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assessment for learning

Dr Cheryl A Jones

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Foreword

This publication has been produced by the DfES-funded Vocational Learning Support Programme: 16–19 (VLSP: 16–19) as part of its remit to support teachers and managers in delivering high-quality A-levels in vocational subjects.

There is more to assessment than seeing if the requirements for achieving a qualification have been met. Formative assessment is the assessment used by teachers on an ongoing basis to help their students achieve to the best of their abilities and is a very important part of the learning process. In contrast, summative assessment takes place on completion of a topic or unit and often contributes to the grading and assessment of a qualification.

Assessment for learning supports practitioners and helps them focus on the learner and learning in individual classroom sessions. It also shows how one of the Assessment for Learning strategy's principal themes, quality feedback, can be used to help learners progress. Many teachers have expressed concern in recent years that the introduction of burdensome assessment requirements detracts from effective classroom practice and prevents them meeting learners' needs. The purpose of this publication is to help teachers develop Assessment for Learning strategies to:

- improve classroom practice
- contribute to the personalised learning agenda, where learners are empowered to take an active part in their own learning
- develop the confidence of learners to undertake peer and self-assessment.

The author, Dr Cheryl A Jones, is an experienced and highly respected inspector of education and training, accomplished researcher, conference speaker and consultant. She has a plethora of knowledge and experience of educational issues and, with a doctorate in the management of quality of education, is best placed to offer practical guidance to support staff in meeting learners' individual needs to promote learning and ultimately achievement.

This practical guide details a case study featuring New Heys Community School – a specialist Business and Enterprise College located in south Liverpool – which introduced Assessment for Learning as a key priority in 2004/05 to help the school meet its primary goal of continually improving achievement rates. Cheryl and I hope that readers will find this publication to be a valuable contribution to the Assessment for Learning agenda and the post-16 vocational curriculum.

Ian Duckett
Development Adviser
Vocational Learning Support Programme: 16–19

Introduction

Teachers make professional judgements on learners' performance in every teaching and learning session undertaken, whether consciously or subconsciously. Using these professional judgements and translating them into feedback on the quality of individuals' work is the focus of Assessment for Learning. Successful Assessment for Learning strategies result in improved learner progress on a continual basis. The principal characteristic of Assessment for Learning is effective feedback provided by teachers to learners on their progress. The value of the feedback is dependent on two factors:

- the quality of the feedback
- how learners receive and ultimately use it.

Teachers, therefore, need training and support to enable them to make valuable assessment decisions, to provide quality feedback to learners, and to teach learners to receive feedback positively and use the information contained within it effectively to improve their work. Assessment for Learning and quality feedback can and do promote increased learner progress. However, assessment **of** learning rather than assessment **for** learning has preoccupied the minds of the profession for many years in an effort to meet awarding body requirements. Assessment of learning can detract from effective classroom practice and prevent feeding back assessment decisions to learners on their performance with the view to improving their work.

The Working Group on 14–19 Reform, led by Sir Mike Tomlinson, set out its final recommendations in 2004.[1] Tomlinson and his colleagues endorse the refocusing on teacher-led assessment and, by introducing Assessment for Learning now, educational establishments are providing opportunities for teachers to develop their assessment and feedback skills while promoting confidence in their professional judgement and fostering an effective learning environment. By putting the learner at the heart of the assessment process and refocusing the objective so that the learner becomes the primary benefactor, improved meaning to teachers and value to learners can be achieved.

[1] Working Group on 14–19 Reform (2004). *14–19 curriculum and qualifications reform.*

We know from numerous Ofsted reports the power of assessment for learning. Indeed Ofsted tells us that just four schools out of 10 use assessment for learning well, which clearly indicates that there is much to do to improve classroom practice. Ofsted, the Working Group on 14–19 Reform, and the White Paper *14–19 education and skills*[2] call for strategies to further engage and actively stretch all learners to reach their full potential: assessment for learning is a proven strategy that can and does help teachers to meet these important challenges, as is evident in institutions that are deploying these strategies to best effect.

[2] DfES (2005). *14–19 education and skills*. White Paper. Department for Education and Skills.

In his speech at the 2004 North of England Conference, David Miliband MP, former Minister of State for School Standards, highlighted the need for teachers to develop assessment for learning strategies in the quest to meet the personalised learning agenda. Without effective assessment for learning strategies, which involves high-quality feedback to learners being embedded within every teaching and learning session, the personalised learning agenda is a dream that will never be realised.

Miliband described personalised learning as:

High expectations of every child, given practical form by high quality teaching based on a sound knowledge and understanding of each child's needs. It is not individualised learning where pupils sit alone. Nor is it pupils left to their own devices – which too often reinforces low aspirations. It means shaping teaching around the way different youngsters learn; it means taking the care to nurture the unique talents of every pupil.[3]

[3] 'Choice and voice in personalised learning'. A speech by David Miliband MP, former Minister of State for School Standards, at the North of England Conference 2004. Reproduced in DfES (2005). *A national conversation about personalised learning – a summary of the DfES discussion pamphlet*. Department for Education and Skills, p4.

The following extract is lifted from *A national conversation about personalised learning*:

A personalised offer depends on really knowing the strengths and weaknesses of individual children and young people. We believe a key means of doing so is assessment for learning and the use of evidence and dialogue to identify every pupil's learning needs … But whatever the contextual practice, the rationale is always the same: clear evidence about how to drive up individual attainment; clear feedback for and from pupils so there is clarity on what they need to improve and how best they can do so; and a clear link between learning and lesson planning.[4]

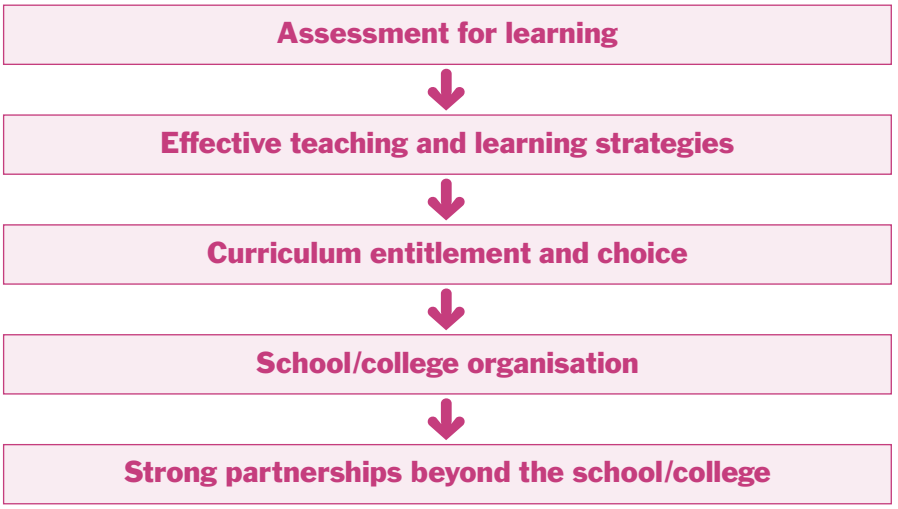
[4] DfES (2005). *A national conversation about personalised learning – a summary of the DfES discussion pamphlet*. Department for Education and Skills, p8.

