



**NCCA**

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta  
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta  
National Council for  
Curriculum and Assessment

# Junior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) short course

Guidelines for the  
Classroom-Based  
Assessment (for use with  
the 2023 short course)

August 2024

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# Introduction

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This document, *Junior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) 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 2023 specification for the Junior Cycle SPHE 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 2023 specification for the Junior Cycle SPHE short course, the NCCA's online assessment supports for junior cycle and the NCCA Toolkit for Junior Cycle SPHE.

# 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.

## The autonomy of the school 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 choice Classroom-Based Assessment is presented and students can also choose to present their work in a variety of formats. 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 [here](#).

## How the school supports the completion of the assessment

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 meeting
- applying the guidelines for Learning and Assessment Review meeting
- applying inclusive assessment practices and 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).

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 Classroom-Based Assessment
- using annotated examples of student work to clarify the meaning and interpretation of the Features of Quality to students
- providing formative feedback at key moments to ensure that students stay on track
- providing supports for students with special educational needs (SEN).

**NOTE:** Only work which is the student's own can be accepted for assessment in the JCPA.

## Inclusive assessment practices

Schools facilitate inclusive assessment practices whether as part of ongoing assessment or Classroom-Based Assessments. Where a school judges that a student has a specific physical or learning difficulty, reasonable supports may be put in place to remove, as far as possible, the impact of the disability on the student's performance in Classroom-Based Assessments. These supports e.g. the support provided by a Special Needs Assistant or the support of assistive technologies, should be in line with the arrangements the school has put in place to support the student's learning throughout the year.

## 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, 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.

# Classroom-Based Assessment in SPHE short course

Assessment in SPHE is classroom-based. Students complete **one** Classroom-Based Assessment, from a choice of two. It is important to note that work completed in year one of Junior Cycle cannot be included for reporting in the JCPA.

Considering the diversity of learners and contexts, and to support maximum flexibility and choice, there is a choice of Classroom-Based Assessments in Junior Cycle SPHE. The choice of Classroom-Based Assessments in SPHE (outlined in Table 1 below) is designed to support teacher- and student-agency and provide choice of focus, format and mode of presentation.

**Table 1: Choice of Classroom-Based Assessments for SPHE**

Title	Format	Student preparation
<b>Portfolio of my learning and my reflection on learning in SPHE</b>	Individual selection of items of work, such as digital, written texts, posters, audio-visual or multi-modal	Students will choose three pieces of work, completed over time and linked to different strands of learning within the course, and present these accompanied by a reflection on why each piece was chosen and how it marked important learning for the student in SPHE.
<b>Or</b>		
Title	Format	Student preparation
<b>Taking action for SPHE</b>	Individual or small group project that can be presented in a wide range of formats	Students will, over a specified time, with support and guidance from the teacher, research, report and reflect on an action they have taken to raise awareness about or promote an aspect of health/wellbeing studied in the SPHE short course.

Regardless of the option chosen, assessment in SPHE is directly related to the aim of the short course and learning outcomes. The specific learning outcomes assessed through the Classroom-Based Assessment will, to an extent, depend on the focus chosen.

## Time for Classroom-Based Assessment

Classroom-Based Assessment is included within the time allocated for short courses, which is approximately 100 hours.

If undertaking Option 1 – *Portfolio of my learning and reflection* – students will keep examples of work throughout their learning. Within class time they will periodically decide which examples they wish to include and exclude from their portfolio. Also within class time, they will also be supported to engage in reflection on their chosen pieces of work. Final selection of portfolio pieces and reflections should be completed in 3rd year.

If undertaking Option 2 – *Taking action for SPHE* – it is envisaged that preparation for and completion of this Classroom-Based Assessment take place over approximately 6 hours of class time, during either 2nd or 3rd year. Aspects of the planning and research might be completed as homework.

Work which cannot be authenticated by the teacher cannot be accepted for assessment in the JCPA.

The timing of completion of the Classroom-Based Assessment in short courses may vary from school to school.



# Guidelines for completion of the portfolio of my learning and reflection

The *portfolio of my learning and reflection* (option 1) Classroom-Based Assessment asks students to choose three pieces of work, completed over time and linked to different strands of learning within the SPHE course, and present these accompanied by a reflection on why each piece was chosen and how it marked important learning for the student in SPHE.

