Appendix 2: Assessment for Learning

Assessment for learning (AfL) can be defined as "any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students' learning" (Black et al., 2004, p. 10). AfL involves partnership between teachers and learners and relies on pedagogical practices such as: involving students in assessment; making objectives and criteria transparent; and asking open-ended questions that provoke higher order thinking. Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis identified visible learning attributable to AfL-related practices such as self-report grades, meta-cognitive strategies, formative evaluation, feedback and reciprocal (peer) teaching. Carless (2017, p.3) argues that AfL "is now reasonably well-entrenched as part of higher education (HE) pedagogy". Sambell and colleagues (2013) provide six characteristics of effective practice in the integration AfL in HE: 1) authentic assessment 2) balancing summative and formative assessment 3) creating opportunities for practice and rehearsal 4) designing formal feedback to improve learning 5) designing opportunities for informal feedback 6) developing students as self-assessors and effective lifelong learners (Sambell et al., 2013).

2.1 Assessment for Learning Principle
All assessment will embody the principles of assessment for learning.

Objective	Evidence in sections
AL1 Programmes will use a range of pedagogically- and discipline-appropriate assessment approaches including, but not limited to, peer assessment, self-assessment, group assessment, and digital assessment.	2.2.1, 2.2.4, 2.2.8, 2.2.10, 2.3.1, 2.4.1, 2.4.5
AL2 Programmes will employ strategies to develop students as self-assessors and effective independent lifelong learners.	2.2.1, 2.2.5, 2.2.8
AL3 Assessments will be designed to provide flexibility of formats and topics where possible to evidence learning outcomes.	2.2.8, 2.3.1
AL4 Programmes should balance formative and summative assessments that provide opportunities for practice, feedback, and improvement.	2.2.2, 2.2.4, 2.3.2, 2.4.2
AL5 Amounts of assessment, and types and amounts of feedback provided, will be appropriate, timely, and consistent.	2.2.2, 2.2.3, 2.2.4, 2.2.6, 2.2.7, 2.3.4, 2.4.4
AL6 Assessment design, including measures to ensure validity, reliability, and fairness, such as marking schemes, criteria, and rubrics, will be explicit and shared with students.	2.2.5, 2.2.6, 2.2.9, 2.3.3, 2.4.3
AL7 Programmes will be designed to ensure that students have the opportunity to complete a diverse range of assessments that have real-world relevance.	2.2.1, 2.2.8, 2.3.2, 2.4.2

2.2 Evidence from literature
Characteristics of effective practice in Assessment for Learning in HE contexts have been defined as:

1. authentic assessment;
2. balancing summative and formative assessment;
3. creating opportunities for practice and rehearsal;

4. designing formal feedback to improve learning
5. designing opportunities for informal feedback;
6. developing students as self-assessors and effective lifelong learners (Sambell et al., 2013).

2.2.1 Authentic assessment

Authentic assessment aligns learning objectives with real-world tasks, content, and contexts. It is argued that many traditional assessments, such as exams, fall short when it comes to evaluating soft skills; are poorly aligned with the behaviour-based assessments increasingly used by employers; and can constrain creativity and divergent thinking (Iosad et al., 2020). An authentic assessment task must be of value to students personally and to a community of practice; this approach aims to take account of some of the complexity and contradictions that students can expect to face in the real world and are less easily captured in traditional learning strategies (Martinez Serrano et al., 2018). Students therefore engage in performance-based tasks, where they produce work or demonstrate knowledge, understanding, and skills in activities that are close to those they might experience when addressing a real-world problem. In this approach, students create their own understandings of new concepts and practices by integrating their previous experience, the resources they have, their own research and their current experience (Roach et al., 2018). Authentic assessment has been found to have a positive impact on student learning, problem-solving skills, autonomy, motivation, self-regulation and metacognition (Villarroel et al., 2018).

Use of authentic assessment also raises questions about who assesses, and when assessment takes place. Authentic assessment can be part of the learning process, rather than something that is mechanically 'attached' at the end of a programme of learning (Martinez Serrano et al., 2018). It can also be an opportunity to include students' reflections upon their own work and accounts of how they judge their own performance against agreed standards or through discussion with peers (Bromley et al., 2007; Mulder et al., 2014; Smith and Sodano, 2011; Stefanou et al., 2013).

