

Stepping Up and Stepping Forward

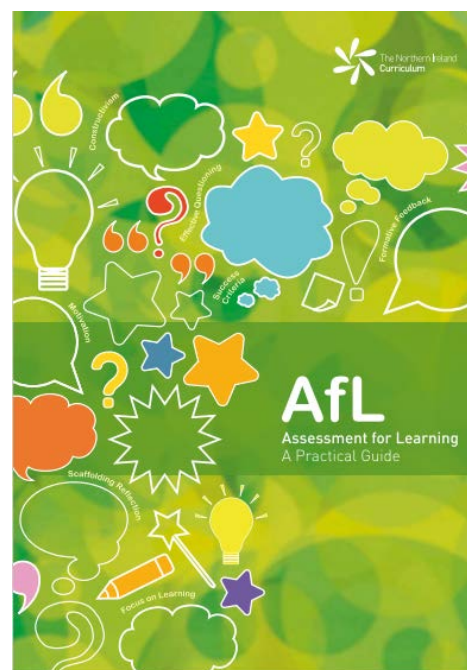
Learning Insight 9

In a year when public examinations were cancelled, some pupils reported experiences of ‘testing overload’; the constant collection and collation of data can distract from learning



What do we know?

The ETI acknowledges the importance of assessment and testing as part of an effective [assessment for learning](#) pedagogy. High quality, qualitative feedback can make a big difference in improving learners’ knowledge, understanding and skills; key factors of which are teacher professional judgement and knowledge of the learner. Effective assessment informs conversations around learning between the teacher and the learner to discuss strengths and aspects of their work which may be improved. It is important that learners understand the organisation’s assessment practices, the purpose of each assessment and the feedback a teacher provides, and that they are given opportunities to act upon teacher feedback and apply it to their work in order to make improvements.



Organisations routinely track the standard of learners’ work in order to demonstrate progression but excessive internal testing can consume valuable learning time. Assessment is integral to learning and teaching and assessment for learning has a positive impact on learners’ progress. All organisations should assure themselves that their data and tracking systems support learners to make progress, inform learning and interventions and are not overly burdensome for learners and staff.

What have we learned?

Ensuring that arrangements for assessment are robust while providing pupils with high quality learning experiences can be a difficult balance to achieve.



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Learning Insight 9

In a year when public examinations were cancelled, many learners were engaged in numerous internal assessments. Teachers, in both primary and post-primary schools, reported that correcting and providing feedback for online testing was excessively time consuming. On returning to face-to-face lessons, the loss of teaching time during the lockdowns was compounded by a focus on assessment rather than learning in some organisations. On return to school in the spring of 2021, teachers and learners reported that extensive assessments and tests were set, in order to ascertain gaps in learning.

The cancellation of formal examinations in the summers of 2020 and 2021 added additional pressures and brought in new demands for assessment data, in order to confirm centre determined grades. Teachers reported to inspectors that this testing and its associated administration was challenging for staff and pupils. Teachers and leaders faced the extremely challenging task of having to put in place alternative awarding arrangements to provide centre determined grades.

What will help us move forward constructively?

It will be important that a holistic and appropriately balanced teaching, learning and assessment process is re-established. While it is essential for schools and organisations to monitor the progress of their learners, the collection and collation of data can at times become overly burdensome for learners and teachers alike; too much testing can distract from learning and the evidence shows a demotivating impact on learners' engagement in, and enjoyment of, their lessons and education more generally.

ETI promotes the effective use of data but we, along with organisations, know that data is only part of the picture in assessing learning and progression. High quality assessments can generate rich data and can provide valuable information about learner progress but assessment practices must put learners, and learning, first. The professional holistic judgement of educators who know their learners best is crucial first-hand evidence in how learners are performing and should contribute to planning next steps and interventions in learning.

Covid-19 is still presenting significant challenges. Schools, parents and young people are still concerned that alternative assessment arrangements for public examinations may have to be introduced again in 2022; this is causing uncertainty and some anxiety. Any decision to change the current understanding of how the 2021/22 series of examinations will be conducted, needs to be communicated in a timely manner to allow learners and staff to be well-prepared. In 2021, the quality of the arrangements was improved by leaders, practitioners, parents and young people being actively involved in the decision-making processes around alternative assessment arrangements; this needs to continue. ETI is committed to monitoring the outworking of any alternative arrangements and commenting without fear or favour on how modifications can best meet the needs of all learners.



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