



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 Learning². 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)?



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.

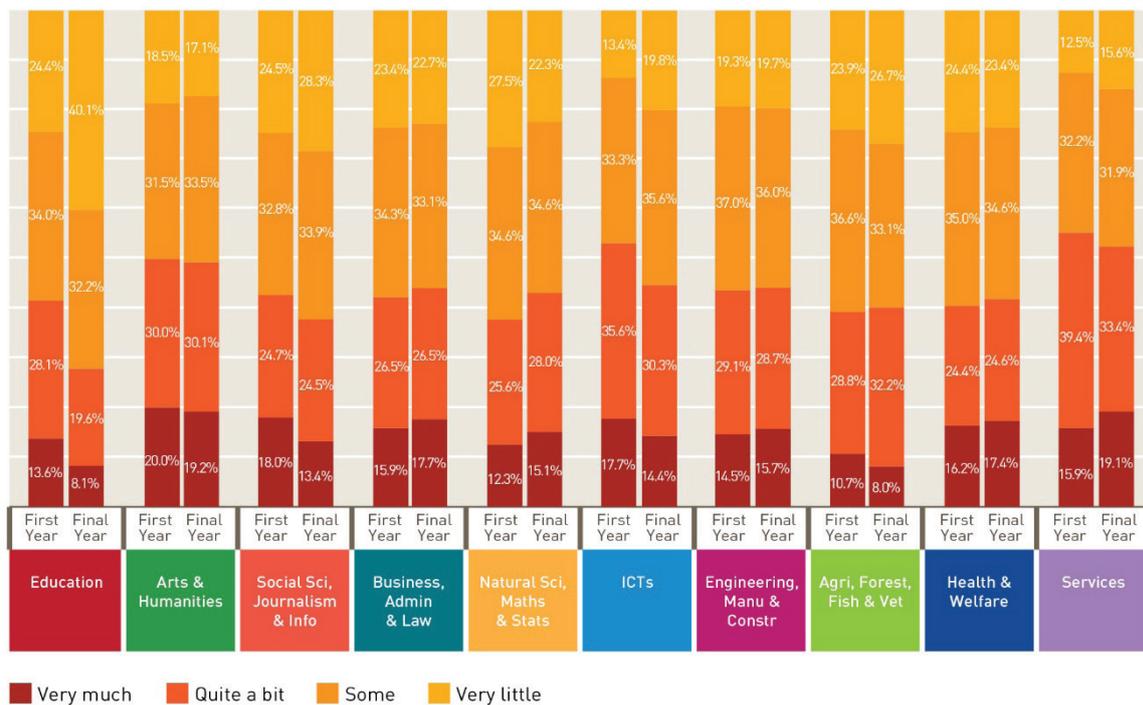


Figure 1 During the current academic year, to what extent have lecturers/teaching staff provided feedback on a draft or work in progress? (ISSE, 2016)



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).

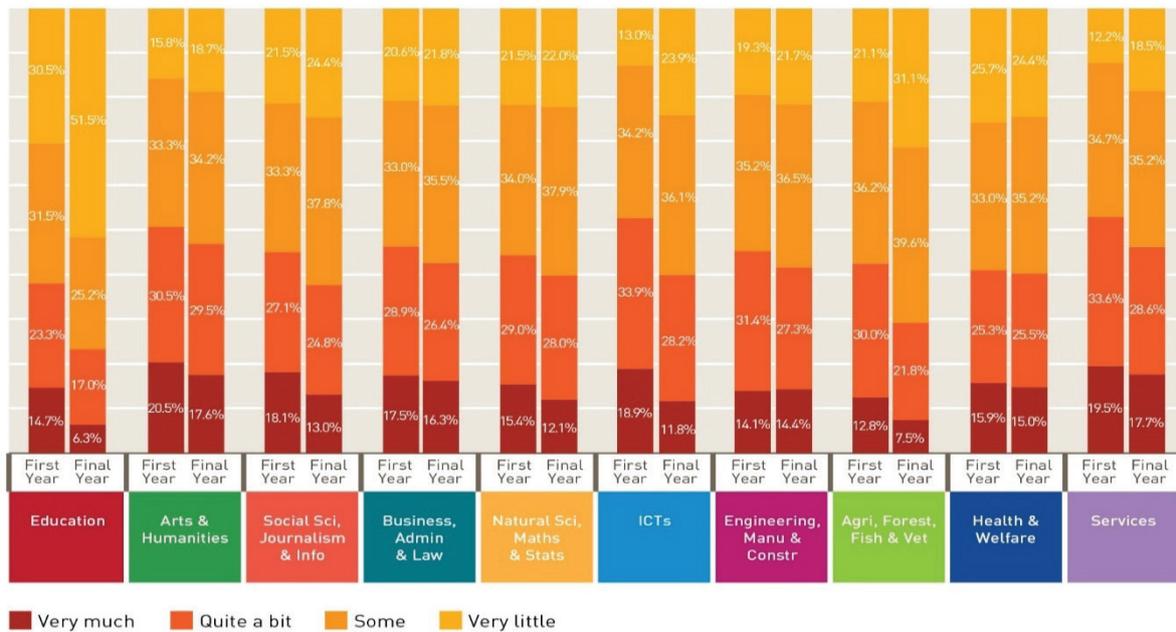


Figure 2 During the current academic year, to what extent have lecturers/teaching staff provided prompt and detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments? (ISSE, 2016)

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.

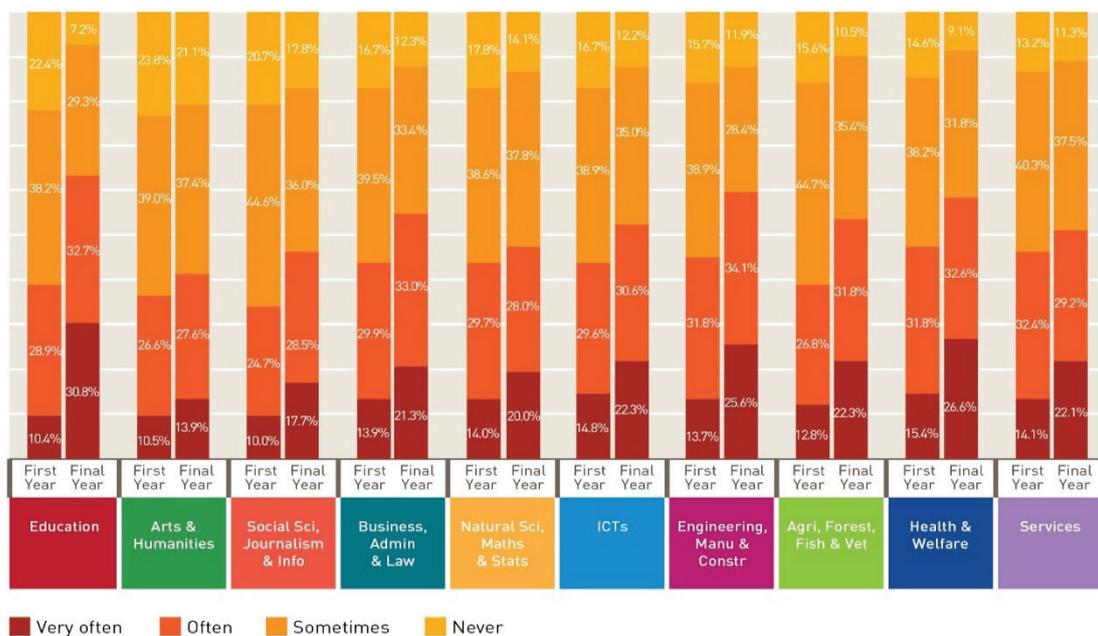


Figure 3 During the current academic year, about how often have you prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students? (ISSE, 2016)



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 workshops³.

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.

References

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