The White Paper, *14–19 education and skills*,[5] highlights the need to reduce the burden of external assessment while challenging and stretching the more able learner. Teachers will welcome this change in focus, which will allow them to free up time to get back to basics; they need to undertake internal assessment for the benefit of learners not purely to meet the requirement of external assessment regimes and, as a result, maximise learning and improve attainment in individual teaching and learning sessions.

[5] DfES (2005). *14–19 education and skills*. White Paper. Department for Education and Skills.

Personalised learning has five key components and assessment for learning is at the heart of its philosophy.

The personalised learning model – the five key components



In the next chapter, 'What is Assessment for Learning?', the rationale of Assessment for Learning is clarified. In addition, advice is provided on: promoting effective assessment; how to plan for learning; how to establish the learning goals; how to communicate the assessment criteria; how to create effective session learning plans; and how to create a learning ethos within an institution in which to introduce Assessment for Learning.

In the following chapter, 'Assessing learning: the effective use of questioning', the use of questioning as a method of checking learning is discussed and advice and guidance put forward for developing appropriate questioning strategies to thoroughly check learning.

In 'Feedback for learning', the benefits of providing effective feedback to learners are defined and its characteristics are identified. In addition, oral and written feedback are discussed, as are peer and self-assessment. In conclusion to this chapter, a continuous professional development (CPD) activity is put forward.

A case study focusing on a model of Assessment for Learning at New Heys Community School – a specialist Business and Enterprise College – is featured in the next chapter.

In the following chapter, Assessment for Learning quality audit checklists are put forward for use by teachers and managers in the planning, implementation and review stages.

Further reading is identified at the end of the publication.

What is Assessment for Learning?

Assessment as part of classroom activities is a fundamental process required to promote learning and ultimately achievement.

Learners need to know and understand the following before learning can take place:

- What is the aim of the learning?
- Why do they need to learn it?
- Where are they in terms of achieving the aim?
- How can they achieve the aim?

When learners know and understand these principles, the quality of learning will improve. Sharing this information with learners will promote ownership of the learning aims and a sense of shared responsibility between the teacher and learner to achieve those aims. Improving learners' confidence and self-esteem reflects positively in learners' work and their motivation is improved.

To promote effective assessment, teachers need to:

- explain the learning aims to learners and check their understanding
- demonstrate the standards learners are required to achieve and help them recognise when they have achieved that standard
- give effective feedback on assessment decisions, so that learners know how to improve
- demonstrate high expectations and make it obvious to learners that they believe that they can improve on their past performance
- provide regular opportunities for teachers and learners to reflect on the last performance and review learners' progress
- develop learners' self-assessment skills, so that they can recognise what aspects of their own work need to improve.

Assessment for Learning is all about informing learners of their progress to empower them to take the necessary action to improve their performance. Teachers need to create learning opportunities where learners can progress at their own pace and undertake consolidation activities where necessary. In recent years, it has been stated that teachers have become adept at supporting the less able learner, sometimes to the detriment of the more able learner. Assessment for Learning strategies should be implemented in such a way that quality feedback provided to learners based on, for example, an interim assessment decision, will help to challenge the more able learner to reach new levels of achievement and, in doing so, reach their full potential. The individuality of feedback, by its very nature, has the facility to support weaker learners and challenge more able learners.

How well do you promote Assessment for Learning in your teaching and learning session?

Ask yourself the following questions and grade yourself using the six-point scale.

1 = excellent
2 = very good
3 = good
4 = satisfactory
5 = poor
6 = very poor

In the right-hand column, consider what action you need to take to improve your performance.

Key issue	Grade	Areas for improvement and required action to improve performance
How well developed is your questioning technique?		
What strategies do you use to promote effective question distribution?		
How effective are you at using marking to inform dialogue with learners?		
What is the quality of feedback you provide your learners?		
How effectively do you promote self-assessment and peer assessment?		

How to use Assessment for Learning in classroom practice

Much classroom practice can be described as assessment activities. Teachers set tasks and activities and pose questions to learners. Learners respond to the tasks, activities and questions, and the teachers make judgements on the learners' knowledge, understanding and skills acquisition as evidenced in the learners' responses. These judgements on learners' performance happen quite naturally in the course of any teaching and learning session and require two-way dialogue, decision-making and communication of the assessment decision in the form of quality feedback to the learner on their performance. Depending on how successfully these classroom practices have been undertaken, learning will have taken place in varying degrees from learner to learner. At the end of each session, teachers need to ask themselves: What do learners know now that they did not know before they attended the session? Although somewhat crude, this will evaluate how effective a particular session has been.

How to plan for learning

Learning does not happen incidentally, it has to be carefully planned. Planning is an essential part of a teacher's workload. Teachers need to plan and create opportunities within each session for both the learner and the teacher to obtain information about a learner's progress towards the learning goals defined by the teacher at the start of the session. It is crucial that the learning goals are communicated to the learner, and of equal importance is that the teacher checks to ensure that the learner not only understands the learning goals, but also appreciates the assessment criteria which will be used to assess the work.

Teachers need to:

- decide what is going to be learnt in a particular session
- define the learning goals
- communicate the learning goals to the learners
- compile questions and design tasks to check learner understanding of the learning goals
- explain to the learners the criteria which will be used to assess their work
- decide how feedback is going to be provided
- define how learners will take an active part in the assessment process
- plan opportunities for learners to use the feedback provided on the assessment decision to further progress.

How to establish the learning goals

At the beginning of an academic year it is usual for teachers to plan the delivery of the curriculum for the forthcoming year. A scheme of work details what is going to be covered each week and how it is going to be done to ensure the curriculum governed by the awarding bodies is covered. However, it is crucial that teachers identify the learning objectives for each session to ensure that chunks of time are devoted to specific learning goals and the sessions are not wasted 'carrying on from the last session' without anything specific being achieved. It is therefore important that schemes of work identify the learning goals for each session and define how they are going to be assessed.

How to share learning goals

For learners to understand the learning goals, it is important that teachers explain and check that they comprehend what they have to do during the task, what they have to learn from doing it and why they have to learn it.

Often learners do not understand why they have to undertake a task and how it fits into the curriculum; if they did, they would be more inclined to do it. The learning outcomes, in terms of the work that learners have to produce, have to be clearly communicated to learners and involve them in the learning process. Learning cannot be done to individuals, it has to be done with them and by them. It is evident, therefore, that effective two-way communication is the key to unlocking learners' full potential to learn and ultimately achieve. Encourage learners to observe how others are responding to a task, so that they will begin to apply the assessment criteria to their own work.

Teachers need to explain:

- the learning objectives and why learners have to achieve them (and check learners' understanding)
- the assessment criteria and how to use them
- what learners have done well and what they need to do to improve.

