

+ Assessment and feedback case study compendium 2026

**Designing sustainable and workload-aware assessment
practices**

Edited by Vic Stephenson, Senior Consultant & Stuart Norton,
Head of Educational Excellence, Advance HE



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Positioning third space practitioners to engage in co-creation and enhancement of curriculum

**Dr Steve Briggs, Director of Learning, Teaching and Libraries,
University of Bedfordshire, UK**

Background

In the higher education sector, a ‘third space’ practitioner works in a role that transcends traditional academic and professional services job categories (Whitchurch, 2013).

Whitchurch (2023) discussed how the higher education third space may have plurality in that it can comprise multiple spaces that undergo continued reconfiguration. As such, many HE professionals, knowingly or unknowingly, work permanently or periodically in the third space (Briggs, 2025). Specific roles more synonymous with the third space include learning developers, librarians, learning technologists and employability advisors.

Many teaching and learning practitioners in third space-centric roles work in a centralised capacity within a support service or faculty. This means they work with students from across subjects and levels of study. As part of third space roles, there will often be opportunities to discuss assessment briefs, formative and/or summative feedback with students. Through such interactions, third space practitioners will develop rich insights into ‘what works’ in terms of teaching, learning and assessment. Accordingly, such individuals have the potential to play a key role in enhancing how students can engage with assessment feedback and associated literacies. However, to realise such benefits, third space practitioners must be positioned to work as curriculum development partners with course teams (Briggs, 2024).

Sloan and Porter (2009) advocated for a ‘Contextualise, Embed and Map’ (CEM) approach to English language support. This involved English language tutors working in partnership with course teams to ensure that support was:

- + routinely reflective of the programme of study in terms of subject matter and preparation for assessment (contextualise)
- + an integrated part of the course rather than an optional extra (embed)
- + scheduled and designed to complement sessions delivered by the course team (map).

While Sloan and Porter focused on English language tutors, their principles are applicable more widely to third space practitioners. While CEM-oriented collaborations can sometimes happen organically, to realise such potential across an institution there typically will be a need to purposefully design curriculum development methods to facilitate such approaches. This case study focuses on how this has been approached in terms of librarians and learning development tutors at the University of Bedfordshire, with a particular focus on support for assessment and feedback.

Since 2013, learning developers and librarians at the University Bedfordshire have co-delivered open-access academic skills support. This includes online and in-person tutorials and online learning materials. Additionally, librarians deliver information literacy teaching sessions within courses. In complement, learning development tutors worked in a targeted manner and provided support where inequalities of opportunity (such as retention or attainment) are identified. In both instances, there was historically a reliance on course teams to facilitate times to deliver sessions (and timetable these) and commonly involved a course team saying what a session(s) should cover. In practice, this could mean that, on occasion, corresponding sessions were generic, treated as an 'add on' by students and inadvertently duplicated content delivered by the course team or other support services (such as the language centre). Collectively this undermined the extent to which students were able to fully engage with support opportunities that could be provided by learning development tutors and librarians, including in relation to assessment feedback. As such, past institutional curriculum development approaches needed to be revisited and updated.

Approach

When the University of Bedfordshire Curriculum Framework (Figure 1) was updated, the opportunity was taken to explicitly reframe learning developers and librarians as curriculum co-creators. The Curriculum Framework review took place during academic year 2023-24 and Briggs, Reynolds and Brunton (2024) detail how this was approached. The final framework is shown in Figure 1.

