



Putting Our Students First-
Irish Senior Cycle Reform



e-Assessment
Awards 2022

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March 2022- The Changes Announced

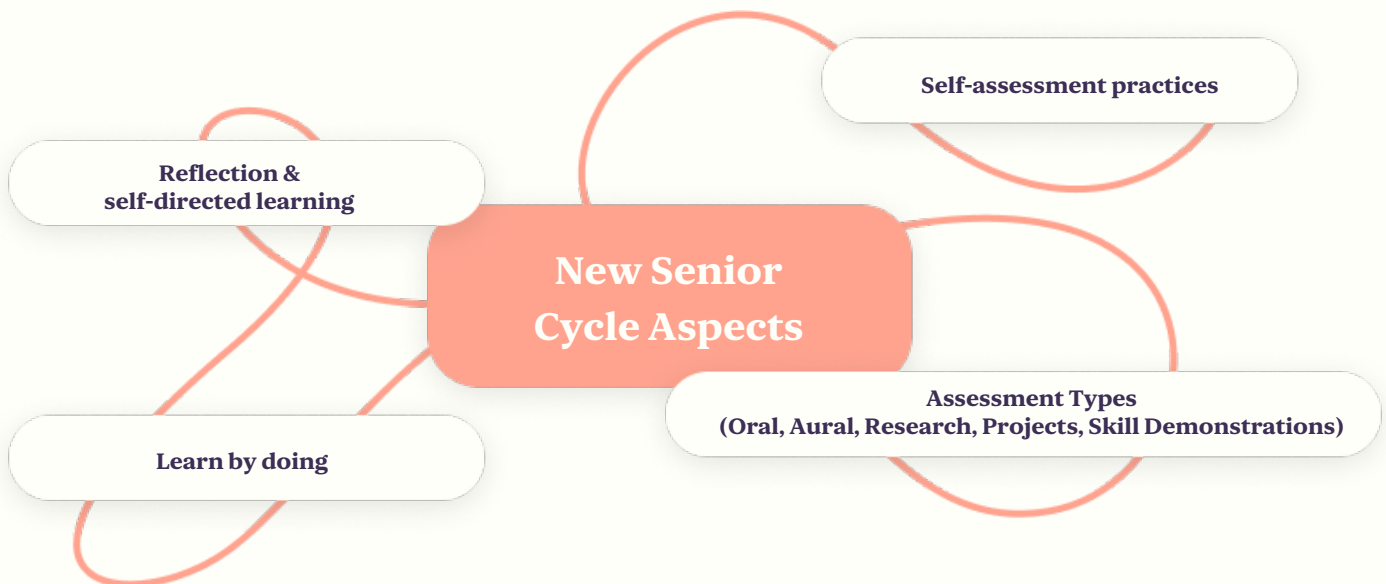


In March of 2022, Minister of Education Norma Foley announced that the Senior Cycle would undergo its most radical change ever. The biggest of which is the incorporation of Teacher Based Assessments which will now make up to 40% of the final result.

While we are still in the preliminary stages of this change, there is clear evidence of what other changes may be coming down the line.



From examining the report and press release provided by the Minister and her department, the following aspects will become core to the Senior Cycle process:



What you will learn:

In this document, we provide practical guidance on each of these aspects and discuss how using Nurture now will empower your teaching and increase student achievement prior to these changes being enacted.

Nurture has really helped my students to develop their self-regulation skills."

