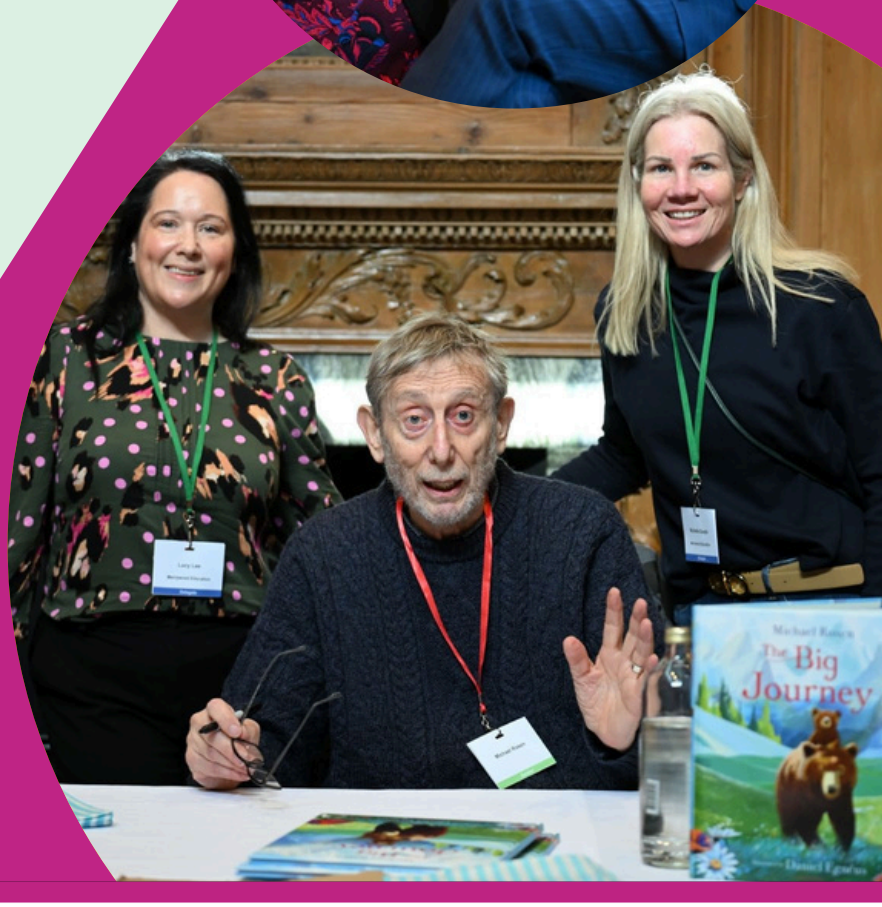
Next Generation Assessment 2026

Principles to Practice

24th February 2026

Post-Conference Publication



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Introduction

Professor Bill Lucas, University of Winchester

Every year for the last four years, the Rethinking Assessment coalition of organisations has held an annual event bringing together teachers, school and system leaders, academics, exam boards and policy makers to share promising practices and make progress in reforming our creaking assessment systems. This year our theme was wellbeing, and we explored the many ways in which changes in practice could enable more young people to flourish.

Making this point powerfully at the start of the event was Clara Kerslake, a student currently studying for a T level in health, who poignantly reminded us that we are all more than the scores or grades we achieve in examinations. For her, walking the Ten Tors or completing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award were even more important, if largely invisible in the formal accountability system. And, as Fran Wilby reminded us, using digital learner profiles, as Rethinking Assessment has been advocating, is one way of making a reality of Clara's ambitions for strengths-based assessment.

John Taylor chaired a fascinating session on interdisciplinary approaches to problem-based learning. Interestingly, across the world – in China and many Scandinavian countries, for example – there is a move towards making interdisciplinary learning a core feature of secondary education and in many States in Australia and Canada there are project qualifications, something the IB has offered for many years. The London School of Architecture and Art History link-up showed how these approaches work especially well when teacher subject expertise is simply not available in a school. Schools interested in this can take action immediately by taking away a GCSE and replacing this with two Higher Project Qualifications, to better prepare students for the Extended Project Qualification at Sixth Form.

It was heartening to see so much teacher innovation in the poster and workshop sessions exploring oracy, school-developed courses, the new suite of Welsh 14-16 qualifications, technology in assessment, level 3 enrichment qualifications, T levels, therapeutic play curricula, fairness in assessment design, AI in formative assessment, radical new curriculum models and a pupil-curated museum.

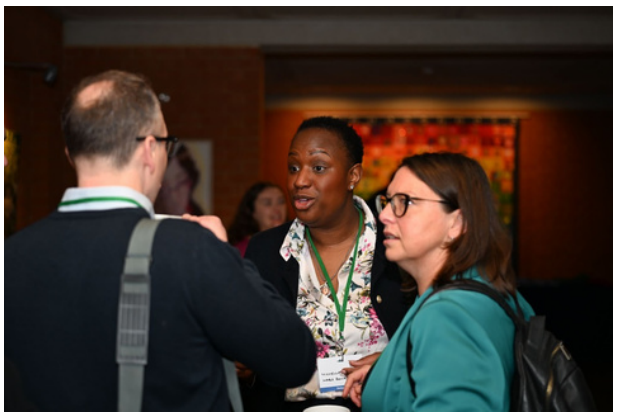
The new Education for Human Flourishing framework provided much food for thought from Michael Stevenson, showing how the theme of the conference is gaining in currency among high-performing education systems and offering a model with five competences which can guide schools in their planning.

Looking ahead I am excited that, with funding from the Comino Foundation, the Chartered College of Teaching will be leading work on two key areas – the use of oracy as a teaching and assessment method, and best practices in problem-based learning and authentic assessment. This work will be led by Dr Laura Kerslake.

You can find a video overview of the conference here.

Why rethinking assessment matters now

Fran Wilby, Rethinking Assessment



Across education systems, there is growing recognition that assessment is no longer fully aligned with the world learners are entering. While qualifications continue to play a vital role, following a clear directive from the Curriculum and Assessment Review, the current system too often fails to recognise the breadth of skills, dispositions and capabilities needed for a thriving life and a fulfilling career. Questions of equity sit at the heart of this challenge: Whose knowledge counts? Whose strengths are made visible? Whose potential remains unseen?

At present, assessment systems are frequently misaligned with industry expectations and lived experience. Employers consistently emphasise skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, communication and adaptability, yet these remain marginal within many formal assessment frameworks. The result is a disconnect between what is valued in classrooms and what matters beyond them.

Rethinking Assessment starts from the premise that the solution is to adopt a more balanced approach. Exams as the sole method of assessment cannot, on their own, capture the full range of learning that young people develop across their education.

Vocational education and professional training offer valuable lessons here – particularly with an eye on the forthcoming V Levels. These pathways have long combined examinations with performance-based assessment, practical application and professional judgement. Rethinking Assessment builds on this integrated approach by exploring how broader methods can be embedded across mainstream education.

Central to this work is the development of **learner profiles**. These profiles enable learners to evidence and curate a richer picture of their learning, including skills, dispositions and applied capabilities that are often overlooked. When combined with digital badging, learner profiles offer a powerful equity lever: they surface and recognise strengths that may not be visible through traditional assessment alone, and they support the portability of learning across transitions into further education, training or employment. In doing so, they help position assessment as a driver of lifelong learning rather than a terminal judgement.

