



Minerva
Learning Trust

Assessment Policy & Principles

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Contents

Changes to this edition	1
1. Purpose	2
2. Policy Aims	2
3. Links to other Documents	2
4. Roles and Responsibilities	3
5. Overview.....	3
6. Day to day formative assessment.....	4
7. Medium-term Summative Assessment.....	6
8. Final, end of course formal summative assessment	8
9. Links to tracking	9
10. Estimated grade teacher guidance	10
11. Monitoring and Evaluation.....	11
12. Equality Impact Assessment	11

Changes to this edition

First edition.

1. Purpose

This policy sets out how Trust schools will approach assessment. It represents the overarching principles all schools will uphold, in order to best serve all our students.

The policy is for use by senior leaders (SLT) and subject leaders (SLs) in each school so that there is a consistent approach across the Trust with common language and expectations. It will help us to articulate a common vision to subject leaders and wider staff, enabling cross-school collaboration to ensure the highest standards of assessment planning and implementation, leading to outstanding provision and outcomes for all our students.

Subject teachers also need to reference the policy to understand the Trust approach to assessment and their use of it.

This policy will support the development and embedding of the very best assessment practice in all our settings alongside training that we put in place across the Trust or in individual schools.

Any communication with students and parents should be in keeping with the principles of this policy and extracts of it could be used to explain our approach to assessment when needed.

2. Policy Aims

This policy aims to:

Support the development and embedding of the very best assessment practice in all our settings alongside training that we put in place across the Trust or in individual schools.

The policy provides a rationale for a consistent approach across the Trust with common language and expectations. It sets out a common vision for senior leaders, subject leaders, and wider staff, enabling cross-school collaboration to ensure the highest standards of assessment planning and implementation, leading to outstanding provision and outcomes for all our students.

3. Links to other Documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with other trust policies, specifically:

- Trust and school Curriculum Policy
- Trust and school Teaching and Learning Policy
- Trust QA Policy

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Headteachers have responsibility for overseeing the implementation of this policy and ensuring assessment procedures in the school are carried out in line with it.

Senior Leaders have responsibility for sharing the Trust and school policy and vision around assessment practice with middle leaders and ensuring that any necessary training and support is provided and accessed where needed.

Subject Leaders have responsibility for designing and implementing effective assessment practice within their teams, for monitoring its implementation and impact, and for responding to arising issues with refinements and teacher support where needed. They will collate and monitor data generated from medium term summative assessment and analyse and respond to developing trends. Subject leaders will also engage with end point assessment data to identify achievements patterns and adapt to curriculum and assessment models accordingly.

Subject teachers implement school and Trust assessment policy in their classrooms, including taking responsibility for developing their own professional practice where needed. They contribute to the design and implementation of medium-term summative assessment including recording and reporting of associated data.

5. Overview

Assessment falls into three broad categories:

- Day to day formative assessment.
- Medium-term summative assessment.
- Final (end of course) formal summative assessment.

The purpose of assessment varies depending on the context, and sometimes we design assessment to fulfil more than one purpose, and/or cater for multiple audiences. We give very careful consideration to developing high quality assessment design and how we share the results of it. This is because assessments can have unintended or less obvious consequences, impacting on future engagement and learning. We are mindful of potential impact on students' perceptions of the effectiveness of their own learning (both positive and negative) and how it can shape students' self-esteem. Assessment is a vital part of students' overall development as learners and it must be enacted within a positive, low-threat learning culture.

All Minerva teachers are encouraged to consider the following questions in planning their overall approach to assessment in their subject:

- What does it mean to be a successful student in this subject?
 - What is the purpose of our subject?
 - What does it mean to be a good mathematician/musician/historian etc? Is this what we are preparing students for?
 - What are the core knowledge and skills needed for success?
- What is the purpose of assessment in our subject?

- Why do we assess?
- Who is assessment for?
- What does progress look like in our subject?
 - How do we know when a student is making progress?
 - How might progress vary over time?
- How can progress be assessed most effectively in our subject?
 - Which assessment techniques work best in our subject?
 - How can formative and medium-term summative assessment work together to ensure effective assessment for learning?
 - How do we benchmark and QA our assessment practices?
- How do the assessment practices in our subject team inform tracker entries?

