



Building Communities
and Enhancing Belonging:

A Route Map for Assessment Design

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A sense of belonging to a community in HE has been linked to positive outcomes for students such as increased engagement, identity development and retention (Masika & Jones, 2015; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015) and has emerged as a buffer to declining mental health following the COVID-19 pandemic (Gopalan et al., 2021).

A key challenge for students undertaking assessment and engaging in feedback is that it tends to be an individual experience and often fraught with stress. Through dialogue with staff and students, our research project established that assessment and feedback practices mediate belonging and communities in unseen ways. Meaningful interactions between staff and students can have a lasting impact on their work and make them feel that they matter (Gravett & Ajjawi, 2022), for example, group assignments support the formation of communities that outlast assessment deadlines.

The following route map draws on our project findings to provide key questions and ideas for how to support a sense of belonging at each stage in the assessment design journey.



**Your journey
begins here!**



1. Linking Belonging to learning outcomes:

What are my LOs and how will students demonstrate achieving them?

What does belonging and community mean to students on this module/programme?

Can you use verbs like 'reflect' and 'collaborate' in your learning outcomes?



Provide guidance to your students on learning outcomes, and emphasise any links to belonging.

Make students feel that they matter by engaging them in co-creation of learning outcomes.



2. Identifying the approach:

What task(s) will students undertake and why?

What is the 'real world' context to embed 'authentic' assessment?

How can we ensure that the assessment 'matters' to students?



Build in choice and creativity - consider project based approaches.

Build in reflection on the learning process through diaries, reports or blogs.



3. Establishing the parameters:

How, when, where?

Is the assessment an individual or group submission? Students can still work in teams either way!

Can you take your students beyond the classroom?



Include activities that encourage students to focus on their strengths and those of others.

Link students with communities beyond the classroom - consider local and professional networks.



4. Embedding formative support:

What support will students need - assessment literacy?

What scaffolding do students need as they work towards this assessment?

How can you encourage collective risk taking and creativity in the assessment?



Think about your timetable, carve out group study time for students to work collaboratively on assessments.

Embed support for teamworking and communication skills.



5. Providing feedback

How, when, where?

How can you deliver feedback in a way that generates a dialogue and makes students feel that they matter?

Are there opportunities for peer to peer feedback and learning?



It's more than just one stop - feedback should happen across the module.

Emphasise to your students that the learning process is as important as the result.



Foster a culture of enquiry and share FAQs and answers.

Create space across the module for dialogue with students, prompt them to reflect on belonging.



6. Evaluating and reflecting

How will I know if it's working?

'How many questions did you get about the assessment?'

When will you collect feedback across the duration of the module? Remember to 'close the loop'.



You've reached your destination!

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