

+ Assessment and feedback case study compendium 2026

Inclusive assessment and feedback design

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Reasonable adjustments, real impact: student and staff perceptions of inclusive practice

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Background

Despite widespread interest in and knowledge of inclusive assessment, large-scale implementations of fully inclusive assessment practices remain rare (Nieminen, 2024) and constraints of assessments, both real and perceived, often fail to accommodate the diverse needs of students. Universities in the UK have a legal and ethical duty to ensure that students with disabilities are not disadvantaged and have the same access to education as others (Equality Act, 2010), with a requirement for reasonable adjustments (RA) to be made where necessary to facilitate this. It is therefore common for institutions to permit alternative forms of assessment, with adjustments varying from practical and temporal considerations through to technological support and changes to structure or format. Although the very nature of different assessment for different student groups can be considered to contradict the aims of equal opportunity (Sharp and Earle, 2000), use of RA can ensure an individualised approach that takes account of each student's specific needs.

Better provision for a diverse student population and widening participation strategies have improved access to higher education (HE) for disabled students and enhanced awareness and diagnostics have enabled better recognition of neurodiversity, such that the proportion of students disclosing a disability has increased substantially over the past two decades, rising from 5.4% in 2003-04 to 19.9% in 2023-04 (Office for Students, 2025). As requests for adjustments increase, the feasibility of accommodating them for higher numbers of students becomes a challenge and programme learning objectives and environments need to employ strategies that are scalable and manageable within the constraints of delivery. Where assessment already often falls behind other measures of student satisfaction in the National Student Survey, positivity levels reported by disabled students are still consistently lower than their non-disabled counterparts (Office for Students, 2025), indicating a need to better understand student experience and perspective to drive any improvements and enhance accessibility. Indeed, actively involving students in critical discussion can not only enable feedback on processes but also development of new ideas (Ainscow and Messiou, 2018). Adopting a 'students as partners' approach, including the engagement of disabled student ambassadors as accessibility experts, can enable institutions to draw on students' lived experiences as a valuable source of pedagogic insight (Brown et al, 2020).

Individualised and flexible adjustments can be expected to lead to the best student experience but, at times, the very nature of assessment itself is in conflict with these requirements. This is particularly the case for programmes of study with strict professional

requirements and competencies, where Professional and Statutory Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) set standards, accredit courses and regulate professions. The context of this study relates to such programmes, in areas of healthcare and subjects allied to medicine and veterinary medicine in the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences (FHMS) at the University of Surrey. Assessment strategies for these programmes are designed to evaluate and evidence key learning and competencies through varied methods, including written, oral and complex practical assessment, for large and diverse cohorts. The aim of this study was to explore student and staff perspectives of the use of RA in such programmes, in order to inform further development of inclusive practice.

Approach

This research project received a favourable ethical opinion from the University Ethics Committee at the University of Surrey (Reference no: 1336) and took place between May and July 2025. The study was funded through a FHMS Associate Dean of Education Seed Funding grant.

Participants

Participants included both students and academic staff from FHMS, representing disciplines of Biosciences, Health Sciences, Psychology, Veterinary Medicine and Medicine. Disabled and neurodivergent students with experience of reasonable adjustments were recruited via email and flyer through the School Disability Liaison. Academic staff with expertise or interest in assessment design, and knowledge of current assessment practices, were recruited via an expression of interest circulated by the Associate Head of School in each department.

Initially, three student facilitators were appointed from across FHMS. Each facilitator had personal lived experience of RA in assessment and was engaged as a co-producer and accessibility expert. Their role included contributing to the design of the focus group questions, facilitating discussion and supporting the interpretation of findings. Student facilitators then led a series of focus groups, with 13 students participating in Phase 1, 18 staff in Phase 2, and seven students in Phase 3.

Methodology

The project adopted an educational co-production approach, positioning students as partners (Bjørnerås et al, 2024; Bjørnerås et al, 2025), and using an iterative multi-phase focus group design. This approach was intended to prioritise student expertise, support dialogue between students and staff, and enable the progressive refinement of ideas.

- + **Phase 1 - student focus groups:** student-led focus groups explored students' experience of RA in assessment, perceived barriers to implementation and ideas for improving flexibility and inclusivity. Discussions focused on identifying aspects of current practice that worked well, as well as areas where adjustments were considered inconsistent or constrained.

- + **Phase 2 - staff focus groups:** key themes and questions arising from Phase 1 were used to inform the design of student-led focus groups with academic staff in Phase 2. These discussions explored staff perspectives on RA, assessment design, competence standards and implementation challenges. This phase facilitated comparison of student experiences with staff understanding, revealing areas of alignment and tension.
- + **Phase 3 - second student focus group:** a further student-led focus group was held to review and refine the ideas emerging from the staff discussions. Students were invited to reflect on staff perspective, challenge assumptions and further develop recommendations.

Across all phases, focus groups were led by student facilitators, with the academic research team involved only in supportive roles where necessary.

Analysis

Data from all focus groups was analysed using the Framework Method (Gale et al, 2013). Researchers familiarised themselves with the transcripts, independently coded a shared transcript and met to agree coding labels. Data was then indexed and grouped into categories to aid interpretation. The analytical framework was informed by the study aims and focus group questions and refined iteratively throughout analysis.

The framework enabled systematic comparison of student and staff perspectives across phases, and supported the identification of areas of agreement, disagreement and tension. Insights from earlier phases informed both subsequent data collection and ongoing refinement of the analytical framework.

Outcomes

Throughout the focus groups, students emphasised the positive impact that adjustments had on their experience of assessments but also identified areas for improvement. Some students reported experiences of certain academic staff showing a lack of understanding of their support needs in relation to specific assessments, for example the physical environment during computer-based exams or the time constraints of practical exams. This mirrors experiences of staff working within Disability Services in HE, who report inconsistency between courses, schools and whole departments depending on the willingness of individual staff members to embed and adopt inclusive approaches (Borkin, 2023). Students did not always know what adjustments were possible and would prefer more transparency and consistent guidance for both students and staff. Positive experiences were often linked to specific relationships such as a proactive or accessible member of teaching staff or a supportive personal tutor.

“My personal tutor is actually quite good with these things and I feel like maybe that’s also on the side of training lecturers a bit better when it comes to neurodivergence and any kind of physical or mental health, any type of disadvantage anyone can be in. It would be training these people and making them understand, helping them understand that certain adjustments can lead to improvements in confidence.”

(Student, Phase 1 Focus Group)

While the student focus groups were characterised by consensus based on shared experience, there was considerable variation in attitudes within the academic staff focus groups. Some participants had a proactive, open attitude to how we might modify our approach to assessment for students who were entitled to adjustments. Others had a more process-oriented, conservative approach, focusing on the constraints of programme and regulatory requirements. They described a tension between competence standards and learning outcomes, leading some academic staff to make individual judgements about what is and is not considered ‘reasonable’, particularly in relation to flexibility in assessment (Borkin, 2023). Staff reported difficulties applying the duty to make reasonable adjustments within the constraints of competence standards required by PSRBs (Equality Challenge Unit, 2015). Staff report needing more training and time to understand what is required and how best to implement it (Little et al, 2023).

“...in the back of my mind is always the professional requirements of the programmes and what we are adjusting and does it support the students to join their profession.”

(Member of staff, Phase 2 Focus Group)

More positively, staff accounts suggested a pedagogic awareness that reasonable adjustments can operate as a catalyst for systemic improvement. As one staff member noted,

“I think there’s a lot of learning that can be taken from the adjustments that we may put in place for people who need them, for whatever reason, disability and neurodivergence, whatever the reason might be, and apply that across the board to our assessment standards.”

(Member of staff, Phase 2 Focus Group)

This shows an appreciation that adjustments initially designed for individual students may reveal structural weaknesses in assessment design and generate improvements that could benefit all students being assessed. This view is consistent with reporting to the Office for Students (Williams et al, 2019) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) literature (CAST, 2024), that suggests embedding accessibility and flexibility within assessment

structures may reduce the reliance on individual adjustments over time. However, within the student focus groups there was some pushback against these ideas. Student participants wanted individualised adjustments, alternatives and options, rather than a wholesale adoption of a ‘universal design’ approach. Their perspective was academic staff may not be best placed to determine whether students could have specific adjustments or not. Expertise in this area lies with specialist advisers and the students themselves.

