



## Integrating disciplinary practices to optimally deliver alternative assessments and embed graduate attributes in a Global Mental Health Master's programme

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### ABSTRACT

The routes to optimising the authenticity of assessments in different organisational and disciplinary contexts have been ambiguous and challenging. This paper offers a case study of diversifying the assessments in a taught Master's programme by integrating disciplinary practices to design alternative assessments. Embedding discipline-specific principles and perspectives was found to be key to achieving authenticity of assessments. This paper reports on a descriptive mixed-method study that the authors conducted to evaluate current students' perceptions of and experiences with the diversified assessments in the programme. Overall, the findings demonstrate students' acknowledgement of the importance of a diverse mix of assessments, especially in terms of fostering the development of several graduate attributes. The paper demonstrates that novel assessment methods can be introduced gradually to complement current curriculum design, with evaluations included to optimise the student learning experience. Garnering students' perspectives of components such as workload balance, assessment fairness and assignment planning can highlight opportunities for enhancing the constructive alignment of the curriculum. Introducing innovative applied assessment methods can encourage students to become more cross-culturally aware and ethically conscious. Alternative assessments can be feasibly designed to promote many of the graduate attributes necessary to create 'global students' in an increasingly competitive and internationalised job market.

**Keywords:** Assessment; alternative; authenticity; graduate attributes; internationalisation.

### Introduction

In contrast to traditional assessment modes such as written exams, essays and reports, alternative assessments represent a problem-based approach to developing assignments that allows learners to apply creative and critical thinking to authentic, contextualised problems (Yorke and Harvey, 2005). This innovative approach to assessment entails encouraging the solving of complex problems, developing conceptual and analytic skills to prepare students for vocational success, and stimulating active learning, among others (MacAndrew and Edwards, 2002). Examples of alternative assessments include the creation of posters, infographics and other visual aids, of electronic, video and mobile resources, blog posts, portfolios and role-plays (Yorke and Harvey, 2005; Klenowski et al., 2006). Alternative assessments originated from the recognition of the need to 'contextualise assessment in interesting, real-life and authentic tasks' (Gulikers et al., 2006, p. 339; Birenbaum and Dochy, 1996; MacLellan, 2004), with the ultimate aim to motivate students to take more responsibility for their own learning and to utilise assessments as the foundation and catalyst for learning (Libman, 2010).

Despite the widely recognised pedagogic benefits of alternative assessments, their implementation in HE is often faced with uncertainty, practical difficulties, lack of educational leadership, and sometimes even outright resistance (Janisch et al., 2007; Murphy et al., 2017). Common barriers to the uptake and routinisation of alternative assessments have been administrative (for example, compliance with the often-lengthy institutional quality assurance approval processes), time and financial constraints, lack of student motivation, inadequate teachers' knowledge about alternative assessments, and the insufficient alignment between assessment structure, instruction and the curriculum (Janisch et al., 2007; Murphy et al., 2017). Additional challenges include varying perceptions of students and tutors about effective assessments and effective learning practices (McLellan, 2001), the degree of curricular embeddedness, appropriate assessment criteria and optimal instructional designs (MacAndrews and Edwards, 2002).

Furthermore, although research has demonstrated that alternative assessments tend to generally lead to higher student satisfaction and deeper, more useful learning (e.g. Swaffield, 2011; Fook and Sidhu, 2010), their introduction can also trigger uncertainty, anxiety, lack of self-confidence and frustration in learners (e.g. Keeling et al., 2013). It is, therefore, incumbent on

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educators to continuously assess how students respond to alternative assessments, and what specific aspects of authenticity are most strongly linked to higher student engagement, performance and satisfaction (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2013; Forsyth and Evans, 2019; Gore et al., 2009).

### Embedding graduate attributes via innovative curriculum design

Graduate attributes broadly refer to an institutionalised set of target qualities, aptitudes and abilities that students are expected to develop in the course of their university programme (Hughes and Barrie, 2010; Yorke and Harvey, 2005). These attributes expand beyond the acquisition of subject-specific knowledge and encompass the enhancement of transferable skills that are likely to equip and empower learners to become skilled, enterprising and responsible citizens that can solve complex social challenges (Hughes and Barrie, 2010). Examples of such transferable abilities include creative problem solving, adaptability, interpersonal skills and entrepreneurial skills (Yorke and Harvey, 2005).

While educators and researchers seem to converge on the importance of integrating graduate attributes into the curriculum, the specific mechanisms for achieving such change have been subject to much debate (Hill et al., 2016; Treleaven and Voola, 2008; Kinash et al., 2018). For instance, few universal guidelines exist as to the seamless and balanced integration of graduate attributes and subject-specific knowledge into the curriculum design. Differences in institutional environments, staff qualifications and skills, organisational leadership and disciplinary orientations make the application of a one-size-fits-all approach challenging (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2011).

Alternative assessments are an excellent 'vehicle' for systematically embedding graduate attributes into the curriculum (Yorke and Harvey, 2005). When constructively aligned with the curriculum and the institutional infrastructure, alternative assessments represent immersive, practical and empowering opportunities for learners to develop expected graduate attributes (Pretorius et al., 2013). Ramsden (2003) purports that optimising the assessment structure is likely to be crucial for the development of graduate attributes and that students tend to perceive assessments as a defining feature of the curriculum. The enhancement of graduate attributes has been recognised as a gradual, multi-stage process that requires adequate organisational resources, leadership and commitment (Hill et al., 2016). Developing student awareness of graduate attributes and how they are targeted by the completion of the assessments has been highlighted as an important programmatic goal (Treleaven and Voola, 2008).

### Rationale and aims of the current study

Since 2018, the authors have embedded a cyclical model of curriculum enhancement in the MSc Global Mental Health programme which aims to collect, collate and build on student feedback. The authors conducted a small-scale qualitative investigation into MSc Global Mental Health students' satisfaction, perceived utility and engagement with a range of blended learning resources (Sharp et al., 2019). The assessment focus of this evaluation was partially motivated by the lower than desired Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) scores on fairness of assessments and fairness of marking of assessments. The findings revealed the need for a more systematic and explicit integration of the University's Graduate Attributes and the programme-specific intended learning outcomes (ILOs) into the assessment structure. In particular, the study highlighted the need for a curriculum design and instruction that established clear, transparent links between individual learning activities, assessments and the specific set of transferable skills and attributes that are being targeted by those assessments and learning activities. A diversified, authentic and constructively aligned assessment structure emerged as one of several key high-impact areas for future curriculum innovation aimed at improving students' learning outcomes and experience.