The following sections describe the three types of assessment and set out the principles by which subject teams should plan and implement their assessment work, but the detail will be individual to each subject and will have been developed by thinking through the questions above.

6. Day to day formative assessment

Teachers use a range of assessment for learning (AfL) techniques throughout their day-to-day teaching. These are specifically planned opportunities to check the learning, understanding and progress of students within their classes at a granular level, the multiple tiny steps that build up to secure long term learning. At its best, this approach informs the immediate next steps for the teacher within the lesson, at whole class and individual level, as well as the re-shaping of the bigger picture medium- and long-term planning. It also informs feedback for students about how successfully they are understanding and embedding new knowledge as well as how well they are retaining knowledge and skills over time. This provides both the teacher and the students with opportunities to modify their approach to learning in the short- and longer-term. The expectation is that students respond to feedback they receive increasingly over time as they are expertly guided by the teacher who knows them and the subject content very well.

Techniques for checks on learning will be referenced more extensively within **Teaching and Learning** and **Feedback** policy documents, since many of these tools serve the dual purpose of developing learning and practicing skills as well as providing feedback on progress for the teacher and the student. Indeed, AfL is about the process and methods of learning, not the final outcomes. Elements could include (not exhaustive!):

- A range of questioning strategies as appropriate at whole class and/or individual level, including; use of mini-whiteboards; no hands up; pause, pounce, bounce; hinge questions; think, pair, share; hot-seating; snow-balling; polling; quizzing etc
- Low stakes topic tests
- Low stakes quizzes (could use technology-based tools)
- Checks of homework activities

- Checks on written work in class (could be coupled with dot marking)
- Modelling with student self-checking
- Modelling, live-marking or sharing exemplar work with a visualiser
- Exit passes

The principles that underpin this regular formative assessment for all **teachers** are:

- Activities should provide accurate and immediate (or very short-term) information about the rate and depth of student understanding and progress
- Checks should be on small steps in the first instance
- **Checks should uncover and address mis-conceptions**
- Information gleaned should be used to inform next steps for teacher and student
- Feedback should be timely and constructive
- Feedback should focus on specific curricular knowledge, skills and understanding and their place within the building of wider subject expertise
- Opportunities for students to act on feedback should be planned in and expected
- No grades or levels should be applied.

7. Medium-term Summative Assessment

This style of assessment, if well designed, can provide both formative and summative information, but teachers need to be aware that formative inferences will be more limited than those inferences gained from the kind of activities described in the previous section. In developing skills and knowledge, teachers break down big ideas into component parts to help students acquire an underlying mental model. In medium-term summative assessments, the aim is to check student understanding, progression, and retention against the curriculum intent so far. The big picture is unlikely to yet be fully developed, so the questioning needs to be a mixture of opportunities to demonstrate understanding of the smaller steps as well as chances to start to pull these together in the style of final end point formal assessments. There should be a good balance of factual recall (to support checks of retention over time) and analysis and synthesis style activities (to build up the skills to be successful in final summative assessments). These assessments should also not focus solely on the most recently covered content and skills, they can be used to embed and check work undertaken longer ago. They can be part of a spaced learning and interleaving curriculum structure.

Subject Leaders should carefully consider the purpose of each medium-term summative assessment for their subject. It is recognised that assessments serve multiple purposes, and the outcomes must sometimes be used and communicated differently for different audiences. Some of the key purposes include:

- To complement low stakes testing and other AfL to embed long-term retention of subject specific knowledge and skills.
- To encourage and develop students' revision techniques and check the effectiveness of these.
- To expose students to exam style questioning and formal testing atmosphere.
- To provide a measure of levels of understanding and retention of content covered so far to inform future planning.
- To check the quality of curriculum implementation and inform responsive teaching, including revisions to long term curriculum plans as needed.

- To inform teacher judgements of estimated final outcomes for tracking – in turn communicated with students and parents.

