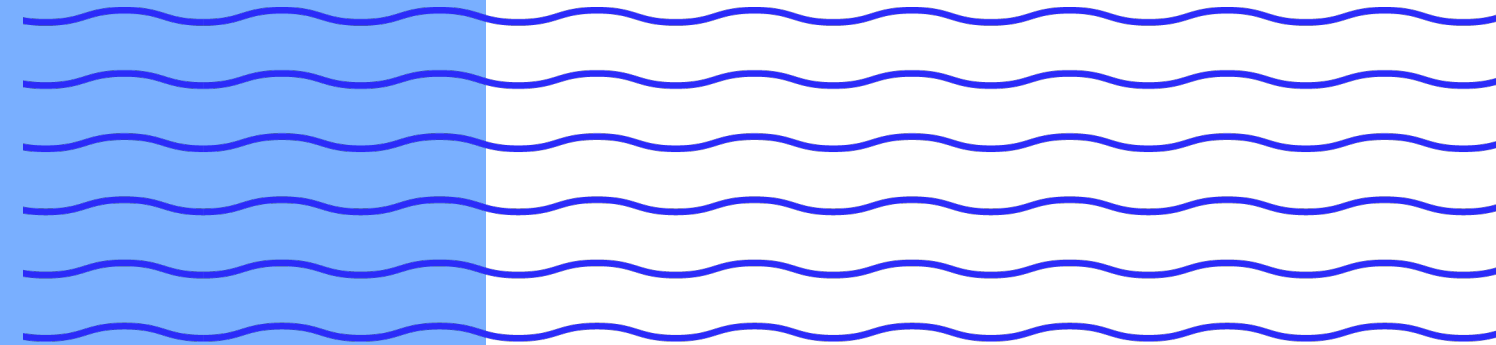


Changing assessment



WONKHE

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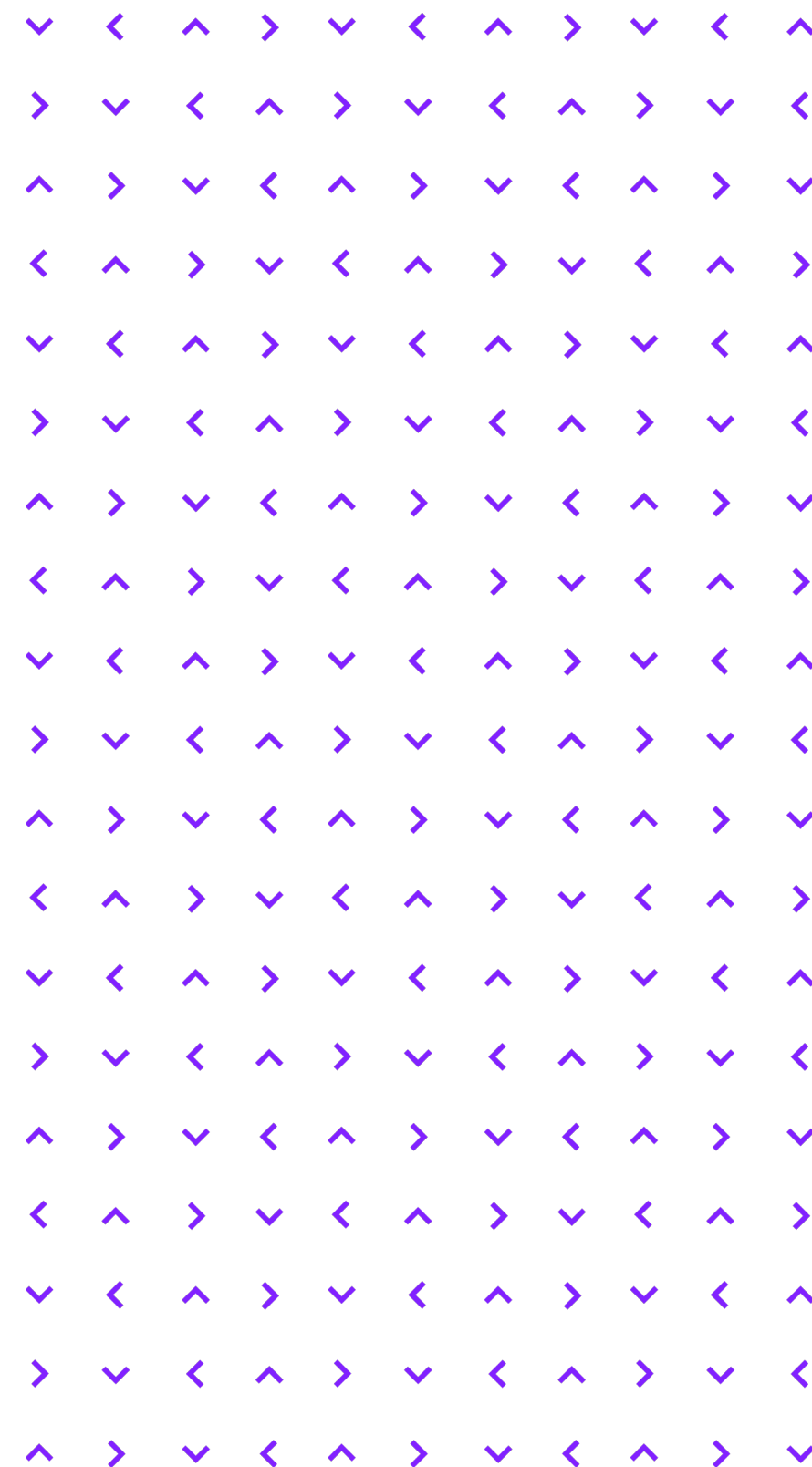
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Introduction

Assessment is the central cog that sets the rest of the academic curriculum in motion. It is the basis on which students achieve, progress, and are awarded their degrees.

How universities choose to assess students communicates important pedagogic values and encapsulates how the university conceives of learning.

It is also enormously culturally totemic and as such, very hard to change.

Decades of pedagogic research and thinking on themes such as assessment for learning, authentic assessment, and feedback and assessment literacies have led to enhancements to practice.

But it took the Covid-19 pandemic to force large-scale rethinking of assessment, as in-person mass examinations became untenable.

In the autumn of 2021 we interviewed seven leaders and experts in learning and teaching from a range of different kinds of universities. We also held a private round table with 13 senior leaders to capture their views on assessment and change.

Key findings

1

Opening up the prospect of changing assessment affords opportunities in improving accessibility, inclusion, and range and meaningfulness of assessment

2

There is a strong will to embed positive changes arising from the pandemic, tempered with an understanding of disciplinary differences and the toll the pandemic took on university staff

3

HE leaders are not settled on a fixed way forward – this is a time for deep reflection, for evidence-gathering, and for building common purpose to underpin sustainable change for the future

“Too often we assess what is easy, but we forget to assess what is meaningful. Now my team focuses on assessment for impact.”

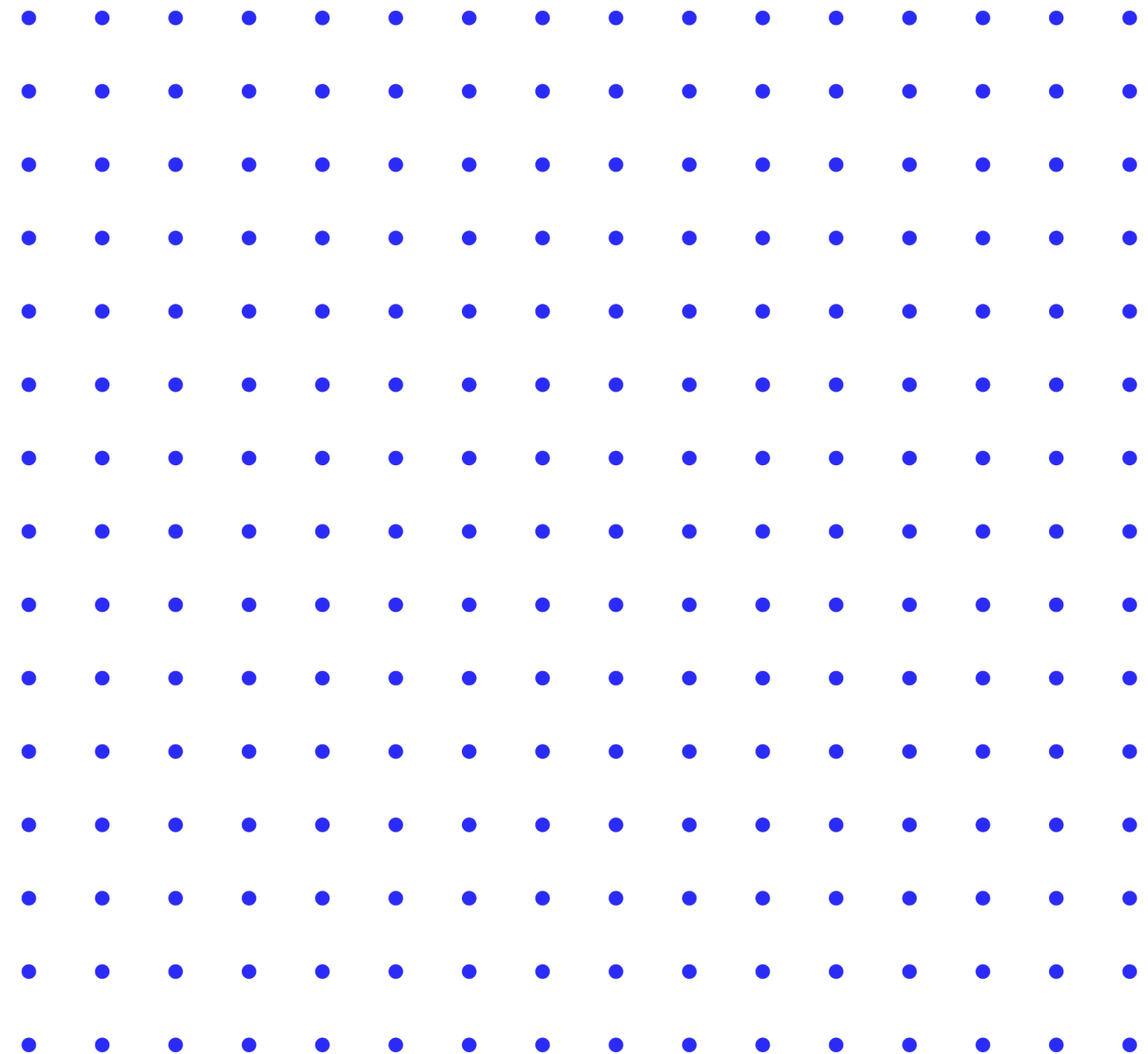
Senior leader, Wonkhe/Adobe online round table on assessment

“Assessment is a relationship builder – if we can crack our assessment challenges, we will make our students happy.”

Senior leader, Wonkhe/Adobe online round table on assessment

“Assessment is the hardest thing to change yet it’s the thing that’s shaping the students’ experience more than anything. We subscribe to all this stuff about promoting graduate attributes of being good citizens and critical thinkers and then we push them into the straitjacket of assessment systems that are so often rigid.”

Jan McArthur, senior lecturer, Lancaster University



Covid-19 accelerated changing assessment practice

Faced with the impossibility of timed in-person exams some universities sought to reproduce the synchronous proctored examination experience in an online environment – with mixed success. Others took the opportunity to explore alternative forms of assessment.

