

Department for Education and Skills (DfES): Consultation on *Making Good Progress: How can we help every pupil to make good progress at school?*

Response from the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE)

Introduction

1. The General Teaching Council for England (GTC) was established in 2000 as the independent professional body for teaching. Its role is to uphold standards of teaching in the public interest. Its statutory duties are to register and regulate the teaching profession and to advise the Secretary of State on a range of matters relating to teaching.
2. The GTC broadly welcomes the current focus by government on pupil progress as reflected in this DfES consultation, *Making Good Progress*. It has been vital over the last two decades to raise national levels of pupil attainment overall, but the importance of pupils progressing according to their personal capabilities has not always been fully acknowledged in the public arena, though remaining a priority for teachers and schools.
3. The consultation also confirms what many in education believe, including the GTC, and supported by evidence over time, that the current attainment gap will only be reduced through the re-direction of resources via schools into ways of developing personalised pupil learning. These need to include assessment for learning approaches, real pupil participation in learning and high quality and sustained teacher learning to enhance pupil learning.
4. The GTC also welcomes, in this consultation, the proposal for a two year pilot of the range of progress mechanisms with a small number of local authorities and their schools. A genuine pilot with a rigorous evaluation framework built into it will allow the Government to develop evidence of what interventions actually make a difference and are practicable in schools and classrooms in order to make necessary refinements.
5. However, at this stage of public consultation the GTC does have a series of reservations about what is currently proposed in the DfES consultation document. These concerns are focused on:

- a number of assumptions that are made in the DfES document about the nature of pupil progress within the current system which form the basis of these proposals
- the DfES intention to introduce pupil progress tests and targets in addition to the end of key stage tests and threshold targets already in the system. The GTC sees these as conflicting with the approaches and desired outcomes of the recent Gilbert recommendations on personalised learning and resulting in overload for pupils and teachers
- the gap between the DfES proposals and the GTC's recommendations about future pupil assessment arrangements which separate three broad uses of assessment for improved learning, as the basis of public information and accountability and for monitoring national standards over time.

The remainder of the GTC's response deals with three areas of concern outlined in this section.

Pupil progression issues

6. There is confusion throughout the consultation paper concerning the average rate of pupil progress in terms of a group and an individual. Across any group of pupils it is not possible to have a uniform rate of progress where every individual is progressing at the same rate, firstly because of individual pupils naturally progressing at different rates and secondly, because progress is not necessarily linear.
7. On the first, there will always be a range of rates of progression across any group of pupils around the mean rate and the issue is to decide what an 'unacceptable' range is and how far below the average range a pupil has to go before extra help is triggered. The GTC believes that schools can be further advised on this area, as they are already to some extent through Ofsted and School Improvement Partner (SIP) arrangements, and that the pilot will give further insights into the issues affecting individual progress and the different ways of addressing them.
8. However, schools and teachers also need continued support and training in the management and interpretation of data which would help to systematise the professional judgements that teachers regularly make about individual pupils and the factors that are impacting on their progress.
9. On the second point, the GTC's own evidence gathered from teachers consistently reflects their understanding grounded in every day practice, that pupil learning is not linear. Pupils make progress in some areas and not in others, even within the same subject and the factors behind their progress or lack of it are various and often complex. Any assessment system needs to build on that rather than expecting as it currently does, and within these proposed

changes, that the individual must adapt to the needs of the system. This point is further developed later in this response.

10. The progress of a pupil by two levels during the course of a key stage (KS) could only be useful as a performance indicator for schools if all pupils were equally likely to progress by two levels, regardless of their prior attainment. The diagram attached to this response, which relates specifically to KS3, shows that this is not the case. A pupil's chance of progressing by two grades at KS3 appears to depend in an almost arbitrary manner on which percentile of the population that pupil occupies on prior attainment. It is thus not possible to use this indicator (see Appendix 1).
11. The discussion in the DfES document also gives the impression that the pupil's rate of progression and his/her movement through the National Curriculum levels are synonymous, which is not necessarily the case. A National Curriculum level is supposed to encompass two years of pupil development and, therefore, substantial progress can be made within a level. Furthermore, levels are not based on empirical data and were not developed according to how pupils actually progress.
12. The GTC believes that schools need continued support and training in the interpretation of data related to specific pupil groups and in the implementation of legal duties related to race equality, gender and disability.

