

# RSD Assessment Policy

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this policy is to outline the different types of assessment that should be carried out in RSD. It should be used by individual subject departments to build assessment into their departmental planning so that it is an integral to on-going learning and teaching.

Assessment can affect pupils' motivation to learn. It plays a crucial role in improving learning and raising standards (Stiggins, 2008). Assessment is a key professional competency (GTCNI, 2011) that requires teachers to:

- use a range of assessment strategies to assess pupils' learning;
- appreciate the uses and limitations of these strategies;
- make evidence-based assessment against relevant criteria;
- involve pupils in assessing their learning and performance;
- assess pupil performance against relevant benchmarking data;
- understand the relationship between assessment, setting pupil targets and progression;
- use assessment information to make teaching more effective; and
- collaborate with others to make assessment more effective at the classroom and whole-school level.

Assessment is an integral part of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. It must reflect curriculum requirements and provide constructive, motivating and challenging learning experiences. Assessment should be part of the teaching and learning process that supports independent learning. It should enable young people to gauge their own progress and potential and make improvements in their learning.

The teacher's role is central to ensuring quality assessment in schools (Wyatt-Smith et al., 2010). Teachers must have sound knowledge of assessment and the professional skills to develop and apply this in practice (GTCNI, 2011). This is associated with the notion of assessment literacy, which Webb defines as: "knowledge about how to assess what students know and can do, interpret the results of these assessments, and apply these results to improve student learning and effectiveness of schemes of work." (2002, adapted)

This policy aims to encourage and promote:

- effective and manageable assessment planning, marking, judgements and standard setting;
- pupils' active involvement in peer and self-assessment, including setting and reviewing their own learning targets and identifying areas for development;
- constructive use of feedback to improve learning;
- effective use of assessment data to:
  - inform teaching and learning;
  - track progress; and
  - promote improvement (DENI, 2009a);

### **What is assessment?**

For the purpose of this guidance we define assessment as the systematic collection, interpretation, and use of information to give a deeper appreciation of what pupils know and understand, their skills and personal capabilities, and what their learning experiences enable them to do.

### **Principles of assessment**

The following five principles underpin quality assessment practice. It should:

- be complementary to and supportive of learning;
- be valid and reliable;
- be fit for purpose and manageable;
- support teachers' professional judgement; and
- support accountability.

### **Purposes of assessment**

Assessment can serve different purposes according to how we use the information it provides (Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP), 2010; Appendix 1). The main purposes of assessment in the RSD classroom are:

- formative assessment – to enable pupils to make specific improvements in their learning;
- summative assessment – to acknowledge, record and report pupils' overall achievement at a given point

## 2. Formative Assessment or Assessment for Learning (AfL)

*'Assessment for learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.'* Assessment Reform Group (2002)

1	Sharing Learning Intentions	Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success
2	Questioning	Engineering effective classroom discussion, questions and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning
3	Feedback	Providing feedback that moves students forward
4	Self-Assessment	Activating students as 'owners' of their own learning
5	Peer Assessment	Activating students as instructional resources for one another
<b>One Big Idea</b> - using evidence of learning to adapt lessons in real time in order to meet students' learning needs.		

### ***D. Wiliam – Formative Assessment: five key strategies and one big idea***

In RSD, formative assessment should embrace the ideas set out above. The aim is to stimulate dialogue between teacher and pupil within lessons; generating feedback which enables pupils to take responsibility for their learning and make progress. There are links here to the RSD Stretch & Challenge policy and current SDP focus on Independent Learning.

Formative assessment is thus part of the everyday teaching and learning process. Teachers should gather evidence about a pupil's learning by, for example, observing, listening, questioning, discussing, and reviewing their work. They can then use this evidence to:

- identify progress and gaps in learning (including individual support needs);
- set learning goals and success criteria; and
- provide feedback to pupils.

Making time to provide feedback and making time for the pupils "to take the feedback on board" are two issues that should be considered by teachers. Assessment is not formative unless it **causes pupils to think** and is **used by the pupils to make improvements**.

- One practical example of making time is to hand back work and give individual feedback to select pupils during a structured task such as an ICT project in an ICT room or any other extended piece of work.
- Another approach can be to offer extra credit for work that has been improved within a time frame (say 3 days), with pupils revisiting the original material in their own time.
- A third approach is to dedicate time in a lesson (say 12-15 minutes) for pupils to read the work given back and the teacher's comments and then conduct individual interviews with select pupils while the others begin the next task.

