Introduction
This chapter outlines a programme-led approach to Assessment for Learning (Afl) taken through the BA (Hons) Sports Development with Coaching programme in the Division of Sport Sciences at Northumbria University. The case study outlines key steps taken to initiate and develop a cultural shift towards assessment for learning in sport.

The objectives of this case study are:

- To provide an overview of an approach taken by the Division of Sport Sciences to design innovative assessment practices which enhance the adoption of Afl in an undergraduate degree.
- To highlight key distinctive features of a programme-led assessment strategy that distinguishes it from a more module-based approach.
- To provide summary evaluative information on key success factors derived from a range of stakeholders including students, employers and academic staff involved in the management and delivery of the programme.
- To outline lessons learned and ongoing challenges in achieving a cultural shift in terms of moving from traditional didactic approaches to more student-centred interactive approaches to assessment for learning within sport.

Keywords: assessment for learning, assessment strategies, engagement, programme-led
Context and Rationale

Northumbria University was awarded a Centre of Excellence for Learning (CETL), specifically for Assessment for Learning, in 2005. The University Teaching and Learning Strategy 2007–10 includes developing assessment as a tool for effective learning as a key area of that strategy area. One strategic objective for the university is to ‘operationalise the six CETL Assessment for Learning criteria in all programmes’.

The CETL in Assessment for Learning at Northumbria University, proposes six conditions for the support of AfL, which are developed through a learning environment that:

1. Emphasises authenticity and complexity in the content and methods of assessment rather than reproduction of knowledge and reductive measurement.
2. Uses high-stakes summative assessment rigorously but sparingly rather than as the main driver for learning.
3. Offers students extensive opportunities to engage in the kinds of tasks that develop and demonstrate their learning, thus building their confidence and capabilities before they are summatively assessed.
4. Is rich in feedback derived from formal mechanisms e.g. tutor comments on assignments, student self-review logs.
5. Is rich in informal feedback (for example, peer review of draft writing, collaborative project work) which provides students with a continuous flow of feedback on ‘how they are doing’.
6. Develops students’ abilities to direct their own learning, evaluate their own progress and attainments and support the learning of others.

For more, see http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/cetl_afl/whatis/?view=Standard

The case study examines these six criteria and documents how the CETL plays a large part in working with university Schools and Divisions to embed AfL. It explains how members of staff within the Division of Sport Sciences have become affiliated to the CETL (AfL) as CETL Associates, and are working with the CETL to further develop excellence in teaching and learning within the Division. At the heart of our approach to embedding AfL across the degree programme is a clear academic rationale based on assessment for learning principles. The case study outlines our commitment to developing assessment procedures that address factors that contribute to learning and help build an individual’s enthusiasm for learning (Broadfoot, 2008).

The BA (Hons) Sports Development with Coaching programme is a significant part of the sport undergraduate portfolio at Northumbria University. There are approximately 70 students per year on this programme, which includes core modules such as Managing and Developing Sport; Sport in Society; Community Sports Development; Strategic and Development Planning in Sport; Sport Organisations: Policy to Practice; and Sports Equity. Students also undertake a work placement in the second year, and can opt to take a Professional Development through Sport module.
which provides further placement learning and assessment in their final year. The case study details the main features of our AfL approach adopted through this programme over the course of 18 months.

Description

Investigating staff understanding of AfL and assessment processes

One of the first elements in the process of embedding AfL was to explore the current knowledge and understanding of sport staff. A small team of CETL associates in sport worked together to devise an interview schedule to probe staff views of assessment, their knowledge of formative assessment, and their current assessment practices, at the same time identifying any barriers or issues which stood in the way of them setting their ‘ideal assessment’ for students in their specific sport modules. A research assistant was employed to undertake semi-structured interviews, which were then transcribed, anonymised, and returned to the CETL team for analysis. The initial findings from this study were then fed back to staff. An important part of this initial process was to gain staff trust in the CETL team and to see their approach as a focus on enhancement of the assessment process rather than as a quality assurance mechanism.

