

workshop
05 **FOCUS ON LEARNING
LEARNING
OUTCOMES**

Note to facilitators

Purpose of this booklet

This is part of a set of *Focus on Learning* booklets aimed at providing support for teachers' practice in Ireland. This booklet and associated materials are intended to be used in a flexible way to empower teachers to explore a range of approaches which will enable them to develop a coherent approach to the use of learning outcomes. The materials are aimed at facilitating both whole staff discussion and team-based discussion. The material and approaches in this booklet can be used across all sectors, although there is a particular focus on junior cycle examples of practice.

How is the booklet to be used?

Schools may choose to use and adapt the material in any way to suit their own context. They may find it helpful to follow the steps and activities outlined below or can develop their own workshop plan. Where possible, we would encourage using the material on a school-wide basis as research evidence indicates that changes in practice are more likely to become embedded if they are introduced on a systematic basis across a whole school.

To support schools using the booklet flexibly, it has been divided into broad themes that may be explored in the order that best meets the needs of schools. The themes are not mutually exclusive and are organized so that the exploration of any one theme will complement the exploration of another theme.

This booklet will help you examine the following questions:

- What are learning outcomes?
- Why use learning outcomes?
- How learning outcomes link to learning intentions and success criteria?
- What are the effects of using learning outcomes?
- How to plan using learning outcomes?

The journey to learning outcomes in Ireland

Since the early 2000s, there has been a move in Ireland towards an outcomes-based approach to curriculum development, with learning being defined in terms of what students should be able to know and do at the end of a period of learning. Learning outcomes are now used at all levels of education in Ireland from pre-school to university.

Learning outcomes were first used in the rebalanced Junior Certificate subject syllabuses in the early 2000s. Since then, as thinking has evolved, they have been a key feature of junior cycle and senior cycle specifications and of primary curriculum developments.

Using learning outcomes in the development of new curricula has placed emphasis on the understanding, skills and attitudes students will learn and develop as well as focusing on the subject knowledge of the course or specification.

Learning outcomes in other jurisdictions

NCCA commissioned research by Professor Mark Priestley, University of Stirling, to review how learning outcomes are being taken forward in Singapore, Ontario, British Columbia, New Zealand and Hong Kong.

Some key messages from the research are captured in the activity at the end of this [booklet and the full report can be found here](#).

Page Legend



Worksheets

The following symbol is used throughout the booklet to show activities and worksheets that can be photocopied for use in a workshop.



Activity

Learning outcomes – how are we doing?

	Agree	Disagree	To some extent
I have a firm grasp on how learning outcomes, success criteria and learning intentions link together	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I plan teaching and learning using learning outcomes in partnership with colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know which learning outcomes I will need to re-visit with my students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can see how both content and skills can be developed through learning outcomes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can plan units of learning using learning outcomes in collaboration with my colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I plan to have a range of assessment approaches so that I know how well my students are doing in achieving the learning outcomes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning outcomes enable me to plan learning for my students based on their learning needs and what is meaningful to them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I regularly discuss and agree learning intentions and success criteria with my students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My students understand what success looks like	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My students are supported to reflect on their learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Activity

Cut up these cards and give a set to each small group or pair. Their task is to match up the term, definition and example.

<p>Learning outcome</p>	<p>Definition</p> <p>Statements in curriculum specifications to describe the knowledge, understanding, skills and values students should be able to demonstrate after a period of learning.</p>	<p>Example</p> <p>Students will be able to plan, prepare, cost and evaluate healthy and nutritious individual and family meals and snacks</p>
<p>Learning intention</p>	<p>Definition</p> <p>A statement, created by the teacher, that describes clearly what the teacher wants the students to know, understand, and be able to do as a result of specific learning and teaching activities.</p>	<p>Example</p> <p>Students are learning to identify the essential nutrients needed for a healthy diet and where these can be found</p>
<p>Success criteria</p>	<p>Definition</p> <p>They are developed by the teacher and/or the student. They help the teacher and student to make judgements about the quality of student learning.</p>	<p>Example</p> <p>I can create a menu that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● shows awareness of the need for balance ● is economical, nutritious and tasty



Learning outcomes, learning intentions and success criteria – Making the connection



Figure 1: Planning teaching learning and assessment

Learning outcomes provide the building blocks for teachers to plan their teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers can then use learning intentions and success criteria to take forward their planning and enable the learning outcomes to come alive in practice with their students.

