

# Education and Skills Select Committee: The Work of Ofsted

Memorandum by the General Teaching Council (GTC)

## Summary

- There is a correlation between the quality of school self-evaluation and the calibre of the management of the school and its capacity to improve.
- School self-evaluation does not, however, form the basis of the majority of schools' accountability to internal and external monitoring processes.
- There is work to be done to ensure school self-evaluation processes are embedded in every day school practice and planning.
- The Government Green Paper *Extending Opportunities: raising standards* is an opportunity to move away from assessment for the purposes of quality control and accountability towards a more diagnostic and formative model. More localised structures to support greater individualism in 14-19 learning cannot be accommodated in national performance tables as currently configured.
- Government proposals to trial new approaches of supported teacher assessment in primary schools are welcome.

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## Memorandum by the General Teaching Council (GTC)

### Background

- 1 In the General Teaching Council's (GTC's) last memorandum to the Education and Skills Select Committee on the work of Ofsted in September 2003 we informed the Committee that the GTC was working on an accountability model that:
  - ensures public transparency and accountability
  - encourages teacher professionalism and trust
  - supports the development of teachers' informed practice
  - best informs school improvement.
- 2 The GTC has a commitment to school self-evaluation (SSE) involving:
  - rigorous internal self-evaluation involving all stakeholders
  - monitoring of and support for the process of self-review by external advisers
  - external audit and quality assurance.
- 3 A primary focus for the GTC is to identify how SSE works best in different circumstances. The object of this work is to provide a greater degree of teacher and wider community review, recognising the need for transparency and to utilise better teachers' informed professional and collective judgement.

### Introduction

- 4 There is no shortage of accountability in schools. The Secondary Heads Association (SHA) has identified at least 127 bodies including parents, governing bodies, LEAs, central government, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), Ofsted, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Connexions Partnerships, Local Strategic Partnerships, Lifelong Learning Partnerships and Child Protection Officers, to which schools are legitimately answerable. Ofsted is currently working to a revised inspection framework introduced in September 2003, which proposes a greater emphasis on SSE.
- 5 Secondary school inspection will change in breadth as the Government's Green Paper proposals on 14-19 education, "*Extending Opportunities: raising standards*" are implemented and greater numbers of young people are

educated in more diverse settings and study a more flexible curriculum with greater balance between academic and vocational courses. Furthermore, the Green Paper *“Every Child Matters”* has implications for more integrated services at a local level which in turn have consequences for how Ofsted interacts with other inspection agencies as is made clear in *“The Future of Inspection”* document.

- 6 *“The Future of Inspection”*, Ofsted’s review of school inspection, proposes shorter inspections every three years with the shortest possible notice to schools with inspection supporting a greater degree of self-evaluation in schools, with an acknowledgement that *‘It is time to trust schools more and draw on the professionalism of teachers’*. David Miliband in his speech to the North of England Conference (NEEC) in January 2004 also supported the need for *‘Intelligent Accountability’*.
- 7 In this context, it is timely that the GTC, through its Collaborative Forum of stakeholders, including Ofsted, is examining the inter-relationship between inspection, self-evaluation, peer review and performance data collection, interpretation and application.

## **School self-evaluation**

### ***Evidence***

- 8 Ofsted has a framework for inspection which includes the principle that they will have due regard for self-evaluation. Evidence suggests that the better school leadership and perceptions are, the better the quality of self-evaluation will be.
- 9 According to Ofsted, the quality and use made of school self-evaluation is a good indication of the calibre of the management of the school and the school’s capacity to improve. The evidence for this is the close correlation between the quality of 100 S4 forms (the record of the schools’ summary of its self-evaluation) and the final inspection reports found in an unpublished Ofsted survey.
- 10 Ofsted says *“Self-evaluation ... provides the school and the registered inspector with a means of ensuring that inspection covers matters of potential significance to the school.”* However, school self-evaluation currently does not form the basis of the majority of schools’ accountability to internal and external monitoring processes, though it will play a greater role in the new proposals on inspection announced in February 2004.
- 11 The NFER research *“Evaluating School Self-Evaluation”* identified positive findings on school self-evaluation for LEAs and schools. For schools the SSE process:
  - provided a mechanism to change the culture of the school
  - benefited Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
  - increased a sense of the school developing its own agenda

- helped to encourage community feedback and involvement
- provided schools with a range of tools for evaluation activities.

12 Problems identified included:

- the tensions between LEAs “managing” and “supporting” their schools
- ownership of the school self-evaluation process. LEAs were clear it should be school-driven but did admit that LEAs were often actively managing the process
- how the provision of LEA support should be funded and organised
- initiative fatigue exacerbated by the tensions in schools between self-evaluation and preparing for Ofsted inspection.

13 The Council shares the concern identified in the NFER research about the ownership of the school self-evaluation process and embedding its processes in every day school practice and planning.

### ***GTC Focus Groups***

14 The GTC is in the process of taking evidence from schools, LEAs and partners on school self-evaluation in the context of the Ofsted framework and other models. As part of this evidence-gathering GTC has established a series of focus groups in Norwich, Rochdale, Bradford and Oxford involving in total 155 teachers.

