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Dublin City University



## Students as Partners in Assessment: A Literature Scoping Review

Ruth Ní Bheoláin, Rob Lowney and Fiona O'Riordan

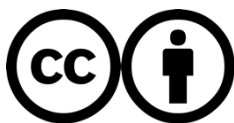
Students as Partners in Assessment (SaPiA): A Literature Scoping Review  
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# 1. Introduction

The purpose of this scoping review is to explore what the literature says regarding students as partners in the process of assessment in higher education. Carless (2015, p. 9) suggests “[A]ssessment is a critical aspect of undergraduate education because it has a range of powerful impacts on what students and teachers do”.

Competing discourses around the role and purpose of assessment are prevalent in most institutions and the higher education sector at large. Set against this backdrop, the review builds on our interest and previous work in assessment through several other projects (DCU Teaching Enhancement Unit, 2020) to provide a synthesis of the literature on students as partners in this space.


In recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on students as partners in teaching, learning and assessment. Indeed, some educators would argue this is part of a larger paradigm shift in the latter part of last century towards student-centred learning. Conscious of this paradigm shift and the ever-present competing assessment discourses, the review investigates the growing interest in student partnership in assessment specifically, distinct from wider arenas of student partnership.

There is a growing recognition that in order for students’ learning and assessment experience to be successful they should have a sense of agency and investment in the process. This agency is crucial to promoting high levels of student engagement. Those who teach in higher education are being called on to empower students to become more involved in the assessment process (National Forum, 2016b). It is useful to remind ourselves that involving students in the assessment strategy can be something many who teach do intentionally. For example, at Dublin City University (DCU) there are educators who co-design marking criteria with students or allow them to negotiate the assessment brief and submission dates. Anecdotal evidence suggests, nevertheless, these examples of co-design are atypical as most students are not given the opportunity to partner and influence assessment practices in this manner.

This literature scoping review aims to demystify the ways in which those who teach can partner students by exploring initiatives such as involving them as self or peer assessors, as co-creators of assessment activities and marking criteria, and the use of collaborative opportunities to co-own the assessment process. In this review we use *students as partners*, *co-creators*, *co-designers*, or *actively engaged in assessment* synonymously as each involves the conscious and intentional partnering of students in the assessment process by educators. In attempting to demystify this partnership approach in order to help educators appreciate the benefits and embrace the potential, the review presents practical insights found in the literature.

Having reviewed our chosen literature, we grouped it into three overarching themes—self and peer assessment, assessment activities and criteria, and collaborative grading.

This review adopts the following structure. Firstly, it sets the context by providing a rationale for partnering students in assessment by exploring the evolving landscape of students as partners and



considering some other current trends to influence the role of students in assessment such as enhancing assessment through assessment of, for and as learning, the role of student partnerships in promoting academic integrity, and inclusivity in assessment.

Having framed the discussion in this wider context, the paper then describes the methodology employed to locate and undertake the scoping review of published literature. Following this, each emergent theme from the literature is explored—self and peer assessment, assessment activities and criteria, and collaborative grading.

Lastly, the Appendix distils many of key findings in a useful resource for educators wanting to learn more about students as partners in assessment in higher education and to try some partnership approaches.





## 2. Students as Partners in Assessment: Rationale

The context and rationale for student partnership in assessment is explored here to frame the discussion of the literature that follows in a subsequent section. This context and rationale does not purport to be exhaustive but does provide a foundation for later exploration of student partnership in assessment.


### **The evolving landscape of student partnership in assessment nationally and internationally**

The provision of high-quality, student-centred learning experiences that promote student autonomy and involvement in the learning process and which value transparency in assessment processes has been a priority at both a European and Irish regulatory level and student movements for a number of years.

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015) are a set of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance that apply to all higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), including Ireland. One of these standards is a call for student-centred learning, teaching and assessment that advises providers to ensure that their programmes are “delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.” (p. 12). This standard explicitly promotes mutual respect between learners and educators along with the promotion of student autonomy. Among other criteria, it references the provision of support for educators in learning about the provision of explicit guidance to students in relation to assessment including the publication of marking criteria. As early as 2001, European Ministers stressed that students are “competent, active and constructive partners” that should actively contribute to the shaping of the now established EHEA (EHEA, 2001).

The European Students’ Union (ESU, n.d.) actively promotes student partnership as something that is not only good for students but “good for everyone”. The ESU emphasises the role and expertise of those who teach as pedagogical, subject knowledge and administrative experts that can be complemented by students’ expertise in their own learning who recognise effective teaching when they experience it and who know what is in their own best interests. This complementation supports the idea that those who teach and students working in partnership can create the most effective overall learning experience that is to everyone’s benefit.

Beyond Europe, the trend towards student partnership can also be seen. The Australian government’s Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), for example, recognises the centrality of students to its role as a regulator (2008). TEQSA’s Student Expert Advisory Group (SEAG) was established to advise the TEQSA Commission on matters related to the quality assurance of higher education institutions and in relation to student engagement specifically. The



implementation of SEAG is stated to have provided a framework for partnering with students to co-designing strategies to tackle important issues in the sector.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the Irish statutory body for quality assurance in the further and higher education sectors. One of its express functions includes the validation of programmes of education and training for providers who do not have designed awarding power to validate their own programmes. Accordingly, their policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training (QQI, 2017) set out explicit criteria to ensure that all validated programmes are of an acceptable standard. One of these is a detailed standard in relation to assessment strategies including the provision of a programme assessment strategy, module assessment strategies and sample assessment tasks, marking schemes and related evidence on the implementation of assessment. In 2018, QQI published a *Green Paper on Assessment of Learners and Learning* asking stakeholders to reflect and give feedback on a number of areas. One such area was student partnership where stakeholders were asked, “What can be done to further engage learners as partners in assessment of, for and as learning?” (p. 62). Feedback on the green paper revealed strong views from multiple stakeholders including both students and educators from Irish HEIs (QQI, 2019). Notably, some student respondents described how assessment should be “seen as a partnership between educator and the learner” and they described how, as students, they “should be encouraged to view assessment as a positive aid to learning, and recognise how learning, assessment and the learning outcomes are connected” (p. 19).

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) established a working group in 2014 to examine and make proposals around the issue of student engagement in higher education. This led to the development of the publication *Enhancing Student Engagement in Decision Making* (2016) and ultimately to the launch of the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) in 2016 as a joint initiative between the HEA, QQI and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) that demonstrated a national commitment to student engagement and the implementation of ten published core principles of student engagement. Two of these principles are *students as co-creators* and *student as partner*. In this publication, the role of students as active participants and creators that shape their own learning experience, and the mutual benefit this yields for both students and institution, is emphasised and is consistent with the broader European dialogue discussed earlier. It highlights criticism for passive student involvement that takes student feedback and actions it but does not involve students in the decision-making process itself. In relation to co-creation specifically, this principle states that “Irish HEIs [higher education institutions] will embrace innovative teaching and learning techniques which value active involvement from the students” (p. 31).

