University of Reading

InForm

Issue 25 March 2026

A journal for International Foundation Programme professionals

Voices Unlocked: Social issues as a catalyst for English expression in an IFP class

Using Arts-Based Approaches to Enhance the International Foundation Learning Experience

The Price of Collaboration: Student Perceptions of Fairness in Group Presentation Assessments

From Policy to Practice: Designing Accessible GenAI Guidance for All Learners

InForm Conference 2026

University of Reading

Shifting Foundations:
Navigating change in teaching and learning

We are pleased to announce that the summer InForm Conference 2026 will be hosted by Birmingham International Academy at the University of Birmingham.

The event will include presentations and workshops on themes related to international foundation and pathway programmes and provide an opportunity for interaction and sharing of practice with colleagues from across the IFP community.

Saturday 20 June 2026

Venue: **The Alan Walters Building, Edgbaston campus, University of Birmingham**
Attendance: **in person only, Fee: £80**

The Conference will include presentations, workshops and posters on four sub-themes:

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   Considers how our students are changing and how our teaching methods must adapt in response.
   Focus: Student needs, engagement, well-being, and diversity
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   Looks at what we teach, ensuring our curriculum is relevant, meaningful and prepares students for their future degrees and careers.
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WELCOME

Dr Mark Peace

Chair of the InForm Editorial Board

From the editorial board...

InForm Issue 25: Enhancing Quality and Equity takes its theme from the InForm Conference 2025, hosted by King's College London on 21 June 2025. The first six articles are by authors who presented at the conference, opening with **Lana Haverstock**, **Jasmine Guo** and **Idil Koc**, who offer recommendations for enhancing equity and fairness in assessed group work, addressing issues raised in a student survey. **Nick Boden** and **Julia Carroll** then show the versatility of oral assessments in their article on hybrid oral assessments in social science modules. **Olive Nabukeera**'s article on teaching implicit bias shows that Foundation students readily engage with social justice themes and outlines an inclusive pedagogy for embedding them in subject specific learning. **James Frew** explains arts based teaching approaches that have broad applicability and foster active experiential learning, leading to improved engagement and attainment. Then **Paulina Poplawska** presents a shared student writing log, offering a flexible approach to sustaining regular autonomous writing practice. The last conference article by **Amo Kahlwan** shares classroom experience of using an AI powered online reading tool that acts as a listening partner and supports students' development of reading fluency.

Next, we consider the impact of mobile electronic devices in the classroom. **Panagiota Kesidou** presents a pilot study in which technology use was limited in an EAP classroom. Preliminary results indicate that restricting mobile devices enhanced learning. Returning to oral expression development, **Elisavet Tsakiroglou** uses culturally resonant themes and a feminist pedagogical approach to unlock international students' voices. Then **Zara Iles** shows how embedding research tasks in creative practice on Foundation art makes applying taught research skills purposeful. **Matthew Lane** reports a mismatch between students' perception of critical evaluation in writing and their application of it in practice and proposes how this mismatch can be addressed. **Mirena Nalbantova** then reflects on giving student feedback orally in the classroom and the influence of students' academic cultural backgrounds on how it's perceived. **Carla Smedberg** provides details of a bold, and ultimately successful, mathematics module intervention, whereby new content delivery and the mid-module reassessment were delayed, to accommodate the provision of additional revision support. Then **Katie Burrows** and **John Fowle** share a flag reporting system that collects academic progress and engagement data for enhanced weekly monitoring and timely intervention.

In the Exchange section of short articles, the first, by **Natasha Ingall**, **Barney Samson-Ledger** and **Gresa Shuleta**, reflects on hosting InForm Conference 2025 at King's College London, highlighting the values adopted in its organisation and the benefits of collaboration. **Donna Mac Lean** then gives a reflective personal account of her university's international foundation and language centre being targeted for compulsory redundancies and advocates pre-emptive action to prevent similar situations elsewhere. Next, **Jayne Quoiani** presents the need for institution-wide consistent and accessible student guidance on GenAI use, particularly for international and minority groups. Finally, **Hannah Paterson** explains how social justice themes of equity and bias resonate with her psychology foundation students, facilitating purposeful application of critical evaluation in literature research.

On behalf of the InForm Editorial Board we thank all the authors for their insightful and highly thought-provoking contributions to Issue 25 and encourage readers to submit your own articles for Issue 26.

This year's InForm Conference 2026 is hosted by the Birmingham International Academy at the University of Birmingham on 20 June 2026. Themed *Shifting Foundations*: *Navigating change in teaching and learning* it promises to be an excellent day of stimulating presentations and discussion and we hope you will join us.

InForm

InForm **Issue 25 | March 2026**

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InForm is published by Global Academy, University of Reading. For further information concerning any of the articles in this issue, please email **inform@reading.ac.uk**

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The Price of Collaboration: Student Perceptions of Fairness in Group Presentation Assessments

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This collaborative project, carried out by a tutor and two former King's International Foundations (KIF) students, examined the effectiveness of the programme's group assessments. We surveyed 20 students to investigate the issues of fairness, grade weighting, and collaboration, and to gather suggestions for improvement. The findings highlighted the need for clearer marking criteria, a balanced grade weighting between group and individual performance, and the need to develop group work skills on the programme. Our next goal is to share these insights with module leads to support the design of fairer and more collaborative group assessment practices on KIF.

Introduction

Free riding, unfairness in grading, and communication issues are among the most commonly reported challenges of group assessment (Levrai, 2024; Sholl & Yorkstone, 2025; Adebola, 2025). Assessment in general is one of the most complex aspects of teaching and learning, and group assessment is often the most difficult to manage because of the dynamics inherent in group work. Grounded in social constructivist theory, group work relies on interaction and collaboration to support learning (Adebola, 2025). Interacting effectively enables students to negotiate meaning, share ideas, and construct knowledge collectively; it is therefore fundamental to successful group work and its assessment. When communication breaks down, however, the quality of both the collaborative process and the resulting assessment is compromised. Research shows that ineffective communication is potentially the root cause of unequal participation, free riding, and the exclusion of less confident students (Chiriac & Frykedal, 2023). The more active students who show greater participation may also question the fairness of the grading process when the same grade is awarded to all group members despite differing levels of engagement. Ding (2013) therefore argues that marking criteria should be "transparent to all stakeholders" and clearly specify whether the assessment focuses on content, the quality of group collaboration, or both. Similarly, Levrai (2024) emphasises the need for clear guidance on whether assessment should prioritise the "process or outcome," or treat both as equally important.

The challenges outlined above surfaced repeatedly in conversations with some of my English module students, who at the time were preparing for assessed group presentations in several of their King's International Foundation (KIF) modules. Their frustration was understandable: six modules on the programme use group presentations as a form of summative assessment, meaning that depending on their pathway, some students may complete up to three assessed group presentations during their time on KIF. Shortly after King's Academy announced its funded project "Collab! Curriculum Change" for King's College London staff and students, an idea took shape to collaborate with two of my then KIF students, Jasmine Gao and Idil Koc, to investigate the effectiveness of group assessment from the student perspective.

Methodology

To ensure the project reflected students' perspectives as accurately as possible, Jasmine and Idil designed a 17-question survey combining multiple-choice and open-ended items. These questions explored a range of issues, from challenges encountered during the early preparation stages to views on grade weighting (group versus individual). The survey was shaped by their own experiences of group assessment on KIF and was reviewed by the author and another KIF tutor. Once ethical approval was granted, Jasmine and Idil administered the survey to 20 KIF students after they had completed their assessed group presentations across various modules.

Results

Overall, students reported a positive experience of working in groups for their assessed presentations. Thirty-five per cent of respondents stated that they felt supported by their group members, 25% felt that their contribution was acknowledged, and 20% described the experience as creative and exciting, while the remaining 20% identified other positive factors. In a separate question on their delivery mode preferences, 80% of survey respondents indicated that they preferred delivering presentations in groups rather than individually.

Despite these positive experiences, the survey also highlighted several challenges encountered during group presentations. As respondents were allowed to select multiple answers, scheduling group meetings was the most frequently reported difficulty (55%), followed by unequal workload distribution (45%) and communication issues with group members (35%).

Grade weighting emerged as a point of contention in the survey responses: one of six KIF modules allocates 80% of the overall grade to group performance and only 20% to individual contribution. Students enrolled in this module expressed moderate (40% of the respondents) to high levels of dissatisfaction (27%) with this weighting structure. In contrast, in the remaining five KIF modules, where only 20% of the overall grade is allocated to group performance, students reported higher satisfaction levels, ranging from 43% to 67%.

When asked about their ideal grade weighting, 35% of respondents indicated a preference for individual performance to account for 60% of the overall mark, followed by 25% who favoured an equal 50–50 split between group and individual assessment. Only 20% preferred individual assessment to account for 80% of the overall grade (see Figure 1). These findings could suggest that, overall, students may perceive group work as an opportunity for additional support (from their peers) and may feel more confident when grade weighting is more balanced, indicating a potential need to revise the current marking criteria.

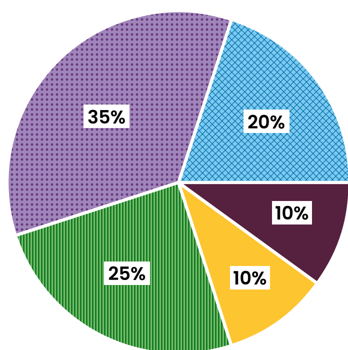
Regarding the fairness of grading, 35% of the respondents stated that the grading did not adequately recognise the students who contributed more to the assessment preparation compared to the free riders (see Figure 2 below), while 10% of the respondents reported that the feedback bore no reflection to their contributions. These findings could therefore suggest that changes to the grading process, potentially revising the marking criteria, or implementing closer monitoring of group work conducted in class, may be necessary to ensure the fairness of assessment.

When presented with the open-ended question, "What else could make group presentation assessment more enjoyable and academically rewarding?", respondents suggested "focusing more on the skill than content", "... having mock presentations and teachers keeping more in touch while students are preparing for the presentations", "discussing [presentations] in class", and that "tutors have to encourage and ensure the participation of each group member".

Overall, analysis of the survey responses identified three key issues that could be addressed to enhance the quality of group assessments on the programme: communication challenges, free-riding, and the need for a fairer grading process, which could help reduce unequal contributions within groups. One common theme observed in the respondents' suggestions, was the need for closer monitoring and facilitation by the tutors during the preparation stages.

What percentage of the final mark do you think should be based on individual contributions vs. group work?

20 responses

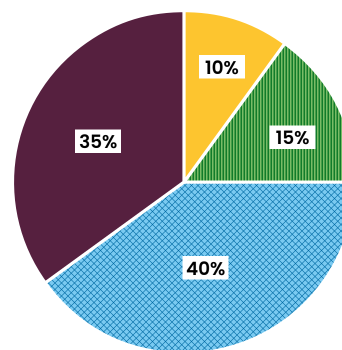


- 100% group, 0% individual = 0%
- 80% group, 20 % individual = 10%
- 60% group, 40% individual = 10%
- 50% group, 50% individual = 25%
- 40% group, 60% individual = 35%
- 20% group, 80% individual = 20%

Figure 1. *Grade weighting preferences for individual and group performance*

Did you feel the grading process was fair?

20 responses



- Yes, it was fair and transparent = 40%
- No, it was unfair to individuals who worked harder = 35%
- No, the feedback did not reflect to my contributions = 10%
- Unsure = 15%

Figure 2. *Fairness of the grading process*

Discussion

The three major findings of our survey: communication issues, free riding and unfair grading, appear to be consistent with existing empirical literature. Regarding communication issues, Adebola (2025, p.7) notes that "the mere formation of groups does not guarantee communicative engagement," emphasising that successful group assessment and genuine collaborative learning require careful scaffolding and structuring. This aligns with suggestions from our survey respondents who proposed closer tutor monitoring of group work in class to encourage equal participation. While valid, this may be difficult to implement in practice because most of the group work takes place outside the classroom, limiting tutor ability to observe student interactions directly. In terms of scaffolding, KIF currently uses Activity Logs, which alongside project diaries have been identified as effective strategies for promoting equal engagement (Francis et al., 2020). However, Activity Logs have had limited success on the programme, being treated as a boxticking exercise rather than a meaningful tool for facilitating collaboration.

Regarding the issue of free riding and a subsequent questioning of the fairness of the grading by the more active students, empirical literature suggests pre-empting the issue by designing tasks which foster individual responsibility. For example, allocating each student a leader role in a collaborative project during a designated week, can help identify individual strengths and promote meaningful contribution (Levrai, 2024). In the same vein, Sholl and Yorkstone (2025) recommend forming groups as early as possible so that students have time to develop personal and academic rapport before assessments begin.

Creating fairer and more transparent grading processes for group work remains a challenge, however, since much of the collaboration takes place asynchronously and outside the classroom. This leaves tutors with limited opportunities to monitor and assess group work, thus making the assessment of group work as "a process", rather than "a product", more difficult.

Nevertheless, implementing some of the strategies discussed above in the KIF context could help ensure that students feel more confident in their collaborative work. By supporting more equitable participation and more productive group discussions, such measures could lead to fairer, more rewarding, and ultimately more successful group assessments.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings of our survey have revealed three key issues that students perceive with assessed group work on the programme; namely, communication challenges, free riding, and the fairness of grading. However, the survey results have also demonstrated that KIF students enjoy collaborative projects as they find them "exciting and creative" and prefer to deliver their assessed presentations in groups as they can rely on each other for support. Such a positive interpretation of the values of group work therefore reinforces the idea that collaborative learning can indeed be a powerful tool for students if structured and scaffolded accordingly. Adopting the measures that promote individual responsibility and more equitable engagement could help strengthen collaboration on the programme, ultimately leading to fairer and more successful group assessment experiences for our students. Given that this small-scale study examined only student perceptions, future research should incorporate tutor perspectives to develop a more comprehensive understanding of group work challenges on KIF or similar international foundation programmes.

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"A different experience from just plainly writing essays"

New Approaches to Oral Assessments

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The rapid development of artificial intelligence and its associated academic integrity concerns have renewed interest in alternative assessment in higher education. With inherent honesty attributes, oral assessment deserves its place in the debate. Aside from academic integrity, benefits include the development of higher order thinking skills, authentic student engagement and improved linguistic outcomes. This article discusses the introduction of hybrid oral assessments onto level 3 social science units at the University of Bristol, explaining the pedagogical strategies used and sharing feedback from a student survey. Readers are invited to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of introducing oral assessment.

Background

The International Foundation Programme (IFP) at the University of Bristol is a full time, 24-week course, designed to support international students in accessing university degree programmes. Students can enrol from 16 years of age and there are over 40 nationalities from a wide range of backgrounds. Entry onto the IFP Arts and Social Sciences pathway requires an IELTS score of 6.0 with a minimum of 5.5 in writing and 5.0 in each part of the test. This equates to CEFR level B2 and we believe provides sufficient prior oral assessment experience to consider it appropriate for IFP cohorts. As well as being considered 'real world' authentic, the recognised advantages of oral assessments for students include linguistic development, academic acculturation, improved student satisfaction and development of higher order thinking skills (Buehler and Schneider, 2009; Li and Wang 2024; Stephenson et al, 2025)

Two units on the Arts and Social Sciences pathway are Culture and Identity, taken by law and social sciences students, and Foundations of Politics, taken only by social sciences students. In 2024-25 Culture and Identity (C&I) had 54 students in 4 groups of maximum 16 and Foundations of Politics (FoP) had 12. Both units use hybrid oral assessments which include a written component which builds on the advantages of oral assessment. This approach was decided over a written exam, recognising that most graduates will attend job interviews and defend their ideas verbally but will not sit written exams again following graduation (Huxam et al., 2010).

Oral Assessment: Culture and Identity

Fostering a sense of belonging (Masika and Jones, 2016) was key to both course design and assessment for C&I, helping to promote student engagement through discussing their own cultures. Thus, the course content and assessment prioritised the unique needs of IFP students arising from the challenges of integrating into new academic cultures in a second language. The hybrid assessment consisted of recording an interview and then writing a reflective essay to analyse it. Submitting the recording was compulsory, but it was not graded. Only the reflective essay received a mark, with the developmental rationale of scaffolding students' speaking skills. This hybrid approach allowed students to practice oral communication with peers. Students started the course by watching several pre-recorded interviews with participants from a wide range of cultural backgrounds to help them adapt to living in a new country. These served as a model for their own interviews to be recorded in Week 17. Theories of identity and belonging were introduced on the course, such as Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (1984), Holliday's Small Cultures (1999), and ideas on postcolonialism, stereotyping, and gender. Students were encouraged to relate the individual narratives from the interviews to the theories and to their personal lived experience. For the assessment, they were each paired with a classmate from a different culture. Students evaluated the theories and conducted

an interview about their partner's background and experience of adapting to life in the U.K. The questions were planned in class and sent to the interviewee to give them time to consider their answers. In the following session students recorded the interview which provided a basis for their reflective essay.

Students performed well on the task and found the experience positive and insightful. All students in this cohort passed the assessment. Formulating appropriate questions for the task was a challenge at times. It was observed that students enjoyed the recorded aspect as overlength recordings were often submitted. There was no live audience, and the recording could be restarted which fostered the focus on interpersonal interaction. The interview served to scaffold confidence and allowed students to adapt to new academic environments with peers in preparation for self-directed undergraduate study (Cameron & Rideout, 2020). Providing students an affirming and developmental experience on their foundation course was key to the task design.

Oral Assessment: Foundations of Politics

Oral assessment in FoP comprised of two stages: a written response and a live debate, both in response to the same prompt: "To what extent has the state system and world order changed since the year 2000?" The grading criteria, designed to mark the debate and the written element, did not reward the students' oratory skills but rather their cognitive knowledge, understanding, thinking processes, and capacity to communicate (Joughin, 1998). The formative written component received tutor feedback before an in-person formative debate. This process was repeated for the summative debate with a formative brief receiving feedback before the summative. It was observed students appeared to benefit from this hybrid approach, iteratively improving their argumentation and knowledge before the summative debate.

The summative live debate took place two working days after the summative brief deadline. Feedback on the summative brief and the debate was provided simultaneously ten working days after the debate. No set positions were offered to students, as such students were challenged to construct their own argument through careful consideration of the nuances of the claims and counter claims to the prompt. Oros (2007) found that such an approach not only built vital citizenship skills but also had a marked improvement on student's evaluation skills. In the live debate students had a maximum of 10 minutes with a ten percent leeway to present their argument. The remaining time was left for questions by the tutor and peers to facilitate an 'academic conversation'. Standardised follow up questions included "Do all realists agree on the nature of anarchy in international relations?" and "How far can Liberalism explain contemporary international relations?" The debate took place off timetable. To ensure students were able to attend, the date was available several weeks beforehand. Stored for 9 years according to the university regulations in a password protected department drive, MS Teams was used to make the recording which facilitated controlled access for marking and moderation. Students were given a choice of whether to appear physically in the recording.

