



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curraim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment

Guidelines to support the assessment of the Senior Cycle Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes

March 2026

Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
ASSESSMENT FOR CERTIFICATION: GENERAL INFORMATION	3
Gathering evidence for assessment for certification	4
DESCRIPTORS OF ACHIEVEMENT	5
Level 1 and Level 2 Descriptor of Achievement	5
ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	5
Assessment Criteria for deciding Descriptor of Achievement: Level 1	6
Assessment Criteria for deciding Descriptor of Achievement: Level 2	6
REVIEWING ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING	7
Internal Validation	7
External Validation	10
APPENDIX 1: SPECIFICATIONS	11
Level 1	11
Level 2	11
APPENDIX 2: PROGRESSION CONTINUUM FOR ONGOING ASSESSMENT	13
APPENDIX 3: GLOSSARY OF TERMS	15
APPENDIX 4: USEFUL LINKS	16

Introduction

This document, *Guidelines to support the assessment of the Senior Cycle Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes* provides:

- General information on assessment for certification of the Senior Cycle Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes
- General information on gathering evidence for the Student Portfolio
- The Descriptors of Achievement used to decide the level of achievement for each curriculum area and module within the Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes
- The assessment criteria for curriculum areas and modules within the Senior Cycle Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes
- Guidance for schools and teachers on the implementation of the internal validation process
- Guidance for schools and teachers on the external validation process.

These guidelines should be used in conjunction with:

- The Senior Cycle Learning Programmes: Level 1 and Level 2 Programme Statement, which can be accessed [here](#).
- The specifications for Level 1 and Level 2 curriculum areas and modules, which can be accessed [here](#).
- Any further programme specific guidance or Circulars issued by the Department of Education and Youth (DEY) or the State Examinations Commission (SEC) or additional supports issued by the NCCA.

These guidelines may be updated as required during the implementation and review period.

Assessment for Certification: General information

Assessment for certification is based on the learning outcomes set out in the Level 1 and Level 2 curriculum areas and modules at senior cycle (see Appendix 1).

The evidence of learning and achievement for the Level 1 and Level 2 programmes at senior cycle will be gathered in a portfolio. Each student will present one portfolio for assessment for certification. This portfolio will contain the evidence being presented for each module undertaken by the student. The learning recognised for certification will be at Level 1 or Level 2 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Each module undertaken by the student may be certificated by the State Examinations Commission (SEC).

Gathering evidence for assessment for certification

The evidence presented must demonstrate that the student has achieved the intended learning outcomes.¹ Evidence of learning and achievement can be generated through a wide range of assessment activities and methods and in a variety of forms. A holistic approach, where assessment activities consider the whole learner and their abilities, should be taken for the curriculum areas and modules. To mitigate the risk of over-assessment, integrating assessment activities and methods across modules and curriculum areas can be explored. Students should be given sufficient opportunities to generate evidence that demonstrates their learning and achievement of the relevant learning outcomes.

Evidence of learning and achievement is captured by the teacher. In addition, sometimes evidence of learning and achievement can be captured by someone other than the teacher, especially when the evidence of the student's learning is being demonstrated outside the classroom. This might include gathering evidence from a parent/guardian, therapist, SNA or other professional working with the student. Evidence of the learning observed or gathered by others should then be forwarded to the teacher and collated prior to including it in the student's portfolio.

The Student Portfolio

The evidence of learning and achievement by each student will be gathered on an ongoing basis to create the student's portfolio. The student portfolio is compiled over the two years of the student's learning programme. A portfolio can be in physical form, digital form or a hybrid of both. While the student portfolio can be used for both formative and summative assessment, it will be specifically used for summative assessment at the end of their final year, for certification and reporting purposes

Portfolios provide students with a repository of concrete evidence of their learning and achievements related to the intended learning outcomes. The portfolio can contain evidence of learning and achievement for a student where the learning may have taken place individually, in a small group or whole class setting. While some evidence of learning may come from collaborative work, the evidence in the portfolio should clearly show the student's own learning. Evidence within the student's portfolio can cover a range of achievements, including practical tasks, demonstration of skills, and community or work placement achievements.

Types of evidence within a portfolio can include, but is not limited to:

- Photographs, videos or audio recordings of work or other multimedia elements undertaken or produced by the student
- Photographs, videos, recordings of interactions with teachers, SNA, parents or members of the community
- Work samples, written work, short assignments
- Project work (written and online)
- Drawings, sketches, charts, diagrams
- Teacher observations
- Student diary entry, reflection sheets by students, peer reviews

¹ The learning outcomes are presented in the specifications of the curriculum areas and modules, which can be accessed [here](#) and are listed in Appendix 1.