The Figure 1 above shows the relationship between learning outcomes, learning intentions and success criteria.

What are learning outcomes?

Learning outcomes are statements in curriculum specifications to describe the knowledge, understanding, skills and values students should be able to demonstrate after a period of learning.

What are learning intentions?

A learning intention for a lesson or series of lessons is a statement, created by the teacher, that describes clearly what the teacher wants the students to know, understand, and be able to do as a result of specific learning and teaching activities. Clear learning intentions should help students focus not just on the

task or activity taking place but on what they are learning. Learning intentions are always linked to one or more learning outcomes in the specification.

What are success criteria?

Success criteria are linked to learning intentions and therefore to the learning outcomes. They are developed by the teacher and/or the student and describe what success looks like. They help the teacher and student to make judgements about the quality of student learning.



Resources to help you in planning using learning outcomes, learning intentions, success criteria can be found on the [NCCA website here](#).



Activity



Watch this video of John Hattie explaining the value of using learning intentions and success criteria (4 mins 44 seconds)

Reflective questions on video

Discuss with your partner

What strikes you most powerfully in this video?

Why does Hattie see the need for both learning intentions and success criteria?

Share an example of how you have used both with your students

Learning outcomes – some advantages

Relevance

Teachers in Ireland are well placed to know what is likely to motivate, challenge and interest the learners in their class. The flexibility offered by learning outcomes allows teachers to use their local context to improve student learning.

What students find relevant in Dublin might not be of relevance to students in Donegal or Kerry. What is of relevance for students' learning in an inner-city multi-cultural school may not be relevant for students living on an island or in a rural setting. A class on the west of Ireland taking forward a study of weather patterns may use local knowledge from local fishermen as well as weather forecasts from the newspapers, TV and the internet. Such flexibility allows teachers to use their professional judgement to create different learning activities to meet the learning needs of **every** student.

Think about examples in your subject specification where your local context can inform how you work with the learning outcomes.

Inclusion

Learning outcomes facilitate planning towards universal design where the diversity of needs of all students is considered from the beginning instead of planning on the basis of an 'average student'. The flexible nature of learning outcomes can challenge the most able students in their learning as well as meeting the needs of students with special educational needs. In addition, learning outcomes respond to students' diversity (for example based on culture, religion, gender, sexuality) and thereby enable greater participation in learning. In this way, learning can be purposeful and meaningful for every student.

Consider Michael Absolum's suggestion 'We do not want students to learn something just because it is in the curriculum. We need to make the understanding of and connection to the learning purposeful for them'.

Student voice

For some teachers using learning outcomes, learning intentions and success criteria means a significant shift in their teaching and may involve a move away from a reliance on textbooks towards more varied teaching methodologies to meet the needs of all learners. It can also open up opportunities to have conversations with students about their learning and how they are making progress in achieving the learning outcomes.



A good starting point would be to engage students in conversations about their prior learning. If learning outcomes are to inform the next steps in students' learning, there needs to be meaningful engagement with students to clarify where they are currently at in their learning. [The Focus on Learning booklet 'Formative Feedback'](#) provides

useful suggestions on ways to engage students in meaningful conversations about their learning.

Enhanced teacher collaboration and professionalism

'The Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) recognises the importance of professional development and collaboration between teachers for informing their understanding of teaching, learning and assessment and their practice in the classroom.'

Framework for Junior Cycle 2015, p.6

A key aspect of using learning outcomes is working with other teachers to take forward planning using learning outcomes.



Listen to Professor Andy Hargreaves talking about the importance of collaborative professionalism.

Consider how you have collaboratively engaged with learning outcomes in your school. What have been the benefits? What more could be done at school-wide level and also at departmental level to support collaborative practice?



Activity

Why use learning outcomes?

Advantages for learners

They encourage learners to:

- Be active in their own learning
- Be clearer about what they are meant to be learning
- Undertake self-reflection so they know how they learn not just what they are learning
- Keep a check on their own progress
- Become more motivated in their learning
- Develop a range of skills
- Have a voice in their learning

Advantages for teachers

They allow teachers to:

- Collaborate with other colleagues in planning
- Plan a range of teaching methods and learning tasks for their students
- Choose assessments that allow students demonstrate their understanding and skills in relation to the learning outcomes
- Provide more focused feedback to students on how they can improve
- Engage all students, from the exceptionally able to those who are under-achieving
- Select what to teach and the order in which to teach it

'Learning outcomes have great potential to facilitate better learning and teaching.'