The rapid **emergence of AI** further intensifies the need to rethink and rebalance the system. While much current debate focuses on preventing malpractice, the more fundamental question is: How do learners understand, evaluate and responsibly use AI tools? Rethinking Assessment working groups are exploring approaches such as responsive and adaptive assessment, alongside transparent models like Leon Furze's Assessment Scale, which makes explicit how, where and why AI has been used – as well as where it should not be used. Developments such as adaptive comparative judgment, now being piloted in some multi-academy trusts, show how AI can support teacher judgement, moderation and bias reduction whilst maintaining high reliability.

Internationally, similar thinking is emerging. The OECD's latest work on secondary education certification[1] points to systems moving in differing directions but converging on **a common middle ground**: combinations of assessment methods shaped by context, with industry playing a meaningful role in defining what should be assessed and how[2]. In England, Qualifications such as Pearson's new set of Higher (HPQ) and Extended (EPQ) Project Qualification Topic Pathways explore the shift towards a mixed methods approach. Rethinking Assessment is about modernising assessment so that it is more equitable, more meaningful and better equips learners to thrive, now and in the future.

Find out more at Rethinking Assessment.

1. OECD (2026) The Theory and Practice of Upper Secondary Certification. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-theory-and-practice-of-upper-secondary-certification_b3fea5ba-en.html (accessed 6 March 2026).
2. OECD (2026) Webinar: Are high stakes exams and assessments still relevant? *Youtube,* 29 January, 2026. Available at: https://youtu.be/nMmjxvnegh4?si=kd-xgEBA2HLxBaWD&t=2 (accessed 6 March 2026).

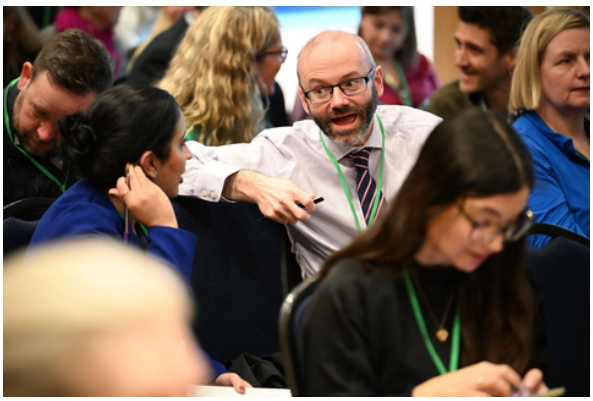
Next Generation Assessment project

Dr Laura Kerslake, Chartered College of Teaching

The Next Generation Assessment project has been set up to systematically review the research evidence into different ways of carrying out assessment that will help all learners to thrive. This research will provide a secure evidence base for leaders and teachers who are interested in carrying out different forms of assessment, and will be augmented by a suite of resources that are aimed at classroom implementation.

A starting point for the project has been to think of questions that are important to ask when thinking about assessment. Several of these questions were explored and discussed as part of the the Next Generation Assessment conference:

- How could schools and colleges do assessment differently?
- Which types of assessment could teachers and leaders use?
- How do other countries carry out assessment in schools and colleges?
- What is the role of EdTech and AI in assessment?
- Which types of assessment can help all learners to thrive and succeed?
- What outcomes do teachers and leaders want to see from assessment?



For me, one of the the key aspects of the conference was a reminder of the question: how can assessment bring out the best in all young people? I think that to answer this question we need to see young people as whole human beings. In her speech, Clara gave us a powerful reminder that while gaining her GCSE results was important for what she wanted to go on and do in the future, it was what she gained from other activities she took part in that made her into the person she is today. This included team work, resilience, communication skills and a willingness to try new things.

Two aspects of assessment that I will be looking at are oracy and project-based learning. I'll be looking at oracy from a formative assessment perspective as well as examining assessment of oracy: what research tells us about the progression of oracy skills. During the conference, we heard about different approaches to project-based learning, including the HPQs and EPQs. These are rigorous qualifications that promote independence, critical thinking and creative thinking. Some schools are already allowing students to drop one GCSE and take one or two HPQs instead, enabling young people to develop a broader range of skills by being assessed in a different way.

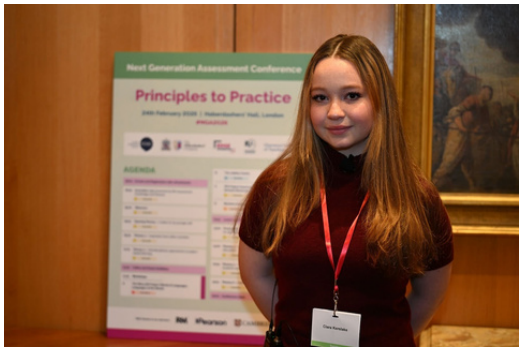
A well-rounded education that helps all young people to thrive considers knowledge, skills and attributes: not only what learners know, but also what they can do and the people that they become through doing it. This requires school leaders and teachers to carefully consider not only curriculum content but also pedagogy and assessment methods. This publication contains the ideas and practical tips to begin to do this.

If you would like to take part in our advisory groups for the research reviews into oracy or project-based learning, please contact me at lkerslake@chartered.college.

Please also contact me if you work at an educational setting that is already putting oracy or project-based learning into practice and would be interested in taking part in a case study.

A letter to my younger self

Clara Kerslake



I'm sixteen as I'm writing this, but you are only twelve years old. I know that you hate going to school at the moment, that you feel stupid and that you cry every day, but I want to tell you that you're going to do things you can't even imagine right now.

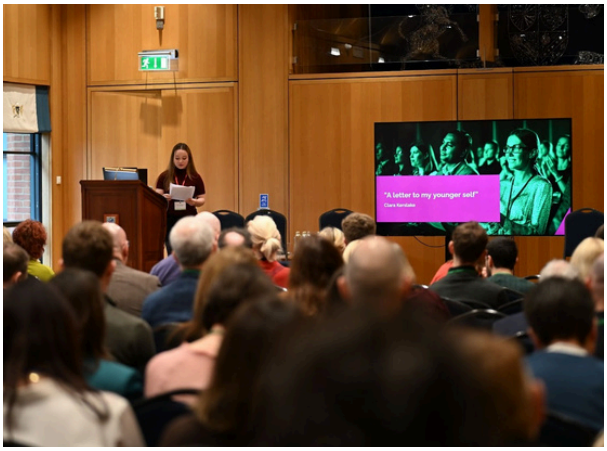
Later this year you're going to be diagnosed with dyslexia. This is a really good thing. School is going to be really helpful. You'll get to go to learning support where you'll get help with work, and Lexia sessions. You'll be able to stop worrying about writing in class because you'll get to use a laptop. Most importantly, you'll stop feeling stupid.

This is partly due to your dyslexia support but it's also due to all the other things you're going to do. I know it sounds hard to believe, but you stop thinking that your grades are the only thing that matters about you.

Next year you're going to do your bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award and the bit you're going to like most is the expedition. You're going to meet new friends and realise how strong you are. In fact, you like it so much that you're going to do Ten Tors for the next three years. I bet it would surprise you to hear that you're going to sleep in a tent with ice on the inside, fall into more Dartmoor bogs than you can count and get attacked by many sheep. And you're going to learn a lot about teamwork, perseverance and the joy of crossing the finish line after walking for 35 miles. You'll even win the Ten Tors Leadership Award.

You'll develop so much more confidence, and you'll have great relationships with your teachers, especially those that came to Ten Tors camps. You'll find it easier to ask for help than you do now. With this new confidence, you'll sing a solo in the school concert and play the part of Chip the teacup in the school production of Beauty and the Beast. You'll become a prefect because, at your prefect interview, you'll talk about overcoming struggles and supporting others when they're struggling. You'll go on to win the student of the year award out of 15,000 students in the whole Trust.

