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Guidance for assessment and learning

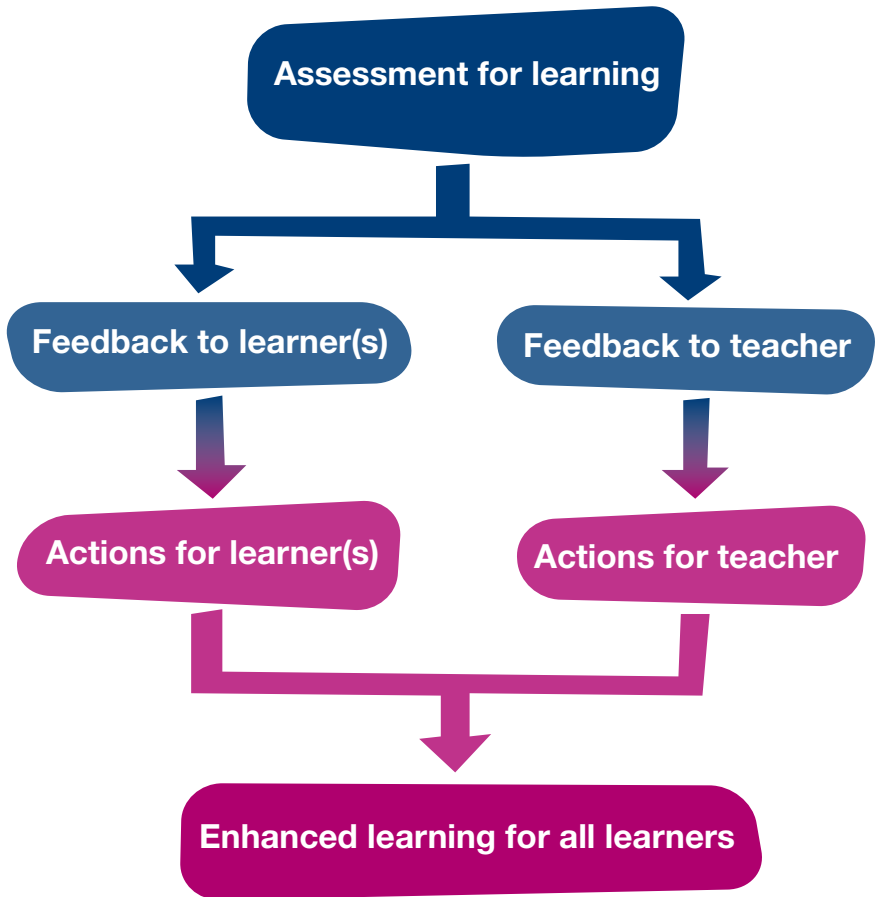
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Assessment for learning

What is assessment for learning?

Assessment for learning – sometimes called formative assessment – involves teachers and learners using assessment to improve learning. It is about assessing progress and analysing and feeding back the outcomes of that assessment positively and constructively to:

- agree actions to help the learner improve
- adapt teaching methods to meet the learner's identified needs.



Assessment for learning:

- follows on from initial and diagnostic assessment and continues throughout a learner's course or programme
- while distinct from assessment of learning, nonetheless helps in the process of guiding learners towards accreditation.

What does assessment for learning involve?

Assessment for learning demonstrates a particular view of learning – that all learners can improve and achieve their full potential. Ability is incremental, not fixed. Assessment for learning involves:

- sharing learning goals with learners – and making sure they know the standard or level they are aiming at
- teacher and learner assessing progress through methods that include learner self-assessment and peer review (note that learners often need help to develop and use these skills well)
- teacher and learner together reviewing and reflecting on assessment information
- giving feedback to learners in ways that enable them to improve and plan their next steps.

Assessment for learning is a **continuous dialogue** that should:

- focus on the whole person, taking into account feelings as well as skills, and understanding any barriers the learner may experience
- encourage learners to take more responsibility for their own learning
- ensure that learners are aware of what they are learning and why.

What research tells us

- Giving feedback on learning errors and getting the learner to correct them and identify strategies to improve future work is directly linked to significant improvement in achievement rates.

(Professor John Hattie, 2002)

- To create a culture of success, where all learners believe they can achieve, teachers need to:
 - make sure that learners are clear about:
 - what they are meant to be doing
 - how it will be assessed
 - what they are doing well
 - what is wrong and what needs to be done to put it right
 - avoid reference to ability and competition and comparison with others.

(Black and Wiliam, 1999)

- Feedback using constructive comments leads to improved performance – up by 33%. Marking using grades can have a negative effect on learner performance, particularly for low achievers.

