



The UK Quality Code for Higher Education - Advice and Guidance



Sector-Agreed Principle 11 -
Teaching, learning, and
assessment

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About this Guidance

Context

This Advice and Guidance supports the [UK Quality Code](#) for Higher Education (Quality Code) and is designed to unpack Sector-Agreed Principle 11 - Teaching, learning, and assessment and the Key Practices that sit under it. It has been produced by QAA in partnership with a writing group of sector experts and peer-reviewed by colleagues across UK higher education. This is in accordance with the ethos that the Quality Code remains a sector-agreed reference point, built on a shared understanding of what providers can expect of themselves and each other in the assurance and enhancement of quality and the maintenance of standards across post-secondary education throughout the UK. QAA would like to thank the writing group and peer readers for their invaluable contribution in developing this guidance. Details of the writing and reading groups can be found on page [93](#) of this guidance.

An important contextual note relates to the diversity of higher education providers in the UK. Providers can be large universities, operating with significant infrastructure, or small specialist providers, operating on a significantly smaller scale, or any number of other different operating models. The Advice and Guidance is designed to be useful for all providers (and representatives from a range of providers formed the writing and peer review groups), but we recognise that, on occasion, the nomenclature used could suggest a larger provider's context. It is important that each reader interprets the Advice and Guidance in the context of their own operating environment and that all readers recognise that quality and homogeneity are not synonymous.

Scope

This Advice and Guidance encourages providers to reflect on their practice and processes in relation to the Sector-Agreed Principle. Following the Advice and Guidance is not mandatory, but illustrative of approaches that can help providers meet the relevant Principle. National regulators and QAA do not view the information in the Advice and Guidance as compliance indicators. This guidance does not interpret statutory requirements.

The language we use

Where the word 'should' (or any other similarly directive language) appears in the Advice and Guidance this represents a shared understanding within the UK higher education community. On some occasions an institution can align with the Sector-Agreed Principle in a range of different ways, and in such cases an institution may have a different approach to that set out here. Ultimately, to be aligned with the Quality Code, an institution must be able to demonstrate how it meets the Sector-Agreed Principles in practice. No provider or individual should feel that the Advice and Guidance is prescriptive or impinges their autonomy or freedoms.

Structure

In response to sector demand, the Advice and Guidance aligns directly with the overarching Sector-Agreed Principles to provide clear navigation between the different elements. The guidance begins by unpacking the Principle in an operational context. It is then divided into subsections focusing on each Key Practice outlining practical considerations and approaches for providers to benchmark their own way of working. This features practical tips and experience shared by providers on operational practice. Finally, in each subsection there are tools to enable reflection on the guidance. These tools offer the opportunity to explore what 'good' might look like through reflective questions and practical scenarios that enable interrogation of current practice with a view to enhancing quality.

Commonly used terms

The following terms are used throughout this advice. Other terms which benefit from a precise definition are listed at the end of this document.

- **Students:** refers to all individuals studying towards a higher-level award regardless of demographic, mode of delivery, level of study, subject area, or geographic location.
- **Provider:** describes all types of organisations that provide higher level learning, including universities, colleges, institutes of learning, and employers. We also use 'institution' in some instances where 'provider' might not suit the context.
- **Student representative body:** a formal body or mechanism that represents and promotes the interests of students. This may be known as a students' union, a students' association, or guild, or by another bespoke name where these specific organisations do not exist.



Sector-Agreed Principle 11 and its Key Practices

Providers facilitate a collaborative and inclusive approach that enables students to have a high-quality learning experience and to progress through their studies. All students are supported to develop and demonstrate academic and professional skills and competencies. Assessment employs a variety of methods, embodying the values of academic integrity, producing outcomes that are comparable across the UK and recognised globally.

Key Practices

- a. Learning and assessment at all levels is informed by research and/or scholarship. Teaching, learning and assessment align to ensure students can demonstrate their achievements, reflect on and reinforce their prior learning, skills and knowledge, and fulfil their potential.
- b. Students are given clear information about the intended modular and/or programme learning outcomes and the purpose of assessment and are enabled to use feedback/ feedforward to support further learning.
- c. Staff involved in facilitating learning and supervising research are appropriately qualified and supported to enhance their teaching and supervisory practice. Research degrees are delivered in supportive environments that are conducive to learning and research.
- d. Students are enabled and encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and to take an active role in shaping and enhancing the learning process. Providers offer ongoing advice and guidance about academic integrity to ensure that students and staff understand what is expected of them.



- e. As students move through their learning journey, they are given the opportunity and support to transition effectively between academic levels, further study and employment. Providers enable students to recognise the progression they have made and steps they need to take to achieve their potential.
- f. Providers design assessments that test appropriate learning outcomes and are fair, reliable, accessible, authentic and inclusive. Where applicable, and sustainable, students are offered different options for undertaking assessments to promote accessibility and inclusion.
- g. Providers establish coherent approaches to technologies that impact teaching, learning and assessment (such as Generative Artificial Intelligence). These approaches are clearly communicated to staff and students, include how they are utilised and define misuse of such technologies.
- h. Providers offer advice and guidance about academic integrity to ensure that students and staff understand what is expected of them throughout the learning journey. The advice is kept current.



Principle 11 - Teaching, learning and assessment

Providers facilitate a collaborative and inclusive approach that enables students to have a high-quality learning experience and to progress through their studies. All students are supported to develop and demonstrate academic and professional skills and competencies. Assessment employs a variety of methods, embodying the values of academic integrity, producing outcomes that are comparable across the UK and recognised globally.

Providers have student-facing policies for quality assurance in teaching, learning and assessment. These are supported by clear structures and procedures that create a coherent system for maintaining standards, reflecting on practice and driving improvement.

To make these policies inclusive, providers avoid jargon that students may not always understand.

'Inclusive' approaches in this guidance refer to curriculum, teaching, assessment and support practices that proactively remove known barriers and reduce the need for individual adjustments, including through accessible design, varied assessment methods, and clear communication.

Teaching, learning and assessment policies are publicly available and integrated in the strategic and operational management of the provider, ensuring alignment with other institutional missions. They are updated regularly in line with institutional and sector-level guidance, to accommodate developments in areas such as Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI). Updates to policies take place systematically rather than being reactive or ad hoc.

The development, delivery and enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment includes a structured, meaningful and visible role for students and other relevant stakeholders. Students are given opportunities to contribute to discussions about curriculum design, teaching approaches, assessment practices, feedback processes and the wider learning experience. Providers do this through mechanisms such as module evaluation, student-staff forums, representative structures, curriculum review activities and partnership projects focused on learning and teaching enhancement.

The core outcomes of the quality assurance processes and the measures taken are shared regularly with the stakeholders, including students, through appropriate channels such as committee reporting, student staff forums, summary communications (for example 'You said, we did' outputs), digital platforms or published quality reports.



Key Practice a - Teaching, learning and assessment informed by scholarship and research

Key Practice a

Teaching, learning and assessment informed by scholarship and research

Learning and assessment at all levels is informed by research and/or scholarship. Teaching, learning and assessment align to ensure students can demonstrate their achievements, reflect on and reinforce their prior learning, skills and knowledge, and fulfil their potential.

Providers demonstrate that learning and assessment design is actively informed by scholarship of teaching and learning and/or research. This includes evidence-based approaches to teaching, reflective academic practice, professional development, and the integration of current disciplinary and pedagogic knowledge into curriculum and assessment. Staff involved in teaching, supervision and assessment are supported to engage with research and scholarly practice that informs and enhances the quality of the student experience.

Assessment enables students to demonstrate the achievement of programme and module learning outcomes, which are set at the appropriate level of the relevant national qualification framework - for example, the [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies \(FHEQ\)](#) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework \(SCQF\)](#) in Scotland.

Assessment is a fundamental aspect of the student learning experience. Ultimately, it supports a determination whether each student has achieved their programme's learning outcomes and allows the awarding body to ensure that appropriate standards are being applied rigorously and are consistent with the relevant national qualification framework (see [Key Practice f](#) for advice on assessment design).



Providers facilitate an inclusive approach, collaborating with students that enables them to have a high-quality learning experience and to progress through their studies. All students are supported to develop and demonstrate academic and transferable skills and competencies. Assessment employs a variety of inclusive methods, embodying the values of academic integrity, producing outcomes that are comparable across the UK and recognised globally. Institutions increasingly adopt inclusive curriculum design approaches, such as [Universal Design for Learning](#), which provide multiple ways for students to engage with learning and demonstrate achievement. Brief acknowledgement may help illustrate how inclusive design supports accessibility across teaching, learning and assessment.

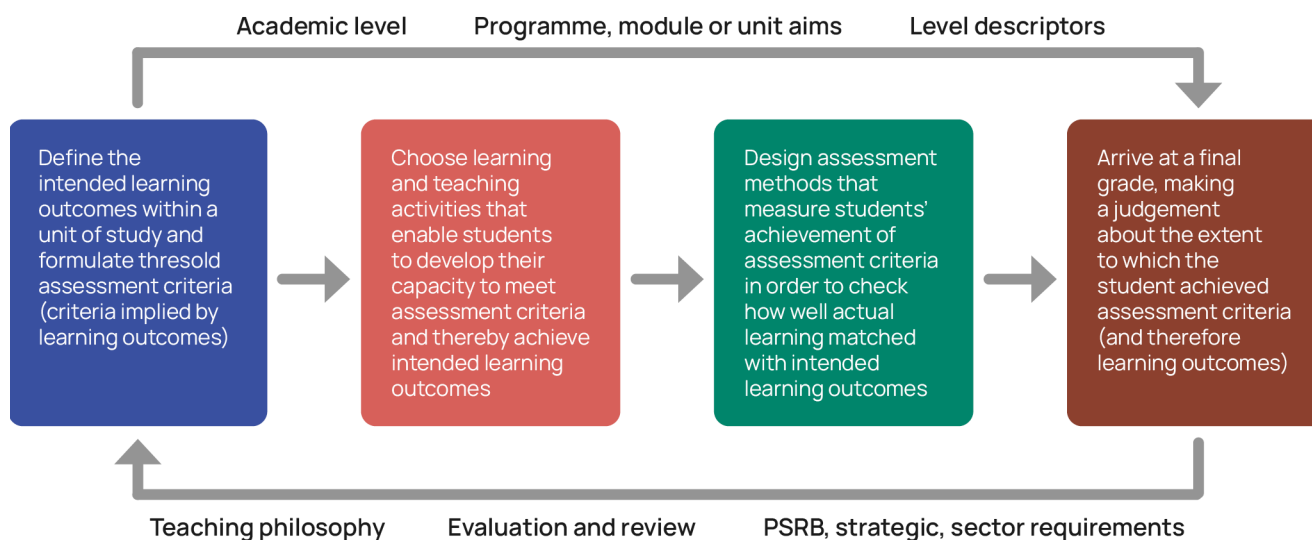
Constructive alignment: learning outcomes, teaching and learning, and assessment are aligned

Learning and teaching activities provide the basis for assessment, both of individuals and of groups, aligned with learning outcomes. These activities also support students' academic, intellectual, professional and personal development by establishing links between modules, subjects and levels of study. Learning and teaching activities are designed in alignment with knowledge, behaviour and skills-based intended learning outcomes (ILOs). Curricula also feature formative and summative assessments. Formative assessment functions primarily as assessment for learning, while summative assessment is typically assessment of learning, though it may also support learning when, for example, reflective elements are incorporated.

Sector practice increasingly approaches constructive alignment at programme level as well as module and teaching level, supported through curriculum mapping that shows how learning outcomes, assessment strategies and capability development are coherently designed and developed across modules and stages of study.

There is clear alignment between ILOs, teaching and learning strategies, methods of assessment and assessment criteria. 'Constructive alignment' is a model where learning environments and activities are designed to enable all students to achieve the desired ILOs, measured through assessment activities using clearly aligned criteria. ILOs, assessment criteria and learning and teaching activities are developed in accordance with the academic level of study, using appropriate descriptors and consistent language. They reflect programme and module aims as well as other factors where appropriate, such as professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements. For example, a professionally aligned ILO requiring students to demonstrate applied problem solving skills may be supported through simulated practice activities and assessed via a portfolio mapped to both academic criteria and relevant PSRB standards.

Figure 1: The four major steps to constructive alignment



Effective design of assessment ensures that programme-level ILOs (which themselves fulfil the requirements of, where appropriate, the relevant qualification frameworks, credit frameworks, [Subject Benchmark Statements](#), and guidance on qualifications' characteristics) are addressed through the assessment of the programme's constituent units or modules.

In addition to aligning individual assessments with intended learning outcomes at module level, many providers adopt a programmatic approach to assessment design. This involves systematically mapping assessment tasks across modules and stages of study to ensure that programme-level intended learning outcomes are addressed coherently, progressively and without unnecessary duplication. Programmatic assessment mapping supports transparency, enables students to understand how learning and assessment build across a programme, and assists providers in assuring that all programme learning outcomes are appropriately assessed.



What are the key considerations providers need to consider when implementing this Key Practice?

Staff capability and development: staff are supported to maintain and develop current knowledge in their subject and pedagogy. Providers offer structured opportunities for continuing professional development, scholarly engagement, and reflective enhancement, ensuring that teaching and assessment are informed by current disciplinary, professional and educational practice.

Institutional culture: scholarship is recognised, valued and enabled at institutional and programme level. Providers embed expectations around scholarly activity within workload allocation models, promotion and reward criteria, and national and institutional teaching recognition schemes. This signals its central role in enhancing learning, teaching and assessment.

Evidence use: programme teams draw on a range of evidence to inform design, review and enhancement activity. This includes current educational research and scholarship, relevant disciplinary and professional standards, external reference points, and quantitative and qualitative data on student engagement, performance and outcomes. Evidence is used critically and reflectively to support informed decision making and ongoing improvement.

Reflective practice: there is a culture of critical self evaluation and enhancement in learning, teaching and assessment design. Staff and programme teams regularly reflect on the effectiveness of pedagogic approaches and assessment practices, individually and collectively, and use reflection to identify areas for development and innovation over time.

Student outcomes: the impact of scholarship on student learning, progression and attainment is evaluated and understood. Providers use appropriate measures and indicators to consider how scholarly enhancements influence the student experience and outcomes and use this evaluation to inform future curriculum development and pedagogic practice.



What characterises effective practice?