Student Feedback

Students were invited to fill in anonymous surveys for course evaluation. Examples of comments on the positive aspects of the C&I assessment included: "I assumed it would be another tedious task assigned to us, but (…) it was enjoyable as I discovered information only an insider would know, this debunked stereotypes that I had had" and "this was a really good way to do an assignment especially with the personal aspect of incorporating our own kind of interview into it". Students also highlighted how it enabled them to see their own culture from new perspectives, connect with their peers on a deeper level and engage with abstract ideas through personal examples. Reflecting from the student perspective, one issue on the C&I unit, could be working with an unreliable or absent partner. Submitting the interview files sometimes caused technical difficulties. From a tutor perspective, the biggest challenge was the marking time involved (listening to the interviews in addition to reading the reflective essays) so cohort size should be considered. On the plus side, however, a unique opportunity was created for students to bond and share with each other and their tutors (Masika and Jones, 2016; Li and Wang, 2024).

Informal feedback from FoP students on the hybrid approach was that it allowed them time to improve their arguments. Students reported "It allows for students to bond with their peers and allows for different perspectives to be shared" and "Stating our essay in our own words with the interaction with the peers and tutor was really effective". Furthermore, one student reported, "We need to do that more" and another commented on the "Free format, we are able to reflect freely about theories and express ourselves on them". On the other hand, some students reported understandable apprehension towards the assessment, as the debate has a performative element. From a grading perspective the written component allowed for reasonable marking adjustments.

To encourage a shift from lengthy presentation-style individual contributions in FoP we intend to reduce individual speaking time from 10 minutes to 2 minutes with the remaining time left for questions. This will allow students to engage with others' ideas and result in a structured academic conversation to encourage peer to peer interaction. Grading criteria will be adjusted to ensure a greater focus on student engagement to encourage higher order thinking skills. Questioning students consistently may be a challenge and can have influences on reliability and impact; therefore, staff calibration is advised. This means that the FoP debate might be harder to introduce with bigger student cohorts than the C&I interview.

Conclusion and recommendations

The unique combination of formative and summative oral assessment used on the units contributed towards meeting the aim of the IFP to allow international students to develop the social and intercultural skills necessary to thrive in new academic cultures. We would encourage educators to design oral assessments to include a hybrid combination of written and oral components. The non-assessed recorded oral component used in C&I created a sense of community and belonging, observed through the duration of the recordings and student feedback on the process. The approach in FoP helped to build authentic civic skills and challenged students to iteratively interrogate political arguments. Formative mock debates, and formative feedback on written preparations scaffold and empower students to perform for the summative oral assessment.

We would like to thank departmental colleagues and leaders for their prior work on the assessments and the reviewers of the article for their valuable comments.

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Teaching Implicit Bias in Foundation EAP

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This article reflects on a lesson within the International Foundation Year (IFY) Healthcare module that integrates the teaching of implicit bias into English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Using interactive and reflective pedagogical strategies, the lesson engages students with disciplinary texts, discussion and critical reflection to develop both awareness of bias and key academic literacies relevant to healthcare practice. Educator perspectives illustrate how positionality and lived experiences shape pedagogical choices while student feedback points to enhanced empathy, self-awareness, and critical thinking, demonstrating the value of embedding social-justice themes within disciplinary EAP teaching.

Introduction: Addressing Bias in IFY Healthcare

Teaching implicit bias in a Foundation Year module responds to a growing need for inclusive, ethically grounded pedagogies that prepare students for professional practice. For the purposes of this paper, implicit bias (often referred to as unconscious bias) is understood as unrecognized assumptions individuals or groups hold about others, which shape attitudes, perceptions, interactions, and judgements in educational and professional contexts. In healthcare education, such biases can compromise quality of care and patient safety (Haider et al. 2011; Sukhera & Watling, 2018). Although awareness of these issues in healthcare is increasing, effective curricular integration in EAP remains limited. This paper draws reflections from two lecturers teaching on an International Foundation Year (IFY) Healthcare module at the University of Leeds. One has taught on the course for several years and serves as module leader, while the other is in her third year of teaching on the programme. They are referred to as Lecturer A and B respectively. As educators, they reflect on the successes and challenges of teaching this topic within healthcare education and advocate for a greater inclusion of such socially responsive themes in foundation-year curricula. The following sections outline the rationale for introducing this topic, the pedagogical design of the lesson, and the insights gained from student and educator reflections.

Context and Rationale for inclusion

Students on the IFY Healthcare programme take several credit bearing modules designed to support progression to undergraduate health care degrees. One of these is *the Academic Study Skills for Dentistry, Medicine and Healthcare Professions*, an EAP module that develops academic literacies through discipline specific themes. In Semester 1, the first six weeks focus on the topic of *Ethics in Healthcare*, within which a lesson titled *Medical Ethics and Implicit Bias* is delivered across two seminar sessions. The module typically enrolls between 35-40 students per academic year. In the iteration discussed here, the cohort comprised 35 students, divided into two groups of 17 and 18 taught by Lecturer A and Lecturer B.

The decision to include a lesson on implicit bias emerged from teacher critical engagement with the module. Drawing on a decade of teaching and leadership of the module, Lecturer A observed that while students readily engaged with topics of ethical debate, they often lacked awareness of how bias and inequality shaped the professions they aspire to enter. Recognizing that this topic did not feature in the broader foundation-year curriculum, she designed a discipline-specific lesson for the healthcare cohort to address this pedagogical gap. The lesson complements students' reading, writing, speaking, and critical thinking, while encouraging them to link language with professional responsibility and social justice in their disciplines (Breen & Roux, 2024).

The topic also aligns with professional codes of conduct such as the Nursing and Midwifery Council Code (2018) which requires healthcare professionals to "treat people as individuals, avoid making assumptions and recognize diversity" (p.6). The Equality Act (2010) also provides a legal framework governing equality and non-discrimination across protected characteristics.

Lesson design and Pedagogical approach

The lesson combines interactive discovery tasks, critical discussion, and academic reading and listening circles. Conceptually, it draws on culturally responsive teaching principles, which emphasise the inclusion of students' prior experiences, community settings, and cultural identities in pedagogical design (Gay, 2018; Essa, 2024). These two sessions are designed to move students from critical engagement with academic research on implicit bias to collaborative discussion of its social and historical dimensions through audiovisual materials.

Session one begins with a well-known Father–Son riddle, adapted from Pendry et al. (2007), which invites students to consider how a surgeon who exclaims *I can't operate on this boy, he's my son!* can be the child's parent following the father's death in a car accident. In previous cohorts taught by Lecturer A, most students overlooked the possibility that the surgeon could be the mother and required explicit prompting to connect the scenario to gender bias. More recently, however, Lecturer B has noted a change in responses, students now identify the mother immediately. This shift raises questions about whether students are demonstrating genuine progress towards gender-neutral thinking or simply reflecting the social realities of their generation. Having grown up in contexts where women increasingly occupy roles once dominated by men, the idea of a female surgeon no longer registers as noteworthy. At the same time, this apparent progress raises a critical question about whether increased familiarity with diversity has made gender bias less perceptible, even as more subtle forms continue to persist. Students are then asked to brainstorm forms of bias they have encountered in everyday or academic contexts while linking them to protected characteristics under the Equality Act of 2010.

Alongside more familiar examples, they also mention culturally specific forms such as tribalism to reflect countries where tribal affiliation may shape social hierarchy in significant ways. In one recent class, a student argued that, in his context, familial ties can legitimately influence decisions about whom a doctor treats, rather than such decisions being viewed simply as biased. Lecturer B clarified that such discretion would constitute discrimination within the UK healthcare context, which prompted a lively discussion about how professional ethics and legal expectations vary across societies. Students also take part in an academic reading circle based on Marcelin et al.'s (2019) article *The Impact of Unconscious Bias in Healthcare* which offers evidence-based insight into clinical bias in the United States. They identify examples of bias in the text, analyse academic conventions of journals, and discuss mitigation strategies relevant to their contexts. This collaborative approach develops critical reading, vocabulary development, and ethical reasoning through academic discourse.

In the second session, students reflect further on implicit bias through a listening circle discussion based on the BBC documentary *Our NHS: A Hidden History*, which they watch in advance. This documentary film examines racial inequities within the UK context and the contributions of racially minoritized healthcare workers in the National Health Service. In small groups of 3-4, they engage in in-depth discussions of the film and write a reflective piece on what was learned. As such the documentary's pedagogical impact lies in its capacity to extend student engagement with bias beyond intellectual recognition to more affective reflection. Student feedback on the lesson suggests both cognitive and affective learning. End of module survey reflections included comments such as: *"that lesson taught me to be more self-aware in the future when treating patients and to ensure all patients receive quality care,"* and *"I wasn't aware of all the different aspects of unconscious bias."* These illustrate how, for foundation level students, exploring bias may serve as an entry point to disciplinary thinking about ethics and care while also supporting their emerging professional identities.

Educator Positionality

As white British and Black African educators teaching on the same module, Lecturer A and B bring different cultural backgrounds and lived experiences that inform how the lesson is interpreted, adapted and delivered. In her first year of teaching, for instance, Lecturer B noticed that one slide on racial bias presented statistics about Black experiences in the UK. Concerned that this information might appear self-referential or equate racial bias solely with Blackness, she proposed broadening the examples to include other racially minoritized communities in the country. This adjustment supported a more intersectional understanding that enabled students to see themselves as both potential recipients and agents of bias. Teaching sensitive content inevitably brings together positionality and emotion, as racially minoritized educators may feel personally implicated in the material and therefore more attuned to how it risks reinforcing narrow or stereotypical framings. This reflective attentiveness does not confer pedagogical authority but highlights how teachers' identities and lived experiences can function as a critical resource in reflexive teaching. Also, as module leader, Lecturer A's openness and willingness to adapt the materials in response to discussion exemplifies the reflexive collaboration that underpins inclusive teaching.

Conclusion: Reflections for Practice

Teaching implicit bias illustrates how EAP classrooms can foster inclusive participation through discovery-based tasks, critical reading, and reflective dialogue. When embedded with disciplinary content, social-justice themes create space for students to critically examine ethical issues while developing the academic literacies required for successful university study. Rather than positioning such issues as separate from core academic work, integration within subject-specific learning connects academic language development with professional responsibility and values. Although this paper focuses on implicit bias in healthcare education, the pedagogical approach outlined here may be adapted to support other disciplinary values such as academic integrity, student belonging and global citizenship. An ongoing review of teaching materials for representational breadth is also essential as this ensures that content reflects diverse identities and intersections. Involving educators with relevant lived experience or contextual knowledge can enhance this process, particularly if such contributions are recognized as pedagogical expertise rather than symbolic representation. As shown in this lesson, even small adjustments can encourage inclusive discussions and model reflexivity in curriculum design. Inclusive teaching depends not only on curricular content but on educators' readiness to engage reflexively with their own positioning. A final implication relates to the evolving identities of EAP learners. While such topics have traditionally been treated as peripheral to academic goals, IFY students now enter year 0 with strong linguistic resources that enable them to engage beyond language development. This creates room for critical engagement with pedagogies that foreground identity and belonging. As universities work to decolonize curricula, EAP classrooms are a powerful site for everyday academic practice that integrates quality, equity and criticality at the heart of academic language education.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Nancy Woods for her invaluable ideas, inspiring teaching, and generous collaboration, which significantly shaped and enriched this work.

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Using Arts-Based Approaches to Enhance the International Foundation Learning Experience

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Ensuring comprehension and engagement within international foundation programmes is a difficult task for both the student and teacher – this is no surprise as undertaking a course of study in a foreign language is a challenging task. The following paper, adapted from a presentation given at the InForm Conference in June of 2025, presents a reflection on the author's experience as a tutor to second language learners on an art and design foundation course. Therein, the author proposes that using an arts-based teaching approach creates an equitable, inclusive, creative, and co-constructed learning environment which transcends language barriers and enhances student attainment.

Overview

In the following paper, I explore arts-based learning and teaching approaches as having the potential to increase student engagement, comprehension, confidence, and attainment, whilst creating a more inclusive, equitable, and, most importantly, *fun* international foundation programme experience. Through focusing on my own teaching practice during my time as an international foundation programme art and design tutor at OnCampus Southampton, I discuss how I successfully integrated an arts-based approach within a Contextual Studies module I taught. To clarify, art and design learning is typically split into two complementary course components: *art practice* which builds experiential, procedural skills, and *contextual studies* which underpins historical and critical thinking and is traditionally writing focused. During my tenure with OnCampus, these practical and theoretical elements covered programme pathways including fine art, games design, textiles, fashion design, graphic communication, and fashion marketing.

To support my enquiry, I draw upon student attainment figures and evaluative course feedback collected from 2022–2024, which I contextualise within key pedagogical theories to exemplify the efficacy of using an arts-based teaching approach. Specifically, I argue that the exploration of theoretical concepts via practical modes such as drawing, painting, music, and creative writing creates a learning environment which transcends differences in culture and nationality, whereby creativity acts as a universal language that allows students to find novel solutions to their coursework whilst stimulating interest.

The Arts-Based Approach

An arts-based approach can be classified into two main academic contexts: first, as a research methodology, and secondly, as a learning and teaching approach within education. The artist Shaun McNiff (2007, p. 29) defines arts-based *research* as the use of the artistic process to understand and examine experiences, whilst the educational theorist Elliot Eisner (2002, p. 12) defines arts-based *learning* as a process whereby the educational environment is conceived of as an artistic task, which has the potential to profoundly enhance the teaching context.

As a research methodology, it can be used to collect, analyse, disseminate, and present data, whereas, in a teaching environment, it can be used to design curricula, classroom activities, and modes of assessment. Fundamentally, an arts-based approach uses art not as a subject, but as a tool for understanding, which can encompass visual art, performance, literary arts, audio and music, and multimedia. Mirroring this concept, the philosopher Herbert Read (1943/1970, p. 223) stated that "Play is rather an informal activity capable of becoming an artistic activity, and of thus acquiring significance…" In essence, Read indirectly underpins what arts-based learning is: experiential, playful, and actively experimental. This notion aligns well with constructivist and social constructivist paradigms alongside the commonly used constructive alignment educational model, that enables students to create their own approach to knowledge acquisition (Biggs & Tang, 2011, p. 97); as such, students experimentally develop their own meaning from the learning process.

The benefits of an arts-based approach are clear, especially when used to address challenging or "dry" course aspects, as it promotes interest, confidence, and understanding of theoretical course materials, whilst allowing higher level thinking and analysis (Hunter & Frawley, 2022). This

is especially useful within an international foundation programme context, as theoretical, language-heavy coursework often leads to disinterest – a tendency I have witnessed with my own students. Accordingly, arts-based learning is a powerful tool for international students as art, in all its manifestations, is a universal language. As such, it is inherently inclusive, as it experientially accommodates different levels of competence, favours novel perspectives, welcomes diverse worldviews, and emphasises multiple interpretations of knowledge which are not fixed to specific cultures or languages, whilst also supporting diverse learning needs. Therefore, I emphasise that arts-based pedagogy can be used across a range of teaching disciplines and contexts to successfully scaffold and differentiate lesson content. I have witnessed the benefits of this approach firsthand with my own students who come from a range of cultural backgrounds, who speak different languages, and some of whom are differently abled or neurodivergent; the results of which I shall now expand upon.

From Rococo to Rap Music and Essays Made of Paint – Arts-Based Approaches in Practice

During my first academic year with OnCampus from 2022–2023 I noticed my students struggled significantly with their Contextual Studies module early in the course. After reporting these concerns to my Programme Leader, I was allowed to redesign our contextual studies curriculum to incorporate arts-based activities to supplement traditional modes of theoretical learning for the subsequent 2023–2024 session. Art and design students typically do not favour the written, contextual component of their course (Orr & Shreeve, 2018, p. 33) – a reality I was acutely aware of, especially when teaching second language learners. As such, the main struggles my students faced when undertaking contextual studies were language barriers, limited academic skills, and a general lack of interest in art theory. With an arts-based approach in mind, what activities did I employ to address these issues whilst embedding core contextual skills in a more accessible way?

To escape the monotony of the normative classroom setting, I arranged frequent local gallery visits where I tasked students with creating a written interpretation of an artwork, otherwise known as an *ekphrasis* exercise, where they were free to interpret artworks by writing stories, poems, and even songs about them. During one memorable trip to Southampton City Art Gallery, one of my students was so fascinated by the 18th century English Rococo painter Thomas Gainsborough's 1767 painting 'George, Lord Vernon' that they wrote and live-performed a rap song about it, complete with a backing track, much to the delight of their fellow students and gallery staff. I believe it is novel experiences such as these which instil a genuine joy for learning – arguably, lesson content should follow *how* it is taught and experienced.

I applied this same principle to my contextual studies classroom activities, where I would ask students to respond to conventional essay questions through the medium of painting and drawing, inspiring them to think and conduct research from a tactile, procedural perspective.

These practical essays were not assessed coursework elements and instead functioned as a scaffolding task that elicited interest, sparked curiosity, and made challenging concepts accessible through fun provocation. I was not prescriptive and allowed the students to interpret the task as they wished; a range of imagery emerged – abstract forms, bold mark making, and depictions of objects. I observed that the content of the essays was secondary to the positive associations the task generated in relation to theoretical enquiry – the artefacts generated became instigators for discussion and peer feedback which could underpin critical and contextual knowledge in a way untethered to language. Furthermore, I would begin contextual sessions with a practical task that related to the topic at hand – examples included Pop Art collages, painterly Expressionist mark-making, or Surrealist inspired *exquisite corpse* drawings. By beginning classes in this way, I aimed to heighten interest whilst priming students for the themes of the lesson ahead – by learning through making the students could take ownership of new knowledge in a memorable way, rather than passively receiving information. These activities were met positively, with students stating, "It was a fresh experience to express an essay question into an artwork" and "You can do anything – [I was] not limited", which instilled confidence in me that my approach was working.

Activities such as these exemplify what is at the heart of an arts-based approach – the use of creative, practical tasks allow students to find novel connections, create new ideas, and embrace an accessible way of learning which overcomes language barriers common to international foundation programmes, all whilst having fun in the process. Ultimately, these activities empowered students to become co-constructors of their own learning, enabling them to think and learn in ways which suited them best.

