

Understanding K–12 assessment

K–12 policies and resources

February 2022

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Purpose

This document outlines the K–12 assessment position of the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) and provides a foundation for building and clarifying knowledge and understanding of assessment literacy. It is intended to support and guide the processes integral to quality teaching, learning, assessment and reporting.

This document is also available on the QCAA website (QCAA, 2021).

Background

All Queensland teachers and students deserve to benefit from their assessment experiences.

Assessment should provide timely and useful information that can be used by teachers and students alike to improve how teachers teach and how and what students learn. Assessment is an essential component of effective teaching and learning.

Assessment:

- improves teaching by providing information on what students know and can do
- helps students progress in their learning by giving them feedback to inform their next steps in learning
- provides meaningful information on students' strengths, learning needs and achievements.

Principles and attributes of assessment

The following principles (Appendix 1) form the foundation of beliefs about assessment practices.

Assessment should be:

- **aligned** with curriculum and pedagogy
- **equitable** for all students
- **evidence-based**, using established standards/continua to make defensible and comparable judgments about students' learning
- **ongoing**, with a range and balance of evidence compiled over time to reflect the depth and breadth of students' learning
- **transparent**, to enhance professional and public confidence in the processes used, the information obtained and the decisions made
- **informative** of where students are in their learning.

Quality assessment is characterised by three attributes (Appendix 2):

- **validity**, through alignment with what is taught, learnt and assessed
- **accessibility**, each student is given opportunities to demonstrate what they know and can do
- **reliability**, assessment results are consistent, dependable or repeatable.

Assessment

Assessment is the ongoing process of gathering, analysing and reflecting on evidence to make informed judgments about the achievement or capabilities of individuals and cohorts.

Assessment plays an integral role in improving learning and informing teaching. Its fundamental purpose is to establish where learners are in an aspect of their learning at the time of assessment (Masters 2014).

The literature uses different terms about assessment, including assessment for, as and of learning, diagnostic, formative and summative.

Assessment for, as and of learning

Assessment for learning, assessment as learning and assessment of learning (Earl 2013) are purposes for which evidence is gathered about student progression to improve teaching and learning. Assessment for these purposes can involve both teachers and students, providing opportunities for them to give and receive feedback and inform future planning. The principles and attributes described above should be considered when planning any assessment.

Assessment for learning

Assessment for learning occurs throughout the learning process and could be diagnostic¹ and/or formative².

Assessment as learning

Assessment as learning places the student central to the processes of assessing and learning. Students monitor their own learning and use formal and informal feedback and self-assessment to determine the next steps required to meet learning outcomes/objectives. Assessment as learning encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning.

Assessment of learning

Assessment of learning is often referred to as summative³ assessment and can include formal assessment tasks, internal or school-devised assessment and external assessment.

Uses of assessment

Assessment information has multiple uses, including:

- provision of feedback to teachers, such as

¹ Diagnostic assessment gathers evidence on a student's strengths or discrete knowledge and skills. This evidence can inform further support, differentiation or intervention to teaching and learning.

² Formative assessment is undertaken throughout the teaching and learning process to determine progress on achieving learning outcomes/objectives. Formative assessment provides the basis for feedback that is used to adjust teaching and learning and can help teachers to differentiate instruction.

³ Summative assessment is undertaken at defined key points of the teaching and learning process to indicate standards achieved and informs reporting/certification. Summative assessment provides sufficient evidence of learning to make defensible and comparable judgments about the quality of student responses against predetermined standards/objectives.

- evidence of students’ strengths, ways of learning, areas of development, the depth of their knowledge, and their conceptual understandings, which informs the teacher, so they know what students can do, and what subsequent teaching is required to progress student learning
- identification of students’ learning needs across a range and balance of assessments that enhances teachers’ ability to establish where students are in their learning and to help them attain higher levels of performance
- provision of feedback to students and parents/carers that gives
 - clear, specific, meaningful and timely feedback, allowing reflection on the learning process and collaboration to support future learning and development
 - evidence of student learning and advice for further progress, underpinning the provision of meaningful reports/statements to parents/carers and others
- development of lifelong learners by enabling students to identify and reflect on the progress they are making, which is crucial to building self-evaluation, self-efficacy and self-responsibility for in-depth and long-term learning
- refinement of quality teaching, by supporting teacher reflection and professional learning
- provision of information for certification
- measurement and evaluation of policies, programs, interventions and teaching strategies to provide better understanding of student achievement and growth.

Assessment literacy

What is assessment literacy?

Assessment literacy is defined as the skills and knowledge teachers require to design, evaluate and quality assure assessment performances to support student learning (DeLuca 2016).

Teachers who are assessment literate:

- produce quality assessment
- demonstrate the required knowledge and skills to validly and reliably assess students' learning
- apply standards/descriptions consistently to, and make judgments about, students' learning/work
- interpret and apply the feedback and data from assessment to improve teaching and learning.

As students move through the phases of schooling, they become increasingly assessment literate, with the ability to:

- understand the purpose of what they are doing
- understand the basis on which judgments will be made
- demonstrate this understanding through their engagement with assessment
- reflect on feedback and apply it in the future.

