

# Exploring compassionate feedback



Marianne Greated (GSA)

Vikki Hill (UAL)

Robert Mantho (GSA)

Emily Salines (UAL)

Thea Stevens (GSA)

# Belonging through assessment: Pipelines of compassion

QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project 2021



**Compassion:** ‘The noticing of distress and/or disadvantage to self or others, and a commitment to take action to reduce it.’

Paul Gilbert, 2005

**Belonging:** ‘...a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important...’

Terrel Strayhorn, 2012



# QAA Belonging through assessment: pipelines of compassion

Three strands of work:

Grading / ungrading

Policies ('whole self')

**Feedback**

**Project members:**

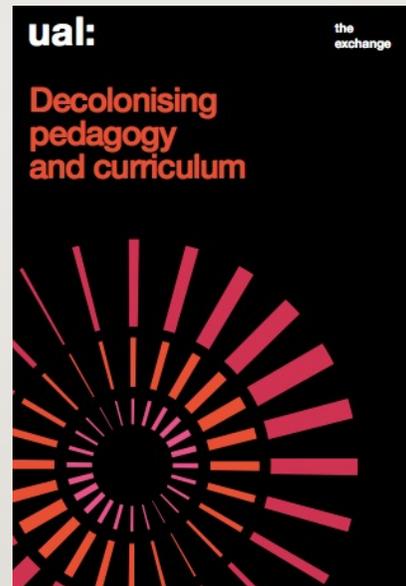
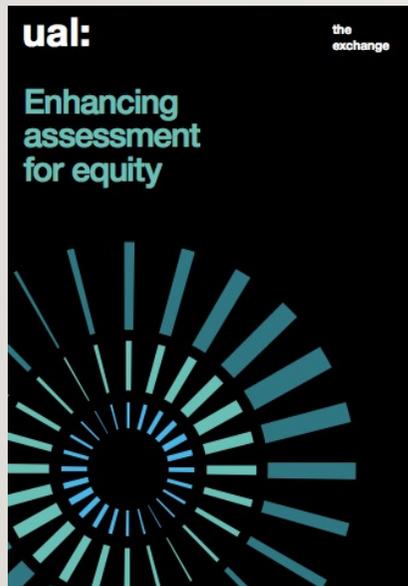
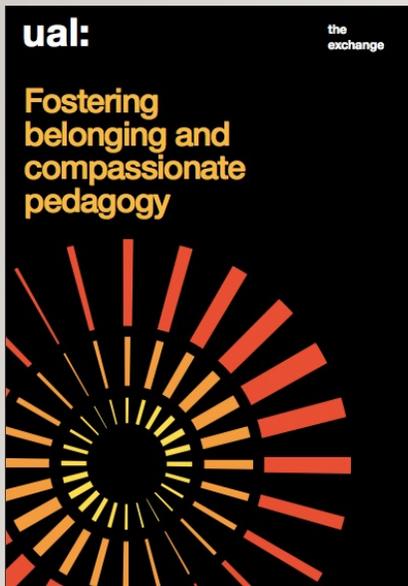
**Lead: Vikki Hill**

**UAL: Liz Bunting, Dr Neil Carrant, Dr Emily Salines**

**GSA: Marianne Greated, Robert Mantho, Thea Stevens**

**LAU: Prof Sam Broadhead, Peter Hughes, Dr Laura Da Costa**

## UAL – compassion, belonging, equity, and decolonizing pedagogies

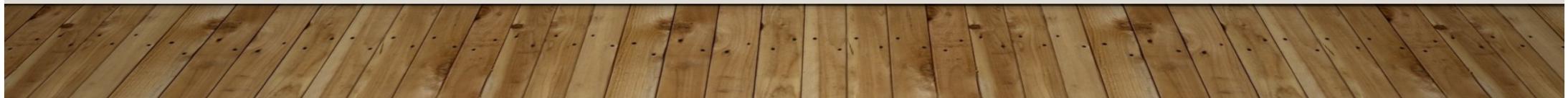


‘If assessment shapes how and what students learn, as the literature suggests, and if we are committed to social justice within and through higher education, then surely assessment is key to the achievement of that social justice.’

