

### WHAT CAN ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING DO FOR THE TEACHER?

Involving the learner/s in the whole process of assessment gives clarity and direction to teaching and increases motivation in learners. Involving learners in assessing their own and each other's work affords the teacher greater insight into learner motivation and progress and is a source of valuable data for reporting to parents.

### DOES ADOPTING AN AfL APPROACH INCREASE THE TEACHER'S WORKLOAD?

No. All teachers engage in assessment as part of their everyday work. When adopting an AfL approach the teacher begins by making small and manageable changes in the classroom (e.g. sharing the learning intention for each session). There is no change to the content of what is taught; what changes is how the teacher presents the work and how the assessment dimension of the work is structured and managed.

### WHAT CAN ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING DO FOR THE LEARNERS?

AfL is a source of empowerment and motivation for learners. It is widely recognised that ownership of the learning process is a key element in the development of the efficient and independent learner. It is equally true that assessment drives learning, so that when the learner is closer to the learning and assessment cycle he/she experiences a greater sense of purpose and involvement in learning. Assessment for learning, then, is associated with improvement in levels of achievement and a better disposition towards learning.

*"The students showed enthusiasm when given an opportunity to discuss how homework might be presented."* AfL Teacher, 2003

### CAN THIS IMPROVEMENT IN LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT BE QUANTIFIED?

Yes. Research evidence has indicated improvements in the order of 12% in test scores for students coming from AfL classrooms. More significantly, perhaps, assessment for learning has been seen to have been of greater benefit for students traditionally regarded as lower achievers.

### WHAT CAN ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING DO FOR SCHOOLS?

Schools have a responsibility to report to parents on the progress being made by students. AfL improves the quality of data on progress, learning style and motivation available to teachers and so enhances the quality of reporting to parents especially during parent/teacher meetings.

### WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING?

Visit the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment at [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie) Look for the link to the Junior Cycle Review and click on the link to the Assessment for Learning home page for an overview of assessment for learning and a growing collection of useful exemplar materials.

*The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is the statutory body which advises the Minister for Education and Science on matters relating to curriculum and assessment in early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools.*



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# ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

This leaflet sets out to answers some of the questions frequently asked about Assessment for Learning (AfL).



### WHAT IS ASSESSMENT IN EDUCATION?

Assessment in education is about gathering, interpreting and using information about the processes and outcomes of learning. It takes different forms and can be used in a variety of ways, such as to test and certify achievement (e.g. Junior and Leaving Certificate), to determine the appropriate route for students to take through a differentiated curriculum or to identify specific areas of difficulty or strength for a given student.

### ARE ALL TYPES OF ASSESSMENT THE SAME?

No. A key way of differentiating between forms of assessment is to look at their purposes, e.g. the differences between assessment **of** learning and assessment **for** learning.

Assessment of learning is the kind of assessment traditionally associated with the examination hall. Its purpose is to measure achievement, i.e. to find out what the learner has learnt and to report on that. Generally speaking, the judgements made are expressed as marks or grades. **Assessment for Learning**, on the other hand, is the kind of assessment associated more often with the classroom. Its purpose is to use the whole process of assessment to help learners to improve their learning. That said, the terms are not mutually exclusive because the outcomes of all forms of assessment can be used in a formative way to support and guide learners in the next steps in their learning.

### ARE THERE OTHER WAYS OF DESCRIBING THESE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ASSESSMENT?

Yes. Assessment of learning is often referred to as summative assessment in that its intention is to provide a summary of the achievement/s of the learner. Assessment for Learning (usually shortened to AfL) is often referred to as formative assessment in that its intention is to form, shape or guide the next steps in learning. It is sometimes referred to as 'learning to learn'.

### IS AfL THE SAME AS CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT?

No. The essential purpose of continuous assessment is to produce a grade or mark (or a set of grades and marks) arrived at by means of a series of assessment events rather than by means of a two or three hour examination or test. The essential purpose of assessment for learning is to provide feedback to the learner on the progress of his/her learning so that he/she can learn more effectively.



### ARE TEACHERS THE ONLY SOURCE OF FEEDBACK FOR STUDENTS?

No. The teacher is the person who is best placed to give focused feedback and support to the learner, but the learner can gain important insights into his/her own learning by reviewing or assessing his/her own work or by paying attention to feedback supplied by other learners such as fellow classmates.

### WHAT KINDS OF THINGS ARE INVOLVED IN AfL?

When a teacher is using assessment for learning he/she is trying to get the learners 'on the inside' of the learning process, as it were. So, he/she will try to get the learners to see that there is a

specific learning intention or target to each lesson and will share the learning intention with the learners. This gives the learners a clear idea of what they will learn and why, thereby enabling them to become more active participants in the learning cycle. The teacher will often encourage the learners to unpack the learning intention by drawing out the criteria for success. Put simply, this means making sure the learners will know 'what we are looking for' or 'what are the signs that we have achieved the learning intention'. When observing or marking the work of the learners the teacher will give feedback related to the criteria for success.

*"Oral work in pairs is very effective for stimulating ideas and for enabling the weaker students to prepare for written work. The whole class engaged enthusiastically in this activity." AfL Teacher, 2003*

### DOES SHARING THE LEARNING INTENTION RESTRICT THE TEACHER?

No. The learning intention can be as broad (or as narrow) as the teacher wishes. The essential task for the teacher is to heighten awareness in the learners of the purpose and direction of their learning. It is a feature of independent and effective learners that they regularly review their learning goals and that they try to understand both how much progress they have made and what steps they have yet to take to achieve those learning goals.

### WHEN USING ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING DOES THE TEACHER GIVE MARKS AND GRADES FOR HOMEWORK AND IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS?

Generally not. AfL advocates the use of **comment-only marking** in which the teacher draws attention to three areas: what the learner has done right, what weaknesses there are in the learner's work, and what are the next steps the learner should take to improve.