National overview of practice in remote learning

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Assessing learning and providing feedback to learners on progress within secondary schools

1. Introduction

HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE) have been engaging with local authorities, schools, parents, carers and learners since January 2021 to provide a national overview of how remote learning is being delivered in schools across Scotland. The purpose of the national overview is to outline what is working well, identify the challenges and what further support is needed to continue to improve the delivery of remote learning. In the initial phases of the national overview, six reports were published. These focused on planning, guidance and delivery of remote learning and how schools and local authorities are taking forward the expectations and entitlements outlined in the remote learning guidance published on 8 January 2021. The final report of this phase summarised what we have learned so far about what is working well in remote learning across Scotland and where there remains scope for reflection and improvement.

Phase three of the national overview focuses on taking a closer look at particular themes emerging from evidence published in previous reports. This report focuses on how schools are assessing learning and providing feedback to learners on progress within secondary schools. It highlights examples of practice which illustrate what is working well in schools within five local authorities. The report includes comments made by school leaders and educators during professional dialogue with HMIE and detailed case studies to help illustrate examples of strong practice.

2. Approach to engagement with local authorities

HMIE engaged in professional dialogue with 11 secondary schools across five local authorities to learn how schools are assessing learning and providing feedback to learners on progress. The schools were nominated by their local authorities to exemplify strong practice in this aspect of their work.

This report contains case studies from some of the schools and local authorities involved. A selection of supporting documentation shared by local authorities and schools will be published on the 'Sharing what's working well' section of the national overviews website.

3. Findings

Approaches to assessment in a remote learning context

"Our assessment working group has enabled staff to have a shared sense of clarity with each other and with learners. This team has been successful in supporting the continuation of effective assessment processes while learners are working remotely."

Headteachers report that they have reviewed approaches to assessment and feedback to reflect the context of remote learning. Approaches to assessment in most schools are embedded within their overarching learning and teaching policy. This is helping to ensure that staff have a clear understanding of expectations relating to learning, teaching and assessment that reflect remote learning. For example, in many schools there is a clear structure to the delivery of remote learning with teachers sharing learning intentions and success criteria, delivering activities and tasks to meet learning needs, checking for understanding and reviewing learning. In these cases, headteachers are able to articulate the various purposes of assessment used during remote learning. They are clear why young people are being assessed, what the assessment is intended to achieve and how the assessment information will be used. They acknowledge that there is ongoing work needed to ensure that all staff understand the principles of assessment and mitigate against the burden of over-assessment.

Case Study - Queen Margaret Academy, South Ayrshire Council

Remote learning quality assurance audit tool

In January 2021, Queen Margaret Academy were part of a group of schools involved in developing a quality assurance process for remote learning. Part of this work included an audit tool with reflective questions designed to support departments to reflect on their remote learning provision. Teachers across departments have used the audit tool as part of their self-evaluation processes. This approach has enabled reflection on the range and quality of assessment undertaken.

Senior leaders reviewed departmental responses to identify practice which would support colleagues and to identify training or resource needs. As a result, a series of short videos have been developed and shared by staff which demonstrate good practice in assessing leaner's progress. Staff across departments have shared practice on the effective use of Kahoot quizzes to assess young people's understanding of new concepts, the use of Microsoft Teams breakout rooms to facilitate peer assessment of work, and the development of a holistic assessment matrix using national benchmarks to support teachers to record assessment information for each learner.

The quality assurance audit tool is supporting staff to review their remote learning provision. This is leading to staff employing good practice from across departments and embedding new strategies and approaches to assessing young people's progress in learning in a remote context. Staff are also beginning to identify practice which will continue when young people return to school buildings.

In one school, professional learning has focused on practical applications of a range of digital tools designed to assess progress, such as Microsoft Forms, Nearpod and One Note. In other schools, there is a greater emphasis on providing live learning as

young people report the benefits from engaging directly with their peers and their teacher. This allows them to receive instant feedback. Headteachers state that they are continuing to strive for greater consistency in the approaches used to assess learning and provide feedback across subjects and departments.

"Teachers and young people have shared feedback in a reciprocal way through live lessons, specifically by calling on young people to answer questions in the 'chat' function or by unmuting if they have access to a microphone; intervening as they work 'live' or by having an open style lesson where the teacher is present in a 'live' capacity for young people to call upon if they need help."

