

Creative approaches to assessment in SPHE/RSE

Why is assessment important in SPHE/RSE?

Giving students opportunities to demonstrate their learning benefits both the teacher and students.

- For the teacher - It enables you to feel confident that learning has taken place, be able to affirm progress and identify future learning needs.
- For the students - it creates an awareness of the development of their knowledge, attitudes and skills, signifies the value of learning in SPHE and increases their motivation for further learning.

“ **The focus of assessment is to enable students to show evidence of their learning journey.** ”

Senior Cycle SPHE specification

The main purpose of assessment is to support learning. It is anticipated that most assessment in SPHE will be classroom-based and formative in nature. Being clear about the purpose of any assessment activity is really important as this allows you to share the goal with your students and provide relevant feedback.

Planning ongoing assessment in SPHE allows you, the teacher, and your students to engage in ongoing conversations about their learning.

Other relevant guidance on this toolkit

- Student voice in SPHE
- Supporting student reflection in SPHE
- Effective pedagogical approaches.

Ongoing assessment – what does it look like?

Assessment in SPHE is not about setting tasks in order to accumulate a record of marks. Nor is it about teachers assessing where the student is situated on the continuum of wellbeing or making a judgment about a student’s physical, social or emotional wellbeing. The focus of assessment is on allowing students to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and dispositions they have gained through their engagement in learning in SPHE.

Assessment activities should provide opportunities to assess:

- an increase in knowledge (Before I knew ... now I also know ...)
- an increase in understanding (I always knew ... but now I can see how it connects to ... and now I can see how I could use this in my life)
- a change or reconfirmation of a belief/attitude (I used to feel ... and I now feel ...)
- improved communication skills (Before I would have said ... but now I can say ...)
- increased competence/skills (Before I didn't know how to ... but now I know how to ...)
- new strategies acquired (Before I wouldn't have known how to ... but now I know new/more effective ways to ...)
- changed or challenged assumptions (Before I thought that ... but now I realise...)¹

And remember – not everything needs to be assessed. You simply want to help students show evidence of their learning journey.

¹ Adapted from guidance published by PHSE Association, UK

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Sample approaches to ongoing assessment

Questioning is one of the most powerful tools in assessing learning, particularly if you think carefully about the kind of questions you ask. Plan your questions and it will help make questioning more focused and effective. Consider the purpose of your questions. If you want to check students' knowledge or recall, then ask a closed question (i.e. a question with a correct answer). If you want to probe their understanding or prompt thinking, then ask an open question. See **Focus on Learning: Effective Questioning**.

Allow 'wait time' to allow students to think and formulate an answer before taking responses. Use a variety of means for capturing student responses - mini-white boards, post-its, their learning journal, google forms, mentimeter, etc.

Using the six wellbeing indicators

In assessing what students have learned, students can be encouraged to move beyond thinking simply about knowledge or information gained and prompted to consider how specific key skills have been developed through their learning. In this context, the six indicators - Active, Responsible, Connected, Resilient, Respected and Aware - can be used to support ongoing reflection and self-assessment of learning. For example, at the end of a class, a unit, or a term, students can use the indicators to reflect on

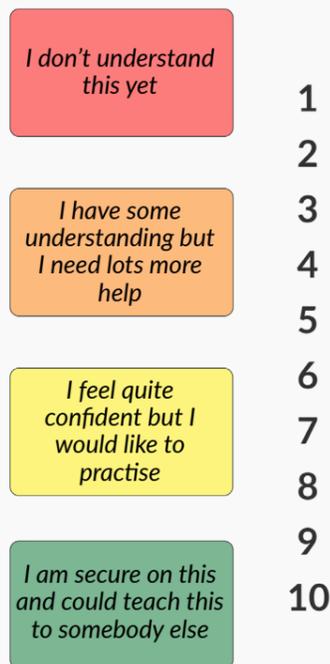
- their important learning about wellbeing
- the indicators that they feel they are making most progress on through learning in SPHE
- the indicators that they would like to make progress on and how this might be done.

Keep it simple!

It's sometimes useful to do a quick check-in on students' learning. This can be done at the end of a lesson by asking students to respond to prompts such as:

Today I learned... The most useful thing I will take from this lesson is... This is useful to me because ...

Another quick check-in method is **traffic-lighting** as shown below:



Further helpful resources

Practical ideas to help you develop your ongoing assessment practices are available [here](#). These **prompts** (available from <https://www.ourvoicesourschools.ie/>) suggest some ways that students' voices can be heard in ongoing assessment practices.

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Summative assessment linked to success criteria

In addition to the assessment approaches suggested above, SPHE teachers also need to plan formal assessment activities to check students' progress in achieving the learning intentions related to a series of lesson or a unit of learning.

This requires planning rich assessment tasks as part of your planning for teaching and learning, sharing the learning outcomes and learning intentions with your students and agreeing how your students will demonstrate their learning linked to criteria for success. For guidance on how to plan teaching, learning and assessment using learning outcomes, learning intentions and success criteria go to **Focus on learning**.

Focus on learning

The outcome of these assessments can be used to support conversations with your students about their learning and to report students' progress and achievement to parents/carers.

Peer and self-assessment

Peer and self-assessment are very powerful methods of assessment which activate students as learning resources for themselves and one another. Well-managed peer feedback provides opportunities for collaborative learning in SPHE and also builds the skills students need to be able to assess their own work.

To be successful, it requires

- clarity regarding the success criteria for the piece of work under discussion
- practice (led by the teacher through coaching, modeling and formative feedback)
- some guidance on how to give constructive feedback to peers.

Ways to enable student voice and choice

This can be achieved by

- inviting student input into what will be assessed and how
- involving students in designing assessment tasks
- inviting students to co-create success criteria and discussing with them what a really good piece of work might look like
- discussing with students how they would like to show evidence of their learning - written, oral, visual, multi-modal?
- building students' skills in peer and self-assessment
- agreeing with your students how feedback will be given and used to plan next steps
- checking in with them what forms of teaching, learning and assessment best support their learning.
- providing choice as to how the students will show evidence of their learning. What will they make/write/do? How will they present their learning - oral, written, visual, art-based, etc.? Think about ways that you can allow for multiple means of expression that will allow all learns to engage in the task. See UDL guidelines for more on this [here](#)
- allowing for a mix of in-class assessment with take home assessment tasks
- allowing for a mix of individual and group/paired assessment tasks