This study was also motivated by the relative neglect in the higher education literature of how to integrate discipline-specific principles and practices into an enhanced, alternative assessment structure (Coffey et al., 2011; Esterhazy, 2018), particularly within the design of summative assessments in the postgraduate teaching of psychology, psychiatry and related disciplines. The belief in the importance of such integration for maximising educational outcomes is rooted in the assumption that a discipline-appropriate implementation of feedback and assessment processes is instrumental in creating a community of learners that can confidently apply knowledge and skills to perform authentic tasks with real-world impact (Coffey et al., 2011; Esterhazy, 2018). Relatedly, understanding how to optimally embed professional practices into the curriculum is essential to sustainably stimulating the attainment of graduate attributes through assessment design. This requires bringing the often-implicit disciplinary context to the fore by designing assessment and feedback approaches that organically emerge from the very essence of the academic field that is being taught (Esterhazy, 2018). Encouraging students to clearly identify how the set assignments are intertwined with the core disciplinary principles and values is an important component of a 'disciplinarily responsive' curriculum- defined as the responsiveness to 'the nature of its underlying knowledge discipline by ensuring a close coupling between the way in which knowledge is produced and the way students are educated and trained in the discipline area'. (Slonimsky and Shalem, 2006, p. 36, citing Moll, 2004, p. 7).

Global mental health is a relatively novel area of research and practice (Patel, 2014; O'Donnell, 2012). Unsurprisingly, few case studies are currently available into how to effectively deliver a global mental health curriculum with the use of pedagogic approaches and techniques that are congruent with the very 'substance' of this academic field. It is the current authors' firm belief

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that the experiential learning communicated in this paper could inform and inspire thoughtful efforts to enhance the assessment structure and the attainment of graduate attributes in a range of other disciplines and educational settings.

The main purpose of this study was two-fold: (1) to demonstrate and rationalise the introduction of several alternative assessments in the Master's programme, which incorporated disciplinary practices, values and perspectives; and (2) to evaluate student perceptions of the utility of alternative assessments and of their relevance to employability. In addition, this study aims to provide useful insights into designing alternative assessments to ensure the optimal acquisition of both transferable skills and subject-specific (including theoretical) expertise.

**Diversification of the assessment structure in an MSc Global Mental Health programme**

Since the academic years 2016-17, following a series of evaluations of student learning and satisfaction with the Global Mental Health MSc programme (See Sharp et al., 2019), the significance of diversifying the assessment structure has become apparent. A staged, collaborative process commenced that led to the gradual increase of the number and diversity of alternative assessments in the programme.

In the most recent iteration of the programme curriculum ('Figure 1'), fifteen assignments contribute 120 Credits to the full-time MSc programme as part of seven taught courses (five 20-credit and two 10-credit courses). The assignments are completed over two semesters and the due dates are consistently planned to ensure there is always a minimum of one week between submissions. Seven different assessment types currently feature in the programme - including information sheets, campaign proposals, case vignette, oral presentations and podcasts. The oral modality was introduced into the summative assessments in the form of oral presentations and podcasts. Moreover, several of the newly introduced assessments (e.g. developing a campaign proposal and the production of a pamphlet and a podcast) allow students to self-select topics or priority issues of interest that are directly relevant to their identities as learners, their cultural and ethnic heritage, and civic values.

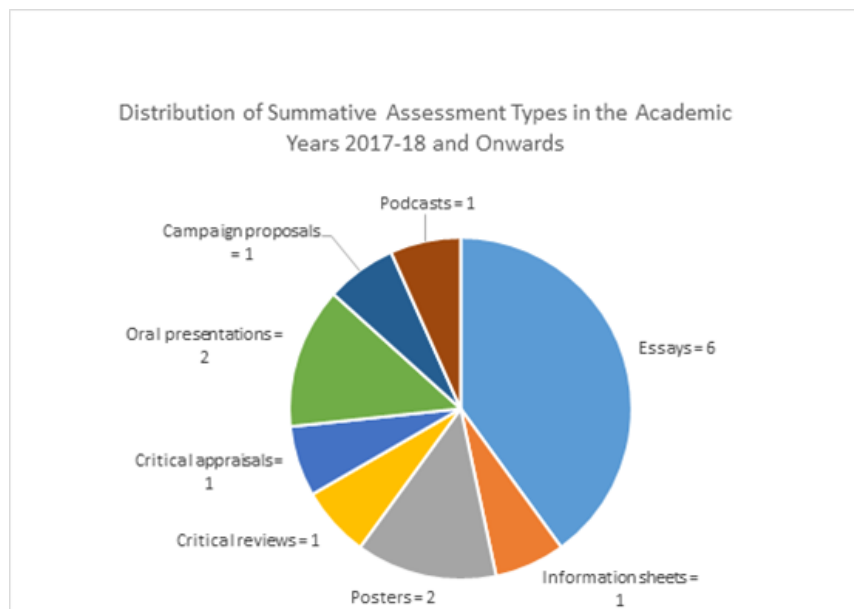


Figure 1. Distribution of summative assessment types in the MSc programme in the 2017/18 academic year and onwards.

The newly introduced alternative assessments are detailed in 'Table 1', together with their corresponding dimensions of authenticity and target graduate attributes.

**Table 1.** Examples of newly implemented alternative assessments in the programme. The dimensions of authenticity applied in the table are based on Gulikers et al.'s (2004) criteria

Assessment Task	Assignment Details	Dimensions of Authenticity	Graduate Attributes Targeted
Information sheet	A targeted information sheet for healthcare professionals.	The outcome is significant (functional) product that can be used in real-world contexts. Students have ownership of the specific topic of choice.	· <b>Effective communicators</b> - including articulating complex ideas

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<b>Oral presentation</b>	Giving an oral presentation (using PowerPoint) in front of a live audience (the class).	Performance-based; requires multi-modal communication (e.g. PowerPoint slides, verbally and in writing); contextualisation (students are required to critically assess the legislation in a specific country); discussion involving the class is encouraged following the presentation (collaboration and feedback).	effectively for diverse audiences;  · <b>Confidence</b> - including excellent interpersonal skills fostered within an internationalised community;
<b>Podcast</b>	Recording a brief podcast on a given area of research or practice.	Involves an alternative (oral) mode of knowledge communication; As a practical activity, it can foster deeper engagement with the learning material (Sutton-Brady et al., 2009).	· <b>Adaptability</b> - including flexibly applying skills and knowledge to a variety of situations;
<b>Poster</b>	Creating an academic poster to communicate research findings.	The task challenges students to present complex information succinctly, effectively and accessibly; In the process, students are encouraged to reflect on what makes effective versus ineffective communication tools.	· <b>Experienced collaborators</b>
<b>Campaign proposal writing</b>	Students design an evidence-based anti-stigma campaign for a target population and mental illness of their choice.	Students have ownership of topic. Involves the creation of a product that would be professionally recognisable in a real-world setting.	All of the above.  · <b>Investigative skills</b> - including effective problem-solving and solution-finding;
<b>Case vignette analysis</b>	A case vignette is presented, and students are required to address three questions using evidence and their knowledge of human rights violations.	Requires the contextualisation of theoretical knowledge to a real-world case scenario; mimics real-world complexity in that it requires the critical assessment of legal, medical, ethical and cultural issues.	· <b>Independent and critical thinking skills</b> - including constructing meaning from various information sources, and applying creative and innovative thinking to solve problems;
<b>Scaling-up strategy (formative assessment)</b>	Creating a scaling-up strategy to increase the access to one or more types of mental health treatments in a country or location of your choice.	Requires the contextualisation of theoretical knowledge to a real-world case scenario; mimics real-world complexity in that it requires a consideration of local and global barriers and facilitators related to scaling-up efforts.	· <b>Ethical and social awareness</b>

The novel assessment structure was designed to embody core University graduate attributes, including transferable attributes such as articulating complex ideas to diverse audiences; demonstrating excellent interpersonal skills fostered within an internationalised community; investigative skills; adaptability; and collaboration. In addition, alternative assessments such as the case vignette analysis, campaign proposal and scaling-up strategy require students to mobilise and enhance their abilities to investigate problems and provide effective solutions, apply critical, imaginative and innovative thinking and ideas, and exercise ethical and social awareness.