There was a need to engage more closely with students in negotiating assessments during the pandemic, opening up the opportunity to work with students on changing assessment.

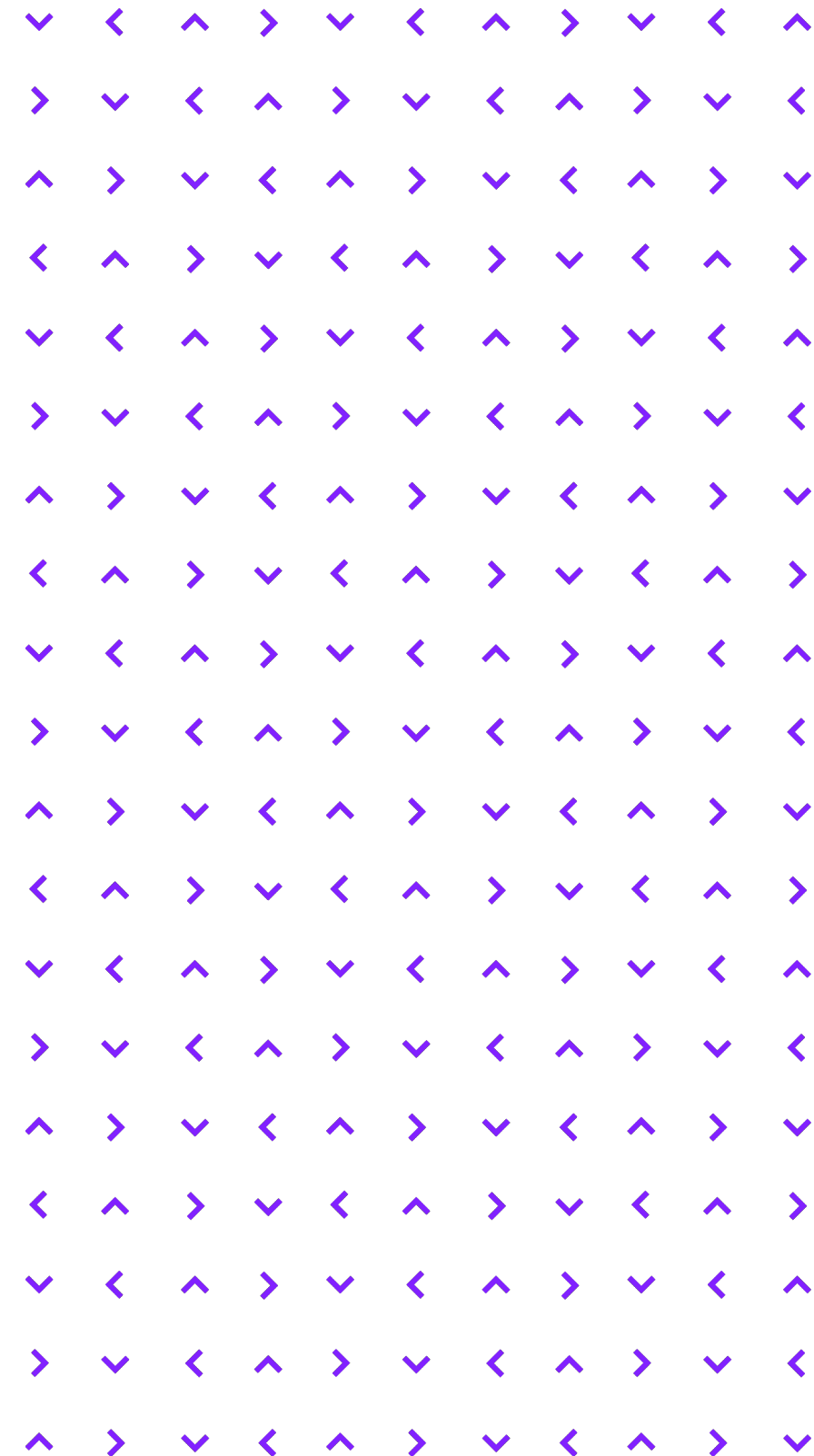
Assessment experts Kay Sambell and Sally Brown compiled the [Covid Assessment Collection](#) showcasing good practice and case studies.

These initially explored rapid alternatives to face to face assessment, but subsequently developed into building a case for the widespread adoption of more inclusive assessments that promote active learning.

The pandemic afforded educators the opportunity to experiment with different forms of assessment.

This helped learning and teaching advocates to develop the case for not returning to the traditional exam format.

The exception is where there is a strong pedagogical case for examination - and ideally exams should be part of a varied and diverse assessment diet.



Universities are changing assessment to make it more...

AUTHENTIC

Engaging students in tasks that have relevance to life and employment; which incorporate process as well as outcome; and which foster competencies associated with self-regulation and personal judgement eg interpreting data leading to an action plan, or evaluating competing options.

DIVERSE

Different kinds of tasks or projects, working individually or in groups, using a variety of media, etc.

INTEGRATIVE

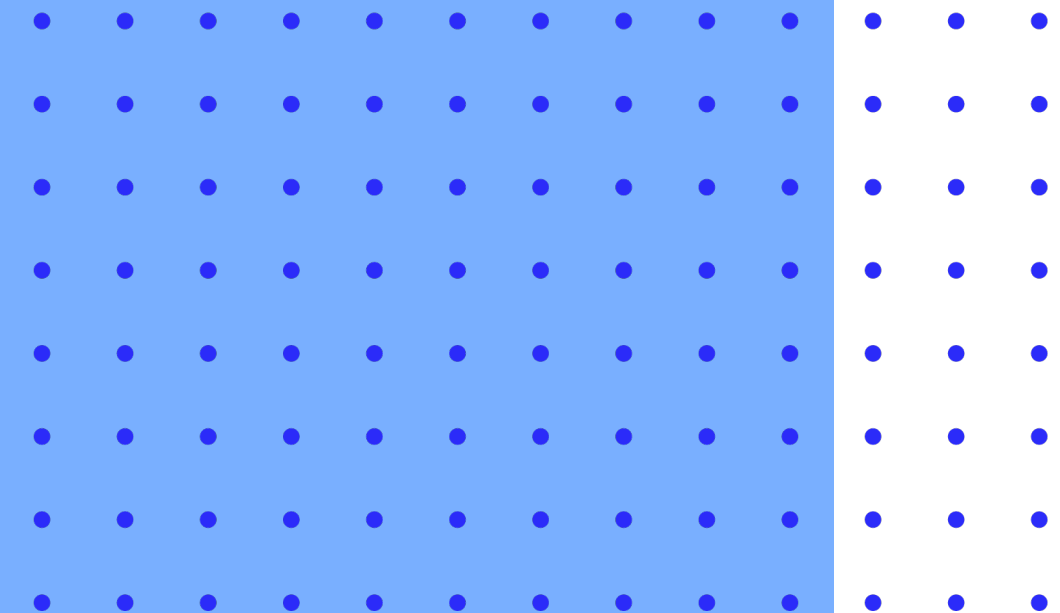
Causing students to mobilise knowledge spanning a range of diverse sources and different modules.

ASYNCHRONOUS

Allowing students to undertake work at a pace and time that accommodates their circumstances (within defined parameters).

OPEN BOOK

Requiring students to source and evaluate reference material rather than relying on memory recall.

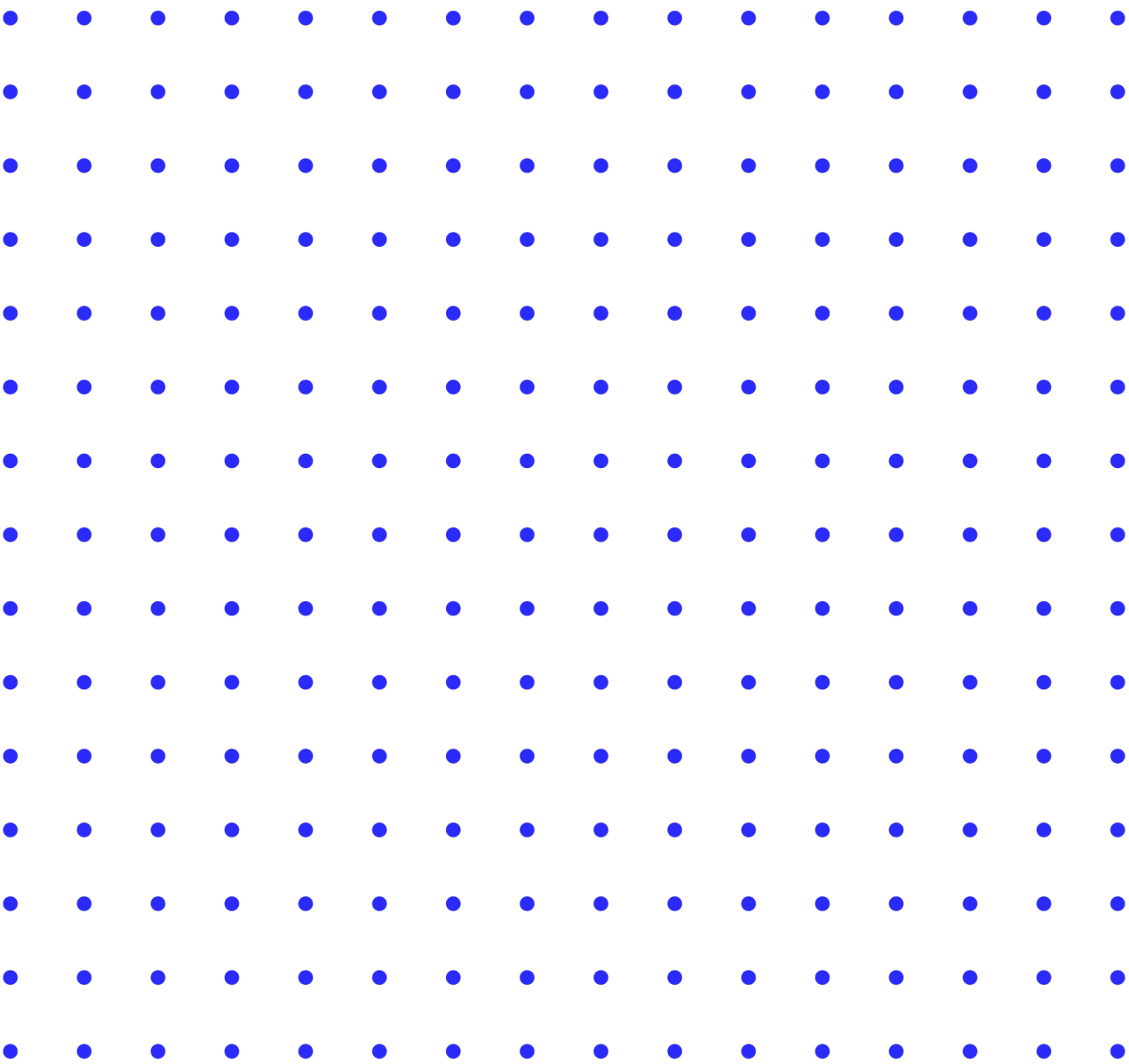


“The pandemic prompted some educators who were doing other things or who had an interest in other aspects of the academy to look again at learning and teaching. But it is still an open question as to what changes we want to keep post-pandemic. We need to extrapolate what works, what helps students learn, what needs to be retained - and what hasn’t worked so well. Going forward we need to establish a minimum expectation that we afford students some diversity of assessment options - flexibility must be retained, while accounting for contextual factors like the individual discipline or where skills need to be assessed over a period of time.”

