Creating a ‘living’ policy

An assessment policy must reflect what is going on in your school and in education more widely. Assessment policies are generally written and reviewed by the school management team in consultation with the teaching staff. Your local authority may offer help by giving suggestions of principles that should be considered or by supplying a format for developing a policy. Many schools put their assessment policy on their website; these can be used as a guide when updating a policy.

An assessment policy helps to emphasise how different aspects of assessment link together. Other leaflets in this series have more information on different types of assessment (see *Assessment for learning* and *Starting out in assessment*).

Policy content

The policy should cover all aspects of assessment and identify the responsibilities of staff in relation to assessment. The assessment policy should also reflect any school targets relating to assessment issues. Schools commonly include sections on each of the following:

- **aims of assessment** – how assessment will help with pupils’ learning, teachers’ evaluation and provide information for others, such as parents and governors
- **curriculum and assessment planning** – from whole school to individual lessons
- **target setting** – both statutory requirements and school-specific targets, the frequency with which they will be set, and how these targets will be monitored
- **types of assessment** – including formative and summative
- **marking** – some schools choose to have a separate, more detailed marking policy
- **record keeping** – how and where
- **reporting** – how feedback will be given to pupils and parents and how information will be shared with other bodies
- **roles and responsibilities** – including the name of the person responsible for monitoring and reviewing the policy, and how this will be done.

How can an assessment policy be made relevant to learning?

Shared ownership of the policy can be encouraged by involving the whole school in its development. This may include seeking the views of teachers, learning support assistants and pupils, as well as governors and parents. You may wish to share your policy at meetings with parents about assessment or it could be put onto the school website. Involving as many groups of people as possible who are linked to the school can be a helpful way of discussing the purpose of assessment. This also gives pupils an opportunity to have a say about issues that affect them, such as what sort of marking they find most helpful.
Making your policy accessible

The purpose of an assessment policy is to help with pupil progress. In order for it to do this consistently, it must be brief and easily understandable. Assessments should be practical for teachers to carry out. For instance, times when different types of assessments need to be carried out should be stated so that both ongoing and formal assessments are built into the school year. The physical policy should be in an accessible place where it is shared with everyone, including learning support staff. This can be especially useful for new teachers or when a class is being covered by a long-term supply teacher.

It is sometimes difficult to translate policy into practice. If the policy is succinct and links aspects of assessment to the reasons why they are done, this task should be made easier.

How often should an assessment policy be reviewed?

How often policies need to be reviewed depends on the size of school and type of policy. Many schools find it useful to review their assessment policy annually. This can be done in a number of ways. Some schools have an annual timetabled staff meeting when the policy is discussed to see what changes need to be made. Other schools start the year with a skeleton policy, which is added to by each teacher so that it is specific to each class or school year. In addition to such formalised reviews, it is also common for schools to revise their policies as the need arises, in response to changes in teaching or assessment practice. This sort of review may arise as a result of staff changes, new ideas from networking or training, or from feedback from members of the school community.

What should be reviewed?

Your school management team will evaluate how new additions to the policy are working and if they have changed teaching practice. This may apply, for instance, to assessment for learning initiatives or new marking strategies. If your policy is not having an impact on pupil performance, your management team will need to ask why. They will need to consider whether this is because more time is needed for staff to adapt to new practices or if these areas of the policy need reviewing. They will think about staff familiarity with policy – how often is it looked at? Is it just the summative assessments that are being followed and not other aspects?

Your school's assessment policy should be constantly evolving. Once it is written and agreed on, everyone involved will be in a position to consider future developments in relation to present assessment practice. Over time, your school management team may wish to build on what is already happening in school, by carrying out an audit of assessment practice, and then modifying your policy as necessary in line with your school's short, medium and long-term goals.