The following principles should underpin the planning of medium-term summative assessment:

- Assessment points should be written into schemes of work.
- Frequency of these assessment points should be carefully planned – typically no more than 2 or 3 times a year (but possibly more in KS5). This is to ensure against excessive and unnecessary testing that may deprive students of teaching time and add unnecessary workload for teachers. One or 2 of these occasions will likely be trial exams during GCSE and A Level courses.
- Timing of assessments should be carefully considered against the curriculum plan and placed to effectively assess curriculum implementation at key points.
- Consider limiting the occasions when assessments happen for all subjects at the same time to older year-groups in preparation for the experience of formal exams. For KS3 students, their assessments for different subjects should be spaced out.
- Placing assessments just before a holiday should be avoided where possible, in order to ensure students are fresh and can demonstrate their best work.
- The form of the assessment needs to be fit for purpose for the subject, level and course. For example, in Maths it may take the form of a 'test', in English it may be a specific piece of extended writing.
- The tests or tasks should be common across the year-group or section of the year-group and designed to limit bias towards or against any type of learner.
- The assessment should be well designed, to test key subject specific content and skills. It should include (appropriate to age, subject and course) a good balance of (for example): Knowledge recall, application, analysis and synthesis and some reflection of the final end point assessment style (GCSE or A Level style questions or tasks).
- The assessment should be accessible to all students and match the work that has been covered in lessons.
- Students entitled to access arrangements in exams should have similar access arrangements for these assessments.
- The marking of the assessments should be consistent and steps should be taken to ensure this across the subject team. This can be achieved through the use of common mark schemes, moderation and standardisation as needed.
- Feedback to students should focus on celebrating successes and highlighting areas for improvement, framed around the content and specific curricular targets, enabling further progress.
- Grades should be used extremely sparingly in years 7, 8 and 9, if at all.
- Grades should not be introduced too early for medium-term summative assessments during GCSE and A Level exam courses.

The final grade is a summative judgement of the standard of a large body of knowledge. Grading smaller sections of the whole can distort and lead to inaccurate judgements of progress towards final outcomes.

- When considering the right time to issue a grade, the approach should be agreed for the whole subject team. Comparative marking and ranking techniques *may* be used to help determine grade ranges across the whole cohort. Decide whether the grades are for teacher use, or for sharing with students.
- GCSE and A Level grades should be shared with students when appropriate. Careful consideration should be given to the impact of sharing a grade: Will it promote progress or will it detract from advice of how to improve? Will it give the student a distorted view of where they are heading to ultimately? Will it elevate or depress self-esteem? Is it accurate enough to be reliable and meaningful? **Ensure students are clear on exactly what the grade represents**, especially if it is not a fair reflection of their likely final outcome.
- Follow-up and feedback should impact on longer term planning of next steps for students and teachers.
- Assessment results should not be the sole source of information that informs judgement of student standards, many of the formative assessment activities can also feed into the bigger picture of the progress each student is making.

8. Final, end of course formal summative assessment

Successful examination outcomes are important for individual students as they enable access to a variety of possible future pathways in terms of stepping stones to further education and careers. They also indicate students' level of engagement with their education as a whole, although not all of the valuable elements are represented in exam results. In preparing for formal examinations students will have built a large body of knowledge that will underpin future learning in life, study and work, helping them to be well-rounded members of society. This formal process will also have developed wider tools for life; resilience, strategies for dealing with pressure, time management and organisation skills as well as understanding of the rigidity of formal systems and processes and the need to adhere to certain rules and regulations.

The school's effectiveness is also judged in part by students' success in formal exams.

Exam results are not the only important aspect of education and they are not the only measure of individual student success as a whole. They are not even always a reliable measure of the value of the course the student has participated in.

It is helpful for teachers to understand that the purpose and design of final exams differs from that of medium-term summative assessment undertaken at interim points during schooling. This will help in the design of the latter as well as in considering purpose and design of the curriculum that should reach beyond the scope of the final examination to develop enduring knowledge and skills in students.

Essentially, final exams are designed to determine proficiency with a large body of knowledge and assign students a broad ranking in comparison to the national distribution of outcomes to categorise them for suitability for future endeavour.

