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# **Challenging assessment habits**

**Ways to make a difference to awarding gaps**

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Enhancing teaching, learning and careers education in partnership with staff and students

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## Introduction

Is assessment a site of potential discriminatory practice?

We argue that without reviewing assessment design, content and format through the lens of social justice awarding gaps may remain.

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## Context

- ❑ UAL's story
- ❑ What is specific about art and design pedagogy and assessment?
- ❑ What has our journey been regarding differentials?

# UAL's story and pedagogy

- 20k students, over 4.5k staff, more than 100 UG course at 6 colleges and 12 sites
  - Creative methodologies and pedagogies
  - Assessment is portfolio and artefact based
  - 'The 'wicked problems' of the often ambiguous and open-ended nature of learning tasks in art and design'
- (Austerlitz *et al*, 2008)



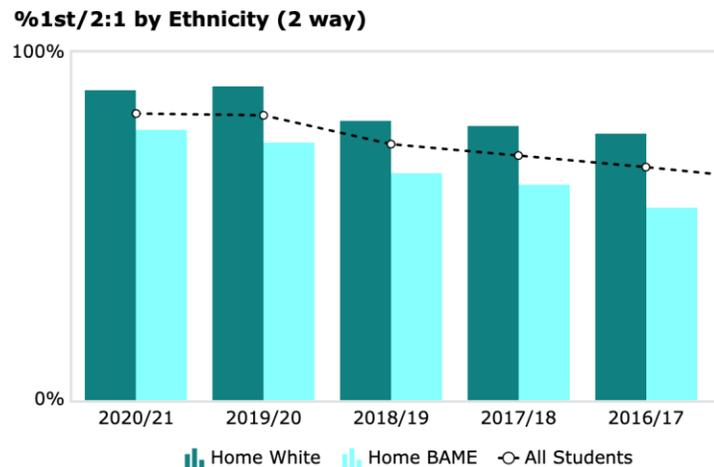
Photo by Cath Caldwell, Stage 1 typography

# Addressing awarding differentials

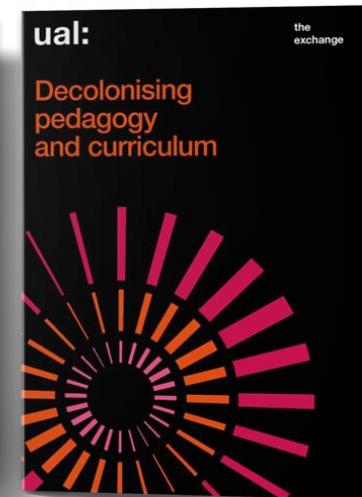
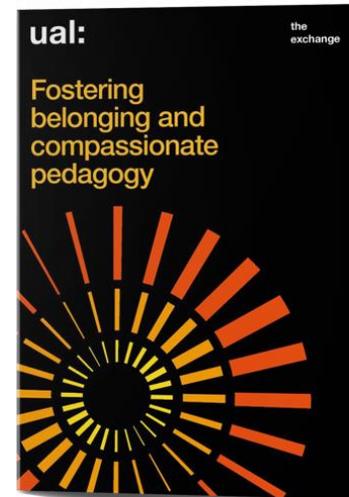
→ Awarding gaps between Home White and Home B.A.M.E students and Home and International students

→ Academic Enhancement team's work

→ Reduction in awarding gap at UAL



**Reduction of 10 percentile points (over last 5 years in Home White/Home B.A.M.E.)**



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## What has our assessment journey been?

- How we started
- Drawing from sector practice and research
- Our approach

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“If assessment shapes how and what students learn, as the literature suggests, and if we are committed to social justice within and through higher education, then surely assessment is key to the achievement of that social justice.”