Evidence may also be referenced through diary entries from teachers, SNAs, or employers as relevant.

Descriptors of Achievement

Each module undertaken by the student is individually assessed and assigned one of two descriptors, which reflect the level of achievement for that specific module. Teachers use the Assessment Criteria outlined on pages 7 and 8 to determine the appropriate descriptor. Students may receive certification at one of the Descriptors of Achievement for each module undertaken.

Level 1 and Level 2 Descriptor of Achievement

For each Level 1 and Level 2 module undertaken, the student may be awarded certification based on one of two Descriptors of Achievement.

Descriptors of Achievement
Achieved
Achieved with Merit

Table 1 Descriptors of Achievement for the Senior Cycle Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes

Assessment Criteria

Assessment Criteria serve as the basis for evaluating the extent of a student's achievement in relation to the intended learning outcomes. By referring to these criteria, teachers exercise their professional 'on-balance' judgement to determine the level of achievement descriptor that most accurately reflects the student's overall performance in each module. The teacher should begin with the 'Achieved' level in the Assessment Criteria and continue reading until they reach the descriptor that best matches the student's evidence of learning in the module being assessed for senior cycle certification.

There is no expectation for students to achieve every learning outcome set out in a module specification. Where it is not clearly evident which descriptor should apply, teachers must come to a judgement, based on the evidence from the student's portfolio, to select the descriptor that best matches the student's work overall. This 'best fit' approach allows teachers to apply the descriptor that 'on balance' describes the work being assessed.

In instances where evidence has not been gathered to demonstrate the student's learning for a registered module, no descriptor will be entered for that module.

Assessment Criteria for deciding Descriptor of Achievement: Level 1

Students following the Level 1 Learning Programme may achieve the learning outcomes in a structured learning environment with the degree of support or guidance that each student requires.

On the completion of each module and curriculum area, the teacher makes a professional, on-balance judgement using the following assessment criteria:

Achieved

- The student has demonstrated an ability to attend to the learning outcomes.
- The student has demonstrated their ability to apply some of the learning described within the module.

Achieved with Merit

- The student has demonstrated engagement with the learning outcomes.
- The student has demonstrated their ability to apply much of the learning described within the module.

Assessment Criteria for deciding Descriptor of Achievement: Level 2

Students following the Level 2 Learning Programme may achieve the learning outcomes in a structured learning environment with the degree of support each student requires.

On the completion of each module, the teacher makes a professional, on-balance judgement on the level of achievement using the following assessment criteria:

Achieved

- The student has demonstrated engagement with the learning described in the module.
- The student has demonstrated that they can apply some of the learning described in the module.

Achieved with Merit

- The student has demonstrated competence in the learning described in the module.
- The student has demonstrated they can apply, with emerging independence, the learning described in the module.

Reviewing Assessment and Learning

Quality assurance procedures are used to support validity, fairness and transparency in assessments. For the Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes these procedures will be implemented through internal and external validation.

Internal Validation

Internal validation is a process which supports teachers in achieving alignment of judgement of the student's level of achievement and expected standards, as set out in the Descriptors of Achievement and their assessment criteria, and assures stakeholders that students' achievements are being recognised appropriately.

There are three stages to the internal validation process.

- Planning and preparation
- Deciding provisional descriptors of achievement
- Review meeting

Planning and preparation

Planning and preparation is undertaken in advance of beginning the modules with the students. The relevant teachers discuss the learning outcomes, become familiar with the assessment criteria and agree the types of evidence to be gathered and reviewed.

The Progression Continuum (see Appendix 2, pp.13-14) supports teachers with the ongoing assessment of student's learning and informs planning, teaching, learning, assessment and reporting.

Evidence to be submitted to the student portfolio can be gathered and collated throughout the two year learning programme. The portfolio is the compilation of evidence that best captures the student's learning, and achievement of learning outcomes, across all modules that the student has undertaken. Each piece of evidence included in the portfolio should clearly demonstrate the students' achievement of the learning set out in the learning outcomes of the relevant module.

Deciding provisional descriptors of achievement

The purpose of this stage is for the teacher(s) responsible for teaching the module to consider the Student Portfolio and assign a provisional descriptor of achievement for each module.

In preparation for deciding a provisional descriptor of achievement, teachers select and organise the pieces of evidence that best demonstrate the student's learning for the module(s) being assessed.

A piece of evidence within this portfolio may illustrate achievement in more than one module, reflecting the integrated nature of the Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes.