Gilbert recommendations and personalised learning

13. The GTC has responded fully and positively to the Gilbert Review recommendations in its advice on personalised learning to the Secretary of State. It supports much of the summary account of the report included in this consultation document. In particular, the Council commends the strategies highlighted on pages 14 and 15 that focus on strengthening teaching and learning and closing the attainment gap. The importance of '*a curriculum that takes account of prior learning and experiences and helps pupils to develop the full range of knowledge, skills and attitudes*' is critical and the kind of flexibility needed for this to take place must be the result of the current review of the secondary curriculum and of the 14-19 reform.
14. The picture of the 'personalised' classroom is also one that the GTC supports with assessment for learning (AfL) at its heart and the emphasis on one strong inclusive teaching plan rather than the 30 separate teaching plans that often mistakenly characterise personalised learning. The link made between the progress of individual pupils in the classroom here with the aims of *Every Child Matters* for the progress of every child towards the fulfilment of their potential is one which the GTC welcomes.
15. However, the proposals for pupils to be entered for tests on a proposed twice yearly basis have no place in the 'personalised' classroom, where assessment is a process integral to learning, not a series of events for which learning is a rehearsal. Summative assessment including external tests are as important as

formative assessment and should be part of that process but they need to be taken when the pupil(s) has/have progressed to a particular point as judged by the teacher, not when the system dictates.

16. The proposals conflict with the approach and desired outcomes of the Gilbert review which also places pupil progress at the centre of personalised learning but whose recommendations included the need for the government to commission a practitioner group to explore '*ways in which teachers should increase their use of summative assessment for diagnostic purposes*' and '*ways in which national assessment should be revised in response to personalising learning...increasing the scope of testing 'when ready'*'.
17. The group had no remit for external assessment but the recommendation is an admission that further changes are needed to the way that summative assessment is carried out if effective personalised forms of learning are to be achievable. This recommendation from the Gilbert Group confirms the GTC's evidence gathering in relation to assessment and personalised learning amongst teachers, other stakeholders and the research community that the current assessment arrangements and the external testing regime in particular remains the most significant barrier to developing personalised learning.

Overload issues

18. The consultation argues that the proposals for twice yearly tests externally set and marked '*need not be cumbersome or time consuming*'. Certainly the conduct of the actual tests will not represent additional work for teachers. But the statement disregards the GTC's consistent evidence from teachers that the current system of external tests and the various forms of 'mock' testing and preparation that go in schools is de-motivating for teacher and pupils, involves a narrow teaching and learning diet geared towards the short term and distracts from the longer term engagement in learning shared by teacher and pupils that needs to underpin more personalised approaches.
19. While the GTC notes the conclusion to section 3 of the consultation, that '*ultimately, these tests might replace end of key stage arrangements*', the immediate reality for school is that they will be an additional high stake requirement. Twice yearly, tests at KS2 and KS3 will mean that pupils will be tested six times during the key stage as well as any end of key stage test. Teachers will be in a perpetual state of preparing pupils, entering pupils, supporting them through the process of the test, dealing with the outcomes including reporting to pupils and parents and moving on to the next stage. It is difficult to see how this regime will support a sense of progress for pupils or teachers and how it will address any concerns about teachers teaching to the test.
20. The proposals for further targets are similarly misconceived. The GTC certainly favours the proposal for national targets that translate the priority of every school to address pupil progress into national educational objectives. However, the pressure of the proposed targets are again likely to be in addition to the

existing threshold targets and to the increase in tests and will have the effect of increasing the pressure on schools to accelerate the rate of pupil movement of all pupils through the National Curriculum at any cost. This will particularly be the case if such progress outcomes become part of published performance tables.