In order to undertake option 1, students will need to develop the habit of gathering examples of work throughout their learning, taking time to regularly identify pieces of work that mark significant learning for them and be provided with opportunities to develop and practice the skills needed for reflection on their learning.

## Selecting pieces of work

The purpose of the SPHE portfolio is to enable students to capture their important learning in SPHE and develop an awareness of how this learning is contributing to them growing in the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed for making healthy choices and creating healthy relationships.

To complete this Classroom Based Assessment, the students need to capture lots of work along the way and over time decide which three pieces of work have been most significant for their learning. Therefore, it is not necessarily the most visually impressive pieces of work that will find their way into the final selection. Rather the focus is on selecting those which have prompted new insights, influenced new ways of thinking, behaving or acting and fostered deeper awareness of self and others.

In addition, the three pieces of work selected should enable students to demonstrate their growing ability to:

- find reliable and relevant information, services and supports about emotional health and wellbeing
- recognise the various influences on health and wellbeing
- show awareness of both the personal and social impacts of decisions and behaviours related to their health and wellbeing
- make judgements, and propose solutions or strategies in relation to different scenarios
- integrate and apply their learning in relevant personal or social contexts.

The student portfolio will derive from day to day classroom activities and homework undertaken by the student. As such, it may include a broad range of items, such as personal responses to stimulus materials used in class, a script or role-play created by the student to demonstrate problem solving or other skills, research gathered to inform project work, a poster, leaflet or brochure created to generate awareness, peer-teaching materials, a blog, an interview, etc. The selected items may be presented in different formats—hard copy, digital, multi-modal.

If undertaking option 1 – *Portfolio of my learning and reflection* – students will gather examples of work throughout their learning and with guidance from the teacher they will periodically look back over their work and decide which examples have been most formative for their learning. With teacher guidance and supported with the reflection prompts (Appendix 1) they will discern what they wish to include and exclude from their portfolio. Final selection of three portfolio pieces and accompanying reflections should be completed in 3rd year and demonstrate learning from a number of SPHE strands and across a range of learning outcomes.

## Reflection on learning

In SPHE, one of the most important skills that students develop is their capacity to reflect on their learning and its meaning for them in their personal and social lives. Like all skills, reflection takes time and practice to develop. With regular reflection, over time students can become aware of both their personal growth and their learning in SPHE. This ongoing practice of reflection will enable students to complete reflections with greater ease as part of their portfolio assessment.

It is important to provide different ways of reflecting to ensure that students find it engaging and do not become weary of the process. See Appendix 1 for *Reflection prompts for my Assessment* and NCCA's Junior Cycle SPHE Toolkit for further guidance on [Student Reflection in SPHE](#).

## Portfolio of Learning: Advice for students

- Organise a folder (either digital and/or a hard copy) and use it to store all your work related to SPHE. You need to keep this over the 3 years of junior cycle. This will help you to select three pieces of work for your SPHE Portfolio when the time comes.
- The kind of work you gather will be varied – arising from your classwork and homework. For example, it could include research you gathered on a question of interest, work generated through classroom discussion or group work, a script or role-play created by yourself or with other students, a poster, leaflet or brochure that you produced to generate awareness or to summarise your learning on a topic, some peer-teaching materials, a blog, an interview, etc.
- Once you have finished a piece of work, take some time to stop and think about what you've learned, and what it means for you in your own life and relationships with others. Keep these reflections because over time you can look back and be able to see the pieces of work that have been most important for you.
- Every few months, stop and look back over your work and your reflections and decide if there is any piece of work that might potentially be included in your SPHE Portfolio of learning and file this separately. Your key reason for selecting a piece of work is because it marks important learning for you in SPHE. For example, you might have been challenged to rethink your ideas on something as a result of this piece of work, or you might have developed greater awareness of a certain personal skill through doing the piece of work.
- Keep in mind that your Portfolio of learning (including reflections on learning) will be judged against the Features of Quality, so you need to keep these in mind when selecting your three pieces of work.
- You can use creativity and artistic skills to present your portfolio but remember that it is not an art project. The key thing is to be able to show is your learning in SPHE and your ability to reflect on this learning.

