Professional Learning Resource
Assessing Progress and Achievement
Significant Aspects of Learning
Overarching Paper

The work in progress on Significant Aspects of Learning was reviewed in June and July 2015 in the light of feedback from practitioners, schools and education authorities and in the context of developments in national education policy. This has led to a number of changes to the original ‘Overarching Paper’. These include the reorganisation of one section, the addition of new sections and the addition of hyperlinks to texts referred to in this paper. The most significant of the other changes are noted throughout this document.

Introduction

There are slight changes to the wording of this section, largely to reflect more clearly the part played by significant aspects of learning in quality assurance and improvement strategies at all levels of the education system.

This paper forms the introduction to a professional learning resource designed to support professional practice in assessing the progress of learners and their achievement of a level within the Broad General Education. It is designed to support monitoring and tracking of progress, quality assurance and moderation activities and improvement strategies at all levels of the education system. The resource is made up of the following elements:

- this introductory paper which provides generic advice and information
- a paper for each area of the curriculum1 which provides:
  - a description of the significant aspects of learning within that area of the curriculum
  - an outline of what breadth, challenge and application look like within that area of the curriculum
  - information on planning for progression through curriculum levels, using breadth, challenge and application

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1 In this resource, ‘area of the curriculum’ is used to refer to each of: Expressive Arts, Gaelic Learners, Health and Wellbeing, Health and Wellbeing (Food and Health), Health and Wellbeing (PE), Literacy and English, Literacy and Gàidhlig, Modern Languages, Religious and Moral Education, Religious Education in Roman Catholic Schools, Social Studies, Sciences, Technologies.
• a progression framework for almost every area of the curriculum which describes progression from early to fourth level through the significant aspects of learning of that area; it should be noted that:
  o in some areas (e.g. Expressive Arts) progression frameworks are provided for the different components of that curriculum area
  o on occasion where other resources exist which carry out this function no progression framework has been created
• exemplification of learner work, annotated by practitioners, which demonstrates the achievement of a level in each area of the curriculum or in a component.

It is intended that this professional learning resource is used as a suite of resources, each part of which complements the others. Reference to all of the elements relevant to an area of the curriculum will be more effective than a focus on any single element and will enhance the benefit of the resource to practitioners.

This professional resource builds on Education Scotland guidance on the curriculum, learning and assessment, including Building the Curriculum 5: A Framework for Assessment and the accompanying guidance on recognising achievement, profiling and reporting, on understanding, applying and sharing standards in assessment and on quality assurance and moderation; Principles and Practice papers; statements of Experiences and Outcomes; and relevant CfE Briefings. Links to relevant documents and resources are made throughout this paper.

How should we plan for assessment?

There are only minor changes to wording in this section; these are intended to clarify the line of argument.

Planning for learning and teaching involves and includes planning for assessment. Learners should participate in this process which will involve:

• recognising learners’ prior experiences and learning
• engaging with the experiences and outcomes and Principles and Practice papers
• planning rich learning experiences and agreeing learning intentions and success criteria
• using a range of appropriate assessment approaches
• using a variety of assessment evidence to moderate and make judgements on progress, in order to provide feedback and inform next steps.

Good relevant learning intentions and success criteria are essential if assessment is to be valid. Practitioners use the experiences and outcomes to develop relevant learning intentions and success criteria as they plan learning, teaching and assessment. Good learning intentions make clear what learners should know, understand or be able to do by the end of a learning experience. The focus is on what is to be learned as opposed to the task, activity or context which leads to learning.
Good success criteria describe clearly how we can determine that a learning intention has been achieved. As they are linked directly to the learning intention they inform the selection of evidence of learning for consideration. Involving the learners in agreeing learning intentions and success criteria enables learners as well as practitioners to judge how much and how well each learner has learned. This also makes it easier to give high-quality feedback on what has been learned and informs discussion on the next steps to be taken.

The NAR Flowchart and associated support material provide clear details of the processes which lead to effective assessment in which the learner is placed at the centre.

What are significant aspects of learning?

The original text focused largely on the use of significant aspects of learning in the classroom; this has been addressed by extending this section to make explicit reference to the use of significant aspects of learning in moderation and quality assurance processes.

The original text was itself considered by practitioners to be too dense and the line of argument was confused; this has been addressed by reordering the original content and organising this as a bullet point list.

Significant aspects of learning have been identified for each area or component of the curriculum. Each significant aspect of learning brings together a coherent body of knowledge and understanding and related skills, as outlined in the Principles and Practice paper and detailed in the Experiences and Outcomes, against which learners’ progress can be compared periodically. To ensure coherence and consistency, the development of the significant aspects of learning has been informed by:

- the rationale underpinning the curriculum area outlined in the relevant Principles and Practice paper
- key aims of learning outlined in the relevant Principles and Practice paper
- the organisation and structure of the statements of experiences and outcomes.