Within this second period of remote learning, teachers are planning learning experiences with ongoing and periodic assessment built in. Young people demonstrate their learning by undertaking written and oral work which is evaluated by teachers. All headteachers report that staff have become more skilled at using digital platforms to assess progress and deliver feedback. Examples include teachers and young people using the chat panel during live learning to ask and answer questions, the use of emojis and symbol responses, and multiple-choice questions on Microsoft Form. All of these allow the teacher to assess the young person's learning and understanding of concepts.

"Examples of digital software to support assessment and feedback include the use of real time voting apps, open writing software to edit writing tasks and online quizzes that can be shared between a group of learners."

In almost all schools, headteachers report ongoing collaborative arrangements for teachers across curricular areas to engage in moderation activities. This includes opportunities for professional dialogue within departments, across the school and in cluster networks using virtual meetings. In one local authority, staff work in evaluation trios across schools to share exemplars of a range of evidence of young people's learning. In most local authorities, headteachers comment on the important role played by local authority officers in supporting moderation practice in literacy and numeracy. Schools comment that across curricular areas it is difficult to replicate the necessary conditions to gather robust and rigorous evidence of learning in a remote context. They highlight it is challenging to gauge whether young people have undertaken activities independently or if they have been supported.

Self and peer assessment in a remote learning context

There are a range of approaches to self-assessment adopted by teachers during remote learning. Typically, these include teachers sharing success criteria checklists with young people. This allows young people to self-assess their understanding of aspects of the course. This is particularly evident in the senior phase where teachers are sharing success criteria for lessons and courses which are aligned to National Qualification course specifications. These are issued with independent tasks,

explained at the start of pre-recorded learning, or discussed with learners as an introduction to live learning. Other examples to support self-assessment include teachers posting marking schemes online following the completion of learning activities which allow young people to self-mark before digitally submitting their results. Teachers then use this information to plan the next stages in learning and to identify young people who require further support before moving on to new concepts.

In almost all secondary schools, teachers are sharing exemplars of completed tasks which show how learning criteria have been met. Teachers and learners then discuss the exemplar to ensure young people can identify the successful features and areas for improvement. Teachers explore and correct misconceptions as required. For example, in a social studies faculty, teachers use live learning inputs focusing on 'what a good one looks like' to explain the features and qualities of the work that they want the class to meet or exceed. Learners compare their own work as it develops with the exemplar. Other departments deploy 'find and fix' challenges which allow learners to interact with worked examples remotely to find errors and provide solutions. Overall, these approaches to self-assessment are common across secondary schools and help develop young people's independent learning skills.

Staff recognise during their own self-evaluation activities that learners appreciate working with peers and assessing each other's work. Many teachers are now using breakout rooms that provide useful opportunities for young people to assess the work with their peers. Schools report that young people comment on the benefits to their wellbeing of working and interacting with their peers.

Case Study - Westhill Academy, Aberdeenshire Council

Structuring young people's weekly experience of remote learning to offer high quality learning experiences

Based on feedback from learners and parents, staff developed a weekly structure for remote learning that is maximising opportunities for teachers to assess young people's progress and offer high quality feedback.

At the start of the week, staff share a detailed outline of the learning and teaching planned for the upcoming week. Young people demonstrate their independent learning skills by planning their own personalised and flexible timetable for the week which takes account of their unique circumstances. Young people and parents are positive about the impact of this approach:

"I prefer everything being assigned on Monday so I can make up my own timetable and work around what is easiest for me."

"I prefer to have all the work arriving on a Monday - it's easier to plan around my working week as both my children require my support at times. Great life lesson about managing workload.'

Staff also support young people to structure their week by sharing planned inputs, such as live meets, question and answer sessions and drop-in sessions encouraging regular communications about progress. Staff are using these inputs to assess learners' progress. They are using a variety of approaches, including breakout rooms for peer assessment, quizzes, polls during live meets and One Note folders where pupils can respond to marking comments annotated on their work.

Almost all learners report that they are receiving feedback on some, most or all tasks completed. The school community agree that feedback is offered in a variety of forms, including through posts on digital platforms, during live inputs and drop-in chats. The informal feedback teachers typically give in the classroom has been replicated online through facilities such as emojis, 'thumbs up' and 'hands up' in Teams. This is supporting a quick snapshot of progress.

Teachers feel the weekly structure is allowing a continuous focus on assessment, feedback and progress. They also feel young people are being empowered to demonstrate more leadership in their learning. Most young people report that regular assessment and feedback is assisting them to continue to make progress during remote learning. They are becoming more confident in identifying their strengths and next steps in learning.

