PEOPLE | PLACE | PARTNERSHIP

Building Inclusion Through Wellbeing

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Our values

Our Values set the tone for our University, who we are, where we are and where we want to go.

INTEGRITY

COLLABORATION

INCLUSION

ENHANCING POTENTIAL

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Engineering Perspectives On Learning Enhancement

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Associated Press 1983
and http://www.flightdata.com

Lawn Chair Larry

"He hatched his weather balloon scheme while sitting outside in his "extremely comfortable" Sears lawnchair. He purchased 45 weather balloons from an Army-Navy surplus store, tied them to his tethered lawnchair (dubbed the Inspiration I) and filled the four-foot diameter balloons with helium. Then, armed with some sandwiches, Miller Lite, and a pellet gun, he strapped himself into his lawnchair. He figured he would shoot to pop a few of the many balloons when it was time to descend."

Associated Press 1983
and http://www.flightdata.com

Lawn Chair Larry

"Larry planned to sever the anchor and lazily float to a height of about 30 feet above the backyard, where he would enjoy a few hours of flight before coming back down. But things didn't work out quite as Larry planned."

Associated Press 1983
and http://www.flightdata.com

Equilibrium and Near Equilibrium

Larry misunderstood a few engineering principles: particularly Newton's First and Second laws of motion.

But it's practically impossible to put such a system, in a chaotic environment, in perfect equilibrium – even when it may appear if such a system is in perfect equilibrium.

This has two important consequences for us in our discussion:

- What looks like a static system may actually be accelerating;

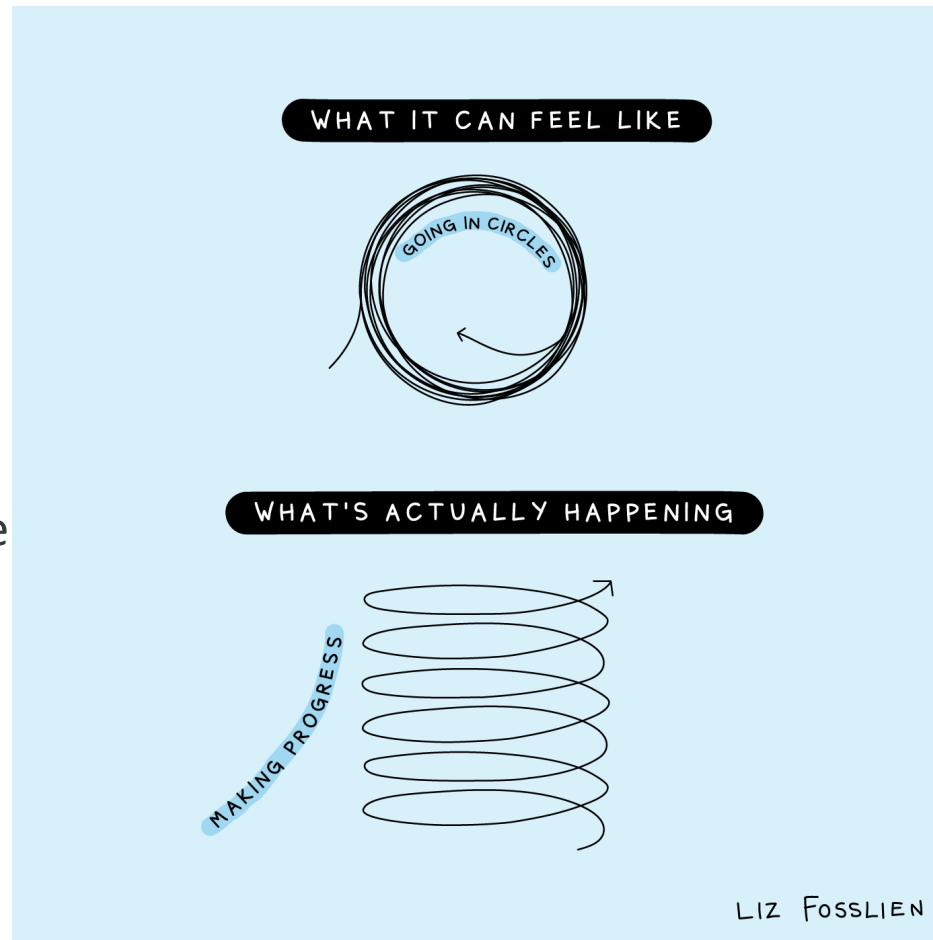- When a system is close to equilibrium it can take modest input to push its acceleration in the "right" direction.

