



## SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

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Education Department  
Qualifications, Assessment and Curriculum Division

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### **CIRCULAR No. 02 JUNE 2005**

Chief Executives of Scottish Local Authorities and  
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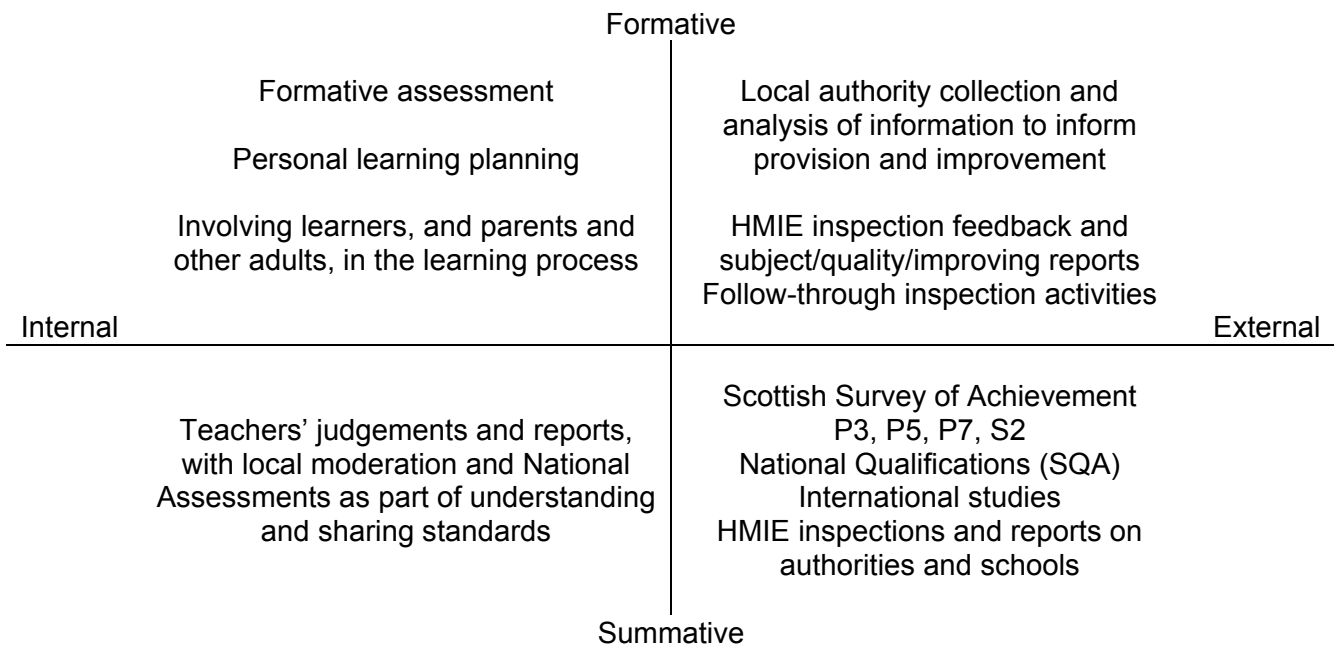
Dear Sir/Madam

### **ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING 3-14**

1. I am directed by Scottish Ministers to advise you of the developments proposed for assessment, testing and reporting policy for 3-14 year olds, outlined in *Ambitious, Excellent Schools* and in the response to the consultation on assessment, *Assessment, Testing and Reporting 3-14: Our Response*. These developments capture what is best in current practice in Scottish schools and build upon the work undertaken through the *AifL - Assessment is for Learning* programme since 2002. The AifL programme was established to develop 'a streamlined and coherent system of assessment' for Scottish schools that would support learning. Ministers are committed to introducing AifL into all Scottish schools by 2007 (see Annex 1).

#### **A 'streamlined and coherent system of assessment'**

2. The overall purpose of assessment to support learning is to provide all partners with sufficiently dependable information and feedback to inform judgements, choices and decisions about learning, and to inform planning for improvement. Each of the various partners in education has an important role to play in generating and using dependable assessment information for these purposes. Staff, children and parents will participate in **internal** assessment, both **formative** (the continuous process of gathering evidence of learning, providing timely feedback about strengths and development needs and planning next steps) and **summative** (arriving at a judgement at a particular point in time about the extent and quality of learning). Local authorities, HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE) and the Scottish Executive will also gather and use information from **external** assessment to inform judgements about the quality of learning and planning for improvement. The quadrant overleaf shows how these various kinds of assessment fit together in the new Scottish system.



