



Testing the Water

Exploring the future of assessment in teaching

Interim Report

Will Millard and Loic Menzies



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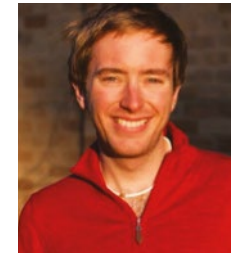


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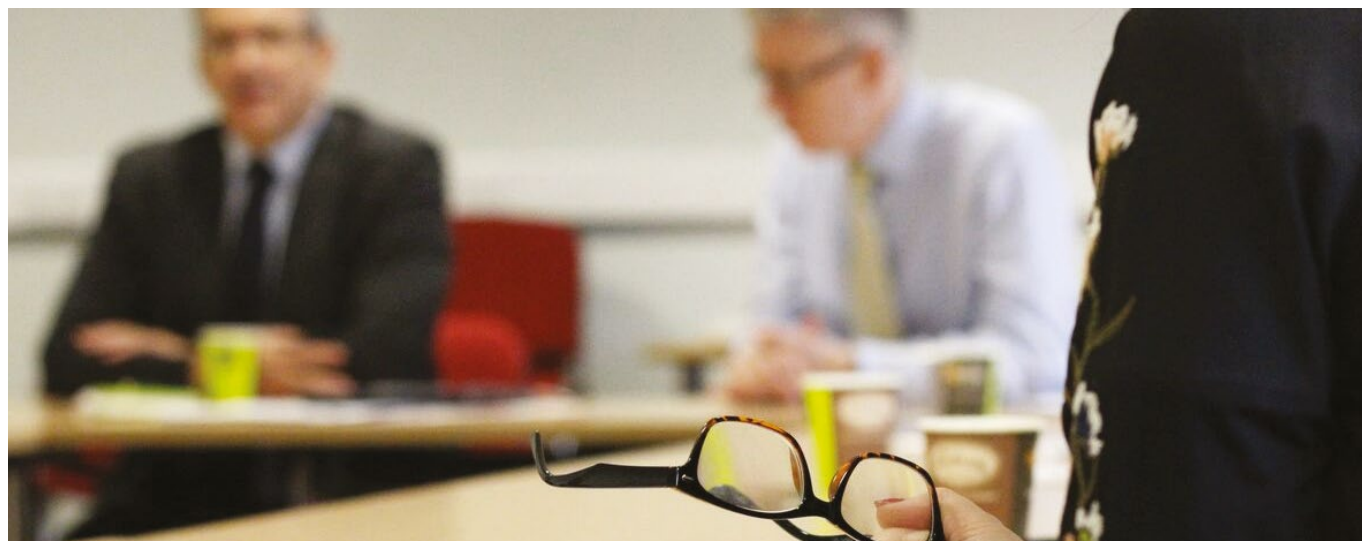


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Foreword

When we launched this conversation about assessment at the turn of the year, I explained in *Schools Week* why I felt it was important. First, it's essential that testing and assessment underpins and does not undermine, great teaching. The purpose of assessment is after all, to help improve learning. I wanted a conversation with teachers and others to see the extent to which they agree. Second, there is a growing sense that too much weight is put on testing, particularly in terms of its consequence for schools and for teachers. The point is that exam results tell us a great deal, but don't tell us everything about the performance of schools and teachers. We also need to see the bigger picture.

Since then we have worked with LKMco to bring together almost 20 events around the country, working with a wide range of stakeholders – and we are extremely grateful to everyone who has participated so far. This report reflects those conversations, highlights the reservations teachers feel, but also seeks ways forward – with 39 ideas about improving assessment itself as well as how it is interpreted.

This report is a first staging post in this conversation. We will produce a second report later in the year with a deeper exploration of the issues, and further engagement of teachers through our online survey and other research work.

I am pleased that this report has tapped in to the passions that this subject brings out in teachers everywhere. Assessment in the classroom may be as old as teaching itself, but this report is candid in acknowledging that its value as a tool is under challenge. And yet the authors are clear that there is near unanimity that assessment *can* play a crucial role in supporting teachers. In the coming months we will explore what makes great assessment, and flip this project towards solutions. How can assessment inspire better teaching? Can ongoing, formative assessment relieve – not exacerbate – the pressure of doing an exam at Key Stage 2 or 4? When schools are held accountable for their performance, what factors beyond performance in assessment should be considered?