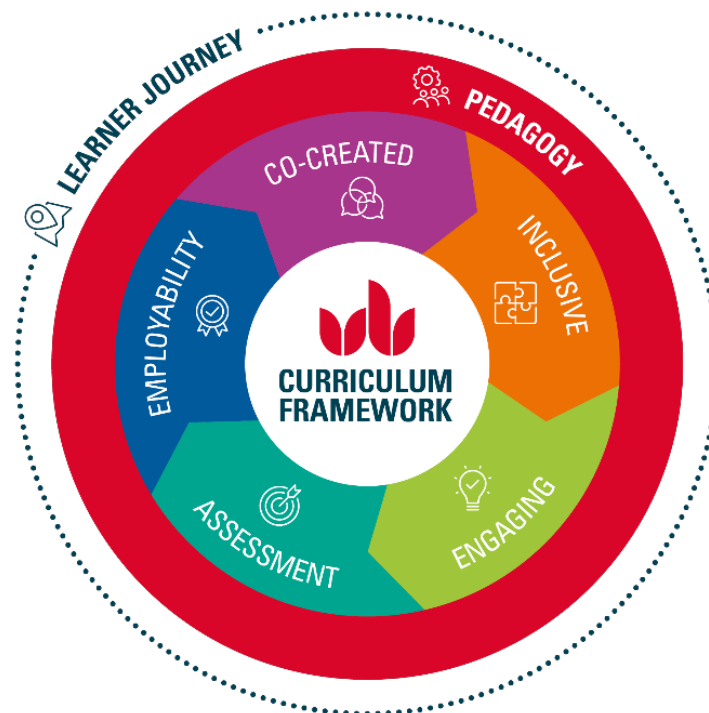


Figure 1. University of Bedfordshire Curriculum Framework 2024

Three dimensions of the Curriculum Framework particularly position learning developers and librarians to work with course teams in a curriculum development co-creator capacity.

- + **Co-created.** This emphasises that curriculum should be ‘developed and enhanced collaboratively.’ This is achieved through course teams working in partnership with curriculum consultants to develop teaching, learning and assessment approaches. Curriculum consultants are defined as teaching and learning practitioners (including learning development tutors and librarians), learners and industry experts.
- + **Learning journey.** To ensure students receive a consistent and effective induction into their course and then between levels of study, a ‘learning to learn’ pathway was introduced. This defines topics to progressively address during initial weeks of study. For example, Level 4 undergraduate students cover:
 - Week 1 - getting the most from scheduled sessions
 - Week 2 - learning resources (virtual learning environment and library)
 - Week 3 - personal tutoring and support services
 - Week 4 - academic integrity and referencing
 - Week 5 - assessment and feedback

Librarians and learning development tutors co-developed the template learning to learn pathway, so this reflects their collective expertise around how to support student transitions. Librarians and learning development tutors then work with course teams to support adoption – that could be via a single unit or across units. Corresponding session delivery often includes librarians and learning development tutors. Consolidation and/or expansion sessions that build on learning to learn content are also factored into course design planning.

- + **Assessment.** This outlines the need for:
 - authentic assessment
 - choice and flexibility
 - assessment scheduling
 - assessment explanation
 - feedback rich environment.

In 2024-25, an assessment transformation programme was instigated to ensure that assessment practices were consistent with the curriculum framework. This included 10 overarching assessment principles, one of which reiterated the need to co-create course-level assessment strategy. Additionally, enabling assessment enhancement projects were undertaken, including an update of the assessment brief template. This provided the opportunity to position learning development tutors and librarians as critical friends who can offer feedback on previous briefs to inform future iterations. Similarly, a new peer support of teaching and learning policy has positioned these practitioners as potential peer reviewers of previous assessment feedback provided by course teams.

The launch of the Curriculum Framework was supported by a series of bespoke curriculum development events across our then four faculties. Curriculum framework introductory sessions were led by the Director of Learning and Teaching Excellence and an Associate Dean (Education and Student Experience) – typically at a school level. Following sessions were arranged specific to emergent faculty/school needs and routinely delivered by centralised teams. For example, over the last 18 months the Careers and Employability Service led work to support the embedding of employability dimensions. Migration to the new framework was also facilitated by updated quality processes that reinforce adoption. Similarly, in academic year 2025-26 there will be a series of faculty sessions delivered by educational developers related to embedding Universal Design for Learning principles.

At the start of academic year 2024-25 the new course proposal forms were updated to require commentary on how each dimension of the curriculum framework has been addressed. Likewise, details of how specific aspects of the framework are to be embedded into courses has been included in annual enhancement planning since September 2024 (including subsequent adoption of the 10 assessment transformation principles).

In 2025, there was a further opportunity to position librarians and learning development tutors to feed into curriculum development. This involved co-locating both teams within a new Learning, Teaching and Libraries directorate. This now means that the librarians and learning developers are in same directorate as educational developers and learning technologists. This further reinforces the messaging that all are well placed and available to support the development of teaching, learning and assessment practices.