The information sheet assessment, for example, was assigned to acquaint students with the challenges of communicating scientific information concisely to non-academic audiences (See 'Table 1'). This requires the 'translation' of academic terms into accessible language, without compromising the accuracy and quality of the communicated information. The campaign proposal task, on the other hand, requires that students harness their theoretical knowledge of mental health stigma, socio-cultural dimensions of mental illness, and health policy in the design of a hypothetical anti-stigma campaign. This task involves a significant degree of learner ownership-for example-in the choice of geographical region and specific mental health problem. Also, this assessment commands critical reflection upon the various real-world factors (such as the cultural context) that are likely to influence the intended outcome of the anti-stigma campaign.

In addition to introducing new, alternative assessments, some of the traditional assessments (such as essays) were modified with the aim of increasing their 'authenticity' as forms of assessment. One example is the modification of some of the traditional essay assignments in the programme. Historically, the essay assignments in the programme tended to ask students to respond to a purely theoretical question (e.g. Critically discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the biopsychosocial model for mental health difficulties and the relevance of this model for Global Mental Health related initiatives. Support your answer with appropriate evidence.). More recently, however, the programme team has endeavoured to design essays topics to be more "authentic". In particular, some of the newly assigned essay-based assessments have tended to more strongly require the transfer of theoretical

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knowledge to real-world contexts. To demonstrate, a recent essay topic was based on a quotation from an indigenous person, followed by specific questions related to the subject matter.

### Integrating disciplinary principles and practices from the field of global mental health

Core disciplinary practices and principles from the field of global mental health were embedded into the diversified assessment structure. As argued by Bath and colleagues (2004, p. 326), '[G]eneric skills are most effectively developed when they are embedded in curricula in ways that give them discipline-nuanced expression.'. This ensured the newly designed alternative assessments have adequate 'disciplinary substance' at their core - that is - that they reflected some of the foundational values and perspectives related to global mental health theory and practice (Coffey et al., 2011).

Leading researchers in the field of global mental health have emphasised the importance of learners' engagement with context-specific learning resources (O'Donnell and O'Donnell, 2016). As O'Donnell and O'Donnell (2016) state, '[...] understanding the global context [emphasis added] is essential for working effectively in one's core emphasis, be it a discipline, organization, sector, country, specific issue, or domain like GMH [global mental health]'. Increasing the pedagogic focus on contextualizing learning should therefore be an explicit goal of global mental health degree programmes. In accordance with such a commitment to increasing the pedagogic and employability value of the assessments, the Programme team ensured that the new assessments allowed students to critically adapt and concretise their theoretical knowledge to a specific country or geographical setting. For instance, the scaling-up strategy assessment required that students consider a range of political, organisational and cultural barriers and facilitators related to their priority mental health intervention of choice (See 'Table 1'). Such an assessment design also encouraged students to engage with, and incorporate, both core resources (such as peer-reviewed journal articles, edited books and international guidelines) and contextual resources (such as organisational reports, situational analyses, non-governmental reports, and others; O'Donnell and O'Donnell, 2016). In addition, this assessment also integrates activities that are highly relevant to capacity-building and training of health professionals and policy-makers - one of the key aims of global mental health (Patel, 2014; O'Donnell and O'Donnell, 2016).

Furthermore, the revised assessments, particularly the case vignette analysis for the module on human rights and international law and policy (See 'Table 1'), implicitly asks students to engage in mental health advocacy by identifying the human rights violations depicted in a real-world case and proposing strategies and interventions to ameliorate those injustices. Advocacy for equitable mental health is a vital commitment for global mental health academics and practitioners (Patel, 2014; O'Donnell, 2012).

Ultimately, the introduction of alternative assessments aimed to contribute to the internationalisation of the Global Mental Health curriculum in that it encouraged learners '[...] to develop the values, knowledge, attitudes and skills, dispositions and democratic principles which enable them to co-exist [...] and to make a critically informed, responsible contribution to society.' (Robson and Wihlborg, 2019, p.128). Exposing learners to socially and culturally diverse curricular experiences offers invaluable opportunities to help them foster global thinking and mindsets (Robson and Wihlborg, 2019). In the context of the Global Mental Health (MSc), assessments that 'invite' critical reflections on the global "forces" and local realities shaping mental health phenomena, and that encourage students to envision ameliorative actions to addressing injustices in the mental health provision are particularly valuable. Assessments that challenge students to think politically, economically and socio-culturally by applying both Western and non-Western analytic lenses should be integrated. Such an approach to curriculum design is instrumental in creating 'global students' - students who graduate well-equipped to undertake relevant roles that help them make effective, ethical and sustainable contributions to society in a globalising world (Simm and Marvell, 2017; Killick, 2015).

All in all, in addition to the transdisciplinary dimensions of authenticity distilled by Gulikers and colleagues (2004; 'Table 1'), authenticity in teaching global mental health entails promoting students' mindfulness of the tensions between the global and the local contexts and encouraging them to critically reflect on key issues at various levels of analysis (e.g. cultural, geographic, political, historical, medical).

### An evaluation study of student views of the assessment structure and utility

A descriptive mixed methods design was employed to obtain data on students' views of and satisfaction and engagement with the range of the assessments in the programme. Those data were elicited using an online questionnaire and a participatory workshop. The Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences (MVLS) College Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow, granted approval of the project in May 2018 and extended it in February 2019 until August 2020. Informed written consent was required for both the online questionnaire and the workshop. The data were stored on the University systems with restricted access via passwords and local access. Confidentiality of the research participants was maintained as no names or matriculation numbers were recorded.

#### Materials and methods

A mixed-method approach was used generating quantitative and qualitative questionnaire data, as well as qualitative data from a participatory workshop. Survey-type methods such as evaluation questionnaires offer an ease of administration, can generate comparable data year-on-year allowing for quality assurance, and place a relatively low burden on participants (Cohen et al., 2013). On the other hand, qualitative, including participatory, approaches such as collaborative workshops and focus groups are more



student-centred and problem-focused, can promote student-staff collaboration and allow for probing into students' motivations, attitudes, emotions and beliefs in an authentic manner (Cohen et al., 2013; Fullana et al., 2016).