In a number of cases research on ‘big ideas’ in a curriculum area has also been consulted. The form and nature of the significant aspects of learning differs to some extent across the curriculum areas because they reflect the structure, content and underpinning rationale of the relevant curriculum area. However and importantly, all significant aspects of learning share a number of key features. Each significant aspect of learning:

- brings together a coherent body of knowledge and understanding and related skills
- is common to all levels from early to fourth
- can provide sound evidence of learning in accord with the principles of Building the Curriculum 5: A Framework for Assessment
- can be effectively used to inform assessment of progression within a level and achievement of a level
- can be used to plan further progression within a level and from one level to the next
• supports the practice of holistic (‘best fit’) assessment.

Using significant aspects of learning makes assessing progress and achievement more dependable and more manageable. The structure of significant aspects of learning:

• supports practitioners in planning and integrating learning, teaching and assessment which reflects the principles of Curriculum for Excellence
• ensures that learners and practitioners can draw on a range of meaningful, robust, valid and reliable evidence from all four contexts of learning: classroom activities, interdisciplinary learning, the life and ethos of the school and personal achievements, including those outwith the school
• is consistent with the focus in Curriculum for Excellence on ‘how much’ and ‘how well’ rather than on ‘how fast’ learners progress and achieve a level
• affords learners space to demonstrate the breadth of their learning, effective responses to challenging learning experiences and the ability to apply what they have learned in new and unfamiliar situations
• provides opportunities for personalisation and choice so that each learner can enjoy challenge and learning relevant to them and allows learners to progress by different routes and pathways through the experiences and outcomes
• provides opportunities for learners to demonstrate progression and achievement by making use of a range of opportunities and strategies that meet their needs
• helps practitioners avoid fragmented approaches to assessment which prevent learners from demonstrating the full range of their knowledge, understanding and skills
• avoids an over-reliance on evidence derived from single brief learning experiences or end of unit tests, which may not adequately reflect the achievements or skills which have been developed by the learner
• affords practitioners opportunities to plan and assess within a curricular area the development of the skills, attributes and capabilities required for learning, life and work, including the development of literacy, numeracy and digital competencies
• supports practitioners and learners in planning for progression as they look forward to the next level of learning, in particular at transition points
• supports practitioners in making holistic (‘best fit’) judgements about the achievement of a level either in an individual significant aspect of learning or, drawing on evidence from across the relevant significant aspects of learning, in a curriculum area (e.g. Social studies) or a component of a curriculum area (e.g. Art and design).

The use of significant aspects of learning will inform:

• moderation activities based on holistic judgements supported by dependable evidence
• monitoring and tracking progress in learning
• quality assurance approaches
• the use of assessment to inform improvement at all levels of the education system.

The significant aspects of learning are identified and described in the accompanying papers for each area. Progression through the areas or components of the curriculum from early to fourth level is
illustrated in the progression frameworks. The range and quality of learner work related to significant aspects of learning required to achieve a level are illustrated in the annotated exemplification.

What does progression look like?

The experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence are designed to provide opportunities for progression within each level as well as towards learning at the next level, including progression from the Broad General Education to the Senior Phase and national qualifications. To demonstrate that they are making progress within a level, or to demonstrate that they have achieved a level, learners need planned opportunities to show that they:

- have achieved a breadth of learning across the experiences and outcomes for a significant aspect of learning
- can respond to the level of challenge set out in these experiences and outcomes and are moving forward to more challenging learning in at least some aspects
- can apply what they have learned in new and unfamiliar situations.

The significant aspects of learning and associated statements of experiences and outcomes provide the basis for planning progression through breadth, challenge and application. As they observe the processes and outcomes of learning, practitioners determine when evidence of learning reflects breadth, challenge and application and makes clear that a learner has met agreed expectations and achieved a level, either in a component (e.g. Music) or in a curriculum area (e.g. Social studies). This evidence and information will be used by practitioners and learners in planning progression to learning at the next level, including progression into the Senior Phase and national qualifications.

It is important that learners have the opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of standards and expectations in different ways and to progress by different routes and pathways through a significant aspect of learning. This offers opportunities to consolidate and extend learning in each area of the curriculum in order to meet learners’ varied needs.

Further advice on planning progression in learning in relation to the experiences and outcomes and to progression from one level to the next or from one phase to the next can be found in CfE Briefing 2: Assessing progress and achievement in the 3-15 broad general education; CfE Briefing 6, Briefing 7 & Briefing 8: Progression from the Broad General Education to the Senior Phase and CfE Briefing 11: Planning for Learning part 1: Through the Broad General Education.
Breadth, challenge and application

There are only minor changes to wording in this section.