## Features of Quality: SPHE Portfolio of Work

Features of Quality	
<b>Exceptional</b>	
<p>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.</p>	<p>The student's reasons for choosing their three pieces of work are very clear and compelling.</p> <p>The selected pieces of work clearly demonstrate the development of specific knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviours across different strands of learning and a range of learning outcomes in the short course.</p> <p>There is strong evidence of meaningful reflection on learning, including the capacity to recognise the relevance of their learning and apply it to personal and/or social contexts.</p>
<b>Above expectations</b>	
<p>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.</p>	<p>The student's reasons for choosing their three pieces of work are clear and compelling.</p> <p>The selected pieces of work show the development of specific knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviours across a limited range of strands of learning and learning outcomes in the short course</p> <p>There is good evidence of reflection on learning, including the capacity to recognise the relevance of their learning in personal and/or social contexts.</p>
<b>In line with expectations</b>	
<p>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.</p>	<p>The student's reasons for choosing their three pieces of work are briefly presented.</p> <p>The selected pieces of work show the development of specific knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviours across a very limited range of strands of learning and learning outcomes in the short course.</p> <p>There is some, albeit limited, evidence of reflection on learning, including the capacity to apply their learning in personal and/or social contexts.</p>
<b>Yet to meet expectations</b>	
<p>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.</p>	<p>The student's reasons for choosing their three pieces of work are not clearly presented.</p> <p>The development of specific knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviours are not clearly evidenced though the selected pieces of work and the work relates to a very limited range of strands and learning outcomes.</p> <p>There is limited or no evidence of reflection on learning.</p>

# Guidelines for completion of the Taking Action for SPHE project

The Taking Action for SPHE Classroom-Based Assessment is asking students to 'research, report and reflect on an action they have taken to raise awareness about or promote an aspect of health/wellbeing studied in the SPHE short course'.

Note the key words (highlighted for emphasis) which signify important elements of this Classroom-Based Assessment.

**Research** involves finding reliable and relevant information, sorting, recording, analyzing and drawing conclusions. Therefore, students need to show evidence of being able to gather, sort and use relevant, reliable and appropriate information.

**Report** implies presenting a written, visual or oral account. Students may choose to report in a variety of formats including multimodal.<sup>1</sup> The key thing is that their report shows evidence of having engaged meaningfully in action for the purpose of raising awareness and promoting an aspect of health/wellbeing.

**Reflect** requires students taking a step back at different points in their learning to think about why this action is of importance, what they are learning through engagement in the project, what new insights have they have gained and what it means for them in their own life?

**Action** can take the form of a wide range of activities, including creating and conducting a survey, gathering and sharing information on a topic of interest or concern to young people in an engaging manner, organising an event or awareness raising activity, creating an awareness-raising tool in order to educate and motivate others, identifying a real-world question or challenge encountered by young people and suggesting ways to address this challenge, scoping out reliable and age-appropriate supports relevant to young people's health and wellbeing and making these known to their peers, advocating for change with people in power on an aspect of young people's health or wellbeing.

The action project can be at classroom, school or wider community level and relate to any aspect of health or wellbeing studied in the short course. Keep in mind that the purpose of the action in SPHE is to raise awareness.

It is important not to allow students to rush into undertaking the action project without first spending enough time engaging with teaching and learning linked to a selection of learning outcomes from one or more strands of the specification.

To support this process, as students engage in classroom learning, it would be useful to take note of particular areas of interest or questions that arise in class. Having completed a body of learning, across one or more strands, these notes can be re-visited to identify possible topics based upon which students might take action. Students could be asked to scope out these topics in greater depth, making a case as to why the project might be worthwhile and how it relates to their learning in the short course.

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<sup>1</sup> Multimodal can be something physical (such as a dramatic presentation), digital (such as a collage, poster, video, PowerPoint), paper based (scrapbook, poster, booklet, brochure), data-based (charts, graphs), or an artistic representation.

Some students may prefer to engage in an individual project and this can be facilitated. In general, it is recommended that the Taking Action for SPHE project (option 2) should be completed with a partner or small group. Small groups ought not to comprise more than three students to enable every student to contribute to the project.