You've done your GCSEs now and I'm sure you'll want to know how it went. Well, there's good news and bad news. The good news is that you passed everything and even got a Grade 5 in maths. I know that's the one you're worried about most. The bad news is that for the whole of Year 11 you're going to do about 12 hours of maths per week, not including revision and homework. Not only maths lessons, but you'll be put in a maths tutor group for extra maths during tutor time, you'll have after school sessions and break and lunchtime sessions. Then you'll do even more homework and revision at home. I'm not going to lie, it'll be boring, it'll be tiring and you'll wonder if you'll ever have time for anything else.



You will get a massive sense of achievement when you open your results, and that's brilliant. But I want to tell you that it's all those other things you do that will make you into the person I am now…

I'm doing a Health T-Level at college, and I want to be a nurse. I bet that's a surprise to you reading this at age twelve. There are exams, but I also get to do a lot of practical work. I've been on placement one day a week in a care home and I'm about to start a placement in hospital. There are different things that are important than just doing well in exams: being compassionate, being resilient and being willing to try new things.

Life gets better for you and it's pretty good for me now but there are still some things I wonder:

- Why are GCSE exams only designed for a certain sort of person?
- Why do people struggling with English and maths just do hours and hours of it every week and lose access to other opportunities that might make them feel better about themselves?
- How can more students be encouraged to take part in activities like Duke of Edinburgh, Ten Tors and other opportunities?

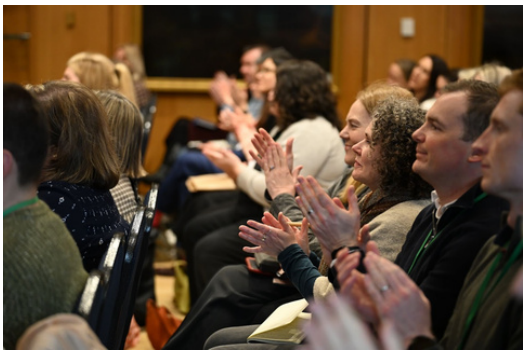
To watch Clara's full speech, see the video here.

International assessment

From principles...

Dame Alison Peacock, Chartered College of Teaching

The value of hearing from assessment practice around the world was immediately apparent at the Next Generation Assessment conference. Too often education systems become inward looking, convinced that their own metrics are the only ones that matter. However, increasingly, it is becoming hard to ignore voices across the globe that call for reform.



Strikingly, we heard from Professor Sandra Milligan from the University of Melbourne that young people in Australia are becoming increasingly stressed and dissatisfied with the current assessment arrangements. Similarly, Professor Louise Hayward talked to us about the imperative for change from within Scottish schools; each testimony brilliantly reinforced by the words of Clara Kerslake with her letter to her twelve-year-old self.

Students and schools as agents of change was a theme picked up passionately by Professor Bill Lucas who pointed us to many examples of formative assessment practice, seeking to broaden notions of educational success, already being enacted by schools across England and internationally. The work in Scotland to reform assessment has taken place in a deeply democratic and collegial manner; this is echoed by the work of Melbourne Metrics, encouraging innovation and creative assessment practice from the grassroots of schools.

The direction of travel of the DfE White Paper, votes for sixteen-year-olds and the centrality of oracy in the Curriculum and Assessment Review are all levers for change that Next Generation Assessment would be wise to seize upon in England.

...to practice

Bill Lucas, University of Winchester

In the session exploring global innovation we reminded ourselves of ten key trends:

1. Shallow, narrow, solo	1. Nature of learning	Deep, wide, collaborative
2. Dominated by head-work	2. Range of strengths	Head, heart and hand
3. Number or grade	3. Style of credential	Evidenced narrative
4. Single body	4. Source of credential	Broad consortium
5. Predominantly summative	5. Focus of assessment	Predominantly formative
6. High-stakes, standardised	6. Integration	Ongoing, authentic
7. National/State norms	7. Personalisation	Individual progression
8. Employers/HE/FE	8. Ownership	For learners and for others
9. Largely for accountability	9. Strategic intent	Mainly for improvement
10. Formulaic, mechanistic	10. Approach	Carefully evidencing capability

Global trends in assessment (Lucas (2021) Rethinking Assessment: The Case for Change. Melbourne: Centre for Strategic Education, p. 36).

Professor Sandra Milligan gave an overview of her work with 'first mover' schools across Australia who are systematically and intentionally beginning to credential complex competencies. She gave an overview of the work of Melbourne Metrics, explaining how a group of schools are leading the way in generating robust assessments of key skills which are then feeding into a digital learner profile, warranted by the University of Melbourne. She suggested that change in education was no longer dependent on government policy but could be led by thoughtful communities of practice such as the one she coordinates.

Professor Louise Hayward described the process of curriculum and assessment review she has led in Scotland, It's Our Future - Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment (2023). She described the way she had sought to engage with all stakeholders as part of her review process, including young people.

She made a number of recommendations; noteworthy for this event are her emphasis on the importance of problem-based learning and the desirability of strengths-based assessment. While the current uncertain political context in Scotland has led to a delay in implementation, a Scottish learner profile is already being introduced.

There are a number of practical steps we could all take immediately, including:

- trialing learner profiles using templates developed by Rethinking Assessment
- experimenting with assessing creativity using models developed in Western Australia and drawing on a study of work in England undertaken by the Australian Council for Educational Research
- teaching one fewer GCSE and introducing the Higher Project Qualification (HPQ)
- focusing on formative assessment
- taking part in webinars organised by the Chartered College of Teaching and keeping an eye on the Next Generation Assessment project webpage for research, events and resources.

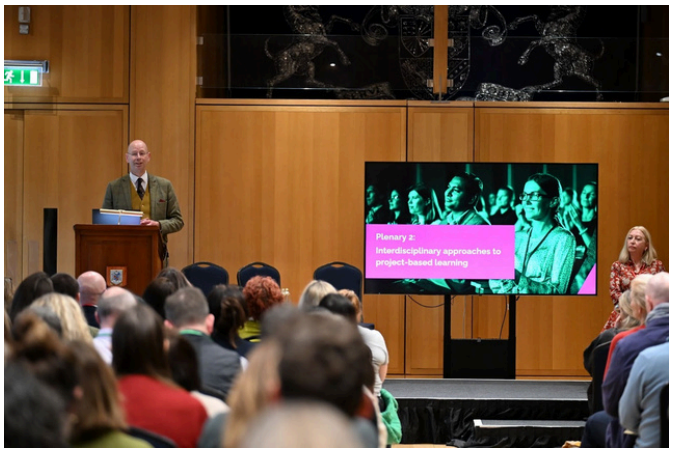
Watch the full International Approaches to Assessment panel here.

Interdisciplinary approaches to project-based learning

From principles...

John Taylor, Cranleigh School

The starting point for a project is a question or practical challenge of the learner's own choosing. This simple fact contains the key to a mode of learning that is both more engaging, starting as it does within the world of the learner's interests, and more inclusive, in that the scope spans as wide as the domain of questions that a young person might wish to explore.



In recounting something of the history of the development of the project qualifications, I sought in my presentation to highlight the power of this type of learning and the impact it has had. From beginning in a post-16 programme in the history and philosophy of science, assessed by means of a research dissertation, project qualifications have expanded to encompass the full range of assessment modalities, from performance to investigation to artefact, and also across the full age range of secondary school students, with the foundation and higher tier projects sitting below the EPQ and providing entry points to this world of engaging, inclusive assessment.