2.2.2 Formative assessment

Formative assessment is assessment that takes place throughout a module, enabling students to learn from feedback received early on when completing later assessments. Formative assessments will often contribute to the final mark of a module but may not necessarily do so (Heywood, 2000). It is a key aspect of AfL because an appropriate balance of formative assessment (in comparison to summative assessment) creates opportunities for practice and rehearsal. Formative tasks and feedback, which are explicitly used to adapt and improve learning, are known to be powerful drivers of student learning (Black and Wiliam 1998; Hattie 2009). Analysing data from across over 50 universities participating in TESTA (Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment), Tomas and Jessop (2019) report that programmes with a 'medium' level of assessment have 40-48 summative assessments, compared to just 5-19 formative assessments. Summative assessment therefore competes for student time and attention, especially in systems with higher assessment loads where students find the demands of juggling both summative and formative tasks across multiple modules difficult (Jessop et al. 2014; Harland et al 2015; Jessop and Tomas 2017).

There are also frequently problems due to the fragmented nature of assessment design, in particular, academics struggle to construct meaningful formative tasks which align with learning outcomes and summative assessments and engage students in more than doing solely what is needed to satisfy minimal requirements (Jessop and Tomas, 2017). Heron (2010) discusses the importance of ensuring the alignment between formative and summative feedback is made more explicit, for instance, by including formative feedback in the final submission to allow the summative feedback to build upon existing work in a cumulative way.

2.2.3 Designing formal feedback to improve learning

Academics are often frustrated by a perceived lack of student engagement and responsiveness to feedback; this is highlighted as a weakness in curriculum design and is consistently an area of student dissatisfaction across the sector (West & Turner 2016; Boud & Molloy 2013; OfS 2018). Wolstencroft and de Main (2021) argue that the shift to online marking has exacerbated this issue. While rubrics and comment banks mean that marking can be completed in a shorter period, it also means that there is a tendency for comments to become generic rather than specific to the individual learner, and students are increasingly aware of this. Killingback and colleagues (2019) conducted a systematic literature review on alternative feedback mechanisms and concluded that richer, media alternatives are important in assisting students to achieve greater levels of comprehension of the feedback received.

There have been several attempts to find ways to encourage students to access their feedback, for example, withholding the grade until feedback has been reviewed (Jackson & Marks, 2016); separating the feedback and grade (Laflen and Smith 2017); adaptive release of grades (Irwin et al. 2013); and grade self-assessment based upon tutor feedback (De Grez et al. 2012; Taras 2003). Overall, this research has found that, while such approaches can be successful in encouraging some students to read feedback more carefully, they can also generate feelings of anxiety, frustration and disappointment around the feedback/grading process.

If feedback is given on a summative assessment at the end of a unit, the impact of this feedback on learning is limited (e.g. Carless, 2019; Hounsell et al., 2008; Quinton & Smallbone, 2010). In recent years, the literature in assessment and feedback has called for the dominant transmission-focused approach to be replaced by an emphasis on dialogue and student action following feedback, with a focus on the resulting improvements in subsequent tasks (Winstone & Boud, 2019).

2.2.4 Designing opportunities for informal feedback

Pitt (2021) discusses how, in addition to traditional one-way summative feedback, feedback can also be ongoing, two-way, incidental and informal. This type of feedback is designed to support learning broadly (beyond just what is formally assessed). Pitt contends that this 'dialogical' approach to feedback has been gaining momentum as an important approach to support student learning. An example might be when a teacher provides feedback to the student on their learning in real-time, answering questions to clarify understanding. In their study of formative feedback practices in a UK Business School, Poppitt and Iqbal (2009) found there was strong support among students for more informal feedback (verbal, email) as an indication as to how they were progressing.

In addition to dialogue between teachers and students, informal feedback can also take place on a peer-to-peer basis amongst students. In Headington's (2018) study of informal peer feedback networks where students alternated between the roles of recipients and producers of feedback, students felt that, in contrast with some of their experiences of tutor feedback, informal peer feedback was contextualized, prompt and enabled understanding to be negotiated through dialogue. The language used between peers was at an appropriate level and could be modified in the light of each others' emotional responses, offering greater sensitivity within the feedback process.

