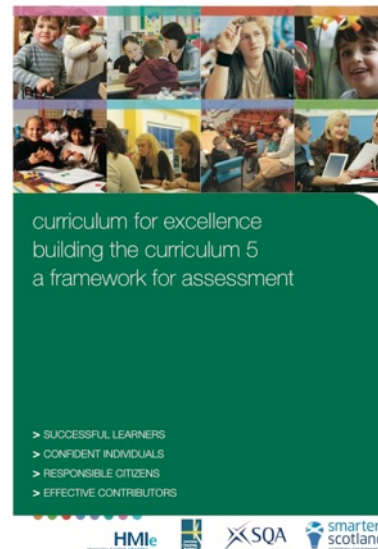


Building the Curriculum 5: a framework for assessment aims to create 'better understanding of effective assessment practice and sharing of standards and expectations, as well as more consistent assessment'. This aim is worth careful consideration if we are to ensure that BtC5 is effective in supporting Curriculum for Excellence.

- a. The account of 'effective assessment practice' in BtC5 reflects the key features of Assessment is for Learning, which was designed to establish a coherent system of assessment that recognised and reconciled different uses of assessment, namely *assessment for learning* (or formative assessment), *assessment as learning* (or personal learning planning) and *assessment of learning* (or summative assessment, sometimes also used for school evaluation purposes).
- b. In the 64 pages of BtC5, the expression 'Standards and expectations' is used 53 times, clearly indicating the importance attached to these concepts. However the phrase appears in different contexts and with different intentions. Meanings are assumed rather than defined. An important starting point for staff coming to grips with BtC5 lies in understanding what these terms mean in practice. 'Sharing standards' is commonly associated with *assessment of learning* and it suggests that the standard is predetermined. In BtC5, standards are described as coming from teachers exercising professional judgment, so the process of arriving at shared standards clearly depends on effective moderation practices.
- c. 'Consistent assessment' looks to moderation, advocated in both AifL and BtC5 as the way to ensure the reliability of professional judgments. If effective moderation procedures are established, confidence is raised and staff and managers are less likely to attach undue significance to the results provided by isolated and often decontextualised tests, which would contradict the message in BtC5 that sound judgments come from a range of evidence.



BtC5 confirms the continuing importance of the approach to assessment adopted in AifL, with a particular emphasis on *assessment of learning*.

Unfortunately, an independent evaluation showed that *assessment of learning* was the least understood or developed aspect of AifL. By raising its profile in a coherent approach to assessment in Curriculum for Excellence, the publication of BtC5 reinforces the importance of professional development in this aspect of assessment.

BtC5 provides a framework. It sets out the broad approach to assessment in the context of CfE. It creates an opportunity for schools and local authorities to devise their own practical approaches that promote understanding and effective use of *assessment of learning*.

Approaching assessment in CfE

BtC5 presents Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes as the source of ‘standards and expectations’. This has practical implications for planning and providing day to day learning experiences. The four steps described below offer a broad approach that can support coherent planning, ensure the validity and reliability of assessments, begin to reconcile the tensions between assessment for learning and for accountability and meet the requirement in BtC5 that assessments should be based on a range of evidence. Using CfE Es & Os as a starting point, staff can:

1. explore specific Es & Os as concise statements of what a pupil is expected to learn, allowing them to identify the learning intended.
2. From this, they should be able to determine the nature and range of the evidence required for making judgments about the extent to which the expectation has been met.
3. This understanding should facilitate their judgments about pupils’ work by allowing them to construct success criteria relevant to the learning intended and expected evidence. Comparison of evidence with criteria allows staff to give formative feedback.
4. A reliable summative judgment about the quality of pupils’ work will depend on further professional discussion of the evidence generated, leading to agreement on the extent to which it has met the criteria previously identified for all pupils. This discussion helps clarify the standards in judging the extent to which a pupil’s work provides evidence of learning which is developing, consolidating or secure.

The judgments resulting from this process are more likely to be a better fit for different purposes: to inform improvements in pupils’ learning, to report their progress to parents and as indicators for school self-evaluation.

