



1

Guidance for assessment and learning
www.sflip.org.uk

High-quality assessment processes:
 guidance for managers

This guidance is essential reading if you are a manager with responsibility for the curriculum, teaching and learning and quality assurance across your organisation. It aims to support you to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate high-quality assessment practices that support learner success. Its focus is assessment **for** learning rather than assessment **of** learning through qualifications.

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The term 'learner' is used throughout this leaflet to refer to service users (clients, customers, workers, offenders and so on).

The features of high-quality assessment processes

High-quality assessment processes:

- **happen throughout learning**, using the right type of assessment for the right purpose at the right time
- **are learner-centred**, ensuring that the learner is informed and supported to make decisions based on the outcomes of assessment
- **are positive**, building learner confidence, self-esteem and motivation by celebrating strengths and achievements as well as identifying learning needs
- **are forward looking**, taking account of the learner's goals and aspirations for future study, work or for their personal life
- **are holistic**, building up a picture of a learner's achievements, interests and previous learning experiences as well as their skills levels

- **are appropriate**, using a range of approaches, methods and tools that suit individuals and their learning context
- **include assessment of literacy, numeracy and language skills** (sometimes called Skills for Life), crucial to enabling individuals to improve their life chances
- **make effective use of assessment data** at all levels, informing:
 - referral to learning, training or employment opportunities
 - curriculum offer and design
 - teaching and learning approaches
 - individual goals and targets
- **position individual learning plans at their centre**, recording assessment outcomes, teaching and learning targets, strategies and activities, progress, achievements and progression routes
- **are monitored and evaluated** as part of the self-assessment process, identifying priorities and actions for quality improvement.

Why are high-quality assessment processes important?

Effective assessment processes play an important role in learner and organisational success. They provide you with information that enables you to:

- design provision to match the skills profile and aspirations of your learners
- personalise learning, ensuring a differentiated approach for each learner
- identify learners' additional support needs
- monitor, review and record learners' progress and achievement
- identify and promote opportunities for progression.

And so ensure that the learner is on the right course and:

- is more likely to achieve the course outcomes
- will progress towards achieving their long-term goals.

The right assessment for the right purpose at the right

Type of assessment	Purpose	Timing
Skills check		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A way of identifying if a learner's literacy, language or numeracy (LLN) skills are at Level 2 and if there is a need for a more detailed assessment by an LLN professional ● Not needed in all cases, eg if a learner has referred themselves for LLN provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Makes sure the learner has the right advice at the right time, eg regarding appropriate learning, training and employment opportunities ● Motivates the learner to think about their skills and how these match to what they want to do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● At the beginning of a learner's contact with your organisation, during the information, advice and guidance process
Initial assessment		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A holistic process during which you start to build up a picture of an individual's achievements, skills, interests, previous learning experiences, goals and learning needs ● Includes the identification of a learner's LLN levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Used as a basis for negotiating a course or programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● At the time of a learner's transition into a new learning programme
Diagnostic assessment		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Detailed assessment of specific skills, including LLN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Helps to identify specific learning strengths and needs, and determines learning targets and appropriate teaching and learning strategies to achieve them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Initially at the beginning of a learning programme and subsequently when the need arises
Assessment for learning or formative assessment		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ongoing assessment of progress and constructive feedback and analysis of assessment outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Helps teachers and learners to adapt teaching and learning strategies to improve performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Follows on from initial and diagnostic assessment and continues throughout a learner's course or programme

Who does it?	How?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Front line staff; helpline staff; union learning representatives; probation officers; information, advice and guidance staff; youth workers and Jobcentre Plus staff, whose role involves interviewing and who have been trained to deliver skills checks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● May be done informally as part of an initial interview or induction ● Can include the use of an 'off the shelf' paper- or computer-based assessment tool such as Smart Move. Tools generally include short LLN tasks and take about 10 minutes to complete
<p>Staff who are able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● understand the whole assessment process ● present it to learners in a positive and constructive way ● use a variety of approaches appropriate to the individual learner and the context for learning ● interpret results appropriately and give professional feedback to learners ● recommend learning programmes ● refer learners for further expert assessment ● use LLN initial assessment tools effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Should involve a range of methods and approaches such as interview, discussions, self-assessment, observation and structured activities (eg free writing). Initial assessment tools can play an important role in the objective assessment of LLN
<p>Staff who, in addition to the above, are able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● use assessment outcomes to plan individual and group learning ● monitor progress ● use LLN diagnostic assessment tools creatively and flexibly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Should involve a range of approaches as above. Can include a diagnostic assessment tool as part of the detailed assessment of LLN skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teachers and learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can take place in teaching and learning sessions using a range of approaches: teacher-led assessment; self-assessment; peer assessment; through written feedback and as part of review, target setting and action planning

