

Examinations replaced by essays

Student with anxiety

York St John University. Sports Science and Injury Management
BSc (Hons)



Presenting situation:

The student was experiencing severe exam-related anxiety. In meetings with the student physical symptoms of this were apparent and medical evidence was provided. Following a discussion, the department's additional support mechanisms (academic tutorials in preparation for the exam, and sitting the exam in a more comfortable setting) were considered insufficient. Alternative assessment formats were therefore proposed, and formulated in consultation with the module leaders. The alternatives suggested were considered to be responsive to the individual student's needs and also provide an equitable assessment of the learning outcomes. A request for change of assessment form was completed, which outlined the nature of the alternative assessment and the link to learning outcomes. This was sent to the external examiner for comment and subsequently approved by the Faculty Quality Committee.

Original assessments:

The student was required to sit two exams in total: one in Sport Psychology and one in Exercise Physiology. Both exams were 120 minutes (2,500 word equivalent), representing 50% of the associated module mark.

The first assessment was an open book examination with questions requiring the integration of theory. The second consisted of essay-based seen questions.

Alternative assessments:

The exams were replaced by two 2,500 word essays. In both cases, the student answered a single essay question addressing the same learning outcomes as the original assessment.

Reflection: Academic Tutor

This was an extremely time-consuming and resource intensive process that involved several members of staff. There was the original tutor that the student approached, the Head of Programme and two module leaders, who gave significant time to supporting the student and the process of adjustment.

It was very much a reactive response to providing alternative assessment based on the needs of a particular student. Some of this was due to the idiosyncratic nature of the situation, in that it appeared to be a developing condition for the student rather than something that had previously been identified. Also, the curriculum tended to be more heavily weighted towards coursework, so although there had been short tests, MCQ and practical exams, prolonged written examinations had not been encountered previously on the student's programme. As a result, the need for an alternative assessment had only been brought to light in the weeks prior to the examination.

There was a great deal of discussion by the team and at the Quality Committee regarding not advantaging this student. More specifically the question of whether it is easier to do well in an examination than a coursework-based essay was considered. This also raised interesting debate about how we implicitly approach the marking of different types of assessment - exams, coursework assignments or presentations - in different ways, and therefore the complex, subjective nature of the marking process.

Outcome

The student gained a mark of 58% for the examination component for the physiology module (56% overall) and 67% for the examination component of the psychology module (61% overall). The student graduated with an upper second class honours degree.