Enjoying opportunities for breadth:

- involves achievement in an increasing number of outcomes across the range of learning described in the experiences and outcomes
- allows the use of a variety of assessment approaches across the significant aspect of learning which allows learners to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, skills, attributes and capabilities across the range of the experiences and outcomes.

Participating in challenging tasks and activities across a significant aspect of learning:

- develops learners’ interest and confidence in their learning
- provides opportunities to develop skills, attributes and capabilities to a high level
- gives learners opportunities to demonstrate aspects of learning where they have a depth of knowledge and understanding, high levels of skill and well-developed attributes and capabilities.

Opportunities which allow learners to demonstrate their ability to apply learning in unfamiliar situations:

- provide relevance and purpose to learning
- afford learners opportunities to demonstrate that their achievement of knowledge, skills and attributes can be drawn on readily, flexibly and effectively in different contexts
- confirm that learning is secure and readily available for learners to use
- provide opportunities to make links across ideas and concepts from more than one curriculum area.

_CFE Briefing 4: Interdisciplinary Learning_ provides further information on planning learning and assessment which draws on different areas of the curriculum and provides opportunities for the application of learning in a range of contexts.

Developing skills for learning, life and work

This section has been added to reflect the use of significant aspects of learning in planning the development of skills for learning, life and work. Coherence across education policy is important to ensuring manageability.

As recognised in _Building the Curriculum 4: Skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work_, all learners must be afforded opportunities to develop a range of relevant skills including: literacy, numeracy and associated thinking skills; skills for health and wellbeing, including personal learning planning, career management skills, working with others, leadership and physical co-ordination and movement skills; and skills for enterprise and employability.
As practitioners use the significant aspects of learning to plan teaching, learning and assessment and as they provide opportunities for learners to experience and enjoy breadth, challenge and application, they will be afforded ready opportunities to plan for and assess these skills for learning, life and work and to prepare all young people for employment. These include the development of literacy, numeracy and digital competencies.

The processes of assessment will help learners to reflect on how they are developing their skills, identify the next steps in their skills development and understand how the skills they have acquired can be used across the curriculum and in their lives in and outside the classroom or establishment.

**Responsibility of all**

All practitioners share the responsibility of supporting children and young people in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills in Literacy and Numeracy and their capacities in those aspects of Health and Wellbeing which are identified as the responsibility of all. As recognised in *Building the Curriculum 4*, the digital competencies currently detailed in those experiences and outcomes within the Technologies curriculum area under ‘ICT to enhance learning’ can and should be developed in a variety of contexts and settings in all curriculum areas.

All practitioners have opportunities to assess progress and achievement in literacy and numeracy where these are integrated into and form a substantial part of learning. This is the case, also, for digital competencies.

The Health and Wellbeing Experiences and Outcomes include overarching statements which describe the key features of a supportive learning environment which promotes the health and wellbeing of children and young people. These statements provide a clear and useful format and structure for all practitioners and learners to review the ways in which the learning environment supports the development of children and young people.
How do we make holistic judgements about achieving a level?

As outlined in *Building the Curriculum 5: A framework for assessment: Recognising achievement, profiling and reporting*, practitioners will make holistic ('best fit') judgements about the achievement of a level in a curriculum component or area. They will take stock and use their professional judgement to evaluate a range of evidence when they believe that a learner has achieved a level. Using the significant aspects of learning, they should give consideration to those aspects of learning, knowledge and understanding and skills, attributes and capabilities that are prerequisites to ensure successful progression. Evidence will come from day-to-day learning as well as from specific assessment tasks and activities. Learners will require to demonstrate that they:

- have achieved a breadth of learning across the experiences and outcomes for an aspect of the curriculum
- can respond to the level of challenge set out in the experiences and outcomes and are moving forward to more challenging learning in some aspects
- can apply what they have learned in new and unfamiliar situations.

To inform holistic judgements, practitioners will draw on a range of evidence related to the relevant significant aspects of learning which provide the necessary breadth, challenge and opportunities for application of learning. Judgement of achievement of a level cannot be determined on the basis of evidence related to an individual outcome or provided by a single isolated piece of work or test. These cannot provide evidence of breadth of learning, of the ability to confidently use learning to meet challenges or of the ability to apply learning in new contexts. Evidence may be derived from any or all of the four contexts of learning: classroom activities, interdisciplinary learning, the life and ethos of the school and personal achievements, including those outwith the school.

Practitioners will recognise that learners may progress more quickly in one component or area of the curriculum than another.

How can we monitor and track progress?