Is this what is happening?

Well…

Maybe…

You need to pay attention to the direction…

WHAT IT CAN FEEL LIKE

GOING IN CIRCLES

WHAT'S ACTUALLY HAPPENING

MAKING PROGRESS

LIZ FOSSLIEN

CREDIT: https://www.fosslien.com/images#/liz-fosslien-making-progress

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Of course, if things have been going in the wrong direction for a while, it may still take a while for small interventions to be obviously making a difference…
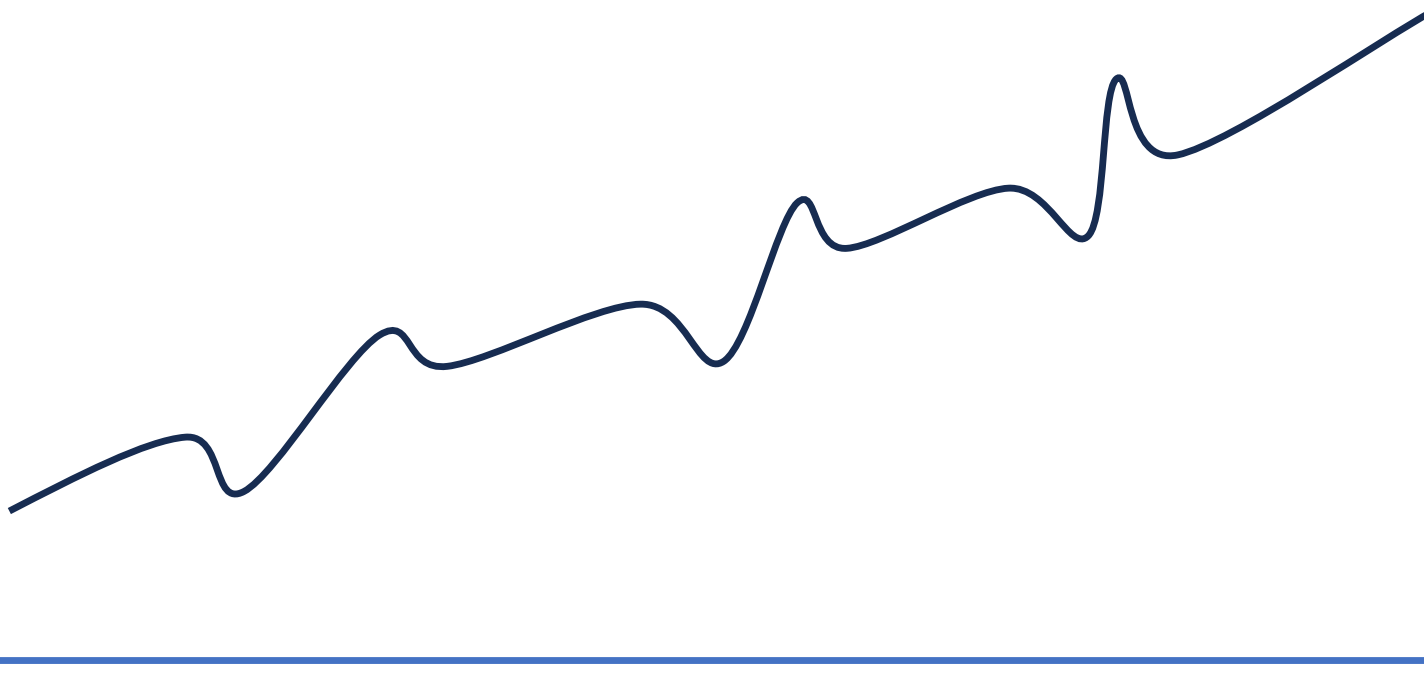
THINGS ARE BAD IN THIS COUNTRY, AND THE FIRST DERIVATIVE OF BADNESS WITH RESPECT TO TIME IS ALSO POSITIVE. BUT, THERE IS GOOD NEWS – WITH YOUR HELP, THE *SECOND DERIVATIVE* OF BADNESS CAN BE TURNED NEGATIVE!