Assessing progress in practical subjects

A majority of headteachers report challenges associated with assessing the development of young people's practical skills during remote learning. For example, teachers face challenges in directly observing young people demonstrating their skills in practical science and drama. In addition, some young people may have restricted access to appropriate resources, materials and equipment to prepare for and complete assessments. Staff continue to adopt creative approaches to reduce these barriers to assessment for young people. For example, in the senior phase, music is being recorded for assessment instead of being played live for a visiting assessor. There are also examples of staff providing learners with practical packs to enable young people to prepare for assessments. Nonetheless, there remain challenges of assessing learning and progress in practical subjects.

Case Study - Dunoon Grammar School, Argyll & Bute Council
Approaches to assessing practical skills

Departments continue to explore approaches to assess young people's practical skills during remote learning. There are a number of departments across the school using creative approaches to assess learning. In modern languages, staff record conversations

in the foreign language with young people to assess their understanding. This has given young people additional time for reflection. It also allows them to hear themselves so has supported them to speak with improved pronunciation and confidence in other languages.

In physical education, staff encourage young people to ask parents or siblings to record them participating in activities, for example, playing football. Videos are submitted to staff and this supports high-quality dialogue around skills progression and next steps in learning. Staff also encourage young people to re-watch videos to support learners to self-assess and recognise the skills they are demonstrating.

In home economics, young people make recipes at home and send photographs of their cooking to their teacher. In drama, staff use digital platforms to rehearse dialogue and presentations. The headteacher believes that these approaches are supporting teachers to record progression against the benchmarks in the BGE and to support teachers assessment of progress towards National Qualifications.

Feedback to improve learning and learning conversations

"Pupil voice helped us understand the value of 'mark it live sessions' and so where possible, we embed live marking into our lessons. Young people told us that this deepens their understanding."

Schools report that a majority of their staff employ a range of approaches to provide feedback during remote learning. These include verbal, written and live feedback. As well asking young people to submit completed activities which are assessed and returned with brief comments, schools also have well-organised live inputs. These inputs offer pauses that enable young people to complete tasks, review assessment guidance with staff, and carry out self-assessment.

Schools highlight the opportunities to provide feedback offered by new technologies. For example, almost all schools report that recording feedback using voice notes is popular with young people, helping them to engage and improve their learning. A few teachers ask learners to record practical activities using devices and, thereafter, review the recordings with small groups of peers. The teacher plays a key role in facilitating a conversation to identify strengths and next steps in learning. Young people leave the conversation with clear actions to improve their learning. Headteachers report that a few young people do not yet have the confidence to ask for direct support from their teacher. To address this issue, staff are using their knowledge of young people to adapt approaches. They are using questions to check learners' understanding and offering one to one or small group inputs to review aspects of learning as required. They are also encouraging young people to contact other young people for support as well as staff.

"We would encourage all students to contact each other, share some face time, and tackle some of the learning together – it can really help. Offering moral support is the key thing – get in touch with your teacher or pastoral teacher if you are struggling with this and we may be able to help."

Case Study - Eyemouth High School, Scottish Borders Council

Teachers use One Note for feedback in subject departments

In art, teachers use One Note effectively to create digital portfolios for each student. This allows learners to see a record of their past and current work with supporting feedback. Young people told their teachers that they prefer verbal feedback. As a result, the teacher uses voice notes that analyse the piece of work submitted against the agreed learning intentions. The faculty are considering retaining this when young people return to school.

In modern languages, teachers use an electronic pencil to support the marking of work. They give detailed written feedback in One Note, either on word documents or images. Essays are sometimes printed and marked with written detailed feedback. An image is taken of the essay to enable return to the young person directly onto One Note or by e-mail. These digital approaches aim to offer high-quality feedback to support improvement.

A majority of headteachers report that offering high quality feedback online is more time-consuming for teachers. Teachers find it challenging to replicate the constant flow of information offered on learner progress through in school face-to-face learning through, for example, questions, direct observation and scaffolding. This is particularly the case when offering comment based feedback and arranging learning conversations. Remote learning also relies on learners engaging meaningfully with the feedback offered independently, without the encouragement and motivating influence of a teacher. Overall, teachers use of live video discussions, voice notes, personalised comments on work and opportunities for young people to respond and act on feedback resulting in positive impact on learners.

Case study - Falkirk High School, Falkirk Council

Digital approaches to learning conversations

As part of the school's delivery of remote learning and plan to create a 'connected classroom', staff developed the role of digital technology to improve learner outcomes.