Jan McArthur, 2021



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**Can we design  
assessment for  
equity?**



Picture by Alys Tomlinson, UAL

# Formalising / conceptualising formative feedback and support for students who need it most



Photo by Ana Blumenkron Zertuche

# The crit



<https://www.arts.ac.uk/subjects/curation-and-culture/short-courses/art-history-and-criticism/art-criticism-short-course-csm>

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## Formalising / conceptualising formative feedback and support for students who need it most

- Who is able to take advantage from the informal feedback structures in the studio?
- How does our assessment framework unwittingly create disadvantage?
- In other words, who are we designing our assessment for?



Photo by Cath Caldwell WIP show

## How can compassionate assessment help?

→ Pass/fail

→ Policies

→ Feedback

The screenshot shows a webpage with the following elements:

- Title:** Belonging through assessment: Pipelines of compassion
- Subtitle:** QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project 2021
- Search:** A search bar with a magnifying glass icon and the text "Search".
- Image:** A large image featuring a black background with intricate white circuit-like patterns. Two yellow vertical bars are positioned on the left and right sides of the image.
- Logos:** On the left side of the page, there are logos for "ual:", "THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART", "LEEDS ARTS UNIVERSITY", and "QAA".
- Navigation:** A dark navigation bar at the bottom contains the following links: Home, Research channel, Events, Team, In the Media, and About.

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## How do we decolonise assessment?

- Exploration of the power relationships at play in assessment
- How can our assessment approaches support pluralities of knowledge?
- How can all students be seen and recognized through assessment?



Eloise Sherridan 2016



Dr Gurnam Singh, Coventry University



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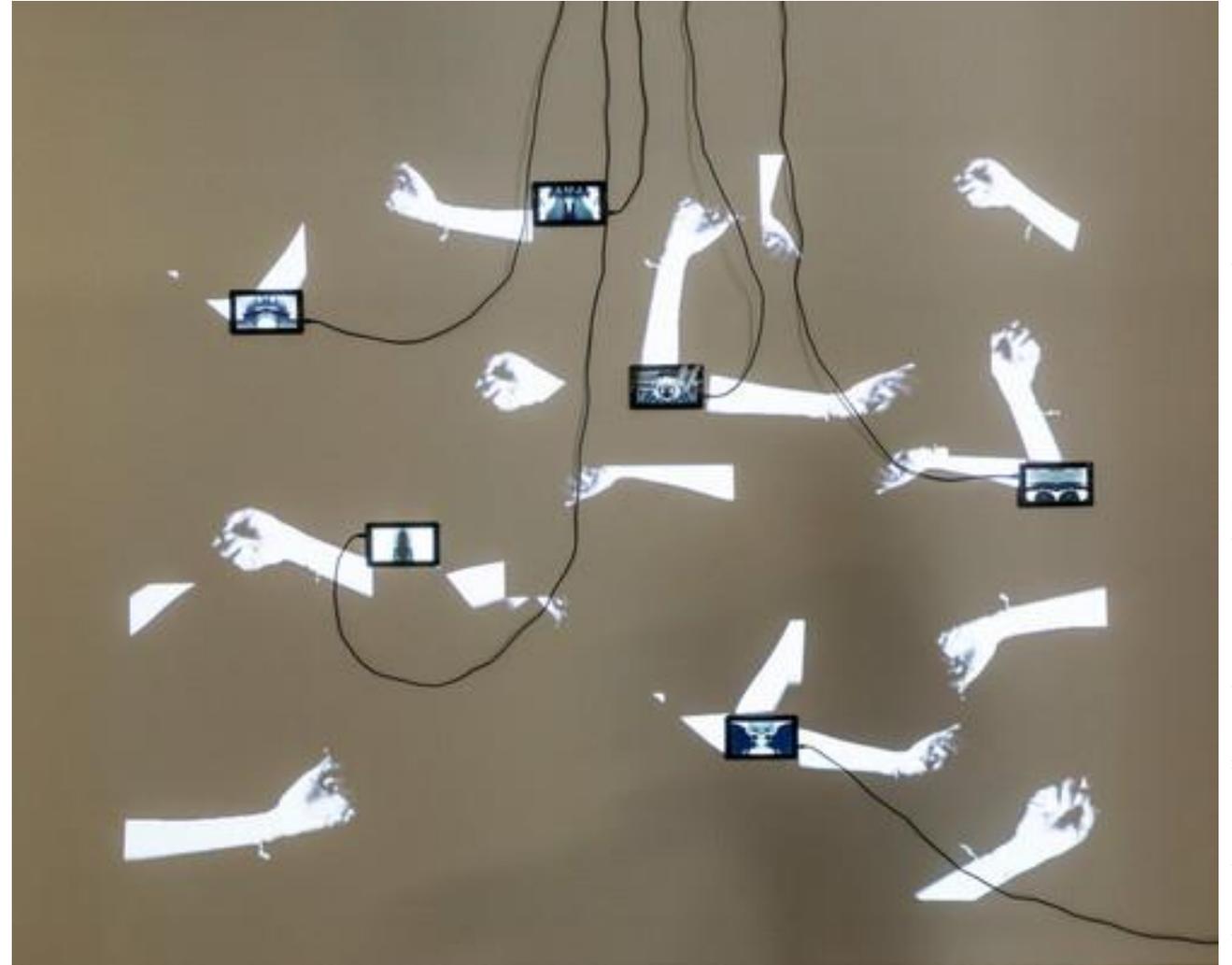
## Examples of practice