This initial report is launched as the Government is seeking views on primary assessment. We will continue to feed our findings in to the government, but this conversation applies beyond primary schooling – into secondary schools and onto colleges and universities.

I am pleased that this initial report highlights the potential for technology to help teachers make the most of assessment to gain real-time insights into how their pupils and students learn. I am keen to explore how assessment technology can help teachers improve learning outcomes while reducing teacher workloads.

The purpose of assessment in unleashing great learning remains as powerful today as it has ever been. I hope and believe it can play a still greater role in the future.

My thanks to everyone who has participated to date, and to Loic and Will for bringing this initial report together. I look forward to taking part in the next phase of this excellent project.

Rod Bristow

President of Pearson in the UK



1. What does this consultation involve?

1.1 The consultation

In December 2016 Pearson and LKMco launched a consultation entitled 'Testing the Water'. It seeks to better understand concerns among teachers, school leaders, parents, governors and young people about assessment, and identify ways of addressing these concerns. The consultation will run until the end of the summer, 2017.

In June 2016 BritainThinks conducted a survey for Pearson, and found that assessment is a top issue for classroom teachers, second only to workload (although workload is, of course, affected by assessment practices).¹ Consequently, we are seeking the input of a wide range of stakeholders during this consultation, but especially want to explore the perceptions and attitudes of those using assessment every day: teachers.

By 'assessment', we mean any activity that takes place to evaluate or monitor children and young people's learning and progress. This might include informal, impromptu verbal feedback during a lesson, or an A-level exam, and everything in between.

¹ BritainThinks, on behalf of Pearson (2016) *Assessments Attitudes of UK Teachers and Parents*. In June 2016 BritainThinks conducted a survey for Pearson of 506 teachers, headteachers and parents. The random sample had good spread across the country and comprised: 256 parents, all with children aged between 4 and 18; 200 fulltime teachers, and; 50 headteachers.



1.2 The process

1.2.1 Information sharing: mini-site and other resources

We created a mini-site in order to act as the central hub for our consultation, containing further information about our aims and process, and a portal through which to collect survey responses. The mini-site also contains links to our consultation video and some of the media coverage we have generated so far.

The mini-site can be found here: www.pearson.com/uk/web/testingthewater.html.

Testing the Water: LKMco and Pearson launch consultation on assessment

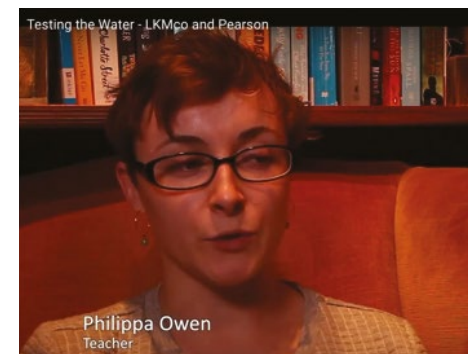
Assessment, testing and exams are perceived by teachers and parents alike to be one of the top issues facing the education sector.

In partnership with think-and-action-tank LKMco, we have launched an in-depth, consultation with teachers, school leaders, experts and parents to better understand concerns about assessment and to identify ways of addressing them. Over the coming months we will solicit opinions, engage with teachers and promote any resulting new thinking to bring about positive change in how assessment is used for the benefit of young people.

[Find out more about the consultation >](#)

Resources

- Rod Bristow, President of Pearson UK writes about the launch of our new project "Testing the water - exploring the role of assessment in teaching" in Schools Week.
[Read more about the consultation >](#)
- A full summary of the results of Pearson's 2016 survey of teachers' and parents' attitudes towards assessment and testing.
[Download the 2016 survey results \(PDF | 413.64 KB\)](#)
- This paper, by Dr Peter Hill, seeks to generate informed discussion and debate about the future of assessment in England and build on the results of the initial survey.
[Download the Testing the Water stimulus paper \(PDF | 121.98 KB\)](#)
- Further information regarding the focus and scope of the consultation.
[Download the consultation summary \(PDF | 175.01 KB\)](#)



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ROD BRISTOW
President, Pearson UK

We're launching a consultation on assessment in schools

[Rod Bristow | 5:00, Dec 9, 2016](#)

Testing and assessment worry parents and teachers, although both are integral and critical to good teaching, says Rod Bristow. He explains why his company now plans to talk to "all stakeholders" to bring about positive change.

