BIMM UNIVERSITY | A university for the creative industries

Higher Education Course Design Handbook

Policy and Guidance for Course Teams
2025

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Contents:

Contents: 1
Part One: Course Design Principles 2
Institutional Context 2
BIMM University's purpose and vision are to: 2
Academic Framework and Course Approval Policy 3
Course Design Stages 3
Courses and Modules 4
Constructive Alignment 6
Student-Centred Course and Module Design 7
Part Two: Designing Learning Outcomes 8
Key Resources 8
Graduate Outcomes 9
How do we design Course Level and Module Level Learning Outcomes? 9
Learning Outcomes Must be Demonstrated Through Assessment 10
Bloom's Taxonomy 11
Higher Education Levels 15
Examples of things not to do when writing outcomes 16
Intended Learning Outcome (ILO) Development Tool 17
Part Three: Designing Assessment 20
Assessment has the most effect when: 20
Assessment is often categorised in two ways: 21
Constructive Alignment and Assessment 21
Checking alignment 21
Suitability 22
Types of assessment: 22
Assessment Validity 23
Difficulty 23
Number, Equivalence and Weighting of Assessments on Modules 24
Graded Assessment Points Per Module 24
Assessment weightings 24
Assessment Loads & Equivalences 24
Assessment loads at FHEQ levels: 25
Other considerations: 25
Diversity and Variety 25
Clarity 25
Assessment Design 23
Assessment Alignment Tool 25
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Checklist 29
Learning Outcomes 29
Formative Assessment Alignment 31
Student Agency 31
Clarity and Consistency 33
References and Further Reading 29

Part One: Course Design Principles

Institutional Context

BIMM University's purpose and vision are to:

- *Inspire the next generation of industry professionals through the creation of inclusive and creative learning environments that remove barriers and create opportunities for equal participation in the creative industries.*
- *Provide the highest standard of industry-led education, built on a foundation of collaboration, inclusivity and an entrepreneurial spirit, preparing our students for a sustainable career within the creative industries.*

At our core is a solid commitment to enhancing teaching and learning and further developing our capacity in terms of research and enterprise. We believe that all students should be enabled to achieve success through a practical and transformational curriculum, outstanding learning and teaching and an institutional culture that values our educators and produces graduates who are:

- Highly skilled and adaptable.
- Professional, employable and entrepreneurial.
- Creative, innovative and articulate.
- Collaborative and connected
- Globally aware and socially responsible.
- Intellectually curious and critical.
- Self-aware and compassionate.

Graduate attributes must be reflected in the course design and module outcomes.

Our Higher Education Strategy outlines our values and how we define excellence in our approach to our student's education:

- Students are supported and enabled to succeed.
- Effective and transformational curriculum design.
- Outstanding learning and teaching
- We provide outstanding learning & teaching.
- Valuing our educators.
- Exceptional graduates.

In particular, our education strategy sets out our approach to the curriculum and its delivery:

Effective and transformational curriculum design: Our curriculum encourages students to ask deep questions, explore uncertainty and challenge conventional thinking. We develop our courses holistically to meet the needs and expectations of students, employers and the higher education sector. Aims, methods, content and outcomes are aligned and carefully evaluated by teachers, learners and external experts. We strive to innovate in learning design through continual evidence-based experimentation, evaluation and enhancement.

Outstanding learning & teaching: We ensure that learning, teaching, and assessment are enhanced through reflection and by drawing on best practices and current research. We engage students as active participants in their education and creative practice. Assessment is fair, relevant, authentic, collaborative, diverse, inclusive and accessible. We recognise that knowledge, understanding and learning are socially constructed in learning communities where staff and students become co-creators

of understanding and co-producers of learning.

Academic Framework and Course Approval Policy

BIMM University's Academic Framework outlines the criteria and rules for creating courses at the university. The policy and process for course approval can be found in the Higher Education Course Approval & Modification Procedure. Additional guidance and course design templates for Course Teams can be found on the Course and Curriculum Development SharePoint.

The university's Education Team

BIMM University has a central team of educational specialists available to support course teams in the development and approval of new courses or the redevelopment of existing ones. Their role is to act as 'critical friends', providing advice and guidance and feedback on course proposals and course enhancement, not to design courses or to enhance them. Areas the Education Team can advise on include:

- The approval process.
- The academic framework and regulations.
- Sector benchmarks.
- Course, module and assessment design.
- Digital learning.
- Access and participation.
- Equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Employability.
- Stakeholder consultation.

Course Design Stages

There are four stages to the approval process for new courses:

1. Initial consideration of the proposal from faculty at the Course Development Working Group (CDWG).
2. Stage 0 approval at the Commercial and Academic Planning Committee (CAPC) meeting.
3. Stage 1 academic approval (approval to proceed with development) at the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee (LTEC).
4. Stage 2 final academic approval by a Course Approval Panel convened by LTEC.

Important note: courses proposed at the beginning of an academic year will proceed to CAPC and then LTEC– course development and stage 2 approval will begin from the following academic year (typically from November/December and conclude in May for undergraduate courses and June for postgraduate courses) with students enrolling the following September (18-19 months from initial proposal to first cohort enrollment).

CDWG is a working group of CAPC, comprising Faculty Deans, Pro-Vice Chancellors (Business Development), and the Deputy Provost and Director of Postgraduate Studies. The role of the group is to consider new course development proposals and recommend them to CAPC. If this group approves proposals, a Stage 0 business case proposal will be made to CAPC.

Stage 0 requirements:

- Course name.
- Level and length.
- Course start and locations.
- Target recruitment (3 years).
- What the course is about.
- Market demand.
- Employability.
- Applicant profile(s).
- Competitor differentiation.

Once Stage 0 has been approved for a new course, the next stage of development is Stage 1 which should include a consideration of the following aspects:

- Modes of study, awards and entry points?
- HECOS codes?
- Entry criteria and fees?
- Course financial viability?
- English language requirements?
- What is the academic rationale for the course?
- How will it be structured?
- What sector of the creative industries/arts will the course serve?
- How will the course be delivered?
- What physical and human resources are required?
- Is the course linked to Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation?

Thinking through these aspects will help you to shape the course proposal and allow you to move to the next stage of development, that of course, design. At this stage, the team will need to consult the Academic Framework and seek advice from the Education Team and external academic/industry experts to inform decisions about the overall structure and content of the proposed course, including its aims and outcomes. The Education Team offer an initial briefing meeting for course developers to discuss the process, timelines for documentation and provide support and guidance as outlined above.

Once the new course has been approved at Stage 1 and any feedback from LTEC has been attended to, the team can proceed to Stage 2, where a detailed proposal and design will be prepared before formal approval. See here for more detail on Stage 2 requirements: Higher Education Course Approval & Modification Procedure.

