# Introduction to the Issue

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The current issue of AISHE-J was conceived as an opportunity for colleagues across the higher education community to share their responses, individual and collective, to the National Forum for Teaching and Learning's work on the theme assessment *of, for* and *as* learning. In producing an issue themed around the issue of assessment in its many forms and educational contexts, we at AISHE-J are signaling our own appreciation of the importance of the theme. The result is an issue that explores the theme through reflection on practice, research into particular aspects and offers models for innovation. The theme of assessment for learning, with timely feedback designed to promote engagement with learning, is particularly strongly emphasized in the issue. Our contributors have investigated the benefits of technology and engagement with peers in providing feedback that enhances learning. There is a strong concern that assessment should assist the student to effectively across the whole programme, rather than in multiple isolated modules.

When one has spent the greater part of a career working in education, through successive cycles of innovation and their consequences, the first instinct might be to leave it all behind. We are fortunate that Marion Palmer has not chosen to do so[GS1]. Rather she has, in this issue, explored, critiqued and documented her journey in assessment theory and practice as a teacher, lecturer, and an educational developer. In doing so she has opened up to the reader a wide spectrum of approaches, developments and solutions to matters that arise when one is committed to offering students an assessment experience that supports and engages them in their own learning narratives.this is typical of the thoughtful and generous collegiality that has contributed to the pivotal role that Marion has played in education development in Ireland.

Palmer recognizes that thinking about assessment and trying to have a range of assessments to give learners diversity in assessment is an important aspect of education, it is not without dangers, including over assessment and the possibility that the formative elements may be lost in an ocean of summative assessment. She characterizes formative assessment as an 'opportunity to learn, to make mistakes and to retrieve a situation', and as such as something essential to learning.

This is a reflective piece based on professional experience from the past eighteen years, during which the author states:' I have seen assessment change in higher education. There has been robust debate and discussion. This for me has been the most enjoyable part of my assessment journey, challenging myself and my colleagues and both agreeing and disagreeing about the issues.'

One particular dimension of assessment is the subject of the paper, entitled 'Peer assessment of, for and as learning: a core component of an accredited professional development course for Higher Education teachers '. While the potential benefits of peer assessment and feedback are widely acknowledged the literature shows that students are often reluctant to engage with it. In their paper, , Arlene Egan and Laura Costello discuss the role of peer assessment and feedback of, for and as learning. Their paper is particularly interesting in that the students were themselves teachers taking accredited professional development in the area of learning and teaching. Even though participants were teachers, peer assessment and feedback was challenging and there was 'distrust' around it, although it was also valued. On the basis of the findings the authors have developed a model to scaffold the development of skills and confidence in peer assessment. This is likely to be of interest to colleagues across the sector who are interested in implementing any form of peer assessment and/or feedback.

In 'An Analysis of the Impact of Formative Peer Assessment and Screencast Tutor Feedback on Veterinary Nursing Students' Learning, ' Bernadette Brereton and Karen Dunne examine ways in which the learning environment can be enhanced for higher level learners by means of feedback via screencasting and peer assessment. The paper considers the experiences of a group of final year veterinary nursing students who were given tutor feedback via screencasting and encouraged to formatively peer assess each other's work. Their attitudes to these feedback methods and their reflections on the usefulness of these methods for their learning form the core of this paper. The authors examine topics such the impact on deep

learning, social cohesion and self-confidence in the learning group. Positive outcomes are possible when fear and apprehension is carefully addressed and controlled. The authors 'identified deep learning as taking place in an independent and flexible environment where learning is active and teaching is interactive and found that assessment could improve the learner experience.' The reader will find this a comprehensive and useful that may well encourage colleagues to develop similar approaches in their own courses.

Likewise, 'The Y1 Feedback Project' focuses on using digital technologies to enhance feedback in the first year.  This reports on an ongoing, multi-institutional learning and teaching enhancement project that aims to support the transition to Higher Education (HE). The project is funded by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching in HE under the 2014 Enhancement fund.  The paper outlines the project development and progress, with particular focus on identification of the feedback approaches that are being developed.  The project is not complete, but is a work in progress  and the paper reports the outcomes of initial evaluations and reflects on the process and the challenges encountered thus far..