How to communicate the assessment criteria

It is crucial for teachers to share the assessment criteria with learners to promote the chances of learning taking place. The assessment criteria should be clear and should not be added after learners have generated the work for a given task. It is therefore vital that all learners in a group understand what they are trying to achieve in a given task and why they are doing it. If teachers want learners to understand and demonstrate their commitment to a task, they need, as far as it is possible, to decide on the goals and define the assessment criteria on which their progress is to be assessed.

Teachers need to:

- use appropriate language and terminology which learners have developed, communicate the learning goals and assessment criteria, and check learner understanding
- demonstrate how the assessment criteria can be met by use of examples
- encourage peer assessment through effective use of assessment criteria
- promote self-assessment through effective use of the assessment criteria.

How to create effective session learning plans

Teachers need to make sure that every session learning plan includes:

- details of the learning intentions / outcomes
- how learning intentions / outcomes are going to be shared with learners and methods of checking their understanding
- information on the assessment criteria and marking
- assessment opportunities
- methods of feedback to be provided
- details of the differentiated range of learners making up the group
- information on teaching and learning styles incorporated into the session
- how review times are to be used
- the specifications of the differentiated teaching and learning materials to be used to meet individual learner needs and create effective learning opportunities
- an evaluation section for the teacher to complete to say what did or did not work well and why.

How to create a learning ethos within a college or school

The teacher and the learning community as a whole must:

- demonstrate that learning is valued and celebrated
- foster trust in all professional relationships
- develop learners to ask for help and to access support accordingly
- use learning to promote self-esteem
- genuinely believe that **all** learners can learn and improve against their own previous performance, not that of others
- demonstrate the use of value-added data
- provide teachers with appropriate training and support in Assessment for Learning
- encourage team involvement in defining any strategies designed to promote change whether it be imposed by external agencies or within an institution.

Assessing learning : the effective use of questioning

No matter how well a teaching and learning session is planned, or how well a teacher may feel at the conclusion to the session, **it is not how well the teacher has performed, but the reaction of the learners that matters**. The real test is whether learners have learnt and ultimately progressed against the learning objectives defined at the start of the session. Testing learning is an important part of classroom practice, and questioning is one of the most common methods of checking learner understanding. Questioning is something teachers do naturally as part of their daily routine, but developing the skills associated with questioning techniques presents many challenges for teachers and is something that is developed over time. Teachers need to review what is to be learnt in any one teaching and learning session and plan for the inclusion of questioning accordingly. When to pose open and closed questions, how to develop a question distribution strategy and when to use questions to check learners' knowledge, comprehension and application are all issues that teachers should consider.

The Common Inspection Framework (CIF) used by Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) as the basis for inspecting post-16 education and training focuses on the learner and learning.[6] One of the key questions within the CIF is : How well do learners learn, progress and ultimately achieve ?

[6] Ofsted /ALI (2001). *The Common Inspection Framework for inspecting post-16 education and training.* Ofsted /Adult Learning Inspectorate.

It is therefore crucial that :

- the learning aims and objectives are clearly defined and shared with the learner
- methods of testing learning are appropriately identified.

Teachers need to be aware that :

- questioning is a skill which needs to be developed
- communication is a two-way process
- questioning is a good way to develop an interactional style of communication
- they need confidence to develop questioning skills
- when they pose a question, they have no idea as to what the learner is going to say, despite their hopes
- they need to have the courage and confidence to deal with any answer, no matter how bizarre

- when they ask learners questions, they have to be prepared for the learner asking them a wide range of searching questions in response
- they have to be confident in their subject matter and be well prepared
- one of the first stages of questioning is getting the learner to talk, which may seem strange as teachers spend a lot of time trying to get the learner to be quiet
- what they are really trying to do is get the learner to think out aloud, check their learning and share knowledge with their peers
- some teachers tend to talk far too much without checking that learners understand what they are saying.

Planning

Like everything else, careful planning is required to support the development of the questioning technique and to check learning thoroughly.

- Teachers need to plan questioning rather than hope that a question pops into their head at an appropriate moment. It might be useful to list appropriate questions on the reverse side of the lesson plan and use them to check learning at appropriate times. Remember, the order in which teachers ask these questions is also important.
- Although teachers may prepare the questions before the session, they may have to change the questions, or use a series of unrehearsed questions, to respond to answers they receive. In other words, teachers need to plan a questioning strategy, but be prepared to develop tactics on the spot.
- It may be useful to pose open questions at the end of one lesson which stimulate curiosity about the next teaching session.

Why do teachers question learners ?

Teachers question learners to :

- involve learners in the session through thinking
- provide the teacher with an insight into the level of learning.

What are ‘closed’ questions ?

Closed questions usually only require the learner to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and as such are not particularly valuable.

What are 'open' questions?

Open questions require learners to think and formulate a response. If a teacher asks learners to explain why vaccines work, then the learners have to provide this explanation in their own words. This gives the teacher feedback especially if the teacher observes the learners' body language. Once teachers have developed their questioning technique, they will need to look at question distribution.

Question distribution strategy

1. Pose the question to the whole group.
2. Pause – allowing all learners to think of (or discuss) the answer Pose, Pause, Pounce (PPP).
3. Name a learner to answer.
4. Listen to the answer.
5. Reward correct answers.
6. Incorrect answers should not be ridiculed either by the teacher or the remainder of the group of learners.
7. Spread the questions around the class so that all can participate.
8. Encourage all to join in – in a regulated manner – for example: 'Helen, can you give an example of what James means?'

Question distribution:

- If teachers work around the class in an obvious systematic order, those who have answered tend to relax a little, and sometimes 'switch off'.
- Use a technique which is not obvious.
- Be conscious of the tendency to choose the same learners when asking questions.
- Most teachers tend to concentrate their attention on those learners, so deliberately pay attention to those normally omitted.

Posing questions:

Questions may be asked at various levels. For example, in the cognitive domain teachers could ask:

- 'What are the main parts of a flower?' (knowledge)
- 'What does this abrupt change in the graph mean?' (comprehension)
- 'Knowing the properties of sulphuric acid and the composition of water, predict what would happen if the two were mixed.' (application)

Feedback for learning

Feedback on assessment

The Assessment for Learning model is only as good as the quality of feedback provided to learners. Successful Assessment for Learning strategies hinge on the nature of feedback, its content and the way it is received and used by learners. Many adults can still remember feedback they received from teachers numerous years later and not always for the best reasons. Off-the-cuff remarks or comparisons with older siblings do little to promote learner confidence. Comments such as: 'You are never Robert Evans' sister are you? I'm surprised – he was such a bright lad!' can be destructive and can manifest themselves in learners becoming disengaged. Generalised statements that mean nothing to the learner do not help to promote improvement in individuals' work. Comments such as: 'There are some good bits and some bad bits in this piece of work – keep going!' only serve to leave the learner confused and do not identify areas for improvement, nor do they offer practical advice on the required remedial work to overcome shortcomings.

