

ual:

the  
exchange

# Enhancing assessment for equity



# Assessment is an obvious area for enhancing inclusivity. Where there is an attainment gap, we need to be sure that our assessment process does not contribute to this.

Julian Prindle et al (2019)

## About this strand

**This strand supports course teams to devise an assessment environment that addresses attainment by focusing on equitable assessment for learning, with the aim of eliminating awarding differentials. By exploring ways in which assessment can become part of a decolonising pedagogy that empowers students, this strand helps course teams to review and map assessment plans for the year. Students' needs are always at the heart of this work. Using this method will require close participation with Course Leaders and teams because much of the learning, reflection and actions will take place beyond the workshops.**

**This strand acknowledges the work previously developed by colleagues both at institutional and college level. It draws from, and builds on, assessment research and initiatives, such as Blueprint (a cross-UAL Formative Assessment Initiative), Make the Grade and the UAL Assessment Criteria Steering Group and Research Collective; attainment, and recent work on core practice for inclusive online teaching and assessment.**

**It also draws on research which emphasises the importance of the student journey through the course when designing assessment, with an aim of supporting students in developing sustainable feedback literacy. The AEM and Attainment Team aim to enrich the dialogic and critically reflective aspect of the work.**

### Our aims are that course teams:

- Will be guided to review and develop all aspects of assessment on their course from the design of assessment to supporting student learning and attainment to the practicalities of ensuring assessment is fair and inclusive.

Through engagement with this strand, we anticipate the following impact:

- Assessment processes are strengthened to ensure they are equitable
- Equitable methods of assessment are prioritised
- Consistent approaches to marking and feedback for attainment
- Empowerment of students' assessment and feedback literacy

Measures of success will look at improved student feedback in survey results, retention figures, overall attainment, and reduced attainment gaps.

### Why use this strand?

This strand is particularly helpful when your course meets one or more of the following criteria:

- Course is below benchmark for attainment against sector
- Course has awarding differentials
- NSS and USS assessment questions receive below benchmark satisfaction
- Unit feedback, course committees, NSS and USS free-text comments refer to issues in attainment and assessment
- Course is going through reapproval and assessment is a concern

# The awarding gap is not attributable to individual students, their language abilities, prior qualifications or cultural backgrounds'

(Core practice for inclusive assessment online, 2020)

## Why focus on assessment?

Given the well-documented impact of feedback on student achievement (Sabri 2018), designing an assessment environment which optimises students' opportunities to act on and learn from feedback places attainment firmly at the core of this strand.

Ensuring that support systems are in place for students who need it most plays a key role in working towards eradicating awarding differentials. Reviewing the balance between formative and summative assessment, the frequency and variety of assessment, and paying close attention to assessment loads helps ensure that a feedback loop can occur as students progress through their course (Winstone and Carless, 2019; Carless and Boud, 2018).

In other words, a holistic review of the student journey through assessment provides an essential starting point in work to optimise student attainment.

The causes for awarding gaps include a combination of institutional factors such as implicit biases, inequitable assessment and support practices and the dominance of certain canons in the curriculum. The need to ensure that diverse, intercultural and postcolonial knowledges are recognised and rewarded in assessment is central to the university's work on decolonising the curriculum and these are embedded in the assessment criteria introduced in 2019. A key aim of this strand is therefore to support a decolonising pedagogy which empowers students, through a questioning of hierarchies of knowledge at all stages of the assessment process (assessment design, briefs, summative assessment practices) and through the establishment of assessment cultures which support students as they take control of their own learning.

UAL's 'Kind Campus' project emphasises the need to create a community spirit of generosity and empathy that will instil a greater sense of belonging and wellbeing for all, in a supportive and inclusive environment' (Canvas 22 May 2020). This strand acknowledges the emotional dimension of assessment and feedback (Winstone 2019) and embeds compassionate pedagogies that respond to student needs as essential to optimising attainment.

# Themes

This strand interweaves three themes: course assessment review and planning, inclusive assessment and summative assessment practices. Connecting these themes are discussions around attainment, equity, and decolonising work so as to interrogate hierarchies of knowledge.

