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FET Authentic Assessment Project



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Authentic Assessment Project Proposal

Introduction

The launch of Chat GPT in late 2022 heralded a landmark change in the access to, and use of generative AI technology. The sophistication, and new-compositional output of the subsequently available Gen AI (generative artificial intelligence) tools have posed a seismic challenge within the education sector. Countless fundamental questions have arisen since 2022: What is ethical use of AI within the process of teaching and learning? To what extent should learners use AI in the learning process? To what extent should practitioners use AI in the Teaching process? What risks to the validity of assessment does Gen AI pose?

Most institutions have sought to provide guidance to all relevant stakeholders on how Gen AI use might feature during programmes, particularly at assessment time. But, there is a problem. The output of what might be generally accepted as ‘ethical’ use of AI is, in most circumstances, undistinguishable from unethical use (unless a comprehensive catalogue of drafts and prompts are provided by the learner and reviewed by the practitioner) .

The Quality Team of WWETB developed a full framework for a robust approach to academic integrity with particular emphasis on use of Gen AI at assessment time. The framework is comprehensive but ultimately, it relies on some key linchpins:

- Learners will be comprehensively and unequivocally guided as to what is allowed in terms of Gen AI use in teaching, learning and assessment.
- Learners will endeavour to appropriately respond to guidance provided, and use Gen AI ethically.
- Practitioners will use provided tools, and their knowledge of the learner’s general output and ability to help detect/determine unethical use of Gen AI.
- Practitioners will implement comprehensive and robust rectification procedures, where AI has been used to the extent that the validity of the learner submission is in question.

With these linchpins in place, Gen AI use will be appropriate, and if not so, detected as such. But there are large open spaces between the linchpins, and in these open spaces there is huge uncertainty. Generative AI use forces us to face questions about the validity of the way we traditionally assess learners. It forces us to consider not just the achievement of learning outcomes, it compels us to consider the autonomy and responsibility assumed by the learner in the achievement of learning outcomes. It also compels us to consider more keenly, the internalisation of learning, how learning has been applied over the course, how it could be applied thereafter.

Gen. AI can help us, and our learners to present information, in many formats, in countless styles. Many of the traditional assessment tools that we utilise ask the learner for information. Directions from various institutions to learners often present 'ethical' use of Gen. AI as including: 'use Gen. AI to assess an essay/answer/submission and look for potential insufficiencies/ gaps in information.' Or, they may be encouraged to use Gen. AI to: '...rewrite an essay/answer/submission to be more academic and better structured'. While we continue to use these assessment tools we have to consider, 'Who are we actually assessing?'

One thing that has become clear both anecdotally, and by way of research (*Cath Ellis, Karen Van Haeringen, Rowena Harper, Tracey Bretag, Ian Zucker, Scott McBride, Pearl Rozenberg, Phil Newton, Sonia Saddiqui et.al*)¹ is that more authentic forms of assessment are less susceptible to some of the more unethical approaches that can be taken at assessment time. Not just unsanctioned or overuse of Gen. AI, but also more traditional forms of malpractice such as contract cheating etc. Forms of assessment such as examinations and skills demonstrations, while not impervious to unethical approaches, have particular conditions that not only limit opportunity for dubious approaches by the candidate, but also create a very authentic and decisive method of knowledge and skills testing. While skills demonstrations and simulations customarily correlate to expected real-world standards and applications, examinations have often been considered as more problematic in this regard. More examinations may not provide the answer to the challenge that use of Gen.AI at assessment time brings, but there are other forms of authentic assessment that could be more

¹ [Does authentic assessment assure academic integrity? Evidence from contract cheating data](#)

effectively utilised across FET programmes that could provide, as a whole, a more valid, authentic, balanced and fair approach to assessment in the Gen. AI era.

Gen. AI is a tool that seems here to stay and there is no reason that it can't enrich our lives in many ways, including while learning and at work. However, formal education is in many ways institutionally responsible for **validating competency**. The book, as it were, starts with us. If we don't hold firm and fair on this fundamental responsibility, then competency slides, and with it, possibly the real value, and future of formal education.

Project Overview

This Action Research project focuses on introducing more 'Authentic Assessment' methodologies into WWETB FET provision.