Ultimately, feedback should help learners improve in a specific activity; when feedback provides correction or improvement in a piece of work, it is valued by learners and acts as an incredible motivator. Remember, teachers must genuinely demonstrate that they believe that all learners can learn and improve, but the improvements must be measured against their own previous performance, not that of others.

Learners need to be able to trust the teacher/assessor. Publishing and explaining the assessment criteria before the work is undertaken will demonstrate that there is no hidden agenda. Moving the goalposts after work has been set only serves to promote an atmosphere of mistrust. Feedback should be something that learners look forward to receiving – not because it gives praise and offers false hope of success, but because it contains honest, professional judgements that clearly articulate to learners at the appropriate level. It should be a commendation for what they have done well, coupled with constructive advice and guidance on how to improve areas of their work that need developing.

What is feedback?

- Feedback is providing information to an individual which focuses on their performance or behaviour.
- The feedback provided should be delivered in a positive manner and lead to action to affirm or develop an individual's performance or behaviour.
- Feedback provided should not be of a personal nature and should focus on hard data, facts or observed examples of evidence.

Types of feedback

Affirmation feedback:

- Affirmation feedback is provided as soon as possible after a performance has been observed. 'Well done, Ben, you observed safe working practices while preparing a window mount for your artwork.'

Developmental feedback:

- 'Nancy, next time you stretch paper, use gum strip instead of masking tape to secure the paper to your drawing board.'

Effective feedback:

- Effective feedback is tailored to meet the needs of the individual and is directly linked to observable evidence – either a learner's written or practical work or a performance of a given task.
- It focuses on individual action points.
- Effective feedback deals with one point at a time.

When learners complete a piece of work and hand it in to the teacher, they expect two responses:

- the assessment decision (grade or mark), but more importantly,
- feedback on their performance.

Sometimes learners focus too much on the grade or mark out of 10 that they have been awarded for a particular piece of work without taking the necessary notice of the information contained within the written feedback which could help them improve the work or affect the way they approach the next task or assignment. Learners need to be guided into the appropriate use of feedback – it does not happen incidentally. Opportunities need to be created for learners to use feedback appropriately and take the required action.

The benefits to learners of effective feedback

Teachers' feedback should act as scaffolding to support learners' skill-building and the acquisition of knowledge. Teachers provide the 'x' factor in promoting learning through intervention strategies and feedback on learners' performance. Feedback must not be confused with doing the work for the learners or giving them so much help that it becomes the teacher's work. There is an art to providing support and feedback and it is definitely not giving learners the solution to a problem as soon as they become stuck. Learners must be given opportunities to think a problem through for themselves, which is a crucial part of the learning process, so that the piece of work is their own and the end result evidences their learning through which individuals can take much satisfaction in their progress and achievements.

There is no doubt that learners can and do benefit from effective feedback.

- They know how well they are progressing.
- They are informed of their strengths and of areas they need to improve.
- They know what they need to do to improve.

The benefits of effective feedback are greatly enhanced when feedback is applied on a number of attempts so that progress can be tracked from one attempt to the next and illustrated by developmental improvement.

Effective feedback and its appropriate use can improve:

Progress: progress is made when learners know and understand what they need to do to improve and are given time to undertake the required action to bring about an improvement in their work.

Achievement: as a result of progress being made in each teaching and learning session, opportunities for learners to achieve will increase.

Learners handing work in on time: work being handed in and the return of marked work with feedback is a two-way contract. The dates for handing in and returning marked work should be adhered to by both parties. If feedback is valued, it will promote the desired effect – work is handed in on time.

Learner confidence: effective feedback which recognises what the learner has done well and instigates further progress promotes learner confidence.

Motivation: motivation is enhanced when learners can see for themselves that they are improving as a result of taking the action recommended in the feedback.

Attendance and timekeeping: when feedback is valued and thereby worth receiving, learners are encouraged to attend teaching and learning sessions and timekeeping does not become an issue.

Retention: when feedback is valued and progress is seen by the learner to have been made, retention does not become an issue.

Behaviour in class: the most effective behaviour management strategy is the demonstration of progress which has resulted from effective teaching and learning.

Learner–teacher relations: when feedback is effective, learners value teachers' contributions and this is apparent in the quality of the learner–teacher relationship.

Learner participation in class: when learners receive helpful and constructive feedback, they are encouraged to contribute to classroom activities.

When observing a teaching and learning session, observers will ask themselves the following questions:

- Do learners understand the purpose of assessment?
- Do learners receive constructive feedback from teachers?
- Is the marking of learners' work consistently detailed and evaluative to prove helpful?
- Does feedback provide learners with clear guidance about how to improve their performance?
- Do assessment procedures meet the requirements of the validating and examining bodies?

Effective feedback is:

- written in plain English
- written clearly
- detailed
- evaluative
- constructive
- positive
- identifies strengths and weaknesses
- provides effective guidance on how a learner can improve
- begins by saying what the learner has done well
- progresses to areas the learner could have done better
- ends on a positive note
- specifically linked to task / assignment / unit assessment criteria (cross-referenced to what teachers have asked learners to do)
- must be prompt.

Oral feedback

Learners receive oral feedback every time they are in contact with their teacher, whether it is consciously or subconsciously. Learners sometimes do not class informal discussion with their teachers as feedback, but this can often be the most valuable form of information where hints and tips for improvement are shared with learners and vocational tricks of the trade are imparted by vocational experts while monitoring learner activities in an effective learning environment.

It is widely believed that oral feedback has a greater impact on learners' work than written feedback, possibly because most oral feedback is provided instantly or within a very short period of time of an activity taking place or a piece of work being generated. If teachers are observed delivering a teaching and learning session, they are keen to receive feedback as soon as possible after the completion of the observation; if they are told it will be provided at the end of term, it will have minimal effect on their performance when the feedback is eventually provided as the experience of delivering will have faded along with missed opportunities for learning.

Teachers need to:

- build in feedback to learners as an important element of each lesson as part of effective lesson planning, whether it is group or individual progress
- share the structure of the lesson with learners as part of introducing the session, highlighting the opportunities for feedback
- encourage learners to take notes when oral feedback is being shared
- provide opportunities within each session for learners to absorb the feedback they have received and undertake the required action if appropriate within the timeframe of the lesson
- encourage learners to action plan using targets based on feedback received
- ensure learners do not leave any session without knowing how well they have performed
- demonstrate that they genuinely believe that **all** learners can learn and improve against their own previous performance, not that of others.

Written feedback

Even the most reluctant learners want and value assessment feedback. Teachers should never say anything in writing that they would not say to a learner's face. They should focus on feeding back on the quality of work and not on the person to minimise the possibility of personality issues coming into play. Personal comments such as: 'You are lazy and this has reflected in the quality of your work' are not helpful and only serve to detract from the content of the feedback. They also create a barrier between teachers and learners, resulting in the learners digging in their heels and refusing to act on the teachers' advice even though it is their work which will suffer. As with oral feedback, teachers should use only the assessment criteria as defined in the briefing of the task on which to base the assessment. To mark learners down for not doing something that was not a requirement stipulated in the initial briefing is unfair and will only serve to promote mistrust.

