



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.

References

- Knight, P.T. (2000). The value of a programme-wide approach to assessment. *Assessment & Evaluation*, 25(3), 237-251.
- O'Neill, G., Donnelly, R., & Fitzmaurice, M. (2013). Supporting programme teams to develop sequencing in higher education curricula. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 19(4), 268-281

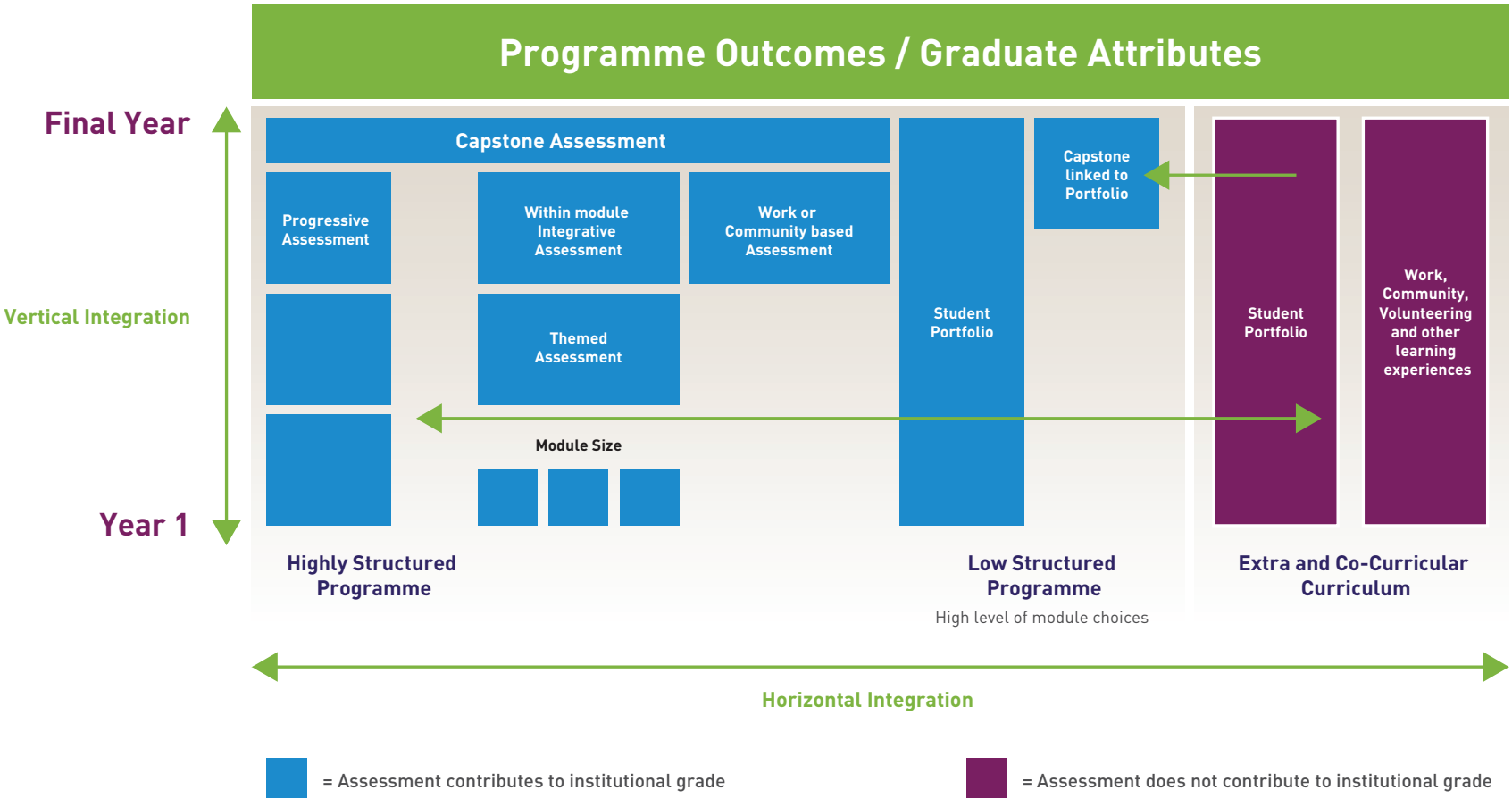


Figure 1 Programme assessment OF, FOR, AS learning interventions