3. For the new arrangements for assessment to operate effectively, three main strands of activity will need to be secured. Each of the main partners in the diagram has an important part to play in making them work smoothly to support learning and learners in Scottish schools. The roles of local authorities, schools and early years centre managers are outlined in the boxes below.

**Strand 1**

**Good assessment to support children’s learning as part of classroom practice, so that parents, other staff and the children themselves can confidently rely on informed professional judgements about children’s progress and achievements**

4. As part of the *AifL - Assessment is for Learning* programme, many teachers in Scotland have been changing the way they approach assessment in the classroom, to practise assessment *for* learning. Sometimes called **formative assessment**, this approach is based on research that suggests that children learn and achieve best when they understand what they are trying to learn, get good feedback about how well they are doing, and get good advice about what they can do next to improve.

- **Local authorities and school and early years centre managers** should continue to develop good practice in formative assessment approaches in their schools and classrooms, and to provide appropriate training and development opportunities for staff.

5. Good formative assessment also involves the children themselves in thinking carefully about their own learning. **Personal learning planning**, or assessment *as* learning, plays an important part in the new assessment arrangements, involving staff, children and their parents in talking about learning and thinking about what evidence is available, what it tells them about important aspects of the child’s learning, and what needs to be done next. For some children, the personal learning





planning process will contribute to the identification of additional support needs that may subsequently be recorded in a more detailed individualised educational programme (IEP) or, where significant multi-agency support is required, in a co-ordinated support plan, or in another plan.

- **School and centre managers** should, in discussion with their staff, put in place arrangements for children to discuss their learning regularly with a member of staff. They should also make arrangements for **children**, with the help of staff, to note what has been discussed and decided in a suitably concise and easily accessible way. This should be discussed with their parents or carers, and other adults as appropriate, and updated regularly throughout the school year. Arrangements for personal learning planning should be manageable, realistic and sustainable.
- Where necessary, **school and centre staff** should work with learning support and other multi-agency professional staff as required, to develop IEPs and co-ordinated support plans for children with additional support needs which require more detailed planning than provided through personal learning planning.
- At an appropriate time (or times) during each session, **the school or centre** should provide a summary of the information gathered through assessment and personal learning planning, in a written report to parents. This will sum up what the child has aimed for and achieved during the year, and set out for children, parents/carers and the next teacher what needs to be done to ensure continued progress into the next stage of education, in a suitable format agreed by the school or centre.

6. The Scottish Executive and its partners in the AifL programme, Learning and Teaching Scotland, HMIE (since some of the guidance may come through inspections), SQA and University Faculties of Education, will continue to provide guidance and support for local authorities to develop formative assessment, personal learning planning, reporting to parents and assessment arrangements for children with additional support needs.

## **Strand 2**

**Sound quality assurance of teachers' assessments in schools and local authorities, so that all can share a common understanding of the outcomes and standards expected of children at different stages in their education**

7. Effective classroom assessment is about looking carefully at different evidence and building from it a well-informed picture of how children are progressing, and what they need to do next to improve their learning – assessment *of* learning. The professional judgements that teachers make on this basis should be sound and dependable. Formative assessment and personal learning planning in classrooms help to improve both the quality of teachers' judgements about children's progress and levels of attainment. However, since teachers usually work in only one establishment or department, and do not always have opportunities to compare notes with colleagues, it is often difficult for them to know if their judgements about learning and the standards of attainment needed to achieve different levels would be similar to those of teachers in other classrooms and schools. As part of the new arrangements for assessment, more emphasis will be put on the responsibility of schools and local authorities to enable teachers to 'share the standard' with other professionals in their area, building on existing good practice.





8. One important way for teachers to share standards is through **local moderation**. This involves groups of teachers from different classrooms and schools in gathering examples of children's work in particular aspects of the curriculum, agreeing on the criteria for assessing them, carrying out assessment against the criteria, and agreeing their judgements about the quality of the work. The worked examples can then be shared and used with other groups of professionals to help them understand how they might judge standards in the particular curriculum or subject area.