Standardised feedback sheets on which a teacher details written information on assessment decisions are often well received by learners, particularly when they are used by all teachers across the institution.

A common approach to written feedback in terms of a cross-institutional document is advisable as is a standard turnaround period for work to be assessed and feedback to be formulated and provided to learners.

Teachers need to:

- compile a standardised feedback sheet that has general agreement across the institution
- define the length of time that learners will have to wait for their work to be returned with written feedback and adhere to this deadline
- be consistent in their assessment decisions and ensure there is no favouritism
- use the assessment criteria and mark against the requirements set out in the task / assignment / activity briefing
- make sure that handwritten feedback is legible and information presented is set at an appropriate level
- evaluate what has been done well and provide praise while ensuring it is not condescending
- highlight the areas of work which need further development, putting forward constructive advice in a way that conveys to the learner that the teacher genuinely believes that the individual can improve and ultimately achieve if they act upon the advice and guidance provided.

Peer and self-assessment

It is widely recognised that when learners are fully engaged in the learning process, learning increases. A fundamental requirement of Assessment for Learning is for learners to know **what** they have to learn, **why** it is required (how it fits into the course of study and which unit it is part of) and **how** it is to be assessed. When learners are able to understand the assessment criteria, progress is often maximised, especially when individuals have opportunities to apply the assessment criteria to work produced by their peers as part of planned classroom activities. Peer assessment using the predefined assessment criteria is the next stage to evaluate learner understanding and consolidating learning.

Benefits of organising peer assessment activities include:

- learners clarifying their own ideas and understanding of the learning intention
- checking individuals' understanding of the assessment criteria and how it is to be applied to learners' work.

As with teacher assessment, learners should only be judged and thereby assessed using the published assessment criteria. It must be stressed that peer assessment must be managed carefully.

If peer-assessment activities are not appropriately managed by the teacher:

- learners will be publicly ranked according to their performance – this will only serve to demotivate less able learners
- learners who are performing well will not find peer-assessment activities challenging and therefore their learning will not be extended, which defies the very principles upon which the Assessment for Learning philosophy is based.

From peer assessment to self-assessment

Once learners are able to use the assessment criteria appropriately and can actively contribute to peer-assessment activities, the next step is to engage them in self-assessment tasks. Self-assessment is a very powerful teaching tool and crucial to the Assessment for Learning process. Once learners can engage in peer-assessment activities, they will be more able to apply these new skills to undertaking 'objective' assessment of their own work. We all know it is easy to find fault in other people's work, but it is a far more challenging process to judge one's own work. Once learners can assess their own work and their current knowledge base, they will be able to identify the gap in their own learning; this will aid learning and promote progress and contribute to the self-management of learning.

Teachers need to:

- provide opportunities for learners to reflect on their own work
- ensure they provide individuals with the necessary support so that they are able to acknowledge shortcomings in their own work
- support learners through the self-assessment process so that strengths in their work are fully recognised and weaknesses are not exaggerated to the point that they damage learners' self-esteem.

Teachers may wish to present a series of anonymous learners' work, possibly from a previous cohort, so that they can review and evaluate work that does and does not meet the assessment criteria. This will clarify what has been required in a task / activity / assignment and lessons learnt can be applied to their own work.

Building in interim reviews and feedback opportunities

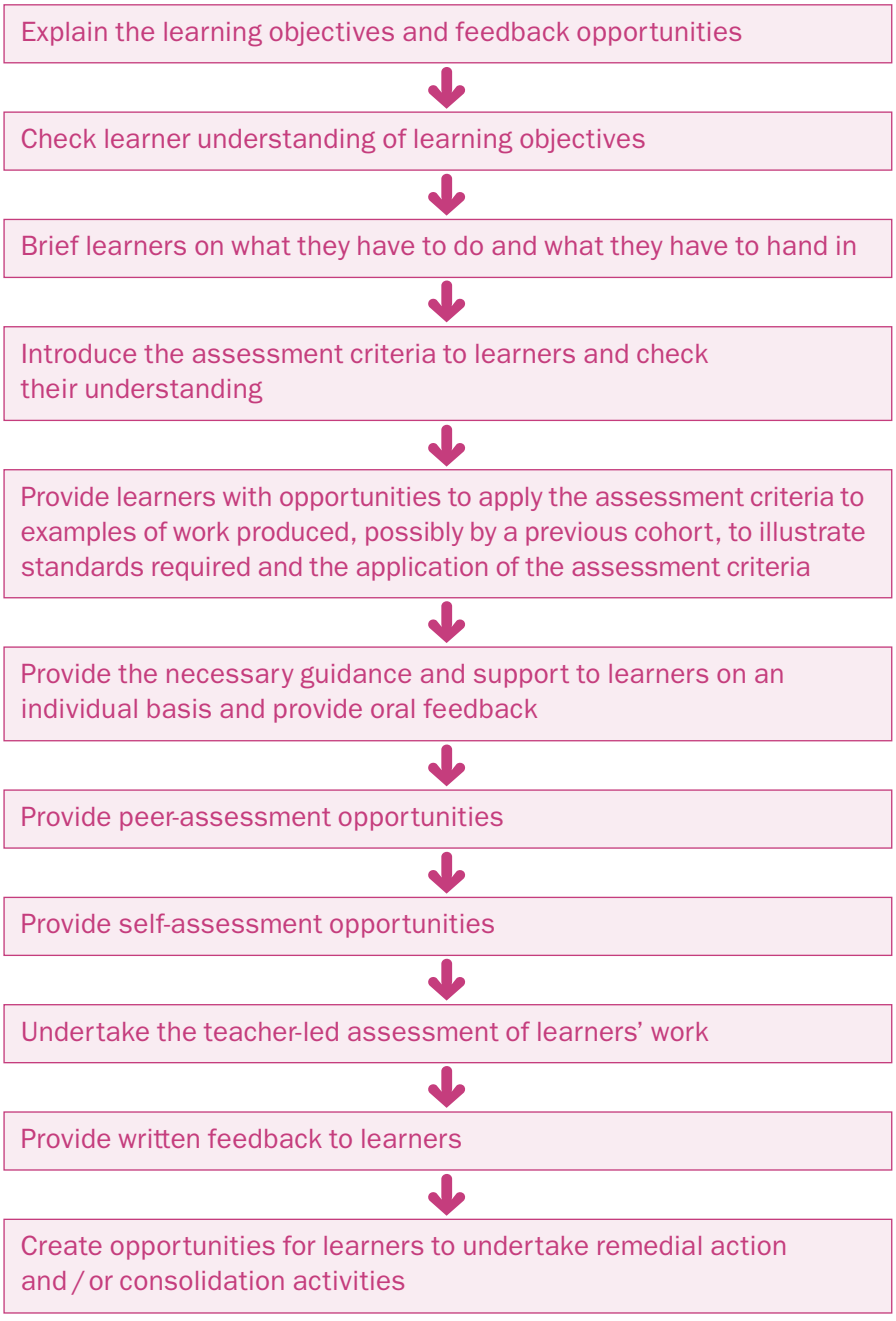
Assignments, particularly for portfolio units, often reflect the length and depth of the units themselves. The assignments may last between six and eight weeks and the initial briefing seems a long time ago. Learners think they have forever to complete an assignment, especially extensive assignments which are designed to generate evidence, possibly in its entirety for a portfolio unit. **If learners' progress is not checked at key stages throughout the assignment, individuals may and often do lack focus in pursuing the learning objectives and become confused about the outcomes**. Deadline dates for these assignments are often the ones that are not adhered to.

