RCN and RCNi Education, Learning and Development Strategy 2021-2024

Underpinning evidence in the development and enhancement of RCN Quality Assurance Framework

Assessment of learning activity framework

CORPORATE

Acknowledgements

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Contents

Background

The RCN and RCNi is committed to providing an inclusive, supportive and inspirational learning environment, where the entire health and social care workforce feel encouraged to share their knowledge, skills and experience. All education, learning and development are included in the RCN and RCNi Education, Learning and Development Strategy (ELD). This includes informal, formal/accredited programmes, practical/skills-based, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) (including for revalidation) and Lifelong Learning (LLL) which contributes to career development and progression.

At the commencement of the RCN and RCNi ELD Strategy project it was identified that a review of the quality assurance models underpinning the delivery of education and learning required a formal evidence review. Four workstream pillars undertook an evidence review of the following aspects of education, learning and development:

• Pillar 1 Identifying a programme framework – a needs assessment for ELD activity

• Pillar 2 Identifying the policies required to underpin the learner journey

• Pillar 3 Assessment of learning activity

• Pillar 4 Evaluation of learning activity

Each of these workstream pillars had a range of stakeholders involved in task and finish groups. Staff stakeholders were engaged from across the RCN and RCNi and across the UK. The outputs from these workstreams were scrutinised by the RCN Professional Nursing Committee Task and Finish group for the development of the ELD Strategy.

The Royal College of Nursing offers both trade union and professional learning, education, advice and support for our members and RCNi , our group publishing house which offers learning through RCNi learning. This strategy is the first ever opportunity to address education learning and development as a joint offer for the UK.

The RCN and RCNi ELD Strategy vision is:

'To provide RCN leadership and influence across the entire UK health and social care workforce through the provision of quality education, learning and development.'

The ELD offer will enable the development of a competent and capable workforce, influencing, leading and delivering person centred safe and effective health and social care. The ELD Strategy supports the growth, recruitment and retention of the entire workforce.

The figure below outlines the quality assurance processes required for the development of all education and learning resources.

Fig. 1: Four pillars for developing education, learning and development

RCN and RCNi STRATEGY 2021-2024

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF RCN and RCNi EDUCATION LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

1 — PROGRAMME FRAMEWORK

2 — ELD POLICY FRAMEWORK

3 — ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

4 — EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

RCN Centre of Excellence for Education, Learning and Development
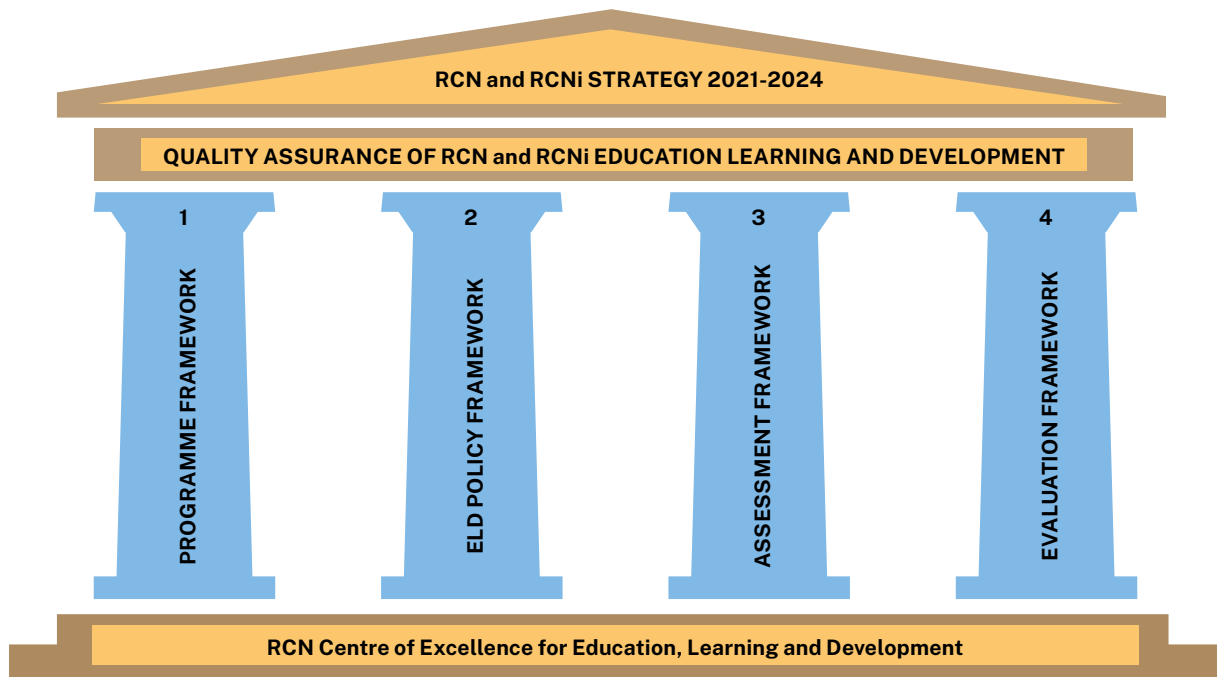
3.0 Introduction

Assessment is an essential element of the process of learning and as such requires a robust process to guarantee the efficacy of the programme/learning resource. Higher Education learning needs to be measurable, fair, reliable, and transparent. It should be independently assured through external examiner confirmation for inclusion and equity to encourage academic integrity (Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), 2018). As the RCN and RCNi expand their provision, assessments need to articulate achievement across all levels from informal learning to higher academic levels and ensure, thorough quality assurance processes, credibility and validation, supported by policy and process.

