

frameWORKS

Essential frameworks for
enhancing student success

01. Transforming assessment in higher education

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 broader level. Higher Education Academy believes that attention to the methods of assessment and feedback and the use of self-assessment and peer-assessment, coupled with 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, 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 the 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;
- fairer representation of student achievement;
- greater confidence in academic standards;
- increased suitability of assessment methods;
- improved value for money to the outcomes of 21st century HE.

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.



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Three areas of focus

The framework highlights three interrelated areas of focus that can be used to transform assessment.

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 a dialogic learning and teaching process. Practices should promote 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.



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Six tenets underpin and circle the three areas of focus.

These tenets are derived from Assessment Standards: a Manifesto for Change*. 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 six tenets are:

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;

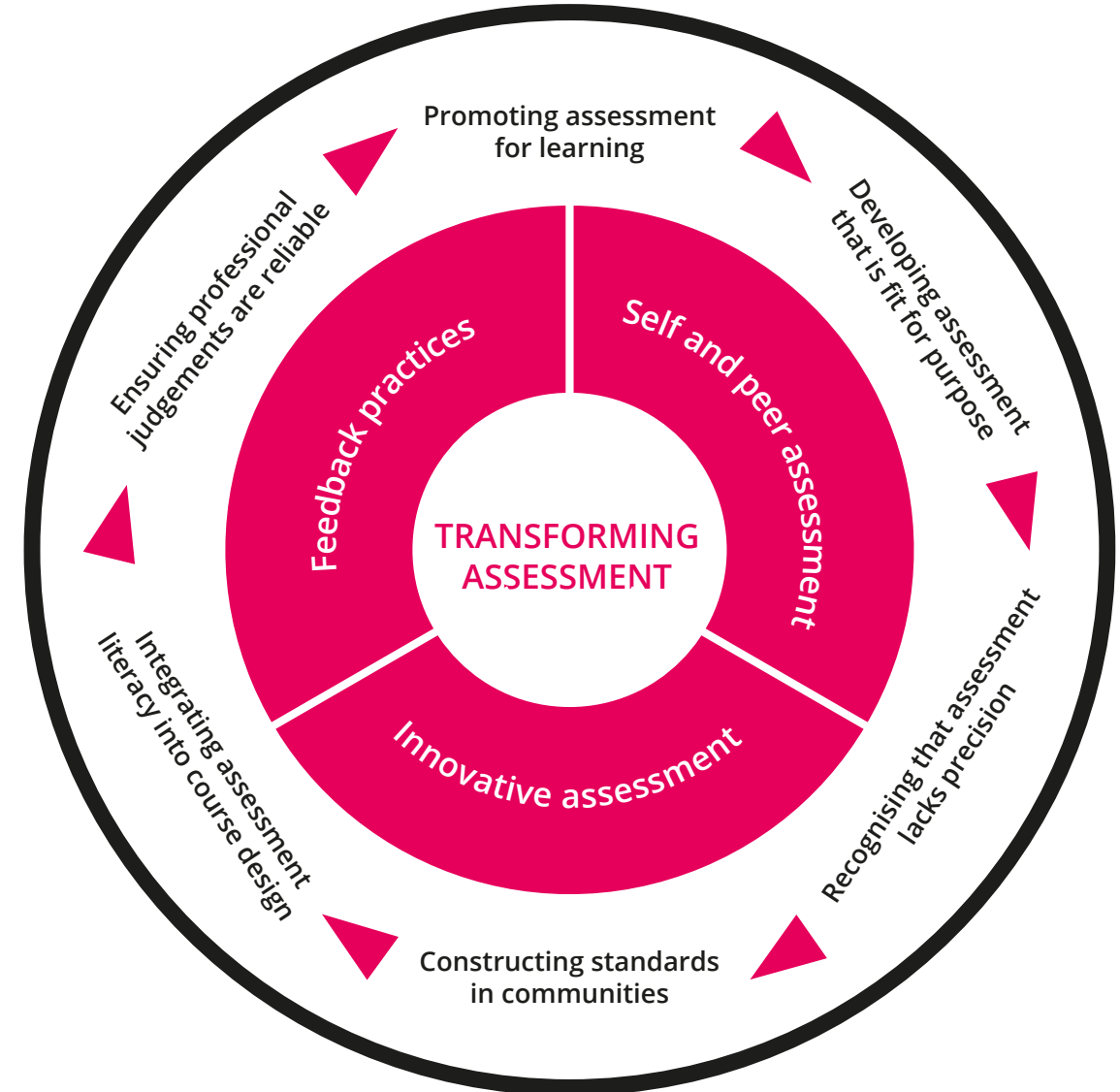
INTEGRATING ASSESSMENT LITERACY INTO COURSE DESIGN

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.

