

Expert Group on Assessment Arrangements

A response from the General Teaching Council for England

Introduction

1. The General Teaching Council for England is pleased to contribute to the deliberations of the Expert Group on assessment before its report to the Secretary of State in February.
2. The remit of the Group has a very broad scope, including issues related to Key Stages 1-3 and the developments around the proposed School Report Card. It would be difficult to do justice to all aspects of this remit in the four sides that have been requested.
3. The GTC has developed detailed proposals on pupil assessment over the last five years, underpinned by a robust research and evidence base. The Council made a substantial input to the Select Committee Inquiry on assessment in early 2007, both in terms of written and oral evidence. The Select Committee's response makes detailed reference to the GTC's proposals.
4. This response will therefore draw on the GTC's proposals, developed to support assessment arrangements throughout Key Stages 1-4. The decision by the Government in Autumn 2008, to abolish the National Curriculum end of Key Stage 3 tests from 2009 has left schools and teachers in some uncertainty about the way to develop assessment at institutional level going forward. The GTC has concerns about how assessment at Key Stage 3 can be quality assured in a policy environment in which there has been no lead in to prepare for schools for such a radical degree of change.
5. The arrangements at Key Stage 3 are therefore the focus of this response, though the GTC believes its proposals are also applicable to Key Stages 1 and 2. The GTC has particular concerns about Key Stage 2 and a section later in this response deals with those.

The development of a teacher assessment model at Key Stage 3

6. The GTC's assessment proposals have always been based on the case that forms of summative assessment and the end of Key Stage tests in particular have been used for too many purposes. The use of tests as the basis of national targets, performance tables and other forms of public accountability has resulted in assessment for the purposes of developing learning being perceived as taking a second place.

7. The GTC has supported the findings of the systematic review (Harlen, 2004) that assessment by teachers has the potential to provide summative information about students' achievements because teachers can build up a picture of individual students' attainment across a range of activities and goals. However, teacher evidence to the GTC over time suggests that many teachers do not feel they are currently in a position, or work within a structure, that would allow them to undertake all forms of pupil assessment. It is for this reason that the GTC, with its public interest remit, recommends an incremental approach to teacher assessment implementation.
8. The proposals to replace the end of Key Stage 3 tests with a teacher assessment system puts the focus on teacher professional judgement as the basis of assessment to develop learning, as the basis of the accountability relationship between teachers and parents and as a greater focus within the public accountability of schools. At a first glance this looks like a genuine opportunity for secondary schools to create an assessment system that more coherently supports their response to the revised Key Stage 3 curriculum and enables them to meet the learning needs of a greater range of learners. In addition, Wynne Harlen's research review carried out for the Cambridge Primary Review (2007) that additional time spent by teachers at Key Stage 3 on external summative assessment in the form of external tests amounted to about 165 hours (approximately 5 weeks of 33 hours) suggests that professional time could be gainfully re-directed.
9. However, the lack of lead in time remains problematic. Schools continue to order the Key Stage 3 tests in the absence of any immediate alternative. Existing forms of national support for teacher assessment such as Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) are already under attack for creating additional forms of workload for teachers. (Times Educational Supplement, November 2008)
10. The GTC's proposals make a two stage response to the issue of implementing teacher assessment and ensuring that it contributes to the quality assurance of the system. On the basis that the Government would continue to invest in Assessment for Learning and in APP as set out in the DCSF Assessment for Learning Strategy published in Summer 2008, the GTC proposes that in the first instance, a bank of national summative tests and tasks should be developed at Key Stage 3 from which individual teachers could select and use with learners at a time determined by them.
11. In the early stages, teachers would be encouraged to use the evidence on which they based their judgement about the timing of the test as part of professional/peer moderation activities in preparation for working towards a more integrated model of teacher assessment. Teachers would become increasingly involved in the analysis of the outcomes so that the tests/tasks would play a key role in teaching and learning. Teachers' involvement in marking and analysis should also be linked to professional development opportunities
12. Over time and as teachers become familiar with and skilled in using a range of nationally devised tests/tasks, they would increasingly be used to confirm teachers' existing summative assessments of pupil progress and achievement. Teachers would collect evidence from test/task outcomes during and at the end of the Key

Stage so that the information could be used formatively to adapt teaching as well as the basis for summative decision-making. The evidence derived from the test/tasks would then be subject to assessment moderation processes.