Courses and Modules

At BIMM University, we utilise a common modular framework based on academic credit, where one credit equates to 10 hours of learning. All university undergraduate and postgraduate taught modules from FHEQ Level 4 to 7 are weighted as 15, 30, 60, and 90 credits.1 All undergraduate courses comprise

[1] 60 and 90 credit modules are reserved for postgraduate courses only.

360 credits (120 at each level/year across Levels 4,5, and 6), and master's degrees comprise 180 credits at a single level (Level 7).

Additionally, there are specific rules that Course Teams must consider regarding the structure of courses, as outlined in the Academic Framework, which establishes guidelines for the structure of all undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

Most courses will consist of a number of core modules designed to secure the Course Learning Outcomes for each level and cumulatively overall, leading to the award of a qualification. They should be closely aligned with the award title to ensure the course has a clear identity. They should also be constructively aligned (see below) through assessment with the intended outcomes and with each other, so that core learning is built at each level and throughout the course.

Course Teams may also include option modules, freestanding units of learning that should not require pre-requisite learning beyond the transferable knowledge and skills a student at each level of study within a subject will have acquired. Option modules do not need to be closely aligned to overall course learning outcomes. Moreover, core modules cannot be deployed as option modules.

It is possible to share modules between courses within a cognate subject area. However, Course Teams should consider the potential implications of sharing core modules, as any changes or enhancements to core modules in the future will require meticulous consideration to ensure no negative impact on any of the courses sharing the module. For this reason, it is recommended that Course Teams not include a large number of shared modules. Additionally, for undergraduate single-honours courses, at least 120 module credits must be closely aligned with the course title, and postgraduate courses typically have 90 credits aligned with the title.

Undergraduate Framework Joint Honours				
Level 4 Credits	**Cert HE**			**Total: 120**
S1	**Spine 1 15 credits**	**Core Subject Modules – 90 credits** (45 Core credits from each single honours subject)		**Core Subject Modules** may consist of: 15 credit modules: over one semester. 30 credit modules: over one or two semesters.
S2	**Spine 2 15 credits**			
Level 5 Credits	**DipHE**			**Total: 120**
S1	**Spine 3 15 credits**	**Core Subject Modules – 90 credits** (45 Core credits from each single honours subject)		**Core Subject Modules** may consist of: 15 credit modules: over one semester. 30 credit modules: over one or two semesters.
S2	**Spine 4 15 credits**			
Level 6 Credits	**Honours Degree**			**Total: 120**
S1	**Project 30 credits**	**Core Subject Modules 60 credits** (30 Core credits from each single honours subject)	**Option Module 30 credits**	**Core Subject Modules** may consist of: 15 credit modules: over one semester. 30 credit modules: over one or two semesters. **Option Module** may consist of: 2 x 15 credit modules: each over one semester. 1 x 30 credit module: over two semesters.
S2				
				semester. 1 x 30 credit module: over two semesters.

Constructive Alignment

John Biggs's book *Teaching for Quality Learning at University* (Biggs & Tang, 2011) was published in 1999 and remains a critical staple for course designers worldwide.

In constructive alignment, we start with the outcomes we intend students to learn, and align teaching andassessment to those outcomes. The outcome statements contain a learning activity, a verb, that students need to perform to best achieve the outcome, such as "APPLY expectancy-value theory of motivation", or "EXPLAIN the concept of ... "That verb says what the relevant learning activities are that the students need to undertake to attain the intended learning outcome. Learning is constructed by what activities the students carry out; learning is about what they do, not about what we teachers do. Likewise, assessment is about how well they achieve the intended outcomes, not about how well they report back tous what we have told them. The SOLO Taxonomy helps map levels of understanding that can be built into the intended learning outcomes, creating assessment criteria or rubrics. Constructive alignment can be applied to individual courses and degree programs, as well as

at the institutional level, to ensure that all teaching aligns with graduate attributes.[2]

Student-Centred Course and Module Design

The teacher's expectations of the students are made explicit from the beginning in the form of learning outcomes that constitute an organising principle on which decisions about content, teaching and learning methods, and, above all, assessment can be made. Thus, there are benefits for students who have a clear idea of what they must do to succeed in the module or course, and for teachers who need to make difficult decisions, such as which content to include and which to exclude.

[2] https://www.johnbiggs.com.au/academic/constructive-alignment/

Part Two: Designing Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes focus on the achievement of our students: the skills and knowledge they will acquire through their learning experiences and the tasks they complete as part of their modules and courses.

Student learning outcomes summarise what they will know, understand and be able to demonstrate as a result of the course. They are a threshold judgment – in other words, they articulate what a student who has reached the pass threshold of the assessment will achieve (40% for undergraduate, 50% for postgraduate) at module, course and award level. Students may exceed this threshold, and we use assessment criteria, specifically our holistic field-based Assessment Rubric, to judge how well our students have performed in an assessment. The rubric is included on the Canvas VLE and in our undergraduate and postgraduate academic regulations.

Key Resources

At BIMM University, we use SEEC descriptors to categorise our learning outcomes at each level as follows:

- Setting.
- Application of knowledge and understanding.
- Cognitive skills.
- Practical skills.
- Behaviour and values.

Level outcomes are also benchmarked against the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) Levels and the Credit Framework for England to guide the assessment of academic credit through learning outcomes and to inform curriculum design and set academic standards. You can find the current version of the SEEC descriptors here.

The Quality Assurance Agency also produces a range of subject benchmark Statements, which describe the nature of study and the academic standards expected of graduates in specific subject areas. Additionally, they outline what graduates can reasonably be expected to know, do, and understand upon completing their studies. These are not intended to be prescriptive, but rather provide a valuable source of general guidance for course and module developers.

Subject Benchmark Statements can be found here and include the following areas of relevance for BIMM University courses:

- Communication, Media, Film and Cultural Studies.
- Business and Management.
- Dance, Drama and Performance.
- Education Studies.
- Events, Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism.
- Music.

You can also find our policy and process for curriculum design and enhancement here, along with templates and relevant guidance. Before designing a course, you should also be familiar with our Higher Education Strategy and Academic Framework.

Graduate Attributes

When designing level-based outcomes at the course level, you should align these with SEEC and the Generic Outcomes for our graduates, which at the Undergraduate level are:

- **Highly skilled and adaptable**, embracing change and keeping an open mind.

- **Professional, employable, entrepreneurial**, and able to create opportunities ethically and sustainably.

- **Proactive, resilient, tenacious and resourceful**, able to remain motivated to overcome uncertainty, learn from constructive criticism and bounce back from rejection.

- **Creative, innovative and articulate**, able to conceive new ideas, tell stories, and engagingly communicate with others.

- **Collaborative and connected**, able to work effectively in teams, create networks and contribute to communities of practice.