Grant Wiggins defines 'Authentic Assessment as: "...Engaging and worthy problems or questions of importance, in which students must use knowledge to fashion performances effectively and creatively. The tasks are either replicas of, or analogous to the kinds of problems faced by adult citizens and consumers or professionals in the field.'" (*Assessing Student Performance*, 1993).

The aim of the project is to review the defined learning outcomes of a selection of modules and consider how those learning outcomes might be assessed with optimum authenticity. The context for authenticity will not only relate to the lens by which Wiggins expressed it; '*worthy problems.. faced.. in the field*' (paraphrased), but also through the lens of valid assessment, assessing the relevant learner competence through the *application* of knowledge rather than just the provision of a knowledge based product (assignment etc.)

- Context rich, real-world practice.
- Reduce reliance on Gen. AI for assessment output.

The redevelopment of assessment methodologies will happen across several QQI-accredited modules at NFQ levels 4-6. By trialling more authentic, applied and

personal assessment methods, the project aims to support deeper learning engagement, uphold academic integrity, and strengthen alignment between assessment activities and the competencies set out in QQI module descriptors and corresponding Assessment Instrument Specifications (AISs).

The project will adopt an Action Research approach and run over an academic year. Redesigned assessments will be piloted with multiple learner groups, allowing the Quality Team to evaluate their effectiveness across varied contexts. Information will be gathered from Learners, Practitioners and assessment-related data to evaluate the impact of the redesigned methodologies.

The broader intention is to contribute to enhanced assessment quality and validity, improved learner experience and a more robust culture of academic integrity within FET provision and the organisation.

Similar Projects

University of Bedfordshire

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/membership/benefits-of-qaa-membership/collaborative-enhancement-projects/assessment/the-impacts-of-authentic-assessment>

Technological University Dublin (TUD)

<https://www.tudublin.ie/explore/about-the-university/academic-affairs/lta/lta-resources/authentic-assessment-toolkit/what-is-authentic-assessment/>

Dublin City University (DCU)

<https://www.dcu.ie/teu/interactive-oral-assessment>

NUI Maynooth

<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/centre-teaching-and-learning/hub/authentic-assessment>

While there are not large amounts of empirical data relating to the various impacts of assessment methods optimised for authenticity, some large scale studies have been conducted such as Dimitrios Vlachopoulos and Agoritsa Makri's, 'A systematic literature review on authentic assessment in higher education: Best practices for the development of 21st century skills, and policy considerations' (December 2024), <https://pure.eur.nl/en/publications/a-systematic-literature-review-on-authentic-assessment-in-higher-/> . Findings here indicated that authentic assessment 'enhances key employability skills'. It does however also note occasional barriers to adoption including stakeholder resistance, resources and training.

Ying Zhan, David Boud, and Zilu Du have also written a recent paper entitled 'Designing for Authentic Assessment: A Scoping Review'- (Springer Nature November 2025). The study focuses on 'meaningful' assessment design and espouses the values of relevance and realistic contexts. The review also discusses the importance of not simply replicating work tasks in assessment but rather creating more broad contexts of authenticity to include personal and societal references for learning and assessment.

This project is grounded in the principles of **authentic assessment**, action research, and assessment for learning within further education settings. Authentic assessment theory emphasises the creation of tasks that mirror real-world challenges, require applied knowledge, and promote higher-order thinking. Research literature highlights that authentic tasks can significantly reduce opportunities for learners to rely on generative AI tools because such tasks typically require situated, personal, context-rich responses rather than generic outputs.

Within QQI-accredited provision, assessment methodologies should remain aligned with defined Learning Outcomes (LOs) while allowing flexibility in assessment design. This project operates within that framework: LOs will remain unchanged, but the assessment instruments and methodologies will be redesigned to be more practical, contextualised, and learner-centred.