Transferability of findings

Our study was undertaken to stimulate discussion with programme directors and assessment leads across several fields. Findings and recommendations of this study, indicated below, should influence assessment design and academic processes within health and medical disciplines. Universal design principles should be applied, for example in how assessment information is presented and how exam environments are managed; however, this would not eradicate individual adjustments, which should be identified by students-as-experts and staff with an understanding of what is available. This understanding would be focused on rights and adaptations, rather than ableist limitations.

“I don’t think that discriminatory workplaces are a reason to not put in reasonable adjustments in education.”

(Student, Phase 3 Focus Group)

Recommendations

1. **Give choices:** think about alternative assessment rather than assessment adjustments. Can the same learning outcomes be met with a different approach?
2. **Review the presentation of exam papers / written materials for exams:** could all written information be presented in an accessible way – large font, coloured paper?
3. **Improve academic awareness of disability and neuroinclusive practice:** students want better awareness of possible adjustments, better awareness from examiners, invigilators and assessment designers regarding individual students' learning support needs.
4. **Simplify academic processes relating to assessment:** reduce the evidence requirements for extenuating circumstances, particularly the requirements for medical evidence; reduce limitations on frequency; where students have ongoing concerns they should not have to repeatedly apply.
5. **Treat students as individuals:** don't make blanket assumptions about what adjustments might be useful. Be creative and personalised – this is where 'alternative' rather than 'adjusted' assessment may come in; acknowledge temporality – conditions fluctuate/flare up.
6. **Tackle the attitude of 'benevolent ableism'** where practical exams are concerned. Students said: academics tell us that assessments should reflect 'the real world' but in the 'real world' we would be able to have adjustments regarding timing, pacing, the environment.

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Repurposing Telegram as a lightweight LMS for inclusive formative feedback in low-resource ESL contexts

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Background

Formative assessment and feedback are widely recognised as central to effective learning in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). However, sustaining formative feedback practices remains challenging in low-resource ESL settings with limited infrastructure, time, professional development and institutional support (Bailey and Christian, 2021; Kayzouri et al, 2020).

In many low-resource ESL contexts, teachers rely on common communication platforms rather than purpose-built LMSs, which present both limitations and opportunities (Bailey and Christian, 2021). Although these platforms lack formal assessment structures, their accessibility, low technical threshold and familiarity to learners make them attractive for ongoing interaction and feedback. Telegram is one such platform that has gained attention in language education research due to its lightweight design and support for features such as channels, polls and automated bots (Kayzouri et al, 2020; Çakmak et al, 2023).

This case study is situated in a low-resource ESL teaching context where access to institutional LMS infrastructure was limited and where both teachers and learners relied primarily on mobile devices for learning-related communication. At this stage, the work represents the design and developmental phase of an ongoing project; implementation, data collection and analysis will follow in subsequent cycles. Learners were adult ESL students at intermediate to upper-intermediate levels from diverse backgrounds. Teaching and assessment activities took place largely outside formal classroom hours, increasing the need for flexible, sustainable feedback mechanisms integrated into routine teaching (Bailey and Christian, 2021).

Within this context, the central challenge was not simply how to deliver feedback digitally, but how to design formative feedback practices that were inclusive, manageable and responsive to learner diversity under constrained conditions. Rather than introducing a new platform or assessment system, the focus of the work was on repurposing Telegram as a lightweight LMS to support formative feedback processes. This involved adapting existing platform features such as polls, channels and messaging functions to serve assessment purposes typically associated with more complex educational systems, while remaining sensitive to access, participation and learner confidence (Kayzouri et al, 2020; Zhao et al, 2022). The work was framed by a combination of formative assessment principles, sociocultural theory and teacher-focused models of pedagogical readiness. Formative assessment principles emphasised feedback as an iterative and dialogic process that supports learner self-regulation (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

Sociocultural theory informed attention to mediated interaction and scaffolding in feedback exchanges (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006), while metacognitive perspectives foregrounded teachers' planning, monitoring and regulation of assessment design over time (Flavell, 1979; Teng, 2021). These perspectives were complemented by considerations of technological pedagogical content knowledge, which shaped how Telegram's features were repurposed in pedagogically meaningful ways (Mishra and Koehler, 2006).

The specific aims of the case study were to:

- + examine how Telegram can be repurposed as a lightweight LMS to support formative feedback in low-resource ESL contexts
- + illustrate how teacher planning, monitoring and regulation shape the sustainability and inclusivity of digital feedback practices
- + identify design principles that may be transferable to other constrained teaching contexts.

The focus on inclusivity provides learners with multiple engagement options, recognising variation in access, confidence and participation, while maintaining feasible practices for teachers.

Approach

Project rationale and design orientation

The project adopts a practice-based, iterative approach to formative feedback design, shaped by the constraints of a low-resource ESL teaching context. Rather than introducing a new assessment platform or externally designed intervention, the work focuses on repurposing Telegram features already familiar to teachers and learners. This orientation is informed by the need to minimise technical barriers, reduce cognitive and administrative load, and ensure that feedback practices remain sustainable within existing teaching routines (Bailey and Christian, 2021; Kayzouri et al, 2020).

Telegram is approached not as a substitute for a full institutional learning management system, but as a lightweight infrastructure capable of supporting core formative functions. These functions include clarifying learning goals, eliciting learner responses, providing timely feedback and supporting follow-up action. Design decisions prioritise simplicity, optionality and accessibility, allowing learners to engage with feedback through multiple modes without requiring constant synchronous participation.

Participants and timeframe

The approach is situated in an ESL teaching context involving one teacher only (with no additional staff required) and approximately 20–30 adult learners studying at intermediate to upper-intermediate levels. Learners represent diverse backgrounds and they access materials primarily via mobile devices. Telegram-based formative activities are integrated alongside existing teaching arrangements.

Participation in Telegram-based activities is voluntary but encouraged, **allowing learners to choose when and how they engage with feedback while maintaining formative interaction opportunities**. The current implementation cycle is scheduled to run over 12 weeks, with ongoing refinement informed by reflective practice.

Repurposing Telegram as a lightweight LMS

Telegram's features are selectively repurposed to support formative feedback processes typically associated with LMS environments. Channels are used to organise learning content and feedback prompts, providing a stable reference point for learners over time. Pinned messages are employed to clarify task expectations and assessment focus, supporting feed-up by making learning goals visible and persistent (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

Polls function as low-stakes formative checks, enabling the teacher to monitor understanding and engagement without requiring extended written responses. These polls serve as rapid diagnostic tools, informing subsequent feedback and adjustments. Messaging and threaded replies support asynchronous learner responses, reducing pressure associated with real-time participation and enabling more reflective engagement.

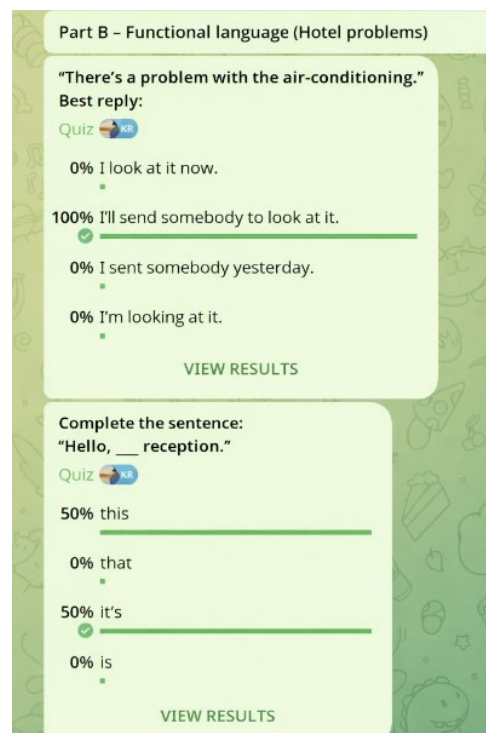


Figure 1. an example of a repurposed Telegram poll for low-stakes formative checks in an ESL context.

Where appropriate, automated bots are incorporated to provide immediate feedback on selected tasks, such as short quizzes or comprehension checks. These bots are positioned as supplementary supports rather than replacements for teacher feedback, offering rapid, standardised responses while preserving teacher agency and pedagogical judgement. Their use remains deliberately limited and optional to avoid over-automation (Andújar, 2020).

Teacher planning, monitoring and regulation

Central to the approach is an explicit focus on teacher decision-making across three interrelated processes: planning, monitoring and regulation. During planning, the teacher designs formative tasks that align with course objectives while remaining feasible within Telegram's affordances. Tasks are intentionally short, repeatable and adaptable, allowing for adjustment in response to learner participation patterns.

Monitoring occurs through observation of learner engagement patterns within Telegram, including response timing, participation spread and non-response, rather than through formal analytics.