Consequently, we can see that the role of students as partners in higher education institutions has been a prioritised topic in the advancement of higher education in EHEA as early as 2003. More recently published standards explicitly state the importance of student-centred learning with transparency of assessment processes for those who teach and for students. This can be seen at the European level and re-iterated in Irish standards for programmes. There has been increasingly substantial dialogue in relation to both assessment and student partnership respectively in the Irish context over the last number of years with a growing emphasis on the active participation of students in their own learning experiences with the establishment of NStEP indicating a national priority.

## Enhancing assessment

Assessment is a valuable driver of student learning, and thus enjoys much focus and attention. Nationally, assessment was called out as the enhancement theme for 2016 to 2018 by Ireland's National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (National Forum, 2016a). Assessment has many facets and serves different purposes other than the solely summative, high-stakes purpose with which it has long been associated. National understanding of assessment in higher education is captured in this graphic representing the different assessment facets succinctly:

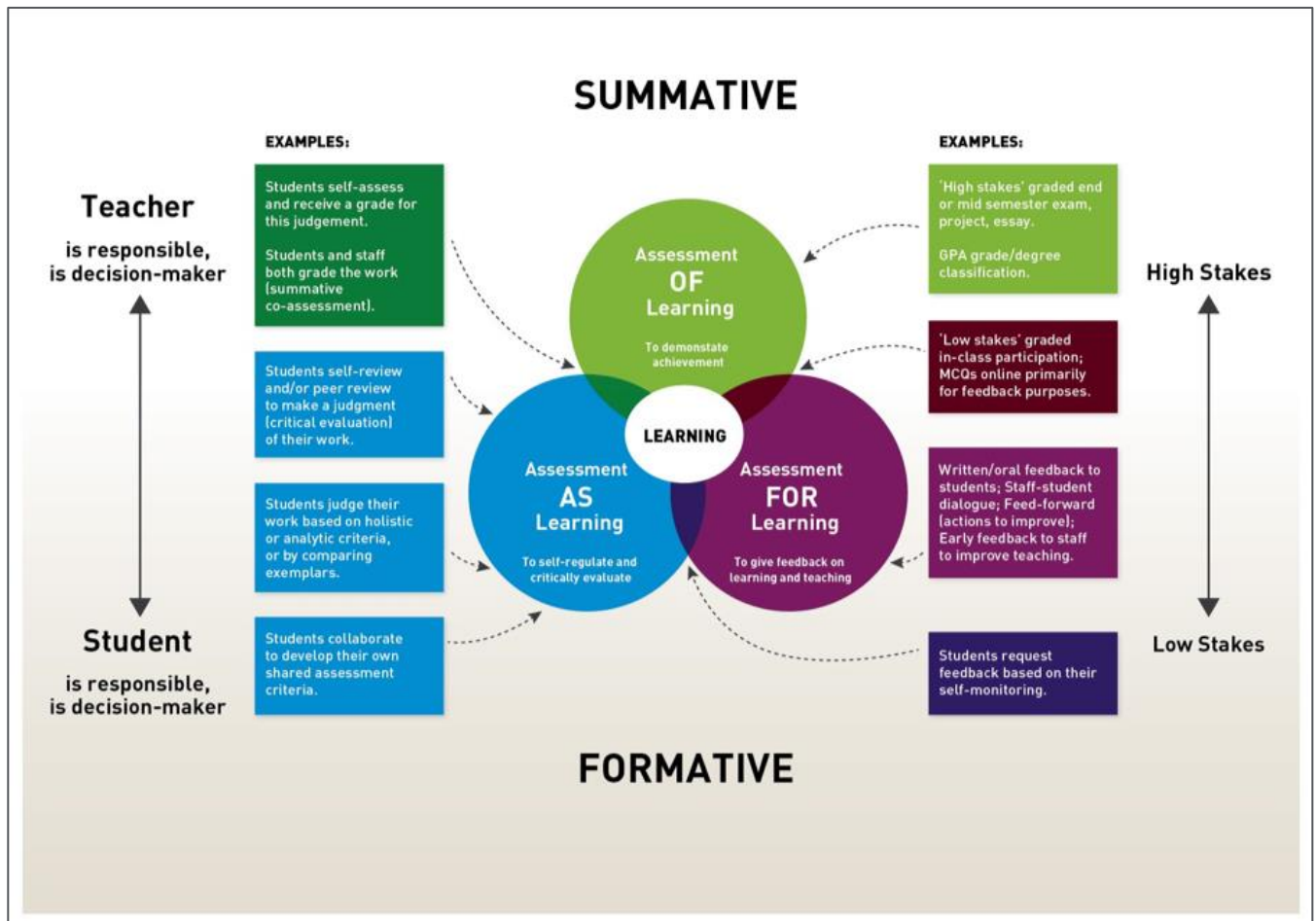


Figure 1: National Forum assessment as/for/of learning graphic (2017)

Although not explicitly stated, many of the descriptions and examples provided herein are forms of student partnership in assessment. Under *Assessment as Learning*, we see examples of self and peer review and collaboration on assessment criteria. Under *Assessment for Learning*, we see examples of dialogue and feeding forward. Similarly, in the overlap of these facets we see examples of students requesting feedback and self-assessing their own work for grading purposes (National Forum, 2017). These examples and more come to light in the literature reviewed in later sections of this scoping review.



## Academic integrity


Academic integrity, as a concept, has always been important in higher education, but in recent times has garnered more attention around the world amid concern about possible rises in plagiarism, contract cheating, and other dishonest practices as a result of greater reliance on remote assessment. The International Center for Academic Integrity defines academic integrity as a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage (Fishman, 2017). These values are intended to enable those who teach to translate into action changes in assessment behaviour. The changes are directed at assessment design approaches to promote academic integrity and reduce the risk of cheating.

In a scoping review conducted by Egan (2018) for DCU, there is evidence to show assessments that involve students help to promote academic integrity. Development of a suite of academic integrity principles for assessment design emanated from Egan's work and these principles are used as a framework to plan integrated assessments that can reduce the risk of plagiarism and cheating. The twelve principles are presented across three categories—standards, design and student ownership. In the student ownership category, assessors are advised, among other things, to co-design aspects of the assessment with students. Other principles advocate involving students through self and peer assessment and co-creating marking criteria or rubrics (DCU Teaching Enhancement Unit, 2019).

## Inclusivity in assessment

Another growing trend in higher education in recent times is that of universal design for learning (UDL). UDL can be described as an approach to teaching that consists of the proactive design and use of inclusive instructional strategies that benefit a broad range of learners, including students with disabilities (Scott, McGuire & Foley, 2003). UDL seeks to make teaching, learning and assessment more open and inclusive for all kinds of learners, regardless of disability, background, culture, and so on. Although it contains the word “learning”, a UDL approach can be applied to curriculum, teaching, learning and indeed assessment, and higher education is seeing a paradigm shift with regard to it at present.

This is particularly pertinent when we consider how higher education is changing and diversifying. In Ireland alone, over 10% of new entrants to higher education indicated they have a disability and over 37% of them indicated they needed assistance with it. 21% of new entrants came from groups designated non-manual, semi- and unskilled. 8% are mature students. 17% are studying part-time. 10% are international students, mainly from other EU countries and from Asia. (Higher Education Authority, 2019). Many higher education institutions have ambitious plans to increase the numbers of international students, increase participation from socio-economic groups that have been traditionally underrepresented, and offer more part-time, online programmes targeting lifelong learners. All of this has implications for how we design our curricula, how we teach our students, support their learning and importantly, how we assess them—as they become ever more diverse.