A provider demonstrating effective practice would:

- **design and/or deliver high-quality programmes**, reviewing programmes regularly to maintain and ensure standards, and drive improvement and enhancement in curriculum design
- typically have a **policy for programme review** which sets out this regularity, setting out, for example, programme lifetime and mid-term reviews
- **include external reference points** (for example, Subject Benchmark Statements, PSRB input, sector research) in programme development and review
- **provide assessment optionality**, where appropriate and sustainable, to support accessibility, inclusion and student motivation while ensuring that learning outcomes are met – see the [QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project on optionality in assessment](#)
- **create inclusive and engaging learning environments** that support student success, promote accessibility, value diverse perspectives, and enable students to develop the subject-specific and transferable skills needed for employment, self-employment and further study - see [Principle 10 - Supporting students to achieve their potential](#)
- **continually evaluate the effectiveness of learning and teaching** in the context of student needs, using a variety of evidence to assess student achievement and outcomes throughout their educational experience and respond accordingly
- **include a number of pathways to a specialist outcome**, so students can identify and implement a clear 'path' through their programme and can appreciate how prior learning acts as the foundation for current and future learning
- **ensure that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards both at and beyond the threshold level** that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers, consistent with the relevant national qualification frameworks' descriptors
- **ensure assessments measure the extent to which students achieve the learning outcomes** both at and beyond the threshold level, via external examining and the use of external input and/or reference points in programme design and assessment frameworks
- **embed scholarly approaches** across curriculum and assessment design, aligned with national frameworks and standards
- **offer structured continuing professional development (CPD)** and recognition for pedagogic and subject-specific scholarship and research
- **facilitate opportunities for student co-creation** on research-informed learning design and scholarship
- **routinely evaluate and reflect** on the effectiveness of assessment in promoting learning and academic rigour (such as assessment for learning and assessment of learning that meets threshold standards and allows students to demonstrate knowledge, skills and attributes that exceed those thresholds).

How scholarship and research-informed practice may be demonstrated in different provider contexts

Scholarship and research-informed teaching may be expressed differently across provider contexts. The illustrative examples below are intended to help providers reflect on how the Key Practice might be demonstrated in different settings.

Large universities may have access to institutional research centres, for example formal departments that are specifically set up to conduct, support and coordinate research. Integration of research and teaching can be supported through scholarship frameworks, workload models, and peer-review of teaching. Larger providers may have formalised systems for recording student achievement (beyond grades and progression decisions) which enable students and staff to embed reflective practice into personal tutor meetings and record them formally.

Small or specialist providers might focus on applied practice and professional scholarship in creative, vocational or industry-linked settings. Clear articulation of how practice-based learning is informed by sector research is important. Small providers will likely have a good knowledge of their students' achievements and backgrounds and will be able to retain a personal knowledge of each student and their development beyond formal progression decisions.

Further education (FE) colleges may prioritise practice-based pedagogic scholarship, including research into learning technology, widening participation and transitions. Research here may focus on improving teaching quality and learner outcomes, rather than producing original disciplinary research. Support for staff, who may draw more from industry or professions rather than academia, to engage with scholarship is critical. As with small providers, FE colleges are likely to have a good knowledge of their students' development and progression beyond that which is recorded formally.

Collaborative partnerships agree shared expectations for scholarly practice across partners, including staff qualifications, assessment practices, and moderation processes. Cross-cultural sensitivity (awareness that partners' staff may come from different teaching traditions, professional identities, institutional structures, and cultural or regulatory contexts, and ensuring expectations for scholarship, assessment and quality are negotiated, translated and respected rather than assumed) and professional equivalence are important.



Reflective questions

1. To what extent do our learning and teaching activities align with knowledge and skills-based outcomes and the activities that assess them?
2. How effective is our approach to assessment in measuring the programme learning outcomes, and meeting nationally agreed sector reference points?
3. How do we know that students can see a clear path for progression through their programme?
4. To what extent do our teaching and learning practices enable students to reflect on and reinforce prior learning?
5. To what extent can students point to specific areas to demonstrate their achievements in knowledge and skills development?
6. How do we know that training on reflective practice provided for students and staff is effective?
7. To what extent do our teaching and assessment practices draw on current pedagogical and disciplinary scholarship, and how is this use of evidence recorded or evaluated?
8. How do we support staff to engage with scholarship that enhances inclusive, innovative and evidence-informed approaches to curriculum design and assessment?
9. How effectively are we supporting diverse student needs, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, through evidence-informed teaching and assessment practices?
10. What proportion of our student engagement activities directly influence teaching and learning, as opposed to broader governance?
11. How are we designing assessments to reduce the stakes for the assessment which may influence students to engage in misconduct activity (for example, avoiding one assessment worth 70%+ of the module's marks)?
12. In what ways are students meaningfully contributing to the enhancement of learning and teaching through ongoing dialogue and involvement in curriculum development and co-creation of assessments?
13. Are our learning and teaching environments, and the systems supporting them, actively removing barriers or unintentionally reinforcing them (for example, accessibility, digital access, assessment design, confidence, systemic complexity)? How can they be improved?

Scenarios

Scenario 1: Scholarship-informed teaching and assessment

Context

As part of ongoing enhancement work, a university looks at ways to further embed scholarship into teaching and assessment across all programmes. Academic staff are encouraged to undertake action research and use published pedagogic literature to inform their assessment design.

A programme leader redesigns an assessment task using findings from a sector research project on authentic assessment. They also attend CPD workshops and engage in peer dialogue to reflect on and refine their approach. The updated assessment is piloted and its impact on student performance and engagement is evaluated through a mixed-method study, using surveys and focus groups, feeding back into further programme improvements.

Considerations

- How is the impact of scholarship-informed practice on student outcomes being measured?
- Are staff supported with time and recognition to engage in scholarly activities related to teaching?
- What opportunities are there to share findings across and beyond the university?

Scenario 2: Student engagement activities

Context

A provider has co-created a student partnership scheme where students collaborate on learning enhancement projects with staff.

A group of students works with academic leads to redesign feedback on assessment/feedforward processes, drawing on feedback from previous cohorts. These students are involved in the review meetings and present proposed changes to faculty committees. Although they are not in roles with decision-making authority, they act as co-creators, bridging feedback and institutional action.

Considerations

- How do formal student roles support genuine influence over learning and teaching practices?
- Is there a clear route for students to see how their input leads to tangible change?
- Are students clear on which skills they have developed as a result of the project?
- How do you select students, and ensure that you have representation from across your student body rather than just from those who are 'active' in engagement initiatives?
- Do students have a formal record of their contribution to the project?



**Key Practice b -
Information for
students on learning
outcomes, feedback/
feedforward**

Key Practice b

Information for students on learning outcomes, feedback/feedforward

Students are given clear information about the intended modular and/or programme learning outcomes and the purpose of assessment and are enabled to use feedback/feedforward to support further learning.

Making intended learning outcomes (ILOs) visible and accessible

While significant development and resource have been attributed to the design of programme and module-level ILOs, attention should also be given to the subsequent dissemination, communication or engagement of these important learning outcomes. To ensure students have a fair opportunity to achieve the programme's aims, students need to be aware of what they will learn, how they will learn, and how they will be assessed. All of these elements need to be connected to create a learning environment where students understand what is expected of them. As a starting point, this can be achieved by having a consistent approach in communicating this information, whether using module and programme handbooks, the virtual learning environment (VLE) or any other accessible institutionally supported platform or mechanism.

Additionally, relationships between programme and module-level ILOs are made explicit. Programmes are often designed using programme-level ILOs to inform those at module level. From a student perspective, ILOs may be viewed as building blocks that contribute to the overall programme outcomes. Making the connection between programme and module-level ILOs visible and accessible enables students to understand how individual modules support achievement of programme-level ILOs, thereby supporting learning, assessment completion and subsequent reflection.



Where modules are studied independently rather than as part of a wider programme, module-level ILOs take on this role, helping students understand the knowledge, skills and attributes they are expected to develop and demonstrate. This requires careful consideration, as programme and module-level ILOs may need to be communicated differently - Table 1 gives some examples.

Table 1: Key considerations when communicating ILOs to students

Consideration	Practice example
Clarity	The assessment brief includes a section that maps to the module learning outcomes and breaks down what it means in relation to that piece of assessment. The ILOs are expressed in accessible language.
Location	Learning outcomes and other assessment information are in the same location on each module.
Access	Learning outcomes are easily accessible and clearly signposted.
Reflection	Learning outcomes are added to formative peer and self-assessment activities on the module.
Reinforcement	Learning outcomes are introduced at the start of the module, and repeated at key points throughout, such as assessment briefing sessions, formative assessment and feedback points. Learning outcomes can also be tied to threshold concepts covered in the module.



Communicating the purpose of assessment

Students can clearly understand what is being assessed, how it is being assessed, why it is being assessed, and how it contributes to their academic and professional development.

Student understanding can be enhanced by communicating all relevant information about assessments in an accessible and understandable manner and at key points throughout the student journey. Information around assessment is introduced at the start of a module and then reiterated closer to the assessment deadline. This information includes clear reference to the programme and module learning outcomes, the skills and graduate attributes the assessment is designed to develop, and the purpose for the piece of assessment.

Communication around assessment must be mindful of diverse learner needs. This includes using accessible and understandable language, free of jargon and offering multiple opportunities for clarification. Including a glossary either at programme or institution level (or even module level where distinct language is used) can address challenges around understanding common terms that may arise, provided it is easily available and known about by students.

Assessment communications take multiple modes, including (but not limited to) using voice overs, visuals and written communication. When using multiple modes or instructors it is essential to regularly review all assessment information to ensure consistency of messaging and approach.

Table 2: Examples of different modes of communication that can be used to inform students

Mode	Mode	Practice example
Written	Assessment brief section	Clear, permanent and accessible
Verbal	In-class explanation	Encourages real-time engagement
Visual	Infographic linking ILO and purpose	Simplifies complexity, supports diverse needs
Digital	Screencast or video explanation	Asynchronous access, repeatable
Dialogic	Peer/self-assessment activities	Builds shared understanding and agency

Assessment briefs are one of the most common ways assessment information is communicated with students. Using assessment brief templates on an entire programme enhances consistency of information, which in turn enhances student understanding and satisfaction, upholds quality and fairness in assessment, and promotes inclusivity in assessment practices.

When discussing assessments with students, staff adopt a dialogic approach. This means not only stating the purpose of assessment but actively engaging students in conversations about how the assessment fits within the context of their programme of study, what knowledge and skills are being assessed and why this is relevant for their subject area/discipline. These conversations should be embedded within teaching time, but also revisited before, during and after assessments as part of an ongoing, dialogic process rather than a one off explanation.

By having open and honest discussions about assessment, staff can build assessment literacy in their students and be able to proactively address any misunderstanding or hidden curriculum.

Key considerations when designing feedback and feedforward

Timely

To foster a learning culture in which feedback and feedforward are integral to the learning process, providers ensure feedback and feedforward take place at strategically planned points across modules and programmes, avoiding assessment feedback bunching. Programme teams map out where and how feedback will be delivered, ensuring it is provided after formative assessments and before subsequent summative submissions. Each point is aligned with the relevant learning outcome to demonstrate relevance to students.

Multiple touchpoints, especially for larger modules carrying more credits, are beneficial. This can take the form of an initial session to outline links to assessment criteria, around formative assignments, and when summative assignments are formally 'set'.

Transparent

Feedback/feedforward opportunities are set out in programme/module documentation, which clearly outline the types of feedback/feedforward students can expect, when and how it will be delivered, and the platforms or modes of communication that will be used. These documents also set out student responsibilities in engaging with feedback/feedforward, and include detailed assessment guidelines, standards and criteria well in advance of assessment submission.

Providers typically have a common feedback return time policy. This timing maximises its relevance and impact on student progression and performance.

Constructive and developmental

Feedback/feedforward is constructive, aligned and level appropriate. Feedback goes beyond general comments to provide specific, actionable guidance. It highlights both strengths and what needs to be improved, how improvements can be made, and the extent to which the current work meets assessment standards. Using annotated examples or models can help clarify expectations and support student development.

Dialogic and engaging

Feedback is part of a two-way, reflective dialogue. Providers create opportunities for students to engage actively with feedback, ask questions, seek clarification, and reflect on how to apply it in future work. This promotes feedback literacy and deeper learning. This can include peer review, formative assessments, draft submissions, feedback workshops or one-to-one tutorials/seminars. Setting out when students can reach out to staff (such as office hours where applicable) for further help is also useful.

Supportive and intervention-focused

Providers use feedback/feedforward and formative assessment opportunities to identify students who may be struggling, not meeting expected outcomes, deadlines or opportunities for engagement. This identification is followed up with clear referral pathways to appropriate and relevant support services to offer timely and targeted interventions.

Reflective and enhancement-led

Providers establish ongoing mechanisms to reflect on current feedback and feedforward approaches at both institutional and programme levels. Providers benchmark against sector practice, support academic staff in reviewing their own methods, and promote engagement in activities such as moderation, peer observation, and training on marking and feedback.

Providers implement monitoring and quality assurance measures by appointing internal and external reviewers or examiners with a remit to evaluate the quality of feedback and feedforward across programmes. Findings are used to implement clear, actionable steps for improvement. These processes are embedded into quality assurance cycles and contribute to institution-wide enhancement strategies.

Accessible and in varied formats

Feedback and feedforward are delivered in a range of accessible formats (for example written, audio, video or in person), enabling students to engage with and understand feedback in ways that support diverse learning needs.

Where written feedback is used, providers may adopt structured templates to support consistency, alignment with assessment criteria and clarity for students. All written feedback is legible, clearly presented and development-focused.



Reflective questions

Assessment design

1. How do we communicate programme and module-level ILOs to students, and how do we know they understand them?
2. How do we help students understand the purpose of assessment and its role in supporting learning and progression?
3. To what extent are assessment tasks, criteria and learning outcomes constructively aligned?
4. At what points in the student journey do we articulate the purpose of assessment to students?
5. What informs assessment design choices (including assessment format, number of assessment components per module and weighting of these components)?
6. How clearly does the assessment brief (or equivalent) articulate the knowledge and skills that the assessment is intended to assess? Could this be improved?
7. How are our staff engaging with subject-specific pedagogic literature or CPD relating to assessment design?

Feedback

8. How do we ensure that feedback to students is timely, constructive and developmental?
9. How effectively are feedback and feedforward opportunities embedded within both formative and summative assessments to support student progression over time?
10. To what extent do we support academic staff to design and deliver feedback and feedforward in ways that encourage student engagement and use?
11. How do we make sure that students are clearly informed about the types of feedback, and when and through which channels they will receive it for all modules they are studying across a programme?
12. What opportunities exist for students to actively engage with and reflect on feedback?
13. How do we ensure that feedback practices are inclusive and accessible to all students, including those with different learning needs or for whom English is an additional language?
14. How do we ensure that students are making use of innovative feedback methods (such as digital tools, peer assessment) where appropriate?
15. How do programme teams evaluate the effectiveness of their assessment and feedback approaches?

Scenarios

Scenario 1: Inconsistent feedback and unclear assessment expectations

Context

Two students enrolled on the same module receive notably different forms of feedback on a recent written assignment. One student's feedback is detailed and developmental, highlighting strengths, specific areas for improvement, and clear references to the marking criteria. The other student's feedback, however, is brief and general, consisting of a few summary comments without direct linkage to the assessment criteria or guidance on how to improve.

Feeling that their work has been unfairly marked, the second student approaches the module leader for clarification. The module leader refers the student back to the published marking criteria, noting that all assessments are judged against the same standards. However, upon reviewing the marking criteria, the student finds the descriptors vague and difficult to interpret, with limited indication of how specific performance levels correspond to expectations for the task. The student explains that these criteria were not explicitly discussed or unpacked during teaching sessions, leaving them uncertain about how to meet them in practice.

The module leader responds that the student's submission failed to meet both the module and the overarching programme learning outcomes. The student expresses frustration, explaining that they were unaware of the need to engage with the programme learning outcomes, as these were not clearly communicated or linked to assessment tasks within the module. Feeling unsupported and unclear about the basis of their grade, the student subsequently submits an academic appeal on the grounds of inconsistent feedback and insufficient transparency regarding assessment expectations.

Considerations

- How does your department or institution promote consistency and fairness in the delivery of feedback across different cohorts?
- At what points within the programme or module do students have opportunities to engage with the marking criteria and rubric? Do these opportunities allow sufficient space for clarification, and is the marking guidance presented in an accessible and transparent way?
- In what ways are students explicitly informed and signposted to understand how assessments align with the module and programme learning outcomes? Do students have the opportunity to discuss feedback with the marker directly?

Scenario 2: Misalignment between assessment brief, marking criteria and learning outcomes

Context

During the mid-point of a module, a student raises a concern regarding the clarity and alignment of the assessment brief. The student reports that the brief appears vague, with limited guidance on expectations or the scope of the required submission. The student also notes that the marking criteria do not appear to correspond directly with the stated assessment task. For example, while the assessment requires a reflective case study, the marking criteria primarily focuses on theoretical analysis and referencing conventions, with little reference to reflection or applied learning.

Seeking to understand how the assessment contributes to their overall programme outcomes, the student refers to the module handbook but struggles to identify a clear mapping between the assessment and the published learning outcomes. The student then attempts to locate the programme specification for further context but is unable to find an accessible or up-to-date version on the institutional virtual learning environment.

This leads to confusion regarding what is being assessed, how the assessment will be marked, and how the task contributes to the intended knowledge and skills development within the broader programme. The lack of coherence between the module narrative, assessment brief and learning outcomes raises questions about transparency, constructive alignment and accessibility of programme information.

Considerations

- How are assessment briefs and marking criteria clearly communicated to students? Is there a consistent approach across different levels of the university?
- Is the alignment between assessment tasks, learning outcomes, and programme aim clear to both staff and students?
- Where are programme and module specifications, as well as any related mapping documents, held and are they accessible to students?
- What mechanisms are in place for students to raise and resolve concerns about assessment clarity and alignment?
- What mechanisms are in place for internal or external staff peer review of assessments before they are issued to students?
- How do you know that these two mechanisms are being followed and are effective?



Key Practice c - Providers support suitably qualified staff to deliver teaching and research supervision

Key Practice c

Providers support suitably qualified staff to deliver teaching and research supervision

Staff involved in facilitating learning and supervising research are appropriately qualified and supported to enhance their teaching and supervisory practice. Research degrees are delivered in supportive environments that are conducive to learning and research.

Effective teaching and supervisory practice is undertaken by:

- individuals or teams appropriately qualified in learning, teaching and/or supervisory practice, who actively engage in ongoing, evidence-informed development to enhance their work and support critical reflection on practice
- individuals or teams with expertise in disciplinary, interdisciplinary and/or professional field(s), and research experience appropriate to the level of student learning.

Effective learning is supported by staff who communicate a sound understanding and up-to-date knowledge of their subject and/or professional practice, and who utilise current, evidence-informed pedagogical practice to engage students in active learning. Such staff demonstrate effective and inclusive support for learning by appropriately adapting their approach and the complexity of the material being taught in line with the level of the programme and needs of their students.



Continuous professional development and review

Staff at all stages of their career are offered relevant development opportunities to facilitate career-wide enhancement of teaching and supervisory practice (such opportunities may include mentoring of others, development of leadership skills or engagement with relevant national and international networks). Ongoing development of practice supports staff to deliver effective and inclusive teaching and/or supervision in response to the changing demands placed on higher education.

Providers have robust, proportionate policies and processes to recruit staff with appropriate subject, professional, practice and/or vocational experience and qualifications to support learning at the relevant level. Providers recognise that high-quality learning and assessment may be delivered by staff with differing professional profiles, including those whose primary expertise lies in industry or professional practice.

Appointment and deployment decisions therefore balance:

- depth and currency of subject or professional expertise, and
- the staff member's current capability to support teaching, learning and assessment at the relevant FHEQ/SCQF level.

Staff new to teaching, supervision and/or supporting student learning are provided with timely, appropriate and achievable induction and development, which may include mentoring, peer support, observed teaching, supported assessment practice and structured guidance on academic standards (including FHEQ/SCQF level expectations and assessment requirements).

Where staff are unable to engage immediately in formal teaching qualifications or accredited CPD, providers ensure that alternative mechanisms are in place to support and monitor teaching quality, such as team-teaching, moderated assessment, or staged engagement with pedagogic development once contractual or professional pressures allow.

Providers are able to evidence how all staff who teach and assess are supported to understand and apply appropriate teaching, learning and assessment principles, and how any identified development needs are addressed in a proportionate and risk-based manner over time.

Once appointed, and throughout their careers, staff continue to engage with internal (and, where appropriate, external) CPD to develop and extend their teaching capabilities and reflect critically on their teaching practice. The [Professional Standards Framework](#) (Advance HE, 2023) provides a reference point for initial and ongoing CPD by helping providers and individuals to recognise, develop and reward effective and inclusive teaching and support for learning. The [Vitae Researcher Development Framework](#) provides an additional resource for staff or universities seeking to develop supervisory practice.

Regular continuing development review processes are used to support all staff (regardless of experience or career stage) to enhance their teaching and/or supervisory practice. Impactful review processes are likely to draw on evidence of effectiveness from other sources (for example, teaching observations and student feedback) to identify both current strengths and areas for development. Staff leading reviews have sufficient time to dedicate to the process and are offered support and guidance for making the process as effective as possible. It is important for all staff involved in the development review process to recognise that, even where current practice is considered to be effective, ongoing development is normally required to respond to the changing context and demands placed on higher education and/or to support career progression of individual staff.

Scholarship, reflection and support for teaching practice

Staff draw on scholarship and research (and on professional or industry experience where relevant) to directly inform and enhance their teaching. This may include conventional research (discovery of new knowledge), innovative application or integration and synthesis of existing knowledge (for example, in professional practice), or the study of learning and teaching processes and practices (pedagogic development). All staff who support learning can articulate how and why their pedagogic approaches are effective in their contexts, and be supported to use evidence to enhance their practice (this may be via processes such as teaching observations, mentoring, engagement with institutional quality assurance and enhancement processes). Staff are supported to take a scholarly approach to teaching by engaging in evidence-based interventions through the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL).

Staff are supported (through processes such as teaching observations or development reviews) to reflect on their development needs specifically in relation to their teaching or supervisory practice. Staff development activities are planned strategically by providers with sufficient resources being allocated to cover the needs of both research, and learning and teaching development, including protected time factored into staff workload allocation. Providers have processes in place to assure themselves of the effectiveness of their approaches to staff development and have procedures to identify teachers or supervisors in need of additional support (particularly those new to supporting learning or research), providing them with opportunities, assistance and mentoring to enable the improvement of their skills and competency to an agreed level.

Providers ensure that part-time and associate tutors, including graduate teaching assistants and visiting lecturers, are supported through proportionate oversight and structured support mechanisms, such as mentoring relationships, designated academic leads, team teaching arrangements or moderated assessment practices. These arrangements enable staff to engage meaningfully in development activities and contribute to consistent, high quality teaching, supervision and assessment, within the practical constraints of their roles.

Systematically disseminating good practice

Providers have explicit mechanisms for disseminating good teaching, learning and supervisory practice, through, for example, conferences, networks, communities of practice and/or teaching observation schemes. Providers also consider ways that the impact of staff development can be made evident to local leaders (Heads of School/ Faculty or equivalent) to ensure that pedagogic and supervisory development is valued and supported by those who work most closely with staff at the forefront of supporting learning. Identification of impact relies on effective evaluation mechanisms that capture the range of ways (relevant to a particular provider) that staff development can support the enhancement of teaching and supervisory practice.

Supportive environments for research degrees

Providers establish a sustainable infrastructure and active research culture that supports postgraduate researchers, early career academics and established scholars in developing their academic identities while fostering their research activities, professional growth and personal development. Providers can consider the following when developing supportive research environments.

Collaboration and partnership in supportive research environments

Providers with supportive research environments promote a culture of partnership and collaboration between research-intensive and/or practice-led providers. They enable the sharing of best practices, host joint events, offer student placements and tailored training and development opportunities for both research staff and students. These partnerships also facilitate access to shared resources, academic expertise, project funding and opportunities for collaborative research and innovation. They can also develop industry connections, raising awareness of a provider and their unique skillset and knowledge.

Fostering researcher belonging and community

Supportive research environments foster a sense of belonging for both research staff and students, enabling them to engage in networks, conferences, seminars and other forms of dialogue. These spaces for sharing experiences, resources and exchanging insights are essential for driving continuous improvement.

The principles reflected in the [REF Environment criteria](#), particularly those relating to people, research culture and sustainability, provide a useful framework for considering how research environments support the development and well-being of researchers. Providers may wish to consider how their approaches to peer support, researcher development, collegiality and inclusion contribute to a positive and sustainable research culture for postgraduate and early career researchers.

Supporting researcher progression, funding and career stability

Supportive research cultures and environments attract and retain researchers by enhancing productivity through assistance with grant applications, journal publishing and the development of internal research opportunities. They also offer flexible funding arrangements such as extended grant periods and longer-term contracts to support sustained research careers, including targeted schemes for returners and those from underrepresented backgrounds.

Supportive research cultures and environments invest in researchers with having stable career pathways and attractive opportunities beyond completion of research degrees and fixed-term contracts. They offer hours for career development and tailored career guidance to enable career mobility across sectors both within and beyond academia, including through industry collaborations.

Promoting inclusive leadership and effective research management

Supportive research cultures invest in both supervisors and researchers to adopt and promote inclusive leadership and effective management with clear lines of accountability aimed at fostering collegiate, respectful and inclusive research environments.

Ensuring transparent processes and fair progression for researchers

Supportive research cultures and environments ensure transparent application and assessment processes for both research students and staff. Clear guidance is provided on research degree assessments, with well-defined and consistently applied progression monitoring. Promotion criteria recognise a broad spectrum of research activities and outputs, including contributions such as peer review.

Clear frameworks, policies and guidance for research degrees

Explicit academic frameworks and regulations, policies, guidance and codes of practice for research degrees are made available to prospective and current research students and staff. The diverse needs of research students, including distant learners with personal and professional commitments, are considered throughout the provision and signposting of this information.

Creating an enabling and ethical research environment

The research environment and infrastructure are enabling, instructional and adaptable. The provider promotes creativity, criticality and independence of thought, while ensuring adequate support and guidance is in place on research integrity, ethics and avoidance of academic misconduct.



Reflective questions

Staff support and qualifications

1. How do we ensure that staff who support learning and/or supervise students are trained and supported to develop in their roles, regardless of their seniority or amount of experience?
2. How effectively do our development review processes (such as appraisals or professional development reviews) support staff to continually enhance their teaching and/or supervisory practice at our institution?
3. How do we recruit staff with the relevant experience and qualifications to teaching or supervisory roles? And how are students matched with them?
4. How do we ensure that well-being risks commonly experienced by research students and staff (such as loneliness, pressure, imposter syndrome and burnout) are recognised and addressed with clear processes and procedures?
5. How do we ensure that staff and students are provided with workspaces, facilities and resources, including funding, opportunities to network, train and develop their skills and undertake research?
6. How do we ensure that staff have equal access to relevant/appropriate development opportunities across campuses, with collaborative institutions and disciplines, to make sure that research support is equitable for all students?
7. How do we ensure that researchers are offered sufficient training to develop transferable skills, academic publishing, teaching and public engagement, beyond academic fields for cross-sector work?
8. To what extent do we consider or adopt a range of policy frameworks such as QAA's Characteristics Statements for Second Cycle ([Master's Degrees](#)) and Third Cycle ([Doctoral Degrees](#)) qualifications, Advance HE's [Professional Standards Framework \(PSF\) 2023](#), UKCGE's [Good Supervisory Practice Framework](#), and expectations of funders such as UKRI, ESRC and Wellcome Trust?
9. How and where are the roles and responsibilities of research students and supervisors made clear and accessible?

Research environments

10. Reflecting the [REF Environment criteria](#), particularly those relating to people, research culture and sustainability, in what ways do our research environments intentionally cultivate and sustain meaningful peer support networks for postgraduate and early career researchers? How do these networks contribute to their sense of belonging, confidence and professional development?
11. How do we support staff to make effective use of their qualifications and previous experience to support student learning through teaching or supervisory practices?
12. How do we ensure that learning and research environments are sufficiently inclusive of a diverse range of groups (such as first-in-family to enter higher education, women in STEM, international students, disabled students)?
13. How do we encourage researchers to engage in research impact and diverse knowledge exchange activities?
14. How do we encourage a vibrant, connected research culture through seminars, networking, peer learning and conferences?

Scenarios

Scenario 1: A provider does not have a consistent approach to development opportunities

Context

During a faculty meeting, there is some discussion about differences in the development opportunities staff receive and engage with. Some lecturers have a teaching qualification (such as the PGCert in HE) and have attained Advance HE Fellowship, while others bring valuable workplace experience, professional qualifications, and subject expertise gained from practice but hold no teaching qualification or Advance HE recognition. It also emerges that a number of experienced researchers are supervising PhD students for the first time but have not undertaken any formal supervisory training. Several staff members raise concerns that workloads make it difficult to attend development workshops. Some even question whether mandatory training adds value given their years of teaching experience. Recent feedback from students has been mixed, with some reporting excellent supervision and teaching, while others feel that support is inconsistent across the provider.

Considerations

- What does it mean to be 'appropriately qualified' in your institution? What is (most) valued in your context - teaching qualifications, subject expertise, practical experience, research experience, professional accreditation, or a combination?
- How can the department, and institution as a whole, balance respect for staff expertise with the need for consistent standards in teaching and supervision?
- What kinds of support (for example, mentoring, CPD workshops, peer observation, workload allocation) would help staff enhance their teaching and supervisory practice? Are different types of support more or less effective for staff at different career stages?
- To what extent do the priorities of leaders at the local level (department, school, faculty) impact on whether pedagogic and supervisory development opportunities are valued by staff and taken up?
- What are the pros and cons of making professional development for teaching and supervision mandatory, optional or tailored based on staff experience or career stage?
- How can the department and the institution monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of staff development?
- To what extent can this evaluation be used to frame the rationale for decisions about professional development provision around teaching and research supervision?

Scenario 2: A provider who is implementing changes to create a more supportive research environment for its students

Context

Results from a recent postgraduate research experience survey highlighted mixed experiences across departments at a large university. Many students report excellent access to facilities, regular supervision and a vibrant research culture with seminars, conferences, and peer networks. However, others feel isolated, highlighting inconsistent supervisor contact, and limited opportunities to connect with peers and other researchers, or to network with potential employers. Of particular concern are the experiences of some of the university's international students, who highlight challenges with integration, access to tailored support and difficulties navigating institutional processes.

To address the uneven postgraduate research experience, the university seeks to develop and adopt a structured, institution-wide framework that guarantees a consistent baseline of support while allowing departments flexibility to build on their strengths. This includes establishing minimum expectations for supervision frequency, creating cross-departmental research communities, and developing a central programme of seminars, writing groups and career development workshops accessible to all postgraduate researchers. To reduce isolation and to increase preparedness for employment after completing studies/research projects, the university introduces a peer mentoring scheme linking new and continuing researchers, alongside regular interdisciplinary networking events that connect students with staff, peers and employers.

Strengthening tailored provision for international students - such as dedicated induction pathways, cultural and academic transition support, and clearer guidance on navigating institutional processes - is also introduced to ensure greater equity of experience.

Considerations

- What does a 'supportive environment' for research students and research staff look like in your context? How do you know it is properly supportive?
- What role do supervisors, peer communities, and institutional services play in fostering a positive research culture at your institution? Are there any opportunities to enhance any of these aspects?
- How could you better respond to the needs of specific groups (for example, international students, part-time students, distance learners, commuter students)?
- Supervisors raise concerns about resource constraints (such as limited funding for conferences, or uneven access to research software/tools). How can the university ensure equity of access to resources and opportunities across different departments and disciplines?
- To what extent would centralised provision (for example, researcher training programmes, shared postgraduate research (PGR) spaces, cross-disciplinary events) improve consistency of PGR experience and equity of support?
- Which aspects of PGR student provision do you think should be provided locally within departments and disciplines?
- What support does your institution provide to research students around employability, both in academia and in other areas of work?



Key Practice d - The student's role in their learning

Key Practice d

The student's role in their learning

Students are enabled and encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and to take an active role in shaping and enhancing the learning process. Providers offer ongoing advice and guidance about academic integrity to ensure that students and staff understand what is expected of them.

The guidance here is split into three sections, with issues for providers to consider and some suggestions for what good practice may look like appearing under each:

- **designing and delivering curricula and assessments** that promote and equip students for active, self-directed and reflective learning
- **creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment** that provides students with the necessary resources and encouragement to manage their learning progression
- **establishing and maintaining accessible mechanisms for students to provide feedback** and actively engage in the **co-creation** and enhancement of their educational experience.

The Key Practice also asks providers to offer ongoing advice and guidance about academic integrity, so that students and staff understand what is expected of them. This is covered in full under Key Practice h, to avoid repeating that guidance here.



Designing and delivering curricula and assessments

Providers develop and implement learning activities and assessment methods (for example, project-based learning, inquiry-based tasks, peer review) that require students to take initiative, manage their own progress, and reflect on their understanding, while also embedding within the curriculum explicit development of skills for independent study, time management and critical thinking. Providers encourage academics to support students to develop agency and ownership of their work, by allowing them to make choices in the topics they work on, to align with their interests, goals and aspirations.

It is made clear to students, academics and others who support student learning where support is provided for the skills described above, whether that is at the module or programme level, or institutionally provided. This support includes consideration of individual student needs, including language and issues related to disability.

Staff capability and confidence

Providers need to consider whether academic and research staff have the pedagogical knowledge and confidence to design and facilitate these active, self-directed learning experiences. They ensure that staff can work effectively in teams, with shared understanding, to design and scaffold these experiences for their students. Appropriate training, resources, peer support and case studies are provided to support implementation of this practice within disciplinary contexts.

Progressive development of learner autonomy

Providers consider the development of active, self-directed and reflective learning within and across the programme of study. The level of challenge is appropriate, and the practice embedded in the curriculum in a programmatic and progressive manner, with student responsibility and self-direction progressively building across levels/years/modes of study. For example, in year 1 tasks might be scaffolded, with more independent projects in later years; additional support might need to be provided for part-time and/or remote learners who need to take more responsibility in their own learning.

Academic skills and learner support

Some academic and study skills support for students such as study skills centres often sit outside academic departments/schools, offering essay writing and language skills support. These may be particularly important in the international student context.

Assessment for active and self-directed learning

Assessment is a vital aspect of implementing this practice. Where assessments drive active learning, rather than just measuring recall, they will support the development of reflective and self-directed learning. Providers ensure there are a range of assessment tasks which require greater student autonomy (for example, open-ended problems, student-chosen topics within parameters, self-assessment components). Programmes and modules include autonomy and self-directed learning, where appropriate.

Supporting diverse learner backgrounds

Providers consider the diverse cohorts of their students, including ensuring that students who may lack prior experience with self-directed learning or come from educational contexts with different pedagogical norms are appropriately supported. This is particularly relevant for diverse student cohorts across UK nations and provider types (for example, college students transitioning to higher education and international students).

Learning resources and infrastructure

Providers consider the learning resources that are required to support independent student inquiry and project work, including digital and physical resources, such as laboratories or specialist studio spaces. They ensure that resources are accessible and available to students.

Creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment

Providers ensure there is systematic and accessible guidance (for example, academic skills support, personal tutoring, digital literacy training) that empowers students to effectively navigate and take responsibility for their own learning journey. Providers support students and staff to understand how each educational activity and feedback contributes to future work across the whole programme. Providers also foster a culture where students feel sufficiently comfortable and confident to ask questions, challenge ideas respectfully, make mistakes as part of the learning process, and engage with diverse perspectives.

Indicators that active, self-directed and reflective learning is being effectively embedded include:

- students actively engaging in problem-solving, critical analysis and collaborative work
- students demonstrating higher-order thinking, initiative and the ability to work independently or in self-managed teams
- students being able to reflect on and adapt their learning strategies in response to feedback
- teaching methods that extend beyond traditional lectures and are used appropriately to support active learning
- clear communication of varied modes of delivery (such as synchronous or asynchronous teaching)
- explicit and embedded development of skills like research, critical thinking, problem-solving and time management, rather than extracurricular workshops.

Supporting students to manage their learning

Academic skills support, personal tutoring and other resources are made accessible to all students (for example, disabled students, part-time students, commuting students and international students), and students are made aware of and encouraged to use these services.

There is a culture where students feel able to ask for help, admit mistakes, and engage critically without fear of undue negative consequence.

Building an inclusive and supportive learning culture

All staff (academic and professional services) are familiar with the support services in the provider that can provide pastoral care. Providers signpost to these services.

Helping students understand their learning journey

Programmes work effectively and provide a coherent educational journey, which is clearly communicated to students. Students understand how the different parts of their programme contribute to their learning and are encouraged to reflect on their feedback and understand its relevance to their future work.

Partnership and dialogue between staff and students

There are regular meetings of staff and students where the programme is discussed. Both in anticipation of these meetings and outside them, staff are regularly provided with accurate information about support services that are available.

Students report feeling supported, safe to experiment, have a sense of agency and clear on academic expectations; staff report confidence in addressing diverse student support needs and receiving appropriate training.



Establishing and maintaining feedback and co-creation mechanisms

Student voice and partnership

Providers regularly use formal and informal channels (such as student-staff committees, programme representatives, structured feedback surveys, and co-design workshops) to listen to student voices, facilitate their active participation in decision-making processes related to curriculum review and pedagogical improvements, and demonstrably integrate their perspectives into the overall learning environment.

Providers ensure there is appropriate training and support in place for student representatives so they can effectively develop understanding of experiences of their peers, and to be able to communicate with the institution effectively. Providers also ensure staff are supported to engage with students in these fora effectively and address student feedback in enhancing assessment and curricular design.

See also [Principle 2 - Engaging students as partners](#) for the broader institutional framework for student partnership.

Balancing student input with academic and regulatory requirements

Providers need to balance student voice against academic expertise, professional/statutory body requirements, and institutional strategy, with clear structures for weighing student input alongside academic rigour and regulatory compliance. Establishing clear structures where student input is weighted appropriately against the needs for academic rigor and regulatory compliance can help to ensure a holistic approach to quality and continuous improvement.

Closing the feedback loop

The true value of student feedback mechanisms lies in their capacity to lead to tangible change, moving beyond a perfunctory 'box-ticking' exercise. Effective providers ensure a robust 'closing the loop' process, where students are explicitly shown how their input has been acted upon, demonstrating that their contributions are valued and directly inform enhancements to their learning experience and environment.

Governance and responsiveness

A provider's governance and quality processes are structured to facilitate the timely implementation of changes that arise from both formal and informal student feedback. Processes are streamlined and efficient, preventing necessary improvements from being delayed by excessive bureaucracy, thus ensuring that the student experience benefits promptly from the feedback provided.

Developing staff capability for partnership working

To ensure genuine engagement, staff are supported and trained to effectively solicit, interpret and act upon student feedback. This includes understanding how to move beyond mere consultation to genuinely involve students in co-design processes, positioning them as partners in the development and delivery of educational offerings and support services.

Supporting and developing student representatives

Providers ensure that student representatives are adequately trained and supported to effectively fulfil their role. This preparation equips them with the necessary skills and institutional knowledge to represent their peers accurately, understand governance structures, and contribute meaningfully to high-level institutional discussions and decision-making.

The Students' Union or association plays a pivotal role in the training and support of student representatives. This function is most impactful when carried out in partnership with the provider, ensuring that training programmes are comprehensive, resource-backed and fundamentally centred on student voices and needs, fostering a mutually respectful and effective representative structure.

Inclusive and representative engagement

Providers ensure that all student demographics are adequately represented within feedback and co-creation processes. This means proactively reaching out to students from diverse backgrounds, including various ethnic backgrounds, socio-economic statuses, disabled and neurodivergent students, international students and part-time learners. Furthermore, mechanisms must be accessible to all, ensuring students on different modes of study (for example, part-time, remote, blended) have a full opportunity to engage and contribute their unique perspective.

Closing the feedback loop

Providers consistently implement tangible changes in curricula, teaching methods, resources or support services that are a direct and appropriate response to co-creation or student feedback. This confirms a closed feedback loop where input reliably leads to visible, positive enhancements in the student experience.

Inclusive participation and representation

Providers achieve strong student engagement rates across all feedback and co-creation activities. This practice goes further by actively analysing and addressing participation gaps across different student cohorts (for example, part-time, international, specific ethnic groups) to guarantee that a diverse variety of student voices are heard and inform institutional improvement.

Creating a culture of trust and openness

Providers actively cultivate an environment where students feel comfortable giving their feedback honestly and have confidence that their input will be valued and acted upon where appropriate and feasible, which is fundamental to obtaining genuine, high-quality input.

Students and staff as partners

The highest standard of effective practice is a shared culture where students and staff view each other as partners in the educational endeavour. This collaborative ethos recognises the shared responsibility for quality and success, moving beyond a transactional relationship to one of mutual co-creation and respect.

Reflective questions

Designing and delivering curricula and assessments

1. How does our curriculum explicitly build student responsibility and self-direction progressively across levels/years/modes of study?
2. To what extent do our assessment tasks encourage student autonomy (for example, open-ended problems, student-chosen topics within parameters, self-assessment components)?
3. How do we identify and support students who may lack prior experience with self-directed learning or come from educational contexts with different pedagogical norms?
4. How do we encourage our students to reflect on their learning needs and seek appropriate resources (for example, academic skills support, personal tutoring and other resources)?

Creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment

5. To what extent do our learning resources (digital, physical, and specialist facilities such as labs or studios) enable and support independent student inquiry and project work, and how do we evaluate their sufficiency, appropriateness and accessibility across different student groups and modes of study?
6. How do we ensure that all staff (academic and professional services) are aware of the support services we have in place that can provide pastoral care and that they should signpost to?
7. How do we actively build a culture where students feel able to ask for help, admit mistakes and engage critically without fear of undue negative consequence?
8. How do we ensure that informal and formal student feedback mechanisms effectively lead to change, and it is clear to students that their input has been acted upon?

Establishing and maintaining feedback and co-creation mechanisms

9. How do we ensure that student involvement in co-design goes beyond consultation and results in demonstrable influence on the design of curriculum, assessment or learning approaches?
10. What training and support do we provide to student representatives to effectively represent their peers and contribute meaningfully to institutional discussions?
11. How do we ensure student representation is reflective of the student body, and how do we reach students from non-traditional backgrounds to gain feedback?
12. How do we enhance the whole programme so that it works effectively and provides a coherent educational journey, which is clearly communicated to students?
13. How do our governance and quality processes move student feedback, both informal and formal, into timely action and measurable enhancement?
14. How can we enhance the role of the student union/association in training student representatives, working in partnership to ensure that student voices and needs are centred?
15. How can we ensure that all students' voices (for example, different ethnic backgrounds, socio-economic statuses, neurodivergent and disabled students, international students, part-time learners) are included in enhancement processes?

Scenario

Students co-creating an institutional approach to GenAI

Context

In a medium sized research-intensive university, students raise concerns about inconsistency in permissibility of use of GenAI across the provider. Existing academic policies (including academic misconduct policy and processes) are complicated and, in practice, unenforceable in misuse of GenAI matters.

The provider decides that it needs to respond more effectively to the challenges of GenAI and begins a process to create an appropriate policy and invites students to work in partnership with staff to design a clearer institutional approach.

They begin by consulting sector bodies, local industry (wider stakeholders) and looking at the policies created by similar providers. They develop a draft policy, overseen by a working group with both staff and student members, using a human-centred design process. They develop realistic and relevant principles that centre ethical use of GenAI, considering how it can support student learning.

Each programme team is asked to identify where in their programme it would be appropriate for students to use GenAI. They are also asked to consider whether amendments to modes of assessment might be required to respond to the challenges of GenAI.

Training for staff and students in GenAI use is developed. Student training includes consideration of how GenAI is authentically used by employers and is developed in partnership with the careers service. Students are educated in the ethical use of GenAI within their programme, with opportunities to experiment and receive feedback about their use of GenAI. A shared understanding of what is ethical and appropriate use within the context of the programme is developed as part of an ongoing conversation about assessment and learning.

Student and staff review software provided within the institution to ensure the level of embedded GenAI is understood. Staff response includes more agile approaches to assessment design, ensuring that assessment is valid and supports learning. The policy and training are reviewed regularly by a student-staff team.