Effective monitoring, recording and tracking look at the learner holistically and are informed by holistic assessment of evidence related to the significant aspects of learning in each area of the curriculum. Monitoring and tracking involves a number of processes, including:

- observation of learners
- assessment of oral and written reports
• assessment of performances and artefacts
• self-assessment and learning logs
• dialogue between learner and practitioner.

Practitioners with learners will periodically evaluate a range of evidence of learning. By taking a holistic approach and using their professional judgement practitioners can determine the sufficiency and quality of the evidence in demonstrating standards and expectations.

Learners should participate in the process and contribute to determining and gathering relevant evidence. Formal recording of progress should be planned in ways which allow learners sufficient time to demonstrate development of their learning within significant aspects of learning. Systems for monitoring and tracking progress should recognise that learning is rarely linear and that learners, within the same group, can provide evidence of their progress in learning in different ways within a significant aspect of learning. Dialogue between the learner and practitioner will facilitate the updating of target setting and building of a personal profile.

The processes of monitoring and tracking at establishment level draw on the same sorts of information on progression and achievement as those used to inform the monitoring and tracking of individual learners. To ensure that information that is collated for sharing within a school or between schools is valid and reliable, it is necessary that practitioners have opportunities to participate in moderation activities and work together to develop shared understandings of what progress and achievement in an area of the curriculum look like. As they do so, practitioners can draw on the elements of this professional learning resource including the progression frameworks and the annotated exemplification of learners’ work.

These processes ensure that education authorities, schools and practitioners are working consistently and coherently to improve progression and achievement for all learners within Curriculum for Excellence.

Further information can be found in Monitoring and tracking progress and achievement in the broad general education, CfE Briefing 2: Assessing progress and achievement in the broad general education and CfE Briefing 3: Profiling and the S3 profile, Journey to Excellence: Monitoring, Recording and Tracking Progress and Journey to Excellence: Assessing Progress and Achievement.

Moderation and quality assurance

This section has been added to clarify the role of significant aspects of learning in supporting moderation and quality assurance at all levels of the education system.

Moderation is a necessary and valuable way of ensuring that standards at different levels are interpreted and understood in a consistent way across schools in Scotland. A focus on what is important in learning is supported by assessing progress and achievement in the significant aspects of learning in each area or component of the curriculum.
Practitioners should engage in regular moderation of how they evaluate children and young people’s learning. Collaborative moderation supports staff in developing their understanding of what can be expected of children and young people at each level. This gives learners, parents and the wider community confidence that standards are shared and agreed across the profession. Practitioners will draw on a range of helpful resources and benchmarking materials to support their moderation activities. In particular, for each area of the curriculum the progression framework and the growing bank of annotated exemplification of pupil learning will support understanding and interpretation of progression and achievement within the significant aspects of learning. Together these will support teachers in using moderation activities to develop and maintain consistent understanding of standards and expectations and to arrive at consistent judgements of achievement.

School clusters or associated schools groups should provide regular opportunities for moderation activities. Nursery and primary staff and likewise primary and secondary staff should meet together to discuss assessment and evidence of learning across sectors.

Quality assurance supports and is informed by moderation activities. Quality assurance requires that sound assessment decisions are informed by high quality evidence which demonstrates:

- that children and young people have met appropriate success criteria
- that learners have met the demands of appropriate breadth, challenge and application across a level
- how staff and learners have assessed work
- how learning has been recognised from across the range of contexts of learning.

In addition to the progression frameworks and annotated exemplification, the NAR flowchart and Education Scotland pages on Assessment and Moderation and Quality assurance and moderation provide support for moderation and quality assurance.

Supporting improvement

This section has been added to clarify the role of significant aspects of learning in supporting improvement at all levels of the education system.

The Scottish Government is committed to the development of a National Improvement Framework consistent with the principles of Curriculum for Excellence in order to support national monitoring of achievement and improvement in achievement, both generally and to close the achievement gap. In so doing, the Government recognises the importance to improving performance of professional judgement and autonomy over the curriculum and assessment.

The forthcoming duties of both Councils and Ministers to attach priority to reducing inequalities of outcome and to report on this will require evidence to support improvement and professional development. The use of the significant aspects of learning, supported by moderation and quality assurance procedures, supports professional judgement and autonomy while providing significant
data to demonstrate what is working in Scottish education, why, for whom and in what circumstances and thus to support improvement.

**A work in progress**

This point has been added to make explicit the importance of engagement in developing policy and professional learning.

The process of supporting the use of significant aspects of learning is a work in progress. Modifications will be made as a result of review processes including engagement with and feedback from practitioners, informed dialogue between Education Scotland and stakeholders, developments in understanding of assessment and learning and elaboration of national policy.