UDL guidelines exist to help guide educators to move toward more inclusive practices. These guidelines cover three fundamentals of UDL: providing multiple means of engagement for students, multiple means of representation and multiple means of action and expression (CAST, 2018).

Involving students in their assessment process, giving them choice and flexibility in how they engage with assessment and how they express themselves is good UDL practice and, as we will see throughout this scoping review, good partnership practice also.

Altogether, the changing landscape of student partnership in assessment makes it timely to review the literature regarding the practical application of student partnership in the higher education classroom. Furthermore, the review that follows aims to create a bridge between quality assurance/enhancement and practice by providing a pragmatic review of methods for employing student partnership in assessment, as well as demystifying it to encourage educators to embrace and apply such methods in their own assessment practices.

Having established the rationale and discussed the evolving focus on student partnership in assessment in the wider Irish and European context, the next section describes the methodology employed to undertake the scoping review.

### 3. Scoping Review Methodology

The review was conducted from March to May 2020, and followed a scoping search (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005) using relevant databases. This process was selected because it enables relatively swift coverage of a field, does not require quality assessment of each article selected, and does not emphasise synthesis of results. Consequently, as Arksey and O’Malley observe, “scoping studies provide a narrative or descriptive account of available research” (2005, p. 23).

The PICO (Population or Problem - Intervention - Comparison - Outcome) model was used to frame the purpose of the literature scoping exercise. This approach is used by Evidence-Based Medicine (EBM) research as a specialised framework to help formulate and facilitate literature searches (Schardt et al, 2007).

<b>P</b>	Population	Educators assessing in higher education
<b>I</b>	Intervention	Students as partners in assessment
<b>C</b>	Comparison	Evidence in literature on students as partners or co-creators
<b>O</b>	Outcome	Support educators to facilitate and empowers students to become partners in the assessment process

Table 1: Framing purpose of literature scoping review

The purpose of the scoping review, as defined using the PICO model, was developed using a search template adapted from the University of Tasmania Library. This facilitated identification of the key concepts in the research (Table 2). Once key concepts were agreed, free text terms were tested and used to help refine the terms used under each concept for the searches (Table 2). Each concept was searched separately, and then the three searches were joined to provide a comprehensive search of potentially suitable articles. Two databases were used for the search, selected for their appropriateness for Education research. These were Education Research Complete (172 hits) and ERIC (28 hits) resulting in 200 search results for initial review.

Key concepts	Search terms
Student engagement	“student as partners” OR “student partnership” OR “co-learning” OR “Student voice” OR “student agency” OR “student engagement” OR “student participation”
Assessment	“assessment of learning” OR “assessment as learning” OR “assessment for learning” OR “formative assessment” OR “summative assessment” OR “self assessment” OR “peer assessment”
Higher education	“higher education” OR “college” OR “university” OR “post secondary” OR “postsecondary” OR “third level”


Table 2: Key concepts and search terms

The three authors divided the 200 search results for screening against the inclusion criteria using a shared screening spreadsheet (Table 3). Following an initial screening, 164 papers were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria, leaving 36 results for consideration. The authors conducted a second review as a peer group and screened out an additional six papers for not meeting the inclusion criteria. Two duplicate papers were also removed at this stage, leaving 28 results for full-text review. Resulting from the full-text review process and further consultation between the authors, 14 papers were removed. This was on confirmation that the inclusion criteria were not applicable including one paper that was not available in English, another that was conference proceedings, papers that were not based in higher education or that ultimately did not demonstrate student partnership in assessment. The final literature review was subsequently informed by 14 core research studies.

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Timeframe	2000–2019	Prior to 2000
Language	English	Non-English
Access	Full text availability only	Only titles or abstracts available
Sample	Referring to higher education students only	Referring to students outside higher education
Type of publication	Peer reviewed, original research published in journals	Content that was not peer reviewed, not in journals, not original, and/or grey literature
Focus of literature	Presenting findings that investigated aspects of student partnership in assessment	Research on assessment or other areas of education that does not include student partnership

Table 3: Criteria for inclusion and exclusion

Through casual web searching and browsing the authors are aware of many ad-hoc examples and case studies of student partnership in assessment provided by individual institutions, but as these



were not captured by the PICO model approach to literature searching, they are not included in this scoping review. The only exception to this is a recent paper by one of the authors (Gillanders, Karazi & O’Riordan, 2020).

The next section discusses the identified literature and shares practical insights in an attempt to demystify approaches to student partnership in assessment. It is structured according to the three emergent themes.



# 4. Students as Partners in Assessment: In Practice

The rationale and impetus for partnering students in assessment is clear, and for many undisputable. This section of the scoping review presents evidence-based best practice examples of how these partnerships can be operational. Discussion focusses on the role of self and peer assessment (interwoven with other elements) in developing a shared assessment literacy and in improving student productivity and performance as well as how technology can support it. Following this, examples of student partnerships in designing assessment criteria and activities and collaborating in grading are explored. For those who teach, much of this will be familiar as it is part of best pedagogical practice. However, it still warrants calling it out when designing and delivering courses or programmes, and more importantly supporting students in the partnership through formative assessment and opportunities for dialogue or class discussion.

## Self and peer assessment

Gikandi and Morrow (2016, p. 153) adopted the definition of meaningful learning as learning that is “robust and transferable to real-life professional practices and contexts”. The reconstruction of roles among educators and students with students taking an active lead in learning and feedback processes may promote meaningful learning that is active, collaborative and reflective in a way that fosters self-regulation of learners so they can be empowered to take ownership of their learning (Vonderwall, Liang & Alderman, 2007; Gikandi, Morrow & Davis, 2011). There are many ways in which this autonomy can be afforded to students so that they may be engaged as partners in assessment. Self and peer assessment are two such effective ways.

Boud (1991, p. 5) posits that “[T]he defining characteristic of self-assessment is the involvement of students in identifying standards and/or criteria to apply to their work and making judgements about the extent to which they have met these criteria and standards.” Wride (2017) draws on the work of Taras (2010) to share examples of weak or low risk self-assessment where students used the educator’s marking criteria to assess their own work and compare to the educator’s assessment, through to a stronger partnership where students co-design criteria (this is discussed in greater detail further on in this scoping review). Peer assessment is defined by Fry, Ketteridge & Marshall (2009, p. 292) as “students assessing the work of others at a similar level”. Topping (1998, p. 250) conducted an extensive review of the literature and thus defines peer assessment as “an arrangement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality or success of learning... of peers of similar status”. He advises that peer assessment offers an opportunity to involve students in the assessment in a critical way. Wride (2017, p. 7) recommends that peer assessment “...should be designed to enhance deep learning through rounds of review and feedback”. In the Irish National Forum insight document on students as partners in the assessment process, two recommendations include “[G]ive students opportunities to self- and/or peer-assess their work in a module”; and “[S]upport students to work with assessment criteria to monitor their own learning” (National Forum, 2016b).