Professor Mark Priestley University of Stirling

Reflect with your partner on your own experience of using learning outcomes. From the two lists above, identify the advantages for learners/teachers that you would agree match your own experience.



Activity

Discussion

Pair and share – from your experience so far in working with learning outcomes, what are the challenges? Agree the most common challenges and discuss how these might be addressed

What are the most common challenges?

How can these be addressed?

Can you just make them more specific?

The claim is often made that ‘learning outcomes are too vague and not specific enough.’ However, research evidence from other jurisdictions (CEDEFOP, 2009) shows that over-specification of learning outcomes leads to:

- the development of highly bureaucratic systems
- complex specifications that get in the way of good teaching
- box ticking
- superficial learning for students
- over-assessment and increases in teacher workload

In providing support for teachers in working with learning outcomes, this booklet aims to avoid over-specification that would likely result in these issues emerging in practice.

Engaging with learning outcomes

An important aspect of engaging with learning outcomes is careful consideration of the verbs used within learning outcomes e.g. *identify, describe, investigate*.

These verbs have been carefully chosen to inform the teacher what is expected of the students and the range of verbs used ensure that students can achieve a range of skills and knowledge.

Each verb has a specific meaning and therefore it is important to become familiar with the glossary at the end of each specification which provides a definition of each.

Activity 1

The following page includes a list of some of the most common verbs used in learning outcomes.

Photo-copy page 13 (one per group) and then cut each page into pieces.

Work together in small groups (5 minutes) to see if you can successfully match up each action verb to the correct definition.

Activity 2

Choose two to three learning outcomes from your subject specification.

Discuss with a colleague how you might engage students with the learning outcomes given the definition of the action verb.

'Shared sense-making is suggested to be key for curriculum reform. Shared sense-making entails constructing a collective understanding of the meaning for reform, its significance and its implications for schools...'

Pyhäntö, K., Pietarinen, J., & Soini, T. (2018).

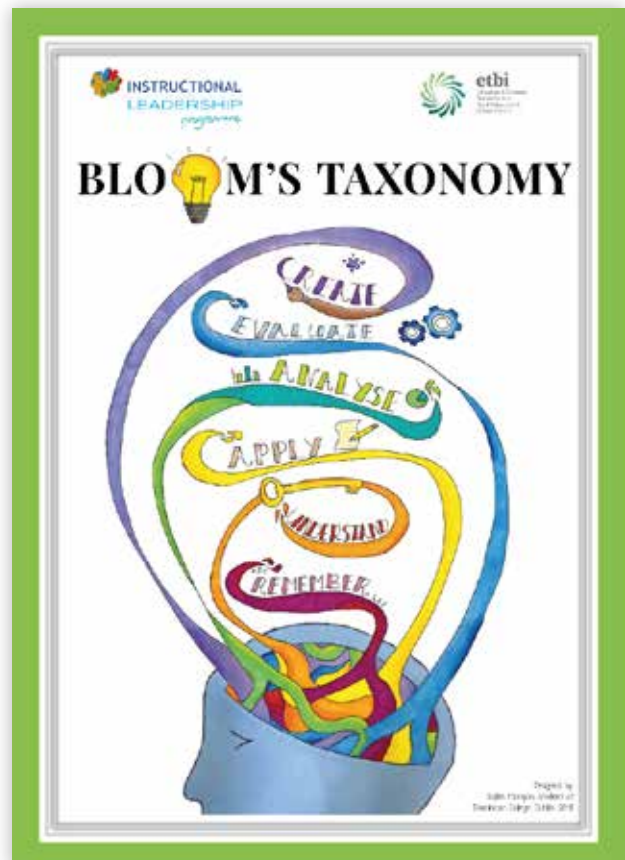
Activity 3

You may have noticed that the learning outcomes in your specification include verbs that

- focus on a range of higher order and lower order thinking skills (linked to taxonomies such as those developed by Andersson, Krathwold and Bloom.)
- relate to the development of both knowledge and skills

Discuss

- How you might build on students' learning over the three years, using learning outcomes, to develop a range of knowledge and thinking skills with your students?
- How does the use of learning outcomes support the kind of learning that young people in Ireland need in the context of changes they will face in the world of study and work?





