ERW

Ein Rhanbarth ar Waith
Education through Regional Working

A brief guide to assessment in schools

Cynghrair o 6 awdurdod lleol yw ERW a reolir gan gyd-bwyllgor cyfansoddiadol cyfreithiol.
Y nod yw gweithredu strategaeth a chynllun busnes rhanbarthol cytunedig a chefnogi gwelliant ysgolion.

ERW is an alliance of 6 local authorities governed by a legally constituted joint committee.
Its aim is to implement the agreed regional strategy and business plan to support school improvement.

Central South Consortium
Consortiwm Canolbarth y De

EAS

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A brief guide to assessment in schools

This document has been produced by the four education consortia in Wales to provide schools with a brief guide to assessment. It covers the processes and practices of effective assessment from first principles through to end of key stage assessments. Definitions of the assessment terminology used in the document can be found at the end.

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1 Purposes and principles of effective assessment

Promoting children's learning is a principal aim of schools. Assessment lies at the heart of this process. Sound assessment has to be:

- purposeful and planned;
- based on clear objectives;
- designed to allow learners to show what they know and can do;
- fair and free from bias;
- valid, reliable and consistent;
- manageable, putting quality above quantity;
- used to improve both learning and teaching.

Only when these principles are applied will the information generated by the assessment of learners' work be good enough to underpin the school improvement process. This guide will focus on the commonly understood dimensions of assessment for learning and assessment of learning and not venture into the third dimension of assessing achievement which sits outside our prescribed curriculum.

A clear distinction should be made between *assessment of learning* for the purposes of measuring, grading and reporting, which has its own procedures for endeavouring to ensure validity and reliability, and *assessment for learning* which informs and guides both a pupil's progress and how a teacher furthers the learning of that pupil. The effectiveness of assessment for learning will inevitably be a significant factor in determining how well a pupil fulfils her or his potential when that pupil's learning is measured, graded and reported upon.

Assessment for learning

Assessment for learning, when it is done well, is used to:

- encourage and motivate pupils;
- build on previous learning;
- diagnose weaknesses and confirm strengths;
- propose the next steps which a pupil should take to remedy weaknesses and both deepen and broaden learning.

*Principles to follow when assessing **for** learning:*

- the means of assessing progress should be planned from the beginning;
- the assessment tasks must be integral to the learning activity;
- the task assesses the intended skills, knowledge and understanding i.e. it is a valid task;
- a pupil's skills, knowledge and understanding are developed as a result of the assessment;
- all pupils should be able to demonstrate achievement at some level;
- the teacher needs to know what form of feedback is most effective and follow it through with the pupil;
- the pupil needs to understand and act upon the next steps in learning provided by the teacher;
- assessment is on-going and dynamic i.e. a process not an event;
- how a pupil learns is as important as what they learn;

- a combination of being both sensitive and honest with the learner is critical in managing their commitment to learning;
- the capacity for self-assessment has to be taught.

Assessment for learning is the process of knowing where you are, where you want to go and how to get there. This applies to both learner and teacher.

Assessment of learning

Assessment of learning, when it is valid and reliable, is used to:

- provide pupils with a perspective over time on how they are progressing and teachers with a view on the effectiveness of provision;
- provide a summary of a pupil's achievements at a designated point in time such as end of topic, end of year, end of key stage, transition to another school or college, place of employment;
- report the attainment of individual pupils and groups of pupils to parents, governors, the local authority, regulators and Welsh Government;
- indicate how well a school, or education system as a whole, is performing by monitoring trends and patterns;
- inform the targeting of resources to where the need is the greatest.

*Principles to follow in the assessment **of** learning:*

- items of work contributing to the assessment must all be fit for purpose i.e. they are valid and cover the necessary range in the subject;
- assessment of learning should come at the end of learning episodes;
- understanding of the characteristics of each level description and the distinctions between the different levels have to be a key part of a teacher's toolkit;
- judgements must be fair;
- testing, while a legitimate form of assessment in the right context, should be used to provide a snapshot of achievement, or attainment, at a point in time and in a predefined area of learning i.e. frequent summative testing is not, of itself, formative;
- reporting using the outcomes of assessment of learning needs to be set in context.

2. Planning for assessment

Planning for assessment is an integral part of the continuum from planning the curriculum through to planning a lesson and even down to planning to meet individual needs.

When planning **assessment for learning**, teachers need to:

- be clear on what the intended learning outcomes are for any course of study and for individual lessons;
- plan for the right climate for learning, including the physical environment and resources;
- make clear to learners what is expected of them;
- plan for learning activities that offer more than one opportunity for the learner to show what she or he knows, understands and can do;
- ensure that assessment activities are valid;
- also allow learners to assess their own achievements and those of their peers;
- plan to capture, formally or informally, the learning which takes place.