GTC assessment recommendations

21. The consultation implies that the proposed tests will validate teachers' judgements related to teacher assessment/assessment for learning. The GTC understands that the teacher assessment model underpinning the proposed progress tests will be developed around the *Assessing Pupil Progress (APP)* framework already being rolled out via the National Strategies in English and Mathematics at KS2 and KS3. Longer term, the APP model could become sufficiently robust in order for the proposed tests to have the role of confirming existing teacher assessment judgements. However, it is early days and teachers need time and sustained professional support in order to carry out a fuller assessment role.
22. The GTC's own proposals acknowledge the importance of validating teacher assessment but are they are based on building a more integrated relationship between formative and summative assessment over time. The Council supports the Gilbert vision of assessment for learning being embedded in schools through a model of teacher professional learning that gives AfL particular priority, supported by the development of specialist teacher roles in assessment in the majority of schools.
23. In this model, teachers would use a bank of externally devised tests, also reflecting levels, when pupils are ready. Information from the tests would be collected during and at the end of the key stage and would inform future teaching and learning. Longer term, with sustained development for teacher in place, the bank of tests would be developed further involving those taking up specialist assessment roles and teachers would use them to moderate their own professional judgements.
24. These proposals represent considerable challenge to teachers but give them greater capacity for professional judgement in teaching and learning that has been another strong theme in the teacher evidence gathered by the GTC over the last four years. However, greater teacher professional judgement must be based on the kind of sustained teacher learning related to assessment and moderation processes and opportunities for specialism outlined in paragraphs 22 and 23.
25. As paragraph 5 stressed, the GTC's recommendations are based on separating the purposes of assessment. On monitoring national standards the GTC recommends the development of a system of pupil cohort sampling that frees external tests to be used as the means of assessing pupil progress without the simultaneous pressures of reflecting standards over time. The Council also argues the case for a more contextualised school information/accountability

system based on more rigorous assessment for learning, school self evaluation with the external checks through the respective roles of SIPs and Ofsted.

The “progression premium”

26. There is no evidence to support the contention that the offer of a financial “bonus” to schools based on a specific performance indicator is an effective incentive. The history of the Schools Achievement Award demonstrates the likely outcomes of “premiums” of this type, especially when they are linked to performance indicators, which lack the professional confidence of teachers. They either reward in an arbitrary and capricious manner, or benefit those schools where the need is least because pupils have the fewest disadvantages. The Council advises against the institution of any financial “premium” of this type.

Conclusion

27. The consultation document stresses that:

‘The reason for pursuing higher standards is not in order to achieve numerical targets or deliver accountability...they are the servants and not the masters. The data and targets we set are the means towards the objective of equipping pupils with the skills and knowledge they need: education for self-fulfilment, access and equality’

28. The GTC fully supports this sentiment. However, the proposals as set out in *Making Good Progress* are unlikely to support pupil progress more effectively or give pupils or teachers the space to develop the skills and knowledge that are needed by the young people who are currently in our schools. The Council believes its own thinking around pupil assessment and progress has a contribution to make towards the development of a more effective future framework.
29. The GTC welcomes the Education and Skills Select Committee (ESSC) review of pupil assessment and the opportunity that the Council has always recommended, for a wholesale review of the assessment arrangements at all key stages. The review will further test views on the progress assessment proposals but will also ask questions about the effectiveness of the current end of key stage tests and the role of teacher assessment in teaching and learning. It will also be an opportunity for KS1 teachers to reflect on their experience of teacher assessment judgements in the core subjects being given greater weight than at other key stages and for those working in the 14-19 field to reflect on the future complexities of assessing specialist diplomas alongside GCSE. Final decisions on the proposals here need to take into account the review recommendations as well as the experiences of the pilots.
30. The Council reiterates its earlier plea to government to ensure that its proposed pilot plans encompass sufficiently robust evaluation arrangements that support

the level of further change that might need to be made before the progress model were to be implemented across the system.

31. The government is also urged to re-consider the scope of its planned pilot and to include a dimension over the two years where at least some if not all of the pilot LAs and schools would be trialling the new tests and targets outside the current assessment and accountability requirements but in conjunction with the other mechanisms in place post-Gilbert to develop personalised learning approaches. This would have the effect of trialling a system that develops a greater momentum around pupil progress while allowing a comparison to be made with outcomes in the greater majority of localities and schools where existing accountability requirements would continue.

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APPENDIX 1: Distribution of levels achieved in English, maths and science

The following graphic shows the distribution of levels achieved in English, maths and science by the *current* Year 10 cohort across the country:

- in 2003, when they were in Year 6; and
- in 2006, when they were in Year 9.

The shaded sections are those who, while staying at the same percentile in the rank order, would have "*improved by two levels*" during KS3. As can be seen, there is absolutely no uniformity of pattern to these groups.

- In English, it includes the top 10% of the population, together with another group, roughly between the 60th and 70th percentile
- in maths, it includes almost the whole of the top 60% of the population, together with a small group near the 25th percentile.
- in science, it includes the top 15%, together with a small group near the 60th percentile.

The proposal that the progress of these pupils in the three subject areas would in some objective sense be "better" than others who remained at the same percentiles but didn't progress by two grades clearly cannot be substantiated. The use of "improving by two levels" as a measure of success is thus shown to be invalid.