Outcomes

Eighteen months on from the launch of the Curriculum Framework, librarians and learning development tutors have shared reflections on whether there have been changes in how they work with course teams, particularly in terms of assessment and provision of feedback. Overall, responses support a notable change in collaborations between librarians, learning developers and course teams. As hoped, team members reported increased opportunities to propose, develop and deliver new teaching, learning and assessment practices (including provision of feedback), illustrated by the following quotes:

“The portfolio lead even mentioned that I have ‘almost become part of their teaching team.’ To me, this is evidence of librarians becoming embedded in teaching, learning and assessment delivery.”

“The curriculum framework has provided a ‘foot in the door’ through scheduled engagement with course enhancement planning and a wide range of meetings to enable forums that allow for identification of areas for further co-working”.

“I proposed and then worked with a unit lead to co-design and trial assessment writing retreats and have received very positive feedback from students.”

"I have delivered annual CPD sessions for healthcare academics across disciplines [Children & Young People (CYP), Adult, and Mental Health (MH) Nursing, Midwifery, Operating Department Practitioner (ODP)] on approaches for teaching numeracy for drug calculations which have provided opportunities to discuss and re-shape assessment design and content."

Responses from course teams has indicated that this work is positively impacting on students' experience and outcomes

"Co-creating the Learning to Learn Pathway with the academic liaison librarians and learning development tutor ensured the delivery of all key skills students require in their first year of study. Prioritising skills in this way additionally results in the sessions being delivered by experts within the University, with subject content being supplied by subject specialist academics. This ensures holistic support for all first-year students, with students and academic staff seeing the importance of all areas of university support. Hopefully, this will reduce the views of academic staff seeing support services, such as the learning development tutors, as a nice 'add on' for students. For them to see the benefit of holistic student support by engaging and embedding the specialist support provided more cohesively within course development and teaching opportunities."

"The School has worked closely with the Learning Development Team, where students can book 1-2-1 sessions. Personalised emails to resit students have had a positive effect on resit rates within the portfolio areas. We now work more closely with the library and learning development teams to deliver sessions across all levels."

While feedback has indicated that considerable progress has been made across many subject areas, there have also been some pockets where change is slower:

"A negative aspect is the lack of buy-in by [certain] lecturers. Sessions then become tick-box scenarios, particularly if course teams feel pressured to engage."

"I would like us to become regularly involved prior to assignment 'sign-off' to help highlight issues where assignment briefs do not elicit clearly for the student what the academic has in mind... I would like us to be proactively involved earlier in the process (where there is the 'preventative' opportunity)."

"I see a great disparity in how well students are prepared for final year or Master's projects. I would like to see more learning development input to support these assessments."

Accordingly, in early 2026, a roundtable will be held with learning development tutors, librarians and Associate Deans (Education and Student Experience) to co-develop plans to address where challenges have persisted in relation to realising co-creation aspirations. It is anticipated that this may lead to arranging further curriculum development events for selected course teams but with an emphasis on workshops facilitated by learning development and librarian teams.

Overall, the changes in practice since repositioning learning development tutors and librarians via the curriculum framework and then team restructuring, have simultaneously positively impacted on their co-creation of teaching, learning and assessment. As such, when institutions are undertaking a Curriculum Framework review it is advisable that consideration is given as to how this might be used to strengthen co-creation input from learning development tutors and librarians. Likewise, given the current financial challenges facing the higher education sector, many universities may be reviewing the third-space team structures and roles. It is recommended that any such review gives consideration as to how such teams can be best positioned to maximise input to teaching, learning and assessment practices.