- ❑ Where have adjustments to assessment made an impact?
- ❑ How do we know?
- ❑ 3 examples



# Example 1

- Improving feedback
- Emphasis away from summative to formative for learning
- Scaffolding assessment



Multimedia Installation by Lucrezia de Fazio, private view, Show 1

# Asking student's to talk about assessment feedback

Me when I submit my work pending for the feedback



Me beforehand

20h

Me when I'm about to open the assessment feedback link on my phone and it says unavailable



getting ready to read feedback



Me when I get my feedback and read it because it's not what I expected



Me treating myself cos I didn't get what I wanted for my feedback #retailtherapy



me when I tried really hard but most of my feedback is negative



I did nothing well

Me questioning if I should drop out after one negative feedback assessment



Me overthinking and wondering what I could've done better after getting my feedback cos I tried my hardest



Me determined to try harder and not give up after one of my first major units



Me ignoring the positive feedback and reading the negative part in my assessment feedback



me after looking at my grades



I'm too scared to look back at my feedback because too much was wrong lol



reading my assesemnt feedback



when i get good or back feedback - wine is always the answer



Padlet link: <https://arts.london.padlet.org/Ihenry144/EmbPrintEmotions/>



# Course assessment review and planning

## Example 2

→ Mapping student assessment journey across whole course

B = Briefing, A = Assessment, F = Feedback

Week Commencing	BLOCK 1 (19/10/20 – 19/02/21)									BLOCK 2 (22/02/21 – 18/06/21)																					
	19 Oct	26 Oct	2 Nov	9 Nov	16 Nov	23 Nov	30 Nov	7 Dec	14 Dec	11 Jan	18 Jan	25 Jan	1 Feb	8 Feb	15 Feb	22 Feb	1 Mar	8 Mar	15 Mar	22 Mar	12 Apr	19 Apr	26 Apr	3 May	10 May	17 May	24 May	31 May	7 Jun	14 Jun	
Introduction to Footwear (20 credits)	B			*	A				F																						
Product Design and Technologies (40 Credits)			B	*				*	*	*	A	*																			
Product Creativity (20 credits)													B				A1	*						*		*	A2		F		
Better Lives (20 credits)														B										A				F			
Fashion Cultures and Histories (20 credits)														B										A			F				
Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	

This is my preferred - and would add Formative to Unit 7 in week 4. (CP)

This is propto

**Dialogue Assessment + Written Feedback**

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b9a685226919efe/1537116103089/Tracey-Waller.pdf>

- Written Feedback
- Review / Crit
- Review / Crit + Written Feedback
- Parity review workshop
- Unit briefing
- Tutorials Group
- Tutorials Individual
- Peer to peer tutorials

Peer marking ?