There will never be a mathematician president.

Potential

Effort

The journey to Learning Enhancement might look a bit like this. There are places of relative stability, or the lack of it.

Can we change the nature of this curve?

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Potential

Effort

The effects of Culture.

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Potential

Effort

Can we design / engineer a high quality stable equilibrium at a sensible (sustainable) effort?
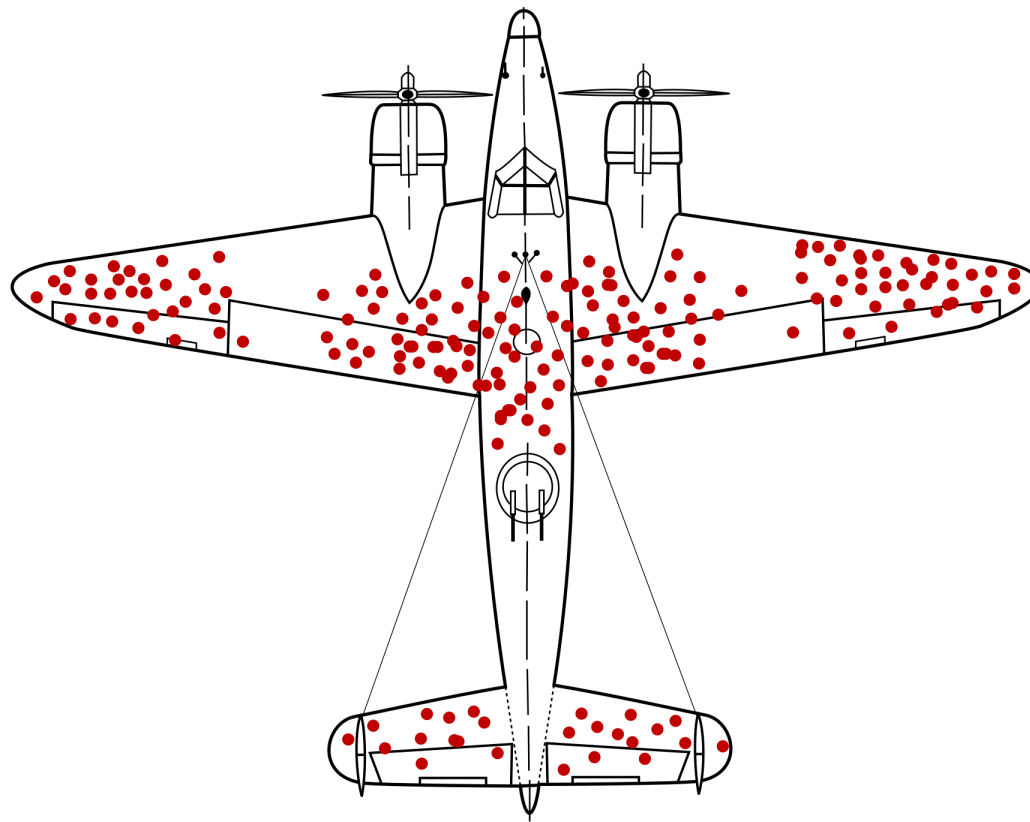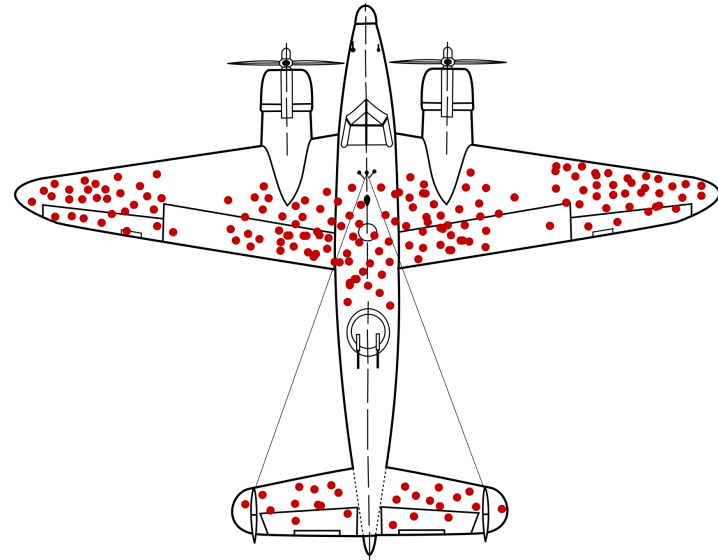
I believe so…