Teachers use the Assessment Criteria to support their professional, on-balance judgement when reviewing the evidence. Based on this review, a provisional descriptor of achievement is assigned for each module.

Teachers and schools have the autonomy to decide when and how they would like to plan and organise this stage of the process, which may occur termly, or as a series of meetings throughout the academic year as modules are completed, or at the end of the two-year programme.

Schools and teachers should retain a hard copy/online record of the provisional descriptor of achievement per module.

Review meeting

The purpose of the review meeting is to consider the provisional descriptors of achievement for modules undertaken within a student's portfolio and agree on a final descriptor of achievement. This supports teachers to collaboratively reach consistency in their judgements of student work against assessment criteria. The review process is centred on teachers discussing student work at structured meetings. It enables teachers to align their judgement with expected standards as set out in the Descriptors of Achievement and their assessment criteria, and gain consistency in their judgements.

The objectives of the review meetings are to:

- Support teachers to achieve greater consistency in how they judge student work
- Make sure judgements match the expected standards
- Reassure parents, guardians, and others that students' achievements are being recognised appropriately.

During the meeting, teachers examine the student's portfolio, discuss how well the evidence matches the assessment criteria, and consider the provisional descriptor of achievement awarded.

Assessment review meetings are an important part of supporting assessments within the school. They help teachers agree on how to judge student work using the assessment criteria. By talking about the evidence in each portfolio, teachers get a better understanding of the standards and expectations. Schools should retain a hard-copy/online record of Review meetings.

In some instances it may be the case that an inter-school meeting would assist teachers in considering the provisional descriptors of achievement, for example, where there may be very low numbers of students following the Learning Programmes in a given school.

Role of the co-ordinating teacher

The teacher responsible for co-ordinating the review meeting leads the meeting and keeps the record of the decisions made, which is used to generate the report of the meeting. A report of the meeting should be retained by the school. It is recommended that the meeting should generally follow this sequence:

- Explain the purpose of the meeting is to support achieving consistency of judgement about the evidence presented in the student's portfolio and to develop a common understanding about the quality of student learning
- Ask a teacher to introduce a sample from the student portfolio they have assessed as Achieved
- Following a short introduction by the teacher, the co-ordinating teacher leads a general discussion on the extent to which the student's work matches the relevant Assessment Criteria
- The co-ordinating teacher may refer to examples of student work from a student portfolio that other teachers in the group have assessed and awarded that descriptor to
- The emphasis in affirming judgements during the review meetings should always be on a 'best fit' approach which allows teachers to reflect upon the descriptor that 'on-balance' is most appropriate for the work being assessed
- If possible, there should be discussion of at least two samples for each descriptor and the co-ordinating teacher should ensure that each teacher has at least one of their samples discussed during the meeting
- The process is repeated, in turn, with sample Student Portfolios assessed as Achieved and Achieved with Merit. At the end of the meeting, the co-ordinating teacher briefly summarises the key points from the discussion.

It is important that the teachers note the implications of the decisions made during the meeting for the rest of the evidence gathered in the student portfolio they have already assessed, particularly in the case of descriptors where their judgement did not align with the view of the majority of teachers at the meeting.

After the meeting, each teacher considers the assessment of their student's portfolio based on the outcomes of the meeting and, where it is considered necessary, makes the appropriate adjustments to their provisional descriptors.

Following the review meeting, the co-ordinating teacher submits their report from the meeting to the school's principal, focusing on the outcomes of the discussion of student's portfolio at the meeting.

How the teacher supports the internal validation process

The teacher supports the internal validation process by:

- Becoming familiar with the learning outcomes.
- Becoming familiar with the assessment criteria.
- Deciding on the types of evidence to be gathered and reviewed.

- Undertaking assessment activities and methods to gather evidence of learning of the intended learning outcomes.
- Supporting the student in gathering and maintaining evidence of learning in the Student Portfolio.
- Providing opportunities for students to generate appropriate evidence of learning.
- Assessing and judging the student's evidence against the assessment criteria.
- Applying the provisional descriptor of achievement.
- Adhering to and engaging with the internal validation procedures.
- Recording the outcome.
- Making sure that all relevant documentation is retained appropriately and made available for validation purposes as appropriate.

How the school supports the internal validation process

The school supports the internal validation process by:

- Ensuring that the NCCA Guidelines to support the assessment of the Senior Cycle Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes are provided to relevant teachers.
- Supporting relevant teachers in recording the descriptors of achievement awarded to each student.
- Retaining student portfolios including records and pieces of work, as appropriate, for the purposes of validation in a safe and secure manner.
- Applying the guidance for the internal validation process as set out in this document.
- Make sure that all relevant documentation is retained appropriately and made available for internal and external purposes as appropriate.

