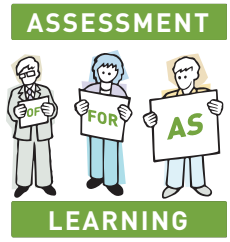
ASSESSMENT

LEARNING

ENHANCING PROGRAMME APPROACHES TO ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK IN IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION: CASE STUDIES, COMMENTARIES AND TOOLS

Edited by Geraldine O'Neill

T&L
NATIONAL FORUM
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION



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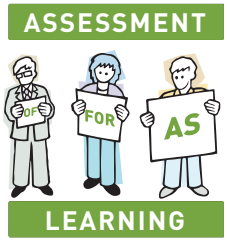

Introduction

We must prepare students to cope with the unknown and build their capacity to learn when the props of a course - curriculum, assignments, teachers, academic resources - are withdrawn.

What, then, does that imply for what and how we assess?

Boud, 2014, p26

Why Take a Programme Approach to Assessment and Feedback?

Assessment and feedback[1] are central to the question of how we can enhance and transform teaching and learning in higher education. Underpinning this resource is a recognition of the benefits of adopting a whole programme-level approach to assessment and feedback. This approach is important because:

- it allows for a more effective and efficient use of resources in balancing the requirements of both high-stakes assessment that is reliable and valid assessment that measures complex learning (Knight, 2000);
- multiple unconnected modular assessments can put student assessment efforts in one module in competition with efforts in parallel modules, potentially resulting in a focus on the immediate rather than on the important;
- a programme view of assessment and feedback allows staff to plan for a diversity of assessments across the programme, both familiar and unfamiliar;
- coherent and integrative approaches to programme assessment have the potential to support students to develop complex understanding and challenge their learning by building on learning in previous and parallel modules;
- institutional and student reputations affected by plagiarism and cheating are best addressed through a multi-pronged approach at programme and institutional level (Bretag & Harper, 2016); and
- the design and positioning of assessment and feedback within a programme is key to the integration of learning from different modules in ways that prepare students to apply their learning successfully within their lives and work.

1 A sectoral understanding of assessment and feedback (Assessment OF/FOR/AS Learning) developed as part of the National Forum's Assessment Enhancement Theme can be found in a recent Forum Insight (National Forum, 2017b). See also Earl and Katz, 2006.

What is This Resource and Who is it For?

This resource aims to assist staff and students in exploring approaches that consider assessment and feedback from a programme view.

It showcases the contribution of 37[2] staff and two students, from 14 national and five international institutions, to the National Forum's Assessment OF/FOR/AS Learning Enhancement Theme[3]. It includes:

- nine commentaries from international and national experts, including one commentary based on contributions from students;
- summaries of 18 case studies of practice, submitted by staff across the Irish higher education sector evidencing their practice with regard to programme approaches to assessment; and
- four tools which may be of use to those wishing to evaluate their approach to assessment at programme level.

This resource reflects the contributors' personal and/or professional experience of assessment and feedback. It aims to uncover and inform current programme-level assessment approaches in Irish higher education with a view to giving staff and students across the sector insights, tools and examples to assist them in enhancing teaching and learning within their own contexts. The resource, therefore, will be of benefit to all involved in related efforts, including:

- institutional leaders,
- heads of schools or departments
- programme teams,
- academic staff,
- quality assurance officers,
- disabilities officers,
- students,
- assessment administrators,
- learning support staff, and
- educational developers/technologists.

How to Use the Resource

Different contributions may be of interest to people in different positions within higher education. To assist in navigating this resource, the sections are structured and colour-coded to explore the following topics (see Figure 1):

- Drivers of Change (Context)
- Leading the Change: Some ideas (Leadership)
- Knowing What's Going On (Evidence and Dialogue)
- Making Changes Within Programme(s) (Design Interventions)

2 Overall, there were 60 participants in the Enhancement Theme Expert Groups (for a full list of Expert Groups, participants and institutions, see Appendix).

3 The National Forum Enhancement Theme for 2016-18 focuses on assessment and feedback. i.e. Assessment OF/FOR/AS Learning. The aim of the enhancement theme is to support and leverage an enhancement approach to assessment, in order to ensure that Ireland adopts and promotes innovative, engaging, collaborative, learner-oriented and integrated approaches to assessment that take into account the complex dynamics and requirements of higher education. A key element of the assessment theme is the design of programme approaches to assessment and feedback, which is the focus of the resource.

Figure 1 Overview of the resource

While the submitted tools and commentaries have been reproduced here in full, the case studies have been represented through summary paragraphs. Each case study is reproduced in full linked from the National Forum's programme assessment webpage, see https://tinyurl.com/NFprogramme.

This resource, therefore, serves as an introduction to the content of the online space and is a rich collection of current practice and theoretical and personal commentaries on this topic. The resource should be a springboard for continued dialogue and development, stimulating further discussion and supporting positive change at local, institutional and national level.

Some places to start in this resource

- *If you are an institutional leader*, you might like to read the 'Context' and 'Leadership' sections.
- *If you are a head of school or leader of a programme,* the sections on 'Leadership' and 'Evidence and Dialogue' are a useful start. You might also find the six case studies on programme mapping tools particularly interesting.
- *If you are a student,* you might find Catherine Bovill's commentary on students as partners interesting[4].
- *If you are a quality assurance officer, or a member of staff on a quality assurance committee,* the section 'Evidence and Dialogue' may assist you in gathering evidence on programme quality, while the section on 'Design Interventions' gives some ideas for quality enhancement.
- *If you are an academic member of staff* involved in the later years of a programme, Case Study M on capstone assessment might be a good starting point. For a module focus, see Case Study K, which describes a creative and integrative approach to assessment.

4 The National Forum/USI Insight on Students as Partners http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Students-as-Partners.pdf (National Forum, 2016) also provides useful thoughts on this subject.

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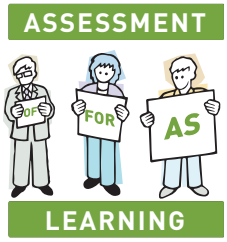
DRIVERS OF CHANGE (CONTEXT):
PROGRAMME ASSESSMENT

Drivers of Change (Context): Programme Assessment

This section gives an overview of the contextual elements which surround efforts to lead and enact change in assessment and feedback at programme level, including a specific commentary on students as partners in assessment and feedback. Many of the case studies in subsequent sections highlight student views and their involvement in programme assessment and feedback. The third commentary in this section provides an insight into how students can experience assessment at programme level. The wider national and international policies and projects that influence and support programme approaches to assessment are also outlined.

The key elements of this section are:

- two overarching international commentaries on programme approaches to assessment, (one focused on global forces affecting programme approaches to assessment and the second focused on developing a context in which students become partners in assessment);
- student experiences of assessment at programme level; and
- a commentary on wider national and international policies and projects that influence and support a programme approach to assessment.



Commentary: The Wider Context of Programme-Level Enhancement of Assessment

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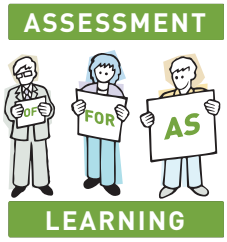
The most important principle that should guide our design of higher education programmes is that formative assessment has learning power. Formative assessment involves a judgment of the quality of work, which should be informed by explicit criteria, and might be made by a tutor, by a peer, or be a self-assessment. This judgment should provide information for the learner on how to improve their work and to academic staff on how to improve their teaching. I will return to this key issue of formative assessment, but first I want to discuss three wider issues around programme enhancement work: the neoliberal policy framework; graduate attributes; and our (over)dependence on learning outcomes for programme design.

Key Insight:
Formative assessment has learning power.

In the higher education sector internationally, we are living in an age of accountability and need to acknowledge that. As George Monbiot suggests, 'imagine if the people of the Soviet Union had never heard of communism' (Monbiot, 2016). In the Western world since the 1980s, neoliberalism has had a huge influence on educational policies and systems by emphasising parent/student choice as 'customers', high stakes inspection, student evaluative feedback, performativity of staff, league tables and inevitable washback from this policy framework into teaching, learning and assessment practice and even into how tutors and students work together. Within this 'age of accountability', we need to consider the student's position; expected to be entrepreneurial, setting off into the world by investing in their own higher education. They have come through a schooling system obsessed with testing, grading and target-setting – so who would be surprised if they tend to adopt surface or strategic approaches to learning when arriving in higher education. We also need to consider the academic staff, subjected to high accountability policies and procedures on recruitment, teaching, and assessment, not to mention research outputs and/or high teaching workloads – who would be surprised if these academics tend to be sceptical or cautious when asked to pursue a collaborative programme-level inquiry into assessment of, for and as learning. An action research approach, including its ethical framework, can help to provide a 'safe' learning environment for teaching teams. As academics, we need to more powerfully articulate and design for the wider aims of education and Gert Biesta proposes three overlapping purposes of qualification, socialisation and subjectification. His meaning for socialisation includes preparation to be a citizen and family member as well as an employee. And 'subjectification' relates to education enabling a student to become a unique human being, to respond to the curriculum in creative and personalised ways that might surprise tutors.

Within the challenging wider context, a programme level approach is particularly helpful in enhancing assessment strategies and practices because there is a tendency, especially in modularised systems, for us to forget that the award of a degree is a public declaration of the student's demonstration of programme-level requirements. These programme-level requirements include subject discipline knowledge, understanding and skills, but also 'graduate attributes'. In recent times, under the influence of the neoliberal policy framework, higher education institutions have particularly focused on 'employability'. A key challenge for teaching teams is to integrate these institutional requirements fully into their programmes within the subject discipline or professional field. Failure to embrace and integrate such programme-level requirements could lead to the imposition of 'bolt-on' modules or student experiences and even lead to pick-and-mix programme structures that lose the traditional and valuable student experience of socialisation into the discipline or field – the experience I enjoyed of gradually 'becoming a geographer' during my first degree.



Currently in education we tend to design and assess learning using 'learning outcomes'. It is arguable that the paradigmatic dependence on well-defined and thus measurable 'learning outcomes' is a consequence of the wider policy context. Learning outcomes are the cutting edge of neoliberal education policy. In reviewing programme-level aims, learning outcomes, and assessment strategies, we might consider how the programme provides sufficient space for subjectification. On a practical level and working within current constraints, it is possible to take a step towards this by ensuring that at least one of our learning outcomes, for each module or course we design, is open-ended enough to give some degree of autonomy to students, to invite creative and innovative responses. Alternatives to the over-emphasis on learning outcomes include a focus on key concepts, but this approach would have to avoid the perils of a content-based approach to programme planning. There is an interesting ongoing international debate around the school curriculum that provides some useful insight, building on the thinking of Durkheim and Bernstein around social realist perspectives of knowledge, with contributions from Michael F. D. Young (2008) among others. The focus on learning outcomes links to approaches to grading student work and providing written feedback. It tends to encourage the idea that grading can be criteria-based and analytic, as if an academic could evaluate a complex assignment such as an essay against five learning outcomes. In practice, at least in the light of my own research with Sue Bloxham, many academics tend to make holistic judgments that involve an element of norm referencing. They will perhaps refer to the published assessment criteria to confirm boundary judgments or provide some key words to ensure that the written feedback matches the grade awarded. A key challenge for us within a high accountability context is to consider to what extent we admit to students that holistic judgment by subject discipline experts is a big part of assessment in higher education. We would be acknowledging publicly that learning outcomes, assessment criteria and transparency are useful tools but have their limits.

I began this discussion by emphasising the learning power of formative assessment. In place of 'formative' I prefer the term 'low stakes' assessment because it better captures the significance of a safe learning environment in which struggle and mistakes are welcomed as learning opportunities. For students to benefit from formative assessment they need to believe that they can improve through effort (developing a growth mindset) and yet their experience of education in the age of accountability may have included much labelling of learners using incoherent terms such as 'ability'. Perhaps an even greater challenge is that academic staff must also believe in the malleable intelligence of their students, avoiding labelling and setting high expectations for all. Both academic staff and students need a 'safe' learning environment within our age of accountability.

Key Question:

To what degree do we welcome struggle and mistakes as learning opportunities within programmes?

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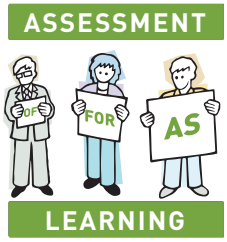

Commentary: Who Has Responsibility for Assessment?

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Key Insight:
Students have a valuable role to play in designing and discussing assessment.

The design and discussion of assessment in higher education is often considered to be the territory of academic staff. Indeed, many staff are shocked when I suggest that students have a valuable role to play in designing and discussing assessment. Yet, in the last few years we have witnessed a substantial increase in research and practice relating to student-staff partnership in learning and teaching in higher education with some of these partnerships focusing on assessment. Some of the shock, or perhaps reluctance to allow students to be part of assessment design decisions, might relate to the continued understanding that assessment means 'assessment of learning' – a summative test of what students learn/recall. Yet there have also been shifts in understanding assessment over recent years, with more and more academic staff coming to see the benefits of moving beyond assessment of learning. Many are recognising the benefits of using 'assessment for learning' where assessment is formative, offering the opportunities to learn through the assessment process. Others are highlighting the value of 'assessment as learning', which involves students in the process of assessment in authentic ways, such as through peer, self and co-assessment, and which enable students to learn about how they learn and to develop a metacognitive understanding of assessment.

Key Question:
How might we open up assessment to make it a more transparent and democratic process in our own programme contexts?

Throughout the years of a degree programme, students need to be able to develop 'assessment literacy' in order to understand how to meet assessment requirements, to understand the purposes of assessment, and to be able to develop a deeper understanding of their own learning. Dr Susan Deeley, who lectures in public policy at the University of Glasgow, has been working in partnership with her students for a number of years to try to enhance assessment literacy and promote assessment as learning (Deeley, 2014; Deeley & Bovill, 2017). She has used a range of different ways of opening up assessment to make it a more transparent and democratic process, including co-designing grading criteria with students, peer assessment and co-assessment. Co-assessment involves Susan grading the students' work and each student grading his/her own work, and then Susan and each student meet individually to compare grades and discuss the rationale for giving the grade before finally negotiating the final grade. Susan still has the final say in the grade awarded, but this is openly discussed and negotiated. So although there might be some limits or rules within assessment partnerships, these can be openly negotiated and discussed. Underpinning Susan's approach, and that of others trying to democratise the assessment process (see also chapter by Kruschwitz and chapter by Hudd in Cook-Sather et al., 2014) is a belief that students have valuable knowledge and experience to bring to discussions of assessment design, and that we do not help students to develop their understanding of assessment and learning by closing off assessment from collaborative discussion.

There is of course still a place for testing student knowledge. I would rather walk across a bridge designed by a civil engineer who passed her exams, and be operated on by a doctor who had passed his assessments – students will still need to demonstrate their knowledge and competence. However, students are much more engaged when they can see the relevance of learning and assessment, when they can actively learn through the process of assessment, when assessment is considered to be fair, and when they can enjoy- yes enjoy - assessment.

So how can students become co-creators in assessment? They do not necessarily enter higher education as experts in Angoff scoring of multiple choice questions, but they will be experts in their individual experience of assessments at school or in other settings. I suspect we rarely tap into these previous experiences to support the transition to learning about assessment in higher education. Students are not going to become experts in higher education assessment immediately, but they will learn about assessment much more slowly if we don't start having assessment discussions, providing more choice within assessment and offering students opportunities to influence assessment early in their time in higher education. Ultimately, students and staff can work in partnership to design assessment as they build greater understanding of assessment and learning.

All of this requires a pretty seismic shift in thinking about assessment from many staff and students, particularly about who has responsibility for assessment.

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Commentary: Student Experiences

This commentary was compiled from anonymous student contributions to the Assessment OF/FOR/AS Learning Enhancement Theme. Two students, who shared very different experiences of programme approaches to assessment, were asked to take part in interviews during which a full account of their experiences were recorded and are summarised here.

Student A:
A challenging, integrated yet extremely valuable experience... if you asked me to start that module again I would have absolutely no problem doing so.

