**Extended essay replaced by portfolio for students on Extended Science course**

**SWANDS group universities (South West Academic Network for Disability Support)**

**Number of students pm trial: 140 (14 identified as disabled)**

From: Waterfield, J. and West, B. (2006) **Inclusive Assessment in Higher Education: A Resource for Change** University of Plymouth. Plymouth

**Description**

This module was designed to assist students in developing the necessary skills

and strategies required for successful undergraduate learning. This new assessment mode, offered to all, enabled students to reflect on how they had developed over their first term and review what they needed to do next, in a way that the original essay had not allowed. Although the portfolio was designed around criteria based on the learning outcomes of the module, students had flexibility in how they met those criteria. This provided students with some independence in selecting ways of delivery best suited to demonstrate their strengths and abilities through articles, lab reports and coursework. It provided a student focussed assessment more suited to the increasingly diverse student group (on average 52% mature students and 12% disabled students).

**Outcome**

Since the introduction of the portfolio, students’ overall marks have improved.

Also 80% of students reported that the portfolio had effectively supported their learning on other parts of the course and students felt they had been well supported in developing their portfolios. The portfolio also reduced plagiarism and marking time.

**Issues arising**

Time management was an issue for some students. The module leader built in time management sessions and portfolio development sessions into the module, recognising that portfolios require different skills to essay writing. Student feedback in the questionnaires and interviews confirmed that they needed time and guidance to undertake an unfamiliar assessment mode. It is envisaged that “staging points” will be given to students next time, to indicate which aspects of the portfolio need to be completed by when, to provide a time-line for those needing further guidance.

**Issues arising continued…**

For some students the portfolio could be submitted electronically if the compilation and ordering of paper based materials is a barrier. The portfolio assessment has proved itself as a more inclusive assessment mode and is now embedded at school level. Currently portfolios are used in a number of modules where they have had a positive impact on the course delivery. They fit well with the ethos of many courses and have been cited as best practice for meeting student diversity.

**Reflections**

“I like the idea of a portfolio or a learning journal but personally I would need more feedback and the opportunity to talk with a tutor or other students.”

(Student with dyslexia, studying Science)

“We all need to take risks. Students don’t always trust themselves to work in a new way even if the old way isn’t working. We need to supply the trust.”

(Delegate contribution at the SPACE Conference Plenary)

“Compiling the portfolio really made me think and I learnt where the gaps were in my knowledge and skill. I’d like to do this again.”

(Non-disabled student, studying Science)