Teachers need to:

- compile assignments that are broken down into a series of tasks, building in reviews and feedback opportunities
- prescribe a completion date for each task and provide support to ensure that learners set individual targets to meet the required outcomes of the task
- provide informal oral feedback as and when required as part of classroom-monitoring activities
- review progress against targets and provide feedback
- provide opportunities for learners to reflect on feedback provided and act on advice given
- provide opportunity for consolidation work to be undertaken by less able learners. Variable pace and progression is a theme evident in the Tomlinson report.[7] The report advocates a commitment to 'personalised learning' and that the 'pace and progression' of learning should be determined by learners' needs
- make sure that any remedial work is again reviewed and feedback provided before learners progress to the subsequent task
- create opportunities for learners to participate in peer assessment and self-assessment activities on completion of the overall assignment
- undertake formal assessment of learners' work and return assessed work with written feedback within the agreed period.

[7] Working Group on 14–19 Reform (2004). *14–19 curriculum and qualifications reform.*

Assessment for Learning – the process



The dos and don'ts of feedback

CPD activity

Either in groups or individually, complete the grid below.
Consider using it as a guide for new teachers or established teachers when providing oral or written feedback.

Dos :	Don'ts :

CPD activity : debriefing handout

Dos :	**Don'ts :**
Be positive	Don't be condescending
Look forward	Don't leave the learners demoralised
Provide detail	Don't patronise
Be evaluative	Don't be subjective
Be constructive	Don't change the goalposts (of the assessment objectives of a piece of work)
Identify strengths and weaknesses	Don't use generalised statements which mean nothing to the learner
Be honest	Don't make personal remarks
Give encouragement	Don't be sarcastic or make a joke at the learners' expense
Be objective	Don't ask learners to do something which is impracticable (ie, ask them to word-process an assignment when they have no access to a computer)
Cross-reference to the assessment criteria of the assignment / assessment objectives	Don't use jargon
Provide advice on how learners can improve	Don't focus on the person ; focus on the work
Encourage learners to assess their own work	Don't compare one learner with another
Devise an action plan	Don't be hypercritical
Encourage learners to mentor each other	Don't be negative
Provide advice which contributes to the learners' overall improvement and achievement	Don't argue
Allocate marks according to assessment criteria	Don't dent the learners' confidence
Write clearly and in plain English	Don't prejudge
Use the technical terms associated with the curriculum area / sector	Don't be vague
Give 3–4 clear instructions for improvement, ie SMART objectives	Don't avoid the issue

Dos :	**Don'ts :**
Correct where necessary on the script and refer to it in feedback	Don't base judgements on your personal bias
Be consistent	Don't say something in writing that you would not say in person
Give examples, where appropriate	
Provide feedback promptly	
Finish on a positive note	
Ensure confidentiality	

The New Heys model : a case study

Context : New Heys – background to this specialist college

New Heys Community School is a specialist Business and Enterprise College. The recent development of the school can be traced back to a key appointment made in 1999 – a new, dynamic and forward-looking deputy headteacher whose vision for the school included creativity and enterprise. Ann Stahler currently holds the post of acting headteacher. She is fully committed to vocational and work-related learning and has developed links with a range of local businesses with the assistance of a recently appointed business and enterprise coordinator employed at the school three days a week. Ann had experience of a programme called 'Young Managers' from a previous school and, after knocking on the door of Johnson Control – a multinational company located in nearby Speke in south Liverpool – embarked on developing a Young Managers programme at New Heys. This marked the beginning of enterprise activities at the school. The initiative resulted in developing a creative enterprise culture at New Heys using the training division of Johnson Control. The school has also benefited tremendously from a creative, responsive and thoroughly effective Education Action Zone (Speke Garston EAZ) which has dramatically moved the work-related learning agenda forward in south Liverpool.

New Heys became a specialist Business and Enterprise College in 2003. In 2004/05 it has 1089 learners on roll.

What is the structure of the management team ?

The school has a headteacher, one deputy and three assistant headteachers. The Leadership Group takes responsibility for one of the following :

- Assessment for Learning
- student support for teaching and learning
- professional support for teaching and learning
- monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning.

Assessment for Learning is the principal strategy incorporated within both the School Improvement Plan and individual Department Improvement Plans as a means of promoting improved attainment.

Who is responsible for overseeing and driving forward the Assessment for Learning initiative at New Heys ?

Ann Stahler, Acting Headteacher, and Sue McDonough, Acting Deputy Headteacher, are responsible for the Teaching and Learning strand which includes Assessment for Learning. Sue is also the school's Strategy Manager. 'Anything that comes through from the National Strategy Unit comes to me in the first instance and I will manage it across the curriculum and hopefully drive it forward,' said Sue. In addition, she also carries out the role of Strategy Manager for Liverpool Education Authority.

One of the key issues focused on during internal observations of teaching and learning was Assessment for Learning and this facilitated the monitoring of development and progress throughout the school at various stages of the year. New Heys felt that Assessment for Learning was such an important initiative and one crucial to raising achievement that it had to be driven forward by senior managers who had the authority to action change as and when required. Ann said : 'If we had given Assessment for Learning to a middle manager they would invariably focus on their department, but giving it to an assistant headteacher brings about a whole-school approach.' New Heys is committed to creating an effective personalised learning community and is looking at ways of merging Assessment for Learning with the effective seven-part lesson which includes meeting preferred learning styles. The school also has a research practitioner who links up with Birchwood, Broughton Hall Schools and others to identify good practice at these schools and evaluate their CPD to support the Assessment for Learning initiative. Lessons learnt are fed back into New Heys staff training.

Summary of project

In the previous academic year, the identification of preferred learning styles and designing teaching and learning sessions to meet the needs of all learners were key priorities of this specialist Business and Enterprise College. In 2004/05, the school identified Assessment for Learning as a key priority as it believed that this important inclusion to the school teaching and learning strategy would promote increased learning and ultimately manifest itself in improved attainment. Assessment for Learning, like the learning styles initiative in the previous year, has been introduced as a whole-school approach. Within the learning styles initiative, there has been a drive to share learning objectives with learners at the start of each lesson and devise lessons that cater for learners' preferred learning styles. New Heys believes that the natural development for the school is to look at assessing learners' work, which has been presented in a range of ways, feeding back to learners with the view to promoting improvement in their performance. Staff are beginning to get the message that it is valuable marking that is to be focused on in Assessment for Learning and valuable feedback on performance that is required. This is bringing meaning to the whole process of Assessment for Learning. At the end of 2004/05, each department will review its Assessment for Learning policy; good practice will be identified and a whole-institution Assessment for Learning policy will be devised, based on the experiences of the pilot year.