Results

Upon analysing Term 1 Contextual Studies summative assessment grades between my 2023 and 2024 cohorts I noted a substantial improvement in attainment following my course redesign. Students were still subject to the conventional writing parameters dictated by the core curriculum – a 500-word essay. Assessment criteria included the student's ability to a) identify artists' methods of production, b) compare and contrast examples c) show understanding of contextual and cultural impact of selected examples and d) exemplify academic writing and referencing skills. Despite retaining the same traditional essay assessment format, A and B grades more than doubled from 30% to 65%, with an overall enhanced attainment rate. Moreover, resubmissions dropped significantly from 39% in 2023 to 22% in 2024. These results correlated with the student experience, as they found greater satisfaction in the learning activities offered on the course compared with the 2023 cohort, manifest in evaluative programme feedback stating, "increased confidence", "fun [classes]", and "freedom to explore my ideas." Whilst these outcomes are positive, and a testament to the benefits of an arts-based approach, a limitation of my research is that further study must be explored post international foundation programme, to trace how well the approaches I used prepare students for higher education learning, where conventional reading and writing activities still appear within contextual studies modules.

Summary

Based on my findings, what are the potential implications for the wider application of arts-based learning within international foundation programmes? As a novel teaching approach, I believe it has the capacity to overcome language barriers and extend our current perceptions of knowledge production, leading to new modes of pedagogy that encourages fun engagement and heightened inquisitiveness, whilst leading to greater comprehension of concepts, and increased attainment. However, further research must be conducted to gauge the continued efficacy and transferability of such an approach to the conventional assessment formats international students will face within a higher education context.

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Encouraging autonomous student writing practice

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Foundation students often require substantial writing support, yet both practice-time and feedback capacity are limited. This article shares a tested routine inspired by Goodson (2023), that uses a shared writing log to make writing practice regular, manageable, and accountable. Students commit to regular writing sessions where they utilise one of the suggested writing exercises: practising using newly learnt vocabulary in context, a draft/edit split, learning through writing, and using an error checklist. The article argues that, with generative AI present, students still need writing practice to organise thinking, judge quality, and guide AI outputs.

Introduction

On many foundation programmes, students need support with their academic writing, yet teachers' capacity to give feedback, and students' time to practise, are constrained by competing assessments and commitments. As a result, even motivated students can struggle to sustain a regular writing practice.

This article shares an approach used on the University of Birmingham EAP Foundation and Pre-sessional, to address the joint need for regular low-stakes writing practice and sustainable feedback. Applied in both whole-class and 1-1 settings, it is inspired by Patricia Goodson's book, *Becoming an Academic Writer: 50 Exercises for Paced, Productive, and Powerful Writing* (2023). Goodson (2023) makes a strong case for practising regularly, comparing writing to any other skill: the more one practises, the better one becomes. Repetition reinforces skill-specific neural pathways (Coyle, 2009, pp. 32-33), making the act of writing progressively easier. Goodson's first two chapters provide a concise rationale for short, regular practice and offer manageable starting points that fit alongside other commitments (Goodson, 2023). Students consistently described these chapters as 'motivating' and 'inspiring': they establish the *why* before the *how*.

Keep and Share a Writing Log

To help our students sustain regular practice, a shared writing log adapted from Goodson (2023) was implemented. In Exercise 5 - *Keep and Share a Writing Log*, the author summarises studies of writing productivity, including Boice (1989), who compared three groups of new academic staff (N=10 per group) measuring productivity as manuscript pages per week. Group 1 wrote as usual without intervention. Group 2 wrote regularly and kept a log of their writing, producing approximately four times the output of Group 1. Group 3 wrote regularly, kept a log, and the log was reviewed biweekly, adding accountability. This yielded incredible results: Group 3 produced nine times the output of Group 1.

Inspired by these findings, the first step was to create a shared document for each student. It served as a space for daily writing and a record of regularity (date and duration of each session). A further practical advantage of a shared document is its version history, which provides a transparent record of how consistently the student practised. This was also followed by regular progress reviews in tutorials. With the log in place to support regularity and accountability, the next step was to introduce another exercise from the book: Exercise 10 - *Use New Academic Words*.

Use New Academic Words

In the original exercise from Goodson's book, the first step is to develop a list of words commonly used in one's field (Goodson 2023). For EAP foundation and pre-sessional students, the recommended approach is to select newly learnt vocabulary from class. Whereas some might argue that ready-made academic word lists or lists generated by Generative AI (GenAI) are easier to compile, the process of selecting and organising the words also matters: meaningful engagement supports memory (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). For this exercise, students can add words to a table in the shared document after each lesson or week.

Learning a word's meaning (translation, synonyms, definition) establishes initial understanding, but genuine mastery develops through authentic use, here, in writing (Schmitt, 2008). This act of production prompts a deeper level of cognitive processing, moving beyond shallow memorisation to build the knowledge required for fluency. The task for the daily writing practice session is then to pick a word (or a small set of words) and write as many sentences using that word as possible within the agreed time.

Agreeing on the length of each practice session is important. Students should choose a daily target time for writing (typically 10–15 minutes) as learner choice increases intrinsic motivation and follow-through (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Setting a timer also helps turn the ambitious goal of "improving writing" into short, time-bounded bouts of practice, which reduces friction at the start and keeps the task manageable (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006).

When time is up, the student checks their sentences against example sentences in an online English-English dictionary (or uses GenAI to flag errors without auto-correcting) and attempts self-correction. Following this, brief teacher feedback would be provided as comments in the shared document, focusing only on the target vocabulary; this typically takes just a few minutes.

One common challenge was that, in the early weeks, students would often forget to update their logs when the habit was forming. To address this, Outlook @-mentions were used to assign a simple "remember to complete your daily practice" task, which generates an email reminder and proved effective for those who needed extra motivation. In practice, this added minimal workload because students already use Microsoft 365 routinely on the programme and were familiar with Outlook features, so time for set-up and troubleshooting were negligible. Once the routine had settled, most students logged reliably. Figure 1 shows the one-page instructions provided to students, which restate the rationale outlined earlier and include a model entry.

These procedures extend beyond vocabulary practice; the same shared log can also be used for other writing tasks. Some might be concerned that, because these tasks are often completed asynchronously, students could use GenAI to generate the required writing. However, the shared document's version history makes the process visible (incremental drafting and revision rather than a single pasted block), and because the tasks are low-stakes practice revisited in tutorials, the incentive is to build fluency and control, not to outsource the work.

Implementation Example: Student Log

To illustrate the log in practice, Figures 2-4 present an anonymised excerpt from one student log, showing task implementation and later transfer to assessed writing. The student created and categorised their own vocabulary list, an excerpt of it shown in Figure 2.

The student then used these vocabulary items in their daily writing practice. In the log, they highlighted them in yellow for easier feedback and logged date and duration of each session. Figure 3 shows an entry from their log. Over six months, this student averaged ~3 writing sessions per week and logged 144 target items; 12 (≈8%) were later identifiable in a single in-class timed paragraph.

Use this document to record and practise using newly learnt vocabulary in context. Add any new vocabulary from your lessons and try to create as many sentences with that word as possible. Remember to set a timer to **[__] minutes per day**. It is important to practise this **daily**. When the time is up, please check your sentences against example sentences in an English-English dictionary and make any improvements. I will also provide my feedback.
Good luck!

Example:

30.07.2025
plausible
It seems ***plausible*** that Paulina will check these sentences regularly so we better practise!
He came up with a ***plausible*** excuse for not completing his homework.
While it's ***plausible*** that aliens exist, many people do not believe they do.

Figure 1. *Instructions and model log entry.*

verbs	nouns	adjectives/ adverbs	transitions	other
outsell	professions	controversial	in contrast	upward trend
stagnate	inhabitants	legislated	along with	from the outset,
measure	worrisome	dramatically	following this	subsequent months
plateau	transaction	respectively	on the whole, ...	hit a peak of
dip	pattern	former	turning to	by the close of the year
indicate	correlation	subsequent	with respect to	increase by
surpass	consumptions	steady	aside from	slight increase
restrict	projection	gradual -gradually	additionally,	reached a peak
utilise	capability	interestingly	with a stark contrast,	alternative perspective
supplant	popularity	increasingly	of particualr note,	showed a similar pattern

Figure 2. *Excerpt from student's categorised vocabulary list. Blue highlighting indicates words later reused in Figure 4.*

5. (10 minutes) to use 6 words. (28.5.2023)
1- the overwhelming majority are tend to have addiction to phones.
2- the university of Birmingham is reputed in medical field.
3- the new generation assumes to alter and disregard the values of previous one.
4- whereas facilitating the sequences of adapting a new environment, culture shock is continuing to exist.

Figure 3. *Excerpt from student's daily writing log.*

Artificial intelligence (AI), which is increasingly commonly used between educators, should be restricted in higher education institutions because of (...) To start with advantages, AI might be involved in educational sectors because of the capability of indicating and suggesting anonymous creative ways to shift students' ways of learning. (...) Additionally, educators who are special needs, such as dyslexia or autism seems to be beneficial from AI abilities to provide individualised learning experiences suit with their needs (Rayyan, 2023). In contrast to evidence which presents the view that AI could embrace into educational process an alternative perspective shows that AI has potential risks. (...) A survey indicates that 43 percent of current undergraduate and graduate students used AI throughout their assessments and exams, which (...) As has been mentioned AI has benefits and potential risks and all new invention could have the same controversial issues. (...) From the above, it is clear that AI can be beneficial in learning process and may lead students to develop their own ways to learn but also it can be useless if students depend on it while they be assessed unless education institutions restrict framework rules towards using AI.

Figure 4. *Excerpts from later student essay demonstrating reuse of target vocabulary. Blue highlighting shows words first logged in Figure 2 that reappear here. Ellipses mark omissions of original text.*

Finally, Figure 4 shows a later in-class timed paragraph in which several target items reappear in appropriate contexts. Although a single illustrative case rather than a formal evaluation, it suggests that regular, time-bounded practice in a shared log can support consolidation and transfer of academic vocabulary.

Other Useful Writing Exercises

Using the shared log, students can also work with further exercises from Goodson (2023) outlined below; in my classes, these activities have proved to be useful supplementary exercises.

Write Quickly, Edit Slowly

This exercise separates creating and revising: focusing on a single process minimises task-switching (Mayr & Kliegl, 2000) and helps students get started/keep going when they feel stuck (Elbow, 1998; A'Hwang, 2010). Students set a short timer and write continuously ignoring any mistakes. Once the time is up, they focus solely on editing and reorganising the draft they produced. In the shared log, students label the entry "Draft only," record duration, and add "Edited" with the specific editing focus.

Write to Learn (Anything, Including How to Write)

This exercise positions writing as a tool for learning new material: students select an unfamiliar or only partially understood topic and write about what the topic might involve, what is known, what is not yet known, and the questions that follow. After the timer, they consult one source to address a sub-question and compose a concise explanation, converting reading into understanding. In the shared log, each entry names the topic and closes with a one-line list of next steps (e.g., terms to verify).

Identify Patterns of Problems

This exercise develops error awareness and proofreading skills. Students review recent writing and any previously received teacher feedback to identify recurring mistakes, then compile a personalised checklist recording an example, the error type, and a corrected version. In future pieces of writing, before submission, rather than attempting to identify every error, the student focuses on their most common ones. This is particularly useful for writing exam preparation. This exercise supports internalisation of rules and makes proofreading manageable by limiting attention to a single target at a time.

Discussion: Do Students Need Writing Practice?

It is worth asking whether, with generative AI, students still need to practise writing. In this teaching context, the answer is yes, and the rationale aligns with the current approach.

Writing organises thinking: it communicates ideas and helps form them. Regular writing sessions help students structure arguments, weigh evidence, and clarify stance. *Write to Learn* turns reading and uncertainty into concise explanations.

Judgement of writing quality develops through practice and underpins effective GenAI use. Through drafting and revision, students learn structure, clarity, cohesion and register. The shared log, *Use New Academic Words* and *Identify Patterns of Problems* moves language from recognition to controlled use, giving learners criteria to evaluate texts, including GenAI output.

Ultimately, students still need to write. Regular, purposeful practice equips them to evaluate and direct GenAI outputs, revise with intent, and meet the communicative demands of their programmes. The model presented here aims to make such practice feasible within realistic constraints of EAP provision, particularly student time pressure and sustainable staff feedback workloads, not in spite of GenAI but because of it.

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From Decoding to Fluency: Exploring AI's Role in Second Language Literacy

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This article explores how an AI-powered speech recognition tool called Reading Progress can create an interactive learning environment to enhance audible and silent reading, which in turn may develop students' overall literacy skills. Initially, current understanding of the key literacy differences between first language and second-language learners, and the skills required for reading fluency is outlined. The article then draws on observations and data from an IFP pilot to highlight the benefits and challenges of using Reading Progress in the classroom. It concludes that Reading Progress has the potential to increase reading speeds and enhance engagement among international students.

Introduction

Schmidtke et al. (2025) argue that developing reading speed during a foundation programme can help learners succeed and thrive academically at university. However, reading speeds differ between learners with English as their first language (L1) and second language (L2). The optimal silent reading rates for L1 learners are estimated at 250 to 300 words per minute (wpm) (Carver, 1982), while L2 learners often operate at much lower speeds (Nation, 2005). To understand this fluency difference, and the development of literacy skills, it is necessary to analyse the cognitive skills required to decode and interpret texts. Drawing on literacy theory, this article examines how a pilot of Reading Progress (RP), part of Microsoft Teams Learning Accelerators, can support L2 reading fluency and engagement in IFP contexts.

Literacy: Lower-level vs Higher-level Processing Skills

The cognitive skills involved in literacy can be divided into lower-level and higher-level processing skills. Lower-level skills focus on decoding and word recognition, which are foundational to reading. Once mastered, learners progress to higher-level skills, which involve comprehension and making connections between words. According to Automaticity Theory, coined by LaBerge and Samuels (1974), skilled L1 readers bypass lower-level decoding, allowing their cognitive resources to be dedicated to comprehension. Conversely, L2 learners often struggle with lower-level skills, making fluent reading a more cognitively demanding process. Incorporating fluency-building activities can help L2 learners develop their lower-level processing skills by providing targeted practice.

AI-powered Reading Tools

Reading tools here refer to software applications for enhancing reading skills. They display passages of text onscreen for the user to read aloud whilst recording their speech using the device microphone. This is analysed, often in real time, using speech recognition to provide user feedback and data on their reading performance. AI-powered reading tools enhance this capability offering tailored reading texts for targeted practice and personalised learning experiences. These tools analyse learners' reading patterns, identify areas for improvement, and offer adaptive feedback based on learners' ongoing performance. By tailoring activities to individual needs, AI supports the development of fluency, accuracy, and expression in a highly engaging manner. The principal feature is the ability to practise reading aloud, where learners receive instant feedback on pronunciation and intonation.

The Role of Audible Reading and AI-Powered Learning

While silent reading is often the focus of academic instruction, reading aloud is a powerful tool for improving fluency. It reinforces the three key levels of lower-level processing: phonological, morphological, and semantic decoding (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2018).

The combination of visual, auditory, and speech processing during audible reading strengthens automatic word recognition in silent reading and improves prosody and parsing, consequently leading to a higher level of reading fluency. Research conducted by Dennis (2024) on AI-powered speech recognition software and by Jose (2024) on RP confirms that AI-driven tools can effectively bridge the gap between audible and silent reading. Their studies showed measurable improvements in pronunciation and speaking skills, which are deeply interconnected with reading fluency.

Practical Setup and Application

As Reading Progress (RP) is integrated into Microsoft Teams for Education, institution-wide accounts are required. Once a class team is set up, teachers generate an assignment and add the RP Learning Accelerator. The main advantage of using Teams and RP is the ability to create assignments and store all assignment and RP data in one centralised location. This data aids in monitoring students' accuracy and reading speeds over the period of implementation. Students are provided with tailored fluency practice, and real-time feedback on pronunciation and vocabulary recall. Additionally, it tracks skill development, generating data-driven reports for educators. As Figure 1 shows, students, and their teachers, receive detailed feedback on their attempts with colour-coded errors:

The accuracy and fluency rates are also recorded to track improvements. The teacher can review the recording and subsequently use the in-built AI programme to automatically generate a new text that incorporates mispronounced words for repeated practice, known as challenge assignments. Furthermore, there is the option of generating comprehension questions to further test and reinforce reading proficiency. This technological framework enables a dynamic classroom where students engage in personalised tasks, while teachers use AI to create scaffolds and provide continuous practice. The system can enable both independent practice and collaborative learning through the class teams, creating a supportive and data-led learning environment.