Experience of Student A

In an undergraduate programme, this male business student was undertaking a module in which he had to research into and develop a product. It was a 5-credit elective final-year module, spread over two semesters, that could be taken by different disciplines within this higher education institution. As part of the assessment activity, students were assigned into groups from across different disciples.

During the first semester, the students were asked to conduct a feasibility study – working with students from a different field of study to agree a concept and carry out primary research, secondary research and compile accounts and marketing strategy. The assessment included a diary and an initial business plan. During the second semester, the assessment focused on preparing the product for competitions, further developing the business plan, doing a presentation and presenting the product at a stand.

During the module, the students met with lecturers every week for feedback on how they were doing. General feedback was given in class to the whole class. Individual feedback was given during one-to-one interactions between classes. The student seemed to know how well he was doing throughout. He read and gave peer feedback on others work, although some students did not engage with the peer feedback approach.

Despite the student reporting that the module consumed a lot of time and had a high workload, he was overwhelming positive about his experience of the module: 'As a subject, it was my favourite one... it was extremely beneficial... I personally think the module should be mandatory for fourth years'. He highlighted how the module had integrated knowledge and skills from parallel and earlier modules: 'In that module, you basically get to taste every bit of [the subject area]... everything I've learnt outside is basically all funnelled into this... that's why I can't understand why more students are not doing the module'.

He described it as a very authentic experience and, as he did not have an opportunity to go on work placement, it was the closest he could get to a sense of running his own business. In particular, he found that working with other disciplines was highly valuable: 'Working with the other students also is very much eye-opening... different schools have different ways of doing things... I thought it was absolutely fantastic that I got to experience it... the fact even that I had disagreements with the other discipline students, I still realised it's never going to be plain sailing. At least through this I was able to get experience in dealing with those type of things... it was an experience, I was able to get over it'.

Despite the challenge and the high workload, when asked was it worth it, he said, 'Completely. Absolutely. It's the one module I hated but I absolutely loved it!... You'd have to be very very small-minded to think just because there's a lot of work it's not beneficial. The stuff you learn, as long as you take it away, will stay with you for life.'

Reflecting on the value of the module within the programme as a whole, the student shared: 'I know it might be very hard to do... I don't understand why it isn't mandatory... even if they had to remove modules there's one or two that they could possibly remove and make an elective, I do think that is should be made mandatory'. He alluded to the authenticity of the module: 'You get to use all the different knowledge that you're learning and also the fact that you don't have placement [in the programme], it's something that you could certainly talk about in an interview, which I have already... You get to actually think. You're not learning stuff off. You get to think.'

Experience of Student B

Student B:
Completely over-assessed to the point where people weren't actually going to classes... I would never go back.

This student was enrolled in a master's programme in a similar field to Student A. It was a full year, full-time programme, six months taught, six months on placement. The student group was large (approximately 100), with a range of non-business backgrounds.

The programme began with two 5-ECTS-credit modules, including assessments, scheduled within the two weeks prior to the first semester. The first semester (12 weeks) had eight modules, each 5 ECTS credits, plus two half modules in preparation for work placement in the second semester. Assessments were mainly a mixture of individual assignments, group assignments, interview, presentation and exams. The second semester (six weeks) had four 100% group project modules, each worth 5 ECTS credits. Some of the weighting in three of the modules was for individual effort. However, the overall grade was dependant on working in a team. There were many assessments in addition to the four project outputs, resulting in a total of 13 assessments within the six weeks.

The student, who explained that she was a hard worker and wanted to get good grades, was adamant that she was over-assessed. The first semester 'was insane', while in the second semester students were 'completely over-assessed to the point where people weren't actually going to classes... in the last three weeks in one of my lectures six people showed up consistently [out of 50].'

She also felt the modules in the programme were 'not equal at all. I don't know, are they meant to be equal? In terms of the actual effort and the time it would take, parts of them were not even close to being equal. Considering they were all five-credit modules it's a bit strange. Or it felt a bit strange at the time anyway'. The student felt they were doing considerably more hours per credit than they should have been during the second semester, that the effort in those four modules outweighed the effort in the previous eight modules combined. 'We essentially did the same amount of work that we did in the 12 weeks in the first term but they squashed it into half the time (six weeks)... academically, if you had 12 weeks and you could do parts of it yourself it probably wouldn't have been so bad'.

She acknowledged that there were some good modules with passionate and supportive lecturers: 'One of my lecturers in the second term was a really interesting guy and so obviously passionate about what he did and he put so much work into his lectures and again by the last month no-one was coming because we had so much work... by the end you're kind of like, what does this mean, am I going to be assessed on this? I could be doing something else. Yes, this is interesting but is it relevant to what I am handing into the office right now?'.

The student did not like that fact that the second semester was made up entirely of group work and that there no aspect for which she was personally responsible and she could control the outcome. She found this frustrating and that it was reflected in her grades: 'In first term I didn't like the group work because of my personal preference but it was fine. I was able to deal with it to the extent that it was getting done and the grades were good. It was in the second term where I had a serious problem with it and actually the entire class did because it got to the stage where nothing we did was actually any of our own work. And it ended up with a number of students, one of which was me, who just did all of the work. And there was a good 40% of the class who were just following along. And that reflected in the grades, which was really unfair in the end

because they were big projects that should have had a few people working on them. And we had such a tight timeline. I think we only had six weeks for a couple of them. It got very frustrating and it wasn't just me, just my natural preference'.

Asked how the approach to assessment within the programme affected her learning, the student responded: 'Negatively, without a doubt. I like being on time to class and I like going to class and if at all possible I will go to class but even by the end where there was six of us in class it was getting to the stage where I was like "should I go to this three-hour lecture/tutorial or should I try and finalise the project and actually get to sleep before midnight?".. it was just so much pressure that you couldn't actually do anything about it. It was just about getting it done and handing it in.'

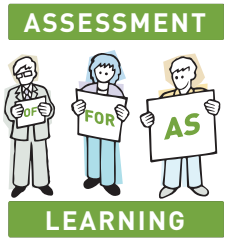
Lessons to be Learned from the Student Experiences

The two students in this commentary were faced with high workloads within their programme/module, were expected to participate in group work and participated in five-credit modules. Both were diligent and willing to do their best to get the most from their learning encounters. However, the students' experiences were very different. Notwithstanding the fact that students' interests, skills and circumstances often differ, what can be learned from the experiences of these two students?

There were indications in both cases that the credit load of modules did not always reflect the effort invested, and that the efforts required for the same credit loads sometimes differs between modules. Although the level of effort required for the same assessment can differ between students, the experiences described here do highlight the need for programme staff to be very careful in ensuring effort invested is reflected in credits awarded.

The experience of Student A illustrates how a well-constructed authentic assessment can draw together learning from across a programme in ways which have a lasting positive effect into the careers of graduates.

The experience of Student B, however, provides an insight into how poor planning with regard to programmatic assessment can result in student learning being curtailed and their experiences of higher education becoming negative. When asked what one thing she would change about the programme, the student gave a particular insight into the link between her experience of being over-assessed and the need for effective programme-level assessment planning: 'I would have a long talk with the lecturers about speaking to each other when they do assessments. Instead of everyone just assessing and just thinking of their own module, perhaps some actual communication so the students don't end up with what happened to us.'



Commentary: Policies and Projects Related to Programme Assessment

National Forum Team

The National Forum Enhancement Theme 2016-18 focuses on Assessment OF/FOR/AS Learning. The aim of the enhancement theme is to support and leverage an enhancement approach to assessment, in order to ensure that Ireland adopts and promotes innovative, engaging, collaborative, learner-oriented and integrated approaches to assessment that take account of the complex dynamics and requirements of higher education.

There are a number of phases in the enhancement theme process: (i) the theme is informed through consultation with the sector and relevant literature, (ii) evidence is built regarding current practice, (iii) structured and unstructured conversations take place to build capacity across the sector, (iv) good practice is shared and (v) the work in the theme is monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis.

As part of the building capacity phase of the assessment enhancement theme, advisors and experts from around the country were invited to gather and discuss a number of aspects of the theme, considered to be enablers to reaching the overall aim (see Appendix). These aspects included developing a sectoral understanding of assessment, clarifying assessment principles within the Irish context, enhancing understandings of the meaning and application of authentic assessment, discussing needed policy developments to enhance assessment practices, and promoting effective programme assessment practices within and across institutions and fields of study. While each of these aspects interact, it is this latter element of the assessment theme, programme approaches to assessment and feedback, which is the focus of the current collection of resources. Figure 1 illustrates the evolution of this aspect of the enhancement theme alongside the overall enhancement theme development.

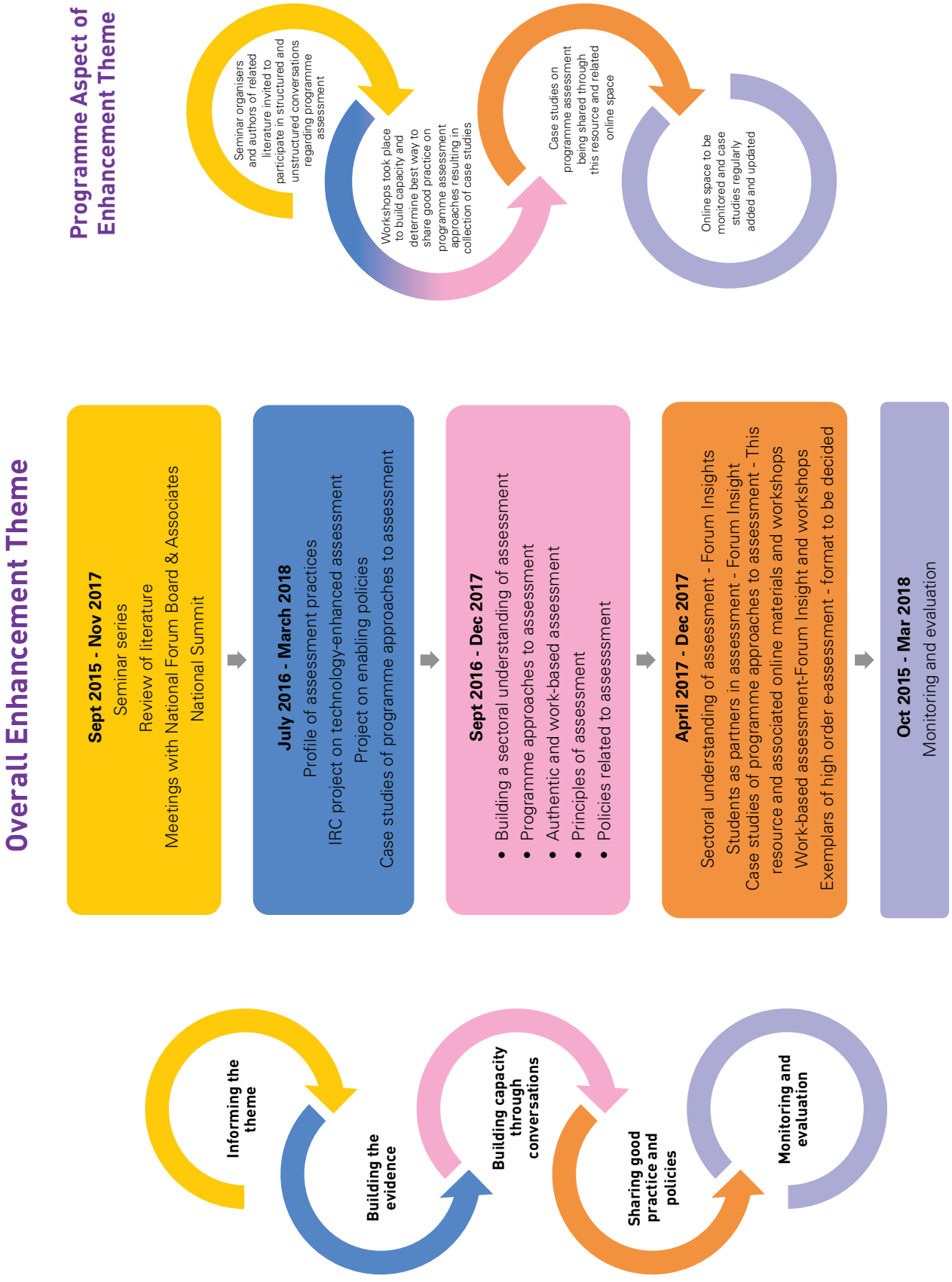


Figure 1 The place of this resource within the National Forum Enhancement Theme 2016-18

Place Within National and International Policies and Projects

There are a range of international and national policies and projects that influence and support programme approaches to assessment. These are presented below with reference to leadership, gathering evidence for change, and design interventions.

Leadership

Strategic vision and leadership is needed to fully engage staff in the potential offered by new modes of learning, teaching and assessment (European Commission, 2014, p27). Nationally, institutional leaders are now required, through their institutional mission-based compacts, to benchmark their programmes by the appropriate assessment of teaching and learning (HEA, 2013, p11). Students should be involved in these institutional benchmarking processes and become involved in the design and implementation aspect of programme assessment (HEA, 2016). In addition to dialogue with students, programmes should be developed through dialogue and partnerships with graduates and other stakeholders (European Commission, 2013, p41).

To support this leadership activity at national level, in addition to the National Forum Enhancement Theme, the *Professional Development Framework for All Staff who Teach in in Higher Education* supports the idea of staff 'leading' the development of programme assessment and feedback approaches (National Forum, 2016). For example, the Framework sets out the following professional development elements that should be developed/pursued by those in this leadership role:

- Supportive of active student-centred approaches to learning that engage students and build towards students as partners in their learning.
- Design and management of sessions, modules and/or curricula (programmes) appropriate to the learning environment.
- Application of appropriately aligned assessment and learner-oriented feedback approaches from one's own discipline and, where relevant, from other disciplines.

Connected to the ongoing pilot of the Framework, a non-accredited digital badge on 'Programme Focused Assessment' is in under development. This will assist programme leaders to develop skills in this area in the future. Also connected to the Framework, the most recent round of *Teaching and Learning Enhancement* Funds focused on supporting the creation and provision of professional development opportunities for middle/senior managers across collaborating institutions that align with the new Framework and support their development as leaders of teaching and learning enhancement and as digital champions.

Another national development which promises to support the enhancement of programme approaches to assessment across the sector is the recently-launched discipline-focused National Forum learning impact award, the *Disciplinary Excellence in Learning, Teaching and Assessment (DELTA) Award*. Assessment OF/FOR/AS Learning is one of the key elements to be considered by disciplines in preparing their applications for the award. This key element includes the following statements:

- Teaching and Learning Enhancement requires systematic, coherent, creative planning and development of assessment approaches within a programme.
- The discipline group's assessment policies and procedures should highlight their commitment to a student-centered approach to assessment and feedback: developing students' abilities to peer-review and self-monitor so they can regulate their own learning and demonstrating a commitment to students as partners in Assessment OF, FOR and AS learning.

Gathering Evidence for Change

There are national requirements to gather and discuss evidence on assessment and feedback approaches that currently exist in the programme. The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (Hunt Report) recommends that higher education institutions should put in place systems to capture feedback from students, and use this feedback to inform institutional and programme management (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). In addition, the HEA (2013) institutional mission-based compacts emphasise using student feedback to inform programme content and delivery (p11). Suitable measures should be put in place across the institution to ensure that students are facilitated in providing feedback (HEA, 2016). As a consequence of these drivers, institutions and programmes are supported at national level in the use of ISSE (Irish Survey of Student Engagement), which specifically gathers feedback on students' experience and engagement in their programmes (ISSE, 2016).

A National Forum project that supports the idea of gathering existing evidence for the purpose of enhancing student learning and wellbeing, is the National Forum project Learning Analytics and Educational Data Mining for Learning Impact (National Forum, 2017).

Design Interventions

There has been a range of international and national policies that support the idea of the development of student as partners, a key aspect of this assessment enhancement theme. The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) emphasises that institutions should ensure that programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students in an active role (European Commission, 2015). The HEA working group report, in particular, maintains that students as partners is key in moving beyond legal compliance to embed a culture of engagement throughout the institution (HEA, 2016). It also notes that institutions should embrace innovative learning techniques which incorporate the student as creator of their own learning.