15 Teachers’ perceptions of current school self-evaluation include:

- self-evaluation should be part of a cycle informing the school’s development plan and CPD programmes
- there should be external validation of a school’s self-evaluation processes
- school self-evaluation should lead to a shared understanding about how the organisation needs to grow, generating shared values and common goals
- all groups were keen on peer-led reviews
- a strong plea for head teachers to ensure that the outcomes of self-evaluation were communicated to all staff
- schools where there was a tradition of involving pupils such as in a School’s Council were more positive about involving pupils in self-evaluation
- teachers generally welcomed the involvement and support of their LEA in their school’s self-evaluation but teachers did not see much benefit from involving business/independent consultants
- teaching and learning should be the main focus of school self-evaluation
- teachers’ experience of school self-evaluation tended to involve the completion of questionnaires but they generally favoured more interactive approaches
- time and resources were seen as the main inhibitors of schools self-evaluation
- training on self-evaluation would be welcomed.

16 This is the beginning of process of building evidence to support the development of the model of school self-evaluation to which the GTC is

committed, leading to intelligent accountability. The next steps will be the use of targeted groups on parents, governors and pupils, liaising with Schools Council UK and other organisations to develop and facilitate a pupil group.

### **GTC work on assessment**

- 17 The GTC is developing recommendations on principles for developing assessment policy. These will be built on the premise that there needs to be a better balance between formative and summative assessment that is reliable, meets public accountability needs and forms a lever for developing teacher professional judgement across the policy area. The principles are likely to incorporate the following elements:
  - 17.1 The primary purpose of assessment is to provide feedback to shape and develop the teaching and learning activities in which both teacher and pupils are engaged. Targets should be used to support the feedback, that all pupils need before they can take action to improve their learning.
  - 17.2 Assessment for learning rather than of learning occurs when evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching to meet the needs of the pupils, or by pupils themselves to change the way they work at their own learning.
  - 17.3 The dominating influence of short, summative, external testing has the effect of drawing teachers away from formative assessment.
  - 17.4 The systematic weighing of evidence from many studies by Black and Dylan<sup>1</sup> shows that formative assessment does raise standards. The evidence also showed there is room for improvement in the way teachers use formative assessment.
  - 17.5 The advice targeted at the learning needs of individual pupils, which teachers can offer from formative assessment, is not matched by results from tests.
  - 17.6 Strengthening the practice of formative assessment should include new ways of enhancing feedback between pupils and teachers, actively involving students in the assessment process, helping pupils to develop self assessment skills produce significant, and often substantial, learning gains. Many studies show that improved formative assessment helped low attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties more than the rest.

### **14-19 Education**

- 18 GTC has welcomed the Government Green Paper "*Extending Opportunity: raising standards*" as an opportunity to move away from assessment for the purposes of quality control and accountability towards a more diagnostic and

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Paul Black and Professor Dylan William, Kings College London.

formative model.

- 19 The GTC believes that the Government's commitment to greater individualism in 14-19 learning with more localised and responsive structures to support it cannot be accommodated in national performance tables as currently configured. The GTC is developing principles for a framework for assessment that better balance internal and external assessment underpinned by a greater degree of teacher professional judgement. We consider that the current assessment process is over-reliant on external exams. The last decade has seen the further development of a series of drivers of school accountability, including performance indicators, targets and published performance tables. Teachers, over the last few years, have articulated that they are being diverted away from their core accountability to pupils for providing high quality teaching and learning, to being increasingly answerable to the demands of these drivers.
- 20 The GTC welcomes the distinction the Tomlinson Reform Group makes between "assessment **for** learning" and "assessment **of** learning" as it indicates a shift away from the dominance of external testing as a means of quality control. It is also welcome that assessment for learning appears to be set to become a greater part of school practice as the DfES's Standards and Effectiveness Unit gives it greater strategic priority.
- 21 We also welcome the Reform Group proposal that "*better use could be made of assessment which is already undertaken by many teachers ... rather than relying on a greater volume of externally prescribed tasks.*" The GTC's own policy and piloting work with teachers adopts this approach to good effect. The GTC LEA CPD Partnership Project, involving nine LEAs and some 500 teachers to examine models of entitlement to continuing professional development, drew on data already being collected for evaluation purposes and provided formative feedback to participants.

## Primary Schools

- 22 *Excellence and Enjoyment*, the new Government strategy for primary schools, gives primary schools greater flexibility in relation to aspects of Key Stages 1 & 2 curriculum and assessment practice. At Key Stage 1 the Government proposes to trial new approach of supported teacher assessment where tests underpin teacher assessment rather than being reported separately. This is consistent with the GTC's advice to the Secretary of State on CPD, which recommended that schools be encouraged via, among other means, LEA and Ofsted self-evaluation frameworks, to use CPD to underpin and further develop teaching and learning and support school improvement.

## Conclusion

- 23 The direction of public policy on school assessment is moving towards a stronger focus on school self-evaluation. The GTC's concern is to ensure that

future accountability processes include more teacher and community review based on practitioners' informed professional judgement and ensuring transparent forms of public accountability.

- 24 The GTC believes that for effective assessment processes to be embedded in everyday school practice and planning there needs to be a better balance between formative and summative assessment and a shift away from the dominance of external testing as a means of quality control.

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