The questionnaire method was employed as an efficient tool to monitor the students' experiences and perceptions. The questionnaire results informed a richer, contextualised discussion in the workshop (See below). This approach had been implemented successfully with a previous cohort of MSc Global Mental Health students to establish their perceptions of new blended learning materials (Sharp et al., 2019). The questionnaire was used to gather information regarding views on the types of assessments and contained binary, Likert-type and open questions. Versions of the questionnaire had been developed and implemented previously with a focus on blended learning (See Sharp et al., 2019). Prior to its release, the questionnaire was reviewed by the Programme Director, the administrative assistant, a learning technology specialist and a teaching assistant who was also a programme alumnus. This ensured that the questionnaire items were reviewed by a team with diverse expertise to ensure they were neutral (non-leading) and clear. The questionnaire was distributed electronically via the Bristol Online Survey web platform to current on-campus masters students (22 in total). The questionnaire contained 17 response domains (some of which contained one or more sub-domains) and a total of 53 items. The questionnaire combined multiple-choice questions, Likert-type questions and open-ended questions in order to maximise the richness and clarity of the data. The questionnaire gathered student views of engagement with the curriculum structure, assessment and feedback practices, virtual learning environment, assignment completion and individual modules.

A total of 45 items targeted various aspects of the assessment design and structure (including formative and summative assessments, and feedback practices). Specifically, students were queried about the fairness, timing, level of difficulty, level of enjoyment, variation, and alignment with the curriculum of the assessments. In addition, students were asked to rate the extent to which they believed the assessments to be relevant to working life after completion of the programme. Lastly, respondents were asked which of the University's Graduate Attributes they believed were enhanced as a result of completing the assessments.

At the time of data collection, students had completed the following assessment types: information sheet, podcast, poster, or a presentation, campaign proposal, and essays. Due to the timing of this study, student responses could not be elicited regarding the case vignette assessment.

Following completion of the questionnaire, the students could self-nominate to participate in a structured workshop led by a member of the programme team. The participatory workshop aimed to clarify, complement and expand the findings from the survey questionnaire. The volunteer students were engaged in discussion about the assessments in the programme using a combination of projective, generative and reflective methods, including visual prompts (Cowan and George, 2013) and an activity which required the students to align the marking criteria to the associated grade points. The data used for promoting discussions and feedback were adapted from the questionnaire output and from basic programme analytics such as the number and distribution of assessments. Workshop participants were also presented with a comparative graph depicting the assignment breakdown in the programme between the years 2012 and 2017, and that from the year 2017 and onwards (e.g. 'Figure 1' and 'Figure 2'). These resources were used to prompt discussion about the usefulness of alternative assignments and the students' experience of completing these assignments.

To preserve the anonymity of the students, workshop participant characteristics were not recorded. The workshop was facilitated by a programme team member and an unrelated facilitator-both unknown to the students and not involved in teaching or marking in the programme. A draft timetable of key themes to be considered during the workshop was created. Both facilitators made notes within the themes during the session and prompted for more detail or clarification as appropriate. These notes were collated and clarified by the facilitators following the session. This was used to minimise bias and increase transparency.

#### *Data analysis*

The close-ended questionnaire responses were analysed automatically by the host online survey platform, Bristol Online Survey, and reported as percentages and counts (descriptive statistics). The open-ended questionnaire data were exported to Microsoft Excel and analysed by hand by the first and second authors using descriptive content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The qualitative workshop data were generated by note-taking by both facilitators and also exported to Microsoft Excel for qualitative content analysis.

Qualitative content analysis was used because it enables the generation of detailed, descriptive accounts that remain closely grounded in the original data-therefore minimising the risk of misinterpreting participants' responses (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The analysis followed several stages: (a) inductive line-by-line coding capturing the essence of the responses; (b) organising the codes into sub-themes based on similarity of meaning; and (c) developing higher-order themes that descriptively and parsimoniously summarise the underpinning codes and sub-themes and that correspond to the respective questionnaire or workshop items (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). An example of the coding process is offered in 'Table 2':

**Table 2.** Examples of the coding process for the qualitative data

Workshop Notes	Codes	Sub-themes	Theme
The students really liked the formative podcast.	Formative podcast-enjoyable	Benefits of formative assignments	Formative assignments-benefits and challenges
Students felt that they did not gain additional learning from the class feedback and some highlighted that they only received feedback from one peer.	Formative group assignment - feedback scarce and not helpful	Challenges of formative assignments	

## Findings

### Questionnaire findings relating to the programme's assessment structure

17 (or 77%) of eligible students completed the online questionnaire. Of those, 7 (41%) were U.K. students, 2 (12%) E.U. students, and 8 (47%) international students. English was the native language of just over half (53%) of the respondents. The data were cross-tabulated to undertake a comparison between the EU and UK students and the international students. However, no consistent patterns of difference were identified between those sub-groups of participants. Therefore, aggregated data only are presented in this paper.

While the questionnaire was designed as a comprehensive evaluation of the MSc programme, including its feedback and assessment practices, curriculum structure and timing, and the accessibility of the Programme's virtual learning environment (VLE), only the results pertaining to the programme's assessment structure are reported here.

Overall, the students celebrated the diversity of assessment types available in the programme (See 'Table 3'). The majority (n=16, 94%) of participants considered that the variation in assessment types offered within the programme increased their enjoyment of the courses. This variety was also considered by most students (n=14, 82%) to have supported the consolidation of their learning. A small proportion of the students neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement (n=3, 18%). Three-quarters of the students (n=13, 76%) believed the skills being developed through the various assessment types would be relevant in future posts.

Almost three-quarters of students (n=12, 71%) reported that the various assessment types were equally as challenging to complete, however a few (n=4, 14%) did not consider the demands to be comparable (See 'Table 3'). One student highlighted that the variation in assessment styles introduced varying types of challenge. Another indicated that they found some more difficult, particularly if it was their first attempt at an assignment of this type. Some students revealed that despite their initial scepticism, they discovered great value in some of the alternative assessments such as the podcast and the poster:

*'Although I was skeptical about the posters and podcast now I can say I enjoy them I have learn a lot while doing it.'*

In the open-ended responses, several students suggested that the class could benefit from additional guidance for the less familiar types of assessments such as the poster assessment. Indeed, several of the open-ended comments communicated concerns regarding the appropriateness of the poster format for complex essay topics, as well as regarding the transparency and fairness of the marking approach. For example, one student shared:

*'[...] using a poster to answer broad questions is not necessarily the best mean[s].'*

**Table 3.** Responses to questionnaire items regarding the assessments in the programme (percentages and counts)

	Yes	No	Unsure
Assessment arrangements have been fair	70.59% 12	5.88% 1	23.53% 4
Marking of assessments has been fair	23.53% 4	35.29% 6	41.18% 7
	Strongly Agree / Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Strongly Disagree / Disagree
Assessment-related topics were covered in class prior to assessment submission deadlines	70.59% 12	11.76% 2	17.64% 3
Assessment-related learning materials were available on Moodle prior to submission deadlines	88.24% 15	11.76% 2	-

