



# Principles of assessment

School resources

The vision for education in New Zealand is a 'system that learns', from the level of individual learners in early childhood settings through to primary school (years 1 to 8) and senior secondary schools (years 9 to 13). This learning system includes teachers, ECE settings, kura, schools, parents and whānau, and educational agencies.

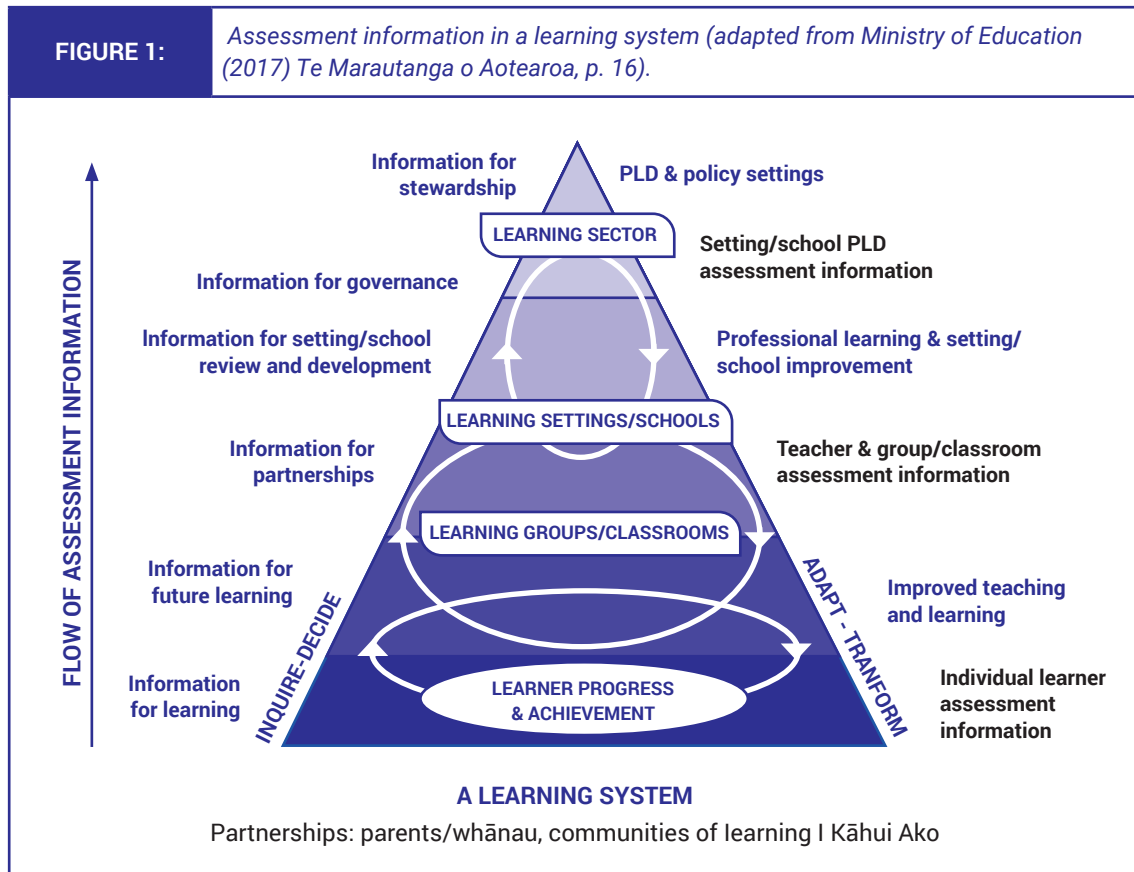
The principles of assessment are presented in two levels. The first level describes the overarching intentions and central premises of an education system that learns. The second level provides indicators of good or effective assessment that apply at ECE settings, kura and schools. The pillars of sound educational assessment identify the essential elements of validity, reliability and fairness in all assessment practices. New Zealand's national curricula (*Te Whāriki*, *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*, and *The New Zealand Curriculum*) contain statements of and guide assessment policy and practices in these contexts. The principles for each curriculum are listed in the appendix.

Advances in educational assessment globally continue to influence thinking about assessment for and of meaningful outcomes for today's learners, as do considerations of how technology can be used for assessment to inform teaching and learning. These remain challenges internationally but are strongly signalled in future directions for assessment in New Zealand and around the world.

## An education system that learns

A learning system is one that improves over time, in which all participants are active learners who work together to achieve improved wellbeing and educational outcomes for all. A learning system focuses on using high quality assessment information to support and continuously improve the progress and achievement of each learner across the system while also strengthening and improving the system itself. It requires trust across the system to share assessment information. Figure 1 shows the multi-layered levels of a learning system that uses assessment information and the purposes for which it is used, with the ultimate goal of strengthening the learning of individual learners, teachers, schools and educational agencies.