There is an expansive body of existing research evidencing the capacity of self and peer assessment to enhance student learning (Boud 2013; Falchikov 2013; Yan & Brown 2017). The benefits of self-assessment are long-established in the literature (Falchikov & Boud, 1989; Ozogul & Sullivan, 2007; Brown & Harris, 2013) including a recent meta-analysis that showed positive effects of peer assessment on students' learning performance (Li et al., 2020). Boud (2000) emphasised that the potential of peer reviews to inform purposeful and productive student performance is reliant on the effective design and efficient delivery of a useful activity. An exploration of the literature in relation to peer assessment in the context of student partnership provides concrete examples of well-designed and evidenced peer assessment activities that can be adapted for use in both physical and online classrooms. As with any good assessment design it is important to have an integrated and scaffolded approach to self and peer assessment across a programme lifecycle.

Kearney (2019) explored a model of self and peer assessment as a means of engaging and orienting first year students to the assessment process in higher education. He adapted his own model, the Authentic Self and Peer Assessment for Learning (ASPAL) model of self, peer and lecturer assessment to teach students about assessment through participation in all stages of the assessment process (Kearney, 2013). This model provides a helpful overview of how student partnership in assessment can be implemented across the entire lifecycle of a programme.

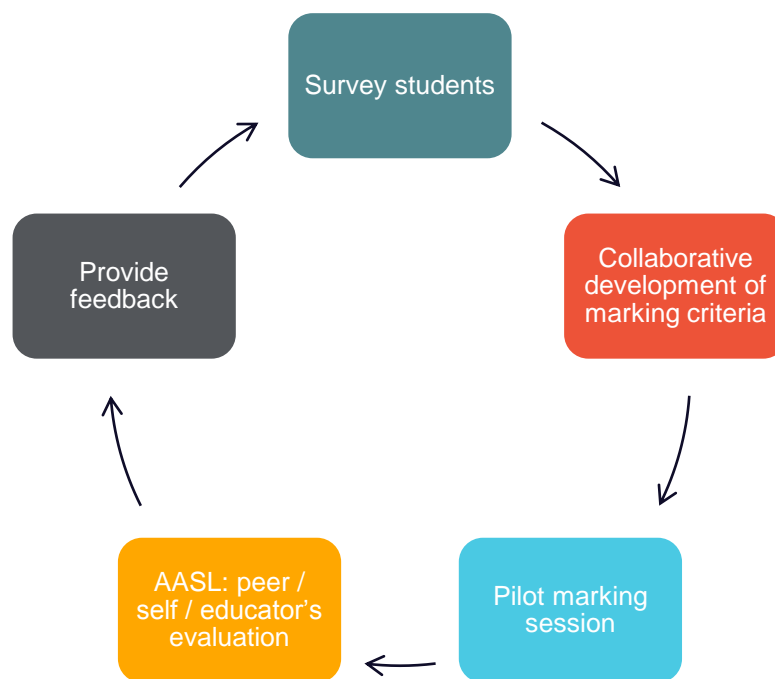


Figure 2: The ASPAL model

The ASPAL model combines self, peer and the educator's evaluation in a multi-week process involving authentic learning tasks. The ASPAL model was informed by student surveys (n=200) in 2010 that found that the majority of students were not reading their own assessments before submitting them, had not seen exemplars, were not collaborating with their peers or reported that they did not receive adequate information about assessment requirements.


Following the ASPAL model, over five weeks, the following activities occur:

1. Educator surveys students about their experience with self and peer assessment;
2. They collaboratively develop marking criteria;
3. They undertake pilot marking session where students practise marking similar assessments to the one they will complete;
4. Students submit task for self and peer marking;
5. Self-assessment occurs last so students can learn from the peer assessment process;
6. Results are combined to produce a summative grade for the student;
7. De-briefing session with feedback received from the educator and peers;
8. Educator surveys students to get feedback.

67% of students in Kearney's (2019) study found that ASPAL helped them become autonomous in their learning, and 89% percent reported that it provided valuable study skills. Throughout this literature scoping review, we see many applications of student partnership that align to different stages of the ASPAL model. Subsequently, it could be useful as a reference tool for reviewing the various stages of programme and module delivery in the context of student partnership.

In line with Boud (2000), a useful peer assessment activity can improve student performance and productivity. Having experienced a number of challenges in engaging students in group discussions including lack of participation, domination of active students and difficulty assessing subject mastery of individual students, Handayani, Ummas Genisa and Triyanto (2019) implemented two forms of peer assessment in an attempt to increase equity of participation among students. Although discussion can be between educator and students and among students (Omatseye, 2007), in this context it was interpreted as students working together in solving problems through information retrieval and the exchanging of ideas. They employed the use of internal and external group evaluation. Internal group evaluation was peer assessment carried out by members of the same group using internal assessment rubric indicators, e.g., student participation, contribution to completing the project, teamwork, and attitude. External group evaluation was peer assessment conducted between groups. Groups used assessment rubrics with marking criteria to assess the output of other peer groups, e.g., criteria such as project outcome and presentation using simple questions aiming to elicit feedback about positive and negative aspects from the students' perspectives. The findings of their research indicated that the methods of peer assessment enhanced student performance in group discussions in relation to interpersonal skills, teamwork, and problem-solving. Peer assessment appeared to reduce students' feeling of laziness, reduced intimidation from the active students, gave all members equal responsibility, and helped them to develop their participation in group discussion through feedback.

Echoing Topping's assertion that peer assessment can give students the opportunity to engage in assessment in a critical way (1998), Verkade & Bryson-Richardson (2013) employed peer assessment in a final year classroom with 88 students where their grades were combined with those of the educator. In this context, students had five weeks to prepare an oral presentation which lasted a total of 15 minutes including a ten-minute presentation and five minutes of questions. A five-criteria rubric using a four-point scale from poor to excellent was used based on explicit criteria including quality of presentation, identification of key experimental evidence, description of the



experiments, explanation of conclusions and the ability to answer questions. Students' overall grade was calculated based on a combination of peer assessors' attributed grades and the educator's attributed mark—20% of the weighting was assigned based on the average result of 12-19 peer assessors' marks and 80% of the weighting was assigned to the educator's mark.

The role of students as partners in assessment is a dominant theme in online learning where traditional academic-led pedagogies do not match the often asynchronous nature of the online learning environment (Baran, Correia & Thompson, 2011; Gikandi & Morrow, 2016).

Online learning has different pedagogical demands than physical face-to-face settings due to the predominantly asynchronous nature of interactivity between both educator and students and between students (Naidu, 2007). Active engagement is critical in online settings because students are expected to self-regulate and take primary responsibility for their learning (Baran, Correia & Thompson, 2011; Gikandi, Morrow & Davis, 2011). A number of studies have emphasised that opportunities for informal observations and questions may be more limited than what is typical in a physical face-to-face classroom and consequently, online courses need to be carefully designed to ensure meaningful learning and to promote student engagement (Akyol, Garrison & Ozden, 2009; Sullivan & Watson, 2015).

A lot of empirical research has explored the potential and performance of peer assessment in physical classrooms (Cartney, 2010; Mulder, Pearse & Baik, 2014) but many of the studies considered in this literature scoping review have specifically focussed on the self-assessment and peer assessment that is facilitated by the VLE (Gikandi & Morrow, 2016; Sullivan & Watson, 2015; El-Mowafy, 2014; Forbes, 2011). Specifically, what follows explores peer formative feedback that is facilitated using discussion forums (Gikandi & Morrow 2016) and podcasting (Forbes, 2011) as well as peer assessment using assessment criteria and grading rubrics facilitated by in-built VLE peer assessment tools and digital rubrics (Gillanders, Karazi & O'Riordan, 2020; Sullivan & Watson, 2015; El-Mowafy, 2014).

