

# Assessment for Learning

## A working definition and guidance for policy

Assessment for Learning can be defined as

*the use of assessment as a holistic inclusive strategy to empower students to become ultimately independent evaluative judges of their own work **and** their own learning progress as part of a disciplinary, academic or work community. This involves:*

- *the use of authentic summative assessment aligned with clearly defined learning outcomes which allows students to demonstrate higher order learning and make knowledge connections;*
- *opportunities for formative assessment to build skills and confidence which encourages students to achieve course learning outcomes;*
- *opportunities for dialogic feedback involving tutor, peers and self-evaluation.*

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## Guidance

Both the working definition and guiding principles of assessment for learning within higher education are drawn from a holistic model articulated by Sambell et al (2013), supported by research and examples from across the UK and international higher education sector. Assessment for Learning is *not* about responding to short-term student preferences, metrics or feedback; rather, creating a cultural shift towards dialogue with students to co-create meaningful learning experiences for longer term success.

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## Key Principles of Assessment for Learning

1. Designing valid assessments which are rigorous and in line with a). the requirements of the discipline/profession and b). internal and/or external accreditation of courses; while foregrounding MEANINGFUL learning as the most important factor. Therefore, the use of **individual assessments** and/or **programme assessment patterns** which are seen to *hinder* meaningful learning (such as over assessment encouraging surface approaches, teacher dependency, plagiarism or rote memorisation) should be minimised ([TESTA](#)).

2. Alignment of assessment with learning outcomes at the programme and module level rather than only with topic or *content* ([Biggs, 2003](#)). This means that assessment needs to be the most important next step in the curriculum design process after learning outcomes have been devised for courses. Criteria for performance standards and expectations (in whatever form that takes) should be designed alongside assessments and clearly communicated to students and among academic staff ([Rust et al, 2003](#); [Bloxham, 2009](#)).
3. Considering opportunities for ALL students within the design and implementation of assessments with inclusive **Universal Design** principles in mind wherever possible, rather than only providing reasonable adjustments for certain students. This applies to on-campus, blended and fully online education. Inclusive assessment should take place as part of a programme level approach or assessment strategy.
4. Using authentic assessments which allows ALL students to develop, demonstrate and articulate complex skills and knowledge which are directly relevant to the world of work or research ([Fung, 2017](#)). Where students are less likely to see direct connections, it is the responsibility of the programme to ensure rationales for assessments are made explicit in dialogue with students.
5. Providing opportunities for low-stakes practice inside and outside of class time, which are not necessarily formally assessed/graded. This approach should be scaffolded throughout a programme to build confidence in students to take the risks of curiosity and creativity that are necessary for transformative educational experiences. Opportunities for explicit reflexive inquiry, peer and self-evaluation should be embedded within programmes in forms appropriate for the context ([Boud et al, 2018](#)) in order to aid transition.
6. Feedback is conceptualised as part of a module teaching strategy or process, rather than merely one-directional written or verbal comments on students' individual pieces of summative work. This means that workload for staff and students should not significantly increase as a result. Opportunities should be provided throughout a programme for students to become 'assessment literate' i.e. develop evaluative judgments of their own learning and their own performances against disciplinary standards ([Carless and Boud, 2018](#), [Winstone et al, 2017](#)).

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## Key references and resources

- Assessment for Learning at King's: <https://blogs.kcl.ac.uk/aflkings/>
- Biggs, J.B. (2003). Teaching for quality learning at university. Buckingham: Open University Press/Society for Research into Higher Education. (Second edition) (A brief summary [https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/id477\\_aligning\\_teaching\\_for\\_constructing\\_learning.pdf](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/id477_aligning_teaching_for_constructing_learning.pdf))
- Feedback for Learning: closing the assessment loop: <http://newmediaresearch.educ.monash.edu.au/feedback/>

- Sambell, K., McDowell, L. & C. Mongtgomery (2013). Assessment for Learning in Higher Education. London: Routledge.
- Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment:  
<https://www.testa.ac.uk/index.php/about>
- Universal Design For Learning: <https://commons.georgetown.edu/teaching/design/universal-design/>