The **course assessment review and planning** theme focuses on students' journey through the course and their experience of assessment overall. It looks at the balance of summative assessment and formative assessment and the ways in which students' feedback literacy is developed throughout the course, with an aim of developing students' ability to take charge of their own learning (see Malecka, Boud and Carless 2020). Consideration of over/under-assessment, variety of assessment, implementation of formative assessment, relevance and timeliness of feedback helps to uncover the relationship between assessment practices and the student experience. Course teams are encouraged to pay close attention to how different groups of students currently access and benefit from formative assessment and to explore strategies to support students who need it most.

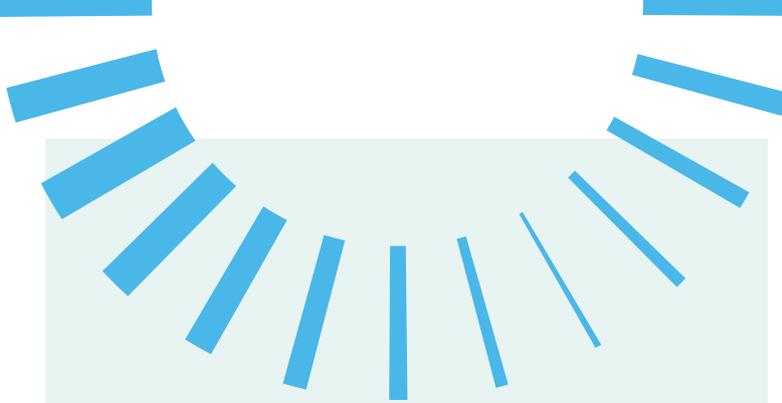
The **inclusive assessment** theme critically reviews assessment practices, focusing in particular on the inclusivity of briefs, approaches to feedback and the way in which students are supported and identifying targeted support where it is needed. The theme also looks at how students' peer assessment and self-assessment skills are developed, and the opportunities which exist for co-creation, thereby making assessment less one-directional. It is anticipated that all courses using this strand will be putting in place Make the Grade / Reducing Referrals and Resubmissions interventions (in collaboration with Academic Support teams where possible).

The third theme is **summative assessment practice**, which strengthens team approaches to inclusive assessment through benchmarking, parity review, marking against learning outcomes and applying assessment criteria, writing feedback and moderating.

### How will we engage?

Every course team will begin with a review of their existing work on assessment planning (from 19/20) in view of feedback from surveys and attainment data. Following that, they will choose to focus mainly on one theme at a time through a blend of asynchronous and synchronous activities.





# the exchange

## Academic Enhancement Model and Attainment team

### Contributors:

Dr Emily Salines  
Dr Clare Warner  
Cath Caldwell  
Siobhan Clay  
Vikki Hill  
Dr Danielle Tran  
Dr Susan Orr  
Gemma Riggs

### Acknowledgements

The Assessment for Equity strand has been created in collaboration with UAL colleagues who have contributed their time, thoughts and ideas to the production of materials.

We would like to thank:

Dr Duna Sabri  
Terry Finnigan  
Pat Christie  
Tim Stephens  
Elizabeth Staddon

### References:

AEM Toolbox Resources available at: <https://www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual/teaching-and-learning-exchange/resources/aem-and-attainment-resources> [Accessed: 29 June 2020]

Carless, D and Boud, D (2018) The development of student feedback literacy: enabling uptake of feedback, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*.