External Validation

The SEC will be the awarding body for certification purposes and will carry out the role of external validation. The SEC will ensure that internal assessment of the students' portfolio has been undertaken in a quality assured manner. External validation includes a sample-based approach that would involve a review of a selection of student portfolios. Students will receive their qualification for each curriculum area/module undertaken after the external validation process.

Schools participating in the Senior Cycle Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes will be required to submit information to the SEC regarding what modules have been undertaken by each student and their level of achievement in each module. The relevant procedures for submission of this information will be outlined to schools by the SEC.

As part of the external validation process, schools will be required to make themselves available to be visited by SEC staff, who will wish to view school documentation supporting the internal assessment and internal validation processes, including minutes/reports of internal validation meetings. SEC staff will also wish to view student portfolios and the evidence of learning and achievement used in assessment for certification whether through a site visit to the school or otherwise.

Appendix 1: Specifications

The Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes at senior cycle consist of a range of curriculum areas, each designed on a modular basis. A specification is provided separately for each curriculum area and its associated modules. In the case of each module, the specification includes learning outcomes which describe the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions students should be able to demonstrate after completing the module.

Level 1

Curriculum Areas

[Communication and Literacy Level 1](#)

[Numeracy Level 1](#)

[Personal Care Level 1](#)

Elective Modules

[Physical Education Level 1](#)

[Visual Art Level 1](#)

[Drama Level 1](#)

[Looking after my Environment Level 1](#)

Level 2

Curriculum Areas

[Communication and Literacy Level 2](#)

[Numeracy Level 2](#)

[Personal Care Level 2](#)

Elective Modules

[Cookery Level 2](#)

[Drama Level 2](#)

[Visual Art Level 2](#)

[Literature Level 2](#)

Physical Education Level 2

Looking after my Environment Level 2

My Life, My Finance Level 2

Appendix 2: Progression Continuum for ongoing assessment

Throughout the two year cycle, teachers use formative assessment in their differentiated pedagogy and planning of lessons to ensure each student is progressing commensurate to their individual learning profile. A Progression Continuum for Level 1 and a Progression Continuum for Level 2 is provided in the Senior Cycle Level 1 and Level 2 [Programme Statement](#). This ongoing assessment of student progression may be guided using a Progression Continuum. The progression continuum supports formative assessment by providing a framework against which a student's achievement can be evaluated in a meaningful and developmental way. In addition, the Progression Continuum can be used as a means of feedback to both parents and students in relation to a student's progress and learning.

Formative assessment helps identify where a student currently sits on that continuum. The continuum informs planning, differentiation, approaches to teaching and learning, and reporting. The progression continuum provides a structured way to evaluate and report on student learning at key points in time for the purposes of summative assessment.

The progression continuum tables indicate where the student's progress is in relation to the learning outcomes. The progression continuum may be used to support teaching, learning and ongoing assessment in the student's daily activities.

The Progression Continuum for L1LP and L2LP support the teacher in identifying if and to what extent the student is making progress across the learning outcomes and modules. Movement within the progression continuum may take longer and progress may be more variable depending on the student's strengths and needs. To allow for progression at different rates, students are not expected to fully achieve outcomes by a predetermined point in time.

Level 1 Progression Continuum

Attend	Student attends and is present at the learning activity or event
Recognition	Student shows an awareness of, or recognition of, the learning activity/event including a fleeting focus
Attention	Student pays attention to the learning activity/event but it can be inconsistent and often brief
Acknowledgement	Student begins to respond to, or acknowledge the learning activity/event, often inconsistently and the response is appropriate to the student
Engagement	Student shows more consistent attention to learning activities/events
Involvement	Student begins to share, take turns, show enjoyment of the learning activity/event, express choice

Anticipation	Student begins to anticipate familiar learning activities/events
Action	Student joins in , gestures, vocalises on learning activity and others, appropriate to the student's form of communication

Table 2 Level 1 Progression Continuum

The student may also show progress through:

- higher levels of enjoyment of the activity
- increased use of senses; from nearby senses such as tactile to more distant senses such as visual or auditory senses
- increased use of movement such as body language right through to the use of visuals.