Self-assessment and peer feedback can be developed and embedded in online discussions (Vonderwell, Liang & Alderman, 2007) which may contribute to a sense of shared purpose and responsibility for learning among students and those who teach. Sustained interactive collaboration and formative feedback among teachers, individual learners and peers can provide ongoing scaffolding of learning in online learning (Ludwig-Hardman & Dunclap, 2003). Empirical research has shown that interactive collaborations within asynchronous discussions have potential to enhance peer formative feedback processes (Vonderwell, Liang & Alderman, 2007).

Gikandi and colleagues (2011) purported that effective formative assessment includes mechanisms that promote interactive and collaborative learning. For that reason, Gikandi and Morrow (2016) employed the use of online discussion forums to explore the effectiveness of peer-peer formative feedback in continuing teacher education in online learning. They used three strategies for peer formative feedback, making creative use of discussion forums within the VLE:

1. Active participation and collaborations within topical asynchronous discussion forums where students were required to upload artefacts for discussion and were prompted by educators' interaction;
2. Open forums to share developing thinking and work-in-progress;
3. A discussion forum for students to share their polished artefacts.

Gikandi and Morrow (2016) found that educators' interaction emerged as a critical component of the peer-peer feedback process as their presence guided constructive responses and helped weave discussions by enriching discussions with reflective summaries and examples. Findings showed that online interaction moved beyond social interaction and promoted meaningful dialogue and constructive feedback. It also provided sustained opportunity for interaction as the forums were not restricted by narrow time constraints.

Forbes (2011) also used the VLE to facilitate self and peer assessment in the implementation of podcasting for learning or *podagogy*. In this study, students created reflective podcasts on their experiences of learning using digital technologies. The assessment was implemented as follows:

1. Students were asked to research educational podcasts and generate their own ideas for podcasts;
2. Students then listened to a podcast created by the educator on reflections of learning through digital technologies that also modelled a self-assessment;
3. Students then created a podcast of their own before uploading a draft recording to the VLE;
4. Students then self-assessed their own efforts and gave and received formative feedback;
5. Students then had the opportunity to refine their final podcasts before submitting them for summative assessment if they chose to do so.

Forbes (2011) found that the outcomes of her research were in keeping with findings of previous research in that students found the opportunity to create a podcast motivating and found it inspiring to create work for an authentic audience that provided feedback on their efforts (Burt, 2008; King & Gura, 2007). The findings supported the idea that students engaged in "podcast-mediated reflective learning" (Ng'ambi, 2008, p. 133).

Sullivan & Watson (2015) highlighted the opportunity for the sophisticated use of VLEs to implement wide-scale use of peer assessment with streamlined administration for both educators and administrators. In doing that, they provide a useful blueprint for how the VLE, e.g., Moodle Workshop activity, can be used to facilitate peer assessment:

1. Use in-built tool to automatically assign peer reviews to participants and to automatically notify students via the VLE;
2. Use the VLE rubric feature to pre-define a grading rubric—pre-set the rubric used to reduce subjectivity and increase inter-rater agreement (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000);



3. Students then view their assigned peer's work via e-reader and apply the predefined rubric;
4. A comment box can also be enabled to provide formative, individualised feedback and use comment box to provide feedback;
5. Free text comments are purposefully open-ended with the general task of providing useful feedback.

These methods are not used exclusively in online education and can be applied across multiple contexts where the use of a VLE is available. For example, the work of Gillanders, Karazi & O'Riordan (2020) uses the Moodle Workshop activity to randomly assign peer work to peers for review and a comprehensive rubric built into the VLE facilitated efficient and accurate grading of work. Students were motivated to engage in this peer review assessment by using loss aversion theory which was authentic given the students were studying economics. Loss aversion is when "...people put a larger weight on potential losses than they do on potential gains when deciding upon a course of action" (p. 425). Similarly, El-Mowafy (2014) implemented peer assessment in fieldwork to enhance students' practical training, which also employed a VLE peer assessment activity and digital rubrics to facilitate peer assessment.

Carless & Kam Ho Chan (2017) and McKevitt (2016) explored the dialogic use of exemplars to enhance student assessment literacy. McKevitt (2016) provides a useful blueprint for conducting self-assessment that is complemented by the educator's feedback to enhance student assessment literacy and summative assessment outcomes. In this research, exemplars, self-assessment and formative feedback were used to enhance student assessment literacy.

The process, outlined in Figure 3, can be summarised as follows:

1. Students were provided with exemplar assessments and assessment criteria at the outset of the module which was closely followed by a discussion of the rubric and the process of self-assessment, led by the educator;
2. Students submitted a draft assessment that was self-assessed using the grading rubric midway through the semester and were given individual formative feedback based on the same rubric;
3. Following the return of individual feedback, students were given additional general feedback and asked to grade the initial exemplars they were given—discussion led by the educator then provided context and clarity of how assessment criteria could be applied to the exemplars;
4. Students submitted their final assessment, including final self-assessment, before receiving final feedback.