(Butler, 1988)

To find out more about the research, go to the ‘Want to know more?’ section.

Methods for assessment for learning

Assessment for learning can take place in teaching and learning sessions, through written and verbal feedback and as part of review, target setting and action planning.

How can you check learning and assess progress?

When deciding on techniques for checking learning in a group situation, consider to what extent each method enables you to:

- assess the progress of **all** learners
- ensure learners get constructive feedback
- get feedback on your teaching.

You should use a range of approaches:

- teacher-led assessment
- learner self-assessment
- peer assessment
- computer-based assessment.

These should be written into your course and session plans.

Effective checking for learning enables learners to be involved in the assessment process and to make sense of what they are learning and how it relates to and builds on what they already know.

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Form a question

Ask learners to form questions based on the session in order to check one another's learning.

Minute paper

Three or four minutes before the end of the session or stage in the session, ask learners to write a short (timed), focused response to a carefully worded prompt. For example, What was the most important thing you learned about X? What new aspect of Y did you learn today? What was the most surprising thing you learned today? What point remains least clear to you?

To find out where to access more ideas for checking learning, go to the 'Want to know more?' section.

Reviewing learning: looking backwards and forwards

Most learning programmes have time when teacher and learner meet to review learning. These review sessions, formal or informal, involve looking into the past and:

- discussing what has happened in the preceding period of time
- recognising and celebrating achievements, in particular targets that have been achieved and progress that the learner has made.

Then looking forward to:

- modify targets or set new ones
- plan learning opportunities and progression options.

Review sessions are likely to play a key part in assessment for learning. However, in practice, assessment for learning takes place whenever you meet the learner, including during class sessions.

Developing the skill of reflection

For all learners, the ability to reflect on what they have experienced and learnt is important. It involves learners:

- describing an experience and how they felt about it
- reflecting on what they have learnt – or will be able to learn – from the experience
- developing skills of self-assessment.

Assessment for learning gives opportunities to support and guide the learner's reflection in a climate of mutual trust and respect.

Giving and receiving feedback

Giving constructive feedback – verbal and written – is a vital aspect of assessment for learning. You can provide feedback in a range of situations: from an instant, informal reply to a more formally planned review.

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When giving written feedback...

- Respond to the content and the message in the writing first. Don't focus only on surface errors such as spelling or punctuation.
- Don't jump straight to the errors. Praise first.
- If writing is weak, select one or two particular areas to draw attention to. Don't cover work in red ink.
- Be specific. Indicate what action the learner should take in relation to weaknesses that have been marked.
- Encourage the learner to make corrections. Don't simply write in correct answers, spellings and so on.
- Link comments to the learner's personal targets on their individual learning plan (ILP).

When giving verbal feedback...

- Stress the positive. Always give specific feedback on what a learner has done well.
- Remember to give ‘a medal and a mission’. Celebrate what’s been achieved and be clear about exactly what needs to improve next and how.
- Seek learners’ views and value their contribution. This will help them to get better at assessing their own work, which is vital to them becoming independent learners.
- Invite the learner to comment on what you do as well. Feedback is not a one-way process.
- Frame questions carefully. Use open questions and resist asking more than one question at a time.
- Use prompts such as ‘Would you like to say more about that?’
- Pause for a few seconds after posing a question or a response has been given, to encourage learners to carefully consider and expand on what they have said.
- Avoid generalisations such as ‘There are a lot of inaccuracies’. Instead focus on specific areas for development which you can discuss with the learner.
- Focus on things that each learner can change, and avoid overloading them with too much feedback at once.
- Be sensitive if you have to give feedback to one person in a group. Will they feel undermined if others hear?
- Look for ways forward together. Share ideas and explore solutions rather than always putting forward your own suggestions.
- Agree what you will both do as a result. This could include agreeing new targets or planning learning opportunities.
- Adapt your approach to suit one-to-one or group situations.

Linking to the ILP

Assessment for learning is the main process by which you and the learner will keep the ILP up to date.

You can draw on assessment for learning to:

- review progress against targets
- celebrate progress and achievements
- identify new targets
- inform teaching and learning strategies
- involve learners in setting their own individual targets and learning contexts.

Recording what's agreed

Record the outcomes of assessment for learning in the ILP. Encourage learners to complete the record themselves, with support if necessary.

Learners need to feel they own their records. Ask them to record a review, but if you write it up, make sure you use language that the learner understands.