A critical review of current evidence has been undertaken to:

- review existing assessment frameworks
- develop a 'best fit' in assessment frameworks which may be universally applied to RCN and RCNi learning resources
- ensure best quality outcomes and Higher Education Institute compliance.

3.1 The aim

To ensure that ELD programmes address assessment as part of their holistic design, delivery and review.

3.2 The project objectives

	Original project objective	Outcome measures
1	to ensure a framework upholds RCN values – reflecting professional standards and regulatory requirements	... provision of standards and guidelines which reflect the RCN governance requirements
2	to align with a system of quality assurance to maintain standards of proficiency of nurses in safeguarding the public	
3	to ensure a framework would be inclusive of all four country educational assessment needs	... implement an assessment framework applicable to all four countries
4	to generate a framework which reflects the needs/specifics of educational products across the UK wide RCN and RCNi	... implement a framework inclusive and reflective of RCN and RCNi educational levels of assessment
5	to produce a framework which could be applied to different levels of educational assessment/descriptors	
6	to develop an assessment framework to conform to HEI standards	... implement RCN and RCNi standards and guidelines to support the development of assessments addressing HEI requirements

3.3   Background

In preparation of the above, the development of an Assessment Framework to complement the suite of RCN and RCNi learning resources is an important step in assuring that the ELD offer from the RCN has currency in the Higher Education Institute (HEI) arena and meets UK national standards. As such, it is a vital component of the future plans for the RCN and RCNi across the UK to deliver on the Education Learning & Development (ELD) Strategy. Current RCN and RCNi provision of education, learning and development encompasses a wide remit in terms of objectives and outcomes. Much of the current resource relates to learning to enrich people's understanding, perspectives and experience which may or may not be academically accredited or formally acknowledged. It is argued that not all learning activity and delivery must necessarily result in measurable outcome/output, as learning for professional or personal development doesn't always generate or necessitate the need for formal assessment, however evidence of engagement is beneficial.

In acknowledgement that all learning does not require formal assessment the framework would aim to guide the development of an assessment strategy best suited for the learning in question to conform to a set of validated minimum standards. This would not be an additional requirement where a learning resource or programme is externally validated and accredited. RCN accreditation, credentialing and endorsement processes are also exempt from application of this process as they have robust quality assurance processes to follow through current formal RCN procedures.

3.4 Critical evidence review

3.4.1 Overview of the models

Fig. 2: The steps of educational resource development
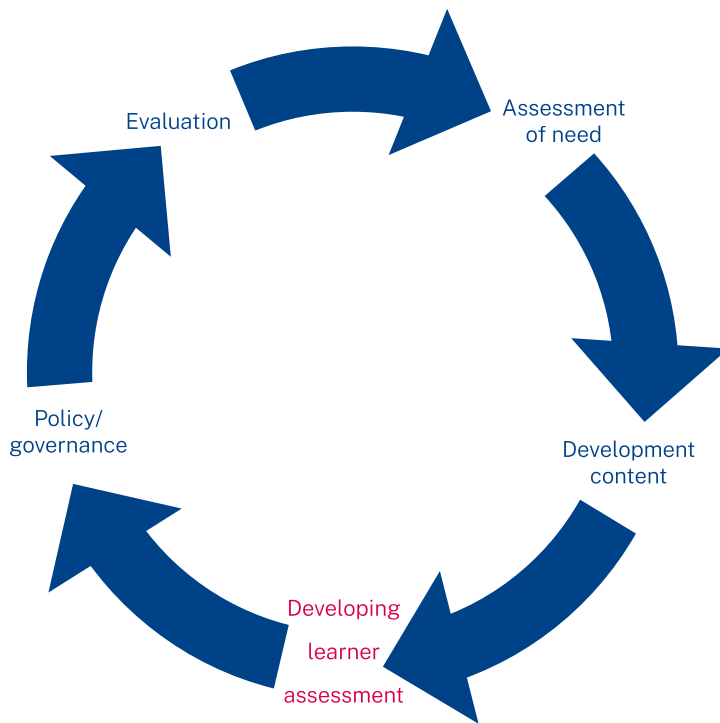
The above diagram represents where learner assessment fits into the development of an RCN and RCNi ELD offer. The provision of RCN and RCNi ELD is broad, consisting of a wide range of learning programmes and events at varying educational levels, which must accommodate and acknowledge achievement (often as assessment) along a continuum. Provision must acknowledge all types of learning including informal, formal/accredited programmes, practical/skills-based, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) (including for revalidation) and Lifelong Learning (LLL) which contributes to career development and progression.

Fig. 3: Styles of learning and related assessment

informal	informative/entry level	personal reward
formal	cognitive/enquiry/ knowledge acquisition	credit bearing
practical	skill and ability acquisition	competence/capability
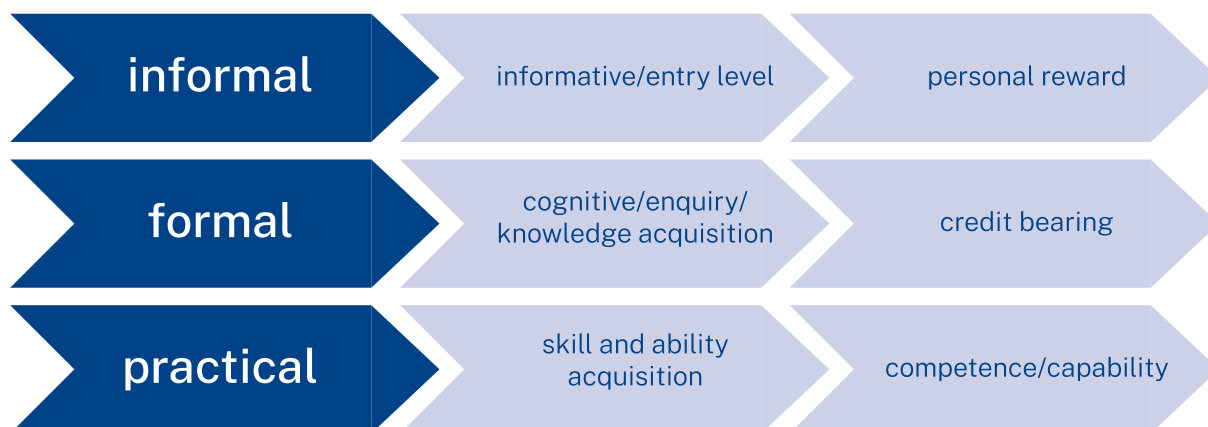
Delivery of excellence in education and learning provision requires the RCN and RCNi ELD offer to be quality assured to meet and maintain the highest standards (RCN, 2019). As part of the quality assurance/governance process and justification of the need for learning delivery, evidence that learning had taken place is required in the form of assessment. In this instance 'assessment' is used loosely to indicate evidence of learning via an output/outcome that is manifested through different approaches/models. As part of the RCN standards the element of assessment must meet the demands required to achieve and evidence learner competence and capability specified in the learning outcomes (LO) of their programmes and match the UK Nationally recognised descriptors for award confirmation (QAA, 2018).

3.4.2 Thematic analysis

Themes emerging from the literature

1. the purpose of assessment

2. the nature of assessment and constructive alignment in assessment design

3. impact of assessment: inclusion and quality assurance.

3.4.2.1 The purpose of assessment

Exploration of assessment need requires consideration of for whom or what assessment is being undertaken and to concentrate on where the main emphasis is found. This approach embodies the idea that assessment takes place in the service of particular interests and, far from being a singular and fixed entity, will shift as those interests pull it in different directions. "The fundamental purpose of assessment in education is to establish and understand the points that students (either as individuals or groups) have reached in their learning at the time of assessment" (Masters, 2015 p1).

Archer's (2017) Assessment Purpose Triangle best addresses the balance required between the competing purposes of assessment. Those being: assessment to support learning (formative), assessment for accountability (quality assurance) and assessment for certification, progress and transfer (summative). Archer's work highlights the

significance and benefits of the different types of purposes of assessment applied to different 'user groups,' which were adopted within the RCN guidance.

3.4.2.2 Defining assessment – The nature of assessment and constructive alignment

Explanations helping to clarify assessment include those from Angello (1995), Palomba & Banta (1999) and Ewell (2002), the key facets of which are: a focus on student learning, the collection, analysis, and interpretation of information and the application for the purpose of improvement. These elements informed the RCN definition.

The type or nature of assessment is often determined by the purpose of learning. Biggs and Tang (2011) argue that intended learning outcomes (ILOs) should be developed in the first instance and that all teaching and assessment can then be constructively aligned to support these ILOs. A constructively aligned assessment would therefore use a method that would best indicate that the learning outcomes have been met and would follow on from the learning. For a practical skill this may involve a certain number of clinical hours or a simulated assessment such as an objective structured clinical examination (OSCE). Constructive alignment in assessment design considers the links between the learning outcomes, the teaching and learning activities and the assessment tasks. The main theoretical underpinning of the outcomes-based curriculum is provided by Biggs (2003) who advocates the use of a learning taxonomy to enable understanding of required achievement (such as Bloom, 1956 or Biggs & Collis, 1982). This approach is reflected in the proposed guideline 'process'. Please see Appendix 1.

As currently articulated, the model is attributed to Biggs (2003, 1999) but the essentials were formulated by Tyler (1949) some 50 years earlier – and elaborated in the 1980s by Shuell (1986). At its most basic, the model requires alignment between the three key areas of the curriculum, namely, the intended learning outcomes, what the student does in order to learn, how the student is assessed.

3.4.2.3 Impact of assessment, inclusion and quality assurance

The choice of method of assessment can have a significant impact on students' approaches to learning (Ramsden, 1988), encouraging deeper learning or giving the impression that surface learning will suffice. Using more diverse assessment methods allows for the measurement of a potentially wider range of knowledge, competence and skills. This can also improve accessibility and inclusion, as those students who are disadvantaged by a particular assessment method could demonstrate their full range of abilities. When selecting an assessment method, the length of time that it will take to implement, administer, mark and provide feedback and whether the time and effort required is warranted by the course objectives needs to be considered. The outcome of assessment also tends to be the key focus of the impact for the student. The type of the assessment is therefore critical in terms of determining the impact, but it is also essential to remember that assessment is a point in time. As such some assessments need to be regularly repeated for currency and competence. Revalidation of nursing registrants is an example of why re-assessment is critical and how the relevance of the outcome is important to the learner. The step-by-step processes within the guidelines reflect these considerations.

Assessment guidance is addressed in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (QAA 2018) and acts as a benchmark for achieving quality and standards in all assessment frameworks. The document sets out expectations and core practices for HE providers in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. It provides practical advice in applying its 10 Guiding Principles to the design, implementation and review of assessments. Though not mandatory they are a 'concise expression of the fundamental practices of the higher education sector' (p4). The SQA (2017) demand that all their qualifications meet their assessment Principles which reflect those of the UK quality code and are reiterated throughout the OCNLR (2020) assessment guidance. The RCN assessment guidance includes 10 principles which satisfy the four country requirements.

