



# Imagining Compassionate Assessment

Neil Currant (University of Bedfordshire)

Liz Bunting (University of the Arts London)

Vikki Hill (Queen Margaret University)



# About us



**Dr Neil Carrant**

Senior Lecturer, University of  
Bedfordshire

[Neil.Carrant1@beds.ac.uk](mailto:Neil.Carrant1@beds.ac.uk)



**Vikki Hill**

Senior Lecturer in Learning  
Enhancement and Academic  
Development, QMU

[vhill@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:vhill@qmu.ac.uk)



**Liz Bunting**

Educational Developer:  
Academic Enhancement, UAL

[l.bunting@fashion.arts.ac.uk](mailto:l.bunting@fashion.arts.ac.uk)

# Compassionate Assessment Network



The screenshot shows the QAA website interface. At the top left is the QAA logo. To its right is a search bar and a language dropdown menu set to 'English'. Below this is a navigation menu with links: 'About us', 'Membership', 'Quality Code', 'Reviewing HE', 'Products & services', 'International', 'Access to HE', 'News & events', and 'Member login'. A breadcrumb trail reads: 'Home > Membership > Collaborative Enhancement Projects > Assessment > Compassionate assessment in higher education'. The main content area features a large purple and green banner with the title 'Compassionate assessment in higher education'. Below the banner, there is a text block on the left and a photograph of a student writing on a piece of paper on the right. The text discusses the challenges of implementing compassionate assessment methods and the role of the new network in supporting this development.

Compassionate assessment methods in higher education, including peer-led grading and learner-informed assessment policy, can be transformative in supporting student well-being, engagement and learning. However, implementing these changes can be challenging without a collaborative platform for sharing knowledge and good practice.

This project will establish a Compassionate Assessment Network to facilitate sharing research, resources and experiences that promote a culture of compassion and social justice in assessment.

How can assessment be compassionate, as well as meet quality requirements? Considering policy through to practice, the new Network will provide long term support for the development of assessment that is empathetic, while also addressing challenges such as awarding differentials, the use of artificial intelligence and the implications on academic integrity – all from the perspective of compassion.



<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/membership/collaborative-enhancement-projects/assessment/compassionate-assessment-in-higher-education>

Mailing list

Website (next academic year)

# Responding to times of crisis

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**NEWS**

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## Cost of living: 'I worry about money more than my uni assignments'

© 23 April



Zineb and Liara say their money worries are distracting them from their learning.

Guardian sm with £5 per month

The Guardian Newspaper of the year

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Universities Students

This article is more than 8 months old

### Pandemic still affecting UK students' mental health, says helpline

Student-run Nightline says growing numbers are seeking help for anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts



Nightline says 17% of callers since September report stress and anxiety, up from 10.9% in the summer. Photograph: Oli Scarff/JAP/Getty Images

Advertisement

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## US colleges adopt pass-fail rules, stirring wider reform

Pandemic-driven grading shifts illuminate long-accepted inequities

April 6, 2020

[Paul Basken](#)

Twitter: [@pbasken](#)

More than 150 US colleges and universities have adopted a pass-fail grading system for the spring semester, a spontaneous reaction to the coronavirus pandemic that could bring fundamental change across higher education.

The overwhelming majority of the institutions have made pass-fail an option, reflecting student concerns that work



A photograph of two paper boats on a white surface. The boat in the foreground is bright yellow and is in sharp focus. Behind it, a white paper boat is visible but out of focus. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# Outline

- Introduction to Compassionate Assessment.
- Idea generation: What assessment policies or practices could be more compassionate?
- Group work: Redesigning policy or practice.



What does compassion  
mean to you?

# Compassion

“...the noticing of social or physical distress to others, and the commitment to reduce or prevent that distress”

- Theo Gilbert, 2017, p.189



# What is compassion?

- Two components:
  - Sensitivity to suffering in self and others. (motivated attention)
  - Commitment to alleviate or prevent. (motivated action) (Gilbert et al 2017)
- Compassion is Relational.
- It is not: kindness, care, sympathy, empathy etc. although they may all be elements of compassion.