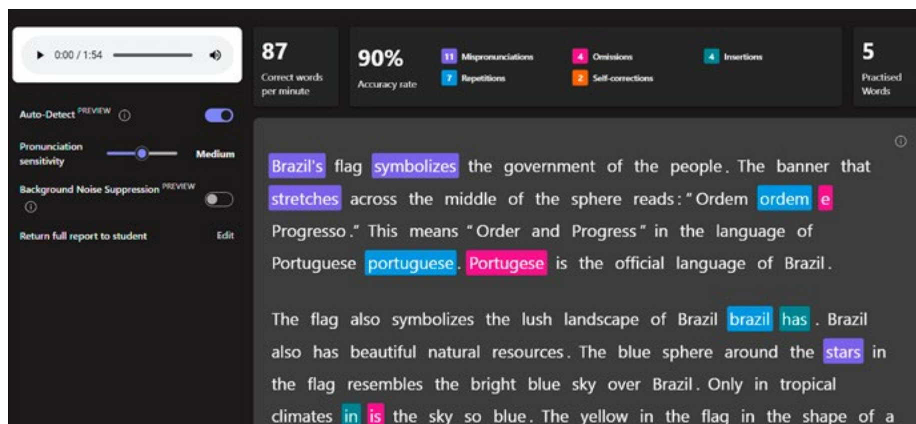

Figure 1. *Microsoft Teams Learning Accelerators Reading Progress insights.*

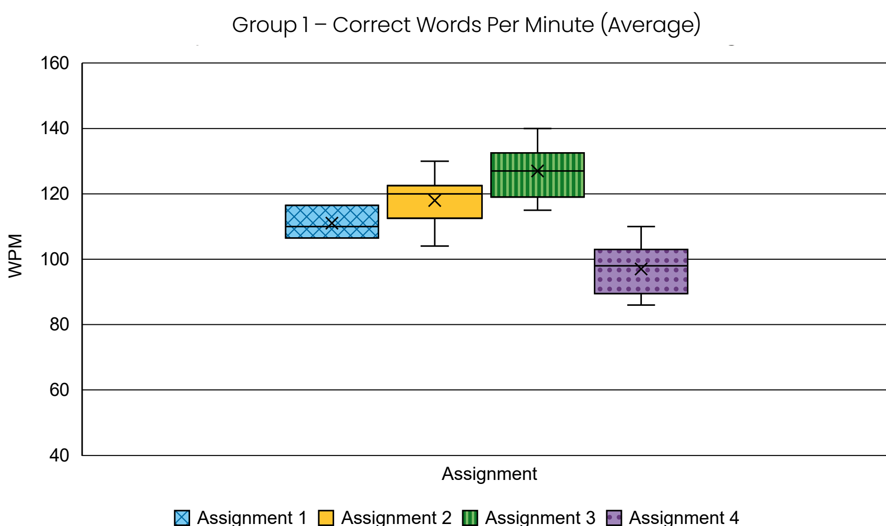

Figure 2. *Group 1 average words per minute (WPM).*

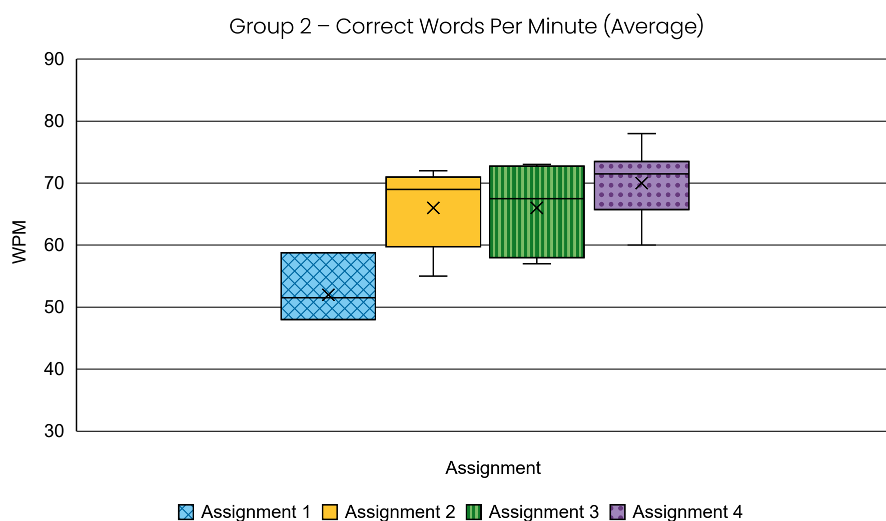

Figure 3. *Group 2 average words per minute (WPM).*

Reading Progress Classroom Pilot

To explore the theoretical principles and practicalities in the classroom, an exploratory pilot of RP was implemented at OnCampus Amsterdam in 2024. Two IFP groups of mixed nationality were chosen and the assignments were set at varying points over one term. Group 1, which consisted of 9 students at B2 level, demonstrated higher levels of fluency, while Group 2, consisting of 8 students at B1, had lower levels across the allocated reading assignments. It is important to note that the AI-generated texts used for each assignment differed across the two groups. Overall, Group 1 (Figure 2) showed an upward trend from assignments one to three (111-127 correct wpm) before experiencing a noticeable drop in assignment four to 97 wpm, whereas Group 2 (Figure 3) demonstrated steady, incremental gains across all four assignments (52–70 wpm).

Although there was a distinct increase in wpm, the most striking observation was the students' increased engagement in class compared to traditional reading activities. Students sustained attention for almost all the assignments as RP's continuous feedback loop required them to participate actively. Students also reported that they felt more confident after the repeated practice. Upon completing each assignment, the students were provided with their five most mispronounced words which they subsequently had the opportunity to practise. The detailed feedback was released at varying intervals which necessitated continuous monitoring of the data and prompt instructional decisions. Challenge assignments were created for those that finished earlier or pair work was assigned where they discussed each other's feedback. Overall, the assignments created a dynamic, multimodal learning environment that demanded ongoing cognitive and physical involvement from the teacher.

Discussion

The observations indicate that students demonstrated measurable progress over the period, aligning with Jose's (2024) findings regarding the positive impact of RP. It also supported the development of lower-level processing skills through scaffolding that steadily built their literacy proficiency. These engagement patterns were consistent with Automaticity Theory (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974), as repetition and immediate feedback likely supported the gradual automatisation of lower-level processing skills. Although both groups showed improvements, there was an evident decline for Group 1 and a plateau for Group 2. Students noted that these texts were not as interesting as others, which may have impacted their correct wpm.

The continuous feedback loop and the interactive and personalised exercises appeared to enhance learner motivation, as they could view their errors from the immediate feedback. Students also reported that they felt more confident with their reading ability, which aligns with a study conducted by Qurashi et al. (2025), who found that 65% of students believed their reading ability and comprehension had improved, reinforcing the positive perceptions associated with AI-supported reading tools. This suggests that adaptive reading technologies may enhance learners' self-efficacy, which can also contribute to long-term improvements in academic performance.

Challenges

Despite these positive outcomes, there are certain limitations to the RP trial. As the assignments were AI-generated rather than standardised, the content varied across the two groups. This made it difficult to ensure comparable data for both groups. It is important for future research to use identical texts to ensure validity of the findings. Engagement was also influenced by topic choice and several students indicated that they found one assignment uninteresting, which appeared to affect their correct wpm. It is therefore necessary for educators to generate or select appropriate and relevant texts prior to implementation.

Although AI-driven data can reduce some aspects of teacher workload, the use of RP also introduces new tasks in which teachers must be trained. Time must be allocated to reviewing recordings for those students who are struggling and reviewing AI-generated errors. The approach also increases the time needed for monitoring and decision-making, as teachers must oversee multiple recordings and progress dashboards, and then set individual assignments. While this introduces additional cognitive demands for the teacher, it may save time overall through automated passage creation, differentiation capabilities, and progress tracking functions.

Conclusions and future research

Initial observations of using RP generally support the theoretical frameworks on L2 literacy and research conducted on AI-powered reading platforms. RP may offer meaningful and engaging opportunities to strengthen lower-level processing skills among L2 learners as described in Automaticity Theory. Integrating RP and AI-supported reading software can also provide benefits in terms of data-driven insights, continuous, tailored feedback, and increased student engagement and confidence; however, its success is dependent upon supporting teachers in developing additional skills to manage novel tasks and ensuring that appropriate texts are generated or selected. As such, further research is required to assess how AI-supported tools can support fluency development, particularly through text standardisation, evaluation of teacher workload, and longitudinal tracking.

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Welcome to the No-Phone Zone: Does a phone-free and tech-light classroom environment lead to higher-quality learning?

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This pilot examined the impact of a phone-free, tech-light policy on student focus, participation, and interaction among 14 international foundation-year students in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) class during the 2024-25 academic year. Preliminary findings suggest that limited technology use can improve concentration, encourage active engagement, and support peer collaboration. These findings are relevant for international students transitioning to UK higher education as they adjust to a new teaching and learning environment. The results highlight the potential of tech-light environments to enhance learning quality and suggest that similar approaches could be trialled in other International Foundation Programme (IFP) modules.

Introduction

Even before the pandemic, smart technologies were already reshaping learning. Students increasingly turned to online resources to complement traditional textbooks, while teachers' roles shifted toward facilitators rather than sole knowledge providers (Caleb and Aloysius, 2016; Spector and SLFG, 2018, as cited in Phoong et al., 2019). For many educators, integrating technology, particularly smartphones, was a practical response to evolving student needs (Kuznekoff et al., 2015). This trend was reinforced in the post-Covid era, with a rapid shift from in-person to online learning environments (Moorhouse and Kohnke, 2021), further normalising personal technology as a standard aspect of education.

However, although some students may maintain strong performance when using digital devices (Kuznekoff et al., 2015), reliance on them can limit real-time communication, independent critical thinking, and collaborative learning. In contrast, tasks trialled in this pilot, such as interactive whiteboard activities and paper-based exercises, appeared to enhance focus, collaboration, and engagement. Within this context, intervention was considered necessary to develop skills essential for foundation-year programmes, which require students to independently access and analyse information and make informed judgements (SEEC, 2016, p. 8). This pilot aimed to implement structured activities reducing device dependence while promoting interpersonal skills, self-regulation, and classroom engagement.

The Pilot

This pilot was conducted in an EAP class of 14 international students with an overall IELTS score of 6.5 at King's Foundation in 2024-25. The 'no-phone' policy was introduced in response to declining concentration, participation, and engagement during live seminars, particularly when digital devices were present. Specifically, students struggled to express themselves fully and effectively in Academic English, as they were often unable to maintain conversations for more than five minutes. As a result, topics were frequently addressed only superficially, which is problematic for foundation-year students who attend seminars to discuss topics critically and in depth.

Haidt's (2024) The Anxious Generation, which examines the emotional and cognitive effects of constant digital exposure on Generation Z (GenZ, born between 1997 and 2012), significantly informed this pilot, as it helped explain some of the recurring patterns in student communication mentioned above. Smartphones are linked to several harms affecting Gen Z, including social isolation, fragmented attention, and addiction, with Haidt (2024, p. 128) claiming that 'the mere presence of a phone damages their ability to think'. These arguments, alongside student reports, prompted exploration of a phone-free, tech-light classroom approach to support focus, communication, and participation.

Throughout the year, each session began with a PowerPoint slide outlining the policy and clarifying which tasks required laptops or tablets. Classes were held for five hours per week, and participation in the policy was compulsory, except in cases of medical or family emergency. Activities were adapted for offline delivery, with prompts and instructions presented on slides, while students participated through speaking, writing on whiteboards or paper, or using printed worksheets. Many sessions also began with a game (e.g., back to the board) to boost energy. While students worked mostly offline, tutors remained tech-assisted, integrating all materials, including videos and answer keys, into a single slide set to minimise cognitive overload. This approach positively impacted tutors as well.

Student and Tutor Feedback

Feedback from students and tutors was central to the pilot. Data was gathered through informal discussions, peer observations, in-class check-ins, and an end-of-year student questionnaire.

Student responses were generally positive. Many reported improved focus and fewer distractions without smartphones, aligning with Patterson and Patterson (2017), who argue that devices distract both users and those nearby. Several students felt more present and better able to engage in discussions and group work. However, some mentioned occasional inconvenience, such as a lack of access to digital dictionaries, or noted that laptops would aid notetaking. Overall, limiting device use contributed to a more focused, collaborative, and enjoyable learning experience.

Feedback from 10 tutors trialling similar low-tech strategies across different modules indicated benefits, including increased participation and enhanced peer interaction. However, some expressed concerns about the extra lesson planning time, learner autonomy, and the environmental impact of printing. The initiative also received support from the EAP module leader, who shared survey feedback indicating that the 'phone-free zone' enhanced participation for some students. Furthermore, the group implementing the no-phone policy recorded the highest reading-test progression rate (93%) and a joint-highest median mark (79%) among all 23 groups in last year's EAP cohort. While these results are not causal and may be influenced by variables, such as class level or reading proficiency, they suggest potential benefits of phone-free, tech-light learning and indicate the need for further investigation, particularly as AI-driven tools introduce new challenges to student focus.

Reflections and Implications for IFPs

The pilot has provided insights that are now guiding a formal research phase with over 100 EAP students and 10 EAP tutors. The tech-light approach has also extended to two Culture and Society classes, focused on developing critical thinking through theory. Although this module occasionally requires internet access for research, phone-free, tech-light strategies have reduced distractions and encouraged deeper engagement with provided content. For example, during class discussions, students are encouraged to rely on the given sources to develop their ideas rather than searching online for additional evidence. These tasks promote active reading and independent critical thinking. Since foundation-year modules operate within defined contexts and primarily use provided sources (SEEC, 2016), with independent research being secondary, the assumption that constant access to digital devices and the internet is necessary for in-class research can be re-evaluated.

These observations suggest tech-light policies can be effective across IFP modules. Such environments help international students adjust from teacher-centred systems to UK academic norms, fostering independent study, critical thinking, and active participation; thus, preparing them for undergraduate study. Tech-light classrooms also support smoother transitions from secondary education to IFPs by encouraging students to become confident, active learners. However, cultural and individual attitudes toward technology should be considered to ensure inclusive learning, as demographic and background characteristics, including digital-device use patterns, can influence engagement (Zhang and Liu, 2025). These differences highlight the importance of investigating how students respond to tech-light approaches.

Next Steps

A formal study is underway, involving 10 EAP tutors, student surveys, and an end-of-year tutor focus group. Its aim is to evaluate the impact of tech-light teaching on learning quality and explore its applicability across King's Foundations modules and session types (e.g., lectures). Key questions include:

- How can tech-light environments help students develop a healthier relationship with technology, both in and outside the classroom?
- How can tech-light teaching be implemented without increasing tutor workload and planning time?
- How can these approaches translate into improved student performance and assessment outcomes?

Central to this phase is developing a balanced, context-sensitive approach, shaped by tutor and student perspectives, informing lesson design and materials while responding to evolving pedagogical demands.

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Voices Unlocked: Social issues as a catalyst for English expression in an IFP class through feminist pedagogy

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This article explores the need to unlock the voices of English as a Foreign Language students in IFP classrooms. Expressing views in English can be a challenging process for these students, particularly in Higher Education. In this reflective piece, Jasper's ERA cycle (2013) of experience, reflection and action, is used to explore the impact of incorporating pervasive themes into the IFP syllabus. Drawing on data collected from classroom observations and guided by feminist pedagogy, this article shows that integrating contemporary social themes in syllabi can both invigorate classroom dynamics and also promote a sense of belonging and validity, which are vital elements for efficacious language acquisition.

Introduction

Teaching oral presentation skills in an IFP class is of vital importance for students' success in tertiary education. However, the majority of IFP textbooks for English as a Foreign Language students, put focus on writing and reading skills (Salehi et al, 2015; Dali, 2017; Lolbi, 2022). Additionally, it has been noted that most traditional approaches to speaking and oral presentation skills privilege the most dominant cultural and linguistic standards, which at times tend to marginalise learners from other linguistically and/or culturally diverse backgrounds. Listening and speaking in most cases is somewhat overshadowed and that was the main reason that led me to design a syllabus that does not rely on a single textbook but rather on a wide selection of materials that deal with social themes that international students can relate to. The ultimate goal was to engage students in themes that stimulate their interest in order for them to discover their voices and work cooperatively in learning to construct and deconstruct arguments and counterarguments in English. Thus, the rationale behind the creation of this IFP syllabus was guided by feminist pedagogy, a theoretical framework which emphasises respect, empowerment, equality, inclusivity and collaboration (Hall & Villegas, 2025).

Experience

The selection of teaching materials was developed for a three-month IFP class taught at an American university in Greece. The particular course is mandatory for students of all disciplines who need to improve all four English language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening). The class usually consists of 25 B2-level South-European English learners. Although in the vast majority of cases students are cooperative and eager to learn, they usually struggle with expressing their views, having meaningful dialogues and disagreeing in a respectful and democratic manner. The aim of this IFP class is not only to enrich students' academic vocabulary but to also foster critical thinking, respect, collaborative learning, and a shift in classroom dynamics aligned with feminist pedagogical principles. A salient characteristic of feminist pedagogy is its strong emphasis on the creation of a classroom environment that values belonging, equality and inclusion, and promotes finding one's voice through meaningful interactions between teachers-students, as well as between genders (Shrewsbury, 1993; Hall & Villegas, 2025). According to Fisher (2001) feminist teaching has a double purpose; the first one is to motivate and encourage students to become successful in current society, as well as to empower them to challenge and change current social norms. In short, guided by feminist pedagogy, the materials were designed to simultaneously encourage meaningful L2 production and empower student presence.

Given the diverse background of cultures in the classroom, students were instructed to read texts, watch documentaries, listen to podcasts, answer questions and write their reflections about social themes, covered in the syllabus, such as:

- Identity
- Social Media
- Culture Shock
- Academic and Communication Challenges
- Gender Roles
- Family/Societal Expectations
- Peer Pressure

Reflection

As noted by Brinton et al (2003), a 'theme-based' syllabus, which has a thematic focus, provides a clear framework with regard to the introduction of new language. Using current themes and real-world corpora, students engage in meaningful, academic discussions. From the beginning of the course, students gradually set the foundation for their first oral presentation in English, which was scheduled for the last week of classes. Students were not only given the opportunity to utilize their newly acquired academic vocabulary, conjunctions and adverbials of contrast and consequence, but also turn their whispers to words and empower their voices. In keeping with the feminist pedagogical approach, presentations were collaborative and students were required to present their 'stories of silence' in pairs. The presentation of their stories had to relate to the themes covered in previous weeks (see Table 1). Since students were asked to share personal experiences, I tried to remain as attentive as possible to group dynamics in order to sustain appropriate boundaries and foster an emotionally safe and respectful learning environment.

The week prior to students' presentation was designed for encouraging them to break the quiet walls which hinder them from expressing their views. For that purpose, Anshul Tewari's TEDTalk 'Want to make change? Let young people tell their stories' (2025) was used, which urges young people to speak, because their stories, views, experiences matter and can make a change. According to Tewari (2025), speaking up does not have to do with a perfect speech but an honest voice.

I really wanted my students not only to relate to what Tewari said but also to the fact that he found the courage to speak, although English is not his first language. I wanted them to realise that their voices count, no matter how broken or imperfect their English was. Not speaking up and expressing ideas makes one feel '... invisible [but] not like Harry Potter with an invisibility cloak...[but] really powerless" (Tewari, 2025). At the end of this class, I felt really pleased with the reception that the talk had on my students. I observed a spark in their eyes, which is of paramount importance, in academic studies.

The final week of the oral presentations came and although students were nervous, they all managed to share their stories and experiences, and have meaningful discussions. Their stories provided opportunities to share not only similar, but also diverse perspectives thereby, enhancing intercultural understanding. Moreover, the fact that all presentations, all stories, were received with interest and respect, empowered students and made them realise that all stories matter and all voices can make a change. After the end of their presentation, two students approached me and said, 'Miss, just like Harry Potter, we also beat Voldemort...Our Voldemort was an oral presentation in English and we managed to fight it without any invisibility cloaks'.

The incorporation of culturally resonant themes into the IFP syllabus was positively received by students and demonstrated the pros of creating purposeful content to develop students' oral and lexical skills through a feminist pedagogical framework. By creating an environment of inclusivity and empowerment, pervasive themes propose to develop students' ability to construct arguments in English while simultaneously empowering them to use their own voices. In addition, learners enhance critical thinking skills, respectful dialogue and use semantically meaningful language, which are keys to academic success.

Action

To conclude, apart from the positive outcome of this course, the particular reflection helped me identify some further pedagogical adjustments with regard to the use of contemporary social themes in order to motivate students and make them unlock their voices. Firstly, since the cohort of international students is different every year, a needs analysis questionnaire must be provided at the beginning of the course in order for students to express their preferences on areas, topics and themes they wish to delve into and share their views. Additionally, a more diversified selection of motivational speakers (just like Anshul Tewari), including speakers from places more familiar to students may deactivate their defences faster, since relatability often breaks the barrier that says 'speaking up and sharing my story is not for me'.