Patrick Baughan, senior learning advisor, Advance HE

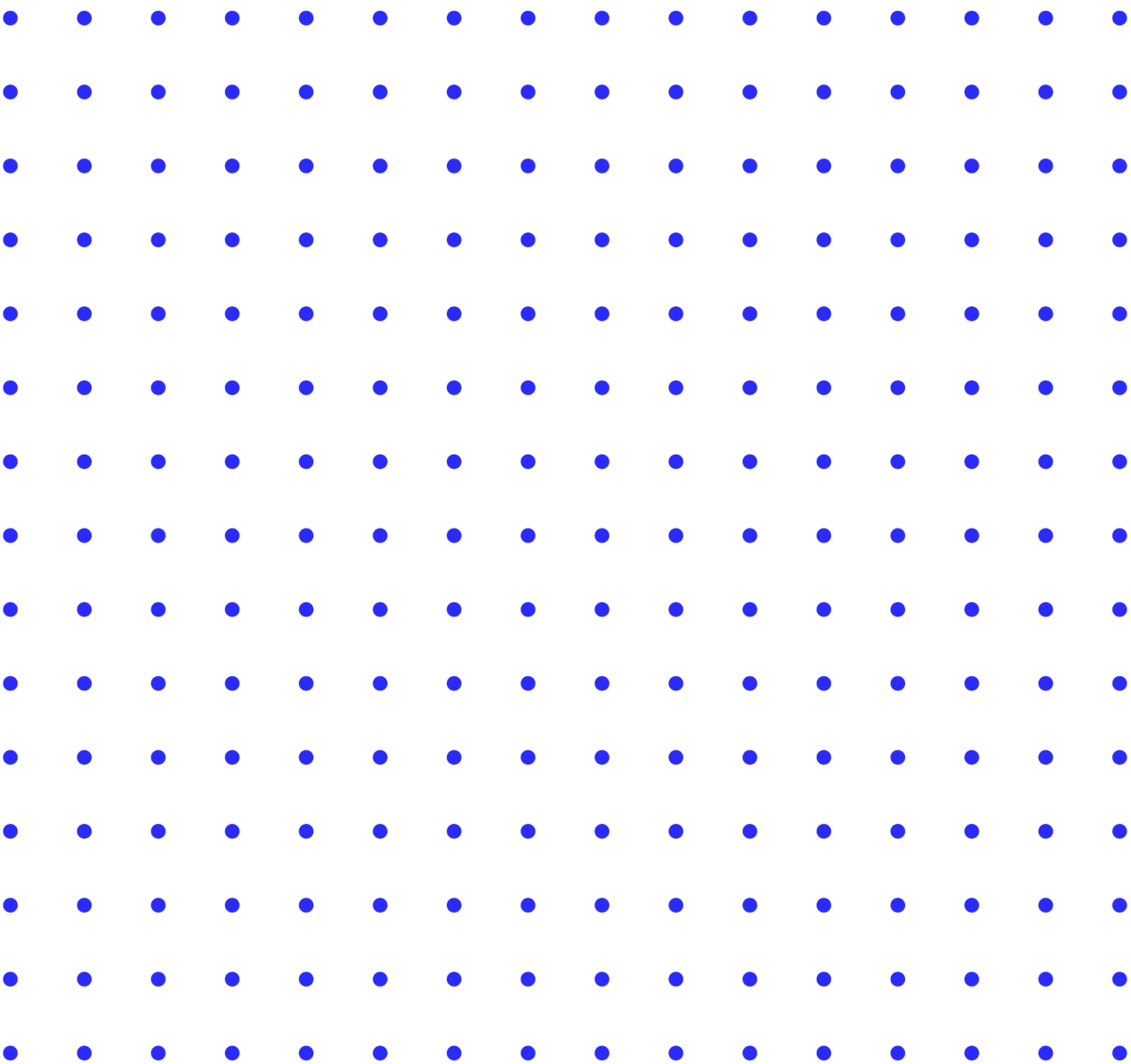
“Part of what’s come out of the pandemic experience is improved dialogue with students. When you have to change assessment really quickly you need that dialogue with students about what the assessment is going to be - and you gain more understanding of what students’ difficulties might be, and more understanding from students about what their experience of assessment was, and not just have them turning up for the exam and hoping for the best and then it’s over.”

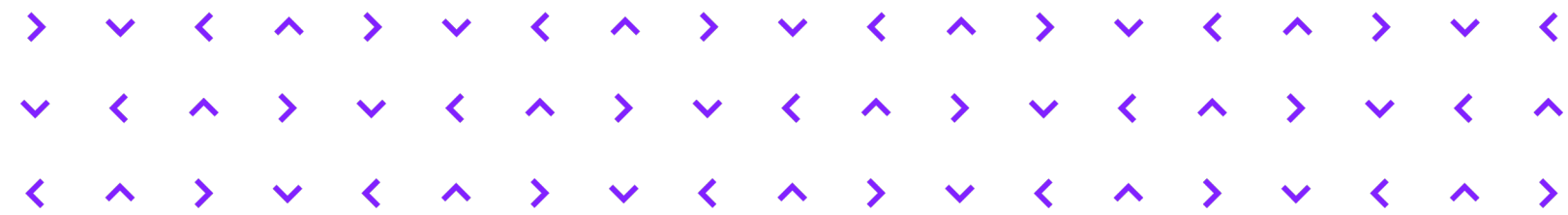
Karen Barton, director of learning and teaching, University of Hertfordshire



“We’re recasting our institutional review of assessment in light of new online assessment experience – focusing for example on BYOD, late submissions management, and the use of student engagement data. But what we also have is a real opportunity to think differently about inclusion. We’re looking at the impact on students and disabilities, working with the SU on understanding the digital experience of trans and gender non-conforming students and the impact on other groups. Our data shows that while some have done better with online assessment, it has affected students differently. Being able to schedule assessment to your own timescales, not having to use a pen, being in your own environment – it works better for some excluded groups but it actually often works better for everyone – and understanding these patterns can offer insight into better assessment pedagogy.”

Gwen van der Velden, deputy pro vice chancellor (education), University of Warwick





Assessment in pedagogy

An effective assessment framework is one that is aligned with a university's pedagogic values and learning and teaching strategy. Assessment links two things: the learning and personal development outcomes and graduate attributes the university aims to support its students to develop during their period of study; and the pedagogies and learning experiences that enable students to achieve those outcomes and attributes.

Some universities are working to make assessment “digital by default” to support flexibility and procure technology platforms that can support online assessments. Updating technology can create the conditions for a conversation about changing and diversifying assessment, but the two need to go hand in hand.



Re-evaluating assessment

Re-evaluating assessment affords opportunities across a range of strategic goals for students' learning:

ENGAGEMENT

Engagement of students, as well as other stakeholders such as employers and PSRBs, in developing meaningful, authentic opportunities for students to develop and showcase their knowledge in different ways and follow their personal interests.

INCLUSION

Inclusion and support for diverse students' interests; and making it as straightforward as possible for students to complete assessments within the particular constraints they may have (eg caring responsibilities, long commute to campus, part-time work, disability).

WONKHE | JANUARY 2022

EMPLOYABILITY

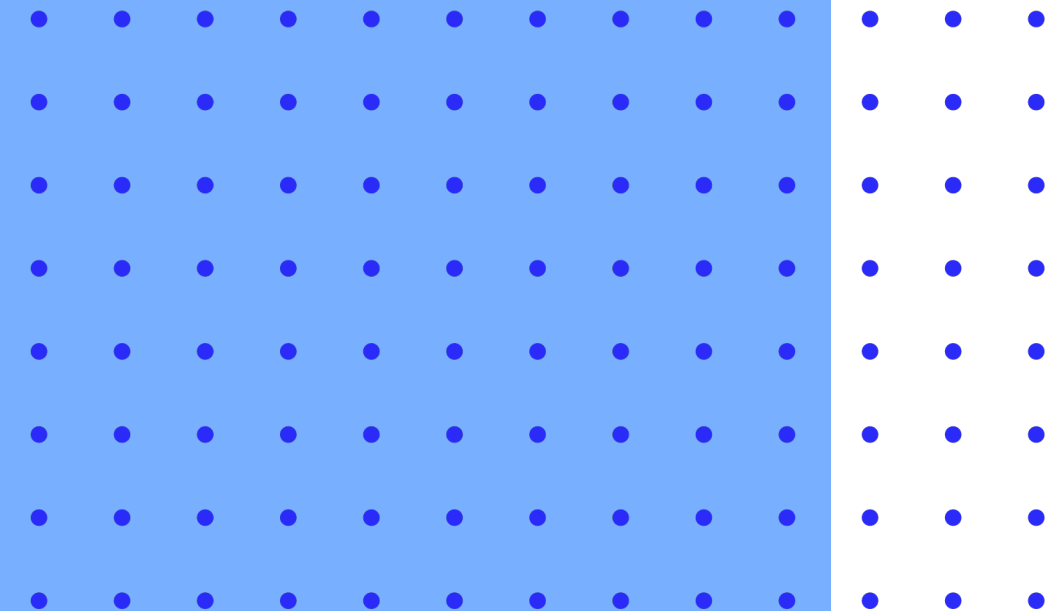
Employability and graduate attribute development as tasks explicitly ask students to practice skills and competencies, and consider "real world" ethical, civic, and technical challenges that will apply in their future professional lives.

WELLBEING

Wellbeing and mental health where assessment frameworks consider issues like the clustering of assessments, feedback literacy among students and staff, formative assessment opportunities that create space for failure and improvement, and when and how grades are assigned.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity where students are required to produce their own authentic and creative work rather than follow a predictable template.