Activity 1

Analyse	study or examine something in detail, break down in order to bring out the essential elements or structure; identify parts and relationships, and to interpret information to reach conclusions
Assess	show skills of judgement and evaluation, balancing different perspectives
Compare	give an account of the similarities and/or differences between two (or more) items, perspectives or positions, referring to both/all of them throughout
Critique	state the positive and negative aspects of, for example, an idea, perspective or event and give reasons
Debate	set out a viewpoint or argument on a subject on which people have different views, supporting one's stance with evidence
Describe	give an account, using words, diagrams or images, of the main points of the topic
Discuss	examine different concepts, perspectives or opinions on a topic and then come to their own conclusion/viewpoint, supported by appropriate evidence or reasons
Evaluate	collect and examine evidence to make judgements and appraisals; describe how evidence supports or does not support a judgement; identify the limitations of evidence in conclusions; make judgements about ideas, solutions or methods
Examine	enquire into/look closely at an argument or concept in a way that uncovers its origins, assumptions and relationships
Explain	implies more than a list of facts/ideas: the reasons or cause for these facts/ideas must also be given
Explore	systematically look into something closely for the purpose of discovery; to scrutinise or probe
Identify	recognise and state briefly a distinguishing fact or feature
Investigate	observe, study, or make a detailed and systematic examination, in order to establish facts and provide supporting evidence for conclusions
Present	show something for others to examine
Recommend	put forward something with approval as being suitable for a particular purpose
Recognise	identify facts, characteristics or concepts that are critical (relevant/appropriate) to the understanding of a situation, event, process or phenomenon
Research	find suitable information, sort, record, analyse and draw conclusions
Survey	examine or measure in a detailed manner
Synthesise	bring together separate elements/ideas in order to arrive at a new understanding





Activity 2

Work with a colleague to select two or more complementary learning outcomes from your own subject. In the case of teachers working with PLUs, pick a learning outcome from a PLU that complements a subject learning outcome. Then use the grid below as a starting point for planning a unit of learning.

Learning outcome(s) identified	
How will I assess for students' prior knowledge in this area?	
What do I want students to know?	
What do I want students to understand?	
How will students apply this knowledge and show their understanding?	
How might you develop students' self-reflection skills?	
How will I develop students' key skills?	
How might I make this learning clear and relevant to students?	
How will I know this learning has been successful?	

Working with learning outcomes, learning intentions and success criteria

This section provides some examples of how teachers might approach planning with learning outcomes in a variety of subjects.

Further examples are available on www.curriculumonline.ie

Example 1: Religious Education

Learning outcomes

- 1.2 Investigate two communities of faith that have a significant presence in their locality/region.
- 1.3 Engage with members of faith communities, associated with one of the five major world religions studied in this specification, living in their locality and show an appreciation of how the religious beliefs of these communities influence the day-to-day life of their members
- 3.4 Investigate what living a morally good life means with reference to two major world religions and compare with a non-religious world view.

Sample learning intentions

We are learning how to

- Research communities of faith that are living within our locality
- Engage in dialogue with members of a specific faith community so that we can learn about their beliefs and practices
- Ask good questions and listen respectfully
- Discuss how people live out their beliefs in different ways.

Sample learning activities

- Create a map showing places in their locality which are linked to a community of faith (Useful website: [CSO](#))
- Capture evidence of 'communities of faith' locally and create a presentation, using phones or disposable cameras or digital cameras, if available.
- Interview people in the school or wider community about their religious beliefs and practices.
- Arrange class visitors or use skype/email to engage in dialogue with representatives of a specific faith community.
- Use worksheet/graphic organiser to summarise learning about different beliefs and practices.
- Participate in Jigsaw learning activity to share research and learning about different faith communities.

Sample assessment activity

Create a short piece of work (written, oral, electronic) that shows what you have learned about the religious beliefs and practices of your chosen faith community. Students may work in small groups or alone to complete the assessment and not all students in the class need focus on the same faith community or major world religion.