Considerations

- How consistent are your expectations for GenAI use across programmes, and how do you address areas that feel unfair to students?
- How well do your GenAI policies reflect student and staff needs, and how might co design improve their relevance?
- Are your programme teams able to identify appropriate uses of GenAI and assess whether current assessments remain fit for purpose?
- Do your staff and students receive enough training to understand ethical and real world uses of GenAI in their discipline?
- How responsive are your processes for updating GenAI policies, assessments and technologies through student-staff collaboration?



Key Practice e - Transition and progression support

Key Practice e

Transition and progression support

As students move through their learning journey, they are given the opportunity and support to transition effectively between academic levels, further study and employment. Providers enable students to recognise the progression they have made and steps they need to take to achieve their potential.

Providers understand that student transition is complex, continuous and impacted by factors beyond learning and teaching (see [Principle 10 - Supporting students to achieve their potential](#), in particular Key Practice b - Supporting students at key transition points, and [QAA's resources on supporting student transitions](#)). It is a continuous process that occurs throughout the student journey, including entry to higher education, progression between levels of study, movement into placements or work-based learning, return from interruptions to study, progression to postgraduate study, and transition into employment.

Approaches that consider the whole student and draw on the resources of the whole institution are likely to be more effective. Approaches that help students to become resilient, confident, life-long, self-regulating learners support transition and also develop key employability skills and prepare students for life beyond higher education. Providers ensure that design of programme information, online communication, advice platforms and other reference points are delivered in effective ways that reflect the diversity of the student population.



A strategic approach to supporting students

Supporting transition and progression is a whole-provider endeavour that is embedded in strategy. Operationally it is delivered through curriculum design, learning and teaching practice, assessment and student support. Providers take a coordinated approach to ensuring that students understand expectations at different stages of their studies, can recognise their academic and personal development, and are prepared for progression to higher levels of study, further study or employment. Effective approaches draw on the contributions of academic and professional services staff, ensuring that guidance, feedback, personal tutoring, skills development and employability support work together to help students navigate key transition points successfully.

While academic experiences are central to transition and progression, wider services such as well-being, careers, financial and other student support may also contribute to student success and should be appropriately coordinated with learning and teaching activities.



Recognising diverse backgrounds

Providers recognise that contemporary learners enter higher education (HE) from a range of diverse backgrounds, via a number of routes and with various aspirations. Learners may also enter HE following a significant gap in formal education. It is therefore important for providers to understand and proactively support student transition to help learners to achieve their potential. This is especially true during first-year studies but is also relevant in the transition into HE, through HE (including readiness for placement years, returning from intermission, students who have had resits/repeating years) and out of HE.

Figure 2: Interventions to ensure equality of opportunity



How teaching, learning and assessment can support transitions

Providers understand the key transition points within programmes and design curricula, learning activities and assessment to support students as they move through them. This includes progression between academic levels, preparation for placements or work-based learning, return from interruptions to study, progression to further study, and preparation for employment. Students are provided with clear, consistent and accessible information about academic expectations, progression requirements and the knowledge, skills and behaviours they are expected to develop at each stage of their studies.

Providers recognise that transition occurs not just into higher education and between levels of study, but also into and out of placements or work-based learning, return from interruptions to study, progression to postgraduate study, and transition into employment. Teaching, learning and assessment approaches help students navigate these stages by making expectations, development and progression explicit.

Curricula are designed to support progressive development, enabling students to build on prior learning and demonstrate increasing levels of independence, complexity and achievement over time. Learning outcomes, assessment and feedback make progression visible, helping students recognise the development they have made and identify the next steps in their learning. Providers clearly articulate expectations for successful achievement at each level of study and make implicit academic expectations explicit, so that progression is not hindered by [hidden curriculum](#) practices.

Providers make explicit how learning, assessment and co-curricular opportunities contribute to progression beyond the programme, including preparation for postgraduate study, professional practice and employment. Students are supported to recognise and articulate the knowledge, skills and attributes they develop through their studies and how these relate to future opportunities.

Assessment, feedback and reflection

Providers have a clear understanding of the role assessment and feedback play in their institutions as mechanisms that enable students to monitor and understand their own progression, and to prepare for future steps. Students are supported to understand how assessment and feedback helps them to review and enhance their own performance. Providers also support staff to implement mechanisms that deliver effective support for students to understand and use feedback to plan their learning and progression.

Providers use activities and processes (for example, skills audits, pre-arrival questionnaires, diagnostics, feedback, tutor meetings) to help students evaluate their current capabilities, identify areas for development and monitor their progress towards programme learning outcomes. These activities and processes act as a way of making development and progression apparent to students, staff and external stakeholders, including employers. Resources are provided to support students and staff in understanding the outputs and outcomes from such activities.

Assessment, feedback and reflective activities may help to support students to recognise transferable skills, academic achievements and professional capabilities that are relevant to progression between levels of study, applications for further study and entry to employment.

Reflection plays a central role in supporting student transition and progression. Providers encourage students to connect reflective practice with their learning experiences, using structured opportunities to pause, review and make sense of their development. This includes helping students engage meaningfully with feedback from taught sessions and assessments, recognising feedback as a resource for improvement rather than a one-off event.

Recording progress

Students are actively involved in recording and discussing their academic progress with staff, using the most effective medium to engage for each individual. Best practice would integrate a range of the above activities and processes into the curriculum to help to ensure equal access for all learners, and to situate transition and employability support as central to the effective learning and teaching that is of primary importance to students.

Providers have systems in place to identify trends and patterns in transition and progression and enable them to make effective interventions and evaluate activities. Such monitoring and intervention can help to address inequalities that affect particular student groups in relation to effective progression into, through, and out of HE. Student perspectives and feedback are likely to be helpful in shaping inclusive and effective progression initiatives.



Reflective questions

1. How do we currently support students through transitions in their student journey and what mechanisms exist to identify the effectiveness of this provision?
2. What student-facing guidance do we provide to support students to be successful in their studies at all levels and stages of their programme?
3. To what extent do our established practices recognise the diverse backgrounds, entry routes and aspirations of learners?
4. What systems do we have in place to identify trends and patterns in transition and progression?
5. How do we involve students in recording and discussing their academic progress with staff and how is the effectiveness of this monitored?
6. How could we better integrate activities into the curriculum that make progression visible to students?
7. How do our governance and quality processes support learning from both informal and formal student feedback, and how does this learning drive timely and meaningful enhancement?
8. How might we enhance assessment design to make progression between academic levels more explicit and to better prepare students for further study or employment?
9. How might we enhance feedback and feedforward mechanisms to enable students to understand their progression and prepare for future steps, and what support is provided to staff to construct and deliver feedback more effectively for this purpose?
10. How could we involve students more in identifying issues and shaping interventions and initiatives to enhance transition and progression?

Scenario

Disparities in student progression

Context

Senior leaders at a provider have noted increasing disparities in student progression between programmes, particularly at key transition points such as the move from first to second year and the return from placement or interrupted study. Although the provider's documentation emphasises support for transition, in practice students receive inconsistent information about expectations at each academic level. Some programmes provide structured skills diagnostics, early feedback and opportunities for reflection, while others rely on ad hoc support or assume students already understand how to navigate transitions. This inconsistency is most challenging for students entering from non-traditional routes, those returning after time away, and students with additional responsibilities.

Students report that the 'hidden curriculum' - such as unwritten expectations about independent learning, assessment literacy, or where to find support - varies widely across departments. Many say they receive feedback but do not understand how it connects to progression or how to use it to plan their development. Staff acknowledge that roles and responsibilities for supporting transition are unclear, especially between academic and professional services teams. As a result, interventions are not always coordinated and some students fall through gaps at critical moments in their learning journey.

The provider recognises that its current approach does not reflect the needs of its diverse student population, nor does it fully integrate reflection, feedback engagement or progression support into the curriculum. The provider establishes a cross-institutional working group to build a more strategic, coordinated model that strengthens communication, supports structured reflection, clarifies expectations and ensures students can navigate transitions confidently and equitably.

Considerations

- Do you map all key transition points and provide clear, consistent information at each stage? Is this consistent across all programmes, or are there better approaches in some departments?
- How do you make expectations and the 'hidden curriculum' explicit within programmes and levels?
- Do your diagnostics, feedback and tutor meetings drive student reflection and next-step planning?
- How do you support, define, coordinate and train staff with responsibility for transition?
- How do you monitor progression patterns - by student group - and use them to target inclusive interventions?



**Key Practice f - Fair,
reliable and inclusive
assessment design**

Key Practice f

Fair, reliable and inclusive assessment design

Providers design assessments that test appropriate learning outcomes and are fair, reliable, accessible, authentic and inclusive. Where applicable, and sustainable, students are offered different options for undertaking assessments to promote accessibility and inclusion.

Fair assessments give all students an equitable opportunity to succeed by aligning the assessment with module and programme-level learning outcomes.

Reliability ensures that assessments are consistent and objective, with clear criteria and transparent marking and feedback practices.

Accessibility means that all students, regardless of their circumstances or requirements, can effectively engage with the assessment, and have equitable access to relevant support and resources.

Authentic assessments reflect real-world scenarios, encouraging students to apply their knowledge, skills and critical thinking to meaningful contextual tasks, demonstrating learning in a way that is relevant beyond the academic setting.

Inclusivity ensures that tasks are designed to give all students a fair and equal chance to demonstrate their learning, meeting the diverse needs of learners.

In addition, **compassionate assessment** recognises the varied challenges students may face and supports them to demonstrate their learning through flexible, transparent and supportive assessment practices, while maintaining academic standards.



Fair and reliable assessment

Assessment serves multiple purposes:

- **of learning** - measuring achievement and maintaining standards
- **for learning** - guiding improvement through timely, constructive feedback that is explicitly linked to learning outcomes and communicated to students
- **as learning** - engaging students in meaningful, relevant tasks that support personal and academic development.

Assessment ensures that qualifications are awarded only to students who meet clearly defined learning outcomes, which align with national qualification frameworks and are supported by constructive alignment between teaching strategies, assessment methods, and criteria. This alignment ensures that learning environments and activities are purposefully designed to help students achieve the ILOs.

Fairness in assessment depends on equitable access to learning resources; assessment cannot be separated from the broader learning context. Inclusive and accessible design considers the diverse needs of students, including those studying remotely, from varied backgrounds, or with additional learning needs. Using varied teaching and learning approaches alongside diverse assessment strategies supports different learning styles and helps students develop a broad range of skills. For example, uploading all lecture recordings, slides and reading lists to the VLE with transcripts and captions and a glossary of key terms helps to support students with English as an additional language.

Assessment tasks are appropriately weighted, timed and varied to avoid over-assessment (sometimes called 'assessment bunching') and excessive workload for both staff and students. While offering different formats can enhance accessibility, it is important to maintain consistency in the skills and competencies being assessed. Excessive variation can undermine coherence across a programme and limit the effectiveness of feedback.

Assessment policies, regulations, processes and standards expected are explicit, transparent and accessible to all staff and students involved in the assessment process. Marking procedures are consistent, fair and transparent. Assessment criteria are robust enough to ensure parity across different assessors and tasks.

National reference points

There are established national reference points against which assessment practices can, and should, be aligned. In the UK, this includes the level descriptors set out in the [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#). These descriptors articulate the expected knowledge, skills and competencies associated with each higher education level, helping to ensure that degrees meet nationally recognised standards and align consistently with the UK qualification frameworks. The document also provides classification descriptors for bachelor's degrees with honours that support consistent interpretation of academic standards and guide judgements about student performance.

Marking and moderation

Providers ensure assessment judgements are fair, consistent and appropriately calibrated through internal moderation and externality. Policies for marking, moderation and handling borderline grades must be clearly articulated and regularly reviewed. Awards at the same level are comparable in terms of qualification and level descriptors, assessment criteria, Subject Benchmark Statements and, where applicable, PSRB requirements.

External examiners can help confirm that standards are upheld, awards are comparable and processes are applied appropriately. Their commentary can also help providers ensure that standards are interpreted consistently, both within programmes and across the wider sector. Externality is supported by QAA's [External Examining Principles](#).

Even with written criteria and standards in place, and the oversight given by externality, staff may still interpret these inconsistently. This highlights the value of sector wide initiatives, such as [Advance HE's calibration work](#), which enable academic staff from different providers to compare, discuss and align their judgements about performance at specific levels.

Accessible and inclusive assessment

[Inclusive assessment](#) practices ensure that all students, regardless of background, ability or circumstance, have equitable opportunities to demonstrate their learning. Assessment practices recognise the varied circumstances of students, including time pressures, caring responsibilities, access to suitable study spaces and availability of digital resources.

As higher education providers serve increasingly diverse student populations, assessment is designed with intentionality, flexibility and awareness of systemic barriers.

For example, students could be:

- given the option to choose between different modes of assessment
- offered flexible submission deadlines
- provided with resources (datasets, templates, guidance documents) digitally and formatted for screen readers.

Measures to promote inclusivity may include providing assessments in alternative formats, and adopting diverse assessment approaches such as project-based or collaborative tasks.

Where students are offered a choice of assessment format, all options are designed to assess the same intended learning outcomes and are marked using shared criteria and standards. This ensures that academic judgement remains consistent and comparable, while allowing students to demonstrate their learning in ways that best reflect their strengths. The principles of [Universal Design for Learning](#) (UDL) may help in designing accessibility for all.

Staff are supported through professional development to use student data ethically (see [Principle 4 - Using data to inform and evaluate quality](#)) and to gain a thorough understanding of the lived experiences of their learners.

Competence standards and inclusive assessment

In the context of the Equality Act (2010), most assessment is considered a PCP (provision criterion or practice) that describes a way of doing things that an organization applies generally but may disadvantage certain people. Where a PCP puts a disabled student at a substantial disadvantage, the provider has a duty to make reasonable adjustments.

A competence standard as defined by the Equality Act is 'an academic, medical or other standard applied for the purpose of determining whether or not a person has a particular level of competence or ability'. Where a genuine competence standard forms part of a programme specification, the same principle applies to the method of assessment of that standard. In other words, whilst the standard is non-negotiable, the method of assessing whether a student has met that standard is a PCP and subject to reasonable adjustment. The requirement (standard) is the same for all students and cannot change but the way(s) in which that standard is achieved through assessment can.

Legitimate competence standards are an important mechanism for ensuring students meet the requirements of externally accredited awards. Correctly framed, they offer all students the opportunity to demonstrate that they have met the standard required to join a professional register or work in a regulated profession.

An exception to this principle is in the rare instance when a competence standard is intrinsically linked to the mode of assessment. For example, if:

- students must be able to carry out essential safety tasks and make decisions that will avoid harm to themselves and others
- students must be able to communicate essential information
- there are essential time-dependent actions
- there is an essential physical or sensory function.

These very specific competence standards normally only exist in response to a specific requirement of an external regulator.