*ASKe (Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange) Assessment Standards: a Manifesto for Change; Feedback: an Agenda for Change. Available from: <http://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/Manifesto/> [30 April 2015]



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

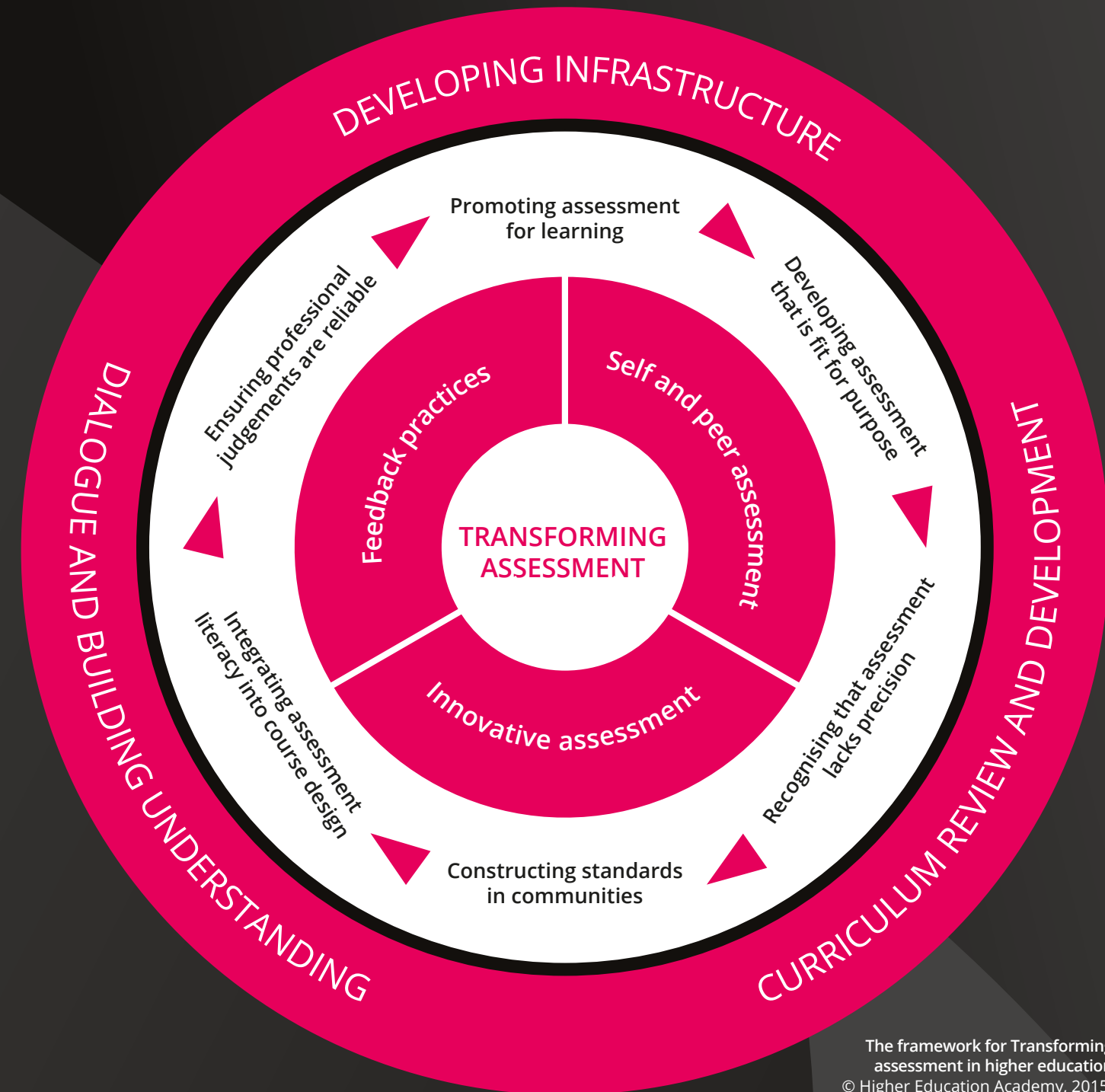
so that enhanced assessment practices can be effectively integrated in institutional processes.

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).

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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.

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. © Higher Education Academy, 2016. Higher Education Academy is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales no. 04931031. Registered as a charity in England and Wales no. 1101607. Registered as a charity in Scotland no. SC043946. VAT registered no. GB 152 1219 50. The words "Higher Education Academy" and logo should not be used without our permission.



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