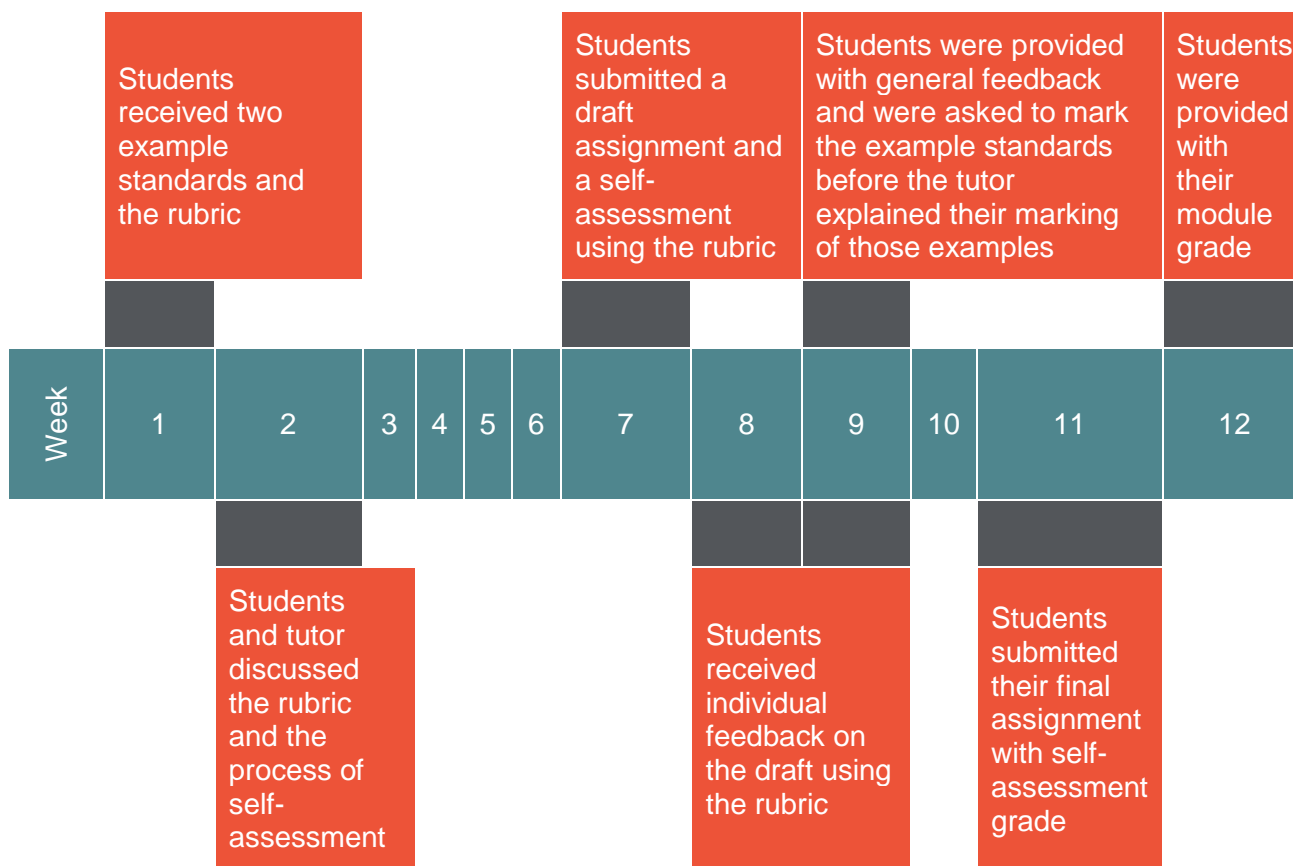


Figure 3: McKeivitt (2016) self-assessment with tutor feedback process

Carless & Kam Ho Chan (2017) also explored the dialogic use of exemplars to enhance student assessment literacy. Similarly to McKeivitt (2016), students increased their assessment literacy through educator-led discussions of assessment exemplars comparable to an assigned summative assessment task. The discussion clarified lecturer expectations of students and increased students' confidence to tackle the task. Whereas McKeivitt focussed on individuals interacting with exemplars and receiving individualised feedback, Carless and Kam Ho Chan (2017) took a more collective approach where students individually evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of two exemplars before class and peer interaction, discussion and mini presentations were used in class to further dialogue. Student reflections were also gathered as a form of feedback on the process in line with Kearney's (2019) ASPAL model.

Used in the context of formative assessment, these are good examples of how students can be engaged as partners as assessment in low-stakes scenarios that can still have significant benefits for empowering students on their learning journeys.

This discussion of self and peer assessment approaches illustrates the wide variety of avenues that can be pursued to engage students as partners in pragmatic and pedagogically sound ways. These vary substantially in terms of workload for those who teach and can be implemented for both formative and summative assessment purposes and can be further enhanced over time. For example, those new to the idea of engaging students as partners in assessment may begin with the dialogic use of exemplars before progressing to the implementation of self-assessment in their module assessment strategy, followed by the integration of peer assessment at a later stage. As can be seen from many simple but creative uses of the VLE, self and peer assessment can be

facilitated by tools in the VLE such as discussion forums, peer assessment features and digital rubrics that can streamline assessment processes and reduce the administrative burden created by assessment tasks.

## Assessment activities and criteria

Another way of involving students as partners in the assessment process is by involving them in the development of the assessment activities and/or assessment criteria (Tiew, 2010; El-Mowafy, 2014; Andrews, Brown & Mesher, 2018). This can increase ownership and decrease anxiety (Topping, 2009) and can be used to streamline summative assessment processes, enhance formative assessment for students and can be applied in multiple contexts, including peer assessment.


A very simple way of involving students as partners in the creation of assessment activities could be empowering students to create and respond to their peers' quiz questions or items. Students generating items has been shown to be an effective way of improving student achievement (Kerkman et al. 1994; Baerheim & Meland 2003). Poot et al. (2017) explored student motivation to participate in online learning tasks through the lens of Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory. This theory of motivation purports that an individual's intrinsic motivation is based on the fulfilment of three psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. Consequently, Poot et al. (2017) argued that when students do not have autonomy to control their own learning experience, they do not believe they have the competence required to complete a task or when they don't feel connected to and cared for by others, their intrinsic motivation to participate in tasks will decrease. To test their theory, Poot et al. (2017) gave students a non-mandatory opportunity to generate items in an online environment, using the tool Peerwise, and answer questions developed by their peers.

They found that there was a significant relationship between participation and final achievement in the assessment and that appropriately preparing students to participate can increase their sense of competency. Although many students perceived the value of this task, less than half of students eligible to participate engaged with the task. Consequently, they suggest that allocating specific course time may be necessary to engage less conscientious students in a task such as this.

Tiew (2010) outlined a useful basic process for structuring a session where students are engaged as partners in the development of assessment criteria, summarised as follows:

1. The educator gives an introduction of methodology;
2. Students are divided into small groups and asked to suggest criteria for assessing their fellow students;
3. Presentation of criteria accepted by each group;
4. Facilitated discussion by the educator to examine the meaning, use and relevance of each criterion to determine a final agreed list of criteria;
5. The educator develops rubric based on criteria.

Andrews, Brown and Mesher (2018) embarked on a project to improve the quality of assessment activities and criteria, enhance assessment literacy and to build student confidence in assessment




processes in response to feedback that students felt that assessment design was too subjective and that grading criteria were unclear. Lack of understanding around vocabulary and difficulty differentiating between award classifications were identified as sources of stress and anxiety for both students and those who teach. In this study, educators worked in partnership with student representatives on an undergraduate interior architecture and design course to create and refine tools that are now used at formative and summative stages of the design projects. They held focus groups and workshops with students and educators respectively to further explore and contextualise feedback and issues identified via student surveys. Based on the outputs of these workshops, *assessment for learning* tools were developed in partnership between students and educators.

The following tools were identified for development:

- **An assessment lexicon:** Educators developed a discipline specific lexicon that defined the quality of work in explicit language, including language to define the differences between grade bands.
- **A refined marking matrix aligned to learning outcomes:** Students were given exemplar assessments and worked in pairs with blank assessment matrices, and using the learning outcomes, to describe characteristics of the exemplars. Educators and students then worked together to agree appropriate terms to describe the characteristics of assessment in each grade band.
- **Enhanced formative assessment:** an additional outcome of co-creating grading matrices was the production of documents used to inform formative feedback accompanying assessment artefacts. Prior to the development of the feedback matrix, students cited receiving brief and de-contextualised feedback on the quality of their work. This document facilitated consistency and usefulness of formative feedback.

An analysis of qualitative and quantitative data post-implementation indicated positive outcomes for the project, whereby both students and educators have experienced benefits including increased assessment literacy and increased levels of common understanding. It was observed that students were more confident and had increased agency in evaluating their own work and educators were seen to have become more efficient, precise and consistent when assessing work and providing feedback. Quantitative survey data saw significant increases in students' perceptions of fairness (increased from 50% in 2012 to 69% in 2016) and their perceptions that feedback helped clarify their understanding (increased from 50% in 2012 to 75% in 2016).

In the application of co-created assessment criteria for peer assessment, Kearney (2013) and El-Mowafy (2014) complemented this development with explicit training opportunities to increase student confidence and competence in the application of assessment criteria. As referenced in the earlier discussion of VLE-facilitated peer assessment, El-Mowafy (2014) employed the use of digital rubrics and VLE peer assessment workshop activities. When looking at the results of peer assessment by different peer assessors, El-Mowafy found that grading was more consistent between assessors who received training in advance of peer assessment. This suggests that training is important for the application of assessment criteria in peer assessment to be consistent and effective.



As seen from these examples, there are many ways to engage students as partners in the co-creation of assessment activities and criteria that can enhance the learning experience for students, increase assessment literacy for students and educators and can facilitate streamlined feedback processes for educators that also create consistency in formative feedback provided to learners. Again, we see how the VLE that can be used to facilitate assessment processes and leverage success.

## Collaborative grading

Student partnership through collaborative grading, which involves stakeholders other than the educator contributing to assessment outcomes including grading, can be defined as a participatory process where key stakeholders are engaged (O'Sullivan, 2004) and where the needs of students, employers and society as a whole are met (Somervell, 1993; Rourke, 2013). Student partnership through collaborative grading can provide a “real-time” experience that can stimulate learning (Nevo, 2006, as cited in Cooper, 2017, p. 71), lead to the development of assessment literacy (Higher Education Academy, 2012) and lead some students to feel the benefit of their learning and experience coming to life in a real and dynamic format (Cooper, 2017). Cooper (2017), Kearney (2019) and Lorente and Kirk (2013) implemented collaborative summative assessment in the context of student partnership and professional education.


In the application of Kearney's (2019) ASPAL model, 200 students on an undergraduate initial teacher-education degree programme were involved in the study and their assessment task was considered authentic in that it had professional application. As part of the overall model, students participated in both self and peer assessment that contributed to their overall module grades. The weighting for this was broken down as 15% for two peer marks, 30% for self-marking and 40% for the educator's marks. The results indicated that the average marks for the self and peer marking were both within two percentage points of the educator's mark, and that the educator's mark, which accounted for 40% of the total final grade, worked as a moderator for both the self and peer marks.

In Cooper's (2017) research, students planned, delivered and evaluated a six-week youth work intervention during placement where their summative assessment focused on a critical analysis of the planning, delivery and evaluation of the project along with a critique of methodology rather than the quality of the project itself. The rationale was to enable students to make judgements about their own learning and performance on placement. Consistent with ASPAL (Kearney, 2019), the student, fieldwork supervisor and university placement tutor received grading criteria at the outset of placement. Students were prepared for the collaborative grading in a pre-placement workshop where the criteria and process are explored in depth, and new supervisors are informed of the process at briefing meetings held annually.

Cooper (2017) employed the following methodology in conducting collaborative grading process itself:

1. Student describes the project and specified objectives for 20-30 minutes;
2. A three-way professional discussion ensues about the quality of the student's practice—questions are led by the educator and supervisor but are prompts for



- 
- dialogue rather than clarification, to promote focus on future practice rather than simply what the student did in their project;
3. At the end, each participant independently decides and declares their mark using the grading criteria—declaration happens in the prescribed order of student, fieldwork supervisor and finally, the university educator;
  4. The process concludes with a negotiation to agree a final mark based on the grading criteria.

Findings of Cooper's (2017) research indicated that engagement in collaborative grading results in a level of exposure for all participants. Participation can be daunting, particularly for students who are less confident in articulating themselves in real-time and for students who are on earlier stages of their developmental journey. Consequently, it is important to ensure all participants are empowered to participate and to ensure the process is transparent.

Workplace supervisors may experience anxiety for the added responsibility of formally grading work and also that the student's performance could reflect poorly on their supervisory skills. Educators noted that the power they have in grading can be taken for granted but did not identify fear of their grading being opened to scrutiny.

The research also identified that the collaborative grading process enabled a "common language" (p. 69) to emerge to promote valid judgements as tutors themselves were experiencing professional development as a consequence of participating in dialogue and negotiation based on set criteria. This is consistent with Andrews, Brown and Meshers' (2018) research on the student partnership in the development of assessment tools where student and educators co-created and negotiated assessment criteria and rubrics to mutually enhance assessment literacy. Cooper (2017) identified fear of providing biased judgements by supervisors in particular and emphasised the need to support reflexivity rather than striving for objectivity, which is never going to be possible as participants are "human beings, not automatons" (p. 70). This may provide further support for the development and use of grading criteria that can create consistency of grading. Furthermore, Cooper (2017) noted a range of challenges that can arise in the implementation of partnership approaches to summative assessment and grading, which can create barriers for staff involvement. These challenges can include an institutional focus on quantifiable outcomes and inflexible and/or poorly communicated regulation that diverts the attention of those who teach away from assessment as a process and towards the minutiae of administration. Cooper identified the tension that can arise in implementing collaborative grading inherent in the shift in power where an educator may be concerned about relinquishing control over assessment (Cooper, 2017; Cousin & Deepwell, 2005; Tan, 2008).

However, as seen throughout the discussions of student partnership in this literature scoping review, engaging students as partners in assessment can be a structured and transparent process. It can be empirically and pedagogically robust and underpinned by robust quality assurance structures as prescribed by European and Irish regulatory standards, for example, the provision of training for students and educators and publishing explicit assessment criteria.

## 5. Conclusion

This literature scoping review has shown that empowering students to become partners in their own educational experience is a growing movement in education over the past couple of decades, including in higher education. In Ireland, those who teach in higher education were specifically called upon to facilitate this aim (National Forum, 2016b). Deepening trends with respect to academic integrity, universal design for learning and quality assurance processes also align with the discourse around this movement.

This scoping review presents the case that students as partners in assessment is a given. It empowers them and gives them ownership and agency, which all leads to students being better engaged in the assessment process. If we accept this premise as a starting point, it is important to call out explicitly how and where these partnerships can occur.


Presented in three emergent themes, this literature scoping review explored practical and tangible ways in which educators can partner students in assessment processes, informed by 14 core published studies. It specifically explored and provided guidance on what engaging students as partners looks like when those who teach employ the use of self and peer assessment, the creation of assessment criteria and activities, and collaborative grading.

The literature shows us that VLEs can support student partnership opportunities, and assessment literacy enables it (Andrews, Brown and Mesher, 2018). A key way to develop a shared sense of assessment literacy is to use assessment tools, exemplars, processes and grading with students (Carless and Kam Ho Chan, 2017; Cooper, 2017). Peer and self-assessment approaches are powerful forms of partnership and engagement that support both assessment literacy and learning (McKevitt, 2016; Kearney, 2019; Gikandi and Morrow, 2016). They involve students in a critical way and facilitate students taking ownership of their learning (Vonderwall, Liang & Alderman, 2007; Gikandi, Morrow & Davis, 2011). In some cases, there was a clear recommendation to train and support students to enable them effectively be partners in assessment (Kearney, 2013; El-Mowafy, 2014).

Co-designing assessment criteria, tasks and/or tools are effective ways of improving students' confidence and assessment literacy (Tiew, 2010; El-Mowafy, 2014; Andrews, Brown and Mesher, 2018). Students who create assessment items may feel a greater sense of competency and ownership and be intrinsically motivated to engage in assessment (Poot et al, 2017).