Where a competence standard exists, providers should be able to explain:

- why a competence standard exists
- how it relates to programme outcomes
- whether it is informed by regulatory requirements
- why particular assessment methods are required (or not required).

Providers should also be able to articulate when a reasonable adjustment cannot be made for a legitimate reason(s) - because, as explained above, a competence standard may sometimes be intrinsically linked to the mode of assessment.

Good admissions practices should limit the occasions on which a student will have difficulty in demonstrating the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in a programme of study. See [Principle 9 – Recruiting, selecting and admitting students](#) for more guidance.

Providers may find it helpful to refer to Chapter Seven (p98) of the EHRC's [Technical Guidance on Further and Higher Education](#) and review the EHRC's [Note of Learning](#) for providers that distilled key issues arising from the County Court judgement in the case of [Abrahart vs University of Bristol](#) and the outcome of the subsequent appeal (and cross-appeal) in the [High Court](#).

Please note: the Equality Act (2010) only applies to England, Scotland and Wales. Providers in Northern Ireland should instead refer to the relevant legislation in that jurisdiction. The advice at [Equality laws in Northern Ireland](#) may be useful.

Authentic assessment: preparing students for real-world challenges

Assessment in higher education responds to the broader societal, professional and workplace context, supporting learner employability and preparing students for life beyond university. Authentic assessment is a key approach in achieving this, emphasising relevance, realism and readiness.

Relevance ensures that tasks are connected to real-world problems, such as business students analysing current market trends or nursing students managing simulated patient cases. Realism requires assessments to mirror practical situations, for example, preparing a policy briefing, conducting a research project or delivering a professional presentation. Readiness focuses on developing skills and knowledge that students can directly apply in their careers, such as critical thinking, decision making, collaboration and the responsible use of digital tools.

Authentic assessments enable students to apply their knowledge and skills in practical, meaningful contexts, fostering deeper engagement, ownership of learning and preparation for future challenges.

Where appropriate, technology is integrated to mirror tools and platforms students will encounter in professional contexts. This includes responsible and critical use of generative AI, digital collaboration tools and industry-standard software. Care is taken to ensure digital inclusion, accounting for variations in access to devices, connectivity and digital literacy.

While authentic assessment supports employability and deeper learning, it is not suitable for all modules and should be applied thoughtfully within the curriculum. Providers should also consider using authentic formats in formative assessments before it is used in summative assessments to prepare students.

Inclusive formats and flexibility

Assessment is designed to be accessible, inclusive and transparent from the outset. Providers use clear instructions, consistent formats and accessible materials to support student understanding and engagement. Drawing on principles such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), assessment may offer different ways for students to demonstrate achievement, including written, verbal and/or non-verbal, visual, practical or multimedia approaches, provided that the intended learning outcomes and academic standards remain consistent.

Where assessment choice or optionality is offered, providers ensure that alternative formats are equivalent in enabling students to demonstrate the same learning outcomes and are assessed using comparable criteria. Clear guidance is available to students and staff on the purpose and requirements of different assessment options.

Proactive inclusive design can reduce the need for individual accommodations, but reasonable adjustments remain available where required. These may include adapted formats, assistive technologies, alternative submission methods or other measures that enable students to participate equitably while maintaining academic standards.

Providers may also involve students in the design and review of assessment through consultation, feedback and co-creation activities. This can enhance assessment literacy, strengthen student engagement and help ensure assessment remains relevant, inclusive and effective.

Compassionate assessment design

A [compassionate assessment](#) lens can strengthen inclusive practice by acknowledging that students may experience a range of personal, academic or wellbeing related challenges during their studies. Embedding compassion into assessment design and delivery can reduce unnecessary barriers and create a more supportive and equitable experience for all learners, while still maintaining academic standards. This approach encourages flexibility where appropriate, clear guidance and expectations, supportive feedback, and reasonable adjustments or alternative arrangements when required, enabling students to demonstrate their learning in fair and meaningful ways.

Assessment for learning and progression

Assessment supports progressive skill development by adopting a balanced approach to formative and summative methods. This approach enables students to build skills incrementally, deepens understanding, and reduces pressure, particularly for those who may be less familiar with academic conventions or assessment expectations. Formative assessments, such as draft submissions, peer reviews or low-stakes quizzes, can provide opportunities for practice and self-reflection, while summative assessments evaluate the consolidated learning outcomes. This is particularly important when new assessments are introduced that encourage students to demonstrate different skills and competencies, ensuring they can engage effectively and build confidence in applying their learning.

Assessment and feedback are conceived as interdependent components of curriculum design. Assessment strategies incorporate planned opportunities for timely, constructive feedback to support student learning and progression. Feedback is clear, actionable and directly aligned with the marking criteria, enabling students to understand their strengths and areas for improvement. Examples include written comments highlighting specific improvements, annotated work with targeted guidance, verbal and/or non-verbal feedback in tutorials, or digital feedback through learning platforms.

Providing feedback promptly allows students to apply insights to subsequent tasks, reinforcing learning and skill progression. In addition, feedback is delivered in ways that reflect the principles of compassionate assessment, recognising the emotional and cognitive demands placed on learners. By attending to the relational and human dimensions of feedback, educators can foster a learning environment in which students feel valued, motivated and able to engage meaningfully with their developmental trajectory.

Strategic and institutional considerations

Inclusive assessment is embedded within programme design rather than applied retrospectively. Providers take a proactive approach to assessment design, aligning tasks with learning outcomes, considering the needs of diverse student groups, and promoting equitable opportunities to demonstrate achievement. See [Principle 7 - Designing, developing, approving and modifying programmes](#) for more information.

Assessment design is reviewed to identify and reduce potential sources of bias or exclusion. This includes considering the language, contexts and assumptions used in assessment tasks to ensure they are accessible and inclusive.

Providers systematically review and enhance assessment policies, regulations and practices using evidence from sources such as student feedback, external examiner reports, grade distributions and differential outcomes data. Findings inform continuous improvement and provide confidence in the validity and effectiveness of assessment.

Effective assessment also depends on institutional support, including appropriate staff development, resources, infrastructure and workload management.

Reflective questions

Reliability and fairness

1. What procedures and policies do we have in place to provide reassurance that assessment methods are fair, and that marking is consistent and transparent?
2. How do we ensure that assessment criteria are applied consistently and align with national frameworks, level descriptors and PSRB requirements, where applicable?
3. How can we ensure fairness across diverse student backgrounds and writing styles, mitigating potential biases in marking?
4. How do we use moderation and calibration to support consistent judgement across markers and formats, ensuring reliability while maintaining a compassionate approach to student achievement?
5. How can students, as partners in assessment design, contribute to enhancing the inclusivity, fairness and relevance of assessments?

Accessibility and inclusivity

6. How do our assessment approaches incorporate flexibility, choice and reasonable adjustments in ways that promote equitable participation while maintaining academic standards and achievement of learning outcomes?
7. How do we identify and address barriers to assessment, including anxiety, confidence, prior experience and access to resources, and how do our assessment and support practices help students to prepare for success?
8. What evidence do we use to evaluate the effectiveness, inclusivity and fairness of assessment, and how do institutional policies, processes and governance arrangements support continuous enhancement?
9. How do we support staff to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to design assessments that are fair, inclusive and accessible?

Competence standards

10. Which of our programme learning outcomes constitute genuine competence standards?
11. How do we distinguish between competence standards and established assessment conventions?
12. Where assessment flexibility is offered, how do we assure ourselves that competence standards are maintained?
13. How do we explain competence standards clearly to students and staff?
14. How do we review competence standards when responding to requests for reasonable adjustments?

Authentic assessment

15. How do we ensure that the assessment approaches allow students to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world or professionally relevant contexts, where applicable?
16. How do assessments provide opportunities for students to draw on their personal experiences and apply their learning in meaningful ways without disadvantaging any group of students with limited exposure to professional contexts?
17. To what extent do our assessments involve real external audiences, clients or stakeholders who have a genuine interest in the outputs? Where this is not yet the case, what steps are being taken to move beyond institution-controlled simulations?
18. How do we involve employers, industry partners, or community organisations in the design of assessment briefs, criteria or judging of student outputs? How is this involvement documented, quality-assured and developed over time?

Assessment design encouraging good academic conduct

19. How do we design assessments that minimise opportunities for outsourcing or unauthorised assistance, while still preserving accessibility and inclusivity for all learners?
20. In what ways do we incorporate authentic, personalised or iterative assessment tasks that make it easier to verify authorship and reduce the risk of misconduct?
21. How do we balance flexibility in assessment formats with safeguards that maintain the integrity and security of the assessment process?

Scenarios

Scenario 1: Changing an in-person exam to a critical analysis assessment

Context

A programme leader has proposed replacing a traditional two-hour, in-person examination with an assessment focused on critically analysing a current, discipline-specific global challenge. The assessment would allow a flexible 48-hour submission window and give students the option to submit either a written report or a recorded presentation pitch. The intention is to prioritise learning and critical thinking over time-pressured memorisation, and to develop real-world professional skills such as problem-solving, digital literacy and employability.

The programme leader recognises that successful implementation depends on engaging students in the design and decision-making process. To achieve this, they have taken the following steps:

- consulting with student representatives to gather perspectives on assessment format, optionality and accessibility needs
- consideration of the available infrastructure and support required to implement the proposed assessment changes, including consultation with professional service staff, academic technologists and academic staff directly involved in the design and delivery of the assessment
- co-creating guidance materials that clearly explain the purpose of the assessment, including the ethical use of a designated, institutionally supported GenAI platform for all students, ensuring equitable access and providing training and opportunities to practice using the platform prior to the assessment, while developing skills in writing, clarity and analysis relevant to contemporary workplaces.

Initial feedback highlighted both potential benefits and challenges:

- students with learning differences (such as dyslexia) or for whom English is an additional language valued the opportunity to use GenAI to improve grammar, clarity and structure
- some students welcomed the flexibility to select their preferred submission format, seeing it as a chance to demonstrate their strengths
- concerns were raised about fairness and academic integrity, particularly regarding GenAI use and the comparability of presentations versus written reports
- staff expressed uncertainty over marking presentations, potential workload implications, and ensuring consistent assessment criteria across formats.

Considerations

- In what ways have your students been genuinely engaged as partners in similar assessment design and decision-making processes, and how has their feedback influenced the final assessment approaches?
- How can you ensure that the introduction of GenAI tools supports equitable access and academic integrity, while also helping students develop ethical, transparent and workplace-relevant GenAI literacy?
- What steps do you take to ensure fairness and consistency in marking across different submission formats (for example a written report against a presentation), and how confident and supported do staff feel in applying the assessment criteria?
- What infrastructure, guidance and staff/student development are required to implement a change such as this sustainably, and how would you evaluate the impact of the new assessment format on student learning, workload and experience?

Scenario 2: Issues with implementation

Context

A working group of staff and student representatives met to discuss implementation of the new assessment approach (from Scenario 1). They co-developed guidance documents and clarified expectations for ethical GenAI use. Despite this, some staff members raised concerns that using two different submission formats, written reports or recorded presentations, might not assess the same skills equally. They highlighted that marking criteria may not capture the same domains across formats, that staff time required for marking could differ, and that students' effort and preparation time may vary, potentially creating inequities.

Before introducing alternative assessment formats, the programme team reviewed the module and programme learning outcomes to ensure that each assessment option provided students with an equivalent opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The team also considered how the assessment contributed to the wider pattern of assessment across the programme, ensuring that the choice of format did not leave any programme-level outcomes insufficiently assessed.

The programme leader decided to:

- maintain flexible submission options by allowing students to choose between written reports or recorded presentations, while providing clear marking criteria and support for staff
- pilot the assessment with a small group before full implementation to allow refinement based on feedback. This pilot will also evaluate the marking of the two submission options, gathering feedback from staff and comparing the data to ensure that the marking criteria are equitable across both formats
- emphasise that the assessment focuses on developing real-world skills, and that GenAI use is encouraged within clearly defined ethical boundaries. Students are required to clearly outline and acknowledge how any approved GenAI tools are used, providing screenshots of their engagement and the prompts used
- provide timely, supportive feedback (including whole-cohort feedback) to help students understand strengths, areas for development and next steps for progression.

Considerations

- In what ways can student consultation and co-design contribute to the inclusivity and relevance of the assessment?
- How can offering submission format options (written or presentation) support student agency and diverse learning preferences?
- Are all staff adequately prepared and supported to assess different formats consistently and fairly?
- Are there any gaps in infrastructure or support that affected such a new policy's implementation?
- How effectively are concerns about workload and marking consistency addressed?
- What mechanisms can be put in place to monitor and evaluate the long-term impact of such an assessment approach on learning outcomes and equity?

Scenario 3: Diverse student consultation and support

Context

Following analysis of attainment data indicating disparities across ethnic groups, a provider engages with students from diverse communities to explore the lived experiences influencing engagement and success.

Through facilitated focus groups, students share that certain assessment formats and limited access to support resources are barriers. The provider uses this feedback to diversify assessment methods and provide targeted academic mentoring schemes. Curriculum teams are asked to evaluate inclusive design principles in their modules.

While not formal research, activity was conducted in line with institutional ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, and appropriate handling of sensitive personal data. Any intention to disseminate findings beyond the institution would be subject to formal ethical approval.

In the future, student focus groups form part of routine enhancement activity informed by attainment data.

Considerations

- How are the needs of diverse learners systematically captured and addressed?
- What mechanisms are in place to assess whether inclusive teaching and assessment strategies are reducing barriers?
- Who has /needs access to data relating to the ethnic background of students?



Key Practice g - Coherent approaches and communication of digital technologies

Key Practice g

Coherent approaches and communication of digital technologies

Providers establish coherent approaches to technologies that impact teaching, learning and assessment (including Generative Artificial Intelligence). These approaches are clearly communicated to staff and students, include how they are utilised and define misuse of such technologies.

In this Key Practice, technologies refer broadly to the digital tools, platforms, systems and associated methodologies that support learning, teaching, assessment and the overall student experience. These technologies are used to solve problems, enhance academic tasks and improve the design and delivery of programmes. Examples include physical devices (such as tablets, multimedia equipment or VR headsets), institutional digital systems and platforms, and emerging technologies like AI, which have the potential to transform educational practice and graduate outcomes. Providers define appropriate, ethical and acceptable uses of new and emerging technologies to highlight positives rather than concentrating entirely on misuse.

Digital accessibility and responsible use of technology

All digital assessment content complies with recognised accessibility standards, specifically [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG) 2.1 or 2.2 at Level AA, to guarantee usability for disabled students.

The use of GenAI tools is guided by principles of responsible and ethical practice, with transparency regarding their use. Policies ensure that GenAI does not exacerbate existing inequities or compromise academic integrity, for example by providing clear guidance on acceptable GenAI-assisted work and integrating digital literacy training to support equitable engagement.