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Embedding compassionate assessment through staff-led action research in international pathway programmes

Jacqui Browne, Head of Learning Measurement and Evaluation and Dr Victoria Wilson-Crane, Senior Director Innovative Student Learning, Kaplan International Pathways

Carla Smedberg, Academic Leader for Science, Engineering and Computing, Nottingham Trent International College

Dr Tony Saba, Academic Leader for Science and Engineering, Prasham Kothari, Academic Leader for Quality and Insights and Dr Christopher Smith, Academic Leader for Business, Law and Social Science, Kaplan International College London, UK

Background

Kaplan International Pathways is a leading higher education company helping international students shape their future and the world around them. We work in partnership with universities offering opportunities to study at a university in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US, through direct admission or a degree preparation course. Our programmes are designed to support students academically while also preparing them for the cultural, social and emotional demands of studying in another country.

Within this context, assessment plays a critical role. For many international students, assessment formats, expectations and academic conventions are unfamiliar. Students arrive from diverse educational systems and may not share a common understanding of what constitutes 'good' academic work in the UK context.

As expectations around assessment continue to evolve, particularly where digital tools and artificial intelligence are available and their use is expected, we made a deliberate decision to focus on human-centred practices that might otherwise be overlooked.

A key challenge identified by the Centre for Learning Innovation and Quality (CLIQ) was how to engage staff in pedagogic development without imposing change from above. Many educators were already committed to supporting students compassionately but lacked the time or framework to experiment with new approaches and reflect on their impact.

Action research offered a model that aligned with Kaplan's values by positioning staff as knowledgeable practitioners capable of identifying challenges and testing small, purposeful changes within their own contexts. Rather than treating research as an additional burden, action research was framed to formalise what staff already did instinctively: observe student needs, try new approaches and reflect on outcomes.

Considerable groundwork had already been undertaken to build shared understanding of compassion in assessment. Through internal newsletters, CPD activity and dialogue with managers, compassion was consistently framed as a pedagogic strength rather than a soft alternative to academic rigour. Colleges were encouraged to shape project ideas that were relevant to their own contexts, ensuring that enthusiasm for participation was driven locally rather than centrally.

“Compassionate pedagogy is an educational approach that notices and actively addresses or mitigates distress and disadvantage in a learning environment” (Killingback, 2025). By embedding action research into everyday academic life, we aimed to create a culture in which staff felt safe to experiment, supported by leadership and confident that small-scale innovation was valued. The overarching objective was to explore how compassionate assessment practices could reduce unnecessary barriers, support student confidence and improve outcomes, while also fostering professional autonomy and satisfaction among staff. Wilson-Scott et al (2025) suggest current assessment practices in high-stakes environments can appear far from compassionate: “Over-assessment, heavy assignment weightings, and clustered deadlines, among other challenges, contribute to the risk of student anxiety, stress, and imposter syndrome, and create an assessment landscape that is not conducive to joyful learning or student wellbeing”.

Approach

The action research initiative focused on assessment practices viewed through the lens of compassion. Participation was voluntary, and projects were deliberately scoped to be small, practical and achievable within existing workloads.

While compassion was the unifying theme, staff were given autonomy to identify assessment-related challenges most relevant to their students and disciplines. This sense of personal ownership was central to staff engagement. Action research was framed as inquiry rather than evaluation, reducing resistance and reinforcing its relevance to everyday teaching practice.

“Action research provided structure, guidance and critical friending to work that was being undertaken already. Therefore, there was no additional workload, but rather, a supportive framework which eased burden of the work, empowering and amplifying good practices which could be more widely shared and recognised.”

(Participant feedback)

Three projects were selected to pilot the approach across different disciplines and contexts.

Firstly, science educators at Kaplan International College London explored the use of exemplars to clarify assessment expectations in biology, chemistry and physics modules. Students on these programmes encounter assessment formats such as laboratory reports and exam types that may be unfamiliar or interpreted differently across educational systems.

Rather than providing model answers, staff designed WAGOLs (What A Good One Looks Like) to prompt discussion, highlight common misconceptions and demonstrate how assessment criteria could be met in practice. For laboratory reports, a single exemplar was created using a topic that was not directly assessed, preventing students from simply copying, while still addressing all criteria. For exams, annotated exemplars were produced to demonstrate how marks were allocated and how students could interpret command words.

