

Belonging through Assessment: Pipelines of Compassion

QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project 2021-22

Launch Event, 27 January 2023

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Belonging

'...a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important...' (Terrell Strayhorn, 2012, p. 4)

Compassion

'...noticing of distress and/or disadvantage to self or others, and a commitment to take action to reduce it' (Paul Gilbert, 2005)



Amanda Gorman
@TheAmandaGorman

A friend gifted me this engraved compass and it took me several moments to remember I wrote this line in my book 😭



12:46 AM · Jan 3, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

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Project Aims

1. Identify areas of enhancement in assessment policies and practices to promote student sense of belonging and tackle issues of social justice.
2. Link this relational work with attainment gap/awarding differentials agendas in the creative arts.
3. Develop collaborative, dialogic, polyvocal and affective resources for staff development across the HE sector.



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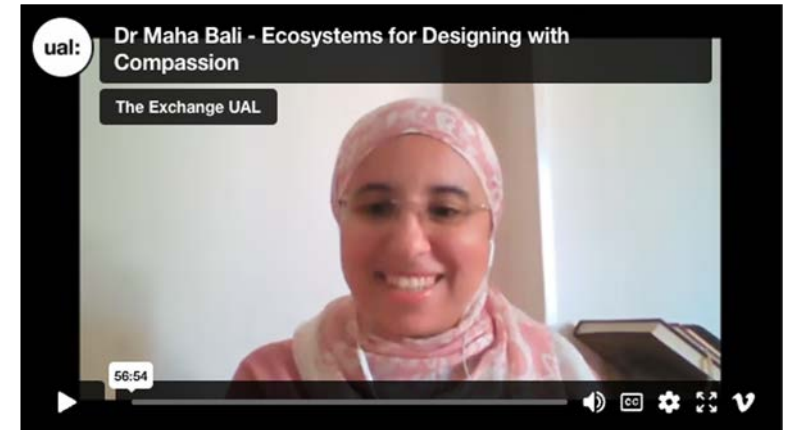
Key outputs

1. A symposium on compassionate assessment
2. A briefing paper on the project's activity
3. A blog documenting the organic development of materials and providing a space for exchange of ideas

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

4. A participatory digital resource for three research strands:

- * Pass/fail grading
- * Trauma-informed policy
- * Compassionate feedback





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Introduction

In February 2021, colleagues from University of the Arts London (UAL), Leeds Arts University (LAU) and Glasgow School of Art (GSA) secured funding for the QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project – Belonging through assessment: Pipelines of compassion. The project began against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic and the team identified a shift in assessment practices across the three participating arts institutions. This offered an opportunity to further our work, in collaboration, to address social justice, belonging and inclusion through compassion.

This project aims to:

1. Identify areas of enhancement in assessment policies and practices to promote student sense of belonging and tackle issues of social justice.
2. Link this relational work with attainment gap/awarding differentials agendas in the creative arts.
3. Develop collaborative, dialogic, polyvocal and affective resources for staff development across the HE sector.

Three research strands emerged from themes relevant to our own institutional priorities, mutually informing the project and institutional practice and policy. These are pass/fail grading, trauma-informed policy and compassionate feedback. Initial cross-institutional research and evaluation into pass/fail assessment was taking place at UAL and at LAU in the wake of measures introduced during the pandemic. The trauma-informed

Diamond Nuchjalearn drawing in the studio. Fine Art: Drawing, CCW.
Photograph by Alys Tomlinson

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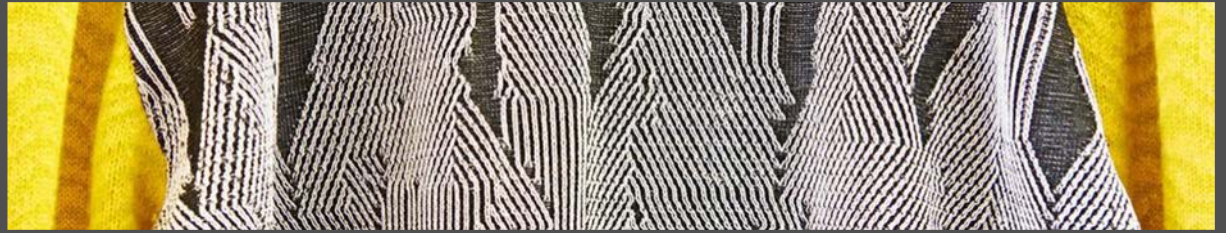
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ual:

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QAA



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Pass / Fail grading background and research

- Pass / Fail changes as a result of 'no detriment' policies during Covid - LAU / UAL.
 - Change to pass / fail 1st year.
- Call out to sector for literature related to the topic.
- UAL – interviews with 1st & 2nd year students and staff to evaluate the shift to pass / fail. (Summer 2021)
- LAU – evaluation of pass / fail in AY20/21 (May 21 and follow-up May 22) – student focus groups and institutional data.



