OBSERVATIONS ON THE NATIONAL ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING PROGRAMME
(2010–2018)

Skills development in networks

FINAL REPORT 2018

"I think that involving the pupils when setting the criteria will teach them the language they need to be able to assess each other and therefore also understand the feedback I give them. I think that when they are this actively involved in setting the criteria, they really begin to understand what they are being assessed on – that there should be transparency around what it takes to achieve the different grades. That there must not be an imbalance of power between the all-knowing teacher and the unknowing pupil. They should be able to feel confident." (Lower secondary teacher, FIVIS 2012)

Table of contents

1. Introduction

In 2010 the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training launched the four-year Assessment for Learning programme in order to develop assessment practices and cultures that are more conducive to learning. The programme was renewed for a second period in 2014–2018 in response to White Paper 20 (2012–2013) *"On the right path"*. Development of competence in respect of assessment for learning and learning networks as a method has been central to the programme.

The target groups are local school authorities representing a selection of schools, adult education institutions, the educational psychology service and vocational training establishments. Free schools have also participated.

The purpose of this report is to present the knowledge that has been accumulated from the programme (2010–2018) and to document what has been achieved. The report also provides an insight into the process of changing assessment practices. Experiences and knowledge from the programme can be valuable in future skills development processes and other initiatives both in relation to assessment and in other areas.

Brief summary: What are the outcomes of the *Assessment for Learning* programme?

Although it is difficult to isolate individual reasons behind changes in assessment practices, there is considerable accumulated evidence to show that participation has resulted in:

- A more learning-driven assessment culture
- Improved skills and a positive change in assessment practices
- Increased understanding of the curriculum and more active use of it
- More uniform assessment terminology
- Increased expertise on conducting research and development and running networks

The programme has also contributed to:

- Keeping assessment high on the agenda in the sector
- Reinforcing awareness amongst local school authorities of their responsibility for assessment practices in their schools and training establishments

There has been growing interest in assessment generally and assessment for learning especially during the programme period. The knowledge base on assessment practices in Norwegian schools has received a significant boost during the period in that the number of research projects and doctoral theses addressing assessment has increased sharply since 2010. The outcomes will be described in more detail in part 3.

1.1 Background
White Paper 16 (2006–2007) "*… and no one was left behind. Early intervention for lifelong learning"*
sums up the challenges surrounding assessment in four separate statements:

- the regulations on individual assessment are perceived as unclear
- both teacher training institutions and schools lack the necessary expertise
- assessment cultures and assessment practices in schools are weak
- little research has gone into assessment in Norway

Among the drivers behind the national Assessment for Learning programme was the fact that teachers had called for initiatives to boost teachers' and schools' assessment skills, including how to assess pupil attainment, in connection with the rollout of the Knowledge Promotion reform. Findings from the evaluation of Reform 97 show that assessment practices at the primary stage bore evidence of general praise, ipsative assessment and an absence of explicit, unambiguous standards (Klette 2003). The OECD (2005) had also expressed concern for Norwegian pupils' development and that they were not being adequately monitored. According to the OECD, more systematic monitoring could reduce what it saw as a disproportionate number of so-called "underachievers".

The *Better Assessment Practices Project* was launched by the Directorate for Education and Training in spring 2007 in response to White Paper 16. The project had two main objectives:

1. trialling national attainment indicators
2. proposing a clearer set of regulations – regulations on individual assessment

The conclusions from the trial were not unequivocal, but the final reports from both the researchers and the directorate recommended a continued nationwide initiative to further develop assessment skills in primary and secondary education (Throndsen et al. 2009, Directorate for Education and Training (2009).[1]

In autumn 2009 new regulations on individual assessment were adopted, and one year later a memorandum was circulated elaborating on the provisions of the regulations. The provisions on formative assessment placed considerable emphasis on learning. The new regulations incorporated four research-based and widely accepted principles for assessment. The purpose of individual assessment was made clear, and the regulations remained explicit as to the connection between assessment and adapted education (Directorate for Education and Training memorandum no. 1 – 2010).

As a result of the findings from the Better Assessment Practices project, the Directorate for Education and Training was in 2009 tasked by the Ministry of Education and Research with launching a new systematic programme to further develop existing assessment cultures and to improve assessment skills and practices.

1.2 What is assessment for learning?

Assessment for learning (AfL) is frequently used as a synonym for the research-based term *formative assessment*. In the programme the two terms are used interchangeably. The term assessment for learning was chosen in order to emphasise that formative assessment should promote learning. Assessment for learning / formative assessment uses information about the pupils' and apprentices' competencies and development to plan and facilitate their learning.[2]

---

[1] In its final report to the Ministry of Education and Research, the directorate recommends continued investment in assessment and learning. Link to the report: https://www.udir.no/globalassets/upload/forskning/5/bedre_vurderingspraksis_sluttrapport_til_kd.pdf

[2] This interpretation of assessment for learning is based on the definition adopted by the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) (2002): "*Assessment for Learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.*" The ARG definition highlights the process of gathering and interpreting information about the pupils' learning and how pupils and teachers should use this information in the learning process.

Four research-based and statutory principles for formative assessment were at the heart of the programme:

Pupils and apprentices learn more and better when they

- know what they should learn and what is expected of them (Sections 3-1, 4-1)
- receive feedback on the quality of their work or achievements (Sections 3-11, 3-13, 3-14, 4-2)
- are given advice on how they can improve (Sections 3-11, 3-13, 3-14, 4-2)
- are involved in their own learning by assessing their own work, competencies and academic development (Sections 3-12, 4-8)

Formative assessment is a broad form of assessment which is integral to everyday learning. Such comprehensive assessment involves fluid transitions between assessment, learning and guidance (Dysthe 2008). This type of assessment calls for a systematic and consistent learning process based on productive communication between teacher and pupil and with continual assessment/feedback as an integral element. It requires a consistent approach to testing with follow-up procedures and a considerable degree of pupil involvement right from the outset.

The programme has focused on various dimensions and correlations pertaining to assessment for learning, including:

- The four principles for formative assessment and the correlations between them, which include self-assessment, self-regulated learning and pupil and apprentice involvement.
- Correlations between the principles, the concept of competence and curriculum analysis.
- Correlations between local curriculum planning and assessment for learning, including planning for learning.
- Correlations between formative and coursework assessment.
- Judgement in assessment and collective interpretation.
- How to develop/use formative testing.
- The importance of a good learning environment as a prerequisite for assessment for learning.

Unlike formative assessment, final assessment is often described as summative assessment or assessment *of* learning. However, the purpose of final assessments is to provide information about a candidate's competencies in the subject *upon completion of study*. *Summative* assessment provides information about the pupil's attainment in relation to the stipulated learning objectives/outcomes. There is no rigid distinction between formative and summative assessment or between assessment *for* and *of* learning.[3] The difference concerns the *intention* behind the assessment, not different forms of assessment (Dysthe 2008). In order for formative assessment to aid learning and provide information about a pupil's or apprentice's competencies, it must also include assessment *of* learning. However, the information used to assess the pupil or apprentice must also be used to support them in their further learning.

---

[3] *Many people talk about formative assessment and summative assessment, but again, it does not make sense to use the words formative and summative to describe assessments because the same assessment can function both summatively and formatively (Dylan Wiliam 2017).*

There is a general risk that research and development practices are reduced to a set of procedures and techniques with no fundamental understanding of the ideas on which the practices are based. Consequently, this could have a negative impact on the learning process and prevent changes to existing practices in line with intentions. Research on assessment for learning frequently addresses the issue of the *spirit* versus the *letter*, which refers to the challenge of disseminating content and interpreting and practising said content – i.e. understanding the underlying intentions and/or adhering to procedure (Marshall & Drummond 2007). One key question addressed by the programme has therefore been how to prevent an instrumental approach whereby assessment for learning is reduced to a set of techniques and procedures rather than a reflected and carefully considered practice.

Assessment for learning – principles for learning and development in an organisation

The principles for formative assessment (assessment for learning) do not only apply to pupils and apprentices but can also be used to good effect in all learning and development processes, including skills development, at all levels of an organisation. Practising the principles "on ourselves" and on colleagues can help raise awareness of how they affect our own learning and thus provide an insight into their effects on pupils and apprentices. By practising the principles, staff are also modelling them for pupils and apprentices.