Establishing coherent institutional approaches

For providers to develop coherent approaches to the use of technologies in teaching, learning and assessment, including GenAI, it is essential to first define the scope of this guidance and how it aligns with the institution's education strategy, student experience priorities and governance structures. Clear communication of these approaches is critical to ensure consistency and confidence among staff and students.

Providers may need to consider multiple dimensions and levels of guidance, depending on context.

These can include:

- functional use of tools (for example, day-to-day teaching applications)
- governance and resource management
- introduction of innovative technologies
- ethical and responsible engagement with GenAI and other emerging tools
- staff professional development
- student training and academic skills development.

Each of these dimensions contributes to defining what constitutes acceptable and effective practice. To minimise fragmentation and poor practice, providers establish a common understanding, often through a framework or policy or agreed institutional guidance, that supports staff and students in making informed and responsible use of technology and GenAI.

Levels of providers' internal guidance

Providers' own guidance may need to operate across several levels depending on their context and size:

- provider level - policies on procurement, access, training and quality assurance for institution-wide systems and platforms
- faculty/school/department level - localised policies addressing discipline-specific needs, innovation and quality measures
- programme/module level - guidance on integrating technology into curriculum design and delivery, including accessibility, and inclusive assessment, and GenAI use
- academic support and student skills - evolving support services (for example, libraries, student services) to address ethics, digital literacy and responsible technology and GenAI use. This may include myth-busting and redefining academic support beyond traditional models.

Good guidance is not static. Providers must commit to robust policies, ongoing professional development, and regular review to keep pace with emerging technologies, particularly GenAI, and their implication for teaching, learning and academic integrity. Feedback from staff and students can also be taken into account during reviews of guidance and policies. Acceptable use is clearly defined at provider, faculty and programme level and revisited at regular intervals to consider new evidence, practice and approaches as these evolve.

Embedding technology in teaching, learning and assessment

When providers are implementing and embedding technologies into teaching, learning and assessment, simply adopting tools may not be sufficient. The priority is to ensure their meaningful, ethical and appropriate use, supported by clear guidance and relevant training for staff and students. This requires a coherent, institution-wide approach that aligns with strategic goals, maintains academic standards and anticipates emerging challenges, particularly those posed by GenAI and other transformative technologies.

Key areas to consider include:

Academic standards - maintaining consistency and quality in learning outcomes, assessment practices and programme design, even as technologies evolve.

Technology in assessment design and delivery - integrating tools and applications in ways that enhance validity, reliability and authenticity focusing on learning outcomes and purpose of the assessment.

Staff development - providing ongoing professional development to build confidence and competence in using technologies and GenAI for teaching, learning and assessment.

Stakeholder coordination - involving academic staff and professional services (such as IT, library, quality assurance, careers, student services and admin support, which may have different titles in different providers) in developing guidance tailored to different audiences and disciplinary contexts.



What characterises effective practice?

Effective for this Key Practice means that technology is not treated as an add-on. It is an integrated, strategic component of teaching, learning and assessment. It requires clear, coherent approaches that are communicated effectively, aligned with institutional priorities, and responsive to emerging GenAI practice.

Key indicators of effective practice include:

Contextualised quality assurance measures - technology cuts across all aspects of education and the student experience. Good practice recognises that quality expectations may vary by context - provider-wide, faculty, school/department, programme level, and discipline - while maintaining consistency in principles and standards.

Ongoing evaluation and review - policies and guidance are not static. They are regularly reviewed and refined to keep pace with rapid technological change, including emerging and transformative tools such as GenAI.

Dedicated oversight and accountability - a designated senior academic lead, working in partnership with quality assurance, professional development and IT teams, ensures that technology decisions are guided by a pedagogically informed, learner-centred approach. The focus is on meaningfully enhancing teaching, learning, assessment and student outcomes - rather than treating educational technology as a purely technical implementation project.

Active engagement and co-design with students - students are partners in shaping guidance and practice, helping providers understand how technologies are used in real contexts and identifying emerging needs. Good practice includes early communication of expectations to students, explicit teaching on the role, limitations and ethical use of new software or GenAI functionality, and structured opportunities for students to develop competence through guided activities or formative tasks. Assessment criteria clearly articulate how use of the software is evaluated and how it interacts with existing assessment policies, ensuring transparency, fairness and consistency.

Employer and external stakeholder input - engagement with employers ensures that approaches to technology support graduate outcomes and reflect workplace expectations for digital skills and ethical practice.

Shared responsibility across functions - technology decisions, such as procurement, training support and application development, are not delegated solely to IT departments. Academic quality and standards and education leadership and governance must remain central.

Inclusivity and equity - providers consider issues of digital access, affordability and participation when implementing technologies in teaching, learning and assessment. They take steps to reduce barriers arising from digital poverty, unequal access to devices or connectivity, and differences in access to paid-for digital or GenAI tools. Approaches may include providing appropriate devices, supporting reliable internet access, offering accessible and alternative formats for digital materials, and ensuring that students have equitable opportunities to engage with learning and assessment.

Providers regularly evaluate the impact of technology on different student groups and use this evidence to inform support, promote equitable access, and ensure alignment with institutional policies and expectations.

Ethics, transparency and academic integrity - clear definitions of acceptable and transparent use of tools and GenAI applications are embedded in policy and communicated to staff and students. Guidance anticipates risks to academic integrity and provides practical strategies to mitigate them.

Digital fluency and capability building - providers support staff and students to develop core digital skills and confidence, enabling meaningful and responsible engagement with technology. Academic support services work collaboratively with programme teams to develop the capability and infrastructure needed to support unfamiliar technologies, including targeted staff development and clear student-facing guidance. This includes ensuring that technical, library and academic integrity advice is consistent, accessible and responsive to emerging risks associated with new technology and AI-enabled tools.

Secure systems and data protection - robust measures are in place to safeguard data and ensure compliance with legal and regulatory requirements.

Adaptability across provider types - approaches are scalable and sensitive to different contexts - for example large universities, colleges, small specialist providers and collaborative partnerships - without compromising quality principles.



Reflective questions

Curriculum design

1. How strategically is technology embedded within our curriculum and assessment design to support programme learning outcomes and enhance learning, teaching and assessment?
2. How do we seek external perspectives (for example employers, PSRBs and academic advisers) when considering technology in curriculum and assessment design?
3. How effectively does our programme design enable students to develop and apply digital and GenAI capabilities responsibly, including through formative opportunities, feedback and assessment?

Purpose and value

4. How clearly do we articulate the rationale, purpose and added value of technologies for different stakeholders?
5. How do we use GenAI and other digital tools to support learning, pedagogy and preparation for employment?

Accessibility and inclusion

6. To what extent do our digital approaches promote an equitable and inclusive student experience, including addressing barriers relating to access, accessibility and alternative arrangements?

Evaluation and risk

7. What are the potential benefits, risks, limitations and unintended consequences of this technology, and how will we identify and mitigate these?

Governance and ethics

8. How well are our approaches to digital technologies aligned with relevant institutional policies and sector expectations?
9. How clear and well-understood are our ethical expectations, accountability arrangements and governance processes for technology and AI use?

Procurement and implementation

10. How robust are our arrangements for selecting, implementing and reviewing digital platforms and GenAI tools?
11. How do procurement and implementation processes address accessibility, privacy, interoperability and sustainability?

Capability and support

12. How coherent and effective is our approach to developing the digital and GenAI capabilities of staff and students, and how do we evaluate its effectiveness?
13. How are training resources kept up to date with emerging technologies and pedagogical practices, and how is their quality assured?
14. How effectively are our staff and students supported to develop the digital and GenAI capabilities needed to use technologies confidently, ethically and pedagogically?

Quality assurance and evaluation

15. How do we monitor and evaluate the impact of digital and GenAI tools on learning outcomes and student experience?
16. How do staff and students provide feedback on digital and GenAI tools, and how is this feedback used to support continuous improvement?
17. How effective are institutional oversight arrangements in ensuring coherence, quality and continuous improvement?

Scenarios

Scenario 1: Provider and faculty adoption of new GenAI tools

Context

A provider adopts a new GenAI tool to enhance assessment and feedback and to reduce administration for educators and professional services teams. The new tool will be supported centrally and available to all educators and students across the provider.

At the institutional level, a cross-functional working group is established to connect with the appropriate existing governance structure. Representatives on the group include academics, quality assurance staff, IT, legal advisers, library staff, students and professional support teams responsible for assessment and digital learning. Together, they develop a governance framework that defines acceptable and unacceptable uses, addresses data security, ethical implementations and an implementation plan to embed good practice use, with a commitment to regularly review guidance as the technology and evidence base evolves. This includes training plans for staff and students to be embedded into the institution-wide digital capability strategy.

At the faculty level, the guidance is adopted and co-designed with academics, administrators and students to reflect disciplinary contexts and needs. Employers are also consulted to ensure alignment with graduate skills expectations. Each programme lead then provides and communicates clear expectations to staff and students on professional practice and ethical use of the tool. Training is integrated into staff development and student digital literacy initiatives, with resources addressing accessibility, transparency of use and the equitable access of GenAI tools.

Considerations

- How do your approaches to developing new technological tools make sure to include the right voices, and identify gaps in existing policy?
- How do you ensure that any new guidance on acceptable, ethical and secure GenAI use is clear, usable and accessible?
- How do you ensure that local departments adapt guidance such as this to disciplinary needs and employer expectations?
- What evidence would show such a tool's impact on assessment quality, workload and student experience, and how would you use that evidence to improve?

Scenario 2: Student digital capabilities

Context

A first-year undergraduate student joins the university with limited prior experience of institutional digital platforms and has not previously used core institutional platforms (for example, office/productivity software, the VLE, or an originality-checking tool). Early in the programme, the student encounters learning materials, collaborative activities and formative assessments delivered through these systems. As the academic year progresses, the student is required to prepare coursework using these platforms and submit summative assessments via the VLE and originality-checking tool. Successful engagement with these platforms is essential to meeting assessment requirements, demonstrating academic integrity and achieving programme learning outcomes.

Academic support services provide coordinated, proactive and timely support that enables the student to develop the digital skills required to succeed. This includes structured digital induction, clear and consistent guidance on core platforms, and accessible resources that are reinforced at key points in the academic year. Support services work in close partnership with programme teams to align messaging on academic integrity, accessibility and responsible technology use, while monitoring patterns of engagement to identify and address emerging barriers.

Considerations

- How well do your digital induction activities equip students with limited experience to use core platforms early in their studies?
- How consistent and accessible is your guidance on using key systems for learning and assessment?
- How effectively do your support services anticipate student needs and provide timely help at critical points in the academic year?
- How well do programme teams, support services and digital teams work together to deliver aligned messaging and support?
- How do you track student engagement with digital platforms and use this insight to address barriers early?

Scenario 3: Introducing discipline-specific technology

Context

A third-year undergraduate student undertakes a programme that introduces an innovative end-of-year summative assessment requiring the use of subject-specific software integrated with AI-enabled functionality. The technology has not previously been used within the programme and is unfamiliar to both students and some institutional support services. Successful completion of the assessment depends on the student's ability to use the software effectively, understand the role and limitations of the AI components, and apply them appropriately to meet academic and professional expectations.

Initially, the programme and module teams tried to ensure that the introduction of AI-enabled, subject-specific software is pedagogically justified, aligned with programme learning outcomes, and embedded coherently within assessment design rather than treated as a technical add-on. Prior to implementation, the software was reviewed for compliance with institutional policies, including assessment regulations, academic integrity, data protection and accessibility requirements, and discussed with IT and relevant governance bodies to confirm suitability and sustainability.

Despite this, the student fails the assessment and lodges a complaint, claiming they were disadvantaged because the software was unfamiliar, they felt insufficiently prepared to use it effectively, and relevant support services were not always able to assist with technical or conceptual queries.

The investigation reviewed programme documentation, assessment design records, minutes of internal approval processes, and student support logs. Based on this evidence, the university finds that the required institutional processes for introducing new digital assessment tools was followed, but recognises that some students required more time to develop confidence with the tool. They also acknowledge that the guidance could have been clearer and support was not fully consistent when queries were raised, with some delays in receiving specialist guidance during critical periods, with potential disadvantages to the student.

Considerations

- How do you check that students and staff are ready to use new or AI-enabled tools before high-stakes assessments?
- Is your guidance on new technologies clear, timely and consistent across the institution?
- Can your support services respond quickly and effectively to specialist technical or conceptual queries?
- How do you ensure assessment implementation gives all students enough preparation time and practice?
- How do you track engagement with new tools? Are you able to step in early when students need more support?



Key Practice h - Advice for students about academic integrity

Key Practice h

Advice for students about academic integrity

Providers offer advice and guidance about academic integrity to ensure that students and staff understand what is expected of them throughout the learning journey. The advice is kept current.

Different providers will be operating within a variety of contexts from the national regulator governing their provision, the extent and nature of PSRBs influencing their provision, the subject matter and level of study applicable to their programmes, and the applicant pool that they recruit from. However, what is universal is the underlying importance of, and need for, an effective academic integrity framework. As well as the direct regulatory imperative to ensure the integrity and value of awards students obtain, strong academic integrity measures are needed to instil confidence in employers regarding the robustness of a provider's awards and the quality of their graduates. That confidence is important as graduate employability is a further metric on which providers are judged.

Tailoring academic integrity advice

Providers reflect on what and how they teach students about academic integrity in light of their particular context, for example, the type of programme provision, level of PSRB influence on programmes, and the applicable national regulatory approach. Providers then produce local resources aligned with their institutional policies that can be disseminated to students in an accessible way.

Where a provider has a diverse portfolio of programmes, the advice and guidance strikes a balance between being generally applicable across the institution, while being discipline-specific enough to allow for variations in a subject-informed manner, or clearly indicate where subject-specific variations apply and explain why that is the case. Resources provided are supportive as well as developmental to students in learning about academic integrity and good academic practice, while conveying the seriousness of violating academic integrity standards.



Embedding academic integrity throughout the learning journey

Providers reinforce expectations around academic integrity periodically throughout the student learning journey, embedding guidance and development opportunities within the curriculum rather than treating them as standalone activities. Training provided for students on academic integrity and good practice features not only at the beginning of a student's learning journey (for example, as a standalone module completed at induction), but throughout their whole programme, and as students advance through different, and potentially more challenging, assessment types. This not only reinforces students' understanding of academic integrity, but also enables them to see its relevance in the context that they are in at each stage of their studies and also be made aware of changes in the provider's position if applicable.

Providers do not assume a shared starting point: students arrive with differing prior exposure to academic integrity expectations depending on their educational and personal background. Where required, the support and advice provided to students is tailored in light of their prior experience and starting knowledge with providers prepared to respond dynamically depending on their particular student cohort and background. Fundamentally, assumptions are not made about students' understanding of academic integrity prior to enrolment.