Progress can also be shown by movement. Students may progress from showing resistance through movement to enjoying their interactions, such as:

- a reduction in intervention, support or reinforcement
- when a student demonstrates the achievement more than once
- when a student combines skills or uses skills across contexts when a student decides not to respond, having previously done so, is a sign of progression in itself

Level 2 Progression Continuum

Engagement	The student is at an acquiring stage where they are beginning to engage with the learning outcomes
Advanced engagement	Through repetition and support, the student can achieve the learning outcomes
Competency	The student can achieve the learning outcomes independently on several occasions
Advanced competency	The student is maintaining their level of achievement with the learning outcomes. They can achieve the learning outcomes after a break or change
Proficiency	Students can apply their learning in different contexts, scenarios with different stimuli and people
Expertise	Student will adapt their learning emerging from learning outcomes to understand or problem solve in new contexts or scenarios

Table 3 Level 2 Progression Continuum

Appendix 3: Glossary of terms

Assessment Activities

Assessment activities is an umbrella term for tasks, exercises, methods or activities that teachers use to collect evidence of a student's learning, skills, progression and achievement of a learning outcome. When related to gathering a student's portfolio of achievement, assessment activities serve as the sources of evidence that go into that portfolio. Assessment activities can be structured or incidental

Assessment Criteria

Assessment Criteria are the criteria through which the student's work is assessed. Teachers use Assessment Criteria to decide the student's overall Descriptor of Achievement.

Descriptor of Achievement

For each Level 1 or Level 2 module undertaken, the student will be awarded with certification in the Level 1 or Level 2 Learning Programme at senior cycle at one of two of the Descriptors of Achievement.

Formative Assessment

Assessment is formative where it is part of an on-going instructional process where teachers ascertain students' in order to inform teaching. Formative assessment is sometimes referred to as assessment for learning.

Portfolio

The Portfolio is a collection of work that demonstrates a student's progress, learning, effort and achievement across the student's two year engagement in senior cycle. It presents a variety of assessment activities for a holistic view of the student's learning and achievement.

Summative assessment

Within this context, summative assessment refers to assessing a student's learning and achievement at the end of their two year engagement with Level 1 Learning Programme or the Level 2 Learning Programme. It is the 'summing up' of students' achievements.

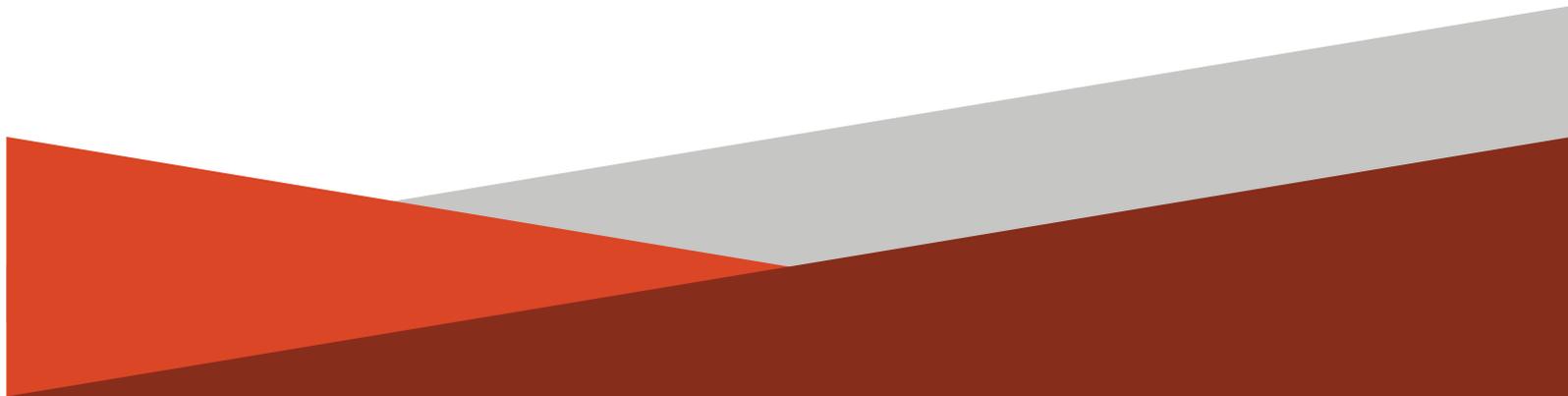
Appendix 4: Useful Links

National curriculum: [Curriculum Online](#)

Senior Cycle Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes: [Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes](#)

Senior Cycle Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes: Programme Statement: [Level 1 and Level 2 Programme Statement](#)

Senior Cycle Level 1 and Level 2 Circular, DEY (2025): [Circular 0065/2025 Senior Cycle Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes](#)



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment