

Embedding Inclusive Assessment: **A REFLECTIVE TOOLKIT**

Part of a QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project
Led by Teesside University

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Project Partners: Teesside University (lead), Oxford Brookes University, Greenwich University, University of Hertfordshire, University of Brighton, University of West of England, Kingston University, and Birmingham City University.



Toolkit Overview

This toolkit has been developed as part of a 15-month collaborative project between eight partner institutions. The project was funded by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and led by Teesside University. Each partner identified undergraduate programmes that had closed either attainment gaps and/or continuation gaps across a range of different student demographic groups during the Coronavirus pandemic. The leaders of these programmes were interviewed about any changes that they had made to their programme. Students in their final year of study on these programmes were invited to participate in focus groups or interviews exploring their experiences of assessment and any barriers they experienced in the assessment process. Thematic analysis of the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups was carried out, leading to the identification of 9 inclusive attributes that were common across the programmes identified in the eight institutions. There are grounds, therefore, to believe that these attributes are likely to apply to provision across the UK HE sector, and this toolkit is designed to help you engage with them and to consider what they mean in your context (see 'Embedding Assessment: Final Report' for a more detailed account the project approach).

Project Position Statement: Inclusive assessment is realised through holistic and flexible approaches that recognise, value, and reflect student diversity, facilitating choice and enabling every individual to demonstrate their achievement with respect to academic/professional standards and empowering them to take ownership of their learning journey. To achieve this, assessment needs to be strategically designed as an embedded element of the curriculum to proactively consider students' needs and to remove systemic barriers in institutional policies, processes, and practices.

Introduction

The toolkit is intended to prompt reflection on the inclusivity of assessment and to aid action planning to enhance inclusivity. This project has shown the range of factors that affect inclusivity, as suggested in the position statement. The toolkit has therefore been designed to reflect a collaborative philosophy, bringing together different stakeholders to ensure all these factors are considered from a range of perspectives.

We anticipate it being used individually and collaboratively by three different groups:

Leaders: A leader provides oversight of practice, ensuring there is sufficient resources and effective systems in place to deliver inclusive assessment.

Academics: An academic undertakes the work of assessing, and/or of providing the learning support for assessing students inclusively.

Students: A student engages with the learning support and assessment on a course and experiences barriers and enablers to their engagement.

The purpose of this toolkit is thus to facilitate:

1. reflection on the extent the inclusive attributes are currently embedded in practice;
2. discussion between the stakeholder groups named above;
3. negotiation of priority areas for development;
4. collaborative action planning.

In this toolkit you will find a table of inclusive assessment attributes (p.3); sets of the reflective questions for each group of users (p.4-6); and a proforma for considering the reflective questions (p.7). We recommend that the toolkit is used in conjunction with the case studies, to facilitate deeper understanding of the attributes.

How to use the toolkit

Leaders

We recommend that leaders use the reflective questions in the toolkit to;

1. critique, review and enhance policies that impact on assessment, such as Assessment and Feedback, and Extenuating Circumstances policies.
2. ensure sufficient resource is available and distributed in ways that allows for greater inclusivity in assessment.
3. ensure practical knowledge about inclusive assessment is integrated into staff development provision.
4. ensure discussions occur between different stakeholders to increase understanding about how inclusive assessment is currently and how this can be enhanced; and to agree an action plan of enhancement (see suggested protocol below).

Academics

We recommend that academics use the reflective questions to;

1. reflect on the inclusivity of their assessment and identify ways in which they will further enhance it.
2. identify additional support they require to improve inclusivity and feed this back to the appropriate leader.
3. identify practical challenges to assessing inclusively in their context and identify potential solutions using the associated case studies as prompts.
4. encourage students to use the appropriate questions in the toolkit, as suggested below, and to provide feedback on how practice could be further enhanced.

Students

We recommend students use the reflective questions to;

1. review their assessment experiences to enable them to give informed feedback to staff.
2. identify any gaps in their knowledge and understanding of assessment policies, practices, and expectations so that they take appropriate actions to address this.
3. identify opportunities to work with other students to improve collective student understanding of assessment expectations.
4. identify any barriers to their learning/demonstration of learning and raise these with academics so they can access appropriate learning support.