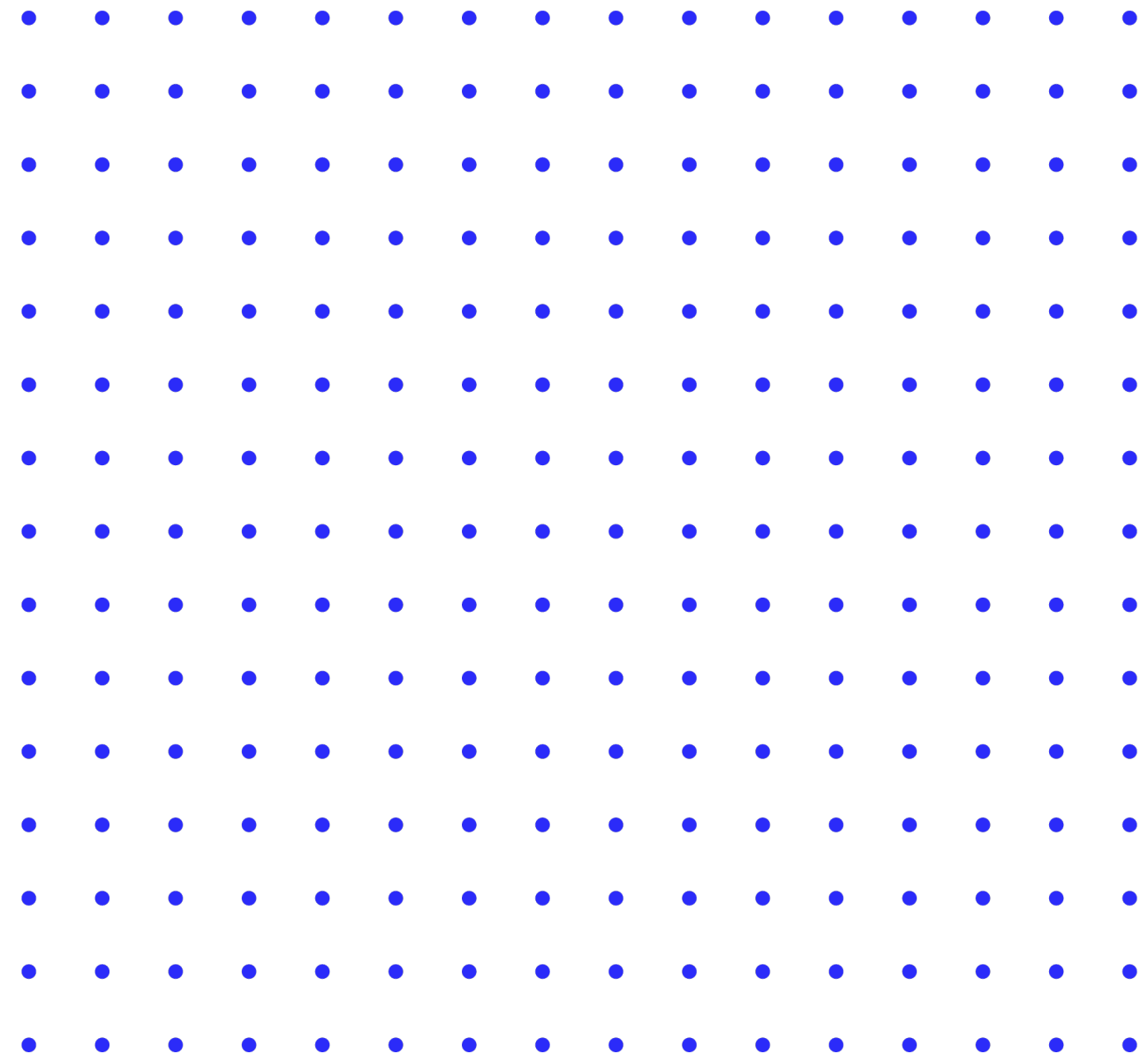


“During the pandemic students drove change but they are now supporting staff not to go backwards. Except in medicine, we’ve said goodbye to hiring large halls and invigilators, and students are OK with that. We’re trying to think creatively, and celebrate the good – we’re asking how to do less assessment overall, do more programme-level assessment, and analyse growth in academic misconduct cases and use that data as an opportunity assess more creatively.

Ultimately it’s about going back to why we assess – for feedback and progression, but also for employability which is where we need more authentic assessment. Then it’s about going even further back to what makes a good learning outcome - going back to graduate attributes, and the need to assess teamworking, critical ability skills etc.

We are sharing student feedback on experience of doing diverse assessments [such as] podcasts, documentaries, posters, and critical reviews. BTEC students have loved diversity the most.”

Senior leader, Wonkhe/Adobe online round table on assessment

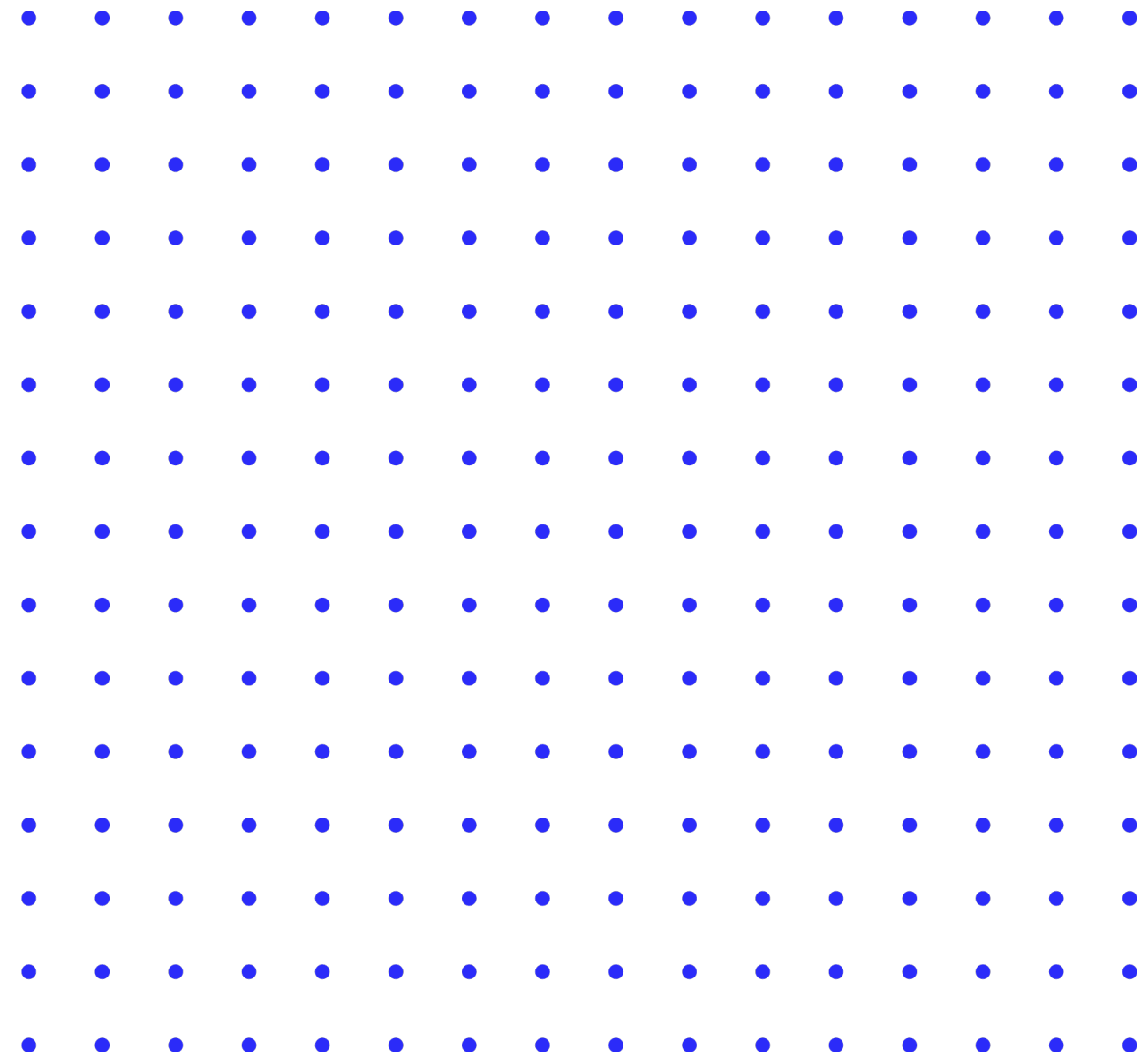


“Our hope is to change assessment to reduce harm to students. We’re looking at grading: what it is, and what it does, and asking staff and students to question that. In the fishbowl it’s hard to see outside, but the idea of grading creates competitive environments that are not real or replicable in terms of students going out into the world or industry. The symbolic power of grades is incredibly powerful but incredibly problematic as well - we need to ask how these beliefs about the necessity of grades affect our learning and teaching and our policy.”

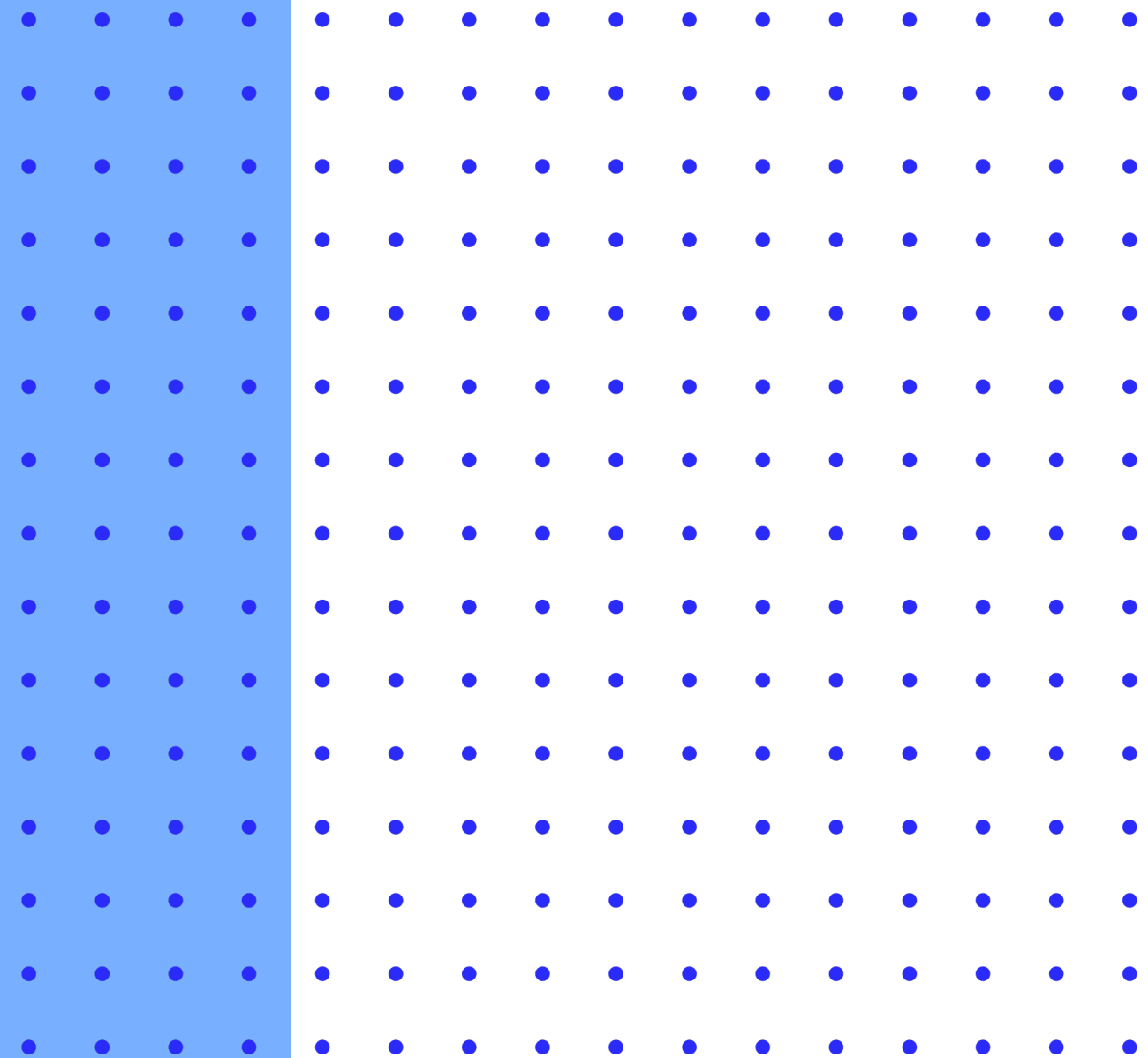
Vikki Hill, educational developer, University of the Arts, London

“The pandemic allowed us to do a lot to modernise assessment and liberate academic colleagues to do things differently – now we have to hold our nerve and keep the conversation going. It’s an opportunity to empower students, co-create and understand better the knowledge that sits with students – and think about the curriculum in a more holistic way, looking at workload in assessment design, and wellbeing awareness.”