When planning for the **assessment of learning**, teachers need to:

- know what range of evidence is required to arrive at a reliable judgement;
- work to school policy and meet statutory requirements, including the duty to track progress against the Literacy and Numeracy Framework;
- make clear to learners at the outset what standards are expected of them;
- plan a follow-up programme of support for learners to address shortcomings;
- give pupils opportunities to reflect on their learning and to discuss their progress.

Following assessment, teachers need to:

- use assessment information to inform future planning, revisiting both teaching and learning strategies;
- use assessment information to set learning objectives for groups and individuals according to need;
- be familiar with the main messages residing in the data held on each learner and groups of learners to have a clear picture of both prior attainment and potential.

3. Task Setting, Validity and Reliability

When planning learning and integrating assessment into activities, a teacher has to consider if the learning objectives can be properly and explicitly fulfilled in the task or tasks set. The learning objectives can be drawn from the level descriptions in the national curriculum orders and, for subjects which are working from new 2015 orders, both the level descriptions and the outcomes.

Validity

An assessment is **valid** when the task or tasks measure the learning outcomes intended.
The above definition works when talking about both assessment for learning and assessment of learning.

The tasks can take a variety of forms but must be tied to the skills and range of experiences set out in the programmes of study. Validity therefore refers to both those elements, range and skills, so that an assessment, whether of a single piece of work or a body of work, must:

- provide the opportunity for a learner to demonstrate the skills which the task or tasks purport to measure; and
- be based on one or more of the range of experiences from the programmes of study.

Validity can be applied in a variety of contexts e.g. individual work, group work, and to a wide range of tasks and activities including:

- discussion with peers and/or teachers;
- oral presentations;
- performance / role play;
- practical demonstrations and investigations;
- written work, formal and informal;
- trial and improvement activities;
- tests and examinations.

Barriers to an assessment being valid might include:

- the demand of the language used makes the task inaccessible to some learners;
- prior learning that is essential to working at a certain level is not in place;
- there is an insufficient range of experiences to allow a learner to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do;
- pupils have not been guided to apply their learning in more than one context.

Reliability

To help teachers arrive at reliable judgements there are a number of steps or pre-conditions needed:

- learning outcomes are clearly stated for the piece of work to be assessed;
- the activity gives the learner the opportunity to gain or reinforce the skills required to be successful;
- the assessment task is a valid one;

- the teacher ensures learners know what they are supposed to be learning;
- the teacher's judgement of the standard reached is based upon clear criteria commensurate with the intended learning outcomes;
- the judgement derives from the evidence presented by the learner in carrying out that task, not from any prior expectations the teacher may have of how that learner might perform;
- any additional help afforded to the learner is taken into account when judging the standard of achievement.

4 Evidence Collection, Standardisation, Moderation and Best-fit Judgements

Evidence Collection: A learner profile is the body of a pupil's work which accumulates over one or even two years and is assessed at the end of a key stage; this is necessary:

- for examining the body of evidence to award a level at the end of the key stage;
- for in-school and cluster moderation;
- to provide evidence and inform feedback to parents;
- for in-school monitoring of standards.

The evidence itself can take many forms, but will usually be:

- written work;
- visual material e.g. maps, diagrams, drawings, videos;
- audio recordings.

The teacher, or teaching assistant, can also create the record, noting down what characteristics of learning that are evident during these activities.

- listening to a pupil read;
- discussing a topic with a pupil;
- listening in on a group discussion,

To be more manageable, these activities can be electronically recorded and reviewed later by the teacher.

Standardisation refers to the steps taken to achieve consistency in assessment as a pupil's body of work accumulates. This process needs to be integrated into a school's assessment schedule throughout the year but must precede any cluster moderation of standards.

The work being standardised can be from learners within different classes and across year groups. Comparing the work with examples of work already validated as being of that standard, as will be found in a subject portfolio, ensures consistency of judgements over time. Standardising a piece or pieces of work can work in several ways but there are basic principles to be observed:

- learning outcomes for the task are properly understood by all;
- the task is valid in that it measures the intended learning outcomes;
- the annotation points to the evidence of the learning outcomes achieved;
- teachers arrive at a common understanding of <u>why</u> the piece is the standard it is;
- lessons are learnt e.g. about planning, task setting, teaching and learning strategies;
- there is agreement on what the pupil should learn from the assessment.

