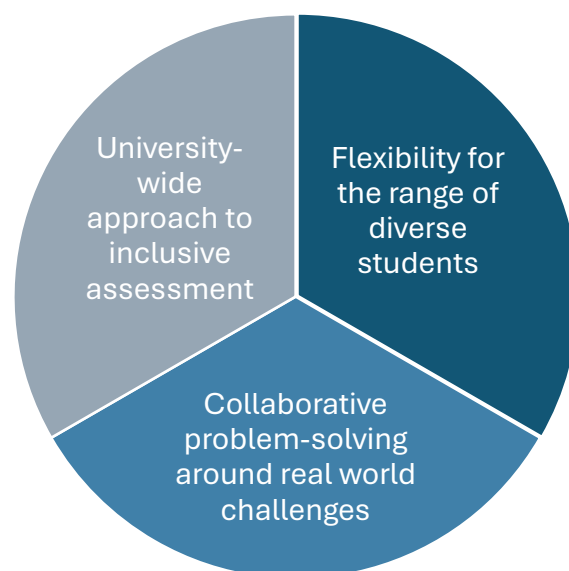


Leading inclusive assessment in higher education: A framework to guide inclusive practice

This document offers universities a framework to support the design and implementation of inclusive assessment. The framework is structured around three principles to achieve more equity in assessment (inclusive, flexible, and collaborative). These can help support universities to develop institution-wide approaches, with a focus on facilitating the creation of flexible assessment practices that are responsive to, and problem solve around, real world concerns. Key to this framework is the importance of acknowledging students' lived experiences and knowledge, and foregrounding student agency by providing opportunities for student control and choice.

This framework has been developed as part of a Council of Australian University Leaders in Learning and Teaching funded project that investigated sector-wide understandings of inclusive assessment policy and practice. The research team drew on interviews conducted with assessment policy leaders and the educators who implement these policies in Australian and New Zealand universities, alongside academic literature. The framework, therefore, is informed by experiences in various disciplines and geographic and jurisdictional contexts.

Inclusive Practice Framework



Under each of the three principles (university-wide approach to inclusive assessment, flexibility for the range of diverse students, collaborative problem-solving around real-world challenges), the framework includes suggested approaches that can assist universities as they work towards more inclusive assessment. Practice suggestions are offered under each of the approaches. This framework is meant to be applied flexibly,

with consideration given to the university's context, with engagement also guided by the work the institution has already done in this area.

Principle 1: A university-wide approach to inclusive assessment

University leaders and educators consistently identified the need to design institutional approaches to implementing inclusive assessment design. This included considering ways to develop shared understandings about inclusive assessment design within institutions, as well as examining how to support those staff charged with designing assessment to put those understandings into practice with students. Project data highlighted the importance of making sure effective exemplars were shared so that pockets of good practice were not siloed within institutions.

Establish a shared understanding of inclusive assessment

- Adopt university-wide principles that support inclusion (e.g., Universal Design for Learning, CAST, 2024)
- Share examples of inclusive assessment implementation through workshops and/or communities of practice led by learning designers, academic developers, or school/faculty leaders
- Nominate inclusive assessment champions to work within faculties and schools to support staff/share practice examples, recognising and catering to the different skill and experience levels of educators.

Support staff to design more inclusive assessment

- Provide tools for adaptation in different contexts, which support consideration of design principles (e.g., digital accessibility tools, assessment toolboxes with a range of examples of inclusive assessment from different disciplines/universities, checklists based on UDL or other frameworks to guide the design process)
- Include policy guidance on assessment program plan design and provide clarity about what can be changed at the unit level.

Consider the role of students, their access to policies, and right to have a voice

- Ensure students have access to clear, comprehensible, and accessible policies
- Consider the naming of documents/webpages so that students can easily locate and interpret them
- Prioritise students-as-partners programs in relation to initial assessment design, assessment review/revision, and assessment policy creation and review.

Principle 2: Flexibility in assessment design for the range of diverse students

Research consistently shows that there is no ‘one size fits all’ and that, to respond to diversity in equitable ways, flexibility is key. Consideration should be given to introducing a degree of flexibility in how students are required to engage with and demonstrate their learning through assessment tasks. This includes considering the timing of tasks, allowing students choice in how they engage with assessment, and providing a range of assessment support resources for student use as they engage with and complete their assessments.

