

THE SCOTTISH APPROACH TO ASSESSMENT

A joint paper from the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and Scottish Qualifications Authority

Purpose

1. This paper aims to briefly outline approaches to assessment in the curriculum from ages 3-18. In doing so, it presents an opportunity to explore the issues arising in respect of assessment practice and sets out a proposed approach by which the Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB) can consider these matters in more detail and agree their collective responsibilities in supporting improvement.

Context

2. Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) aims to help children and young people to gain the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for learning, life and work. It is also focused on improving outcomes for all by actively engaging learners, improving pedagogy, promoting deeper understanding, developing skills and closing the poverty-related attainment gap.
3. Assessment is an integral part of learning, teaching and the curriculum. It helps teachers, learners, parents and others to understand the depth and breadth of learning established in respect of each curriculum level or each relevant qualification or award so that progress and next steps can be identified, discussed and planned¹. The purposes of assessment, as set out in BtC5 can be summarised as:
 - Supporting learning.
 - Helping to plan next steps.
 - Informing learners and their parents of their progress.
 - Summarising achievements (sometimes through qualifications or awards offered by SQA and others).
 - Monitoring the education system and influencing future developments at class, local and national levels.
4. CfE aims to support and optimise the role of assessment through:
 - Making clear the learning continuum and skills progression from 3-18.
 - Recognising the integral role of assessment in supporting learning.
 - An integrated early learning, primary, secondary school and college curriculum providing a better connected and smoother assessment system.
 - Highlighting the need for flexibility in meeting individual learners' needs.
 - Allowing for recognition of learners' skills and achievements periodically and at key transitions (from primary to secondary, to further or higher education and employment) to ensure that their learning continues uninterrupted *at the correct level and appropriate pace* for them.
5. The guidance issued by the Chief Inspector of Education in May 2016² made clear the need for effective assessment from 3-18, aligned with the approaches set out in the National Improvement Framework.

¹ Refers to Building the Curriculum 5 <https://education.gov.scot/Documents/btc5-framework.pdf>

² Chief Insp. CfE statement <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/documents/cfestatement.pdf>

Approaches to assessment

6. Assessment is an essential part of learning and teaching, day-to-day, periodically and at key transition points. A range of approaches to assessment are used throughout the 3-18 curriculum.
7. As set out in the National Improvement Framework, the assessment of children's progress is considered in its widest sense – from development in the early years, right through to their destination on leaving school, and recognising the primacy of health and wellbeing throughout.
8. The central purpose of assessment is to support learning and this is best achieved by a combination of formative and summative assessment. This means assessing learning both in an ongoing way and by 'stepping back' at regular intervals to take stock of learners' progress and achievements. The terms 'formative' and 'summative' do not describe a type or form of assessment, but instead describe how assessments are used.
9. During both the broad general education and senior phase, teachers gather assessment evidence on an ongoing and informal basis, in a number of ways, including observing children working together, initiating discussions within class and providing feedback on pieces of work. Children may also assess their own work or that of their classmates, against agreed success criteria. This wide range of ongoing assessment tends to have a formative/diagnostic purpose, whereby information is used to identify strengths and development needs and to inform next steps in learning.
10. Evidence and feedback from any assessment can be used formatively to inform planning for improvements in learning, as well as contributing to ongoing and periodic summaries of progress and achievement for reporting and monitoring, and to ensure suitable progress is made.
11. In best practice, teachers and their pupils have a clear understanding of:
 - What they are supposed to be learning;
 - How they will know if they have succeeded; and
 - What their next steps should be.
12. There should be ongoing discussion around these three aspects amongst pupils (through self- and peer-assessment), and between teachers and their pupils to ensure suitable progress is made.
13. Assessment can also be more structured, and may be undertaken at key transition points – such as a test at the end of a topic or course unit. This more summative approach to assessment is used to identify whether the child or young person has secured key learning outcomes or achieved a particular standard or level, for example the relevant Curriculum for Excellence levels.
14. The Experimental Statistics publication of Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels provides key national data on children's progress in literacy and numeracy at P1, P4, P7 and S3 and is based entirely on teachers' professional judgements, of whether a child or young person is considered to have met the standards associated with the relevant level.
15. The Scottish Government has taken a number of steps to support teachers in making these judgements:

