



FRAMEWORK FOR Transforming assessment in higher education

Introducing the framework

This is one of a series of strategic frameworks led by Higher Education Academy (HEA). The framework offers a structure for higher education providers (HEPs) to engage with the process of transforming assessment. It provides a shared point of reference for reviewing assessment policy and practice and ultimately transforming assessment in higher education (HE).

HEA recognise it is time to significantly re-think assessment policy and practice, drawing on a wide body of scholarship and data to inform such changes. The framework supports this process and builds on A Marked Improvement (HEA 2012) that detailed a rationale and approach for transforming assessment in HE.

What is transforming assessment in higher education?

Assessment plays a vital role in HE. It is essential for measuring the extent of student learning (assessment of learning) as well as of student learning (assessment for learning). Assessment should be designed in ways that promote student learning; whether learning the subject or professional domain or competencies, literacies and skills at a subject or broader level. HEA believes that attention to the methods of assessment and feedback, and the use of self-assessment and peer-assessment, coupled with the tenets, is fundamental to student learning

Transforming assessment is a process that will need to involve a wide range of stakeholders in a cycle of review, plan and action. Doing so has implications for the infrastructure of the institution, the dialogue required between staff and students about assessment and for curriculum review and development. Transforming assessment can have a positive impact upon student learning and student satisfaction as well as promoting greater confidence in academic standards.

Who is this framework for?

This framework is relevant to a range of staff working in HE, including those who teach, those tasked with changing assessment policy and practice and those responsible for quality assurance and enhancement, centrally or in subject areas. The latter may include pro-vice chancellors, deans, heads of department, and subject and programme leaders. It can be most effective if adopted at an institutional level as well as embedded within programmes.

Why is transforming assessment important?

Learning and teaching in HE can be significantly enhanced through transforming assessment policy and practice, leading to:

- improved potential for student learning;
- increased student satisfaction;
- improved value for money;
- increased suitability of assessment methods to the outcomes of 21st century HE;
- fairer representation of student achievement;
- greater confidence in academic standards.

Transforming assessment can have valuable implications, promoting consideration of:

- the balance of formative and summative assessments at the module and programme level; with formative assessment thoroughly integrated within learning and teaching;
- the use of diverse assessment methods to improve validity, authenticity and inclusivity, thus maximising their relevance to students and focus on assessing programme level outcomes;
- opportunities for self-assessment and peer-assessment within the learning and teaching process to enhance students' understanding and trust in assessment;
- the design of assessment approaches to foster student development in academic literacies and an understanding of good academic practice.

Want to find out more?

HEA can help you or your institution to use and apply this framework to enhance policy and/or practice.



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HEA has a toolkit containing complementary tools and resources to help you apply this framework.



www.heacademy.ac.uk/frameworks-toolkits/toolkits

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How is this framework structured?

The framework highlights three interrelated areas of focus that can be used to transform assessment. These are underpinned and encircled by a set of tenets, derived from Assessment Standards: a Manifesto for Change¹. These tenets are interconnected and, together with the areas of focus, can provide a stimulus for dialogue to build a shared understanding of how assessment can be transformed.

The outer circle of the framework details the institutional contexts where change should be targeted – curriculum design, infrastructure, and staff and students. Read collectively, the framework offers an organising structure for transforming assessment.

Areas of focus

Innovative assessment: assessment should be challenging, realistic and meaningful. New forms and methods of assessment can promote student learning. These may be considered innovative with regard to:

- a subject, discipline or professional field;
- being characterised as authentic or work relevant, involving employers or experts in the assessment process;
- using technology-enhanced learning;
- how students engage and participate (e.g. through devising assessment tasks and criteria);
- offering variety in the range of assessment approaches used.

Feedback practices: feedback is integral to assessment and to a dialogic learning and teaching process. Practices should promote the regular use of formative assessments, and dialogue between staff and students, and among students (rather than providing particular forms of feedback). Having a set of principles for effective feedback can be valuable to ensure consistent practice and help students use feedback as an aid to learning.