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Academy Principal

1.2.2 Deep dives: workshops around the country

The first phase of the consultation has involved running a series of participatory workshops around the country, and listening to teachers, school leaders, parents, governors and young people.

These workshops ran for between 30 minutes and an hour and a half. Participants discussed our consultation questions in groups. We explain in Section 2 how we devised these questions.



Workshop questions

1. Are teachers' negative attitudes towards assessment inevitable, or could this change? If so, how?
2. Why do teachers and parents feel more negatively about some forms of assessment than others? What can we do about this?
3. What explains parents' belief that their children are not adequately prepared for assessments and tests? How could this be improved?
4. What might be done in the longer term to resolve tensions between the validity, reliability and credibility of assessment?
5. Could we redress the balance between assessment for learning, assessment for accountability and assessment for qualifications?
6. What should teachers' role in assessment be?
7. How can we make assessment (particularly formative assessment) more efficient and effective? Can technology help?
8. Whose responsibility is innovation in assessment?
9. Do you have any other thoughts not covered by these questions?

Who took part in these workshops?

In total we have run 17 workshops, speaking to over 150 teachers and school leaders as part of this process. To help us focus in particular on the voices of classroom teachers and other school-based practitioners, 12 of the workshops were with teachers and school leaders. To arrange the workshops we worked with a range of organisations, although the views expressed and conclusions drawn in this report do not specifically reflect those of any single organisation mentioned here. A full list of the workshops is given in Appendix 1.

To organise the workshops we worked with:

NASUWT
The Teachers' Union

ESGA
ESSEX SCHOOL GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

NAHT
FOR LEADERS, FOR LEARNERS

British Youth Council
byc

Ambition
School
Leadership

Portsmouth
Teaching School Alliance

nasen
Helping Everyone Achieve

n|g|a National
Governors'
Association

research **ED**



TeachFirst

CHALLENGE
PARTNERS

ssat
the schools, students and
teachers network

ASCL Association
of School and
College Leaders

Pearson

1.2.3 Casting the net: the online consultation

Alongside the workshops, we launched an online consultation, open to anyone living or working in England. By the 5th of April 2017 over 200 people – teachers, governors, parents, policymakers and academics – had responded to our online questions. The online consultation opened in mid-March 2017, and will remain open until the summer to help us secure as wide a range of responses as possible. A range of organisations have supported us in disseminating the online consultation, including:

- Challenge Partners
- The Schools, Students and Teachers Network (SSAT)
- Teach First
- Ambition School Leadership
- The National Governors' Association (NGA)
- Freedom and Autonomy for Schools (FASNA)
- The National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC)
- The National Association of Special Educational Needs (nasen)
- The School Bus

To encourage as many people as possible to respond to the questions and help us secure a wide breadth of responses, we are asking three questions and limiting the length of respondents' answers. This helps emphasise the most pressing concerns people have about assessment. We are also asking respondents a brief set of questions about their relationship with education and assessment, which will ultimately help us better understand how different groups' responses differ.



Online consultation questions

1. What is your biggest concern about assessment?
2. What is assessment useful for?
3. How would you improve current approaches to assessment?

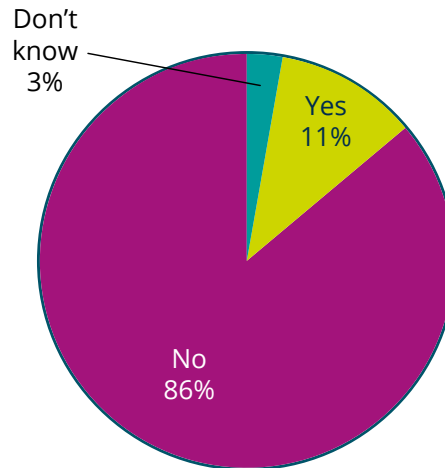
Who has responded to our online consultation so far?