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Research / Evaluation findings

- Students recognise that their previous educational experiences have to a degree conditioned them to work within a graded system, such that removal of that can be destabilising.
- Over time, students appreciated that pass/fail grading helped reduce stress and anxiety around their transition into university.
- Pass/fail grading enabled some students to feel free to experiment, play, have more freedom and take risks in their creative practice.
- Letter or number grading can create a more competitive rather than collaborative environment.

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Ten challenges of pass / fail grading

1. Pass / fail is unfamiliar – can cause additional anxiety
2. Can be destabilising – needs careful explanation.
3. Can be perceived as lowering standards.
4. Signals “just a pass” – can impact motivation and effort.
5. Does not recognise high achievement.
6. If only used at level 4 (year 1) can cause assessment literacy challenges when moving to year 2.
7. Fears of how it will be perceived by employers.
8. Removes compensation, no such thing as a marginal fail.
9. Runs counter to prevailing UK policy around signalling higher achievement and excellence.
10. Pass / fail is a rarity in UK context which requires continual justification.

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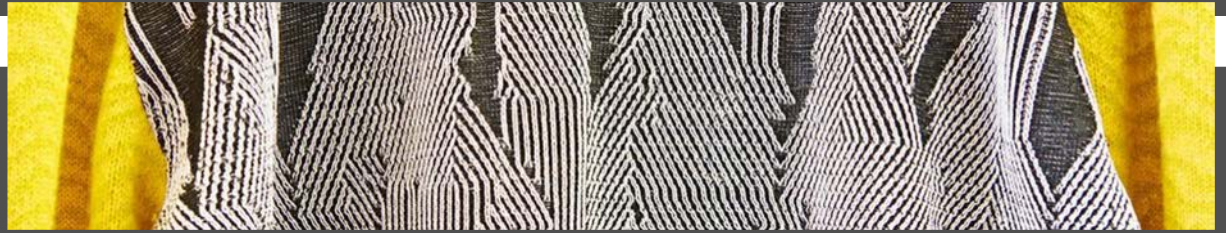


Ten benefits of pass / fail grading

1. Removes students' focus from grades to learning.
2. Can help activate intrinsic motivation and self-regulation.
3. Can create space for conversations about assessment and learning.
4. Can encourage greater engagement with feedback.
5. Can benefit student mental health.
6. Can encourage a more cooperative rather than competitive learning environment.
7. Can encourage greater access to additional learning opportunities, co- & extra-curricular, societies, volunteering etc.
8. In first year, can create a common space for students of different backgrounds to transition into HE.
9. Can lead to greater marking consistency.
10. Reduces concerns about grade inflation.

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[All episodes](#)

Interrogating Spaces

Pass/fail assessment in arts higher education

DECEMBER 01, 2021 UAL TEACHING, LEARNING AND EMPLOYABILITY EXCHANGE SEASON 2 EPISODE 6

00:00 | 42:34

LISTEN ON

SHARE EPISODE

The image shows a podcast player interface for the episode 'Interrogating Spaces: Pass/fail assessment in arts higher education'. It includes a thumbnail image of a group of people in a workshop, a play button icon, and a progress bar. Below the player, there are icons for various podcast platforms (Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, Amazon Music, etc.) and social media sharing options (Twitter, LinkedIn).

<https://interrogatingspaces.buzzsprout.com/683798/9644305-pass-fail-assessment-in-arts-higher-education>

QAA Membership Podcast: Students' vi...
MEMBERSHIP

Watch Later Share

MORE VIDEOS

6:08 / 58:47

YouTube

The image shows a YouTube video player interface for the video 'QAA Membership Podcast: Students' vi...'. It features a circular profile picture of a man with glasses and a beard. The video title is partially visible. The player includes standard YouTube controls like a play button, volume icon, progress bar (showing 6:08 / 58:47), and icons for subtitles, settings, and full screen.

https://youtu.be/XoWC_Zhpj-A

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Trauma-informed policy

To what extent do the assessment policies of creative arts institutions acknowledge the interaction between assessment and students' whole self, representing a compassionate approach to assessment?

Defining trauma

"an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being." *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)*

"...policies are 'contested', mediated and differentially represented by different actors in different contexts..." (Ball, 2015: 311)





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Principles of trauma-informed policies

- 1. Connect:** Supportive and trusting relationships mitigate the destructive impact of trauma. Trauma-informed policies support the building and maintaining of relationships, and networks of support, within university communities.
- 2. Protect:** Traumatic events often make us feel unsafe, anxious and fearful. Trauma-informed policies support an individual's emotional, cognitive, physical and interpersonal safety. Cultivating a sense of safety through transparency, stability, and preventing further harm.
- 3. Respect:** Individuals often feel they have lost a sense of control or agency following traumatic experiences. Trauma-informed policies empower students and staff through choice and voice, promoting agency, sharing power and decision-making.
- 4. Redirect:** When we experience trauma, we can lose touch with our sense of purpose. Trauma-informed policies anchor education as a space for healing, centring on skill-building and competency, enabling students to have positive futures and embroidering hope into educational experiences.