UAL assessment criteria briefing

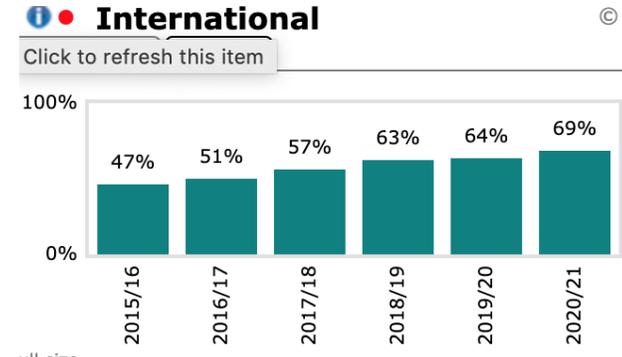


## Example 2: impact

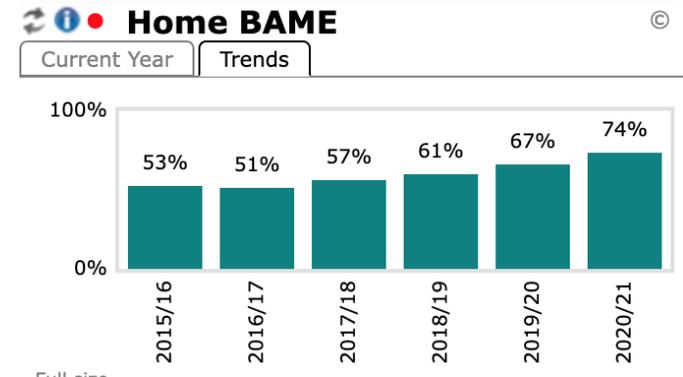
→ *The work that we've done together so far on assessment and feedback have been really good. They've all made really positive contributions to the way that we're doing stuff, and hopefully, ultimately, result in good scores in NSS and so on.*

