



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

Assessing pupils' progress

Assessment at the heart of learning



Foreword



Assessment is at the heart of an effective curriculum and is a fundamental part of good teaching and learning. Assessment enables learners to recognise achievement and make progress, and teachers to shape and adapt their teaching to individual needs and aspirations. Over the past year QCA has been working with schools and key partners to develop new ways of looking at assessment that put the learner at the heart of the process.

Central to achieving this vision are the assessing pupils' progress (APP) materials. By focusing on a wide range of evidence, APP provides a detailed individual picture of learners' strengths and areas for improvement, gives a reliable and consistent link to national standards, and contributes to productive discussions between teachers, learners and parents.

Many teachers and curriculum leaders I have met have spoken of the positive impact APP has had on the way they think about assessment and how the information it provides helps pupils make progress. Many have found that using APP has also helped to develop their confidence and expertise in assessment by providing a common framework for sharing and discussing the evidence they have of learners' progress.

This booklet describes the APP process, the thinking behind it and the benefits it can bring, as well as outlining how APP will develop in the future. I hope that APP will have an important role to play in supporting your school's assessment journey, helping you and your colleagues to redefine your school's assessment landscape in ways that will benefit all learners.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mick Waters". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Mick Waters

Head of Curriculum, QCA

What is APP?

APP is the new structured approach to teacher assessment, developed by QCA in partnership with the National Strategies, which equips teachers to make judgements on pupils' progress. It helps teachers to fine-tune their understanding of learners' needs and to tailor their planning and teaching accordingly, by enabling them to:

- use diagnostic information about pupils' strengths and weaknesses to improve teaching, learning and pupils' progress
- make reliable judgements related to national standards drawing on a wide range of evidence
- track pupils' progress.

The APP subject materials for teachers include:

- **the APP handbook** to help teachers use the materials and implement the approach
- **assessment guidelines** for assessing pupils' work in relation to national curriculum levels. These provide a simple recording format providing assessment criteria for each of the assessment focuses in the subject
- **standards files** – annotated collections of pupils' day-to-day work that exemplify national standards at different levels. These help teachers reach consistent and reliable judgements about national curriculum levels.

APP has been greeted enthusiastically by teachers piloting the approach. They say it provides them with a more well-rounded profile of their pupils' achievements. It has given them the confidence and ability to recognise how and when pupils are learning, in a variety of classroom contexts.

APP materials are currently available for key stage 2 and 3 reading, writing and mathematics. Materials are being developed for speaking and listening, science, ICT and foundation subjects at key stage 3.



'APP has helped me to become more aware of the assessment opportunities that exist and more secure in assessing pupils' levels of attainment.'

Year 5 teacher



How does APP work?

The APP approach is straightforward. In line with their school assessment policy and practice, teachers periodically review evidence of their pupils' work using the assessment guidelines and build a profile of their achievements.

Generating evidence from teaching

Through their day-to-day interactions, observations and ongoing assessment teachers see evidence of what learners understand and can do. APP is most effective when it draws on a broad range of evidence that shows what learners can do independently. Assessment evidence could include:

- extended or shorter focused pieces of writing in a variety of different forms for a range of purposes
- information from different curriculum areas
- text annotation or visual organisers such as thought mapping, storyboards or timelines
- oral work such as pupil presentations to the class, contributions to class discussions, drama activities or discussions with teachers
- observations of learners' behaviour and interactions
- learners' self-assessment.

Reviewing the evidence

When a teacher has enough evidence of what the learner is able to do independently in different contexts, they can apply the APP guidelines to make a periodic assessment.

The assessment guidelines cover two national curriculum levels with overlaps (levels 3 and 4, 4 and 5, 5 and 6, and so on). The teacher needs to select the appropriate sheet based on their judgement of roughly which level a pupil is working at.

Drawing on the evidence they have selected, the teacher then considers each of the subject assessment focuses carefully and highlights where the criteria have been met across the two levels.

Making a judgement

Once judgements have been made for each of the assessment focuses, the profile of highlighted criteria allows the teacher to make an informed decision about the overall national curriculum level at which the learner is working. The judgement is made in a holistic way, taking account of how independently, consistently, and in what range of contexts learners demonstrate their skills.