Title: *'I chose not to speak because I thought it wasn't serious, but now I see that it affected me – and maybe others too'.*

Description: Paired Oral Presentation

Duration: approximately 15 minutes (allowing 5 more minutes for questions)

Guidelines: Choose one of the themes below that resonates with your own experiences and tell your story.

Theme: Identity and Culture Shock

Theme: Gender Roles and Stereotypes

Theme: Peer Pressure and Social Media

Theme: Academic Challenges

Theme: Societal/Family expectations

Each person tells their story (5 minutes each), then reflect together for 2–3 minutes:

- What similarities do your stories have?
- In what ways did silence affect each of you?
- What did you both learn from this experience and what would you change?

Table 1. *Paired Oral Presentation brief.*

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Research, Relevance, and Reflection: Evolving Student Attitudes to Creative Inquiry

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This article reports a small-scale mixed-method pilot study of Foundation students' approaches to research within creative practice at the University for the Creative Arts. Drawing on survey feedback and classroom interventions, it explores home and international students' starting points, challenges and responses to a structured Research Folder embedded in the Final Major Project. The folder scaffolded engagement through four submissions: practitioner analysis, comparison, CRAAP-based source evaluation and primary research. Findings suggest that where research is perceived as abstract or separate from making, sequenced tasks can help home and international students articulate clearer research-to-practice links.

Introduction

Research in the creative arts is frequently perceived as academic, abstract, or disconnected from studio practice (Brew, 2006; Elkins, 2009). At Foundation level, this tension can be particularly visible: students may regard research as information gathering (often online) without seeing how it is a practice-relevant tool for shaping idea development, experimentation, evaluation and creative choices. This view can appear in both home and international cohorts, who arrive with varied educational experiences and expectations. Tutors therefore face the challenge of framing research as part of making, not an add-on that sits beside studio work.

Prior to 2024/25, University of the Creative Arts taught home and international Foundation students separately. In 2024/25, teaching was combined, and the Foundation cohort comprised 152 students, including 40 international and 112 home. In Semester 1 Foundation students were taught core academic skills and research conventions. Tutors observed low engagement and some reticence towards research, perhaps because its role in creative development felt unclear to students, raising concerns about consistent application later in the year in projects and the Final Major Project.

In response, the teaching team redesigned the Semester 2 support for research by embedding a structured Research Folder within the assessed Final Major Project. This required students to complete a sequenced set of research tasks linked directly to their studio work. The intention was twofold: firstly to make expectations explicit and position research as practice-embedded; and secondly to activate academic skills introduced in Semester 1 by applying them to studio-relevant tasks in Semester 2.

This article presents findings from a pilot study exploring 2024/25 UCA Foundation students' perceptions and experience of research across Semester 2. It aims to provide insight into the concerns raised by tutors in Semester 1 and the impact of the Research Folder unit in Semester 2, with a particular focus on students' reported practices, confidence, and research-to-making links.

The Research Folder assessment

The Final Major Project asks students to contextualise their practical work through independent research. The Research Folder provided a structured, supported route for achieving this, requiring submission of four linked PowerPoint files of 300-400 words each, with visuals where needed, completed in sequence. In the first file, students analysed three relevant practitioners or works to understand their ideas, techniques, and contexts. In the second, they compared practitioners or works to identify similarities, differences, and thematic or stylistic links. In the third, they evaluated a credible academic source using the CRAAP (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, Purpose) test. And in the fourth, they conducted primary research, such as material testing, interviews or audience feedback. Together, the tasks moved from contextual understanding (Files 1-2) to source evaluation (File 3) and purposeful enquiry in practice (File 4).

Teaching and scheduled Research Folder tutorials/workshops were staged to align with each file, with checkpoints to confirm practitioners/works and themes, and to review drafts and CRAAP-tested sources. There was no separate formative submission; however, students regularly brought work-in-progress to weekly sessions and sought guidance.

The pilot study

Data were collected via an anonymous online questionnaire completed by 19 students (13% response rate), alongside informal classroom observation and student comments noted during critiques and tutorials.

The questionnaire served as an enhanced end-of-unit evaluation for the Research Folder unit and comprised 20 questions (open and closed) grouped around expectations, practices, sources, support, confidence, and perceived future value. It was administered after final submission and included retrospective questions reflecting on views held at the start of the unit.

This article reports the questionnaire findings.

Questionnaire Findings

In the following results it can be assumed that all participants (n=19) gave responses to questions, unless otherwise stated. Figures presented are created by the author from questionnaire data collected in May 2025.

Early attitudes to Research

Students were asked to select up to three words from a list of eight describing how they remembered feeling about research at the start of the academic year. Responses are shown in Figure 1 and the most frequently selected words were confused (48%), curious (42%) and uncertain (32%), followed by bored (26%) and anxious (26%); fewer chose motivated (21%), excited (11%) or resistant (5%). One respondent described research as “Something I had to do but didn’t want to do”. These recalled starting points suggest that early engagement with research combined interest with uncertainty. According to Hidi & Renninger’s (2006) model of interest development this is characteristic of starting something unfamiliar and requires scaffolding and relevance to build sustained engagement.

Research practices and sources reported during Foundation

When asked how students engaged with research, they reported a range of research activities during Foundation, as shown in Figure 2. The most frequently used were online searches (63%) and artist case studies (63%), followed by sketchbook annotations (58%). Exhibitions (37%) and experiments (37%) were selected by a smaller group, while interviews (16%) and other (16%) were least common.

Figure 3 shows they also reported using diverse sources/materials (Figure 3). Online articles/videos were most common (68%), followed by artist case studies (58%), exhibitions (53%), and books/journals (47%). Interviews/surveys (26%) and experimentation (32%) were less frequently selected.

Q4: How students felt about research at the start

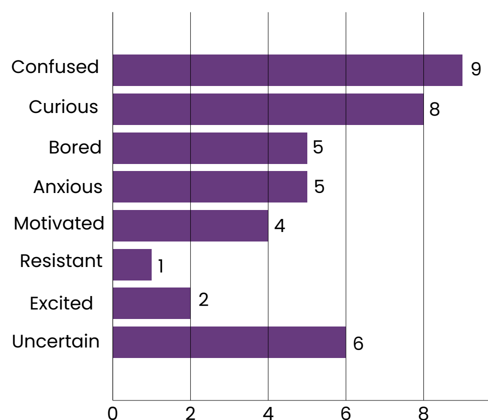

Figure 1. *Feelings about Research. Number of students from 19 that selected each word. Students selected up to 3 words.*

Q5: Types of research done during Foundation

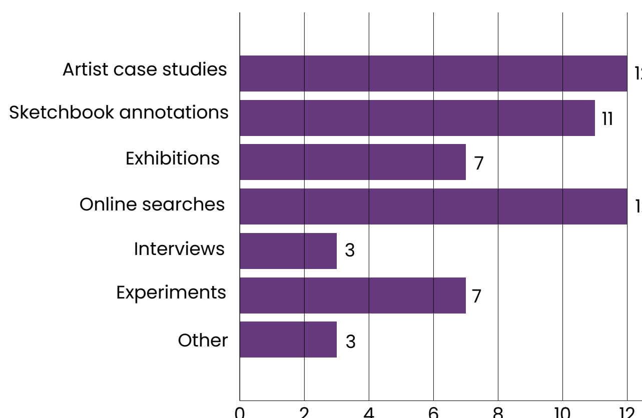

Figure 2. *Types of Research. Number of students from 19 that selected each type of research. Students selected all applicable options.*

Q7: Sources or materials used

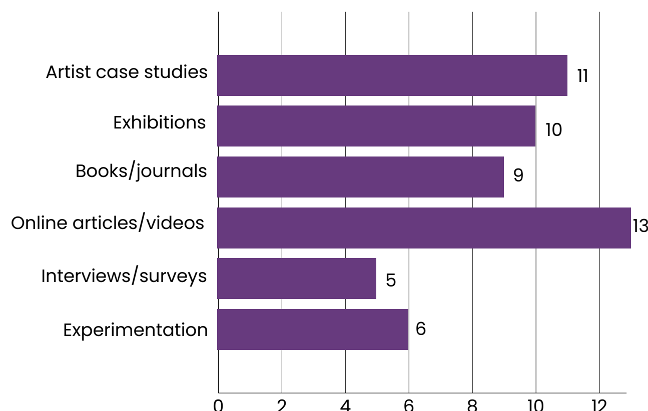

Figure 3. *Sources/Materials. Number of students from 19 that selected each type of research. Students selected all applicable options.*

The Research Folder: reported usefulness and support

When asked in an open question what supported engagement with the Research Folder (Q14, n=16), tutor guidance/support (38%) and repeated practice (31%) were cited most, followed by peer reassurance (19%) and examples/handouts (13%).

Comments suggest that the staged structure helped students express why their sources mattered to their making: "I learned to connect ideas more deeply". Others stressed the social dimension: "We were all confused, so it helped to talk".

End-of-unit confidence and future value

Confidence in using research at the end of the Research Folders unit was generally high. Figure 4 shows that no respondents selected "not at all confident"; most selected very confident (53%), with 11% extremely confident, 21% moderately confident, and 16% slightly confident.

Respondents overwhelmingly anticipated that research would help at BA level or in future creative work, as shown in Figure 5 where 17 selected Yes, 1 Maybe, and 1 No. In a related question asking if they perceived connections between research and making (Q16, n=18), 14 selected Yes, 2 No, and 2 Not sure; one respondent described the link as meaningful only "when it helps further the creative process".

Results Discussion

Research in art and design is widely conceptualised as a set of interconnected practices: textual and material, academic and intuitive, reflective and experimental (Frayling, 1994; Gray & Malins, 2004; Sullivan, 2005). Brew and Saunders (2020) similarly emphasise that inquiry-based learning can foster independence and purposeful engagement. Making connections between research and practice is developmental. Understanding what stage Foundation students are in this process can inform effective support.

Several questionnaire responses suggest that students' early framings of research were relatively narrow. When asked what they expected doing research to involve (Q1, n=18), 8 described general information gathering and 4 mentioned artist/practitioner research; one respondent summarised this as "artist research using websites and stuff". Levy and Petrulis (2012) suggest that students may initially equate research with information gathering rather than knowledge building, and they reinforce the importance of making the purpose of research explicit within studio-based learning.

The Research Folder aimed to make research expectations more legible by sequencing four connected research tasks and embedding each within the Final Major Project, rather than positioning research as an external academic requirement. Responses suggest that this sequencing helped some students articulate clearer research-to-making links. The CRAAP task, in particular, appeared to strengthen research literacy for students who previously relied mainly on online searching, with one respondent noting that it made them think critically about sources for the first time.

Students developed skills through modelling and guided rehearsal of applied research. Schön (1992) argues that professional thinking develops when tutors make processes visible and support learners to articulate the reasoning behind decisions. In the Research Folder, this was enacted through staged inputs and checkpoints and echoed in comments highlighting tutorial and peer support. Structured, context-rich enquiry may therefore help build confidence and independence (Mulders, 2024).

Alongside survey evidence, tutors noted progress in Research Folder submissions, including more accurate referencing and clearer explanations of inspiration sources and their influence on practice. One tutor reflected that a staged research folder can make research processes explicit for Foundation students, though its effectiveness depends on context, implementation and cohort.

Finally, the study has limitations. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and the response rate was low (n=19; 13% of the cohort), preventing subgroup and longer-term impact analysis. The questionnaire was circulated relatively late in the unit (after the unit submission point). Making it available earlier and for longer may have increased participation and captured responses closer to students' engagement with the Research Folder tasks.

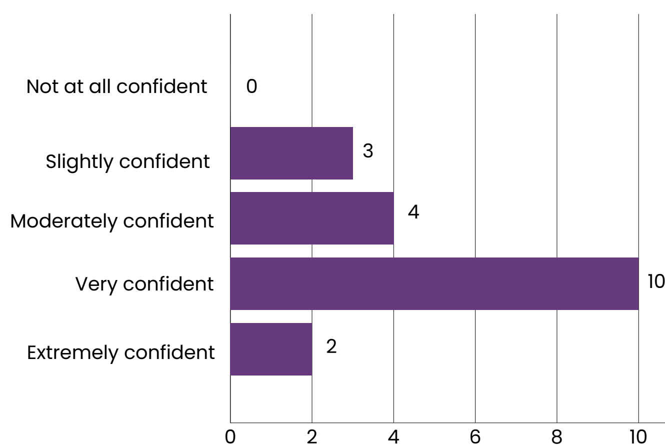

Figure 4. *Research Confidence. Number of students from 19. Students selected the most appropriate option.*

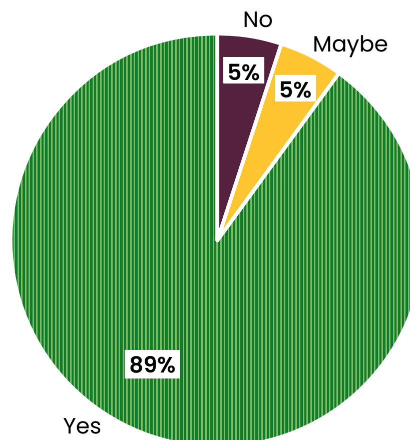

Figure 5. *Research in Future Work.*

Classroom observations and conversations with students suggested that similar issues were present across home and international Foundation students; however, questionnaire findings should be treated cautiously and as exploratory. The intervention was delivered to a combined cohort, so results are discussed in relation to this mixed teaching context.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This pilot study suggests that while Foundation students often begin with narrow or resistant views of research, a structured intervention such as the Research Folder can foster deeper engagement. Students reported greater confidence, clearer links between inquiry and practice, more critical approaches to sources and clearer research conventions overall.

Given the small sample, findings remain exploratory. A larger, longitudinal project would follow students into BA-level study to assess whether such interventions build lasting confidence and independence. With mixed cohorts becoming more common, further research is needed to explore how early, structured approaches to research can enhance teaching across International Foundation Programmes and mixed cohorts.

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Encouraging Critical Evaluation in Foundation Year Academic Writing

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This article reports on a small-scale study at King's College London investigating how international Foundation Year students understood and attempted to demonstrate critical evaluation in academic writing. Findings revealed a mismatch between students' stated perceptions and their written performance. The article discusses pedagogical implications for EAP practitioners, including the need for explicit modelling, scaffolding, and alignment between teaching and assessment.

Introduction

Critical evaluation is often described as a defining feature of academic writing, yet for many Foundation Year students it represents a steep learning curve. International students in particular may have little prior experience of being asked to question sources, weigh up evidence, or justify a position in writing. On International Foundation Programmes (IFPs), however, these skills are not only encouraged but also assessed, meaning students must adapt quickly to succeed.

This article draws on a small-scale study carried out at King's Foundations at King's College London with students enrolled on the Academic Expression and Critical Thinking (AECT) module. The study explored how students understood the idea of critical evaluation and how this understanding shaped their essay writing. By examining the gap between perception and practice, the discussion identifies practical steps that teachers can take to support students in moving beyond description towards more confident evaluative writing.

Background

"Critical evaluation" is widely emphasised in higher education, yet its meaning is often unclear to students, who are frequently told to "be critical" without explicit guidance. Research in academic literacies highlights that writing is shaped by implicit disciplinary conventions that are rarely made explicit (Lea & Street, 1998). For international Foundation Year students, this challenge is magnified: many associate evaluation with comparing views rather than developing a reasoned argument (Andrews, 2010). Even the academic literature offers multiple and sometimes conflicting definitions of critical thinking (Moore, 2013), and expectations vary across disciplines (Jones, 2015).

Understanding how students interpret and enact evaluation in writing is therefore essential for supporting them more effectively.

The Study

The research was carried out with five international students enrolled on the Academic Expression and Critical Thinking (AECT) module at King's College London. All were completing an International Foundation Year as preparation for undergraduate study. The study drew on two sources of data: a questionnaire in which students explained what they thought "critical evaluation" meant and how they had tried to demonstrate it in their summative essays, together with the essays themselves.

The aim was not to produce generalisable findings but to explore how individual students' perceptions aligned with their written performance. This was done by comparing students' questionnaire responses with the content of their summative essays, focusing on how evaluation was, or was not, demonstrated. By pairing self-reported understanding with examples of actual writing, the study provided a fuller picture of how evaluation is interpreted and demonstrated in practice. This small-scale, qualitative approach was chosen to capture depth and detail, offering insights that could be of practical relevance to EAP and IFP teachers working with similar cohorts.

Findings

The findings revealed that students generally recognised the importance of critical evaluation in academic writing. Most described it as essential for completing the Foundation Year successfully and for progressing in higher education. However, their definitions of evaluation often reflected only a narrow aspect of the concept. Several students equated it with "comparing different views" or "showing both sides," but few mentioned making judgements about the quality of evidence or justifying a position. This echoes research suggesting that students often adopt surface strategies when asked to be critical, rather than demonstrating deeper reasoning (Wingate, 2012).

Analysis of the essays confirmed this pattern. In many cases, students demonstrated awareness of the need to include multiple perspectives, but their writing often remained descriptive. Passages summarised sources at length without moving towards evaluation. For example, one student included contrasting views on a topic but offered no comment on which was more convincing or why. Another repeated definitions from sources without critically engaging with them. This pattern aligns with research suggesting that many international students experience criticality as an unfamiliar and sometimes intimidating expectation (Tahira & Haider, 2019).

A smaller number of students did attempt evaluation in their essays, usually by questioning reliability or highlighting the strength of particular evidence. These efforts, however, were inconsistent and often lacked development. This limited follow-through points to the difficulty students face in developing reflective engagement into sustained evaluative commentary (Monbec, 2024). One student, for instance, stated that a study was "outdated" but did not explain why this weakened the argument or suggest what more recent evidence could add. Others hinted at critical engagement but then reverted quickly to summary.

Importantly, there were mismatches between students' stated perceptions and their written practice. Some who described evaluation as essential showed little evidence of it in their essays, while others who expressed uncertainty managed to include more evaluative comments. This inconsistency highlights the challenge students face in translating their abstract understanding of evaluation into concrete writing practices.

Overall, the findings suggest that while Foundation Year students value critical evaluation, they struggle to demonstrate it in writing. Their strategies often remain descriptive, with evaluation being brief or underdeveloped. These difficulties may stem from limited prior experience, linguistic challenges, and the implicit framing of criticality within academic programmes (Moore, 2013).

Implications for Practice

The findings from this study informed the development of teaching materials focusing on critical writing, argumentation, and the use of evidence. These were designed to support students in demonstrating critical evaluation in their writing and have since been incorporated into teaching across the Foundation Year programme at King's College London. The study has also informed my ongoing professional development, including the development of a doctoral research project building on these findings.

The investigation's findings highlight the need for Foundation Year students to receive clearer, more structured support in developing critical evaluation. Although students recognised its importance, their essays showed that they often struggled to put this into practice. From a teaching perspective, several implications emerge.