# Compassion as relational

- Compassion for others
- Compassion from others
- Self-compassion

# Relationships

In HE assessment we broadly have three actors:

- Students.
- Tutors: all colleagues involved in supporting students' completion of assessment.
- Institution: the non-human elements that shape the student experience, e.g. learning technologies, policies, practices etc.

	<b>Student</b>	<b>Tutor</b>	<b>Institution</b>
Self	Student self-compassion	Tutor self-compassion	
Student (recipient)	Student compassion for other students	Tutor compassion for students	The institution's compassion for students
Tutor (recipient)	Student compassion for tutors	Tutor compassion for other tutors	The institution's compassion for tutors

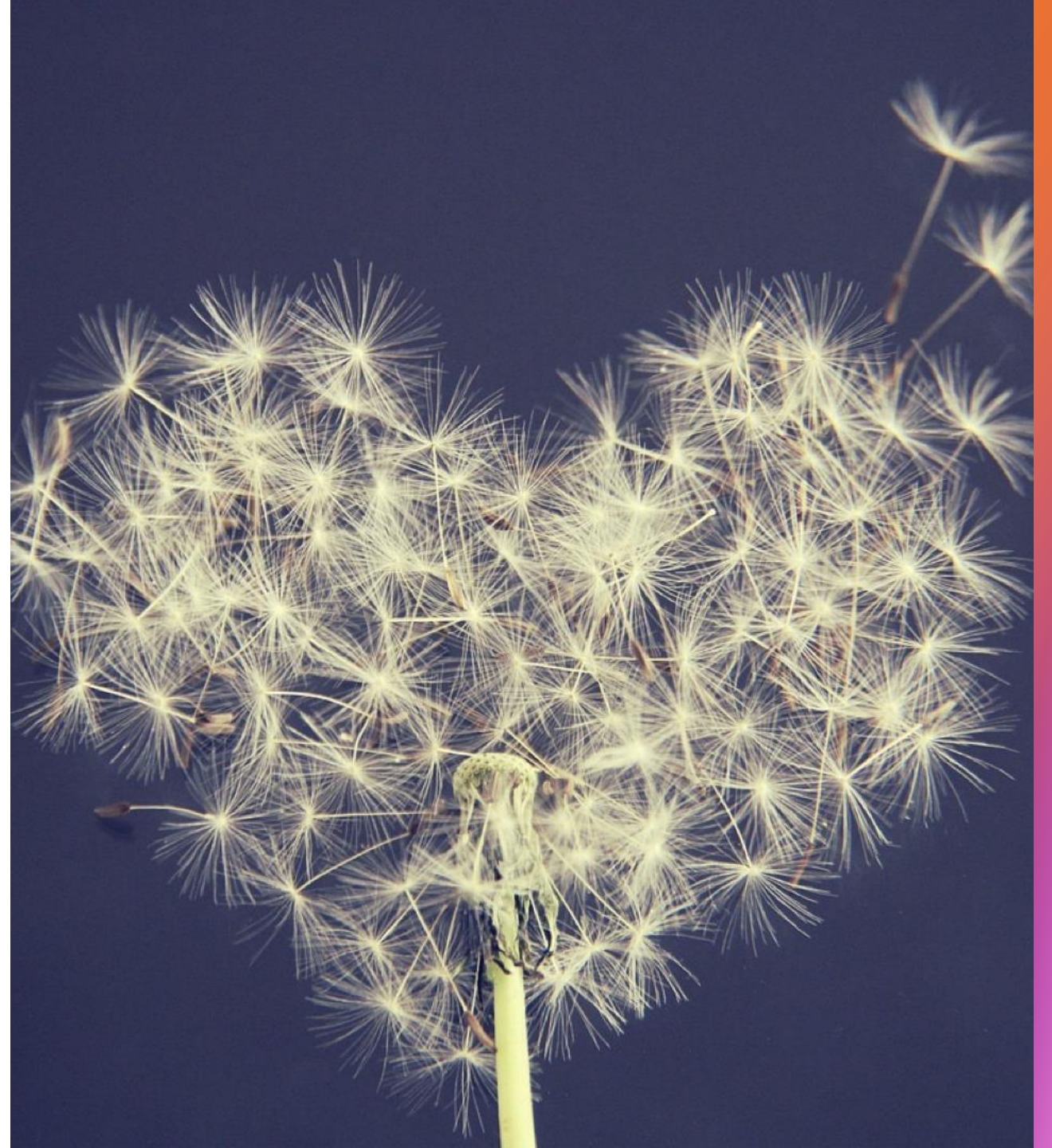
In a perfect world  
with no barriers,  
what changes would  
help create more  
compassionate  
assessment?