Success criteria

- I clearly explained 2-3 key beliefs and practices of my chosen faith community
 - I showed how these beliefs influence the day to day life of believers
 - I offered my own reflection on what I have learnt and any questions I'm still left with.
-

Example 2: Music

Learning outcomes

- 1.10 discuss the characteristics and defining features of contrasting styles of music represented in the local school or community
- 3.8: select a particular advertisement and analyse the role that music plays in supporting the message and promoting the product
- 3.4: compose and perform an original jingle or brief piece of music for use in a new advertisement for a product, and record the composition

Sample learning intentions

We are learning to:

- Investigate the relationships between image and sound
- Explore the role that music plays in impacting on consumer habits
- Examine some adverts that are currently on TV/ radio and analyse the timbre, tonality, tempo, dynamics and texture of these adverts
- Identify the criteria for what makes a successful advertisement
- Create an original musical idea to promote a product
- Work with technology to make a recording of the musical idea

Sample learning activities

- Listen to a set of musical excerpts that are used for advertising a product and match the image of the product to the audio
- Present the students with a set of images of different products and facilitate a discussion on generating ideas for what instruments, tempo, dynamics and tonality would best support and match the promotion of the product
- Compare the different types of music that are played in different types of shops/supermarkets, and discuss the impact of the music on customer behaviour/buying patterns
- Identify music from 3 different periods that are used in advertising through various media
- Interview people from the school or wider community to discover and compare their views on the adverts that they feel combine music and images successfully
- Using the criteria from these interviews, create brief jingles or short musical motifs (instrumental or vocal) that could be used in advertising
- Investigate and consider ways to record and share an original composition

Sample assessment activity

You have been asked by the managing director of Coffee Bean Inc. to devise a marketing campaign for their new coffee beans, which will be called the 'Toffee Coffee'. This is a coffee product with a toffee flavour, is sophisticated, expensive, and aimed at the adult market. You must devise a 20-second musical motif that will successfully promote the product. You must decide on the style, tonality, timbre and texture to use that will best do this. You must record the composition and share this with the manager of the company.

Success criteria

- My musical idea has some dynamic interest
- My motif has some variation in timbre and texture
- The style I have chosen successfully matches the image of the product
- I have created a jingle that is 20 seconds long
- I used appropriate technology to record the composition
- I shared the recording with the manager (teacher)

Example 3: Visual Art

This unit is for a mixed ability group of first years after a number of classes where students have been practising and building up their skills of observation and drawing of natural forms in their Visual Art sketchbooks.

Learning outcomes

Students should be able to:

- 1.1 analyse their work, or that of another, using appropriate vocabulary and knowledge
- 1.4 demonstrate how they use drawing to observe, record and analyse the human figure and the world around them
- 1.5 interpret the world and communicate ideas through visual means
- 1.11 consider the use of the art elements and design

Sample learning intentions

We are learning to:

- Examine the work of famous artists who also worked with natural forms
- Observe and record natural forms
- Represent natural forms through drawing and by using colour and texture
- Use artistic language to discuss our work and the work of others
- Reflect on skills and techniques used to represent the natural forms in drawing

Sample assessment activities

- Record your drawings in your Visual Art sketchpad
- Show how you have represented the natural form through your drawing and using colour and texture
- Discuss your work and that of others using artistic language
- Demonstrate your understanding of the art elements and design principles by discussing the work of famous artists

Success criteria

We can:

- Observe and record natural forms
- Experiment with drawing techniques and use colour and texture to represent what we see
- Display our work in our Visual Art sketchpads
- Discuss our work, and that of others, using artistic language
- Reflect on our discussions and plan future learning

Engaging with research on learning outcomes

International Research

NCCA commissioned Professor Mark Priestley, Stirling University, to research how learning outcomes were taken forward in other jurisdictions.

Some key messages from the research are captured in the four extracts on the following pages and the [full report can be found here](#).

Activity

This activity can be taken forward as a school wide activity or in smaller subject department groupings of 4 or 8 participants.

The 4 sections, on the next page, should be shared out amongst the group members.

Each member or pair reads the card a couple of times and takes notes on the main points from the card.

Individually or with a partner the main points are put on to a A3 poster using a graphic, drawing, or simply a set of key words.