Senior leader, Wonkhe/Adobe round table on assessment



Making
change
happen



Challenges and enablers for change

CHALLENGES

Variation in disciplinary practice and culture, including in external/professional body expectations

Scepticism/anxiety about impact of change among students

Lack of integration between different modules

High risk/low reward for academics considering making change

Staff burnout post-pandemic

Legacy systems or processes

ENABLERS

Allowing for distinctiveness in approach – building subject-level (and interdisciplinary) pedagogical narratives

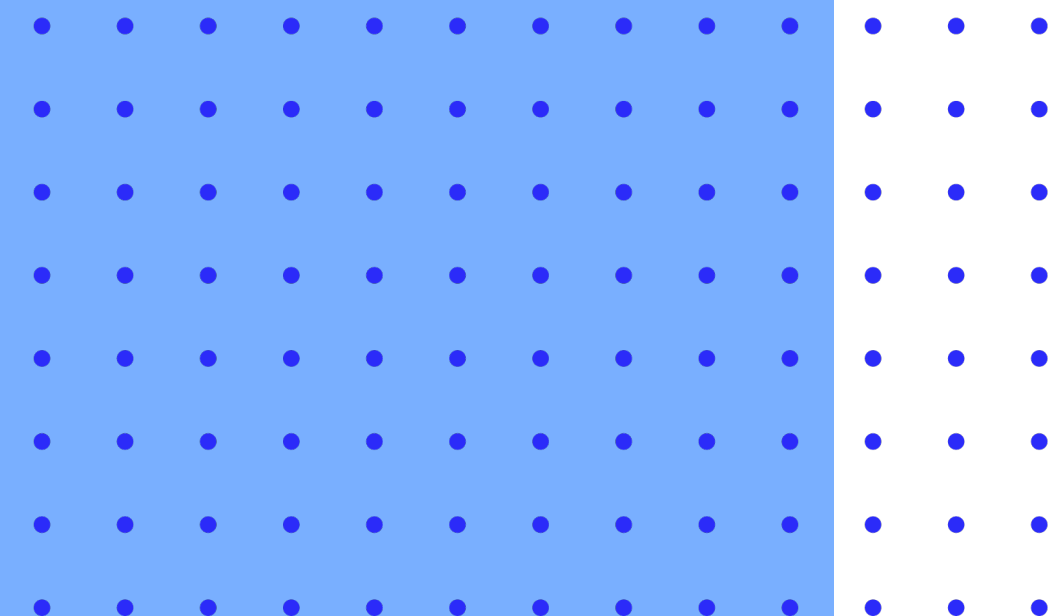
Co-production with students; close attention to diverse student experience and inclusion

Empowering programme leaders; adopting a programme design approach; collaboration and teamwork across programmes

Changing recognition and reward structures; building supportive academic teams to share innovation and support risk-taking

Creating spaces for reflection and development that are not regimented or process-led and are safe

Procurement of new systems; changing processes or building in greater flexibility and agility

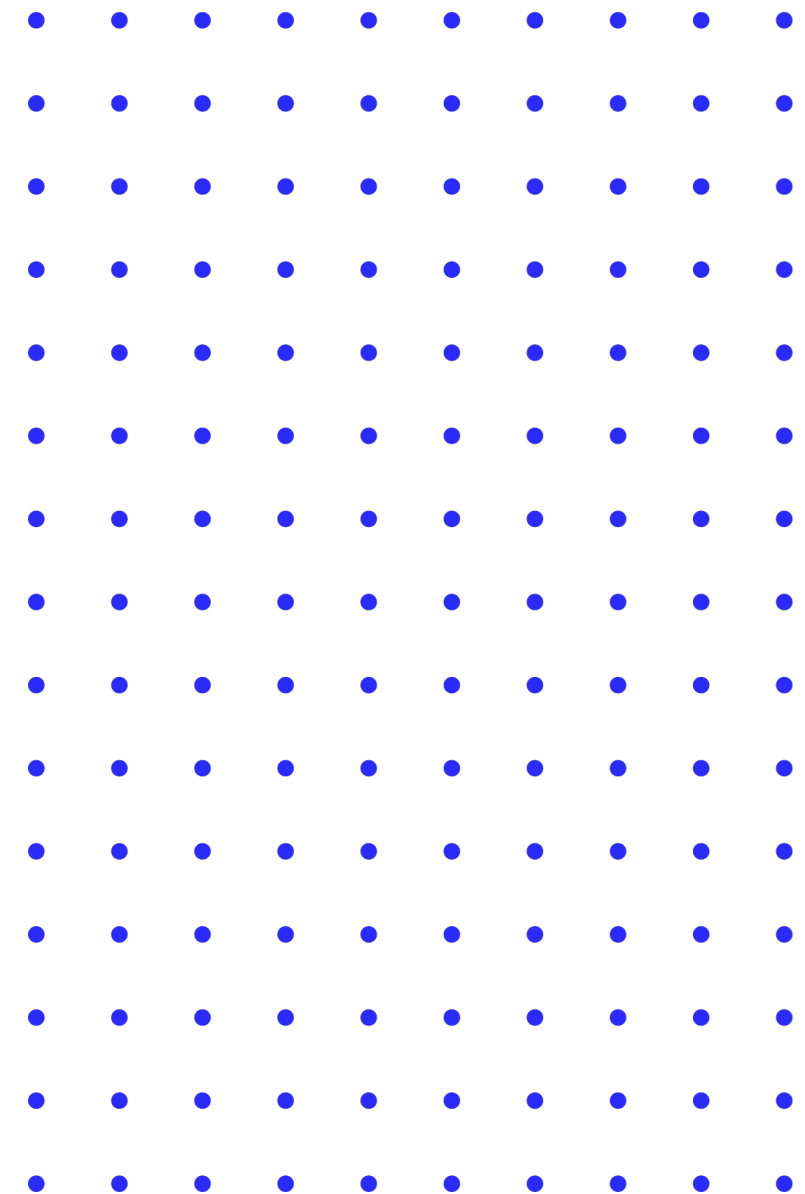


“Making change is about safe spaces and sharing stories – including stories of failure, and having tried something that didn’t work. Things get too formalised, with people insisting on agendas, or well-meaning but managerial ways of doing it. The problem we have with assessment is that there’s absolutely no joy in it. It should be about understanding more about students’ needs, and about students celebrating achievement, about getting them to apply knowledge. Academic rigour should not be cut off from joy - it’s about discovering knowledge and joy and challenge of applying knowledge. We take all of that out, and we take it out for academics too.”

Jan McArthur, senior lecturer, Lancaster University

“The fundamental conversation about assessment needs to happen at programme level rather than at module level – which is difficult because it’s not always how universities are set up to operate. But we need to look more holistically about how we combine assessment across modules. Where it works is good programme leaders empowering their teams and its joined-up – but that takes work, and effort, and not everyone has the time, and space. Academic careers require you to balance lots of competing priorities, and it’s hard to go it alone – there needs to be collaboration among staff and students and between institutions to get the best results.”

Karen Barton, director of learning and teaching, University of Hertfordshire

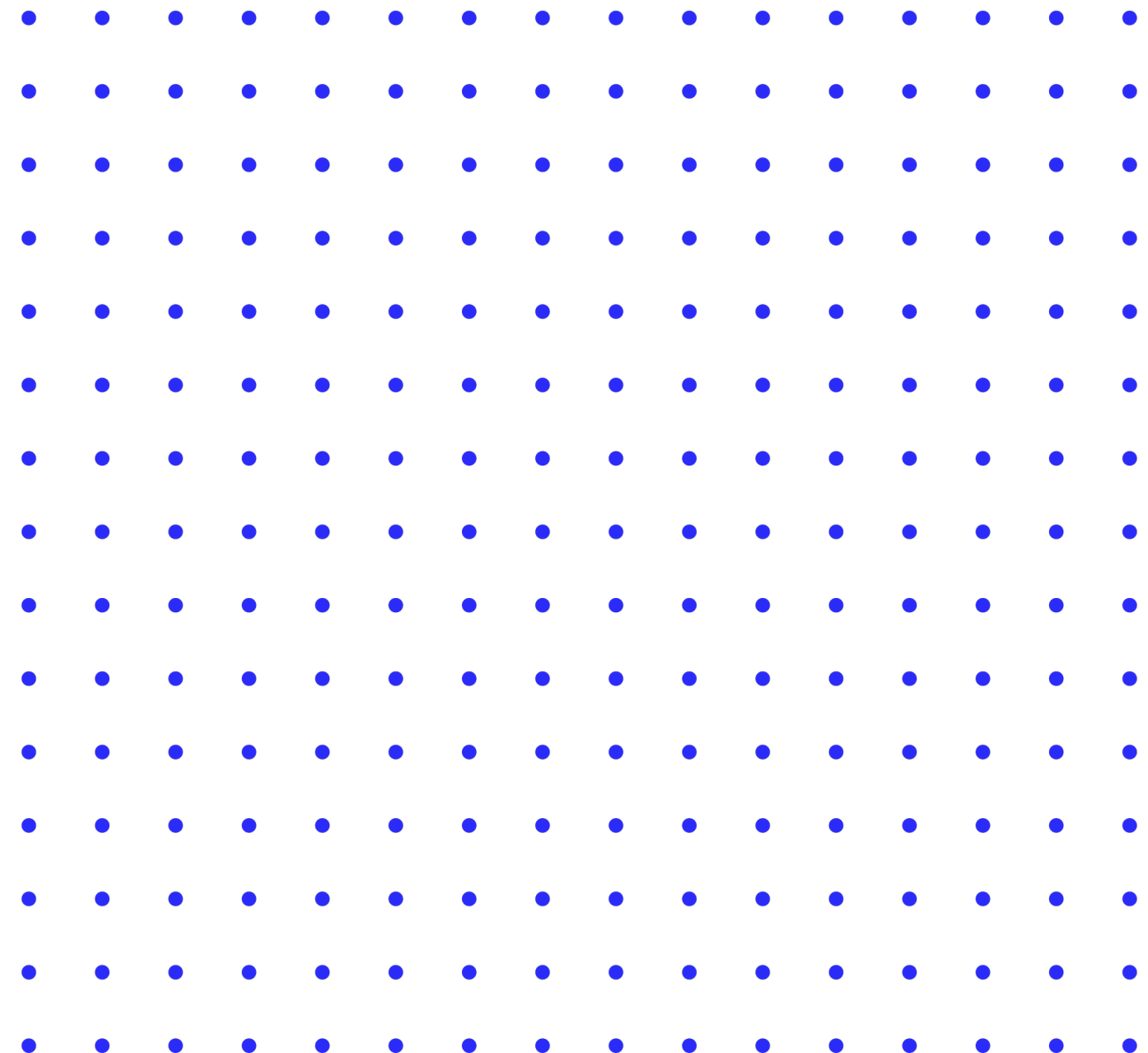


“This [pandemic] has been the best and worst staff development ever. The kind of staff development you wouldn’t wish ethically, or emotionally on anyone. But it has happened. And the amount of learning has been unreal.

But people don’t learn overnight. They had to, under pressure of Covid, but colleagues are exhausted. People need time and space to learn and reflect. At this time of ongoing disruption is not when I would expect my colleagues to have available time and rested minds to think through, reflect, work with others, and go from there. We need to give it time and create spaces where reflection can happen.

