



## 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.

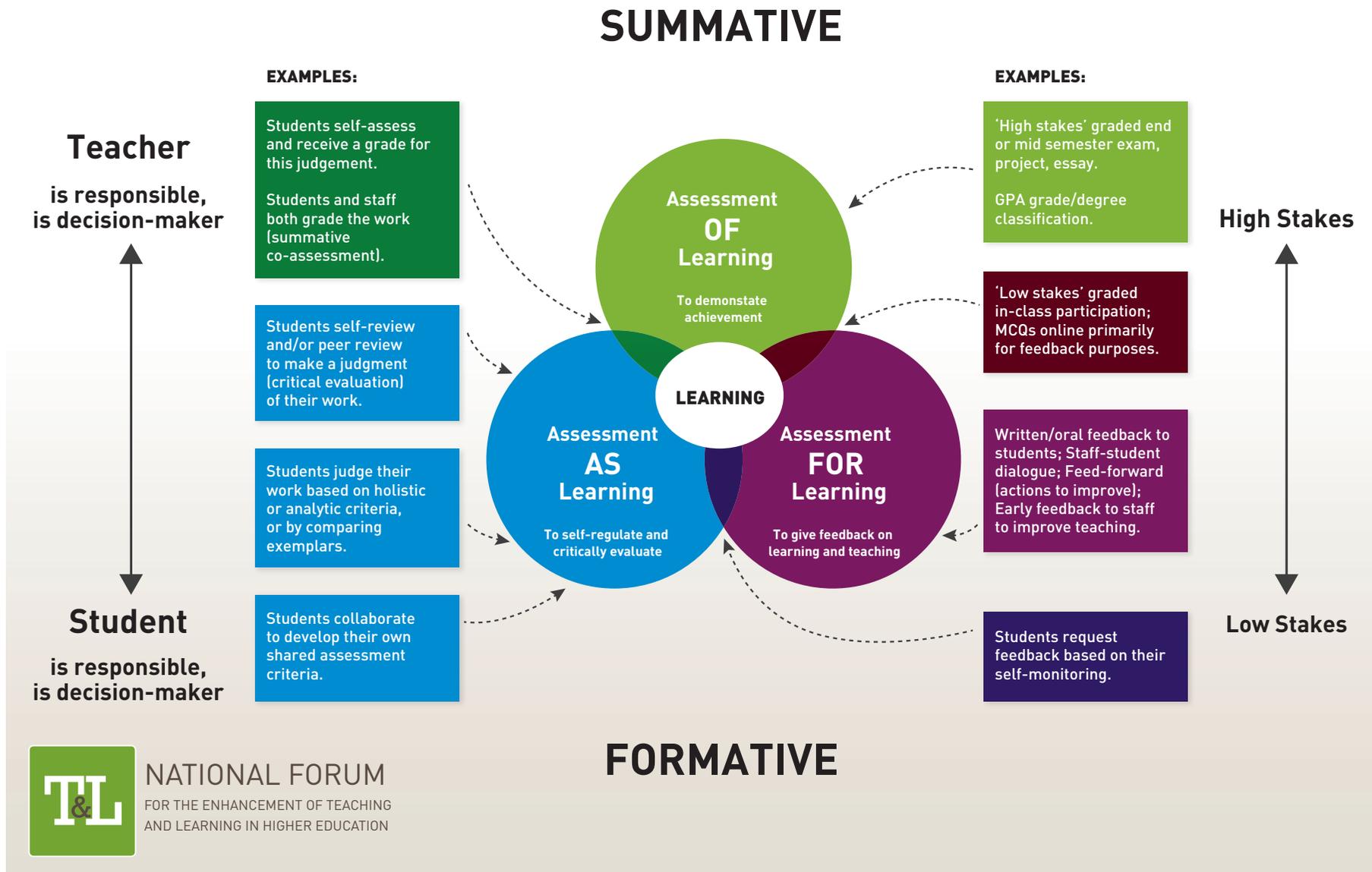
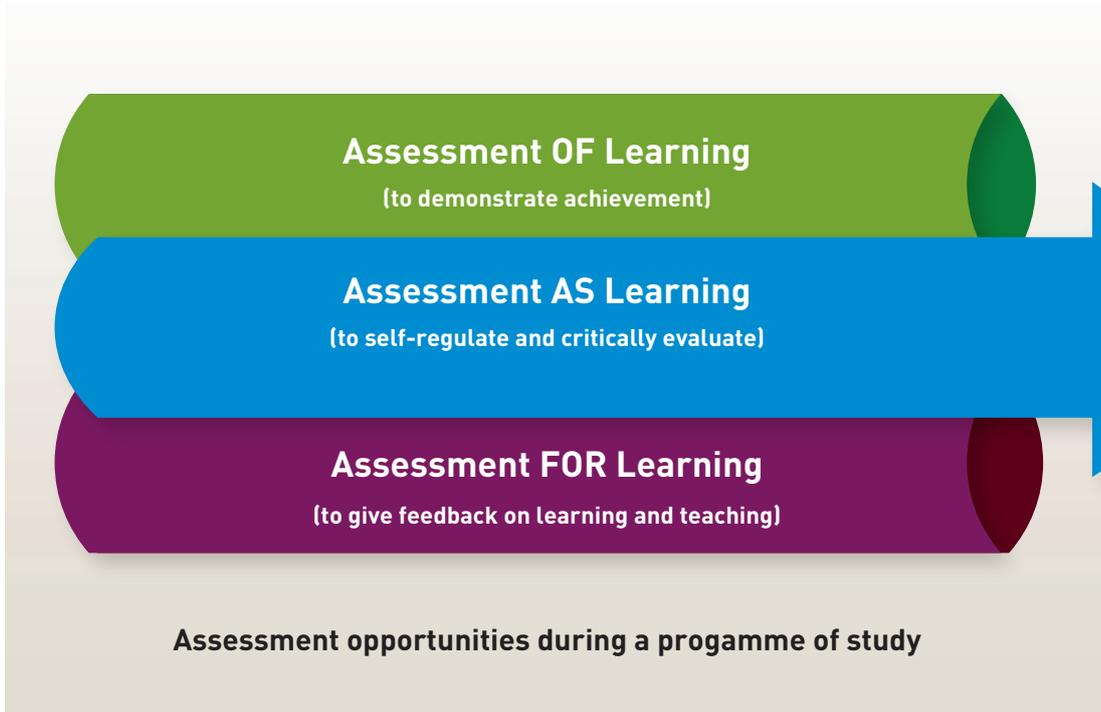


Figure 1 Programme assessment OF, FOR, AS learning interventions.  
<http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Sectoral-insight-web-ready.pdf>



**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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