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Considering Inclusion – Data's Shadow

Considering Inclusion – Data's Shadow

- We must pay attention to what the absence of data may imply.
- For instance, it is possible to find programmes of study with generally poor metrics in retention and progression, but excellent NSS scores. How can this arise?
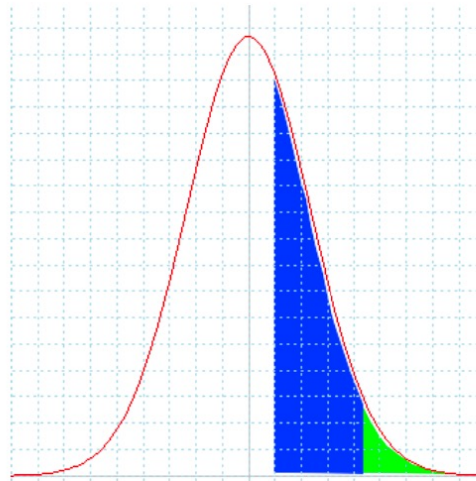
Considering Inclusion and Diversity

Widening Participation

Consider the green in the figure to represent what was 10% participation, and the blue as the extra 30%. Picking whatever statistic you like on the x axis, can we **really** treat these as a homogeneous whole? If we do, this is a problem for all students.

A slide from a talk on Curriculum Design from 2006

Participation in Higher Education has changed dramatically in this Century.

Just how much have delivery and assessment changed in response?

Student Wellbeing

- HEIs have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments to remove barriers students may face due to disability.

- The duty is anticipatory.

- In many Universities the number of reasonable adjustments is increasing (literally) exponentially.

- Students may face waiting lists for diagnosis of certain conditions of five years.

- The conclusion is that most Universities can't continue to react to these as they have in the past as a sustainable or equitable solution.

- We often take a reactive "sticking plaster" approach to the student wellbeing issues *that are declared and that we can see*.

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We must consider the possibility that ballooning numbers of reasonable adjustments implies that many of our traditional assessments are "*unreasonable*" for many of our students.
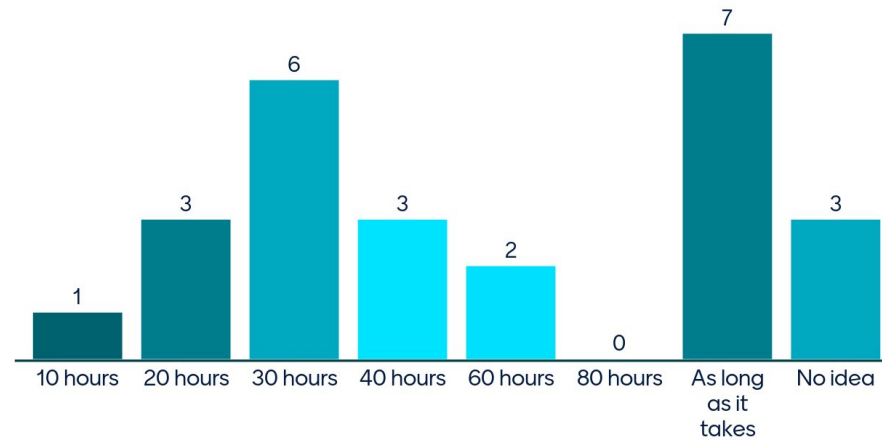
Trying to patch them isn't working for anyone.

