LLLP - POSITION PAPER - 2021

RETHINKING ASSESSMENTS:

PRIORITISING

LEARNERS' WELLBEING

This paper draws on the results of the Lifelong Learning Platform's annual theme activities such as the LLLP Working Group on Wider Benefits of Learning (date 1 and date 2), the meeting of the European Parliament Interest Group on Lifelong Learning on "Funding Education for Wellbeing" (1 December 2021) and the 11th edition of the Lifelong Learning Week (29 November to 3 December 2021).

In addition, it reflects LLLP members' concerns throughout some months of consultations. LLLP designs its positions through different activities, but it also relies on the expertise of partner and member organisations with special knowledge on the topic. Experts from the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI), Professor Michael O'Leary, and LLLP Pool of Experts. We would like to thank the participants listed below who contributed with their views to a series of focus groups in July 2021, in August 2021 and in September 2021:

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*Disclaimer: The term *assessment is used in this position paper to mean activities geared towards evaluating a learner's progress towards the learning outcomes of a given course. We are aware of the fact that in non-formal education the term 'evaluation' and that in different languages the two terms are either used interchangeably or only one term exists. For the purpose of clarity we are using this terminology to distinguish between assessments and evaluations which in EU policy environments tend to be understood as evaluating education and training systems.

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INTRODUCTION

All across Europe, the drive towards privatisation and marketisation of education has gathered steam[1]. Our education systems are brashly depicted as an industry, as a source of profits, a zone of competitiveness, with countries, universities and schools ranked by performance indicators. In many instances, teachers and educators have been reduced to tools preparing learners for the labour market. It is not surprising that currently 47% of educators in the EU report quite a bit or a lot of stress at work[2]. Under this imperative to transform education into a labour market tool, with a rhetoric of skills for jobs, wellbeing and the vital role it plays in education has taken a back seat. The need to reposition wellbeing as a fundamental tenet of education has taken on a renewed impetus in light of Covid-19, and the subsequent disruption caused.

The pandemic exposed many of the already existing inequalities that cut across our educational systems: differences in home support, educational resources, and (in) capacity of certain educational settings to support remote learning have ensured that the greatest impact was and continues to be felt by those disadvantaged. Against this backdrop of inequality, new doors for change and a renewed emphasis on tackling inequality and **repositioning wellbeing as a core principle in how education is practiced** and provided have been opened. At the same time, many of the long-standing educational practices that have come to characterise our educational experiences have been suddenly called into question.

Education provides us with a key site to nurture and support wellbeing, which is an important prerequisite for the learning process. Research has identified that inducing positive emotions within education acts to enlarge cognitive perspectives while simultaneously enhancing the capacity of individuals to attend to more information, make richer interpretations, and experience higher levels of creativity and productivity[3]. **Simply put, those who feel better tend to learn better**. Furthermore, supporting wellbeing in education has been shown to affect the likelihood of individuals pursuing education throughout life[4], and vice versa: where wellbeing is hampered, so too is the willingness of individuals to pursue opportunities and view education positively. It is crucial to equip learners with a positive conception of learning to ensure that they pursue opportunities throughout life.

Positioning wellbeing as a fundamental component of education and including it as both an overarching goal and ubiquitous feature of provision requires a radical change. The famous expression: 'never let a crisis go to waste' can be applied with vigour to pave the way in this direction. While the scope of re-positioning wellbeing transcends any one particular element of education, the landscape of assessments* demands a concerted shift in orientation.

Assessments (or learner's evaluation as understood in other non-formal learning environments) dominate education by shaping curricula, teaching and learning. They define what learners regard as important, how they spend their time and how they come to measure performance. Assessments greatly determine what shape and form learning takes. Accordingly, changing learning inadvertently entails changing the methods of assessment[5]. In addition, assessments, given the strength of their influence on learning, are also strongly implicated in impacting how learners feel and experience education and training.

Assessments continue to be cited as a persistent source of stress and anxiety for many learners, as well as a cause of low self-esteem. This is especially true in formal learning environments (schools, universities). Within the EU, **around 60% of school students report feeling tense whilst studying for tests**[6]. The effects of assessment practices that are detrimental to wellbeing can be carried through into adulthood, reducing an individual's willingness to engage in learning later in life. It is our position that **assessments can and should better align with wellbeing**.

In this paper our aim is therefore two-fold. Our first intention is to call into question the naturalisation of stress and anxiety inducing assessments, and their other detrimental impacts on wellbeing, which have been rigorously maintained through an unyielding false narrative. This narrative follows a simple line of thought: that exposing learners to high stress inducing assessments is itself a learning process that can prepare them for the 'real world'. Proponents of this argument often cite the inevitability of facing high-stress situations within the context of employment and how thus, learners should be prepared or even 'build endurance' by undergoing high-pressure assessments—thereby building a workforce that is resilient to stress. Such a position is based more on faith than fact and contrary to what an abundance of empirical evidence has shown time and time again: stress-inducing forms of assessment are detrimental to learning—and can embed in learners a negative perception towards educational environments that is difficult to reverse.

Our second intention is to provide a way forward. To demonstrate that assessment can align more harmoniously with wellbeing, that the two need not be in conflict—and that practical solutions exist. To this end, we will not merely provide a critique of traditional assessment practices, but also

[1] ETUCE, 2021, Privatisation and public-private partnership.
[2] European Commission (2021), Teachers in Europe: Careers, Development and Wellbeing.
[3] Bates, M. & Boren, D. M. (2019). Assessing Wellbeing in Schools: An Educator's Practical Guide to Measuring Wellbeing. EdTech Book.
[4] OECD (2018). Trends Shaping Education. Spotlight, Good Vibrations: Students Wellbeing.

[5] Brown, G., Bull, J. & Pendlebury, M. (1997). Assessing Student Learning in Higher Education, London: Routledge.
[6] Council of Europe, Improving Wellbeing at School.

an outline of what the intertwining of assessment and wellbeing entails in practical terms. In asserting the centrality of practical solutions, we advance a tangible piece of work that can add to the policy debate on rethinking assessments in general and introducing learner's wellbeing at the centre of our policies. **This position paper is the Lifelong Learning Platform's contribution to furthering the case for a more holistic conception of assessments, one that is based on learners' and societal needs and that is not detrimental to wellbeing but conducive to it.**

Assessments should enable learners to 'make evaluative judgments, to be agents of their own learning, and to see learning as a process', Jessop and El Hakin.

'If the structure does not permit dialogue the structure must be changed', Paulo Freire

'Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information', Paulo Freire

Learning outcomes

Assessment methods

Education
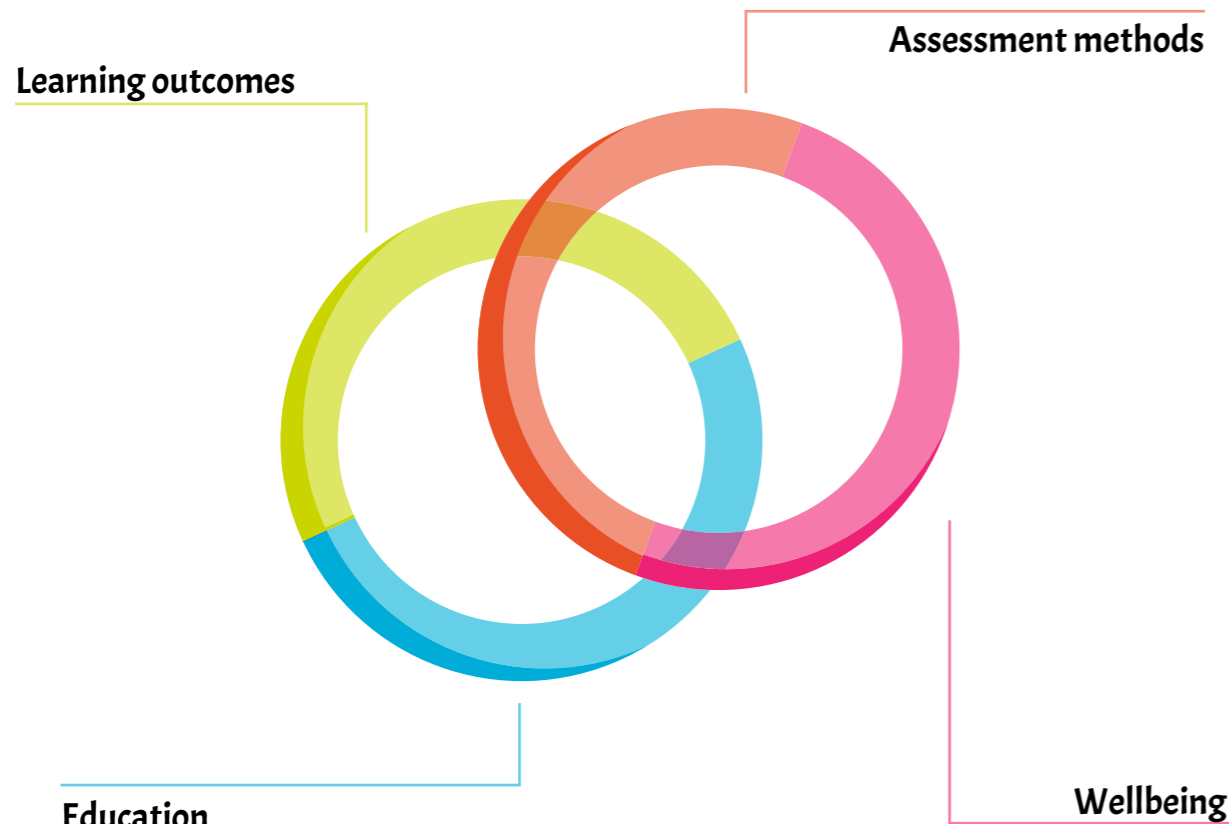
Wellbeing

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Assessments as a catalyst for wellbeing - not for stress! Recognising and monitoring wellbeing in education and training as wholeness of mental, emotional and physical aspects takes into account the interdependence, complexity and integrity of living systems on wellbeing. The stress related to assessments can create a fragmentation between learners' physical, emotional, mental health aspects. What's more, mental health problems created by the pressure of assessment have spillover effects such as costs in children's and adults' healthcare.

Moving with the times - launching assessments into the learning environments of the 21st century! We should ensure that assessments are attuned to real-life experiences of learners so as to support them in using the knowledge accrued in learning in their daily life, for a more harmonious participation in society, one that promotes values in harmony with the way society has progressed. We should also create more spaces to learn from inspiring practices that are often used in non-formal learning settings.

Harnessing digital technology for advancing innovation! There is a clear need to reassess assessment methods in such a digital revolution. LLLP strongly encourages shifting the balance towards assessment methods that allow an increased flexibility, creativity and innovation. Standardised tests are not suitable for exploiting the full potential of learners in the digital age. Therefore, a variety of different assessment methods, and in particular formative assessment, should be further explored and also combined with other electronic forms of assessment.