First, expectations need to be clarified. Telling students to "be critical" is not sufficient; they need to know what this looks like in their own writing. As Wingate (2012) maintains, breaking down the abstract notion of "criticality" into specific, observable actions helps students understand what is required. Providing examples that contrast descriptive and evaluative writing can also make the distinction more tangible.

Second, evaluation should be explicitly modelled. Teachers can demonstrate their reasoning in class by analysing a short passage and showing how they weigh up evidence, question assumptions, and make a judgement about reliability. This can be reinforced by providing annotated extracts of student writing, highlighting instances of effective evaluation. Making these processes visible helps to clarify what "being critical" involves and shows students that evaluation is a skill which can be developed through practice.

Third, scaffolding is important. Students often find it easier to practise evaluation in small steps before applying it to extended essays. Classroom activities might include ranking sources by credibility, comparing short extracts to decide which is stronger, or rewriting descriptive statements to include evaluation. Such tasks create opportunities to practise evaluative thinking without the demands of extended writing. As Andrews (2010) notes, the incremental development of argumentation skills supports learners as they progress towards more complex reasoning.

Fourth, encouraging reflection can help students connect their perceptions with their practice. After receiving feedback, they might be guided to review how they approached sources, the assumptions they made, and the strategies they used to justify claims. Structured prompts or checklists can support this process, enabling students to identify where they engaged evaluatively and where further development is needed. Such metacognitive activities can bridge the gap between understanding what evaluation involves and applying it effectively in writing.

Finally, teaching and assessment should be aligned. If assessments require evaluation, teaching needs to provide explicit guidance and opportunities to practise it. Equally, feedback should identify areas needing improvement as well as instances of effective practice. Positive reinforcement of students' developing evaluation skills can build confidence and motivate them to persevere with this challenging aspect of writing.

With sustained and explicit support, these teaching approaches can help students move beyond description and develop more effective evaluative writing.

Conclusion

Critical evaluation remains one of the most challenging aspects of academic writing for international Foundation Year students. The small-scale study discussed here showed that while students generally valued evaluation and associated it with academic success, their understanding was often partial and their written practice inconsistent. Most tended to rely on descriptive strategies, with only occasional and underdeveloped attempts at deeper engagement with evidence. The mismatch between perception and practice underlines the need for

explicit and sustained support. For teachers, the key message is that evaluation cannot be left implicit. Students require clear explanations of what it involves, accessible models of how to demonstrate it, and scaffolded opportunities to practise. Reflection tasks can also help students to compare their understanding of evaluation with how it appears in their writing. Finally, assessment criteria should be transparent and consistent with classroom teaching, so that students are not left guessing what is required of them.

Although this was a small-scale study, the findings offer insights that resonate across International Foundation Programmes. Clarity and explicit teaching are essential if students are to make progress in critical writing. Making evaluation more visible can enable students to move beyond description towards the kind of academic writing that supports success at undergraduate level and beyond.

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Equity in Oral Formative Feeback Provision: A Double-Edged Sword

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Oral formative feedback is an essential part of the tutor's toolkit when developing learners' academic literacy in a process approach to writing. This article reports on tutorial observations during 1:1 feedback sessions on a Pre-Master's academic writing module where equitable feedback was provided, and the (unexpected) response on the part of the students (Chinese, B2 level). The latter raises awareness of subtleties in terms of culturally determined behaviour and expectations as well as points to the need for targeted intercultural training and further research into Confucian-heritage educational background learner's attitudes in terms of student-teachers' interactions.

Background and context

I was teaching an academic writing and research module on a Pre-Master's programme preparing students for UK university study. In a process approach to writing, students produced work and received 1:1 oral formative feedback on three occasions during a 2-term period. The student profile was Chinese, around B2 level, social sciences disciplinary area. In an attempt to better support learners, I provided equitable rather than equal feedback as per each individual student's need and stage in their writing process. In this case by "equitable" I mean more voluminous and /or more frequent feedback given to some learners. This, however, had interesting and consciousness raising effects on me as an educator in terms of intercultural competence. What follows is an account of my tutorial observations, which I will place in the context of literature on cultural differences. After a brief description of procedure, two cases will be described. The article will then explore the implications for practice and provide some recommendations for educators working in similar contexts.

Method

The cases described in this article are based on my informal (unplanned) practitioner observations during 1:1 sessions where I was looking at snippets of students' work on an academic writing module. They were examples of what literature on research in education describes as "critical incidents" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 551). This is similar to what Barnett and Merchant discuss as literacy-as-event, where the 1:1 session brings people together and opens up a "multiple potentialities" and can have unexpected outcomes (2018, p. 51). The sessions were conducted in a classroom setting where a corner of the room was accommodated as a separate space for chatting to each student. Thus, I was a participant as well as an observer in the feedback event. Due to the learners' profile and my previous research into behaviour of learners from Confucian heritage educational background, in this piece I take this one step further and try to interpret what I observed in light of culturally determined differences.

Case 1

During 1:1s where students were showing me drafts of their literature reviews, I provided more feedback to students who needed more support to ensure equity and give them a good chance of successfully completing the module. This additional feedback was within pedagogical and ethical boundaries and within the flexibility permitted by my institution.

What I observed was that some students were uneasy and perhaps anxious about me paying extra attention to a classmate of theirs. Stronger students started approaching me with various questions some of which seemingly inconsequential or not urgent in terms of the assessment. A possible reason for that might be seeking positive appreciation from the teacher on the part of students as noticed in studies investigating learners with a similar profile (Wen & Clement, 2003; Cookson, 2017). Another possible reason could be Chinese students' expectation for fair and equal treatment as found in a study by Ai (2017). Both themes also emerged from interviews in small-scale research on East-Asian students' attitudes to being nominated to answer a question in open class settings I did (Nalbantova, 2023). Whilst working on the latter I came upon the East-Asian concept of *kiasu* - the fear of missing out (Hodkinson and Poropat, 2014), which could indeed be a

further factor determining the observed behavior. Examples of that could be students trying to receive additional help and/ or access to resources their classmates might not have. It is related to the general pattern of competitive nature of the exam-ridden Chinese educational context, vying students against each other in pursuit of higher scores. An interviewee in a study providing insights into the affective aspect of feedback explicitly linked volume of feedback to a higher score: "Sometimes we feel that the more consultations you have with the lecturer, the higher the grade you get." (Carless, 2006, p. 227). Thus, in this instance, providing more feedback to some students might have been construed as giving them a competitive edge over the others in their preparation for the assessment and more broadly, achieving a higher score in this module.

Case 2

My desire to help students extended to supporting a student who received a lower grade for their literature review. I provided further guidance and feedback on short snippets of their work, which they were keen and active on improving as this would then be part of the final written work. This happened before or after class or during breaks, whenever the student approached me and wanted me to look at their improvements. The fact that the student was gaining more confidence and requiring more attention made me question the appropriacy of my kindness and empathy and I self-regulated through gradually withdrawing the scaffolding. The student did receive enough support and was able to continue on their own, so I encouraged them to do that as I was feeling conscious of other students' potential feelings of unease and sense of justice in this situation. This also made me reflect upon issues of educator's beliefs and values on the one hand and institutional rules and practices on the other. Recommended institutional guidelines on 1:1s posit equal provision of feedback within the classroom allocated time. Students are also informed via module materials on the VLE that they could receive support from their tutor in class. For me, this entails the time I am present in the classroom, including immediately prior to the start of the class as well as during breaks for quick questions. My behavior was within these boundaries.

Meanwhile, whilst writing this, I attended a professional development session, where colleagues coming from Confucian-heritage educational background (CHEB) explained that Chinese students value and expect the teacher to be largely available for extra help as this creates friendly relationship with the tutor. This clashes with what we practice in the Western educational system and could explain the unease I felt as described in Case 2.

On the other hand, the above is also in contrast with the concept of *kiasu* (the competitive advantage aspect) and my observation that some students feel uncomfortable asking for help in front of everyone lest it be construed as weakness and lack of knowledge. Another common occurrence in my context, which I have discussed with colleagues, is CHEB students' reluctance to come and show any unfinished work as it is considered losing face for not completing the homework to the required standard. To offset this, I always explain the purpose and value behind 1:1s in terms of students' progress for the particular assignment and their overall progress on the programme. I try to convey the idea of 1:1s as being an informal chat with the tutor rather than being judged on what they have produced so far. This has proven to bear good results with learners and increase their confidence to come to feedback sessions and discuss their work.

Conclusion and implications for practice

My empathy and desire to help students through providing equitable feedback proved to be a double-edged sword. While it helped some students, it caused unease and perhaps even anxiety for others (Case 1) as well as uncomfortable situations for the tutor (Case 2). This points to the need for further exploration into this area since literature on the relational aspects of oral feedback is scarce. Surveying students on their attitudes and expectations could provide useful insights into the issue and help identify meaningful ways to resolve tensions.

Intercultural competence training and awareness raising activities should be part of institutional CPD allocation especially for HE institutions working with students from overseas, but also an effort on the part of each tutor having students with such profiles. Literature abounds in studies regarding the differences between Eastern and Western educational contexts (Gálvez-López; 2023, Alt & Raichel, 2021). Chapter 8 in Alt and Rachel's book (2021, pp. 117-133) is particularly insightful on the question of culturally responsive feedback. Apart from familiarization with students' previous learning experiences, Elliot and Raynolds (2012) further recommend transparency and rationalization of any tutorial interventions, which might alleviate any feelings of anxiety and indeed acculturate students into Western educational practices. In practice, this could include setting clear expectations and explaining feedback procedures and process at the beginning of the module, which is also part of the general feedback literacy students from other learning contexts need to acquire. Building good rapport with learners is also essential for them to feel comfortable with sharing their ideas and work in class. Further research is needed into CHEB learners' expectations and attitudes towards tutorial feedback and behavior in order to gain insights to successfully tailor student-tutor interactions and avoid potential issues arising due to cultural differences or a lack of transparency of expectations.

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Embedding Compassionate Reassessment in an International Pathways Foundation Mathematics module: A Case Study from Nottingham Trent International College

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This case study explores the implementation of compassionate reassessment within a Foundation Certificate Mathematics module at Nottingham Trent International College, in response to widespread learning loss exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on self-determination theory and pedagogical frameworks, the intervention combined structural flexibility with human-centred engagement to support student needs. Students were streamed into groups, with a strategic pause in content delivery and focused revision for underperforming students. The approach led to significant improvements in outcomes, pass rates, and student engagement. Outcomes suggest that compassionate reassessment, rooted in empathy, flexibility, and support, can improve academic outcomes whilst maintaining rigour.

Introduction

Widespread gaps in mathematics learning, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, have significantly impacted student performance and engagement (Kuhfeld & Lewis, 2025; Royal Society ACME & Joint Mathematical Council of the UK, 2020). In response, the Science, Engineering and Computing academic team at Nottingham Trent International College (NTIC) implemented a targeted mid-module compassionate reassessment strategy that balanced academic rigour with empathy.

Compassionate assessment, as defined by recent pedagogical literature, is not a lowering of standards but a strategic approach that removes unnecessary barriers to success. It aligns with frameworks such as Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (2015), which emphasises autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key drivers of motivation and engagement. This view is echoed by Killingback et al. (2025), who define compassionate pedagogy as "noticing distress, committing to alleviate it, and promoting wellbeing," and argue that such approaches are essential for inclusive and effective learning environments. Bayraktar et al. (2025) reinforce this by presenting a trust-based feedback framework that promotes student agency and reduces misconduct.

This case study explores how operational flexibility – through dynamic scheduling that allows reassessments to be set when students demonstrate readiness rather than according to a fixed calendar – and streamed academic support can work together. It also examines how these approaches can be paired with a human-centred model focused on trust building, motivation, and personalised academic guidance.

Context and rationale

The 2024/25 September group comprised 31 students, 13 of whom were required to complete reassessments for the Intermediate Mathematics mid-module exam. This group's performance was compared with that of the 2023/24 group, which included 21 students and had 9 mid-module reassessments. In 2023/24, reassessment outcomes were notably poor, with the average score declining by 2%. Traditional support was provided through revision classes alongside the student timetable, and a fixed reassessment schedule. With mixed ability groups, there were limited opportunities for scaffolded / tailored support as the pace was often set with attention necessarily drawn

toward struggling students. This led higher-achieving students to experience stagnation in progress, and while they performed well, expected scores were lower than earlier indicators suggested. Additionally, for students needing more support, the existing structures lacked a strategic pause in new learning for meaningful consolidation of prior knowledge, which negatively affected confidence and increased anxiety.

These outcomes and identified shortcomings highlighted the importance of embracing a more responsive and compassionate approach to reassessment and student support, one that is adaptable to the diverse needs of learners while upholding academic integrity and rigour. The approach would provide targeted support not only for students who are struggling but also offer appropriate stretch and challenge for those performing at higher levels.

Designing the intervention

The intervention was built around two complementary components: structural flexibility and human-centred engagement. Students were regrouped into two streams based on their mid-module examination performance: one focused on stretch and challenge for higher performers, and the other on intensive scaffolded support. For the latter group, new content delivery was paused for three weeks, allowing time for focused revision and consolidation. Exam timetables were adapted to accommodate this revised teaching plan.

Alongside these structural changes, the intervention prioritised relational engagement. The Academic Leader communicated the rationale and structure of the intervention clearly to both students and tutors. Individual and small-group meetings were held to build trust, address concerns, and boost motivation. Learning activities were designed to provide manageable and achievable successes, helping students build confidence. Learning resources were personalised following a review of strengths and weaknesses identified in the mid-module assessment, with focused activities addressing shared needs and flexible regrouping to cover individual learning gaps. These included differentiated problem sets and opportunities to develop mastery of key mathematical concepts, supported by instant feedback through clear marking guidance and, where appropriate, Moodle-based digital tools, before progressing to applied problem-solving. Throughout the revision process, regular praise from the tutor and Academic Leader recognised students' effort and progress, reinforcing a sense of achievement.

Outcomes and impact

The intervention led to marked improvements in student outcomes in 2024/25. Ten of thirteen resit students passed the module (pass mark 40%), with only one of them scoring less than 50% and the others scoring higher than that, where the average score raised by 25%. This was in contrast to the previous academic year which did not show post-reassessment gains in the mid-module exam when using traditional support strategies.

A well supported mid-module reassessment resulted in fewer end of module reassessments, with students demonstrating core mathematical skills for more advanced mathematical concepts in the latter half of the module, alongside greater confidence. At the first Assessment Board, the Intermediate Mathematics module pass rate rose to 90%, exceeding the projected 71% based on mid-module performance. As shown in Figure 1, this represents a 9% improvement compared with 2023/24, where the pass rate was 81%, and an 11% increase in mean module scores.

Students responded positively to the support and consistent tutor involvement throughout the intervention. Evidence of improved engagement and motivation was drawn from end-of-module student survey responses, in which learners identified revision sessions, tutor support, and opportunities to address individual weaknesses as key factors supporting their learning. Students noted that "revision classes were helpful" and highlighted the value of "getting to know about my weaknesses and what I can improve", while others emphasised the importance of the revision week and structured revision materials. This feedback contrasts with comments collected prior to the mid-module assessment, where students expressed concerns about the pace and intensity of the module, describing it as "condensed". These responses suggest that the dynamic scheduling and focused consolidation period enabled more effective pacing and a more responsive approach to content delivery.

A more supportive classroom culture emerged, where students actively encouraged one another, often cheering on their peers in class. This peer-led positivity cultivated a safe and inclusive learning environment, enabling students to take academic risks and support each other's progress. Given the strong sense of achievement and camaraderie that developed during the intervention, the group remained together rather than rejoining the parallel stream, as it was felt that introducing further structural change risked disrupting this positive dynamic. Regular praise from both the tutor and the Academic Leader reinforced student effort and achievement, while learning activities were structured to provide manageable and achievable successes. These incremental wins helped build confidence and sustained motivation during the revision process. These findings align with research by Sarvary and Ruesch (2024), who found that flexible deadlines significantly reduce student stress whilst maintaining academic standards. Their study supports the idea that dynamic scheduling and compassionate pedagogy can enhance performance while preserving rigour.

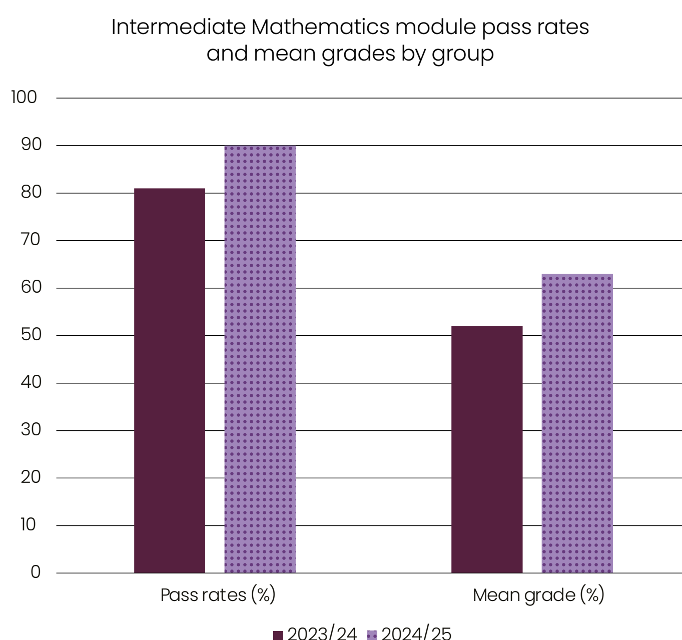

Figure 1. *Comparison of Intermediate Mathematics module pass rates and mean grades between the 2023/24 and 2024/25 groups.*

Reflections and implications

This case study indicates that compassionate reassessment is not a soft alternative to academic rigour. Rather, it offers a strategic, evidence-informed approach that removes unnecessary barriers to success. By embedding flexibility, adaptive teaching, and relational support, the intervention created conditions in which students were better able to recover and refocus.Implementing dynamic scheduling carries significant resource implications. It requires additional time and coordination to support greater agility in the organisation and administration of examinations, underpinned by strong communication. The streamed model also necessitated adjustments to curriculum delivery and pacing, with future assessments timed accordingly. Effective timetabling was essential to ensure sufficient delivery within the programme window, resulting in additional delivery weeks and increased staff availability.

Despite the resource demands, the streamed model challenged and supported both high-achieving and underperforming students. The intervention also highlighted the value of clear communication and trust-building in enhancing student engagement. Compassionate reassessment, when implemented with intention and structure, can transform the learning experience and outcomes for students in international foundation programmes.