2.2.5 Developing students as self-assessors and effective lifelong learners

Transmission of feedback as a one-way process from assessor to student has been widely challenged as students do not learn to become self-reliant and self-judging if they only have access to feedback from an 'expert' (Molloy and Boud, 2013; Nicol, 2010). Peer assessment as a formative practice has been found to be effective across a wide range of contexts (Double et al., 2020). Closely linked to peer assessment is the idea of student 'feedback literacy', which entails appreciating feedback

processes, developing the capacity to make judgements, managing affect and taking action to use the feedback (Carless and Boud, 2018). Reflecting, making a balanced assessment, formulating and delivering feedback can all lead to learning gains, as can receiving and evaluating the feedback by deciding what aspects to implement (Li et al., 2012). As Winstone and Carless (2019) point out, whilst the importance of training for students carrying out peer assessment and feedback is well-documented in the literature, this is not always heeded in practice. Digital technology is increasingly being used to support peer assessment, for example, students providing video feedback for each other (e.g. Hung, 2016). Many virtual learning environments have features that facilitate peer review processes (Winstone & Carless, 2019).

2.2.6 Amount of assessment

The last two decades have seen notable changes in the amount of assessment given to students in the HE sector. Modularisation has led to an increase in the assessment load experienced by students (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007; Jessop et al., 2012). Wass and colleagues (2020) reported that students feel frustrated and annoyed by the timing and amount of assessment, as this influences the quality of what they can produce and is not felt to be a good indicator of their potentials. The 2022 Student Academic Experience Survey (Neves & Brown, 2022) reported an increase in the volumes of both summative (assignments contributing to a grade) and formative assignments, saying "it is unclear what is driving the consistent upturn in assignment volume, although it appears that for some students this is causing a level of anxiety […] some students have clearly felt not fully prepared for the number of assignments" (p.46). Research has demonstrated that high volumes of summative assessment counteract deep learning (Lizzio et al. 2002). More summative assessment is not necessarily better for student learning because students are working harder, as effort does not necessarily equate to depth (Harland et al. 2015). Thus, students may be working more frequently, but in more instrumental and superficial way.

The amount of assessment in HE institutions can vary widely. For example, Devine and colleagues (2015) found that, even in a subject leading to an externally-awarded licence (in this case by the GMC), there was substantial variation, not only in assessment volume, but also in the type and intensity of assessment, with undergraduate students at the University of Cambridge experiencing over three times as much more written assessment than those at the University of Leeds for instance.

2.2.7 Timing of assessment

In focus groups conducted by Jones and colleagues (2021), students described how "bunching of assessment was also problematic; having 'so many assessment deadlines [means] that you need to adopt a really strategic approach'" (p.11). There have been attempts to address the issue of assessment bunching, such as the Map My Assessment (MMA) online platform which enables staff to visualise a complex picture of module assessment information across modules and programmes, potentially eliminating assessment bunching and choke points; introducing or reducing assessment variety; reducing assessment volume; and meeting marking turnaround deadlines more effectively (Walker et al., 2019). There is evidence that early assessment and feedback can be used to identify and support students who are struggling (Linden, 2022).

2.2.8 Diversity and flexibility of assessment

Diversifying assessment usually involves educators changing a traditional assessment format to a different approach in order to provide a range of different assessment types to cater for different learning approaches, preferences, and abilities. An extension of diversification is where educators may give students the flexibility to choose between two or more assessments in the same module. Teaching staff in O'Neill and Padden's (2021) study identified student engagement and

empowerment as a key benefit of diversifying assessment through offering choice of assessment. However, there can be challenges around diversifying assessment such as students and educators being resistant to change and experiencing stress, and students may perform poorly as a result (Bevitt, 2015; Medland, 2016). In their focus groups, Jones and colleagues (2021) found that, according to staff, although examinations were potentially stressful for students, they were also familiar and expected, meaning that examinations were potentially preferred in comparison with other less traditional forms of assessment. However, in the same research, student panels advocated greater variety and flexibility around assessment types, with students preferring to be "able to 'pick if they want exams'…or 'choose your own style of assessment'" (Jones et al., 2021, p.11).