- **Globally aware and socially responsible**, with a positive mindset and a fearless and playful attitude

- **Intellectually curious and critical**, can question received knowledge, seek new perspectives and analyse data to make meaning.

- **Self-aware and compassionate**, confident in your abilities, conscious of the needs of others, and invested in continuing to grow and develop.

How do we design Course-Level and Module-Level Learning Outcomes?

Begin with the end in mind!

Course learning outcomes at FHEQ Level 6 (undergraduate) or FHEQ Level 7 (postgraduate) should be considered in detail when writing new courses, given the wealth of diversity available in possible learning opportunities for students in the creative industries. Course-level learning outcomes should be aligned with SEEC descriptors, subject benchmarks, and BIMM University Graduate Attributes, and drafted as fully as possible before constructing outcomes at lower course levels, particularly at the module level.

Initial course-level outcomes may not be entirely resolved in their articulation until the course approval paperwork is finalised. However, the course-level outcomes contextualise considerations for the learning set at the module level and how this contributes to student achievement at the course level. Working backwards from the end as fully as possible before analysing the bottom-up journey will support establishing a constructively aligned learning journey and decrease the risk that approval panels may ask teams to revisit the curriculum alignment in detail as a condition of approval.

Learning outcomes should be written to complete one of the following statements:

- *On successful completion of this course (level 6), you will be able to…*
- *On successful completion of this level (levels 4 and 5), you will be able to…*
- *On successful completion of this module, you will be able to…*

By using this approach, the focus is on the student and what they will be able to accomplish. However, there are some fundamental principles to follow in doing so.

Learning Outcomes Must be Demonstrated Through Assessment

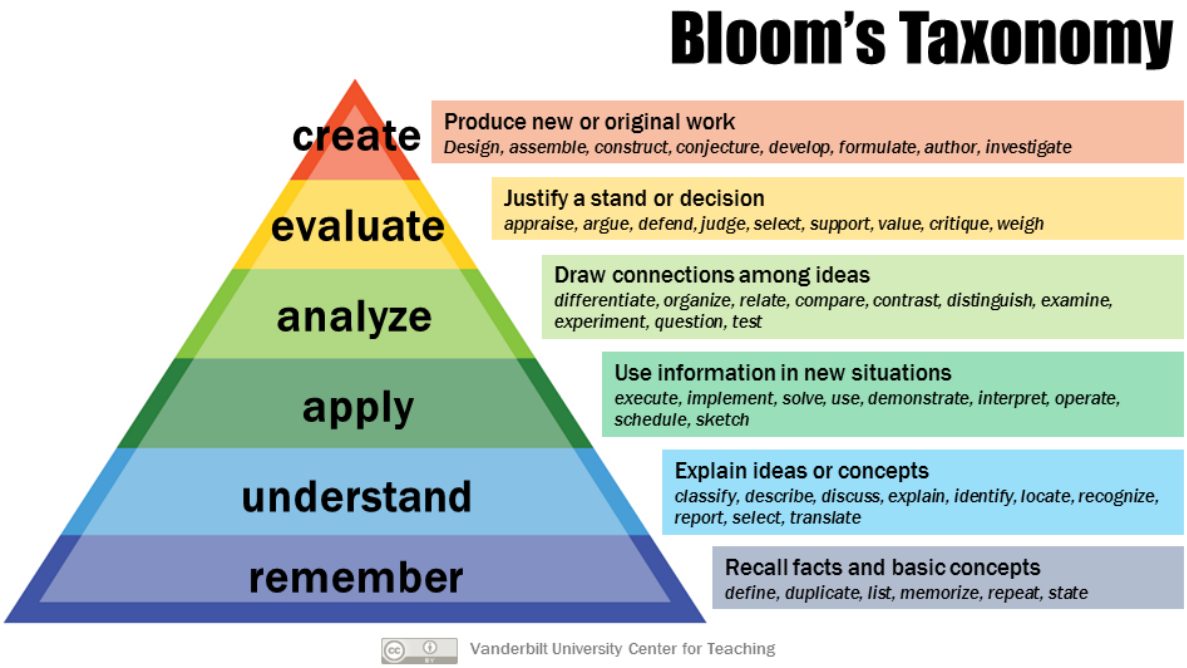
Learning outcomes must be linked to assessment tasks in the course or module you are designing. After all, this is how you assess whether students have achieved what you intended. Think about the outcomes you write – can they be effectively and reliably demonstrated through assessment? In other words, can you set tasks for your students to produce outputs where you can judge that they have achieved the learning outcomes you have set reliably? This may seem obvious, but it is not as easy to accomplish as some aspects of their learning are inherently difficult to observe or demonstrate tangibly.

When discussing how students demonstrate achievement, we describe them doing something. We use verbs to complete the 'on successful completion…' statements above; the next word must always be a verb. Choosing the best verb requires some consideration. For example, 'understand' is not a good verb because it is too ambiguous. If your students understand something, how will they *show you* that understanding – *how will you observe and measure it?* It is much more effective for you to describe what they might *do that demonstrates their understanding of something*. You could, of course, replace 'understand' with 'demonstrate understanding.' However, this is still not an effective learning outcome, and you would be more precise in stating what they will do to demonstrate that understanding. It will be a far more accurate statement, and *it will be observable and measurable*. There are other examples we could cite here. The critical point is to avoid using vague or difficult verbs to observe and measure in practice. Verbs such as select, apply, organise, describe, design, operate, analyse, evaluate, and synthesise are effective in articulating learning outcomes.

Blooms Taxonomy

Course designers have long utilised Bloom's work to inform the development of learning outcomes. The original Bloom's Taxonomy was created in 1956 by Benjamin Bloom. The updated 2001 version by David Krathwohl and Lorin Anderson is the most current version, as reproduced below.

There are six levels: ***remember, understand, apply, analyse, evaluate, and create***, each with increasingly complex cognitive processes. The following figure illustrates the hierarchy of cognitive processes, along with their definitions and examples. The higher on the pyramid (e.g., 'create'), the more complex.



Three domains:

Bloom and his colleagues also suggested that there are three domains (areas) of learning:

- **Cognitive** = knowing and understanding things (Bloom, 1956).
- **Affective** = having certain attitudes and dispositions (Krathwhol, Bloom, and Masia, 1964).
- **Psychomotor** = physically performing (Gronlund, 1970; Harrow, 1972; Simpson, 1972).