- As part of their assessment policies, **school and centre managers** and **local authorities** should make sure that staff have regular opportunities to discuss the quality and standard of children's work with other professionals, within and across schools, as an integral part of their work. These should as far as possible be incorporated into existing arrangements for staff meetings and professional discussions, rather than being additional, formal processes.

9. Another way for teachers to check their judgements against national standards is for them to use externally devised assessments and tests and compare the results with the results of their own classroom assessments, when they judge that children have reached a particular level. New on-line **National Assessments**, which have replaced National Tests, are materials that have already been used in the Scottish Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP). The written and practical assessments in the surveys are set and reported at 5-14 levels, so they are a good tool for teachers to use to confirm their own judgements against the levels achieved by a nationally representative sample of children in Scotland. The bank of assessments available to teachers to confirm children's levels of attainment will be built up gradually and extended from 2005, using assessment materials from the new Scottish Survey of Achievement.

- As part of their assessment policy, **school managers** should agree with **teachers** and with their **local authority** how National Assessments might be used to confirm teachers' judgements about the attainment of levels. The children's results on National Assessments should be only part of a range of evidence teachers consider to arrive at judgements about levels of attainment. No decision about a child's attainment or future learning should be made or reported on the basis of a single assessment or test score, as it will not, on its own, be sufficiently reliable for that purpose. All assessments and tests used to monitor children's progress and attainment should be demonstrably fit for their purpose. It is unlikely that widespread reliance upon standardised tests will be a common feature within the new arrangements.

### **Strand 3**

**A robust national monitoring system that provides accurate information about overall standards and trends in achievement, without over-burdening schools or distorting classroom practice**

10. It is important for Scottish Ministers to have accurate information about overall levels of attainment, especially in literacy and numeracy, so that they can see how effective education policy has been, and what needs to be done to improve standards for all children. Until now, the Scottish Executive has gathered information about levels of attainment from local authorities, who in turn have gathered it from their schools. The information published by the Executive about local authorities' performance has therefore been an aggregate of all the different levels for individual children made by teachers.





11. This use of attainment information has, in the past, been perceived as putting pressure on teachers to concentrate on a narrow range of skills and ‘get children through the tests’. This is not good practice. Good practice involves making more considered assessment judgements across a range of concepts and skills, based on individuals’ learning needs. For schools and local authorities, the collection, summary and considered use of assessment information, shared in an open and collegiate way, are essential parts of the process of identifying ways of improving learning and teaching and children’s achievements. For this to be successful, they will need to make sure that assessment information is relevant and of good quality; train all staff involved in its use; and support staff in using information efficiently and to the positive benefit of children’s learning.

12. The new arrangements will separate national monitoring from classroom-based assessment. Teachers will arrive at judgements about children’s attainment on the basis of a range of evidence, supported by local moderation and National Assessments. This will help to ensure that judgements are dependable and that standards are comparable across schools.

- **Headteachers and schools** should use teachers’ judgements to arrive at an overall picture of children’s attainment, as part of monitoring the establishment’s provision and progress. They should use this and other relevant information from self-evaluation to set appropriate targets for improvement.
- **Local authorities** should use schools’ attainment information to monitor performance and support schools in the process of setting appropriate local targets for improvement. They should ensure that their approaches to gathering information from schools are not intrusive or disruptive of effective classroom practice. Authorities should also quality assure the policy and procedures that their headteachers have in place to ensure the dependability of teachers’ judgements and therefore the quality of the attainment information coming in to them for analysis.
- For **schools and local authorities**, comparing themselves with examples of good practice and high standards elsewhere will continue to be an important part of self-evaluation and setting targets for improvement. The Scottish Executive will continue to work with partners to develop a range of benchmarking tools, procedures and support for effective practice in this area.

13. **HMIE** in their inspections of schools and authorities will take an interest in, and report on, schools’ and authorities’ assessment policies and the extent to which they assure both the quality of learning, teaching and assessment and the dependability of teachers’ summative judgements. They will want to be satisfied that policy and practice support learning, that information and data collected are dependable and of good quality, and that the analysis and use of data support planning for improvement do not reduce time for teaching, and are manageable and sustainable. As at present, HM Inspectors will continue to expect schools to be able to make available information about children’s levels of attainment, and the evidence they have to support these professional judgements. They will ask about arrangements for considering practices and achievements in other schools and for particular groups of children, with a view to improving learning.