As our thoughts continue to revolve around the question of curriculum and assessment reform, there is much here from which to learn. A central question for those looking to promote a more inclusive assessment framework is whether we are prepared for this mode of learning – which currently flourishes within the margins of the curriculum – to take a more central position.

...to practice

Rose Aidin, Art History Link-Up

Project-based learning is at the heart of Art History Link-Up (AHLU). Our charity offers art history EPQ courses free-of-charge to state sixth-form students, taught online and at the Courtauld, Somerset House, on term-time weekends, and an art history HPQ for pre-GCSE students in a range of settings. Our project qualification courses have proven to be a highly effective tool in engaging young people from diverse backgrounds in the history of art.

A key outcome from our work with these project qualifications is the importance of celebrating and recognising failure. Young people are often taught that failure is anathema rather than a fundamental aspect of life and learning. Drawing on Japanese craft traditions to understand academic resilience demonstrates how interdisciplinary thinking enriches project-based pedagogy. Our experience of teaching students to embrace failure within their projects, as a space to learn, is perhaps the most important finding from the project – providing evidence that it boosts resilience and a sense of accomplishment.

A practical way to explain this to students is through the Japanese art of 'kintsugi', meaning 'golden joinery'. This ceramic technique of fixing broken pots using lacquer combined with a precious metal emphasises rather than disguises the imperfections and journey of the object. There is a clear comparison to be made between a kintsugi pot and a student's activity log. If you have a student who is determined to present their project as a perfect, seamless journey, try showing them a kintsugi pot.

And if you know a state student who is aged 13-to-15 and might be interested in joining our free art history HPQ course, over ten Sunday mornings from April at the Courtauld, Somerset House, please direct them here: https://www.arthistorylinkup.org/programmes/hpq-introduction-to-art-history

Roy Coupland and Ya Ya Chen, London School of Architecture

The London School of Architecture's (LSA) HPQ and EPQ programmes introduce interdisciplinary learning through a design brief that runs the length of the course and informs the content of the course. The brief itself is a jumping off point and more vague than you might encounter at Higher Education level, with the idea being that students will be introduced to a range of disciplines that will help them to shape their responses. They are supported to engage critically with those professions and use them as a lens through which to analyse the design brief, but are given the opportunity to choose which profession to gravitate towards.

The LSA's EPQ in Architecture has run since 2023 and we have found that several key rules have helped us deliver a successful programme:

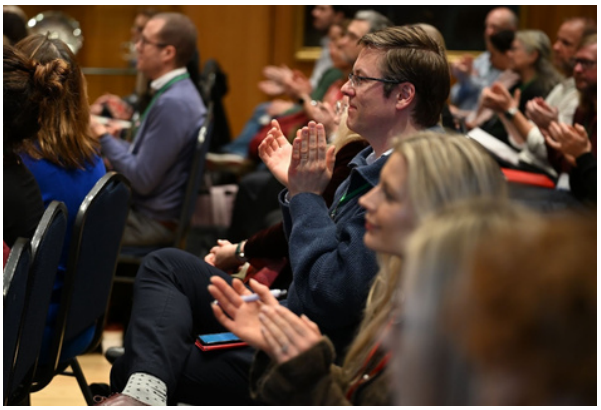
- Introductions to professions that do not try to be exhaustive
- Information that is easily applied to the design brief
- Workshops that support the application of multi-disciplinary knowledge.

These three features of the LSA's EPQ are supported by a range of industry professionals who are keen to pass on their own experience. Hearing directly from experts ensures that a wide range of knowledge is offered in an engaging manner. Students are then given the time and support to produce refined design projects that demonstrate the application of their new skills and knowledge.

For more information about the LSA's EPQ in Architecture, please see here: https://www.the-lsa.org/programmes/part0

Helen Turner, Act On It

Interdisciplinary project-based learning is a valid alternative for teachers who are looking beyond traditional, exam-focused assessment models. This can let us focus on assessing what students remember to assessing how students think, create, and communicate ideas across disciplines.



A practical place to start could be to focus on processes rather than outcomes. For example, focusing on areas such as research quality, creative experimentation, and reflection. In creative performance projects, ask students to show evidence of idea development through sketchbooks, storyboards, rehearsal recordings, or annotated research notes. This works especially well for performance-based submissions where students might express academic research through drama, dance or music.

It may be helpful to consider building interdisciplinary project weeks into the curriculum to allow for mini projects to be used as a way of modelling taking a project approach to learning, maybe under a theme or wider topic. Themes such as identity, technology and society, or sustainability can be effective as they naturally encourage cross-subject thinking.

The goal is to keep rigour whilst broadening how achievement is demonstrated, helping students to develop independence, critical thinking, and creative problem solving.
It can also be a way to celebrate differences; turning particular skills or challenges that a student has overcome into their superpower.

If you are interested in project-based learning and assessment, you might also be interested in the posters from Bloxham School and Caterham School.

Watch the full Interdisciplinary Approaches to Project-based Learning panel here.

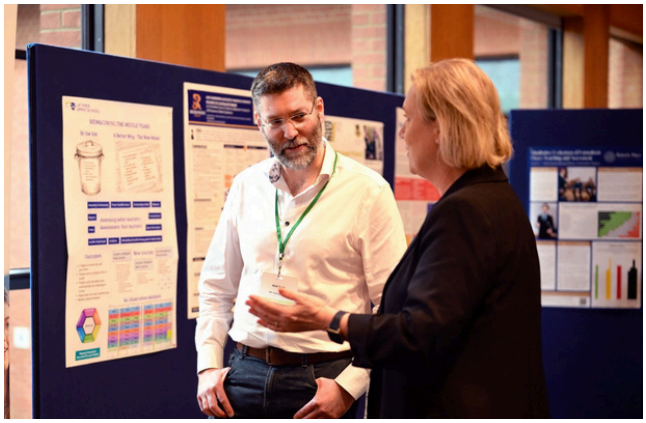
Poster sessions and workshops

The theme of the conference was principles to practice and as a result we wanted to showcase the innovative work that is going on in schools and other organisations to support the next generation of assessment. To do this we had a poster exhibition and a workshop session for which delegates could choose one of four workshops.

Posters

Looe Community Academy presented a poster showcasing their work to implement a new oracy curriculum in their school. Working with the Great Oracy Toolkit, they developed a Key Stage 3 oracy curriculum through fortnightly discrete oracy lessons. Oracy is also reinforced explicitly across the wider curriculum, through structured opportunities for talking learning through, thinking aloud, reasoning and collaborative problem solving. This approach recognises spoken language as foundational to academic attainment, cognitive development and social confidence. They have collected student feedback and found increases in confidence and engagement with talk-based learning.

The King Alfred School presented the courses that they have developed as an alternative to GCSEs. KAS Literature uses a range of assessment methodologies, including oral assessment, recreative assessment, controlled assessment and exam. This replaces the emphasis on quote learning and formulaic responses in GCSE. Global Challenges, which uses 2 HPQs – one individual, one group – builds social entrepreneurship opportunities, and gives students the opportunity to take action in the world to tackle its problems. Creative Technology to replace Computer Science GCSE: Students learn three computer languages, not one, and apply these to a major programming project around game design. Assessment is significantly more diverse than GCSE – students create an object-oriented program, take an exam, and create a game. They have replaced GCSE Drama with a UAL (University Arts London) Level 2 pathway in Theatre and Performing Arts with a broad range of assessment and greater emphasis on authentic outcomes.