The concept of inclusive assessment is closely linked to diversity of assessment. Inclusive assessment can be defined as "the design and use of fair and effective assessment methods and practices that enable all students to demonstrate to their full potential what they know, understand and can do" (Hockings 2010, p. 34). However, "there is a relative dearth of studies on the design and implementation of inclusive assessment" (Tai et al., 2021, p.3) and at present, accommodations or adjustments (e.g. altering the setting, timing, scheduling, presentation or allowed responses) are more common approaches to inclusion in assessment.

2.2.9 Perceived fairness of assessment

Taras (2003) considers fair assessment in terms of unambiguity: "coherent and logical educational processes that are not detrimental to their [students'] learning" (p.501). Indeed, the emphasis in much of the assessment literature is on ensuring neutrality or objectivity in terms of assessment tools, rather than broader issues of equity (Leathwood, 2005). However, as Leathwood (2005) emphasises, "assessment systems are rooted in academic cultures and institutional habitus" (p.315). Using a comparison of the different ways in which illness and differences in economic class (which may lead some students to have to work long hours of paid employment in order to go to university) may be judged reasonable grounds for different treatment, McArthur (2015) discusses how "these supposedly 'fair' systems are themselves highly selective and based on socially-constructed notions of what should and should not count, and these may deserve rethinking" (p.13).

Plagiarism remains a concern for many forms of assessment. For example, a recent Times Higher Education survey of university staff reported concerns about the accuracy and quality of remote assessments (Barber, 2021). In response to this issue, Pauli (2021) argues that a more sustainable long-term solution would be not to attempt to 'fix' the issue of cheating, but instead look to design new methods for formative and summative assessment which align with learning outcomes and employability agendas, with a focus on supporting students in developing good academic practice and promoting clear understanding of academic integrity.

2.2.10 Digital approaches

Digital approaches to assessment offer the potential for more sophisticated ways to conduct assessments, for example, using remote datasets, creating simulated tasks or adaptive learning and personalised assessment tasks and feedback tailored to a student's ability (Barber 2021). There are also possibilities to use technology such as automated marking to provide instant feedback to students (Barber, 2021). Traditional coursework and exams usually involve manual assessment and, unless staff members are present while students perform tasks, it is impossible to overcome the problem of 'dangled feedback' arriving days or weeks after it was needed (Boud & Molloy, 2013).

2.3 Evidence from student consultation

2.3.1 Range of assessment approaches

Methods of assessment mentioned in student focus groups included: written exams, practical exams, 24-hour open book exams, coursework, presentations, filmmaking, role play, lab reports, research proposals, bench test, multiple choice tests and posters. Some students felt there was sufficient flexibility, or choice, in their assessments. However, others said they would like more choice when it came to assessment.

> *So we've had things like making a film, things like doing mock politics, and things like that, where we've had to take a role as a specific party or a specific organisation, and then kind of debate an issue. And I really enjoy being able to do something that's beyond a traditional essay, because I think that brings a bit of variety and a bit of fun to your degree (FG7)*

> *…the course is very essay focused. And I wish there were more criterias in judging our ability, our understanding of the course, instead of just writing because not everyone's good with writing…sometimes I feel like I could talk to someone and explain them better than I would in writing. And there's like, so many things that can be done, like presentations, or, you know, like some projects that we can work on. (FG4)*

2.3.2 Real-world relevance and opportunities to practise

Most students expressed a strong preference for assessments that reflect the types of tasks they might be expected to do in a career after graduation.

> *…they'd often be linked to like, local projects. So I think we assessed the flood risk at this building that's under construction, and then saw whether the mitigation measures would actually deal with that…just sort of linking it to things you can actually see made it a lot more exciting, and a lot more enjoyable to engage with. (FG7)*

> *I think it is, like more helpful, and also more just representative of what you would do in your career to work on a project for like two or three, four weeks, rather than have like, an exam where you have two hours or even 24 hours to write one essay (FG3)*

On the other hand, assessment tasks that did not appear to reflect what students might be expected to do after graduating could feel frustrating.