Jan McArthur, 2021

## Gap: in research and support resources

- The contribution of feedback to student learning is well known. (Hattie and Timperley 2007)
- Guidance and support for staff for effective feedback are available. (Boud and Molloy 2013)
- Discussions of feedback and assessment in relation to belonging and compassion is growing, however, there is a need for initial resources to inform practice.
- Exploring feedback in terms of human experience, for students and staff.
- Aim is to develop principles and start to form user friendly guidance.



## Our two key aims:

In collaboration with academic staff, **develop definitions** of what compassionate feedback might look like, and **devise guidance and support** for approaches to compassionate feedback within the art and design disciplines. What **advice** might we give to ourselves, our colleagues, and students for a compassionate approach to feedback?

Explore with staff **how existing structures and processes may be adapted and modified** to enable compassionate feedback, bearing in mind the **potential cost for staff** of what Spaeth calls the 'emotional labour of feedback' (Spaeth 2018), including issues of workload. The approach responds to Jan McArthur's call to restore 'joy' in assessment (McArthur 2018) and make the assessment process both manageable and compassionate.



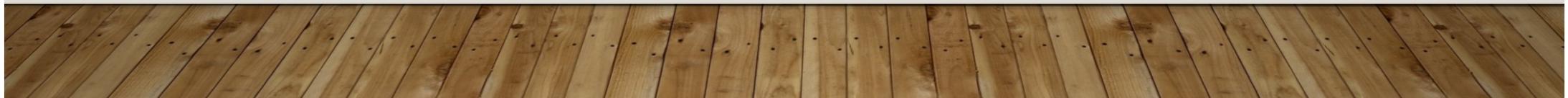
## First-Phase Workshop @ GSA: April 2022

The team developed and delivered a collaborative workshop that asked invited participants from GSA's five Schools to reflect on how we can support ourselves and our students in approaching feedback and feedforward, **particularly at the formative assessment stage.**

Action Research: *reflexive, responsive, leaving ourselves at the door*

Process of learning together: *extremely rich discussion and sharing*

Initial step towards co-developing guidance and support: *team reflecting on findings and reflecting on what next steps may be.*



## How we did it

The team developed and delivered a collaborative workshop that asked invited participants from GSA's five Schools to reflect on how we can support ourselves and our students in approaching feedback and feedforward, **particularly at the formative stage.**

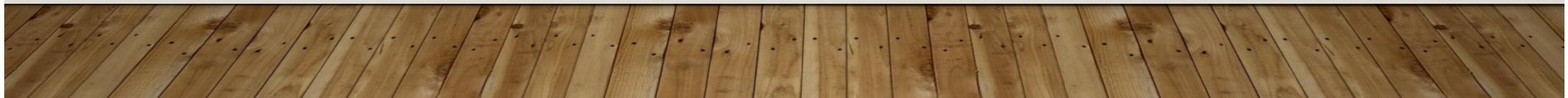
The workshop included framing presentations and two core discussion sections with the following guiding questions:

### **1: What is your understanding of compassionate feedback?**

- a) How do we define compassion?
- b) In what ways can compassion be used in assessment?
- c) What are the principles of compassionate feedback?

### **2: How can we enact compassion when giving feedback?**

- a) Can you describe what compassionate feedback would look like?
- b) Can you describe what compassionate feedback would feel like?



# Defining and understanding compassion

**Understanding:** With education as an act of love (Freire), belonging is understanding: students need to understand that their educators understand their learning journey.

We need understanding of **individual requirements for learning**, and to inculcate **awareness of diverse experiences**.

**Qualities of compassion** help us define how to embody it, including:

- mirroring so that the other feels 'seen';
- active listening;
- honesty and transparency: helping students understand why, what, and how.

**Understanding our power:** Our pedagogy should suggest and guide rather than dictate. Assessment creates artificial structures dealing with non-human elements, including grades. More compassion built into the structures would be key, and acknowledging our own power position.