Whereas many policies highlight the importance of timely feedback *to* students (European Commission, 2015; QQI, 2016), there is also a recognition that students have a part to play in developing their own judgements (Assessment AS Learning):

- to encourage a sense of autonomy in the learner (QQI, 2016); and
- to empower students in the learning process, i.e., the principles of universal design for learning (HEA, 2015).

As highlighted by ISSE, students gain most when they invest time and energy in their learning and institutions and staff have key roles to play in providing an environment that both encourages and facilitates that engagement (ISSE, 2016).

The National Forum has some ongoing and earlier projects that link with the Assessment Enhancement theme and in particular link with a programme approach to assessment, for example:

- Supporting Transition: Enhancing Feedback in First Year Using Digital Technologies (Y1Feedback)
- Assessment for Learning Resources for First Year Undergraduate Mathematics Modules
- ePrePP (Preparation for Professional Practice)
- Technology Enhanced Assessment Methods (TEAM) in Science & Health Practical Settings

These national and international polices and projects give some sense of the context in which programme approaches to assessment and feedback are situated.

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LEADING THE CHANGE IN PROGRAMME ASSESSMENT: SOME IDEAS (LEADERSHIP)

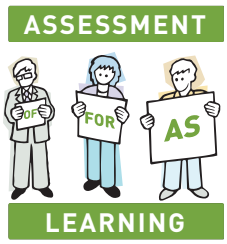
Leading the Change in Programme Assessment: Some Ideas (Leadership)

Programmes of study can be complex entities. They can span many years, schools, disciplines, institutions, countries and/or continents. Student cohorts and teaching staff can be diverse and bring with them varied knowledge, skills and competencies. Enhancing an individual programme and/or a range of programmes across an institution requires strong leadership in order to mobilise resources and to support staff and students in this challenging task.

The key elements in this section are:

- a commentary by a head of department on her experience, over time, of managing and interrogating programme assessment; and
- summaries of case studies from four Irish higher education institutions which describe their experiences of institutional approaches to enhancing programme assessment practices. The case studies are at different stages of leading change, with some at the planning stage and others having already implemented significant institutional change.

Challengers and enablers to leading change are described in the case studies, as well as some of the processes involved. The importance of staff professional development and the benefits of involving students as partners in leading assessment change are common themes.


ASSESSMENT
OF
FOR
AS
LEARNING

Commentary: Head of Department's Experience of Managing and Interrogating Programme-Level Assessment – Asking Questions

Dr Marion Palmer

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Key insight:

The key task for a head of department is to ask questions about assessment - questions about student effort and learning and questions about staff effort and workload.

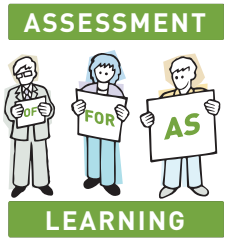
Working with students, programmes teams and lecturers as Head of Department meant supporting them in terms of assessment. I had a duty of care to students to ensure that their assessment was fair, consistent and worthwhile and a duty of care to staff to ensure that their workload was appropriate.

In doing so, it became evident that I needed an overview of the assessment of a programme. Students tend not to grasp their assessment workload. They aren't always sure how many assessment tasks they have at any one time. They aren't confident about the assignments they have submitted and can be confused about when they get results and/or feedback or both. Lecturers don't always see the assessment load that students have. Having a programme assessment strategy enabled me to develop an understanding of the student assessment experience.

Developing a programme assessment strategy (QQI, 2013) requires that programme teams ask and answer questions about assessment.

Some of the questions are:

- How many assignments do students have over the year?
- How long is needed between submission of student work and the issue of provisional results and feedback?
- What assessment methods assess the programme and module learning outcomes?
- What assessment methods do students experience over the whole programme?
- Over the course of a full programme, do students have enough/too many essays/projects/tests? How many essays (or other assessment methods) do students do in Year 1 (2, 3, as appropriate)?
- Is there over- or under-assessment? Are all the assignments/tests/projects/exams needed?
- How do the assessment methods link within and across modules?
- How does the assessment planned for a module meet the module learning outcomes? What does it contribute to the assessment of the programme learning outcomes?
- Where do students develop the academic referencing and writing skills needed for the programme? How are these assessed?
- How do assessments fit with the student effort hours per module? Have students time to read, to practice skills or to just think?
- Do students have time to prepare for exams?



A coherent team approach leads to practices that have a positive impact on students. Lecturers are aware of assignments, projects and other assessments across the programme. It can help manage assessment fashions – do students need four different reflective journals at any one time?

With a programme assessment strategy, programme teams work together to see how their assessments link from one module to the other over the duration of a programme. Lecturers do not make individual agreements with classes, they make decisions through consultation with both students and colleagues. When programme team members change, the programme team can support new team members with the programme assessment strategy and, hopefully, previous assessments.

Programme teams can be resistant to developing a programme assessment strategy, yet programme approaches to assessment support lecturers in developing their assessment.

As a head of department, questions that I asked were:

- Does the assessment assess the module learning outcomes?
  How does it contribute to the assessment of the programme learning outcomes?
- Will the assignment give you reasonably accurate information?
  How will you use the information?
  How will students use the information?
- Is the assessment/assignment of value to the students?
  Is it worthwhile?
  Does it engage the students and/or you?
- Is it worth your time to mark/assess/grade it?
  How long will it take you to assess?
  Will you get it returned to students in the agreed time for the programme?
- When do you assess student work?
  When you receive assignments from students, how do you manage your work?
  Can you spend the working day on the assessment?

I think the key task for a head of department is asking questions about assessment. Questions about student effort and learning and questions about staff effort and workload challenge but they provide a means of interrogating assessment at a programme level; they help lecturers and programme teams make professional decisions about assessment and improve the quality of programme assessment and student learning.

References

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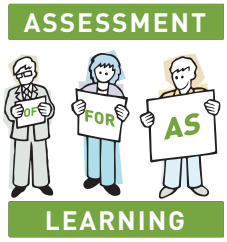


Case Studies Related to Programme and Institutional Leadership

Case Study A: An Institutional Approach to Programme Mapping (UCD)

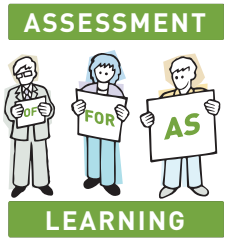
This case study describes a strategic institutional mapping exercise conducted across UCD, which aimed to ensure that the teaching and learning activities, assessments, and content within each programme aligned with the programme outcomes. The output from the process - the curriculum map - comprised a series of summary tables, which provided a visual representation, using simple scoring and a colour-coded pattern, of the degree to which programme outcomes appeared to be addressed and assessed. Each programme team then met to review and interpret the map, facilitating a critical opportunity for collegial dialogue about the programme as a whole. Key enablers and challenges to this approach, as well as perceived impacts, are discussed.

Case Study B: The Trinity Assessment Framework: Developing an Institutional Approach (TCD)

Against the backdrop of the Trinity Education Project (an institution-wide initiative aiming to re-articulate a shared vision for Trinity education across the University), the Trinity Assessment Framework was developed. The Trinity Assessment Framework, which is the focus of this case study, is an institutional approach to assessment, aiming to move from assessment OF learning to assessment FOR and AS learning. Collectively, the Framework depicts a structure for enabling transformation in assessment practices and policy in Trinity. Taking a programme-focused approach, the Framework shifts the focus of assessment from being purely at the module level, and encourages design and delivery of assessment that is integrated in nature.

Case Study C: DIT Programme Re-Design Initiatives

The institutional approach described in this case study is one in which DIT programme teams from all four Colleges of the Institute have been encouraged to become engaged in a holistic approach to curriculum review and design by the provision of timely professional development alongside formal recognition and incentives. Examples of incentives and practice exchange opportunities for staff are provided. The process of redesign is intended for degree-programme teams, who work in parallel during the process and share good practice as they rethink their programmes and undertake their design work.



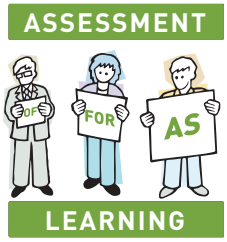
Case Study D: A Framework for Assessed Group Work: Development and Initial Implementation of an Institution-wide Approach (DkIT)

Following extensive feedback from their students on the assessment of group work, Dundalk Institute of Technology identified that there was a need for an institution-wide approach to address students' concerns and identify good practices. The institution aimed to establish a programme or stage approach in order to a) enhance visibility of group work, b) address the number of simultaneous group projects and c) scaffold the development of group work skills. As a result, the Learning and Teaching Subcommittee of Academic Council developed a framework to support programme teams across the institution in the planning and implementation of assessed group-work. The framework is currently being piloted and evaluated.

Key Insights from Case Studies Related to Leadership

- The case studies highlight the importance of (i) assessment developments being embedded within holistic, institution-wide development initiatives and (ii) a focus on building capacity with the programme team as a key facilitator of positive change.
- Cross-disciplinary approaches are also evident in the case studies, as is student involvement. Student involvement takes a number of forms, from their involvement in the dialogue on assessment change to their support in developing additional skills.
- Importantly, the professional development of staff is a common feature in all three institutional case studies. (The *National Professional Development Framework* may be useful in helping institutions to ensure that staff have an opportunity to align their existing knowledge, skills and competencies with regard to programme assessment and identify where further development is needed.)

KNOWING WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR PROGRAMME (EVIDENCE AND DIALOGUE)



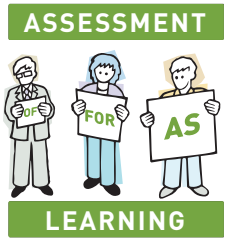
Knowing What's Going on in your Programme (Evidence and Dialogue)

While the enhancement of programme assessment and feedback practices should be an evidence-based process, gathering data on the experiences and practices of students, staff and other stakeholders is only the first step in such a process. There is also a need for programme team dialogue to take place in order to consider the causes and implications of the collected evidence and to discuss strategies for enhancement. The collection and interrogation of evidence is the focus of this section.

The section presents programme assessment review tools that involve the gathering of data to evaluate students and/or staff views on programme assessment and feedback practices. In addition, it presents case studies of a variety of programme mapping tools in use across Irish higher education.

The key elements of this section are:

- An international commentary on how students and staff can learn from the evaluation of programme approaches to assessment.
- Tool 1: ISSE: Using ISSE Data to Inform and Enhance Changes to Assessment OF/FOR and AS Learning.
- Tool 2: The EAT Framework: Considerations for Programme Leaders and their Students.
- Tool 3: The Programme Design Dialogue Tool: To Support Staff in the Review of their Programme Assessment and Feedback Practices.
- Tool 4: TESTA and its Potential to Enhance Programme Assessment.
- Six case studies of programme mapping tools in use. A comparison of these tools explores assessment load, diversity and additional information, such as variety, amount and/or timing of assessment methods.



Commentary: Learning from the Evaluation of Assessment: How Faculty and Staff Can Use Results to Inform Practice[1]

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Key Insight:

An ongoing evaluation of assessment results and practices can be useful to inform the development of effective programme approaches.

There are various reasons why those of us in higher education assess student learning. It may be done as assessment *for* or *of* learning, or other such distinctions, but a shared impetus for the work is that students advance their individual learning. Yet, students are not the only participants in assessment that can learn from the process or results. Through assessing student learning, a wide range of data and evidence on students and their learning are collected that can inform faculty and staff practices and processes such as teaching, learning, and curriculum design.

When thought of as a re-occurring cycle that promotes the use of evidence to inform practice, one might move through the following, cyclical steps:

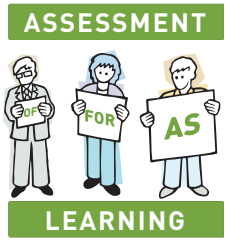
- Plan and identify outcomes
- Collect data
- Analyze data
- Share results
- Identify and implement changes
- Evaluate impact of changes

On first review of the evaluation cycle, one might notice a close alignment to scholarship or inquiry in the process of engagement with evidence. The first two stages of planning and collecting data are completed mainly through the act of assessment activities: for example, collecting data on:

- programme assignment and examination grades;
- diversity, sequence and amount of assessment in a programme;
- common errors highlighted in feedback comments;
- opportunity for students to self-assessment and/or peer review in a programme; and
- number of failed questions within an assignment.

The following stages occur through discussion, deliberation, careful analysis and interpretation of results - and are ongoing. The last step before beginning the cycle of use again is acting on the evidence - implementing changes to learning design or teaching and examining the impact of the changes.

1 This commentary was adapted from Kinzie, Hutchings & Jankowski (2015).



To focus upon a cyclical process of using evidence to inform learning design, assessment must provide actionable evidence on student learning and address faculty and staff questions of interest around student learning.

Undertaking assessment with a clear focus from the onset on how results will be utilized or the connections that can be made between evidence and advancing improvements in students' learning will better position assessment as a mechanism that can drive meaningful practices in teaching and learning. Asking of ourselves, 'how will we act on the evidence we collect?' can be a useful first step in using assessment results to improve learning.

Key Question:

Asking of ourselves, 'how will we act on the evidence we collect?' can be a useful first step in using assessment results to improve learning.

In our work at the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) based in the United States, we have found that providing faculty and staff space for reflection on evidence gathered from examining student learning reinforces connections between assessment and improvements in teaching and learning as well as fosters evidence-based conversations and scholarship of teaching and learning. Providing space and time for faculty and staff for evidence-focused discussions and intentional consideration of the impact of action taken can help to move teaching and learning discussions through the full evaluation cycle presented above.

To inform the work of using evidence to improve teaching and learning, we offer several principles for consideration including:

1. The value of assessment of student learning should be based on the extent to which evidence is used (for example, the extent to which examinations and assignments are improved in the following year). Are questions of practice driving the application of results? Is potential use considered from the onset?

2. Clear targets for the use of evidence of student learning should be part of the design of evaluating assessment efforts and the process of sharing results. Who are the different faculty and staff members that should be part of the discussions around the results? How is evidence used and what was the impact on student learning and success? What is the practical value of the evidence of student learning for faculty and staff?

3. Begin assessment of student learning processes and activities with an end use in mind. What are the questions of greatest interest to faculty and staff? What do faculty and staff expect to find? What might be changed based on conversations (i.e. increase in diversity of assessment; developing some choice of assessment; design of more authentic assessments)?

4. Remember that the process is a continuous one, where making decisions based on evidence of student learning is important, but is the beginning of a new cycle. What was the impact of the change? Did it lead to improvement in student learning (for example, the extent to which the changes improve student assessment success rates, reduced student anxiety, etc.)?

Fostering a culture of evidence-based change requires follow-through and time. Through conversations informed by evidence of student learning, faculty and staff are better positioned to implement meaningful changes in teaching and learning and assessment of student learning that lead to higher levels of student accomplishment.

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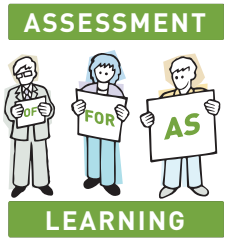
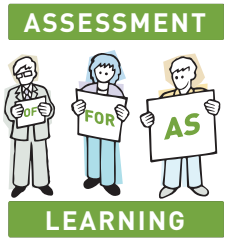


Tool 1: Using ISSE Data to Inform and Enhance Changes to Assessment OF/FOR and AS Learning

National Forum Team

In the Irish context, an important tool for gathering evidence on students' experience of their programme is the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE). ISSE is an annual survey that explores students' experiences of higher education. First piloted in 2013, ISSE is designed to inform developments within institutions while also providing a national set of data. The survey collects responses during February - March each year 'to ensure that first years have enough experience of higher education to comment in an informed way, while avoiding the additional demands on all students' time (first year, final year and taught postgraduates) towards the end of the academic year' . Since its establishment, ISSE has collected over 90,000 student respondents. Its main objectives are:

- to increase transparency in relation to the student experience in higher education institutions;
- to enable direct student input on levels of engagement and satisfaction with their higher education institution;
- to identify good practice that enhances the student experience;
- to assist institutions to identify issues and challenges affecting the student experience;
- to serve as a guide for continual enhancement of institutions' teaching and learning and student engagement;
- to document the experiences of the student population, thus enabling year-on-year comparisons of key performance indicators;
- to provide insight into student opinion on important issues of higher education policy and practice; and
- to facilitate comparison with other higher education systems internationally (ISSE, 2016).