Putting it all in place

Planning for high-quality assessment

It is important that your assessment strategy, policies and operational plans are:

- **well thought through**, based on a thorough analysis of accurate data
- **comprehensive**, covering all stages of assessment as appropriate to your organisation
- **based on a clear vision** of the desired outcomes for learners, staff and the organisation
- **clearly and positively communicated** to your staff and learners (as appropriate) to secure their buy in and consistency across the organisation
- **well-resourced**, supported by appropriate allocation of staff development, time and materials
- **inclusive**, supporting learner and staff entitlement to timely and effective assessment, including LLN skills assessment
- **clearly and cohesively linked to other organisational strategies, policies and plans** such as those relating to staff recruitment and development, teaching and learning, and so on.

key questions

- Have you set SMART targets to measure the impact of the assessment strategy, for example, in terms of learner success and progression? SMART targets are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound.
- Are your selected assessment approaches and methods at all stages appropriate to the skills profile of your learners and their context for learning?
- Do your operational plans:
 - clearly detail roles and responsibilities at all levels for developing, managing, coordinating and delivering assessment processes at all stages?
 - include a process for capturing, analysing and using assessment data at all stages?

Developing the skills staff need to carry out effective assessment

Your HR strategy should ensure adequate levels of appropriately skilled and qualified staff to manage, support and deliver effective assessment across the organisation.

Recent QIA research highlights that, when assessing LLN, the skills of the assessor are more important to effective assessment than the assessment tools and materials used. How and why tools are used is as important as the robustness of the tools themselves.

Data on staff qualifications, skills and training, captured via Management Information Systems, should inform initial and continuing professional development.

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See the section 'The right assessment for the right purpose at the right time' for information about who should be carrying out the various types of assessment and the skills they need.

See the 'Want to know more section?' for how to access information about learner support and initial teacher qualifications.

key
questions

- Do you include training on all stages of the assessment process in your staff training and development plans?
- Is priority given to learner-centred processes?
- Are all staff aware of the ways in which assessment needs to link to effective learning as well as referral systems for assessment or support?
- Are staff aware of the LLN demands of their core programmes?
- Do you provide opportunities for vocational and LLN staff to work together to consider how LLN needs identified by assessment processes can be addressed in vocational sessions?
- Are all staff able to discuss and review LLN achievements and development needs in tutorials?

For their own personal development and to enable them to effectively support learners, staff at all levels should have access to confidential opportunities to assess and develop their own LLN skills.

Allocating time, facilities and resources

Operational plans need to take account of the resource implications of implementing high-quality assessment processes.

Do staff have sufficient time:

- and resources to tailor assessment processes to meet the different needs of learners?
- and an appropriate environment in which to carry out assessment and explore outcomes with learners?

Do learners have:

- a clear understanding of the purpose of assessment as they move into and through provision?
- flexible access to assessment, including computer-based assessment where appropriate?

Using assessment data to improve learner success

It is important that you have Management Information Systems (MIS) in place for capturing data at all stages of assessment. Effective MIS provide accurate, clear, relevant and timely information on assessment and achievement, both accredited and non-accredited, that can be used at all levels of the organisation to improve learner success. Staff and learners (as appropriate) should have access to assessment information and the skills to use it.

Managers need access to assessment data to:

- ensure that programmes offered are appropriate for the skills profile of learners
- monitor consistency and quality across programmes
- identify and promote appropriate progression routes.

Teachers and learners need access to assessment data to:

- develop individual learning targets
- inform appropriate teaching and learning strategies
- review progress
- identify appropriate progression routes and prepare for the next steps.