Making the shoe fit - aligning the curriculum! Shifting to competences-oriented and outcomes-based approaches to assessment to consider the impact on the wellbeing of both learners and educators alike. Curriculum design, pedagogies and andragogies used should seek to positively impact learners' wellbeing, and educators should understand and know how to support learners in this context.

Lifelong learning depends on positive educational experiences, assessments have a part to play! Many learners, especially adults, lack motivation to engage in lifelong learning, often due to prior adverse experiences with education which assessments often contributed to, so let us turn the tide and ensure that assessment practices do not lead to people disconnecting from education and training.

Enjoy learning to keep learning! Addressing early leaving from education and training through better assessment practices. Learners who suffer from the impacts of assessment methods that hamper wellbeing are likely to leave education and training early, particularly disadvantaged learners. Adjusting assessment practices in education could help to significantly reduce the number of early leavers.

Breaking the vicious cycle of assessment inequity. Certain forms of assessment reproduce inequalities by amplifying the various access to resources between disadvantaged and more advantaged groups. Those with disabilities, a migrant background, as well as those from lower socio-economic backgrounds face the brunt of this. Assessment practices can consolidate the cycle of disadvantage that extends beyond the realm of education and into other spheres of life. When rethinking assessments, it is crucial to be aware of the inequalities they can be implicated in so as to make education and training inclusive.

Women want to be in science, but the barriers have to be lifted. Certain types of assessments and their impact on wellbeing seem to cause girls and women to not want to pursue studies in the STEM subjects, therefore adapting these assessments can retain or encourage women to want to study these subjects which can help ensure a diverse STEM workforce, reduce the gender pay gap and empower women.

Allow educators the space and freedom they need to teach and assess! Assessments help teachers and educators monitor learners' progress and growth; when given more autonomy assessments can help teachers and educators build their capacities to adapt their teaching instruction to better respond to the learners' needs. This is especially important given that teachers and educators' role in the 21st century is to support knowledge creation rather than knowledge transfer, and new assessment methods should reflect this development. This requires support and capacity building.

Strengthening universal access to lifelong learning! Introducing alternative policy-making mechanisms to evaluate education and training providers and systems. Performance and/or results based funding for education and training on the basis of current assessment methods endangers the very mission of learning and universal access to it. Learning entitlements throughout life should be protected from results-oriented policies that effectively neglect learner's wellbeing.

CHAPTER ONE - WELLBEING IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

What we mean when we talk about wellbeing

It has long been acknowledged that wellbeing does not merely constitute the absence of physical or psychological illness. In the broadest sense, wellbeing can be described as the **quality of a person's life**[7] and realising one's own unique potential, in relation to one's inner feelings and self, others and the environment. Within this definition of wellbeing, there are two major approaches to consider: one which relates to our subjective experience of feeling well, experiencing pleasure, positive emotions and personal fulfillment; and the other concerning the external conditions which enable us to reach our full potential and flourish. Both of these approaches, however, are not to be understood in isolation to each other as they are interdependent. The subjective experience of wellbeing depends on external conditions: the natural, economic, human and social systems that embed and sustain individual wellbeing over time[8].

The '**How's Life**' framework[9] for measuring wellbeing developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) puts forward 11 dimensions of wellbeing, where the two approaches noted above reemerge as headings labeled 'material conditions' and 'quality of life'. Under the first heading, the framework groups those aspects of wellbeing that are grounded in market transactions: income and wealth, jobs and earnings, and housing. 'Quality of life', on the other hand, encompasses those things that are vital to people's welfare: health status, work-life balance, education and skills, social connections, civic engagement and subjective wellbeing. Since different individuals will place different weight on different aspects of life, it is useful to understand **wellbeing as a framework rather than a fixed definition**, especially given the fact that wellbeing cannot be quantified per se.

[7] OECD (2017), PISA 2015 Results (Volume III).
[8] OECD (2016), A Framework for the Analysis of Student Well-Being in the PISA 2015.
[9] OECD (2015), How's Life Framework.

Wellbeing in the context of education and training

Wellbeing, as mapped out above, is experienced within a number of contexts across the activities of everyday life[10]. Education and training, in both its spatial and pedagogical forms, provide us with one such arena in which our wellbeing is influenced. Within this context, **the relationship between wellbeing and education is interactive**—both having an influence on each other. Education has become one of the clearest indicators of life outcomes such as employment, income and health—all of which are a strong predictor of wellbeing[11]. Conversely, wellbeing is a crucial ingredient for learning within educational environments; when the learner feels happy and secure in the learning environment, the likelihood of actualising their unique potentials are heightened. Every learner (as every person) has a different way of learning and interest in learning, respecting learner diversity is a critical condition for wellbeing in education.

The OECD defines students' wellbeing as the psychological, cognitive, social and physical functioning and capabilities that students need to live a happy and fulfilling life. Here, they focus on students' life satisfaction, school climate and teaching practices as three variables central to cultivating a student's sense of wellbeing. The term 'student' however encompasses learners who are enrolled in formal education[12], which pigeon-holes education within the realm of formal schooling and hence student or school age life exclusively. As a result, there is a marked absence of understanding into which factors facilitate, or debilitate for that matter, wellbeing within the **wider context of lifelong learning**—where education is understood as encompassing the various sectors, stages of life, and levels of education and training more broadly.

Factors affecting wellbeing in any educational context include **choice within the learning environment**, or plurality in learning possibilities, since adequate choice positively contributes to learner motivation, engagement, and invigorates a learner's commitment to a task while supporting self-regulation, self-discipline and achievement. When learners are offered various possibilities and the opportunity to engage in activities of interest to them, the perceived value of an activity increases[13]. Positive relationships foster a sense of connectedness that stimulates a feeling of belonging—both within and outside the classroom, and are an essential component for wellbeing. Such relationships are characterised by a constructive set of interactions where the learner receives support when needed, without fear of ridicule[14]. This also goes for the intergenerational cooperation that can happen between learners and teachers; moving away from the Banking Model of Education[15].

Enjoyment, or the presence of positive emotion, has also been shown to increase a learner's wellbeing. Indeed, **learning occurs more effectively and fluidly in the context of positive emotions**. In addition, enjoyment broadens a learner's capacity to think creatively, be innovative and to problem-solve more effectively. Self-development and personal growth can lead to a learner having greater satisfaction with life, more confidence and self-efficacy and greater feelings of resilience, health and wellbeing[16]. Finally, feeling physically safe and being in good physical health contribute greatly to wellbeing and optimise learning experiences[17].

The factors mentioned above provide a general picture of what frames wellbeing within the context of education. The question of why wellbeing is important, however, requires an additional inquiry. As a general line of thinking, the literature suggests that prioritising wellbeing in education has been shown to **enhance intrinsic motivation, learning satisfaction and academic achievement**, and decrease disciplinary problems[18].

Wellbeing... ...in all... ...learning environments

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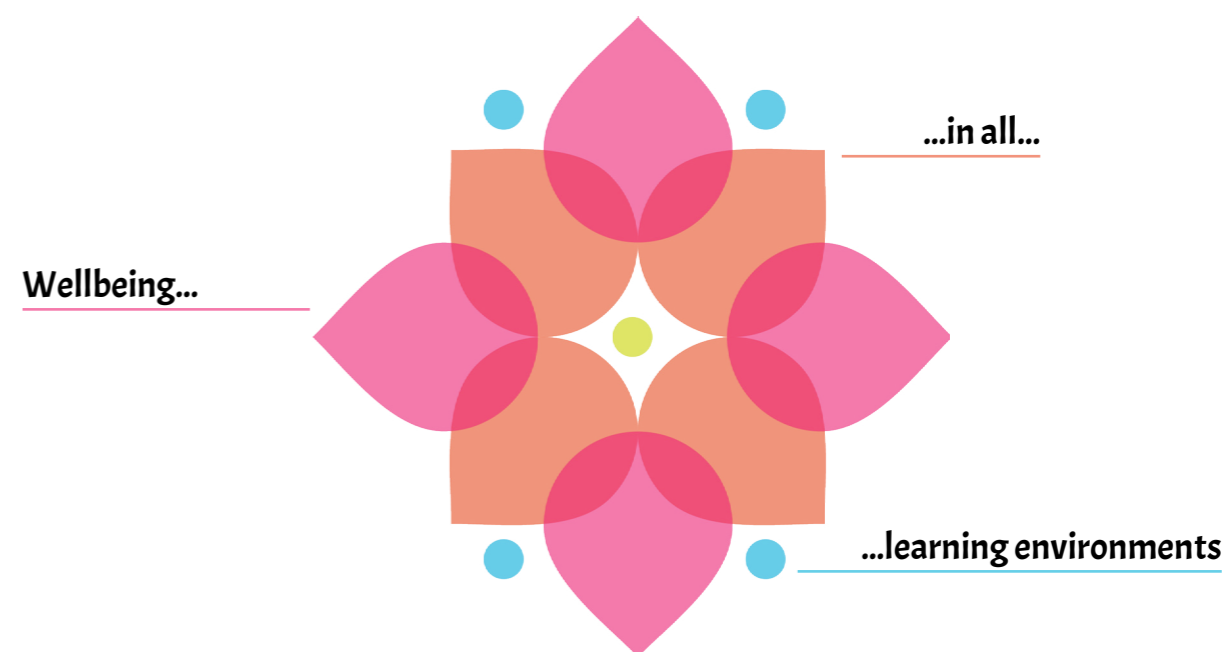
[10] Selwyn, J., & Wood, M. (2015). Measuring Well-Being: A Literature Review. University of Bristol.
[11] EuroHealthNet (2020). Making the link: health, education and inequality.
[12] OECD, Definitions and classifications of the OECD international education statistics, 2017.

[13] Idem
[14] NSW Department of Education and Communities (Australia), 2015, The Wellbeing Framework for Schools.
[15] Freire, Paulo (1968). The Pedagogy of the Oppressed.
[16] OECD (2017), PISA 2015 Results (Volume III).
[17] Idem
[18] Bücker, S., Nuraydin, S., Simonsmeier, B., Schneider, M., Luhmann, M. (2018). Subjective well-being and academic achievement: A meta-analysis, Journal of Research in Personality, Volume 74

Assessments: context and current situation across the EU

Assessments can take various forms and serve different purposes, they can be broadly understood as the "process of appraising knowledge, know-how, learning outcomes, skills and/or competencies of an individual against **predefined criteria**"[19]. While assessment practices refer to "The whole range of written, oral and practical tests/examinations, projects, performances, presentations and portfolios that are used to evaluate the learner's progress and ascertain the achievement of the learning outcomes of an educational component"[20]. The term evaluation instead tends to be used "to describe appraisal of education and training methods or providers"[21]. It is interesting to note that in other languages there is no separation between the two terms.

In the European landscape, the most prominent forms of assessment tend to be summative, formative and to a lesser extent diagnostic assessments. Summative assessments are common in formal education and they can be described as summing up learning at the end of an educational process (for instance after completing a course or a module), they usually involve grading and high-stakes tests, used to formalise and certify learning outcomes. Widespread across education systems worldwide is the use of **standardised assessments**, usually as summative assessments and often with high-stakes—the test has important implications for the test-taker, for instance it could lead to the acquisition of a certificate, impact future academic and professional opportunities and so on. Theoretically, standardised assessments allow judgements to be made on an individual's level of learning with respect to shared benchmarks or agreed-upon standards.