Methodology

Phase 1- Planning and Development

Time	Action	Responsibility	Notes
February 2026	Select modules that will be the subject of the pilot.	Quality Assurance Steering Group (QASG) & Quality Team	
March 2026	Create Expression of Interest for a Subject-matter Expert for each selected area/module. Select Subject matter expert based on: ■ Experience ■ Additional Qualifications/ Training (UDL etc.) ■ Availability ■ Manager approval A brief meeting may be held with candidates based on Authentic Assessment prior to selecting the SME.	Quality Team/Managers	
April 2026	Select the programmes/courses where the new assessment methodologies will be piloted.	FET Leadership Team/Centre Coordinators/FET Principals and relevant Practitioners	Establishing the courses will be a collaborative endeavour and there should be acquiescence among the aforementioned parties.
April 2026	Review current assessment methodologies for selected modules and determine level of authenticity for each based on: ■ Does it provide context rich, real-world practice. and/or ■ Does it reduce reliance on Gen. AI for assessment output.	Quality Team and designated Subject-matter Experts	
April-May 2026	Develop the complete assessment approach and methodologies that will adhere to the requirements of the Specific Learning Outcomes	Quality Team and designated Subject-matter Experts	The complete development will include sample briefs, and marking schemes/ rubrics.

Phase 2- Implementation

Time	Action	Responsibility	Notes
May 2026	Designated FET Centres/Colleges are equipped with the redeveloped documentation. The Quality Team will meet with respective Practitioners and Managers/Course Leads	Quality Team	Revised documentation will include Module Descriptors and AISs.
Ongoing 2026	Check-in meetings with participating practitioners. Suggested timeframes: Shortly before first assessment brief presentation. At midway point (roughly) of assessment cycle.	Quality Team (& designated SME if required)	The frequency and timing of these meetings can be decided on with the practitioner, but it should be at least twice during the implementation of the revised assessment methods. Notes of meeting will be taken.

Phase 3- Review and Findings

Time	Action	Responsibility	Notes
May 2027	Focus Group Meetings. Focus group meetings will be held with the following groups for each module area in the sample: ■ Learners ■ Practitioners & Managers	Quality Team	The Focus group meetings will focus on the following general themes: For Learners: -Their experience of the assessment process in terms of: ■ Workload & encumbrance ■ Fairness & Appropriateness ■ As a constituent part of the process of learning ■ Their overall thoughts on the authenticity of the assessment process and the use of AI during their course. For Practitioners:

			■ Workload. Resourcing and time. ■ Fairness and validity of the revised assessment methodologies. ■ As a constituent part of the process of learning ■ Their overall thoughts on the impact of the revised assessment process and the use of AI during the course (either positive/negative, sanctioned or unsanctioned. Template questions will be drafted for consistency.
June 2027	Data Review- Date following data will be reviewed comparatively with the previous three years per location per module: ■ Rate of Early Leaving/Partial Completers ■ Rate of Certification ■ Rate of Appeals ■ Grade Distribution ■ Instances of unsanctioned AI use during course (local records)	Quality Team	Data anomalies based on final results will be considered and investigated. Reasons for data anomalies will form a key part in reviewing the overall success of the project.
August 2027	Findings from the project will be written as a draft report and shared with stakeholders. QASG & FLT will be briefed on overall findings and next steps can be considered by same.	Quality Team/FLT & DFET	The final report can be shared with external stakeholders such as ETBI, The Quality Network, etc. The final report will include appendices that will show revised assessment methodologies.

Expected Outcomes

The project is being implemented with the intention of enhancing the validity of current assessment processes in the context of the widespread adoption of Gen AI technology and its perceived impact on assessment processes at higher levels of learning in FET.

The projects seeks to improve:

- The congruity of assessment tasks with a more real-world application of the necessary skills, knowledge and competencies.
- The authenticity of the assessment tasks in terms of the representation of the individual learner's voice, learner's key learnings, and the learner's journey.
- The validity of the assessment process in capturing the individual learner's voice and key learnings. Ensuring that the learner response/submission is not unquantifiably diluted by words, insight, learning that is not their own.
- The ethical use of Gen.AI. It is hoped that by reducing the potential of AI *negatively* impacting on the assessment process, that the positive potential for Gen. AI as a supportive learning tool becomes more apparent and powerful.
- The rate of academic integrity breaches and cases. It is predicted that the adapted approach to assessment will in turn reduce the instances of doubt around the authenticity of some assessment submissions.