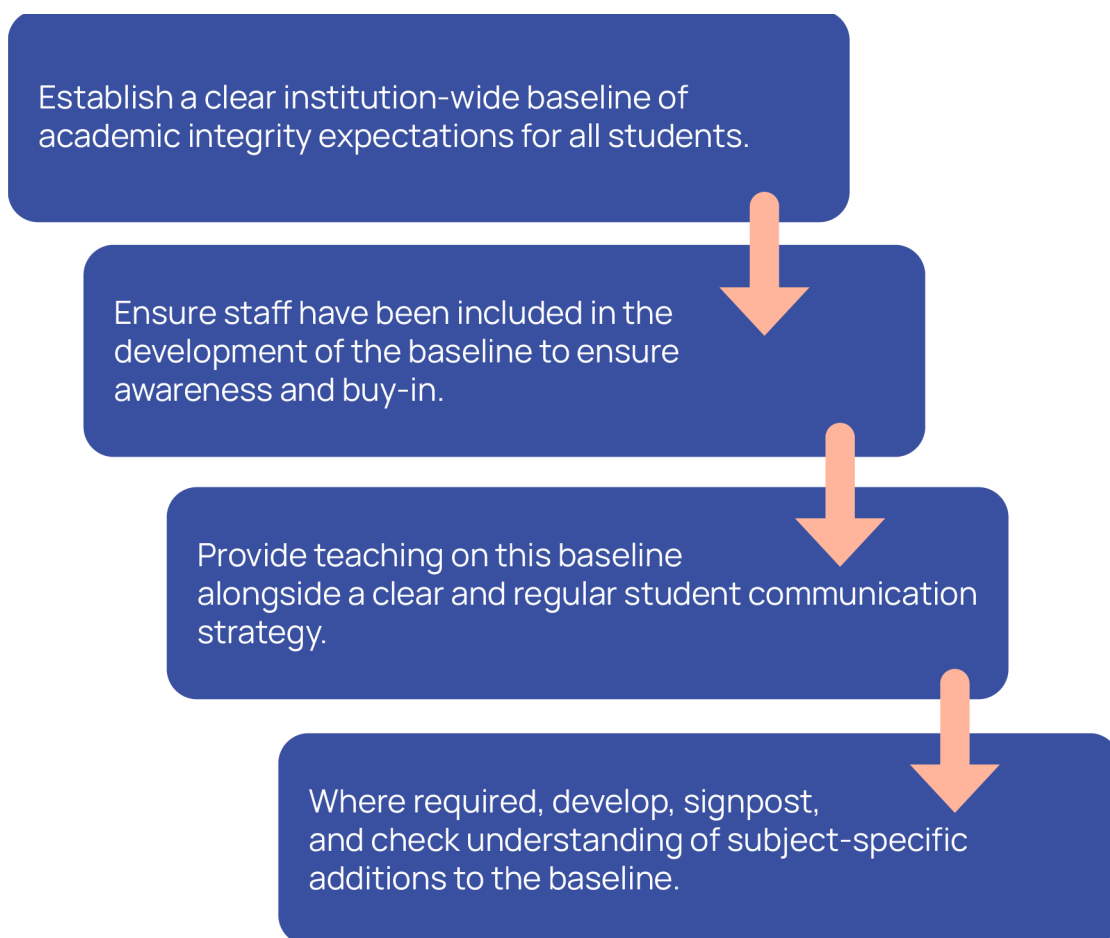


Drawing on expertise

Providers ensure there is expertise to draw on regarding the latest developments in educational technology (for example in GenAI) pertaining to academic integrity, and keep advice and guidance under review in a way that is informed by such expertise and current developments and trends.

The following diagram sets out the approach that providers can take regarding developing and implementing an academic integrity framework in a way that is integrated to their programme of study.

Figure 3: Approach to developing and implementing an academic integrity framework



A 'whole provider' approach to staff development and knowledge

All academic colleagues, not just colleagues with academic misconduct portfolios, have a collective sense of responsibility that it is part of their job to help students understand what is required from the point of view of academic integrity.

Academic misconduct is an ever-evolving issue with new methods emerging that challenge how we need to respond and what we need to know. This is particularly the case with the fast-paced development of technological platforms. For example, while academic colleagues may know of proofreading or writing-support platforms, it is important to ensure that they regularly explore such sites and tools to see how they have evolved from when they were initially launched. Also, technology such as smart watches and AI-enabled glasses provide internet access to the wearer.

Therefore, staff engage regularly with academic integrity CPD and have opportunities themselves to check the currency of their knowledge while being supported regarding integrated developments into their practice. Training is not seen as a one-off, new starter exercise. This further helps to ensure that academic integrity is not seen as 'someone else's job' and is fully integrated within the curriculum.

Creating alignment with the broader approach to GenAI use

While the inappropriate use of GenAI is naturally a concern in academic integrity, there are debates about how it could help students' learning. In particular, there are arguments around the merits of its use as a proofreading tool which could be seen as a reasonable adjustment for some students on some programmes. Therefore, when implementing practices around academic integrity, providers ensure that they are aligned with learning and teaching practices.

Incorporating student voice

Ultimately, the key audience for a provider's academic integrity advice is the student body. Student populations are not a homogenous group and there will be a wide range of diversity even within a seemingly non-diverse group. Therefore, capturing the student voice within the stage of developing academic integrity practices, and the production of guidance, ensures that assumptions are not made as to how students work, what they know, and what they think about academic integrity. Incorporating the student voice helps to ensure that the language is also accessible and comprehensible. Lastly, the more that students have been involved in the process, the more they can feel it is also their process. That buy-in and acceptance can increase the prospect of compliance.

Communication to students

Consistent messaging to students within departments and faculties, and across disciplines, helps to ensure that students understand the expectations that apply to them and are not confused by different approaches encountered on other programmes. Where variations are necessary between programmes or areas of a provider, it is important to make clear the scope of those differences and the rationale for them. This helps students understand which expectations apply in their own context and reduces the risk of misunderstanding or inadvertent non-compliance.

Consideration is also given as to whether there should be a baseline of commonality across all parts of the provider. Where this is the approach, with variations layered on top, it is particularly important that the variations are made clear and are transparently and accessibly signposted to student as differences to other programmes.

The advice and guidance given to students is provided in a dynamic and not static way as they progress through the education journey. This helps ensure that they know what may be different as they enter a new year of study as well as making sure that they know of changes made in light of technological advancements, for example.

The influence and input of PSRBs and other regulators

Providers ensure that the framework and practices being implemented take account of any PSRB requirements that apply within the provider's particular context. Where there may be tensions between PSRB requirements and other policies within the provider, such as around inclusivity within assessments, dialogue takes place with the PSRB to establish whether the requirement is a competence standard or simply a preference regarding the operation of a method of assessment. Any implications for inclusivity, particularly in relation to disabled students, is also considered as part of the formulation of the advice given to students and clearly set out within what is communicated to students.



Clear and accessible rules

Providers have clear, transparent and accessible rules, supported by advice and guidance, on academic integrity that are comprehensive, covering matters at both an institutional level as well as a local/subject-specific level. Resources are developmental and formative with students given opportunities to check their understanding. Students also have opportunities to input into the creation of all levels of the academic integrity framework, including the developmental resources.

Students feel empowered to engage newer forms of technology in their learning and when completing assessments without fearing they are inadvertently violating principles of academic integrity. Effective academic integrity measures do not present unjust barriers to innovation and change. However, when there are grounds for excluding the use of certain technology (for example, but certainly not limited to, the use of GenAI), it is explicitly stated and clearly explained, based on evidence and a reason that withstands scrutiny, and that reason is also clearly communicated.

Academic colleagues feel confident discussing any concerns students have about academic integrity in relation to the changing landscape in technology, notably around GenAI. Training on how to support students in learning with academic integrity is part of standard professional academic development academic staff receive.

Good practice in this area will also have a remedial as well as a developmental element: students who have previously been found to have poor academic practices are given support and extra training to help them avoid any future breaches of principles of academic integrity.

Information about GenAI and academic integrity is technologically neutral rather than naming a specific piece of technology to avoid inadvertent breaches or misunderstandings - focus on the type of activity that is permissible and/or prohibited rather than the means of doing such tasks. This is important where a provider supplies tools to students that are capable of being used for those tasks.

Clear guidance should differentiate between the use of technology to support activities such as proofreading and its use in generating substantive content for an assignment, making explicit the extent to which different uses are permitted. Providers should also consider how technologies such as GenAI are introduced and promoted within learning and teaching. While these tools may offer significant benefits, their use should be framed in ways that encourage critical engagement and independence, rather than creating an expectation that they should be used routinely in all contexts.

Good academic integrity practice is also transparent about the process for handling allegations of academic misconduct, including:

- the stages of investigation and the applicable timeframes
- who will conduct each stage
- the evidential threshold and what amounts to admissible evidence
- the support that is available to students
- an indication of what punishment could be received for each form of academic offence and how these may differ if there have been previous offences by the same student
- the appeal process.

Reflective questions

1. How are our students taught about academic integrity, and how confident are they in applying this learning in practice?
2. How well is taught material on academic integrity coordinated at a programme level to ensure a coherent and consistent student experience?
3. How effectively do our assignment briefs communicate academic integrity expectations, including expectations around GenAI use, collaboration, source acknowledgement and relevant support resources?
4. In what ways have students been a part of the production of the resources and information, and how has this influenced their clarity, accessibility and usefulness?
5. How consistent are our expectations around academic integrity between learning activities and assessment context, particularly in relation to GenAI use?
6. How effectively do we communicate changes to academic regulations to our staff and students?
7. How confident are staff in their understanding of academic integrity regulations at institutional and programme levels, and how do we support and refresh this understanding?
8. How do we intentionally design assessments to promote academic integrity and minimise misconduct, including appropriate use of GenAI, transparent expectations, meaningful engagement, formative learning opportunities and assessment approaches that reward originality and higher-order thinking?
9. How have the measures we have adopted to enhance academic integrity, including assessment and feedback practices, been evaluated to assess their impact on inclusivity, learning and student experience?
10. How future-proof, responsive and technologically neutral are our academic integrity measures and assessment strategies, particularly in the context of rapidly evolving digital tools and emerging risks?
11. How do we ensure that academic integrity leadership and accountability is a shared responsibility?
12. To what extent are our policies and approaches informed through insight of our students' prior experience of academic integrity matters and what constitutes academic misconduct?
13. How are academic integrity policies reviewed to ensure that they are easily accessible and drafted in a clear, plain, understandable language?
14. To what extent are our assessment designs and associated quality assurance processes reviewed for their susceptibility to misconduct, including consideration of emerging risks, patterns of student performance, and opportunities to strengthen academic integrity?

Scenario

Use of GenAI and Unclear Expectations in Academic Misconduct Procedures

Context

A final-year student, who has a declared disability due to being diagnosed with dyslexia and autism, is subject to academic misconduct proceedings due to allegedly using GenAI inappropriately within a module assignment.

The student claims that they did nothing that they had not been encouraged to do while studying other modules on the programme, and that regulations governing the situation were unclear. They also highlight that their study needs agreement issued by disability services allows for proofreading tools to be used as an adjustment.

The assignment brief prohibited one named GenAI tool, but the student instead used a different GenAI tool supplied by the university as part of its standard software suite, to ensure their work read like an academic piece of work and had no grammatical errors.

The student also claimed that at no point did the provider specify that students must not use GenAI tools in relation to any aspect of their work. They argued a statement like this would have avoided confusion as to what could and could not be used, that support and guidance across the programme varied, and staff confidence in applying AI related rules was inconsistent.

The misconduct allegation was dismissed due to unclear expectations and inconsistent communication, including that the student's study needs agreement permitted proofreading tools.

The provider subsequently issued staff guidance on emerging AI technologies to avoid disadvantage or confusion, and agreed to review academic integrity policies across all modules for consistency.

Considerations

- How clear and consistent are your assessment instructions about permitted AI use across all modules?
- How confident are staff in advising students on the boundaries between acceptable support and misconduct?
- How can academic integrity policies and the guidance given to students balance the need for integrity with avoiding substantial disadvantage to disabled students to avoid this scenario?
- How could the curriculum and assessment design be revised to mitigate the prospect of this scenario arising?
- How could the instruction to students have been worded to avoid ambiguity as to what conduct was being targeted and what would be permissible?

Terminology

Term	Definition
Authentic assessment	Assessment that mirrors real-world, professional or disciplinary contexts, requiring students to apply knowledge and skills to meaningful tasks rather than simply reproduce content. Often characterised by realism, cognitive challenge and evaluative judgement.
Compassionate assessment	An approach to assessment design and delivery that acknowledges students may face personal, academic or wellbeing-related challenges, and builds in flexibility, clear guidance, supportive feedback and reasonable adjustments accordingly, while maintaining academic standards.
Competence standard	An academic, medical or other standard applied for the purpose of determining whether or not a person has a particular level of competence or ability. Normally where competence standards are used, reasonable adjustments to the methods of assessment must be offered. Competence standards themselves are rarely outside the duty to make reasonable adjustments. Such rare cases include where the competence standard is intrinsically linked to the mode of assessment.
Flexible assessment	This refers to the purposeful design of assessment that offers students meaningful and equitable ways to demonstrate the same learning outcomes through varied deadlines, formats, modes, timings, tasks, alignment or team/individual approaches. It supports inclusive, authentic and future-focused learning by recognising diverse strengths, needs and professional contexts while maintaining academic standards and comparability.
Inclusive assessment	Assessment designed from the outset so that all students, regardless of background, ability or circumstance, have an equitable opportunity to demonstrate their learning, reducing reliance on individual reasonable adjustments after the fact.
Reflective learning	The active, critical process of thinking about past experiences, observations or ideas to gain new insights and improve future understanding and actions.
Scholarship of Learning and Teaching (SoTL)	Scholarship in the context of UK higher education refers to the systematic and evidence-informed development of academic practice, particularly in relation to teaching, learning and assessment. It involves the critical engagement with current knowledge, reflective practice, and the application of research-informed insights to enhance educational quality and student outcomes. Scholarship may include activities such as curriculum design based on subject expertise, evaluation of teaching practices, professional development, and contributions to academic and pedagogic discourse.

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Continue exploring the Advice and Guidance

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Select the Principles below to access additional guidance, practical considerations and resources that support the enhancement of quality and the maintenance of academic standards.

Principle 1

Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards



Principle 2

Engaging students as partners



Principle 3

Resourcing delivery of a high-quality learning experience



Principle 4

Using data to inform and evaluate quality



Principle 5

Monitoring, evaluating, and enhancing provision



Principle 6

Engaging in external quality review and accreditation



Principle 7

Designing, developing, approving, and modifying programmes



Principle 8

Operating partnerships with other organisations



Principle 9

Recruiting, selecting and admitting students



Principle 10

Supporting students to achieve their potential



Principle 11

Teaching, learning and assessment



Principle 12

Operating concerns, complaints and appeals processes





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