Choosing the best verbs – Cognitive domain

Definition	Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation
Bloom's Definition	*Remember previously learned information.*	*Demonstrate an understanding of the facts.*	*Apply knowledge to actual situations.*	*Break down objects or ideas into simpler parts and find evidence to support generalisations.*	*Compile component ideas into a new whole or propose alternative solutions.*	*Make and defend judgments based on internal evidence or external criteria.*
Verbs	Arrange Define Describe Duplicate Identify Label List Match Memorise Name Order Outline Recognise Relate Recall Repeat Reproduce Select State	Classify Convert Defend Describe Discuss Distinguish Estimate Explain Express Extend Generalise Give example(s) Identify Indicate Infer Locate Paraphrase Predict Recognise Rewrite Review Select Summarise Translate	Apply Change Choose Compute Demonstrate Discover Dramatise Employ Illustrate Interpret Manipulate Modify Operate Practice Predict Prepare Produce Relate Schedule Show Sketch Solve Use Write	Analyse Appraise Breakdown Calculate Categorise Compare Contrast Criticise Diagram Differentiate Discriminate Distinguish Examine Experiment Identify Illustrate Infer Model Outline Point out Question Relate Select Separate Subdivide Test	Arrange Assemble Categorise Collect Combine Comply Compose Construct Create Design Develop Devise Explain Formulate Generate Plan Prepare Rearrange Reconstruct Relate Reorganise Revise Rewrite Set up Summarise Synthesise Tell Write	Appraise Argue Assess Attach Choose Compare Conclude Contrast Defend Describe Discriminate Estimate Evaluate Explain Judge Justify Interpret Relate Predict Rate Select Summarise Support Value

Choosing the best verbs – Affective domain

Definition	Receiving	Responding	Valuing	Organising	Characterising
Definition	*Students become aware of an attitude, behaviour, or value.*	*Students exhibit a reaction or change as a result of exposure to an attitude, behaviour, or value.*	*Students recognise value and display this through involvement or commitment.*	*Students determine a new value or behaviour as important or a priority.*	*Students integrate consistent behaviour as a naturalised value in spite of discomfort or cost. The value is recognised as a part of the person's character.*
Verbs	Accept Attend Describe Explain Locate Observe Realise Receive Recognise	Behave Comply Cooperate Discuss Examine Follow Model Present Respond Show Study	Accept Adapt Balance Choose Differentiate Defend Influence Prefer Recognise Seek Value	Adapt Adjust Alter Change Customise Develop Improve Manipulate Modify Practice Revise	Authenticate Characterise Defend Display Embody Habituate Internalise Produce Represent Validate Verify

Choosing the best verbs – Psychomotor domain

Definitions	Observe	Model	Recognise standards	Correct	Apply	Coach
Definition	*Students translate sensory input into physical tasks or activities.*	*Students are able to replicate a fundamental skill or task.*	*Students recognise standards or criteria important to perform a skill or task correctly.*	*Students use standards to evaluate their own performances and make corrections.*	*Students apply this skill to real life situations.*	*Students are able to instruct or train others to perform this skill in other situations.*
Verbs	Hear Identify Observe See Smell Taste Touch Watch	Attempt Copy Follow Imitate Mimic Model Re-enact Repeat Reproduce Show Try	Check Detect Discriminate Differentiate Distinguish Notice Perceive Recognise Select	Adapt Adjust Alter Change Correct Customise Develop Improve Manipulate Modify Practice Revise	Build Compose Construct Create Design Originate Produce	Demonstrate Exhibit Illustrate Instruct Teach Train

Higher Education Levels

As mentioned above, detailed in the SEEC descriptors, academic credit achievement in the UK is benchmarked against a level-based set of Criteria called the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), which can be found here. For more detailed guidance on Credit in England, it can also be found here. As you will see from these documents, there are currently five FHEQ levels used in Higher Education, with undergraduate courses covering FHEQ levels 4-6, plus level 7 (master's and Level 8 (doctoral) for postgraduate studies. The assumption that underpins this framework is that students will progress through each level, successively accumulating higher-level knowledge and skills as they do so.

Approval requires that courses demonstrate alignment with the FHEQ (through the mapping templates in approval documentation). The SEEC descriptors are aligned to the FHEQ and, in effect, decode and contextualise the framework, helping ensure that learning is set appropriately at each level of study. However, your students will very likely perform at a variety of levels. Therefore, it is not strictly accurate to argue that students, throughout the life of a degree course, will work from low-order to high-order skills. Nonetheless, it is correct to say that they will build on former skills (knowledge and understanding) as they progress. Higher-order skills should be considered in any module, whether first-year or post-graduate; otherwise, they will be too basic for students and not engage them in deep learning. However, the type of skills will depend on the level of that module within the course. Skill-level decisions are *relative,* and you need to consider where the students have come from, where they are headed, who your students are, and what they need to learn. Toohey (1999, Chapter 7) lists characteristics of effective learning outcomes:

- They are meaningful, not trivial.
- They place the development of the learner and the learner's skills within the context of thesubject/discipline.
- They consider what students should be able to do (or demonstrate they can do).
- They enable the development of new skills or the enhancement of existing ones.
- They are memorable and kept low in number.

Examples of things not to do when writing outcomes

At the end of this course/level/module, students will be able to…

OUTCOME	COMMENT	BETTER	COMMENT
Gain experience in applying Actor-Network Theory to learning design.	This is more about what the course offers and reads more like an activity than an outcome. Gaining experience does not necessarily imply learning. This is not measurable.	Apply Actor-Network Theory in order to solve learning design problems.	This clearly states what the students will do, is measurable, and informs the task design.
Discuss the elements of course design.	This is more like a learning activity, not an outcome, and is too broad/vague. This is not measurable, nor does it clearly relate to the development of new skills.	Explain how the various elements of course design contribute to students' learning.	This is more in line with the intention of the course/module. It is meaningful, assumes development, and is measurable. Any task associated with this outcome, will require students to "explain…" If that is not what I want students to be able to do, then I can change the verb. This is probably a low-level outcome.
Understand how an analogue audio console works.	This is too broad! 'Understand' is not observable/measurable.	Name the principal elements of an analogue audio console.	This is more explicit and informs the task design. If students can do these things at a level you expect, then they will have achieved this objective of the course/module. This is probably a low-level outcome (early in a degree).
Demonstrate their understanding of musical harmony.	Ok… but how?	Explain how harmony can be applied to Songwriting. Compare approaches to harmony in modern Songwriting. Utilise Harmony in your Songwriting.	This is much more explicit and informs the task design. It can be low-or high-order, depending on what it is you expect from students.

