

**A Guide for post-primary schools in developing a policy for the use of
assessment instruments (including tests and web-based resources)**

National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)

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Introduction

The aim of this guide is to facilitate school management and staff in developing a policy on the use of assessment instruments in schools. Assessment instruments include achievement/attainment, ability and diagnostic tests. For more information on definitions and good practice requirements in schools, please refer to the Department of Education and Skills *Circular Letter 0035/2017*. The link is provided below.

This guide sets out areas which should be considered and addressed when assessment instruments are administered to students. In addition, the appendices contain a number of templates which may be used to support the development of a school policy on the use of assessment instruments.

For additional information on the practice of employing assessment instruments in schools, please consult the following:

- Department of Education & Skills (2015) – *Circular Letter 0034/2015* https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0035_2017.pdf
- NCCA Education Passport: <https://www.ncca.ie/en/primary/reporting-and-transfer/report-card-templatescreator>
- NCGE School Guidance Handbook (2015): Declan Fitzgerald - *Video Role Play: Provision of Feedback on Psychometric Test Results* <https://www.ncge.ie/school-guidance-handbook/video-role-play-provision-feedback-psychometric-test-results>
- NCGE The School Guidance Handbook (2015): Hugh Jones - *Data Protection: Consent in the School Context* <https://ncge.ie/school-guidance-handbook/data-protection-consent-school-context-issues-plan>
- NCGE School Guidance Handbook (2014): Declan Fitzgerald and Ciara Farrell - *Best Practice, Ethical and Legal Considerations in Psychometric Testing for Guidance Counsellors* <https://www.ncge.ie/school-guidance-handbook/best-practice-ethical-and-legal-considerations-psychometric-testing>
- NCGE School Guidance Handbook (2018): Hugh Jones - *Data protection for the Guidance Counsellor (GDPR)* <https://www.ncge.ie/school-guidance-handbook/data-protection-guidance-counsellor-gdpr>

Guidance on Developing a Policy

The following areas should be addressed by a school's policy on the use of assessment instruments.

1. Purpose of the policy and definition of assessment instruments (the different categories employed by schools should be specified i.e. achievement/ability/interest/diagnostic etc).
2. Staff roles and responsibilities for the policy (what staff are involved in the development, implementation and review of this policy).
3. Policy content:
 - a. Rationale for the administration of assessment instruments in schools (differentiate between achievement, ability, interest and diagnostic tests as they may serve very different purposes – the purpose of all should be outlined, as data protection legislation requires that data are processed in accordance with the purpose for which it was gathered in the first place. Examples of the purpose of administering ability tests include, screening purposes, to assist with subject choice etc).
 - b. Informed consent procedures – consent of parents (when the student is under 18 years) and students – how consent will be sought.
Parental consent for the administration of assessment instruments should be sought at the time of enrolment of the student in the school. Parents should be advised, at the point of entry, of the range of assessment instruments that could potentially be administered to their child, for the purposes of supporting their child's learning and development. Parents should be advised that they will be informed of the results of all tests administered.
 - c. The purpose of employing assessment instruments needs to be clearly outlined in the parental/guardian consent form. The consent form, which should cover test administration during the five/six years of the student's time in the school, can be signed once the student has been enrolled. The consent form should include the following information:
 - i. when¹ the assessment instruments will be administered i.e. first year/transition year etc
 - ii. information on how the data will be processed
 - iii. who will have access to the data and how it will be used by the school
 - iv. how long the data will be held (and where) by the school
 - v. how the results will be communicated to parents and students.
 - d. Administration, scoring, interpretation and feedback – roles and responsibilities within the school staff. Only appropriately qualified and competent school staff (please refer to: https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0035_2017.pdf)

¹ It is advised that assessment instruments should only be administered to students who are currently enrolled in the school and not prior to enrolment. The Education Passport supports the transfer of pupil information from primary to post-primary schools and facilitates post-primary schools in addressing the needs of students.

should be involved in the administration, scoring, interpretation and feedback of assessment instruments. All staff involved in the administration of such instruments need to follow, precisely, the instructions set out in the manual so that test reliability and validity are high.

- e. Administration of instruments to students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), English as an Additional Language (EAL) etc. Please note that it may not be appropriate to administer certain instruments to students with additional needs.
 - f. Processing of and access to data - how will the data be processed and who will have access to the data, and why.
 - g. Data storage and retention – where will it be kept i.e. in hard copy/softcopy, and how long the information will be retained by the school. Please note that if assessment instruments are completed online it is the responsibility of the school to establish where the data are stored. If the data are stored electronically outside of the EU there are data protection implications. Please note that in the case of some instruments some publishers indicate that they will use the data for research purposes. In this event, this needs to be explained to parents/guardians and students in respect to informed consent.
 - h. Provision of feedback to parents and students re test scores (please note that the student owns the data and therefore is entitled to have access to it under the legislation). How will the test scores be presented to parents and students e.g. raw scores, standard scores etc? The school should ensure that test scores² are presented in a way that is readily understood by parents and students.
4. Date policy approved by the BOM
 5. Review of the policy –date agreed for review and updating of policy.

² Note: Percentiles should not be used as they can be confused with percentages and are not easily understood.

