T&L

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

USI

Union of Students in Ireland
Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn

Forum Insight

ENHANCEMENT THEME

Assessment OF, FOR and AS Learning: Students as Partners in Assessment

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This **Forum Insight** aims to give both students and staff some initial thoughts on how they can facilitate students to become partners in the assessment process (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). It builds on the outputs of a workshop organised in partnership between the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) and the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning. It presents both ideas that students have some control over and ideas that staff could consider in their assessment designs.

Students as partners in assessment

Students have an important role to play in becoming more empowered in their own assessment and feedback processes. Whereas staff usually hold much of the 'power' in the allocation of grades in the assessment process, there is a growing international and national movement towards students becoming increasingly involved in aspects of assessment and feedback (Bovill & Bulley, 2011). Evans (2016, p2) supports this when she highlights the importance of 'how students come to co-own their programmes with lecturers and see themselves as active contributors to the assessment feedback process rather than seeing assessment as something that is done to them'.

The terms 'assessment' and 'feedback' can be understood in different ways and to assist in the development of a wider understanding of these terms, as part of the National Forum's Enhancement Theme 2016-2018, three concepts are being used (National Forum, 2016; Earl & Katz, 2006):

- Assessment OF Learning is the assessment that is associated with completing assessment to demonstrate learning, usually graded assessment that has high stakes.

- Assessment FOR Learning is assessment (graded and ungraded) that is concerned with giving feedback on teaching and student learning.

- Assessment AS Learning is assessment and activities that facilitate students' empowerment and engagement to become better learners.

Integral to this enhancement theme is students' involvement in developing ownership of their assessment, for example to enhance their self-monitoring skills in order to judge their progress and act on gaps in their learning (Carless, 2015; Evans, 2016). These skills are regularly prioritised by employers and are essential for lifelong learning.

Some of the relevant questions set out by this enhancement theme include:

- How might we enhance learning by shifting towards more Assessment AS Learning by partnering with and engaging students in the development of assessment?

- How can students become more engaged with assessment enhancement?

- How best might we promote assessment literacy among students and support students to become more engaged in the assessment process?

These questions were discussed among a group of USI representatives at a national workshop in September 2016. The suggestions overleaf are a result of this discussion. They touch on ideas related to national-level and institutional practices/policies, programme design, module design and in-class/online activities. It is hoped these suggestions will contribute to the development of assessment literacy among both staff and students and will foster a sense of partnership between staff and students for the enhancement of Assessment OF, FOR and AS Learning. For example, the option of how staff could design a module so students have some choice of assessment approaches is considered (Mogey et al., 2013; O'Neill, 2011) and students are encouraged to be actively engaged with feedback processes and be open to acting on these.

References

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Suggestions on how to involve students in Assessment OF/FOR/AS Learning

What can staff do?

- Facilitate students' involvement in national-level polices and quality assurance guidelines
- Build students' capacity in assessing their own learning
- Facilitate students' involvement in assessment-related institutional committees
- Reflect on what it was like when you were a student and consider what you would have wanted to be different
- Identify evidence-based assessment practices
- Be open to change in your practices
- Develop your own assessment literacy
- Invite and consider students' and graduates' views at the programme and module assessment design stage
- Work systematically with other staff to develop a coherent programmatic approach to student empowerment in assessment

- Partner with students to negotiate their assessment methods and/or timing, where possible
- Give students some choice of the methods used to assess them from a prescribed range (e.g., oral or poster presentation)
- Give students some choice of questions on an examination paper/assignment
- Give students some control over the topics they want to be assessed on (e.g., choosing their research topic)

- Facilitate students to communicate which areas of their work they would like to receive feedback on
- Give more regular and actionable feedback
- Be accessible for discussion on students' feedback
- Give students opportunities to self- and/or peer-assess their work in a module
- Allow some choice in the method of feedback (online/written/oral), where possible
- Support students to work with assessment criteria to monitor their own learning
- Engage students in in-class/online quizzes or similar activities to enhance their ability to self-monitor

What can students do?

- Engage with your quality assurance processes both nationally and locally
- Input into institutional assessment protocols, when possible (e.g., programme assessment review, development of assessment appeals/code of practices/regulations)

- Be responsible for your involvement, for example, by attending meetings, listening to your fellow students and communicating their issues and ideas
- Engage with your students' union
- Engage with your class representatives when you have suggestions to make about assessment approaches

- Know your relevant rights and responsibilities in relation to assessment
- Stay informed on your role, and the role of staff, in assessment and feedback regulations
- Be open to training in assessment-related areas
- Realise your importance in assessment and feedback processes
- Take responsibility for your learning and assessment activities

- Be open to fair criticism on your assessment work and act on the feedback given
- Discuss assessment issues with staff and suggest they become an item for regular discussion
- Consider your responsibilities in the management of your assessment workload
- Propose improvements to assessment and feedback practices, in particular through student evaluation processes (institutional student surveys and focus groups)
- Propose methods of assessment that you have found useful to you or other students
- Develop your confidence in approaching lecturers and other staff about your assessment needs
- Plan your assessment workload
- Check your module descriptors and other guidance on assessment
- Stay informed of any changes in your assessment requirements