



Manifesto
for a
Compassionate Curriculum

RAISE 
Researching, Advancing &
Inspiring Student Engagement

About the RAISE Manifesto for a Compassionate Curriculum.

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This manifesto is the collective work of RAISE's Partnership Special Interest Group (SIG). Coordinators Phil Carey and Wendy Garner observed that discussions across SIG events repeatedly returned to concerns about student and staff wellbeing and mental health in higher education. In response, and with support from Liz Clifford, Wendy Johnston, and Phil Rothwell, they led a series of collaborative workshops to explore these issues in greater depth.

These sessions brought together a wide range of perspectives to consider how wellbeing can be meaningfully embedded within curriculum design and delivery. By adopting a broad understanding of "curriculum", the work extended beyond what is taught and how it is taught to encompassing student support and wider institutional culture.

The result is a manifesto advocating a whole-university approach. It is intended both as a catalyst for continued dialogue and as a practical resource to inform curriculum decision-making - supporting and inspiring educators to place compassion and wellbeing at the heart of their practice.



Vision.

The RAISE Manifesto for a Compassionate Curriculum highlights the urgent need to integrate wellbeing into every aspect of higher education - from curriculum design, teaching, and assessment to student support and institutional culture. A compassionate approach should not be seen as an optional enhancement. It is a fundamental principle that shapes student success, staff satisfaction and the overall quality of the learning environment. By prioritising care, empathy, and inclusion, universities can create spaces where all learners thrive academically and personally.

RAISE believes that, in addition to intellectual development, students' health, happiness, resilience and sense of fulfilment are integral to their academic success. Wellbeing cannot be a peripheral concern of institutions. Higher education must position wellbeing as a foundational principle that underpins effective learning outcomes.

Compassion is an active expression of care - demonstrating empathy and offering meaningful support. It is not an optional virtue but a critical condition for student achievement, staff satisfaction, and the creation of inclusive learning environments.

Learning flourishes in spaces shaped by care, empathy, and mutual respect. A curriculum grounded in compassion alleviates unnecessary stress, promotes belonging and empowers every learner to thrive.

The RAISE vision is both simple and transformative: to embed compassion into the fabric of university life, ensuring that wellbeing and academic achievement work hand in hand to deliver meaningful outcomes for all learners.

Why Compassion Matters.

Wellbeing is a multifaceted concept that underpins student success. In this manifesto, wellbeing is understood as the capacity to navigate the challenges of university life with resilience, confidence, and a sense of belonging. It is about promoting mental wellness and fulfilment and not just responding to crises.

A compassionate curriculum embeds wellbeing within structure, process, and practice. It is defined by a deliberate commitment to support, to alleviate stress, and to prevent unnecessary distress. It is acknowledged that learning can be challenging and, at times, uncomfortable. However, these experiences should not inevitably lead to undue stress, anxiety, or ill-health. In a culture of compassion, the curriculum should benefit both students and staff by creating learning environments where care and empathy are embedded in every interaction.

What Does a Compassionate Curriculum Look Like?

In this manifesto, curriculum is conceptualised as the interplay between five key dimensions:

- Curriculum Design - planning content, learning outcomes and resources to prioritise wellbeing and inclusion.
- Teaching - using approaches that promote dialogue, creativity, and trust, so that students feel valued and supported.
- Assessment - emphasising design that minimises anxiety, promotes fairness and builds confidence through scaffolding and choice.
- Student Support - providing accessible, proactive services that anticipate challenges and encourage students to seek help without stigma.
- The Hidden Curriculum - addressing how cultural norms, expectations and behaviours shape the student experience.

A Call to Action.

