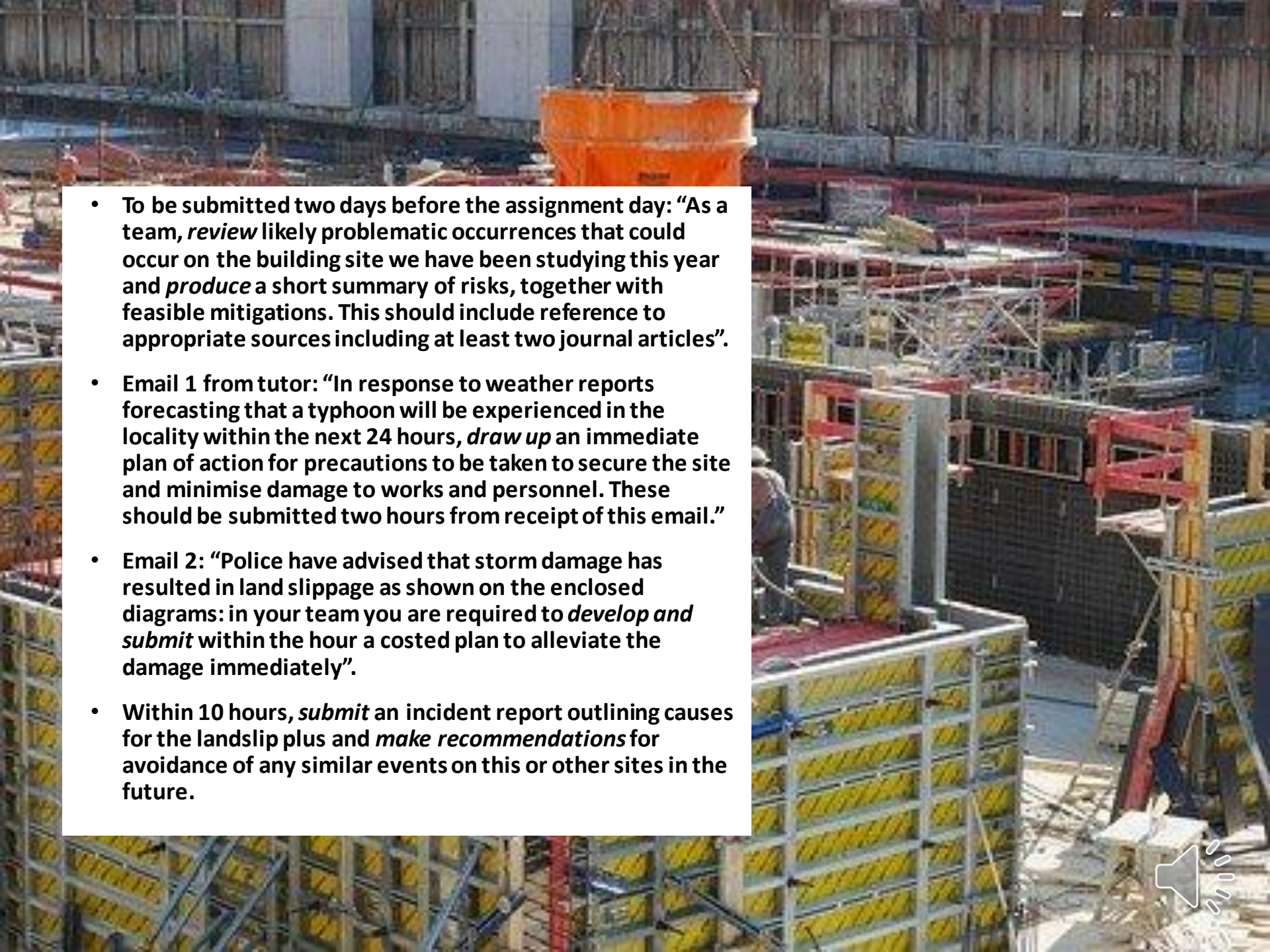


Authentic assessment: a scenario is provided establishing the context for the assignment, and over the course of a 24-hour period, students are required to respond in real time to emails received from the tutor which require prompt and informed decision making

**As final year degree students at HKUST as your capstone assignment integrating learning from different elements of your programme, you will be asked to work in a team to set up a simulated consultancy company, advising the management of a substantial building project in Hong Kong on construction management issues. During the course of the activity, you will be asked to respond to a changing context with timely and accurate advice, based on what you have learned here at HKUST, to demonstrate your capabilities to cope with crisis situations requiring immediate action.**





- 
- To be submitted two days before the assignment day: “As a team, *review* likely problematic occurrences that could occur on the building site we have been studying this year and *produce* a short summary of risks, together with feasible mitigations. This should include reference to appropriate sources including at least two journal articles”.
  - Email 1 from tutor: “In response to weather reports forecasting that a typhoon will be experienced in the locality within the next 24 hours, *draw up* an immediate plan of action for precautions to be taken to secure the site and minimise damage to works and personnel. These should be submitted two hours from receipt of this email.”
  - Email 2: “Police have advised that storm damage has resulted in land slippage as shown on the enclosed diagrams: in your team you are required to *develop and submit* within the hour a costed plan to alleviate the damage immediately”.
  - Within 10 hours, *submit* an incident report outlining causes for the landslip plus and *make recommendations* for avoidance of any similar events on this or other sites in the future.