School assessment policies

School assessment policies provide guidelines for teachers and expectations for all staff and students for assessment. These policies support schools in promoting equitable and credible outcomes, including academic integrity.

Academic integrity

Academic integrity requires academic responsibilities to be approached in an honest, moral and ethical way. Schools, parents/carers and others who support students in their learning are responsible for promoting and maintaining academic integrity.

When students genuinely demonstrate their learning, they achieve results based on their own work and effort. Students will become increasingly more aware of their responsibility in demonstrating academic integrity as they progress through the phases of schooling.

Quality assurance

Assessment-literate teachers use quality assurance processes to develop a shared understanding of the expected quality of learning performance (Willis & Adie 2016). This assists teachers to improve teaching and inform assessment processes.

Quality assurance processes involve teachers:

- engaging in in-depth conversations and/or professional learning prior to teaching about what standards will look like in practice
- collaborating to design assessment tasks aligned with the principles and attributes of quality assessment

- sharing learning intentions/objectives and standards/marking criteria with students
- engaging in feedback, moderation and professional conversations and activities.

Moderation

Moderation of assessment is a process in which teachers engage in focused dialogue to share their observations and judgments in order to:

- improve the consistency of their decisions
- ensure their judgments are as valid, reliable and fair as possible.

Conversations should occur before judgments about the quality of work are given to learners. This provides students and parents/carers with confidence that the decisions made are an accurate judgment of achievement.

Quality assurance processes for Senior schooling

The QCAA operates quality assurance processes for internal assessment in Applied, Applied (Essential), General, General (Extension) subjects and Short Courses.

The QCAA quality assurance processes support schools to develop and administer assessment instruments and ensure consistency of judgments about student responses. The processes support the continual improvement of assessment practices in schools.

Feedback

Purpose of feedback

The purpose of feedback is to provide meaningful information about a student's strengths and areas for improvement to support them to progress towards their learning goals.

How teachers and students make use of assessment information is vital to understanding and improving learning. Effective feedback encourages self-reflection, allows students to actively monitor and evaluate their own learning, and facilitates self-direction and motivation. Together assessment and feedback support continuous, collaborative, active and self-directed learning.

Characteristics of effective feedback

To support evaluation, self-reflection and improved understanding, feedback should be:

- ongoing
- individualised
- specific to the teaching, learning and assessment related to the standards/descriptions
- clear, and in language that is readily interpreted by the intended audiences
- timely, so that students can act on it and adjust their learning
- collaborative, so that students, teachers and parents/carers all support and participate in the students' learning
- delivered in a way to support the learner to reflect, act on the feedback and build their capacity for self-assessment.

Reporting

Schools should refer to their sector policies for reporting requirements.

Purpose of reporting

The purpose of reporting is to communicate assessment information, formally or informally, to help students, parents/carers, teachers and education authorities make decisions about what students know and can do, including recommendations for their future learning.

Reports/statements may provide:

- information about progress and achievement to parents/carers and students
- summaries of the school's achievements and progress for school communities
- statewide and national statistical information and analyses to broader educational communities.

Characteristics of effective reporting

To support the effective communication of achievement, areas for improvement, and actions that the student, school and parents/carers might take, reports/statements should be:

- aligned with the curriculum and assessment
- defensible, comparable and based on clearly defined achievement standards
- accurate
- individualised
- meaningful
- in plain English so they are easy to interpret and understand.

The National School Reform Agreement (Australian Government 2018) underpins the legal obligations of schools and teachers in relation to reporting.

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Appendix 1: Principles of quality assessment

The following principles strengthen assessment practices (QCAA, 2017a).

Assessment should be:

- aligned
- equitable
- evidence-based
- ongoing
- transparent
- informative.

Aligned

Assessment is aligned with curriculum, pedagogy and reporting.

To produce the best learning outcomes for students, alignment means that:

- what is taught (curriculum) must inform how it is taught (pedagogy), how and when students are given advice about how to progress (feedback), how students are assessed (assessment), what next steps are required (future learning) and how the learning is reported (reporting)
- what is assessed must relate directly to what students have had an opportunity to learn
- what is reported to students, parents/carers and other teachers must align with what has been learned from the intended curriculum and assessed.
- Assessment is not an endpoint activity. Alignment is achieved when teachers actively plan assessment at the same time as they plan for teaching and learning.

This means that teachers:

- have in-depth conversations during the planning stage to
 - interrogate the meaning of the standards/descriptions
 - identify what evidence will look like at different levels of performance and
 - reach a shared understanding of the qualities that differentiate achievement
- use the knowledge and understanding gained to inform their teaching, learning and assessment
- share the standards/descriptions with students during the teaching and learning process
- engage in professional moderation conversations to check the consistency of judgments.

Assessment aligned with curriculum, pedagogy and reporting includes assessment of deep knowledge of concepts within and across the disciplines, problem solving, analysis, synthesis and critical thinking.

