

# Modelling compassionate feedback

**Belonging through Assessment: Pipelines of Compassion**  
QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project

**Dr Marianne Greated Robert Mantho Dr Emily Salines Dr Thea Stevens**

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# Belonging

*'...a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important...'*

(Terrell Strayhorn, 2012, p. 4)

# Compassion

'...noticing of distress and/or disadvantage to self or others, and a commitment to take action to reduce it'

(Paul Gilbert, 2005)



Amanda Gorman  
@TheAmandaGorman

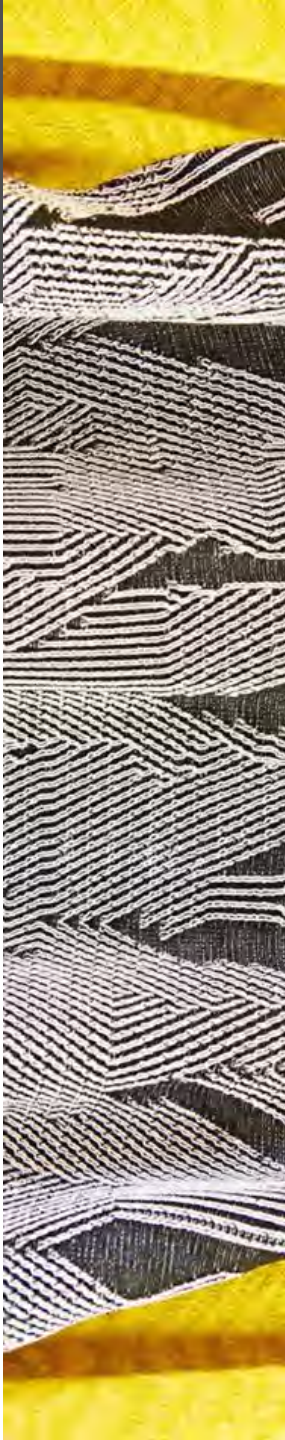
A friend gifted me this engraved compass and it took me several moments to remember I wrote this line in my book 😂



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# Project Aims

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



## Key outputs

1. A symposium on compassionate assessment.
2. A briefing paper on the project's activity.
3. A blog documenting the organic development of materials and providing a space for exchange of ideas.  
<https://belongingthroughassessment.myblog.arts.ac.uk/>
4. A participatory digital resource for three research strands:
  - \* Pass/fail grading
  - \* Trauma-informed policy
  - \* Compassionate feedback



# Compassionate Feedback: Gap

- The contribution of feedback to student learning is well known. (Hattie and Timperley 2007)
- Guidance and support for staff for effective feedback are available. (Boud and Molloy 2013)
- Discussions of feedback and assessment in relation to belonging and compassion is growing, however, there is a need for initial resources to inform practice.
- Exploring feedback in terms of human experience, for students and staff.
- Aim is to develop principles and start to form user friendly guidance.



# Compassionate Feedback: Aims

In discussion with academic staff, **develop definitions** of what compassionate feedback might look like, and **devise guidance and support** for approaches to compassionate feedback within the art and design disciplines. What **advice** might we give to ourselves, our colleagues, and students for a compassionate approach to feedback?

Explore with staff **how existing structures and processes may be adapted and modified** to enable compassionate feedback, bearing in mind the **potential cost for staff** of what Spaeth calls the 'emotional labour of feedback' (Spaeth 2018), including issues of workload.

The approach responds to Jan McArthur's call to restore 'joy' in assessment (McArthur 2018) and make the assessment process both manageable and compassionate.

## Workshop Approach

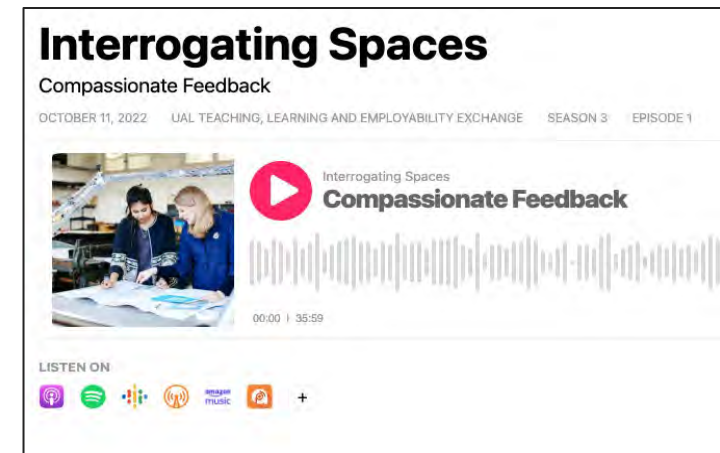
Collaborative workshop model that asked invited participants to reflect on how we can support ourselves and our students in approaching feedback and feedforward. Framing presentations and two core discussion sections with guiding questions:

### **1: What is your understanding of compassionate feedback?**

- a) How do we define compassion?
- b) *In what ways can compassion be used in assessment?*
- c) *What are the principles of compassionate feedback?*

### **2: How can we enact compassion when giving feedback?**

- a) *Can you describe what compassionate feedback would look like?*
- b) *Can you describe what compassionate feedback would feel like?*



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

## What we learned from our own workshop

**Understanding:** With education as an act of love (Freire), belonging is understanding: students need to understand that their educators understand their learning journey. We need understanding of **individual requirements for learning**, and to inculcate **awareness of diverse experiences**.

**Qualities of compassion** help us define how to embody it, including:

- mirroring so that the other feels 'seen';
- active listening;
- honesty and transparency: helping students understand why, what, and how.

**Understanding our power:** Our pedagogy should suggest and guide rather than dictate. Assessment creates artificial structures dealing with non-human elements, including grades. More compassion built into the structures would be key, and acknowledging our own power position.



## Journey of feedback for assessment

Feedback for assessment is a **durational learner journey**, where formative feedback offers powerful constructive affordances. Formative feedback **might acknowledge past learning**, and there might be value in ‘unlearning’ past educational experiences.

Given the value of feedforward, would **compassionate approaches towards students and staff workloads** place most value on formative feedback and assessment moments and frame the summative (albeit with a feedforward element) as more “contained” and manageable?

Feedback for assessment should be a two-way conversation and process recognising environment, tone, and language, a relational and dialogical **‘done with’ rather than ‘done to’**. Engaging students in assessment (e.g. self- and peer-assessment, co-creation) and ‘de-coding’ assessment structures (e.g. transparent constructive alignment) **would inform mutual understanding**.

# Whole self: student and staff experience

Compassionate approaches drive towards recognising the ‘whole’ of the student and staff experience. In this framework of reciprocal conversation, **students should feel empowered** to recognise their work and their journey.

Empathy, sensitivity, and the ability to understand others and recognise risk-taking and obstacles lead to a conception of the ‘whole self’ in the experience of feedback for assessment. However, some of the challenges include **talking about the work, not the person, but recognising the person in the work**; and here we can interrogate the role of the pastoral (e.g. personal tutor system) in helping students feel “seen”.

Reflecting on the impacts of the pandemic and beyond, and triangulating assessment with institutional systems, **compassionate approaches also have a deep linkage to staff workload**, given the value of time and the durational.

## Model: Prompts workshop

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

Assessment Design

Relational Aspect

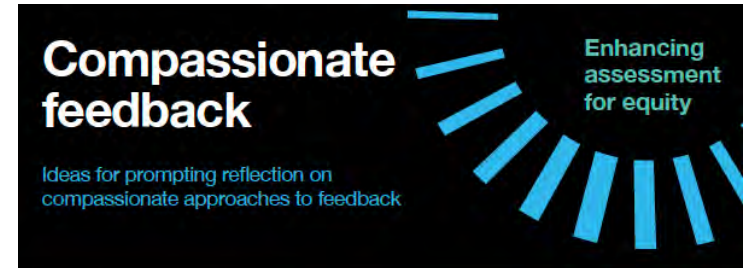
Promoting Student Agency

Tone and Language

Equity

Based on our podcast

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



### Why this resource?

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

### How can you use this?

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

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

### Design

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

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

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

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

Are students supported to decode assessment structures and approaches?

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

### Relational Aspect

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

See things from the student's perspective.

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

Invest time in creating a welcoming space for all students.

## Outcome resources

### Digital resource:

- Sections on each strand
- Indicators of compassionate policies and practices: A series of questions enabling a critical reflective practitioner approach
- Appropriate for qualitative inter- and intra-institutional benchmarking
- [https://read.bookcreator.com/f1f7PVIXKIUx9ApDkHZ1yIHR0kaB9c0VD\\_vu-XSxGbg/ybm\\_cfcOREC50-4MtAXIFQ](https://read.bookcreator.com/f1f7PVIXKIUx9ApDkHZ1yIHR0kaB9c0VD_vu-XSxGbg/ybm_cfcOREC50-4MtAXIFQ)

### Website:

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



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