While working with others is encouraged in SPHE, **each student will create an individual report describing their individual role and contribution to the project and providing evidence of personal reflection.** Work which cannot be authenticated by the teacher cannot be accepted for reporting in the JCPA.

If undertaking this Classroom-Based Assessment it would be important to decide whether the entire class will complete the same project (working in separate small groups) or if it will be possible to support a range of different projects.

Whether working as a class group, in small groups, pairs or individually, students need to focus their project on an aspect of health and wellbeing that is of genuine interest and concern to them, rooted in their learning in SPHE.

## Taking Action for SPHE Project: Advice for students

- Choose a project based on a topic of learning in SPHE that you are really interested in learning more about. You can choose to work on your own, in pairs or in small groups. If you are doing a group project, try to ensure that each member of the group is interested and cares about the topic being addressed.
- Keep a record of the topics that interest you as you learn in the different strands of the SPHE short course. Look out for information, images, videos that will help you to learn more about this topic.
- Once the focus of the project has been decided, identify sources of reliable information with your teacher. If you are working as a group, divide the project tasks out between the group in such a way that everybody can work to their strengths.
- It is important to keep a record of your research, including people consulted or interviewed, sources of information and your reflections on these. This will all help you as you prepare your report.
- Reach out to groups or organisations already working on your topic or issue as they might be able to provide you with useful information or ideas for effective actions to raise awareness.
- If you use the internet as an information source, be sure to carefully select relevant and reliable websites and in your report include accurate references to the sites, images, videos etc you have used as sources.
- Use your creativity in both undertaking and presenting your project.
- Be sure to keep notes of your individual contribution to the work – in other words, *what you did*. Also keep notes of *what you learned* along the way. These notes will be really helpful when it comes to creating your report.
- Keep in mind that your report on your action project will be judged against the *Features of Quality*, so keep these in mind from the start. Even if you work in pairs or as a small group, each student will be assessed individually against the Features of Quality.
- In planning the action project, think about how you will report on the project. For example, will it be an oral presentation, an interview, an artistic representation or multimodal - digital (such as a collage, poster, video, PowerPoint), paper based (scrapbook, poster, booklet, brochure), data-based (charts, graphs, infographics) or a mix?

## Features of Quality: SPHE Report on Taking Action

	Features of Quality
<b>Exceptional</b>	
<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The report displays exceptional research with excellent selection and use of relevant, reliable and appropriate information</li> <li>● It shows excellent awareness of audience and consideration of ways to make the project impactful in raising awareness about a health/wellbeing topic or issue of concern</li> <li>● There is evidence of insightful personal reflection on the learning and capacity to reflect on what this means for the student.</li> </ul>
<b>Above expectations</b>	
<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The report displays very good research and a capacity to select and use relevant, reliable and appropriate information</li> <li>● It shows a clear awareness of audience and consideration of ways to make the project impactful in raising awareness about a health/wellbeing topic or issue of concern.</li> <li>● There is good evidence of personal reflection on the learning and what it means for the student.</li> </ul>
<b>In line with expectations</b>	
<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The report displays good, albeit limited, use of research. Consideration of what research is most relevant, trustworthy and appropriate for the purpose of the project was somewhat less in evidence.</li> <li>● The project shows some awareness of audience although consideration of how to create impact is absent</li> <li>● There is some evidence of personal reflection on the learning. However, reflection on what this means for the student is not in evidence.</li> </ul>
<b>Yet to meet expectations</b>	
<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The report shows limited research and appraisal of information skills</li> <li>● The project lacks awareness of audience and consideration of what makes an awareness activity impactful</li> <li>● There is little or no evidence of personal reflection on the learning or what it means for the student.</li> </ul>

# Appendix 1: Student Portfolio: template for reflection

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**Class:**

**Student:**

**Title of selected piece of work:**

**I chose this because:**

**What I learned from doing this piece of work:**

**How I might apply the learning in my own life:**

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Teachers can adapt this reflection template and add additional prompts to support their students' reflection.

# Appendix 2: Reflection template to accompany Action Project Report

**Class:**

**Student:**

**Title of SPHE Action Project:**

**I/we chose this project because:**

**In doing this project the best sources of information were... because:**

**By doing this project I learned:**

**How I might apply the learning in my own life:**

Teachers can adapt this reflection template and add additional prompts to support their students' reflection.





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