Programme teams need access to assessment data to:

- ensure that learners are on the right programme
- ensure that teaching and learning resources are differentiated to reflect learners' assessed skills levels
- ensure that all learners have planned opportunities to develop their LLN skills
- ensure that LLN support is provided at a level that matches the individual learner's ongoing needs identified through the assessment process.

Information, advice and guidance staff

need access to assessment data to:

- inform referral to appropriate learning, training and employment opportunities.

The individual learning plan (ILP) plays a central role in ensuring that assessment outcomes inform teaching and learning. The assessment diagram at the end of this leaflet highlights how the ILP steers the learning journey, informed by the outcomes of assessment at various stages in that journey. Your assessment strategy needs to make explicit the role of the ILP, and staff should be supported to develop effective practice in using ILPs with learners.

key
questions

- Is your organisation's ILP appropriate for your learners and their context for learning?
- Are ILPs explicitly informed by assessment processes?
- Are learners involved in drawing up their ILPs, using their own knowledge of their strengths and development needs to set their own learning targets?
- Is there a clear link between the learning targets on the ILP and teaching and learning?
- Are ILPs reviewed and updated regularly by learners and teachers?
- Are ILPs used regularly by learners and teachers to monitor, assess and record progress and achievement?
- Is the use of ILPs included in your monitoring and evaluation processes?

See leaflet 4 in this series for more information on using ILPs.

Quality assuring assessment processes

It is important to develop and communicate to all staff quality criteria against which assessment processes should be monitored and evaluated (see 'The features of high-quality assessment processes' on page 2).

Evaluate assessment processes to consider whether they are:

- **fair.** Are all learners treated equally?
- **positive.** Do learners have a positive experience?
- **consistent.** Is there standardised practice across the organisation?
- **rigorous.** Do they provide a true picture of learners' skills, knowledge and development needs?
- **documented.** Are records generated which are easy to use and understand – for all staff and learners?
- **linked.** Does assessment contribute to a dynamic ILP which informs the learner's development and is continually reviewed and updated? Is assessment an integral part of teaching and learning at all stages of the learner journey?
- **understood.** Do all staff understand the processes and their role within them?

You can use a range of approaches to monitor practice and gather information to inform evaluation, including:

- focus groups, surveys and interviews to capture learners' feedback on their experiences of assessment
- observations of teaching and learning that include a focus on assessment for learning
- course reviews and team meetings that consider assessment practices at all stages of learning
- analysis of programme data on learner starting points, progress, achievement and progression
- reviews of the use of particular assessment tools and methods to judge how well they are being delivered and the quality of the information they provide
- reviews of ILPs against a quality checklist
- impact measurement of staff development and training in assessment processes
- peer reviews of assessment processes within and across departments.

key
questions

- Are assessment processes at all stages of learning an integral part of your self-assessment process?
- Do all programme area reviews and self-assessment reports include references to assessment processes and identify actions for improvement where appropriate?
- Do all staff understand their role in implementing and monitoring quality assessment processes?
- Are observations of teaching and learning used to identify good practice in assessment which is then shared?
- Does information gained from the monitoring and evaluation of assessment processes feed into your organisation's self-assessment report and quality improvement plan?

How high-quality assessment processes position the learner at the centre

Assessment for learning

- Recognises what has been learnt, including progress in literacy, language and numeracy
- Recognises what still needs to be learnt and how
 - Provides feedback to learners in ways that help them to improve

The individual learning plan records:

- achievements and reflections
- further learning targets
- reviewed progression options



The learner

- Informed
- Making decisions
- Negotiating and using their individual learning plan (ILP)
 - Developing reflective skills

Diagnostic assessment

- Is a detailed assessment of specific skills
- Informs teaching and learning strategies
- Can include a diagnostic assessment tool as part of the detailed assessment of literacy, language and numeracy skills

The individual learning plan:

- records precise learning targets
- details appropriate learning
- steers learning towards achievement of long-term goals

The individual learning plan records:

- the need (or not) for future assessment
- long-term goals and aspirations
- progression routes

Skills check

- Takes place during the information, advice and guidance (IAG) process
- Informs signposting and referral to learning, training or employment opportunities
- Is a quick assessment to establish abilities and needs in literacy, language and numeracy
- Can include a literacy, language or numeracy skills check tool

The individual learning plan records:

- current achievement levels
 - the need for further assessment in specific areas
- long-term goals and aspirations
- progression routes

Initial assessment

- Begins the process of identifying abilities, interests, aspirations and needs
- Informs selection of the right learning programme
- Can include an initial assessment tool as part of the identification of a learner's literacy, language or numeracy level

Want to know more?