3.5 Summary of the evidence review

The QAA define assessment as follows:

> 'Assessment is a fundamental aspect of the student learning experience. Engagement in assessment activities and interaction with staff and peers enables learning, both as part of the task and through review of their performance. It is a vehicle for obtaining feedback. Ultimately, it determines whether each student has achieved their course's learning outcomes and allows the awarding body to ensure that appropriate standards are being applied rigorously. Deliberate, systematic quality assurance ensures that assessment processes, standards and any other criteria are applied consistently and equitably, with reliability, validity and fairness.' (UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Advice and Guidance 'Assessment.' QAA England, 2018:2).

This definition encapsulates the different elements of assessment which the evidence search has highlighted and consequently require consideration within our RCN and RCNi assessment framework. The evidence review highlighted the need to establish a working definition of 'assessment,' prior to development of the assessment framework. Assessment has been defined exponentially with numerous working definitions aligned to specific levels of learning. Fundamentally the RCN view evolved from an amalgam of various definitions (Palomba & Banta, 1999; Ewell, 2002; Angello, 1995; QAA, 2018; SQA, 2017; OCNLR, 2020) resulting in an RCN perspective.

The RCN view is that assessment is the means by which a learner's skills, knowledge and abilities (tailored to their grade and specialism) are reviewed in order to evaluate what they are learning and what they have learned, to ensure safe and effective practice.

Through scoping style and database searches and including Taylor and Francis Online (an education specialist publisher) and Google Scholar to draw on a wider lens of literature, several themes emerged as expressed above. Having identified the purpose, nature, constructive alignment and impact of assessment, these informed the development of RCN guidelines for assessment focussing on the 3 priorities of 'Purpose – Principles – Process.' The Purpose was influenced by Archer's (2017) 'Assessment Purposes Triangle,' illustrating the balancing of purposes that needs to be considered in assessment for educational quality. The Principles were informed by those stipulated in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (QAA, 2018), and the Process provides a step by step, three stage approach of plan, implement, evaluate, which integrates with the RCN Nine Quality Standards (RCN 9QS).

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (HE) is deemed the 'definitive reference point for all UK higher education providers' (QAA, 2014 p3). It covers all four nations of the UK in identifying key principles essential for the assurance of academic standards and quality from all education providers and therefore which any HE academic product would have to adhere to. This provided a starting point from a 'macro' perspective and discussion stemmed from analysis of this document. The proposed guidelines would have to acquiesce to QAA rigor and were therefore informed by the HE standards in addition to the Scottish Qualifications Authority Guide to Assessment (2017) and The Open College Network Quality Assurance Assessment document (2020).

3.6 RCN stakeholder group

The purpose of the review was to gain views, evidence and information from a wide range of staff group stakeholders from across the RCN and RCNi and across the UK in order to inform the establishment of an agreed assessment framework. This needed to be fit for purpose across all learning and development delivery across the RCN and RCNi whatever its length, audience, environment, or participant. A qualitative approach was used to ensure a wide range of feedback that reflected views, opinions, and experiences.

In order to expedite the review stakeholders were asked to:

• review national quality assurance frameworks for education and learning (UK)

• review a range of assessment frameworks utilised within the RCN

• consider the literature collated on assessment frameworks

• review the draft report and provide feedback

• develop guidance form: Purpose and Principles for the Development of Assessment.

Ideas for a new model/framework emerged from an amalgam of reviewed RCN products and the evidence within the national frameworks. The focus was narrowed to best fit the desired/visualised 'end product.' An initial flow chart/algorithm was developed to clarify the process mapping and disseminated for comment. Additional group members joined, and Microsoft Teams was introduced to allow collaborative work on live documents. Sub-groups were also developed to disseminate workload and comments shared and fed into the process to inform an amended model. A final approach to align with other workstreams resulted in the development of RCN Guidance in the form of a stated Purpose, a set of Principles and a step-by step Process for the development of an assessment strategy.

3.6.1 Stakeholder discussion and feedback

The consideration of an assessment strategy requires a holistic approach to the development of a learning offer, where the nature of the learning and intended outcomes must first be established to ensure constructive alignment with the provision of learning (Biggs, 2003). Coupled with the fact that numerous RCN and RCNi ELD offers are externally accredited, 'assessment need' may be judged in relation to specific criteria.

• Assessment of learning (summative)

• Assessment for learning (formative)

• Assessment for assurance (quality assurance).

Establishing whether an assessment within a learning resource is necessary was therefore the logical initial step in the assessment development process. If this was the case the next step would need to determine the purpose. Approaches in identifying the purpose of assessment were explored (Masters, 2015; QAA, 2018; Archer, 2017) highlighting that assessments have more than one purpose, reiterated throughout the literature. A universal acknowledgement of the characteristics of assessment purposes emerged, though expressed through different terminology. Archer's (2017) 'Assessment Purposes Triangle' (APT) balanced the three main aspects of assessment to be considered equitably to ensure educational quality. Furthermore, it offered acknowledgement of the pressures of institutional funding, accrediting bodies, legislative requirements, and a competitive market. The APT (2017) was therefore

adapted and used to exemplify the 3 main purposes of assessment for RCN guidelines (see Appendix 1).

The purpose of assessment informs the type of assessment where alignment in assessment design benefits students by ensuring the validity, reliability and transparency of the assessments, and can help to ensure that the 'right' skills and knowledge are being assessed at the right time using appropriate methods. Biggs' (2003) definition of constructive alignment identifies:

> '... coherence between assessment, teaching strategies and intended learning outcomes in an educational programme' (McMahon & Thakore, 2006).

Further alignment to a learning taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) indicates that the learner grasps a deeper understanding of expectations (Anderson et al, 2001; Biggs & Collis, 1982). It was important that the RCN Assessment Framework would allow for flexibility within the approach to application of models most suitable/adaptable to the method of assessment. The range of education and learning approaches across the RCN and RCNi spans almost a whole spectrum necessitating acknowledgement within the 'process' guidelines. The RCN Principles of Assessment clearly support this approach to an outcomes-based curriculum.