Practising the principles within the organisation could mean:
- making all involved parties aware of the goals and objectives
- providing formative feedback at all levels
- involving the parties in the planning, execution and follow-up of research and development
- taking a knowledge-based approach, facilitating reflection on practices and adjusting progress

---

1.3 Objectives and methods in research and development

1.3.1 Objectives

The overarching goal for the programme has been to support local school authorities, schools and training establishments in developing more formative assessment practices and cultures. We sought to achieve this by raising skills levels and awareness of assessment as a tool for learning.

The programme has taken a cross-curricular approach to assessment for learning in order to highlight the general academic and pedagogical principles on which it is based. This has created a common framework and understanding of the "underlying idea" irrespective of subject. However, the approach requires the methods to be "converted" in order to make assessment for learning subject-specific. Identifying the correlation between individual subject curricula and the principles for formative assessment locally has therefore been highlighted and emphasised by the programme.

The programme has also aimed to raise awareness of the rules and support the implementation of the Assessment Regulations in schools, vocational training establishments and local and county councils.

1.3.2 Programme structure and methodologies

Local school authorities were tasked with overseeing the programme locally since it is their responsibility to ensure that the rights of pupils and apprentices to assessment are being respected, cf. the Assessment Regulations.[4]

The programme design and chosen methodologies have been based on other national initiatives and on the Scottish *Assessment Is For Learning Development Programme* (2000–2008), amongst other things.[5]

One key factor in all change processes is that they take place over a period of time. Changing a school culture often takes three to five years of hard work and requires careful planning and perseverance before the working methods and principles adopted by a development project become a natural part of the school's practices or culture (Fullan 2007). If the school does not work systematically over a longer period, old practices can easily be re-established. Research and experiences from school development projects also show that there is a critical phase when a programme period or project comes to an end and new ways of working are due to supplant old practices (University of Oslo 2009). One key question is therefore how schools and local school authorities can bring about change and structures that result in lasting development.

In order to reach as many local school authorities as possible, the Directorate for Education and Training opted for a shorter period of participation than three to five years. Local school authorities in the first four cohorts in the period 2010–2014 spent 16 months participating in the programme. Based on the experiences from the first part of the programme, the period of participation was extended to 24 months for the last three cohorts in the period 2014–2018.

One important measure has been to build expertise and support local school authorities in their change processes so they can get the most out of their participation and continue the process after the programme period comes to an end.

The intention is for local school authorities to draw up a plan for how to disseminate the learning acquired and continue the development process after the programme has concluded, cf. background document and letter of invitation.[6] However, it was left up to each local school authority to implement these plan in the way they see fit.

1.3.3 Scope of the programme

The background document[7] describes the background and objectives of the programme. It also describes: common principles, suggestions for content and organisation, and the stakeholders' roles and responsibilities. The background document was revised after one year in response to new

---

[4] In the case of workplace training, it is the training establishment's responsibility to ensure that the apprentice's right to assessment is upheld.

[5] Scotland has drawn extensively on the research carried out by the Assessment Reform Group when it comes to assessment as well as Dr Michael Fullan's theories on change and development in schools.

[6] One criterion for receiving funding is that the school owner has to describe in the planning document how the work will be continued and how the outcomes could benefit all schools and training establishments in the municipality or county. The school owner must also describe their plans for continued implementation and dissemination in the final report.

[7] Link to the background document: https://www.udir.no/globalassets/filer/vurdering/vfl/andre-dokumenter/felles/grunnlagsdokument-2014-2017.pdf

knowledge and outcomes and the programme was renewed for the period 2014–2018.

The invitation [8] issued to the participants in each cohort set out the local school authorities responsibilities as well as expectations and criteria for participation and funding. The invitation letter is based on the background document. The directorate also issued templates for the local school authorities planning document and interim and final reports in order to provide guidance on the content, organisation and evaluation of the programme locally.

A summary of the guidelines on content and organisation as well as national initiatives to support the development process is provided in this table:

Guidelines on content and organisation (few principles – considerable room for local adaptation)	National initiatives to support the development process
- The four principles for formative assessment should form the basis for the development process - Formative assessment should be an integral part of the learning process - Co-operation and dialogue in learning networks - The initiative should be practice-based - Voluntary participation - Clearly defined responsibilities	- Seminars for local school authorities participating in the programme - Online school-based development programme for assessment for learning (SkoleVFL-MOOC) - Online resources at Udir.no - Regional conferences - Day seminars in each county on curricula and assessment as well as coursework assessment

1.4 Financial scope

The total budget for the programme in the period 2010–2018 was around NOK 148 million[9], of which some NOK 93 million was allocated to local school authorities as an incentive. The funds have also covered the cost of the directorate's seminars for local school authorities, two sets of regional conferences[10], research into assessment, collaborations with external experts, admin costs for county governors, online resources, the online course (SkoleVFL-MOOC) and participation fees. They have also been used to pay for the county seminars on the correlation between local curriculum planning and assessment as well as day seminars on coursework assessment.

One-off payments of up to NOK 260,000 per local authority, up to NOK 760,000 per county council and up to NOK 100,000 per private school have been made. Local school authorities have managed the funds in line with predefined criteria. A precondition for participation was that the local authority put forward three schools and the county council five upper secondary schools and three training establishments / apprenticeship training agencies. The funding was reduced if fewer schools were signed up.

---

[8] Invitation letters have been issued to each of the seven cohorts.
[9] This is the total amount allocated through the programme. Annual spending has varied from year to year.
[10] In 2012 and 2018.

Some of the incentives for local school authorities[11] were earmarked for buying out the resource person(s),[12] who had were assigned the dedicated role of overseeing the development process. The funding has also covered the cost of a launch seminar as well as local network meetings and seminars during the programme period. Local school authorities were also required to put up additional funding in order to run the programme locally.

Several municipal local school authorities, e.g. in inter-municipal networks, have opted to co-operate and share the funding between them. Some county governors have also initiated partnerships between local school authorities in order to share and/or distribute funding across different local school authorities networks in the county. This allowed more local school authorities and schools to participate. In some counties every local school authorities was therefore able to participate.

The higher education sector has not received dedicated funding. The intention was for the funding to be allocated to the local school authorities as they have the ultimate responsibility for development of competence in respect of assessment for learning and for them to initiate collaboration with external experts in line with their own needs and plans.

1.5 A growing knowledge base

The field of formative assessment / assessment for learning has seen continual development in the last two decades. In 1998 a group of researchers in Britain established the *Assessment Reform Group* as a research-based alternative to what the researchers saw as a testing regime in England. In Norway formative assessment / assessment for learning was put on the agenda in earnest around 2008–2009 (Throndsen et al. 2009). The provisions on assessment contained in the Education Act were amended, creating a clearer focus on formative assessment.

The data available in the first phase of the programme was very much "dominated" by international research and observations. There were few large-scale studies on the implementation of assessment for learning and little knowledge of how successful it had been (Hopfenbeck & Stobart 2015). With the exception of the national assessment programme in Scotland and a regional initiative in Ontario, there were few similar national or regional assessment for learning programmes of any magnitude to draw on. It was therefore important to adapt international research and observations to suit the Norwegian education system.

Available research data on assessment has been strengthened both in parallel with and as a part of the programme, however. There has been a sharp rise in the number of research projects and doctoral theses (and master dissertations) investigating assessment since the programme launched in 2010.

The evaluation of the Knowledge Promotion reform provided insights into the correlations between teaching, assessment and learning and which aspects of the reform appear to have been adopted by schools.[13]

---

[11] The directorate allocated funding to the local school authorities via the county governors.

[12] Local school authorities nominated one or more resource person(s) to oversee the content and organisation of the local development process. In this report we have used the term "school owner" to also refer to the local school authorities' resource persons as they represent the same entity.

[13] Nordland Research Institute (2011): https://www.udir.no/tall-og-forskning/finn-forskning/rapporter/Vurdering-under-Kunnskapsloftet-tredje-delrapport/

Nordland Research Institute (2012): https://www.udir.no/tall-og-forskning/finn-forskning/rapporter/Undervisning-og-laring-i-

The Research Council of Norway's *Education 2020* research programme (Research Council of Norway 2009) looked at the correlations between different forms of assessment, learning processes and learning outcomes as one of four priority research topics. The topic was chosen based on the need for more information about correlations between assessment practices and learning outcomes at all levels in the education system (Research Council of Norway 2009).

