

# LTS Corporate Profile

## AifL – Assessment is for Learning



Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) is the organisation for the development and support of the Scottish curriculum and is at the heart of all the major developments in Scottish education, moving education forward in partnership with local authorities and schools. This corporate profile focuses on the important role that LTS has had in developing the Assessment is for Learning (AifL) programme.

### Triangulation

Formative assessment is of course only one component of Assessment is for Learning – one side of the celebrated triangle that encapsulates the programme's aims. It is however the part that is, as yet, most fully developed in principle and widely embraced in practice.

But the local authorities have begun to move beyond formative assessment to personal learning planning and local moderation, says Norman Emerson. 'So the AifL schools are now looking at those other two sides of the triangle. They can, quite naturally, grow good practice out of formative assessment into personal learning planning. Then there is the whole question of the testing agenda.

'A one-off test is never going to be as reliable and valid as a whole year's teacher assessment of a pupil, based on a range of evidence that has been quality assured through local moderation. The richness in that discussion about pupils' work cannot be overestimated – nor can its value in terms of teachers' professionalism and learning and teaching.

'That is the next stage of Assessment is for Learning.'

### All learners now

A time-travelling teacher from Scotland's past could, until quite recently, have dropped into almost any classroom in the country and felt right at home. The orderly rows of desks, the big blackboards and squeaking chalk, the pupils with heads down or hands up, even some of the school buildings themselves would all have seemed reassuringly familiar.

All that has changed. Pupils now sit around tables and chat to one other; they move about; they answer back; they make startling use of sophisticated technology. Their classroom walls, once stark, sterile and uninviting, are sunbursts of colour and creativity.

But teachers are adaptable. So our time-traveller might not take too long to adjust to the externals of the 21st-century classroom before settling down to the time-honoured business of getting old knowledge into young heads. At this point the teacher would encounter a more fundamental change:

That traditional model of education, which served schools well for thousands of years, is losing its hold on Scotland's classrooms – and for good reasons, quite apart from the difficulty of identifying a core curriculum inside an information explosion. There is now a wealth of evidence that the 'transmission model' of education, with teacher as fount of knowledge and pupil as passive recipient, simply does not work. Instead something more interactive, individual and engaging is required.

### Formative assessment

As Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam wrote in their seminal paper Inside the Black Box, 'Teachers need to know about their pupils' progress and difficulties with learning, so that they can adapt their work to meet their needs – which are often unpredictable and which vary from one pupil to another.'

In short, teachers need to practise formative assessment.

Following a sequence of reviews, research and consultations on assessment initiated by the Scottish Executive in 1998, embedding formative assessment in Scotland's schools became a major objective of Assessment is for Learning, the development programme launched in November 2001.

This programme was firmly grounded in evidence that learning is at its most effective when learners, young or old:

- understand what they are trying to learn and what is expected of them
- are given feedback about the quality of their work and what they can do to make it better
- are given advice on how to improve
- are fully involved in deciding what to do next and who can help.



The Assessment is for Learning programme is overseen by the Assessment Action Group. It comprises representatives from education authorities, schools, university faculties of education, parent groups, professional associations, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS), and the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED).

## Culture change

Action research and case studies in schools were therefore fundamental, right from the start, to Assessment is for Learning. Classroom teachers became key players in shaping practice and policy. It was a huge culture change, says Margo Williamson, Programme Director at Learning and Teaching Scotland:

'It was, I think, quite daunting at first for the schools. We were asking them to engage with research, but we weren't telling them what to do. There was no menu, no set of instructions for people to follow. Instead they were having to design and plan their projects within the broad guidelines of the programme. The development officers at Learning and Teaching Scotland played a crucial role in all this.'

Drawn from the ranks of classroom practitioners who had some experience with the techniques, knowledge of the research, and commitment to the philosophy of formative assessment, the development officers became the catalysts of culture change, both in the classroom and at the interface between policy and practice.

A notable feature, as time passed, was the professional development of the officers themselves, says Carolyn Hutchinson, Head of Assessment at the Scottish Executive's Qualifications, Assessment and Curriculum Division:

'As time passed, these people grew into the understanding that their role is about empowerment and support, and not about being keepers of the truth. It is a model of leadership that actually works – one in which you talk with people, you listen to them and you help them think through their own ideas.'

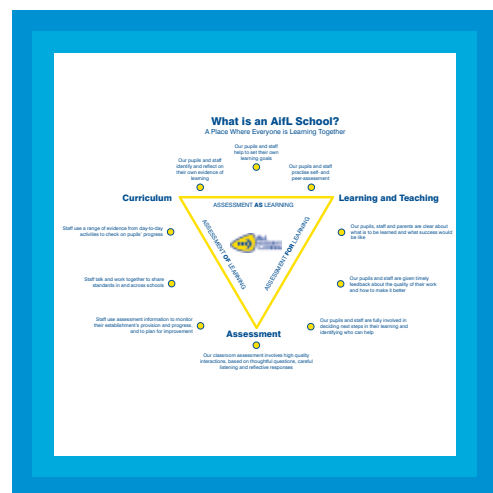
## The impact

Like other educational initiatives, Assessment is for Learning will be judged, in the end, by its impact on pupils and teachers. It is there, in the classroom, that the two culture changes the programme embodies – one in learning, the other in shaping policy – can be seen as twin aspects of a single philosophy: A collaborative approach to learning and teaching based on evidence rather than edict.

'Nobody is up there telling people what to do,' says Norman Emerson. 'We are all part of a community of learners. If we get that culture right among our teachers, researchers, policy makers and inspectors, that will then be a model for our young people.'

'That is vitally important. In trying to produce successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors, we need our teachers to be all those things too. The aim is for every one of Scotland's pupils and teachers to have the confidence to say to anybody:

'I can understand what you're saying, but I don't see it and my experience tells me something different. Let me explain how it seems to me.'



## The methods

Widely welcomed by Scotland's teachers, Assessment is for Learning now forms the focus, together with A Curriculum for Excellence, of school management plans around the country. The methods used by Learning and Teaching Scotland and the Scottish Executive to promote and sustain dialogue among the country's distinct, and traditionally more or less disconnected, groups of education professionals have been a key factor in this success.

'Past initiatives were all about school managers taking what came from on high and passing it on to the troops – who were then supposed to go away and put it into action,' says Norman Emerson, Area Adviser at Learning and Teaching Scotland.

'But initiatives like that came and went, and often had little lasting impact on practice. Teachers were not always convinced by what policy makers and managers, who might not have been in a classroom for years, said they should be doing. Right from the start we wanted Assessment is for Learning to be different.

'So we moved away from that whole idea of experts telling teachers what to do. Instead we've had policy makers sitting down with teachers and learning from them, so that policy was being shaped and changed by teachers' experiences in the classroom.

We've had researchers, who used to be quite remote, in there working with practitioners from the very first day. Even the inspectors have been learning from other professionals.

'All our development work, in fact, has been organised around one basic principle: We are all learners now.'

## Further information

If you would like further information about Assessment is for Learning or copies of our other corporate profiles on A Curriculum for Excellence and Glow, please contact our Customer Services on 08700 100 297 or email [enquiries@LTScotland.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@LTScotland.org.uk) [www.LTScotland.org.uk](http://www.LTScotland.org.uk)