 While it can be difficult to assess the impact of the project and others like it, at such an early stage, first  indications are positive. The authors suggest that one major challenge is to identify and evaluate ways to support the development of programmatic approaches to feedback in resource poor contexts.

Moving from a cross-institutional context to an international one, Ellis and Hogard describe an approach to assessment from the field of Medical Education. Programmatic Assessment, is a significant innovation in Medical Education.  In common with many such approaches, it involves such a change in thinking and action. Programmatic Assessment is characterized as a radical approach to assessment throughout the medical education programme devised to address endemic problems in assessment and their deleterious [SM2] effects on the curriculum and student learning. While the focus is on Medical Education the ideas, issues and approaches are relevant to professional education more broadly.  The approach is interesting in that it represents an attempt to consider assessment as constituting a programme, as important as the curriculum itself, and thus meriting being planned and reviewed in a similar way.

The authors offer many informative insights into the complex relationship between curriculum and assessment and emphasize the need for assessment and feedback to be meaningful. The approach outlined has a clear logic and is based on many assessment insights that have been shaped through research and educational practice but not an easy one to implement. Nonetheless, as the problems that led to the devising of programmatic assessment are not unique to any on context, national or disciplinary, this is a timely and useful paper that we hope will encourage further exploration of the topic.

David Cranny describes his paper, 'Screencasting, a tool to facilitate engagement with formative feedback?' as a 'small scale mixed methods study, using an online survey and focus group seeks to evaluate screencasting as a means of enhancing the formative assessment process for students,

He was supposed to get rid of the 'develop guidelines bit as he doesn't actually discuss thisWhile this is an accurate characterizing of the paper, it refreshingly understated. The study is based on formative feedback provided to second year students on a multi-stage assessment at a Higher Education Institution in the Republic of Ireland.

The paper addresses directly some of the core issues in teaching in higher education, especially at a time when time, a key teaching resource is in acutely short supply. The feedback that students receive on their work remains a problematic area in Higher Education.  Lecturers are concerned by a lack of student engagement with feedback, and students report a lack of feedback being provided, a lack of clarity in the feedback, or being provided too late to for useful application. This is not a new issue. There is a fairly wide consensus, which has persisted for many years, that feedback can narrow the gap between current and desired performance, and can contribute in a positive manner to the student learning experience.   The author outlines the outcomes of the research with clarity and the treatment of the topic will be very useful to readers as they too seek to square the feedback circle to promote learning and engagement.

In itself, this issue indicates an ongoing and comprehensive debate about the theme. Moreover, based on the work that is in process, of which we are aware, but which is not yet at the stage for reporting, we believe that the theme will continue to give rise to a lively and

useful debate in the coming year and we hope that AISHE-J will be able to bring you further reflections in forthcoming issues.  In addition, AISHE, in collaboration with the learning Innovation Network (LIN) will be bring out a book on the impact of accredited professional development on assessment in the early part of 2017.  We gratefully acknowledge the support of the National forum for this work  (and for this issue?) with funding support from the National Forum.

I would like to record our thanks to all those who have contributed to the issue, as authors, reviewers, and editors in their various roles.  To our readers, we hope that you will find the issue informative and enjoyable.  We would also like to encourage you to  consider submitting your work to the journal and, if you would be prepared to devote some time to the ongoing work of AISHE-J, to register as a peer reviewer in your area of expertise.

As we have been reading through the contributions for this issue, one of the most gratifying aspects is the level of commitment demonstrated to the student by all authors.  There is a lively sense of student-centred approaches to teaching, learning and assessment in the educational contexts of the papers presented here. On that satisfying note, it gives us great pleasure to bring you the Volume 8 Number 3, Autumn 2016 issue of AISHE-J.

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