RAISE invites educators, curriculum designers and institutional leaders to become part of a movement for change by:

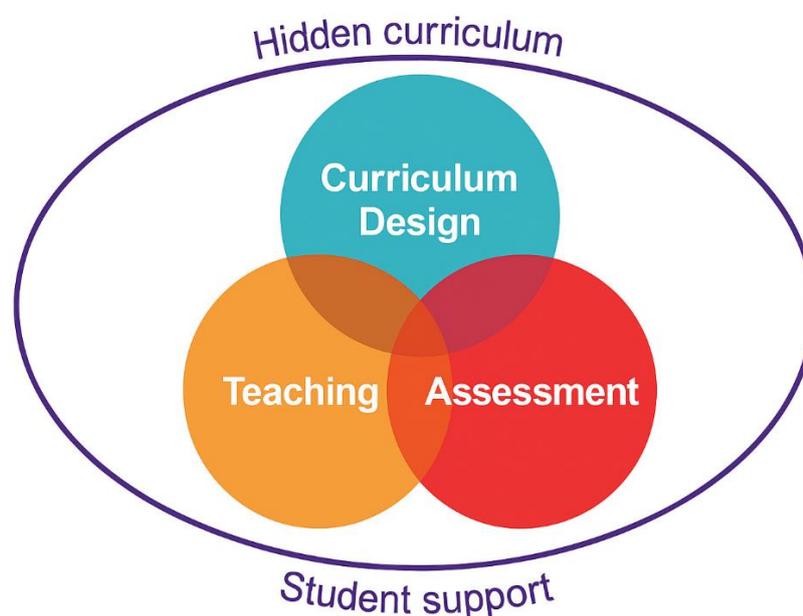
- auditing current practices to identify opportunities to promote and protect wellbeing.
- engaging students as partners in shaping compassionate learning environments.
- championing inclusive, evidence-based approaches to curriculum design, teaching, and assessment.
- investing in staff development for interpersonal and emotionally intelligent teaching practices.
- collaborating across departments and sectors to share best practice and drive systemic change.



Manifesto for a Compassionate Curriculum: Toolkit for Action.

The curriculum is conceptualised as the interplay between:

- **Curriculum Design**, being the curriculum as intended in the development and planning stage.
- **Teaching**, the curriculum as delivered.
- **Assessment**, how students demonstrate their learning.
- **Student Support**, including both local and centralised provision to guide students through their learning and provide help when needed.
- The '**Hidden Curriculum**', which is the culture of the organisation as well as wider sector or disciplinary influences.



The relationship between these elements presents a compassionate curriculum as an interconnected system. Curriculum design establishes the intentions for learning, embedding principles of wellbeing and inclusion that guide subsequent practice. These intentions come to life through teaching, which translates design into experience and sets the tone for classroom culture. Assessment signals what is valued, influencing both how students engage and how teaching is structured. Poorly aligned assessment can undermine even the most thoughtful design. Student support is a critical bridge to help learners navigate challenges and access resources that complement teaching and assessment. Surrounding all of this is the hidden curriculum - the implicit norms, expectations, and power dynamics that permeate institutional life. These shape how students interpret and respond to formal structures.

Together, Curriculum Design, Teaching, Assessment, Student Support and 'Hidden Curriculum' form a dynamic ecosystem. If these elements are appropriately aligned, they create environments where care, connection, and academic achievement coexist. However, a fragmented relationship between these risks undermining the student experience.

Curriculum Design.

Curriculum design outlines the content and proposed organisation of learning. It signals the intended student experience and the purpose behind teaching. While we acknowledge that the planned curriculum is not always enacted exactly as designed, a purposeful approach that prioritises wellbeing provides the foundation for a compassionate curriculum.

1. Incorporation of learning outcomes linked to wellbeing.

Wellbeing related knowledge and content can be embedded into the curriculum.

- Consider including module, level, or programme learning outcomes that explicitly reference wellbeing and the promotion of good mental health.

2. Skills that support wellbeing.

Provide dedicated space in the curriculum for developing skills that enhance wellbeing.

- Identify relevant skills and determine where they can be embedded into modules or programmes.
- Offer opportunities for students to practice wellbeing-related skills through experiential activities, group-based problem-solving or real-world projects that promote resilience and self-management.

3. Inclusive content.

The choice and presentation of content strongly influence whether students feel included or excluded in their learning. Decolonising the curriculum is a valuable approach to reviewing organisation and presentation of content. It facilitates a curriculum that challenges narratives and diversifies sources of knowledge. These principles can be applied more broadly to support wider cultural relevance in the curriculum.

- Audit reading lists for diversity of authorship and perspectives.
- Ensure appropriate representation in case studies, materials, visuals etc.
- Collaborate with students in reviewing modules, materials, and examples for inclusivity and relevance.

4. Importance of academic literacy.

Success at university goes beyond attending classes and absorbing information. It demands active engagement and the development of essential academic skills, such as gathering, processing, and presenting information effectively.

- Use diagnostic tools to identify gaps in knowledge and understanding and provide optional sessions to address these.
- Use pre-arrival surveys and student data to recognise students who may be at risk.
- Provide discipline-specific training on academic expectations.
- Share multiple examples of good work (avoiding a single 'model answer' that limits creativity).
- Provide low-stake opportunities for students to practice skills.

5. Avoiding unconscious biases.

Every curriculum reflects the perspectives of its designers. Choices about content, framing, and representation are shaped by cultural, historical, and institutional contexts, resulting in a partial view of the world that may exclude some students.

- Offer authentic opportunities for students to scrutinise and feedback on the curriculum.
- Involve students in curriculum development.
- Provide unconscious bias training to help staff identify and reflect on the hidden assumptions that may influence their decisions and interactions
- Engage with disciplinary networks to explore strategies for broadening curriculum perspectives.

6. Evaluation and evidence-based decision-making.

While disciplinary demands shape content, organisation and delivery should be informed by evidence of effective practice.

- Offer varied mechanisms for students to evaluate and comment on their learning experiences. These should include opportunities for discussion as well as surveys, recognising that different students will prefer different ways to feedback.
- Undertake and share research on the impact of curriculum and learning environments on mental health and wellbeing.
- Monitor sector developments (e.g. work associated with the Student Minds Mental Health Charter).
- Ensure student involvement in curriculum-related decisions is authentic and meaningful.

7. Institutional policy and processes.

Curriculum design is influenced by institutional regulations, with processes for programme approval, periodic review, and revalidation setting standards for curriculum structure.

- Assess existing regulations for their impact on wellbeing.
- Ensure policy development and review explicitly consider wellbeing.

- Involve students in shaping regulations.
8. Curriculum organisation.
- Curriculum organisation shapes learning by ensuring a logical progression of knowledge across sessions. Scheduling activities influences how students process information and engage in sessions, both cognitively and emotionally.
- Consider the impact of scheduling decisions on commuter students.
 - Organise timetables to minimise gaps between sessions, enabling students to make the most of their time on campus and reduce unnecessary travel.
 - Schedule regular breaks during teaching sessions.
 - Monitor the impact of hyflex or hybrid delivery on student satisfaction and belonging.
 - Evaluate the impact of early starts or late sessions on students' wellbeing.

Teaching.

To embed compassion into teaching, we must prioritise the student voice. This will help staff to refine their practice and encourage students to engage in meaningful co-creation activities.

1. Shift from teaching to facilitating learning.
Balancing the lecturer's role as a knowledge expert with the need to facilitate learning can be challenging.
 - Make active learning strategies the primary approach to teaching.
 - Arrange teaching environments to promote dialogue and discussion.
 - Focus on metacognition so students understand what is expected on them at different stages in their journey and what they can expect from their teachers.
 - Encourage creativity and innovation to prepare students for complex challenges.
 - Connect learning to real-world contexts, helping students see the relevance and practical value of what they are learning.
2. Recognition that teaching and learning is built on trust, dialogue, and mutual respect. Learning grows from relationships that are dynamic, evolving, and sometimes messy.
 - Create opportunities for students and staff to share their stories about learning.
 - When recruiting teaching staff, prioritise relational qualities such as empathy, communication, and the ability to build trust and respect with learners.
 - Recognise that learning should be enjoyable and teaching inspirational.
 - Enable teaching staff to play to their strengths in shaping their practice
 - Encourage staff to make time for meaningful conversations with students.

3. Creating spaces for the safe exploration and exchange of ideas
Effective learning requires students to acknowledge gaps in their knowledge and feel confident in addressing them. This happens only when they feel secure and supported.
 - Avoid risk averse approaches that stifle debate and inquiry.
 - Use dialogic teaching and Socratic questioning to deepen understanding.
 - Provide varied ways for students to contribute, including anonymous feedback.
 - Incorporate problem-based learning approaches.
 - Use micro-assessments to track progress and build confidence.

