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## Exploring Critical Incidents in Assessment

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# Exploring critical incidents in assessment

Jen Harvey (DIT) and Marion Palmer (IADT)



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# Introductions

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- Jen Harvey DIT
  
- Marion Palmer IADT

# Assessment Workshop

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By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Identify critical incidents in their own learning about assessment
- Use critical incidents to analyse assessment
- Consider the emotional aspects of assessment
- Review the assessment cycle to identify key points for lecturers and learners

# Workshop Outline

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## Introductions

- Definition of a 'critical incident'

## Sharing critical incidents (presenters/participants)

- Identification of key features from incidents
- Emotional impact of assessment?

## Tailoring future solutions to address issues

## Assessment within a wider context

## Conclusions

# Critical incidents in assessment

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- Critical incidents are events that change the way you think.
- A critical incident in assessment might be an event - remark, action, observation - that changed the way in which you thought about assessment.

# Critical incident #1

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Running a 10 ECTS credit certificate in learning and teaching for lecturers/staff with a portfolio assessment.

Participants asked to select a topic and write 1000 words relating topic to practice. Draft papers submitted and were poor.

Analysis indicated assessment too demanding – selection of topic required knowledge of teaching and learning participants did not have.

# Issues addressed

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The following year:

- Changed in year two to a selection of readings and a reader response approach adopted
- Quality of work improved.



# Critical incidents in assessment

(adapted from Brookfield, 1990)

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Think back over your experience as an assessor/examiner.

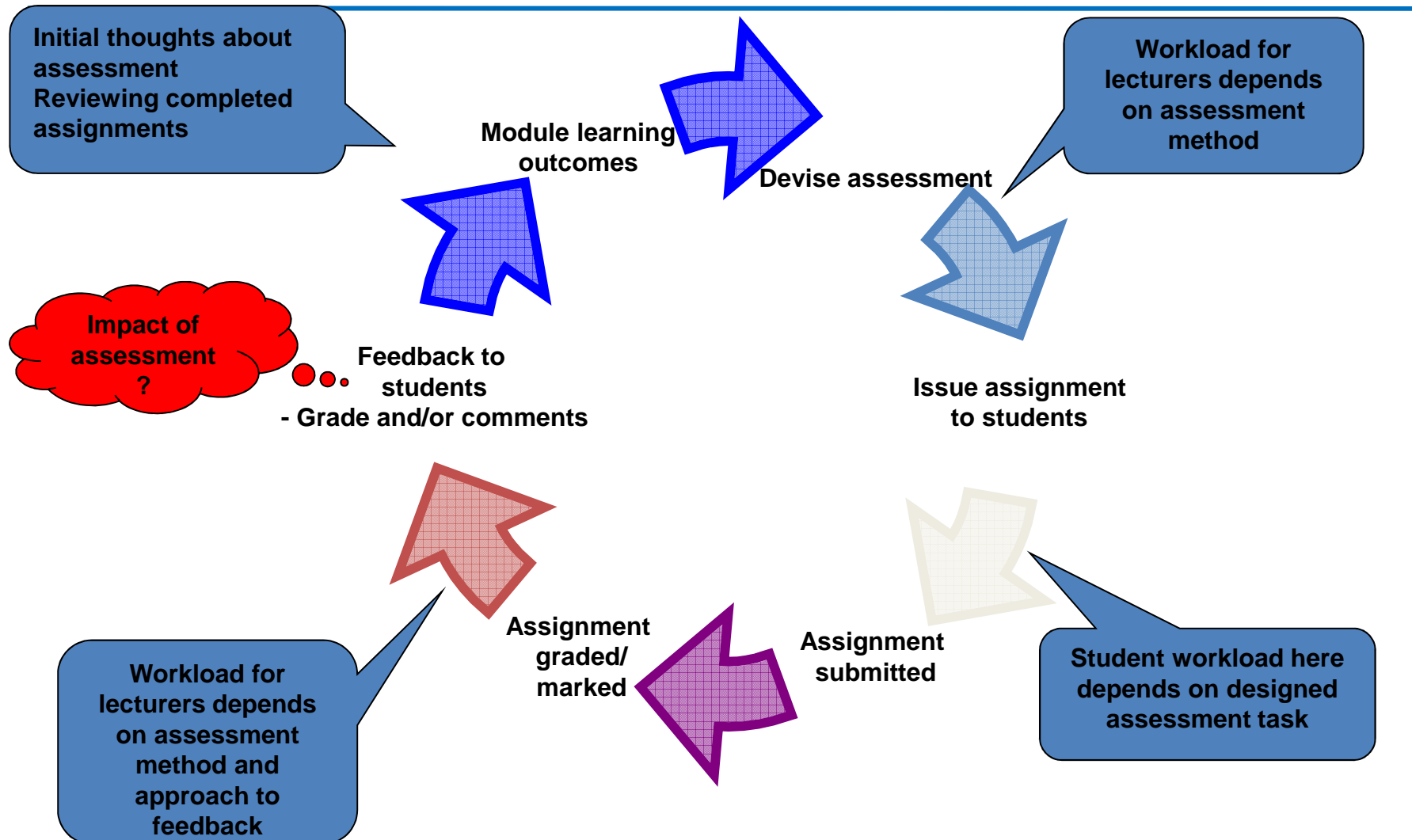
- Describe an incident that you recall as being either particularly rewarding or particularly distressing for you as an assessor.
- Identify the features of the incident that made you feel this way.
- Did this experience provide you with any insight(s) into effective assessment practice?