Teachers should use AfL to enable pupils to build on their learning. The continuous process of dialogue and interaction between pupils, teachers and peers is an essential part of AfL. It focuses on how pupils can improve their learning through feedback from the teacher and peer and self-assessment (ARG, 2008; Black and Wiliam, 2009).

**REMOVE?** Ten guiding principles underpin AfL. It should:

- be part of effective planning;
- focus on how pupils learn;
- be central to classroom practice;
- be a key professional skill;
- be sensitive and constructive;
- foster motivation;
- promote understanding of goals and criteria;
- help learners know how to improve;
- develop the capacity for self-assessment; and
- recognise all educational achievement (ARG, 2002).

Five key AfL strategies support these principles in classroom practice:

- **Focus on learning** shares learning intentions and success criteria with pupils.
- **Effective questioning** encourages pupils to think about their learning.
- **Quality formative feedback** allows teachers to identify pupils' achievements, any gaps in their learning and areas for further work (what pupils have done well and what they should do to

perform better). Feedback should always be direct and constructive. It should give pupils information about the next steps to take to improve their learning. Teachers should give feedback promptly, as delayed feedback can be meaningless to the pupil. Prompt feedback helps pupils to take account of it in their learning. It also motivates them, which is a crucial element in helping them to become successful learners.

- **Scaffolding reflection** gives pupils time to reflect on their learning. It allows them to think about what and how they are learning and to adapt their approaches, if necessary, to achieve their goals (*Assessment for Learning A Practical Guide*, CCEA 2009a).
- **Teacher reflection** on effectiveness of teaching and learning allows teachers to verify what their pupils have learned. This helps them to decide what they may need to teach again in a different way, or how to focus future teaching plans.

### **3. Summative Assessment**

Summative assessment gives pupils, parents and teachers valuable information about a pupil's overall performance at a specific point in their learning. It provides information about a pupil's progress in subject knowledge, understanding, skills and capabilities.

Summative assessment usually takes place after pupils have completed units of work, or modules, or at the end of each term and/or year. The information it gives indicates progress and achievement, sometimes in grade-related or numerical terms. In RSD the normal method will be to use a mark although reports to parents and the tracking process will often be based on grades in Years 11 – 14.

Summative assessment should:

- take account of all the objectives or outcomes of the scheme of work (this is why summative tests of part of the scheme of work are not necessarily valid);
- be used to indicate a pupil's progress at the end of a period of learning, for example a unit of work or a module;
- take account of formative assessments throughout the year;
- be formative in its own right, giving:
  - teachers insights into what pupils have and have not learned, enabling them to adapt their practices; and
  - feedback on what learners did or did not do well.

At a whole school level in RSD, the outcomes of summative assessment will be used for:

- benchmarking;
- monitoring progress;
- target setting;
- reporting to parents
- placing pupils in subject classes; and
- helping pupils to make informed decisions about subject choices.

In RSD formal summative assessment is carried out using a range of Common Assessment tasks in all Year Groups; through examinations in January for Years 8 – 14; and in June for Years 8 – 11; and through the outcomes of public examinations. In Years 11 & 12 some elements of controlled assessment tasks can also be used as part of summative assessment and similarly with coursework in

Years 13 & 14. The outcomes of January and June examinations are reported to parents.

The quality of summative assessment depends on teachers' professional ability to use a range of assessment methods that generate dependable results (TLRP, 2010). Teachers, pupils and parents need to be confident that the information provided by teacher-based assessment is dependable and an accurate reflection of the standard a pupil is working at. Therefore, teacher-based assessment must be both valid and reliable.

**Validity:** Validity is the extent to which assessment measures what it was intended to assess.

**Reliability:** Reliability is how much we can trust an assessment to give consistent information on a pupil's progress. This is why internal standardisation is an important process.

### **The relationship between formative and summative assessment**

Formative and summative assessments have been seen as serving two separate purposes. Formative assessment focuses on improving learning. Summative assessment summarises learning at the end of a period of study. Recently, however, formative and summative assessments have been recognised as interrelated and complementary. They can serve both purposes, depending on how teachers use the assessment information and feedback (Black et al., 2003; Harlen, 2005; Taras, 2005). Research suggests that teachers could make better use of assessment by taking into account this interrelationship (ARG, 2008).

The information from formative assessment, supplemented by valid subject class tests/tasks/common assessments, helps to ensure dependable summative assessment (Harlen, 2005, adapted).