Nearly 9 in 10 of our respondents so far say they have not taken part in a consultation about assessment before, as the chart (right) indicates.

We asked respondents to tell us about themselves. Their responses reveal:

- A little under a third of respondents so far said they work in schools, and they represented the full range of school phases.
- Among this group, there was an equal split between primary and secondary school respondents.
- Over two thirds work in local authority maintained or community schools, or an academy, free school or city technology college.
- Well over half of the respondents who said they work in a school are classroom-based, working either as class or supply teachers, teaching assistants, or middle leaders.

Have you responded to a consultation about assessment before? (n=186)



A more detailed breakdown of our respondents so far, including by school type and job role, is given in Appendix 2.

The online consultation was launched in mid-March, and will remain open throughout the summer, 2017, so that we can collect an increasing number of responses as this consultation progresses.

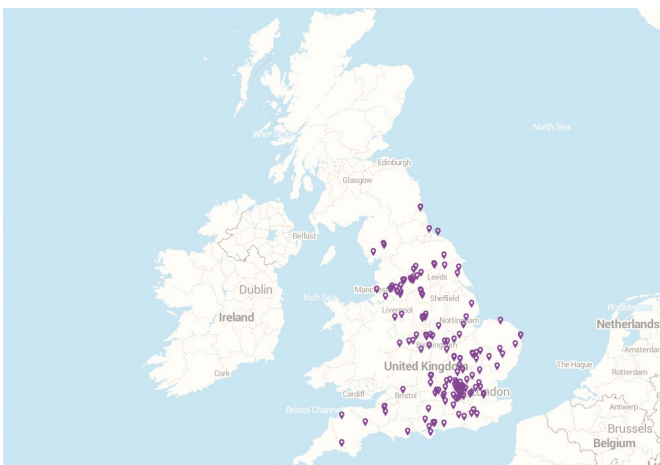
You can respond to our online consultation and share it with colleagues, friends and family by following this link to our mini-site can be found here: www.pearson.com/uk/web/testingthewater.html.

You can Tweet about the consultation using #TestingTheWater, and speak to us @LKMco and @pearson_UK.



Where are these respondents based?

We asked respondents where they live or work, or where their children's schools are, and the following infographic outlines their answers. Because of the ways in which the education system in the UK works, we asked for responses from people living and working in England.

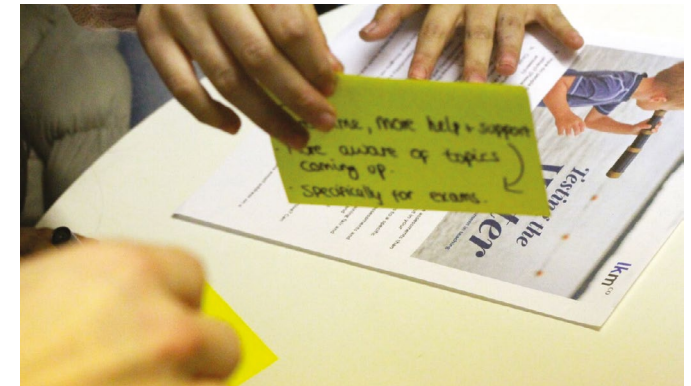


1.2.4 What are our next steps?

Our online consultation will remain open for another couple of months as we gather as wide a range of responses as possible, and in particular from those whose bread and butter is assessment: teachers.

We will then be in a position to start refining potential solutions. As part of this phase we will undertake and draw on a set of international case studies to explore how some of the problems we have identified have been addressed. We will also undertake some national polling, to test and refine our ideas.

We will be publishing a final report outlining the findings from the completed consultation in the late summer, 2017.



We've had a great response so far to our workshops and online consultation. Moving forward we want to keep up the momentum and hear from as many teachers, school leaders, parents, governors, young people, and anyone else with an interest in assessment, as possible.

Help us get the word out by sharing our [online consultation](#) with your colleagues, friends and family.

The mini-site can be found here: www.pearson.com/uk/web/testingthewater.html.

You can Tweet about the consultation using #TestingTheWater, and speak to us @LKMco and @pearson_UK.