For the exemplary lab report, a cross-disciplinary team of six staff, representing biology, chemistry and physics, invested considerable time in drafting, reviewing raw data, providing iterative feedback, and attending scheduled meetings to merge and refine contributions into a coherent, fully annotated exemplar for student use. Separately, the exam-support strand required staff time to create a small bank of WAGOLL exam responses focused on command words, question structure and expected depth of answer. These were reviewed collaboratively to ensure consistency with module expectations before being incorporated into in-class revision sessions. No additional financial resources were required; the project relied entirely on coordinated staff time and existing teaching infrastructure.

A second project at our London college focused on the language used around deadlines across multiple written assessments within the business, law and social science modules. Without altering institutional policy, staff reframed communications to describe a submission window rather than a fixed deadline.

Students were informed that the window opened and closed on a specific date and that they were encouraged to submit when ready. This approach aimed to reduce anxiety, support time management and reinforce student agency, while maintaining academic standards and marking expectations.

Approximately one hour was used per module to update the Assessment Task Information documents which would go to students. The groups of students selected for the trial received an explanation of the window, specifically relating to purpose, expectations and submission process, in class. The data was analysed after each submission window to assess impact, with follow-up discussions with module leaders folded into meetings. No additional costs or staffing resources were required.

The third project, conducted at Nottingham Trent International College, focused on a module called Intermediate Mathematics. A group of students included 13 required to undertake a mid-module resit. Staff identified that ongoing content delivery limited students' ability to consolidate learning and engage meaningfully with revision.

The intervention combined operational flexibility with relational support. New content delivery was paused for three weeks for the intervention group, streamed support was introduced based on mid-module exam performance, and teaching and exam timetables were adjusted accordingly. Clear communication and personalised academic guidance were central to the approach, alongside targeted counselling to engage and support students.

The initiative required a range of additional staffing and operational resources. An extra 24 hours of teaching time was provided over a three-week period, which required additional rooming and teaching staff. In addition, a second version of the exam was produced, alongside the necessary communication and logistical coordination for students. The tutor allocated additional time to review each student's first-sit exam and to personalise learning materials to target individual needs; timetables were adjusted accordingly. The Academic Leader contributed time both to support the tutor, clarifying purpose, expectations and operational processes, and to meet directly with the student groups, ensuring that the intervention was clearly understood and experienced as supportive, collaborative and student-centred.

In addition, because the resit group progressed on a three-week lag relative to the other maths group in the cohort, their subsequent assessments also required separate scheduling. This created further demands in producing additional versions of the later exams and ensuring appropriate staffing for invigilation and rooming for these assessments.

Across all projects, data collection focused on assessment outcomes, submission patterns and qualitative feedback from staff and students. To sustain momentum, participants were invited to share their projects at monthly cross-college CPD events, creating a structured platform for reflection and dissemination.

Outcomes

Across the three projects, findings indicate that small, compassionate adjustments to assessment design and communication can have a meaningful impact on student outcomes, engagement and staff confidence.

Analysis of performance data demonstrated improvements in both coursework and exam outcomes following the introduction of WAGOLLS. For lab reports, physics students showed an improvement in the assessment grade of +7.8% when comparing the April 2024-25 group with the previous year. For end-of-module exams, chemistry students improved by +18.4% year-on-year, while biology improved by +13.0%. When compared with the average of other groups in the same academic year, chemistry exam performance increased by +27.5%, biology by +11.8% and physics by +0.2%.

Beyond performance data, staff reported increased sense of student confidence and clearer conversations about assessment standards. The exemplars functioned as shared reference points, supporting assessment literacy and reducing uncertainty. Students reported that the exemplary lab report was helpful as a template. They felt it provided a clear model to follow, which made their writing more structured and more streamlined.

The submission window project demonstrated notable changes in submission behaviour. Across modules, late submissions reduced from 16% in the previous year to 3% following the introduction of this new language. Approximately 23% of students submitted earlier than would typically be expected, potentially indicating increased confidence and proactive engagement with the change.

Average marks increased from 71% to 75%, and failure rates dropped from 4% to 1% across the combined assessments. While demographic variation means these findings should be treated cautiously, staff reported no evidence of student confusion (relating to the new 'window'), addressing initial concerns about the clarity of the approach.