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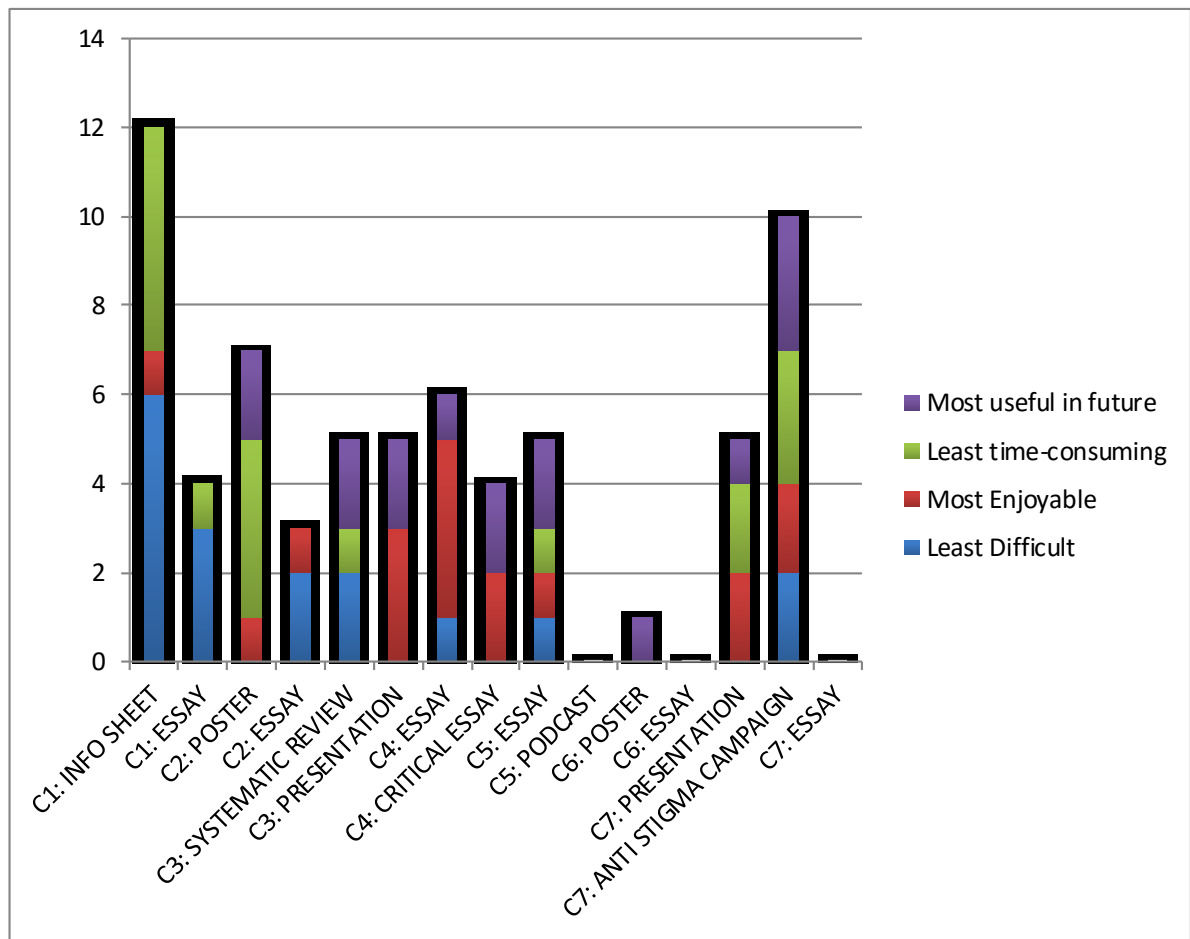
I engaged with all of the formative assessments offered on the GMH MSc programme	76.47% 13	17.64% 3	5.88% 1
The variation in assessment types within the GMH programme increased enjoyment of the courses	94.12% 16	5.88% 1	-
The various assessment types helped to consolidate learning	82.35% 14	17.64% 3	-
The various assessment types were equally as challenging to complete	70.59% 12	5.88% 1	23.53% 4
I anticipate that the various assessment types will have relevance in my working life after I complete the MSc programme	76.47% 13	17.64% 3	5.88% 1
The timing between assessment submission deadlines was appropriate	58.82% 10	17.64% 3	23.53% 4
The percentage weightings of the assessments within individual courses were appropriate	88.24% 15	5.88% 1	5.88% 1
Assessments were marked and returned efficiently	76.47% 13	23.53% 4	-
The marking criteria were applied consistently across the courses	41.18% 7	29.41% 5	29.41% 5

Several interesting findings emerged when students were asked to identify the assessment types they considered to be most and least useful, time-consuming, enjoyable and difficult (See 'Figure 2' and 'Figure 3'). The anti-stigma campaign proposal was perceived to be the most useful in terms of developing valued transferable skills, while essays and academic posters were reported to be the least useful. For example, one student shared they historically enjoyed writing essays but had found the campaign proposal a novel and useful assessment format:

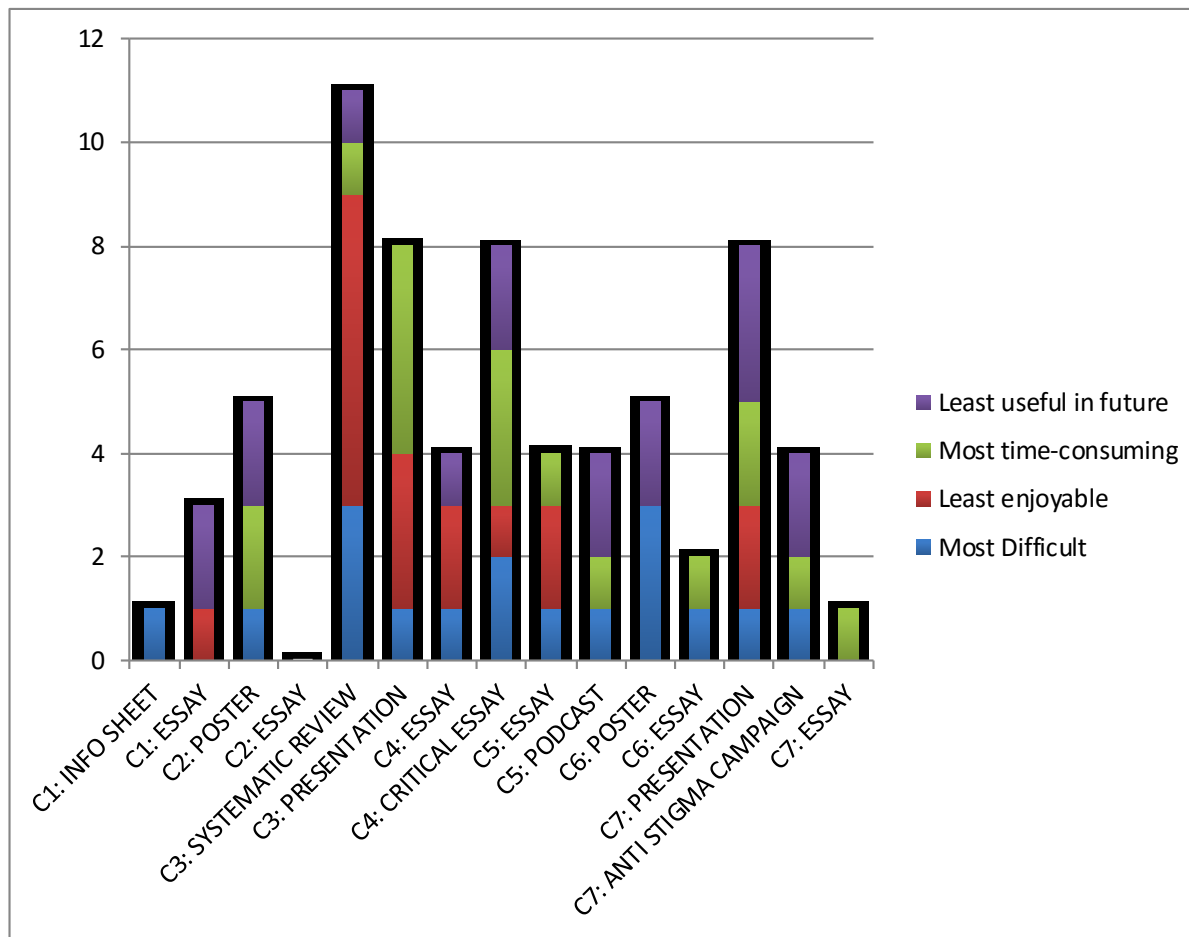
*'I particularly enjoy writing essays, but doing the campaign proposal etc is a fun way to work with large amounts of work in a different way.'*