Ibstock Place School presented a qualitative evaluation of a formalised oracy curriculum delivered to Year 7 students, where oracy is taught both through subject-embedded practice and dedicated weekly oracy and debating lessons. At the end of the academic year, all students complete an English Speaking Board (ESB) qualification and a reflective survey designed to capture perceptions of the course, changes in public-speaking confidence, and the perceived value of oracy education. Results show strong positive attitudes toward oracy; most students agreed that it is an enjoyable subject, a distinctive part of their curriculum, and a valuable life skill. On average, students reported an increase of +1.08 on a 5-point confidence scale over the year. This improvement was consistent across all groups, including students with SEND who, despite slightly lower ESB scores, demonstrated identical gains in confidence to their non-SEND peers. Girls showed the largest increase in confidence and achieved higher average ESB outcomes than boys, suggesting oracy serves as an effective context for developing voice and self-assurance.

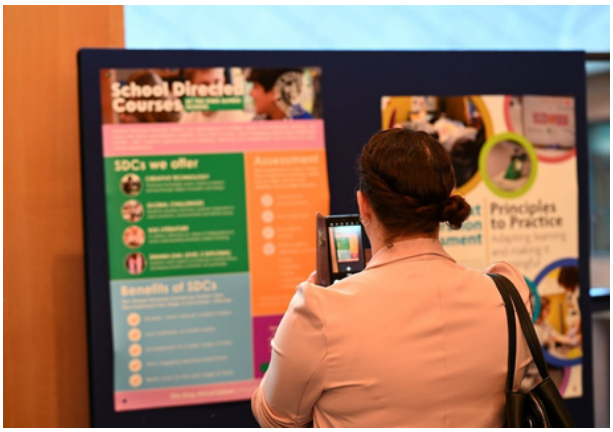
Qualifications Wales showcased a new suite of National 14-16 Qualifications that relate to and support Curriculum for Wales (CfW). In addition to GCSEs, we have created new qualification brands to sit alongside GCSEs. These include VCSEs (Vocational Certificates of Secondary Education), Foundation qualifications, Skills for Life and Work qualifications and a Personal Project. These qualifications adopt a variety of approaches to assessment and are available at a range of levels and, in the case of the skills qualifications, a range of sizes. Alongside subject disciplines typically assessed in GCSE qualifications, CfW has a range of other important aspects including integral skills and cross-cutting themes such as diversity and careers and work-related experiences.

The Bluecoat School presented a poster on the use of technology in assessment. The BCS Blue is a unique, tailored e-learning platform designed to measure, track and share pupils' attainment, providing real-time insights for staff, pupils and parents. Accessible instantly on 1:1 iPads, pupils are fully involved in self-assessment, celebrating achievements across academic learning and personal development. The BCS Blue takes a holistic approach, capturing academic progress alongside the values, skills and attitudes required for success in a rapidly changing world. Subject Leaders identified key skills for every stage, supported by clear descriptors that enable pupils to understand their current abilities, recognise areas for improvement and plan meaningful next steps. Progressive, skills-based statements track development from Year 1 to Year 6 across all subjects.

Cambridge OCR presented a poster about Level 3 Enrichment Qualifications. These are non-core courses designed to complement students' post-16 mixed study programmes. They focus on developing broader skills and knowledge that supports personal growth, employability, and readiness for higher education or the workplace. Enrichment qualifications include oracy, personal finance and sustainability, and carry UCAS points

North Herts College's poster presented the experiences of 16 to 18 year old learners who are on a T level health programme. They have looked at ways to build confidence before starting industry placement and also adapting methods of teaching to make it as practical as possible. They highlighted their amazing facilities and we have looked at scenarios, role plays and case studies, as well as practical experiments. Learners set up stalls in the atrium to teach other learners about health promotions and healthy choices.

Bedales School showcased the development of their own alternatives to GCSEs – Bedales Assessed Courses (BACs). Initially, they were in the Arts and Humanities but we made the decision in 2023 to move to a 2 GCSE and 7 or 8 BAC model, drawing on best practice in countries like Canada and Singapore. The BACs are designed to be a better pathway for our students than A Level, with multiple assessment modalities and centre control on context and structure, within a framework of external moderation.

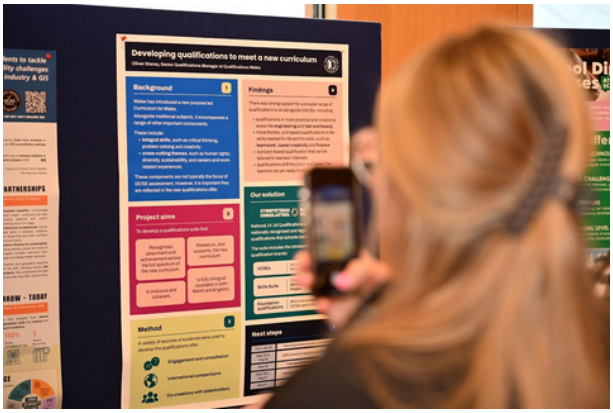


Rookwood School's poster reports on an EdTech intervention in AQA GCSE business. The focus was improving students' performance on the 9-mark 'recommend' responses, which use levels-of-response marking and prioritise contextual application (AO2) and analysis/evaluation (AO3). Naz Watts designed and trialled an AI tutoring agent, Mrs Watts 2.0, built to mirror her exam-technique coaching for 9-mark questions. Students paste the case-study extract, the 9-mark question and their draft response. The agent is trained not to generate answers; instead, it provides short prompts: sentence starters, key term definitions and relevant theory, AO2 context cues, developing chains of reasoning, weighing alternative viewpoints, and constructing a justified recommendation. It returns an indicative mark band only (not a full grade), so pupils still submit work to the teacher for formal marking and progress tracking.

Merrywood Education showcased their need-based curriculum, developed with a team of therapeutic specialists; it incorporates therapeutic play, the development of secure attachments and the permission to fail and make mistakes without judgement. Students follow three distinct curriculum journeys for KS3 and KS4, which are aimed at increasing the number of qualifications they can gain. These also help to reduce stress and fear related behaviours, particularly around formal exams. This comes with a recognition that each individual student's journey may change depending on their mental health and trauma-induced symptoms, which is why the curriculum journeys are interchangeable.

AQA presented a poster on fairness in assessment design, focusing on a set of Universal Design principles to embed accessibility throughout assessment development. Drawing on international accessibility guidelines and research evidence, six overarching standards were established: (1) precisely defined constructs; (2) accessible, non-biased items; (3) simple, clear and intuitive instructions; (4) maximum readability and comprehensibility; (5) maximum legibility of visual resources; and (6) assessments designed to be amenable to accommodations. This approach maximises fairness in assessment design, aiming to give all learners the best possible opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge and skills we are interested in testing in each assessment.

Latymer Upper School presented a poster to highlight their new curriculum model in which, from 2027, Year 10 students will take only maths and English language GCSEs. All other courses will be internally designed and will replace traditional GCSEs. Their aim is to give students the chance to pursue broader and deeper learning pathways that are more individually bespoke and prepare them more effectively for A Level study, an approach that they believe will bridge the widening gap between GCSE and A Level. They also want students to experience a wider range of assessment opportunities, highlighting formats such as vivas, artefacts, extended writing, open-book tests, and presentations. By assessing students continuously and through varied methods — rather than relying on a single high-stakes exam at the end of Year 11 — they aim to reduce unnecessary pressure and support better mental health among young people.