This quote from Daisy Christodoulou in her book 'Making Good Progress? The Future of Assessment for Learning' may help to explain why we should not model all of our other assessment and curriculum planning on the structure and content of the final exam:

Exams only sample wider domains; they are not direct measures of the domain. Because of this, exam success is not the end goal of education, but an indirect measure of the end goal of education. Indirect measures are easily distorted and corrupted, so we have to be careful in the way we use exams and the way we prepare for them. Simplistic backwards planning from past papers, or even from exam specifications, will not deliver the end results we really want. We have to start with our actual goals, not the indirect measures for them.

The danger of planning our curriculum and our internal assessments based solely on the exams, is that fundamental knowledge can be neglected rather than emphasised. The complex skills and tasks tested in formal exams depend on the hidden body of knowledge that should have been mastered through our curriculum and formative assessment. Preparing too superficially for final exams, limits our students' true capacity and engagement with rich subject content that we as specialists are passionate about.

9. Links to tracking

The purpose of data collection is threefold:

- To communicate clearly to parents/carers and students whether the student is applying themselves effectively to their learning in school and to highlight any areas for development that may need to be addressed that may be affecting progress.
- To gather information for use in school to identify underachievement, celebrate success and track progress of individuals and groups of students in terms of their levels of engagement (AtoL) and progress towards their target outcomes so that meaningful intervention can be planned where needed.
- To share information about likely outcomes at Trust level so that resources can be deployed for additional support where needed.

Tracking entries can never be a substitute for direct communication with students about how they are progressing. This on-going dialogue must be at the heart of good teaching and learning. Calendared data collection points should provide a prompt for teachers to engage in renewed dialogue with students about their progress and should support on-going discussions about their approach to learning and setting of subject specific curricular targets.

Estimated grades entered for KS4 and KS5 courses are very important as they will form the basis of any judgements made about whole school progress and which students need additional support and intervention.

Some of the estimated grades submitted on trackers inform judgements about future progression routes and are used on applications. The grade given should be a realistic estimate of what a student is likely to achieve at the end of the course given their current performance, work ethic, work quality and completion rates. Grades entered should not be artificially depressed or generous.

Subject teams decide how teachers will arrive at judgements about students' attainment at data collection points, but these judgements should be informed by formal medium-term summative assessment as well as well as ongoing AfL. Each subject should have processes in place relating to monitoring and standardising these judgements ensuring teachers accurately judge students' learning both formally and informally so that estimated grades are as robust and consistent as possible.

10. Estimated grade teacher guidance

What is an estimated grade?

- The grade you believe the student will attain at the end of the exam course.
- 'Estimated grade' refers to the end of the exam course, regardless of how many years hence that might be.

How do you decide on an estimated grade?

- Take into account any contributory coursework, ongoing assessments and the student's level of commitment as well as the level of challenge still to come. You understand the nature of your course and should have a good idea of likely outcome based on the progress of the student to date.
- Try to be realistic and do not be over generous. If a student is on a borderline, be cautious and give the lower or more conservative estimate. Don't base the judgement on the notion that they *might* get better at meeting deadlines or that they *might* put in a final revision push.
- Try to be realistic and do not artificially depress the grade as a motivational lever.
- Estimates may fluctuate up or down throughout the key stage depending on developing understanding of the student and their potential as well as changes in their levels of commitment.

Why is it important to be as accurate as possible?

- Intervention strategies are often based on a comparison of estimates against Targets (as well as AtoL entries). If estimates are over generous or unrealistically low, the focus of interventions may be misplaced.
- Comparisons are made between students and subjects within schools and across the trust, our estimates need to be as reliable and consistent as possible to make this meaningful.

11. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Trust will carry out an Equality Impact Assessment in order to ensure that policies, procedures and practices cater for individuals who share protected characteristics in relation to the Equality Act 2010. The purpose of these assessments is to ensure that policies, procedures and practices within the organisation are fair to all. If unfairness is highlighted, the assessment will also seek to show how this can be changed and, where it can't be changed, how it can be improved.

The Trust will monitor the impact of the policy to assess whether there is evidence of a detrimental impact on anyone with a protected characteristic as a result of the application of this policy. The assessment will include consideration of adaptations or changes which can be made to address any issues identified.

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