4. Celebrating diversity in teaching styles.
Good teaching reflects both process and personality. Diverse teaching styles can be equally valid and useful. So, celebrating and championing a wide range of approaches to effective teaching should be encouraged.
 - Implement authentic reward and recognition mechanisms for teaching excellence.
 - Offer CPD opportunities that embrace varied teaching approaches.
 - Use peer review and exchange to share ideas and best practice.

5. Being a role model.
Being a role model means that everything a teacher does -how they communicate, respond to challenges, and treat others - sets the tone for the learning environment. Students observe and internalise these behaviours, shaping their expectations and attitudes toward learning
 - Demonstrate respect and inclusivity by treating all students fairly and valuing diverse perspectives.
 - Show a passion for teaching.
 - Model professionalism by being punctual, prepared, and consistent.
 - Respond respectfully and calmly to mistakes and questions.

6. Recognise students as teachers and teachers as students.
Teaching is a reciprocal process. As knowledge becomes more contested and contingent, educators learn alongside their students. Diverse student perspectives enrich the learning environment.
 - Provide opportunities for students to teach through peer-led activities and collaborative projects.

Assessment.

Assessment profoundly shapes the student experience. Success in assessment releases credit and informs degree classification. Unsurprisingly, assessment can be linked to vulnerability, distress, and anxiety. While no approach can fully eliminate this risk, thoughtful design can minimise negative impacts.

1. Modes of Assessment.

Assessment is the mechanism through which learning is recognised, monitored, and credited. Students respond differently to various tasks, so a strong curriculum incorporates a diverse range of assessments.

- Integrate assessment mapping into curriculum design to ensure variety and balance.
- Provide low-stakes assessments to allow experimentation and skill development.
- Help students understand how assessment develops transferable and employability skills.

2. Negotiated assessment.

Negotiated assessment is an approach where students have agency over such aspects as the assessment format or topic, with the suitability of their choices determined through dialogue between the student and tutor. Involving students in designing assessment tasks can increase ownership, deepen understanding, and align strategies with diverse needs. Define the scope of what can be negotiated (e.g. format, deadlines, weighting) while ensuring alignment with learning outcomes and any accreditation requirements.

- Consider the relative advantages of offering a menu of equivalent assessment options (e.g. essay, presentation, podcast) or giving students free reign.
- Involve students in shaping criteria.
- Monitor choices for fairness.

3. The Importance of Scaffolding.

Learning is a journey, yet assessment is often treated as a destination. Scaffolding prepares students for high-stakes tasks by building confidence and competence.

- Sequence assessment modes across the programme to develop mastery progressively.
- Break down complex tasks into manageable stages to reduce cognitive load and build confidence, particularly for less experienced students.
- Include formative checkpoints where students receive constructive feedback before the final submission.
- Align preparatory tasks (e.g. workshops, peer review, practice exercises) with the skills needed for the assessment.

4. Alternative Assessment.

Universities have legal obligations under equality legislation to provide alternative assessments. However, reactive adjustments can be burdensome and time-sensitive, requiring a swift response to individual circumstances.

- Offer students a choice of assessments through which they can meet the learning outcomes. This should reduce the demand for reactive, alternative assessment provision and facilitate more effective assessment design.

5. The Significance of Culture.

Assessment practices are shaped by institutional culture, staff expectations, and student experiences, often reflecting entrenched norms. This matters because these norms can limit innovation and inclusion, making it essential to critically review and adapt assessment approaches to better support diverse learners

- Encourage meaningful dialogue between staff and students regarding assessment.
- Create opportunities for staff and students to share their stories of assessment
- Provide staff development and share good practice.
- Balance regulations to maintain standards without discouraging innovation.
- Work with external examiners and professional bodies to encourage a culture of reflection.
- Respond to feedback and evidence promptly.