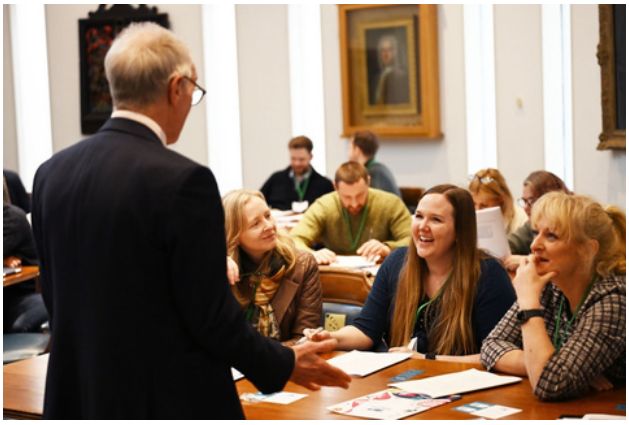


Bloxham School showcased the The Bloxham Sustainability Challenge (BSC), a national education–industry partnership integrating geospatial technology (GIS) and sustainability into the curriculum. Year 12 students act as environmental consultants, tackling real-world briefs such as renewable energy planning. Using Esri's ArcGIS platform, students analyse spatial data, produce professional-standard Environmental Impact Assessments, and present findings to industry specialists. The aim is to bridge the UK's green skills gap and embed future-ready competencies – digital literacy, critical thinking and collaboration – into education.

Caterham School presented a project that explored the use of a student-curated museum exhibition as an alternative form of assessment within a Year 7 interdisciplinary curriculum. Rather than assessing learning through traditional methods, students were tasked with researching, curating, and publicly presenting a museum artefact. The project was delivered through a project-based learning approach, with teachers acting as coaches rather than sole transmitters of knowledge. Students worked collaboratively, engaging in research, the selection of artefacts, exhibition design, and rehearsal for live explanations to visitors. Assessment focused on three criteria: the quality and depth of research, the clarity of explanation, and the effectiveness of presentation for differing audiences. Feedback was gathered from peers, primary school students, parents, community visitors, and teachers.

To view all of the posters, see here.

Workshops



World of Languages, Language of the World (WoLLoW)

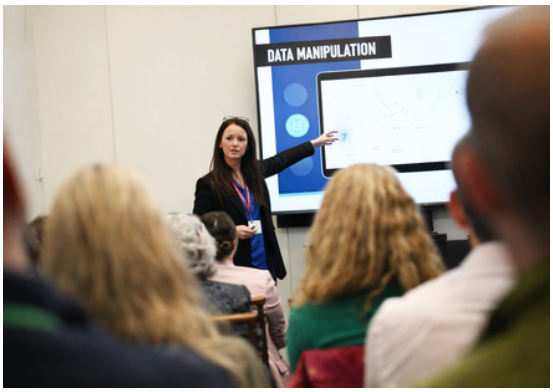
Delegates experienced sample lessons from the WoLLoW course, which was designed by experienced teachers for pupils aged between seven- and thirteen-years-old. The course is not about learning a language but learning *about* languages, not only the languages we have traditionally taught, but the languages that students already know. The programme has been developed over the last five years, providing 120 complete lessons, from the days of the week in Urdu to braille, from the Greek alphabet to sign language. They can be taught by specialists or non-specialists, as part of the language curriculum or alongside the teaching of a language. For more information about WoLLoW, see here.

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

This workshop enabled delegates to explore practical and meaningful approaches to assessing character in schools. It offered a short introduction to character and character education before exploring the "what", "why", and "how" of assessing the character and/or the character development of children and young people, offering assessment strategies that are authentic, developmentally appropriate, and aligned with important intentions central to character education. For more information about The Jubilee Centre, see here.

The Independent Project Qualification (iPQ)

This workshop allowed delegates to find out more about the iPQ, a meaningful equivalent to the EPQ but aimed at younger students in Years 5-9. Delegates discovered how schools are using the iPQ in diverse and innovative ways: as a stretch and challenge programme, as a vehicle for independent learning, as a more equitable alternative to traditional assessment for some learners, and as a framework for collaborative projects with partner schools. It is suitable for all types of schools in all sectors. For more information, see here.



The Bloxham Sustainability Challenge

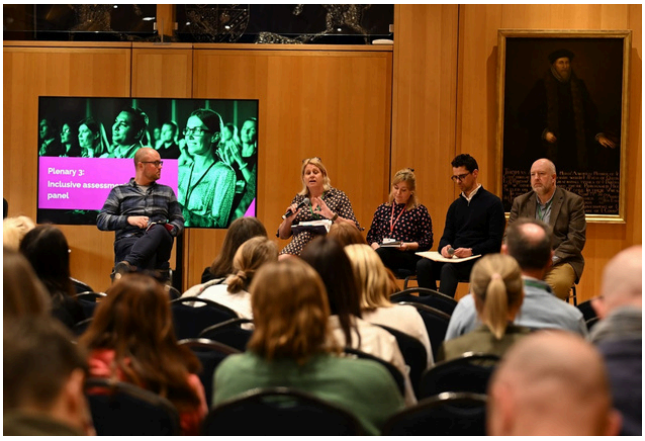
Delegates gained hands-on experience with next year's challenge, Planning for Sustainability: Shaping the Future of East West Rail, in which students act as consultants on one of the UK's most ambitious infrastructure projects -providing authentic, high-impact contexts for learning. It showcased the Geospatial Innovation Pathway aligned to the Level 3 Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) and offered delegates practical strategies to implement this agile, future-focused assessment model designed to equip learners to succeed in a complex, rapidly changing world. For more information about the Bloxham Sustainability Challenge, see here.

Inclusive assessment

From principles...

Olly Newton, The Edge Foundation

There are so many lenses through which we can look at the issue of inclusive assessment – language, neurodiversity, SEND. Yet what it boils down to is how we can make sure that assessment is constructive, formative and gives opportunities for all young people to exhibit their strengths and build up the areas that they need to work on.



We started off by challenging ourselves about why we need to assess these things – skills, character, behaviours. We felt that in doing so it started to formalise the language around them, to speak about these concepts in more of a unified voice, to secure their importance and to instil the belief that these are areas where we can all develop and grow rather than fixed quantities. There was also a note of caution, though – it might be helpful to assess them, but it might also be sensible to keep the state out of it. From the Skills Builder Universal Framework to the Enrichment Benchmarks, do these need to be owned by DfE or can they be developed and managed by expert groups of organisations and individuals outside of government?

As for how, there were strong themes to our discussion – to be inclusive, assessment needs to be multimodal so that there are different ways to exhibit progress. It needs to be personalised to the needs of the learner and have a focus on the formative with a clear developmental purpose to the assessment. We need to learn from good practice across sectors – from the interdisciplinarity of Early Years to the way in which Further Education focuses on a practical end product as proof of competency. Above all, we need to reclaim the language here – a high-quality end point assessment for a vocational subject or a passage presentation in which a student shows their understanding and skills can be every bit as rigorous as a written exam.

