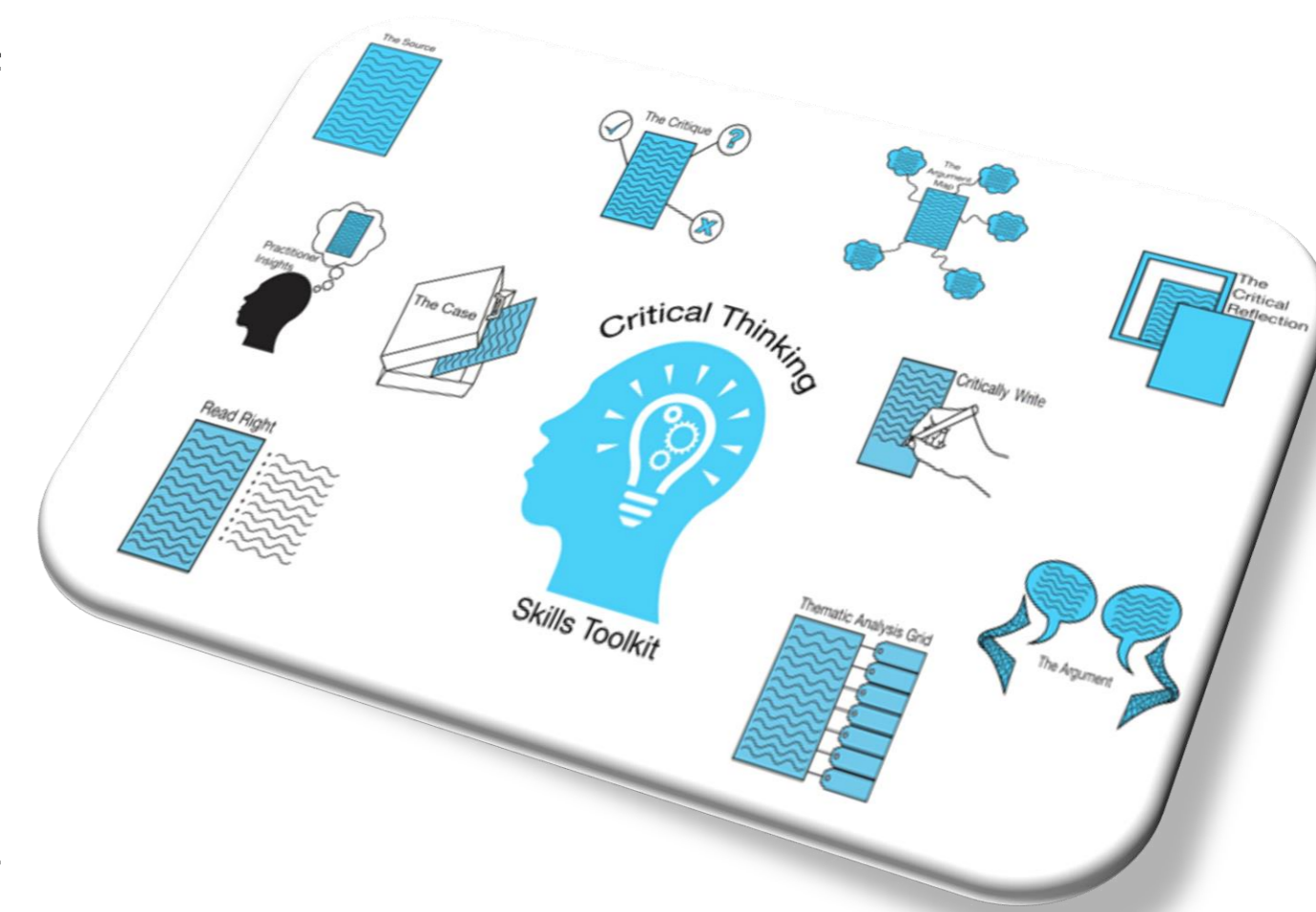


# Engagement and Partnership in the Development of Critical Thinking Skills\*

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Read on to discover how we are nurturing an existing community of practice and enhancing the evolution of the learning and teaching of Critical Thinking skills

