

6. How do assessment and curriculum relate to one another? Surely curriculum comes before assessment?

In the first place, it is impossible to make any neat separation between curriculum and assessment. Assessment may be seen as part of curriculum, and assessment planning should be an integral part of curriculum development. But assessment also makes specialised claims of its own as an area of practice, and can influence the content, methods and systemic aspects of a curriculum. Assessment makes an excellent starting point and closing point when dealing with broad questions of curriculum. Assessment reflects curriculum and shapes it at the same time.

One could summarise by saying that curriculum development involves sets of issues which range from broad philosophical concerns (such as the nature of knowledge, the kinds of values you want to promote, approaches to teaching and learning) to more technical aspects such as materials, delivery and implementation issues. While an assessment model may also address such areas, it homes in on the outcomes or results of learning, the evidence needed to show these outcomes (and progress towards them), assessment methods, and criteria for grading of performance. However, it needs to be stressed that the assessment approach – that is, what is valued in the assessment model – will have an impact on the curriculum, and on teaching and learning.

In the NQF approach to outcomes based education and training, the focus has (ideally) been on broad rather than narrow outcomes. This has suggested assessment activities that:

- involve applying skills rather than only recognizing or reproducing facts or ideas
- demand the performance of complex tasks
- lead to real products or solutions
- are set in a meaningful context that connects different ideas.

This approach implies that, at a classroom level, there does not always have to be a sharp divide between learning something, and having that learning assessed. If both learning and assessment are things that happen through processes and performances, any task or activity can be an event in which the student learns by combining and practising various skills, while also being assessed on a demonstration of designated outcomes.

[Answer to FAQ 6, The NQF and Assessment, the NQF Gateway]