As part of the institution's internal observations of teaching and learning, Assessment for Learning will be monitored. The following characteristics will be expected to feature in each session:

- clear differentiated learning objectives shared with learners
- key assessment tasks identified
- assessment criteria specified and explained to learners
- feedback where learners know what they have done well and where and how they can improve.

Aims and anticipated outcomes of the Assessment for Learning initiative

Aim to :

- promote more creative lessons
- incorporate business and enterprise
- share good practice
- increase enjoyment of lessons
- improve learning in each lesson
- build on previous learning
- build on learners' confidence.

Outcomes :

- Learners are learning how to learn.
- Learners know what they need to know, where they are going and how to get there.
- Learners are able to identify when they need help and they now know how to access support.
- Learning opportunities are being personalised.
- Achievement is being raised.

What CPD has been provided by the college to support staff prior to implementing Assessment for Learning and during the introductory stages?

The first formal training day for Assessment for Learning took place during the first week of the 2004/05 academic year in the form of a one-day INSET course to cross-institutional staff. Heads of department were asked to prepare over the summer holidays a presentation on their department's assessment policy. In this five-minute presentation, heads of department were required to focus on Assessment for Learning. During these presentations it became apparent that the presentations were in fact focusing on assessment of learning rather than assessment for learning. This confusion is not surprising since the drive for assessment and recording to meet awarding body requirements has been paramount in recent years and has taken increasing amounts of teachers' time, many would say to the detriment of learning. Assessment for Learning puts learners at the heart of the assessment process with the benefits focused on individuals and their progress.

The afternoon was devoted to a training session provided by the acting deputy headteacher on defining Assessment for Learning and planning a way forward.

The training was based on the Key stage 3 National Strategy for Assessment for Learning. Video clips of good practice provided in the Key stage 3 National Strategy file were used in the first training session introducing Assessment for Learning. The school believes that with hindsight it would have been better to use examples of good practice from New Heys as staff questioned the achievability at their school of this strategy and also its suitability for their learners. All staff are undertaking all units of the Key stage 3 National Strategy for Assessment for Learning training pack. At the end of the training for a unit, staff audit where they are up to, undertake individual target-setting and then they are required to plan how they are going to meet these targets. Assessment for Learning is built in to the school meeting cycle as part of monitoring and support.

All staff at New Heys are in the process of completing the six Assessment for Learning units. The first three units have been delivered and evidence is presently being generated by individual teachers. In Units 2 and 3, examples of good practice were used from New Heys which had more of an impact on motivating staff and selling the benefits to their learners. Key stage 3 National Strategy for Assessment for Learning has a file containing material to deliver the Assessment for Learning units. Sue has taken this material and personalised it and, in doing so, has adapted it to meet the needs of New Heys. In addition, examples of good practice are now sourced from New Heys. This proved to be a selling point to staff as they realised that there was good practice at the school, and current learners are benefiting from these focused assessment and feedback strategies.

In addition, an advanced skills teacher at New Heys is working closely with departments across the school to develop and refine strategies and disseminate good practice. Issues being covered are short-term learning objectives, long-term objectives, differentiated objectives and how to revisit them during lessons.

New Heys is realistic about where it is in relation to Assessment for Learning, but much is being achieved and learnt by both teachers and learners in this pilot year. Group work and feedback on learners' performance is not, as yet, a strength of the school. However, the school realises that quality feedback is the key to a successful Assessment for Learning strategy. Feedback can be on a one-to-one basis or in groups. Peer assessment is the next module to be covered within the CPD programme which will then be introduced to learners.

The school plans to involve the drama department in the development of feedback skills across the institution. The drama department will be asked to produce a video of good practice in feeding back on role play and group work, possibly incorporating the existing good practice in the RE department.

What training have learners had in Assessment for Learning?

Learners have received training on the meaning of quality learning, how to access information and how to learn.

Year 7: Train the Brain sessions are delivered in PSHE. This training focuses on:

- what makes learning effective
- what is objective setting and goals setting
- how to understand feedback
- how to present information for mind-mapping
- the identification of preferred learning styles.

Year 8: through PSHE a continuation of the DfES strategy packages on Training the Children

Year 9: a software package called Champs

Shortly, a group of student managers will visit other schools, including a school in Washington DC, to research the topics of effective learning and effective learning environments.

Achieved outcomes so far in the first phase of Assessment for Learning:

- Learners are becoming empowered to learn.
- They ask teachers to define the learning objectives at the start of a teaching and learning session.
- Learners take an increasingly active role in their teaching and learning sessions.
- They have an improved understanding of assessment criteria and an increased awareness of how they are to be used.
- Teachers provide improved feedback on learners' progress.

What New Heys has learnt from the initial stages of implementing Assessment for Learning and what it put forward for consideration by other centres launching the strategy at their institution :

- Assessment for Learning must be in the School Improvement Plan.
- Assessment for Learning must be the focus of Department Improvement Plans.
- Assessment for Learning should be part of performance objectives.
- Examples of good practice and benefits to learners need to be from your own school to have greater impact and to make staff realise it can be achieved in their school.
- Time has to be set aside to realise the objectives.
- Learners' voices become more forceful as they become empowered to take ownership for their own learning – strategies for managing this need to be in place.
- CPD and the six units making up Assessment for Learning have to be monitored and audited on a continual basis.
- Assessment for Learning needs to be built into the staff meeting cycle.
- Appoint a senior manager to take Assessment for Learning forward.
- Based on learner responses to Assessment for Learning, the quality of oral and written feedback needs to be improved.

What advice would New Heys give to a centre which is about to implement Assessment for Learning ?

- Undertake an evaluation of where you are now.
- Build Assessment for Learning in to the School Improvement Plan.
- Talk about Assessment for Learning every day – personalise it to each department as departments are very often at different stages of development.
- Give ownership for Assessment for Learning to staff and learners.
- Undertake Train the Brain and How to Learn training with all learners across the curriculum to support the Assessment for Learning initiative.
- Do not try to achieve it all at once – introduce it in phases.
- Realise you do not know all the answers.
- Visit other educational establishments and review and evaluate their Assessment for Learning model – learn from other institutions' achievements and mistakes.
- Share good practice.

- Let the scientists visit other notable science departments to see good practice for themselves within their subject area.
- When selling Assessment for Learning, use examples of good practice, preferably video clips from your educational establishment, as this will make it real and achievable on a cross-institutional basis.

