

Assessment fit for purpose

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Assessment is a powerful educational tool. It influences the judgements of students and teachers about what is of most importance in the curriculum. The effects can be positive and can justify expectations of assessment-led reform. The effects can also be negative, for students, teachers, schools and the curriculum. It is important, therefore, for those responsible for assessment, particularly high-stakes assessment, to pay attention to the 'consequential validity' of their assessment systems. Assessment cannot be seen only as a technical task.

Assessment needs to be fit for purpose. The well-established distinction between formative and summative assessment is helpful in clarifying purpose and informing choice about method. The longstanding distinction between norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessment is also helpful in clarifying purpose but has become less relevant for choice about method because of the capacity of modern psychometric methods to dissolve the methodological distinction between them.