ual:

Supporting attainment with unit design

Why use this tool?

This tool is designed to help you evaluate the effectiveness of your unit(s) and reflect upon how different groups of students experience the unit. This provides the opportunity to make small adjustments to a unit to improve the attainment and experience of all students.

How to use this tool?

Unit leaders may wish to use this tool to guide team discussions throughout the year and at critical points. Some changes to your units may be implemented in the short term as part of ongoing evaluation and responsiveness to students' needs (for example classroom activities, tutorial arrangements, additional support to students etc). While for others (such as changes to summative assessment) you will need to comply with Quality Assurance processes and deadlines.

Step 1: Reflecting on the unit

1**. Get the unit team together.** This will include all tutors involved in delivering the unit, and may also include Academic Support and Language Development staff, as well as technicians, students and alumni.

2. Reflect on the unit last time it was delivered. What went well – why? For whom? If not for all students, what are your perceptions about what was challenging for these students?

Look at attainment data on dashboards (**https://dashboards.arts.ac.uk**). Compare with other units. You may want to:

• Look at the overall attainment figure in the 'all students' column

• Compare the Home and Overseas figure

• Compare the Home BAME and Home White figures

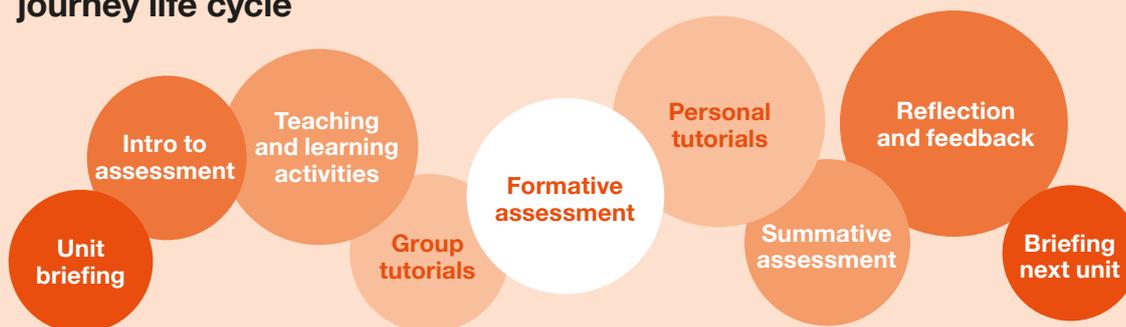• Look at individual units and compare between units

What do you notice? Are there attainment differentials? Can you identify any patterns of achievement for certain groups? Are these consistent across units?

3. Look at existing student feedback for this unit. If you don't have any, gather some (you may want to consider USS and NSS free text comments, course committees, focus groups, unit feedback, course rep feedback etc). How does it tally with your own evaluation of the unit (see point 2)?

It was good to get an overview of attainment and see which units had the biggest imbalance

— AEM evaluation

Mapping the student journey life cycle

Unit briefing · Intro to assessment · Teaching and learning activities · Group tutorials · Formative assessment · Personal tutorials · Summative assessment · Reflection and feedback · Briefing next unit

4. Map your unit as it ran last time. You may wish to visualise the student journey (see the example above).

Key components may include:

• Unit briefing/induction

• Introduction of assessment (including discussion of learning outcomes, assessment criteria, assignment briefs and deadlines for formative and summative assessments)

• Teaching and learning activities week by week, including content covered and expectations of self-directed work

• Group tutorials

• Personal tutorials

• Formative and Summative assessment points

• Reflection on feedback and briefing for the next unit

Step 2 Exploring the causes of attainment differentials in your units

Explore the following areas:

Staff-student relationships and sense of belonging

• How would you characterise relationships between staff/students and among students on your course?

• Are there groups of students who appear to have a greater sense of belonging than others?

• What strategies does the programme/course employ to create a sense of belonging for all students?

• What kinds of strategies do you think would help students who may feel less connected to staff and the university in general feel a greater sense of belonging?

• You may wish to use the 'Teaching for retention and continuation' toolkit for more ideas.

Student Support

• What kinds of academic/pastoral support is in place for students while on the course?

• Are there any patterns in terms of which students access support and those who do not?

• What strategies are in place to address non-attendance/engagement at the earliest possible point?

• Are there any other kinds of support you think your course/programme could put in place that would positively impact on eliminating the attainment gap?

Glossary

Attainment: refers to the proportion of students who qualify with a first class (1st) or upper second class (2:1) degree as a percentage of those who qualified.

Attainment differentials (also called 'awarding gaps'): refer to differences in outcomes between groups – for example between UK-domiciled Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students and White UK-domiciled students or between International and Home students – and more specifically the proportion of students awarded a first or upper second degree.

Dashboards: will enable you to compare your course with other UAL courses, your College, UAL as a whole or the sector. You can also explore data at unit level and compare with other units within the same course or in other courses. UAL is aiming at eradicating awarding gaps (also known as attainment differentials) by 2022.

Curriculum

- How well does the curriculum reflect the identities, interests and experiences of students?
- What opportunities are there for students to bring their life experiences to their studies?
- Does the curriculum embrace and create parity between a range of diverse perspectives?
- Do assessment tasks align to the learning outcomes?
- How inclusive is the brief? Use the 'Creating inclusive briefs' toolkit to help you review it
- Have you scheduled teaching sessions when the brief is explored and discussed with students?

Assessment

- What activities are planned as part of your unit schedule to discuss and explain the new assessment criteria?
- What checkpoints can you add to the unit design to ensure that students are able to monitor their progress?
- Will the formative assessment help students perform better in the summative assessment? Does it enable students to understand the assessment criteria ahead of the summative assessments?
- What self-assessment opportunities and tools are available for students in the unit?

Step 3 Create an action plan

What are the changes you can make immediately?

What long term changes can you make?

How and when will the changes improve student attainment and experience? (Compare with your original map in step one.)

How will you check the ongoing progress and communicate developments as a team?

What resources can you draw on to support your action plan?

List of resources:

Arts SU (2019) *Attainment Report*. Internal document.

Biggs, J. (n.d.) *Aligning teaching for constructing learning*. HEA Academy. Available at: **www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/aligning-teaching-constructing-learning**

Mountford-Zimdar, A. et al (2015) *Causes of differences in student outcomes*. HEFCE publication. Available at: **https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10871/31891**

NUS and Universities UK. (2019) *Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at UK Universities: #closingthegap.* Universities UK publication. Available at: **https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/bame-student-attainment-uk-universities-closing-the-gap.pdf**

Singh, G. (2018) 'What is decolonization really about?'. In: *Decolonising the Arts Curriculum: Perspectives on Higher Education.* Available at: **https://decolonisingtheartscurriculum.myblog.arts.ac.uk/**

UAL Active Dashboards **https://dashboards.arts.ac.uk**

Academic Enhancement Model Toolbox

Supporting Attainment With Unit Design is one of a series of worksheets brought together by the Academic Enhancement Model (AEM) team, part of the UAL Teaching, Learning and Employability Exchange.

Authors: Dr Emily Salines, Dr Clare Warner, Lucy Panesar.

To download digital versions of this series of tools: Search for 'AEM' on **https://canvas.arts.ac.uk/** For further support and tools on attainment, go to **www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual/teaching-and-learning-exchange**