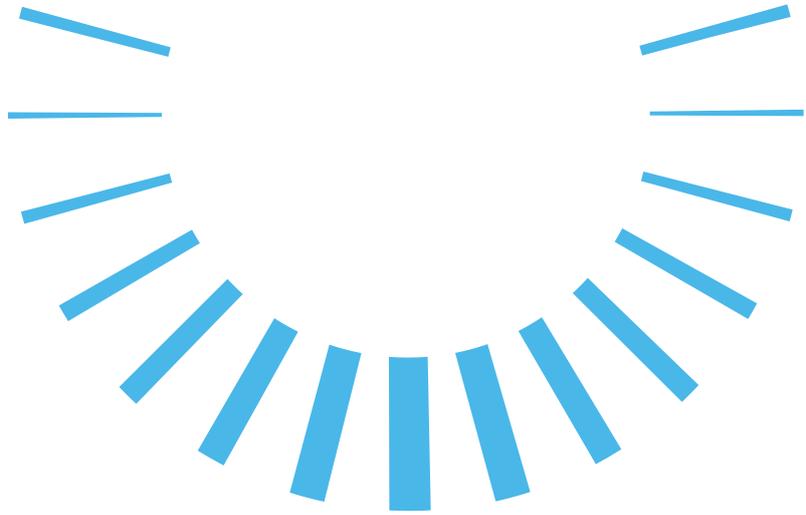
Black, P, and William, D (2008) Assessment and Classroom Learning, *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, volume 5, issue 1.

Bloxham, S., Boyd, P., & Orr, S. (2011) Mark my words: the role of assessment criteria in UK higher education grading practices. *Studies in Higher Education*, 36(6), 655–670.

Decolonising pedagogy and curriculum (2020) AEM and Attainment team.

Core practice in inclusive assessment online [https://www.arts.ac.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0027/215658/Core-practice-for-Inclusive-Assessment-Online-PDF-131KB.pdf](https://www.arts.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0027/215658/Core-practice-for-Inclusive-Assessment-Online-PDF-131KB.pdf) [Accessed: 29 June 2020]

Fair Assessment UAL, Available at: <https://www.arts.ac.uk/study-at-ual/academic-regulations/course-regulations/assessment/fair-assessment> [Accessed: 17 June 2020].



Giloi, S., & Du Toit, P. (2013) Current Approaches to the Assessment of Graphic Design in a Higher Education Context. *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, 32(2), 256–268.

Higher Education Course Regulations 2019/20, Assessment Policy UAL, Available at: [https://www.arts.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0035/179738/Assessment-Policy-19-20-PDF-292KB.pdf](https://www.arts.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0035/179738/Assessment-Policy-19-20-PDF-292KB.pdf) [Accessed: 17 June 2020].

Orr and Shreeve (2018) Art and Design Pedagogy in Higher Education: *Knowledge, Values and Ambiguity in the Creative Curriculum*. Routledge. London.

Inclusive Marking of Written Work Guidelines for Staff, Available at: [https://www.arts.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0023/205538/Inclusive-Marking-of-Written-Work-Guidelines-for-Staff.pdf](https://www.arts.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/205538/Inclusive-Marking-of-Written-Work-Guidelines-for-Staff.pdf) [Accessed: 29 June 2020]

Malecka, B, Boud, D & Carless, D (2020) Eliciting, processing and enacting feedback: mechanisms for embedding student feedback literacy within the curriculum, *Teaching in Higher Education*, DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2020.1754784

Orr, S., M. Yorke, B. Blair (2014) 'The answer is brought about from within you': A Student Centred Perspective on Pedagogy in Art and Design, *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, 33:1, pp. 32-45.

Prindle, J et al. (2019) Narrowing attainment gaps through addressing assessment issues. Advance HE. Available at: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/narrowing-attainment-gaps-through-addressing-assessment-issues> [Accessed 29 June 2019]

Sabri, D, (2018) Research briefing on formative assessment.

UAL Assessment Criteria, Available at: <https://www.arts.ac.uk/students/stories/new-assessment-criteria3> [Accessed: 29 June 2020]

UAL Course Quality, Available at: <https://www.arts.ac.uk/study-at-ual/academic-regulations/student-feedback/ual-course-quality> [Accessed: 17 June 2020].

UAL Designing teaching resources available at <https://www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual/teaching-and-learning-exchange/resources/designing-teaching> [Accessed: 20 June 2020]

Winstone, N, (2019) The Psychology of assessment and feedback processes in Higher Education, conference paper given at Shift conference, University of Greenwich. <https://vimeo.com/309907065>

Winstone, N. & Carless, D. (2019) Designing effective feedback processes in higher education: *A learning-focused approach*. London: Routledge.



Creative Commons Licence:  
**CC BY-NC 4.0**

Attribution: AEM and Attainment Team,  
University of the Arts London