- Ensure that the record stresses the positive and notes the learner's achievements, not just the next challenges.
- The record should note what was discussed, record important points made – acknowledging the learner's contribution – and clearly state agreed future action.
- Recording also acts as reinforcement and can play a part in maintaining learner motivation. The written record is tangible proof of what the learner has achieved.

Records of reviews will help both you and the learner to take a longer-term view. They demonstrate how far the learner has travelled since starting their programme.

Want to know more?

To learn more about the 10 principles for assessment for learning and to access checklists and resources:

www.qca.org.uk/qca_4334.aspx

To find out more about practical approaches to formative assessment: **www.geoffpetty.com**

To find out more about government resources for schools focused on assessment for learning and personalised learning:

www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/personalisedlearning/five/afl

To look at Association for Achievement and Improvement through Assessment (AAIA) reviews, research and inspection findings relevant to assessment for learning, see *Assessment for learning: beyond the black box*:

www.aaia.org.uk/assessment.htm

To find out about improving teacher-led assessment, see *Assessment for learning* (LSN, 2005):

www.LSNeducation.org.uk/pubs

To find out about effective tutorial support and use of ILPs, see *Tutorials and target-setting in the effective delivery of vocational A-levels* (Jones/Duckett, 2004):

www.LSNeducation.org.uk/pubs

To find out about effective assessment for learning and feedback techniques, see *Putting learning first* (LSN, 2008):

www.LSNeducation.org.uk/pubs

To find a useful checklist on giving feedback to learners, see *Recognition and reward: using feedback for learner success* (LSN, 2003): **www.LSNeducation.org.uk/pubs**

To find out more about the Move On approach, online practice tests and skills development opportunities: **www.move-on.org.uk**

To find out more about the research quoted

Black, P and Wiliam, D (1999). *Assessment for learning: beyond the black box*. London: Kings College London.

Professor John Hattie's website is at: **www.arts.auckland.ac.nz/staff/index.cfm?p+8650**

Butler, R (1988). 'Enhancing and undermining intrinsic motivation: effects of task-involving and ego-involving evaluation on interest and performance'. *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 56 (51–63).

How assessment for learning fits with other assessment processes

Assessment for learning

- Recognises what has been learnt, including progress in literacy, language and numeracy
- Recognises what still needs to be learnt and how
 - Provides feedback to learners in ways that help them to improve

The individual learning plan records:

- achievements and reflections
- further learning targets
- reviewed progression options



The learner

- Informed
- Making decisions
- Negotiating and using their individual learning plan (ILP)
 - Developing reflective skills

Diagnostic assessment

- Is a detailed assessment of specific skills
- Informs teaching and learning strategies
- Can include a diagnostic assessment tool as part of the detailed assessment of literacy, language and numeracy skills

The individual learning plan:

- records precise learning targets
- details appropriate learning
- steers learning towards achievement of long-term goals

The individual learning plan records:

- the need (or not) for future assessment
- long-term goals and aspirations
- progression routes

Skills check

- Takes place during the information, advice and guidance (IAG) process
- Informs signposting and referral to learning, training or employment opportunities
- Is a quick assessment to establish abilities and needs in literacy, language and numeracy
- Can include a literacy, language or numeracy skills check tool

The individual learning plan records:

- current achievement levels
 - the need for further assessment in specific areas
- long-term goals and aspirations
- progression routes

Initial assessment

- Begins the process of identifying abilities, interests, aspirations and needs
- Informs selection of the right learning programme
- Can include an initial assessment tool as part of the identification of a learner's literacy, language or numeracy level

About this series

This is one of five leaflets on assessment and learning produced by QIA. Other titles in the series are:

- High-quality assessment processes: guidance for managers
- Using skills checks
- Initial and diagnostic assessment: a learner-centred process
- Individual learning plans.

The leaflets are informed by recent QIA work that highlights the need for:

- greater clarity about the purposes and forms of assessment
- the development and/or honing of understanding and skills to manage and implement assessment at different stages
- effective learner-centred processes
- specific learner feedback that identifies what the learner knows and can do, what the learner needs to learn and how they can learn it
- appropriate use of assessment tools
- effective use of assessment data by learners, teachers, managers and organisations
- effective use of individual learning plans so that they are at the heart of assessment, learning and support processes
- self-assessment and quality assurance processes that take account of the important role played by assessment.

Go to the assessment area of the Skills for Life Improvement Programme website (www.sflip.org.uk) to download copies of all five leaflets, for ideas on how to use the leaflets to support staff and organisational development, and to access a resource bank of supporting material.

Contact us

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