2. Why are we doing this?

Assessment has been the subject of intensive attention and reform in recent years, affecting virtually every stage of formal education from the Early Years into post-16 provision. In this section, we explain the rationale for this consultation, before then providing a brief overview of ongoing activity relating to assessment, both within government a further afield. We then outline some of the key challenges that face the schools sector.

2.1 The rationale for this consultation

Assessment, the curriculum and, of course, pedagogy, are at the heart of teaching and learning. These three components interweave, and discussion of one almost inevitably implicates the others.² However, David Ausubel, an American psychologist, suggested, *“the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him accordingly”*.³ Consequently, while assessment is clearly only one part of the education process, Daisy Christodoulou, Head of Assessment at Ark Schools, argues it has

*“enormous practical importance”, and “any attempt to change curriculum or pedagogy also requires a change in assessment.”*⁴

Assessment, testing and exams are perceived by teachers and parents alike to be one of the top issues facing the education sector. For teachers and school leaders assessment is the second most pressing concern facing education, behind workload (although assessment, of course, also affects workload).^{5, 6} For parents, only funding cuts to schools are a bigger issue.⁷

Pearson’s 2016 survey of teachers’ and parents’ attitudes towards assessment reveals widespread support for a cross-sector debate to address some of the challenges relating to testing and assessment. Pearson and LKMco therefore believe they have a role to play in facilitating this debate and helping find solutions. We launched this in-depth, consultation with teachers, school leaders, experts and parents to better understand concerns about assessment and to identify ways of addressing them.

Our areas of focus for this consultation and our questions are drawn from a stimulus paper prepared by Professor Peter Hill, an expert in international assessment systems, and on Pearson’s 2016 survey. These led to our initial set of consultation questions, outlined in Sections 1.2.2 and 1.2.3.



² Alison Peacock, *Assessment for Learning Without Limits* (London: Open University Press, 2016).

³ David Ausubel, *Educational psychology, A cognitive view* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p.vi.

⁴ Daisy Christodoulou, *Making Good Progress?: The future of Assessment for Learning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 16.

⁵ BritainThinks, on behalf of Pearson (2016) *Assessments Attitudes of UK Teachers and Parents*.

⁶ The Key, *State of Education Survey Report 2016*. The survey reports on a sample of over 2,000 school leaders and governors, who placed ‘internal assessment post-levels’ and ‘preparing for new performance measures’ just behind teacher workload as the most pressing issues facing the sector.

⁷ BritainThinks, on behalf of Pearson (2016) *Assessments Attitudes of UK Teachers and Parents*.

2.2 The assessment landscape

2010 – 2011:

- The 'Importance of Teaching' White Paper, published in November 2010, set out the government's ambition to reform the curriculum and assessment at primary, secondary and post-16.⁸
- The 'English Baccalaureate' ('EBacc') was announced in 2010, and was included for the first time in 2010 performance measures. It includes English, maths, science, a language and a humanities GCSE.
- Lord Bew's 2011 review of KS2 testing and accountability found schools *should* be held accountable for the education of their pupils, but suggested placing greater emphasis on teacher assessment judgements in the accountability system.⁹

2012 – 2013:

- A new universal phonics screening check was rolled out in 2012.
- An Early Years progress check for two-year-olds was introduced in 2012.
- The Centre for Market Reform of Education (CMRE) published a discussion paper in September 2012, addressing issues in 14 to

19 assessments and focusing on the role of competition between assessment providers.¹⁰

- The CBI launched its 'First Steps' report in November 2012, calling for greater alignment between employers' needs, the curriculum and exams, and a move away from GCSEs to summative testing at 18.¹¹
- The ATL called in a May 2013 Position Statement for greater reliance on teacher assessment, which it deems a fairer way to assess pupils' achievements.¹²
- Pupils sat a grammar, punctuation and spelling test at the end of KS2 for the first time in 2013.
- The thinktank IPPR published a collection of essays in June 2013, including several with a focus on the balance between forms of formative and summative feedback.¹³

2014:

- The NAHT's Commission on Assessment published its report in February 2014, outlining a set of principles for good assessment, and examples of best practice meeting these principles.¹⁴
- Ofqual released its review of exam marking in A-levels, GCSEs and other academic qualifications in February 2014, suggesting better use can be made of on-screen marking.¹⁵

- The Department for Education announced its new Reception baseline measure in March 2014.
- Schools taught the new National Curriculum from September 2014.
- Levels, which had been the system used by most primary and secondary schools for monitoring pupils' attainment and progress, were removed in September 2014.
- The Sutton Trust published research in October 2014 exploring what makes great teaching, and found the ability to conduct assessment plays a fundamental role.¹⁶
- The Department for Education launched its workload challenge in October 2014, establishing three independent teacher workload review groups.