Intended Learning Outcome (ILO) Development Tool

Outcome:	Student centred?	Demonstratable?	Measurable?	Achievable?	Clear?	Meaningful?	Relevant?
At the end of this, module/level - students will be able to:	Is the ILO focused on what the students will be able to do at the end of the module/level /course?	Are you able to witness evidence of achievement of this ILO?	Are you able to measure how well students are doing this? Are you able to grade this?	Who are your students? Are they capable of achieving this outcome?	Is the ILO clear about what students will be able to do?	Is the ILO meaningful, or is it trivial?	Is the ILO able to be clearly mapped to course outcomes/subject benchmarks/ FHEQ/graduate outcomes?
1							
2							
3							

4							
5							
6							

Notes:

- **Student-Centred:** Learning outcomes express what the *students* can do at the end of a learning session/module/level/course.
- **Demonstratable:** Students can show you that they have achieved this outcome by *doing* something. ***Careful use of verbs is important.***
- **Measurable:** You need to be able to ***measure*** the quality of the student's work in order to assess their learning against the outcome. How do you measure understanding?
- **Achievable:** It needs to be reasonable for students to achieve the outcome in the given timeframe and context. You may need to revise and/or qualify the level of achievement.
- **Clear:** Being overly ambiguous does not provide clarity for the teacher or student. Try to be clear without being overly specific.
- **Meaningful:** Some outcomes are trivial in context and may be taken for granted. Remove these, or revise another to address them.
- **Relevant:** If the outcome does not contribute significantly to meeting those at a higher level (e.g., level/course, discipline area), it is not relevant.

Part Three: Designing Assessment

Our Strategy for assessment can be found here and states:

- Assessment will be fair, relevant, authentic, collaborative, diverse, inclusive and accessible.
- Assessment may also play a role in the quality assurance of the curriculum.

In addition, we expect the following:

- Assessment should be both valid (does the assessment accurately reflect what it is intended to measure) and reliable (do assessors consistently agree on grading).
- Assessment information should be explicit, accessible and transparent, and where possible, assessment should be inclusive and equitable.
- Assessment should be an integral part of course design, directly related to the course's aims and learning outcomes.
- The assessment volume should be manageable, and the assessment should be conducted using both formative and summative methods.
- Feedback on assessment should be developmental; lecturers involved in assessing students must be trained to an appropriate level. Additionally, students need to be supported in interpreting and applying the feedback they gather.

It is also important to remember that not all student learning can be objectively measured through assessment. Boud and Dochy (2010) provide a guide to thinking about assessment that aligns with high academic standards and the sector's needs. The propositions apply at various levels, ranging from teaching in individual courses to institution-wide approaches. Assessment is a central feature of teaching and the curriculum. It powerfully frames how students learn and what students achieve.' (2010, p.1)

Assessment has the most effect when:

- Assessment is used to engage students in productive learning.
- Feedback is used to actively improve student learning.
- Students and teachers become responsible partners in learning and assessment.
- Students are inducted into the assessment practices and cultures of higher education.
- Assessment for learning is placed at the centre of subject and program design.
- Assessment for learning is a focus for staff and institutional development.
- Assessment provides an inclusive and trustworthy representation of student achievement.

Assessment is often categorised in two ways:

Assessment of learning - or summative assessment: used to measure achievement and provide grades.

Assessment for learning - occurs when assessment and learning are integrated. Assessment for learning can take many forms and may be either formal or informal (Yorke 2003).

Our approach is to focus on the use of assessment for learning and to:

- Place assessment at the heart of the curriculum, aligned with learning and teaching activities and desired learning outcomes.
- Develop assessment practices that focus students on learning, not just achieving grades.
- Providing feedback that students use to improve their work.
- Developing students' reflective and critical judgment skills, as well as their skills of self-direction.

In this guidance, we will focus only on assessment for learning. Assessment criteria and standards (including rubrics) and feedback on assessment will be covered in part two.

Constructive Alignment and Assessment

In the model of constructive alignment (Biggs and Tang, 2007), learning outcomes specify the activity that students will do. Primarily, learning occurs through activities in and out of class, and assessments motivate performance and confirm achievement. However, assessment tasks should also be considered a learning activity. Notably, 'assessment tasks should comprise an authentic representation of the course ILOs' (2007, p.163). This should be true regardless of whether the tasks are formative or summative.

Checking alignment

- For each of your assessment tasks, identify the module and course (FHEQ) level learning outcomes that it assesses.
- Identify where and how students are being assessed for each course learning outcome.
- Are there gaps or redundancies?

For example, you may find that a particular outcome is not being assessed because it does not align with any assessment tasks. If this is the case, consider the usefulness of the outcome and/or the nature of the assessments. Alternatively, you may find that a learning outcome does not represent an assessment you believe is essential. You may add a learning outcome or amend the assessment using the evaluation tools below. This check also allows you to review and refine your learning outcomes.

Suitability

How suitable are your assessment tasks for demonstrating students' achievement of the outcomes?

Types of assessment:

- **Diagnostic assessment.**

This assessment is used to demonstrate a student's preparedness for a module or course. It identifies any strengths and potential gaps in knowledge, understanding, and skills expected at the start of the course, as well as any other possible issues for the learner and the teacher. Particular strengths may warrant formal consideration for accreditation of prior learning. A diagnostic assessment may also be used as part of a formative assessment, allowing lecturers to identify the gap between current ability and desired performance levels.

- **Formative assessment.**

This has a developmental purpose and is designed to help students learn more effectively by giving feedback on their performance and how it can be improved and/or maintained. Reflective practice by students can sometimes contribute to formative assessment, which provides students with feedback on their progress toward achieving the intended student learning outcome. Used to refer to any assessment, whether graded or ungraded, which has as its primary purpose the encouragement of students learning by the provision of feedback on performance.' (Nightingale, Te Wiata, Toohey, Ryan, Hughes & Magin, 1996, p. 269)

- **Summative assessment.**

This indicates how far a learner has succeeded in meeting the assessment criteria, which are used to gauge the intended learning outcomes of a module or course.

- **Synoptic assessment.**

This assessment encourages students to integrate elements of their learning from various parts of a course and demonstrate their accumulated knowledge and understanding of a topic or subject area.

- **Authentic/work-related assessment**.

This involves designing credible tasks that require students to utilise prior knowledge, recent learning and relevant skills to tackle complex 'real-world' problems (Wiggins, 1989, 1993, 1998; Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Gulikers, Bastiaens and Kirschner, 2004). Authentic assessment can play a crucial role in higher education courses that aim to equip students with the transferable skills that employers increasingly demand of graduates. However, we must be careful how we use this form of assessment as Gulikers, Bastiaens, and Kirschner (2004) argue: 'Professional practice should be the starting point for developing authentic assessments since this defines what students should know and be able to do after graduation. Therefore, authenticity depends on the resemblance between the assessment and professional practice. However, confronting inexperienced students with professional practice situations at the expert level seems unfair. Therefore, there should be a balance between making the assessment resemble professional practice while not making it too complex for students.'

Assessment Validity

The key to evaluating your assessment tasks is simply to refer to the verb used in the related learning outcomes and ask, 'Do the students have the opportunity to do this by completing the task?'

For example,if a learning outcome states that students should be able to 'explain' something, multiple-choice questions are unlikely to be a suitable task for this to occur. Thus, assessment validity is essential.