...to practice

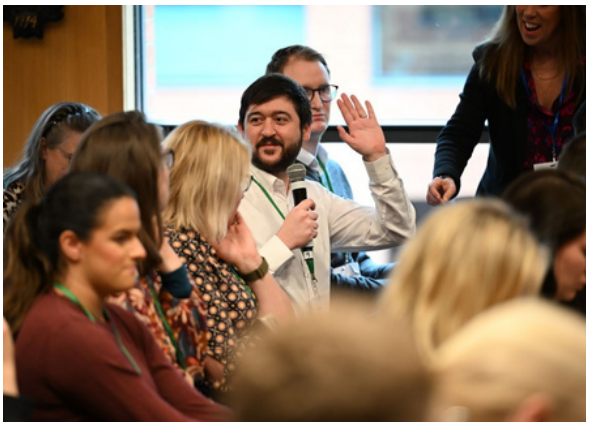
Melissa Farnham, ASDAN

Inclusive assessment is not about lowering expectations; it is about removing unnecessary barriers so that all students can demonstrate what they know and can do. A key principle is ensuring that we assess the intended learning, rather than unintentionally assessing literacy, speed, confidence, or memory unless these are the constructs we explicitly want to measure.

One practical strategy teachers can implement immediately is to build learner agency into how students demonstrate their understanding. Rather than prescribing a single method of response, teachers can offer purposeful choices in medium: for example, a written explanation, an audio recording, a visual representation, or a supported oral response. Crucially, the learning intention and success criteria remain constant; it is the mode of expression that is flexible.

This approach empowers learners to select the medium that best enables them to show what they know. For some students, particularly those with SEND, EAL, or students who experience barriers with writing, this can remove unnecessary obstacles and reduce cognitive overload. However, the benefits extend beyond these groups. When students are trusted to make decisions about how they communicate their learning, engagement often increases and assessment evidence becomes richer and more meaningful.

To maintain rigour, teachers can explicitly teach students how to choose an appropriate medium and reflect on its effectiveness. Over time, this supports the development of metacognition as learners consider not only what they have learned, but how they learn and communicate best.



At a leadership level, inclusive assessment requires more than endorsement; it requires explicit permission and protection for teachers to assess in inclusive ways. Leaders must ensure that assessment policies, accountability processes, and quality assurance systems enable professional judgement rather than restrict it. This includes aligning policy with inclusive practice and creating space for flexibility where it improves access to learning.

Crucially, leaders also have a role in amplifying practitioner and student voice to policy and system-level decision-makers, using evidence from practice to inform and influence wider assessment reform. Inclusive assessment is not an add-on, but a mindset shift that strengthens equity and integrity for all learners.

Dr Rebecca Batty, Skills Builder UK

The Universal Framework

The current assessment system does not work for all learners, nor does it adequately support young learners to develop the skills they need for the future. Research shows people with higher levels of essential skills have higher levels of life satisfaction, higher wages, and a reduced likelihood of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). Essential skills also help learners adapt to new technologies like AI, supporting them through transitions in the future. Therefore, to effectively prepare learners for the future, truly inclusive assessment should include consideration of essential skills.

Skills Builder Partnership is a social enterprise which works to ensure that one day, everyone builds the essential skills to succeed. We work with educators, employers, and social impact organisations to develop individuals' communication, collaborative, self-management and creative problem solving skills by using a shared language and model known as the Universal Framework. The framework breaks down each essential skill into tangible, observable, and measurable steps to structure progression.

We support over 210,000 learners each year to build essential skills through the Universal Framework. Using the framework and our core principles, educators and learners can identify areas for development; for example, from Adapting Step 1, "Identifying emotions", to Step 3, "Persisting". The framework is versatile and we promote multi-modal assessment: how skills are assessed can be adapted to the learner for inclusive assessment. In practice, one learner could talk about their emotions, whereas another may indicate emotions using symbol cards. Teachers can measure the skills of a group of learners, or use the shared language to support 360 feedback. Ultimately, the Universal Framework provides a clear, consistent approach to assessing and progressing in essential skills.

Practical tips:

- Explore the Universal Framework – are there any skills you could develop with your learners?
- Encourage learners to reflect on their essential skills through pupil passports, or use our assessment tool on Skills Builder Hub.

Watch the full Inclusive Assessment panel here.

Education for human flourishing

Michael Stevenson, OECD, in conversation with Professor Bill Lucas

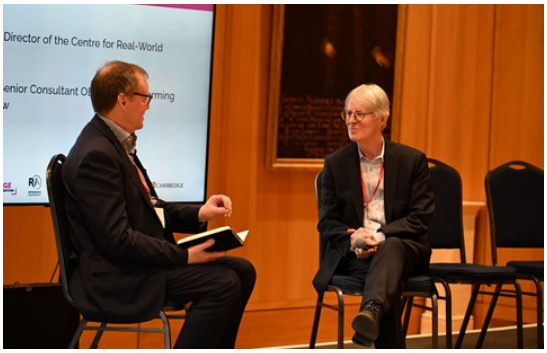
Selected excerpts

Bill Lucas: Can you tell us what you think flourishing is?

Michael Stevenson: A strong focus on those dimensions of human flourishing: happiness, meaning, relationships, accomplishments, whatever you take accomplishment to be, it's not just an exam certificate. You don't have to go far into Eastern traditions, and you don't have to go very far into Aristotle to see the collective dimension of flourishing: families, communities, societies, the planet, lives as yet unlived. I think the most helpful thing to do in reorienting the purposes of education is to focus on the intuitive and broadly agreed dimensions of human flourishing and that's what allows you to realign from foundational literacies - maths and science and reading forever - towards more inspiring and broader competencies.

Bill Lucas: If you could take yourself to a school, what might change in terms of pedagogy if you were set on developing a flourishing set of staff and students?

Michael Stevenson: Well, we're having a go at this at Wellington and its eight sister schools in south Asia. We're putting those five competencies at the heart of the learning experience for those students. It's a kind of spectrum from direct instruction through to aspects of coaching, mentoring, non-directed learning, with each teacher thinking about which aspect of the spectrum they draw on for which dimension of the learning experience for the child in order to create a totally integrated pedagogy.



Bill Lucas: Do you imagine the five competencies being assessed summatively, assessed formatively or a mix of the above?

Michael Stevenson: The OECD framework took a principle view that assessment should be useful. I think I heard Olly talking about it being personalised and multimodal and formative, integrated in that sense. Wonderful if you can take the data live rather than pushing students into exam halls. Now those competencies are going through a kind of PISA lens, thinking about how we could bring those competencies and those assessment principles into a reconceptualised piece in terms of what you'd assess and how you'd assess it.

Watch the full conversation here.

Read the OECD report on education for human flourishing and the five competencies here.

How might AI support all learners in assessment?

From principles...

Helen Barker, Chartered College of Teaching

Formative assessment is the bread and butter of classroom teaching; part of a cycle of planning, teaching and feedback that allows teachers and learners to understand the answers to Hattie and Timperley's three feedback questions: Where am I going? How am I going? Where to next?[3] Generative AI could play a part in supporting teachers and learners with aspects of this cycle, such as helping to develop appropriate hinge questions to check for understanding or even utilising genAI or AI-powered tools to assess student work and provide feedback.

With workload a perennial issue, saving marking time by using genAI seems attractive. However, AI is a new tool, we do not yet have a clear picture of the impact that this could have on teachers, learners and outcomes. Recent research from schools[4] has drawn out a range of potential risks alongside the potential workload benefits, including how AI feedback might impact on teacher-student relationships or lead to deskilling of teachers. Teachers and leaders should give careful consideration of potential benefits and drawbacks, alongside the ethical and practical implications of inviting genAI into the formative assessment and feedback cycle. A thoughtful implementation policy and thinking about where, when, why and how AI should be used in assessment can enable innovative practice whilst minimising risk.