- Georgina, Teacher- Shireland Collegiate Academy



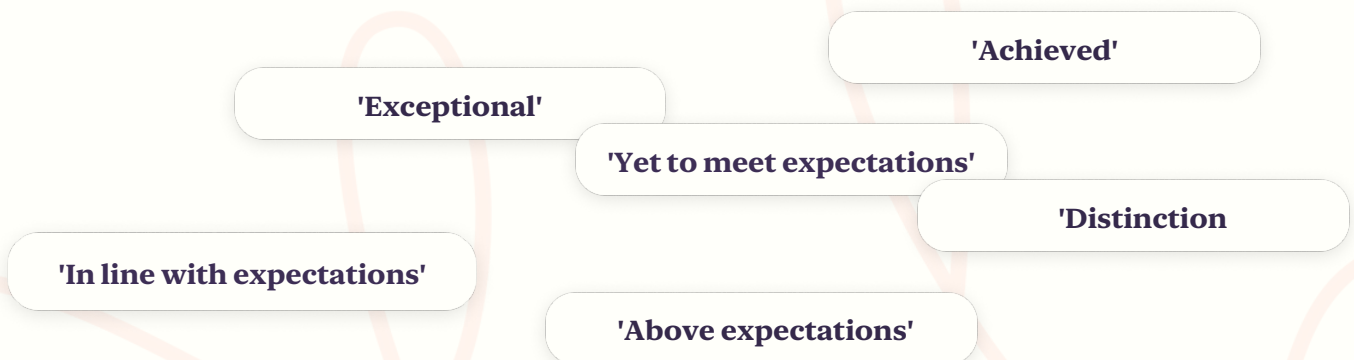


Teacher and State Exam Breakdown

The biggest change worth mentioning at the top of this document - particularly because it informs the rest - is the distribution of final grades. Moving from a traditionally 100 percent terminal exam to a 60/40 split.



Teacher based assessments will now form 40 percent of a student's final grade. The NCCA are currently investigating how to redevelop syllabi to include more teacher based assessments to reduce the stress of terminal examinations on students. Examining how reporting will be redeveloped it is clear that a focus on a more holistic view of student achievement will be emphasised; meaning we may see the introduction of descriptor based grading on certain skills or assessment tasks.



We will examine each of the proposed new additions to the senior cycle framework, offering our own insight and expertise - littered with some tips and tricks and finally showing you how Nurture can help prepare you for all these changes and be ahead of the curve come September 2023 onwards.




What's Desired Within The Move to More Teacher Based Assessment?




Reflection and Self-Directed Learning



While the Senior Cycle reform regards these as two separate aspects, it is vital to see the development of these two processes as one and the same. The ability to reflect and be self-directed in your learning relates back to one's ability to self-regulate. Self regulation examines the way students monitor, direct and regulate their actions towards the learning goal. The action of self-regulation implies a level of autonomy, self-direction, control and discipline. Those with minimal self-regulation abilities depend a lot more on external feedback factors such as their teacher or peers and rarely incorporate the feedback they receive in ways that will enhance their ability to self-regulate more effectively in the future. Reflection is an important process which develops the student's metacognitive capabilities. In developing metacognition, we help students develop their ability to self-regulate their learning - becoming more autonomous and self-directed. It starts with thoughts, actions and feelings which are self-generated and ends with a planned adaptation - a cyclical basis for improving personal goals and educational attainment.

At senior cycle, our students are more developed cognitively and as such, self-reflection practices should be much easier than for those in junior cycle. One successful strategy is to include a reflection piece at the end of each assessment or assignment. For example, asking students to reflect on their confidence and capability in answering a certain assessment will provide a point of reference for them when they receive feedback. Being able to see, in their own words, how they felt they did and comparing this to their score provides context for improvement. This reflective piece then becomes an actionable item for improvement going forward



Learn by Doing

Learn by doing is a term often linked with Kolb's experiential learning cycles - a theory which has been heavily criticised for its lack of foundation. However, in the near 30 years of its existence, no other theories have been proposed. Recently, [Morris \(2020\)](#) conducted a systematic review of experiential learning and made some recommendations which, for the purpose of this document, we will utilise. Experiential learning tries to clarify what a concrete learning experience is; in their proposed model Morris suggested that experiential learning (learn by doing) involves five key themes:

Experiential Learning

=

Learning by Doing



1. Learners are involved, active participants
2. Knowledge is situated in place and time
3. Learners are exposed to novel experience which involves risk
4. Learning demands inquiry to specific real world problems
5. Critical reflection acts as a mediator of meaningful learning

In other words, this approach consists of contextually rich concrete experience, critical reflective observation, contextual-specific abstract conceptualisation, and pragmatic active experimentation.

While some reading this may think that it isn't relevant to their subject, we suggest that, given the predicted changes to a more modular approach to subjects in senior cycle, planning should begin now toward incorporating some elements of a learn by doing approach. In the next section we will discuss how the new assessment elements such as project work, oral and aural, presentations etc. may be incorporated into all subjects, meaning that experiential learning can be integrated into every subject.



If you haven't done so already, try to map out some of these new methods to "real life" examples of your subject in action. For example, as an English learner you may have an interest in journalism, story writing or game scenario development. What skills would be involved in exploring these situations? How can we then create an assignment in line with these? Could we task students with a copy edit of a sport or political section of a particular newspaper - factoring in how copy editing may change in line with the ethos of the organisation and their bias.