Although your assessment tasks may be suitable in his regard, ask yourself if there are better alternatives. For example, an oral presentation may allow students to explain a key concept and demonstrate their verbal communication skills. For some courses, this is an essential academic skill, distinct from but related to the course content. Another important consideration is whether the assessment format may disadvantage your students. If so, can you adapt it to suit their needs?

Assessment Mode

Various modes of assessment may be suitable for your course or module. These could include:

- In-class or out-of-class assessments.
- Online assessments.
- Individual or group assessments.
- Work-related assessments.
- Portfolio assessments. Etc...

Again, another important consideration is whether the assessment format may disadvantage your students. If so, can you adapt it to suit their needs? For example, considering alternatives may free up in-class time, reduce workload, and improve the quality of feedback, among other benefits. While some of these decisions may be primarily based on practical considerations, they mustn't compromise the integrity of the task itself.

Difficulty

Careful consideration should be given to the level and complexity of the tasks (and their alignment with SEEC and the FHEQ), ensuring that they are suitable forthe prior learning and capabilities of the students undertaking the course. This is particularly relevant for FHEQ level 4; course/module designers should be cautious not to assume that all students already possess academic thinking skills, and any task that requires these should be carefully constructed, with students scaffolded through a process of developing these skills. Similarly, assessments for more advanced courses should not demand too little of students.

When evaluating your assessment tasks, consider the types of students you have, their progression througha degree program, and the difficulty level of tasks required at that stage of the program. Additionally, any accreditation guidelines that may affect the level of tasks should be considered.

Number, Equivalence and Weighting of Assessments on Modules

Graded Assessment Points Per Module

Our academic framework and regulations assume that modules will have between one and two formally graded assessment points (one for 15-credit modules and two for 30-credit modules), as most modules are contained within a single semester/trimester lasting 15 weeks. There is no limit on the number of formative assessment opportunities provided within a module. However, if a module only has one summative assessment, ***it must*** provide opportunities for formative assessment. This is because formative assessment is vital in supporting student learning, providing opportunities to practice skills and measure knowledge, and developing students' assessment literacy.

Assessment weightings

Where there are two graded summative assessments, each assessment must be assigned a weighted value to calculate a final mark. Assessment weightings should reflect the demands and relative importance of each assessment, and the overall assessment load in a module or course should correspond to the credit value of that module or course. Additionally, weighting should reflect the relative importance of learning outcomes and the degree of effort required to complete the task.

Assessment Loads & Equivalences

Assessment Type	Equivalence*	Average Student Effort
Performance/skills/ensemble assessment	5 - 10 minutes	10 hours
Performed composition	2 – 5 minutes	10 hours
Written examination	1 hour	10 hours
Oral examination (viva or Q&A)	15 - 20 minutes	10 hours
Presentation/pitch	10 - 15 minutes	10 hours
Group presentation	10 minutes per member	5 hours
Recorded composition	2 – 5 minutes	10 hours
Essay/case study	1000 words	10 hours
Narrated slide presentation	8 - 10 minutes	10 hours
Narrated screen capture	10 - 12 minutes	10 hours
Report/action plan	1500 words	10 hours
Original filmed output	2 – 5 minutes	10 hours
Reflective journal/learning log/diary	2000 – 2500 words	10 hours
Creative Writing	1500 - 2000 words	10 hours
Portfolio Project Work	N/A	20-30 hours**

* Depending on the complexity of the task.
** Depending on academic level.

The table above represents the time taken to complete a task from beginning to end, including research/preparation/rehearsal/revision time and the time required to write/compose/record/review/proof/edit/mix the final work.

Portfolio assessments may include a mix of elements and types of material that are conflated to provide an overall weighted unit of assessment.

Assessment loads at FHEQ levels:

- Level 4: 15 credit module = 2,250 essay words or equivalent.
- Level 5: 15 credit module = 3,000 essay words or equivalent.
- Level 6: 15 credit module = 3,750 essay words or equivalent.

The table above represents the time taken to complete a task from beginning to end, including research/preparation/rehearsal/revision time and the time required to write/compose/record/review/proof/edit/mix the final work. A single weighted module will include at least one formative (weighted) and one summative (weighted) assessment. Portfolio assessments may consist of a mix of elements and types of material that are conflated to provide an overall weighted unit of assessment.

Course Teams should also consider the progression of assessment (i.e., from FHEQ level 4 to 6), not solely in terms of assessment length or duration, but also in terms of complexity. For example, an essay with a higher word count or a longer practical performance is not necessarily more difficult, nor does it necessarily assess higher-level cognitive skills. Therefore, assessments should be designed to measure intended learning outcomes; as learning outcomes change over the stages of a degree, so should the design of assessment questions and formats.

Other considerations:

Consideration should be given to the timing of tasks:

- Is there enough time for students to complete the task to an appropriate level?
- Is there sufficient time between tasks to provide students with feedback they can use?
- Do other concurrent modules have assessment items due at the same time?
- Adjustments should be made so that students are fairly assessed, not overloaded (which is a sure way to have students approach tasks superficially), and can use the feedback to improve their future work.

Diversity and variety

Ideally, various assessment methods should be used so that students can practice and demonstrate a range of skills, allowing students with varying strengths and weaknesses to showcase their understanding. However, if students are exposed to a limited range of assessment types, they may not have the opportunity to develop specific essential skills. Consider the types of assessments your students will complete in other modules they may be undertaking. Is there too much repetition? Can you improve students' engagement in your tasks by considering alternatives? Are some students disadvantaged by an overreliance on particular types of assessments?

Clarity

Lastly, evaluate the clarity of your assessment tasks. While the question or direction may be clear to you, it may not be to students. Try to read the task instructions objectively and assess whether students may misunderstand what they are to do and the level at which they are expected to doit. Is there ambiguity? Is there too much information? Perhaps ask your current students to read the brief and give feedback on its clarity.

Assessment Design

When designing assessments, consider the aims and functions of the assessment, as well as the mode of assessment. Below is an indicative but not exhaustive list of assessment activities that you might consider using:

- Project proposals/plans/schedules and timelines.
- Literature reviews and critiques.
- Bibliography and referencing tasks.
- Projects.
- Dissertations.
- Case studies.
- Conference papers.
- Essays.
- Reports.
- Research reports.
- Compositions and arrangements.
- Audio recordings and videos.
- Animations.
- Films plays documentaries.
- Theatrical and musical productions.
- Performances.
- Role plays.
- Vivas and oral reports
- Presentations, posters, displays.
- Interviews.
- Research fieldwork.
- Action plans.
- Action research projects.
- Microteaching.
- Portfolios.
- Physical artefact.
- Computer coding and programming.
- Questionnaires and tests.
- Problem-solving tasks.
- Concept mapping exercises.
- Business and marketingplans.
- Budgets/forecasts.
- Maps and diagrams.
- Presentations, posters, displays.
- Design tasks.
- Promopacks, CVs and showreels.
- Work-related portfolios.
- Event plans.
- Events.
- Learning or practice diaries.
- Blogs.
- Graphics.
- Organisational charts/diagrams.
- Pamphlets.
- Websites.
- Physical artefact.
- Business and marketingplans.
- Learning or practice diaries.
- Reflective essays, journals or reports.
- Concept mapping exercises.
- Risk assessments.
- Pitches.
- Risk assessments.