Rethinking policies

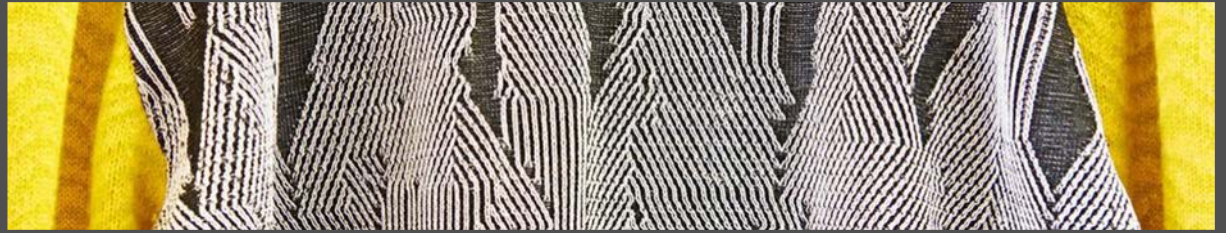
How does the policy process demonstrate trust?

How does the policy ensure equity over notions of fairness?

How does the policy mitigate power dynamics?

How does the policy protect students from further harm?

How accessible is the policy?



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Compassionate Feedback

Devise guidance and support for approaches to compassionate feedback within art and design

What might compassionate feedback might look like?

What advice might we give to ourselves, our colleagues, and students for a compassionate approach to feedback?

Explore how existing structures and processes may be adapted and modified to enable compassionate feedback

How can we take into account the potential cost for staff - 'emotional labour of feedback' (Spaeth, 2018)

How can we make the assessment process manageable and compassionate to restore 'joy' in assessment (McArthur 2018)

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GSA Breakout workshop

Discussion based workshop, framed around short presentations and working sessions which explore topic through discussion.



1: What is your understanding of compassionate feedback?

2: How can we enact compassion when giving feedback?

Interrogating Spaces


Compassionate Feedback

OCTOBER 11, 2022 UAL TEACHING, LEARNING AND EMPLOYABILITY EXCHANGE SEASON 3 EPISODE 1



00:00 | 35:59

LISTEN ON



<https://interrogatingspaces.buzzsprout.com/683798/11480939-compassionate-feedback>

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Prompts workshop

Short workshop aimed at low-impact gathering of snapshot feedback using prompts based on the following areas.

Assessment Design

Relational Aspect

Promoting Student Agency

Tone and Language

Equity

Based on our podcast

<https://interrogatingspaces.buzzsprout.com/683798/11480939-compassionate-feedback>



Why this resource?

This resource supplements the podcast '[Compassionate Feedback](#)' and lists the ideas and suggestions made by the contributors to the podcast as well as additional ideas arising from discussions involving colleagues from Glasgow School of Art as part of the 2021 QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project entitled '[Belonging through Assessment: Pipelines of Compassion](#)'. It is meant to serve as a springboard for discussions rather than as a guide on how to enact compassionate feedback.

How can you use this?

The list can be used by individual tutors, as they reflect on their practice, or in team discussions, or in discussions with students.

You may think of additional or different approaches to compassionate feedback; and you may notice some apparent contradictions, or tensions, between different prompts. This is because there is not one single way of approaching compassionate feedback. Again these are only prompts and suggestions to help you start thinking about what your approach might be.

Design

Is feedback happening at times when it can be useful to students?

Does formative feedback play a prominent role in the student journey?

Can formative feedback acknowledge past learning, and support students in achieving their learning goals?

How is students' engagement in assessment supported (e.g. self- and peer-assessment, co-creation)?

Are students supported to decode assessment structures and approaches?

Is assessment done with students, rather than done to them?

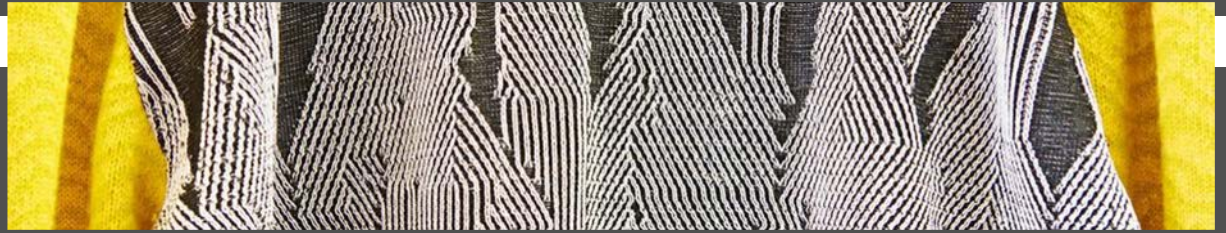
Relational Aspect

Think about who the student is, what is special about them, what challenges they may have overcome, and what their goals and interests are - and reflect this in the feedback.

See things from the student's perspective.

How does feedback convey that you hold the student in high regard, that you care about their learning and that you believe in them?

Invest time in creating a welcoming space for all students.



Compassionate Feedback

What we learned

What is our understanding of compassionate feedback?

How can we enact compassion in feedback for assessment as a learner journey?

Reflection: Understanding, Learner Journey, and Whole Self



Mia Liyanage

EDI Manager (Students), UAL



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