The dynamic scheduling intervention produced substantial improvements for students required to resit the mid-module exam. Of the 13 resit students, 10 achieved a pass (a score of >40), where nine of these students achieved a mark of 50% or more, with the mean resit score increasing by 25 percentage points.

At the first Assessment Board, the overall pass rate for Intermediate Mathematics increased to 90%, compared with a projected 71% based on initial performance, and represented a 9% increase on the previous year. Average module marks increased by +11%.

The successful outcomes led to dynamic scheduling, as an approach, being adopted across the network of 10 colleges with more widespread accommodations made to pause new content allowing time for consolidation of learning. The student feedback has also been very positive. In end-of-module surveys, students identified revision classes, tutor support and opportunities to address individual weaknesses as key factors supporting their learning. One student commented that "The revision classes were helpful", while another highlighted they had the chance to "learn new topics and get to know about my weaknesses and what can I improve". Others emphasised the value of the revision week and structured revision materials.

One student advised others to "study hard, focus on the past paper and don't miss the revision classes!"

These responses contrast with feedback collected prior to the introduction of dynamic scheduling, where students shared thoughts around the pace and intensity of the module, noting that it felt "condensed". Both the performance data and student feedback together suggest that clearer communication, relational support and structured consolidation periods contributed to improved success and confidence. While limited in scope, this feedback indicates that compassionate reassessment, when implemented with intention and structure, can positively shape the learning experience in international foundation programmes.

What began as small-scale, staff-led inquiries has contributed to a shift in organisational expectations around compassionate assessment design.

The use of submission windows has now become an expected approach at Kaplan International Pathways. While institutional deadlines and marking standards remain unchanged, the reframing of assessment communications has been adopted more broadly as a means of reducing anxiety, supporting time management and reinforcing student agency.

Similarly, the use of WAGOLs is now an established expectation across programmes, with continued encouragement for staff to design or co-design exemplars with students where

appropriate. Their adoption reflects a growing recognition that clarity of expectations is foundational for students navigating unfamiliar academic conventions.

Dynamic scheduling has also continued as a practical tool to support students across all colleges. Drawing on the success of the Intermediate Mathematics intervention, operational flexibility is now more readily considered when students require focused consolidation, revision or targeted support.

The significance of this work has also been recognised institutionally. In 2025, the Compassionate Assessment Team received a global Kaplan Way Award in the Student Success category, acknowledging the positive impact of their work. This recognition has further reinforced the legitimacy of staff-led inquiry and highlighted the role of compassionate assessment as a strategic priority rather than an optional enhancement.

Together, these developments demonstrate how action research can act as a catalyst for lasting organisational change. By embedding compassionate assessment practices into everyday academic life, Kaplan International Pathways has found an approach that supports both student success and staff agency.

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Sustainable peer assessment in student-led virtual classrooms: community of inquiry approach

Barbara Nicolls, Senior Lecturer in Postgraduate Education, Buckinghamshire New University, UK

Background

This case study examines work undertaken within a UK higher education institution to design and deliver an inclusive, flexible and pedagogically robust model of oral assessment for the Postgraduate Certificate in Practice Education (PgCPE). The programme recruits aspiring and practising multi-professional educators working across health and social care environments, contexts characterised by demanding workloads, uneven access to learning resources and a high degree of professional variability. In response, the PgCPE is offered through a deliberately flexible blended model combining synchronous on-campus learning, virtual classrooms and asynchronous digital spaces. This structure aims to ensure that students whose professional roles limit their availability can engage equitably with the full programme.

The assessment innovation discussed in this case study aligns with institutional ambitions for active, digitally enhanced and practice-centred learning. It also reflects sector-level expectations for high-quality, evidence-led provision that actively promotes equality of opportunity throughout the student journey (OfS, 2023). More broadly, its commitment to accessible and inclusive practice resonates with UNESCO's sustainable development goal 4 (SDG4) (2024) focusing on lifelong learning and widening educational participation.

Central to the PgCPE design is the integration of Sustainable Peer Assessment (SPA) within student-managed virtual escape rooms. This assessment model draws on the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2000) which emphasises the interplay of teaching presence, social presence and cognitive presence in building purposeful online learning environments to foster positive educational outcomes. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (CAST, 2024) supports the creation of learning spaces offering multiple means of engagement and expression. By embedding UDL principles, the programme aims to ensure that students with differing levels of digital confidence, academic experience and personal availability can participate fully and meaningfully, developing their assessment and literacy skills.