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Some Previous Data

**How many hours should a student spend on all aspects of assessment on a 20 point module? (200 effort hours total)**
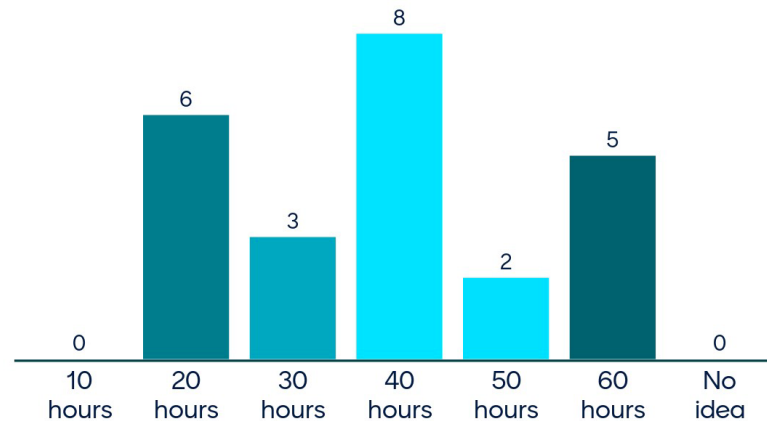
Some Previous Data

How many hours should you spend on all aspects of assessment on a 20 point module?

10 hours	20 hours	30 hours	40 hours	60 hours	80 hours	As long as it takes	No idea
1	3	6	3	2	0	7	3

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Some Previous Data

**How many hours should you spend on all aspects of assessment on a 20 point module?**
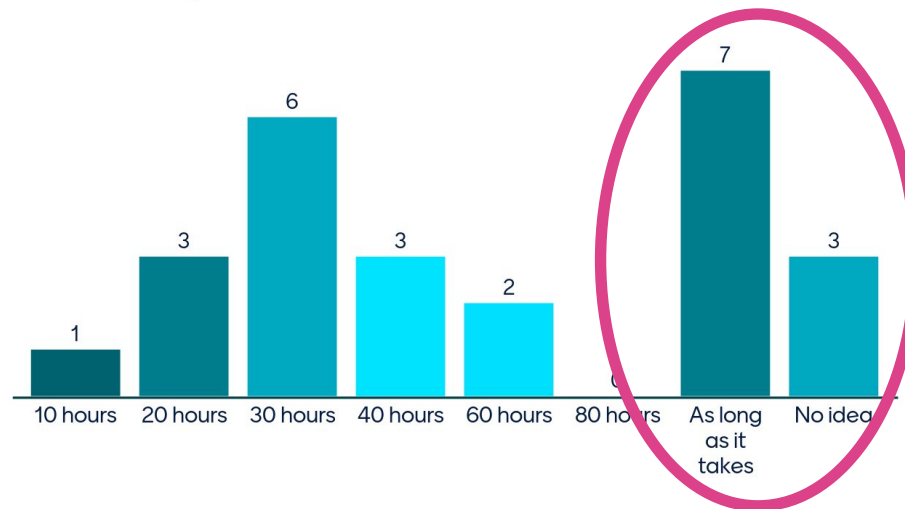
It is my contention that this is a large threat to staff wellbeing, student wellbeing and more besides. How can we dedicate time to thoughtful design?

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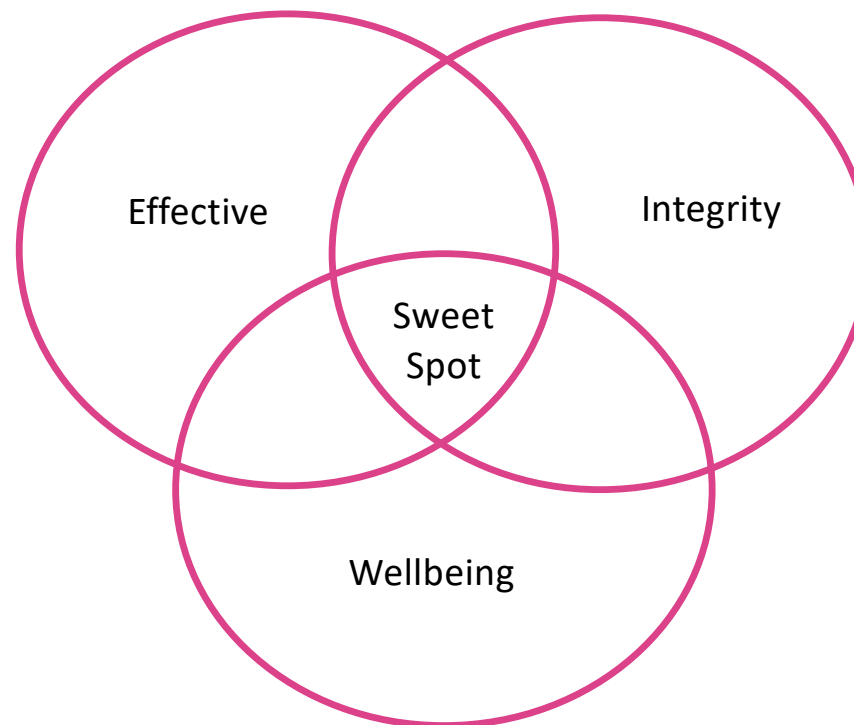
Is AI a help, or a hindrance?

