

Assessment overview

Assessment

What do we mean by assessment? Assessment is the process used to identify, gather and interpret information about a student's performance. Assessment includes informal and formal teacher judgements and external examinations.

Why assess? Assessment serves a range of purposes:

- Diagnostic: to identify what a student achieves, understands or demonstrates
- Instructional: to inform what needs to be taught next or re-taught
- Reporting: to gather data for the purpose of reporting on a student's achievement to the student and parents. It may also have a bearing on a student's employment, further education or training.

Principles of assessment

What does good assessment look like? Good assessment items and tasks have five basic characteristics:

- Validity: They assess the intended syllabus construct(s)
- Reliability: They enable consistent judgements of student performance
- Supportive of learning: They provide information useful for diagnostic purposes
- Explicit: They have clear specifications and scoring criteria
- Fair: They avoid bias and are able to withstand community scrutiny.

School-based assessment

What are the essential elements of school-based assessment? School-based assessments are conducted by teachers in accordance with the school's assessment policy. At the end of a unit, aggregate marks are used to produce a rank order of student achievement. Grade descriptors are then used to determine a grade (A–E) at the end of each unit. In their final WACE year, students studying Stage 2 and/or Stage 3 units will also receive an aggregate school mark out of 100 for each unit. For courses with practical (performance or production) components, a mark out of 100 may be required for each of these components.

External assessment

What is the WACE examination? In their final WACE year, students sit an external assessment or examination of Stage 2 or Stage 3 units being studied. All external assessments have a written component. In certain courses, there is an additional practical (performance or production) component.

Combining school-based and external assessments

Why are school-based and external assessment results combined? In reporting final results, school-based and external assessments are combined in equal proportion. This enables the advantages of the breadth of coverage of school assessments and the objectivity of external assessment to be maximised in the final result. It also provides a means of ensuring consistency across schools.

The school-based assessment mark is combined with the student's external assessment mark to produce a Curriculum Council course score. School-based assessment results are standardised and moderated using the examination result so that state wide school-based assessments can be compared. This comparability is important so that WACE course scores can be used for selection to employment or further training.

For students who wish to be considered for university entrance, their school marks and external assessment marks will be used to calculate scaled scores which are used to calculate a tertiary entrance rank (TER).

Assessment planning

How can schools ensure a valid and clear relationship between:

- the syllabus construct(s) being assessed
- the assessment item(s), and
- the marking criteria?

The following considerations may assist teachers in planning assessment procedures for a unit:

Planning process	Additional considerations
1 Design a series of assessments to be applied throughout the unit.	–do these meet design brief and syllabus requirements?
2 For each assessment:	
(a) Identify the parts of the syllabus to be assessed.	–can the outcome progressions assist in determining the ‘pitch’ for the assessment?
(b) Develop assessment items or tasks which will allow students to demonstrate their achievement and which reflect the unit assessment outline.	–will the assessment item(s) discriminate between students? –do the items reflect the appropriate demand and avoid dependencies, e.g. between questions?
(c) Set the marking guide based on explicit criteria that derive naturally from the task and anticipated student responses.	–are the marking criteria clear to students and markers? –do the marks allocated reflect how students are likely to respond?
(d) Validate the key using a sample of student responses. Adjust the key as necessary. Finally, allocate marks.	–has the marking key been validated using a sample of students’ responses? –does the number of marks distinguish between the full range of likely responses?
3 Combine the results of various assessments using weightings in the assessment outline.	–have marks been converted, if necessary, to reflect appropriate weightings?
4 Rank students on the basis of their aggregate results.	–what are the possible cut-points for grades from your ranked list?
5 Compare achievements of students at grade boundaries with grade descriptors and associated exemplars. Allocate grades (A–E) by identifying grade cut-off points.	–does the proposed grade distribution reflect the abilities of the student cohort?