As part of the National Forum Assessment Enhancement Theme (2016-2018), the National Forum identified 15 questions in the ISSE survey that broadly related to Assessment OF, FOR or AS Learning[2]. Three questions related to Assessment OF Learning, four related to Assessment FOR Learning and eight related to Assessment AS Learning. In addition, although not specifically highlighting assessment, eight General Outcomes questions gave some indication of the intentions of assessment in the students' curricular and extra-curricular activities (see Table 1).

Table 1 Assessment-related questions in ISSE 2016

Assessment FOR Learning	
During the current academic year, about how often have you:	Discussed your performance with academic staff?
During the current academic year, to what extent have lecturers/ teaching staff:	Clearly explained course goals and requirements?
	Provided feedback on a draft or work in progress?
	Provided prompt and detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments?
Assessment AS Learning	
During the current academic year, about how often have you:	Asked questions or contributed to discussions in class, tutorials, labs or online?
	Asked another student to help you to understand course material?
	Explained course material to one or more students?
	Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students?
	Worked with other students on projects or assignments?
	Discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with academic staff outside of class?
	Evaluated what others have concluded from numerical information?
	Worked on assessments that informed you how well you are learning?
Assessment OF Learning	
During the current academic year, about how often have you:	Made a presentation in class or online?
	Combined ideas from different subjects / modules when completing assignments?
	Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in discussions or assignments?
General Outcomes	
How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills and personal development in the following areas:	Writing clearly and effectively?
	Speaking clearly and effectively?
	Thinking critically and analytically?
	Analysing numerical and statistical information?
	Acquiring job- or work-related knowledge and skills?
	Working effectively with others?
	Solving complex real-world problems?
	Being an informed and active citizen (societal / political / community)?

2 See National Forum 2017 for a sectoral understanding of Assessment OF, FOR and AS Learning

A Snapshot of ISSE Assessment Data Across the Irish Sector for 2016

As part of the National Forum's recently published profile of documented assessment practices across the higher education sector (National Forum, 2016), 2016 ISSE data related to students' experiences of assessment was explored. In all, data from 14,076 first year undergraduates and 10,650 final year undergraduates was included in the report.

The data was analysed to see if there were identifiable similarities/differences across fields of study and across programme stages. In particular, given the literature's emphasis on the importance of feedback and student self-monitoring in first year (Knight, 2000; Taylor, 2008) and the importance of students as partners in assessment (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014), the differences between first and final year Assessment FOR and AS Learning were explored.

Interactions with staff involving feedback on assessments were found to happen more often than general discussions on performance. The likelihood of a student receiving feedback on a draft/work in progress varied between field of study and stage in programme (see Figure 1). Final year Education students were least likely to receive such feedback often/very often. In contrast, first and final year Services students and Arts & Humanities students and first year ICTs student were found to be more likely to receive such feedback.

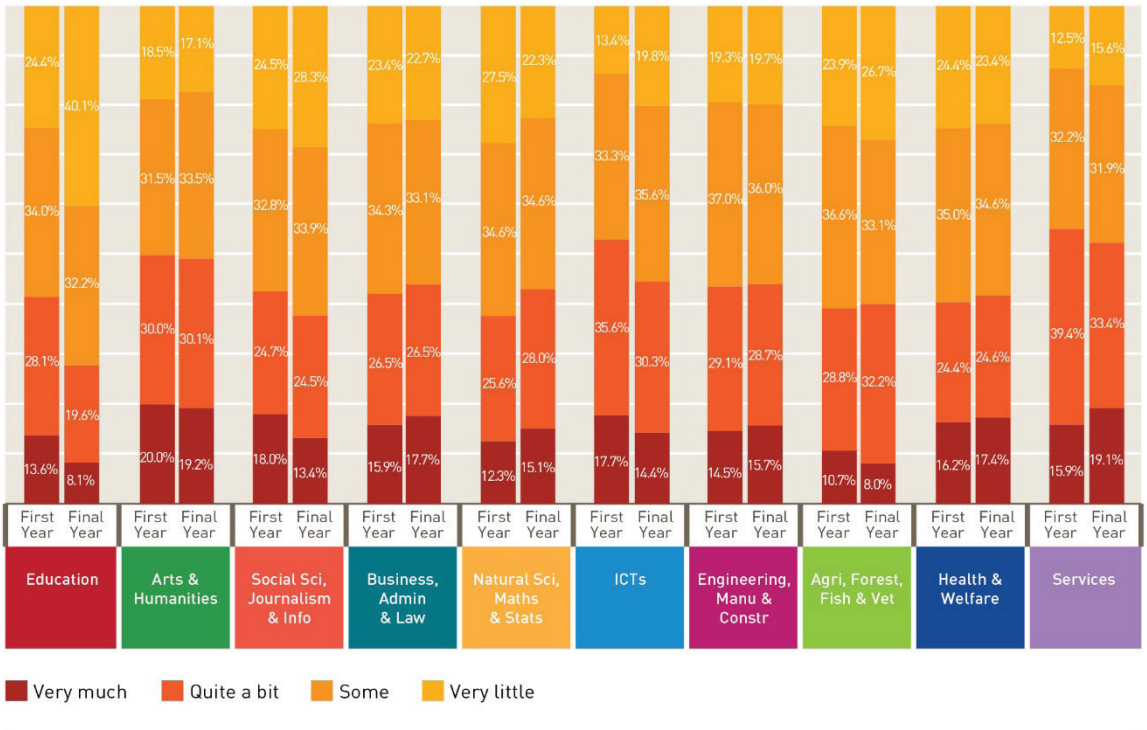


Figure 1 During the current academic year, to what extent have lecturers/teaching staff provided feedback on a draft or work in progress? (ISSE, 2016)

The frequency of prompt feedback was also higher in first year, compared to final year, across all fields of study and was lowest amongst students in the final year of Education and of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary (see Figure 2).

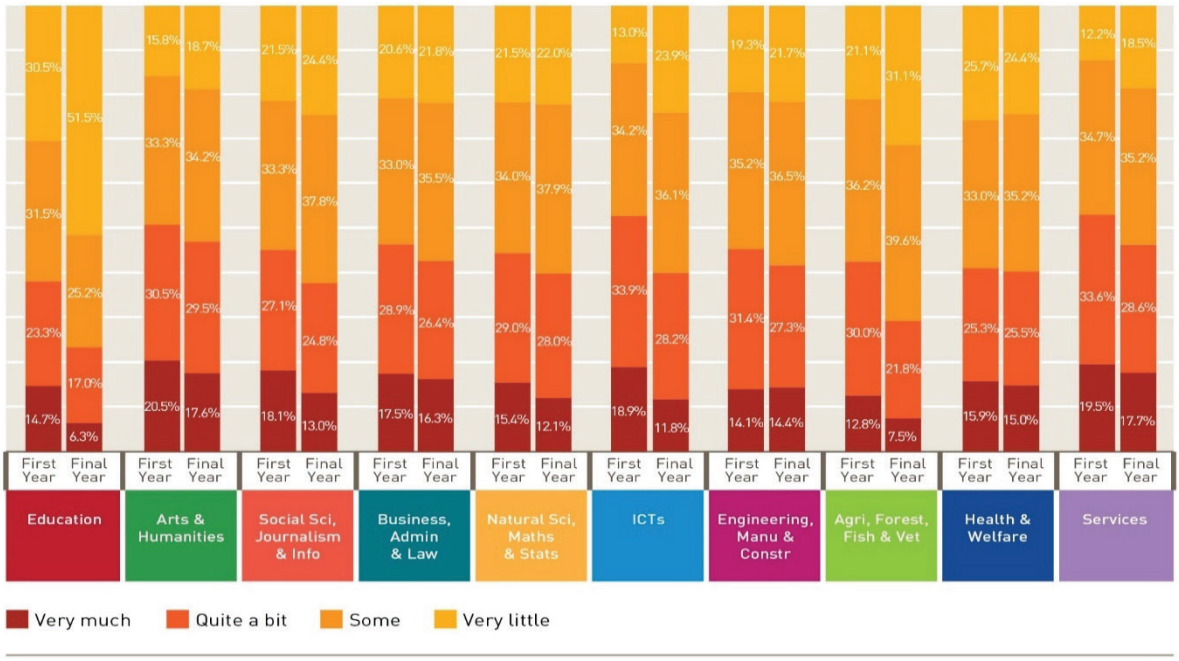


Figure 2 During the current academic year, to what extent have lecturers/teaching staff provided prompt and detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments? (ISSE, 2016)

As Figure 3 illustrates, across the fields of study, final year students were more likely than first year students to find themselves explaining/discussing course material.

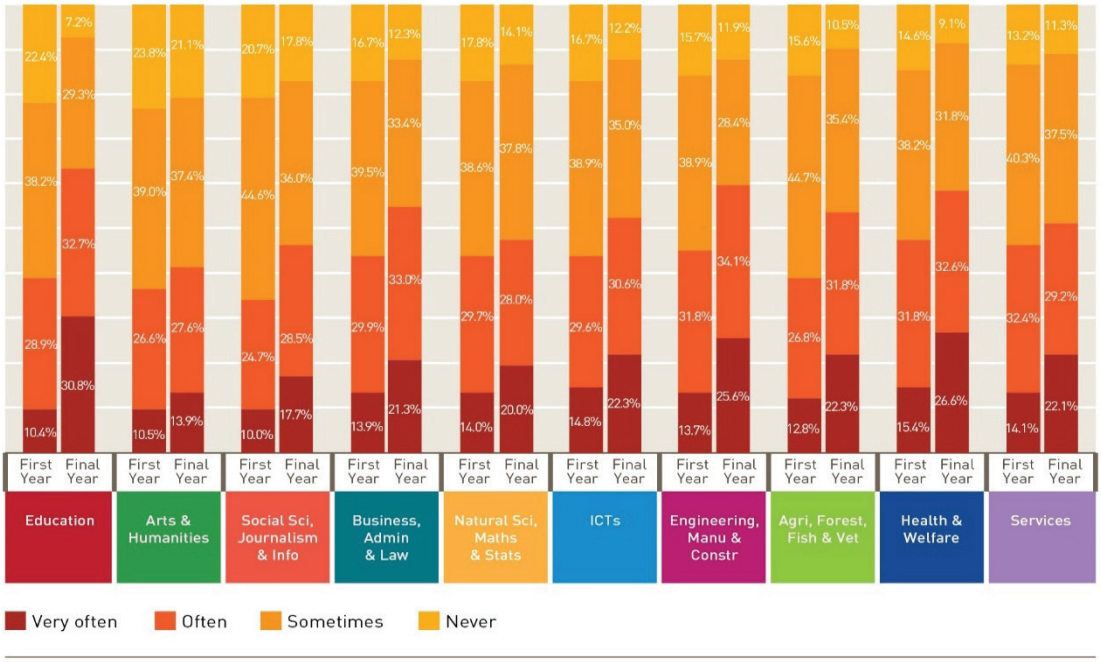


Figure 3 During the current academic year, about how often have you prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students? (ISSE, 2016)

Using ISSE as a Tool at Institutional Level

As assessment FOR and AS learning are gathering more attention both nationally and internationally, the related ISSE questions may be of particular interest for staff and programme teams to investigate at institutional level. ISSE aims to inform, support and encourage enhancement discussions and activities, particularly at institutional level. Within institutions, the lead role for the ISSE may reside within units, committees or within the offices of Registrars or Vice Presidents. Most institutions ensure that academic and administrative staff and local student representatives are fully informed of the importance of the survey and of analysis and interpretation of results.

According to the ISSE team, staff and students are best placed to 'own' and to interrogate institution-level data (ISSE, 2016). The national project is committed to promoting and supporting local analysis via national, regional and bespoke workshops[3].

3 More information on the use of ISSE data can be found at http://studentsurvey.ie/colleges/colleges-using-survey-data/. Queries related to ISSE can be directed to info@studentsurvey.ie or to the ISSE Project Manager, c/o THEA, Fumbally Square, Fumbally Lane, Dublin 8.

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Tool 2: The EAT Framework: Considerations for Programme Leaders and their Students

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The 'Evans Assessment Tool' (EAT) Framework demonstrates a research-informed, integrated and holistic approach to assessment and feedback practices. It has evolved from extensive research on assessment feedback (Evans, 2013) and use in practice within higher education institutions. EAT (Evans, 2016) is underpinned by a Personal Learning Styles Pedagogy (PLSP) approach (Waring & Evans, 2015). The Framework, in drawing on PLSP, stresses the importance of agency, collaboration, and sensitivity to the needs of the context (discipline; programme, etc.) to support the development of strong student-lecturer partnerships in order to build student self-regulatory capacity in assessment and feedback. EAT can be used to explore assessment practice at a variety of levels in order to identify and act on assessment priorities (individual; discipline; faculty; university)[1].

EAT includes three core dimensions of practice:

- Assessment Literacy (AL)
- Assessment Feedback (AF)
- Assessment Design (AD) (see Figures 4 and 5)

These three interconnected dimensions each have a series of four areas for lecturers, students and programme leaders/directors to consider. Figure 1 sets out 12 areas for the lecturer to explore (teacher-focused) and there is a series of EAT scoring cards associated with these. Similarly, given its student-focused approach, Figure 2 sets out 12 areas with associated questions for students to consider as part of a self-regulatory approach.

The possibility of using the EAT Framework at programme lead/faculty/university level highlights scaling-up considerations:

> *We must find ways to stimulate and scale change across institutions - as well as to sustain those changes - if we are to create models that serve the expanding needs of our learners... [This leads to the core question of] where should we put strategic and sustainable efforts to improve uneven performance and variable outcomes.*
>
> (Ward, 2013)

1 For details on how to use the Framework, please see the full EAT guide. The Framework resources, the EAT cards and the EAT guide can be accessed by emailing EvansEAT@soton.ac.uk. The materials are available under a standard Creative Commons license and you will be required to accept these licensing terms before accessing the materials.