A suggested protocol for collaborative use

While individuals are welcome to use this toolkit, we recommend that it is employed in partnership to enable enhancement work to be informed by a range of different perspectives, drawn together in a collaborative workshop between all stakeholder groups as follows:

1. Leaders, academics, and students separately discuss the Question Set relevant to them for each attribute, provide a RAG rating and any proposed action (using the proforma below).
2. The three groups come together to discuss their ratings; reasons for these; which attributes they would like to prioritise for development; and agree an action plan.
3. The action plan is put into practice and provision re-evaluated (as per attribute 9).

Inclusive Assessment Attributes

Inclusive assessment....	
Embeds support	Academic and wellbeing support is integrated within teaching and assessment. It is easily accessible, dialogic, responsive, and considerate of individual student needs.
Develops assessment literacy	Students are actively engaged with assessment processes with a focus on clarifying learning outcomes and expectations. Students and staff share an understanding of the purposes, requirements and approaches of assessment.
Provides formative opportunities	Assessment is framed as a developmental process within which students engage in formative tasks and receive timely, relevant and manageable feedback. Students feel safe to fail, knowing they will be supported to learn from the experience.
Communicates meaningfully	The assessment process is clear and transparent to all developed through a constructive dialogue between staff and students. Different levels, and modes, of communication are managed to ensure timely and accessible information.
Enables personalisation	Assessment is designed to facilitate ownership and flexibility in how students demonstrate learning outcomes. Students feel empowered to make informed choices over what, when, and how they are assessed where appropriate.
Fosters digital capabilities	Assessment design is alive to the opportunities of different technologies. It creates a culture in which students and staff can develop and extend their digital capabilities, facilitating learning and teaching in diverse contexts and environments.
Promotes authenticity	The assessment tasks are relevant to students' subject areas, employment sectors and contexts of further study to which students will progress. The assessment culture encourages multi-modal and creative assessment design.
Assumes considerate policies and processes	The design of assessment policies and processes are informed by an awareness of student needs, understanding of external pressures, and insights into structural and societal barriers.
Requires continuous reflection	Assessment is continuously reviewed and critiqued, using feedback and discussions with students, staff, and key stakeholders, to ensure ongoing enhancement of policies, practices and processes.

Reflective Questions Relating to the Inclusive Assessment Attributes

Reflective Questions for Leaders

Attribute	Reflective Questions
Embeds support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are staff enabled to integrate academic and wellbeing support into teaching and assessment? To what extent are you taking steps to ensure that academic and wellbeing support is timely and effective?
Develops assessment literacy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do assessment policies and frameworks set a clear requirement for clarifying learning outcomes and assessment expectations with students? To what extent and where are these requirements articulated?
Provides formative opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do processes and resources encourage the embedding of formative tasks within the curriculum? To what extent do processes and regulations enable students to fail safely and learn from the experience?
Communicates meaningfully.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are requirements for communication and dialogue about assessment embedded within policies and processes? To what extent is communication of the assessment policies and process managed effectively to ensure timely and accessible information for different stakeholders?
Enables personalisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do assessment policy and regulatory processes empower students to make informed choices over what, when, and how they are assessed? To what extent do policies and processes enable flexibility in the way learning outcomes are demonstrated?
Fosters digital capabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do the processes and resources surrounding assessment enable agile adoption of new technologies for staff and students? To what extent are staff and students supported to develop digital capabilities?
Promotes authenticity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do processes and resources encourage and enable holistic and innovative assessment directly relating to real-world application? To what extent does the culture encourage staff to develop assessment that enables students to develop in ways relevant to their future ambitions?
Assumes considerate policies and processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are you ensuring that the design and the application of assessment policies and regulations are informed by an awareness of the diversity of students' needs? To what extent is student data available and used to inform the development of inclusive policies?
Requires continuous reflection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent have you set clear expectations around the continuous process of review and reflection on assessment practices? To what extent are the mechanisms you have put in place to enable practitioners to continuously review and enhance assessment practices effective?