Other potential outcomes may include the following:

- The likely move away from assignment style assessment to other forms of more authentic methodologies may also correlate to a more Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach to assessment.
- More positive engagement with assessment on the part of the learner.
Potentially a higher submission rate and less applications for extensions.

It should be noted at this point that there may be challenges experienced by the stakeholders and where these challenges are present, they will form part of the review and findings. For example, some authentic methods of assessment may be experienced as resource heavy or not as efficient as the aforementioned 'assignment' style method.

Indicators of Success

The following criteria will be used to evaluate the overall success of the implementation stage of the project

1. Quality		
Indicator of Success	How will we Know?	Evidence
Good alignment of developed assessment methods with Learning Outcomes.	Participating SMEs and Practitioners will be able to adjudicate on, and attest to the fidelity of the assessment methods to the Learning outcomes	- Practitioner Meetings - Focus Groups.
Confirmed improvement to the authenticity and validity of assessment for the module	Participating SMEs and Practitioners will be able to adjudicate on, and attest to the validity and authenticity of the new methodologies as they are applied	- Practitioner Meetings - Focus Groups.
Marking Schemes and Rubrics are clear, consistent, and fit for purpose.	Participating Practitioners will be able to adjudicate on, and attest to the functionality and performance of proposed marking schemes and criteria. EAs will review and comment on same as part of the authentication report.	- Practitioner Meetings - Focus Groups. - IV Reports - EA Reports
Grades are consistent with performance at assessment and fulfilment of LOs.	External Authenticator (a subject-matter expert will review and moderate based on their experience and interpretation of the national standard for the module, NFQ level, and Grade Band	EA Report

2. Gen. AI Use and/or Misuse		
Indicator of Success	How will we Know?	Evidence
Confirmed fewer instances of, or concerns around mis-use of AI.	Practitioners compare with previous courses and number of instances where there were informal concerns and /or formal cases. Learners feedback on how they used AI as part of their assessment submissions.	- Focus Groups. (Learners & Practitioners) - Assessment docs.
Learner work shows increased originality, contextualisation and personalised synthesis.	Practitioners compare with previous courses. EA Reviews	- Practitioner Meetings - Focus Groups. (Learners & Practitioners) -EA Report

3. Positive Experience for Learners		
Indicator of Success	How will we Know?	Evidence
Mainly positive experience of the assessment process. Confirmed as relevant, meaningful and appropriately challenging.	Learners will relay a generally positive attitude to the assessment process based on the aforementioned characteristics.	- Focus Groups. Learners
Course completion rates and timely submission of assessment submissions etc. will remain stable.	Course completion rates will be reviewed against previous years. Practitioner will feedback on assessment deadlines and submission rates.	- Practitioner Meetings - Focus Groups.

4. Feasibility & Sustainability for Practitioners		
Indicator of Success	How will we Know?	Evidence
Practitioners report that redesigned methodologies are manageable within existing workloads	Practitioners report on the sustainability of the new modes with allowances made for the fact that the assessment methodologies will be new and require a certain amount of initial extra work and 'pivot'	- Focus Groups. Practitioners.
Implementation challenges were minor, fixable etc.	Practitioners report on the implementation of the new methodologies and whether there are detrimental deficiencies or substantial issues.	- Practitioner Meetings -& Focus Groups.

5. Evidence-based improvement & Overall Success		
Indicator of Success	How will we Know?	Evidence
The feedback overall confirms that the gains outweigh the issues and that any issues can be minimised over time.	All stakeholders report a largely positive experience of the project and fit for purpose assessment methodologies. Issues and challenges are conformed as not detrimental to success of project. Where AI was used it did not impact the validity of the learning or assessment process.	- Practitioner Meetings - Focus Groups. - EA Reports

Dissemination

A project report will be completed by the Quality Team in the third quarter of 2027. The report will give an introduction to the project including rationale and objectives. Included will be a report on the implementation of the project followed by the overall findings and conclusions. A draft of the final report will be formally shared with the WWETB QASG and FLT groups and the internal stakeholder groups for discussion and comment. The final report will be shared on the Quality page of the WWETB website, the WWETB Staff Hub and can be shared with external stakeholders upon request

Project Gantt Chart

WWETB FET Authentic Assessment Project- Timeline