In many cases assessment method is dictated by learning content and influenced by who, what, why, when and where the assessment is undertaken. The literature considered the choice of method and the impact on student learning (Brown, Gull & Pendlebury, 1997), highlights the advantages of peer assessment (Hughes, 1995) and the merits of formative versus summative assessment (Lau 2016). Discussion of impact includes that on the student in terms of student perception, inclusion and dissatisfaction of assessment and feedback (Gharaibeh, Hweidi & Al-Smadi, 2017; Deeley et al, 2019) highlighting the need for an evaluation of impact within an assessment cycle. This governs the quality assurance element of the assessment strategy feeding back into the purpose, nature and construction of future assessments (QAA, 2018). According to Reinholz (2015) this cyclical approach (the assessment cycle) ensures good quality assessment through design, implementation, evaluation and revision which constitute interrelated actions. The RCN Guiding Principles of Assessment uphold these values the elements of which have been captured in the step-by-step guidelines recommended as the outcome product of this piece of work, which have subsequently aligned to the RCN quality framework and nine quality standards.

The overarching governance processes in contemporary education demand maintenance of standards, a thread which was visible throughout the literature (Archer, 2017, Biggs & Tang, 2011, Biggs, 2003, Ewell, 2004). This theme was addressed through the development of a set of principles and guidelines aligned with the evidence base. These principles aim to ensure standards and quality are upheld and the RCN 'principles of assessment' (see Appendix 1) reflect the UK Quality Code for Higher Education requirements (2014) encompassing the four country frameworks, thus ensuring HEI readiness and meeting quality assurance and governance measures. In relation to assessment, such principles require a robust underpinning system of policies supporting: marking, moderation and external examination, re-assessment, complaints and appeals, accreditation of prior learning (APEL), programme interruption, academic integrity, fitness to practice, exam, assessment and award boards, student educational needs assessment and provision, equality and diversity.

3.7   Conclusions

The assessment of learning does not 'stand-alone' and is interdependent with teaching strategies, content, objectives, and outcomes. As such the assessment strategy should be viewed collectively with the other elements of ELD offered and be developed as part of a continuum of learning. The guidelines/assessment framework produced as a result of the workstream collaboration, align and overlap in some instances with the outcomes of the other ELD strategy workstreams. Thus, educational and learning resources should be reviewed holistically within the RCN quality framework contributing to nurses' lifelong learning and career development.

In considering and incorporating 'best practice' and evidence-based approaches, the RCN Assessment Framework aims to achieve participant/learner-centricity and ensure educational and learning products remain 'fit for purpose, with patient/public safety at heart. The Framework has therefore been developed to accommodate a wide range of types of learning provision at all levels, be inclusive and attractive for adult participants of learning, meet nationally recognised standards for delivery and be sufficiently flexible to adapt to evidence-based progression in the field.

The RCN Assessment Framework aligns closely with the RCN Competency template framework and sits in position with 'assessments' in the 'development of a learning resource cycle.'

3.8 Recommendations

Adoption of a bespoke assessment framework to be utilised across the RCN and RCNi based on research evidence and stakeholder analysis.

- Apply the Guidelines (Principles -Purpose -Process of Assessment) to all RCN and RCNi ELD.
- Integrate the assessment framework into the RCN Quality Framework for RCN professional resources to strengthen the quality assurance approach.
- Ensure proforma/ guidelines for assessment are placed in a repository of learning products including competency frameworks and are available digitally on-line.
- Agreement on universal 'educational' language across RCN and RCNi in published literature.

3.9 Proposed model

RCN Guidelines for Assessment of Learning (Appendix 1).

3.10 References

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3.11 Appendices

Appendix 1: Proposed RCN Guidelines for Assessment of Learning

Introduction

An assessment strategy needs to encompass various aspects of the learning process both to engage the learner and motivate to succeed. The aim of these guidelines to ensure that success is:

> to ensure that RCN Education Learning and Development programmes address assessment as part of holistic design, delivery and review.

The consideration of a holistic assessment strategy therefore must establish the purpose of assessment (Archer's Assessment Purpose Triangle, 2017) and the nature of the learning and intended outcome and conform to set standards or principles, as set out below. It is acknowledged that all learning does not require formal assessment and this framework aims to guide the development of the assessment strategy best suited for the learning in question to conform to a set of validated minimum standards. This framework does not apply to any ELD offer which is externally validated and accredited.
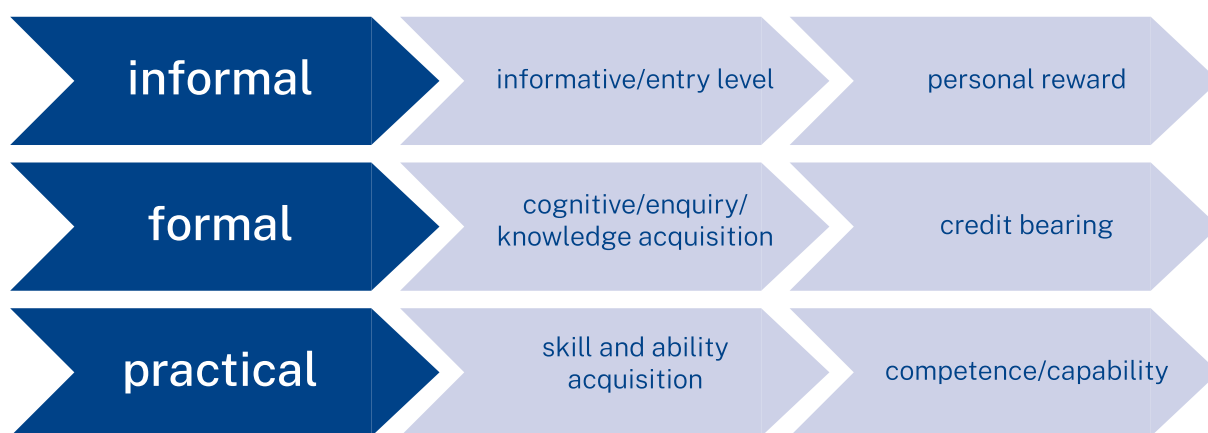
Context

Where assessment fits into the development of an RCN education/learning resource.

