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# Principles of assessment F–12

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Version 1.4

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# 1. Purpose

In the context of the move to an Australian Curriculum, states and territories will identify the assessment practices for the Foundation Year to Year 12 (F–12) that will encourage high quality and high equity educational outcomes for young Australians.

This paper sets out **principles of assessment** to **inform policy development** and support valid assessment practices F–12. The principles provide a valuable tool for designing assessment in classrooms, schools and school systems, and for policy and accountability purposes.

# 2. Context

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is developing the Australian Curriculum for all key learning areas F–12. The new curriculum is comprised of both content descriptions and achievement standards. Individual states and territories remain responsible for the assessment, reporting and certification of student achievement in relation to the achievement standards.

As the Australian Curriculum is being developed and implemented, ACARA will continue its collaborative relationship with the states and territories to explore possibilities for achieving greater national consistency in assessment and reporting, including:

- continuing to improve on the good practice that currently exists within states and territories
- ensuring the common achievement standards are supported by examples of effective assessment practice, and
- supporting the use of assessment for both formative (feedback) and summative (reporting) purposes.

Currently across Australia, there are different approaches to assessment, with students assessed at different times and in different ways to address equity principles. It is not necessary to assess all students across the nation at the same time and in the same manner to implement the Australian Curriculum.

# 3. Rationale

The Australian Curriculum is standards-based. Standards-referenced assessment can contribute to raising student achievement if supported by good assessment practice. This paper therefore identifies a set of agreed principles that underpin valid assessment practice. These principles will guide quality assessment practice in relation to the Australian Curriculum F–12 and for state and territory curriculums that will continue in subject areas not covered by the new curriculum.

The Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) has requested states and territories work with ACARA towards a more nationally consistent approach to assessment and reporting. The principles outlined in this paper have been designed to support that request.

## 4. Background

### Current assessment practices and programs in Australia

#### Assessing and reporting achievement in courses of study from F–10

Each state and territory has developed curriculum with embedded standards which identify expectations about student learning. In addition, each of the states and territories has adopted an approach to assessment, broadly based on a range of school-based assessments and teacher professional judgment. Teachers develop their classroom assessment programs guided by policy and support from each jurisdiction.

Existing national agreements require that twice yearly reports to parents on the achievements of students include the use of A–E grades (or an equivalent five-point scale). In some states and territories, different arrangements exist for reporting in the early years.

#### Assessing and reporting achievement in senior secondary courses of study

In the senior secondary years, each state and territory implements its own system of assessment and reporting of student achievement for a range of purposes, notably certification. For most Australian states and territories, this involves a combination of school-based assessment and external assessments, while two jurisdictions implement systems based on externally moderated school-based assessment.

#### Centralised tests within the National and International Assessment Programs

The National Assessment Program (NAP) includes tests endorsed by MCEECDYA including the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and three-yearly sample assessments in science literacy, civics and citizenship, and ICT literacy.

NAPLAN is an annual assessment for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, testing skills in literacy and numeracy that are developed over time, through the school curriculum.

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a system of international assessments that focuses on 15-year-olds' capabilities in reading literacy, mathematics literacy, and science literacy. PISA also includes measures of general or cross-curricular competencies such as problem solving. PISA emphasises functional skills that students have acquired as they near the end of compulsory schooling. PISA is coordinated by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental organisation of industrialised countries.

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) gathers data from samples of the student population at three levels — middle primary, lower secondary and final-year secondary — from the teachers of these students, and from their schools and systems.

TIMSS seeks to find *'what students know'* and PISA seeks to find *'what students can do with their knowledge'*.



## 5. Assessment

**Assessment** is the purposeful and systematic collection of information about students' learning.

Assessment is used for a variety of purposes, but its most important use is to provide evidence that enables judgments to be made about the students' learning.

Sufficient and suitable evidence is collected to enable fair judgments to be made. Once the evidence is collected and analysed, it is summarised and presented in ways that are meaningful and useful to:

- help students achieve the highest standards they can
- improve teaching and learning
- provide meaningful reports to parents/carers, and others on students' achievements.

Depending on what is being assessed and how the information will be used, the information may come from a range of different types of assessment tasks and teacher observations. Any critical decision resulting from assessment should not depend on only one piece of evidence and should involve various types of evidence, that is, more than one style of assessment.

## 6. Principles of assessment

1. The main purpose of assessment is to inform teaching and improve learning.
2. Assessment is underpinned by equity principles. It takes account of the diverse needs of students and contexts of education.
3. Assessment is aligned with curriculum, pedagogy and reporting. Quality assessment has curricular and instructional validity — what is taught informs what is assessed, and what is assessed informs what is reported.
4. Assessment aligned with curriculum, pedagogy and reporting includes assessment of deep knowledge of core concepts within and across the disciplines, problem solving, collaboration, analysis, synthesis and critical thinking.
5. Assessment involves collecting evidence about expected learning as the basis for judgments about the achieved quality of that learning. Quality is judged with reference to fixed standards and is based on evidence.
6. Assessment evidence may come from a range of assessment activities. The assessment activity is selected because of its relevance to the knowledge, skills and understanding to be assessed, and the purpose of the assessment.
7. Information collected through assessment activities is sufficient and suitable to enable defensible judgments to be made. To show the depth and breadth of the student learning, evidence of student learning is compiled over time. Standards are reviewed periodically and adjusted according to evidence to facilitate continuous improvement.
8. Approaches to assessment are consistent with and responsive to local and jurisdictional policies, priorities and contexts. It is important that schools have the freedom and support to develop quality assessment practices and programs that suit their particular circumstances and those of the students they are assessing.
9. Assessment practices and reporting are transparent. It is important that there is professional and public confidence in the processes used, the information obtained and the decisions made.

## 7. Supporting the principles

The principles are operationalised and supported by (but not limited to):

- quality assurance mechanisms that are appropriate for the circumstances and purposes of the assessment

*Sufficiently rigorous quality assurance processes ensure all stakeholders — parents, teachers, students, the government and community — have confidence in students' results. There must be public confidence in the quality of procedures and outcomes.*

- evaluation and review programs and procedures that are systematic and regular.

*Evidence of student achievement across different jurisdictions and different assessment regimes should receive comparable reported results.*

## 8. Using the principles

The principles are useful for teachers, schools and jurisdictions to:

- plan assessment programs
- audit current assessment practice(s) and programs
- inform and develop teachers' professional learning to ensure teachers have assessment capability.