



Junior Cycle Philosophy short course

Guidelines for the Classroom-Based Assessment

First Edition

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Introduction

This document, *Junior Cycle philosophy short course: Guidelines for the Classroom-Based Assessment*, provides:

- General information on Classroom-Based Assessments
- Detail of the nature and scope of the Classroom-Based Assessment described in the specification for the Junior Cycle philosophy short course.
- The Features of Quality used to describe the level of achievement in the Classroom-Based Assessment
- Guidelines for schools, teachers and students on completing the Classroom-Based Assessment

These guidelines should be used in conjunction with the specification for the Junior Cycle philosophy short course and the *Assessment Toolkit* for Junior Cycle. A detailed outline of assessment in Junior Cycle can be found in the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015, which can be accessed at <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Framework-for-Junior-Cycle-2015.pdf>.

In Junior Cycle short courses there will be a range of assessment approaches to complement learning. These will include ongoing assessments, including routine teacher-designed tasks and tests; ongoing assessment for students undertaking priority learning units at Level 2; and one classroom-based assessment.

Classroom-Based Assessments: General Information

Classroom-Based Assessments are best described as the occasions when the teacher assesses the students using the specific task(s) set out in the NCCA short course specification or in the school developed short course specification. The tasks are described and the Features of Quality, which support teacher judgement, are set out in these guidelines.

Although the assessment is similar to the ongoing assessment that occurs every day in class, in the case of classroom-based assessment the teacher's judgement is used in the school's reporting to parents and students and may also be recorded for learning and assessment review meetings. Students prepare for the Classroom-Based Assessment over a suggested period of time in second or third year. The results of other projects, homework or tests undertaken by the students in the course of their normal classwork do not add up to the award of a descriptor for the Classroom-Based Assessment.

Deciding on the level of achievement

There are four level descriptors of achievement in each Classroom-Based Assessment: *Exceptional*, *Above expectations*, *In line with expectations*, and *Yet to meet expectations*.

Teachers use the Features of Quality, set out in these guidelines (p11), to decide the level of achievement in each Classroom-Based Assessment. The Features of Quality are the criteria that will be used to assess the student work as best fitting one of the following Descriptors:

Exceptional describes a piece of work that reflects the Features of Quality for the Classroom-Based Assessment to a very high standard. While not necessarily perfect, the strengths of the work far outstrip its flaws, which are minor. Suggestions for improvement are easily addressable by the student.

Above expectations describes a piece of work that reflects the Features of Quality for the Classroom-Based Assessment very well. The student shows a clear understanding of how to complete each area of the task. Feedback from the teacher might point to the necessity to address some aspect of the work in need of further attention or polishing, but on the whole the work is of a high standard.

In line with expectations describes a piece of work that reflects most of the Features of Quality for the Classroom-Based Assessment well. It shows a good understanding of the task in hand and is free from significant error. Feedback might point to areas needing further attention or correction, but the work is generally competent and accurate.

Yet to meet expectations describes a piece of work that falls somewhat short of the demands of the Classroom-Based Assessment and its associated Features of Quality. Perhaps the student has made a good attempt, but the task has not been grasped clearly or is marred by significant lapses. Feedback will draw attention to fundamental shortcomings that need to be addressed.

When using the Features of Quality to assess the level of student achievement in a Classroom-Based Assessment, teachers use 'on-balance' judgement. The teacher should read the Features of Quality (starting with *Yet to meet expectation*) until they reach a descriptor that best describes the work being assessed. Where it is not clearly evident which quality descriptor should apply, teachers must come to judgment, based on the evidence from the student's work, to select the descriptor that best matches the student's work overall. This 'best fit' approach allows teachers to select the descriptor that 'on balance' describes the work being assessed.

Teachers should not assume that the results of a group of students being assessed will follow any particular distribution pattern, as the students work is being judged only against the Features of Quality rather than other students' performances.

Time for Classroom-Based Assessments

Classroom-Based Assessment is included within the time allocated for short courses, which is approximately 100 hours. This Classroom-Based Assessment is the culmination of work undertaken in the short course. It is envisaged that preparation for and completion of this Classroom-Based Assessment will take place over approximately 6-8 hours of class time. Whilst the timing of Classroom-Based Assessment in short courses may vary from school to school, Classroom-Based assessment for reporting purposes in the JCPA cannot be conducted in first year.

School autonomy in preparing for the Classroom-Based Assessment

These guidelines set out a range of options for the Classroom-Based Assessment so that it can suit the particular needs and circumstances of students and the school. A variety of possibilities are presented as to types of assessment activities that students might undertake, ways of presenting evidence of their learning and the role the teacher plays in supporting the process. Within the parameters set by the guidelines, the range of themes or topics for the assessment can be determined independently by the school, teachers and students.