- There has been some concern, and a reasonable amount of panic, around the intrusion of Generative AI into the Higher Education sector.
- The concern has really focused on the potential adverse impact of the integrity of assessment.
- There has been a little less attention on the potential benefits.

Credit: https://www.smbc-comics.com/comic/doom
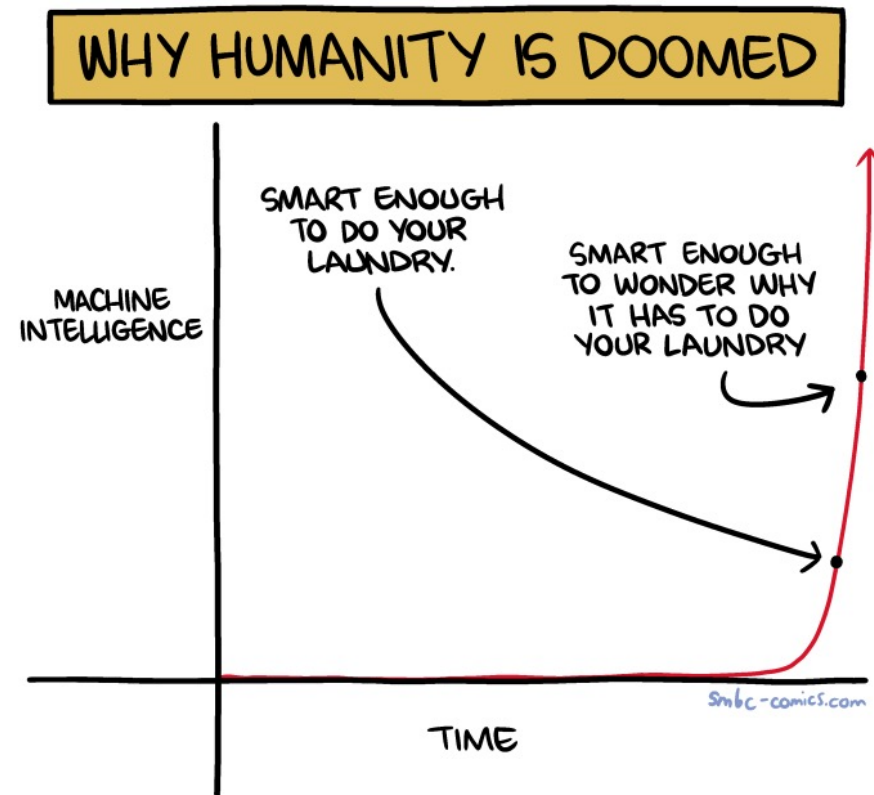
Except it's more like this...