...to practice

Julie Carson, Woodland Academy Trust

When considering how AI can support all learners in assessment, the most important starting point is clarity of purpose. Before choosing any tool, we ask a simple but critical question: What is it we are trying to assess? If the intention is to assess conceptual understanding, reasoning or application of knowledge, then assessment design, and any use of AI within it, must protect that focus.

In our Trust, AI-enabled tools are used within lessons to support responsive assessment rather than to generate grades or automate decisions. For example, platforms such as Magma Maths allow teachers to see pupils' mathematical thinking as it develops. This enables misconceptions to be identified early and addressed through timely intervention, while pupils receive immediate feedback that supports confidence and persistence. Assessment becomes something that actively shapes learning, not something that happens after it.

A practical step teachers could take tomorrow is to review one assessment activity and ask: Am I assessing the intended learning, or am I inadvertently assessing reading speed, written fluency or memory? AI can then be used to remove these barriers, for example by offering alternative ways for pupils to demonstrate understanding, providing scaffolded prompts, or separating the assessment of thinking from transcription.

This approach is particularly powerful for students with SEND, those learning English as an additional language, and those who experience assessment anxiety. When assessment is embedded, low-stakes and supportive, student wellbeing improves and engagement increases.

3. Hattie J and Timperley H (2007) The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research* 77(1): 81–112.
4. Doyle L, Nash RA, Jakcsiova V et al. (2025) 'They want you to read their work': Teachers' and students' perspectives on the use of AI for school feedback. *Technology, Knowledge and Learning* 30(4): 1917–1941.

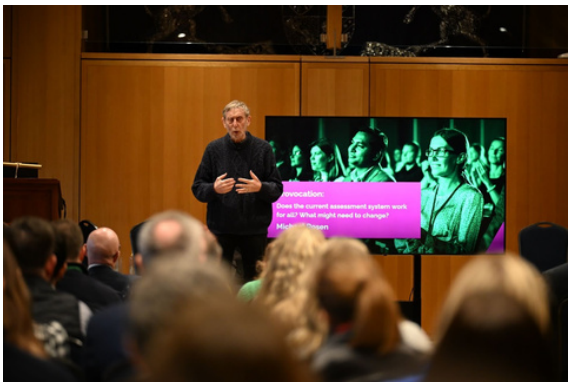
For leaders, implementation should be deliberate. Start with a small pilot, focus on one subject or assessment point, gather staff and student voice, and evaluate impact carefully. AI should strengthen professional judgement and inclusive practice, not replace them. Used thoughtfully, it helps assessment become fairer, more responsive and more inclusive for every learner.

If you are interested in AI and the use of technology to support assessment, you might also be interested in the posters from The Bluecoat School and Rookwood School

Watch the full How May AI Support All Learners panel here.

Keynote speech and poem: Michael Rosen

The Rhythm of Life



Hand on the bridge
feel the rhythm of the train.

Hand on the window
feel the rhythm of the rain.

Hand on your throat
feel the rhythm of your talk.

Hand on your leg
feel the rhythm of your walk.

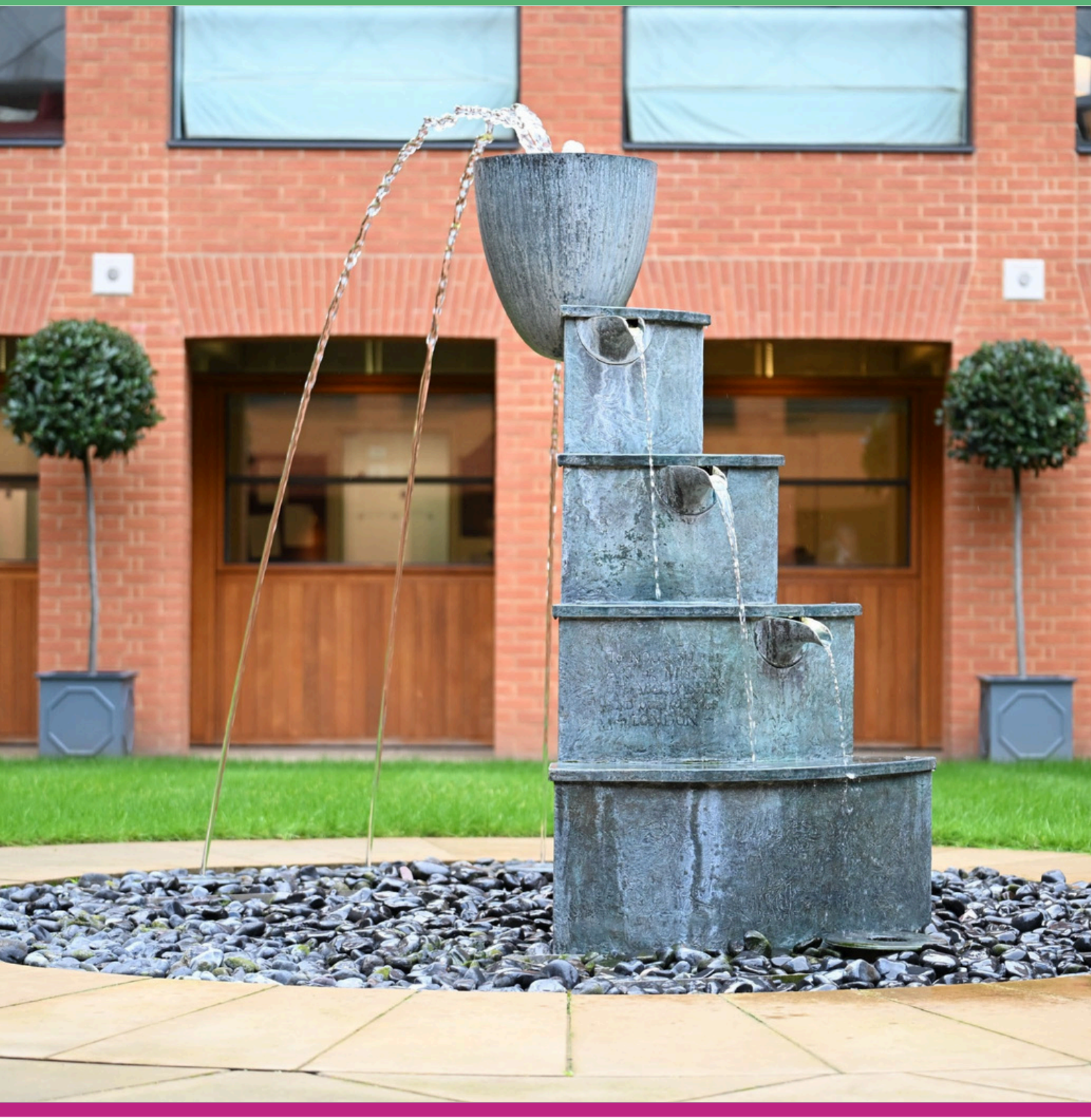
Hand in the sea
feel the rhythm of the tide.

Hand on your heart
feel the rhythm inside.

Hand on the rhythm
feel the rhythm of the rhyme.

Hand on your life
feel the rhythm of time
hand on your life
feel the rhythm of time
hand on your life
feel the rhythm of time.

Watch Michael Rosen's full keynote speech here.



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EDGE FOUNDATION

RA RETHINKING ASSESSMENT

Chartered College of Teaching

The Haberdashers' Company