Each individual or pair then takes it in turn to share the main points of the extract with the rest of the group. (5 minutes each)



**Learning outcomes:
An international perspective**

Extract 1: Knowledge

The research points out the importance of continuing to value the place of knowledge in learning together with broadening our understanding of what we mean by knowledge. It argues that while some learning outcomes may focus on the development of key skills, it is also important to ensure key aspects of knowledge are addressed. The research highlights how both knowledge and skills are inter-related and should be developed in an integrated way. It also advocates an approach to learning outcomes that avoids treating knowledge as a list of things to be taught.

Extract 2: Can we make them more specific?

The research makes the point that if learning outcomes are made up with lots of detail backed up with specific examples of practice there is a risk that they can easily become tick-boxes for assessment. In contrast, broad learning outcomes provide teachers with the room that they need to make the curriculum their own and more relevant for their students. The danger in too much detail is that it leads to fragmented content rather than coherent knowledge and skills that make sense for the learners.



Extract 3: Changing Practice 1

The research argues that it is important not to underestimate the challenge that using learning outcomes presents for teachers. In particular, it will be a significant challenge for teachers who previously worked with a detailed syllabus, often supported by text books. In such cases the use of learning outcomes represents significant changes in both the personal and professional beliefs of teachers. Such a change in practice will not happen overnight but is most likely to occur when teachers take forward professional learning in the context of their own school. A key feature of such localized professional learning is to use learning outcomes as a basis for collaborating with colleagues to plan for learning, teaching and assessment.

Extract 4: Changing Practice 2

Teachers need to 'own' the learning outcomes so that they develop a view of learning and teaching which goes beyond the sharing of knowledge with students for examination purposes. Used properly, learning outcomes can support teachers to enable students to develop deeper understandings, make connections between different knowledge, and be able to apply knowledge in different contexts. In order for this shift to happen, support needs to be provided for teachers to develop confidence in making their own decisions about content and methods that are suitable for all their students. A reliance on generic samples that have been developed by others for a different situation will not support teachers in this process.

Further reading

Learning outcomes: An international perspective (NCCA, 2019) A research paper led by Professors Mark Priestley, University of Stirling that examines how learning outcomes are being taken forward in Singapore, Ontario, British Columbia, New Zealand and Hong Kong.

Application of Learning outcomes approaches across Europe: A comparative study (CDEDFOP, 2016)

Pyhältö, K., Pietarinen, J., & Soini, T. (2018). *Dynamic and shared sense-making in large-scale curriculum reform in school districts*. *Curriculum Journal*, 29(2), 181–200.

Glossary

Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are statements in curriculum specifications to describe the knowledge, understanding, skills and values students should be able to demonstrate after a period of learning.

Learning Intentions

A learning intention for a lesson or series of lessons is a statement, created by the teacher, that describes clearly what the teacher wants the students to know, understand, and be able to do as a result of learning and teaching activities.

Success Criteria

Success criteria are linked to learning intentions. They are developed by the teacher and/or the student and describe what success *looks like*. They help the teacher and student to make judgements about the quality of student learning.

Ongoing Assessment

As part of their classroom work, students engage in assessment activities that can be either formative or summative in nature. Teachers assess as part of their daily practice by observing and listening as students carry out tasks, by looking at what they write and make, and by considering how they respond to, frame and ask questions. Teachers use this assessment information to help students plan the next steps in their learning. Periodically this assessment will be in more structured, formalised settings where teachers will need to obtain a snapshot of the students' progress in order to make decisions on future planning and to report on progress. This may involve the students in doing projects, investigations, case studies and/or tests and may occur at defined points in the school calendar.

Formative Assessment

Assessment is formative when either formal or informal procedures are used to gather evidence of learning during the learning process, and used to adapt teaching to meet student needs. The process permits teachers and students to collect information about student progress, and to suggest adjustments to the teacher's approach to instruction and the student's approach to learning. Assessment for learning covers all of the aspects of formative assessment but has a particular focus on the student having an active role in his/her learning.

Summative Assessment

Assessment is summative when it is used to evaluate student learning at the end of the instructional process or of a period of learning. The purpose is to summarise the students' achievements and to determine whether and to what degree the students have demonstrated understanding of that learning by comparing it against agreed success criteria or features of quality.

Features of Quality

Features of quality are the statements in the subject specifications that are used in making judgements about the quality of student work for the purpose of awarding achievement grades for certification. As success criteria are closely linked to learning intentions and based on the day-to-day processes in the classroom, student learning will gradually come to reflect the requirements set out in the features of quality which are used for certification purposes.



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