Staff devised an online alternative for learning conversations. Faculties were empowered to trial different digital technologies to support learning conversations. The modern language department entered into a collaborative enquiry with other school leaders. The chosen digital platform has a range of functions. Teachers see the responses of all learners simultaneously and can share responses with the whole class, or share their screens to show answers. Data can be gathered through reports which analyse participation and the teacher can store the answers.

Teachers and learners have commented very positively on the way that it enables quick formative feedback. Teachers see learner responses and can highlight their answers and discuss strengths and next steps. The teacher can anonymise the learners' responses which has been positively received. By using the polls function, learners respond to a variety of questions designed to encourage self-reflection and also what they would like the teacher to do next. Learners share ideas through collaboration boards.

During this recent period of remote learning, learners have been provided with effective feedback on what they need to do to succeed. Learner feedback has been very positive when using this online tool and staff have identified opportunities to integrate effectively digital technologies into the classroom.

"Staff use learner conversations to ensure a 'no surprises' approach when reporting on progress of learners in the senior phase and broad general education."

In most secondary schools, learning conversations with young people on their progress with learning is an ongoing process. Some are undertaken on a one-to-one basis or in small groups, such as learning trios. A few schools submit questions to learners in advance of conversations to enhance the dialogue between young people and teachers. A few headteachers report that staff feel digital platforms are improving learning conversations. For example, teachers can display young people's work on screen during online meetings to discuss specific areas of strength and improvement needs. This ensures young people are clear on their next steps in learning. Many staff also work collaboratively with colleagues in other schools to discuss and improve the quality of feedback and learning conversations while using remote learning. These networks are supporting the development of good practice across schools.

Monitoring and tracking progress

"The key elements in senior phase tracking and monitoring is the use of clear targets, use of working grades and then reporting regularly to parents. Cohorts of pupils continue to be tracked against breadth and depth measures."

Headteachers report that checking learners understanding remotely and using this to inform subsequent planning of learning, teaching and assessment remains a challenge. While teachers are monitoring and tracking progress, they need to consider how well assessment evidence is used during digital lessons to inform their teaching to meet the needs of all young people.

Almost all headteachers report that school tracking and monitoring approaches have continued as planned during remote learning. A few schools are now gathering data on young people's progress with learning on a more regular basis. In the best examples, this is compared with the standard of work the young person produced prior to lockdown to allow teachers to monitor learners progress over time. Many headteachers are using features of digital platforms to support the tracking and monitoring process. These approaches to tracking and monitoring allow pupil support staff and senior leaders to work together through a staged intervention approach to address support needs.

Supporting young people who require additional support with their assessments in a remote learning context

"We are constantly reviewing our approaches to ensure the typical over the shoulder assessment that a teacher would normally employ continues in a remote setting."

Almost all headteachers report that a range of measures are in place to support young people with additional support needs with planned assessments. A few headteachers report challenges in providing certain types of alternative assessment arrangements for young people with additional support needs in the context of remote learning. While providing additional time for assessments is more easily delivered remotely, other forms of support such as a reader and scribe, or transcription arrangements are proving more difficult. To overcome this, a few schools are inviting young people who require additional support to attend weekly drop in sessions within the school. This allows young people to get direct support from specialist staff for planned assessments. In other schools, support staff are making more use of assistive technology to support young people with more formal assessments. This includes speech recognition software that converts audio to text, text to speech features that also benefit English as an additional language learners, and enlarged or adapted question papers. In the best examples, approaches to remote learning for young people with additional support needs are based clearly on individual support plans that contain relevant targets. However, reviewing progress and planning next steps in learning for young people with additional support needs is not yet consistent across schools.

Emerging strengths in assessing learning and providing feedback to learners on progress within secondary schools.

- Schools are continuously developing, reviewing and evolving their approaches to assessing progress and providing feedback to learners. They have taken positive steps to gather the views of learners as part of this process.

- The range of assessment approaches adopted by teachers that promote self-assessment. This is helping young people to develop important skills for learning, life and work including independent learning.

- Headteachers report that staff have become more skilled at using digital platforms to assess progress and offer high-quality feedback to learners.

Areas for improvement in assessing learning and providing feedback to learners on progress within secondary schools.

- Continue to build on new ways of assessing learning and providing feedback for when young people return to in-school learning.

- Build on existing approaches to identify other ways to assess young people's practical skills in a remote learning context.

- Consider how monitoring and tracking can be used better to inform next steps in learning, teaching and assessment.

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

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