- The publication of literacy and numeracy benchmarks by Education Scotland to provide clarity on what the achievement of a level looks like;
 - Funding Education Scotland's Quality Assurance and Moderation Support Officer (QAMSO) programme which is helping to ensure the consistency and robustness of teacher judgements across schools and local authorities; and
 - The introduction of Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSAs) and their Gaelic Medium Education counterpart, the Measaidhean Coitcheann Nàiseanta airson Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig (MCNGs) at P1, P4, P7 and S3 to provide an additional source of objective, nationally consistent evidence for teachers to use when assessing and planning children's progress, as well as when determining approaches to be used in the classroom, and to inform dialogue between staff, learners and their parents.
16. The publication of benchmarks in all curriculum areas also aims to support practitioners to assess the progress of learners and support a shared understanding of the standards to be achieved at each CfE level across the curriculum.
17. The support for practitioners detailed above can be seen as progress towards addressing the OECD's finding that *"too many teachers are unclear what should be assessed in relation to the Experiences and Outcomes, which blurs the connection between assessment and improvement. Beyond existing terms, current assessment arrangements do not provide sufficiently robust information, whether for system-level policy-making, or for local authorities, or for individual schools or across CfE domains for learners and their teachers. The proposed National Improvement Framework has the potential to provide such a robust evidence base."*³
18. The well informed assessment of achievement of CfE levels is of critical importance during the transition from the BGE to the Senior Phase. It is vital that practitioners are both confident in assessing CfE levels and understanding how they articulate with qualifications and awards at SCQF levels to support discussions with learners on their appropriate course choices into and through the senior phase.
19. In the Senior Phase, though not exclusively, a substantial part of assessment will contribute to young people gaining formal qualifications and awards. It helps to inform learners and parents of progress, summarise achievements, and influence future pathways to positive destinations and careers, as described earlier in this paper.
20. All SQA assessment associated with their catalogue of qualifications and awards is summative, whether it is carried out by the centre or administered by SQA, because it assesses performance against a particular specification or standard. Those assessments - whether via an internally or externally assessed observation, product evaluation (e.g. assignment or project) or questioning – must meet SQA's principles of assessment: valid, reliable, practicable, equitable and fair. However, robust procedures must also be in place as part of the broad general education (BGE) and at particular points of transition to ensure the reliability of information shared about a learners progress and achievements to-date.
21. All assessment judgements leading to national qualifications must be quality assured to ensure they meet national standards. For internal assessments, schools are responsible through internal quality assurance for ensuring consistency of judgements within a school and that the conditions of assessment have been followed. SQA then sample schools' assessment judgements to ensure consistency across schools. For externally

³ OECD (2015) *Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective* p11.

assessed work, SQA marks and quality assures assessment judgements to ensure they are in line with national standards.

22. Units, some courses and other qualifications are internally assessed and externally quality assured as a pass or fail judgement. Some externally assessed National Courses are graded by SQA to differentiate performance. A full description of SQA's current assessment approaches can be found in the SQA Guide to Assessment⁴.

Emerging factors

Early Learning

23. There is a consensus around the importance of learning through play as part of Curriculum for Excellence, and in particular at the early level. Through inspection evidence, we know that there is work to be done to ensure that children make suitable progress in their learning when a play based approach to learning is adopted. Planning, including the effective use of assessment, to meet children's learning needs is crucial. Teachers need to plan to provide high-quality experiences which enable children to achieve CfE early level by the end of P1. The current debate regarding SNSAs in P1 is linked to this issue, with for example, the organisation Upstart considering the SNSAs to be at odds with a play-based approach to learning and have particular concerns about the use of a standardised assessment tool. David Reedy has been asked by the Deputy First Minister to explore these concerns as part of his independent review of the SNSA in P1, which is due to report this month.

Primary schools

24. We know that in primary schools there can be a tendency to focus mainly on assessing children's progress in literacy and numeracy, and to a lesser extent, aspects of health and wellbeing. When the CfE Benchmarks were published, it was made clear that, to avoid undue workload, primary teachers were not expected to use the Benchmarks for all areas of the curriculum, but to adopt them gradually in line with their school improvement plan. The initial focus on literacy and numeracy was adopted in recognition that progress in these curricular areas provide the critical foundations for all future learning.

Assessment from S1 to S3

25. We know from secondary school inspections that there can be a tendency to focus on national qualifications, rather than assessment from S1 to S3, within a coherent, progressive BGE. This may be due to the continuing high levels of expectation and accountability around national qualifications, as well as the need to give high priority to understanding and implementing the new qualifications introduced from 2014 onwards, and the subsequent changes which remain ongoing. As a result, however, learners from S1 to S3 are not always receiving the support and challenge they require to make suitably brisk progress and well-informed choices. Therefore there is not always suitably robust information from assessment to ensure that learners follow the correct pathways into the senior phase. There is a continuing need for practitioners and networks to make greater use of curriculum area Benchmarks. Education Scotland is working with Local Authorities and local authorities to support improvements in progression in learning from S1 to S3 and into the senior phase.

