

quick guide

effective practice

Assessment and moderation for GCSEs in vocational subjects

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In all GCSE courses, assessment is an integral part of students' teaching and learning. When planning and delivering GCSE courses, teachers need to use assessment in a number of ways.

Assessment is not just what is done formally to meet the requirements of a qualification. Formative assessment is the assessment used by teachers on an ongoing basis to help their students achieve to the best of their abilities throughout their course. Summative assessment takes place at the completion of a topic or unit and often contributes to the grading and assessment of a GCSE. For GCSEs in vocational subjects, teachers should plan their teaching and learning so that the two forms of assessment complement each other.

This leaflet is a brief guide to key points about assessment for teachers delivering Vocational GCSEs. It provides advice on:

- Basic points about assessment for GCSEs in vocational subjects
- Preparing for external assessments
- Helping students prepare for external assessment
- Planning for portfolio assessment (coursework)
- Helping students produce good portfolio work
- The moderation process
- Further sources of information

Basic points about assessment for GCSEs in vocational subjects

Each GCSE has three units

- In each GCSE, one unit is externally assessed and two units are internally assessed by the teacher. The internal assessment is of the student's portfolio (coursework)
- The work required for portfolio assessment (coursework) will vary depending on what the units involve. It may include evidence from case studies; simulations; assignments; visits questionnaires; fact-finding activities (web-based and other research)
- The type of external assessment varies although written exams are the most common. They are usually one hour in length and students answer a number of structured questions that require short answers, or a few sentences of writing

Preparing for External Assessments

Teachers need to:

- Plan when during the two years of the course students will take the external assessment
- Check on which dates the external assessments are held. This varies with each awarding body but will be sometime in January and/or June
- Plan for students who may need to have a re-sit opportunity during the two years
- Plan schemes of work that build in time for whole-class revision sessions
- Give students the unit specifications and make sure they look at them. They are written for students and tell them what they need to learn
- Look at specimen papers (available from awarding bodies) so that they are familiar with the nature of the assessment
- Make students practice under timed conditions. This helps many to improve their 'exam technique' so they feel better when they tackle the real assessment

Helping students prepare for external assessments

The following approaches have all been used effectively to help students revise:

- Working through past papers to familiarise students with the format and style of questions
- Showing students exactly what sorts of answers are required by the verbs used in questions (e.g. describe, explain, suggest)
- Giving clear, understandable examples to illustrate concepts and ideas
- Using a 'key words' approach to help students recall key information
- Providing students with brief summaries of key areas of a specification

- In the run up to the 'live' assessment, setting homework tasks that target key aspects of a specification
- Holding a whole-class quiz or brainstorm to check knowledge recall and reinforce major points
- Getting students to revise in pairs, to share tips and help with concerns
- Using tutorial time to target areas of general concern

Planning for portfolio assessment (coursework)

Teachers need to:

- Check when moderation is available from the awarding body
- Check when the awarding body requires the marked work
- Make sure students know well in advance what the deadline is for handing in work

In many schools, teachers create assignments for students to work through in order to produce the evidence needed for the portfolio assessment.

Each assignment should be designed to ensure that it:

- Matches the requirements in the assessment evidence grid, which means students who complete the assignment should have the type and amount of evidence needed
- Provides opportunities for able students to demonstrate the knowledge, understanding and skills required to achieve the higher grades
- Requires students to undertake a range of activities reflecting the teaching and learning styles they have experienced during the course.

Planning for portfolio assessment (coursework) cont.

When students have produced their portfolio evidence, teachers should:

- Familiarise themselves with the details of the assessment criteria in the unit specifications before they start marking
- Make sure that all staff marking work for each unit do so consistently, by cross-checking each others' marking and agreeing a common approach and standard
- Record the marks awarded so that a moderator can understand why a piece of work has been marked in the way it has
- Complete the marksheets and other documents required by the awarding body
- Ensure that the information on marked portfolio work is submitted to the awarding body on time

Helping students produce good portfolio work

Teachers can adopt a number of strategies to help their students achieve their full potential on the portfolio work.

- Using induction sessions and activities to make students familiar with the type of work they will have to produce
- From the start of the course, making all students aware that by showing the skills of analysis and evaluation in their work, they can achieve the higher grades
- When teaching or setting up activities for students, giving them practice at producing the types of evidence needed for their portfolio before they carry out the work for the assessment
- When students start on each piece of portfolio work, talking through the 'assessment evidence grid' for the unit so they understand exactly what they have to produce
- Explaining exactly what type of skills and evidence students need to demonstrate and produce in their work in order to achieve the higher grades. Illustrate this by giving them real examples

- When setting up the activities that will produce the portfolio evidence (by giving project briefs, guidance or assignments) make the tasks interesting and varied so that students have to carry out a range of activities, not just desk-based work
- Giving feedback on the way students tackle their work, to ensure they are focusing on what is required and not wasting time on peripheral activities.

The moderation process

The purpose of moderation is to ensure that the marks awarded for internally assessed work are the same standard across all centres and that each teacher has applied the standards appropriately across the range of candidates within their centre.

A Moderator appointed by the awarding body will inspect a sample of candidates' work either by visiting a centre or by requesting a postal sample. Shortly after marks have been submitted, a Moderator will contact a Centre to request a sample of portfolios for each internally assessed unit. The sample requested will cover a selection of candidates and a range of grades.

If the work sampled has been assessed accurately and consistently to agreed national standards, within agreed tolerances, all unit marks submitted by the centre are accepted with no adjustments. Any adjustments to marks that are required will be carried out by the awarding body.

The awarding body will inform centres of the outcome of the moderation process at the time of the publication of results. This will include a written report on any significant issues that arise during this process.

further information

There are many potential sources of information on assessment and moderation. Contacting the LSDA and keeping a check on the websites below is likely to prove a useful starting point:

LSDA

Regent Arcade House
19-25 Argyll Street
London W1F 7LS

020 7297 9000

www.vocationallearning.org.uk

IFSP key contacts

Mark Ellis, Programme Leader
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Sarah Lane, Development Adviser
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For general information

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Useful websites

www.dfes.gov.uk

www.qca.org.uk

www.aqa.org.uk

www.edexcel.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

www.wjec.org.uk