14. National monitoring will not use information from classroom assessment of individual children or from individual schools. Instead, it will be carried out through the **Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA)**. In May/June each year the **Scottish Executive**, in partnership with **Learning and Teaching Scotland**, the **Scottish Qualifications Authority** and **local authorities**, will arrange for the SSA to monitor the attainment of a representative sample of children across Scotland on a





broad range of content and skills in one of four broad aspects of the curriculum, and core skills<sup>1</sup> in the context of that aspect. The SSA will use nationally devised written and practical assessments and will be externally marked. Teachers nominated by local authorities will act as field officers and external assessors for the survey. There will be some external moderation of assessors' judgements as part of the monitoring arrangements. Individual schools and children will remain anonymous.

15. The survey will include questionnaires for teachers and children in the sample, asking about their teaching and learning experiences in the particular subject area being assessed that year. The survey will also collect information about the teacher's assessment of each sampled child's attainment.

16. The Scottish Executive will report nationally in December each year on attainment in the curriculum aspect involved in that year's SSA, and on the attainment of core skills. It will also report each year on attainment in half of individual local authorities. Reporting will be carried out using the current 5-14 levels framework until such time as the implementation of *A Curriculum for Excellence* provides a new framework of descriptors for young people's progress through areas of the curriculum.

- **Local authorities** will be expected to support the SSA by encouraging their sampled schools to participate in the survey, by nominating field officers and moderators to carry out assessments, and by helping schools to make well-informed use of the national and authority results as part of self-evaluation and to plan for improvement.
- **Local authorities** will be encouraged to work with partner organisations and with HMIE to make the best use of the information provided by the SSA, to inform improvements in their schools and in the quality of their education provision.

## FUTURE ACTIVITY

### Setting targets for improvement

17. Monitoring performance and using the resulting information and data to set targets remain an important tool for headteachers, schools and local authorities for securing improvement. The existing framework for setting targets for improvement is part of the National Priorities. The current round of targets covers the period 2002-2005. For 2005-2007, schools and local authorities should continue to set targets for raising attainment and achievement. The Executive will work with schools and local authorities to develop further guidance on setting targets for improvement, based on identified best practice. This process should be based on the information gathered and quality assured by staff about children's overall levels of achievement in the school (see 11 above). These arrangements will be reflected in the revised measures and indicators supporting National Priorities and self-evaluation, which are currently under review.

### *A Curriculum for Excellence*

18. All of the assessment arrangements described in this circular will be adjusted in the future as necessary, to reflect changes made as part of review work flowing from *A Curriculum for Excellence*

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<sup>1</sup> Currently, literacy, numeracy, problem-solving, ICT and working with others.





over the coming two years. The Scottish Executive will keep authorities up to date on the impact of this work.

### **Benchmarking**

19. The Executive will continue to work with partners to develop a range of tools, procedures and support for collating, interpreting and sharing data. These processes, for example helping local authorities to compare their progress with that of comparator authorities, are part of the wider process of identifying questions and issues to be explored in improving learning, teaching and achievement in Scottish schools.

### **Implementation**

20. Scottish Ministers expect schools to introduce these new arrangements into all schools as part of teachers' assessment, testing and reporting practice, starting from school session 2005-06. It is expected that the new procedures outlined can be introduced without regulation.

21. A great deal has been accomplished already. I am grateful to your authority for the hard work that has gone into implementing the programme so far, and appreciate your continuing support to build upon what has been achieved. We will continue to monitor progress. Any enquiries about this circular should be made to Carolyn Hutchinson, Head of Assessment Branch (Tel: 0131 244 0417), Scottish Executive Education Department, Qualifications, Assessment and Curriculum Division, Area 2-A, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ.

Yours faithfully

DR GILL ROBINSON  
Head of Qualifications, Assessment and Curriculum Division

cc. Directors of Finance  
Assessment Coordinators



**Ambitious, Excellent Schools**

On 01 November 2004, *Ambitious, Excellent Schools* set the framework for policy to deliver:

- Heightened expectations, stronger leadership and ambition
- More freedom for teachers and schools
- Greater choice and opportunity for pupils
- Better support for learning
- Tougher, intelligent accountabilities

*Ambitious, Excellent Schools* makes two important commitments about assessment to support learning:

***Ambitious, Excellent Schools: commitments on assessment***

“ensure all schools are part of the assessment is for learning programme, by 2007, to ensure that assessment support learning.”