> *I think I'd like to have some more greater connections to real world case studies...for some courses, it was just like…having constant discussions about past papers, disagreements in past scientific journals, you know, I didn't feel that was relevant to what I wanted to do…it's more just having real world examples. (FG8)*

A lack of opportunities to reflect on and use formative feedback often meant that students were often not able to practise and improve based on feedback.

> *…they give feedback. But then there isn't really a chance to put that into practice...I think that is an issue, especially when there's no formative assessment before the summative is kind of like a stab in the dark a bit…[What was better] with the lab reports is that we did four, but two of them counted and two of them didn't count. So you had like time to practise before you went on to the summative…So you could sort of like act on feedback, but that hasn't really existed in other modules. (FG3)*

2.3.3 Fairness and transparency

Students felt there needs to be a clear **r**elationship between teaching/learning and assessment, but occasionally this did not happen. Furthermore, a lack of preparation or guidance could also mean an assessment felt unfair.

> *…applicability to what we've actually learned, and it is something that we're covering, and that is relevant to the module would be helpful, and that it makes sense, given what we're learning. (FG1)*

> *For first year anyway, I feel like if they could show us what a good essay is like. And I know that's hard, because they don't want people copying, but some examples…that could kind of be a good indicator of what we need to do (FG6)*

Whilst some students felt that the assessment criteria were clear, others felt the assessment and marking criteria were not always well-explained.

> *One thing the department do really well is they make the marking criteria very clear to us. (FG2)*

> *I got eight out of 10...so I went to my professor and I was like, "What can I do?", "Nothing, it's fine."…it's clearly not because then it'd be a 10…it doesn't make any sense. But like, I try and ask, and they never have...reasons... (FG4)*

Assignments that students can 'game' can also be perceived as unfair

> *I know people who would do like the first 10 questions, submit it, find out that they got like nine out of 10 know that one of them was wrong, and keep doing like kind of gaming until they got 100. (FG1)*

Furthermore, groupwork was an approach that could seem unfair to some students unless it was carefully structured:

> *I think it can be very challenging, especially if your summative mark is based on groupwork. I know I found it frustrating sometimes when I've been put in a group where I don't feel like other people are putting their weight in. And then if your actual degree grade depends on it, then I think it can be quite difficult. (FG7)*

2.3.4 Amount, consistency and timing of assessment and feedback

Discussions highlighted a conflict between students identifying there is currently a lot of assessment and bunching of assessment deadlines, and wanting more frequent, evenly spaced, assessment with less value attached to each piece.

> *I had absolutely loads, like probably about six or seven, maybe eight or nine...essays due at the end of second term. So I think that's quite a lot. And then plus three exams. That felt like an absolutely massive workload. (FG10)*

> *I didn't really have anything in first term this year. And then it was all sort of towards the end of second term. I think I had sort of three or four assignments during the space of two weeks. And it just puts a lot of pressure on getting things done. And you might have to sort of rush one to then have time to move on to the other. I think it's sort of decreases the quality of work…(FG7)*

> *I think it could be more helpful to have more essays, but spaced out a bit more so that instead of having like, two essays for a module, you have like three or four, but they're not worth as much. (FG1)*

Students recognised that feedback could be good but was not always provided in time to inform the next assessment. Lack of detail on how to improve, generic feedback, lack of consistency between markers and lack of opportunities to discuss feedback were seen as areas in need of improvement.

> *Generally, the feedback is good. It just takes forever...I find the feedback, very helpful, but sometimes we'll get the feedback after we've had to submit the second essay. (FG1)*

> *...what I'd appreciate would be actual concrete examples of how I could improve. So rather than just putting a question mark on a sentence that they didn't like, actually say what they think I could have done better and give an example of what would have been better...it just feels a bit vague. (FG6)*

> *There's sort of different markers having quite vastly different opinions on what you should and shouldn't be doing. (FG8)*

> *…sometimes people just highlight the bits on the rubric that you were at, and don't give you any actual comments. (FG1)*

2.4 Evidence from staff consultation

2.4.1 Range of assessment approaches

In some cases, having a range of assessment approaches was about assessing different learning outcomes using appropriate methods, but it could also relate to giving students options to select, or the opportunity to design their own assignments.