Teachers can use the information from a summative assessment test/task/common assessment as feedback to support pupils to improve their learning. Teachers should 'report not only the students' final performance, but also what processes students need to improve in order to raise their performance' (Harlen, 2005).

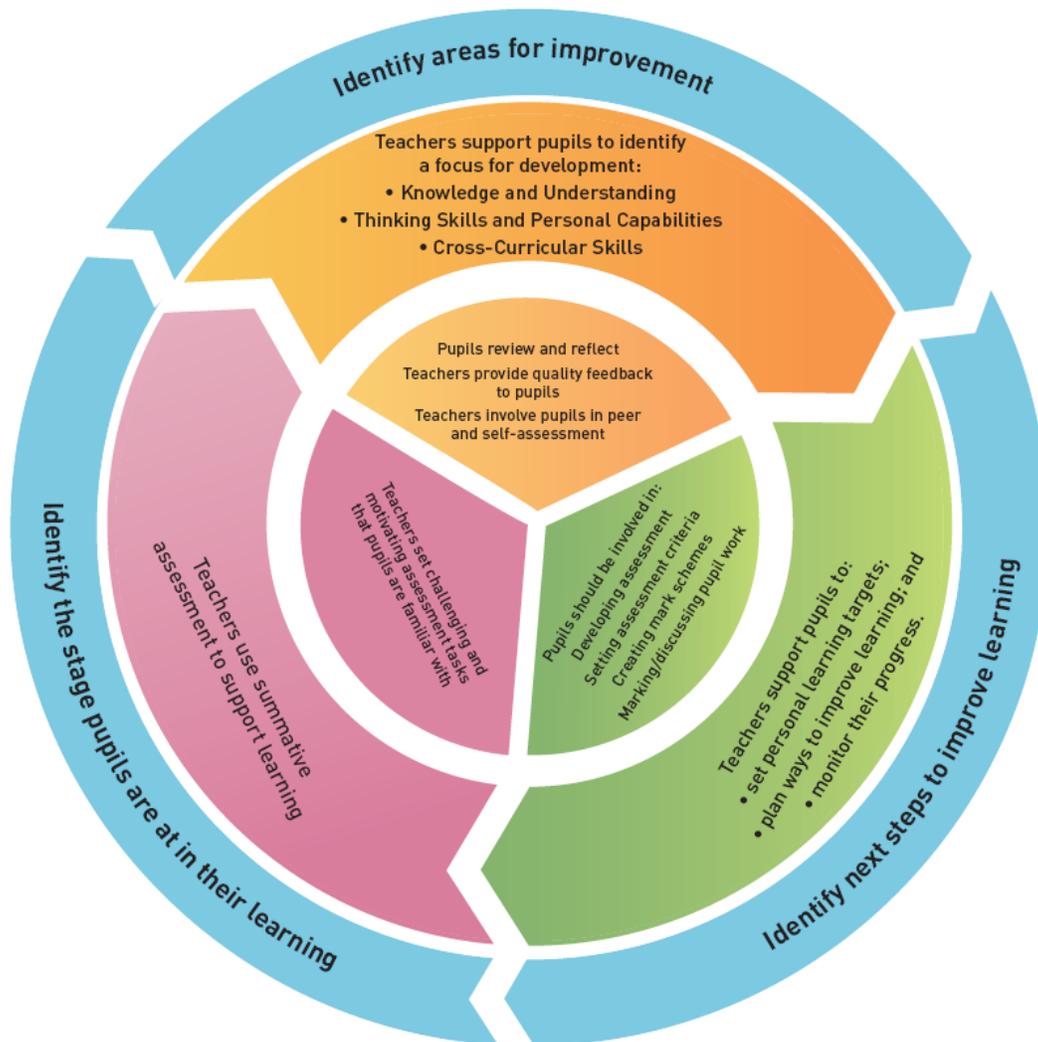
In RSD, full reports to parents should include a comment which states where a pupil is at in their learning, where they need to get to and how to "bridge the gap".

Research suggests (Black et al., 2003; Black et al., 2010; Black et al., 2011; Harlen, 2005) that teachers

should make greater use of summative assessment to support learning by:

- giving pupils opportunities to review their work before the assessment to become familiar with the type of assessment set and to identify areas of insecure understanding;
- involving pupils in developing assessments and setting assessment criteria and mark schemes to help them develop their understanding of assessment and focus on areas for improvement;
- involving pupils in marking and discussing their assessment performance, including the use of peer and self-evaluation; and
- providing quality feedback to the pupil, focusing on their performance and how they can improve their learning.

