



## **Visual and creative assessments: the Learning Developer perspective**

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### ***Presentation abstract***

This presentation explored the role of Learning Developers in supporting university students working on visual and creative or 'authentic assessments' (Kędra and Źakevičiūtė, 2019; Peña and Dobson, 2021). The paper considered how Learning Developers are well-placed to provide insights into understanding how students comprehend and engage with such assignments (Bartram, 2023). This perspective is particularly useful for visual and creative assignments where the assessment and evaluation of 'creativity' can prove challenging for educational professionals (Balchin, 2006).

The paper provided insights into how students approach and comprehend visual and creative assessments, and the potential impact on the Learning Developer role. I contended that some students struggle to understand what is expected and how such assessments are graded. There appeared to be a particular concern for assignments with little or no written element, assessed instead by word count equivalence. I discussed how our Academic Skills team responded to student need by providing new teaching support on visual literacy and creative skills development in collaboration with colleagues.

The presentation provided an opportunity to outline my recent research findings that showed how such assignments were received and valued by students across different disciplines in terms of personal, academic, and professional skills development. By focusing on the student experience, this research identified areas for adaptation or enhancement in the creation, delivery, and support of assignments to promote greater inclusivity. The paper concluded with a reflection on how the unique position of Learning Developers could inform and shape the provision of visual and creative assessments.

**Keywords:** visual and creative assignments; authentic assessment; Learning Developers; assessment support; student experience.

### ***Community response***

The session was well-received by participants, sparking meaningful discussions and reflections on the evolving roles of Learning Developers (LDers) and their collaboration with academic staff. Participants highlighted the importance of working closely with academics to effectively support creative and visual assessments. Robert Ping-Nan Chang, for example, reflected on how ‘the close collaboration with these courses provides a good understanding from staff about what I could do and cannot do, even though this does not “deter” students from discussing their design or research with me’.

The session also underscored the increasing adoption of creative assessment formats across disciplines. Felicity Flynn observed that ‘as assessment types move away from the traditional essay and more creative modes are being trialled in many HEIs, I feel I need to be able to pivot and expand my own knowledge and understanding of what faculty are assessing and how’. This trend highlights the need for LDers to adapt and expand their expertise to meet the demands of emerging assessment approaches.

The proposed standards and framework shared during the session were praised as a valuable reference for LDers exploring creative assessment practices. Flynn remarked that ‘it was extremely useful not only in affirming the importance of faculty/LD collaborations, but also in providing a clear breakdown of visual literacy standards’. Chang added that the ‘framework not only sets a boundary but also provides a space for many LDers to emphasise what they are good at – criticality – and to mitigate the anxiety about what they are not familiar with’.

Overall, the session equipped participants with clarity, confidence, and practical tools to support and adopt creative assessments effectively, while fostering collaboration and professional growth.

## **Next steps and additional questions**

While the session provided valuable insights and practical tools, it also raised questions about addressing gaps in support, ensuring inclusivity, and building confidence in guiding students through these evolving assessments. Questions raised by participants focused on three key themes. The first theme explored how LDers can navigate limitations and empower students:

1. How can LDers better navigate their limitations in technical and visual skills while still empowering students in creative assessments?
2. How can LDers enhance their understanding of subject-specific knowledge and terminology to support students more effectively?

The second theme focused on understanding and supporting faculty expectations:

3. How can LDers improve their understanding of what academic staff are assessing in creative assessments to offer more effective support to students?
4. In what ways are academics gathering and responding to feedback on creative assessments? How is this process contributing to improved student outcomes?

The final theme focused on addressing challenges in resource provision:

5. What strategies can be used to tackle the challenges posed by differing levels of support for innovative assessments, particularly in asynchronous resource provision?
6. How can we ensure equitable access to resources and support for all students undertaking visual and creative assessments?

## ***Author's reflection***

The session provided a valuable opportunity to share knowledge, discuss our team challenges and initiatives, and highlight my research findings collated so far. The feedback from other LDs both on the day and in the reflective comments was informative and insightful, and I valued their thoughts on how visual and creative assessments are

supported across different institutions. The session also gave me ideas for further developing my research, with potential for future publication.

## ***Acknowledgements***

Thank you to all the contributors who shared their reflections and enriched our understanding of this conference presentation and its impact on the audience. Special thanks go to Robert Ping-Nan Chang (University of the Arts London) and Felicity Flynn (University of Southampton) for their thoughtful insights and contributions. The research was conducted following Bath Spa University's ethics policy guidelines. The community response was edited by Raghda Zahran, who captured the key themes of the discussion.

The author did not use generative AI technologies in the creation of this manuscript.

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## ***Author details***

Carolyn Rickards is a Senior Learning Development Advisor based at Bath Spa University. She has an extensive background in teaching and research with a recent move to HE Learning Development. Her interests include creative pedagogy, particularly in making learning more engaging, interactive, and accessible. She also values supporting students working on 'authentic' assessments across different disciplines and this topic informs her current research project on the student response to visual and creative assignments.

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