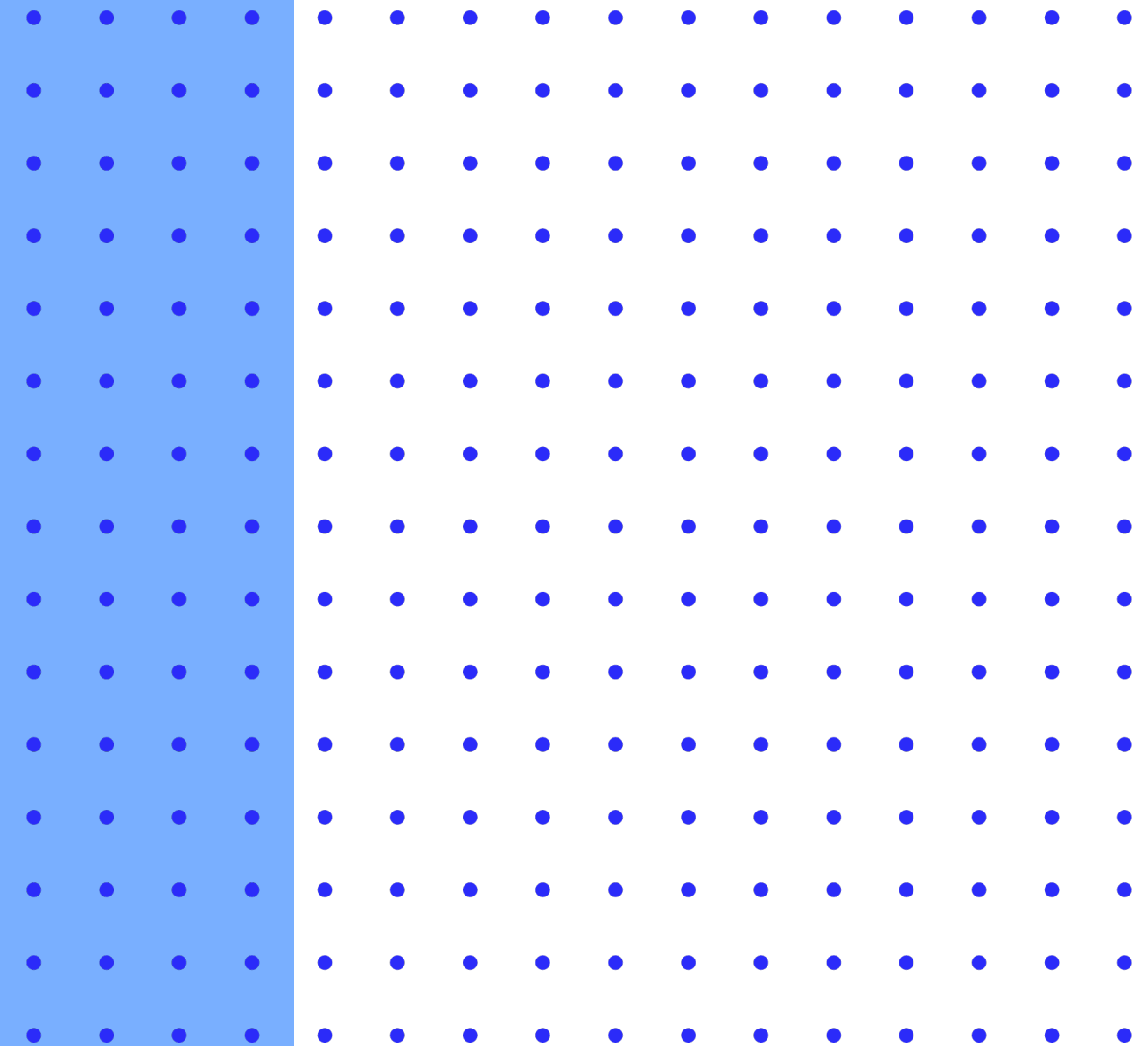
You can change through quality assurance, but we shouldn’t fool ourselves – we can change our systems to suit our commitment to quality and to support the ways it needs to be. This is a time of quality enhancement, rather than assurance – a time of learning, not checking.”

Gwen van der Velden, deputy pro vice chancellor (education), University of Warwick



Making change happen

Three university case studies

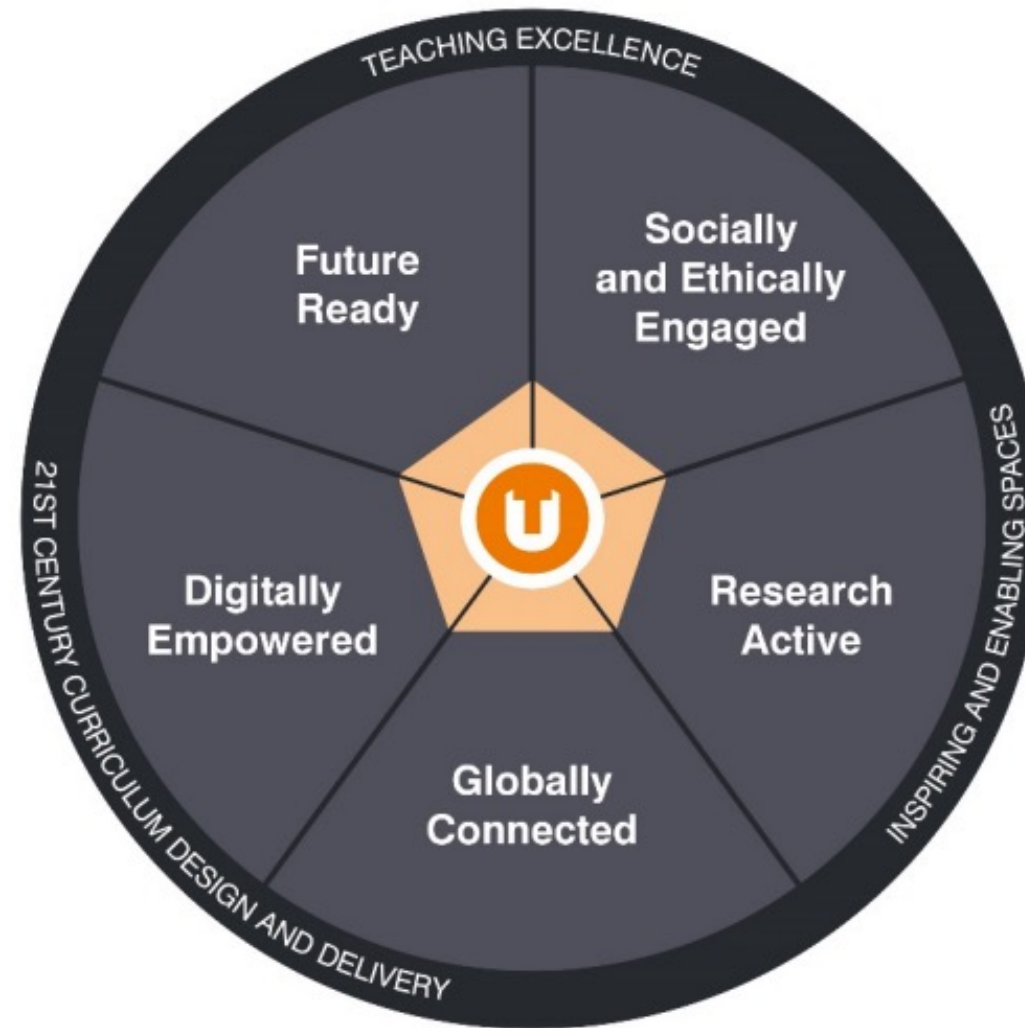


Future facing learning at Teesside University

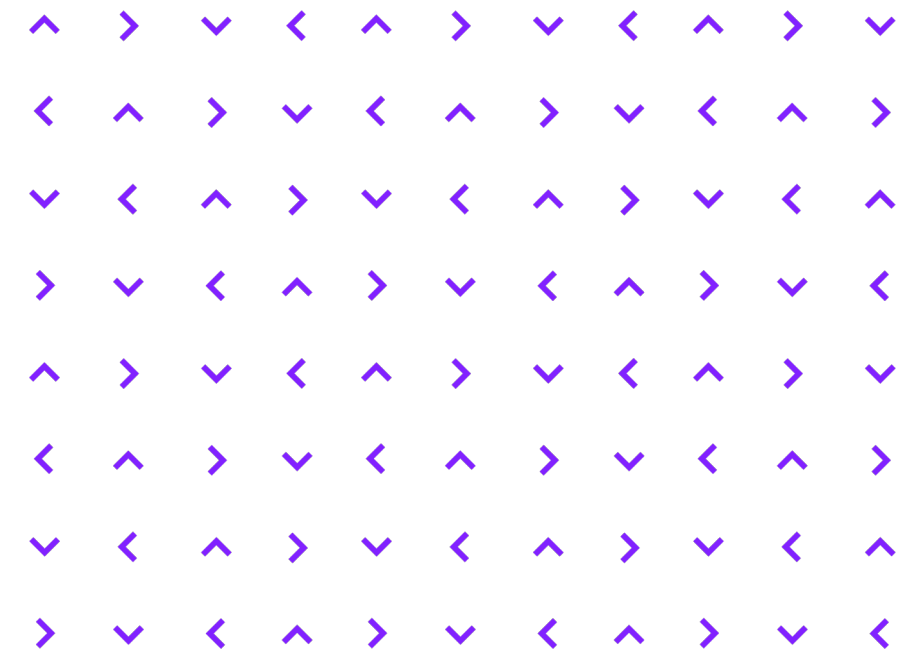
“Historically courses have changed or updated every three to five years. We want to be constantly refreshing and updating what we’re doing.”

Sam Elkington, principal lecturer (teaching and learning), Teesside University

Teesside adopted a Future Facing Learning framework as part of its 2020 strategy. Teesside has been widely recognised for its efforts to digitally empower staff and students as a core element of its pedagogy, and has engaged in continuous curriculum development, including assessment and feedback policies, as part of an organisational commitment to wide scale change.



Source: [Teesside University](#)



Future facing learning at Teesside University: aspirations for change

“Humanising the curriculum” putting authenticity front and centre - in terms of alignment with future employment, but also in terms of meaningfulness for learners’ interests and concerns - with a greater emphasis on formative processes to actively engage students with learning

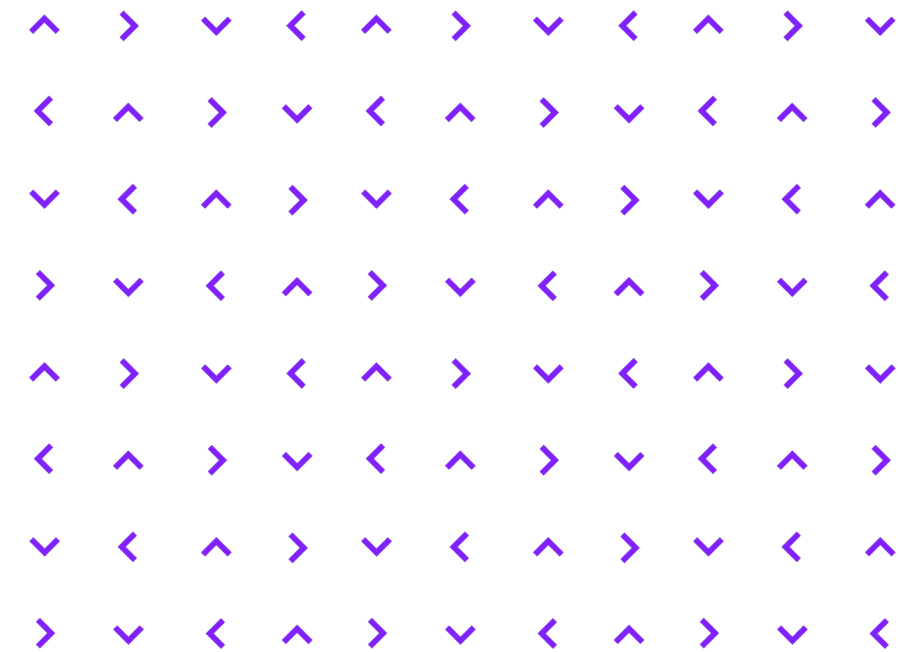
Designing flexible curricula that can anticipate industry and professional change in the years ahead and build in the ability to respond to emerging knowledge

Inclusion through adoption of universal design for learning in assessment

Digital literacy through building use of widely used devices and software into curricula to spark creativity

“Assessment innovation is typically done at local level, and isn’t amenable to wide scale change. Higher education institutions ironically are not set up to be learning organisations . But what will be make or break will be the agility and flexibility of institutional structures – there has to be an organisational commitment to assessment change.”