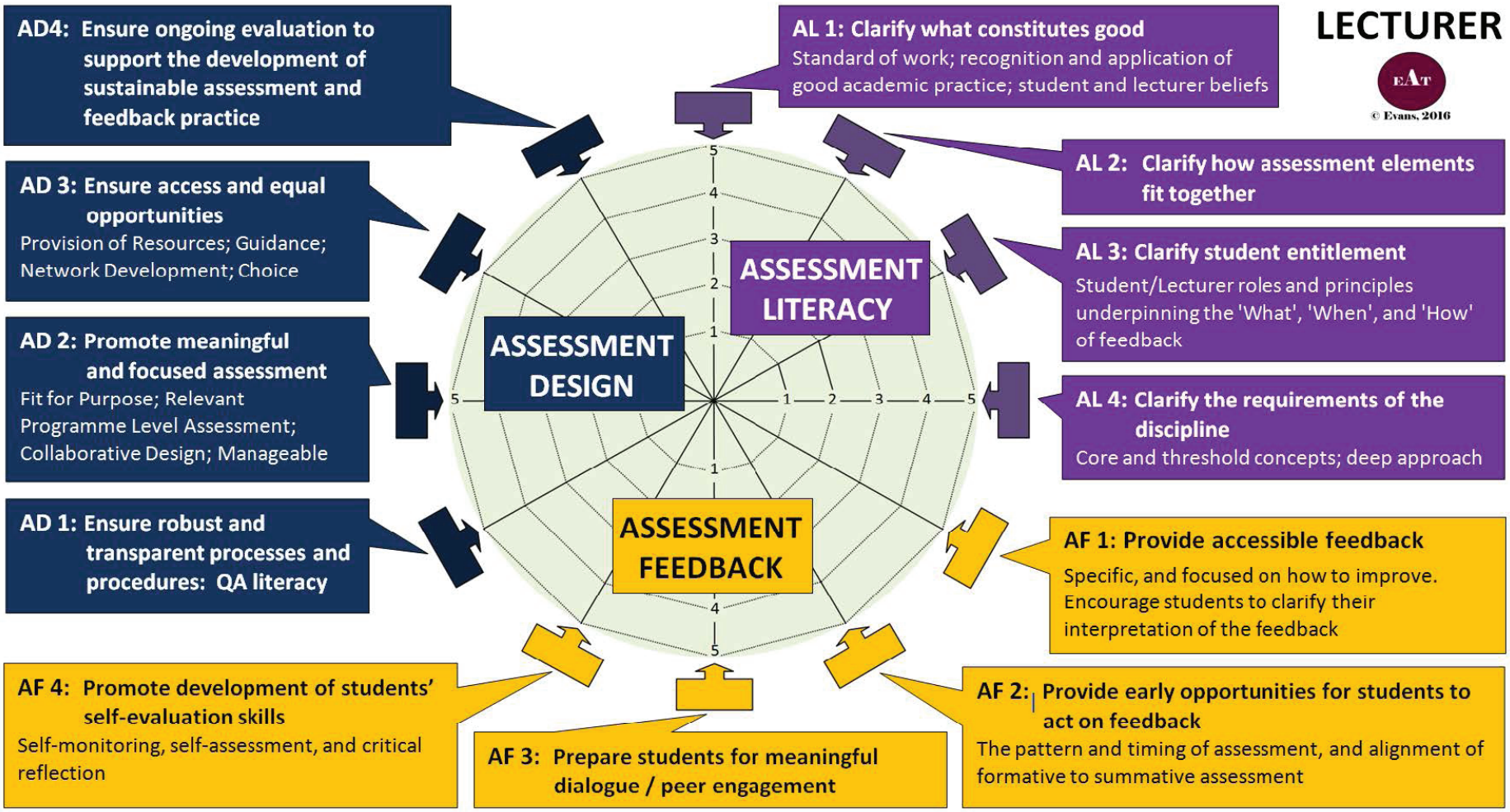

Figure 1 EAT Framework: 12 teacher-focused areas (three dimensions x four areas)

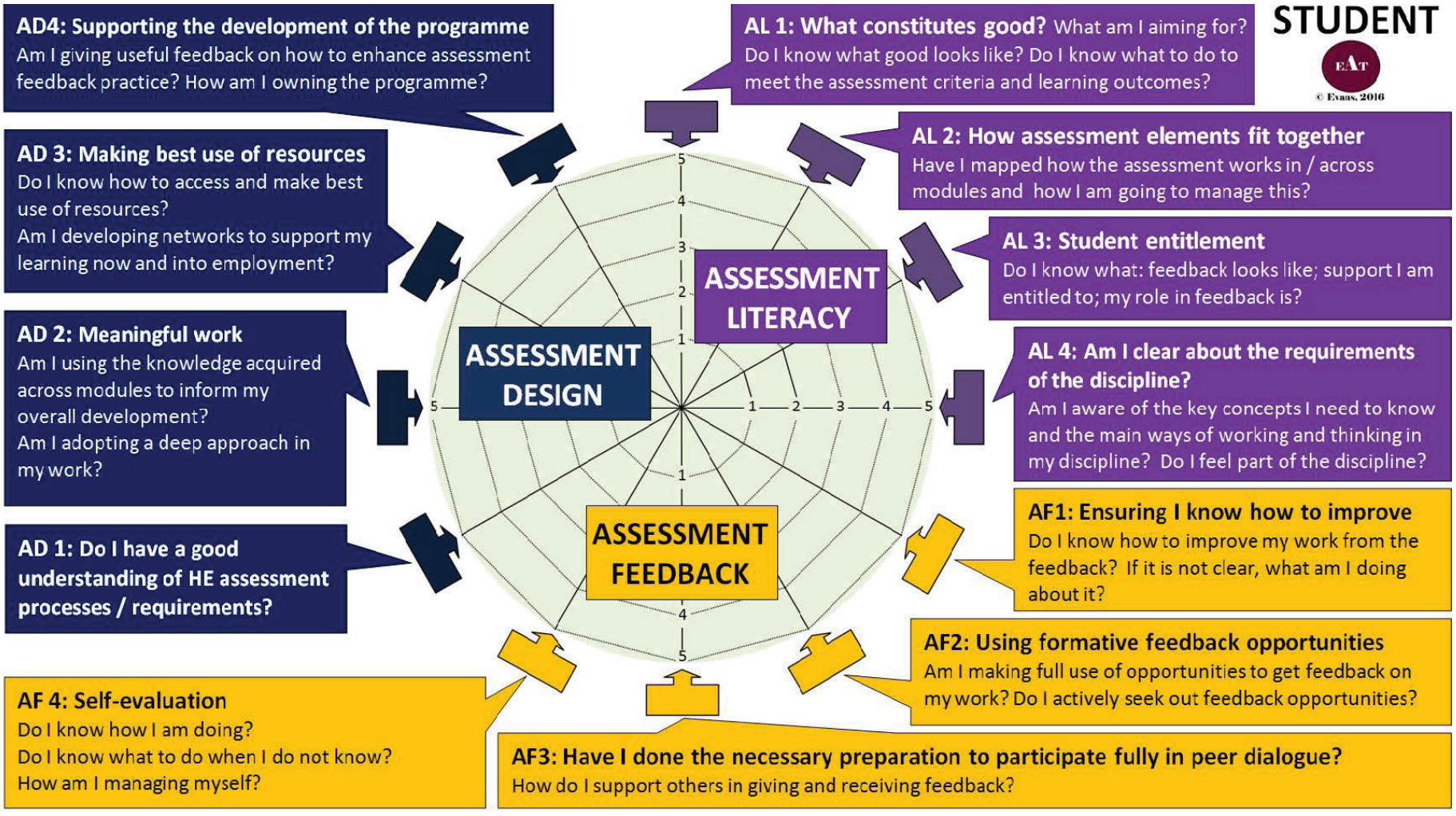

Figure 2 EAT Framework: 12 student-focused areas and questions (three dimensions x four areas/questions)

Key Considerations for Programme Leaders (to be read in conjunction with EAT cards)

1. **Rationale and goals.** Is the key driver/rationale underpinning change to assessment and feedback practices clear to all? Are short and long-term goals transparent? Using the EAT Framework, it is possible to identify measured steps and 'quick gains' that can be achieved that are aligned to longer term goals. A key question is how priorities are being identified and communicated?

2. **Being clear about the essential elements of a scaling-up initiative is critical** (Gabriel, 2014). The EAT Framework's essential elements are: (i) inclusivity with an emphasis on developing autonomy and agency for staff and students in the promotion of self-regulatory learning behaviours as part of a universal design approach; (ii) the integrated holistic framework considering all dimensions of assessment practice; (iii) theoretical underpinnings (cognitive constructivist and social constructivist/social-critical theoretical perspectives (PLSP, Waring & Evans, 2015)).

3. **Developing shared understandings from staff and student perspectives about 'what constitutes good and how this can be developed'.** A key tenet of the EAT framework is the importance of exploring stakeholder beliefs and values about assessment practices to ensure buy-in and ownership of ideas (the EAT Framework has identified principles of effective assessment and feedback practice based on extensive reviews of the literature and practice-based evidence (see Evans, 2016, p.15; Evans, 2013; Evans, Muijs, & Tomlinson, 2015).

4. **Alignment with institutional priorities and structures.** The EAT Framework supports the development of manageable and sustainable assessment feedback practices. Aligning the Framework with institutional/faculty/programme priorities with top-down and bottom-up support involving the engagement of senior leaders, students, and staff is important along with integrating the Framework into existing structures to ensure its inclusion in the 'institutional higher education fabric' and to avoid duplication of effort (Hounsell & Rigby, 2013).

5. **Building a community of practice and shared ownership of the initiative.** In developing a holistic approach to assessment, bringing teams together to explore at programme level how assessment can work most effectively is imperative (Bass, 2012). A key element of this work is on-going focused training and support using research-informed evidence nuanced to the requirements of the context/discipline (Evans et al., 2015). Identification of advocates and clarifying the mechanisms for how networks are to be created, maintained and developed are fundamental to the longer-term sustainability of the initiative.

6. **Reward.** Individual (staff and student) recognition and reward for engagement in the development of assessment practices should be an integral part of higher education reward structures. Ensuring manageability and efficiency are key concerns within the EAT Framework, mindful of the competing pressures on colleagues' time from research, leadership and enterprise activities, in addition to teaching commitments. An effective 'one-stop shop' website to pool resources, encourage collaboration, promote shared understandings, and to provide links to key areas of activity is essential.

7. **Measuring what is meaningful.** Relevant learning gain measures should be an integral part of holistic assessment designs and they should be subject to on-going evaluation and review by staff and students. The effectiveness of the overarching assessment feedback strategy in meeting immediate and longer term goals requires iterative analysis to enable fine-tuning and attention to the requirements of the disciplines. A critical pedagogy perspective, that considers who is advantaged and disadvantaged by assessment practices, is required in order to address differential learning outcomes (Mountford Zimdars, Duna, Moore, Sanders, Jones, & Higham, 2015; Waring & Evans, 2015).

The EAT Framework is a tool that promotes dialogue on, and contextualised improvement to, assessment and feedback and can be used by lecturers, students and/or programme leaders. The Framework strongly supports the promotion of students' self-regulatory practice in assessment (assessment AS learning). Based on a strong evidence base, the guiding set of statements and questions it presents (Figures 1 and 2), along with its key considerations for programme leaders, make it a very useful tool.

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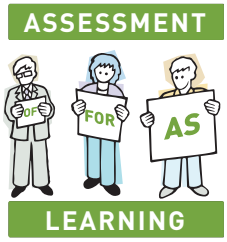

Tool 3: The Programme Design Dialogue Tool: To Support Staff in the Review of their Programme Assessment and Feedback Practices

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Context

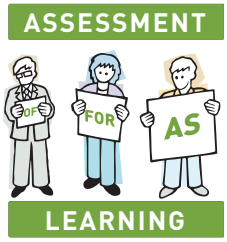
Blended and online activities are becoming more mainstreamed in the changing higher education environment. However, many staff are new to the process of related design at module and programme level. There are international tools available that have been used to assist academic staff and educational technologists/ developers to enhance their programme or module design through a self- and peer-review process. However, some of the language in these tools, and the ways in which they are used, may not suit the Irish context. Therefore, a tool and a process that is more suited to the Irish context and is informed by those working in Irish higher education, the 'Programme Design Dialogue Tool', was created through a two-stage study. This tool is an Irish programme and module review tool for online, blended and face-to-face contexts.

Methodology and Findings

Stage 1 of this Irish study (based on Whiting, Rutjes, Reitsma, Bossuyt, & Kleijnen, 2003), engaged 18 experts across Irish higher education institutions to discuss the underpinning conceptual aspects, develop a rationale of the new tool, and contribute to the initial generation of items in the tool (O'Neill & Cashman, 2015). As a result, 100 programme design statements and 80 module design statements were created that highlighted key considerations of best practice in programme and module design. The statements were then organised into several categories, which are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Overarching categories

Programme Design Categories	Module Design Categories
Programme philosophy and models	Module learning outcomes
Programme context	Module assessment and feedback
Programme outcomes	Module interaction
Programme organisation and structure	Module learner support
Programme teaching and learning strategies	Module learning materials
Programme assessment and feedback strategies	User experience in the module
Programme evaluation	Module evaluation
Programme support	



Stage 2 of the study used a two-round Delphi methodology to gain further consensus on which statements should be included in the tool. The programme design statements were thus reduced from 100 to 48 and the module design statements from 80 to 31 (O'Neill & Cashman, 2016a). Although many of the high scoring statements related specifically to digital aspects (e.g., 'The online learning environment is well organised, consistent and easy to navigate'), many of the statements presented in Stage 1 and scoring highly in Stage 2 were more general teaching and learning statements, such as 'The programme has a coherent structure'. This implies that the tool could also be valuable in programmes that have no online aspect.

Using the Tool[1]

The experts highlighted the importance of using the tool in an enhancement process incorporating 'collegial' self- and peer-dialogue. They also suggested that it should be flexible and adaptable for local contexts, drawing on a core set of statements and an optional bank (O'Neill & Cashman, 2016a).

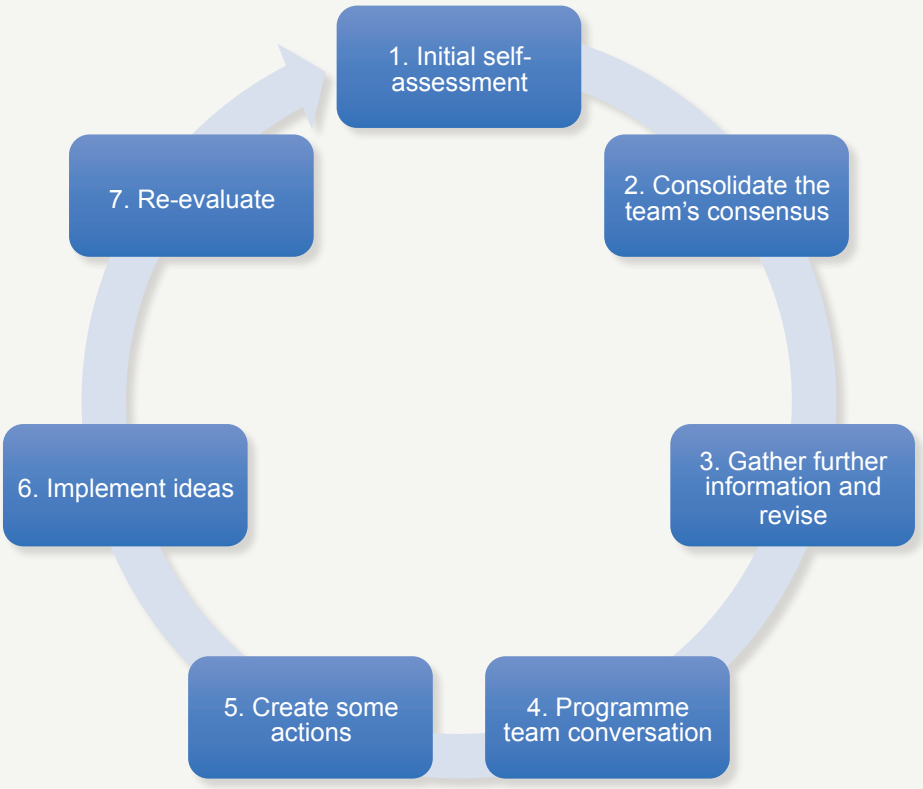
The statements in the tool are scored by staff as either Exemplary (E) Achieved (A) Further Development Needed (FD) or Significant Development Needed (SD). There are eight categories in the programme design section (see Table 1). The category of Programme Outcomes is important in relation to the constructive alignment of assessment. The category of Programme Assessment and Feedback Strategies includes the ten statements set out in Table 2. These relate to many of the concepts in the Assessment OF, FOR and AS Learning Enhancement Theme. For example, the third statement, 'There are many opportunities for students to self and peer monitor their performance throughout the programme', relates to assessment AS learning.

Table 2 The programme assessment and feedback strategies category

Category: Programme Assessment & Feedback Strategies	
1	The assessment workload is appropriate for both staff and students in the programme.
2	The programme contains a balance of formative and summative assessment.
3	There are many opportunities for students to self and peer monitor their performance throughout the programme.
4	A consistent and coordinated approach to programme assessment and feedback should be evident.
5	Students are given information on the programme's assessment and feedback strategy.
6	Each programme should have a defined assessment and feedback structure that Module Co-Coordinators should be aware of and adhere to.
7	There are procedures in place to ensure the reliability of the programme's assessment.
8	All assessments are checked for academic honesty and can be reviewed by a third party (external examiner etc.)
9	Students have opportunities to be assessed by different approaches in the programme.
10	The technology used is supportive of the assessment strategies in the programme.

1 For details on using the full version of the tool see O'Neill and Cashman, 2016b.

When using this tool, in order to ensure that there is a coherent approach to the enhancement of the programme, any conversation around improvements to the programme are best conducted as a team as this will create a climate for change in which all stakeholders are invested. The team should include a variety of stakeholders, including key staff (such as academic staff, educational technologist/developers and librarians), current and past students, employers, clinicians, etc. Given the importance of a team-based approach to this approach, Figure 1 illustrates suggested steps for programme teams when using the tool.