In 2011 the Directorate for Education and Training instigated research to expand the knowledge base on assessment practices in Norwegian classrooms. The Norwegian University of Science and Technology was commissioned to conduct a three-year research project into individual assessment in schools (FIVIS 2011–2014). The main objective was to establish how individual assessment is practised in primary and secondary schools. The project focused in particular on how assessment stimulates learning and on different classroom practices using assessment as a tool for learning, especially in light of the four principles for formative assessment set out in the regulations accompanying the Education Act. The project also was to look at half-yearly assessments and the correlation between formative and final assessments. The research project resulted in two interim reports and one final report.[14]

The programme was somewhat of an innovation in the early stages in that there was little available knowledge about assessment for learning in a Norwegian context. One key element in assessment for learning is the acknowledgement that trial and error is part of the learning process – at all levels. The directorate did not profess to have all the answers, and we chose to pursue a path of learning and exploration in order to gain experience of developing assessment practices. However, combining the role as stewards of regulations and frameworks with dialogue-based and development-driven process management has been a constant balancing act.

Although the goals and parameters of the programme have remained largely unchanged, its content and organisation have continued to evolve throughout the programme period based on new knowledge, experiences and feedback from participants and experts.

The OECD (2013) points out that teachers and school leaders welcomed the fact that the Directorate did not present itself as experts, instead making it clear that participants at all levels were involved in a shared process of learning and development. According to the OECD report, several school leaders found that they were engaged in a genuine dialogue and partnership with the Directorate rather than a top-down process.

Kunnskapsloftet/
NIFU/ILS (2011): https://www.udir.no/tall-og-forskning/finn-forskning/rapporter/Underveis-men-i-svart-ulikt-tempo---tredje-delrapport/
NIFU/ILS (2012): https://www.udir.no/tall-og-forskning/finn-forskning/rapporter/Kunnskapsloftet-som-styringsreform/

[14] Lise Vikan Sandvik et al. (2012): Assessment in schools. Intentions and perceptions. Interim report 1.
Sandvik, Lise Vikan and Trond Buland (ed.) (2013): Assessment in schools. Implementation and practice. Interim report 2.
Trond Buland et al. (2014): Assessment in schools. Developing skills and communities of practice. Final report.

1.6 The programme in numbers

Programme period:

Four cohorts of school owners local school authorities participated between 2010 and 2014, each of them for 16 months. The directorate held one launch seminar for the local school authorities and five two-day seminars for the local school authorities' resource persons during the programme period.

Three cohorts of local school authorities participated between 2014 and 2018, each of them for 24 months. The directorate held one launch seminar for the local school authorities and six two-day seminars for the local school authorities' resource persons during the programme period.

Participation during the 2010–2018 programme period:

310 (ca. 73 %) municipalities and all of Norway's 19 counties
1,500 schools and 55 training establishments / apprenticeship training agencies
102 free schools
Around 96 adult education centres across 60 municipalities
Several local authorities have involved the educational psychology service in the local programme

Regional conferences:

2012: A total of 1,827 registered attendees – 425 in Trondheim, 387 in Tromsø, 612 in Oslo and 403 in Bergen.
2018: A total of 1,250 registered attendees – 266 in Trondheim, 201 in Tromsø, 475 in Oslo and 308 in Bergen.

Online course (SkoleVFL-MOOC):

Just over 630 schools with around 19,000 teachers have completed or will be completing the modules of the online course following its launch in spring 2015. The contents of the course have been revised and further developed since the first version in 2015. The course is school-based and scheduled to last 2–4 semesters.

2. Evaluating outcomes

The purpose of the programme was *to support local school authorities, schools and training establishments in developing more formative assessment practices and cultures by raising skills levels and awareness of assessment as a tool for learning.*

2.1 Sources used in this report

This report is based on a summary and analysis of information from various sources which together provide a picture of the implementation and outcomes of the programme.

The table below lists the *most important* sources.

Source	Description
Reporting by local school authorities	Local school authorities have submitted mandatory self-reports half way through and at the end of the programme period using the Directorate's reporting template. The final report should describe: • how the local development processes have been conducted • outcomes and indications of changing practices • a plan for continuing the initiatives after the programme period The schools should use the reports in the local development process to monitor changes in practice, to document learning and as a starting point for future planning. The reports have given the agencies and the Directorate information about the progression of the programme and a basis for making adjustments.
Summaries of local school authorities reports by cohort	With the help of the county governors, the Directorate has summarised local school authorities 'reports for each cohort. These summaries provide information about development trends in each cohort and serve as documentation for further skills development in relation to assessment for learning. The reports are not research-based, but they do reflect certain tendencies and provide a basis for further reflection and discussion.
Evaluation of the directorate's seminars for local school authorities' resource persons	All of the Directorate's seminars have been evaluated and the information used to make improvements and to identify the needs of the resource persons. The participants' learning outcomes and learning needs at the seminars have played a central part in the evaluations.
Feedback from county governors	The county governors have given their feedback through the local school authorities at dedicated meetings and through direct communication.
The Pupil and Apprentice Surveys	A key source of information for monitoring the development of assessment practices in classrooms and training establishments at national, county, municipal and school levels. The questions posed in the surveys were revised at an early stage of the programme in order to obtain more qualitative information about whether pupils' and apprentices' perceptions of assessment practices are in line with the principles for formative assessment. The Pupil Survey contains nine questions about assessment for learning. The Apprentice Survey contains 14 questions about assessment for learning.
Questions for Norwegian Schools (NIFU)	This is the directorate's biannual survey of local school authorities and leaders. Specific questions about assessment for learning were included in the spring 2012, spring 2014 and spring 2017 surveys. The questions are issued to a selection of respondents covering the entire sector, not just local school authorities and schools participating in the programme. The Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU) prepares reports on each survey with an analysis of the results.
Assessment for learning. Results and analysis of schools' and local school authoritie ' responses to questions about assessment practices (NIFU 2017:4)	NIFU was given an additional task in connection with the spring 2017 survey (cf. column above). The objective was to gain a deeper insight into what the programme has meant for schools and local school authorities generally as well as for the participants in the programme.

Report on appeals against coursework grades between 2010 and 2015. (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2015)	Quantitative and qualitative data from county governors and county councils. A comparison and analysis of the statistics on complaints from pupils on Coursework grades in secondary education. The report also provides information about the county governors' and county councils' views on assessment practices in schools.
Inspection reports	In the period 2014–2017 a single inspection regime was in place to monitor free schools, state schools and their owners. The inspections covered the following topics: - Teaching in individual subjects – local implementation of the LK06 curriculum - Formative assessment in order to improve pupils' learning outcomes - Formative assessment as a tool for providing adapted education and special needs education "Formative assessment in order to improve pupils' learning outcomes" was introduced in 2015 and 2016.
Research on individual assessment in schools – FIVIS (NTNU 2011–2014)	This research project set out to examine assessment practices in Norwegian classrooms. Its scope is limited to assessment practices in the subjects English, Norwegian, maths and PE at the lower secondary stage and Year 1 in upper secondary. The research resulted in two interim reports and one final report. Evaluating the Assessment for Learning programme was not the main objective of the research project, but the participants included schools that had and had not been involved in the programme. This provided an insight into differences and similarities in assessment practices amongst the participants.
Hopfenbeck, T.N., A. Tolo, T. Florez and Y. El Masri (2013) Balancing Trust and Accountability? The Assessment for Learning Programme in Norway. A Governing Complex Education Systems Case Study. OECD.	The programme was selected as one of three case studies for the OECD project "Governing Complex Education Systems" (GCES). The study paints a picture of the complexities of school development generally and has made a significant contribution to the programme, allowing adjustments to be made in the early stages (OECD 2013). The report makes several recommendations on the next steps for assessment for learning. Findings described in the study were made at an early stage of the programme and build on interviews with representatives at all governance levels, parents/carers, trade unions, researchers and journalists. It also analysed national test results, VfL coverage in the media, documents and self-reports.

2.2 Evaluating outcomes of complex development processes

One key question is how to monitor development and evaluate outcomes of a programme that seeks to further develop practices in a complex field and which involves stakeholders at all levels. The programme itself is a national one, but there have also been numerous local (and other national) initiatives linked to assessment and learning.

This all adds up to a catalogue of source material which can provide a picture of how assessment practices and cultures are evolving in Norwegian schools in general and in the participating schools in particular (cf. 2.1). However, it is important to remember that numerous factors play a part, cf. the summary below. It is difficult to isolate a single reason for changes in practices in schools and training establishments and subsequently also their causal effects. However, drawing on multiple methodologies and a range of independent sources that show indications of change help paint a more reliable and correct picture of the situation.