Reflective Questions for Academics

Attribute	Reflective Questions
Embeds support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent is academic and wellbeing support integrated into teaching and assessment? To what extent are you confident that such support is accessible to all students and responsive to their different needs?
Develops assessment literacy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are opportunities for clarifying learning outcomes and assessment expectations with students embedded within the curriculum with consistency and in a timely way? To what extent do you involve students in developing a shared understanding of the purposes, requirements, and approaches to assessment?
Provides formative opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do you create formative feedback opportunities that encourage students to action plan and improve their future work? To what extent have you created a culture in which the receipt of formative feedback is seen as a positive developmental experience rather than something to be feared?
Communicates meaningfully.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do you provide regular opportunities to engage students in the assessment process at appropriate points and in a variety of accessible ways? To what extent does the staff group have a shared understanding of assessment and feel confident they are communicating this effectively and consistently?
Enables personalisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent does the assessment in your curriculum permit students to make choices in relation to what, when and how they are assessed? To what extent are students supported to make informed and decisive choices in relation to their assessments?
Fosters digital capabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent does the assessment within your curriculum harness the possibilities afforded by digital technologies? To what extent does your assessment design support students to develop their digital capabilities?
Promotes authenticity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do the assessments in your curriculum enable students to demonstrate knowledge and skills in real-world contexts which are meaningful to them? To what extent can you evidence that students understand how the knowledge and skills they are being assessed on, are transferable beyond the immediate subject area?
Assumes considerate policies and processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent have you received support in your work with relevant assessment policies and regulations? To what extent has the support received and your awareness of student data encouraged you to consider the diversity of student needs in your assessment practices?
Requires continuous reflection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent have you actively engaged with key stakeholders in relation to assessment to gain a holistic view of the quality and impact of assessment practices? To what extent are you in a position to actively consider and, where appropriate, act upon stakeholder feedback received in an effective manner?

Reflective Questions for Students

Attribute	Reflective Questions
Embeds support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do you recognise academic and wellbeing support as being embedded as part of your course? To what extent can you access academic and wellbeing support that meets your individual needs?
Develops assessment literacy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are you involved in developing a shared understanding of the purposes, requirements, and approaches of assessment with staff? To what extent do you have the opportunity to clarify learning outcomes and assessment expectations with staff and other students?
Provides formative opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do you feel safe to make mistakes and have opportunities to learn from those? To what extent do you experience barriers to your understanding of and ability to act on feedback?
Communicates meaningfully.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do you receive clear relevant and consistent communication about assessment? To what extent do you feel you have meaningful and timely interactions with staff and students about assessments?
Enables personalisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do you feel as though you have choices about what, when, and how you are assessed? To what extent do you feel you can bring your own experiences, interests and understanding into assessment?
Fosters digital capabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent can you access and are supported to use digital technologies within your course? To what extent has assessment on your course required you to utilise and develop digital skills in a variety of contexts?
Promotes authenticity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do you feel as though your assessment has enabled you to develop in a way that will help you to fulfil your future ambitions? To what extent do you feel as though you can demonstrate disciplinary knowledge and skills through a variety of assessment types?
Assumes considerate policies and processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do you feel that assessment and the policies were fair and considered your personal circumstances? To what extent have you been informed and made aware of assessment regulations and understood the implications for you?
Requires continuous reflection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do you feel you have the opportunity to provide meaningful feedback on your assessment experiences? To what extent have you seen evidence of your feedback was actively considered and where appropriate acted upon?

Proforma for considering the reflective questions

ATTRIBUTE	RESPONSES TO REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS	ACHIEVED 	PROPOSED ACTION	ACHIEVED 
Embeds support				
Develops assessment literacy				
Provides formative opportunities				
Communicates meaningfully				
Enables personalisation				
Fosters digital capabilities				
Promotes authenticity				
Assumes considerate policies and processes				
Requires continuous reflection				

Guidance for use: Each stakeholder group should complete a proforma independently ahead of subsequent collaborative discussion.

This resource has been compiled by the following University Alliance institutions