Implementing initial staff workshops and learning teaching and assessment (LTA) forums

Following the research into staff knowledge and understanding of assessment for learning, a series of staff workshops were delivered by sport CETL associates and a learning and teaching advisor. The workshops centred on explaining assessment for learning, giving examples of good and innovative practice in sports development, and responding to staff queries as to how to develop innovative assessment for learning practices within the context of widening participation and increasing numbers of students on sports courses. Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Forums were established within the Division to occur twice per semester for all staff. These forums were on a range of topics and included staff development on providing feedback; marking consistency; and innovative assessment practices.

Involving students in assessments

An important element of our strategy of moving towards more student centred assessment was to involve students in the assessment process. Student representatives in their final year were invited to review a number of assessment outlines and marking criteria for sport modules. They were asked to make comments on the clarity and learning value of the assessment from a student perspective. Student comments were then fed into the next assessment panel process within the Division. The assessment panel is an internal process which evaluates staff assessments before they are sent to external examiners. The panel pays attention to leviness, consistency and clarity of assessment across the programme, and makes recommendations for change where appropriate.

To further engage students in assessment processes, staff were encouraged to involve students in ‘assessment dialogues’ within their specific modules. This was to
facilitate shared understandings between tutors and students regarding the nature of the assessment (Carless, 2006).

Away day to discuss programme assessment strategies

A staff away day was held at the end of the academic year 2007-8. This was an opportunity to highlight the importance of a programme level approach and share experiences. Staff programme teams were invited to audit their current practices and were given time and space to discuss and review their programme assessment strategies in relation to assessment for learning. This also involved a mapping exercise of module assessments and outcomes against the programme learning outcomes (both skills and content based). Programme leaders took notes from these meetings to be followed up in programme team discussions in 2008-9.

Assessment changes in relation to a new academic calendar

During the academic year 2008-9, the university made the decision to amend the academic calendar for 2009-10 towards two thirteen-week semesters, an earlier start in January, and an identified assessment period for three weeks after Easter. Part of the aim of the calendar change was to reduce the number of examinations held in January, and to be more flexible in assessment approaches. The change in the academic calendar was timely, in that it followed the assessment discussions in the Division. Hence, unlike other Divisions, we were prepared and in a positive frame of mind to be making assessment changes. A management team meeting was held to identify a time-line for changes, and to include time for further programme levels discussions as well as administrative deadlines for module changes.

Identification of formative assessment strategies in all assessment outlines to students

Part of the university teaching and learning strategy included asking staff to identify their formative assessment practices in module descriptors. Within sport, staff were asked to incorporate both formative and summative assessment into their module assessment briefs to be distributed to students at the beginning of the semester. In this way, the role of feedback as a way of enabling feed-forward (Duncan, 2007) to future tasks was to become explicit in student documentation. Staff were encouraged to identify tutor and peer feedback opportunities, both written and oral.

Evaluation

Modules incorporating Afl

Table 1 provides an indication of how Afl principles were incorporated into specific modules across the Sports Development with Coaching programme. Module tutors were requested to engage the students in formative feedback. This was important both when introducing new assessment methods and where assessment modes remained quite traditional. For example, where a more traditional multiple choice question (MCQ) examination was used as a summative assessment, the module leader facilitated a formative assessment session where students designed questions, held a quiz and discussed both answers and questions. For a more
innovative approach, a take-home exam assessment, the module tutor held assessment workshops on a mock exam earlier in the semester. This allowed the students a variety of opportunities for feedback on tasks that helped develop their learning. Types of feedback used within these formative processes are also indicated in Table 1. For further discussion of the engagement with formative feedback refer to Fishwick and Allin, (2009).