Regulation involves modifying the use of Telegram features in response to emerging constraints and opportunities. Low-participation tasks are redesigned or simplified, while effective features are retained. This adaptive use of the platform reflects a metacognitive approach to assessment design, in which the teacher continually evaluates the effectiveness of feedback practices and adjusts them accordingly (Teng, 2021).

Reflective teaching notes and Telegram artefacts (for example, poll summaries, response patterns and threaded feedback exchanges) inform ongoing monitoring and provide a basis for post-cycle evaluation.

Ethical and practical considerations

Ethical considerations inform the approach throughout. Learner identities are protected through the use of pseudonyms. Telegram data is used for formative and reflective purposes only, in line with ethical guidelines.

Practical constraints, including varying levels of digital confidence and intermittent internet access, are addressed through low-threshold design choices and the provision of alternative means of engagement. This ensures that the use of Telegram supports inclusive participation rather than exacerbating existing inequalities.

Outcomes

Nature and scope of outcomes

At the current stage of the project, outcomes are understood in terms of design articulation, pedagogical readiness and the clarification of sustainable formative feedback practices, rather than measured impact on learner outcomes. The primary outcome of this work is the development and refinement of a coherent framework, grounded in an integrative review of existing literature and practitioner insights, which makes explicit how Telegram can be repurposed to support inclusive formative feedback in low-resource ESL contexts. Rather than positioning readiness as technical adoption, the framework conceptualises teacher readiness as a dynamic capability involving planning, monitoring and regulation, offering a structured account of enacting formative principles through accessible tools under constraints.

Design insights and pedagogical implications

Several design insights emerge from the framework. First, the repurposing of Telegram features such as polls, bots, voice notes and threaded chats illustrates how low-bandwidth tools can be adapted to perform formative functions typically associated with more complex LMS environments. For example, polls and bot-assisted quizzes support rapid formative checks, while voice notes and threaded exchanges offer alternative pathways for participation and feedback. Second, the framework highlights the importance of optionality and asynchronous engagement in supporting inclusive participation. Features such as private voice notes and delayed responses are particularly relevant for learners who experience anxiety or access constraints, aligning with affective and participation patterns reported in prior research on mobile-mediated feedback (Zhao et al, 2022). Third, the framework reinforces the central role of teacher judgement in sustaining formative feedback cycles. Automation is positioned as a supplementary support rather than a driver of assessment practice, underscoring the importance of pedagogical oversight in preventing over-automation and maintaining meaningful feedback interactions. While full empirical data collection is forthcoming, reflective synthesis during framework development and feedback from professional dissemination contexts (including colleague responses at the Advance HE Assessment and Feedback Symposium, November 2025) have informed the refinement of design principles related to inclusivity and sustainability. These processes provide a foundation for systematic evaluation in subsequent phases of the project without prematurely asserting impact.

Transferability and applicability

Although the case study is situated within an ESL context, the design principles articulated through the framework are transferable across disciplines, platforms and educational levels where formative feedback must be sustained under constrained conditions. The framework does not depend on Telegram-specific affordances alone, but on broader strategies of educational repurposing and teacher-led regulation of assessment design. For instance, similar principles could guide the use of WhatsApp polls for formative checks in STEM modules, or the adaptation of threaded discussions in Microsoft Teams to support feedback cycles in professional development programmes. This emphasis on design logic enhances applicability across institutional, disciplinary and geographical contexts.

Future development and next steps

The next phase of the project will involve systematic data collection and analysis to examine how the framework operates in practice over time. This will include closer investigation of teacher decision-making processes, learner engagement patterns and the sustainability of formative feedback practices under varying contextual constraints. Further development will also explore refinements to AI-assisted formative feedback, with particular attention to ethical considerations such as data privacy, informed consent and transparency in automated feedback processes. Findings from the implementation will inform potential rollout across additional ESL modules or disciplines at the institution, pending evaluation.

The case study establishes a foundation for both practical application and future research-based evaluation.

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Is all feedback received in the same manner? Developing a new feedback format based on dyslexic students' recommendations

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Background

Assessment and feedback systems are improving in HE; however, there is still room for improvement in both students' use of feedback and in their perception of how it can help improve their work. In the 2025 National Student Survey (NSS), while theme 3: Assessment and Feedback received a 80.9 positivity rating, the question 'how often does feedback help you improve your work?' achieved the lowest positivity rating in the set at 75.2 (Office for Students, 2026). This has led universities to explore the possible reasons for this dissatisfaction and why the feedback is not meeting expectations (Boud and Molloy, 2013; Mulliner and Tucker, 2015). The availability of time for feedback and assessment has been reduced due to the shift towards modularisation and the use of semesters, limiting teaching time (Hounsell, 2007). The higher academic workload and larger classrooms have also negatively affected the frequency of feedback (Boud and Molloy, 2013; Hanna, 2023).

There has been a wide range of research and work undertaken to ensure more effective feedback, extending beyond the educational setting and benefiting students in their lives (Hounsell, 2007). For instance, Carless et al (2011) suggest the use of sustainable feedback when the learner can continue learning and improving without further input from the educator. The use of dialogue and a two-way conversation is an important part of this approach. However, there is the possibility of student resistance and reluctance to be critical (Carless et al, 2011). Black and Wiliam (2018) also argue for the benefit of the one-to-one format for providing feedback and the use of dialogue. That said, written feedback remains one of the dominant methods for providing feedback on summative assignments, despite research suggesting that students prefer verbal feedback and a more personal approach (Mulliner and Tucker, 2015). Business-as-usual, consequently, should be questioned (Price, Handley and Millar, 2011), and other non-traditional methods should be explored (O'Donovan, 2017) to improve students' engagement with their feedback.

Dissatisfaction and the need for improvements are also highlighted for students with learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. Their experience and satisfaction with their higher education journey were found to be low (HEFCE, 2015). On the other hand, the number of dyslexic students is on the rise (Higher Education Statistics Agency, nd), further emphasising the importance of this area. The higher anxiety and the heightened emotional response by dyslexic students (Carroll and Iles, 2006; Sturm et al, 2021) can impact their negative experience as, generally, students are found to reject their feedback if it impacts their emotions negatively (Ryan and Henderson, 2018). Their reading and writing challenges

(Osborne, 1999) can negatively affect time, leading to spending up to 10 times as much time on the same task (Fuller et al, 2004). Furthermore, their lower confidence and self-esteem affect their willingness to ask for help and can even make them feel ashamed to be dyslexic (Riddick et al, 1999; Welton, 2023).

Current policies aiming to address the format of the provided information (Gov.uk, 2018), communication (Riddell and Weedon, 2006; Sumner, Crane and Hill, 2021) or even the suitability of the environment (Reid, 2016) seem to fall short in ensuring better ways to provide feedback to dyslexic students. Bacon and Handley (2010) recommend using images and visual aids to support dyslexic students' learning and, perhaps, serve as compensatory strategies for their difficulties. Furthermore, Pino and Mortari (2014) suggest increasing training and awareness for academic staff to enhance their understanding of students' needs.

I explore this phenomenon from students' perspectives and examine their emotional responses to feedback at a post-1992 university, involving nine participants from different educational disciplines. This has enabled a wider shared experience and a better understanding of their challenges. Sharing their experiences led to the development of a new format for providing feedback to students, including non-dyslexic students.

Approach

This research positions itself in the context of the theory of critical reflection and action, inspired by the work undertaken by Freire (2000). The development of a new feedback format for postgraduate-level students was based on research involving dyslexic participants using an adapted Photovoice approach (Wang and Burris, 1994). Photovoice is shaped by Freire's emphasis on developing critical consciousness and fostering empowerment (Breny and McMorrow, 2021; Wang and Burris, 1997). In this approach, participants are the experts in the knowledge and should be able to participate in an inclusive and participatory approach (Brown, 2024), aiming to give voice to a marginalised group of people (Breny and McMorrow, 2021).

Consequently, dyslexic students from all faculties at a post-1992 university were invited to participate in this research. The inclusion criteria were students identified as dyslexic, with an inclusive support plan in place, and who had received written feedback on their summative written assessment. There was no limitation on the stage of their studies; therefore, students from undergraduate to doctoral levels participated in this study.

The call for participation was circulated by email by the programme leads, the inclusive support newsletter and poster placement. Of the initial 30 students who expressed interest in participating, nine attended discussion sessions between March and June 2023. Participants were asked to construct their image(s) using any suitable media, with a caption that serves as their voice within the image. They were then invited to participate in an individual or group discussion session. All discussion sessions were conducted online via Zoom, lasting 20-60 minutes and allowing participants to share images, turn off their

cameras, or leave at any time. All sessions were individual, except for one, which was a pair. Some general probing questions were prepared; however, they were not used.

The participants reflected on their lived experience following the construction of their images, which took place two weeks after the briefing meeting. The briefing meeting was used to further explain the research and to answer any questions they had. The question asked of the participants was deliberately broad, ensuring no unintended direction was given, very much in line with the Photovoice research approach (Breny and McMorrow, 2021).

- + What is your experience and feeling of receiving written feedback on your summative written assignments?

It should be noted that the online approach to participation may not be the traditional approach in Photovoice research. However, the demographic has been changing since the Covid-19 pandemic, and in this approach, there is more flexibility in time and location, as well as the option to turn the camera off or leave at any time. Their participation required using Zoom on a computer (no longer than one hour) and attending the initial briefing (online), which was also limited to 20 minutes. The construction of the images was at their discretion, using any media and any number of images. The main discussion session was two weeks after the briefing meeting, allowing them to reflect, decide the extent of what they wanted to share and construct their images.

Lastly, thematic analysis (TA) (Braun and Clarke, 2022), was used to code and, consequently, to make themes, bearing the initial research questions in mind. The development of the new feedback format is in response to the question: What improvement or methods of providing feedback would the student recommend, and how can it improve the current practice?

Outcomes

The participants generally saw the value in their feedback and were keen to use and learn from it. However, there were barriers and difficulties, mainly due to the format of their feedback, which made it confusing, frustrating, time-consuming and not memorable. Some of these difficulties led to lower engagement or the development of their own methods, resulting in further time penalties for them. They either had never asked their lecturers for alternatives or did not believe it would be possible. In some cases, a lack of confidence reduced their ability to ask questions and seek further clarification.

Although participants were not directly asked to suggest possible improvements, throughout the discussion sessions they made several suggestions they believed would enhance their engagement with their feedback and, consequently, their learning. Some of these points are highlighted below.

- + They felt there should be a set time for them to ask questions in person, in a one-to-one format, allowing them to also understand how the marking is undertaken, ensuring their learning.
- + The accessibility of the format was highlighted, and the use of colours was suggested to aid this in a more balanced approach.
- + They saw the benefit of subdivision and bullet point methods for the main areas, with further explanations, to ensure ease of access.
- + The need for further staff awareness was also mentioned regarding their individuality, which could lead to personalised feedback using simple language.
- + They also wanted to see more examples, to help their learning, and, where possible, the use of visual aids and images was suggested.

The participants' suggestions focused on increasing their engagement with their feedback and making it more accessible and memorable. They wanted their feedback to be balanced, similar to that of participants in the study by O'Donovan et al (2019), highlighting what was done well and what needs further improvement. Having subheadings and bullet points, followed by further explanations and examples, would help them avoid being overwhelmed and make it easier for them to refer to their feedback in the future. Therefore, these recommendations were used to develop and refine our current student feedback format. The new format uses the module learning outcomes on the left, followed by sections for the main areas presented as bullet points, with further explanations, examples and possible visual aids (Figure 1). This aligns with Bacon and Handley's (2010) recommendations for using images with dyslexic students. This is further enhanced by an initial meeting with each individual to explore their specific needs and provide further opportunity for a face-to-face session.

Using this new approach, students have provided positive written and verbal feedback, regardless of the mark received. The neurodivergent students appreciate the initial discussion, which explores their individuality and asks whether they need any specific amendments. They found the format (Figure 1) accessible and easy to refer to, allowing better engagement and learning in their future assignments. The ability to request clarity in a face-to-face session was particularly welcome. We are continuing to collect feedback and data to explore any further possible improvements.

	Learning Outcome	Main points	Further explanation	Examples	
PROCESS Experiment, develop and review methods and their results	Develop an understanding of the physics behind building performance to reduce building energy as well as implications of different energy sources on the climate.				Face-to-face sessions
	Select appropriate energy reduction targets for building typologies and climates				Individual meetings to explore specific needs
	Systematically evaluate net zero energy strategies on the demand and supply side for different building typologies and climates, and assess their strengths and weakness in terms of energy savings, cost benefits and resource efficiency				Use of colours and subsections
ENQUIRY Researching your subject and articulating your own position	Demonstrate a critical understanding of the energy efficient building services including heating, cooling and ventilation systems				Usage of examples and visual
REFLECTION Practice informed by analysis and evaluation of work	Use appropriate software tools or actual performance data to assess the suitability, advantages and disadvantages of the inclusion of a range of energy efficiency strategies in building design				Detailed explanations
REALISATION and COMMUNICATION Independent decision-making and appropriate presentation and clarity of intention or argument and awareness of its context					Main points in a balanced approach – using bullet points

Figure 1. The new feedback sheet, developed and used with new cohorts

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Co-creating inclusive assessment and feedback in Life Sciences honours projects

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Background

Inclusive assessment design and meaningful feedback are increasingly recognised as central to student engagement, a sense of belonging and equitable outcomes in higher education (Tai et al, 2023; Tai et al, 2024). Sector-wide evidence indicates that traditional assessment practices can inadvertently disadvantage particular student groups, contribute to differential attainment and obscure the purpose of assessment as a developmental tool rather than solely a mechanism for grading (French et al, 2024; Winstone and Pitt, 2025). These challenges are particularly pronounced within STEM disciplines, including Life Sciences, where practical assessment is often constrained by laboratory capacity, safety considerations, staffing and rigid skill requirements.

Within the Life Sciences, there is a growing expectation that graduates possess not only strong disciplinary knowledge but also a diverse portfolio of technical, analytical and professional skills aligned with contemporary scientific practice, so graduates possess contemporary employability skills. Accrediting bodies such as the Royal Society of Biology (RSB) emphasise the importance of authentic laboratory experience, data analysis, collaboration and scientific communication (Royal Society of Biology, nd). At the same time, rising student numbers and finite laboratory resources place pressure on traditional models of laboratory teaching and project supervision, particularly at honours level.

This case study is situated within the Life Sciences honours project provision at the University of Glasgow, a research intensive institution with a strategic commitment to student-centred learning, inclusive assessment and partnership approaches. Level 3 of our programmes is where we sit most of our large, skills-based practical labs and assessments. The honours project (Level 4) represents a high-stakes capstone experience for undergraduate students, designed to consolidate learning, develop independence and prepare students for postgraduate study or employment. Traditional laboratory-based provision across both year groups faces challenges related to scalability, inclusivity and sustainability.

The central challenge addressed by this work was therefore twofold. First, how might we evolve our Level three practical class and assessment practices to reflect the constantly evolving employer requirements. Second, how can assessment and feedback practices be redesigned to enhance student engagement and assessment literacy while supporting diverse learner needs? A third consideration to this approach, albeit less pertinent to this

specific case study, is the broader need to increase hands-on laboratory opportunities for honours project students with constrained resources and limited supervisory support

To address these questions, this project explored a co-creation model in which final year honours students partnered with academic staff to design inclusive practical classes and associated assessment and feedback strategies for third-year undergraduate students. The specific aims were to:

- + develop a scalable model of assessment co-creation embedded within the honours project structure
- + enhance inclusivity and flexibility in practical assessment design
- + improve student understanding of the purpose, relevance and criteria of assessment
- + support the professional development of honours students through partnership-based curriculum design.

The work was informed by several complementary pedagogic frameworks. Students as partners theory provided a conceptual foundation, positioning students as active contributors to curriculum and assessment design rather than passive recipients (Healey et al, 2014). Principles of inclusive assessment design underpinned decisions around flexibility, accessibility and transparency, while constructive alignment ensured coherence between learning outcomes, practical activities and assessment tasks. These frameworks align with national and institutional policy drivers, including the University of Glasgow Learning and Teaching Strategy and broader sector trends emphasising authentic assessment, graduate attributes and inclusive practice.

Approach

The project was implemented as a pilot within the Life Sciences honours project programme, specifically the undergraduate Neuroscience degree programme over the course of one academic year. A group of four undergraduate students undertaking an honours project were invited to participate in a co-creation model in which they designed new practical laboratory classes for third-year undergraduate students, alongside complementary assessment and feedback approaches. Participation formed the core of their honours project rather than an additional activity, ensuring parity of workload and academic credit. The practical class was designed to involve open-ended questions and uncertain outcomes, enabling honours project students to collect, analyse and interpret raw data – core components of a laboratory-based investigative honours project. In parallel, it informed the development of a Level 3 laboratory class that embedded these analytical and research approaches, supporting the ongoing evolution of the Level 3 curriculum. In this case we were looking at the autonomic control of heart rate in daphnia, but the model and question is not important, only that it's an investigative question to which you can apply the key practical and analytical skills you're intending the students to learn.

A key feature of the approach was that honours students had completed the third-year course the previous year and therefore brought lived experience of the existing curriculum, assessment and feedback practices. This positioned them uniquely to identify barriers, areas of ambiguity and opportunities for improvement from a student perspective. Their role extended beyond content creation to include critical reflection on inclusivity, accessibility and alignment with learning outcomes.

Each honours student worked on the same practical class that embedded core technical and professional skills, such as experimental design, data analysis, teamwork and scientific communication. These skills were explicitly mapped to RSB accreditation requirements to ensure disciplinary and professional relevance. Alongside the practical class, students developed assessment tasks that were student-led, flexible in delivery and inclusive by design.

Academic staff acted as facilitators and mentors throughout the process. Their role was to provide guidance on pedagogic principles, feasibility and quality assurance, while deliberately preserving student autonomy in decision-making. Regular supervisory meetings supported iterative development and critical reflection, ensuring alignment with institutional assessment regulations.

We ran our pilot study with just four students, but we now plan to scale this delivery within a shared teaching laboratory environment. This model will enable collaborative supervision of multiple honours students and addresses limitations in laboratory capacity by integrating project activity into existing teaching infrastructure.

Outcomes

We have now run through one cycle of running this as an honours project, developed the practical class, embedded it in the Level 3 Neuroscience curriculum, run it and assessed it. The preliminary findings from this pilot indicate that the co-creation model had a positive impact on both third-year undergraduate students and honours students involved in the design process. Third-year students reported increased engagement with practical classes and greater clarity around the purpose and expectations of assessment tasks. Many highlighted that the assessments felt more relevant to real world scientific practice and better aligned with the skills they understood to be valued by employers.

Students also reported enhanced confidence in applying laboratory techniques and interpreting data, suggesting that the integration of assessment with practical skill development supported deeper learning. Perceptions of assessment fairness and transparency were notably improved, with students commenting positively on the flexibility and clarity embedded in the tasks.

It should be noted that much of this positive feedback came after a period of reflection and largely once the cohort had progressed from the third year and into their fourth year. At the time of completing the practical class there was some anxiety expressed about a lab class that has unknowns and didn't necessarily provide a clear-cut answer due to "messy" data.

As this laboratory class was also linked to a summative assessment this likely added to this unease. This design was deliberate, to represent what you might expect when doing real world research rather than a traditional, sanitised and largely engineered Level 3 practical class. We also feel the approach is vindicated by the positive post-reflective feedback from students once they progress in their course and realise the relevance.

For honours students, the project provided substantial professional and personal development benefits. Through their role as co-creators, students gained insight into inclusive curriculum and assessment design, developed skills in peer-focused feedback, and engaged critically with pedagogic decision-making. Reflective feedback indicated that many honours students developed a stronger sense of ownership over their learning and a greater appreciation of the complexity involved in designing equitable assessment.

At a structural level, the model promises to address the challenge of limited hands-on laboratory project capacity by enabling collaborative supervision and embedding project activity within a shared teaching laboratory. This approach supports sustainability and scalability, while also embedding continuous curriculum renewal within the honours project framework. Practical classes and assessment tasks evolve together, ensuring ongoing alignment with contemporary scientific practice and diverse learner needs. While the pilot was small scale, involving four students and the design of one Level 3 practical class, the initial qualitative findings suggest the next phase, scalability, has merit.

Several key messages emerge from this case study:

- + assessment co-creation with students is both feasible and impactful when embedded within existing curricular structures
- + inclusive assessment design benefits from the perspectives of students who have recent experience of the curriculum
- + partnership approaches can deliver reciprocal benefits, enhancing learning and engagement across multiple levels of study.

While the project was situated within Life Sciences, the principles underpinning the model are transferable to other disciplines, particularly those with laboratory- or practice-based components. The approach could also be adapted for postgraduate contexts or interdisciplinary programmes where authentic assessment and capacity constraints are relevant concerns.

Future development will focus on scaling the model so we can simultaneously run multiple projects, with multiple groups of students and refining mechanisms for staff support, evaluation and quality assurance. Further research is needed to explore the longer term impact on student attainment, progression and assessment literacy, as well as the potential of co-created assessment to address differential outcomes across student groups. Questions around workload, staff development and institutional policy alignment will also be important considerations as the model is expanded.

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Practicalities of optionality in Chemical Engineering education

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Background

Assessments play a crucial role in a student's journey through education. They provide information to a student on their understanding, provide educators with a method to grade students and they also play a significant role in the student experience (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007).

Assessment and feedback is a consistent area of poor performance across a number of institutions in the UK based on the National Student Survey (NSS), with thematic questions typically receiving some of the lowest positivity scores (Office for Students, 2025). Alongside this, we must also consider how we support the diverse needs of our students (Cook, 2001). Notably, ensuring assessments are inclusive to students with disabilities; recent NSS data also indicates that students with a disclosed disability are a group who are the least positive when providing feedback on their experience (Johnston and Anwar-Westander, 2023).

Exploring and using optionality within assessments is one way addressing some of these issues (Nieminen, 2021). There are a number of ways to provide choice to students. These includes: submission format, individual or group submissions, choice of questions and choice of weightings (Barua and Lockee, 2025; Wanner et al, 2021). Benefits of this approach include increased student ownership of learning, improved assessment satisfaction, reduction in disadvantaging students and facilitation of deeper learning (Jopp and Cohen, 2022).

The University of Manchester has led on a Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) project on the "feasibility, practicality and utility of student choice in assessment" with some preliminary findings published in October 2023 (Firth et al, 2023). This work looks to build on those findings by exploring the practicalities of implementing a simple approach to optionality within a large cohort size. This recognises both the workload implication for the educator and the impact on student experience and accessibility. The aim is to encourage educators to consider following a similar approach.

Approach

This work focused on developing simple options for students, the aim being to give them a choice that did not feel overwhelming, did not create significant additional workload for the educator and was robust as an assessment.

The NSS asks students directly about the fairness of marking during their degree. There are many reasons why an assessment may be unfair or perceived to be unfair. On the surface this can be an inconsistent use of mark schemes and bias in marking. More deeply, we see

challenges with poor constructive alignment of learning outcomes (Biggs and Tang, 2011), lack of clarity of instruction as well as the design of the assessment providing unintended advantages to some groups of students but not all (Woods et al, 2018). When students submit work in different formats it can be difficult for direct comparisons between students to be made (Irwin and Hepplestone, 2012), leading to questions on fairness. Therefore, the criteria must explicitly detail requirements for the options offered, ensuring fairness and parity.

The task was for students to produce an optimised schedule for a complex batch process. The main outcomes of the work were to produce a Gantt chart of their final schedule and a detailed explanation of their methodology with justification for their decision-making. The submission could either be a written report or pre-recorded presentation of their results.

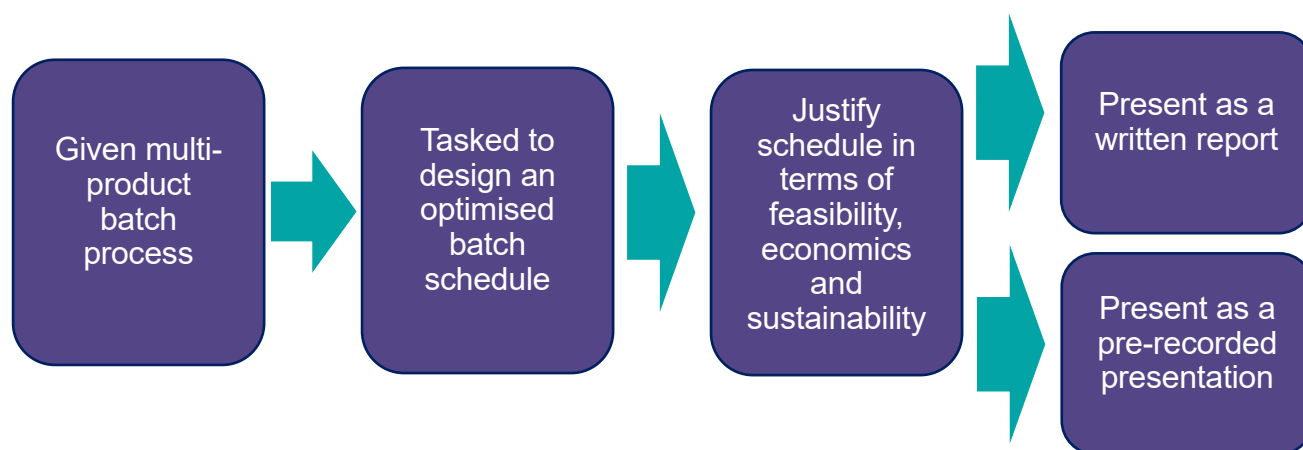


Figure 1. Assessment structure highlighting implementation of optionality.