Appendix I: Assessment Instruments Policy Template

This template can be used by schools when developing a policy on assessment instruments.

School Name (in full):

Purpose of this Policy:

Definition of Assessment Instruments for the purposes of the policy:

Staff roles and responsibilities in relation to this policy:

Date policy approved by BOM:

Date for review of policy:

Policy Content Prompts

Purpose of Testing in the School Purpose & when administered i.e. what year groups
Informed Consent³ How sought & from whom
Staff involved in Administering Assessment Instruments (including interpretation of scores, provision of feedback) Indicate staff involved, roles & responsibilities
Administration to students with SEN/EAL etc Additional considerations for SEN/EAL students
Access to Data Who has access & why
Data Storage & Retention Where stored, what format, how long for
Provision of Feedback To whom, how feedback will be provided, format of feedback – raw scores, standard scores...

³ Informed consent can be sought on one occasion at the time of student enrolment as per 3b above.

Appendix II: Parental Consent Form Template

This template can be used and modified by schools in seeking parental consent for the administration of assessment instruments to students.

Date:

Re: Administration of Assessment Instruments to Students

Dear Parent/Guardian and Student,

During your daughter's/son's education in *School Name*, (s)he will have the opportunity to engage in a wide range of assessment activity as part of normal teaching and learning.

Other specialist tests may also be administered to support your daughter's/son's educational development and learning as well as his/her career development. Such tests may include achievement, ability, diagnostic and interest tests.

The results of all such tests will be shared with parents and students. There may also be occasion to administer tests on an individual basis to your son/daughter to support his/her learning, progress and achievement. Such tests will only be administered following consultation with parents.

I enclose a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) information sheet which may address any additional questions you may have in relation to the above. In addition, the school's policy on the use of assessment instruments is available from the school's website www.websiteaddress.ie

If you would like to find out more please do not hesitate to contact x member of staff.

Please return the completed Consent Form below to the school secretary by (indicate date).

Your sincerely
Principal/Staff member

Consent form

I, the parent/guardian of (full name of child) give consent for assessment instruments to be administered to my son/daughter while he/she is a student in the school.

Name of parent/guardian: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix III: FAQ Information Sheet for Parents/Guardians Template

This template can be used, and modified, by schools to inform parents/guardians on the school's use of assessment instruments with students.

Who will be involved in the administration of assessment instruments?

Administration of assessment instruments will be undertaken by appropriately qualified school staff only, which in some instances will involve subject teachers, the school guidance counsellor and/or the learning support teacher (depending on the nature of the test).

How will the information be protected?

The school will ensure that the information, in line with data protection requirements, is kept secure with access confined to designated school staff. In the case of electronic information this will be kept secure through password protection. Only designated school staff will have access to this password.

Who will be able to access the information and results?

In order to ensure that your son/daughter receives an education that best supports his/her development, the information and results may be shared with your son/daughter's teachers in accordance with established test practice. This is to ensure that teaching approaches can be adapted to accommodate the different learning needs and styles of students. In addition, the guidance counsellor and the learning support teacher will have access to the information.

How long will the school retain the information?

The school will retain the information until seven years after your son/daughter has left school. This is in line with data protection requirements.

Will we be informed of the results?

All parents/guardians will be informed of the test scores achieved by their sons/daughters. The information will be presented in accordance with established test practice and in a format that is easily understood.

Students will also receive feedback on how they did. This will be through a meeting with either the guidance counsellor/learning support teacher or the subject teacher who administered the test.

My child has a Special Educational Needs (SEN) or takes English as an Additional Language (EAL), is further testing appropriate?

In the event that your child has been identified as having a SEN or is an EAL student, and you have disclosed this information to the school, it may not be necessary or appropriate for your child to take a specific test. A member of the school staff will be in touch with you prior to the administration of a test to discuss this further with you.

More Information

Department of Education & Skills (2015). *Circular Letter 0034/2015*
https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0035_2017.pdf

JMB (2013). *Data Protection in Schools* <http://www.dataprotectionschools.ie/en/>

Declan Fitzgerald (2015). *Video Role Play: Provision of Feedback on Psychometric Test Results*. In the NCGE School Guidance Handbook.

<https://www.ncge.ie/school-guidance-handbook/video-role-play-provision-feedback-psychometric-test-results>

Declan Fitzgerald and Ciara Farrell (2014). *Best Practice, Ethical and Legal Considerations in Psychometric Testing for Guidance Counsellors*. In the NCGE School Guidance Handbook. <https://www.ncge.ie/school-guidance-handbook/best-practice-ethical-and-legal-considerations-psychometric-testing>

Hugh Jones (2015). *Data Protection: Consent in the School Context*. In the NCGE School Guidance Handbook. <https://ncge.ie/school-guidance-handbook/data-protection-consent-school-context-issues-plan>

Hugh Jones (2018). *Data Protection for the Guidance Counsellor (GDPR)*. In the NCGE School Guidance Handbook. <https://www.ncge.ie/school-guidance-handbook/data-protection-guidance-counsellor-gdpr>

NCCA (2015). *Standardised Testing for Primary Education*.
<https://www.ncca.ie/media/1354/standardised-testing.pdf>

NCCA Education Passport:

<https://www.ncca.ie/en/primary/reporting-and-transfer/report-card-templatescreator>