Key factors when evaluating outcomes of the AfL programme

When to measure Changing existing practices takes time (3–5 years). Participation in the programme lasts 1.5–2 years, a relatively short period of time considering how long it takes for all participating schools to change their practices. One important aspect of the programme has therefore been for local school authorities to build capacity so that they can continue to develop their assessment practices once their participation in the national part of the programme comes to an end. Whether the school owner has had sufficient time to plan, institutionalise and organise the programme locally must also be taken into account.

How many participants have been involved in the programme at a local level? Local school authorities have adopted different strategies as to how many schools should participate in the first cohort, while school leaders have decided how many participants from their school to involve. Participation in the programme does therefore not mean that all schools and teachers in a municipality/county have been involved in the development process to the same extent.

What to look for Assessment is a complex issue, and there is no one straightforward way of developing assessment practices. Different approaches can lead to the same outcomes. The programme has emphasised the need to both develop skills in assessment for learning and how to run learning networks. It is important, therefore, to take a broad-based approach to monitoring formative assessment practices.

Schools and local school authorities – what constitutes good development? The participants have different points of departure, capacity and experience in relation to assessment and development processes. They have therefore been permitted to organise the local initiatives as they see fit according to the schools' and local authorities' circumstances. Progress amongst schools and local school authorities should therefore be viewed in light of where they were when they started.

How to distinguish between the effects of different programmes? Several other national programmes have been running in parallel with Assessment for Learning, including Developing Secondary Schools and Learning Environments. There have also been numerous local initiatives and programmes. Many of the programmes are very different to each other yet share some common factors. For example, AfL has been aligned with the Developing Secondary Schools and Learning Environments programmes. Especially on major cross-curricular projects – where themes overlap – participation in multiple programmes can generate synergies and provide an extra boost to the development process. It may also have a negative impact if the programmes are seen as fragmented and disconnected.

2.3 Indicators of changing practices

When writing their reports the local school authorities were encouraged to reflect on relevant indicators of evolving assessment practices and to identify sources providing adequate information for the development process. This should take place at ownership, school and classroom levels. Relying on "narrow and/or the wrong type of sources" can paint a distorted picture. It can also send out the wrong signals about what formative assessment practices are all about. Expecting improved results in

national tests, better grades etc. after a relatively short period of participation is not realistic in light of the objectives of the programme and how long it takes for practices to change.

Indicators of development and learning that cover different aspects of the programme at all levels could include:

- *In the classroom / training establishment:* To what extent are pupils and apprentices seeing a change in assessment practices? What has changed, and how does it affect the learning process? To what extent have teachers/instructors changed their practices in respect of planning, delivering and adjusting their teaching? Describe any changes in the interaction between teacher/instructor and pupil/apprentice.
- *At school level:* What practices and experiences have school leaders and teachers acquired from the programme? Which forums are there for sharing experiences and practices, and how are these forums being used? Describe any changes in the interaction between teacher-leader, between colleagues, and between school-parents. Describe practices in relation to pupil appraisals, parent-teacher meetings, parents' evenings, agenda for staff meetings, procedures etc.
- *At municipal/county level:* What relevant changes have there been at local school authorities level? New ways of organising skills development (content, organisation, co-operation, networks etc.). Interaction between local school authorities and school leaders, schools and training establishments + any other stakeholders. Monitoring and dialogue with schools and training establishments.

Local school authorities may have taken a variety of different approaches in order to gain an insight into how to change assessment practices in their schools, but they have all relied on a wide range of sources in their reporting. Examples of sources cited by local school authorities as enabling them to monitor evolving practices: the Pupil Survey, the Apprentice Survey, the Teacher Survey, the Status Analysis, SWOT analyses, inspections, external evaluations, results of national tests and exams, participation in SkoleVFL-MOOC, analytical tools, surveys, school visits, interviews and/or consultations.

3. What are the outcomes of the programme?

Throughout the programme period schools have been reporting considerable enthusiasm and positive attitudes towards the programme. Assessment for Learning is aimed at the very core of teachers' and instructors' pedagogical practices, and the content has therefore had a significant impact. The principles for assessment for learning are reflected at the training establishments, and they support their efforts to train independent skilled workers. The county councils have welcomed the fact that the programme is aimed at both schools and vocational training providers, partly because the regulations on formative assessment apply to both institutions.

Participants at all levels (including the county governors) have therefore found the content to be relevant, which was important in order to generate enthusiasm around the programme.

Stray (2017) finds that teachers respond with enthusiasm when development initiatives harmonise with their school's local and national identity and character, citing the national programme for assessment for learning as a good example of such an initiative.

3.1 A more learning-driven assessment culture

By assessment culture we mean the way in which a school or training establishment interprets and practises assessment. An assessment culture manifests itself through assessment practices in the way teachers and instructors give feedback, involve their pupils/apprentices in the assessment process or reflect on their own and the school's assessment practices, are aware of the learning objectives and the pupils' learning needs etc.

3.1.1 Improved knowledge of formative assessment

A prolonged national programme for assessment for learning has helped keep the issue high on the agenda in schools and vocational training for an extended period of time. Reports, media coverage and experiences from the programme generally show that assessment skills have improved at all levels. The feedback from local school authorities suggests that schools have improved their knowledge and understanding of assessment for learning, and they are more aware of how assessment can promote learning.

In the final phase of the programme, the participating schools have increasingly involved all their teachers in the local development process, according to the local school authorities' final reports. This contrasts with the more sporadic participation by teachers in the first cohorts. It would therefore appear that the programme has had a wider impact amongst local school authorities in the latest cohorts.

Sandvik and Bruland (2013) find that schools that have participated in the programme stand out in that they are taking a more systematic approach to assessment than non-participating schools and that participating school leaders have a more precise and up-to-date understanding of concepts and intentions in respect of national policy design. According to the OECD, schools that make a success of assessment for learning have developed a deeper understanding of the essence of AfL and how they can practise this understanding in various ways. These schools have also been more successful in linking their work on assessment with other goals and initiatives.

Although local school authorities generally report improved assessment skills at all levels, the reports and other findings from the programme show that the understanding of *what constitutes good assessment practices* varies both between and within different local school authorities and schools. The researchers also find considerable diversity of practices in different subjects building on different interpretations of the intentions behind assessment (Sandvik and Buland 2013).

There are collective and individual variations in practices between schools and types of schools but also within schools. Some teachers have a narrow understanding of assessment whereby assessment for learning is reduced to a set of procedures rather than a reflected and carefully considered practice (Sandvik and Buland 2013). The researchers believe it is necessary to raise awareness of the correlations between learning objectives, local curriculum planning, working methods in a subject, feedback to pupils and assessment in the subject. They also point out that there is obvious potential for further developing assessment for learning as part of a process to develop adapted education.

Inspections by the county governors in 2017 found that schools have not adopted a consistent approach to ensure that the half-yearly assessments give the pupils information about their competencies in the various subjects and how they can improve (Directorate for Education and

Training 2017a). Inspections by the county governors have also concluded that the county councils must do more to ensure that training establishments perform half-yearly assessments so that apprentices and trainees receive the training they are entitled to (Directorate for Education and Training 2014).

3.1.2 Positive changes in assessment practices

Local school authorities and county governors consistently report positive changes in assessment practices and assessment cultures as a result of participating in the programme. Local school authorities state that there are variations in the extent and scope of the changes and that it takes time to change existing practices. According to NIFU's Questions for Norwegian Schools in spring 2017, 98% of the school leaders surveyed agree that the work done on assessment for learning in the last 6–8 years has resulted in a more learning-driven assessment culture. School leaders and owners who have participated in the programme state that they have been working more extensively on assessment practices than those who did not participate (NIFU 2017). This pattern is clearest amongst the most recent participants in the programme.

Sandvik and Buland (2013) find that many schools are moving towards a new assessment culture and are well on their way to establishing clear goals for their pupils' learning and involving the pupils in their own assessment. Local school authorities and county governors generally report increasing awareness, a deeper understanding of the contents of the regulations and more focus on formative practices in classrooms and training establishments. Teachers are broadly positive towards the national guidelines on assessment (local school authorities' final reports).