To provide parity between options, clear limits on video duration and page limit were set. This ensured that, regardless of option, the 'volume' of work that could be submitted was the same. They were provided with details of the expectations of each format and a mark scheme in the form of a rubric. Of the marks available, 90% were identical and based on the assessment contents, with the remaining 10% of the marks being awarded for the quality of the report or presentation provided. Additional office hours were provided to allow students a greater opportunity to get support on the task on an individual basis.

Within a number of subjects, programmes are accredited by an external body. For Chemical Engineering, this is the Institute of Chemical Engineers. As part of this process, institutions are required to provide detail of all summative assessments used with three examples of student work and the feedback provided. Guidance provided indicates that the priority of this accreditation is the robustness of the assessment, rather than the assessment itself (ICHEME, 2021). Indicating that optionality is accepted and reiterating the previous notion that fairness and robustness should be inherent.

After the coursework, a survey was sent out to the cohort for feedback on the optionality. Based on the student feedback, revisions were made ahead of running the coursework again in 2024-25, notably redeveloping the rubric to one rubric which was applicable to both formats and increasing support resources.

Outcomes

Of the two student cohorts [n=261], 3.1% chose to complete the assessment using the pre-recorded presentation format. This is low, but not out of line with similar literature in other academic disciplines whereby students were more inclined to choose methods that were more familiar, and hence considered less time consuming or easier (Jopp and Cohen, 2022). It should be noted that several assessments completed by the students by this stage in their programme were written report style, with a small number of live presentations.

Focusing on the decision-making process of the students (Figure 2), the least important factor was following their peers followed by confidence with software. Students were encouraged to use the recording functionality within Microsoft PowerPoint to produce their pre-recorded presentation; this is a commonly used software and as such would explain it scoring lower in importance (Chávez Herting et al, 2023). This may rank differently if a less familiar software is recommended.

The remaining factors were all considered significantly more important based on the four-point Likert scale used. Confidence in their ability to complete work in the chosen format was the most important factor, as noted previously this is due to it being the only example of pre-recorded presentation as an assessment format within their programme.

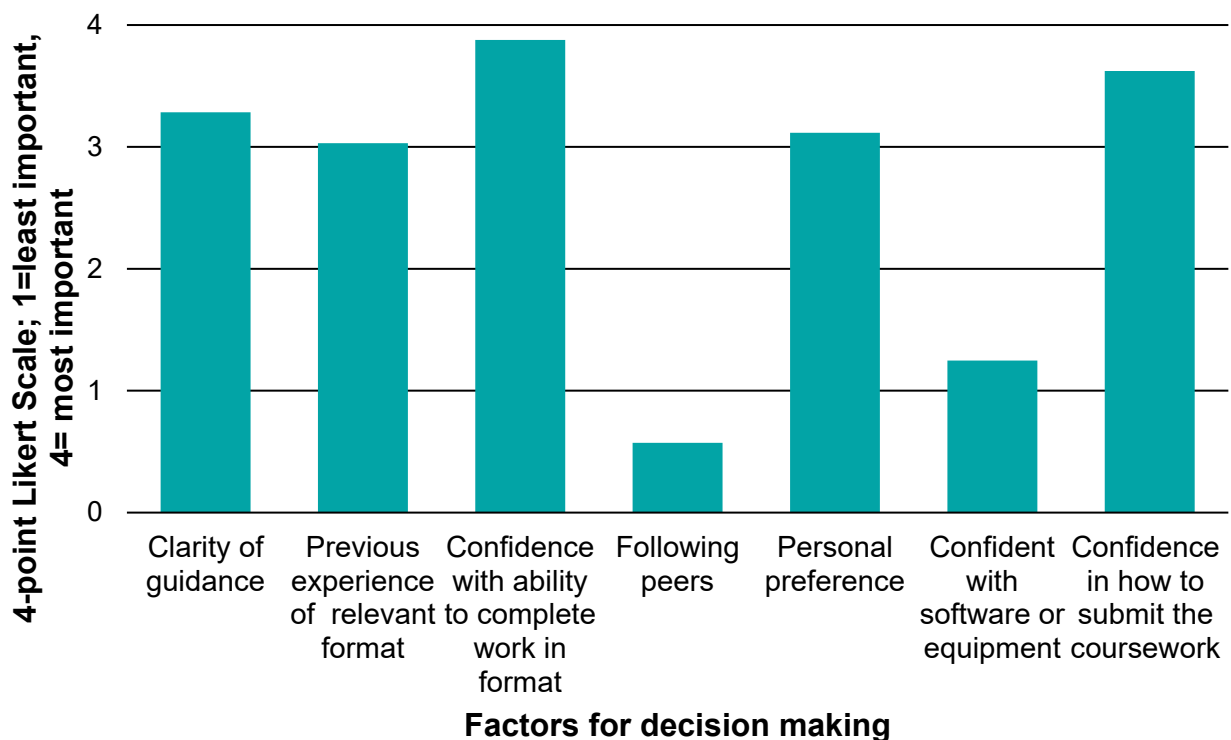


Figure 2. Four-point Likert scale quantifying importance of factors when choosing assessment format, lowest values represent the most important factors. [n=23]

As noted in Section 2, revisions were made based on student feedback. This mostly focused on enhancing the support provided for the pre-recorded presentation option to address the lack of confidence identified by the students. The specific request from students was to see an example of previous student work but this would be challenging as it would be difficult to anonymise and would also provide an advantage compared to the written report where previous examples are not provided. Exemplars can be beneficial when used by students to further their understanding of the marking criteria when explored with rubrics (To et al, 2022) but there is a risk that these are seen as model answers for imitation (Handley and Williams, 2011). Instead, an additional video was produced to provide a template structure to follow with tips on how to record effectively, with a summary of ‘what good looks like’. These resources directly align to the marking rubric and highlight these links to students. An equivalent resource for the written report was also provided.

Following the second year of running the session, feedback was collected again and collated with the previous year. However, this did not lead to an increase in students selecting the pre-recorded presentation format.

Within the survey, students were also asked about the added value of optionality. Of the students who responded to the survey on their assessments, n=23 – 89% – agreed that the provided options within their assessments added value to their education and should be offered more widely.

There was a similar theme in the free text comments provided by the respondents:

“I enjoyed the video process, it was a nice switch up from the usual.”

Student feedback, video submission

“I believe most people chose to stick with the report structure as it is what we have been used to throughout the course. We have only done a handful of presentations, and they were all in person, so no previous experience of recording presentations. However, did feel better to have a freedom with the coursework.”

Student feedback, written submission

“Providing some examples of alternative formats may help students familiarise themselves with the new format.”

Student feedback, video submission

“I felt able to express myself and my process easily/clearly.”

Student feedback, video submission

“Really good idea introducing alternative options for submission formats, and a good presentation skill is significant to chemical engineers, personally, even I picked the traditional way, I still think it is worth carrying on this alternative submission formats.”

Student feedback, written submission

The remaining students all voted ‘Maybe’ in relation to added value and whether optionality should be offered more widely. Anecdotal discussions with students highlighted that if every assessment involved optionality, notably more complex examples of optionality, it would become overwhelming. This aligns to literature previously noted, and suggests a programme level overview of optionality volume would be beneficial if increasing implementation.

In terms of educator workload, trialling optionality did increase workload compared to the previous assessment, which ran without optionality. This was through designing an appropriate coursework brief and marking rubric to ensure there was parity between the two forms of assessment, and through the additional complexity of the submission portal. This required additional support from the internal e-learning support team to ensure the portal was set up correctly, and to provide guidance to students. However, this is a one-time investment in time as these processes and materials can be used for future cohorts, as noted in existing literature (Cowan, 2024). Now that this process is established, the workload implications are no higher than an assessment without optionality undergoing annual updates.

Although the number of students attempting the alternative format was lower than hoped, it still added value to the assessment, as noted by the student feedback within the assessment survey. The mean score for quality of assessment and feedback increased from 4.06/5 to 4.5/5 pre and post optionality in our internal unit evaluation questionnaires. This was further recognised by the work receiving a student-led award from the University of Manchester students' union for inclusive and accessible teaching. The nomination highlighted this assessment as a positive opportunity to “*engage with the content based on their preferred study methods and needs*”.