6. Assessment Literacy.

Success in assessment will, in part, be an outcome of how students understand the purpose of assessment and the nature of the task. Additionally, successful students are often able to accurately judge the quality of their own work.

- Introduce assessment literacy early in programmes. Offer workshops or activities on how to interpret feedback and use it for improvement.
- Include low-stakes practice tasks that mirror the final assessment.
- Explain the purpose of each assessment and how it links to learning outcomes, ensuring that criteria are clear and appropriately detailed.
- Share marking criteria and rubrics early, using plain language and examples.
- Use peer review and self-assessment to develop critical judgment and familiarity with standards.

7. Encourage 'reverse assessment literacy'.

'Reverse assessment literacy' refers to understanding how students perceive, interpret, and respond to assessment and feedback, and using that insight to inform better assessment design. However, feedback can be distorted. Students' commentary on the quality of instruction and guidance may be constrained by

concerns over being 'punished' for providing negative feedback. Their reflections may also be filtered through the lens of performance rather than process.

- Triangulate data from anonymous feedback, ongoing dialogue, draft submission and formative assessment.
- Create safe spaces for honest conversations about assessment design.

8. Constraints imposed by regulations.

Internal regulations and external standards associated with disciplinary norms and professional requirements can hinder innovation.

- Review regulations through an inclusion lens.
- Leverage opportunities in Access and Participation Plans to encourage change.
- Base regulations on contemporary evidence.
- Learn from successful pandemic-era flexibility (e.g. "no detriment" policies).
- Avoid assessment bunching and allow deadline flexibility.
- Ensure regulations are based on contemporary evidence of good practice.

9. Learning from failure.

Assessment practices typically regard student performance as a final judgment rather than the starting point for dialogue and development. This approach limits students' ability to reflect and grow from failure or poor performance. Embedding timely and meaningful opportunities for recovery can transform this into a catalyst for learning and development.

- Offer low-stakes assessment so students can practice and experiment in a safe environment.
- Consider assessment design options that allow students to review and improve their work prior to final submission and validation of the marks.
- Provide constructive feedback.
- Limit impact of early failure on final programme outcomes.
- Consider opportunities for students to be legitimately compensated based on their response to feedback.

10. Exploit the benefits of AI.

The academic community rightly raises concerns about AI in assessment associated with bias, accuracy, academic integrity and the potential erosion of human judgment. However, used thoughtfully, AI can enhance inclusion and wellbeing.

- Provide alternative formats such as text-to-speech, language translation and adaptive assessments to support students with diverse needs.
- Offer automated formative feedback and low-stakes AI-driven assessments to give students timely support and reduce anxiety.

- Use AI analytics to identify patterns of disengagement or struggle, enabling proactive interventions before issues escalate.

Student Support.

To provide effective student support, universities must understand how students, particularly those from less advantaged backgrounds, engage with available services. Evidence suggests that those with the greatest need are often least likely to access support.

1. Awareness of Services.

Students may be unaware of the support available, and staff may also lack knowledge, limiting their ability to advise effectively.

- Promote services during induction and throughout the programme in both physical and digital spaces.
- Signpost support at key points in the student journey, anticipating “pinch points” in the academic year.
- Enable on-demand access to information through user-friendly platforms; AI-powered search tools can improve navigation.
- Ensure students have the option to speak to a person rather than relying solely on automated systems.
- Recognise that ‘every contact counts’—staff in catering, administration, libraries, and security, for example, play a valuable role in student support.

2. Capacity to access services.

Location of services, opening hours, and cultural factors can be barriers to engagement. Staff may also feel uncertain about referral processes, leading to inconsistency.

- Use clear, unambiguous service names.
- Simplify referral processes.
- Provide promotional materials in plain English and multiple formats.
- Ensure imagery and staffing reflect diversity.
- Co-locate services with spaces students already use.
- Offer flexible provision, including online and in-person options.
- Extend availability beyond standard office hours.
- Create opportunities for students to meet staff and build trust.

3. Boundaries.

Uncertainty about roles and responsibilities can lead to confusion or inappropriate engagement.

- Provide clear guidance for all student-facing staff on managing boundaries.