Local school authorities report changes in assessment practices in respect of learning objectives and criteria, feedback, self-assessment and pupil and apprentice involvement. More teachers practise the four principles for formative assessment systematically and as an integral part of their practice. Visible signs of concrete changes include the way in which the tuition is organised and a shift in focus from doing to learning. The following are the most frequently cited signs of change:

> Increased focus on clear learning objectives and expectations, more frequent use of objectives and indicators, better feedback practices with clear and concise feedback, increasing pupil involvement, a better understanding of assessment in general, improved co-operation on assessment at all levels, and the emergence of professional learning communities and a culture for sharing. When it comes to vocational training, one common indicator is also that assessment for learning has been put on the agenda, e.g. in the form of training for instructors and often also examination boards (local school authorities' final reports).

The Pupil Survey (2013[15] to 2017) shows that there has been good and steady progress in the period, corroborating the reports from the local school authorities. Because the survey underwent significant changes in 2013, it is difficult to compare the figures from the first programme period (2010–2013). Generally speaking, the figures show discrepancies between Years 5–7, Years 8–10 and Year 1 of Upper

---

[15] The Pupil and Apprentice Surveys were redesigned during the first programme period, partly in order to include questions about changes in assessment practices which reflect the four principles for formative assessment. The results before and after 2013 are therefore not fully comparable. Changes from 2010–2013 are therefore not identified in the Pupil Surveys.

Secondary School (Vg1). Pupils in Years 8–10 (lower Secondary School) score particularly highly on assessment for learning. The difference between the highest and lowest score is significant (NTNU 2017).

All year groups give the highest score to the questions "*Do your teachers explain the learning objectives in the subject in a way that you understand?*" and "*Does your teacher explain well enough what they are looking for when assessing your schoolwork?*" Years 5–7 have consistently scored highly on these questions since 2013 (84–85%). The corresponding scores for Years 8–10 and Year 1 of Upper Secondary School (Vg1) in respect of the same questions were below 70%. This could suggest that learning objectives and criteria are becoming a well established practice at the primary stage. However, it is important to stress that the Pupil Survey does not provide information about how or the extent to which extent the practices are linked to the curriculum.

Changes in the response to questions about feedback and pupil involvement in the period 2013–2017 are outlined below. The two most positive answer categories have been merged in this summary (i.e. the categories "all or most" and "in many subjects").

Questions about feedback practices:

	"Do the teachers tell you what is good about the work you do?"		"Does your teacher talk to you about how you can improve in the subject?"	
	2013	**2017**	**2013**	**2017**
Years 5–7	76.3%	77.6%	65.6%	69.6%
Years 8–10	56.5%	60.4%	52.4%	54.5%
Vg1	57.2%	64.2%	51.1%	57.3%

Questions surrounding self-assessment and pupil participation:

	"Do you have a say in what to focus on when your work is being assessed?"		"Are you able to take part in assessing your schoolwork?"		"My teachers help me to think about how to improve in the subject."	
	2013	**2017**	**2013**	**2017**	**2013**	**2017**
Years 5–7	51.4%	54.3%	48%	50.7%	64.4%	67.3%
Years 8–10	22.6%	27%	17%	20.4%	32.7%	37.2%
Vg1	25.7%	33.1%	21%	28.2%	34.7%	43%

The summary reflects a positive trend for all questions and some considerable changes for some questions. However, there are still significant discrepancies in the scores for individual questions and between different year groups. The Pupil Survey receives a large number of responses, and even slight changes in the percentage score represent a large number of pupils.

The questions relating to self-assessment and pupil participation see the lowest scores in all year groups, showing that there is still some way to go before these elements become standard practice. Inspections have also found that many teachers do not sufficiently involve the pupils in assessing their own learning (Directorate for Education and Training 2016). The Apprentice Survey shows that there are challenges around involving apprentices in planning and evaluating their work, yet the score is still

higher than for Year 1 in Upper Secondary School (Level Vg1). There are also significant variations across study programmes as to whether apprentices feel they are being involved.

Although pupil involvement receives the lowest score in the Pupil Survey, there has been relatively good progress made in respect of these questions in the period. More local school authorities report an increasing degree of pupil participation and improved awareness of how and why it is important to involve the pupils. One general point to take away from the reports is that pupil involvement/participation is seen as important by both teachers and schools. At the same time many respondents say it is difficult to involve the pupils and apprentices in a productive manner in the assessment process (local school authorities' final reports, evaluations of seminars for resource persons).

Both teachers and pupils find that setting clear objectives and criteria before the learning begins is a motivating factor for the pupils (final reports 2012–2017, Sandvik and Bruland 2013). *"The pupils believe that good assessment practices with clear objectives and criteria in which they themselves are actively involved in their own learning process and those of their peers are conducive to learning, motivation and attainment" (p. 176).* The pupils responding to this survey want to see more participation and clearer feedback, and they say that assessment is important to their learning.

More systematic work on assessment for learning has also led more schools to look more closely at their marking practices as part of the formative assessment process. Feedback from local school authorities and county governors indicates that more schools have scaled back their use of grades, although the directorate does not have the full details. The media has also reported on this trend on several occasions, e.g. the *Aftenposten* and *VG* newspapers cite associate professor Siv Gamlem (12.02.2018) [16][17] when they write that several lower secondary schools are abandoning grades. According to Gamlem, there has been a shift in the use of grades since the Directorate for Education and Training launched the Assessment for Learning programme. She claims to see a change in Norwegian schools towards fewer grades and more emphasis being placed on working methods and learning processes.

> *"More and more people understand that grades can impede learning, and a growing number of schools are trying to roll them back. The question is whether they feel they can remove them altogether. If a school does not have a good learning and assessment culture, they will face a problem in that the pupils do not know where they stand. The key is to give assessments that improve the quality of the pupils' work"*, Gamlem says (Aftenposten and VG 12.02.2018).

3.1.3 More consistent assessment terminology?

The research and development conducted as part of the programme has revealed a need to create a common nomenclature and language for assessment. This also applies to the communication between schools and training establishments / examination boards. The language used to talk about assessment impacts the quality of the co-operation between colleagues as well as the learning dialogue with pupils

---

[16] https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/i/9jg0W/Flere-ungdomsskoler-dropper-karakterer
[17] https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/p6WjmW/flere-ungdomsskoler-kutter-karakterbruk

and apprentices. A professional assessment language for quality must be developed through collective interpretation and has nothing to do with individual teachers' personal preferences and styles. Developing a common understanding of the curriculum and assessment requires dialogue and co-operation. Working together in learning networks has been found to be an appropriate method for creating a common understanding of concepts and principles and what constitutes quality. Some county governors have also pointed out that teachers struggle to describe pupils' competencies in a subject when responding to appeals against grades (Directorate for Education and Training 2015), something which could suggest a need for a more concise vocabulary around curriculum and assessment.

The evaluation of a trial involving half-yearly assessments with one or two grades in Norwegian (NIFU 2018) shows that when the number of formal tests is reduced, teachers tend to give increased ongoing feedback without grades. The report shows that pupils do not always understand the feedback and feel that a numbered grade provides clearer information. The researchers recommend continuing to improve the quality of the language teachers use when talking about assessment with their pupils – a language the pupils understand and which can serve as a tool for both teacher and pupil in the pupils' learning process. The key factor in promoting learning is *how* the teachers talk to their pupils about the learning process.

3.2 Increased understanding of the curriculum and more active use of it

The link between good assessment practices, understanding the curriculum and local curriculum planning has been central to the programme.

According to NIFU's Questions for Norwegian Schools (2017), 95% of school leaders agree that the work done on assessment for learning in the last 6–8 years has strengthened local curriculum planning. Questions were posed to respondents irrespective of whether or not they had participated in the programme. The feedback from the survey shows that the assessment for learning process has resulted in more active use of the curriculum, increased awareness of the link between assessment and local curriculum planning and improved awareness of the content of the national curriculum amongst pupils.

This impression is validated by the local school authorities' feedback on the AfL programme. A majority of local school authorities report that the programme has helped increase co-operation and led to more systematic discussions about assessment and the curriculum. This has increased awareness and resulted in more active use of the curriculum. It has made some local school authorities look at local curriculum planning with a fresh pair of eyes and to look more closely at – and potentially revise – the local curriculum.

NIFU (2017) shows that many school leaders have the impression that most teachers within a given discipline work together to gain a common understanding of what constitutes competence in the subject. Some county councils state that the assessment project has made training establishments participating in the programme more aware of the contents of the curriculum.