Based on literature and information detailed in this case study, offering limited flexibility within assessment is sufficient in gaining the benefits for students while being manageable for staff.

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The SHARP assessment cycle: transforming group assessments through real-time student-staff partnership

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Background

Assessment in higher education frequently suffers from a critical temporal disconnect. Student feedback is collected retrospectively, and improvements benefit future cohorts rather than the students who provided the insights (Folwell and Brennan, 2025). Group assessments compound this challenge, requiring students to navigate interpersonal dynamics, cultural differences and variable engagement levels while meeting academic standards. When dissatisfaction emerges mid-assessment, staff often have no structured mechanism to respond in real time.

The post-pandemic landscape has intensified these pressures. As generative AI becomes more prevalent, assessment design needs to stay authentic and responsive to students' actual experience. Traditional end-of-module evaluations are too slow, and reliance on small focus groups risks excluding the broader student body (Williams and Ingle, 2025). Evidence also suggests that detailed assessment instructions can create unintended barriers, particularly for students with ADHD and other learning differences (Graham et al, 2018), and that students benefit from feedback during, not just after, an assessment (Bulut et al, 2025).

In response, this study introduces the SHARP assessment cycle, a framework that keeps students and staff in active dialogue throughout the assessment process. Developed by the author (Soobedar de Villeneuve, forthcoming) as part of a Transforming Assessment for Students at King's (TASK) funded project, SHARP represents five interconnected phases: Strategic (drawing on previous student feedback and aligning with developments such as AI), Holistic (considering workload, cultural diversity and emotional wellbeing), Adaptive (using real-time student voice to clarify and adjust assessments in progress), Reflective (systematically capturing learning for both students and staff), and Process (embedding these practices as routine across cohorts). Further detail on the framework's development and theoretical background is available from the author upon request.

Aims and objectives

The study pursued two objectives:

- + to develop and implement the SHARP framework within group assessments across two foundation-year modules
 - + to evaluate its impact on assessment clarity, performance consistency and student perceptions of partnership and agency.
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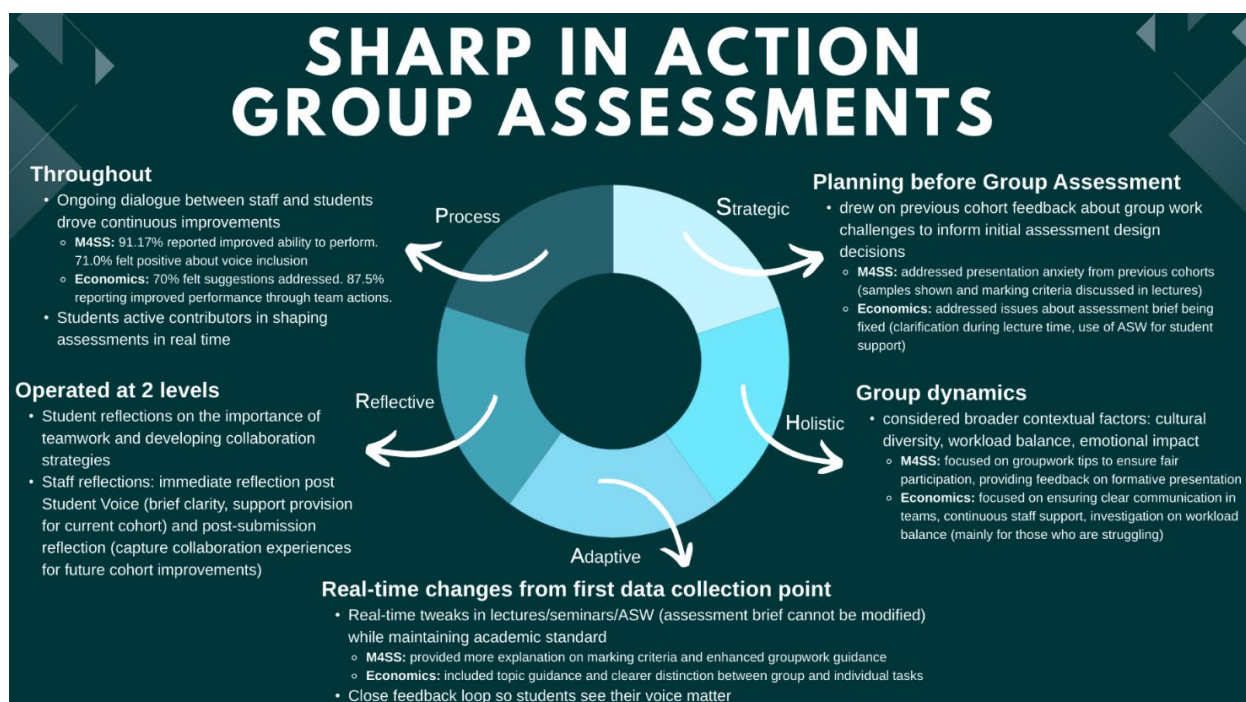
Approach

Implementation context

SHARP was implemented during 2024-25 in two compulsory foundation-year modules at King's Foundation, King's College London: Mathematics for Social Sciences (M4SS, n=236 students, group presentation assessment) and Economics (n=112 students, group report and individual analysis assessment). The author led the M4SS implementation, while in Economics the framework was adopted by the module team with the author's guidance. Both cohorts were culturally diverse, with students originating from China, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan, and numerous other countries. Ethics approval was obtained (LRS/DP-24/25-46257).

The SHARP cycle in practice

SHARP was applied across both modules through the same five-phase structure, adapted to each module's specific context and constraints.



What made it work in practice was simple. Students were asked what they needed during the assessment, not after it. Their responses shaped the support around them in real time: whether that meant clearer criteria explanations, better groupwork guidance, or, for instance in Economics, sharper distinctions between individual and group tasks. For staff, this meant checking in at structured points during the assessment period and acting on what they heard, rather than waiting for end-of-module feedback. In M4SS there was room to refine elements of the brief itself; in Economics the brief was fixed, but the support around it was not. The key takeaway for practitioners is that responsiveness does not require changing the assessment. It requires listening at the right moment and adjusting what you can. In both modules, students saw their voice matter.

Data collection

Mixed-methods data was gathered via structured surveys at multiple time points. For M4SS, 14 pre-submission and 34 post-submission responses were collected (14.4% response rate). For Economics, 24 post-submission responses were collected (21.4%). These response rates are modest, and it is worth noting that more engaged or motivated students may have been more likely to respond, a known limitation in module-level surveys in higher education (Nulty, 2008). The findings should therefore be treated as indicative rather than conclusive. That said, where they converge with the grade-level data from the full cohort, the two sources offer mutually reinforcing evidence, and it is that convergence which gives confidence in the conclusions drawn. To complement the survey data, M4SS grades were analysed across academic years 2023-25, with the coefficient of variation (CV) used to assess performance consistency, and open-ended survey responses were systematically categorised to identify recurring patterns in student feedback.

Resources required included student surveys administered via Microsoft Forms where open-ended responses were reviewed and categorised manually to identify recurring patterns, and grade data were analysed using Excel and Stata. This makes the approach readily replicable by colleagues across disciplines.

Outcomes

Grade performance (2023-25)

Across three cohorts in M4SS, mean grades rose from 61.1 to 64.7 to 65.0, and the median from 60.0 to 64.0 to 65.5. To assess how consistently grades were distributed across student groups, the coefficient of variation (CV) was used. This is calculated as the standard deviation (σ) divided by the mean (μ), expressed as a percentage ($CV = \frac{\sigma}{\mu} * 100$) and measures how spread out grades are relative to the mean. CV declined steadily from 9.77% (2023 baseline) to 8.44% (2024 control where no structured student-voice framework was in place) to 7.83% (2025 SHARP implementation year), indicating progressively more consistent and equitable performance across student groups.