- Define staff roles in supporting students and safeguarding.
- Implement simple systems for documenting interactions.
- Offer supervision and support for staff handling complex cases.

4. Quality of central support.

Centralised resources may result in a one size fits all approach that does not suit a diversity of needs. Highly pressurised services may be unable to meet demand.

- Regularly evaluate service provision to identify impact and areas for improvement.
- Ensure documentation and monitoring processes support communication and handover while respecting confidentiality.
- Where appropriate, inform referrers of intervention outcomes.
- Clarify when referral is necessary and when local action is appropriate.

5. Student-led services.

Peer support offers relatable, accessible networks that complement formal provision. Student-led provision embodies a student perspective on issues and can foster community and enhance a sense of belonging. Student-led services can enhance the experience of both staff and students and provide a great opportunity for the development of skills and employability.

- Provide peer mentoring to match experienced students with newer students to provide a degree of academic, social, or practical advice.
- Offer 'peer listening' schemes for 'light touch' wellbeing support, where trained volunteers provide a 'listening ear' for their fellow students.
- Student academic skill advisors can help their peers with study techniques, revision or navigating university systems.
- Promote student societies that provide informal support and advocacy for identity or interest-based groups
- Use 'buddy' schemes to help students settle into and work through their university life.
- Support student-led campaigns that can alert the university to the contemporary pressures on students and support policy and process developments to address these.
- Explore options for recognising student volunteers through micro-credentials, skills statements etc.

6. Focus on digital accessibility.

As much of the student experience is online, digital inclusion is essential. Universities should ensure that students can access and make the best use of digital resources

- Ensure access to IT equipment and relevant software.

- Provide training and support for effective use of digital tools.
- Ensure all students can access digital learning by identifying and addressing connectivity challenges, providing data support and offering alternative access options for those who may be disadvantaged.

Hidden Curriculum.

The hidden curriculum refers to the values, culture, and practices embedded within university life. To succeed, students must learn to navigate these norms and act in ways that align with institutional expectations. Their ability to do so depends on how open the institution is to challenging dominant cultural norms that may marginalise some students. Likewise, students' capacity to influence change is shaped by the extent to which the university welcomes their engagement.

1 Hidden Expectations.

University life is governed by expectations that are often implicit. Staff may hold assumptions about student behaviour that are not communicated, while students bring their own expectations about teaching and learning that remain unspoken.

- Clearly communicate expectations from the outset and throughout the student journey.
- Provide opportunities for students to articulate their hopes and assumptions.
- Explain, discuss, and manage expectations collaboratively.
- Normalise help-seeking behaviour by promoting a culture that values questioning.
- Create safe spaces for students to share confusion or frustration.
- Regularly review and reset realistic expectations.
- Co-create resources with students to surface implicit assumptions.
- Stress-test institutional expectations to ensure transparency and fairness.

2 Unspoken Academic Rules.

University life is shaped by formal regulations and informal traditions that are not always clear to students - particularly those without prior exposure to higher education.

- Use diagnostic tools to identify areas for development and support planning.
- Commit to plain English and demystifying academic language.
- Extend induction activities and provide ongoing transition support throughout the programme.

3 Bridging and Gatekeeping.

Service providers often act as gatekeepers, enabling or restricting access. Students with less confidence or academic capital may struggle to navigate these barriers.

- Provide accessible information on students' rights and entitlements throughout their university journey.
- Clearly communicate the support, resources, and opportunities available to students.
- Make complaint and referral processes simple, transparent, and user-friendly.

4 Learning beyond the curriculum.

Employers increasingly value extracurricular engagement alongside academic achievement. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds may be unaware of these expectations or face barriers to participation.

- Position co-curricular activity as integral to the student experience.
- Align extracurricular engagement with authentic assessment tasks.
- Offer paid internships to remove financial barriers.
- Develop "clinic models" where students provide supervised services to the public, combining learning with community engagement.

5 Positionality & Unconscious Bias.

Institutional systems and individual behaviours can reflect hidden assumptions about student groups. Staff may unconsciously favour students who resemble themselves.

- Provide unconscious bias training for staff.
- Use senior students and alumni as role models and advocates.
- Review institutional conventions - such as committee structures - that may limit student voice.

