



Prioritising approaches to achieve each goal



The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) has produced a series of practice guides to help school leaders develop and apply quality strategic plans. This guide is the second in a series of 4, and focuses on **prioritising curriculum, pedagogical and assessment approaches to achieve the goals in a strategic plan.** View all guides in this series on the [AERO website](#).

These practice guides relate to the ***Australian Professional Standard for Principals Professional Practices***:

- Leading improvement, innovation and change
- Leading the management of the school.

Once you've set goals and associated targets in specific learning areas, you'll need to **prioritise approaches** to achieve each goal. An approach is a high-level improvement strategy that shows how you will work towards a goal. Approaches that focus on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment have the greatest impact on learning.

This guide recommends practical steps for prioritising approaches to achieve each goal within a strategic plan.

We recommend reading this guide after you have read the first guide in this series, [Setting goals and targets for student learning](#).

1. Identify approaches that relate to each goal

To achieve each goal and associated targets, you first need to identify the curriculum, pedagogical and assessment approaches currently being used across the school.

You can identify these approaches by reviewing the following in each learning area featured in a goal:

- **Curriculum approaches** – These approaches focus on *what to teach*. Information to review includes scope and sequence documents, unit and lesson plans and instructional materials such as textbooks. This will help you understand the choices teachers are making when selecting particular instructional materials over others to implement the curriculum.
- **Pedagogical approaches** – These approaches focus on *how to teach*. Information to review includes instructional models being used, classroom observation records, teacher self-reflections, classroom recordings (for example videos) and lesson analyses. Note that it is important to distinguish between general pedagogical approaches and subject-specific pedagogical approaches. Research emphasises the importance of both, but you may only need to focus on one in the strategic plan.
- **Assessment approaches** – These approaches focus on *how to assess* learning. Information to review includes formative and summative assessment tasks, samples of student work and assessment moderation findings. This may link to the [work you did when you set goals and targets for learning](#) – particularly the accuracy of teacher judgements and assessment moderation practices.

This information-gathering exercise should be a consultative process grounded in conversations with leaders and teachers whose roles link to each goal. During these conversations, explore staff understanding of the evidence base behind different approaches. This will also help you begin to prioritise approaches for improvement.

The curriculum, pedagogy and assessment information you gather at this stage should be considered alongside associated data on student outcomes. This will help you cross-reference your understanding of how specific approaches are impacting learning in relation to goals and targets.

Finally, review relevant links (where they exist) to understand internal coherency across approaches. For example, do assessments accurately capture curriculum content descriptions and achievement standards? Are the selected pedagogical approaches the most effective for the curriculum being taught?



Mapping approaches from the whole-school to the classroom level

Different levels of curriculum, pedagogical and assessment approaches are used across a school. To assist with identifying specific approaches that relate to each goal and target, it can be helpful to map the approaches occurring at different levels. This can be done sequentially using the following steps:

1. Start by reviewing the approaches that are set at the **whole-school level**. For example, a **pedagogical approach** at the whole-school level could be the instructional model.
2. Next, review the approaches at the **grade or learning area level**. For example, a **curriculum approach** at the grade or learning-area level (depending on whether it's a primary or secondary school) could be unit planning.
3. Finally, review the approaches at the **classroom level**. For example, an **assessment approach** at the classroom level could be formative assessment.

Sequentially identifying different approaches across levels will help you visualise the alignment (or lack thereof) of approaches used at the school, and will enable you to begin to prioritise approaches for improvement.

Contextual factors such as school size will influence the types of approaches that exist at different levels. This means that while some schools may determine that certain approaches exist at a particular level, this may differ for other schools. Further, when an approach is identified at a particular level, it is still likely to intersect with other levels.

The activity of sequentially identifying different approaches across levels should be treated as a thought exercise to help you distinguish all approaches being used across the school, rather than a rigid classification that locks approaches at a certain level.

2. Prioritise approaches to focus on

Once you've identified the curriculum, pedagogical and assessment approaches that relate to each goal and target, you should prioritise approaches that need to improve (or be introduced) to achieve each goal and associated target.

To prioritise approaches, you'll need to evaluate evidence about the effectiveness of each approach. If you identify any approaches in the school that you aren't confident are effective based on the available evidence you should prioritise these approaches for change.

Evidence rigour and relevance are the most important considerations when deciding whether you can be confident that a particular approach will be effective in your context. AERO provides [guidance](#) to help you to make consistent and transparent judgements when assessing evidence about the effectiveness of a particular approach.

Summary considerations for prioritising approaches to achieve each goal

- Have you reviewed the available information on curriculum, pedagogical and assessment approaches in each learning area featured in the goals and associated targets?
- Were teachers and leaders consulted to identify the curriculum, pedagogical and assessment approaches that relate to the goals and targets?
- In identifying approaches that relate to goals and targets, have you distinguished between approaches at different levels?
- Have you evaluated the strength of research evidence on the effectiveness of each identified approach, and used this to prioritise approaches for improvement?

We recommend reading the next guide in this series, [Selecting practices to deliver improvement](#).

To provide feedback on this guide or view further information, including full references and additional resources, visit [AERO's website](#).