# How can you write better assessment tasks?

## Our Task Generator

We came up with an approach in our 17<sup>th</sup> August paper (summarised here by @SwantonSketches) which argues that by starting with the learning outcomes, looking for the powerful verbs contained therein, supplying the object for the verb, together with an indication of what outcome/ evidence of achievement is needed and wrapping this up within a context and supplying some 'range statements' it's possible to design practical authentic assessments in a way that is manageable and contributes to learning by building self-efficacy.





Verb/ educational outcome	What? i.e. object	Outcome/ evidence of achievement	Modifiers/ developments/ range statements
<b>Interpret</b>	complex and sometimes incomplete or conflicting data	compile a summary meaningful for experts and laypersons	leading to a viable action plan for a team to implement.
<b>Review</b>	data from a variety of sources	produce an executive summary	for a specific audience of employers
<b>Set up</b>	specialised equipment appropriately	draw up a 'quick guide' for peers	to enable them to use it safely and
<b>Evaluate</b>	three proposed solutions to a problem	propose a further two of your own	appropriately with suggestions about what might work best
<b>Compile</b>	contingency plans for a professional environment	produce disaster recovery in case of a serious emergency	leading to mitigations and remediation





Another example: authentic assessment in Sports Nutrition (loosely fictionalised) based on ideas provided by Belinda Cooke, Louise Sutton and Lauren Duckworth at Leeds Beckett University

**Traditional assessment for a final year module:**  
An exam comprising three short answer questions and one longer question)





# More authentic example

**Context:** You are working alongside a performance nutritionist supporting a local elite Rugby Union team prior to the start of the season and your role is to provide advice to the players. You are aware that lockdown during the pandemic will have affected their training behaviour and diet, and their habits are likely to have been impacted by both formal and informal sources (including social media). Your job is to advise the players how to get back to maximum performance levels



## Tasks:

1. Review the literature provided during your studies and through your own investigations on nutrition in the field of Rugby Union. Select three journal articles and for each, provide up to one side of A4 of bullet points of your key learning from each article.
2. Prepare on behalf of the performance nutritionist an infographic as a PowerPoint slide for the players, setting out in user-friendly language your key advice to them about sensible protein intakes and feeding frequency, together with safe use of appropriate supplements.
3. Write a 700-word blog post, suitable for posting on a club website, setting out for a general audience what the key elements of your advice about nutrition would be for non-elite players, including juniors on how to maximise their performance through nutrition.
4. Write a 200-word reflection on your main learning points from this assignment about sports physiology and comment on any changes you personally will make to your own nutrition.







## Authentic assessment in Travel and Tourism

### Traditional essay-style exam question

**“In creating and costing UK-based Cruise holidays for a prestige company, what factors do you need to take into account to ensure that you offer high-quality passenger experiences that are perceived to be good value for money and yet still are profitable for the company?”**





## Alternative assessment tasks

You work for Eoen Holidays sailing out of Southampton, offering prestigious holidays mainly to Mediterranean and Baltic destinations. Your company has been hard hit by the pandemic and you are keen to attract customers back to cruising with you by appealing to couples mainly over 60 using tried and tested formats. You want to offer 4 one-week cruises in June 2022 with Saturday departures from Southampton on your newest ship, Anna Rose

**1. Undertake an analysis of the company data for 2017-9 to identify the five key features that customer surveys showed to lead to high levels of customer satisfaction.**

**2. Select five ports of call for your cruises, giving your rationale for this selection, based on attractions and amenities likely to appeal to your target age group.**

**3. Using the data pack provided of fixed and variable costs from 2017-9 plus inflation, draw up a draft pricing schedule for each of the 4 weeks for the eight levels of cabin. Provide a full rationale for your costing structure.**

**4. Do an online search of at least three entrainment agencies and propose an entertainment package for the month.**





## Coffee break task

- Chose one of the compendia at <https://sally-brown.net/kay-sambell-and-sally-brown-covid-19-assessment-collection/> (posts on 19 March, 3 May, 13 August or the Maths guest post on 9 June)
- Looking at one example from the compendia or one you heard about in our presentation close to your discipline and spend 10 mins jotting down some notes about how you might create a similar authentic assessment in your own subject area