6 Power Relationships.

Universities operate within hierarchical structures where assessment and credentialing place students in a position of relatively low power. Social factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, and class exacerbate these dynamics.

- Acknowledge that all interactions are shaped by power dynamics, influencing student feedback and their engagement.
- Use inclusive, respectful communication to amplify student voice.
- Role-model equitable behaviour.
- Respond assertively to misuse of power by staff or students.
- Recognise how power is reflected in feedback processes.

Conclusion.

The RAISE Manifesto for a Compassionate Curriculum is a step towards reinforcing a culture of care in higher education. Embedding wellbeing, empathy, and inclusion across curriculum design, teaching, assessment, and student support will drive academic success and personal fulfilment.

Achieving this vision demands collaboration, evidence-based innovation, and a willingness to challenge entrenched norms. RAISE believe that institutions that embrace these principles will create learning environments where resilience is nurtured, belonging is cultivated and diversity is celebrated. Success will be measured by the wellbeing and growth of every learner as well as academic outcomes.

Positioning compassion as the centre of the curriculum will help higher education to become a space where both students and staff thrive - ensuring that care and connection stand alongside academic achievement at the heart of the student experience



Compassionate Curriculum Toolkit Checklist

This checklist outlines a series of practical and actionable steps for embedding compassion into the curriculum.

Curriculum Design

- Incorporate learning outcomes that reference wellbeing and mental health.
- Include wellbeing-related knowledge and skills at modular or programme level.
- Audit reading lists for diversity and cultural relevance.
- Identify where students can develop academic literacy and study skills.
- Involve students in curriculum development.
- Review institutional regulations for their impact on wellbeing.
- Organise timetables to reduce stress (e.g. avoid early starts, provide breaks).

Teaching

- Emphasise active learning strategies that encourage dialogue
- Connect learning to real-world contexts.
- Provide spaces for staff to have meaningful conversations with students.
- Celebrate diverse teaching styles and share best practice.

Assessment

- Map assessments across programmes to ensure variety and balance.
- Avoid assessment bunching and allow deadline flexibility.
- Provide low-stakes assessments for practice and confidence-building.
- Offer negotiated or flexible assessment options where possible.
- Scaffold complex tasks with formative checkpoints and feedback.
- Share clear marking criteria and rubrics early.
- Offer recovery options with no or limited detriment when students fail.

Student Support

- Promote support services during induction and throughout the year.
- Simplify referral processes and ensure clear communication.
- Offer flexible provision (online and in-person) and extended hours.
- Provide peer mentoring and student-led support schemes.
- Ensure digital accessibility and access to IT resources.

Hidden Curriculum

- Communicate expectations clearly.
- Demystify academic language and processes.
- Promote help-seeking as a positive behaviour.
- Review institutional norms and committee structures for inclusivity.
- Address unconscious bias through staff training and student engagement.
- Position co-curricular activities as integral to the student experience and universally accessible.

Measures and Evidence for Evaluating a Compassionate Curriculum

Below are some examples of indicators that may demonstrate whether a Compassionate Curriculum is working as intended. This is not presented as an evaluation strategy but to illustrate the range of options for demonstrating impact.

Curriculum Design

Key Measures

1. Inclusion of wellbeing-related learning outcomes in programmes.
 - % of programmes or modules with explicit wellbeing, mental health, or belonging-related outcomes.
2. Diversity and inclusivity of curriculum content.
 - Diversity of reading lists (authors, perspectives, geography).
3. Embedding of academic literacy.
 - Number and type of study skill activities embedded within modules.
4. Student involvement in design.
 - Number and quality of student co-design activities.
 - Representation of students as co-creators across demographic groups.
5. A focus on wellbeing in regulation and policy.
 - Evidence of policy review cycles including impact assessments for wellbeing.

Possible sources of evidence

- Programme and module audits.
- Reading list analytics.
- Records of curriculum co-design workshops or panels.
- Minutes from programme validation/review demonstrating wellbeing considerations.
- Staff reflections on curriculum design decisions.

