

## What

Assessment *for* learning is the process of using assessment to improve learning (mainly developmental) whereas assessment *of* learning is mainly the measurement of what students can do (judgmental.)

## Why

Assessment for learning is one of the most powerful ways of improving learning. Actively involving all students in their own learning, providing opportunities for students to assess themselves and understand how they are learning and progressing, can boost motivation and confidence. Assessment for learning should be part of effective planning of teaching and learning strategies that address the diverse needs of different groups of learners, and should acknowledge the barriers to learning that some of them encounter.

## How

We can encourage assessment for learning by:

- 1 Diversifying assessment, and moving away from over-use of just two or three assessment formats.** In particular, we need to ensure that we measure learning in a wide range of assessment contexts.
- 2 Making assessment fit-for-purpose, so that we measure what we really should be measuring.** We need to know what we are testing, whether it is decision-making, strategic planning, creative application of information, data collection and processing, logical sequencing, or argument. We need to choose assessments that are good at measuring what students have really learned.
- 3 Making assessment a high-learning-payoff experience for learners by making the most of feedback to students.** We need to think ahead to how we will give feedback to students after each element of assessment, and to how useful that feedback can be in helping them to improve for next time, even when the main purposes of assessment are summative rather than formative.
- 4 Reducing the burden of assessment for learners, and for ourselves.** Too much assessment can take the enjoyment out of learning. Reducing the amount of assessment quite dramatically – by a factor of three or four perhaps – can increase the quality of assessment and the usefulness of associated feedback to learners.
- 5 Assessing students' evidence of their learning more reliably.** Assessment is rarely an exact science, yet with so much depending on the marks and grades we award learners, we need to be constantly striving to make each assessment element as reliable as we can.
- 6 Focusing learning outcomes on what students *need to know*.** What is measured by assessment should be easily recognised as being important, not just interesting.
- 7 Avoiding using assessment methods that encourage students to rote learn material.** Measure 'know-how' and 'know-why' much more, and 'know-what' much less. In other words, move learning away from information recall and regurgitation, and try to use assessment to encourage learners to make sense of what they have learned, and towards being able to explain it and apply it rather than merely describe it.

- 8 **Involving learners in assessing their own and each others' work to deepen their learning.** The more learners know about how assessment really works, the better they can do themselves justice in preparing for it and demonstrating their learning. Developing self-assessment and peer-assessment skills deepens learning and helps students to understand the assessment culture of which they are part.
- 9 **Making your expectations clear so that students know what they are required to demonstrate.** Write in English, not in 'academese'. In evaluations, students often complain that they don't really understand what is being asked for. Teaching is about effective communication, so write as plainly and succinctly as possible.
- 10 **Creating assessment activities in which students have the opportunity to link their learning to what they already know, and to past experience.** This might include drawing on a student's current or past educational and/or work experience.
- 11 **Providing optional pathways towards meeting learning outcomes.** Consider options that allow for flexibility in assessment. Given the diversity of students, the greater the diversity in methods of assessment, the fairer the process will be.

### **Selected references and websites**

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### **Further advice**

Further advice and guidance is available from the Academic Development Consultancy Service ([acdev@port.ac.uk](mailto:acdev@port.ac.uk))

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