Schools have the flexibility to adapt any NCCA short course to suit their particular interests, needs and school context. If adapting the course, schools may also need to adapt the Classroom-Based Assessment, so that it reflects the learning their students undertook. Schools may also develop their own short course(s) and related Classroom-Based Assessment. Guidelines for schools who wish to develop their own short course(s) are available.

How the school supports the completion of the assessments

The school supports the completion of the assessments by:

- Ensuring that the NCCA Specification and Guidelines for the Classroom-Based Assessment are provided to teachers
- Supporting teachers in recording the level Descriptors awarded to each student
- Retaining records and pieces of work, as appropriate, for the purposes of Learning and Assessment Review

- Applying the guidelines for Learning and Assessment Review
- Ensuring accessibility of assessment for all students
- Reporting the outcomes of Classroom-Based Assessments to students and their parents/guardians as part of the school's reporting procedures and through the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA).

In gathering evidence for assessment purposes within the Junior Cycle Short Courses, it is important that teachers use approaches which are sustainable and proportionate. As assessment is about empowering teachers to improve outcomes for students, it is important to ensure that too much paperwork and overly complex processes do not get in the way of learning and teaching. Any paperwork needs to support learning rather than becoming an end in itself.

While assessment judgements should be based on evidence drawn mainly from day-to-day learning and teaching there is no need to collect large folios of evidence to support this. In sharing learning intentions and success criteria or the features of quality for the Classroom-Based Assessment, teachers should highlight the role students can play in identifying quality evidence from their own work to be used for assessment purposes.

An efficient planning process which identifies when and how key aspects of learning will be captured as evidence for assessment is one way to ensure that assessment in short courses remains manageable and sustainable. This approach avoids excessive and inappropriate evidence being collected and allows for review meeting discussions to be taken forward in a structured way. It also avoids the pressure at the end of the course to search for and identify evidence to support judgements about overall performance.

To facilitate providing feedback to students during their engagement with assessment, the process of completing the Classroom-Based Assessments should be viewed as part of teaching and learning, and not solely for assessment purposes. It is envisaged that teachers will guide, support and supervise throughout the process.

Support may include:

- Clarifying the requirements of the task
- Using annotated examples of student work to clarify the meaning and interpretation of the Features of Quality to students
- Providing instructions at strategic intervals to facilitate the timely completion of the final Report

- Providing supports for students with special educational needs (SEN).

Classroom-Based Assessment in Philosophy (short course)

Assessment in philosophy will be classroom-based. There is one Classroom-Based Assessment which is the culmination of work undertaken in this short course. It is important to note that work completed in year one of Junior Cycle cannot be included for reporting in the JCPA.

Classroom-Based Assessment: Philosophical Enquiry

Students complete a philosophical enquiry as their Classroom-Based Assessment. Students are given an opportunity to choose a philosophical question or claim that is of personal interest to them and carry out an enquiry over time on this question leading to a presentation.

The purpose of this is to enable students to demonstrate their skills of philosophical enquiry. Students will use philosophical skills, knowledge and understanding to come to a reasoned view on a question or claim.

Students may choose to present their philosophical enquiry in written, oral or digital format.

The main learning outcomes to be assessed in this Classroom-Based Assessment are:

Classroom-Based Assessment: Philosophical Enquiry
Learning outcomes 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9, 1.10, 1.11, 1.12, 1.14, 1.15, 1.16, 1.17, 1.8, 1.19

Guidelines for completion of the Classroom-Based Assessment:

Assessment in philosophy is directly related to the aim and learning outcomes of the short course. The course places a strong emphasis on the development of philosophical thinking skill, as well as those skills needed for philosophical dialogue: careful listening, collaborative problem-solving, and a willingness to consider different perspectives. By engaging in the Classroom-Based Assessment students are not only learning *about* philosophy and how some of the great thinkers, past and present, have grappled with questions, they are also learning how to *do* philosophy and becoming more critical, creative, collaborative and caring thinkers who can participate in informed discourse and act in the world in a more reflective manner.

STEPS

- *Step 1 Question making and question choosing*

As a class group, or in small groups, students generate questions that are compelling and contestable and of genuine interest to them. These questions or claims may be related to one or more of the strands that students have already studied or they may relate to a new topic. Once lots of questions have been generated, students choose one of the questions (either one they thought of themselves or one generated by another group) and decide to make this the focus of their philosophical enquiry.

- *Step 2 First thoughts*

Based on the questions chosen, students pair up or form small groups, and discuss possible answers and ways to tackle the question.

- *Step 3 The process of enquiry*

This is the core of the Classroom-Based Assessment and the stage where students get an opportunity to demonstrate their skills of philosophical thinking. During this step, the students a) research the history of the question. Who has tried to answer this in the past? What did they say? What arguments did they use? b) identify and select from a range of sources, such as music, poetry, literature, philosophical texts, etc. to show how this question can be addressed from different perspectives. c) map out an argument or set of arguments and come to their own personal position. Some of the research may be undertaken as student homework.