## Journey: how compassion can be used in feedback for assessment

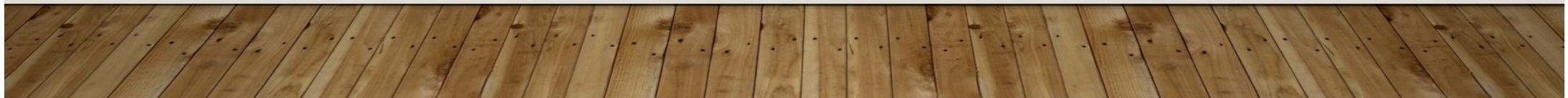
Feedback for assessment is a **durational learner journey**, where formative feedback offers powerful constructive affordances.

Formative feedback **might acknowledge past learning**, and there might be value in 'unlearning' past educational experiences.

Given the value of feedforward, would **compassionate approaches towards students and staff workloads** place most value on the formative moment and frame the summative (albeit with a feedforward element) as more "contained" and manageable?

Feedback for assessment should be a two-way conversation and process recognising environment, tone, and language, a relational and dialogical **'done with' rather than 'done to'**.

Engaging students in assessment (e.g. self- and peer-assessment, co-creation) and 'de-coding' assessment structures (e.g. transparent constructive alignment) **would inform mutual understanding**.



## Whole self: student and staff experience

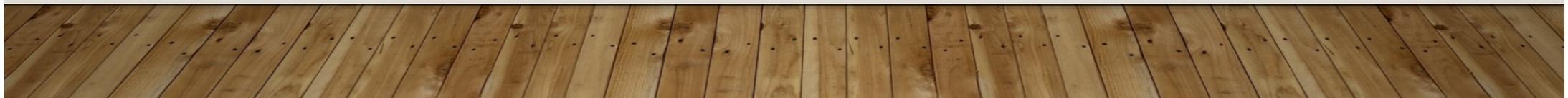
Compassionate approaches drive towards recognising the 'whole' of the student and staff experience.

In this framework of reciprocal conversation, **students should feel empowered** to recognise their work and their journey.

Empathy, sensitivity, and the ability to understand others and recognise risk-taking and obstacles lead to a conception of the 'whole self' in the experience of feedback for assessment.

However, some of the challenges include **talking about the work, not the person, but recognising the person in the work**; and here we can interrogate the role of the pastoral (e.g. personal tutor system) in helping students feel "seen".

Reflecting on the impact of the pandemic and triangulating assessment with institutional systems, **compassionate approaches also have a deep linkage to staff workload**, given the value of time and the durational.



## The conversation and onward steps

- Sharing with UAL colleagues
- Podcast on compassionate feedback
- Workshop plans and guidance to support staff to develop their approach to compassionate feedback
- Development of a draft resource for co-creating principles of compassionate pedagogy in feedback for assessment.
- Presentation of resource on 24 November 2022



## References & Resources

- Boud, D. & Molloy, Hattie, J. and Timperley, H. 2007. The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77 (1) 81-112.
- Nancy Falchikov & David Boud (2007). 'Assessment and Emotion'. In Boud, D. & Falchiko, N. (eds.) *Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education* (Routledge).
- Paul Gibbs (2017). *The Pedagogy of Compassion at the Heart of Higher Education* (Springer).
- Paul Gilbert (2005) 'Compassion and cruelty: A biopsychosocial approach'. In Gilbert, P. (ed.), *Compassion: Conceptualisations, research and use in psychotherapy* (Routledge).
- Jan McArthur (2021). *Rethinking student involvement in assessment*, Centre for Global Higher Education working paper series 58, <https://www.researchcghe.org/perch/resources/working-paper-58final.pdf> (Accessed 12/4/21).
- Spaeth, E. 2018. On feedback as emotional labour. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*. Vol 6 Issue 3. pp 83-86
- Terrell Lamont Strayhorn (2019). *College Students' Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students*. 2nd Edn. (Routledge).

### QAA Collaborative Project & UAL Resources

<https://belongingthroughassessment.myblog.arts.ac.uk/>

<https://www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual/teaching-and-learning-exchange/resources/aem-and-attainment-resources>