Assessment and feedback literacy form another essential foundation for this work, foregrounding learners' capacity to interpret criteria, make evaluative judgements and use feedback to improve future performance and critical capabilities for high-quality, dialogic peer review (Carless and Boud, 2018). Winstone et al (2017) define assessment literacy as "processes of understanding the grading process and of applying this understanding to make academic judgments of one's work and performance" (p25) while feedback literacy

refers to the skills, attitudes and insights that enable students to interpret information, apply it to improve learning, and understand shared responsibilities in feedback processes (Carless and Boud, 2018). Adopting a heutagogical stance further nurtures learner agency by positioning students as co-designers of assessment criteria and reflective practitioners able to transfer these skills into their workplace education roles (Hase and Kenyon, 2000). Together, these frameworks establish a pedagogical foundation that demystifies assessment and feedback as the teacher's sole responsibility by empowering aspiring practice educators to become active agents in their learning journey who can then lead inclusive, evidence-informed and context-responsive educational practices within their diverse professional settings.

Approach

The intervention was implemented over one academic term as part of an ethically approved study involving one full cohort of 41 students to explore how blended and inclusive assessment design could support students to plan, implement and evaluate an assessment relevant to their own learners, while also strengthening their understanding of inclusivity and social justice in assessment. The intervention spanned eight structured weeks combining synchronous on-campus sessions, virtual classroom teaching and guided independent study. This blend allowed students to engage meaningfully despite their professional responsibilities and varied working patterns.

The intervention consisted of three connected phases: virtual MS Teams escape rooms design; peer assessment and dialogic feedback; reflection and professional application. Harnessing the affordances of the tools, nine escape rooms, designed as sub-Cols for synchronous group sessions, were created for the cohort. Following an introduction to the assignment brief and the assessment criteria, the students worked collaboratively on the assessments within their assigned escape rooms. Groups exchanged draft work, provided feedback, justified their evaluative decisions and engaged in synchronous, self-managed discussions to deepen their understanding of assessment quality and judgement. The recordings of the discussions enabled the module lead to monitor progress and understanding followed by corrective action via the respective room chats. The process emphasised clarity, dialogue and iterative refinement of the assignments. The asynchronous flexibility intentionally supported participation across shift patterns and time constraints, fostering equitable engagement and sustained knowledge construction.

Immediately following the peer assessment phase and the oral presentations was the structured reflection. Reflective prompts and collaborative analysis were implemented to encourage them to consider what they had learned about collaboration, assessment, facilitation and inclusion, as well as how these insights could be transferred to their practice educator roles.

In summary, five frameworks informed the structure and sequencing of the intervention: the Col provided the foundations for designing online peer review cycles that developed cognitive, social and teaching presence across synchronous and asynchronous spaces;

UDL guided decisions aimed at reducing barriers to participation, ensuring that students could contribute in ways that aligned with their needs, preferences and contexts; assessment and feedback literacy underpinned the development of students' capacity to interpret criteria and make evaluative judgements; constructive alignment ensured coherence between intended learning outcomes, assessment tasks and feedback processes; and finally, transformative learning principles informed the reflective components, supporting students to critically examine their assumptions and re-consider their professional approaches.

Together, these frameworks created a multi-layered and inclusive assessment environment that encouraged deep engagement, and assessment and feedback literacy development. Students as stakeholders acted as co-designers of assessment criteria, assessors and assesses, peer reviewers and reflective analysts of their own professional development. Using the assessment criteria, they applied assessment and literacy knowledge and skills to make evaluative judgements about their peers' draft assignment's content, structure and communication skills. The module lead initially was the designer and facilitator, modelling feedback processes, supporting the development of assessment literacy and maintaining academic standards while allowing students increasing autonomy. Across the eight-week cycle, the emphasis shifted progressively from teacher-led modelling, to shared peer learning, to student-led evaluative judgement and reflection. Early weeks focused on building trust and clarity around assessment expectations; the mid-phase concentrated on iterative peer review and dialogic feedback; later weeks emphasised consolidation, application and professional transfer.