The diagram below shows how summative assessment can be used to improve learning.



#### 4. Peer and self-assessment **INTEGRATE WITH FORMATIVE SECTION**

Peer and self-assessment, along with other assessment methods, should be an integral part of a whole-school approach to developing quality assessment practice in the classroom (Chappuis and Stiggins, 2008).

Teachers should foster a supportive classroom culture that encourages pupils to engage in a range of peer and self-assessment strategies. This will help pupils to identify gaps in their learning, set targets, and identify the next steps to improve learning.

**Peer assessment** involves pupils assessing each other's work and giving constructive feedback.

**Self-assessment** involves pupils making judgements about their own learning and achievement and deciding how to progress in their learning.

Peer and self-assessment focuses on engaging pupils in reviewing and discussing the quality of their work and reflecting on how to improve it. Actively involving pupils in assessing their own learning through peer and self-assessment can:

- improve learning;
- reduce achievement gaps for low achievers and underachievers; and
- support pupils to become independent learners (Sebba et al., 2008).

Peer and self-assessment supports and reflects a constructivist view of learning. This view suggests that pupils learn by constructing their own meaning, based on their experiences and social interactions with others (Vygotsky, 1978). Engaging pupils in assessing their own learning gives them a better understanding of how and what they are learning. It allows them to identify and close gaps in their learning. Peer and self-assessment support pupils to develop their critical thinking skills and metacognitive (thinking about the thinking) abilities. This helps them to plan, monitor, redirect and evaluate how they think and promotes deep learning (Seeba et al., 2008).

#### **Developing peer and self-assessment practices and strategies in the classroom**

Teachers should plan peer and self-assessment opportunities to complement teaching and learning and other assessment methods. They should foster a supportive classroom culture, by encouraging their pupils to:

- take part in classroom dialogue about thinking and learning;
- respect and take into account pupils' individual differences, for example background, interests, abilities and experiences, and how these can affect learning;
- highlight what they do not understand and view their mistakes as learning opportunities;
- be resilient and persistent to overcome challenges to their learning;
- take part in group work to build relationships based on co-operation, respect and trust; and
- respect each other's views and accept, respond and act on constructive criticism.

Teachers need to engage pupils in a range of peer and self-assessment strategies. This helps them to become familiar with the processes involved and to build their skills and capacity for assessing their own and their peers' work.

Peer and self-assessment succeeds when pupils clearly understand their purpose and processes and have the motivation and commitment to take steps to improve their learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

Pupils must be able to:

- determine what stage they are at in their learning;
- identify gaps in their learning;
- set targets for improvement; and
- know what they need to do to close gaps in their learning.

To help pupils determine what stage they are at and to identify gaps in their learning, teachers should:

- promote peer and self-assessment as an intrinsic part of the learning process;
- actively involve pupils in deciding how best to assess their knowledge, understanding and skills;
- actively involve pupils in developing the assessment criteria;
- ensure pupils understand the criteria for quality work so that they can make fair judgements about their own and others' work;
- support pupils to acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses and assume greater responsibility for their own learning;
- encourage pupils to ask meaningful questions about the quality of their own and others' work; and

- provide timely quality feedback to pupils about their learning.

To help pupils to set targets to improve their learning, teachers should:

- define good work so that pupils understand what they are aiming to achieve;
- model effective approaches to learning core knowledge and procedures
- show exemplars of good work and expected standards;
- engage pupils in critiquing the exemplars to draw out criteria;
- encourage self-reflection by allowing pupils time to respond to feedback;
- clearly illustrate examples of learning targets that pupils can model;
- encourage pupils to set realistic, time-limited learning targets;
- encourage pupils to record, monitor and regularly review their learning targets and progress; and
- work with pupils to discuss and review their targets.

Supporting pupils to assess their own learning enables teachers to understand their pupils' learning capabilities and individual learning needs. They can use this knowledge to develop strategies to help their pupils to improve their learning.

To help pupils to determine the steps to take to improve their learning, teachers can:

- encourage pupils to discuss and ask questions about how they could improve their learning;
- support pupils to explore and identify different ways of improving their work;
- encourage them to think about what they might have done differently;
- provide explicit feedback about what was good, where effort was made and potential areas for improvement or greater effort;
- help pupils to plan and manage current and future work to meet learning targets; and
- help them to become aware of how different approaches and strategies may improve their thinking and learning.

**Reference:** Guidance on Subject Assessment at Key Stage 3, (CCEA, 2012)

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