# Redesign

In groups,

- Choose an assessment policy or practice.
- Design how it could be adapted to make it more compassionate.



# Belonging through Assessment: Pipelines of Compassion QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project 2021

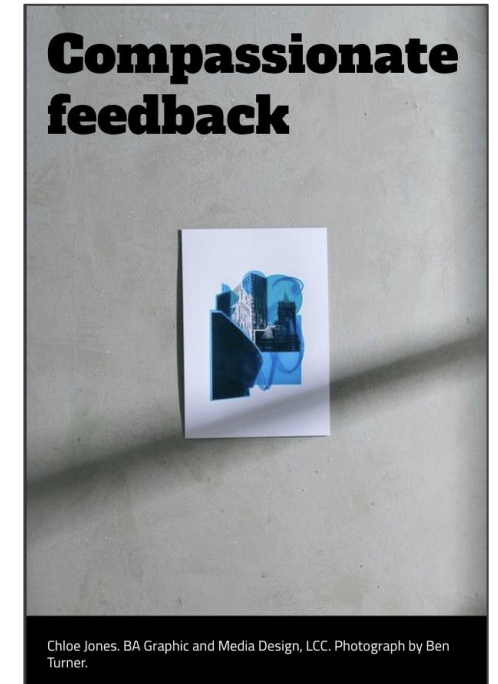


Vikki Hill, Sam Broadhead, Liz Bunting,  
Laura da Costa, Neil Currant, Marianne  
Greated, Peter Hughes, Robert  
Mantho, Emily Salines, Thea Stevens.  
(2023)

[Project Blog](#)

[Ebook](#)

[QAA Project Page](#)