Table 1 Afl Approaches in Sports Development with Coaching Modules

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Type</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Feedback Mode</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Peer</th>
<th>Tutor</th>
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<tr>
<td>MCQ Examination</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Sport and Social Issues</td>
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<td>Media headlines portfolio</td>
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<td>Sport and Social issues</td>
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<td>Reflective log</td>
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<td>Personal Skills Development</td>
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<td>Mind Map</td>
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<td>Managing and Developing Sport</td>
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<td>Action-research group project</td>
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<td>Community Sports Development</td>
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<td>Work Placement portfolio</td>
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<td>Sports Development Placement</td>
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<td>Lesson plans</td>
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<td>Coaching Behaviours</td>
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<td>Video coaching session</td>
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<td>Applied Coaching Practice</td>
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<td>Poster</td>
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<td>Sport on the Cultural Agenda</td>
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<td>Awareness Reflective Portfolio</td>
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In general, the module assessments received favourable comments from external examiners. In relation to the overall programme, the external examiner for the Sports Development with Coaching programme made specific reference to the innovative and authentic assessment practices evident within the programme and commented that ‘the range of assessment methods employed is impressive, and there are some imaginative and interesting coursework tasks’.
**Student Engagement with Afl**

In the first year of adoption of Afl, module reviews suggested that students were largely satisfied with the module assessment processes. For example, over 85% of students provided 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' responses to questions relating to the learning and teaching approaches, learning materials, taught sessions, module support, staff accessibility and formative feedback helping them learn in the Community Sports Development module. This module’s summative assessment required the students to engage with outside agencies and organisations to complete a small scale action-research evaluation project and a series of formative assessment workshops were devised to lead them through this process. Almost 95% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the assessment methods used related well to the content and learning outcomes. The module was further evaluated by a focus group and students highlighted the relevance and authenticity of the assessment in terms of having to complete research in the “real world”. One student commented “the difference is though, this module is a lot more practical; the last time we were just given a question and given the results and we had to write the discussion, whereas this time we’ve actually gone out and done it and understand much more about the question.” Another student emphasised the real world nature of the assessment “you’ve got all your theory-based knowledge from your lectures, you can actually apply that to the real world, but then you can draw on that real world experience in other theories, you can make it into something rather than a textbook in front of you.” Overall, the students highly valued the module in terms of the student-centred learning and rated it as invaluable preparation for their dissertation.

In the module Sport on the Cultural Agenda, the summative assessment was a new assessment mode and took the form of a take-home exam made up of three questions. To prepare for this the students were set an independent study task in the form of a mock take-home exam. The question format mirrored the actual exam, ranging from definitions, to theoretical analysis, to application to practice. A discussion board was set up and a specific assessment workshop held which involved peer, self and tutor marking and feedback. The mock exam exercise was fully evaluated using questionnaires and a focus group interview. The students indicated that the mock exam had been challenging and had encouraged them to delve more deeply into the readings. The students also highlighted that they had a much clearer idea of the expectations and requirements for the summative assessment and indicated that the workshop had both motivated them and reassured them about the assessment. The level of engagement with the task of the 30 students was very high, as the discussion board had over 122 threads of discussion, several of which were visited over 50 times. Overall, the results of the evaluation indicated that the students valued highly this different approach to assessment and the opportunity for them to be engaged in assessment dialogues (Black and William, 1998; Rust, O'Donovan and Price, 2003).
Staff Engagement with Afl

Reflections from programme teams, module tutors and the CETL sport team indicate that there was a noticeable shift in terms of the willingness of staff to discuss assessment more openly with each other, and with students. A multi-pronged approach encouraged active engagement of sport staff in assessment for learning via learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) forums, programme meetings and an assessment panel. LTA forums facilitated open discussion about assessment and offered an opportunity to share examples of innovative assessment practices. There was a consensus in the Sport Division that assessment is not just about the grade but about the process of learning. Additionally, there is an appreciation that the processes of feedback and feed-forward are essential elements for engaging students in assessment dialogues. Staff continue to express some concerns at the increasing numbers of students who arrive at university as seemingly dependent learners. Staff identified the need to try different pedagogic approaches to engage students and foster independent learning.

Key Features for success

Listed below are the reflections of the authors on the key features of the approach which enabled the successful incorporation of AfL into the programme:

- **Bottom up approach to gain buy in from staff**
  - The LTA forums and interactive discussions about good practice gave the staff many opportunities to feed into the process of assessment changes.