Understanding terms

An approach of this kind acknowledges that, in use, ‘standards’ and ‘expectations’ mean quite different things, as do ‘criteria’ and ‘standards’, and so indicates that we must be careful when working with staff to support consistent and reliable professional judgments.

To put it simply, asking someone to cite either the ‘criteria’ or ‘standards’ used in making a judgment of some kind seems to make equal sense. However, a slightly altered word use highlights the difference; talking about doing something to a ‘high standard’ still makes sense while talking about doing it to a ‘high criterion’ clearly does not. Standards are only meaningful if they are seen as defining the quality expected when considering how well the work meets a specific criterion.

Since much of the guidance around CfE has been designed to encourage rather than curtail professional autonomy, it will be important that those engaging with it in the classroom and those supporting their engagement arrive at shared understandings of what they should take these terms to mean in practice.

Developing understanding and practice

Work in AifL helped to increase assessment understanding and improve practice in schools and local authorities. The publication of BtC4 and BtC5 has created the context for further activity to build on these achievements to ensure that assessment practice is fit for the purposes identified in Curriculum for Excellence. Three aspects of assessment development will be important:

- learning the language of assessment
- developing assessment capability
- reconciling conflicting priorities

Learning the language of assessment

BtC5 adds terms to the vocabulary of assessment, such as 'effective assessment practice', 'standards and expectations', 'consistent assessment', 'moderation', etc. which may require explanation for some in schools, local authorities and the wider community.

Staff should have opportunities to make their own meanings out of these terms and begin to explore what they might look like in practice. Such opportunities could happen face-to-face or online, perhaps giving school-based staff access to recorded presentations and activities and allowing time to exploring their understanding and practice in familiar surroundings. However they are provided, these opportunities should be based on a clear understanding of what's involved and practical guidance on how they can be implemented. Day or half-day sessions can be provided and advice on other approaches can be offered.

Developing assessment capability

As well as developing a capacity for talking about assessment in clear, meaningful ways, staff will benefit from practical experience of how valid and reliable assessment information can be gathered and used both to help pupils improve and to evaluate how well schools are doing.

Assessment and Moderation (AM) circles have been devised to foster professional learning by doing and reflecting, which is a good use of time and effort. They can be organised within a school, across a group of schools or authority wide and set up and supported in different ways to suit the needs of those involved.

The process was originally designed to complement the National Assessment Resource and provides an effective framework within which staff can develop a way of working that has lasting benefits for their own development and for pupils' learning. After an AM circle has run its course, staff should be able to use what they have learned to make future development and planning time more productive. You can find out more about AM circles as a cost effective way of developing assessment capability at www.myrayoung.co.uk

Reconciling conflicting priorities

AifL sought to reconcile the potential conflict between assessment to support learning and assessment for accountability, or assessment for and of learning. With the publication of BtC5, local authority and school staff may feel they want to look again at how they gather and use assessment, to ensure that information gathered for school self-evaluation purposes does not adversely affect the assessment activities designed to improve how pupils learn. Staff involved in supporting learning and those with responsibility for monitoring school performance need a shared understanding of what helps and hinders effective learning. This can be supported in different ways.

About me

As a teacher, principal teacher and depute head, the role of assessment in supporting learning as well as measuring it has fascinated me and, since their publication almost twenty years ago, the principles of the largely neglected 5-14 guidelines on assessment have never been far from my thinking.

In 2002, I joined Learning and Teaching Scotland as a development officer for Assessment is for Learning to promote professional practice in formative assessment.

Since then, I've been actively involved in assessment initiatives in Scotland, as an AifL development officer nationally and in a local authority, as a professional adviser to the Scottish Executive Education Department and recently managing the Assessment, Achievement and National Qualifications team at LTScotland.

I was instrumental in establishing and refining the Associated Schools Group model of professional learning used so effectively in AifL and in more recent developments in relation to recognising achievement in *Curriculum for Excellence* and in creating examples of assessment in *CfE* to be shared through the National Assessment Resource, an initiative I've been working hard with others to develop.

I also led efforts to foster an assessment community in Scotland, creating opportunities for local authority co-ordinators, national assessment officers, interested professionals, parents, researchers and others to make links between policy, theory and practice in assessment and so foster knowledge, understanding and skills in assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning.



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Help is just two ticks away!