# Rethinking assessment? Research into the affective impact of higher education grading

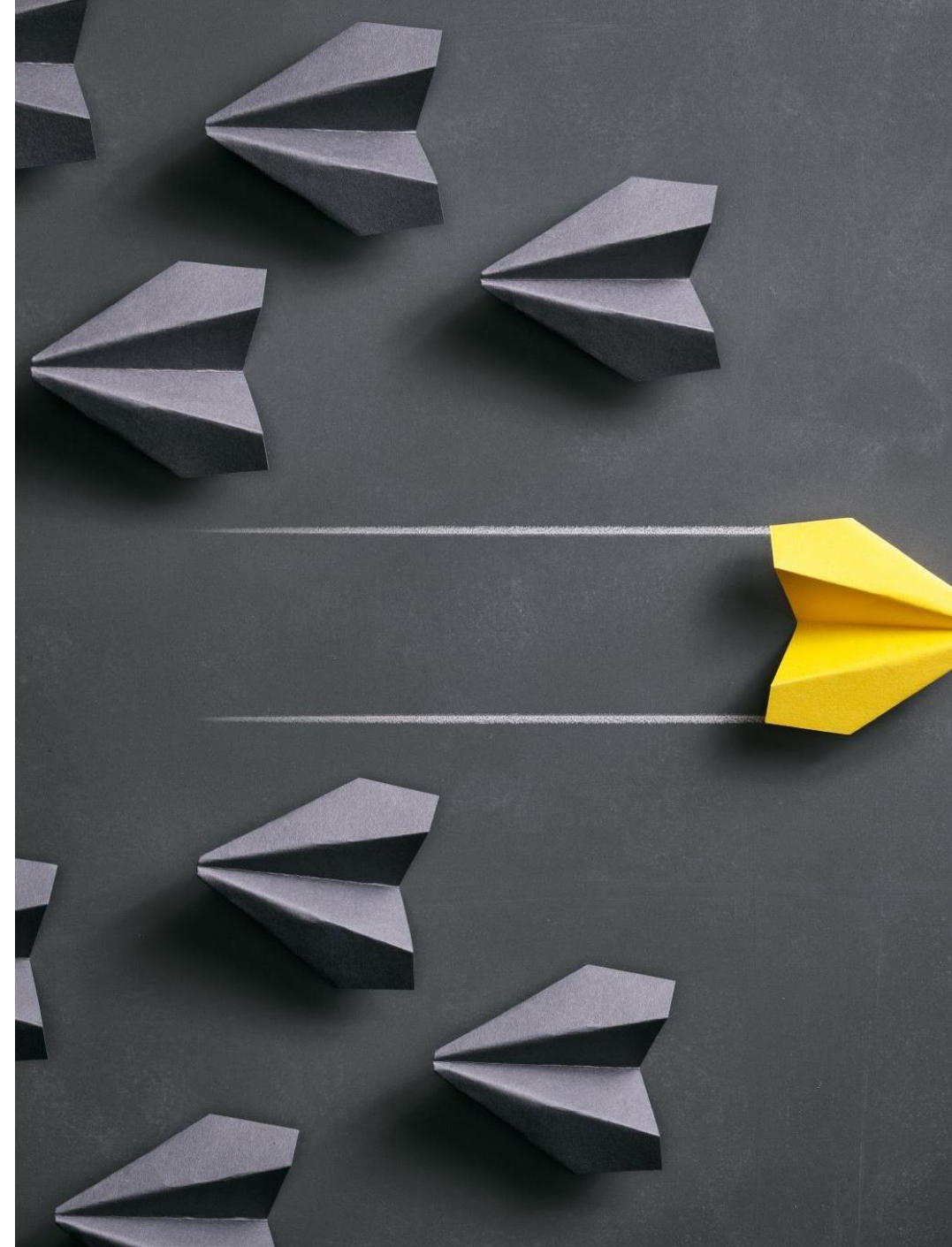
Neil Carrant, Liz Bunting, Vikki Hill and Emily Salines  
(2024)

Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching in HE

Grades impact on:

1. Stress and anxiety
2. Learner identity and motivation
3. Self-expression and creativity
4. Peer relationships

[Article](#)



# Enacting Compassion during the pandemic: academic staff experiences of a No Detriment Policy on pass/fail assessment

Vikki Hill (2023)

UAL stated that the implementation of a pass/fail grade for all Level 4 units was "*in order to simplify the assessment process and ease the pressure during a very stressful time for staff and students and in an exceptional external context.*"

(Level 4 Regulation Amendment Guidance Note for staff - 1 April 2020)

- emotional impact of personal beliefs on policy enactment,
- translating policy into compassionate praxis,
- institutional barriers to compassionate enactment.