“develop personalised learning for young people based on sound personal learning planning in schools and classrooms to encourage involvement of pupils and their parents in planning their own learning.”

Effective assessment, which includes personal learning planning, will make an important contribution to the delivery of the broad policy framework. They help children to become better informed about their own learning and to take more responsibility for planning their own learning and progression. They provide children and teachers with dependable assessment information to inform important judgments, decisions and choices. Freedom for teachers implies a high degree of professionalism on their part, using effective assessment as an integral part of learning and teaching in the classroom, so that everyone can trust in their assessment judgments. Intelligent accountability implies using sound assessment evidence constructively, as feedback to inform improvements to programmes and provision in Scotland’s schools. It can help local authorities to support improvement at a local level. A good assessment system can also contribute to achievement of all the National Priorities. In particular, it can help to achieve what the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) team describe as ‘Excellence and Equity’ in education – ‘closing the gap’.

**Assessment, Testing and Reporting 3-14: Our Response**

On 01 November 2004 the response to the consultation on assessment, testing and reporting was also published, as *Assessment, Testing and Reporting 3-14: Our Response*. The consultation sought people’s views on some important aspects of the proposed new system: Personal Learning Planning and Annual Progress Plans; National Tests; and ways of monitoring national attainment. The results of the consultation show clearly that people want a well-balanced assessment system that puts due emphasis on supporting children’s learning, as well as providing accurate information about national standards of achievement. Taken together, the steps set out in the response document will deliver the commitments on assessment for learning and personal learning planning set out in *Ambitious,*





*Excellent Schools*, and will provide a balanced system of assessment that puts the learner firmly at the centre of the assessment process.

***Assessment, Testing and Reporting 3-14: proposed new arrangements***

- Support for local authority developments and continuing professional development for teachers in formative assessment
- Support for the development of personal learning planning and guidance on annual reporting to build on the personal learning planning process, taking account also of ASL legislation
- Further development and extension of the national assessment bank to provide more tools for teachers to help confirm their professional judgements
- Local moderation to promote shared understanding of standards and local quality assurance of teachers' judgements
- Sample-based Scottish Survey of Achievement to replace annual 5-14 survey from 2005, to provide an overview of attainment levels in each education authority and at national level
- Link and report survey data with information from international and national studies and inspection reports
- Support for local authorities in benchmarking their own attainment data with those of other authorities and to interpret and use these 'intelligently' to inform improvements.

**Additional Support for Learning**

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 is expected to come into effect in late 2005. The Act will introduce a new framework built around the concept of additional support needs. The new concept will apply to any child or young person who, for whatever reason, requires additional support, long term or short term, in order to learn and to work to their full potential. Under the Act, education authorities will have a duty to establish procedures for identifying and meeting the additional support needs of every child for whose education they are responsible. They must keep those needs under review. For those children and young people who require significant, long-term support from outwith education a co-ordinated support plan will be prepared. A co-ordinated support plan will be a statutory document that plans long term and strategically for a child's learning outcomes. Other agencies will have a duty to help education authorities meet their duties. Such agencies may include a local authority's social work services, any health board, any local authority or other agency specified by Scottish Ministers, such as Careers Scotland or further education colleges.

A statutory Code of Practice which will accompany the Act will shortly be considered by Parliament and, subject to Parliamentary consideration, will be available in summer 2005. The Scottish Executive will also publish multi-agency training materials to promote understanding of the Act and support its implementation.





## **Integrated Assessment Framework for Scotland's Children**

The Scottish Executive will shortly be consulting on a draft Integrated Assessment Framework for Scotland's Children. As children grow and develop they routinely have contact with numerous professionals in health and education. Some children and young people have particular health, learning or other needs which require assessment and support from a range of different services and agencies. The Integrated Assessment Framework is intended to ensure the consistency and quality of assessments by introducing a common structure for assessing the needs of children and young people. The aim of the Integrated Assessment Framework is to provide a means by which all services for children – universal and specialist – will be able to gather and share appropriate information, assess needs, plan and co-ordinate services for individual children. Core information gathered for all children will connect with specialist assessments necessary to meet the needs of children and families requiring additional support.

SEED  
June 2005