Best-fit judgement is when work shows characteristics of mainly one level across the range of work, though there may still be some characteristics of the previous or next level in aspects of the work. When the judgement places a significant majority of work firmly within a level, that judgement can be said to represent a 'secure' level. A best fit judgement must take account of different weightings for attainment targets in certain subjects. The judgement must also take account of the amount of support a pupil has received.

Arriving at a level which best–fits the evidence is a professional judgement by the teacher and not a formulaic process of aggregating scores or sub-levels, though it should take into account weightings across Attainment Targets. A rounded or best fit judgement is one that:

- is based on knowledge of how the pupil performs across the range of work required in the subject;
- takes into account different strengths and weaknesses in the learner's performance and the degree of support the pupil has been given;
- is checked against adjacent level descriptions to ensure that the level judged to be the most appropriate is the closest overall match to the learner's performance;
- is criteria referenced (i.e. commentary, with signposting to the relevant examples in the body of a pupil's work, indicates why work is characteristic of the level).

Typically, a learner at the *lower end of a level* shows mainly characteristics of that level across a range of work, but may still show characteristics of the previous level in some aspects of the work.

A learner *securely within the level* demonstrates the characteristics of that level across a range of work.

A learner at the *top end of a level* demonstrates clearly characteristics of that level across a range of work with some examples of characteristics of the next level.

Moderation is an essential part of the assessment process within a school and within a cluster. It is vital to know that what a school takes to a cluster moderation event reflects the standards at which all learner profiles have been levelled at the end of a key stage.
Moderation has a similar aim, but takes places after standardisation.

A moderation process in school, like standardising, can work in more than one way but there are certain key principles to be observed:

- tasks are valid and assessment of individual pieces of work is reliable;
- the outcomes and level descriptions for each subject in the National Curriculum orders are the only criteria which can be applied when ascribing a level to a learner profile;
- a full range of evidence for each pupil must be in place;
- if there is no documented evidence of certain characteristics of a level, the pupil cannot be credited as having achieved those standards;
- a consensus is reached on the best-fit level of each learner profile, making reference to the level above or level below if the judgement is a borderline one.

5 Progress tracking, reporting and feedback to learners

Both quantitative and qualitative information will emerge from the assessment of pupils' learning. Both have their uses and are of value. Assessment can tell us how much has been learned and how well it has been learnt. Using this information to track the progress a learner is making is a critical part of the educational process.

Progress tracking

In order for a teacher and school managers to track, and therefore support, the progress of each pupil, it is important that:

- the school has an unambiguous policy on what is expected of staff in keeping records of pupils' progress;
- records reflect, as a minimum, the range of work required in order to fulfil statutory curriculum orders;
- records indicate which learning outcomes have been assessed;
- records are valid, reliable and current;
- record keeping is manageable;
- learners are able to keep track of their own progress;
- records of progress are accessible to all professionals within the school community;
- records of the standards achieved by learners are used to identify patterns and trends; these can include issues with an individual pupil within a subject or across subjects, with groups of learners or with curriculum provision;
- measures taken to address pupil underperformance are reviewed for the effect they have on standards of achievement;
- all learners receive mentoring to help them meet targets;
- learners are helped and encouraged as a direct result of their progress being tracked.

Data management as a function of tracking progress

A strategic overview of assessment information, therefore, has various benefits:

- performance is set in context using benchmark and value-added information;
- the performance of individual pupils is tracked and alerts highlight the need for some form of intervention;
- targets are set in relation to an analysis of learner potential and attainment, for individuals, classes and cohorts;
- performance of different groups is analysed and issues identified e.g. boys and girls, ethnic groups, more and less able;
- conclusions influence future priorities and action.

Feedback to learners

The nature and quality of feedback to pupils are critical if real and informed progress is to be made. Reporting the outcomes of assessment to the learner is the most useful form of reporting. This is sometimes referred to as 'feedback' or 'feedforward' and is effective if:

- teachers recognise and celebrate achievement in all its forms;
- learners know what they do well and how they can improve;
- teachers regularly provide pupils with opportunities to reflect on and talk about their progress in learning;
- learners are given opportunities to assess and evaluate their own and others' work;

- learners learn from feedback from their peers;
- marking is up to date, accurate, reliable and helpful to learners;
- feedback to learners also informs a teacher's planning of lessons and how they may usefully revise teaching and learning strategies.

6 Reviewing the curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment

Quality assurance in education is part of the day-to-day work of all schools. Staff use a wide range of activities to ensure that high standards are maintained and outcomes improved for children and young people. Since assessment is integral to learning, teaching and the curriculum, these quality assurance processes apply equally to assessment.

The outcomes of cluster moderation need to be woven into the fabric of quality assurance processes to make the most of lessons learnt. Evaluation of effectiveness comes from many external and internal sources. Assessment in its various forms and at its different stages should be a strong focus in any quality assurance regime and include evidence from:

- Estyn reports;
- the challenge adviser's reports;
- monitoring by senior leaders and middle managers;
- self-evaluation by staff and governors;
- pupil and parent surveys;
- close analysis of data – predictions, targets and actual performance; value added performance; performance relative to 'like' schools and to norms.

7 Assessment Terms

Assessment: a judgement or determination of how well a learner has achieved the intended outcome from a learning activity. The assessment can be in any setting, formal or informal, and take any form e.g. observation of the learner, listening to the learner, reading what the learner has written.

Assessment for learning (sometimes referred to as '**formative assessment'**) is the use of day-to-day, often informal, assessments to explore how far pupils have learnt particular skills or gained in knowledge and understanding so that the teacher can best decide how to help them to move their learning on. Peer assessment can also fulfil this purpose on occasions. A task or activity is not formative unless the information it provides is actually used to take learning forward.

Assessment of learning (sometimes referred to as '**summative assessment'**) is the more formal summing-up of a pupil's achievements which can then be used for a variety of purposes e.g. reporting to parents, reporting levels as determined by Teacher Assessment, certification.

It should be noted that assessments can be used for both formative and summative purposes.

Best fit judgement is when work shows characteristics of mainly one level across the range of work, though there may still be some characteristics of the previous or next level in aspects of the work. A best fit judgement must take account of different weightings for attainment targets in certain subjects.

Cluster moderation is the moderating process carried out across a cluster of schools to ensure judgements in each participating school at the end of a key stage are reliable and consistently applied.

Consistent: consistent assessments are both valid and reliable therefore bringing confidence and integrity to the assessment process. (*see also 'valid' and 'reliable'*)

Evidence is the work of a learner in whatever form he or she has demonstrated achievement. For Teacher Assessment purposes there has to be a sufficient range of evidence to allow a reliable judgement of the standard or level to be made.

Learner profile will typically contain the work of one pupil from across the range of the subject and provide sufficient evidence to enable a judgement to be made on the level which best fits the standard represented in the profile. A learner profile should be as straightforward as the pupils' book or books which show evidence of the characteristics of levels and relevant attainment target(s). Other work which would give the complete picture of a pupil's standards might include a theme/topic book, audio visual recordings, reading record. A commentary on the learner profile will make clear how, on balance, the best fit judgement has been reached and why it is not at the level above or below if it is borderline. The commentary will signpost where the evidence of achievement at a particular level can be seen in the exercise book or other original material produced in the year.

Level is a given standard, from levels 1 to 8 plus exceptional performance, within each subject as described in the National Curriculum orders. A level is termed in full, a '*level of attainment*' because the standard is referenced to the criteria in the level description.

Level description: characteristics of the performance which can be expected at each level in each area of learning or attainment target.

Moderation is the process of teachers considering the range of work of an individual learner and, in the context of Teacher Assessment, taking overall performance into account to arrive at an agreed standard for the body of work i.e. a level. In certain subjects this will be for both separate attainment targets and for the subject as a whole.

Outcomes in the national curriculum orders being implemented from September 2015, describe the types and range of performance that learners working at a particular outcome should characteristically demonstrate.

Reliable: an assessment is reliable when the criteria for making a judgement are correctly applied and that judgement is replicated by others.

School moderation is the moderating process carried out within a school to ensure judgements at the end of a key stage are reliable and consistently applied.

A standard is a set of criteria against which performance is measured.

Standardisation is the process of teachers scrutinising individual pieces of work to agree the standard of each based on given criteria (e.g. characteristics found in level descriptions). The work being standardised is usually from more than one learner and learners within different classes and year groups. Comparing the work with examples of work already validated as being of that standard, as might be found in a subject portfolio, ensures consistency of judgements over time.

Subject portfolio is a subject specific compilation of work from different pupils which illustrates the characteristics of work at each level. Typically, the examples of work are annotated to illustrate and explain the specifics of those characteristics and what they look like in practice. The annotation can also helpfully show what the next steps in learning for that pupil should be.

Teacher Assessment: the technical term applied to a statutory teacher's assessment of the 'best fit' level of a pupil's body of work by the end of a key stage.

Valid: an assessment is valid when the task or tasks measure the learning outcomes intended.

Verification: an independent evaluation of the quality and integrity of the moderation process by someone external to the school or schools involved.