Role of S3

⁴ https://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/Guide_To_Assessment.pdf

26. The advice to teachers from BtC3 is that young people should be secure in the relevant aspects of CfE Fourth level if they are to follow a course leading to N5 or another learner pathway in S4 at SCQF level 5. This has not always been well understood, and teachers' understanding of CfE levels is still developing which often results in work at S3 which is not challenging enough. This can, in a small number of cases, lead to inappropriate presentation of young people for National 5 when alternative learner pathways may have been more suitable is also an ongoing issue. The Achievement of CfE Levels data for Fourth level achievement in particular, is less consistent than that for Third level or the primary stages in the BGE phase.
27. It has proved particularly challenging to make clear to the system what is and is not desirable with regard to work in S3 which relates to national qualifications or awards or alternative pathways in the Senior Phase. Whilst teachers should naturally ensure young people make appropriate progress in their learning, which may then include aspects covered through national courses, the key point is that we do not expect young people in S3 to be learning how many marks they will get from SQA by answering in a certain manner, or to focus on questions from 'past papers'. This point of course applies at all phases and ages; we should not be teaching to the assessment as such as these approaches narrow young people's learning experiences. Teachers should be using information from assessment, supported by the Benchmarks, to ensure that young people in S3 are working at a CfE level in line with their learning needs and their aspirations for the senior phase.
28. Within the next stage of improving teacher professional judgement, there is a need for increased support by Education Scotland around the transition between the learning, knowledge and skills young people acquire at Fourth curriculum level and the extensive breadth of SCQF-related learning opportunities available for their Senior Phase pathways.

Quality Assurance and Moderation Support Officer (QAMSO) programme

29. There is evidence from Education Scotland's QAMSO programme, now in its third year, that those involved now have increased confidence in assessment and moderation of literacy and numeracy, and in understanding what is required to achieve a CfE level. The challenge remains to ensure that all local authorities are engaging with the QAMSO programme and ensuring that the expertise being shared at these events is then cascaded to all teachers. The Achievement of CfE Levels data on literacy and numeracy based on teachers' professional judgement remained 'Experimental Statistics' for 2017/18 but provides a baseline on which to measure progress in the BGE. Despite growing confidence from practitioners in their ability to form consistent judgements, there remains an expressed need for further support.
30. Following three years of national support and the ongoing support of the National Improvement Hub and Moderation Hub, Education Scotland and local authorities are agreeing that further development of systematic approaches to assessment and moderation should now lie at RIC/local levels.
31. Education Scotland will extend the QAMSO programme to enable QAMSOs who have been through national training to determine how they might now plan and lead work on assessment and moderation within their own contexts. Education Scotland will also provide the national QAMSO training, by sharing and supporting the understanding of standards through moderation of pupil evidence in numeracy, reading and writing, whilst also offering training in standards within listening and talking for the first time.

32. Quality assurance and moderation across other curriculum areas is less well developed. However, some local authorities are encouraging subject networks to focus on this, building on the processes supported through the national QAMSO programme, and this should be encouraged. Education Scotland's regional teams will support the development of local subject networks to help encourage a wider curriculum offer. Education Scotland's regional teams will support the development of local subject networks to help encourage a wider curriculum offer.

Presentations for the National Qualifications or alternative learner pathways

33. The 2018 SQA Results highlighted a trend towards presentation at National 5 across all subjects where National 4 may have been more appropriate. This may link with the lack of suitably robust information from assessment in S1 to S3 to ensure learners have met the required CfE levels, and/or the persistence in some local authorities and schools for 'aspirational' presentation.
34. Practitioners do need to improve assessment and its use across S1-S3. In particular, practitioners need to develop greater understanding of progression in subject knowledge and the skills in using this to inform their formative assessments and improve their support for learners' next steps. This will help to ensure learners have met the required CfE levels; are following the correct pathways; are presented for the correct level of qualification or award (see paragraph 20) over the right timeframe (one or two years) to allow time to consolidate learning and achieve an improved outcome. A range of tools are available to streamline and improve assessment practice – Benchmarks, SNSAs, NIF performance data – and highlights the role of schools and teachers in using these tools to improve the educational outcomes for young people.
35. Last year's Results also indicated that aspirational presentations are continuing. Teachers are often clear from their estimate grades that they submit for young people that they are not going to pass. This may also be indicative of a desire by some teachers/schools to recreate the Standard Grade model; the role of parental pressure; whole school policies about presentation approaches; the perceived credibility of National 4; and the tendency to focus on National Qualifications as opposed to the wider breadth of learner pathways available in the Senior Phase.
36. This further illustrates the importance of work with national partners to enhance the credibility and promotion of National 4 alongside other learner pathways, in delivering the recommendations of the Learner Journey. In addition, Recognising Positive Achievement (RPA) will be removed from academic year 2019/20 which should enhance the worth of National 4 in its own right, as opposed to being seen as a consolation award.
37. It also highlights the necessity for local authorities to review their presentation policies in light of the 2018 Results and indeed their learners' onward pathways, as encouraged by the Chief Inspector of Education.