Consider the **timing** of assessment tasks

- Complete assessment audits across schools/programs to ensure students are not asked to complete multiple assessments at the same time
- Provide time flexibility for written exams (e.g., open for 24-48 hours, option of sitting in the morning or afternoon)
- Allow a range of options for assessment deadlines (consider negotiated dates)
- Provide the option for short automatic assessment extensions without evidence to allow students to respond to unforeseen circumstances and, when required, gather necessary documentation.

Support student **choice**

- Provide the option of a ‘negotiated’ assessment
- Provide choice in assessment topics, focus areas, and/or the number of assessment tasks to complete
- Allow students to aim towards a particular grade, with options to choose different assessment task components matched to different levels of achievement
- Allow equivalent assessments and provide clear parameters about equivalence. This could be presented as a table that suggests possible tasks which would be considered equivalent (e.g., word count vs number of spoken minutes)

Provide a **range** of assessment support resources for use by students

- Provide checklists or templates to prompt staff to design accessible assessment support resources (i.e., downloadable versions of tasks, labelled non-written content, assessment explanation videos with transcripts, illustrated PDFs of tasks)
- Avoid basing assessments directly around content or scenarios accessible only in commercial textbooks so students with financial constraints can complete assessments without having to purchase these.

Principle 3: Collaboratively problem-solve real-world challenges

Universities exist within a wider education and employment ecosystem. Therefore, universities need to collaborate with a broad range of stakeholders including students, community groups, and industry to make sure assessments meet the needs of each group.

Likewise, during any change process, real-world challenges are often identified. When ignored, these can undermine innovation. Hence, leadership around inclusive assessment includes actively listening to stakeholder concerns and working together to devise solutions that overcome real or perceived challenges.

Work with the broader community to establish shared goals for inclusive assessment

- Establish community consultation about challenges with current assessed learning outcomes and assessment processes, identifying potential solutions
 - Engage with industry regarding accreditation requirements that influence assessment design, collaboratively discuss the benefits of diversity within the graduating workforce and how requirements can be designed in ways that don't undermine this goal
 - Collaboratively review graduate attributes and assessed outcomes to determine if what is being assessed remains valued and, if so, how it can be evaluated in flexible and inclusive ways
 - Explore how inclusive and flexible assessment designs may help address concerns about Artificial Intelligence (both about academic integrity and about supporting students to be ready to use it in ways industry requires)
 - Engage with equity group stakeholders (e.g., Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders, disability advocates, LGBTQIA+ groups, refugee advocacy associations, diverse students) to identify and respond to key higher education goals and challenges that are relevant to their experiences and use this to inform the design of more inclusive assessment.

Respond to staff concerns about inclusive assessment and support implementation

- Create opportunities for consultation and collaboration to identify, discuss, and address challenges. These may include, but are not limited to:
 - Concerns about workload
 - Implement workload recognition/time for developing and implementing inclusive assessment

- Automate short extensions when appropriate (e.g., 3 or 5 days) to reduce administrative load on unit chairs/coordinators so staff have more time to respond to students and their work
- Consider how and when teacher feedback might be best tailored to individual students. This may involve staff using AI tools to generate lower-level feedback comments (e.g., about spelling and grammar) so they can focus on substantive aspects. Peer feedback may also offer opportunities for social inclusion where appropriately scoped.
- Questions around academic integrity
 - Consider the importance of assessment security and identify which assessment tasks are more important for supporting versus assuring learning
 - Check that task conditions align well with capabilities being assessed
 - Give students opportunities to learn how to appropriately use and document the use of AI, particularly to help overcome personal barriers
 - Identify opportunities for inclusive assessment design [including ones which use Artificial Intelligence (AI)] whilst also working to mitigate concerns about academic integrity and authorship (e.g., designing tasks at a lower risk of AI plagiarism which also promote inclusion through reflection, discussion of processes).
- Concerns about course evaluation
 - Identify when innovations in assessment formats and unit designs are implemented to allow for more considered interpretation of end of semester evaluations and/or changes in student achievement patterns.

While the challenges presented here were current and pressing at the time this framework was created, the changing nature of the higher education environment means that other challenges will present themselves into the future. Collaborative approaches will be necessary to respond to emerging and changing challenges.

References

CAST (2024). The Universal Design for Learning guidelines.

<https://udlguidelines.cast.org/static/udlg3-graphicorganizer-digital-numbers-a11y.pdf>