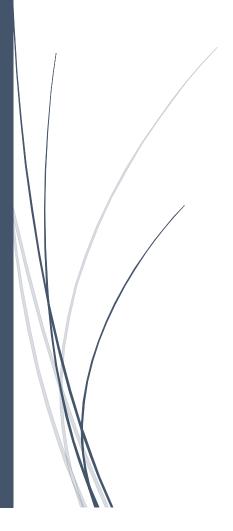# Toolkit: making the language of assessment inclusive

Part of a QAA Collaborative

Overview

This resource is an output from a Collaborative Enhancement Project supported and funded by QAA Membership. The project was led by the University of the West of England, Bristol in partnership with the University of Brighton, University of Greenwich and University of Hertfordshire.

Find out more about Collaborative Enhancement Projects on the QAA website.

The toolkit has been developed as the main outcome of a cross-institutional collaborative project, funded by the Quality Assurance Agency during 2021-22. The focus of the project was a critical enquiry into what we term the

Assessment Design and Setting

The assessment design and setting stage is staff-focused and the toolkit below is meant to provide pointers towards staff dialogue, but could also be used when students are involved in the co

	Questions by staff to other staff in the design process	Additional queries or considerations to explore:
	What is my intention in the use of language when setting the assessment instructions (choice of terminology/words)?	Is the language I am using clear in setting out the assessment instructions? Am I being as clear as possible with the terms I'm using? Do the words used make the task clear? The words I choose may have different meaning in common parlance as opposed to how they are used with my discipline. A good starting point is to consider potential ambiguity would this be clear to others including, for instance, international students?
	What kind of assumptions am I making cf	Am I assuming that all the students who are taking this module will understand the task instructions (in the same way) or have encountered them before? NB: there is a difference here between the language of instruction and any discipline-specific terminology/concepts you may wish students to define/explore.
	What am I looking to assess?	What range/types of tasks/use of instruction words/language will enable students to best demonstrate their learning? (Is the assessment constructively aligned with the learning outcomes?)
	What tools does this module provide?	Will the module provide students with relevant tools to complete the task/s? If not, how/where can they access these?

	Have I involved everyone sufficiently in the design of the task/s?	Who else do I need to liaise with / consult (team; support services etc)?
	Is the language sufficiently clear / accessible / inclusive?	

Assessment Brief Release

Consider the following scenarios:

A new module leader has just given a sample assessment brief to their students in a seminar. They have asked the students if everyone understands the brief, and the students have all nodded, but offered no comment. However, they are concerned that the students are just holding their thoughts and questions back and will quietly struggle later on.

A student has just received an assessment brief, and is completely lt232.92 .92 .92 566.omk an't un-2(dat t)4riek af

At the assessment brief release stage, the range of opportunities for dialogue opens up for conversations between staff and students and among students.

	Questions for staff to consider when introducing the assessment task/s		Questions for students to ask themselves (and staff) about the brief	
	Have the instructions and all the terminology been explained sufficiently?	Do I need to point students to other sources and, if so, what are these/where can they be found? How will I know that all students understand the terminology used? (Refer to Appendix 1 - list of terms ranked by student levels of confidence) What activities can I embed to provide opportunities for students to discuss their understanding of the task/s?	What am I being asked to do?	Do I know all words used in the brief and what they, in this context, mean? Do I know how to respond to the assessment instructions?
	What opportunities for dialogue are embedded in the module for students to engage with the language used in the criteria?	For instance, do we provide any of the following: jargon buster, Q&A session, use of exemplars, opportunities for formative	Do I understand what criteria will be used to mark my work?	Where do I find the criteria? Have I had / made use of an opportunity to use/engage with these before? Did I understand the requirements / language used at the time?

	What feedback am I planning on providing and when?	Do I have a set of generic guidance/FAQs derived from previous student questions? Have I explained how feedback will be given (and by whom)? Do students know how to use previous feedback and what action to take to address the words/language used? Are there opportunities for students to use previous feedback to inform this task? Does drawing on previous feedback form part of the assessment task?	Have I been asked to do this kind of activity before?	Do I have feedback on similar/previous tasks that I can use to inform my understanding? What kind of assumptions am I making about the language I encountered before? Could I explain the words used to another student? How can I plan this better where can I go for clarification of the words/language/terminology used?
	Does the assessment brief include how students can access additional language support?	What resources are there available for students to find out more and how can they be		

Student Engagement with Assessment

Consider the following scenario:

A student approaches a member of library staff for help with their assignment because they remembered, from their induction, that there is help available from the library if they get stuck with their studies. The student is distraught because they do not understand the question posed in the assessment brief, dare not approach their module leader in case they think poorly of them, and don't know if there is a personal tutor in the School that they could approach.

During the stage when students engage with the assessment towards writing up and submission, different conversations new avenues for engagement may also raise new and previously unexplored aspects.

Marking and Feedback

Consider the following scenarios:

Students have submitted their assessment and have been told that their marks and feedback will be released in   feel that the

process is taking too long

A programme leader is concerned about student feedback suggesting they do not always find the marking criteria clear, and that assessment and marking are not always perceived as fair. The module leaders include both new and experienced colleagues, some of whom do not speak English as their first language. The programme leader wants to organise a development session to address these issues as a team.

Once students have submitted their assessment and marking by staff is under way, the conversations and opportunities for dialogue and future avenues for exploration open up.

	What words do I commonly use to provide feedback?	Does my feedback make sense, i.e., is it clear? Do I use words that may be ambiguous or unclear (e.g. to non-native speakers) Is the language inclusive (in terms of, for example growth mindset)? Do I use appropriate language that is constructive, objective and practical? Does the language used encourage the student to take ownership of their learning?	Do I understand the individual feedback I have received?	Are there words/terms that are unclear? Is it clear what I did well and what I need to do to improve?

Do I provide further
opportunities for students to