**BACKGROUND:** Kingston and St George's University has been at forefront of developing interventions to embed Critical Thinking (CT) skills within undergraduate curriculum. The outcomes of an interdisciplinary international research collaboration have informed the development of a CT skills framework and toolkit designed to inform learning, teaching and assessment practice (Wason, 2016). The toolkit, which is underpinned by the work of Abrahmi et al (2015), operationalises our institutional adaptation of Facione's CT skills framework (Facione, 1990). Containing 10 branded teaching tools, it offers a flexible framework of instructional guides and worksheets which are tailored to a variety of learner levels and assignment tasks. With the aid of a small HEFCE Catalyst project fund, the toolkit has been piloted within the first year of 5 undergraduate degree programmes across two diverse faculties and employment sectors (Business and Healthcare).



**AGENTS OF CHANGE:** Partnerships between students, employers, educators and learning support services from both faculties have shaped the development of a curriculum from a content and skills perspective. Module evaluations, student reference groups and appreciative inquiry workshops have led to an iterative adaptation of the toolkit; of optimizing learning gains for students on different programmes. This has provided the impetus for the teaching teams to challenge their own practice and transform how they facilitate learning and interaction with students in the classroom. Methods of exploration and evaluation have facilitated a deeper understanding of existing knowledge, our values and affective states. Our appreciative inquiry highlighted the importance of sharing and the nature by which it has influenced the growth and success of the critical thinking skills project in 3 key ways, as the diagram below illustrates.

## Shared purpose and values

- Developing a common language of critical thinking amongst staff and employers across disciplines.
- Focusing on a community based systematic and reflective exploration of individual experiences enabling the examination of personal assumptions.

## Shared knowledge

- Information, experiential insight and guided practice has enriched the understanding of approaches to engaging students.
- Shared perspectives have generated new insight and transformed understanding. Changes in pedagogic practice and feedback on the student experience have contributed to new forms of knowledge associated with learning and development of critical thinking skills.

## Shared resources

- Built tangible learning resources that are flexible enough to be adapted and utilised across a number of disciplines.
- Examples of learning, teaching and assessment activities have been incorporated into a compendium of good practice which includes ideas for activities, way to adapt and evaluate outcomes and impact.

**USING APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY:** Appreciative inquiry has been central to fostering collaborative engagement, developing a shared purpose and building a strong and dedicated community of practice. Our focus has been in identifying aspects of practice that work well and the factors that have enabled things to happen. We have discovered what makes people feel engaged and productive alongside factors that make things better and improve outcomes. What participants valued most about appreciative inquiry was that it recognised success, engendered a 'can do' attitude, fostered a positive approach to improvement, generated ideas and illuminated insight and maximised potential to gain a variety of perspectives by valuing everyone's contribution. Moreover we have become cognisant of how cooperative engagement promotes sharing in 3 ways and how these have significantly influenced change and development, and transformed practices.

**\*This work forms part of the Meeting Employer Demands for Higher Order Thinking Skills HEFCE Catalyst Fund Innovations in Learning and Teaching and addressing barriers to student success Learn more by following us on Twitter: @cttoolkit**

**References:** Abrami, P. C., Bernard, R.M., Borokhovski, E., Waddington, D.I. Persson, T (2015), 'Strategies for Teaching Students to Think Critically a Meta-Analysis. Review of Educational Research, 85(2), pp. 275-314. Facione, P. (1990) Critical Thinking: A Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction. CA: The California Academic Press. Wason, H. (2016) 'Embedding a Critical Thinking Framework for Undergraduate Business Students, in Remenyi, D. (Ed.) 2016 Innovation in the Teaching of Research Methodology Excellence Awards: An Anthology of Case Histories, Reading: Academic Conferences and Publishing International