Fig. 1: The steps of educational resource development
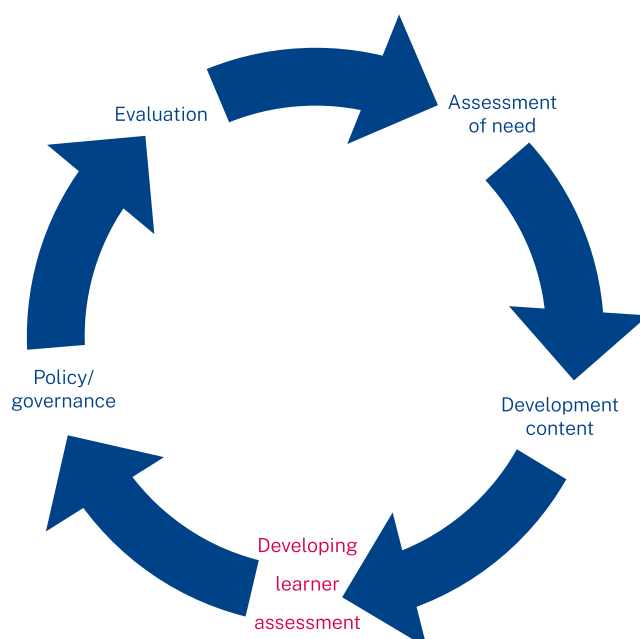
The provision of RCN and RCNi ELD offer is broad, consisting of a wide range of learning resources, programmes and events at varying educational levels, which must accommodate and acknowledge achievement (often as assessment) along a continuum. Provision must acknowledge all types of learning including informal, formal/accredited programmes, practical/skills based, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) (including for revalidation) and Lifelong Learning (LLL) which contributes to career development and progression.

Fig. 2: Styles of learning and related assessment

informal	informative/entry level	personal reward
formal	cognitive/enquiry/ knowledge acquisition	credit bearing
practical	skill and ability acquisition	competence/capability

In order to maintain excellence in education provision, the RCN and RCNi requires all learning products to be quality assured to remain relevant and meet and maintain the highest standards. As part of the QA/ governance process and to justify/validate the need for delivery of learning, evidence that learning had taken place is required in the form of assessment. In this instance 'assessment' is used loosely to indicate an output/outcome of learning which is manifest through different approaches/models.

Guidance on assessment

1. The purposes of assessment

The RCN views assessment as the means by which a learner's skills, knowledge and abilities are reviewed in order to evaluate what they are learning and what they have learned. However, there is more to assessment than the benefits to participants.

The assessment purposes triangle below illustrates the balancing of purposes that needs to be considered in assessment for educational quality. The three basic purposes of assessment are: assessment to support learning; assessment for accountability; and assessment for certification, progress, and transfer. All three need to be considered to support quality education.

## Fig. 3: Quality Education: Assessment Purposes Triangle (Archer 2017)
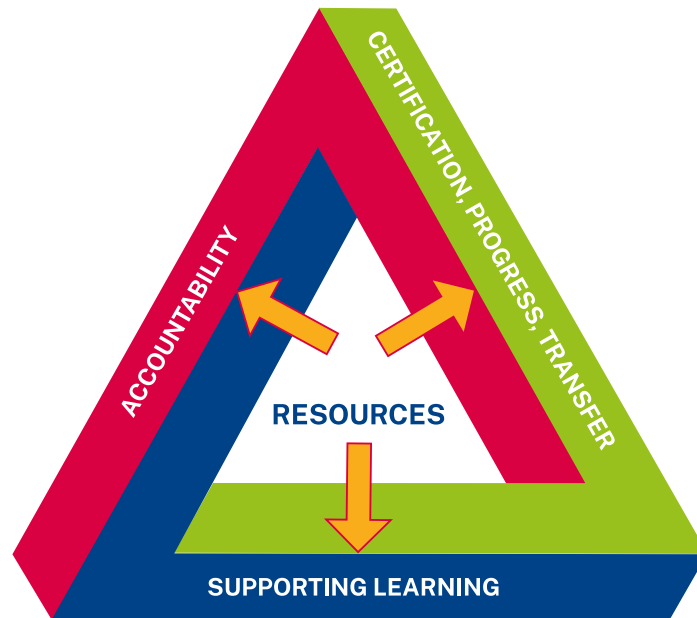
For the RCN's Education, Learning and Development Strategy we propose three types of assessment that need to be considered in order to deliver on the intention of high-quality ELD:

- **Assessment for Learning** is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by participants and their facilitators to decide where they are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there. Assessment for Learning is also known as **formative assessment**.

- **Assessment of Learning** refers to strategies designed to confirm what participants know, demonstrate whether or not they have met learning outcomes or the goals of the learning programme, or to certify proficiency or achievement. Assessment of Learning is also known as **summative assessment**.