Try this:



Top Tip: Use your current syllabus to draw on the curriculum links and match these with the Key Skills Framework to begin to understand how content and skills will mix at senior cycle; then incorporate an activity that assesses these. TY's are obviously a great place to experiment with this.



Assessment Types (Oral, Aural, Research, Projects, Skill Demonstrations & Presentations)

While concrete assessment types will not be provided until a framework for the new senior cycle is published, there are clear indications that the Department of Education are interested in integrating more project and inquiry based work into the syllabi. Specific examples given in their advisory report include: project work; oral and aural; research; skill demonstration and presentations.



We can take a cue from the style of assessment introduced in the Junior Cycle Framework back in 2015 to imagine what new assessment modals will be introduced. Given the emphasis on a “Learn by doing” approach, it is a safe bet to assume these new assessment types will involve more skill based challenges, providing the students with an opportunity to demonstrate their skill development in ways not possible during state exams.



The NCCA published the Senior Cycle Key Skill framework which we can use for identifying, targeting, tracking and providing feedback on skill development. Given that there are still some years until Senior Cycle Reform is implemented, use this as an opportunity to hone your ability to track skill development in students. There are five key skills in the Senior Cycle - information processing; communicating; being personally effective; working with others and critical and creative thinking. These are further broken down into elements and learning outcomes, which can be used as a foundation for assessment tasks. For example, under communicating, one of the elements is “engaging in dialogue, listening attentively and eliciting opinions, views and emotions”.



Self-Assessment Practices

Self assessment is an important tenet of developing students as lifelong learners. Self-assessment is the involvement of learners in making judgements about their achievements and the outcomes of their learning (Boud and Falchikov, 1989 p.529). As part of this process, students should be able to identify the standards which to apply in making their judgements. In being able to self-assess, the student gains an understanding of their own needs- a useful skill in preparing to become a lifelong learner. However, a narrow view of self-assessment would focus specifically on content attainment, ignoring the dimensions of skill demonstration and personal development which are particularly important for more holistic development. Allowing the learner the freedom to determine which dimension gets more attention for particular assignments is part and parcel of the self-assessment process and can be a good starting point for teachers to introduce and develop self-assessment practices.



One technique which we have seen work in school is a reflective piece on self-graded assignments. For example, providing a student with the rubric to assess their own work. Instead of asking them to reflect on the scoring or grading aspect of the process, ask them to reflect on how they felt during the process - when did they notice changes in their mood, or were there were moments of questioning their work. By asking them to reflect on the metacognitive aspect of the process, they are focussing solely on the personal development dimension. By recognising how they felt during this process they can then learn how to become more pragmatic in their corrections - recognising when ego may be hurt or engaged, or when a strong sense of preservation may have impaired their judgement will develop their assessment skills. Having a safe place to “fail” is key in ensuring engagement with self-assessment, it is a skill which students will need to work on to master; treating it like another graded piece of work will only lead to disengagement and disenfranchise them from the benefits of the process.



How Nurture aligns

In this document, we provided practical guidance on how new Senior Cycle changes will incorporate elements of teacher based assessments which will comprise of project based work, providing students an opportunity to reflect in a learn by doing approach which may involve demonstration of the key skills as set out in the key skills framework. Nurture has been used by educators all over the world to develop project based assignments which highlight particular skill development or focus on practising the assessment i.e. aural or oral practice.

As with any good assignment or assessment we must start with the goals of the task - what are the students expected to demonstrate in order to be successful? By making this explicit we achieve the first part of developing self-assessment practices - sharing and clarifying the learning goals. This is where our "Learning Objectives" feature helps. With this feature of Nurture you can set out the goals of the assignment as well as the skills needed using the key skills framework.

Assignment Learning Objectives

1

What are the **themes** of the poem?



Edit Feedback

2

Identify & **explain 3 literary devices** used:



Give Feedback

3

Summarise the poem into a tweet



Give Feedback

Try This:

Putting the skills into assignments is a great way to highlight the students development of each skill; it is also an excellent prompt for their self-assessment to include a reflective piece on skill development.