1. **Self-assess** to gather your own thoughts, initially individually self-assess against the programme statements prior to a programme team meeting.
2. **Consolidate the team's consensus** of the ratings of the statements, in, for example, a programme team meeting or by email (or online survey?)
3. **Gather further information and revise** to answer any outstanding questions (i.e., student feedback, programme documents). This could be any additional module data, including the use of the module self-assessment section of this tool. Revise the programme team's assessment.
4. **Programme team conversation.** At this point, it is useful to have peer conversations on the findings of your programme team's assessment, for the purposes of discussing enhancement. Develop some initial ideas for action with your colleagues.
5. **Create some actions** and prioritise some key actions for change.
6. **Implement changes.** Carry out any actions that are manageable within the time and resource constraints of the programme.
7. **Re-evaluate** using the tool after an appropriate period of time.

Figure 1 Steps in using the Programme Design Dialogue Tool

This study has produced a valid tool and process for the review and enhancement of blended, online and face-to-face programme and module designs. The tool should enable staff working in this area to self- and/or peer-review their designs at early or post-implementation stages. Their designs can be discussed, reflected upon and, where appropriate, changes can be made. Given the importance of the dialogue around the results of the review, the tool, which was originally titled 'The Programme and Module Review Tool for Online, Blended and Face-to-Face Contexts' was retitled 'The Programme Design Dialogue Tool'. While the tool is now available to be used (see O'Neill & Cashman, 2016b), it does require further piloting. In its current form, however, it is hoped that it can be used by programme teams to

a) engage in dialogue on their assessment and feedback approaches;

b) support innovative, valid and reliable approaches to assessment and feedback; and

c) foster an approach to the assessment process which views students as partners.

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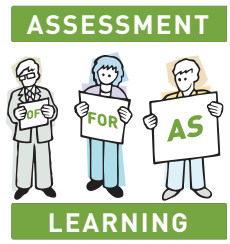

Tool 4: TESTA (Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment) and its Potential to Enhance Programme Assessment

National Forum Team

TESTA is an approach developed in the UK that, as its title suggests, aims to transform the experience of students through assessment (Jessop, El Hakim, & Gibbs, 2014; Jessop, 2012). Its focus is on exploring assessment and feedback through the lens of a programme. TESTA emerged from a joint UK National Teaching Fellowship Project involving four partner universities: Bath Spa, Chichester, Winchester (lead partner) and Worcester. The project was funded by the UK Higher Education Academy for three years (2009-2012).

The TESTA approach:

> *has been used in more than 100 programmes in over 40 UK universities, as well as in Australia, India and the USA. TESTA works with and for academics, students and managers to identify study behaviour, generate assessment patterns to foster deeper learning across whole programmes, and debunk regulatory myths which prevent assessment for learning.*
>
> (TESTA, 2017)

TESTA was developed to address an issue often associated with a modular curriculum: that the sum of the parts (modules) does not equate to a 'whole' programme (Jessop, et al., 2014). The approach reviews (i) the quantity of assessment (ii) the balance between formative and summative assessment (iii) the variety and distribution of assessment (iv) the impact of assessment on student effort, feedback practices, the clarity of goals and standards; and (v) the relationship between these factors and students' overall perception of their degree (TESTA, 2017). A key aspect of the TESTA approach is the engagement of a programme team to discuss the implications of the data gathered.

In TESTA, as in recent Irish literature (National Forum, 2017), summative assessment is defined as that which 'carries a grade which counts toward the degree classification'. TESTA's definition of formative assessment is 'assessment that does not count towards the degree (either pass/fail or a grade), elicits comments and is required to be done by all students' (TESTA, 2017). This differs slightly to the National Forum's recently published sectoral understanding of assessment terms which considers low-stakes graded assessment, when used for feedback purposes, an example of formative assessment (National Forum, 2017).

The TESTA methodology of gathering data on a programme's assessment and feedback approaches is a mixed methods approach and usually includes the following three aspects:

- A Programme Assessment Audit
- The Assessment Experience Questionnaire (AEQ)
- Focus Groups with Students (TESTA, 2017).

The Programme Assessment Audit

The Programme Assessment Audit consists of an interview with the programme leader focused on course documentation. It involves sampling cover sheets and scripts to quantify the volume of written feedback students typically received. The audit draws on nine aspects of assessment, which relate to characteristics of programme-level assessment (Gibbs & Dunbar-Goddet, 2009). The nine elements are:

- number of summative assessments;
- number of formative-only assessments;
- variety of assessment methods;
- volume of oral feedback;
- volume of written feedback;
- timeliness of feedback;
- proportion of examinations to coursework;
- explicitness of goals, criteria and standards; and
- alignment of assessment with programme learning outcomes.

The TESTA website gives some guidance on how to carry out the 10 steps in auditing the programme.

The Assessment Experience Questionnaire (AEQ)

The AEQ was originally developed to measure how students respond to their assessment in individual modules. It clusters questions into 'scales', based on a review of empirical and theoretical literature concerning how assessment affects students (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). The TESTA website provides the templates for using a programme-level version of this tool (Dunbar-Goddet & Gibbs, in press). The scales include:

- quantity of effort,
- coverage of syllabus,
- quantity and quality of feedback,
- use of feedback,
- appropriate assessment,
- clear goals and standards,
- surface approach,
- deep approach, and
- satisfaction.

Student Focus Groups

The TESTA website provides some guiding questions for the student focus group and also advises on how to conduct focus groups and analyse resulting data.

Using the above three methods, the programme team are encouraged to develop strategies for improving assessment and feedback approaches. At the recent Y1 Feedback conference in Maynooth, Jessop (2017) highlighted some strategies for addressing programme assessment and feedback issues:

- Formative feedback – informal, immediate, conversational
- Peer feedback
- Audio and screencast feedback
- Blogging on academic texts with informal threads
- Developmental feedback (measuring performance against past performance)

TESTA can be run by individual institutions or programme teams using the resources, templates and guiding case studies provided by on their website (TESTA, 2017). TESTA has been used over the last 7- 8 years in the UK to assist in reviewing, discussing and exploring programme assessment patterns (Jessop & Tomas, 2016). It has also begun to be used in some Irish institutions to assist in such programme review processes.

For more details on the TESTA approach, please contact:

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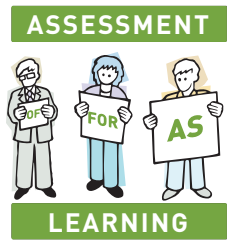


Programme Mapping Case Studies

The following six case studies provide examples of how programme teams have mapped their assessment practices across programmes to ensure appropriate assessment and feedback variety, timing, load, etc. Although there are commonalities in what was mapped by the various teams, Table 1 sets out some of the variations in their emphases.

Table 1 Assessment aspects mapped in programme mapping case studies

	Case Study A	Case Study E	Case Study F	Case Study G	Case Study H	Case Study I
Alignment to programme outcomes	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Summative	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Formative	✓	✓				✓
Method	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Group/Individual			✓			
Weighting (%)		✓	✓			✓
Volume	✓		✓			✓
Timing in module		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Tool used	Institutional online tool	Institutional online tool & follow-up with Excel	PASS, using Google Sheets	Google Docs, Google Form, Google Calendar	Discussion-based	Excel

Case Study A: An Institutional Approach to Programme Mapping[1]

This case study describes a strategic institutional mapping exercise conducted across UCD, which aimed to ensure that the teaching and learning activities, assessments, and content within each programme aligned with the programme outcomes. The output from the process - the curriculum map - comprised a series of summary tables, which provided a visual representation, using simple scoring and a colour-coded pattern, of the degree to which programme outcomes appeared to be addressed and assessed. Each programme team then met to review and interpret the map, facilitating a critical opportunity for collegial dialogue about the programme as a whole. Key enablers and challenges to this approach, as well as perceived impacts, are discussed.

Case Study E: Mapping the Bachelor of Business Studies Programme in Singapore: Large Programme Scale Does Not Always Prevent Assessment Mapping and Change

This case study is set against the background of the Curriculum Review and Enhancement Project at UCD (see Case Study A) and explores the mapping of the University's Bachelor of Business Studies programme in Singapore. The value of this case study is in its explanation of the application of a mapping exercise to a programme with a large student cohort and multiple pathways and its extension of the institutional approach described in Case Study A to programme level. With 3,000 students and 48 modules, the programme is one of the larger undergraduate programmes at UCD. The case study describes how an assessment matrix was used to provide a succinct insight into the scale, timing, variety and scope of assessments across the programme. Once the assessment details were reviewed, proposed revisions to assessment methods and timings were agreed in response to the picture that emerged.

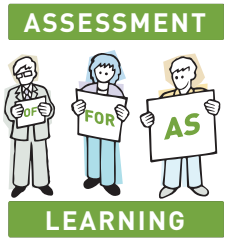
Case Study F: Zoom in to PASS - Mapping Assessment in a Business Programme

This case study, based in Dundalk IT, describes the use of the Programme Assessment Schedule for Students (PASS), an online calendar-based mapping tool designed to capture the types and timings of assessments across modules in each year of a programme. A single version of the PASS schedule is completed by all staff at the start of the semester, providing a calendar-based overview of assessment dates and formats, which is then shared with students. The end result is an overall coherent assessment calendar distributed to each student. The PASS guards against the clustering of assessments in the semester. It also encourages students to pace their learning and engage seriously with their learning from the first week. The macro view of assessment across the programme raises lecturer awareness of the frequency, volume and variety of student assessments. The PASS also serves as a process for tracking and reviewing individual and programme assessment practices. This data can then be used to inform the assessment strategy during programmatic review.

Case Study G: Real-Time Programme Mapping Through an Extended Assessment Calendar

Following programme assessment design, decisions are made by individuals on a programme team or by the programme team collectively during implementation which may enhance or otherwise interfere with the designed alignment of assessments. This case study describes the development of a prototype tool at DIT, using Google Docs, which invited programme team members to submit their assessment data using a Google Form, through which they are prompted to supply not just the date and description of each assessment, but also the mapping of the assessment to the programme learning outcomes and graduate attributes. Importantly for this approach, the programme team is provided with a mapping based on the actual enactment of the programme in real-time rather than the intended enactment of the programme from the time of programme design.

1 Note: This case study also features in the earlier section on Leadership.



Case Study H: Mapping Expectations of Assessment to Reality of Requirements - The Transition to Programme-Level Assessment

This case study relates to the evolution of assessment practices within the Specialist Diploma in Teaching, Learning and Scholarship at the University of Limerick. As the programme evolved, its design and assessment practices were reconsidered in light of feedback gathered from students each year and a comprehensive programme review involving feedback from multiple stakeholders (students, graduates, external examiner, module leaders, etc.). An acknowledgement of the diversity of experience and needs of those enrolling in the programme resulted in the programme being offered at three award levels and the programme team working together to approach assessment at programme level, rather than module level.

Case Study I: Developing a Systematic Programme-Focused Assessment and Feedback Strategy

This case study describes the development and introduction of a programme-focused assessment and feedback strategy to the Humanities Programmes in Open Education at DCU. The aim of this initiative was to design a systematic programme-focused assessment and feedback approach which ensured that students had a reasonable opportunity to meet all the programme learning outcomes. There were four phases to the development of this programme-focused assessment approach: (i) auditing programme learning outcomes and assessments to create an assessment and feedback matrix, (ii) consulting with all stakeholders regarding how to improve assessment variety and alignment, (iii) provision of associated professional development for staff, and (iv) embedding the programme-focused assessment and feedback process into the programme's quality assurance processes. Associated matrices have evolved and changed over the years and it is recommended that all elements of a programme team's assessment and feedback strategy remain under constant review.

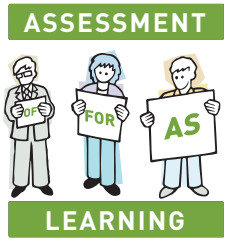
Key Insights from Case Studies Related to Programme Mapping

The mapping exercises described in these case studies involved key programme stakeholders working together and awareness being raised of students' experiences of assessment across the programme.

Key insights from these practices were:

- the importance of ensuring that while assessments are aligned with programme outcomes they retain a sense of fluidity to allow the needs of students and staff to be met as they arise;
- the importance of ensuring that assessment mapping exercises increase staff efficiencies and are not too onerous in themselves; and
- exploring data on assessment (learning analytics) can be used to promote staff improvements to programme assessment and feedback.

MAKING CHANGES WITHIN PROGRAMME(S): SOME DESIGN INTERVENTIONS



Making Changes Within Programme(s): Some Design Interventions

This section presents some programme design interventions. The key elements of this section are:

- two commentaries from the National Forum Expert Group (one commentary introduces horizontal and vertical approaches to programme assessment integration, the other focuses on designing in assessment OF, FOR and AS learning in a programme);
- an international commentary which advocates the development of more 'slow time' in a programme; and
- nine case studies exploring a selection of design interventions, planned and existing, across Irish higher education. In addition to examples of integrative assessment, such as capstone assessment and themed assessments, the case studies explore:

  - authentic assessment for the disciplines[1] (see Case Study K; Case Study R);

  - inclusive assessments for diverse cohorts of students (Case Study J);

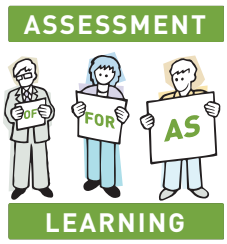
  - students self, peer and group review skills (Case K);

  - cross-disciplinary collaboration (Case P);

  - creative and critical thinking approaches (Case K; Case Q); and

  - sequencing of disciplinary knowledge (Case Study R; Case Study N).

1 More information on authentic assessment can be found in National Forum 2017.


ASSESSMENT
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Commentary: An Introduction to Horizontal and Vertical Approaches to Programme Assessment Integration

National Forum Expert Group on Programme Assessment

Graduate attributes and programme outcomes can be achieved through activities in either what is often described as the 'assessed curriculum' (contributes to institutional grading system) or through extra and co-curricular activities (see Figure 1). Students need multiple opportunities to develop and integrate their knowledge and skills throughout their programmes and staff need to design the sequence of learning opportunities to achieve the most efficient and effective balance between assessment OF, FOR and AS learning (Knight, 2000; O'Neill, Donnelly, & Fitzmaurice, 2013).

It is important within a programme that there are some integrative assessments that draw together students' experiences (i) across modules and years in the programme, (ii) across programmes/disciplines, and (iii) between the programme and life outside of the programme. This can be challenging in a modularised curriculum and while it can be more easily achieved in programmes that have high levels of structure, it is particularly challenging in those with multiple pathways. In general, there can be two forms of integration in a programme (see Figure 1):

- *Horizontal Integration of Assessment:* These are assessment OF/FOR/AS learning opportunities that occur during the same period of time and are linked across modules and/or within a module.
- *Vertical Integration of Assessment:* These assessment OF/FOR/AS learning opportunities build on students' previous and current experience throughout the module, year and/or programme.

In programmes with higher levels of structure, integration can be developed through the following (see Fig 1):

- *Capstone modules or assessment:* These are assessment OF/FOR/AS learning opportunities at the end of a programme that vertically integrate previous learning in other modules (Case Study M).
- *Progressive assessment:* This is a series of module assessments, where assessment OF/FOR/AS learning approaches vertically build on assessment from an earlier module(s). This requires that such earlier modules are pre-requisites or that it is known that students have had opportunities to build these skills in other linked modules or recognised prior learning (Case Study Q; Case Study N).
- *Work or community-based assessments:* These are assessments that build on work or community placement experiences in and outside of the institutional environment and help students to integrate a wide range of their life, professional and other personal skills. These assessments can have both a vertical and horizontal integration. They are often assessed by student portfolios that can be linked with a series of competencies (Case Study L).
- *Themed assessment:* This describes an examination/assessment that often draws horizontally on learning across other modules that focus around a theme (Case Study O; Case Study P).
- *Within-module integration:* This describes an assessment that draws horizontally on learning within the module. It could be focused around a problem/case (Case Study K).