Furthermore, the students found oral presentations and essays to be the most enjoyable to complete, and systematic reviews - the least enjoyable. Notably, however, one student expressed concerns that their 'nerves' inhibited their learning in the oral presentations. Creation of an information sheet was the least difficult assignment, according to the students, while the systematic review and the academic poster, were the considered most difficult assignments. Finally, the information sheet was rated as the least time-consuming, and the oral presentations and the critical appraisal - the most time-consuming.





**Figure 2.** Students’ perceptions of the positive aspects of the assessments (Notes: C1 = Introduction to Mental Health and Disability; C2 = The Global Burden of Mental Health Difficulties; C3 = Research Methods in Health and Wellbeing; C4 = Cultural, Social and Biological Determinants of Mental Health; C5 = Mental Health Promotion across the Lifespan; C6 = Improving Access to Mental Health Care in the Global Context; C7 = Mental Health and Disability: International Law and Policy.)



**Figure 3.** Students’ perceptions of the negative aspects of the assessments (Notes: C1 = Introduction to Mental Health and Disability; C2 = The Global Burden of Mental Health Difficulties; C3 = Research Methods in Health and Wellbeing; C4 = Cultural, Social and Biological Determinants of Mental Health; C5 = Mental Health Promotion across the Lifespan; C6 = Improving Access to Mental Health Care in the Global Context; C7 = Mental Health and Disability: International Law and Policy.)

Three-quarters of the students (n=13, 76%) believed the skills being developed through the various assessment types would be relevant in future posts. For example, in a free text response, one student singled out presentation skills as ‘*definitely useful to many fields*’. Another free-text comment indicated the student’s positive attitudes towards the podcast format:

*‘Podcasts are a unique assessment method (good to know how to do).’*

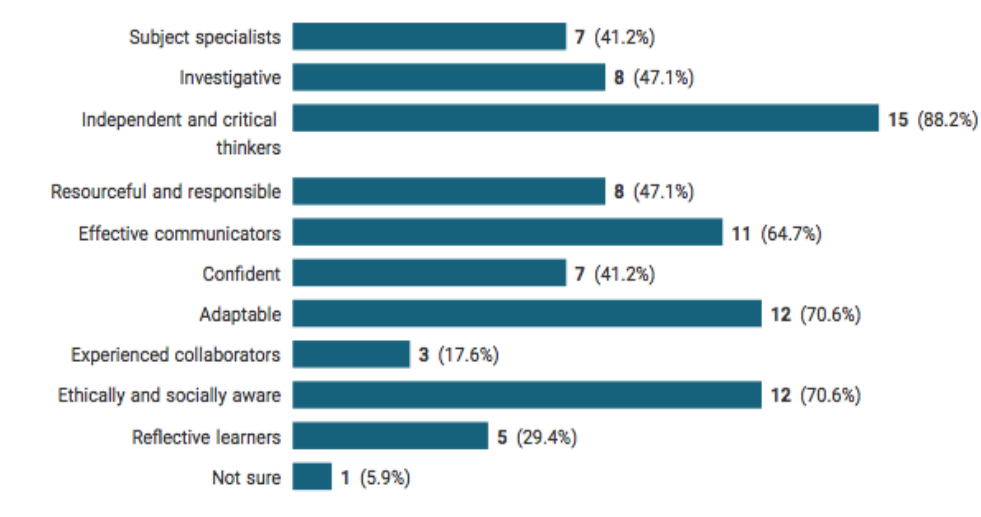
Three (18%) of the participants were unsure if the variation in assessment types would be relevant in their working life after they had completed the programmes. One student (6%) strongly disagreed that the various assignment types would be relevant in their later working life.

There were inconsistencies in students’ perceptions of the consistent application of the marking criteria across courses. Forty percent (n=7) considered there to be consistency. Almost a third (n=5, 29%) of the students did not agree nor disagree that ‘the marking criteria were applied consistently across the courses.’ Five students (29%) indicated that they did not consider marking and feedback to be consistent across modules. Several students also expressed discontents with the usefulness of the feedback provided on the various assessments, which possibly affected their perceptions of the quality of the assessment structure in the programme:

*‘Feedback was at times vague or lacked any constructive criticism, making it difficult to know what to change/improve for future assignments.’*

The students were also queried about the extent to which they believed the various assessments in the programme facilitated the development of the University’s Graduate Attributes (See ‘Figure 2’). All of the University’s Graduate Attributes were considered by at least three students to be enhanced by the variety of assessment types incorporated into the programme. The skills that the most students (65-88%) felt were supported by the programme assignments were “independent and critical thinkers, effective communicators, adaptable and ethically and socially aware”. Between a third and a half of the students considered their skills as “subject specialists, investigative, resourceful and responsible” to be developed through these assignments. Less than a third of the responders considered their skills as ‘reflective learners’ or ‘experienced collaborators’ to be enhanced. The students’ emphasis on

independent and critical thinking skills, communication skills, adaptability and ethical and social awareness largely corresponds with the pedagogic rationale behind introducing the alternative assessments.



**Figure 4.** Students' perceptions of the degree to which the programme curriculum had helped them enhance their graduate attributes

#### Workshop findings

Six volunteer students partook in the workshop. All six participants had also completed the online questionnaire. Several main themes were generated from the qualitative content analysis of the workshop data: formative assignments-benefits and challenges; perceptions about alternative summative assignments; programme structure and cohesiveness; choice in assignment topics preferred; engagement with the VLE; and attitudes towards the grade schedule.

One of the most significant findings that emerged from the workshop was that students desired a greater explicit degree of cohesiveness between the online learning resources and the summative assessments. For example, the students explained that sometimes they were at the end of their assignment before they realised that online resources were available which could have enhanced assignment preparation.