*There's still loads of things we can do, I think there's still improvements.'*

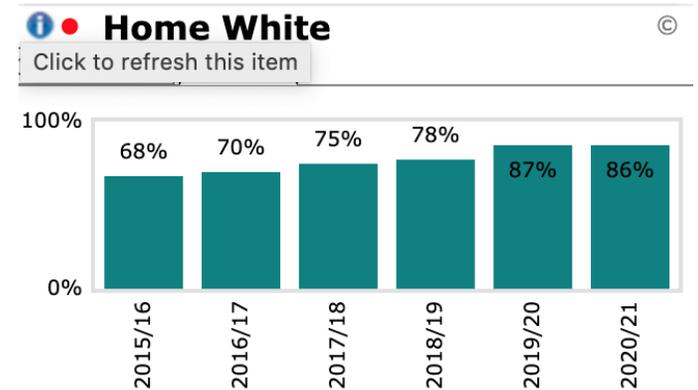
*Course Leader, UAL (October 2021)*



**+22%**



**+21%**

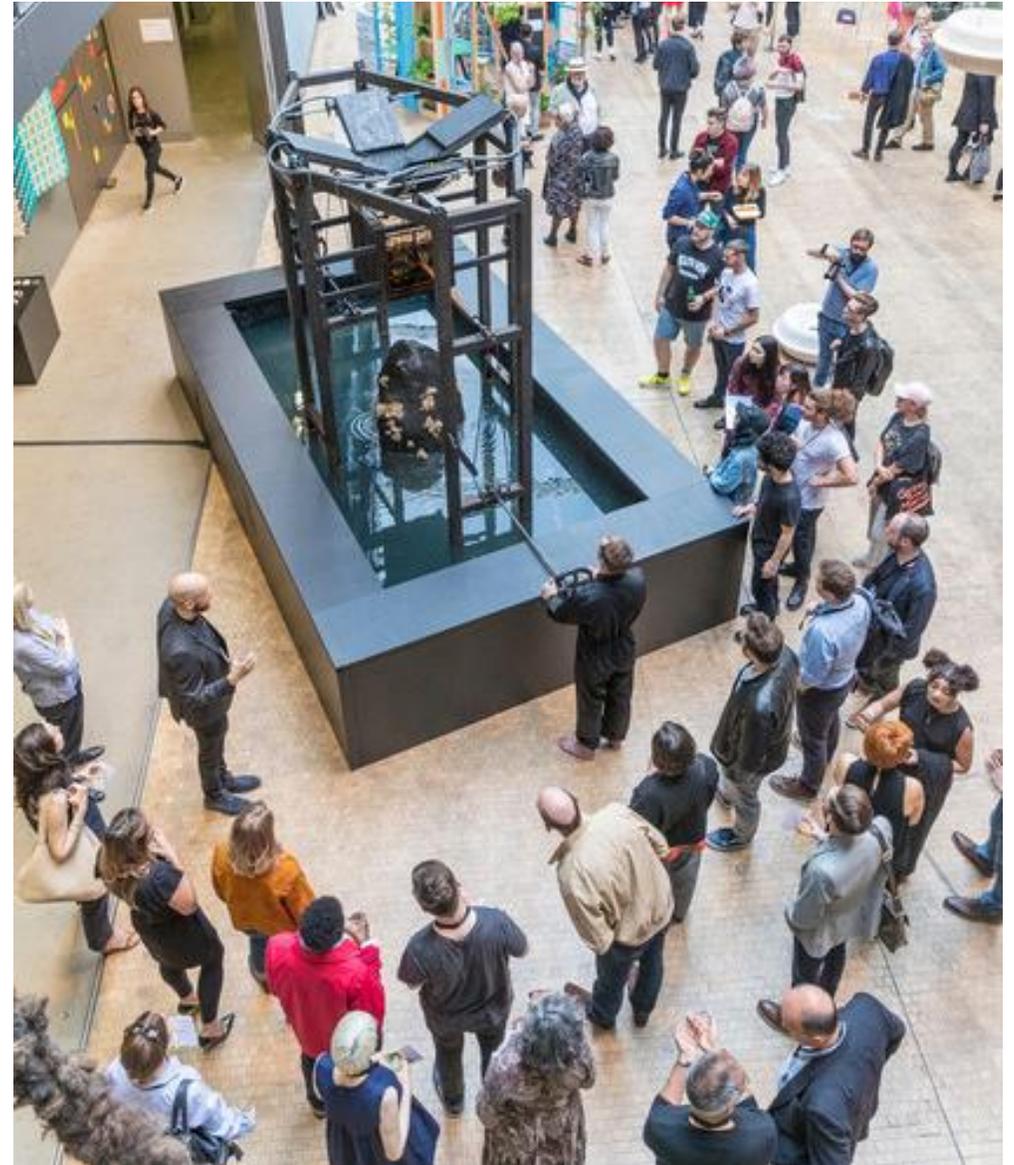


**+14%**

Summative  
assessment  
practice

## Example 3

- Introducing decolonised assessment principles
- Separating high stakes performativity at degree shows from summative assessment in UG Fine Art.



Mixed media installation by Tom Lellouche and Leo Nataf, private view, Show 1

# Rethinking summative assessment

- Impact on underrepresented groups has been sustained.
- Awarding gaps have shifted in certain areas, such as this example.