Teaching

Key Measures

1. Use of active, dialogic, or inclusive pedagogies.
 - Peer review of teaching.
 - Problem-based or inquiry-based tasks
2. Teaching quality relating to relational pedagogy.
 - Survey items on staff approachability, sense of being valued, clarity of expectations.
 - Discussions in student: staff forums.

3. Student sense of belonging in learning spaces.
 - Surveys on community, trust, and psychological safety.
 - Discussions in student: staff forums.
4. Staff confidence and capability in compassionate teaching.
 - Participation rates in CPD.
 - Self-reported teaching confidence.
5. Opportunities for creativity and autonomy.
 - Number of modules using authentic, real-world or collaborative learning tasks.

Possible sources of evidence

- Student pulse surveys, module evaluations, focus groups.
- Staff CPD engagement reports.
- Peer observation (e.g. capturing empathy, communication, equitable dialogue).
- Learning analytics on engagement with teaching activities.

Assessment

Key Measures

1. Variety and balance in assessment methods.
 - Programme-level assessment mapping showing diversity and timing of tasks.
2. Assessment anxiety or distress levels.
 - Student evaluations.
 - Wellbeing 'check-ins' in key assessment periods.
3. Use and effectiveness of formative assessment.
 - Uptake rates.
 - Links between formative participation and final performance.
4. Use of negotiated or flexible assessment options.
 - Proportion of modules offering choice.
 - Student usage and equity of uptake across demographic groups.
5. Assessment literacy development.
 - Students' self-reported confidence in understanding criteria, feedback and expectations.

Possible sources of evidence

- Assessment maps.
- Exam board reports.
- Student focus groups on assessment experience.

- Analytics on submission patterns (e.g. last-minute submissions as stress indicators).
- External examiner reports referencing fairness, burden, and inclusion.
- Data on extensions, appeals, and academic misconduct cases (these are often indicators of pressure).

Student Support

Key Measures

1. Awareness and use of support services.
 - Engagement rates with wellbeing, academic skills and financial support services.
2. Timeliness and accessibility of support.
 - Access during peak periods.
 - Satisfaction with support.
3. Effectiveness of peer-led or student-led schemes.
 - Participation rates.
 - Peer mentor reports.
 - Mentee outcomes.
4. Digital accessibility and inclusion.
 - Access to devices.
 - Engagement with online platforms.
 - Reported barriers.
5. 'Every contact counts' engagement.
 - Evidence of frontline staff involvement.

Possible sources of evidence

- Service usage analytics.
- Induction feedback surveys on clarity of signposting.
- Evaluation reports from peer mentoring or buddy schemes.
- Digital access audits (Wi-Fi, software access, use of assistive technology).
- Case studies of students who benefited from support.

Hidden Curriculum

Key Measures

1. Transparency of expectations.
 - Student understanding of assessment, professional conduct and academic rules.
2. Navigational confidence.
 - Students' self-rated ability to navigate university systems, especially first-generation and commuter students.

3. Power dynamics and student voice.
 - Diversity in representation of students in student engagement activities, course representation, membership of committees, interview and review panels.
4. Equity of opportunity.
 - Participation in co-curricular and extracurricular activities by demographic group.
5. Bias and inclusion.
 - Staff completing unconscious bias training with associated evidence of impact.

Possible sources of evidence

- Student transition surveys (beyond induction).
- Analysis of complaints, appeals, and service referral patterns by demographic.
- Focus groups with under-represented student communities.
- Participation data for internships, co-curricular schemes, and societies.
- Reports from staff–student committees and partnership initiatives.

Cross-Cutting Institutional Measures

These may indicate an overall culture shift that is central to the compassionate curriculum

1. Wellbeing and mental health indicators.
 - Student wellbeing surveys.
 - Staff workload modelling.
 - Staff survey.
2. Belonging, trust and engagement metrics.
 - Attendance and engagement analytics.
 - Continuation/retention rates.
3. Equity and inclusion gaps.
 - Degree awarding gaps.
 - Differential progression rates.
 - Withdrawal reasons.
4. Narrative evidence.
 - Student stories and case studies.
 - Vignettes from staff.