During the workshop, students were also asked for feedback on the questionnaire results that only 59% of respondents considered the timings between assessments to be appropriate (See 'Table 3'). Indeed, in the qualitative (open-ended) questionnaire responses, five students indicated that the assignment spacing was intense or stressful. Discussion around this topic was not very fruitful. The students engaged in the workshop indicated that they had anticipated the coursework requirements to be intense and challenging as it was a Master's-level programme. They concluded that these assumptions meant they did not consider there to be any issues with the timetabling. They highlighted that the submission timetable was transparent at beginning of each semester providing them the opportunity to negotiate their workload to meet deadlines. The small number of students, along with potential bias of a self-selecting participants, may have precluded richer insights into this topic from emerging.

In terms of the specific assessment design and types, it became apparent that students particularly appreciated the opportunity to choose a country/topic/population for assignments because it let them build their knowledge of a subject as the programme progressed. This meant that by the time they came to their dissertation, those students felt they already had a good understanding of their subject.

Several of the students questioned the appropriateness of the poster format and suggested that an essay format would have been more suitable for the topics of the respective modules. Furthermore, some workshop participants noted that the information sheet (See 'Table 1') was particularly useful as a first summative assignment as it helped them gather more confidence as they progressed through the programme.

Workshop participants' perceptions of, and experiences with, the formative assignments in the programme were particularly nuanced. They described activities such as podcasts and group presentations as 'enjoyable' and 'helpful' although some participants noted that completing all assignments (summative and formative) made for an 'intense' work schedule. This feedback about the number of summative and formative assessments creating undue stress at times echoes some of the open-ended questionnaire responses regarding the appropriateness of the timing between assessment deadlines (See 'Table 3').

Also, some participants felt dissatisfied with certain aspects of the group assignment as they felt the peer feedback they had received had not been particularly helpful and because they felt not all students contributed equally.

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During the workshop, clarification was also sought in relation to the questionnaire finding that students were split as to the fairness of the marking (See 'Table 3'). Several of the students felt more transparency in the assessment requirements and marking procedures was needed. Several students highlighted the need for clearer marking criteria for some of the newly introduced assessment types such as the posters. In the poster assignments, some students were dissatisfied with what they considered to be undue emphasis placed on the design of the poster, as opposed to its content, by the markers. To assist students in better understanding the University's grading schedule, a sort and stick activity was undertaken which required the students to align the marking criteria to the associated grade points. Students appeared to see this pilot exercise as a valuable activity. The programme team will consider the possibility of implementing similar activities in the classroom in future cohorts.

One of the workshop participants offered the piece of advice to future students, 'Trust the process'-referring to the different aspects of the programme (learning materials, assessments etc.) coming together 'very well' over its duration to foster students' learning. The authors believe this maxim captures the intent and logic of incrementally developing learners' graduate attributes by incorporating diverse assessment practices.

## Discussion

This study demonstrated that diversifying the assessment structure in a Master's programme can be carried out incrementally - by gradually introducing novel alternative assessments and by increasing the authenticity of pre-existing traditional assessments (such as essays and written reports). A balanced and thoughtful mix of assessments is essential for not only optimising students' learning experiences and outcomes-within and beyond the classroom, but also for adequately responding to the ever-increasing diversity of student cohorts-which has been substantially expanded with the introduction of online-distance learning.

A key implication of the current paper is that enhancing the authenticity of assessments does not necessarily need to involve fundamental changes to the curriculum design. In fact, there exist multiple routes to authenticity, many of which can be effectively achieved by modifying pre-existing pen-and-paper assessment modalities (such as essays and reports). As argued by Spence-Brown (2001, p. 463), '[...] authenticity must be viewed in terms of the implementation of an activity, not its design [...]'. As put by Forsyth and Evans (2019, p. 750), 'Assessments sit on an 'authenticity spectrum', with wholly decontextualised assessment at one end, and congruent or 'authentic' at the other [...]'. Ensuring an optimal mix of assessment types in a HE programme of study should be continually addressed and revisited, when necessary, by a flexible and responsive programme team (Hughes and Barrie, 2010; Green et al., 2009).

The findings from the student survey and workshop are encouraging in that they demonstrated students' acknowledgement of the important value of a diverse mix of assessments. Importantly, the majority of respondents recognised that the skills and attributes developed through completing the assessments had relevance for their future professional realisation. The findings pertaining to the students' perceived difficulty level of the different assessments were somewhat more equivocal and highlight the need to provide adequate instructional guidance in advance of assessment submission, especially when introducing innovative assessment formats. In particular, the programme Team will endeavour to provide prospective students with exemplary coursework from past students for the different assessment types. In response to students' request for more clarity regarding the cohesiveness between the curriculum and the assessments, the programme Team introduced an 'Assignment Tips' rubric within the learning materials, which highlighted the relevance of individual learning activities for assessment preparation and success. It is hoped that this will mitigate some of the students' anxieties when approaching new assessment formats.

Notably, in the questionnaire, only 5 (29.4%) and 3 (17.6%) of the respondents believed being a 'reflective learner' and an 'experienced collaborator', respectively, were developed as a result of completing the assessments in the programme. Those findings seem to indicate the need to embed student reflection more thoroughly in the curriculum design in order to promote the development of graduate attributes and other core competencies. This could be achieved in several ways. Reflective writing, for instance, in the form of personal journals, logs or diaries, has been shown to facilitate subject learning, enhance metacognition, reduce academic anxiety, develop creative and critical thinking skills and foster career planning in university students (e.g. Frank and Barzilai, 2004). Reflective logs have also been used as an unobtrusive method to collect rich data about how students engage in and experience different academic activities including summative assignments (Frank and Barzilai, 2004). In addition, or alternatively, students can be encouraged to engage with the University's electronic portfolio platform-which can be used for storing achievements and tracking skills development, designing a personal development plan, and reflecting on achievements. Marrying alternative assessments with student reflexivity is vital for the attainment of many graduate attributes, whereby '[...] students develop graduate attributes because they are relevant to their sense of self, and they are subsequently aware of the skills they have gained during their studies and can articulate them explicitly to employers [...]']' (Hill et al., 2016, p. 158).

With regards to developing students' collaborative skills, students engage in formative group tasks such as a delivering a group presentation and writing a blog critically appraising a research paper. The results from the current study, however, indicate the need for a more focused and systematic approach to introducing collaborative learning activities, including summative and formative assignments, in the programme.

### Limitations of the current study

Several methodological limitations of this small-scale descriptive case study must be taken into consideration when interpreting and applying the current findings to other educational settings. First and foremost, the study's generalizability is highly compromised by its small sample size (N = 17 survey respondents). Despite that a significant proportion of the current participants were international students (47%), future evaluations of the utility of alternative assessments should aim to capture more culturally and geographically representative samples.

The data collection methods used in the current study also merit critical evaluation. Although the collaborative approach used to design the survey and workshop aimed to minimise the researcher bias, some (implicit) biases may have been inadvertently introduced by the researchers, who were also members of the programme team. Furthermore, the workshop was not audio-recorded but instead two note-takers recorded the discussions that took place. This has likely compromised the fidelity of the data generated from the workshop participants.

### Conclusion: Creating 'global students' by embedding 'authenticity' in the Global Mental Health Master's Programme

The aims of the paper were to share the educators' experiential insights into transforming the assessments in a taught MSc Global Mental Health programme by incorporating alternative assessments underpinned by a strong disciplinary foundation, as well as to report the findings of a student evaluation of the various aspects of the assessment structure in the programme, including their perceived usefulness and relevance to a range of graduate attributes. Qualitative and quantitative data gathered using self-report and participatory methods revealed that, overall, while the majority of students recognised the multifaceted value of the diversified assessments, some expressed scepticism and concerns. The findings indicate that maximising their pedagogic and professional value is contingent upon enhancing the transparency and quality of the marking and feedback practices; optimising the cohesiveness between assessments and core curriculum; ensuring no graduate attribute is left behind; and ensuring a good 'fit' between assessment format and instructions, substantive assignment topic and intended learning outcomes.

Among the next steps for the programme team are a replication of this evaluation covering the most up-to-date assessment structure, evaluating the newly introduced formative assessments, as well as incorporating a class activity focused on increasing students' understanding of the marking process. The programme team are also committed to continuing to explore tactics for embedding principles and practices inherent to the discipline of global mental health within various components of the curriculum.

In conclusion, assessing the degree of authenticity of curricula should take into consideration the values, scope and peculiarities of the subject field in question. Global mental health is inherently a cross-cultural field of study and practice, which has internationalisation, cross-disciplinarity and an awareness of global politics, discourses and knowledge flows at its core (Patel, 2014). This poses significant challenges to creating a truly global and international curriculum (Simm and Marvell, 2017; O'Donnell, and O'Donnell, 2016). It is the programme team's hope that aforementioned assessment innovations have helped develop some of the values and perspectives that are characteristic of ethically aware and socially responsible 'global students'. For instance, assessments such as the campaign proposal and the case vignette, as well as some essays asking students to reflect on quotes from indigenous people, for example, explicitly encourage students to consider the socio-cultural context surrounding the issues under question (e.g. wellbeing, mental illness, stigma). Those assessments therefore aim to help students increase their cross-cultural awareness, ethical consciousness and empathetic understanding of others' worldviews. In the context of the entire curriculum, the programme team believe the current mix of assessments also facilitate learners in nurturing a 'more nuanced awareness' (Simm and Marvell, 2017, p. 470) of the impact of Western ideas on framing experiences of health and well-being.

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#### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Mr Matthew Weldon for co-facilitating the student workshop, as well as the Master's students who kindly gave their time to participate in the online survey and the workshop.

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**Student Details**

(1) Please select the most accurate description for you:

- UK student
- EU student
- International student

(2) Is English your first language?

- Yes
- No (I am a non-native English speaker)
- Other (please specify)

**Moodle Resources in the GMH Programme**

(3) My ability to incorporate the Moodle materials into my learning was:

- Acquired PRIOR TO COMMENCING the GMH Programme
- Acquired DURING THE INDUCTION SESSION of the GMH Programme
- Acquired DURING THE INITIAL WEEKS of study on the GMH Programme
- Acquired BY THE END OF THE FIRST SEMESTER
- NEVER fully established, but I have tried
- NOT A SKILL SET I decided to PRIORITISE

(4) Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The Moodle activities complemented the in-class teaching					
The Moodle activities helped improve my knowledge of the subject area above and beyond in-class teaching					
Some of the Moodle activities should be compulsory					

(5) What aspects of the Moodle resources work well? What are the benefits of this approach?

(6) What aspects of the Moodle resources DO NOT work well? What are the challenges or barriers of engaging with online learning resources?

**GMH Assessments: PTES Questions**

(7) Please select the response that most appropriately represents your experience of assessments in the GMH programme.

	Yes	No	Unsure	Please explain your answer
The Moodle activities complemented the in-class teaching				
The Moodle activities helped improve my knowledge of the subject area above and beyond in-class teaching				

(8) Please select the response that most appropriately represents your experience of assessments in the GMH programme (n.b. different assessment types included posters, essay, presentations, podcasts, critical reviews, information sheets).

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Please explain your answer
Assessment related topics were covered in class prior to assessment submission deadlines						
Assessment related topics were covered in class prior to assessment submission deadlines						
I engaged with all of the formative assessment offered on the GMH MSc programme						
The variation in assessment types within the GMH programme increased enjoyment of the courses.						
The various assessment types helped to consolidate learning						

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The various assessment types were equally as challenging to complete						
I anticipate that the various assessment types will have relevance in my working life after I complete the MSc programme						
Policies relating to Plagiarism were transparent from the start of the GMH programme						
Policies relating to Late Submission were transparent from the start of the GMH programme						
Policies relating to Word Count Limitations were transparent from the start of the GMH programme						
The timing between assessment submission deadlines was appropriate						
The percentage weightings of the assessments within individual courses was appropriate						
Assessments were marked and returned efficiently						
The marking criteria were applied consistently across the courses						

**GMH: Focus on Individual Assessments**

Questions 9-16 had a drop-down list of student assessments for student selection.

- Intro to Mental Health: INFORMATION SHEET
- Intro to Mental Health: ESSAY
- The Global Burden of Mental Health: POSTER
- The Global Burden of Mental Health: ESSAY
- Research Methods: SYSTEMATIC REVIEW
- Research Methods: PRESENTATION
- Cultural, Social and Biological Determinants of Mental Health: ESSAY
- Cultural, Social and Biological Determinants of Mental Health: CRITICAL ESSAY
- Mental Health Promotion Across the Lifespan: ESSAY
- Mental Health Promotion Across the Lifespan: PODCAST
- Improving Access to Mental Health Care in the Global Context: POSTER
- Improving Access to Mental Health Care in the Global Context: ESSAY
- Mental Health and Disability: International Law and Policy: PRESENTATION
- Mental Health and Disability: International Law and Policy: ANTI STIGMA CAMPAIGN
- Mental Health and Disability: International Law and Policy: ESSAY

(9) Thinking about all the assessments across the course, please select the one you found MOST DIFFICULT.

(10) Thinking about all the assessments across the course, please select the one you found LEAST DIFFICULT.

(11) Thinking about all the assessments across the course, please select the one you found MOST ENJOYABLE.

(12) Thinking about all the assessments across the course, please select the one you found LEAST ENJOYABLE.

(13) Thinking about all the assessments across the course, please select the one you found MOST TIMECONSUMING.

(14) Thinking about all the assessments across the course, please select the one you found LEAST TIMECONSUMING.

(15) Thinking about all the assessments across the course, please select the one you found MOST LIKELY TO BE USEFUL IN FUTURE WORKPLACES.

(16) Thinking about all the assessments across the course, please select the one you found LEAST LIKELY TO BE USEFUL IN FUTURE WORKPLACES.

**Graduate Attributes**

(17) Which, if any, of the University of Glasgow 'Graduate Attributes' were enhanced by the varied ASSESSMENT TYPES incorporated into the GMH programme? (Please tick all that apply)

- None
- Subject specialists

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- Investigative
- Independent and critical thinkers
- Resourceful and responsible
- Effective communicators
- Confident
- Adaptable
- Experiences collaborators
- Ethically and socially aware
- Reflective learners
- Not sure

Please provide any additional feedback in relation to assessment types in the GMH programme to help us optimise student experience in future.