- **Assessment for Assurance** refers to the use of participant assessment outcomes to support processes around accountability and course design. Seeing how participants interact with and achieve the intended outcomes helps to inform design and delivery of learning. And the assessment of participant achievement provides evidence of whether a programme is fit for purpose. These processes are part of programme **quality assurance**.

The interface between the types of assessment (above) and the assessment purposes triangle is demonstrated in .

Fig. 4: Types of assessment related to purpose
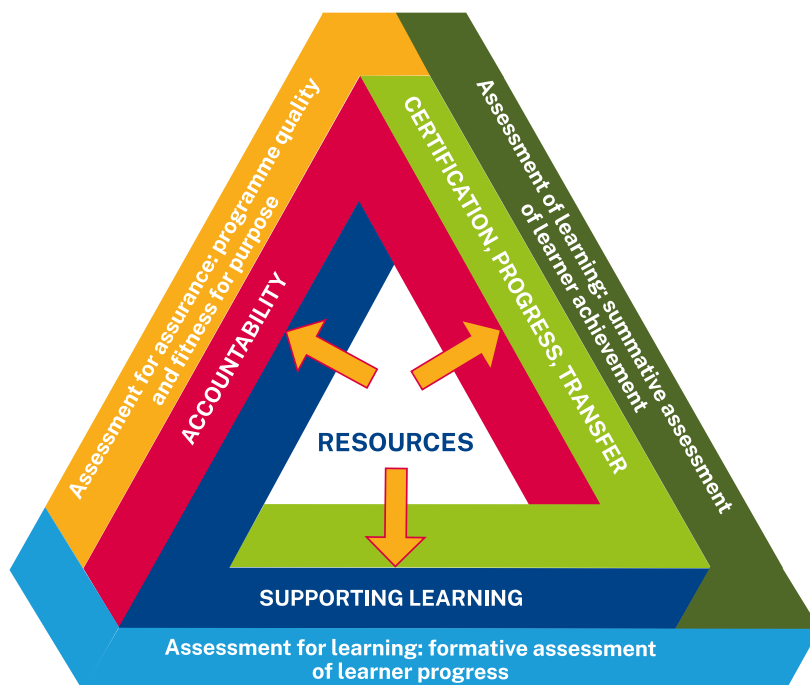
Purposes of assessment by user group

If we look at the purpose of assessment by user group, we can identify the following benefits:

For participant, assessment:

- acknowledges achievement, thereby providing a sense of accomplishment and increasing motivation to continue learning

- helps them to develop skills of self-assessment

- demonstrates and confirms what they have learned and still need to learn

- shows whether they have met all of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for the learning programme or event, which may then allow them to be awarded the credits, or certificate of completion, as appropriate.

For facilitators, assessment:

- provides objective information which enables them to give participants constructive feedback on their progress

- provides information which allows them to respond to individual participants needs

- Pprovides a framework for supporting decision making on participant achievement of intended outcomes

- provides information that supports them to reflect on their own practice as part of their personal development.

For programme/resource providers, assessment:

· helps evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a course

· demonstrates that a course has clear learning goals which are being met effectively.

2. Principles of assessment

Where participant assessment is considered to be appropriate for a programme, learning resource or event, the following RCN principles should be considered when designing assessment tasks.

Guiding principles

1. **Assessment methods and criteria are aligned and relevant to learning outcomes and programme/course activities.**
   It is clear to participants what they are expected to evidence in order to meet the assessment requirements.

2. **Assessment is reliable, consistent, fair and valid.**
   Assessment processes are objective, repeatable over time and comparable between assessors.

3. **Assessment design is approached holistically.**
   Assessment should cover all modes of programme delivery and learning event/resource and should consider a variety of assessment methods.

4. **Assessment is inclusive and equitable.**
   Every participant has an equal opportunity to demonstrate their achievement through the assessment process, with no group or individual disadvantaged.

5. **Assessment is explicit and transparent.**
   The assessment policy and approach is clear and available to participants.

6. **Assessment and feedback is purposeful and supports the learning process.**
   Assessment and feedback is fit for purpose and supports the participants to evidence their learning against learning outcomes.

7. **Assessment is timely.**
   Participants are given sufficient time and opportunity to engage in learning that builds their capacity for assessment.

8. **Assessment is efficient and manageable.**
   Assessment does not overload participants or staff involved in the assessment process and is proportionate to the notional learning hours and/or credit bearing level for the programme or learning event/resource.

9. **Participants are supported and prepared for assessment.**
   Preparation for assessment, and feedback on performance, support participants to achieve the required level.

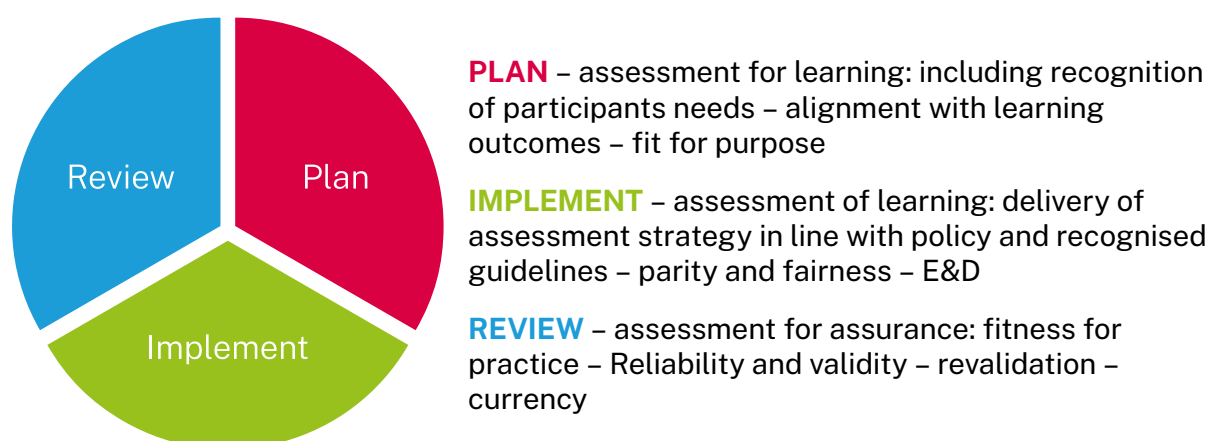10. **Assessment encourages intellectual integrity.**
    Assessment is designed to encourage participants to provide evidence that is clearly their own work.