> *We want to have a diversity of different types of assessment. In part because different types of assessment fit different things which are being assessed, but also I think, that being able to give a range of assessment tests just to…test students in different ways. So I think, we need to have different types of assessment. (Group G)*

> *I'm a big believer in choice in assessment for students, and that's for multiple reasons. One is really around diversity. Because if I set a question that I think is interesting, it may well not be interesting to somebody else…I just said, '...just do whatever you're interested in'. And so the technical requirements remain the same… I don't think in any assessment now students are told 'You've got to do exactly this'; they're always choosing a dataset to work with or a problem domain to do or a particular topic we're going to do and they have requirements within that. (Group H)*

However, staff felt that students prefer forms of assessment that they are familiar with, which they felt hinders diversifying assessments.

> *…a lot of students here at Durham go through our education system, by being good at exams, that's how they got here. So it's, something they're comfortable with…And actually, as soon as you start to push them to something that they haven't tried [before]...they become uncomfortable, because…they're unfamiliar with, and that they could fail at… (Group L)*

> *Taking a bit of a risk with an assessment, try something new, allowing, you know, innovation, and that that can be quite a risky thing to do and quite a stressful thing to do from an academic perspective. And, you know, you can spend a lot of time in class or online explaining to students why they are doing an assignment that isn't an essay, or it isn't an exam and what skills they're going to be developing from that. (Group M)*

Staff also perceive University structures do not allow for innovation.

I would love to have modules where…I have different assessment types, and they choose the assessment they take. And that's part of them on the journey in the module, designing their learning, but Durham is not…I have tried to bring it up, but it's so against ethos here, it doesn't fit the system. (Group K)

2.4.2 Real-world relevance and opportunities to practise

In general, staff prefer assessments that test knowledge application.

…we're trying to focus on application. So, application in context. So if we're going to ask them to do a maths problem, I don't really want to give them a sum. I'm trying to encourage our tutors to give them a problem scenario in which they create the sum. And therefore, they're able to demonstrate that they understand the context and the purpose of the piece rather than simply are able to follow it… (Group L)

Staff favoured assignments that helped to develop both generic and subject-specific workplace skills.

We try and build in, like employability skills as well…presentations is an example of that. Developing, a variety of skills, I think for the students is really important to us in our assessments. (Group M)

…industrially based projects…they will work in a group of five people and come up with solution to a problem and write a report for an external organisation. (Group C)

However, workload issues could present a barrier to providing formative opportunities for students to practise.

… being able to cope with the workload involved in the best types of assessment is something we're struggling with, which means that we're giving students fewer formative assignments and they want more practice (Group C)

We get one formative assignment that gets allocated marking time. And if you want to have anything outside of that, it's got to be workload neutral, as it were, which it makes sense that we have only a limited number of people and a limited amount of time that they have. (Group D)

2.4.3 Fairness and transparency

Staff discussed how increasing the range of assessment approaches could help to make assessment fairer, in particular for students who might perform less well in traditional types of assessment such as exams and essays.

Some students suffer from anxiety and do terribly badly, but then when they've given the opportunity to be continuously assessed, they excel particularly if they are able to choose an area of endeavour in which they can engage with fully. So my argument would be that there is no one…best method of assessment. What's absolutely key is that we have a broad range of different assessment types, to give all students the opportunity and to test the full range of skills. (Group C)

However, in some departments, staff had concerns over academic integrity leading to caution in moving away from traditional in-person examinations.

… if we don't have any exams anymore…We don't have that situation where we can exactly be 100% sure that it's the work of the student that we looked at. So that's, I think, become a bit of an issue. And I'm just a bit worried about not having that clear. (Group A)

On a few occasions, staff also described how they tried to ensure their marking and feedback processes were fair and transparent, for example, by using a marking rubric to be explicit about how the overall mark related to the assessment criteria.

> *…we selected excellent, good. And then a mark for each section. So very transparent. And then overall mark for the whole thing. And like we have…three things that were good three things you could improve on and the overall comments. (Group J)*

2.4.4 Amount, consistency and timing of assessment and feedback

Staff were aware of issues around the amount of assessment and assessment bunching.