An important enabler of this intervention was the level of operational flexibility within the programme, particularly around reassessment scheduling and curriculum pacing. Such flexibility is not routinely available, as institutional regulations often require fixed assessment points and limited scope for adaptive timetabling. While this case benefited from relatively small group sizes, the approach highlights principles that may be scalable to larger groups. For example, early identification of reassessment needs through existing assessment data, clearer readiness criteria for reassessment, and structured consolidation periods embedded within the academic calendar could be applied without extensive individualisation. As discussed, scaling compassionate reassessment may rely less on increased flexibility at the individual level and more on intentional programme-level design and coordination.

Conclusion

Embedding compassionate reassessment within international foundation programmes offers a replicable framework for enhancing student engagement and performance. The intervention at NTIC illustrates how operational flexibility and human-centred support can work in tandem to create a more inclusive and effective learning environment. By designing an approach to reassessment with empathy and responsiveness, educators can empower students to take ownership of their learning and progress with confidence.

While findings are based on a small group, they offer insights into how compassionate reassessment may operate within similar contexts. By intentionally embedding consolidation opportunities and readiness-based reassessment within programme design, institutions can support academic recovery and progression without compromising rigour.

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Quality Engagement through High-Quality Data: Weekly Monitoring to Improve Student Outcomes

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This paper evaluates a revised flagging system for monitoring student engagement and academic progress each week. Data from 183 IFP STEM students suggests these flags might correlate with end-of-year marks and, therefore, work as an early warning system. The two types of flags, engagement and academic progress, while related, work to tailor interventions. The findings suggest specific thresholds for flags and ways to use this data to inform pastoral and academic support in order to increase programme responsiveness and build student success.

Introduction

Engagement and academic progress are inextricably linked, as engagement includes elements of behaviour, cognition, and affect which can lead to academic achievement (Kahu, 2013). The relationship, however, is two-way (Kahu, 2013). Strategies to increase engagement might increase academic achievement, and the reverse. However, teachers are also very aware that engagement and academic performance can sometimes be disconnected, for example, when an engaged, knowledgeable student's performance is hampered by test anxiety or when engagement, for whatever reason, does not lead to the hoped academic attainment. Additional pastoral or academic support may be needed. As a programme, to respond to these diverse needs, we need to be aware of students' engagement and academic progress. Using attendance as a proxy for engagement is too reductive (Naughton et al., 2024), especially in the context of an IFP where cultural norms and visa requirements might inform attendance patterns. Similarly, while summative marks are an indication of students' academic progress, even in a programme with continuous assessment, summatives are often too infrequent. In an effort to collect more comprehensive data and design better interventions, University of Bristol's International Foundation Programme decided to collect weekly student engagement and academic progress data.

Monitoring Engagement and Academic Progress

Teachers complete a weekly flagging procedure for student engagement and academic progress. Any student who is identified as at-risk because of their engagement or academic progress is noted (with a flag or serious flag) and that data is seen by personal tutors, unit directors, and our engagement team. An engagement flag might be for arriving late or using cell phones inappropriately in class, and an academic progress flag might be for low achievement on an informal classroom assessment or homework. Both types of flags might be something that the classroom teacher can address directly with the student. When these issues become longstanding and require support from the engagement team or unit directors, they become 'serious flags'. This might include sustained off-task behaviour or consistent difficulty on formatives. Students could receive up to 8-10 flags per week, 4-5 of each type, depending on the number of units they take. This process was a slight change to a long-standing process of providing weekly student engagement ratings, and teachers received training on the process. Crucially, the additional flag for academic progress helps identify struggling students long before summative assessment data comes in.

It also, theoretically, helps differentiate between students who are struggling with both academics and engagement from those who are, perhaps, trying very hard and still not meeting the academic progress expectations on classwork. It can help identify cases where a student is disengaged from a single class or struggling with learning in general across all units and weeks. Knowing these differences can help tailor interventions.

Flag Analysis

After using the revised flagging system for a year, we aimed to explore any patterns with flags and student performance, evaluate the utility of the new 'academic progress' flag, and understand staff perception of the system. For simplicity, the data is presented from the second 12-week teaching block in our STEM pathway, with 183 students. The STEM pathway represents our largest cohort, and while two units on the pathway (maximum one per student) do not do the weekly flagging, students are flagged in three or four units on the pathway. The large data set represented a key group of students.

Table 1 is a summary of the average number of flags per student in Teaching Block 2, divided into two groups by outcome for STEM. This includes students who have either progressed to their undergraduate degree of choice on their first attempt or performed well enough to qualify for reassessments but did not yet meet progression targets. The group that was not awarded the IFP was too small to share given student confidentiality concerns (n=6). The student data after reassessments, which are offered several months after teaching, was not analysed as various factors might affect those outcomes.

A Welsch t-test was used to compare the groups, given the unequal variance. There was a significantly difference between the groups on each flag type ($p<0.001$). As the table below shows, students who successfully progress without reassessments have on average half as many engagement flags as those who need reassessments. They have almost a third as many academic progress flags. For students who struggled but qualified for reassessments, the number of engagement and academic progress flags are similar (12.72 and 11.78 for flags and 3.42 and 3.20 for serious flags). This may show how engagement drives academic progress, or it may point to the difficulty teachers have with untangling the new constructs.

Looking closer at the students' year mark in the programme, see Figure 1, there appears to be a strong correlation between , the weighted average of the year marks on all units and total flags. Accounting of outliers (|Z| > 3), the correlations were strong ($r=-0.67$). That correlation is slightly lower for the total number of engagement flags ($r=-0.45$) and strongest for the total number of academic progress flags ($r=-0.72$).

At the unit level, there was more variability in whether the assessment mark matched the flags. Some students had serious academic progress flags the week before an assessment and performed well; the reverse was also true. It seemed that the total number of flags across units was more helpful than looking at a particular unit.

Discussion

This analysis shows that the flags could be used as an early warning system. Students may be flagged weeks before they receive low marks on their summative assessments, and even before an official formative assessment is submitted. The data also hints at the possible utility of the academic progress flags; unlike engagement flags which were present with most students, the academic flags were rarer among students who progressed.

Therefore, there might be relevant thresholds for interventions. The data not only suggests addressing each serious flag, but also perhaps five (non-serious) academic progress flags, a number just above the average for students who progress. Identifying clear thresholds is important; while our engagement team knew

	Progressed (n=97)	Qualified for Reassessments (n=80)	p-Value
Engagement Flags	6.47	12.72	<0.001
Engagement Serious Flags	1.33	3.42	<0.001
Academic Progress Flags	3.88	11.78	<0.001
Academic Progress Serious Flags	0.54	3.20	<0.001
Flags	10.35	24.51	<0.001
Serious Flags	1.87	6.62	<0.001

Table 1. *Average number of total flags in Teaching Block 2 in the STEM pathway.*

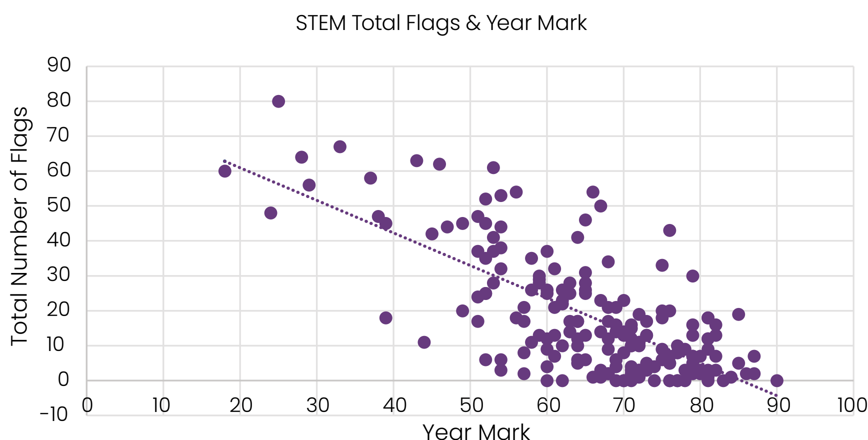

Figure 1. *Students' total number of flags against weighted average year mark.*

the students with 50+ flags overall, it might be worth moving that threshold down to 20 to ensure early intervention. These interventions might take the form of micro-mentoring from our engagement team, short effective meetings that get students back on the right track (Felten & Lambert, 2020). They might also be support sessions in specific subjects. In extreme cases, it might also involve having early conversations about whether or not this is the right learning environment for students.

This analysis also changes how we plan to present this data to personal tutors this year. In the past, we have only presented the flagging data for the current week in our progress reports, thinking it was the most up-to-date; however, the analysis hints at the cumulative, synoptic nature of the flags. Rather than just seeing how a student is doing that week, presenting the total number of flags over the teaching block gives a clearer indication of student performance. Personal tutors can still notice trends over time in their fortnightly meetings. The data can help personal tutors understand the potential seriousness of the students' situation and intervene, redirect, and partner with students.

Further analysis also showed that on some units, there was a strong relationship between flags and assessment results. This, however, wasn't always the case, and the centre has put renewed emphasis on classroom assessment techniques, including offering training and receiving feedback in observations (Angelo & Cross, 1993). These classroom practices of systematic, informal assessments pairs well with the weekly flagging system as they help teachers better understand students' skills and knowledge. They turn a monitoring exercise into something that can be truly formative that helps teachers identify where students are and consider how they can support progress (Wiliams & Thompson, 2017). Additional classroom assessment techniques will work to encourage better interventions and further the predictive power of the flagging system.

In doing so, these flags can help inform our normal operations, like personal tutoring. They give us a much better perspective on the whole student, i.e. whether they have general engagement issues, or is it perhaps subject specific or behaviour specific. It can help to show how a range of complex and personal circumstances are, or aren't, hindering learning. This information, combined with conversations with teachers and other relevant wellbeing staff, can help guide personal tutorials. The focus can then move away from general conversations and be much more targeted and adaptive.

Conclusion

The revised flagging system allows us to work with students using proactive data-informed strategies, creating an early warning system with academic and pastoral interventions. This could raise student attainment and progress levels across all pathways. The next step is to study the effectiveness and student perception of these interventions because it is our intention to build an IFP that thrives by focusing on the individual student and their journey. Student performance data is then used to make them more visible and to create a space where they can belong.

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the vision and technical expertise from Jack Bush and Helen Campbell who created the weekly progress reports which collate this data for personal tutors and the engagement team. I would also like to thank the teaching staff at the centre for their diligent use of the system and the team's thoughtful interventions, without which this work would have been meaningless.

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InForm Exchange

Many Voices, One Vision:
Reflections on Equity and Collaboration in Conference Design

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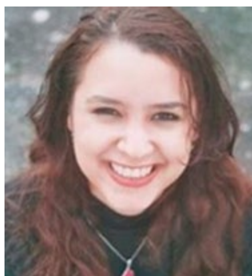

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Written by the two co-chairs and the business support manager of the KCL InForm Conference committee, this reflective piece explores the collaborative process behind organising a recent conference on Enhancing Quality and Equity in International Foundation Year Programmes. Drawing on the experiences of leading a diverse committee, it considers how inclusive practices and cross-departmental collaboration shaped both the event and its wider implications for IFP pedagogy. The aim is to not only inform (forgive the pun!) future potential conference organisers but to also offer insight into inclusive academic practice, and to illustrate the diversity and complexity of the IFP sector.

Many Voices, One Vision: Reflections on Equity and Collaboration in Conference Design

Organising a conference is always a complex task, but when the theme is Enhancing Quality and Equity (InForm 2025 at KCL), the process itself becomes a reflection of the values it seeks to promote. As co-chairs of the committee and business support manager – acting as project manager - we found ourselves not only coordinating logistics but also navigating questions of inclusion, representation, and collaboration.

One of the most striking aspects of our experience was the diversity of voices involved in the planning. Our committee included members from academic, professional services, and business support teams, each bringing distinct perspectives and skills. At times this seemed to cause inefficiencies - revisiting decisions, navigating different communication styles, and balancing workloads - but on reflection we realised that the 'inefficiencies' were in fact a richer kind of dialogue. The multiplicity of voices led to a more inclusive and thoughtful outcome – aligning with findings by Das (2025), who highlights that diverse educational teams foster innovation and inclusivity, despite occasional communication challenges.

This inclusivity extended beyond the core team. Collaborating at every stage of the process with departments such as IT, Estates, Finance, and Digital Services meant that accessibility, user experience, and practical logistics were considered from the outset. For example, we collaborated with various teams to ensure online content complied with KCL accessibility policies. These teams, though not initially seen as stakeholders, became essential contributors to the conference's success. Their involvement highlighted how – as argued by Jones (2025) - equity in education is not just about who is teaching or learning, but also about who is supporting and enabling those processes.

The structure of our committee reflected a balance between distributed input and centralised decision-making. Seventeen volunteer members from across our department contributed their time and expertise throughout the academic year. Formed through an open call, the committee brought together colleagues from a range of academic and support roles, with responsibilities spanning proposal review, communications, programming, and digital support. This structure enabled members to contribute according to their availability and strengths, while ensuring broad representation across functions. Alongside this wider team, a smaller core group was responsible for guiding the process and making final decisions. This arrangement helped maintain momentum and consistency while honouring the collaborative ethos of the event. Additionally, while the wider committee provided ideas and perspectives that challenged assumptions and enriched planning, the core leadership ensured that suggestions were evaluated and integrated in ways that upheld a consistent level of quality.

One of the challenges we faced was ensuring that our speaker line-up reflected the diversity we aimed to promote. We developed an exhaustive (and exhausting!) process

for evaluating proposals, with multiple reviewers assessing each anonymised proposal based on relevance to the IFP context, relevance to the conference themes and sub-themes, clarity, novelty, and likelihood of promoting discussion and interaction. When making our final selections, we aimed to ensure that a balance of institutions, ideas and roles were represented. For example, including professional services colleagues' contributions allowed us to challenge traditional boundaries between academic and support roles, reinforcing the idea that quality and equity in education are collective responsibilities. While the process was time consuming, we found it worthwhile in terms of enhancing quality. In retrospect, we could have also done more to enhance equity. By prioritising equity as a guiding principle and taking a more proactive approach to representation among our speakers and panellists (e.g. in terms of gender and racial identity), we could have more radically used the conference as a platform to challenge norms around visibility and inclusion.

Another key challenge was that of programming; our decisions were shaped by the dual format of the conference—online and in-person. It was important to us to allow meaningful participation for presenters and audiences both online and in person. This was affected by limitations in resources; for example, only one of the rooms could be live-streamed. This meant making difficult choices about which sessions could be streamed, and how to support international delegates. For example, we rearranged the programme so that presenters in different global time zones were presenting at convenient times in their own time zones, as much as was possible. Filippou and Acquah (2025) emphasise that inclusive practices, such as flexible delivery and accessibility measures, are key to achieving equity in higher education. For future organisers, we recommend early consideration of accessibility, time zones, and digital infrastructure to ensure equitable participation.

Throughout the process of organising the conference, we were aware of the importance of recognising different communication styles and assumptions, and of embracing difference rather than striving for uniformity. As a small example, to model inclusivity of difference we included a range of styles in our visual materials rather than having a 'house style.' Overall, our experience underscored the importance of listening to diverse voices, involving wider university teams, embedding equity in committee structures, and actively seeking representation across all aspects of the event, and one we encourage for future conference organisers.

In reflecting on this experience, we see the conference not just as an event, but as a microcosm of the values we hope to embed in our programmes. Equity is not a checklist - it's a culture. Quality is not a standard - it's a shared commitment. And collaboration is not a convenience - it's a necessity.

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Communicating the Value of IFPs and EAP

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At universities across the UK currently, staff are organising to try to protect jobs. In March 2025, 45 staff were at risk of compulsory redundancy at University of Bristol's CALD (Centre for Academic Language and Development). UCU (the University and College Union) members in the Centre voted to take industrial action to avoid the compulsory redundancies.

This reflective account is from the perspective of being an EAP tutor at risk of redundancy and Bristol UCU's branch secretary, engaged in the campaign and negotiations. Pre-emptive collective action in increasing institution-wide understanding of the value of IFPs and EAP to protect both livelihoods and the student academic experience is advocated.

Note: The term EAP here includes English language and communication in academic contexts, from general academic literacy and development, to discipline-specific and genre-informed practices.

Communicating the Value of IFPs and EAP

For universities facing financial pressures, the unstable international student market, Visa changes and the coming international student levy might seem to justify a cost-cutting focus on university-run IFPs. However, IFP leaders and staff can be empowered and prepared to pre-empt and challenge cuts.

Value and Visibility

The value of an in-house IFP seems clear. Students can benefit from direct entry, courses and tuition aligned with departmental expectations, improved undergraduate performance and a sense of belonging to the institution. Universities benefit from well prepared international undergraduate students and staff whose expertise shapes internationalisation initiatives and enhances the international student experience. Despite this, university executive boards might still consider IFPs as peripheral to core academic activity, organisationally distanced and pedagogically, politically and structurally less problematic to cut or outsource than central academic departments, a quick financial win. EAP is not unfamiliar with being positioned at the margins of academia (Ding and Bruce, 2017). This distancing has serious consequences for IFP livelihoods: those at the edges risk being perceived as redundant.

Ian Bruce and Bee Bond's *Contextualizing English for Academic Purposes in Higher Education: Politics, Policies and Practices* (2022) provides some useful pointers on communicating value and becoming more visible from an EAP perspective. It exhorts EAP leaders and practitioners to establish networks and broadcast the value of what they do so that 'EAP engagement can take place at the micro-level (the individual practitioner), the meso-level (the centre and the university) and the macro-level (policies of governments and international agencies)' (Bruce & Bond, 2022, p. 204). Bond proposes 'guerilla gardening', with EAP practitioners collectively propagating and tending to networks throughout the university, to demonstrate the 'symbiosis' of language and disciplinary knowledge in the curriculum (Bruce & Bond, 2022, p. 125). Bruce and Bond (2022, p. 211) also insist that EAP organisations establish 'a collective voice that articulates values and standards relating to employment as part of EAP professional practice.'

IFP leaders and staff likewise will be aware of the need to increase networking and activities to ensure an influential voice in all the 'rooms' of the institution, where connections, perceptions, and decisions take root. Looking at the concept here of a 'collective voice' through an industrial relations lens, many of the approaches advocated in Bruce and Bond (2022) had to be taken by CALD UCU members and their representatives during 2025 in the context of avoiding compulsory redundancies.

Collective Action

In March 2025, 45 staff in CALD were put at risk of compulsory redundancy. The majority of these, 30, were EAP tutors, many of whom had only relatively recently achieved the move from precarious to permanent contracts. At that time, I was both an EAP tutor at risk and Bristol UCU branch secretary, engaged in campaigning and negotiating to protect jobs. A great deal of this involved communicating the value of the Centre, its IFP and its staff.