13. Moderation could be developed in schools within subjects and /or cross curriculum, depending on the way that the revised curriculum is being organised at Key Stage 3 and supported by assessment arrangements. It could also be developed within school networks and other local partnerships.
14. The range of materials would increase in the longer term into a bank of varied assessment materials on which the teacher could draw. The teaching profession, particularly those with assessment expertise, should be involved in the development of test/task materials, including on-line materials. The information generated would be used by the school, local authority, parents and pupils themselves to move learning forward

Investment in teacher learning

15. The GTC's proposals on the development of teacher assessment using a bank of tests have always been based on the need for more effective professional learning on assessment at all stages. . Assessment needs to be a stronger element of the professional standards framework, including qualified teacher status (QTS) and induction standards. Managing assessment across a subject area, a department or faculty and as part of a whole school approach should also be a critical component of professional standards for leadership.
16. It is also vital that each school has a leader for developing strong assessment systems, a commitment by the Assessment for Learning strategy for 2009-2010 onwards. By 2010-2011 onwards this specialist is expected to know how to '*develop ways to support assessment across the whole school...To run in-school moderation...develop a robust assessment policy for the school*'. It is important that this assessment leader is a pedagogical leader rather than having an administrative/co-ordinating role. The GTC has always supported the idea of developing assessment communities within and across schools led by specialist assessment roles created in every school and these kind of developments need to be embedded in teaching and learning. The Chartered Examiner route could accredit this kind of role.
17. The DCSF Assessment for Learning strategy also advises on the need for schools to review AFL structures, practice and processes as an integral part of school self-evaluation. However in the context of schools becoming assessment communities with teachers needing to develop greater professional responsibility for assessing their learners and for being accountable for their judgements to their learners, their parents and the wider public, the strategy is missing a layer. There should be more investment in the individual practitioner's skills to evaluate their practice and its impact on learning and to be able to share the development of such learning with colleagues. As Members of the Expert Group may be aware, the GTC's Teacher

Learning Academy provides this national framework of recognition for such rigorous forms of professional learning already taken up by teachers across the country. The Council is glad to provide the Group with further details if necessary.

National sampling

18. The development and delivery of a robust national sampling system to provide information about national standards by testing a sample of pupils is part of the GTC 's proposals for future assessment system that results in better information on the respective performance of individual learners, schools and the system itself. The GTC has always regarded sampling as an alternative to universal end of key stage testing as being a more effective way of evaluating standards over time.
19. The need for such system to be developed at Key Stage 3 is a priority for providing public assurance in relation to continued national standards in the core subjects in a period of rapid change. However, the GTC has argued for a system of national monitoring that should be trialled and developed at a particular key stage but over time extended to other key stages.
20. In addition, the GTC has argued that:
 - the tests should involve as wide as curriculum as possible and involve a range of tasks;
 - the system should be as simple and understandable as possible for pupils, teachers, parents and the wider public;
 - teachers should be professionally supported prior to the introduction of such a system and in the course of its implementation.

The GTC has produced a paper on how such a national monitoring system could work and this again is available for the Group if requested.

Key Stage 2

21. The Government's main concern about Key Stage 2 is about the time that schools and teachers spend on preparing pupils for the end of key stage tests and this is part of the Expert Group's remit. However, the GTC's detailed case for an alternative to the current arrangements applies as much to Key Stage 2 as 3. The retention of the single level tests at Key Stage 2 when they no longer exist at Key Stage 3 seems illogical. The GTC believes the same model of teacher assessment needs to be the basis of the Key stage 2 arrangements with similar sources of professional support available and the development of cohort sampling to monitor national standards over time.

Conclusion

22. What is missing here is a key strand of GTC work on assessment for accountability which formed the second of the three themes around which the Council structured its proposals and the evidence/research on which it is based. The Council is engaged in some longer term policy thinking in 2009 onwards on accountability in teaching, based on teachers' administrative, moral and professional forms of accountability. These areas are wider than the remit of the Expert Group but the GTC will want to highlight some of its early thinking in relation to the accountability White Paper in the Spring, which will include further Government consideration of pupil assessment issues

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