> *…every head of department said we over-assess, how can we cut down the number of assessments? And the net result is that you know, we just continue assessing to the same amount but just in different ways. So I think part of it is just us as academics just being disciplined in kind of saying, you know, if we truly mean less assessment, then you can just get rid of some assessments. (Group E)*

> *…something we continuously get as feedback from our students is stuff around assessment bunching so when the deadlines are for our coursework, and students feeling like they've got too much to do within a short space of time…there's nothing that you can do about it because there's just not enough space. (Group E)*

Whilst most felt there was no easy solution, a few described how they tried to ensure that assessment was spread throughout the year.

> *Students get weekly formative tests. And then every two weeks, they've got to take a summative test. And it has had a positive impact: students engage more, and it reduces the amount for the last exam by 20%. (Group K)*

Staff expressed concerns about the amount of feedback provided to students, as a workload issue, leading some to advocate for more targeted feedback. Staff reported an interest in providing feedback verbally and some had experimented with peer feedback and statement banks to improve efficiency of feedback.

> *The best kind of feedback is fast. And it is focused on one or two points for engagement, which they can improve noting that it is an iterative process. And those points will not be the same for the next piece of work. (Group L)*

> *I find that five-minute chat is far easier - verbal feedback, actually sort of giving them examples and modelling helps in sort of thicken up, right, 'This is what I meant'. And so they are 'Okay, I understand it now'. (Group H)*

> *We did like a presentation and peer feedback and discussion session with two members of staff and only eight students…And the feedback was really rich and in depth (Group M)*

Another issue in some cases was the availability of guidance for all markers on a module to ensure consistency.

> *…we need to be clear, basically, in terms of the expectations for module leader…before you start marking, to organise some sort of…coordination meeting in a way that the marking team is on the same line with the same expectations. (Group A)*

2.4.5 Peer assessment

A few members of staff had introduced elements of peer assessment, but their experiences suggest that this is fairly unusual at present and was an approach that students lacked confidence in.

…one thing I get to do in first year, is submit a peer assessment, which is quite unusual…When I first did it, they absolutely they absolutely roasted me, I've never had such bad feedback. You know, because obviously, "How can other students possibly know what's going on?...What's good about this? We need an expert…" Because they're very successful students, they assume the assessment system is perfect, because it's identified them as correct… (Group H)

2.5 Assessment for Learning at Durham University

This section details existing principles and polices at Durham University and discusses gaps that have been identified in the analysis of the current state of play regarding active pedagogy.

2.5.1 DU Principles and Policies relating to Assessment for Learning

- Programmes will be focused on student learning gain – on the educational distance travelled from matriculation to graduation[1].
- Programmes will incorporate a balanced and pedagogically justified mix of forms of assessment (formative and summative; exams, papers, problem sets, etc.)[1].
- Assessments will be: valid, reliable, and equitable, explicit and transparent, support the student learning process, and efficient[2].
- Assessment outcome will be monitored, and this monitoring used to support the enhancement of assessment policy and practice[1].
- Staff involved in assessment will be competent to undertake their responsibilities in this area[1].

2.5.2 Gap Analysis

Both students and staff involved in focus group discussions preferred AfL approaches, recognising the importance of active approaches to learning linked to authentic assessment, supported by timely and constructive feedback, as well as opportunities to practise through formative assessments. Staff report that the need to cover course content, along with perceived structural problems and the volume of feedback required, combine to hinder greater use of active pedagogies. Students report that they are over-assessed and that assessments are bunched, and feedback is either delayed or too generic to be useful in following assessments.

Further discussion on AfL, and its essential components: active pedagogies, authentic assessment, balance of formative and summative assessments, and feedback should take place during the second phase of consultations to establish guidelines on: constructive alignment of teaching approaches with authentic assessment practices, the appropriate amount of assessment for modules of different credit values, efficient and effective approaches to providing feedback that is targeted and useful for students' academic development, and developing students as self-assessors and effective lifelong learners.

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[1] Learning and Teaching Handbook : 7.1: Objectives & Expectations - Durham University
[2] Learning and Teaching Handbook : Principles of Assessment - Durham University