Assessment Alignment Tool

Do the tasks adequately assess the learning outcomes at the module level?		
Assessment Task:	Weighting:	Module Learning Outcomes:
Brief description of what students are to do	%	Which outcomes are assessed?

Are the learning outcomes for the course assessed adequately at each level?		
FHEQ level learning outcomes:	Assessment tasks:	Weighting:
List learning outcomes by level	Which module assessment task/s measure the achievement of these outcomes?	%

Suitability of assessment tasks					
Task:	Type:	Format:	Mode:	Difficulty:	Weighting:
Brief description of the task	Is the type of task (e.g., formative, diagnostic, summative) appropriate?	Is the format of the task (e.g., essay) appropriate to measure the outcomes?	Is the mode of the task (e.g., in-class test) appropriate?	Is the difficulty of the task appropriate in terms of skill level and complexity?	Is the task at an appropriate weighting to reflect its importance, contribution to learning outcomes, and student workload?

Overall review of assessment					
Task:	Alignment:	Suitability:	Timing:	Diversity:	Clarity:
Brief description	How does the task align with learning Outcomes?	Is the task suitable in terms of its form, type, mode, level, and weighting?	How is the timing of this task in terms of the level of student workload and feedback?	How does this task contribute to the diversity or otherwise of assessment methods for the module/course?	Is the task clear - not too ambiguous, and not too detailed?

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Checklist

The complete checklist is included below.

In the sections below, each item is expanded with explanations, examples, and citations.

- The connection between the learning outcomes and the assessment(s) is clear.
- Students have been taught all the skills, content, and competencies being assessed.
- Students are offered meaningful formative assessment opportunities that help them build towards the summative assessment(s).
- The assessment brief leaves a reasonable scope for students to investigate, develop, and pursue something they are passionate about.
- The assessment leaves a reasonable scope for students to exercise their skills as independent learners, thinkers, and artists.
- Where possible, the assessment offers students a choice as to how they will be assessed.
- Information about the assessment is consistent across all information sources, including the Module Handbook and Canvas.
- The assessment brief utilises formatting elements, including bullet points, headings, and bold or italic text, to clarify the instructions for students.

Learning Outcomes

- **The connection between the learning outcomes and the assessment(s) is clear.**

Students must see how their learning in the module will be applied to their assessments. This principle is part of John Biggs and Catherine Tang's theory of 'constructive alignment' (2011), which supports student learning by ensuring that all aspects of the module work towards the same goals. In some modules, this will be very straightforward; in others, you may have to work a little harder to clarify the relationship between the learning outcomes and the assessment.

The learning outcomes should match the assessments in two key ways:

1. Mode of assessment
    a. For example, if the learning outcome relates to a practical skill, it should not be assessed solely or primarily through a research essay.
2. Scope of assessment
    a. For example, if the module covers short films, it should not be assessed with a feature-length project.
    b. Similarly, if the module teaches a particular skill, that skill should be part of the assessment.

A quick way to check that your learning outcomes and assessment brief align is to phrase the brief using the same language as the learning outcomes or to tag the learning outcomes as relevant in your assessment brief.

Example

Imagine a module with a portfolio-style assessment that combines several different components.

If your assessment brief includes a list of potential portfolio components, you might consider identifying which ones are most suitable for demonstrating each learning outcome, like this:

The following are examples of optional components that you might include in your portfolio, along with the Learning Outcomes they are most likely to demonstrate:

- Mood Board (LO1, LO2).
- Mind Map (LO1, LO3).
- Draft Script (LO3).
- Playlist (LO1).
- Decision Flowchart (LO2).

The same assessment brief could spell out the learning outcomes and their relationship to the assessment in the initial assessment description.

For example:

This portfolio assessment will allow you to demonstrate your knowledge of core production processes (LO1) and specialist design skills (LO2) through a combination of components. You will choose a combination of components that speak to your interests. Each portfolio will also include a short piece of written work or video essay to demonstrate that you have analysed and reflected on your learning this term (LO3).

This approach can also be reinforced through how the assessment is introduced in class and any discussions about the assessment in tutorials.

- **Students have been taught all the skills, content, and competencies being assessed.**

A good rule of thumb is that you should not assess a skill, competency, or concept that you did not actually teach the students as part of the module or that they should not reasonably know already based on preceding modules.

We should not assume that students arrive at university with *any* specific skill set unless this is directly assessed as part of their application. Remember that not all students will have come directly from school with A-Level/BTEC qualifications, and not all students had their secondary education in the same country or context.

It can be helpful to challenge your assumptions: when you review your assessment brief, identify the core skills and knowledge a student would need to complete the work. For each, ask yourself, 'how do they know?' Consider adjusting the assessment if you can't identify how and when they would have learned something.

Formative Assessment Alignment

- **Students are offered meaningful formative assessment opportunities that help them build towards the summative assessment(s).**

This forms part of your constructive alignment in your module design. Meaningful formative assessments align with the marking criteria and learning outcomes, and they typically allow students to practice the same skills assessed in the summative.

Depending on the nature of the summative assessments, this may include a full draft of the work, a demonstration of selected key skills or competencies, and/or a detailed plan or outline.

The formative assessment(s) must provide *feed-forward* opportunities for students. Formative feedback should include a constructive approach to identifying gaps or challenges evident in each student's work.

Keep track of your feedback at the formative stage so that you can identify where a student has improved their work in relation to your comments on the summative work.

Student Agency

- **The assessment brief leaves a reasonable scope for students to investigate, develop, or pursue something they are passionate about.**
- **The assessment leaves a reasonable scope for students to exercise their skills as independent learners, thinkers, and artists.**
- **Where possible, the assessment offers students a choice as to how they will be assessed.**

Student's ability to learn independently is a priority in UK Higher Education (Kingsbury, 2014 and Ashwin, 2012). Quesada et al. (2017) argue that student participation in the assessment process at various stages – including design, implementation, and marking – can improve student performance.

One way to empower students as participants in the assessment process is by providing a reasonable scope to investigate, develop, or pursue something they are passionate about. This might look like:

- Setting assessment parameters but leaving the content open to students' choice.
- Setting content/questions, but leaving the method of investigation up to the students.
- Offering a 'wild card' or self-directed option, in which students can set their own essay question /research task.
    - Ideally, students taking this option should get a 1-1 tutorial to discuss their ideas with the lecturer.