Self and peer-assessment: can be employed in a variety of ways as part of learning and teaching, whether in class-based activities, group work or through online forums. Self-assessment and peer-assessment within the curriculum helps students to develop as autonomous learners, with reflective and evaluative skills, and capabilities for working collaboratively. Through being involved in assessing and giving feedback to others, students can build confidence, assessment literacy and fully appreciate what is required of them. The attributes and skills developed through the process, such as self-reflection or communication, are all important features of a student's employability and will be invaluable to them throughout their lives, whether in employment or self-employed, undertaking further study or voluntary/community activities.

The process

Transforming assessment is enabled through:

Dialogue and building understanding among staff and students, particularly with regard to the assessment tenets and the implications of these for assessment policy and practice.

Curriculum review and development so that enhanced assessment practices can be effectively integrated in institutional processes.

Developing infrastructure to support change, which includes institutional assessment regulations, and the use of technologies to enhance assessment practice, improve feedback and streamline assessment management (e.g. e-submission, e-feedback).



How can this framework be used?

The framework provides a structure for those working in HE to engage with the process of transforming assessment. How this process is undertaken and realised can depend on institutional context and priorities, but it is likely to entail:

- reviewing and evaluating existing policy and practice;
- identifying priorities for change;
- developing action plans.

As part of this process, the framework can be used as a guide in:

- determining priority areas of development;
- engaging staff and students in dialogue about this framework and assessment processes and practices more broadly, so that a shared understanding can be developed;
- integrating enhanced assessment practices within curriculum design, review and validation;
- designing programme level (rather than module level) assessment.

It can be most effective if adopted at an institutional level, as well as at the programme level.

Tenets

Promoting assessment for learning: learning and assessment should be integrated and fully aligned.

Developing assessment that is fit for purpose: the assessment of learning should focus on the demonstrable achievement of intended programme outcomes.

Recognising that assessment lacks precision: learning extends beyond what is amenable to precise specification of standards or to objective assessment. Thus not all learning or assessment outcomes can be specified.

Constructing standards in communities: given that assessment standards are socially constructed, staff and students need to engage in dialogue about standards to understand what is required from, and entailed in, the assessment process.

Integrating assessment literacy into course design: programmes, modules and assessments should be designed in ways that help students understand the recognised standards.

Ensuring professional judgements are reliable: assessment is dependent upon professional judgement; confidence in which depends on forums for developing and sharing standards within and between academic, disciplinary and professional communities.

HEA framework series

This is one of a series of strategic frameworks on core sector priorities, developed by HEA, the national body for learning and teaching in the United Kingdom (UK). They have been created in response to, and in collaboration with, the HE sector and draw on extensive evidence, expertise and experience.

The frameworks can be adapted by a wide range of HE stakeholders, individuals and groups, and applied to different disciplines, modes of study and institutional contexts. They may have more impact if adopted at an institutional level and embedded across all provision, with all staff. HEA toolkits can support you in this process. Frameworks are designed to enhance individual sector priorities or be interconnected to enrich policy and practice. They aim to improve learning outcomes by raising the quality and status of teaching in HE, across the UK and internationally.

Frameworks in the series include:

TRANSFORMING ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EMBEDDING EMPLOYABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

STUDENT ACCESS, RETENTION, ATTAINMENT AND PROGRESSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

FLEXIBLE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

INTERNATIONALISING HIGHER EDUCATION

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

How does this framework align with the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)?

Staff may want to consider how their engagement with transforming assessment in higher education can offer an effective approach to areas of activity, enable deeper understanding of core knowledge, and demonstrate alignment with professional values. It is particularly relevant to the following dimensions:

Activity: A1 and A3 **Knowledge:** K2 **Values:** V1 and V3

HEA invites lecturers, teachers and learning support staff to evidence their use of this or other HEA frameworks in applying for HEA Fellowship in recognition of their commitment to professional practice.



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Acknowledgements

This framework is based on HEA's publication, A Marked Improvement: Transforming Assessment in Higher Education (2012), involving leading experts. It is also informed by the findings of HEA's Transforming Assessment Pilot Scheme (2013-14) that was set up to apply the framework and evaluate the assessment review tool provided by A Marked Improvement to advance change in assessment strategy.

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