Formative assessments, on the other hand, are used to give feedback during an educational process and can take different shapes, such as peer reviews, portfolios, class presentations and so on. Formative assessments provide "feedback to the learning process indicating strengths and weaknesses and providing a basis for personal or organisational improvement"[22]. Meanwhile, **diagnostic assessments** tend be to used as pre- and post-test assessments in order to identify current knowledge and/or misconceptions about the topic being taught and include self-assessment, interviews, and polling among others[23]. While acknowledging that a debate on the dichotomy between formative and summative assessments exists due to the fact that "researchers and policymakers often struggle to come to terms with the meaning of the distinction"[24], for the purposes of this paper we use this terminology as it can serve as a common reference point, given its vast use in policy making across the European Union[25].

Common assessment practices in formal education in the EU

Across the European Union, formative and summative assessments are widely used in primary and secondary education, although the latter is more commonly used in secondary education (i.e. all Member States use summative assessments in secondary education, while 24 Member States use this type of assessment in primary education[26]). In primary education, it can be observed that Member States are moving away from grading and increasing their focus on individual feedback, descriptive assessment and reporting, accompanied by more open and collaborative teaching methods. Feedback in this context is mainly provided through individual reports or individual school plans. Conversely, in secondary education the qualifications learners acquire are expressed as grades (used for both formative and summative purposes)[27]. A lack of clear distinction between the different forms of assessments across EU Member States is reported to create confusion among learners and parents[28] in compulsory education, as the type of assessment has different implications for the learner, for instance when it is a high-stakes assessment.

Assessment practices and methods across higher education institutions in the EU appear to be homogenous in the sense that a **high-stakes summative assessment examination is often customary at the end of each course module**. This is usually accompanied by non-graded student activities, followed by formative assessment, although this practice is less wide-spread across continental Europe[29]. Whatsmore, examples of activities carried out throughout the academic term rarely contribute to a learner's final grade[30]. Evidently, the frequency of assessments and methods employed vary across disciplines and levels of study. Notably, the possibility of using continuous assessments in higher education can be either allowed or restricted by legal frameworks, and therefore impact universities' internal rules[31].

[19] CEDEFOP (2011). Glossary: Quality in education and training.
[20] European Commission, Education and training, ECTS, Users guide.
[21] Cedefop (2014), Terminology of European education and training policy. Second Edition.
[22] DG EAC,PPMI (2020), Prospective Report on the Future of Assessment in Primary and Secondary Education.
[23] Idem
[24] Idem
[25] Idem

[26] Eurydice, National Education Systems.
[27] DG EAC, PPMI (2020), Prospective Report on the Future of Assessment in Primary and Secondary Education.
[28] Eurydice, National Education Systems.
[29] Coimbra Group (2018). White Paper: Current trends in assessment in Europe: the way forward. Education and Innovation Working Group
[30] Idem
[31] Idem

Assessment diversity and commonalities outside formal education

Assessments take place throughout an individual's life, both in the **lifelong**—education, work, in continuous education—and **lifewide dimensions** such as in activities that are not commonly related to work or education such as volunteering and other organised forms of training. Non-formal education, defined as intentional learning that takes place through structured and organised action (in terms of learning objectives and periods) but is not part of the formal education and training system[32], covers an area where autonomy for the choice of assessments is usually more prevalent than in state-regulated education.

In the **work context**, assessments are common for **recruitment purposes** and for **evaluation** such as job appraisals which can take many forms: interviews with managers, 360° evaluation, self-evaluations, external assessments, and public competitions. Workers can be confronted with assessments also when following training as part of **their continuous professional development**. This is mainly true in bigger companies and public institutions ('talent management systems')[33] because it requires resources to provide training opportunities to employees that smaller organisations do not always have.

In the **VET sector**, more traditionally and now increasingly more for work situations or recruitment, assessments are usually more practice-based[34], following a teaching style that is itself often practice-based, companies increasingly use real life assessment methods such as roleplays, in basket, or tests in assessment centres.

Assessments are used in **validation of prior learning or non-formal and informal learning**. Validation is defined as the "process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard"[35]. **Validation consists of four distinct phases**: the identification of competences, the documentation to make an individual's experiences visible, the assessment of these experiences/competences; and the certification of the results of the assessment—which may lead to partial or full qualification[36]. Standardised tests, which are considered as being the most valid and reliable, are still the most accepted methodology for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL)[37]. As VNFIL approaches are already outside the mainstream formal education system, there are concerns that alternative assessments may create "B class certificates"[38].

Assessments—mostly in their alternative forms—are also conducted in **NGOs and the volunteering sector, including youth organisations**[39]. For example, the French Scouts have developed a tool for their volunteers[40], while the Erasmus Student network has launched a self-assessment tool in the form of a skill survey for all their volunteers. Other NGOs have also helped to develop nation-wide tools that assess individuals' competences and learning outcomes in volunteering. Assessments in this sector are particularly valuable for the inclusion of disadvantaged individuals, particularly those who were left out of formal education, as well as support the social inclusion of certain groups, help them reconnect positively with learning and foster their trust in their abilities.

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[40] The Scouts (2012). How to translate your Scouting skills to the language of employers

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> **GOOD PRACTICE - Valorise-toi! - Empower Yourself! [WOSM]**
> This self-assessment tool was developed in the framework of the work of the National Working Group of Scouts et Guides de France on 'Young Adults-Rover Section' dedicated to the question of giving the appropriate value to skills acquired in volunteering. It's about gaining recognition in university and professional fields of the richness, the diversity and the seriousness of the skills acquired and used in the framework of the role as Leaders of the Scout Movement. This tool aims to allow everybody to self-assess their skills and to highlight their value. This is done by putting forward a list of activities linked to the individual's role as Leader and allowing an analysis of what the individual already knows (skills and competences) and of what they might be able to still learn, using a 'professional' language to talk about their Scouting experience and to give it its fair value.

> **GOOD PRACTICE - Validation of Volunteer Work [ESN]**
> The Erasmus Student network has developed a self-assessment tool in the form of a skill survey for all their volunteers to identify the competencies gained through the structured and unstructured learning while volunteering for ESN so as to increase their employability as well their own recognition of their skills. Volunteers are asked to complete the self-assessment tool and send the relevant documentation to the Network Committee who analyses whether the procedure was respected and the competences were acquired or developed. At this point, the volunteer either receives a certificate, or if the Committee deems that the skills have not yet been acquired, they will put forward a set of recommendations to support the volunteer develop those skills.

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[32] JobBridge project (2019). Stocktaking report: The State-of-play of validation in the volunteering sector.
[33] Idem
[34] European Commission (2020). A report of the ET 2020 Working Group on Vocational Education and Training (VET).
[35] Council of the European Union (2012). Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.
[36] Cedefop (2014). Terminology of European education and training policy. Second Edition.
[37] Idem
[38] Idem
[39] Improval project.

GOOD PRACTICE - Tools for assessment in the volunteering sector [LLLP]
The EU project Improval lists over 50 tools available in the EU, most of which include or relate to assessments and aim to bring benefits to the individuals - the volunteers. These benefits include: a sense of agency, self-confidence, empowerment, career management, motivation for learning, social and communication skills, all aspects that can be linked to an increased wellbeing of individuals who feel they are useful, they contribute to something and their value is recognised.

Assessments in **adult education** also vary greatly[41]. They can mirror or repeat (or even align to) traditional, standardised, or formalised assessments especially when publicly-funded and linked to a qualification. This is especially true for VET qualifications and for language courses which are usually aligned with national qualification frameworks and levels. Perhaps this is to a lesser extent true for courses with non-VET objectives (like art courses), for which the sector is more likely to experiment with innovation.

GOOD PRACTICE - Well-being as a learning outcome in adult education [LLLP]
The EU project Tampada has led to the creation of a digital lifelong and lifewide progress assessment tool which goes beyond the measurement of the usual learning outcomes and includes the measurement of three other key dimensions: "Development of self and life skills", "Health and wellbeing", "Social, community and citizenship". Under "Health and well-being", it measures the following progress of adult learners over time regarding Life satisfaction, Coping with stress, Anxiety, Happiness, Feeling safe, Physical activity, Time for leisure and more indicators of well-being. The tool is a self-assessment tool (but it requires the support of an educator given that it is firstly addressed to disadvantaged learners).

While traditional assessment methods mostly test memorised knowledge are dominant in the formal education landscape[42], the non-formal education sector is where **alternative forms of assessment have shown most innovation and diversity in recent years**[43]. These alternative forms include: portfolios, self and peer assessment and simulations—amongst other methods—as opposed to multiple choice tests and essay writing"[44]. This can be partially explained by the autonomy of the non-formal education sector, as it is less regulated and standardised. Acquiring a diploma or qualification is not always the main objective of a non-formal learning pathway; it is often considered in a formative approach or for personal development and there is less need for the standardisation of assessments. With a lower degree of formalisation in non-formal education, stakeholders are afforded a wider scope in opting for **non-standardised or alternative assessment methods and tools**, often using a personalised approach. In many cases this is the most adequate solution because, for instance, it can require fewer resources for the setup; it doesn't have to be translated into grades; or it can be better adapted to the context where it takes place, such as job-based exercise in the recruitment process.

Assessing for what, exactly?

Assessments are used in a variety of ways and for distinct purposes across learning environments. The different contexts where assessment results are used can include monitoring learners' progress, monitoring and improving teaching, monitoring and assessing institutional achievements, informing policy, delivering qualifications and supporting the development of education and training systems or a combination.

We can distinguish what assessments are used for along two lines: internal and external purposes. By way of example, an internal purpose can be to **monitor student learning progress and achievement**. National standardised assessments while initially developed for internal purposes, have recently been used for external purposes such as evaluating the effectiveness of education systems[45]. It deserves to be noted that this is a risky undertaking as it can increase inequalities[46],

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[41] Mubayrik, H. F. B. (2020). New Trends in Formative-Summative Evaluations for Adult Education.

[42] Innoval project.
[43] Cedefop, European Commission, ICF (2019). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Synthesis report.
[44] Idem
[45] Johnson, S. (2017). Design challenges for national assessment in this accountability era. A background paper commissioned by Cambridge Assessment.
[46] Reis, A.b. et al (2012). Ranking schools: a step toward increased accountability or a mere discriminatory practice?

besides arguably not revealing much about the education systems. Another example for an external purpose is how assessments in vocational education and training and wider non-formal education are used, which is within the **validation context** —to certify the acquisition of competencies and skills gained by the learner in non-formal and informal learning. An external purpose which has been gaining prominence is that of international large-scale assessments which are increasingly being used as **soft policy mechanisms of indirect governance** to influence policy making at national and international level—this is particularly true for PISA[47]. Interestingly, these international large scale assessments have also been influencing the adoption of competences-oriented and learning outcomes-based approaches to assessment thereby impacting teaching and learning[48].

Some problematic trends have started to emerge such as using assessments to **compare outcomes between education providers and between countries**[49]. Ranking education institutions (providers) according to assessment scores has been utilised as a means for allocating funding, and in some circumstances teachers; this is true especially in school and university level but it applies to other providers too[50]. Taking into account the steep social gradient cutting across education providers' assessment performance, this stands to disadvantage educational settings

with a higher proportion of learners from marginalised and lower socio-economic backgrounds where test and exam scores will tend to be lower. The implicit idea underpinning this policy imperative is that educational disadvantage can be remedied by incentivising educational providers through performance-based funding. If we consider that within the EU, countries with higher levels of income inequality tend to have more stark disparities within the arena of education[51], tackling educational disparities through incentivising performance is therefore limited in scope.

The Lifelong Learning Platform believes assessments should be geared towards the learner as they can be an important part of the learners' personal development—an approach common in non-formal education. What's more, using **assessments as a tool *for* learning, not only *of* learning**, should be promoted to enhance learner agency where the learner is an active player in the assessment process, practices and criteria. In this approach, assessments are designed in a meaningful way and because of that they contribute to deep learning and help with retention of learning—here assessments have the **double-function of enhancing and documenting learning**[52].

However, this raises the question of the need for new approaches to use assessment for external purposes or identifying new indicators to monitor and assess education

systems that will not undermine the universal mission of education. The need for such new approaches is also a way to **move away from results-oriented funding** that has a direct impact on rising inequalities. Furthermore, these new approaches could be a way to increase the flexibility of education and training systems and could support breaking down barriers and silos across sectors, which also applies to digital education and the acquisition of digital competences—which are becoming fundamental for any form of learning in any sector. Taking such an approach will

help make lifelong learning a reality and widen the scope of learning beyond formal education systems.

Assessment...

...for learning...

...not only...

...of learning
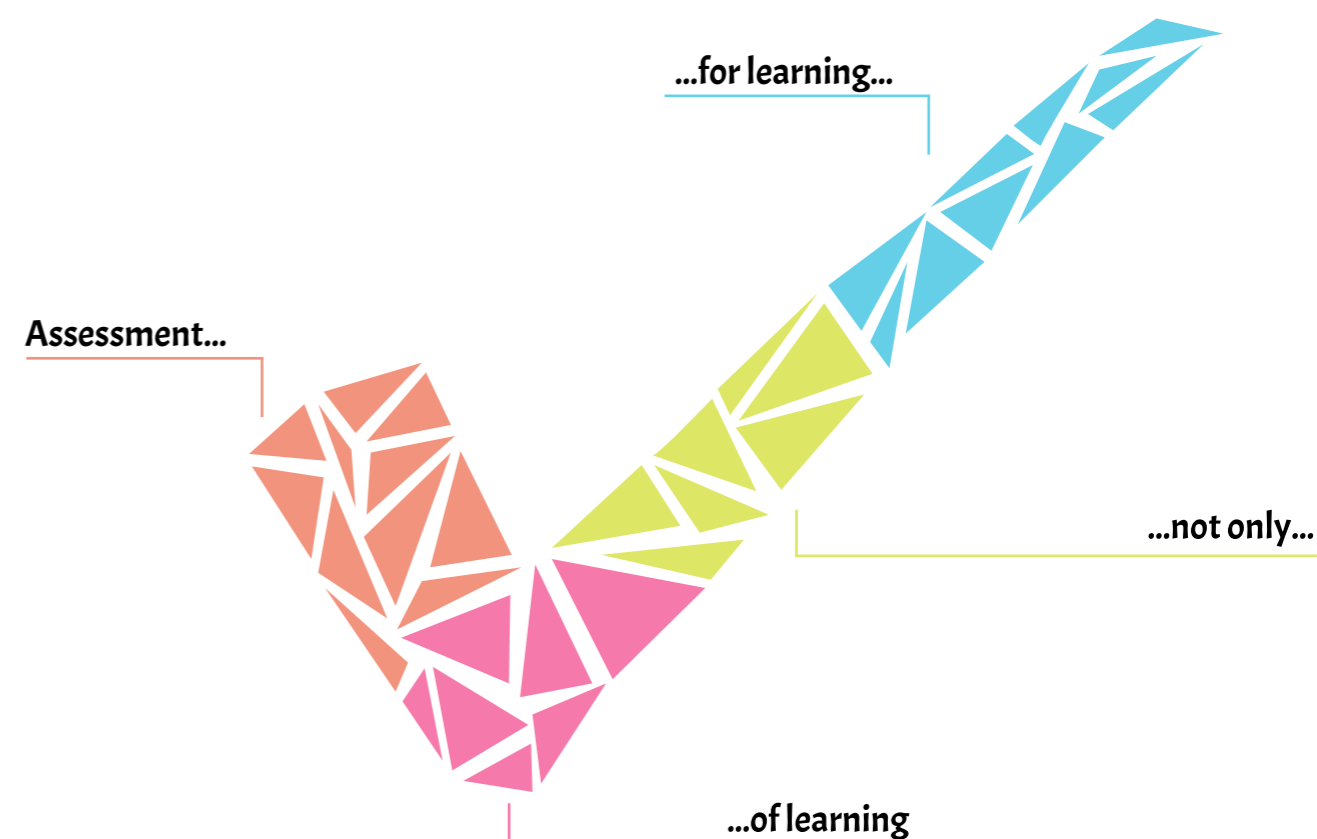
[47] Hopfenbeck, T.N., et al. (2018), Lessons learned from PISA: A systematic review of peer-reviewed articles on the Programme for International Student Assessment, Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research.
[48] Cedefop (2016), Application of learning outcomes approaches across Europe. A comparative study.
[49] European Commission (2013), Study on Policy Measures to improve the Attractiveness of the Teaching Profession in Europe, Volume 2.
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[52] Coimbra Group (2018), White Paper Current trends in assessment in Europe: the way forward. Education and Innovation Working Group.

Assessments, innovation, wellbeing - why pick just one?

The idea that modern assessment systems should assess learners' cognitive and non-cognitive learning outcomes to prepare learners for the 'real world' is gaining prominence[53]. Recently, various Member States have been shifting to **competence-oriented approaches** in the field of education and training. However, suitable assessment methods are not being developed to match the approaches, thus hindering the implementation of these reforms[54]. Whatsmore, Eurydice maintains that national assessment tests in compulsory school education do not thoroughly cover the key competences defined by the European Qualification Reference Framework[55].

Assessments are an important area of education and training that can facilitate and create **innovation**. In fact, the OECD's 2017 framework for the creation of innovative learning environments mentions that to foster innovation assessments should be designed with a focus on formative assessments and be consistent with the following principles: learning should be made central, social and collaborative, engagement should be encouraged, learning should be highly attuned to learners' motivations and sensitive to individual differences; and lastly learning should be demanding but not excessively[56].

Some claim that an obstacle standing in the way of innovative ideas for educational development are the more traditional procedures, such as **grade-based summative assessments**. Issues that can arise with these forms of assessment include teaching-to-the-test i.e. teaching only the material that will pop up in the test. This can impact the content of the teaching, the format (e.g. worksheets emulating the test), as well as the cognitive demands of the tests[57] thus preparing and instructing learners only to pass the exam (developing 'test skills') rather than focusing on gaining the knowledge, skills and attitudes foreseen in the learning outcomes of the course. This is also often said to hinder creativity and individuality of both the educator and learner.

A further challenge posed by assessments concerns the relationship between assessment and the **learners' overall educational experience**—and subsequently the long-term impact which these experiences have on the learners' future educational prospects. Assessments have been continuously reported as one of the main culprits for tainting learners' perception of formal education[58]. Initial experiences of education, be they positive or negative, greatly influence the likelihood of pursuing education throughout adult life. Adults who have experienced early success

in education are considerably more likely to view learning in a positive light—and subsequently continue to avail of learning opportunities throughout adulthood[59]. This is even more important when considering that parents can have a positive or negative influence, whether consciously or not, on their children's perception of learning activities.

Conversely, learners who do not experience success in compulsory education are less likely to engage in learning as adults. Positive learning experiences, it can be said, instill both a desire for more learning and increase an individual's willingness to view educational environments through a positive lens. Negative early experiences of education induce a reverse effect—resulting in a situation whereby education and learning is seen as something to be avoided, a common cause of early leaving and young people ending up in the situation of **not being in employment,**

education nor training (NEETs). Although the various processes shaping whether or not a student's initial learning experiences are positive or negative are far reaching—transcending the education environment alone—a key factor determining our initial experiences of education revolves around assessment performance[60].

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CHAPTER TWO - ASSESSMENT

IMPACT ON WELLBEING

The link between assessment practices and wellbeing

The Council of Europe states that a **round 60% of school students report feeling tense whilst studying for tests**[61]. In addition, over 60% of girls and 40% of boys report that they feel very anxious about doing tests at school—even when they feel well prepared[62], highlighting a gender disparity. Taking these figures as a starting point, it can be argued that testing often induces in learners a source of deep anxiety that runs contrary to learning, and indeed wellbeing. Students who suffer from exam induced anxiety are considerably more likely to perform poorly, be frequently absent from school, or drop out completely[63]. It has also been shown that excessive levels of anxiety can negatively affect students' social and emotional development and sense of self-worth[64]. The extent of this issue is perhaps best represented in the finding that school-age children and adolescents frequently cite tests as one of the most prominent sources of anxiety and stress[65].

The literature suggests that **standardised high-stakes summative exams are of particular concern** as they are most likely to negatively impact learners' wellbeing[66]. Such forms of assessment have been reported to induce high levels of stress and anxiety owing to their significant impact on learners' future academic or career prospects[67]. These types of exams exert high pressure on learners to succeed, creating an environment of unhealthy competition and even perfectionism. Under these conditions, learning often takes a secondary value to that of results—the subsequent benefits to learning are thus scarce, if not absent[68]. In addition, high-stakes standardised assessments tend to take place in strict examination environments, and are characterised by overcharged timetables, with exams taking place in a short concentrated period of time—also known as exam season. This arrangement has been shown in a wealth of studies to incite extreme stress buildup, a reality that decreases students' performance considerably[69].

In higher education settings more specifically, it has been observed that **high-stakes examinations have a profound influence on the mental health of students**—higher education counselling services tend to be in their highest demand by large swathes of students in exam season. Such services, however, can often be marked by long waiting lists of up to four weeks[70]. Anxiety, depression, eating disorders, panic attacks, burnout and, in extreme cases, suicidal thoughts have all been correlated with stress induced by high-stakes and high-pressure exams[71][72]. Physiological effects have also been noted, such as sleeping disorders, loss of appetite, physical inactivity and substance misuse[73][74][75]. Again, and unsurprisingly, high levels of stress have been linked to poorer academic performance stemming from a lack of motivation and reduced productivity[76][77].

> **GOOD PRACTICE - Affording students the choice to avail of a calculated grade (Ireland)**
> Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Irish senior cycle students were offered little choice in the form of their final year assessment. With the move to remote learning, however, the traditional high-stakes and once-off exams were replaced with a system of calculated grades in which teachers would carry out the responsibility of assessing their own students for certification purposes. The reforms have been further adopted to offer students the choice of taking calculated grades or the more traditional once-off exams. Preliminary findings report that the introduction of teacher assessment has worked to considerably decrease the stress commonly associated with the traditional exam

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The Covid-19 pandemic has provoked an additional bundle of stressors in the context of assessments. The pressure on teachers to make up for learning losses, a lack of guidance from governments and institutions regarding students' perceived preparedness and poor levels of wellbeing, increased levels of workload in the context of continuous assessment have all been amplified throughout the disruption[78]. Furthermore, the swiftness of the forced transition to digital forms of learning and assessment resulted in institutions, educators and learners being ill-equipped to navigate the novel set of requirements emanating from this new form of educational and assessment provision.

The wellbeing of educators

Certain forms of assessment practices have also been observed to have a negative effect on the **wellbeing of educators**. This is especially the case when it comes to standardised testing, as teachers tend to have little control over standardised external assessments[79]. These forms of assessment place a heavier burden and pressure on teachers as not only do they serve as a comparison tool between students, they also compare teachers and educational institutions. Furthermore, teachers surveyed in a European Commission study[80], indicated that such assessment methods have a perverse effect on teaching methods imposing restrictions, as well as the way students learn. This can sometimes **corner teachers into teaching-to-the-test** because the high pressure imposed on learners to perform well translates into high pressure on teachers to make learners perform well. In addition, it is often the case that the assessment practices upheld in education institutions have the effect of significantly increasing the workload of educators with excessive marking tasks, which exponentially grows with large classroom sizes[81].

Another issue which has surfaced related to standardised testing and educational staff's wellbeing revolves around 'accountability', which can be defined as using student performance data (i.e. test results) to evaluate the effectiveness of schools and educators—a practice which has been increasing in school systems worldwide. **Test-based accountability** intends to align the aims of teachers, school leaders, parents and governments and thus improve student performance. However, evidence suggests that it is affecting educators' wellbeing, since research shows that the more data-driven a school system is, the more staff feel stressed about their job[82]. Inevitably, a short-circuiting occurs, and the work of the educator becomes geared towards the generation and massaging of performance data rather than to the official purpose of the work itself. It is important to note, however, that this relationship is by no means black and white; the extent to which educators have control of the use of this data and to what ends the data is to be used are important factors[83].

Mainstream assessment practices impact some more than others

Extensive research has repeatedly shown that children's socio-economic background is the single most reliable indicator of their educational success[84]. The family and the household are the first social systems where children begin to acquire the fundamental cognitive and social skills necessary for school and for life. The material resources available in the household where students live greatly influence both their cognitive and psychological development; but not all resources are equally accessible to all learners alike[85]. These inequalities can also be expressed in spatial terms. For instance, the move to remote learning prompted by the Covid-19 pandemic had an unequal impact among rural and urban dwellers. Here, research has shown that **large swathes of households in rural Europe lack an adequate broadband connection**[86].

Those from **disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds**, who often have a migrant background[87], have less access to material and non-material resources, than their more advantaged peers—producing a cycle of educational poverty and disadvantage. The inequitable situation is made clear by the stark difference in the percentage of individuals who do not pursue further education where for **migrant learners** it is more than double of that of native learners (i.e. 8.9% and 22.2% respectively[88]). A situation that has been highlighted and worsened with the Covid19 pandemic.

These inequalities are likely to have an impact on assessment performance.

[78] OBESSU (2021). Through School Students' Eyes - Impact and Challenges of COVID-19 on Education Systems in Europe.
[79] European Commission (2013). Study on Policy Measures to improve the Attractiveness of the Teaching Profession in Europe, Volume 2.
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[82] Jerrim, J., Sims, S. (2021). School accountability and teacher stress: international evidence from the OECD TALIS study.
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[86] SOLIDAR (2020). Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2019.
[87] "39% of migrants in Europe are at risk of poverty compared to 19% among natives". European Commission (2020). Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027.
[88] Eurostat. Development of the share of early leavers aged 18-24 years from education and training, EU, 2010-2020 (%).

Research shows that advantaged students tend to, on average, perform better than those from disadvantaged backgrounds[89]. These gaps are to be found across all age-groups, and often widen as learners grow older. Moreover, given the relationship between relative performance and learners wellbeing—it can be suggested that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, who on average perform worse than their more advantaged counterparts, are less likely to avail of the positive emotions and satisfaction arising from performance[90]. Looking further, research also maintains that feeling adequately prepared is a key mechanism for reducing exam-anxiety. Test-preparation is challenging when one has fewer resources, so disadvantaged learners are less likely to feel well-prepared.

What is increasingly worrying is that certain forms of assessment, far from merely recording educational inequality, are also implicated in its (re)production[91]. In other words, the disparity that exists between learners according to socio-economic, spatial location and native/migrant background is not only reflected in test performance; it is also produced by it. High-stake assessments have received much attention in this regard. Research suggests that such **assessment forms exacerbate educational inequalities** to a greater extent than other less intensive forms of assessment. Learners from advantaged backgrounds can receive greater support through private, out-of-school educational activities[92] and are thus better equipped with test-specific capacities that are targeted specifically towards high-stake assessment preparation.

Breaking the cycle of disadvantage

Tackling educational inequalities requires a concerted effort that transcends a narrow scope, which takes wider inequalities into account. Indeed, these wider inequalities, ranging from material to non-material resources, are the source of inequalities in education[93]. **Less household wealth translates into fewer educational resources**, such as educational games, books and interactive learning materials in the home, and no quiet space to study[94]. This is also true for non-material resources, such as family time and support, hobbies, social relations, and peer networks, that are also important for healthy learning processes and are more scarce in disadvantaged households.

In brief, people with a higher income do everything—both consciously and unconsciously—to pass on their privileged position through support, extra tutoring and specialist care. **The Covid-19 crisis has accentuated this process, highlighting a striking digital divide**[95] which also impacts assessments. The most recent research indicates that the move to remote learning has amplified many existing inequalities[96] that impacts learning. For instance, 25% of people from low-income households do not have an internet broadband connection; people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are also more likely to live in overcrowded housing conditions[97] whereby a quiet space to study is absent. In addition, parents from less advantaged backgrounds are often time-poor; resulting in a situation whereby less time is available to support their children's learning. Indeed, such parents are also disproportionately represented in jobs that cannot be done from home.

[89] Bradbury, A. (2010). Rethinking assessment and inequality: the production of disparities in attainment in early years education.
[90] Idem
[91] Idem
[92] Zwier, D. et al. (2021). Social inequality in shadow education: The role of high-stakes testing.

[93] Economic Policy Institute (2017). Education inequalities at the school starting gate: Gaps, trends, and strategies to address them.
[94] PISA (2019). 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed.
[95] European Parliament (2021). Report on shaping digital education policy.
[96] Joint Research Centre (2020). The likely impact of COVID-19 on education: Reflections based on the existing literature and recent international datasets.
[97] Idem. "17.1 % of the EU population are living in overcrowded households - migrants are nearly twice as likely to live in overcrowded housing".

Mainstream assessments through the gender lense

Besides inequalities affecting disadvantaged students, a wealth of studies[98][99][100][101] also point towards a gender disparity in relation to assessment methods—both in terms of performance and how certain assessment methods are experienced. This can be observed in the form of higher exam anxiety, whereby assessments impact female learners' wellbeing to a larger extent than that of male learners. Which is not to say that male learners do not feel test-related anxiety, stress, or other negative feelings, but perhaps to a different extent and in a different way. Interestingly, almost no gap in the scores between boys and girls was found in the 2015 PISA assessment administered by the OECD, but where they did find a gender gap was in school- and test- related anxiety. **On average girls were about 13% more likely than boys to report they get very tense when they study and 17% more likely to feel "very anxious" before a test, even if they felt well prepared**[102]. Research suggests that high-stake exams highlight this gender disparity. Even if this elevated anxiety does not result in poorer academic performance for female learners, it undeniably impacts wellbeing[103] and therefore needs to be considered.

Academic research suggests that this disparity emanates from the dominant social roles assigned to different genders. **Gender socialisation** can result in women experiencing elevated pressure to succeed; and in men experiencing a sense of discomfort in openly expressing feelings of anxiety. To this end, schools have an important role to play in learners' early years to deconstruct these socially assigned roles.

Another aspect to consider in relation to gender and assessments is that **specific assessment methods do not impact women and men equally**. For instance, not all learners perform equally well with multiple choice tests: females tend to do less well than males[104]. As elaborated by a 2018 Stanford University study[105], the test format accounts for 25% of the gender difference in performance in reading and maths. Some hypotheses for these differences include that when it comes to high-stake tests girls will tend to guess less due to risk aversion[106], again a product of socialisation.

Lastly, the negative impact of examination-related anxiety has been correlated to fewer females staying in **science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) studies**. In a study carried out in the United States, they showed how women only underperformed in high-stakes examinations in introductory courses across multiple STEM fields. While in non-exam and laboratory assessment methods in these same courses, either there was no gender gap or female students outperformed their male peers. Furthermore, in PISA 2012, 15-year-olds taking the test were asked how they feel about mathematics. A considerable proportion of them reported feeling helpless and emotionally stressed when dealing with maths, unsurprisingly girls were consistently more likely to report feelings of anxiety towards this subject[107]. This represents a barrier to more women working in science, which must be taken into consideration when dealing with assessment methods and learners' wellbeing[108].

The need for more inclusive assessments

Another group of learners who are likely to be negatively impacted by popular forms of assessments are **learners with disabilities or with learning difficulties**. Staggering figures show that 31.5% of people with disabilities leave education and training early, in comparison to the average which stands at 12.3%[109]. There is reason to believe that this is partly due to practices which are detrimental to their wellbeing—assessments included[110]. Learners with disabilities or learning difficulties tend to be more prone to exam stress for a variety of reasons also on an individual basis, and it can also exacerbate certain learners' difficulties. It is argued that the use of testing regimes has an adverse effect on these students and may result in early school leaving—not doing well in exams, failing, **getting low grades is recognised as a push-out factor** within the school system which marginalises or alienates a student and ultimately pushes them out[111].

International law sets out standards for the inclusion of people with disabilities, in the context of educational practices, General Comment 4 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[112] stipulates that barriers to learning need to be removed by focusing on wellbeing and success of students with disabilities. It further recommends that "standardised assessments must be replaced by flexible and multiple forms of assessments and recognition of individual progress towards broad goals that provide alternative routes for learning", as traditional modes of assessment may disadvantage learners with disabilities. Outside the EU, there are calls to implement **Universal Design for Learning**[113] in assessments which can offer multiple means of engagement (i.e. stimulating motivation with materials which learners can engage with differently), of representation (presenting content in different ways to support different learners' understanding), and of expression (offering options to learners to demonstrate their knowledge/skills in different ways)[113].

[98] Jovanovic J et al. (1994). Performance-based assessments: Will gender differences in science achievement be eliminated?.
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The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered an additional set of concerns for learners with disabilities as remote learning has compromised their learning and wellbeing. This is mainly because many digital platforms were not adapted to learners with different educational needs, while adequate materials and accommodations should have been made. To address issues like these, educators must be trained and investment made in materials and equipment or digital education solutions[115].

Furthermore, **there is a clear need to shift towards inclusive assessments** which, as highlighted by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, can lead "teachers, school managers, other educational professionals and policy makers to re-think, re-structure and re-articulate teaching and learning opportunities in order to improve the education of all learners"[116].

GOOD PRACTICE - LEAD! Project [LLLP]

Educational institutions can meet the needs of learners through personalised educational programmes and tailored assessments. Adapting learning programmes is an effective practice as it involves systematic, intensive and personalised education that can support individuals with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to identify strategies that can help them to learn. Compensatory tools, that improve performance in learning and carrying out tasks, have proven to support learners with difficulties. What's more, dispensatory measures which exempt learners from carrying out activities that are not essential to the quality of the concepts to be learnt, have also been identified as helpful to the learner, these can include: additional time for tests and written assignments; exemption from written foreign language tests; among many others. These strategies also represent an important preventive intervention from a mental health perspective.

Taking the above into account, the LEAD! Project is developing:
- Guidelines for an interactive map on compensatory tools
- A European certificate for the use of compensatory tools
- A European License of compensatory tools
- An online platform 'MySkills' with training modules, a help desk and community for families, educational staff and learners with Dyslexia, Dysortography, Dysgraphia and Dyscalculia.

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[115] European Disability Forum (2021). Inclusive Education and the Impact of Covid-19 on Learners with Disabilities.
[116] European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. Assessment In Inclusive Settings Key Policy Messages.

CHAPTER THREE - REORIENTING ASSESSMENT CONSIDERING WELLBEING

Reconceptualising assessments: from stress to support

The concept of learners' wellbeing begins with the idea that when the learner feels happy and secure in the learning environment, the likelihood of finding joy in learning and of actualising their unique potential is heightened. As indicated throughout this paper—wellbeing positively influences both the learning process and the learning outcome. Learning tends to occur more fluidly in the context of positive emotions; a condition which subsequently improves their achievements and attainment. (Re)discovering the joy of learning which is essential to feel well and learn well is a trend that has been developing in the last years[117]. When wellbeing is hampered within the learning environment—the scope for learning and/or positive association within and with educational environments deteriorates. Notwithstanding the wealth of empirical evidence continuously demonstrating the well defined relationship between wellbeing and learning—certain forms of assessments that are both stress and anxiety inducing continue to be an all too regular fixture for learners. As aforementioned, assessments are commonly reported as a prime source of negative feelings for learners in their educational experience.

We might start by **reconceptualising assessments for learning and not merely of learning**; offering learners a plurality of forms; redistributing assessment more evenly both in terms of time and opportunity; offering learners the chance to participate in the making of their assessments; mitigating a culture of error and leaving competitiveness and standardisation aside. The use of assessment forms that consider wellbeing can on the one hand demonstrate the efficacy of centering wellbeing for learning—thus improving the experience of learners. On the other hand it can also steer the discourse surrounding assessment and its purpose in a new, more wellbeing conducive direction.

Several alternative forms of assessment, both digital and non-digital, exist that can to a certain extent counter the use of high-stress and anxiety inducing assessments on a number of fronts: in terms of learning and wellbeing; but also in terms of a **broader**

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[117] For example: The Joy of Learning School.

cultural shift regarding the intention of assessments and their position in the wider purpose of education more broadly.

What should assessments actually measure?

To re-conceptualise assessments we need to consider what they should actually measure. In response to the calls for assessments of individuals to become more and more holistic by capturing new categories of impact that learning has on individuals, innovation emerges in the EU regarding the 'what' that is being measured. One good example illustrating this is the consideration of **wellbeing as a potential learning outcome of education** (see good practice 4). The Tampada EU project partners created a tool that measures adult learners' progress over time on a range of well-being indicators, which can be in many cases directly attributed to the participation in learning activities. This includes not only social inclusion benefits but also mental health improvement and well-being-related skills such as, having a proactive attitude in life, facing challenges, or being able to cope with stress and broader negative feelings. The results of this measurement is valuable information for educators and staff who can then provide better learning and educational service provisions to the learners (for instance, by providing a nursery for parents so that they can attend the classes).

Historically, measuring learning outcomes other than those strictly related to academic achievement was a practice mostly spread out outside of formal and VET education, for instance, in the volunteering sector (see good practice 3 for example). However, given the lifelong impact of assessments on wellbeing from early ages, notably in primary and secondary education, one can question whether there would be some value in introducing more holistic assessments of (young) learners in formal education as well. While keeping a competence-based approach for defining learning outcomes is perhaps more adequate at this stage rather than introducing new indicators on well-being as previously presented, formal education stakeholders could have more insights in the future on the importance of learners' social and emotional skills. Formal education is a learning environment where these skills can thrive or collapse (one can think of the impact of bullying on young learners for instance, or of bad grades on self-confidence). The OECD took a one-of-a-kind initiative to look into these questions by conducting an international survey and study on socio-emotional skills of 10 and 15 years old. The results of which are

presented in a recently published report[118]. One chapter pays peculiar attention to psychological well-being and notes for instance that between 10 and 15 years old "life satisfaction and current psychological well-being dip while test anxiety increases from childhood to adolescence, especially for girls". Besides, "Students' social and emotional skills are strong predictors of school grades across students' background, age cohorts, and cities". This questions the role of schools for improving learners' well-being. Recommendations from the report call on policy-makers and education practitioners to put more focus on this dimension, beyond academic learning. "The benefits of developing children's social and emotional skills go beyond cognitive development and academic outcomes; they are also important drivers of mental health and labour market prospects"[119].

Now that it is clear that we need to change the nature and purpose of assessment and evaluation, the complementarity of lifelong and lifewide learning sectors and environments can be pursued. Going beyond the focus on academic achievement, qualifications and employability of learners can bring so much added value for the society and the economy. Ensuring learners' well-being by changing assessments is essential for individuals to prosper in today's demanding, changing and unpredictable world. The question of "what" is being measured is central. Learners who fail in

academic terms might succeed better if other dimensions of their abilities are made visible. This is one of the reasons why we recommend that transversal skills (which can often be more easily enhanced outside the classroom) should be better captured. Indeed, plenty of examples from non-formal education—youth organisations, NGOs—show the great benefits of valuing transversal skills for learners who had an adverse experience with education, giving them self-confidence and trust in their own potential and ability. The purpose of assessment is also an essential question: do we want to systematically segregate career outcomes with personal development or individuals' empowerment outcomes? Couldn't we envisage that both go together and mutually reinforce each other? The question should not be about whether one should take over the other but rather how we can best embrace individuals' diversity. In fact, we advocate for holistic assessments which pay attention to how every individual learner functions thanks to their own inner diversity as well as how the learner unfolds these capacities, by taking into account core capacities—particularly for children.

There can sometimes be a serious mismatch between what assessments are meant to measure and what they really measure in terms of learning outcomes—which is in essence a problem of the validity of the assessments. This often results in tests which assess where a learner remembers

[118] OECD (2021). Beyond Academic Learning: First Results from the Survey of Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris
[119] Idem

notions and not whether they can apply the skills learnt[120]. This can be a great source of frustration for learners and impact wellbeing and well as the motivation to learn and study. We need to be mindful of what assessments actually measure, especially with the shift towards digital assessment methods. This is because there is a danger that the assessment method becomes more about learners' ability to navigate the test setting rather than the targeted learning outcomes.

Representativeness in assessments

Recentering assessments around wellbeing can be done through shifting towards forms and methods of assessment which are less stress-inducing and more learner-oriented. However, one fundamental aspect to be considered first and foremost is the **learners' involvement in their own assessment**, as it gives them choice within the educational context—an important factor influencing wellbeing. When speaking of learners being involved in the assessment process, what is meant is a change in their role, becoming active agents of the process from its conception until its actualisation—negotiating the assessment format (including approach, method and timing), the frequency, the criteria, the modality and so on. Learners' participation in assessment processes is also found to support the development of competencies such as creativity, decision making, as well as problem solving[121] and critical thinking; besides facilitating self-regulation, a skill key to manage one's emotions and behaviours.

By being consulted and meaningfully involved in all or some of the stages of assessment and its elements—design, implementation, and grading and/or feedback—the process becomes more clear and transparent for the learners, which can also help reduce anxiety concerning the assessment. This is especially true when learners understand the stakes of the assessment, its purpose, and how or on what basis they will be evaluated. By taking ownership of the process, assessment modes will be more suited to the learners, another factor which can contribute to their wellbeing.

Another way learners can be involved in their own assessment is by using participatory modalities, whereby a shift from hetero-assessment to peer-assessment takes place, namely by use of peer-assessment, self-assessment and/or co-assessment[122].

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[121] Gómez-Ruiz, M.A., Rodríguez-Gómez, G. & Ibarra-Sáiz, M.S. (2013). Development of basic competences of students in Higher Education through Learning Oriented e-Assessment.
[122] Quesada Serra, V. et al. (2017). Chapter 12 Student Participation in Assessment Processes: A way forward.

GOOD PRACTICE - A Personal Portfolio: Socratic Dialogue in a Secondary School in Finland [ECSWE, L4WB-F]
The essence of this practice is to enable pupils to become an active part of the teaching and assessment process. The teacher, Eeva teaches the Finnish language using a Socratic dialogic teaching method. Students have the opportunity to engage with all subjects, through the dialogue and then through an assignment for which she provides personalised comments for the students' progress. With the help of a course guide, the pupils can plan their journey and select the assignments they would like to include, and discover how they can best show their capabilities in line with the instructions. At the end of the main lesson block, pupils bring all of their work together in a portfolio, make the necessary adjustments, and hand it in to receive a summative evaluation, consisting of an overall grade and a written comment.

Have learners...

...and teachers...

...codesign...

...assessment

Who should do the assessing?

Self-assessment, understood as learners analysing and evaluating their own performance, has a strong focus on the learning dimension and is said to increase "knowledge regarding learning itself to improve present and future strategies"[123]. Furthermore, it not only increases learner engagement, it also empowers learners by making them more confident and autonomous, while also developing the self-regulation skill to know and understand how they learn best. Self-assessments can help develop lifelong learning skills for judgment, critical thinking, and communication among other transversal skills.

> **GOOD PRACTICE - E-portfolio for volunteering skills and competences [Arci / SOLIDAR]**
> The E-portfolio is a tool especially aimed at the identification of learning outcomes in the contexts of activities linked to non-formal education, developed in an Arci club (Strauss Aps) in relation to completing the Youthpass. It is like a personal diary of the ESC Volunteer so they can identify the skills and competences acquired during the volunteering activities. It is a form of self-assessment that makes reference to the 8 competences contained in the Youthpass. The continuous update of the e-portfolio allows the volunteer to have an updated view of their 'learning status' and this facilitates the final completion of the certificate.

Peer assessment is a tool for learning often used in formative assessments and is known as a collaborative form of learning. When peers assess each other, negative feelings related to performance can decrease—although it is important to mention that if not designed fairly it can be a source of negative emotions. For peer-assessment to work, learners need to be guided by the educator. Some teaching practices designed to avoid the human and social impact of peer-assessment employ rubrics and/or anonymised peer-assessment[124]. A clear advantage of this form of assessment, besides its impact on wellbeing, is the fact that it supports learners in reviewing and improving their own work[125]. It is crucial however that the educator supports the assessment and ensures that it results in rich feedback that is efficient and effective, thereby increasing the learning.

> **GOOD PRACTICE - Digital Readiness Assessment Tool [Dlearn]**
> In the context of Vocational Education and Training and digital skills, a self-assessment tool is being developed that provides a swift assessment on the users' digital readiness based on their input. In the case that the user finds the level of their digital skills not as advanced as they would like it to be, the self-assessment tool provides mitigation actions that can be taken to reach the desired target level. The tool also includes an automatic comparative analysis and benchmarking scale. The tool will be content agnostic so that it is fully transferable to all learning contexts.

Making feedback central to learning and assessments

When it comes to **feedback**, it can be said to be a central component of learning, as it is through this that learners can understand how to improve. Feedback is also linked to areas of competence, be they conscious or unconscious for the learner, as it can guide them towards their strengths, thereby encouraging and motivating them; as well as their areas of improvement—making them aware of where they need to focus their attention. Feedback, when provided adequately, can help retain students in higher education[126] when transitioning from school to university. What's more, there are many proponents of feedback that suggest moving away from grades and focusing on feedback, as grades put a value on a learner's piece of work while feedback provides information that the learner can use to improve and to guide them towards what they need to learn better or more of.

[123] Gómez-Ruiz, M.A., Rodríguez-Gómez, G. & Ibarra-Sáiz, M.S. (2013). Development of basic competences of students in Higher Education through Learning Oriented e-Assessment.
[124] Panadero, E. (2016). Peer Assessment Is it safe? Social, interpersonal, and human effects of peer assessment: A review and future directions.
[125] Rollinson, P. (2005). Using peer feedback in the ESL writing class.

[126] Yorke, M. (2002) Academic Failure: a Retrospective View from Non-Completing Students. In: Failing Students in Higher Education (eds Peelo, M & Wareham, T). SRHE and Open University Press, Maidenhead.

GOOD PRACTICE - The Art of Writing Good Reports: An Alternative to Grades, Denmark [ECSWE, L4WB-F]
A secondary Steiner Waldorf school in Denmark has looked beyond grades entirely as a means for evaluating student performance and effort. Pupils produce an individual lesson book of their learning process which the teacher continuously marks by taking into account the following criteria: (a) the pupil has implemented feedback, (b) they have managed to show engagement and interest (c) and they have made progress from when they started. The end product is a 30+ page final report which looks back on the syllabus, learning process, interaction and achievements of the pupil in two or four years. This is utilised to give higher education admission officers or employers a clear, honest and positive picture of the pupil.

Feedback needs to possess the following qualities in order to be valid: it must be timely, intimate, individual and empowering; it should open doors not close them, and should be manageable[127]. **A reflection is needed on how to provide feedback**; which advantages and disadvantages come with each method; and what the needs of the learners are—for instance how they digest feedback the best. Educators must think of whether they want to mark by hand or provide feedback digitally, taking into account the readability and how this difference shapes feedback—as a way of example using shorthand when writing by hand results in not being able to emphasise as well as with typed feedback. What sometimes may appear as just a detail, like the marking with a red pen can actually have an important impact, as this "hinders retrieval practice and increases cognitive overload"[128].

Educators may also want to consider using feedback aids such as model answers or different feedback modes such as giving feedback to the class as a whole for issues relevant to all class members, or in small groups. Educators should also take into account either replacing written feedback or supplementing it with face-to-face feedback which "can carry with it a very high learning payoff for students"[129]. To counter the issue that most educators across Europe face, i.e. lack of time, **a trade-off must be made between forms of feedback that are high-performing versus those that are time efficient**. However, the quality of the learning and wellbeing of the learner (as well as that of the educator) cannot be hampered because of underfunded and hence understaffed educational institutions and overworked educators. Therefore, it is imperative that these issues be addressed first and foremost, otherwise solutions that support learners' healthy development will not work as they'll be to the detriment of educators.

There is often a cultural difficulty in accepting praise, and there is also a difficulty in accepting constructive criticism—as individuals can often get on the defensive when faced with criticism. Learners need to be taught how to embrace and work with both types of feedback, and just as importantly, educators must be taught how to deliver it. In this context, we talk about feedback literacy which is a paramount social practice for both sides of the classroom to possess, as it is an increasingly relevant transversal skill required both in our professional and personal lives.

The new **ESCO transversal skills and competency mapping**[130] lists several sub skills that can either be strengthened or weakened by the way assessments are designed and implemented such as 'Maintaining a positive attitude', 'Behave confidently', 'Approach challenges positively'. Some other skills are also proven to be essential for accepting and using feedback in a positive way such as the skills to 'accept criticism and guidance', and 'exercise self-reflection'. Providing support in the assessment process (e.g information provision, counselling and formative feedback) is particularly recommended for disadvantaged learners as shown in the Innoval project[131]. It is recommended that counsellors, educators and assessors be trained on providing such support which can be very valuable for certain learners.

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[127] Race, P. (2005) Using feedback to help students learn.
[128] Gnambs, T. et al. (2015). The effect of the color red on encoding and retrieval of declarative knowledge
[129] Idem

[130] ESCO (2021). Transversal skills and competences mapping. Draft version.
[130] Innoval Project.

GOOD PRACTICE - Team London Young Ambassadors | London City Hall programme [Volunteering Matters]

The programme makes use of a combination of assessment practices that enable to get a holistic view of the development of the youth who participates in this programme and include:

▶ Post social action teacher surveys which enable teachers to share the students' progress, such as increased communication, confidence & teamwork skills;

▶ Baseline data assessment where information is collected (usually in the form of observations) on the young people's skills development and it is used to measure their engagement, wellbeing, communication, confidence and team-work skills.

▶ Case studies and interviews are carried out with teachers and young people which comprise of a set of questions;

▶ Videos for the pitch are used to assess young people's learning and development after the workshops have been delivered. The young people are asked to design their own social action project and present their idea to a judging panel. This is also a way to understand the impact the programme has had on them.

The coaching role of educators

Another paramount role of an educator is to coach learners so as to facilitate learning development—which refers to the "Supporting others" skill in the Social and Communication cluster (ESCO transversal skills and competences framework). When it comes to assessments, there is an important aspect that can support learners in coping with the negative feelings that is bound to come when being examined, this is the educators' **assessment literacy**[132]. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that learners do not necessarily know how they learn best, how to de-stress and organise their learning time, therefore coaching can be of great help. For instance, learners can be coached on how to create a learning environment that works for them, techniques to de-stress, to gain motivation or for self-regulation. Educators can also support learners in mastering the learning to learn competence, which encompasses many other competencies necessary for success in studies and other areas of life. Some good practices on coaching by educators to support learners with exam

anxiety include mindfulness classes[133]. Mental health and wellbeing is a topic that should also be explored in education and training and taught, as part of health literacy, with a lifelong learning approach.

GOOD PRACTICE - Promoting Mental Wellbeing in VET [EfVET]

Dropping out is one of the major challenges in secondary vocational education and it has a strong association to mental health problems. Research shows that mental health promotion programs can be effective in equipping people with the skills necessary to avoid or deal with mental distress. The goal of the project was to develop the professional competence of teachers, directors and in-company trainers in promoting mental health in VET. The material and the training programme were structured around five themes: i) mental wellbeing as a resource, ii) self-knowledge, iii) emotions and interaction, iv) coping skills and v) the learning community. The target groups of the project were: i) VET teachers, in-company trainers, directors, ii) the students (and their parents), and iii) the internship companies. The project helped young people in participating colleges to acquire mental health skills that help them study effectively, master their life and enter the job market. Measures were also taken to actively influence the objective-setting in European vocational education policy.

What's more, educators and what they teach play a crucial role in the self-development of learners. With regards to **LGBTQ+ learners**, educators can play a role in making the learning environment more inclusive. For example, by normalizing the use of pronouns, educators can make trans people feel more comfortable, and therefore prevent the creation of an atmosphere that makes the LGBTQ+ cohort disengage from the classroom. By teaching traditionally eurocentric and heteronormative subjects in an inclusive way, disengagement of education can be prevented to a certain extent[134], since what takes place in the classroom and in the wider learning environment has an effect on assessment performance.

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[132] OECD (2013). Synergies for Better Learning. An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment.

[133] Pearson (2019). Using mindfulness to deal with exam stress.
[134] Page, M. (2017). From Awareness to Action: Teacher Attitude and Implementation of LGBT-Inclusive Curriculum in the English Language Arts Classroom, SAGE Journal Volume 7 Issue 4

Breaking away from homogeneity of assessments

Homogeneity of assessment has become a driving force throughout our educational systems, and continues to be a widely used practice across the majority of EU Member States[135]. As aforementioned, such forms of assessment have come under scrutiny on several fronts: (1) they encourage teaching to the test, (2) they sacrifice means for end and (3) their power in education is too broad— meaning that the pressure to achieve the necessary test scores permeates all facets of the learning system and (4) they tend to show an indifference to the individual.

The use of personalised assessment stands in stark contrast to the one-size-fits-all approach built into standardised assessment. In contrast to the latter, the former offers learners an opportunity to participate and direct their assessment— and obtain a sense of control over their learning. Ipsative assessments build on this, referring to an instrument that allows an individual to base their performance on a measure to his or her past performances[136]. In this sense, a primacy is placed upon the individual, and on their own development and efforts as opposed to a general scale where they are compared to the rest of the class. This enables learners, coached by educators, to see their own improvement and identify areas of development.