Sam Elkington, principal lecturer (teaching and learning), Teesside University



Future facing learning at Teesside University: approach to change

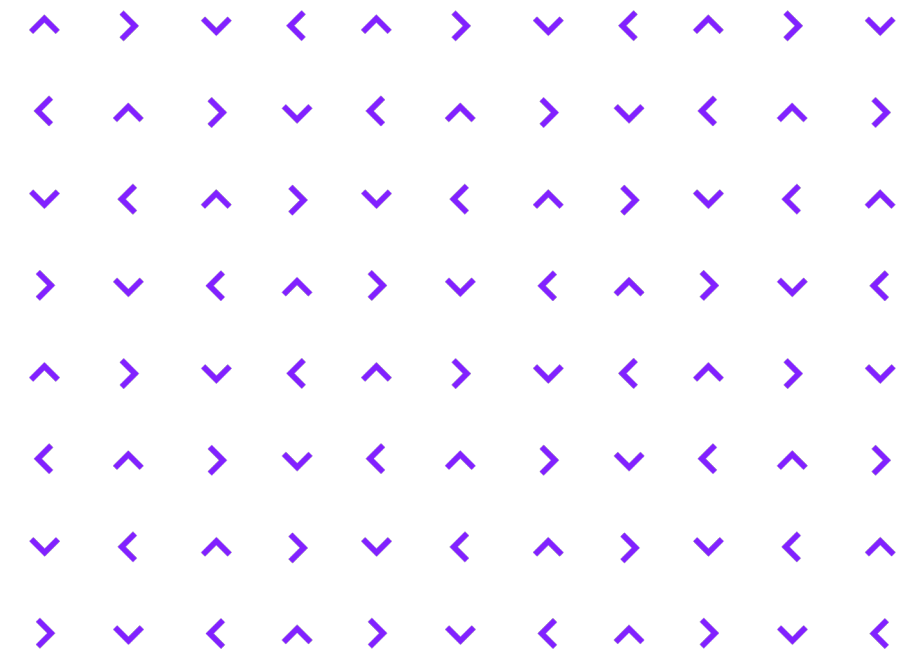
Workshops supporting programme wide **dialogue on curriculum**, examining the evidence, exchanging worldviews and perspectives on practice – not shying away from conflict but airing disagreement as part of a journey towards finding common ground and a shared approach – not setting out the steps but helping people find a path to change that works for them.

Making space for, valuing, and legitimising one to one conversations, listening to staff concerns and challenges, drawing a “route to practice” for assessment change in dialogue with staff.

Addressing **policy or structural barriers** that staff are experiencing that hinder their ability to make the change they want to, while also challenging false or exaggerated perceptions of powerlessness that arise from regulatory conditions.

Building **interdisciplinary coalitions of change** around evidence-based practice and sharing practice, building collective knowledge not only of how to change assessment, but how to change culture.

Work on **assessment literacy** of students and staff.



Solent University's real world curriculum

"I can acquire content anywhere - for me that is not the role of the university going forward. We're here to help students acquire those skills for the future."

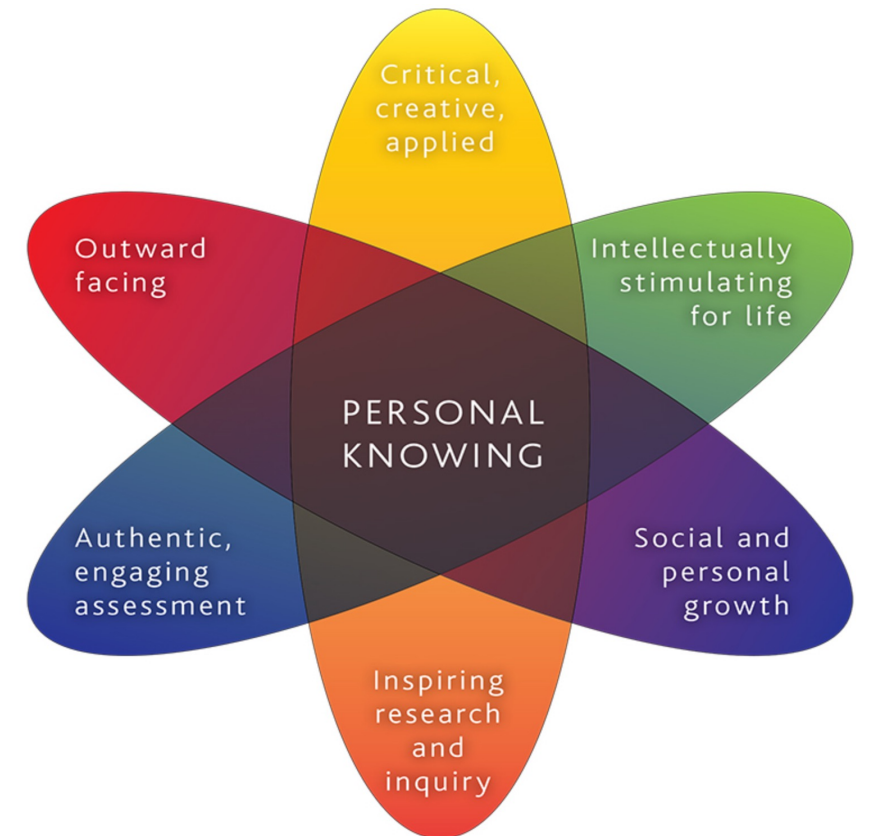
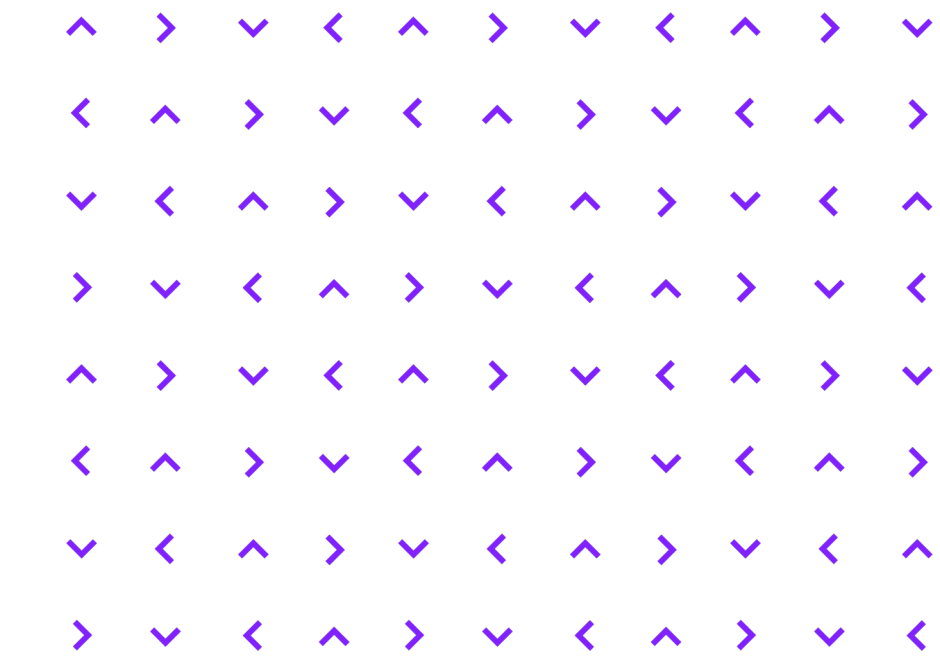
Karen Heard-Laureote, professor of learning and teaching and head of learning and teaching, Solent University

Solent University's real world curriculum framework emphasises "personal knowing": beyond acquiring subject knowledge for the purposes of assessment, students are encouraged to know how knowledge is formed and applied, moving from a view of knowledge as fixed and absolute to fast-moving, fluid, and open to interpretation.

Within this framework, the "authentic and engaging assessment" dimension aims for students to experience assessment within a spiral curriculum that:

- Is creative, engaging, and meaningful
- Mirrors disciplinary practices and real-world contexts
- Develops individual and team work skills, and other workplace-relevant skills
- Build on each other and grow in complexity over the lifespan of their course, enabling connections between modules

The curriculum framework is being developed as part of a whole-university commitment to curriculum change, with senior-level strategic leadership.



Solent University's real world curriculum: aspirations for change

“Living CV” Supporting staff and students to translate learning outcomes into language that can be used on a CV, enabling students to build up a skills record throughout their course. This approach provides a frame for learning outcomes that are more skills-focused (for example, learning activities that are collaborative, and focused on problem-solving), and assessment design that asks students to undertake assessments that are meaningful and that are based on something they may actually be required to do in their future chosen career.

Flexible, agile, and inclusive assessment practice Adapting and updating assessments to mirror industry expectations, and student aspirations. This means baking flexibility into module descriptors and promoting choice in context, content, and order as well as flexible modes of assessment such as portfolios, which may include a variety of different kinds of assessment tasks that can easily flex to accommodate employer needs.

Building staff and student digital literacy In part to support flexible and hybrid learning, but also to ensure that use of digital tools is built into assessments. Introducing digital tools can have a democratising effect in the classroom, as students bring their existing digital skills and staff bring subject knowledge, creating more of a learning community experience.