How Nurture aligns

Next, in designing the assignment itself emphasis should be placed on a learn by doing approach. Where Nurture empowers this process is in the final learn by doing step - critical reflection. Firstly, we capture student confidence at the point of submission - an important data point for reflection later. Secondly, the teacher can set out a 3-2-1 reflection which asks students to reflect on the three things they've learned, two things they found interesting and one question they're still left with. This is particularly effective in Nurture as their grade (if graded) is withheld behind the reflection; meaning the reflection is based on the feedback, unbiased by the grade they received - we call this delaying the ego response. In doing so, we can more naturally and seamlessly integrate self-reflections/evaluations into the students' learning process.

3-2-1 Student Reflection



What are 3 things you learned?



What are 2 things you found interesting?



What is 1 question are you left with?



%

Unlock Grade



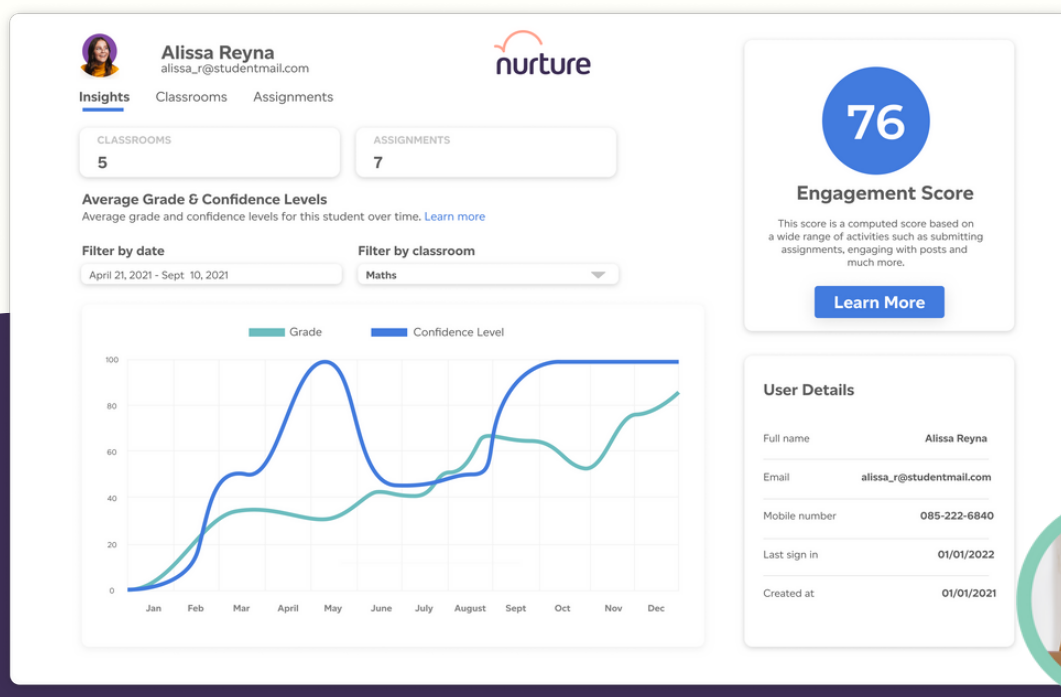
How Nurture aligns



Because Nurture is subject agnostic but based on best practice it can be used by teachers of all subjects and assessment or project types can be utilised effectively too. We have seen educators using Nurture for oral language; aural practice; inquiry based learning; group project work, presentations, hard skill demonstrations and much more. This year, we are launching our Teacher Collaboration feature which allows teachers in the same school to share assignments with each other. In preparation for the new Senior Cycle changes, creative teachers can create assignments within Nurture and share with their subject colleagues, meaning you can accumulate a wealth of effective resources before the implementation, putting you even further ahead of the curve.

Finally, the collection of all this data - the skill development, confidence, critical reflections - are meaningless unless they can be accessed and surfaced by the student and teacher. This is where our Learner Passport comes in. Our purpose built data solution surfaces meaningful data and engagement scores.

Our holistic approach shows where students are performing beyond their expected confidence, underperforming or may need additional help and support or a push to excel even further. The Learner Passport allows both teachers and students to understand the journey the student is on, and where improvements can be made. Even better, it allows the student to access all previous assignments and feedback, meaning they can always refer back to previous feedback for moving forward.





Great to have you read through our write up on senior cycle reform. Hopefully you'll take away some actionable insights! If you have some questions for us on this, the Nurture team will be happy to answer them.



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