- *Step 4 Presenting the philosophical enquiry*

Students decide how to present the philosophical enquiry and set about preparing their presentation. For example, the philosophical enquiry can be presented as an essay or on a poster, as an oral presentation or interview and/or electronically using digital media. Where students have worked in twos or threes in researching and examining a question they can present their philosophical enquiry as a group or individually.

Whilst students may undertake the Classroom-Based Assessment in pairs or groups, the student's individual role and contribution to the work will be the focus of the assessment. All students are expected to set out different arguments and perspectives and draw their own informed personal conclusion on the question. Work which cannot be authenticated by the teacher cannot be accepted for reporting in the JCPA.

Classroom-Based Assessment: Advice for students

- You should choose a question that is of genuine interest as this will make the whole process more meaningful and engaging.
- Keep a record of your research, different arguments and sources of information, and your personal reflections and learning along the way.
- Use your creativity in deciding how to present your philosophical enquiry.

Deciding on the level of achievement

Features of Quality

Key Features of Quality in support of student and teacher judgement for the Classroom-Based Assessment: Philosophical Enquiry are described here. The Features of Quality are the criteria used to assess the student work as best fitting the Descriptors:

Exceptional describes a piece of work that reflects the Features of Quality for the Classroom-Based Assessment to a very high standard. While not necessarily perfect, the strengths of the work far outstrip its flaws, which are minor. Suggestions for improvement are easily addressable by the student.

Above expectations describes a piece of work that reflects the Features of Quality for the Classroom-Based Assessment very well. The student shows a clear understanding of how to complete each area of the task. Feedback from the teacher might point to the necessity to address some aspect of the work in need of further attention or polishing, but, on the whole the work is of a high standard.

In line with expectations describes a piece of work that reflects most of the Features of Quality for the Classroom-Based Assessment well. It shows a good understanding of the task in hand and is free from significant error. Feedback might point to areas needing further attention or correction, but the work is generally competent and accurate.

Yet to meet expectations describes a piece of work that falls somewhat short of the demands of the Classroom-Based Assessment and its associated Features of Quality. Perhaps the student has made a good attempt, but the task has not been grasped clearly or is marred by significant lapses. Feedback will draw attention to fundamental errors that need to be addressed.

Features of Quality: Philosophical Enquiry

Exceptional

Steps taken in answering the question are presented in a comprehensive, logical and highly effective manner.

The account of different perspectives on the question is insightful and comprehensive.

The student's arguments and personal conclusion are coherent, well-reasoned and can stand up to scrutiny.

Above expectations

Steps taken in answering the question are presented in well-organised and clear manner.

The account of different perspectives on the question is accurate and thorough.

The student's arguments and personal conclusion on the question are valid and sound.

In line with expectations

Steps taken in the philosophical enquiry are presented in an organised manner with reasonable clarity.

The account of different perspectives on the question is adequate to the purpose.

The student's arguments and personal conclusion on the question are reasonably valid and sound.

Yet to meet expectations

There are gaps and a lack of clarity in the steps taken in the philosophical enquiry.

The enquiry shows little evidence of how the question has been approached by another thinker/perspective.

There is very limited evidence of personal reflection on the question or of any personal conclusion being reached.

Learning and Assessment Review meetings

Shared understanding of standards within junior cycle short courses will arise through professional discussion in Learning and Assessment Review meetings. Teachers gather examples of student work and compare their judgements with other colleagues. Over time, this process will help develop a greater understanding of standards and ensure consistency of judgement about student performance.

When there is a single teacher of a short course in a school, where feasible, the teacher will participate in a Learning and Assessment Review meeting with another school. The potential of ICT to support such meetings will be explored.

Further details on managing and participating in Learning and Assessment Review meeting can be accessed at <http://juniorcycle.ie/Assessment> .

Following the Learning and Assessment Review each individual teacher re-considers their judgement of their student's work, based on the outcomes of the meeting, and where necessary makes the appropriate adjustments to the level of achievement awarded to the work. The Descriptors awarded are used in reporting progress and achievement to parents and students as part of the school's reporting procedures and through the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA).

Using feedback

Providing effective feedback is a crucial step to support learning. Students will be informed of the Descriptor they have been awarded once the review meeting has taken place and its outcomes have been processed. However, effective feedback goes beyond the naming of the Descriptor awarded. Feedback on the strengths of the student's work, and on areas for improvement can be used to support their future learning. Further information on the use of feedback can be found at <http://juniorcycle.ie/Assessment>.

Querying a result

Queries in relation to the Descriptors awarded for the Classroom-Based Assessment, where they arise, will be dealt with by the school.