During consultation, staff and Bristol UCU challenged the rationale for redundancies. The cuts were countered as short-sighted, too deep, too fast, and based largely on projected IFP student numbers for 2025-26. It was argued that both financially and operationally, the redundancies were unnecessary. There was evidence to support an increasing need for the in-sessional support provided by at-risk staff, as well as of a negative impact on workloads of the proposed cuts. Member-led campaigning included a national petition. Local MPs wrote to and met with the VC. Staff submitted pages of alternative proposals. Yet compulsory redundancies remained on the table. The university's position was that for IFP sustainability, staffing levels needed to be adjusted in response to declining IFP student numbers.

In June 2025, UCU members in the Centre voted decisively for strike action to remove the threat of compulsory redundancies. After four days of action, the members voted to withdraw all strike action when the mitigation of a voluntary redundancy package was proposed by the university. Compulsory redundancies and a selection process were avoided as several staff took voluntary redundancy. A voluntary redundancy package was clearly an improved outcome and resolved the dispute, but for the staff who took it, myself included, it was still an incredibly difficult decision to make. Now in 2025-26, the actual IFP student numbers far exceed those predicted by the university.

This thumbnail summary doesn't convey the impact on everyone involved, management and HR colleagues included. No one wants a dispute, especially student-centred staff who care deeply for their students' well-being and academic experience. Pre-emptive action is needed to try to avoid these impacts on students and staff.

Pre-emptive Action

My concluding reflection is that once the announcement of redundancy proposals has been made, it's very hard to convince university management that staff are too valuable to lose. There is a climate of financial peril driving cuts across the sector, but also one of financialisation, marketisation and managerialism.

Communicating the value of IFPs and EAP then, can be done pre-emptively and in a language appreciated by executive boards. Data evidencing financial value, showing IFPs not to be cost centres, but direct and indirect income-generators, short and long-term, can be emphasised. The risks, complexity and ongoing financial costs involved in outsourcing can be contrasted with the value of insourcing. Naz (2024) provides some insights here. A university-run IFP can be extolled as a risk buffer, an integrated, quality-assured route into undergraduate study that improves student academic experience and progression while protecting an institution's principles, outcomes and staff.

So, dig in and broadcast this value at the micro, meso and macro levels. Keep collaborating and networking with academic and management colleagues to bring understanding of the value of IFPs and EAP in from the edges to the heart of the institution. If you haven't yet joined a union, now might be a good time to find out more. Whatever form of activity you engage in to communicate the value of IFPs, where possible, make it pre-emptive, organised, before institutional thoughts of cuts become established, and certainly before change management appears on the guest list for the next departmental meeting.

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From Policy to Practice: Designing Accessible GenAI Guidance for All Learners

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As universities continue to embed generative AI (GenAI) into teaching and assessment, national surveys report that most students find institutional policies clear. Yet this reported clarity sits alongside anxiety and non-use. Drawing on sector data and practice in transitional programmes, this Exchange piece examines how experiences of institutional GenAI guidance may not be evenly distributed across all of our student groups. It considers what the headline measures of "clarity" may overlook, and suggests that inconsistent communication of GenAI policy can unintentionally widen equity gaps.

Context

As generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) becomes embedded in teaching and assessment, students are being asked to navigate new expectations about what is permitted and what is not. Institutional policies are usually articulated in broad terms, but the practical guidance students rely on is often communicated at individual course or assessment level. This flexibility allows for disciplinary nuance, yet it can also result in subtle variations in language, tone and emphasis across a programme of study.

Why consistency matters

National survey data present a complex picture. The Higher Education Policy Institute's Student Generative AI Survey 2025 reports that around 80 per cent of UK undergraduates agree that their institution's GenAI policy is clear (Freeman, 2025). However, more than half of the undergraduates surveyed report feeling anxious about being accused of cheating when using GenAI, and a minority report never using it for coursework or assessed work (Table 1). "Clarity", in other words does not necessarily translate into confidence in using GenAI as a legitimate learning support tool.

Looking more closely at the same dataset reveals emerging digital divides. Women are significantly more likely than men to report fear of being accused of cheating (59 per cent compared with 45 per cent), and students from lower socio-economic groups are more likely to report non-use of GenAI tools (Freeman, 2025). Reported clarity, therefore, coexists with uneven patterns of engagement.

Targeted research focusing on disabled and neurodivergent students provides some further context. In a small-scale survey conducted at Nottingham Trent University (n = 54), a smaller proportion of respondents reported that institutional GenAI policy was clear (36%), while levels of anxiety about plagiarism were similar (50%) to those reported nationally (Fletcher et al., 2024). Rates of non-use (31%) were also higher in this sample. Although these findings are not directly comparable to national survey data, they reinforce the possibility that experiences of clarity and confidence may differ across student groups.

Measure	HEPI UK Undergraduates (2025) n = 1041
Agree that their institutions' GenAI policy is clear	80%
Report fear or anxiety around using GenAI due to being accused of cheating/plagiarism	53%
Never used GenAI to prepare assessed work	12%
Never used GenAI during their studies	8%

Table 1. *Selected findings from the HEPI Student Generative AI Survey 2025 (n = 1,041). Source: Freeman (2025).*

Such differences matter acutely in transitional contexts. Students entering pre-undergraduate programmes are often adapting to unfamiliar academic conventions while simultaneously navigating linguistic, socio-economic, and neurodivergent identities. In these settings, even minor variations in how GenAI expectations are framed can amplify uncertainty about what is permitted. How policy is communicated may therefore shape who feels confident enough to engage with these tools.

This prompted a closer examination of the 20 per cent of respondents in the HEPI 2025 survey who did not report institutional GenAI policy as clear. At the time of writing, no UK national survey data were identified that disaggregate clarity by English proficiency, pre-undergraduate status, or intersections of language and disability. This evidential gap limits understanding of how policy clarity is experienced by learners at the margins of the system.

Additional risks may arise for students working in an additional language. Research suggests that GenAI detection tools can be biased against non-native English writers (Liang et al., 2023; Perkins et al., 2024). At the same time, complex or inconsistently worded guidance may be harder to interpret. Together, these factors point to a broader concern: that unclear or inconsistent communication may unintentionally widen existing inequities.

The real cost of mixed messages is therefore not simply confusion, but the potential amplification of confidence gaps. Without clear and accessible guidance, the students who might benefit most from GenAI as a learning support may feel least secure in using it.

Designing against mixed messages: sharing practice

Mixed messages are not inevitable. Small design decisions can make a meaningful difference to how students interpret and engage with GenAI guidance. Drawing on principles from Universal Design for Learning (UDL), expectations can be communicated in ways that reduce ambiguity and support confidence, without lowering academic standards.

Recent research has also highlighted the importance of moving beyond predominantly punitive framings of academic integrity, and instead providing structured opportunities for students to develop ethical GenAI practices (Perkins et al., 2024). Within foundation and transitional programmes, this has meant thinking carefully about how policy is translated into everyday assessment guidance.

Making expectations explicit at assessment level

Rather than relying solely on institutional policy documents, GenAI expectations can be made explicit at the point of assessment. Translating policy into a clear, student-facing summary helps reduce the need for inference. Figure 1 provides an example of how permitted and non-permitted uses can be presented in a single, accessible format, supporting more confident decision-making.

The figure illustrates how institutional GenAI policy can be translated into clear, student-facing expectations for a specific assessment.

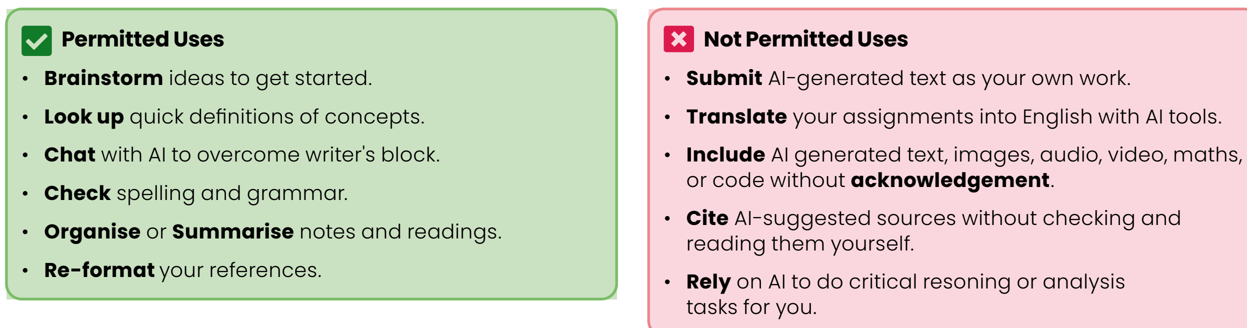

Figure 1: *Example of assessment-level guidance distinguishing permitted and non-permitted uses of generative AI.*

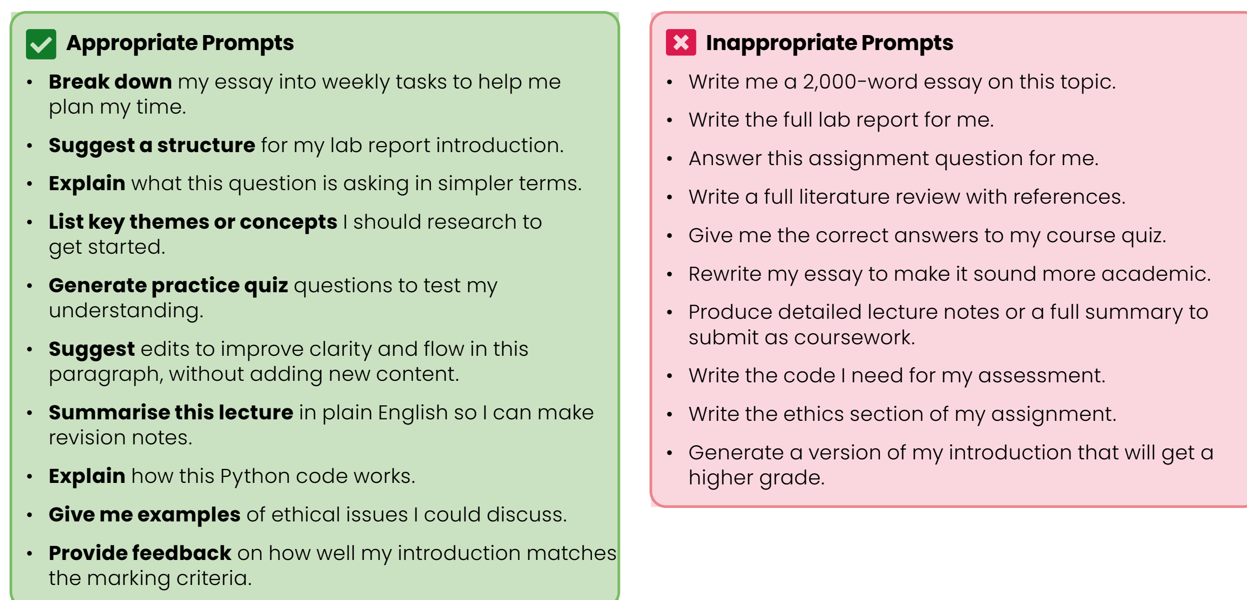

Figure 2. *Example of guidance distinguishing appropriate and inappropriate GenAI prompts.*
The figure shows how concrete prompt-based examples can be used to clarify acceptable use and reduce uncertainty for students.

Using concrete examples rather than abstract rules

High-level statements such as "AI must not be used to generate assessed work" can be open to interpretation. Providing concrete examples of appropriate and inappropriate prompts makes expectations easier to understand in practice. Figure 2 illustrates how prompt-based examples have been used to clarify acceptable use while reinforcing assessment integrity.

Aligning messages across courses

Where multiple courses contribute to a programme, agreeing shared language and baseline expectations can help reduce unnecessary variation. Even when disciplinary differences remain, greater consistency limits the need for students to reinterpret policy repeatedly across contexts.

These approaches are relatively simple to implement, but they require intentional coordination. Importantly, they are designed to benefit all students while offering particular support to those most affected by ambiguity.

Final thoughts

This Exchange piece has drawn on practice alongside national and targeted survey findings. While further research is needed to understand how GenAI policy is experienced across different transitional and intersectional cohorts, existing evidence suggests that clarity and confidence are not evenly distributed. Designing communication with this unevenness in mind is therefore a pragmatic step towards greater equity. When guidance is developed with those at the margins in view, the benefits extend across the whole learning community.

Acknowledgment

A version of this article, **No More Mixed Messages: AI Policy Through a Neurodiverse Lens**, first appeared as a Teaching Matters blog authored by the same author (University of Edinburgh, October 2025).

Declaration of GenAI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process: During the preparation of this article, the author used GPT-5 to support refinement and linguistic clarity. Infographics used to illustrate this article were created with support from Gamma AI. The author reviewed and edited the content throughout and takes full responsibility for the final manuscript.

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From WEIRD to Just: Embedding Social Justice in Psychology Education

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This paper examines psychology's enduring reliance on WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic) samples and the consequences of generalising this framework to all humanity. Despite longstanding calls for reform, psychology continues to display limited diversification in participant pools, entrenching inequities within theory and practice. The paper considers teaching as a site for transformation across disciplines, drawing on culturally responsive pedagogy to centre minority perspectives, student agency, and critical reflection. For international foundation students, such approaches provide opportunities to see their perspectives represented and valued. Inclusive practices, such as "windows and mirrors," empower learners to contribute to a more equitable discipline.

From WEIRD to Just: Embedding Social Justice in Psychology Education

The development of Psychology was a deliberate attempt to craft a new science in the face of a research gap around the human mind and behaviour (Kalat, 2022). Although the field of psychology emerged in Europe, formalised teaching of psychology began in North America with the first psychology programme taught at Harvard University by William James in 1875 (Schachter et al., 2020). James also established the first American psychology lab at Harvard, although Wilhelm Wundt, a German scientist, is regarded as founding the first formal psychological research laboratory at University of Leipzig in Germany (Schachter et al., 2020). The USA became a hub for psychological research and dominated the literature with studies using samples that can be described as "WEIRD"; Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic (Henrich et al., 2010). From psychology's inception, geographical and cultural roots shaped the populations it studied, but this sampling bias did not end in the 1800s. It remains a pervasive issue with findings in behavioural science still. They are often generalised, yet derived from narrowly defined samples (Atkinson et al., 2022).

In 2008, Arnett highlighted that only 5% of the global population were represented in articles published in six of North America's leading psychology journals. The paper called for urgent reform, emphasising that a major concern was the failure of these studies to acknowledge the limited scope of their samples. Instead, they frequently presented findings as though they applied universally, without addressing the lack of generalisability. This echoed long-standing concerns about reliance on WEIRD samples. Although U.S.-based authorship and sampling have declined, much emerging research still originates from other Western contexts, reflecting only modest diversification (Thalmayer & Toscanelli, 2021). According to Ghai et al. (2024), psychology has made little substantive progress in broadening participant pools yet continues to present its findings as though they hold universal validity.

At first glance, this is an issue distinct to psychology, but I would argue the teachings in this 'call for reform' translate across a range of international foundation programme contexts. Issues of sampling are often discussed within the domain of research methods, a topic many educators routinely teach. However, research methods are sometimes presented as a technical, step-by-step process, leaving little space to address questions of equity or social justice (Etengoff, 2023). Reframing this content creates an opportunity for students to engage critically with representation in research and to develop as social justice change agents (SJCA) (Min, 2022). This falls under a pedagogy called culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and creates SJCAs by centring minority perspectives in education (Min, 2022). Through critical engagement with the current literature, students begin to envision and develop future scholarship that reflects greater diversity and equity. As a Psychology lecturer on Heriot-Watt's foundation programme, I teach a mix of UK and international students; some of whom have learning differences, disabilities and neurodiversity. I felt it critical to ensure, as the social justice approach infers, the course served each individual despite their background (Gallor, 2017). Through research and reflective practice, I have

developed an approach to embedding this overdue change in my teaching. This involves drawing attention to the issue and fostering inclusive practice in the classroom.

Etengoff (2023) identifies seven teaching practices designed to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. Two of these practices are particularly relevant to my own teaching: visibility and representation, and the promotion of students' agency. The first invites educators to ask, "Who is not here today and how does that affect, shape, comfort, or define those of us in the room?" (Fine, 2002, p. 19, as cited in Etengoff, 2023). This question foregrounds the significance of demographic representation in the classroom, encouraging students to reflect on how the presence or absence of particular voices can influence knowledge production. The second practice, promoting students' agency, involves supporting learners in deconstructing and reconstructing the methods used by researchers. I incorporate this by drawing attention to the demographic composition of the classroom and encouraging students to consider how this shapes our discussions. This positions students as active participants with personal stakes in these debates. I assign research studies for students to evaluate independently once they have established a foundation in research methods. Students then take responsibility for "running" the tutorial, critically analysing studies not only for methodological issues, but for bias and inequity. This approach empowers learners to critically interrogate methodological practices, developing their capacity to contribute diverse and equitable perspectives.

The British Psychological Society (2023) advocates the use of "windows and mirrors" within curricula. This metaphor highlights the importance of exposing students to perspectives that extend beyond their own lived experiences (windows), while also ensuring the curriculum reflects their own demographic identity (mirrors). In practice, this requires the continual inclusion of diverse and contemporary literature that challenges the dominance of Western perspectives. By embedding such sources into teaching, students expand their worldview. Building on Etengoff's (2023) recommendations, I encourage students to evaluate literature by asking, "Did this piece of research feel like a window or a mirror?" This question invites students to critically interrogate whose voices are amplified within psychology and whose remain absent, fostering awareness of diversity and representation in knowledge production.

For psychology to remain relevant and equitable, it must evolve from a discipline centred on WEIRD populations to one that embraces global, diverse, and inclusive perspectives. This transformation is not only necessary for research, but also for teaching, where classrooms serve as spaces of activism. Embedding representation, student agency, and critical reflection at foundation level ensures that learners are prepared to challenge inequities and to contribute to a more just discipline. Foundation years provide students with the building blocks for a successful academic journey, and instilling values of social justice and critical thought as rudimentary skills is not as challenging as we may initially believe. Crucially, progress is built through small but deliberate steps: diversifying readings and examples, consistently asking "Who is missing?", and using tools such as the "windows and mirrors" framework to guide student reflection. These practices cultivate awareness of representation while equipping the next generation of psychologists to move the field beyond WEIRDness and toward justice.

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This is a *call for papers* for Issue 26 of InForm

The submission of papers is now invited for Issue 26 of InForm from members of the academic community associated with International Foundation Programmes. Issue 26 will be published in Spring 2026.

We are interested in articles related to the variety of academic disciplines commonly found across international foundation programmes and remind contributors that while InForm welcomes articles on IFP English language teaching, it is not predominantly an English language teaching journal.

As well as article submissions, we invite letters in response to articles in the current issue (max 200 words).

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