In programmes with less structure, diverse work experiences and/or multiple pathways, the student may have to put their own coherence on the assessment experience. This can be achieved, for example, through:

- *Capstone modules linked with the student's portfolio:* This is also a capstone module. However, in this case, the student needs to build coherence based on their unique learning journey that has been documented over the programme in their own portfolio (Case Study M).
- *Student portfolios.* These are developed over the programme and may have more student-driven content than those in the more structured programme or work-based portfolios.

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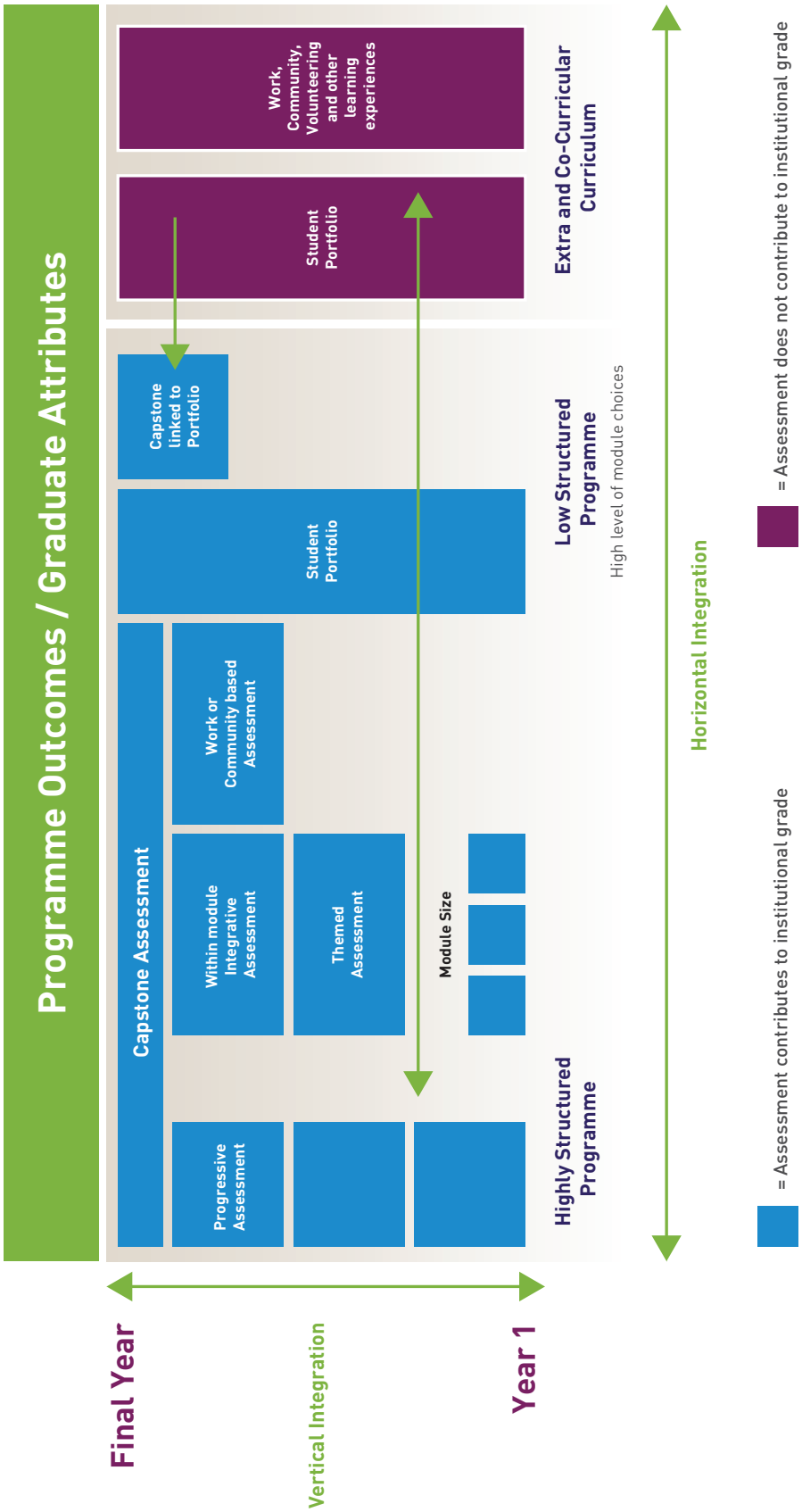
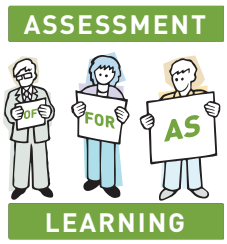


Figure 1 Programme assessment OF, FOR, AS learning interventions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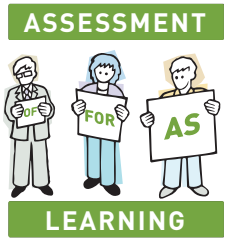

Commentary: Designing in Assessment OF/FOR/AS Learning Throughout the Programme

National Forum Sectoral Understanding Expert Group

Throughout a programme, assessment should be a dynamic interaction between the three overlapping purposes of assessment and feedback (see Figure 1). Students self-regulating and critically evaluating their performance (assessment AS learning) is at the core of this activity (see Figure 2).

At various points, assessment will be influenced by groups of different stakeholders and different learning contexts. Early in the curriculum students are strongly influenced and supported by family and friends. At this early stage, students need to start to develop their self-monitoring and self-regulatory skills (O'Regan et al., 2016), which need to be scaffolded initially by feedback and feed-forward from staff.

As a student progresses on this journey, another key group is their student peers. Students need to learn to give feedback to and receive feedback from peers and engage in more dialogue with other students. Student-to-peer feedback needs to be supplemented with teacher feedback (Kauffman & Schunn, 2011). In addition, students need training on how to do this as they need 'time to make sense of instruction and to incubate and develop self-regulatory skills in order to apply these to new and other learning contexts' (Evans, 2013, p.88). As the journey progresses, these communication approaches and the power relationships can change.

At specific points in a programme, usually at the end of semester or end of year, students are required to demonstrate and be judged on their learning for progression/certification (assessment OF learning). Student expectations are often set by standards and explicit or implicit assessment criteria in these assessment OF learning tasks. As part of this assessment activity, students receive, and at times give, feedback. Peer review is a powerful learning experience (Nicol, Thomson, & Bresli, 2014). It is very valuable for students if they can get or give feedback to make changes in time for these graded assessment OF learning tasks. There is a need to also design self, peer and staff feedback so that it is incrementally built upon throughout the programme, moving them from monologue to dialogue (Nicol, 2010). This allows students to build capacity in these skills and for staff to focus their feedback.

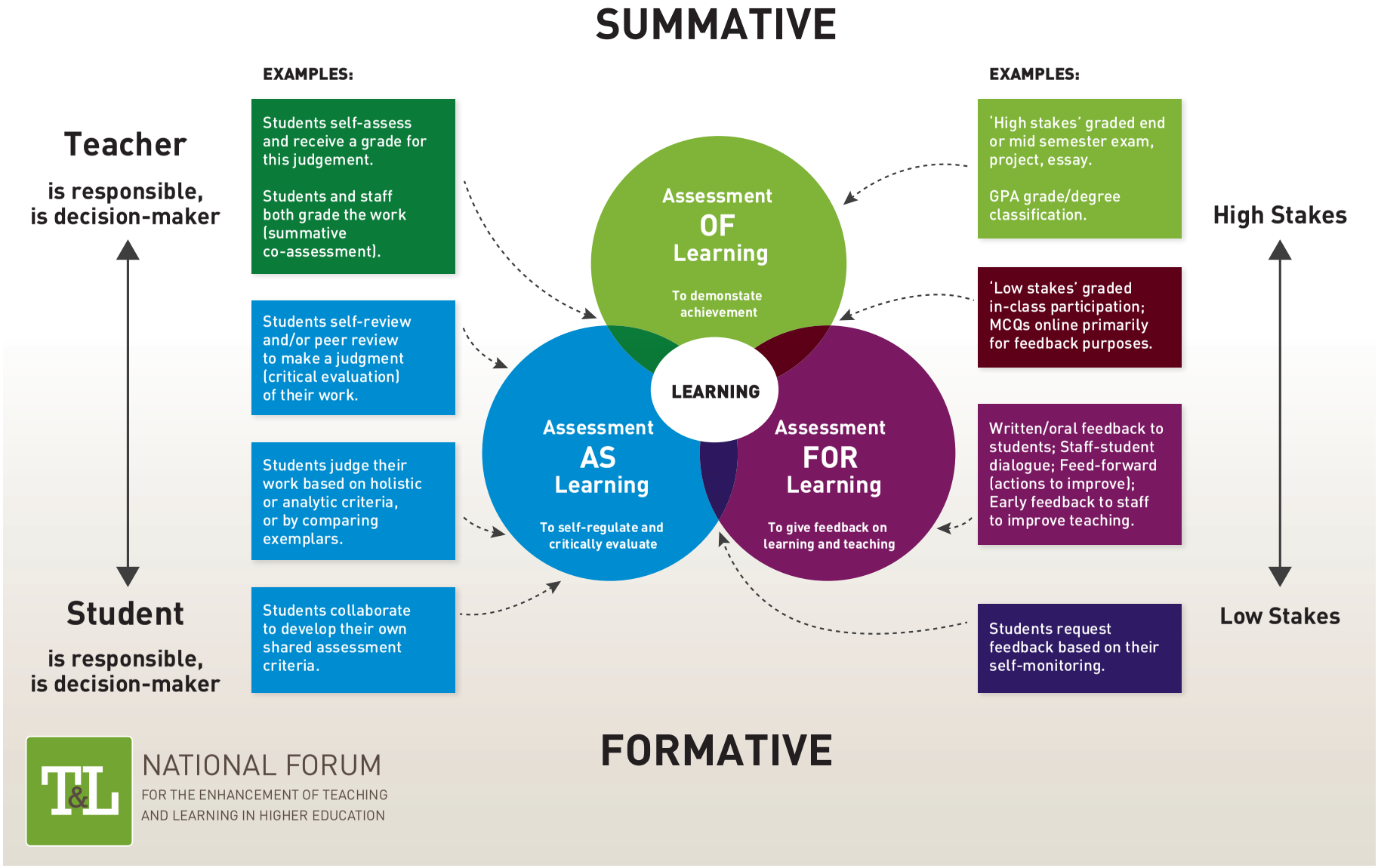

Figure 1 Programme assessment OF, FOR, AS learning interventions.
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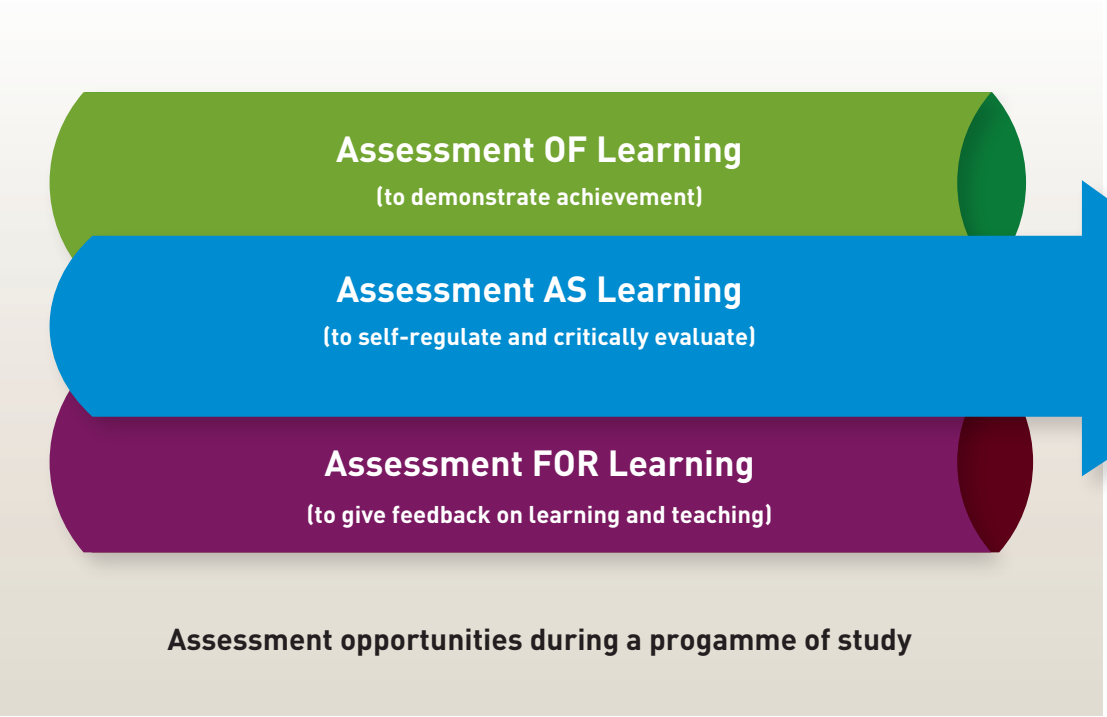

Figure 2 Assessment OF/FOR/AS learning throughout and beyond a programme

Throughout a programme, there can be overlap between assessment OF and FOR learning (see Figure 1) where graded low-stakes continuous assessment (OF) is used by staff primarily for student feedback purposes (FOR) and/or as an extrinsic motivator for keeping students focused on the task. This has been described both negatively, as a 'conveyor-belt' process of numerous small assessment OF learning pieces (Harland, McLean, Wass, Miller, & Nui Sim, 2015; see also Harland, 2017 in this resource), and positively, as it allows students in the early years to continuously know how they are doing (Taylor, 2008). Programme teams need to explore the positive and negative impact of this overlap across the programme for staff and students. As a programme progresses, the staff, institution, other students and the discipline/subject groups all become increasingly strong influences on assessment.

Later in the programme, students need to become less dependent on staff for their feedback and become more autonomous, self-regulated learners. As illustrated in Figure 2, it is assessment AS learning that connects learning within a programme to life and work beyond higher education. It is at this stage that employers, professional bodies and wider societal groups may become more influential in the assessment OF/FOR and AS learning approaches. Towards the end of a programme, students should also become more empowered in graded assessment OF learning opportunities, e.g. by becoming co-designers of assessment, having choice of assessment methods or choice of questions, developing assessment criteria, trying out summative co-assessment, etc. (see National Forum, 2016). The power relationship should move from staff to students-as-partners in both assessment OF and FOR learning (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014; Carless, 2015).

As students prepare to exit a programme, they need to have developed a strong sense of responsibility for their own learning, including their self-monitoring and regulatory skills for employment, further study and lifelong learning.

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Commentary: A Case for Slow Scholarship: Implications for Programme Assessment Design

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Key Question:
Do we have an understanding of how students experience the assessment load that results from our programme planning?

The 'assessment arms race' is about the proliferation of graded assessments in a modular system of mass higher education (Harland, et al., 2015). The findings of this study showed that frequent graded assessments altered the learning experiences of students making certain higher-order objectives harder to achieve. The observed increases in graded work were driven by student demand and a desire by lecturers to regulate student study behaviour. If a task was not graded, a student was likely to ignore it and so teachers on different modules competed with each other for student attention. This created an 'arms race' in which assessment frequency had reached a point at which the grade had become the determining factor of the student experience. Students were so busy with assessment requirements that they had little space and time for thinking or doing any study outside of assessed course requirements. The need to grade had led to the fragmentation of experiences and the miniaturisation of knowledge as learning happened in micro-modules. Neither students nor lecturers were entirely happy with this situation and it caused the research team to reflect carefully on their own teaching practices.

I teach ecology at the University of Otago, New Zealand, and I would like to reflect on how the 'arms race' research influenced practice. The ecology programme has been undergoing gradual change for the last 15 years and it has led to the development of many educational ideas. In 2002, student numbers were expending rapidly and we set out to ensure that all students, regardless of ability, would come away with a worthwhile education. We began by asking ourselves how we learned as academics and reasoned that whatever we did would be good enough for students. The idea of teaching students as researchers was born and ecology has this research thread running through that starts on the first day our students set foot in university (Harland, 2016). Students are seen as research apprentices and are trained in research by doing the same activities as academics. These include developing original research questions, writing grant proposals, designing experiments, doing field work, presenting at seminars and symposia, and so on. Students are trained over three years in analytical techniques and peer review, and by the start of their third year, some are capable of producing work publishable in international journals. However, what we have found is that all students benefit from this curriculum approach and we have evidence that ecology students have qualities, in terms of critical thinking, organisational skills, problem solving and levels of self-motivation that others at a similar stage in their education do not possess. In addition, teachers have benefitted from this approach, in particular the improvement of their own research.