Collaborative grading can assist assessment literacy development too as well as give students a sense of their learning experience coming to life, as they participate in the grading process as a stakeholder (Cooper, 2017).

It is our hope that the range and scale of both formative and summative assessment approaches outlined illuminates the many shapes that student partnership can take and the different places and spaces in which it can be implemented. Furthermore, this review helps to illustrate those aspects of educators' existing practice that already strongly support the ethos of student partnership and give



comfort to all educators that there is an existing foundation of research evidence and experience to build upon in seeking to enhance their practice in this area.

Finally, we hope that the practical focus of this literature scoping review helps to demystify the concept of student partnership in assessment and that it contributes to a sectoral understanding of the variety of ways we can seek to enhance practice in relation to it to enhance the overall learning experience for both students and those who teach and support teaching.

To this end, the Appendix provides a two-page summary resource listing the possibilities for partnership in assessment as well as practical advice for making such possibilities a success.



# Appendix

This two-page resource was created to distil the main findings of this literature scoping review and to provide a simple, clear and accessible source of ideas and practical insights for those who teach and for students who want to get started with student partnership in assessment.

The contents of the resource were augmented with input from the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) and from a small focus group of DCU students held in July 2020, coordinated by DCU Students' Union.

The first page of the resource lists some foundational elements that underpin good partnership: shared assessment literacy, dialogue and student feedback. It then represents different possibilities for student partnership from low-level to high-level partnership, and what would suit formative, summative or formative and summative assessment.

The second page of the resource provides some practical advice for those who teach and for students on how to make partnership in assessment a success. This advice is framed around some core wishes from students: dialogue, direction, fairness and agency.

Creation of this resource was made possible by Quality Improvement (QUID) funding awarded to the Teaching Enhancement Unit by DCU Quality Promotion Office in 2020.

The original resource can be accessed directly at this link: <https://bit.ly/sapia>. It is also available alongside other material at [www.dcu.ie/teu/sapia](http://www.dcu.ie/teu/sapia).



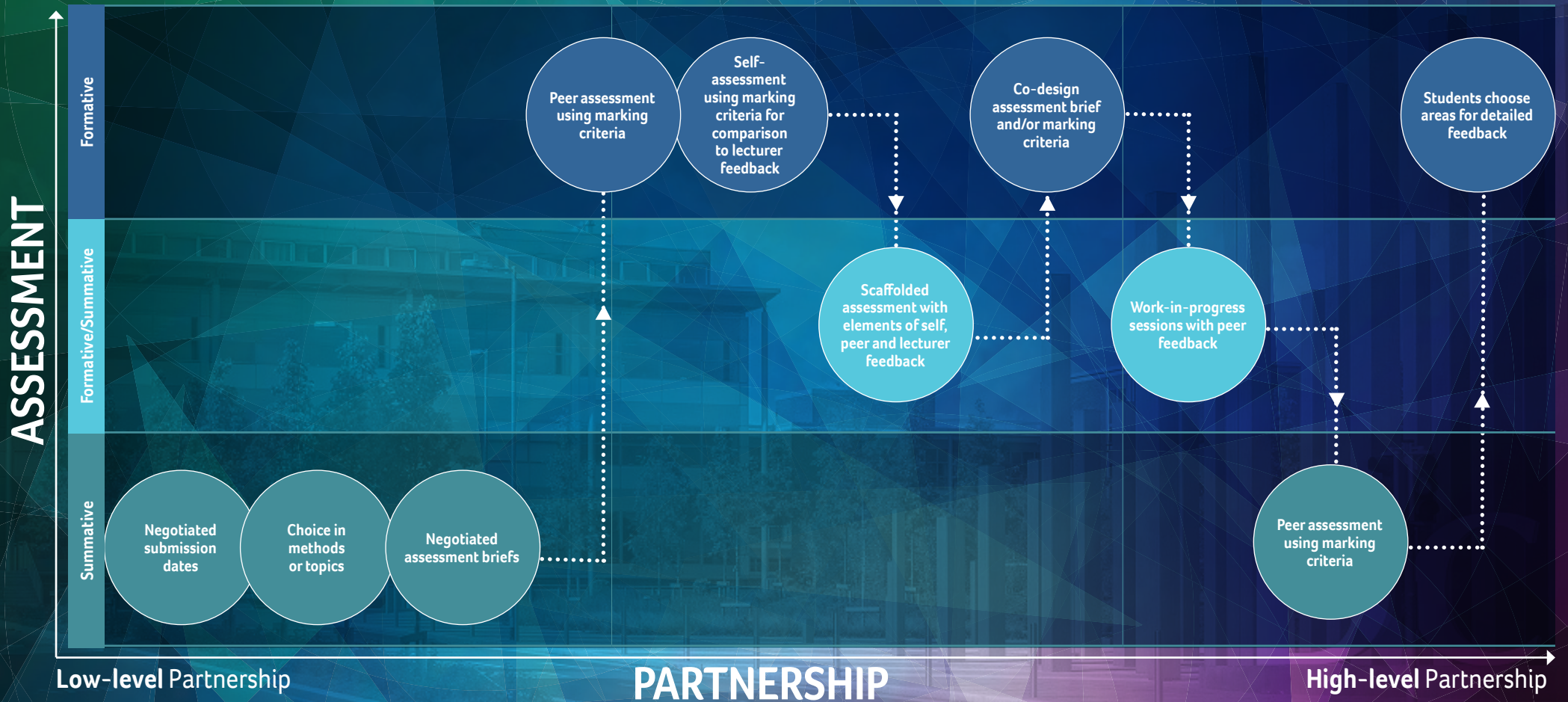
Ollscoil Chathair  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University

# Students as Partners in Assessment (SaPiA)

Engaging students as partners helps develop their agency, ownership and enhance their learning. This resource explores a variety of partnership possibilities in assessment and how academics and students can make partnership a success.

## Partnership Possibilities >>

- 1 Develop shared assessment literacy
- 2 Tutorials discussing marking criteria, assessment briefs and exemplars
- 3 Focus groups with students to seek feedback on assessment





# Perfecting Partnership



## ADVICE TO ACADEMICS

Be open to change  
 Build student capacity  
 Seek student feedback  
 Involve students in all aspects of assessment  
 Develop a shared assessment literacy (incl. grading criteria)  
 Provide exemplars or model answers



## WHAT STUDENTS WANT

Dialogue (to discuss assessment)	Direction	Fairness	Learner Agency
Class size impacts on dialogic opportunities Novice lecturers sometimes more open to dialogue Need for open, communicative assessment environment	Provide grading criteria for everything Give formative feedback before summative piece Self and peer assessment useful Give exemplars and sample papers (especially for new modules)	Consistency across modules Recognise the balance of power when giving opinions about assessment Current, relevant assessments	More choice Recognised as experts in their own learning Develop life skills by partnering in assessment



## ADVICE TO STUDENTS

Be actively involved  
 Empower yourself by staying informed  
 Take active ownership of your own assessment  
 Engage in discussion with lecturer and peers  
 Develop a shared understanding of what is required  
 Be open to receiving, providing, and acting on constructive feedback

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- DCU Quality Promotion Office



### Further Information

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