Equitable

All young people in Queensland are entitled to an education that meets their needs, and prepares them for active participation in the creation of a socially just, equitable and democratic global society. Teachers can support students to access a socially just education by:

- designing teaching, learning and assessment activities that are socially and culturally responsive and inclusive
- ensuring access and participation for all learners, on the same basis as their peers
- making adjustments, where required, to enhance engagement and equitable outcomes for all students
- acknowledging the diverse bodies of knowledge, backgrounds and families of all students.

Assessment is equitable if it provides opportunities for every student to demonstrate what they know and can do.

Individual learners' needs must be considered and, if required, adjustments made to the delivery or mode of assessment, without changing the way the assessment is judged or marked, to enable students to be able to demonstrate what they know and can do.

Evidence-based

Assessment involves collecting evidence as the basis for judgments about the quality of learning that students have achieved.

To ensure judgments about students' work are defensible and comparable, they are based on:

- evidence collected from a range and balance of tasks over time
- established standards such as
 - Kindergarten Continua of learning and development
 - P–10 Australian Curriculum achievement standards and QCAA standards elaborations
 - senior reporting standards.

Assessment provides evidence that students' current understanding is a suitable basis for future learning.

Ongoing

Assessment should be part of an ongoing process in which progress is monitored over time. Assessment should:

- be varied in nature
- provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate the depth and breadth of their learning
- cover a range and balance, informed by
- content descriptions
- assessment modes (e.g. written, spoken/signed, multimodal presentations)
- assessment techniques appropriate to the learning area
- assessment conditions (e.g. supervised, open).

Transparent

Transparent assessment enhances professional and public confidence in the processes used, the information obtained and the decisions made.

Transparency refers to:

- the clarity of assessment expectations for students
- the clarity of procedures for making judgments about the quality of students' work.

Transparency can be enhanced by:

- providing clear task descriptions so students know what they are expected to do
- developing clear criteria and standards/descriptions, aligned with curriculum requirements, so students know how they will be assessed
- modelling the task so students know the level of performance expected
- engaging in moderation processes to ensure that every student has their learning assessed equally and appropriately.

Informative

Quality assessment provides information to teachers, students, and parents/carers about the depth of students' conceptual understandings, problem solving, analysis, synthesis and critical thinking.

Informative assessment:

- informs teachers' planning and delivery of future learning opportunities
- promotes further learning and development when combined with constructive feedback and opportunities for reflection
- enables learners to understand and appreciate the progress they have made and recognise that they are being successful in their learning
- assists students to develop their self-assessment skills to enable them to assess their own learning, set specific goals and plan next steps for their learning
- maximises collaboration and sharing of knowledge between families and schools to support the learning and development of all students
- leads to informative reporting
- supports school and system-wide planning.

Appendix 2: Attributes of quality assessment

Quality assessment is characterised by:

- [validity](#)
- [accessibility](#)
- [reliability](#).

(QCAA, 2017b)

Validity

The extent to which an assessment accurately measures what it is intended to measure.

Assessment instruments and performance descriptors:

- align to what is taught (content validity)
- test what they claim to measure (construct validity)
- reflect curriculum requirements
- are authentic and appropriately challenging
- provide realistic contexts
- allow students to demonstrate specified performance levels within curriculum documents.

Accessibility

The extent to which the assessment provides all students with a clear understanding of how to demonstrate their learning.

Teachers can improve accessibility of assessment by:

- sharing assessment information before the assessment is administered
- providing all students with sufficient exposure to, and practice in, the work prior to the assessment
- providing feedback that is timely enough to enable students to apply it
- taking into consideration issues of access, equity and diversity so that students are not disadvantaged by their race, gender, ethnic background, disability, socio-economic status or other factors
- effectively communicating to students what is required for successful completion through
 - clear, appropriate use of layout, cues, visual design and format that are free of bias
 - instructions that are clear, concise and unambiguous
- providing clear assessment criteria that
 - are taken from the curriculum to ensure assessment is connected with teaching and learning
 - are made explicit to students to focus their attention on what they have to achieve
 - provide students with feedback about their progress

- using inclusive strategies to adjust teaching and learning experiences and assessment to enable all students to demonstrate knowledge, skills or competencies. Adjustments can be grouped into
 - timing — the amount of time allocated
 - scheduling — when assessment occurs
 - setting — where assessment is completed
 - presentation — how an assessment appears or is communicated to a student
 - response — how a student may respond to the assessment
- designing assessment with clear and specified conditions that support students to demonstrate the skill by
 - giving sufficient notice of the task
 - ensuring that the length of the task or timeframe is appropriate to complete the task
 - providing appropriate access to equipment.

Reliability

The extent to which an assessment will produce the same consistent result.

Reliability refers to accuracy and precision of:

- an assessment — if it were to be repeated, the extent to which subsequent results would agree with previous results
- marking guides — the extent to which marks awarded by one marker would be comparable to those awarded by another marker.

Reliable assessment ensures that judgments are trusted and defensible. Teachers can achieve reliability in the classroom by:

- engaging in conversations to interrogate the standards/descriptions prior to teaching
- providing as much appropriate detail as possible about the assessment to guide students
- providing students with opportunities to engage with the standards/descriptions
- engaging in professional moderation conversations with colleagues to share samples of students' work and to check marking consistency.