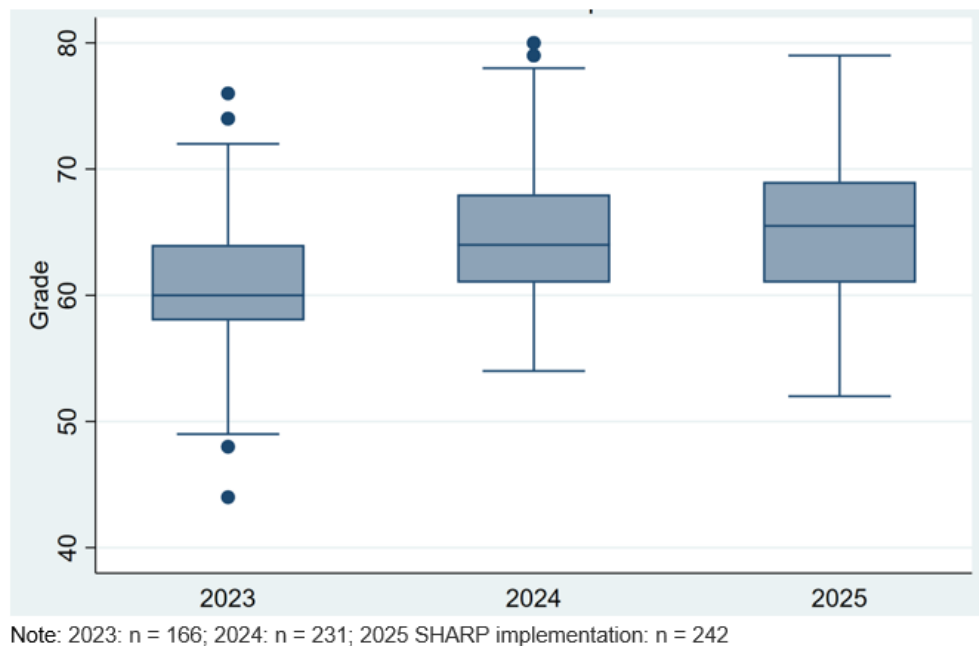


Figure 1. Grade distributions by year (2023-2025).

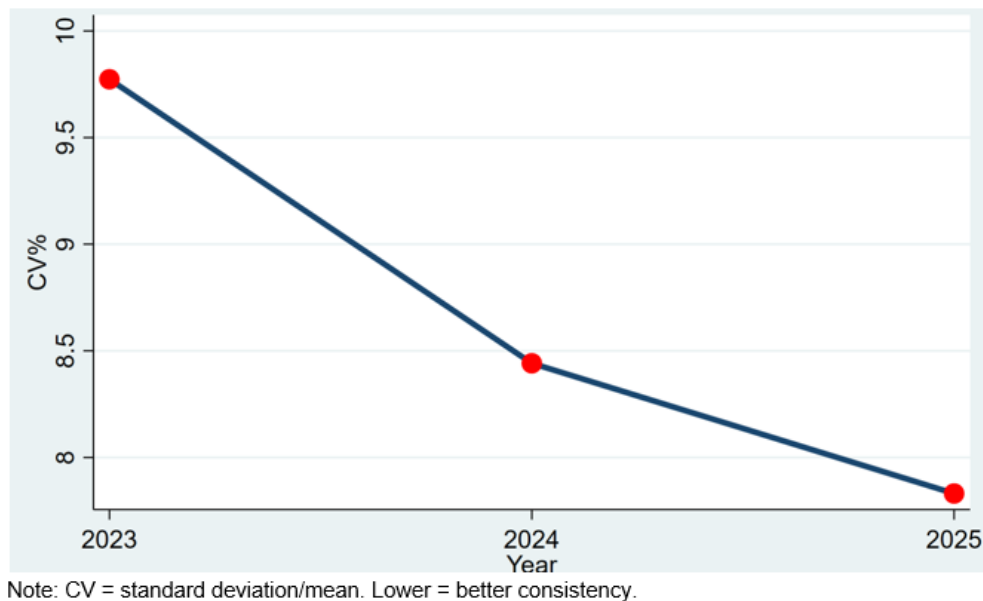


Figure 2. Assessment consistency: CVs trend from 2023 baseline to 2025 SHARP implantation. *N.B. CV = standard deviation/mean. Lower = better consistency.*

As Figures 1 and 2 illustrate, the 2025 SHARP cohort's grades concentrated around the 65-67 range with a markedly tighter interquartile range, while 2023 exhibited wide dispersion with outliers at both extremes. Crucially, this improvement in consistency occurred alongside rising mean and median grades, confirming that SHARP did not lower academic standards but rather reduced the gap between highest- and lowest-performing groups.

Grade-level comparison was not undertaken for Economics, as deliberate changes to the assessment brief in 2024-25 (designed to strengthen individual learning assessment within the group context) precluded isolation of SHARP's effect on grades. The module leader

confirmed that no negative impact was attributable to SHARP and has decided to extend the formal feedback mechanism across the module's assessments in 2025-26.

Student feedback

Open-ended survey responses provided valuable context for the quantitative findings. In M4SS, the pre-submission survey (see Figure 3 for a summary of findings) revealed that respondents reported becoming clearer about what to do and what not to do in the presentation after receiving sample provisions, and that the structure of the presentation was now clearer to them.

Metric	Finding
Found samples helpful for preparation	100% (14/14)
Brief was clear	100% (13/13)
Saw something in samples to avoid	92.8% (13/14)
Language level of brief was clear	92.3% (12/13)
Grading criteria easy to find	92.3% (12/13)

Figure 3. Pre-submission Survey Findings: M4SS (n = 14)

Post-submission, students consistently identified the responsive support as distinctive. One noted: "In M4SS, we had more structured check-ins and clearer instructions from the start. This made it easier to understand what was expected and allowed everyone to contribute more equally." Another contrasted the experience with other modules: "In other modules, we only saw one sample where they got a roughly high grade ... however in maths, [the lecturer] has provided really clear instructions and guidance on what we were supposed to do." Students also valued autonomy, reporting that staff "allowed us to find and form our own group presentation and choose topic, which gave us free will" and "provided us with many previous examples and told us where we could improve." These patterns are reflected in the metrics reported in Figure 4.

Metric	Finding
Happy with topic selection	97.0%
Pre-submission voice effectiveness rating	4.3 / 5
Team actions improved presentation ability	91.7%
<i>of which: significantly improved</i>	58.8%
Positive about voice inclusion	71.0%

Figure 4. Post-submission Survey Findings. M4SS (n = 34)

In Economics, students highlighted the benefit of brainstorming sessions, with one noting that "the structure and the order of the content were explained" and another that it "helped us to organise several meetings and work efficiently." Figure 5 presents the full Economics survey findings. The consistency of assessment criteria was particularly valued: "the criteria was confirmed to be the same as the essay one, which helped me a lot during the revision process."

When asked whether incorporating their voice would help them feel acknowledged, 75% (n = 18) agreed or strongly agreed, with none disagreeing. One student articulated the broader

significance of the approach: “Students should be listened to as part of the reason of foundation is helping prepare students for the next possible years. So, without student voices, how would a university know they are preparing their students for what’s coming?”.

Metric	Finding
Suggestions during brainstorming addressed	70.0%
Team actions improved performance	87.5% (21/24)
Incorporating voice helps feel acknowledged	75.0% (18/24)
Positive about being included in assessment	62.5% (15/24)
Felt well-supported by teaching staff	62.5% (15/24)
Group report experience rating	4.3 / 5
Group collaboration effectiveness rating	4.24 / 5
Brainstorming preparedness rating	4.24 / 5

Figure 5. Post-submission Survey Findings: Economics (n = 24)

Key messages and transferability

SHARP’s greatest strength is its adaptive phase: rather than relegating feedback to end-of-module surveys, it creates a responsive loop in which current students benefit from their own input. The framework improved assessment clarity, produced more consistent grades across student groups, and gave students a genuine sense of agency. For quality assurance, it combines student voice with grade data to monitor impact over time. In 2024-25, the full SHARP cycle was implemented in M4SS, while core elements were embedded in Economics and adapted to suit the module’s assessment context. Three key messages emerged: first, that real-time student voice can measurably improve assessment consistency; second, that students feel genuinely heard when their feedback leads to visible changes; and third, that the framework can be adopted at different levels of intensity depending on time and resource constraints. Beyond the foundation year, SHARP is currently being piloted in National Security Studies (essay writing), where early results are showing positive outcomes. It will next be implemented in Intermediate Economics (in-class test and presentation), extending SHARP’s reach from foundation to undergraduate level.

Next steps

Future work will focus on increasing survey response rates, developing cross-cultural communication protocols and implementing activity logs for group accountability. A key question is whether the grade consistency gains persist as SHARP matures across cohorts. How SHARP can support AI-resilient assessment design is also an area for further exploration. A further consideration is the distinction between retrofitting SHARP onto existing assessments and embedding it at the design stage. Building SHARP in from the outset may give staff and students greater scope for meaningful co-creation within institutional timelines.

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Ethics

Ethics approval to conduct this study was obtained from the King's College London Research Ethics Committee (LRS/DP-24/25-46257).

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