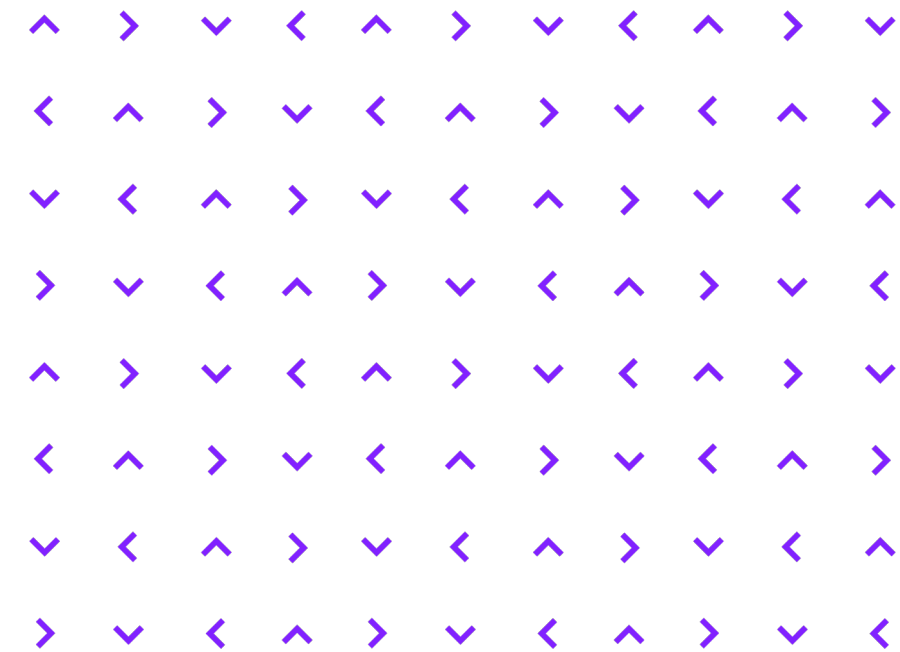
In future, opening up conversations about involving employers in assessment Currently, employers frequently come to the university to talk to students, but the next level would involve employers getting involved in building the curriculum and setting and marking assessments authentic to the workplace. That will involve developing employers' assessment literacy - but also working with employers to consider current grading criteria in light of how meaningful they are in the workplace, and try to align the criteria to how employers understand achievement.

Solent University's real world curriculum: approach to change

Focus on transition Helping students understand the expectations of university learning and get used to a different way of learning, including unfamiliar modes of assessment - and reassuring them that this is what employers want based on evidence of collaboration with those employers. This includes extended induction - at least throughout the first semester after entry - and low-stakes early assessment, especially in the first year.

Work with course leaders with a targeted series of events and activities designed to develop leadership confidence and help create the case for doing assessments differently, aiming to make assessment more interesting for both students and staff.

Fostering digital learning community Using digital tools facilitates collaboration as a way of learning. Student “digi buddies” bring their digital knowledge to help staff facilitate hybrid learning, and both students and staff are working alongside each other towards achieving microcredentials in various digital skills.



FOCUS ON STUDENT TRANSITION

WORK WITH COURSE LEADERS

FOSTER DIGITAL LEARNING

Future ready learners at Swinburne University of Technology

“Our job is to inspire future ready learners – graduates with a sense of purpose and the ability to adapt as they work to make a difference. Digital literacy is critical to achieving that goal, not only for students but also for our faculty and staff.”

Sarah Maddison, pro vice chancellor, academic innovation and change, Swinburne University of Technology

Swinburne University of Technology has adopted a digital first approach across learning and teaching, supported by its digital literacies framework. Students’ ability to confidently, creatively and critically use technology underpins their development of graduate skills and attributes, preparing them to tackle complex global challenges in an ever-changing world.

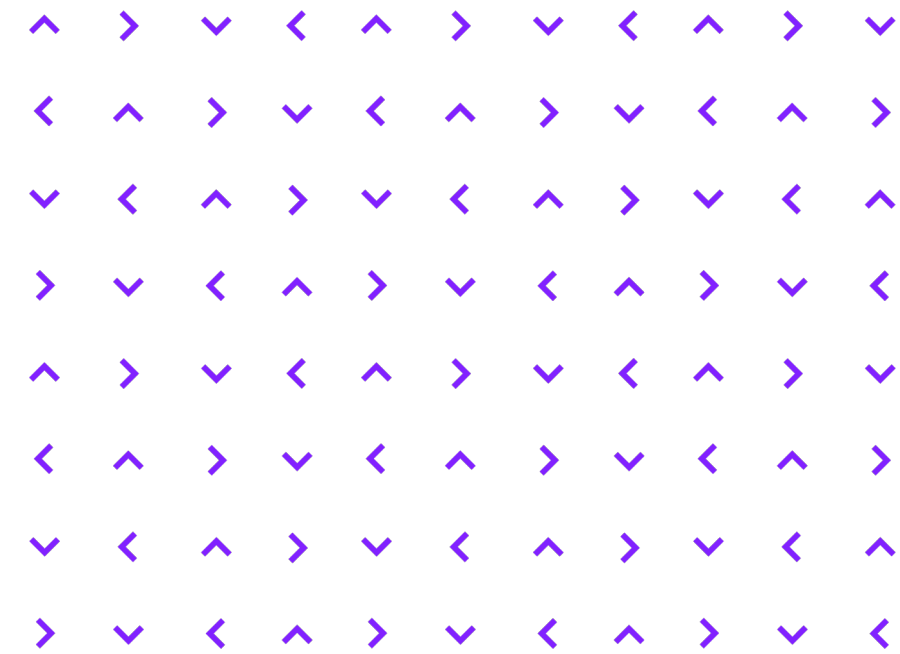
ASPIRATIONS FOR CHANGE

Embedding digital literacies in curriculum across learning, teaching, and assessment through innovating around the use of Adobe Creative Cloud digital tools.

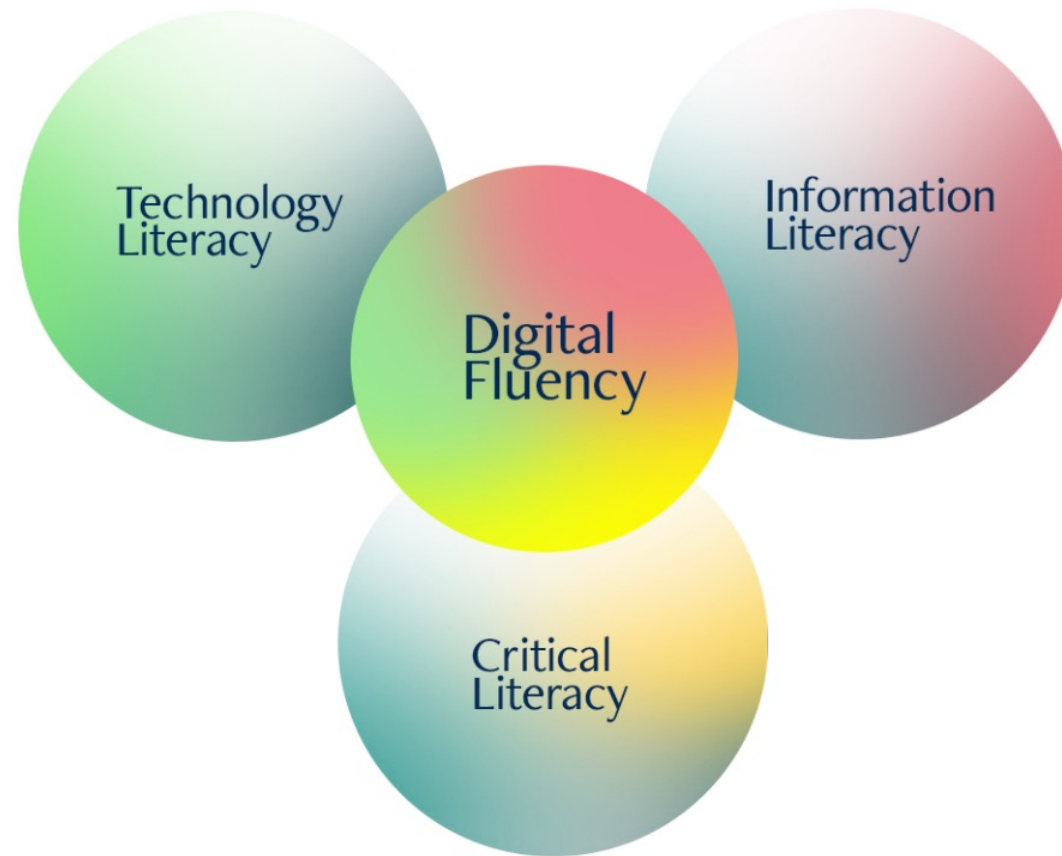
Preparing graduates who are **content creators**, as well as consumers eg students practising, and being assessed on, photo, audio, and video editing, producing virtual and augmented reality assets, creating infographics, digital prototypes of apps, or websites.

Establishing “**making and play**” as a teaching methodology – modelling risk taking and creativity; using storytelling to engage students.

Future ready learners at Swinburne University of Technology



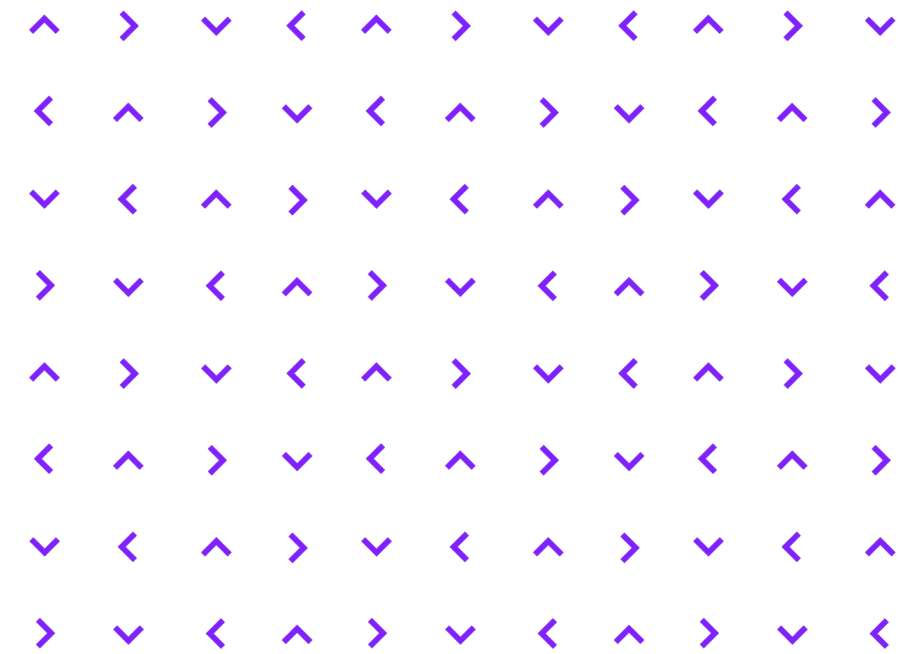
Technology Literacy is the confidence and ability to learn, select and use appropriate technological and digital tools, to achieve desired outcomes relevant to discipline.



Information Literacy is the ability to find and use information in a digital world. This includes the ability to access and manage digital data, information, draw insights through analysis and construct findings and outcomes.

Critical Literacy is the ability to reflectively question the context in which digital artefacts are made and used: who makes them, who controls them and who consumes them? Where are they controlled and what are the ethics we need to consider for future use? Can everyone have access?

Future ready learners at Swinburne University of Technology: approach to change



Student engagement programme enabled by employment and training of students as digital coaches to guide and support staff and students in use of digital tools; creation of digital literacy hub in main library; tools-based labs, workshops for student societies; student showcase projects.

Staff engagement programme including pedagogical development series and “in conversation” events with thought leaders from across the Adobe creative campus network; monthly labs on specific Adobe tools.

Adobe innovation grants awarded to ten innovative projects seeking to embed digital literacies in disciplinary curriculum, supported by a professional development programme to support staff to implement their projects, develop their own digital literacy, and network with other innovators.

Creation of a **digital literacies hub** to promote and showcase innovative practice.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

STAFF ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

ADOBE INNOVATION GRANTS

DIGITAL LITERACIES HUB



Thank you

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WONKHE