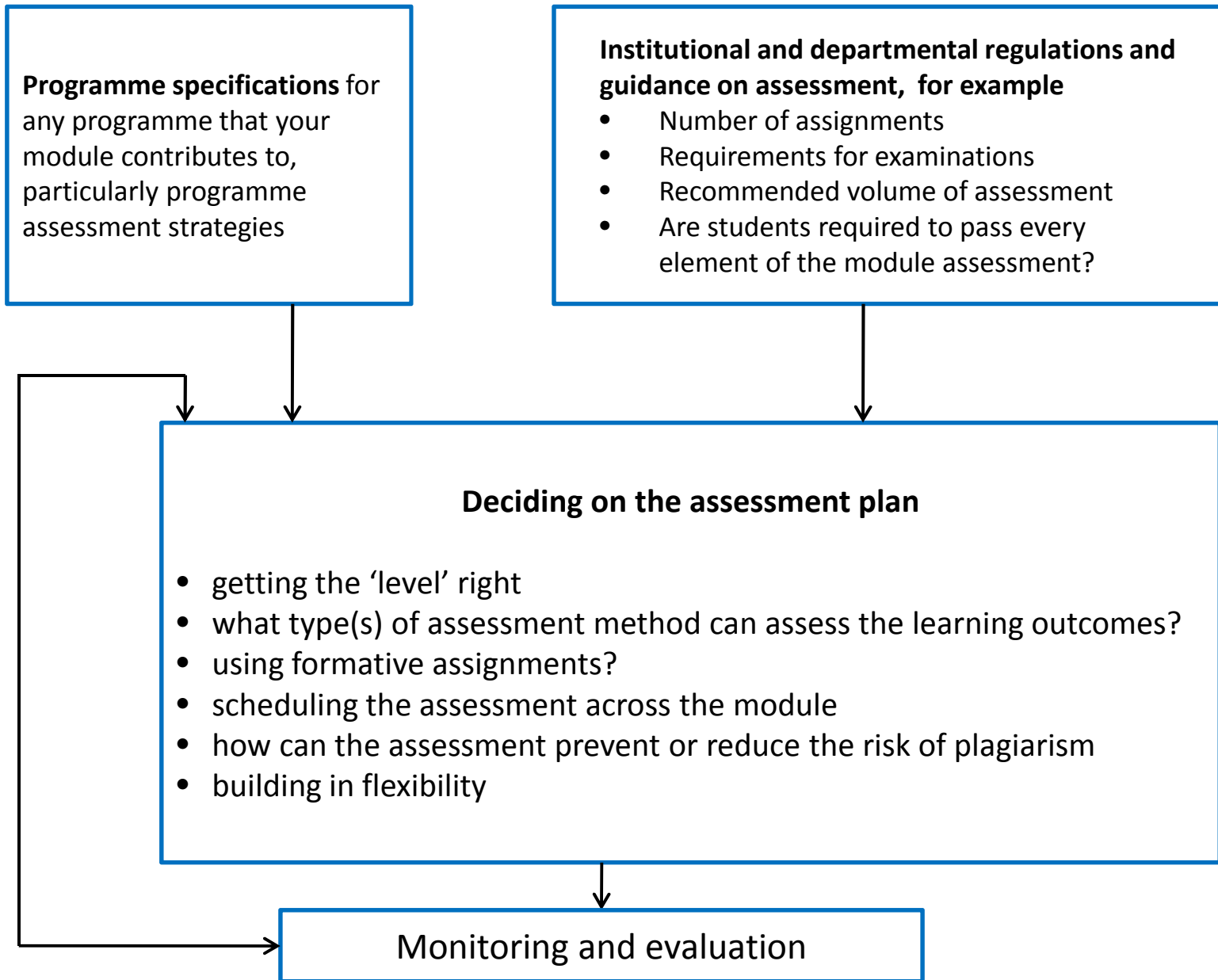
# Sharing experiences

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- Positive /negative features identified from your experiences.
- Are there common themes?
- What can we learn from these experiences?
- Contextualising insights within the assessment cycle.

# Assessment cycle for lecturers (and students)





Designing a module assessment plan (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007)

# Assessing across a programme (Bloxham & Boyd, 2009)

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1. Developing programme learning outcomes
  - with consideration to external stakeholders, institutional goals, employability skills, categories of LOs
2. Mapping programme outcomes across a programme
3. Making assessment fit for purpose
  - balance assessment of learning /assessment for learning
4. Provide for progression
5. Match assessment and learning activities
6. Identify constraints on assessment
  - regulations guidance, assessment workload/scheduling, bunching of assessment, staff workload, passing all components, involving students etc

# Common weaknesses in assessment (Brown, 2002):

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- tasks do not match the stated outcomes;
- criteria do not match the tasks or outcomes;
- criteria are not known to students;
- students do not understand the criteria;
- overuse of one mode of assessment such as written exams
- overload of students and staff;
- insufficient time for students to do the assignments;
- too many assignments with the same deadline;
- insufficient time for staff to mark the assignments exams;
- absence of well defined criteria so consistency is difficult
- unduly specific criteria which create a straitjacket for students and make marking burdensome for lecturers;
- inadequate or superficial feedback provided to students;
- wide variations in marking between modules and assessor
- variations in assessment demands of different modules.

# Exploring the 2008 UK National Student Survey Assessment and feedback issues

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Effective practices identified:

- setting realistic targets/turnaround times
- adequate study time before examinations
- clear schedule of assessments/feedback on assignments
- monitoring /timetabling assignments more evenly
- more timely feedback through class activities
- feedback provided in alternative forms
- standardised feedback systems forms/ grids
- provide timely feedback eg indicating how future improvement might be achieved
- use of one-to-one tutorials for feedback on assessed work.

# Feedback is most effective when...

## (Holden, 2010)

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- It is not a monologue but based on interaction between students and tutors
- Its is not just a product related to assessment but integrated into the processing of learning
- It is not an end point but is linked to opportunities for future learning
- Students have an opportunity to evaluate their own and others work and to give feedback to others
- It helps close the performance gap based on assessment criteria and an understanding of quality
- It is personalised and in a form that a student can understand
- When it is seen as a shared responsibility between staff and students



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Thank you.  
Comments and feedback welcome

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