The arms race research first led the ecology team to cull the number of graded assessments and then to take a close look at specific parts of the curriculum where we thought we could alter the course to achieve an integrated approach to assessment. The first task was simple and resulted in getting rid of any assessment that was more about keeping students on task than being essential to the knowledge project. The second was much more complicated because change had several restrictions that we needed to meet. I will give one example to illustrate the challenge we faced.

The curriculum change concerned student peer review at second year (Harland, Wald, & Randhawa, 2016). Students were required to go into the field, develop an authentic research idea, return to university to write a grant proposal, and then carry out the research the following year (this strategy breaks the modular system). During the grant proposal writing stage, students peer reviewed each other's work. Here we wanted to create a space in which students had unhurried time to think deliberatively about the task in hand thus engaging in 'slow scholarship'. To achieve this, each new stage of the peer review process needed to build on the previous one so students understood that if they failed to complete any part, they would not be able to complete the course. This change required a shift in thinking as all students were required to work for each other to improve the quality of ideas and writing. The old system had been an exchange of grant proposals for anonymous peer review that had two grading points and took two weeks. The new curriculum took place over five weeks and students not only provided anonymous peer reviews, but also produced a rebuttal in response to comments on their own proposals. Only the final product was graded and we found that the quality of the proposals far exceeded what had been achieved in previous years.

In this case, we created the same type of space that academics value in their research and changed the way students understood their education as they shifted from working individually for a grade to working to benefit each other. Even though the peer review exercise initially lasted only five weeks, this sustained period of knowledge production contrasted with the more common short-term student experiences. All were 'encouraged' to take part but this took a lot of careful planning to ensure that no student, within reason, would fail in any of the tasks. I currently think of this as 'highly structured freedom' and this idea seems to me to be central to teaching students as researchers. Like any researcher, they need freedom to learn, but because they are research apprentices and pulled in many directions by other courses and assessment requirements, they also need structure to scaffold a good learning outcome. The lecturer's role then becomes more like that of a postgraduate supervisor aimed at getting the best out if each student.

Key Insight: Students need freedom to learn, but they also need structure to scaffold a good learning outcome.

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Case Studies Related to Design Interventions

Case Study J: Assessment for All

This case study relates to a Postgraduate Diploma in Learning and Teaching at the National College of Ireland, a one-year taught programme designed for existing and future educators in higher, further and adult education settings. Members of the programme team created a 'Statement of Inclusion', designed to enhance awareness of strategies for inclusion in learning and assessment among programme participants. Examples are given of how aspects of the Statement have been modelled by staff across all modules on the programme. The programme team have found that adopting a more inclusive approach to assessment facilitates a more engaged teaching and learning environment whereby students can approach concepts and theories in a manner that is best suited to their particular approach to learning. This case study is also a useful example of students being given a choice of assessment OF learning method, which is an inclusive approach.

Case Study K: An Integrative and Creative Approach in Science Education: Working in Small Groups to Research and Present on a Scientific Breakthrough

This case study focuses on a creative approach to assessment taken in a first year undergraduate science module at Trinity College Dublin. It describes the experiences of the lecturer and the students as they participated in a module while included choice of assessment, self- and peer-assessment and the negotiation of assessment criteria. It uses reflection to develop students' skills of self-monitoring. The empowerment of students in the assessment process and the creativity fostered through the assessment methods were both seen as fundamental to the success of the approach in enhancing student learning.

Case Study L: Student Diary Pro: An Online Portfolio Tool Used to Capture Competences on Placement

This case study focuses on the use of Student Diary Pro (SDPro), an online portfolio tool used across faculties at Athlone IT. Within the BA in Social Care Practice, the online portfolio tool is used to capture students' reflections and encourage self-regulation during the placement component, which is embedded across each year of the programme. The tool is used to allow students to benefit from assessment FOR learning during their placement, before the assessment OF learning takes place at the end of the placement (i.e., incorporating feedforward). The tool was chosen in response to a change in assessment practices whereby student assessments began to be graded by academic staff rather than being graded according to the recommendation of the placement agency supervisors. The successful use of the tool in a similar programme at another institute of technology was also helpful in affirming the decision to use it.

Case Study M: Could ePortfolios be an Effective Capstone? A Student-Centered Approach to Programme Assessment

This case study describes the planned incorporation of a capstone assessment into in all programmes at Trinity College Dublin. This will be an independent piece of work completed by undergraduate students in the final two years of their programmes of study, providing an integrative exercise which allows students to showcase the skills and knowledge they have developed across a range of subject areas and across their four years of study. Challenges arise, however, when a student undertakes, for example, a joint honours route. While a student may choose to pursue a 'capstone' related to one or other of the individual subjects, this case study proposes consideration of an alternate approach. The proposal under consideration is that the student would integrate demonstration of learning related to subject expertise and a range of graduate attributes in an ePortfolio. Challenges, enablers and suggestions for this approach are discussed.

Case Study N: An Alternative Certification Examination (ACE) for Procedural Skills

Medical schools strive to ensure that students have acquired the expected knowledge, skills and attitudes over a broad range of general and speciality medicine to ensure patient safety. Graduates of medical training must be able to apply the knowledge that they have accumulated and demonstrate competence in the domains of professional practice. Current undergraduate examination methods robustly assess up to five of the eight required skills. This case study describes a new assessment format, the alternative certification examination (ACE), which assesses all eight of the required domains in surgical cases. The ACE format consists of four sequential patient encounters observed by two independent examiners. The new format was piloted in the School of Medicine at TCD, where very positive attitudes to this new method of assessment were reported, specifically relating to the integration of previously acquired knowledge and skills, i.e. an example of progressive assessment.

Case Study O: A Faculty-Led Model of Integrated Assessment: Collaboratively Prepared Themed Exams

The modular system in Irish higher education accentuates the 'assessment load' implications of a reliance on written exams. In addition, students typically 'compartmentalise' subjects by module and struggle to integrate the learning across modules. This case study focuses on a proposal in TCD for academics to collaborate in the preparation of 'multi-module' exam papers such that a series of questions, posed to the student in a coherent manner, would combine content from several modules across an agreed 'theme'. This initiative is being developed in the context of the assessment strand of the Trinity Education Project which, among other aims, seeks to semesterise summative assessment and to restructure the academic year in a manner that reduces end-of-term examination periods to a maximum of one week (see Case Study B for more on the TEP).

Case Study P: Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration to Integrate Learning: Street Law

This case study describes an example of cross-disciplinary collaborative assessment and integration of knowledge involving students from the Department of Law and Humanities and the Department of Computing in LYIT in an experiential learning module/project, Street Law. Street Law involves law students teaching law in the community using an interactive, activity-based methodology, which is believed to be learner-centred and emancipatory. It is a form of public legal education where the recipients select the areas of law that interest them and lessons are then tailored to suit the target audience. There are several aspects to the assessment of the law students, which include observation of their participation in training, preparation and planning of lessons, performance and delivery of the lessons, and reflection throughout to enable their lifelong learning skills. This approach encourages peer-to peer-learning which enhances students' self-monitoring skills. It is an example of horizontal integration of learning across different disciplines.

Case Study Q: Integrating Critical Thinking Vertically and Horizontally

The focus of this case study is the integration of critical thinking skills from Year 1 to Year 4 of the four-year, part-time Bachelor of Business Studies programme for mature students at UCD. The programme attempts to have an incremental approach to the development of critical thinking skills at undergraduate level. The case study details how this goal is achieved through various assessments throughout the programme. For each component of assessment, students are summatively assessed and the grade contributes to their module grade. They also receive individual formative feedback on how to develop their approach, for example in terms of critical thinking and analysis. A particularly effective aspect of this programme is the appointment of a learning support officer, who acts an academic and administrative support for the students for programme-related queries, including queries on assignments, development of academic writing skills and other study-related support.

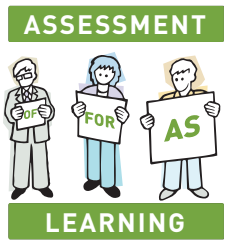
Case Study R: Fite Fuaite: The Design and Planning of a Diploma in Applied Irish at UCC

The Diploma in Applied Irish, in which the case study is situated, is a two-year part-time programme run by the Centre for Oral Irish in UCC. This case study centres on how a student's focus on programme learning outcomes can be maintained by constructing assessment in such a way that declarative and procedural knowledge, both of which are blended within the programme, draw upon and support each other. Where previously the declarative knowledge modules and the procedural knowledge modules were co-ordinated and taught by separate staff, in the future staff will share the coordination and teaching of both types of module. It is felt that this level of cooperation presents an opportunity to showcase how the learning of a language can be enhanced by integrating assessment with a programme's elements.

Key Insights from Case Studies and Commentaries Related to Design Interventions

The key insights from this section are:

- vertical approaches support progressive integration;
- horizontal approaches integrate learning across concurrent modules;
- the importance of slow-time in the programme;
- value of within-programme and cross-disciplinary dialogue with colleagues and students in order to develop a more systematic approach to design interventions; and
- ideas for more efficient, diverse, creative and authentic assessments.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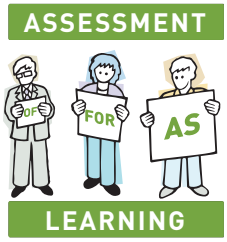


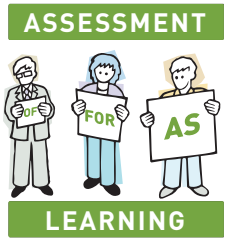
Concluding Comments on Programme Approaches to Assessment and Feedback

The complexity of assessment with its different purposes and different stakeholders heightens the need for a more systematic approach to the development of assessment within a programme (McDowell, 2012). Additionally, students need to move into a partnership role in the assessment process, including developing the capacity to critically evaluate their own work (Deeley & Bovill, 2017; National Forum, 2017b; Sadler, 2010). Such an approach, however, requires the collaboration of a variety of stakeholders and is most effectively done when this is supported and led by the institution and driven by a programme team (O'Neill et al., 2013). Some institutional approaches to this change agenda have been described in this resource.

Changes to a programme's assessment and feedback approaches should be informed by evidence. Such evidence should illustrate current practices and the views and experiences of relevant programme stakeholders. This resource sets out a selection of the many programme assessment review and curriculum mapping tools available to assist staff in gathering and acting upon evidence. It is key that staff listen to and are guided by student experiences of a programme's assessment and involve them in the design of changes to the programme.

Whereas staff may be familiar with their role as teachers in the classroom context, the additional skills required for designing assessment across a programme may require further professional development. This resource will hopefully assist in building staff capacity in this area. In addition, a new digital badge is currently in development which aims to support the professional development of staff regarding programme approaches to assessment.

This resource sets out some initial ideas for changes to a programme's assessment and feedback approaches. Developing these and additional ideas requires the consideration of all aspects of a programme and how each piece fits together. This may require adjustments to institutional and/or local policies and procedures.



Finally, changes to a programme can be slow and iterative, however the impact of these changes can have a lasting effect on staff and, as we are reminded below, the student experiences of a programme:

Student A:
A challenging, integrated yet extremely valuable experience... if you asked me to start that module again I would have absolutely no problem doing so.

Student B:
Completely over-assessed to the point where people weren't actually going to classes... I would never go back.

If you or your colleagues would like to submit a case study on programme assessment for consideration for inclusion in the online collection of materials, please contact: *admin@teachingandlearning.ie*

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National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

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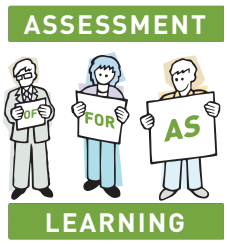

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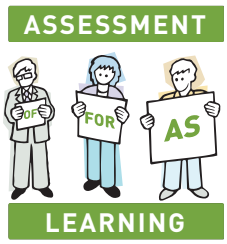
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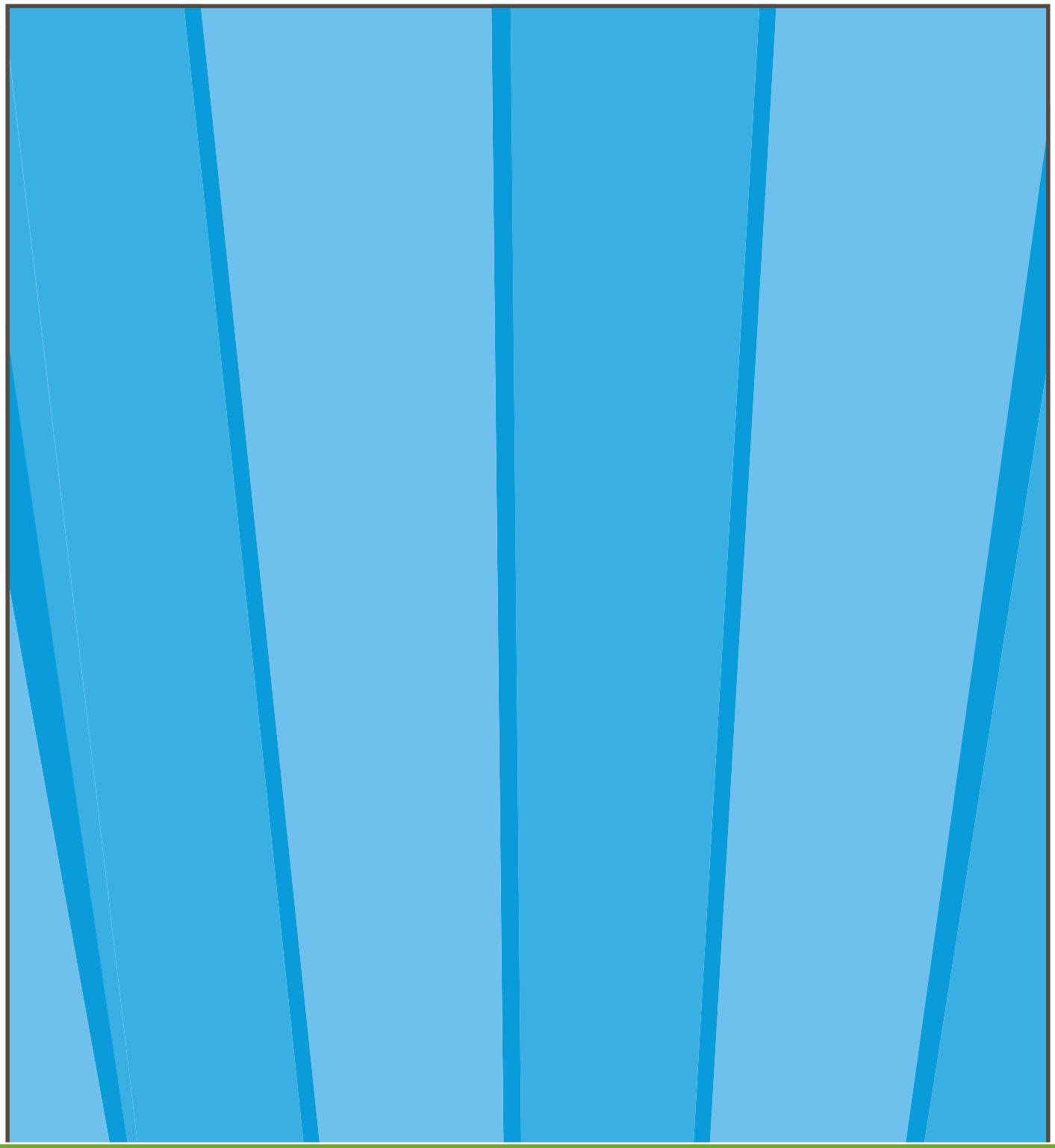

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