Delivery of the Curriculum

38. There is also a body of work to be delivered in conjunction with national partners (including those working in the sector) to support improvements in the quality and effectiveness of learning and teaching across CfE and the variety of learner pathways in the Senior Phase. The key aim should be to focus on the well-paced acquisition of skills, knowledge

and attributes that embeds learning and leads to the successful completion of assessment tasks.

39. In the Senior Phase, anecdotal evidence suggests that learners are being taught to the 'test', rather than being taught how to apply their learning in any given subject. The pace of introducing changes to the National Qualifications may have impacted on teachers' time to understand the revisions and adjust the course structure; learning and teaching; related class/pupil-based assessments of progress; together with preparing learners for the revised National Qualifications.

Assessing National Courses

40. As a result of the Assessment and National Qualification (ANQ) Group's decision, SQA were asked to remove mandatory unit assessments from National 5 (in 2017/18), Higher (2018/19) and Advanced Higher (2019/20). This resulted in changes to course assessment to cover that which was previously covered in units and unit assessments. This resulted in different things in different subjects such as new or amended coursework and/or new/amended question papers. In addition there were a number of subjects where the coursework was internally assessed, and teachers asked that this move to being externally assessed by SQA Markers (who include practising teachers).
41. As a result, there is evidence emerging from SQA Course Reports and verification visits to suggest more needs to be done by the sector to build teacher confidence in delivering and assessing specific subjects within the Senior Phase curriculum to national standards.
42. It also emphasises the need to continue to build on BGE quality assurance and moderation training to improve internal moderation as part of schools' assessment arrangements in the senior phase, and in making appropriate judgements around presentations for assessment and national courses based on a learners' best interests.

Next steps

43. In light of the factors above, we have set out a proposed programme of work (see overleaf) by which the CAB can consider these factors in more detail to agree the collective roles and responsibilities we have in supporting improvements.
44. The CAB is asked to:
- consider the factors raised in the paper, and
 - determine which of the two approaches outlined in Annex A it prefers in order to consider these factors in more detail.

PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITY

Timeframes	Activity	Purpose	Lead	Notes
6 June 2019	Initial paper on the Scottish Approach to Assessment to be tabled at CAB meeting, to seek agreement on how members wish to consider the points raised within the paper.	<p>To seek CAB members views on how they wish to approach discussions regarding the role of assessment in the curriculum either via:</p> <p>Option 1 - A dedicated CAB session on Assessment in the next academic year</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Option 2 - A series of discussions (3/4 plus a wash-up) on assessment related factors in the CAB sessions planned from September onwards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of assessment in CfE • Teacher confidence • Balance and approach • Early learning • Primary schools • Assessment from S1 to S3 • Role of S3 • Quality Assurance and Moderation Support Officer (QAMSO) programme • Presentations for the National Qualifications • Delivery of the National Courses • Assessing National Courses 	SG/ES/SQA	
18 September 2019	First CAB meeting of session 2019/20 and either:	To deliver a dedicated CAB session with workshops on each of the key factors	TBC	<i>Either of these sessions could be facilitated externally.</i>

	<p>Option 1 - A dedicated CAB session with focussed workshops on the factors emerging in respect of Assessment in Curriculum</p> <p><i>or</i></p> <p>Option 2 – The first in a series of discussions on assessment related factors in the CAB sessions planned from September onwards.</p>	<p>highlighted within the Assessment in the Curriculum run alongside regular CAB meeting.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>To proportion a segment of the September CAB meeting to explore one or two of the factors highlighted above.</p>		<p><i>Consideration should also be given to how best to involve wider teacher representative bodies in these discussions.</i></p>
11 September 2019	Assessment Summit in Edinburgh to discuss the Scottish assessment model and how to raise knowledge and awareness of it. We would look to invite around 200 participants to attend.	To raise awareness and understanding of the Scottish assessment model with practitioners, headteachers, local authority staff, and regional improvement collaborative leads, to consider the educational benefits of this assessment approach and how it can be strengthened further. The summit will also consider what can be done to raise awareness and understanding of the assessment model more widely – particularly about the diagnostic purpose of SNSA	SG/ES	
4 December 2019	<i>Second CAB meeting of session 2019/20</i>	<i>Will depend what option was chosen</i>	<i>TBC</i>	
<i>TBC</i>	<i>TBC</i>	<i>Will depend what option was chosen</i>	<i>TBC</i>	<i>CAB meetings beyond December 2019 have yet to be finalised.</i>