[Book](#)

EDITED BY

Mark A. Carrigan  
Hannah Moscovitz  
Michele Martini  
Susan L. Robertson



## BUILDING THE POST-PANDEMIC UNIVERSITY

Imagining, Contesting and Materializing  
Higher Education Futures

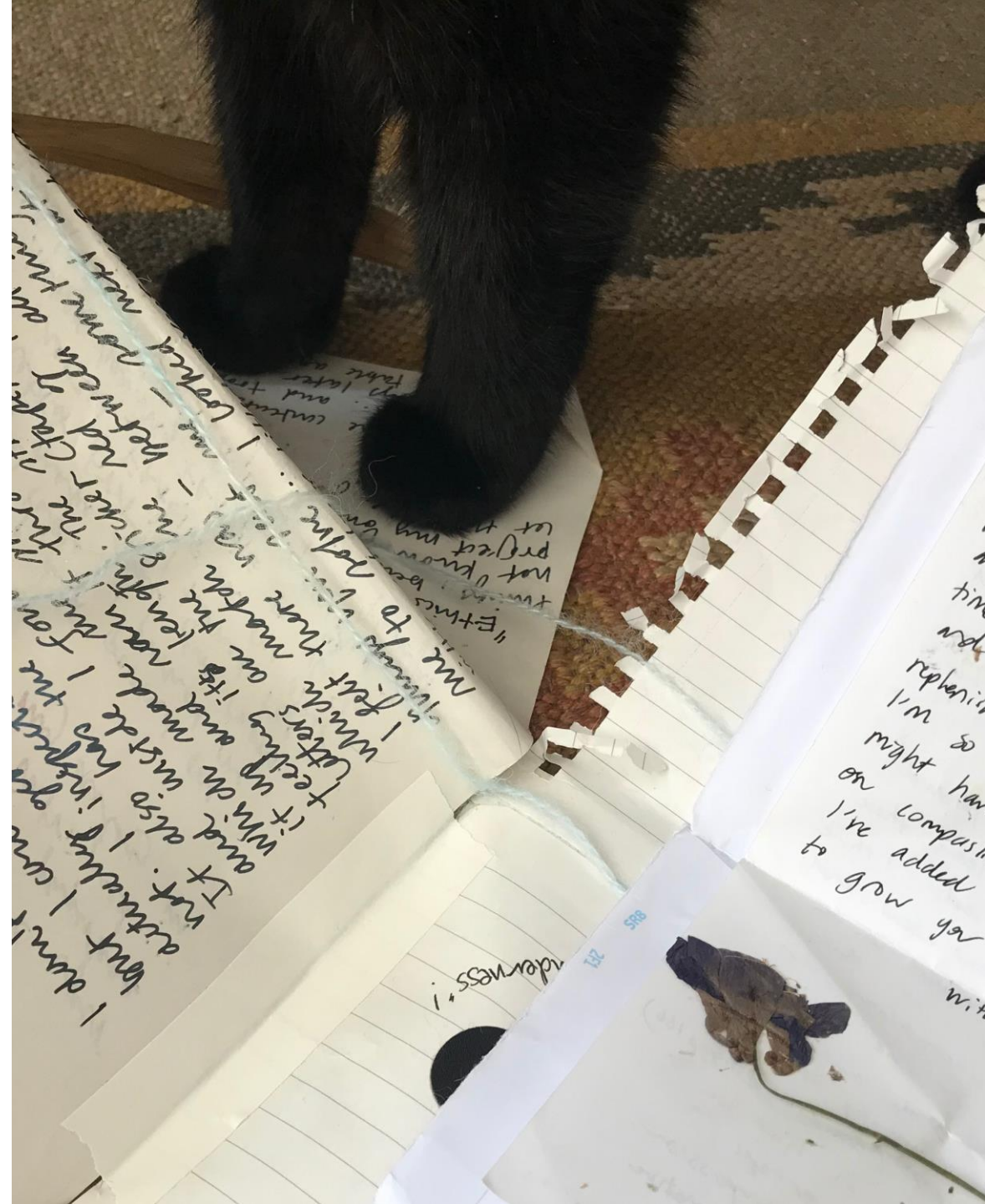


# Love letters as relational pedagogies of assessment

Ana Vicente Richards, Mark Ingham, Liz Bunting, Vikki Hill (2024)

- Assessment as a collective act of community
- Assessment as healing

[Book](#)







# **Questions and suggestions**