The system uses assessment information that builds from the bottom up. Assessment information about the progress and achievement of individual learners allows teachers to consider each learner's current and future learning. Such rich assessment information may be summarised when reporting to parents and whānau, and aggregated when reporting to Boards of Trustees, Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako and educational agencies.



### Central premises of assessment in a learning system

There are four central premises of assessment in a learning system.

#### Assessment information is used for improvement

A learning system uses assessment information for formative purposes – to improve the teaching and learning of individual learners. This involves teachers and learners having an understanding of educational goals and indicators of development and learning, determining how learners are progressing towards those goals, and identifying what adjustments need to be made to further their progress toward achieving those goals. Any assessment information may be used for formative purposes. Teachers' knowledge of each learner is vital to ensure assessment is fit for purpose (valid), dependable (reliable) and appropriate (fair). Furthermore, a learning system relies on an absolute belief that every learner can improve, and on teachers, learners and partners (such as parents and whānau and Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako) sharing and valuing each other's processes of making sense of assessment information.

Shared beliefs about and valuing of assessment information can be extended to others in the learning system. For example, policymakers might make use of information provided by the National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA) – a national-level assessment of what random samples of year 4 and year 8 students in New Zealand English-medium schools know and can do – to highlight how the education sector may improve learners' achievement through, for example, adjustments to the national curricula or professional learning support for teachers.

This does not mean that there is no role for summative assessment. Teachers bring together information gathered from a range of informal and formal sources about learners' progress to make summative judgments about learners' achievement of educational outcomes at certain points in time (such as,

when they are reporting to parents and whānau or Boards of Trustees, and for senior secondary school qualifications). Such summative assessments can also be used formatively to provide insight into aspects of the curriculum that need improved provision, as well as offering senior secondary school learners guidance about possible future education, training and employment trajectories.

### **Assessment is a process**

Assessment in a learning system is best viewed as a process and not just as an event. Viewing assessment as a process to support and improve the progress and achievement of learners has led to the use of several terms: [assessment for learning](#), assessment **as** learning and assessment **is** learning. These terms all reflect the immediate and intimate relationship between teaching, learning and assessment.

It is also appropriate to view assessment as an event for certain purposes, such as when reporting to parents and whānau and Boards of Trustees, or for providing qualifications for senior secondary students, as assessment **of** learning summarises learners' progress and achievement at a certain point in time.

Assessment may be informal (from conversations and observations) or it may be formal (a planned assessment activity). Rich data gathered by teachers about individual learners is appropriate for formative purposes, but will generally be aggregated and stripped of detail when used for summative purposes.

### **Quality assessment information is used at all levels of the system**

Quality assessment information should be used within and among all layers of the learning system to promote improvement in learning and raise learner achievement. The flow of assessment information needs to be coherent and have integrity. Sound formative use of assessment across the system should be able to demonstrate improvement in achieving equitable outcomes for learners.

The use of quality assessment information should happen at the group or classroom level by employing evidence of individual learners' progress and achievement to improve teaching and learning, and also for reporting to parents and whānau. It should happen at the ECE, kura and school level through professional dialogue, reviews, and the development of local policies and practices. It should happen at the system level through system monitoring and evaluating, reviewing and developing system-wide policies and practices.

It requires a high trust and collegial environment where assessment information is freely shared, inquired into and used effectively to decide what needs to be done next and how best to do it, and to adapt (by modifying policy and planning, and revising goals, targets and success indicators). It should be implemented in a way that will transform practice to achieve improvement in learners' educational outcomes.

### **Support is provided by national assessment tools and resources**

Within a learning system, judgments about learners' development and learning are made in relation to nationally co-constructed and developed assessment tools and resources. Teachers may use those that best support their judgments of learners' progress and achievement. Such tools and resources also provide nationally referenced information or expectations that are used consistently across the multiple layers of the education sector. They include [learning stories](#) in ECE, the Assessment Resource Banks (New Zealand Council for Educational Research), the Progressive Achievement Tests (NZCER), e-AsTTle, Learning Progression Frameworks (LPFs) for understanding progress, the Progress and Consistency Tool (PACT) for tracking progress through the schooling sector, and exemplars of learners' progress and achievement.

## Indicators of good assessment

These central premises of assessment in a learning system lead us to identify a set of indicators of good assessment practice that further enhance and support the improvement of teaching and learning for individual learners.

### Assess what is valued

It is important that we assess what we value rather than narrow the focus to valuing what we (can) assess. New Zealand's national curricula (*Te Whāriki*, *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*, and the *New Zealand Curriculum*) set clear expectations for learning, while providing flexibility for local curriculum and for teaching and learning to be designed and delivered in ways that meet the needs of the learners. Therefore, assessment should be underpinned by and used in the service of national curricula while reflecting local priorities.