Assessment briefs that are too rigid leave little room for students to exercise their skills as independent learners, thinkers, and artists.

Offering students a choice in how they are assessed benefits access and participation initiatives, allowing students to play to their strengths and pursue projects that they are passionate about (O'Neill and Padden, 2022). As Waterfield and West show in relation to disabled students, alternative assessment arrangements achieve equity by successfully measuring the same learning outcomes as the traditionally offered assessment mode'; they argue that offering these alternatives to all students can create 'an inclusive approach to assessment' (Waterfield and West 2006).

Choices for students might include:

- The option to be assessed live or through a video/audio recording.
- A choice between, e.g., a research essay or creative writing with a brief reflective commentary.
- A choice between a traditional written assessment and a podcast, video essay, or other format.

You might even consider setting an 'unessay', as described by Victoria Grace Walden. This is an assessment style where students can choose any format for their assessment – except a traditional academic essay.

As a matter of principle, we should aim to say 'yes' to a student's idea as a first response and then work on ironing out the details of equivalency between different assessment types.

Concerning quality assurance, which, as Bloxham (2015) notes, is one of the critical purposes of assessment, students should be provided with detailed marking criteria, as well as formative assessment and feedback opportunities (see also the EDI Checklist).

This level of autonomy may be a challenging adjustment for students coming directly from highly structured and/or exam-focused Level 3 education. Students nervous about having more autonomy in their assessments can be supported with aligned formative assessments and feedback, structured peer-to-peer feedback using a model such as Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process (see reading list below), and 1-1 tutorial support from lecturers. It may also be appropriate to give more structure at Level 4 and more autonomy at Level 6.

Example

The following is an example provided by our Associate Dean, Access and Participation (Nora Williams):

In a previous role as a Lecturer in an interdisciplinary department, I included an unessay assessment on a Level 4 Shakespeare on Film module. Students were encouraged to think creatively about how to best express their learning in the module. I was often surprised by the types of projects that students brought to the table.

Some of the strongest pieces of work were in formats I would not have anticipated, including a painting of Ophelia's perspective as she falls under the surface of the water in Hamlet, a chapbook of poetry from the perspective of Juliet from Romeo and Juliet, and a papier-mâché bust of Ophelia plastered with what other characters say about her in the play. Each of these was accompanied by a thoughtful, critical reflection that allowed students to demonstrate their skills in research and analysis (as per the module learning outcomes).

In this case, equivalency was determined in relation to an established word count for creative writing projects, which were the historical form of assessment on the module. Students working on non-verbal projects, such as the painting and the bust, had a slightly longer word count attached to their

critical reflections.

In other cases, discussions around credit hours (and the number of hours students might be expected to spend developing their assessment pieces) could help bridge gaps between different projects. In some modules, giving some class time to a project pitch session with collaborative peer-to-peer equivalency discussions may be appropriate.

Clarity and Consistency

- **Information about the assessment is consistent across all information sources, including the Module Handbook and Canvas.**

- **The assessment brief uses formatting such as bullet points, headings, and bold or italic text to help clarify the instructions to students.**

Malone notes that 'Consistent structure helps learners know where to go in the course to get the information they need. This method of reducing extraneous cognitive load can also reduce confusion, frustration, and stress.'

Malone's resource, *Accessibility and UDL Best Practices Guide,* includes detailed information about formatting text according to the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Reviewing this guide may help you to format your assessments more inclusively.

EDI Module Development Health Check	
Module Code & Name:	
Module Developer:	

An inclusive curriculum aims to improve the experience, skills and attainment of all students, including those in protected characteristic groups, by ensuring that all students,
regardless of background, are able to participate fully and achieve at equal rates.'

UCL Inclusive Curriculum Health Check (2018)

Guiding principles:

- Incorporate multiple perspectives, theoretical standpoints, and contributions by people from multiple cultures and backgrounds.
- Use this content to raise awareness of equality and promote respect for individual difference.
- Avoid stereotypes while celebrating diversity.
- Provide opportunities for students to reflect on their identities – including their backgrounds, unconscious biases and experiences – and, where appropriate, share these reflections with others.

Questions:	Notes:	Response:
1. How do you plan to introduce and model 'safe spaces' for students at the start of the module? *Safe space = a classroom climate that allows students to feel secure enough to take risks, honestly express their views and share and explore their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours.* Holley and Steiner (2005)	Practices such as check-in/check-out; https://www.artistwellbeing.co.uk/post/2019/04/15/check-ins-outs-guidance-best-practice and collaboratively setting clear expectations and community guidelines in the first lesson (see separate template) can help to foster a safe space in your classroom. However, this will be an ongoing process throughout a module. It is not enough to say to students,'this is a safe space'; you also need to prove that they are safe by celebrating creative and intellectual risk-taking (even when it doesn't work), giving constructive feedback, and cultivating a judgment-free zone.	
2. Please share how you have ensured that learning outcomes are written in accessible language that easily facilitates students' ability to assess their progress.	See the Inclusive Assessment Guidance and Checklist document for examples.	
3. How will this module create opportunities to discuss different perspectives on ethnic diversity and allow students to explore how various factors (e.g. social, economic, ethnic) influence outcomes and perspectives?		
4. How will this module help students reflect and think critically about different perspectives on identity and their positionality?	Consider gender, ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic status, (dis)ability, age, etc.	

Questions:	Notes:	Response:
1. How will you create space for students to raise questions about equality, inclusion and identity?		
2. What actions have you taken after reviewing the module reading list to ensure it contains a diverse range of authors, including those from different ethnicities, sexualities and non-academic sources where relevant?		
3. How will you incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences in your delivery? (Including internal and external expert guest speakers or panels, etc.)		
4. How have you indicated that material that explores different data, models and theories related to ethnic diversity – even within a historical context - is introduced? How have you ensured non-white and non-male perspectives & case studies are included?		
5. How have you suggested that new cultural theories and case studies be introduced? (Including supporting flipped resources you may have commissioned.)		

Questions:	Notes:	Response:
6. What opportunities do students have to shape the module? (Either to impact their year of study and/or for future students.)		
7. Within your suggested scheme of work, how do you plan to encourage discussion from students from marginalised backgrounds and include topics where personal experience and views are expressed.	Where there are disproportionate numbers of one gender identity, how are you being proactive in encouraging the active participation of the minority group? How are you supporting their development of the expertise and skills necessary to be successful.	
8. How do you plan to embed formative assessment and feedback opportunities to ensure all students can reflect on their progress within your suggested scheme of work?	See the Inclusive Assessment Guidance and Checklist document for examples.	
9. How have you ensured commissioned resources (including digital) are accessible to all students? (Including the language, format and platform used)?		

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