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Effective

Integrity

Sweet Spot
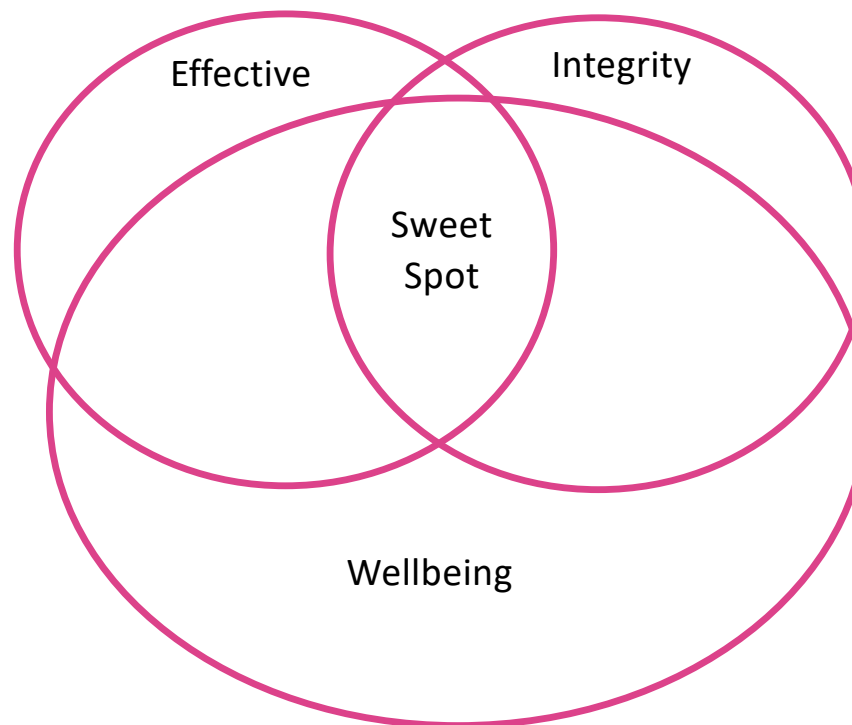
Wellbeing

After all, how can we really claim we are effective if we don't maximise student inclusion, and their executive function? Or that we can have integrity in processes that don't consider wellbeing?

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Ulster University has undertaken specific work on embedding wellbeing in the curriculum more generally. It can be found (*) here:

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/learningenhancement/resources/inclusive-learning/wellbeing

* Last night the PDF toolkit was giving a 404. I've asked for this to be fixed.

What are the potential solutions?

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A reminder of the principal pain points

- We are typically more comfortable in reform of delivery of subject matter than of assessment. There are often claims accreditation is to blame.

- In many cases, we aren't making the time to consider the impacts of less optimal assessment design on staff and students.

- We are sometimes encouraged to take a sticking plaster approach to meeting reasonable adjustments.

- We know that reasonable adjustments do not highlight all the students that need support, because of delays in diagnosis, reticence to come forward and other issues.

- Student bodies are much more diverse than they were in the era when many of our norms were developed, including many more international students.

- We are concerned about AI and the consequences for assessment integrity.

- Many Universities are in difficult financial positions making additional resource unlikely.

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Making Space

- Assessment design answers many of these challenges, with a strong lens on both Staff Wellbeing and Student Wellbeing.

- Many (certainly not all) assessment headaches arise from three main features common in traditional assessments.

1. Acute time pressure
2. Secrets
3. Undermined by another source helping the student

Can we reduce our reliance on these?

Formal Examinations

It's worth noting here that one of the most common and traditional assessment instruments, the unseen formal examination typically relies on all of these.

1. Acute time pressure
2. Secrets
3. Undermined by another source helping the student

Does our potential over reliance * on formal exams really just create more problems than it solves?

* Not you, NMITE, TEDI London

Some Examples

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Assessments where cooperation isn't plagiarism, but supports the Learning Outcomes

Using VLEs to auto generate secrets to be unique to each student.

Table quizzes mid (large lecture) to provide formative feedback, develop peer learning, peer assessment, cohort identity and reduce anxiety

Carefully designed rubrics to produce fast effective feedback especially where mark resolution need not be fine.

Group Projects where assessment briefs contain no secrets. They can be reused within and between years.

Exam papers times long enough that RAR extensions are not needed or used.

Automating marking for part of the assessment in a VLE to balance workload and depth of learning

Semi open book exams balancing real life access to information without provoking overload. Reducing Anxiety.

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My top tip

Supporting staff wellbeing directly supports student wellbeing which directly supports the student experience and outcomes.

Build your assessment moderation processes to explicitly consider student *and staff* wellbeing to provide the need and the room for conversation between peers.

One hour invested in assessment design can easily save ten hours in the execution of the process.

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"When people speak of traveling to the past, they worry about radically changing the present by doing something small, but barely anyone in the present thinks they can radically change the future by doing something small."

— Barbara R. Nelson

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Thank You.

Questions and Conversation.

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