- **Discussions and ownership within programme teams**
  - The programme level discussions allowed staff to see more clearly how their own assessment requirements fitted into the overall programme strategy. This facilitated discussions on the sequencing and progression of assessments across levels and led to the use of a much greater variety of assessment methods across programmes.

- **Enthusiasm of CETL Associates**
  - The presence of CETL associates within the programme team generated an enthusiasm and expertise about assessment. This in turn encouraged the staff to ask questions and stimulate discussions about assessment practices.

- **Assessment Panel with clear guidelines**
  - The clear guidelines set out by the Assessment Panel and peer review of assessment briefs across the programme improved both the standardisation in terms of requirements within levels of study and the clarity of given tasks.

- **Buy in from students regarding relevance of assessments**
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- Involving the students in the reviewing of assessment criteria, and also increasing the opportunities for assessment dialogues between staff and students, clarified expectations across levels.

- **Ongoing Support available from CETL and CETL Associates**
  
  - The resources available at CETL and the opportunities to discuss assessment issues with like-minded individuals created a vibrant assessment culture within the programme team.

- **Designing innovative assessments for large cohorts without overburdening staff**
  
  - Recognition of the time pressures and potential burden on staff of increasing student numbers led to discussions focused on potential solutions in terms of alternative and innovative assessments.

- **Sharing good practice**
  
  - The willingness to share ideas and examples of what worked and the provision of space and time in terms of the LTA forums was a lynchpin in this approach at a programme level.

**Discussion: challenges and lessons learned**

The success of embedding Afl into the sport programme was not without its challenges. These included the time pressures on academic staff as well as more subtle aspects, such as initial resistance to change traditional assessment modes and uncertainty of academic calendar changes during the process. Staff were understandably concerned about the impact changes would have on workload and the implications for marking, particularly when traditional examination formats were being exchanged for more authentic assessments. They were also concerned that, whilst creative assessment changes might be supported in the informal process, they might be challenged within the more formal Divisional assessment panel. Moreover, the processes for assessment change within the School meant that any changes to assessment type or format within a module descriptor involved the completion and submission of forms to a quality sub-committee.

It was therefore important for the programme director to work with the Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning in the school, to ensure that new assessments could be managed practically within quality assurance frameworks. For example, moving to multiple, in-class assessments with subsequent feedback, rather than one end of semester exam, required prior thought about timetabling, the potential use of computers versus paper-based tests, and how different seminar groups would be managed. Integrating a mind map into the sport development module required consideration of staff training on mind mapping and discussion with members of the assessment panel on equivalence in terms of word length policies for modules at the same level. It was also agreed with the Associate Dean, that for this period of change, changes in assessment dates could be handled at the Divisional level, with minimum bureaucracy. Through all this, the challenge was to ensure a consistent message: that there was support for staff to be creative and take risks in assessment enhancements.
A key lesson learned was to ensure specific action plans were identified after useful programme discussions. It was easy to engage in discussions during an away day, for example, but then the momentum would be lost when notes were not detailed and not followed up immediately staff returned after the summer. It was also important to plan meetings around key dates for programme changes, which required meeting at sometimes difficult times. There remained ongoing challenges in reducing the workload involved in change and working within university administrative deadlines in order for changes to be implemented the following year.

Overall, the process was a successful one in developing understanding of Assessment for Learning with the Sport Division and implementing this at a programme level. One measure of success has been the number of staff having informal discussions about assessment in the corridors, and sharing their thoughts in general conversations or in other staff offices. Success in terms of student learning has been shown through student satisfaction with assessments and there has been the beginning of a cultural shift in terms of the move to more student-centred approaches and students engaging in assessment dialogues. However, it is important to recognise that this initial process of change marks the beginning of a much longer term ongoing process of enhancing assessment within sport. Opportunities for staff development, assessment workshops, sharing of good practice and programme reviews need to continue if the embedding of Assessment for Learning at the programme level is to be sustained.

References


**Biographies**

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