Typically, the notion of formative assessments is used to capture more personalised assessment forms. Formative assessment describes an assessment practice that identifies learners' needs and then adapts the teaching and learning to these needs. Characterised by a plurality of forms including oral, written, pres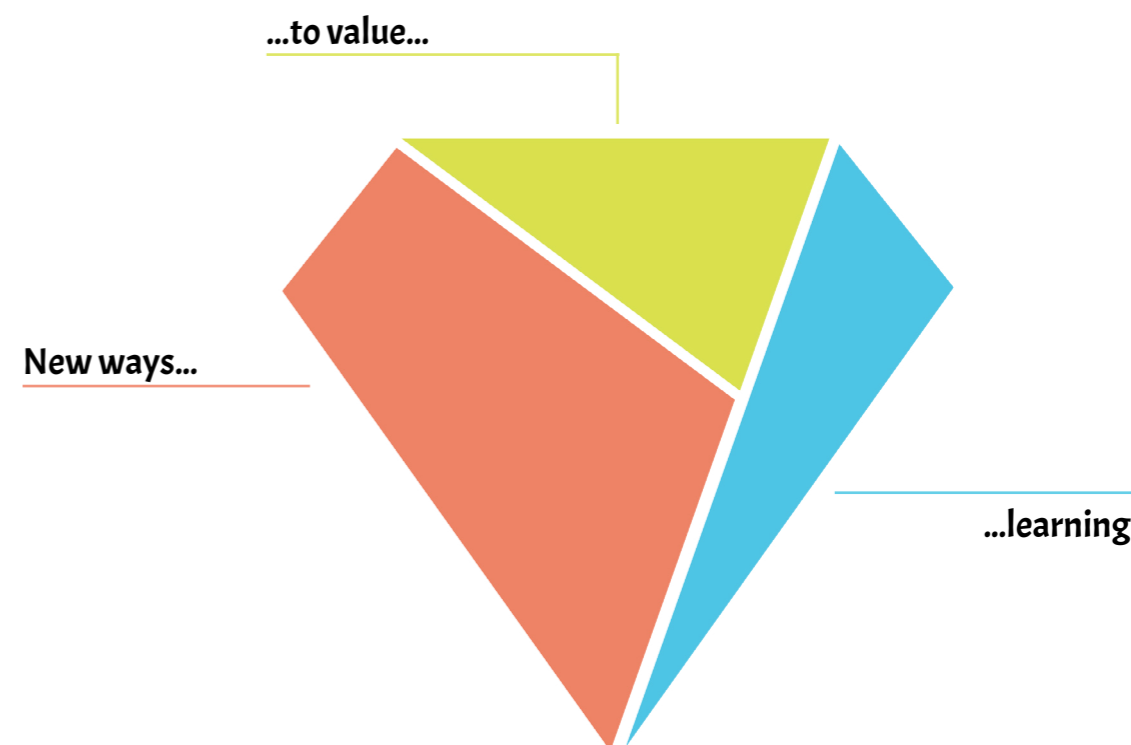entation, group, project based and portfolios. This form of assessment tends to offer multiple chances as well as avoiding the high-stake nature of more summative assessments which, as indicated in an earlier paragraph, has been continuously cited as a main source of anxiety with an impact on self-confidence and self-esteem for learners in educational settings.

...to value...

New ways...

...learning

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[135] OECD (2017). Busting the Myth about Standardised Testing.
[136] American Institute for learning and human development (2020). 10 things educators should know about ipsative assessment.

Towards formative assessment

Formative assessment involves the learners being afforded the opportunity to collaborate in the instructional process as a means for helping them to discover how they learn best. This usually involves the educator gathering evidence of learning, for instance, through short written tests or classroom dialogue, which are subsequently utilised to adapt feedback and/or learning activities to the information gathered from these assessments. To this end, **learners, to a strong degree, can take ownership of their learning** and see the learning environment as more of a partnership between learner and educator. An arrangement that is difficult to replicate through summative assessments which tend to be strict in provision and indifferent to individual needs[137] .

> **GOOD PRACTICE - Innovation within Vocational Education: Creating a Card Game, the Netherlands [ECSWE, L4WB-F]**
> In a VET school in the Netherlands, Naima teaches a class on nutrition where the majority of the learners are from immigrant homes in low-income areas. Naima uses the exercise of creating a card game as a form of assessment - which incorporates self and peer-assessment and where the focus is on the process of learning and on the outcomes. The game involves amassing related subsets of cards in groups (in this class on nutrition the subsets are vitamins); the groups then need to identify and choose different vitamins and carry out research online about them and come up with interesting questions that are related. The assessment is woven into the teamwork which is guided by the teacher.

Formative assessments can be said to mitigate stress and anxiety on several fronts. As indicated above, when learners are consulted and meaningfully involved in all or some of the stages of assessment and its elements: **the process becomes more clear and transparent** which tends to reduce feelings akin to a lack of control, loss of agency and a perceived indifference to individual needs. In addition, obtaining greater control over the direction of an assessment has been identified as an integral component for both **increasing learner motivation and engagement** as well as ameliorating many of the negative features for wellbeing of high-stakes and summative assessment forms[138]. Furthermore, the social nature of learning is reflected in the process of collaboration and participation. The frequent use of formative assessments, such as taking pre-tests, improves learners' learning and performance, data suggests[139].

> **GOOD PRACTICE - Mentoring in VET [EfVET]**
> The SUPREME project addresses student drop-out issues in VET institutes by setting up a mentoring program and ensuring intensive and continuous cooperation between VETs and SMEs. The project was based on the successful Dutch mentoring program MentorProgramma Friesland (MPF). The aim of SUPREME was to develop the talents of young people and to support them in their career, studies and/or private life, in order to prevent student dropouts in VET. Other objectives of the project included the joint development of a mentoring handbook and tools, implementing competence-based education and establishing collaboration with stakeholders.

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[137] Clark, I.(2012), Formative Assessment: Assessment Is for Self-Regulated Learning. Educ. Psychol. Rev. 24 (2), 205–249.

[138] Naastrom, G. et al. (2021). Changes in Student Motivation and Teacher Decision Making When Implementing a Formative Assessment Practice.
[139] Adesope, O.O. et al. (2017). Rethinking the Use of Tests: A Meta-Analysis of Practice Testing.

CONCLUSIONS

The question of how certain debilitating forms of assessment are rigorously maintained within educational environments demands a cultural response. If we are to systematically align wellbeing and assessments then a **shift in orientation is required**, whereby a number of false narratives are to be dismantled and challenged. The steep rise in mental health issues arising from work is not an inevitable reality; and education should not be reinforcing and supporting this notion[140].

Parting with the cultural bias upholding forms of assessment that are detrimental to wellbeing entails re-articulating not only the purpose of assessments but also the purpose of education more broadly. Bluntly put, if **the purpose of education is to add to the quality of a person's life** and, subsequently, enhance their wellbeing— then the desirability of highly-stress-inducing and confidence-damaging forms of assessment lose their appeal.

The key trigger points that can help shape an effective transition away from traditional assessment practices detrimental to wellbeing which we detail in this paper are both **cultural and practical** in direction. Cultural in the sense that ideas carry weight. After all, policy is always created in arenas of contested interpretations that shape the policy agenda and definition of the policy problem. If it is indeed the case, as argued here, that forms of assessment that are detrimental to wellbeing are justified more on 'faith than fact'. Then the tenets underlying this faith must be brought to attention and continuously challenged by actors at various levels, including actors in public institutions, formal, informal and non-formal educational settings, as well as learners, educational boards and civil society organisations to name but a few. Practical, in the sense that there are practices and approaches that can be reconsidered and new ones that can be adopted. Learning from one another can help reshape our education and training systems, particularly when a broader more holistic view is taken and we shift towards conceptualising education as lifelong learning—the wealth of experiences by all the different sectors and levels of education at European level but also at global level can support the adoption of new and better practices.

Within the context of a holistic approach, we urge educational stakeholders to look into assessments when planning educational reforms, but not limit themselves to assessment practices alone. If we truly wish to consider wellbeing and create learning environments where individuals can feel whole and their wellbeing is promoted, we need to adopt a **whole-institutional educational approach**— changing assessments is pivotal, but so is changing many other practices that affect wellbeing in education and training. By way of example, physical education is known to have a positive indirect effect on wellbeing (physical and mental)—it alleviates symptoms related to anxiety and depression and it also build reactivity so that you can face stress better[141]. Yet, almost half of the population of the EU does not do regular physical exercise[142]; in compulsory education physical education receives only 30% of the time that other subjects receive; while funding for physical education is inadequate[143]. This is only the beginning for the EU and Member States to start rethinking education and training systems based on standardised testing and modernise systems to better fit into the 21st century, and most importantly revisit public policy making.

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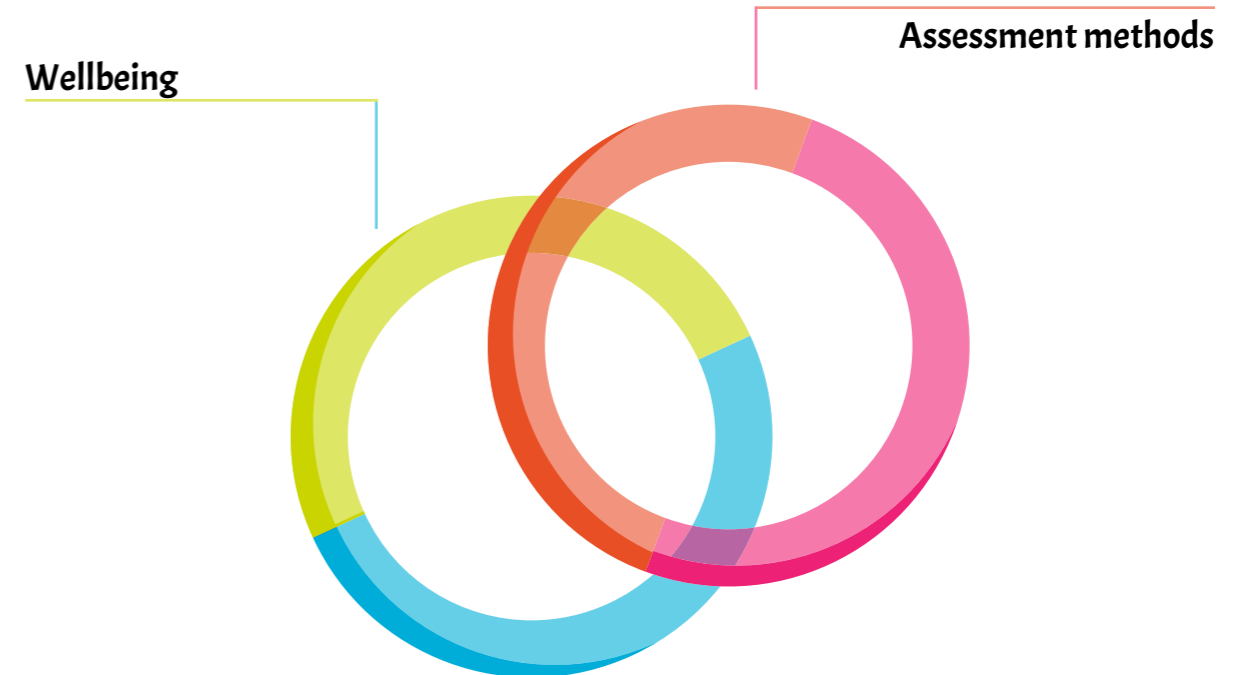
[14] ILO (2016). Workplace Stress: A collective challenge.

[141] Faulkner, G. et al. (2020). Physical Activity as a Coping Strategy for Mental Health Due to the COVID-19 Virus: A Potential Disconnect Among Canadian Adults?
[142] Eurostat (2017), How much do Europeans exercise?
[143] European Parliament (2016). Physical education in school. Briefing.

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