Sandvik et al. (2012)[18] find that there are differences in how schools interpret the concept of competence as applied in the Knowledge Promotion reform. The researchers highlight the problems associated with setting local learning objectives that do not reflect or are not linked to the learning objectives described in the curriculum. They also warn of the risk of setting a number of narrow local learning objectives which are assessed through frequent testing, something which could lead to fragmentation and surface learning (Sandvik et al. 2012; Hodgson et al. 2011; 2012). This is also reflected in an analysis of local curricula which found that there is a relatively weak correlation between a school's annual plans and the weekly plans and schemes of work for individual year groups and classes (Sandvik et al. 2013).

School leaders broadly feel that a majority of teachers see the learning objectives in context and that they set coursework grades on the basis of a broad range of source materials (NIFU 2017). Feedback from the county governors, meanwhile, suggests that some teachers and school leaders fail to see the different parts of the curriculum in context when setting coursework grades. The high attendance figures and feedback from the county seminars on coursework assessment in 2016–2018 show that there is still a need to focus on the link between curriculum interpretation and assessment.

3.2.1 Reduction in the number of appeals against coursework grades

Various surveys and feedback obtained during the programme indicate that the path to good coursework assessment is through good formative assessment (Directorate for Education and Training 2015, NIFU 2014, NTNU 2013, local school authorities' reports). Assessment practices become transparent and predictable once it is made clear to the pupils what they will learn and what is expected of them. It also means that their coursework grades do not come as a surprise, because the pupils have gained a better insight into how coursework is assessed and grades are set. Some local school authorities report that the programme has made teachers more confident in making formative assessments, which makes it easier for them to set grades and justify them (local school authorities report cohort 2).

Appeals made against coursework grades[19] do not in themselves provide any information about assessment practices. The most common reasons for upholding an appeal are procedural and technical errors or teachers failing to make an overall assessment of the pupils' competencies, especially failing to provide adequate references to the learning objectives (Directorate for Education and Training 2015).

There was a steady decline in the number of appeals against coursework grades at the lower secondary stage along with a nationwide drop in the number of appeals being upheld by the county governors in the period 2010–2014 (Directorate for Education and Training 2015). This trend is confirmed in the county governors' annual reports from 2017 in which several governors reported a reduction in the number of appeals against coursework grades. For example, in 2016 the county governor of Oslo and Akershus reported a 50% fall in appeals against coursework grades since 2009, following a period of steady decline. The county governor believes that one main reason for the decline is the work done by

---

[18] Sandvik et al. (2012): Vurdering i skolen. Intensjoner og forståelse. Interim report 1 from the project "Forskning på individuell vurdering i skolen" (FIVIS).

[19] How appeals against coursework grades are processed: https://www.udir.no/regelverk-og-tilsyn/finn-regelverk/etter-tema/Vurdering/behandling-av-klager-pa-standpunktkarakterer-i-fag/4.-hva-skal-klageinstansen-se-pa/

schools on formative assessment over time (county governor of Oslo and Akershus' website, published 28.04.2016[20]).

Directors of education in several counties point out that the efforts to improve assessment skills amongst teachers and school leaders through the AfL programme have had a positive effect on coursework grading practices (*Utdanningsnytt* 11.04.2018[21]; NRK Møre og Romsdal 10.07.2015[22]; Møre og Romsdal county governor's website published 07.07.2015[23], NRK Hedmark og Oppland[24]).

It is difficult to draw any conclusions on the overall number of appeals against coursework grades in upper secondary education and training since they are the responsibility of the county councils. However, a review of the appeals statistics for the period 2010–2014 does indicate a slight fall in appeals and overturned grades (Directorate for Education and Training 2015). A majority of county councils state that they have been getting to grips with appeals and monitored the statistics for some time. With only a few exceptions, they report a decline in the number of coursework appeals over time. Several county councils take the view that improved assessment practices have contributed to the decline (final report 2012).

3.3 Enhanced learning processes

Local school authorities have been responsible for setting up learning networks as part of the programme. There has been considerable leeway as to how the local and/or regional networks are organised, but the organisers are required to facilitate meeting places across different schools and training establishments. Local school authorities have also been able to draw on existing networks.

There has been a variety of approaches to structuring the networks and development processes in terms of organisation and methodology. Many participants found it beneficial to use existing network structures. The learning networks have served as an important learning arena in most cases, and the participants report that the set-up is working. Most local school authorities say that the learning networks have been key to further developing assessment practices. Only 13% of local school authorities in the sixth cohort state that the networks have not played an important role (final report cohort 6, 2017).

The county councils have experienced varying degrees of success in involving vocational training providers in the learning networks. The participating training establishments and apprenticeship training offices say they have benefited from joining networks with teachers and that this has increased their   awareness   of   formative   assessment.

The network model with professional development, knowledge sharing and reflection appears to have been one factor for success and looks to have helped create a more systematic approach to improving assessment skills (local school authorities' final report). The evaluation of the Knowledge Promotion reform found that dialogue and co-operation in networks was not commonplace during the introduction of the reform. The researchers cited assessment as an exception whereby skills development was aimed at teachers in the form of initiatives organised as learning networks and dialogue-based development processes (Aasen et al. 2012).

---

[20] https://www.fylkesmannen.no/Oslo-og-Akershus/Barnehage-og-opplaring/Grunnskole-og-videregaende-opplaring/Klage-pa-standpunktkarakterer1/
[21] https://www.utdanningsnytt.no/nyheter/2018/april/farre-elevar-klagar-pa-standpunktkarakteren/
[22] https://www.nrk.no/mr/fa-klager-pa-karakterene-1.12609891
[23] https://www.fylkesmannen.no/More-og-Romsdal/Om-oss/Presserom/Klager-pa-standpunktkarakterer-nesten-halvert/
[24] https://www.nrk.no/ho/faerre-klager-pa-standpunktkarakter-1.11756691

According to the reports, the networks have contributed to a culture of sharing and a dialogue on assessment practices as well as increased co-operation on assessment within and between schools. This is in line with the OECD's findings in the first phase of the programme, which showed that setting up learning networks between schools helped enable knowledge sharing and provided peer support during the implementation process (OECD 2013).

At the same time, experience shows that it can be challenging to build a committed learning network and meet the various needs of the participants. Some county councils have also said that it is difficult to reconcile the skills needs and assessment cultures of different training establishments and schools. One particular challenge can be to lead and monitor the networks so that they help develop practices, including in the form of development processes taking place in between seminars and linking to the work taking place in the school / training establishment. Mandatory exercises and "homework" are described in the reports as important in order to give the process impetus. It can take time for the participants to develop a common understanding. The networks do not always work as intended if the participants feel that few demands are placed on them in terms of attendance, participation and contribution at the meetings and seminars.

3.4 Local school authorities and school leaders are drivers in the development process

The programme has stipulated that local school authorities and school leaders should be the drivers in the local development process. The OECD (2013) finds that municipalities where there is good interaction between the school, school leadership and local school authorities are likely to be more successful with their development process.

According to Federici (2017a), both local school authorities and school leaders have played a key role and sees as drivers in the local development process, although this varies according to the size of the school and municipality. It finds that school leaders and owners in the largest schools and municipalities are more involved in and positive about the assessment for learning process. The local school authorities reports give the impression that outcomes of the programme and involvement are not linked to municipality size.

Many of them report that the school leader's/head teachers role and ongoing commitment are the key to success. This is consistent with research pointing out that the school leadership plays a vital role in developing a school's assessment culture and practices and that schools with good assessment practices also have a collective outlook and strong management (Sandvik og Bruland 2013 and 2014).

Proactive local school authorities have been working closely with the schools and training establishments, e.g. in the form of early involvement, regular meetings with the school leadership, dialogue, school visits and guidance. As well as organising the network seminars, proactive local school authorities have maintained an ongoing dialogue with the participants about their needs while continuing to observe what is happening in the field of practice. The participants have welcomed the local school authorities' visibility during the programme and how they have enabled and supported the development processes taking place in the schools. Many of them stress the importance of institutionalising the programme amongst the leadership to ensure a structured process with genuine involvement of school leaders capable of setting priorities (final reports).

As many of the participants have highlighted, changing cultures and practices is time-consuming, and in certain phases of the development process, some find that it is too resource-intensive to be of benefit. Bringing about lasting changes in practices also takes time and effort, especially in cases where the new practices challenge existing attitudes and established views on pupils, knowledge and learning (local school authorities' final reports).