Critical success factors of the New Heys Assessment for Learning model

New Heys has made the important first step to introducing Assessment for Learning across the institution. It is only in its first year of implementation and the model is developing as it is being implemented. For this reason, many lessons are being learnt, good practice disseminated and CPD undertaken by staff on a cross-institutional basis. New Heys is not only learning by doing, but also by observing and evaluating what other institutions are doing in relation to Assessment for Learning. It is hoped that other institutions will learn from the successes and pitfalls highlighted in the New Heys case study.

Good features :

- Assessment for Learning is driven by a committed senior manager who not only believes the dream but is also able to sell it to all staff.
- The management structure focuses on the core business – learning.
- Assessment for Learning is being implemented across the institution, which is contributing to changing the teaching and learning culture at New Heys.
- CPD is being delivered to support this important initiative.
- Continuous review and auditing of CPD units is undertaken.
- Assessment for Learning is linked with the institution's internal observations of teaching and learning.
- There are designated staff meetings focusing on Assessment for Learning.
- Examples of good practice are being identified from within to help illustrate, contextualise and sell the Assessment for Learning initiative to staff.
- Teachers are being given the time to complete CPD modules.
- The institution is successfully working in partnership with the EAZ to move the 14–19 curriculum forward and meet the needs of the vocational curriculum.

Benefits to learners :

- empowerment
- increased ownership of their learning
- greater understanding of the learning objectives of each session
- improved feedback on their learning
- greater awareness of the assessment criteria and how they are applied to their work
- improved understanding of the strengths, areas of improvement and what they must do to progress
- building on previous progress
- learners are learning how to learn and, as a result, learner confidence is increasing
- learners are now able to identify when they need help and they know how to access support
- raising achievement.

Areas for improvement :

- Provide initial training and support on giving high-quality feedback to learners – do not wait until the end of the CPD programme to provide advice and guidance on the characteristics of effective feedback and methods of giving feedback.
- Provide training to learners on how to use feedback positively to improve their work.
- Devise a training programme for learners on how to understand and interpret assessment criteria, participate in peer assessment and ultimately self-assessment.
- Devise standardised documentation for feedback – review and evaluate at the end of the academic year and make amendments to the documentation if required.

Critical success factors :

- Identify an appropriate senior manager to drive the initiative forward.
- Identify a respected practitioner with a proven track record of making things happen to support teachers develop implementation strategies and refine their feedback skills.
- Devise standardised feedback documentation and undertake training on good practice in providing feedback to learners.
- Talk about Assessment for Learning every day.
- Make Assessment for Learning a focus of the School Improvement Plan and individual Department Improvement Plans.
- Link Assessment for Learning into the institution's internal observations of teaching and learning.
- Provide time for staff to undertake and successfully complete CPD units.
- Allow all departments to interpret Assessment for Learning to meet the needs of their curriculum while adhering to the principles and good practice of Assessment for Learning.
- Use good practice within the institution to illustrate the benefits of Assessment for Learning.
- Devise methods of identifying and disseminating good practice.

Assessment for Learning quality audit checklists

At the planning, implementation and review stages, teachers and managers may wish to use the following for audit documents to support change management and monitor progress.

Audit document 1

How do teachers know that Assessment for Learning is being successfully implemented and achieving the desired benefits to learners?

	Yes	No
Are learners beginning to ask the teacher what the learning objectives and assessment criteria are at the start of a teaching and learning session?		
Are learners' attitudes and motivation to learning improving?		
Are learners' confidence and self-esteem improving?		
Are learners more inclined to undertake independent learning?		
Are learners demonstrating improved initiative?		
Is there an improvement in learners' willingness to contribute to teaching and learning sessions?		
Are learners' attendance and time-keeping patterns improving?		
Are learners more inclined to ask relevant questions?		
Do learners ask for help when needed?		
Do learners effectively undertake target-setting activities?		
Can learners recognise progress in their own work in terms of skills, written work, knowledge and understanding?		
Are learners actively involved in the formative assessment process?		
Do learners actively participate in peer assessment?		
Can learners knowledgeably apply the assessment criteria to their own work and effectively undertake self-assessment?		
Is there an improvement in progress and attainment?		

Audit document 2

As part of Assessment for Learning strategies, teachers need to check that they have undertaken the following. Have they:

	Yes	No
Got to know their learners well?		
Developed an understanding of why learners make certain kinds of mistakes?		
Developed an awareness of appropriate intervention strategies?		
Explained and checked learner understanding of learning objectives and assessment criteria?		
Used the assessment criteria to assess learners' work?		
Used the assessment criteria to provide learner feedback?		
Encouraged learners to set targets?		
Monitored and supported the target-setting process?		
Created opportunities during teaching and learning sessions to review learners' work and feed back accordingly?		
Encouraged learners to take responsibility for their own learning?		
Provided learners with examples of appropriate work that illustrate standards required?		
Planned teaching and learning sessions that include feedback as a fundamental component of the session?		
Provided learners with opportunities to reflect on their own progress and the feedback given?		
Created opportunities for learners to act on feedback provided?		
Used value-added data to inform future planning?		
Developed confidence in classroom practice?		

Audit document 3

To support Assessment for Learning strategies, do teaching and learning session plans include:

	Yes	No
Introductions to sessions which include the sharing of learning objectives with all learners and ensure their understanding is checked?		
The identification of learners' needs and how they are going to be met?		
How learning support assistants (LSAs) are to be used to promote learning?		
Details on how the assessment criteria are to be explained to learners and how they are going to be applied to learners' work?		
Information on review and feedback opportunities?		
The use of differentiated teaching and learning materials?		
Methods of providing consolidation work for learners who need it?		
Time to provide feedback to learners?		
Opportunities for learners to reflect on feedback provided and act accordingly?		
Opportunities for peer assessment?		
Opportunities for self-assessment?		

Audit document 4

For Assessment for Learning to be implemented effectively, have institutions created a learning ethos that:

	Yes	No
Promotes attitudes that value learning?		
Assigns a senior manager to take responsibility for driving the Assessment for Learning agenda forward on a cross-institutional basis?		
Rewards learning?		
Provides appropriate CPD for teachers?		
Provides appropriate training for learners to support Assessment for Learning?		
Encourages and builds self-esteem?		
Genuinely believes and demonstrates that all learners can improve the depth of their knowledge and standard of their work?		
Measures individuals' learning against their own previous performance and not that of their peers?		
Appropriately uses value-added data which is taken into account in future planning?		
Compiles standardised assessment and feedback documentation, after consultation with staff, which is reviewed and evaluated as appropriate?		
Provides opportunities for review and self-evaluation at individual, subject and cross-institutional level?		

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www.teachernet.gov.uk
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Vocational Learning Support Programme: 16–19

Teachers make professional judgements on learners' performance in every teaching and learning session undertaken, whether consciously or subconsciously. Using these professional judgements and translating them into feedback on the quality of individuals' work is the focus of the Assessment for Learning strategy. By concentrating on the learner and the quality of learning in individual classroom sessions, this publication supports practitioners striving for improved teacher-led assessment.