3 Process of assessment

Application of principles – a step-by-step guide.

Three elements need to be considered in the design of an assessment strategy -

Fig. 5: Design of an assessment strategy

PLAN – assessment for learning: including recognition of participants needs – alignment with learning outcomes – fit for purpose

IMPLEMENT – assessment of learning: delivery of assessment strategy in line with policy and recognised guidelines – parity and fairness – E&D

REVIEW – assessment for assurance: fitness for practice – Reliability and validity – revalidation – currency

These loosely align with Archer's (2017) assessment purposes triangle and can be mapped to the RCN Principles of Assessment (2 above). In addition, the assessment sits within the learning programme/resource which, as part of a wider RCN QA process, integrate with the RCN Nine Quality Standards (9QS).

Table 1: Process of Assessment

PLAN			
Step	**Rationale**	**Aligns to Principle**	**Refer to RCN 9QS**
Step 1: initially establish what the objectives and intended learning outcomes of the learning resource/ event are.	This will dictate/influence the necessity for assessment and the type of assessment most suited to participants i.e., practical/ competency based or cognitive/academic.	1	1a
Step 2: consider what purpose and level of learning applies to the learning resource/ event.	This will guide the mode of assessment, i.e. formative or summative [refer to the purpose of assessment 1 above]. NB: formal/ informal, CPD – non/credit bearing – certificated…	1, 6 & 8	1a
Step 3: decide what model of assessment is most appropriate for the learning resource/ event.	The decision regarding the 'best fit' model will be influenced by the type of learning which needs to be addressed, and the level and purpose of learning as in steps 1 & 2. Consider also the most suitable assessor, i.e. placement mentor, subject specialist, peer etc and the nature of the environment for the delivery of the assessment, i.e. classroom/ simulation suite/ workplace etc	3, 4 & 10	1b
Step 4: ensure the assessment captures the correct levels of achievement.	This could range from a formative assessment or an informative learning resource/event where a facilitator may consider a verbal Q & A or quiz to be sufficient to a post graduate credit bearing assessment where a marking matrix might be appropriate or a clinical competency where a taxonomy may best capture the level of practical achievement. NB: consider Blooms Taxonomy, Millers Model or Benner's Novice to Expert Model	3, 5, 6, 8 & 9	1d & 1e
Step 5: rationalise the choice of assessment.	There should be a robust evidence base for the choice of assessment model applied to the learning resource/event. The reliability and validity of the assessment should be explicit. Where assessment equates with academic credit assessment models should conform to HEI standards.	2, 3, 6	1c & 3
Step 6: consider how the assessment strategy will look in the learning resource/ event.	Draw from the 3 elements of the assessment purposes triangle (1. Purpose of assessment – above). Where will it sit within the learning programme, will all the learning material have been delivered, will participants be sufficiently prepared, is there sufficient time for formative feedback to inform summative assessment, how long will it take, have all individual learning needs been catered for, is it sufficient to meet the external standards?	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8	1d, 1e & 4

IMPLEMENT				
Step	**Rationale**		**Aligns to Principle**	**Refer to RCN 9QS**
Step 7: think of the considerations and implication there might be for its delivery or implementation.	Things to consider might include:- availability of assessors/ moderators/ invigilators – availability of/space in exam rooms – workload of markers – pinch points in assessment with other programmes – scheduled time in simulation lab – access to resources (including consenting patients) – additional resources to address individual learning needs - submission criteria/ intellectual integrity – robust, fair & equitable marking matrix – timely feedback (addressing expectations)		1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8 & 10	1f
Step 8: ensuring authenticity.	This aligns with 'assessment for assurance' (1. Purpose of assessment – above) and should conform to quality standards.		All	1f & 2
REVIEW				
Step 9: maintaining currency and relevance to the participant.	Again, this aligns with 'assessment for assurance' (1. Purpose of assessment – above). The assessment strategy should be transparent, repeatable over time and subject to regular review and/or revalidation. Stakeholder and participant feedback and evaluation mechanisms ensure continuing fitness for purpose.		2	5 & 9
Step 10: achieving RCN approval.	The assessment strategy sits within the wider learning product/resource/activity which is subject to RCN approval. This process is accessible via the RCN Quality Framework lifecycle below.			6 & 9

Integration with the RCN Quality Framework

Assessment is an integral aspect of learning and any RCN and RCNi ELD offer must conform to RCN quality standards. The RCN Quality Framework (QF) outlines a lifecycle approach to quality assessment where an assessment strategy would integrate within an ELD offer, alongside several process steps (adopt/adapt/develop – plan/ adapt/develop – QA & signoff – evaluate – maintain/withdraw). The process of assessment steps outlined above indicate which of the nine quality standards they align with from the QF (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6: RCN Quality Framework (2019)

Summary

The above guide provides a process mapping out the steps involved in developing an assessment applied to an RCN learning product, in order to maintain minimum standards but aiming to contribute to the achievement of excellence in educational provision.

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RCN quality assurance

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Evaluation

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