3.4.1 Assessment for learning in special needs education

Many local authorities have found it difficult to practise the principles for assessment for learning in relation to special needs education in the same way that they practise them in mainstream provision (local school authorities' final reports). The educational psychology service (PPT) was only marginally involved in the first few cohorts, but it has since been increasingly asked to participate in the local authorities' programmes in the latter cohorts. Local authorities that involve the PPT have returned positive feedback stating that it is highly beneficial to include the PPT in the programme. Several local school authorities wish to see the PPT involved at a system level and stress that insights into assessment for learning and the schools' assessment practices will help inform expert evaluations in terms of design and advice in consultation with the pupil and their parents and in partnership with the school.

3.5 Positive effects of co-ordination with other national programmes

The Assessment for Learning programme has been linked to the Developing Secondary Schools in particular, the two programmes having run simultaneously in the latter phase of the programme period. Both programmes have adopted learning networks as a main working method, and assessment for learning has been a recurring theme when schools have been working on the Developing Secondary Schools programme.

The feedback suggests that participation in both programmes has boosted development locally. Many participants point to the advantage of being able to transfer the development process from one programme to the next using existing structures. They also state that participation in Developing Secondary Schools and/or SkoleVFL-MOOC has helped give the assessment for learning process a more school-based perspective on development (local school authorities' final reports).

Participants simultaneously involved in Assessment for Learning and Developing Secondary Schools report positive effects on their school-based development processes. One recurring theme has been how local school authorities can link the programme to other development processes in their schools, something which involves setting priorities according to circumstances and needs.

The indicator report from the Developing Secondary Schools project describes continued positive development in schools as a result of the project. Most county governors state that improved assessment practices are said to be one key explanation for the good outcomes of the development process. This suggests that Assessment for Learning, which has run parallel to the Developing Secondary Schools project, has had a positive impact on many schools' participation in the latter (indicator report, Directorate for Education and Training 2018).

The final report from the advisory team (2013) indicates that Assessment for Learning has been an important tool for school development.

3.6 To what extent is the development process being continued locally?

One critical factor for success, according to the OECD (2013), is the transition from enthusiastic pilot projects attracting attention and (much) support to standard practice being established everywhere, especially if the support only involves disseminating knowledge and learning. Understanding the issues at hand takes time.

On the whole, local school authorities want to continue and further develop assessment for learning after participating in the programme, although the scope and specifics of their plans do vary. 58% of the local school authorities (in the sixth cohort) say they have concrete plans in place for continuing the process, while 40% say they have some plans in place. However, the final reports show considerable discrepancies in how the local school authorities are planning to take the process further and in how specific and committed the plans are. Many local school authorities see the Assessment for Learning programme as part of a wider skills development project and more of a long-term initiative.

Many of them stress that development requires perseverance from everyone involved, while many local school authorities express concern as to how they will be able to maintain momentum, focus and enthusiasm once their participation comes to an end. County councils have identified specific challenges around continuing the initiative in vocational training and how to ensure that all apprentices / trainees across a large number of training establishments are given good formative assessment (final report cohort 2).[25]

Examples of ways in which local school authorities plan are planning to continue with their work on assessment for learning include retaining the networks and resource persons, creating steering groups at a local school authorities and regional level, ensuring knowledge sharing and organising dialogue conferences, allocating time for day seminars while maintaining focus by holding regular meetings, seminars for head teachers and school leaders, and participating in SkoleVFL-MOOC. Many school owners aim to continue working with external experts, and many of them plan to link their work on assessment for learning to other development processes.

Municipal education officer Anne Bergem had the following to say about development in the municipality: *"The initiatives introduced at a school and municipal level as part of the Assessment for Learning programme are a good example of good school-based development. Solid research and theory, high ambitions and emphasis on learning together with the creation of common standards have been cited as success factors for the four-year period and for the work taking place in our schools going forward"* (*Eidsvoll Ullensaker Blad* 09.9.2017).

Local school authorities consistently report that the way the programme was organised has been conducive to effecting change locally (local school authorities' reports). The local school authorities

---

[25] Concrete issues mentioned in the county councils' final reports are: High turnover of instructors and the fact that persons other than the instructor are involved in training the apprentice. The training establishments' revenue and production requirements mean that it is more difficult to send instructors on skills development courses.

have had different points of departure, capacity and experience in relation to assessment and development processes. Many of them highlight how the resources available at udir.no/vfl and the Directorate's seminars for local school authorities have been of help in the local development process.

Especially during the first phase of the programme, the Directorate learnt that school leaders did not receive sufficient support from the local school authorities in the development process. For that reason, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences[1] was in 2014 tasked with developing an online school-based development programme for assessment for learning (SkoleVFL-MOOC). The course is open to all schools irrespective of participation in the programme, and it offers direct support to school leaders on running collective processes and to teachers on developing their practices. Many schools have participated in both the online course and the Assessment for Learning programme concurrently. In response to feedback from the county councils, an online development programme for assessment aimed at training establishments, examination boards and county councils is currently in development and will be launched in autumn 2018.

The local school authorities' representatives have included both heads of education / local school authorities employees and/or head teachers who have been assigned responsibility for the programme. However, experience shows that the local facilitator and the way in which the local school authorities has been involved have been critical factors. The degree to which the process has been institutionalised at each school and the extent to which the development process actually reaches the classroom were other crucial elements. As with other development projects, one vulnerable point is the failure of those most involved / key resource persons to adequately institutionalise the process in the organisation and/or leaving their jobs.

4. Practices must continue to evolve

Findings from the Pupil Survey, local school authorities reports and the single inspection regime in 2014–2017 and 2018–2021[1] show that there is still a need to maintain focus on formative assessment going forward.

In brief, there are six areas in particular that pose a challenge and which we believe must be tackled:

- involving pupils and apprentices in the learning process
- practising assessment for learning in line with the underlying intentions
- linking systematic work on assessment for learning to curriculum planning – especially planning for learning
- raising the quality of the assessment language being used
- reinforcing the link between and the quality of formative and coursework assessment
- improving assessment skills and the understanding of AfL amongst stakeholders outside schools / training establishments to support the schools

One thing to take away from the programme is that it is difficult to communicate the ideas that underpin assessment for learning and convert them into good practice. There is therefore a general risk that assessment practices become simplified and reduced to a set of rehearsed procedures and mechanical processes that do not promote reflected practice and learning. To prevent a narrow, instrumental interpretation, it is vital that teachers/instructors, school leaders, parents/carers and pupils/apprentices have a clear understanding of the reasons for changing existing assessment practices.

It is important to continue to promote, reiterate and work towards assessment practices that are consistent with the very essence of assessment for learning – i.e. the pupil's or apprentice's learning – and that there is support and skills development to that end at all levels of the education system.

Assessment practices and subject renewal

The new core curriculum emphasises the importance of formative assessment practices. One important intention in light of White Paper 28 (2015–2016) is that the curriculum should aid deep learning. The active role played by pupils and apprentices in the learning process is at the core of the concept of deep learning. Learning and understanding something thoroughly requires active participation by the learner in their own learning processes together with learning strategies and the ability to assess their own attainment and progress. This is closely linked to the principles for assessment for learning.

Along with other learning principles for promoting deep learning, the principles for assessment for learning provide a useful approach for schools / training establishments when working with pupils/apprentices to enable them to understand what they will be learning, understand and see correlations in the syllabus, reflect on their own comprehension and learning process. Assessment is a powerful tool. The practice of asking pupils/apprentices to recount factual knowledge rather than understand correlations can help "short circuit" the deep learning process. The same can happen if they repeatedly have negative experiences in relation to their performance. Continued focus on developing assessment practices further along with good learning processes are therefore part of the agenda when realising the intentions behind the subject renewal.

The subject renewal will see the subject curricula, other regulations and resources increasingly lend support to formative and fair assessment practices. The new subject curricula should include subject-specific descriptions of feedback to support formative and final assessment, and they should also demonstrate how formative assessment should promote learning. In order to aid assessment, attainment indicators will also be set similar to the learning objectives used at the primary and lower secondary stages and in upper secondary core subjects. Other resources could also help further develop assessment practices in primary and secondary education.

This report along with other documentation show that much has happened in the field of assessment and professional practice during the programme period. In order to continue the good work, all stakeholders in the education system working to promote pupils' and apprentices' learning must pay attention to the correlations between curriculum, learning and assessment. Creating a common thread in the development process and continuing to build on experiences, networks and expertise locally while developing new knowledge where practice, research and policy converge will be crucial going forward.