To obtain *Planning learning, recording progress and achievement: a guide for practitioners* (DfES, 2003):
www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/planninglearning

To find free literacy and numeracy skills check and initial assessment tools and *Good practice guidelines in skills check and initial assessment* (DfES, 2006):
www.toolslibrary.co.uk

To find out more about the Move On approach, online practice tests and skills development opportunities:
www.move-on.org.uk

For free diagnostic assessment tools for literacy, language (ESOL), numeracy and dyslexia, and tutor instruction manuals describing the diagnostic assessment process and good practice in assessment:
www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/teachingandlearning

For detailed guidance on assessing learners' skills, attainments and potential, see *Improving initial assessment: good practice guide* (Key Skills Support Programme, 2006):
www.ksspforwork.org.uk

To learn more about the wider range of varied and motivational initial assessment methods, see *The initial assessment toolkit* (Key Skills Support Programme, 2007):
www.ksspforwork.org.uk

To find guidance about good practice and preparation for self-assessment, see *Interactive raising standards guides*:
www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/qualityandtraining

To learn more about the 10 principles for assessment for learning, and to access checklists and resources:
www.qca.org.uk/qca_4334.aspx

To find a range of materials and support for excellence in planning and delivery:
<http://excellence.qia.org.uk>

To find out about initial teacher qualifications that include mandatory units on assessing learners:

www.lluk.org/nrp/2986.htm

To find out about developments in learning support:

www.lluk.org/3036.htm

To find out about the unit 'Skills check and signposting' in the Level 2 Certificate in Learning Support:

www.cityandguilds.com/cps/rde/xchg/SID-270A0997-D3043B4B/cgonline/hs.xsl/3641.html?search_term=9297

To find out about how providers' key processes can be systematically planned, managed and improved to achieve better organisational results, see *Improving learning processes: principles, strategies and techniques* (Cox, 2002):

www.LSNeducation.org.uk/pubs

To find out about improving initial assessment in the workplace, see *Improving initial assessment in work-based learning* (Green, 2003):

www.LSNeducation.org.uk/pubs

To find an overview of the initial assessment process, see *Initial assessment: a learner-centred process* (Green, 2003):

www.LSNeducation.org.uk/pubs

To find ideas and resources to support the use of observation in initial assessment, see *Improving initial assessment of personal and social skills in Entry to Employment*:

http://teachingandlearning.qia.org.uk/default.aspx#e2e_assessment

Skills for Life: a health check for providers of further education and training is a tool that will help you assess the quality of your Skills for Life provision.

Available from QIA Publications

Ref HEALTHCHECK 1

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About this series

This is one of five leaflets on assessment and learning produced by QIA. Other titles in the series are:

- Using skills checks
- Initial and diagnostic assessment: a learner-centred process
- Individual learning plans
- Assessment for learning.

The focus for the guidance leaflets is informed by recent QIA work that highlights the need for:

- greater clarity about the purposes and forms of assessment
- the development and/or honing of understanding and skills to manage and implement assessment at different stages
- effective learner-centred processes
- specific learner feedback that identifies what the learner knows and can do, what the learner needs to learn and how they can learn it
- appropriate use of assessment tools
- effective use of assessment data by learners, teachers, managers and organisations
- effective use of individual learning plans so that they are at the heart of assessment, learning and support processes
- self-assessment and quality assurance processes that take account of the important role played by assessment.

Go to the assessment area of the Skills for Life Improvement Programme website (www.sflip.org.uk) to download copies of all five leaflets, for ideas on how to use the leaflets to support staff and organisational development, and to access a resource bank of supporting material.

Contact us

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