### Enable learners to be active participants in assessment

Placing learners at the centre of all aspects of assessment processes and practices supports assessment for learning, the use of timely feedback to enhance teaching and learning, and professional learning designed to assist teachers enhance their own and students' assessment capabilities. Learners who have well-developed assessment capabilities are able and motivated to participate in assessments, and to interpret and use information from good assessment in ways that affirm or further their learning. Learners are involved in identifying their learning goals, understanding their progress towards meeting them and knowing what they need to do next to achieve them. This develops learners' abilities to recognise important moments of personal learning and their [self- and peer assessment skills](#). It also personalises their learning.

### Develop assessment capability

Assessment-capable learners understand the assessment process and actively seek to learn from assessment activities so that they can respond to them and use them to support further learning. Assessment-capable teachers are able and motivated to access, interpret and use information from quality assessments in ways that affirm or further learning.

Learners who are able to actively participate in assessing their own learning and make 'what next?' decisions are assessment capable. They have agency and ownership of their own learning. In these situations, [learners can participate in assessment](#) with ease and are not anxious about the assessment process.

### Gather a broad range of assessment information

Teachers require a broad range of assessment information to determine the progress and achievement of learners across the curriculum and to make informed decisions about how they adjust their teaching for best impact. Good assessment entails using a range of information from multiple sources in order to learn, respond appropriately and improve learning. This may include informal assessments (gathered through observations, and conversations between the teacher and learner) and formal assessments (the planned use of assessments activities, tools and resources). Multiple sources of assessment information contribute to valid and reliable teacher judgments if they are used appropriately and the information produced is interpreted competently.

### Build the mana and connectedness of all involved in the assessment process

Quality interactions and relationships are fundamental to enabling better learning. For learning conversations with learners and their families and whānau to be beneficial, interactions need to be learning-focused and learner-centred, and they must respect and support each learner's identity, language and culture in authentic learning situations. It is important to use assessment processes and

events that respect and support learners of diverse backgrounds, experiences and needs. This builds learner confidence and self-assurance in the learning and assessment processes. What is more, using assessment processes that support a reciprocal conversation with parents and whānau values the role they play in their child's learning. For professional dialogue between teachers to be productive, conversations need to be responsive, respectful, and reciprocal exchanges within an environment that values and supports collegial, collaborative and co-operative interactions where their input is valued.

### Pay attention to learner wellbeing

Positive learning experiences in ECE, kura and school learning environments are critically important to enable learners to achieve successful, relevant educational outcomes in their social development and achievement. Learners' wellbeing can be enhanced by having a deeper interest in their sense of belonging and their identity, language and culture. It is also important for learners to develop good emotional and social skills and to feel supported in their learning environment.

### Consider the potential consequences of assessment

Assessment in ECE settings, kura and schools is predominately formative and forms a normal part of the teaching and learning interactions between teachers and learners. In this sense it is viewed as 'low-stakes'. That is, the assessment does not distort what is valued in the national curricula by reducing the focus of what is taught and assessed. It is a natural part of the close connection between teaching, learning and assessment to enhance learner progress and achievement.

This contrasts with 'high stakes' assessments which may be used for formal reporting purposes or assessments for qualifications at the end of secondary school (such as NCEA or Cambridge examinations) that lead to decision-making about learners' futures. When incorrectly implemented or disproportionately emphasised, such assessments may impact adversely on what is valued and therefore taught, as well as on the types of teaching and learning experiences that learners receive.

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## Appendix: National Curricula characteristics and principles of assessment

### Te Whāriki: Four principles for assessment in early childhood

1. Enhance the mana of the child, and the child's sense of him or herself as a capable person and competent learner (Empowerment / Mana Atua principle).
2. Take account of the whole child and reflect the holistic way in which children learn, based on the context of children's activities and relationships (Holistic development / Kotahitanga principle).
3. Include families and whānau (Family and Community / Whānau Tangata principle).
4. Recognise the people, places and things that support children's learning (Relationships / Ngā Hohonga principle).

### New Zealand Curriculum: Characteristics of effective assessment

1. benefits students
2. involves students
3. supports teaching and learning goals
4. is planned and communicated
5. is suited to the purpose
6. informs planning at a school-wide level.

### Te Marautanga o Aotearoa: Four principles of aromatawai/assessment

1. Mana Mokopuna – education that is mokopuna [child]-centred.
2. Rangatiratanga – education that is unique to the individual.
3. Toitū te Mana – education that affirms whānau, hapū, iwi.
4. Whanaungatanga – education that values whanaungatanga.

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