References

Aasen, P., J. Møller, E.M. Rye, E. Ottesen, T. S. Prøitz & F. (2012) Kunnskapsløftet som styringsreform – et løft eller et løfte? Forvaltningsnivåenes og institusjonenes rolle i implementeringen av reformen. Oslo: NIFU, University of Oslo.

Black, P & D. Wiliam (1998) Inside the Black Box. Raising Standards through Classroom Assessment. London: King's College London.

Dysthe, O. (2008) Klasseromsvurdering og læring. Article in Bedre skole 4/2008, pp.16–23.

Elwood, J. and V. Klenowski (2006) Creating Communities of Shared Practice: The challenges of assessment use in learning and teaching.

FAFO (2009) Sluttrapport fra evalueringen av Kompetanseutviklingsstrategien 2005–2008. Oslo

Federici, Roger André (2017a) Vurdering for læring. Tilleggsrapport til Spørsmål til Skole-Norge spring 2017. Oslo: NIFU.

Research Council of Norway (2009) Norsk utdanningsforskning fram mot 2020 (2009–2018). Research Council of Norway 2009.

Fullan, M. (2007) The new meaning of educational change. New York: Teachers College Press.

Gardner J, W. Harlen, L. Hayward & G. Stobart (2008) Changing Assessment Practice: Process, Principles and Standards. Assessment Reform Group.   ISBN 9780853899297.

Cay Gjerustad C, E. Waagene, R. A. Federici (2017a) Spørsmål til Skole-Norge autumn 2016: Resultater og analyse fra Utdanningsdirektoratets spørreundersøkelse blant skoler og skoleeiere. Report 2016. Oslo: NIFU.

Hartberg, E., S. Dobson & L. Gran (2012) Feedback i skolen. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.

Hattie, J. & H. Timperley (2007) The Power of Feedback. Review of Educational Research 22 (1).

Helland Larsen, J., K. Vaagland, R.A. Federici (2017b) Vurdering for læring – Resultater og analyser av skoler og skoleeieres svar på spørsmål om vurderingspraksis. Oslo: NIFU

Hodgson J. et al. (2010) På vei fra læreplan til klasserom. Om læreres tolkning, planlegging og syn på LK06. NF report no. 3/2010. Bodø: Nordlandsforskning.

Hodgson, J., W. Rønning and P. Tomlinson (2012) Sammenhengen Mellom Undervisning og Læring. En studie av læreres praksis og deres tenkning under Kunnskapsløftet. Bodø: Nordlandsforskning.

Hopfenbeck, T.N. (2011) Fra teoretiske modeller til klasseromspraksis: Hvordan fremme selvregulert læring? Norsk pedagogisk tidsskrift no. 05.

Hopfenbeck, T.N., A. Tolo, T. Florez and Y. El Masri (2013) Balancing Trust and Accountability? The Assessment for Learning Programme in Norway. A Governing Complex Education Systems Case Study. Oxford University and University of Bergen.

Hopfenbeck, T. N., M.T. F. Petour & A. Tolo (2015) Assessment in Education Principles, 22 (1) 44-66 Balancing tensions in educational policy reforms: large-scale implementation of Assessment for Learning in Norway.

Hopfenbeck, T.N., G. Stobart (2015) Assessment in Education Principles, 22 (1) Lesson Learned from Large-Scale Evaluations of Implementations.

Department of Teacher Education and School Research & Rambøll (2013) Forskningsbasert evaluering av ordningen med Veilederkorps. Final report.

Katz, S., L. M. Earl and S. Ben Jafaar (2009) Building and Connecting Learning Communities. The Power of Networks for School Improvement.

Klette, K. (2003) Klasserommets praksisformer etter Reform 97. Synthesis report. Oslo: Department of Educational Research.

Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. White Paper no. 16 (2006–2007) … og ingen sto igjen. Tidlig innsats for livslang læring. Oslo.

Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. White Paper 20 (2012–2013) På rett vei – Kvalitet og mangfold i fellesskolen, Innst. 432 S (2012–2013). Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research.

Lund, T. (2011) Skoler i nettverk-Dialogkonferanser som læringsarena. Gyldendal Akademisk ISBN 9788205361157 pp. 161–179.

Marshall, B. & M.J. Drummond (Published online 2007): How teachers engage with Assessment for Learning: Lessons from the classroom. Research Papers in Education Volume 21, 2006

OECD (2005) Equity in Education. Country Note. Thematic review.

Ottesen, E., J. Møller (ed.) (2010) Underveis, men i svært ulikt tempo. Et blikk inn i ti skoler etter tre år med Kunnskapsløftet. Report 37/2010. Oslo: Faculty of Educational Sciences.

Prøitz, T. and J. S. Borgen (2010) Rettferdig standpunktvurdering – det (u)muliges kunst? Læreres setting av standpunktkarakter i fem fag i grunnopplæringen. Report 16/2010. Oslo: NIFU.

Sandvik, L. V., G. Engvik, H. Fjørtoft, I. D. Langseth, B. E. Aaslid, S. Mordal and T. Buland (ed.) (2012) Vurdering i skolen. Intensjoner og forståelser. Interim report 1 from the project "Forskning på individuell vurdering i skolen" (FIVIS). Trondheim: NTNU, Department of Teacher Education, and SINTEF.

Sandvik, L. V. and T. Buland (ed.) (2013) Vurdering i skolen. Operasjonaliseringer og praksiser. Interim report 2 from the project "Forskning på individuell vurdering i skolen" (FIVIS). Trondheim: NTNU, Department of Teacher Education, and SINTEF.

Sandvik, L. V. and T. Buland (ed.) (2014) Vurdering i skolen. Utvikling av kompetanse og fellesskap. Final report 2 from the project "Forskning på individuell vurdering i skolen" (FIVIS). Trondheim: NTNU, Department of Teacher Education, and SINTEF.

Seland, I., E. Hovdhaugen, B. Lødding, T.S. Prøitz, E. Rønsen (2018) Sluttrapport fra evaluering av forsøk med halvårsvurdering med én eller to karakterer i norsk. Report 9/2018. Oslo: NIFU

Stray, Ingunn E. (2017) Teachers' ways in times of fluidity – idiosyncratic cultural responses to global educational reform movements". University of Agder.

Throndsen, I., T. N. Hopfenbeck, S. Lie and E.L. Dahle (2009) Bedre vurdering for læring – Report from "Evaluering av modeller for kjennetegn på måloppnåelse av fag". Oslo: University of Oslo ILS.

University of Tromsø/Arctic University of Norway (2017) Men det skjer ikke av seg sjøl likevel … Utvidet deltakerundersøkelse av det skolebaserte kompetanseutviklingsprogrammet SkoleVFL 1.0. Tromsø: University of Tromsø.

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2010) Memorandum no. 1.

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2012–2017) The directorate's review of local school authorities' reports, cohorts 1–6.

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2012) Evaluation of the Knowledge Promotion reform. 2006–2012. The Directorate for Education and Training's summary of the evaluation.

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2014): "Et trygt og likeverdig tilbud av høy kvalitet. Fylkesmennenes tilsyn med opplærings- og barnehageområde i 2014"

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2015) Rapport om utviklingen av klager på standpunktkarakterer fra 2010 til 2015. Kvantitative og kvalitative dato fra fylkesmannsembeter og fylkeskommuner.

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2016) Fylkesmannens tilsyn med barnehage- og opplæringsområdet i 2016

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2017a) Fylkesmannens tilsyn med barnehage- og opplæringsområdet i 2017

Vibe m.fl. (2009) Å være ungdomsskolelærer i Norge. Results from the OECD's international teaching and learning survey (TALIS). Report 23/2009. Oslo: NIFU STEP.

Vibe, N., E. Hovdhaugen (2012) Spørsmål til Skole-Norge autumn 2012: Resultater og analyse fra Utdanningsdirektoratets spørreundersøkelse blant skoler og skoleeiere. Report 47/2012. Oslo: NIFU.

Vibe, N., B. Lødding (2014) Spørsmål til Skole-Norge spring 2014: Resultater og analyse fra Utdanningsdirektoratets spørreundersøkelse blant skoler og skoleeiere. Report 26/2014. Oslo: NIFU.

Wiliam, D. (2010) The role of formative assessment in effective learning environments. I Dumont, H., D. Istance and F. Benavides (ed.) The nature of learning. Using research to inspire practice. Paris: OECD Publishing.