Using the assessment criteria inevitably involves a degree of interpretation and professional judgement. Standards files help ensure that judgements made by teachers are consistent and aligned with national standards. Regular collaborative assessment and discussion is another important way of ensuring that assessment standards are reliable and consistent.

Using information from APP

The assessment guidelines give detailed information that can be used to create relevant and measurable targets for improvement. They also support productive discussions between teachers, learners and parents.

What are the benefits of using APP?

APP puts the learner at the heart of assessment. It does this by providing a detailed and personalised profile that gives an overview of where learners are in the subject and what they need to do to improve.

'I've had to interrogate my own judgements more closely, and by using the guidelines I've begun to see the different patterns of strengths and weaknesses and I'm learning more about my pupils. You have to be open-minded.'

Year 9 teacher



The main benefits of APP are as follows.

- It does not require special assessment activities but involves recognising evidence from the opportunities generated by planned teaching and learning.
- It reduces the need to use tests and specific assessment tasks to make assessment judgements by taking into account a far wider range of evidence. This gives a clearer and more accurate picture of learners' achievements and progress.
- It provides a valuable opportunity for professional development as it gives teachers effective tools to develop their assessment and teaching techniques.
- It provides a common language, enabling teachers to share and discuss the evidence they have of learners' progress, to build assessment expertise and develop confidence.
- It directly informs discussions with pupils and future planning, teaching and learning.
- It helps teachers identify gaps in their teaching. For example, when a periodic assessment showed little evidence of a particular assessment focus, teachers from the pilot found that APP influenced their planning and pedagogy.

The table below shows some of the things teachers say they do differently as a result of using APP.

| Practice before APP | Practice after APP |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • define progress through tests and written exercises • use commercial tests and optional national curriculum tests • set level for individual pieces of work twice per term • focus on outcomes (for example exercises and end of unit tasks) rather than processes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assess learning in relation to key assessment focuses • develop a clearer idea of pupils' strengths and weaknesses and gaps in their experience • observe pupils making choices about their learning • make use of spoken and written evidence • observe pupils trying different approaches to solving problems • collect evidence from a range of work in different subjects • assess across the range using assessment focuses • talk to pupils to find out more about how they tackle problems as well as whether they get the answer |

'Far from adding another layer of assessment, APP helps to rationalise the current system and focuses planning, teaching and assessment.'
English subject leader

How are materials being rolled out?

QCA and the National Strategies are now helping schools to use APP and are offering training and support over a three-year period. The Department for Children, Schools and Families, (DCSF) *Assessment for learning strategy* (May 2008) sets out the financial and professional development support available to your school to help develop APP. The expectation is that by 2011 all schools will have embedded the APP approach to teacher assessment.

'Expect APP to challenge what you are doing now – but if you keep your nerve and follow the logical conclusions that devolve from it... you'll really see the benefits.'

Primary headteacher



What is the timetable for publishing APP materials?

The current timetable for the publication of APP materials is outlined below. Piloting of materials in schools is a critical aspect of their development and the timetable is therefore subject to change depending on the pilot outcomes.

| Published | 2008–9 | Future |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> key stage 2 reading, writing and mathematics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> key stage 3 reading, writing and mathematics (revised) key stage 1 reading, writing and mathematics key stage 3 science key stage 3 ICT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> key stage 3 foundation subjects key stages 1, 2 and 3 speaking and listening primary science |



Where are the materials available from?

All materials will be available through the QCA website. Please go to www.qca.org.uk/assessment and follow the links to access the range of published materials.

To access the National Strategies support for APP please go to:

Primary English and mathematics materials

www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primaryframeworks/assessment/app

Key stage 3 English materials

www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/secondary/framework/english/sgs/atspt/app

Key stage 3 mathematics materials

www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/secondary/framework/maths/fwg/mfwapp



About this publication

Who's it for?

Primary and secondary school leaders and teachers.

What's it about?

This booklet is about QCA's approach to assessment, focusing on the assessing pupils' progress (APP) initiative. It describes the materials that support teachers in integrating assessment with teaching and learning.

What's in it?

The booklet contains information on the APP approach developed by QCA, the subjects covered and the materials available.

Related materials

Visit www.qca.org.uk/assessment.

For more copies

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