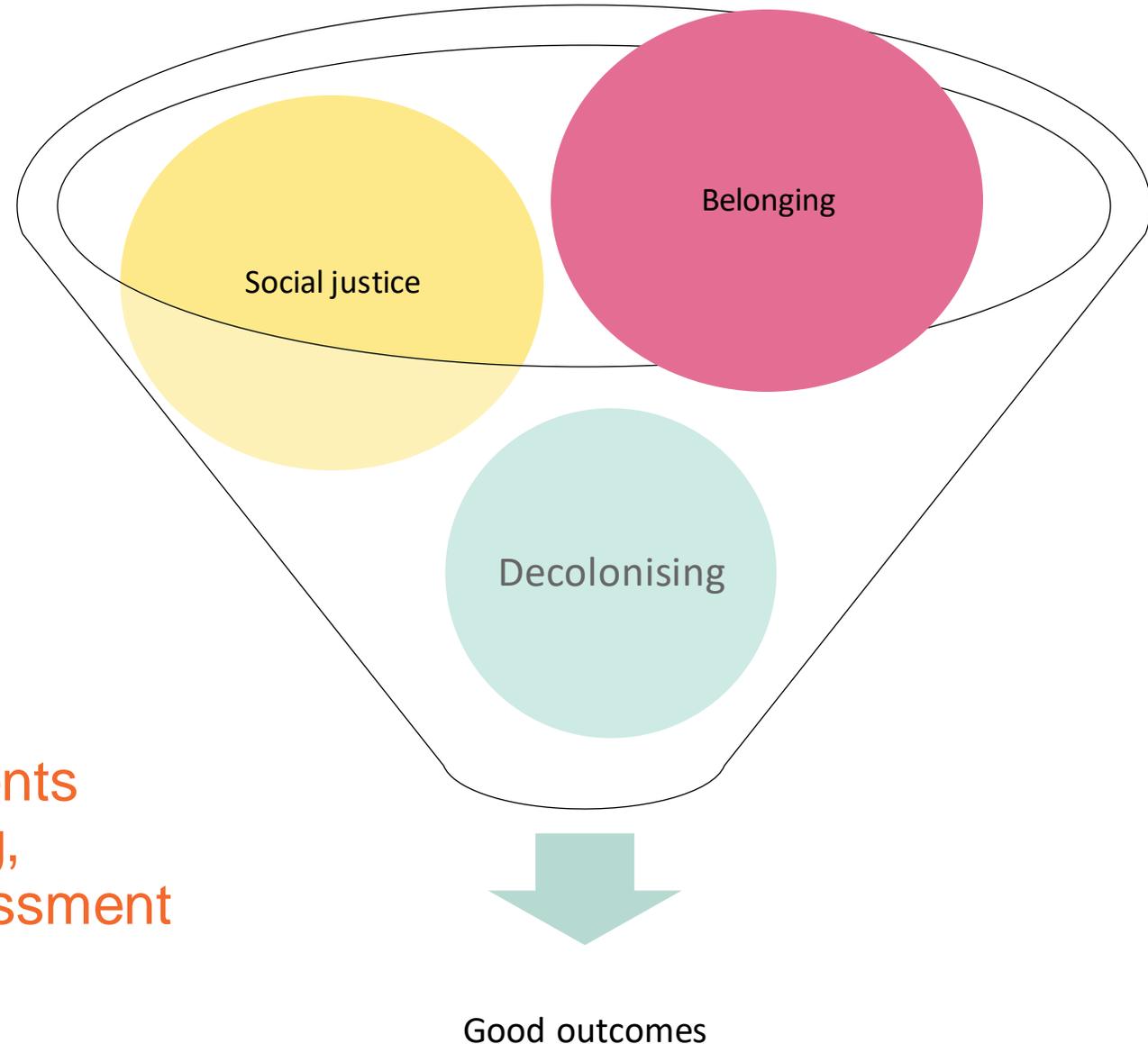


Mobility vehicle by Grace Hinton, private view, Show 1

# How does assessment affect unit outcomes?

→ To have any traction, these values must be built into assessment processes and given recognition in grading or they will slip through

The funnel represents practice of learning, teaching and assessment



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## Summary/provocation

- ❑ Work on decolonising assessment and needs to be undertaken to reduce Awarding gaps.
- ❑ Going through the motions of curriculum interventions and reapproval is not enough without an overhaul of assessment habits.
- ❑ If universities want to take on more students, then they must make an ethical commitment to assess them equitably, rather than willingly enter cohorts into under-resourced assessment processes.



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## References and links

With thanks to all  
staff and students  
who contributed and  
gave permission to  
share their  
work and ideas

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