Outcomes

The outcomes of this project indicated that the Sustainable Peer Assessment (SPA) model structured with Teaching Presence, Social Presence and Cognitive Presence embedded within a blended PgCPE programme, produced marked improvements in students' confidence, academic performance, learning engagement and sense of learning community. One of the most significant findings was the clear growth in students' confidence in giving and receiving feedback. Initially hesitant to critique peers' work, students gradually became more comfortable engaging in evaluative conversations as the structured cycles of low-stakes peer review normalised the feedback process. This shift aligns with research showing that scaffolded peer assessment enhances students' evaluative judgement by creating a psychologically safe environment for dialogue (Carless and Boud, 2018). The intentional design of the escape rooms, combined with co-constructed assessment criteria, offered repeated opportunities for students to practise interpreting criteria, articulating judgements and applying peer suggestions. These activities supported the development of cognitive presence through sustained reflection and increasingly complex reasoning (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2000).

A further important finding was the improvement in academic quality across the cohort. Comparison of early drafts with final oral assessments showed enhanced criticality, stronger integration of theory and clearer alignment with assessment criteria. Most students achieved

marks in the upper grade bands, demonstrating high levels of reflective capability and academic maturity expected at Level 7. The External Examiner's confirmation of this trend reinforced the conclusion that the structured peer dialogue and formative scaffolding helped students internalise assessment expectations. The increased sophistication of the summative assessments also demonstrated the impact of feedback literacy development, a finding consistent with evidence that learners need explicit modelling and practice to interpret and use feedback effectively (Molloy, Boud and Henderson, 2020).

Alongside, student engagement remained consistently strong across synchronous and asynchronous components as evidenced in the learning analytics. Participation in assessment and feedback cycles was high, suggesting that the relevance of the tasks to their professional educator roles served as a significant motivator. This supported wider findings that authentic assessment, work that students recognise as directly transferable to their professional practice, enhances both engagement and learning (Boud and Molloy, 2012).

Another key outcome was the development of a strong sense of community. Students from diverse professional backgrounds formed trusting relationships that supported respectful critique and collaborative problem-solving. Over time, as observed in the recordings, dialogue became richer and more analytical, with students making explicit links between assessment criteria and performance. This progression reflects the development of social presence, an essential condition for deeper cognitive engagement within blended and online learning environments (Garrison et al, 2000). As trust grew, students became increasingly willing to share drafts and to engage in reflective dialogue, leading to enhanced peer learning and a more cohesive learning community.

Partnering with the students in planning and implementing the initiative contributed to the efficient administration of oral presentation assessment of a large cohort, enabling the module lead to meet the institution's assessment policy of a three-week turnaround without the added challenge of requiring extra rooms and extra time for individual presentations.

The transferability of these findings extends beyond the PgCPE context. The SPA model, with its focus on scaffolded peer review, co-constructed criteria, micro-scaffolding and reflective consolidation, is adaptable across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, particularly in disciplines where collaborative evaluation and professional judgement are integral. The escape room design could be applied to other digital platforms, with the core principles transferable to environments such as MS Teams, virtual laboratories or studio-based disciplines. UDL-informed design ensures accessibility and inclusivity, making the model relevant to institutions seeking to widen participation and foster equitable learning experiences (CAST, 2024). The model's compatibility with programme-level assessment strategies also suggests potential for embedding SPA more widely across curricula.

Looking ahead, several areas offer opportunities for further development. Longitudinal evaluation is needed to determine whether students continue to apply peer feedback principles in later modules and in their professional practice. The model could be expanded

across programmes, moving from a module-specific to a curriculum-wide approach to assessment and feedback literacy. Exploring digital enhancements such as integrated analytics or multimodal feedback tools could increase scalability and accessibility. Staff training in peer-assessment facilitation would also strengthen consistency and quality across implementation contexts. Finally, discipline-specific adaptations and dissemination through publications and conferences represent valuable next steps for extending the impact of this work and contributing to wider pedagogic scholarship.

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All enquiries

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