⁸ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175429/CM-7980.pdf.

⁹ www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/pdfs/2011-bew-report-ks2tests.pdf.

¹⁰ <http://www.cmre.org.uk/uploads/publications/When%20qualifications%20fail%202013.pdf>.

¹¹ <http://www.cbi.org.uk/first-steps/assets/download.pdf>.

¹² <https://www.atl.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/policy-posts/common-ground-assessment-and-accountability-primary-schools>.

¹³ http://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2013/06/excellence-equity-attainment-gap_June2013_10897.pdf?noredirect=1

¹⁴ www.naht.org.uk/assets/assessment-commission-report.pdf

¹⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/393832/2014-02-14-review-of-quality-of-marking-in-exams-in-a-levels-gcse-and-other-academic-qualifications-final-report.pdf

¹⁶ <http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/What-Makes-Great-Teaching-REPORT.pdf>

2015:

- The Carter Review of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) published its report in January 2015, finding that, of all areas of ITT, the most significant improvements are needed for training in assessment.¹⁷
- Pupils sat KS1 and KS2 assessments under the old National Curriculum for the final time in the summer, 2015.
- The Commission on Assessment Without Levels released its report in September 2015, highlighting the conflicting pressures assessment could place on teachers, and the need for alignment between assessment, curriculum and accountability policy.¹⁸
- New GCSE courses in English language and literature, and maths, were first taught from September 2015 (to be sat in summer 2017, results in August 2017). The new GCSEs were assessed mainly by exams, and graded 9 to 1. The remaining GCSE subjects would be introduced over two years from September 2016.
- New AS and A-level courses were taught from September 2015 (with further courses to be introduced in 2016 and 2017). The new courses were not split into modules, and were assessed mainly by exam.

2016:

- The three independent teacher workload review groups published their respective reports in March 2016, outlining concerns about marking, planning and resources, and data management, and possible ways of addressing the concerns.¹⁹
- The government scrapped the proposed Reception baseline assessment in April 2016.
- The KS1 grammar, punctuation and spelling test was leaked online in April 2016.
- Pupils took KS1 and KS2 assessments based on the new National Curriculum for the first time in the Summer 2016. The assessment comprised a combination of teacher assessment using interim frameworks, and tests.
- The Headteachers' Roundtable published its Alternative Green Paper in September 2016, which included a range of policy recommendations focused on accountability.²⁰
- The Education Select Committee launched an inquiry into primary assessment in September 2016.²¹
- The Rochford Review, published in October 2016, recommended moving away from the use of P scales to assess children working below the standard of National Curriculum tests.²²

- The Education Secretary said there would be no more new tests or national assessments introduced before 2018.
- The government published findings from its review of the Standards and Testing Agency in November 2016, finding the body had shortcomings but could continue to develop and deliver primary assessments.²³
- Ofsted's Annual Report 2015/16, published in December 2016, found evidence to suggest schools' curricula were being narrowed because of a focus on core subjects in statutory testing.²⁴
- The OECD published its 2015 PISA rankings in December 2016. Its report on 'policies and practices for successful schools' found the UK has a below OECD-average percentage of pupils in schools where teacher-developed tests are used more than once a month.²⁵
- Pearson and LKMco launch their 'Testing the Water' consultation, exploring perceptions of and attitudes towards assessment.

¹⁷ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/399957/Carter_Review.pdf

¹⁸ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/483058/Commission_on_Assessment_Without_Levels_-_report.pdf

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-teachers-workload/reducing-teachers-workload>

²⁰ <http://schoolsweek.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/The-Alternative-Green-Paper.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/primary-assessment-16-17/>

²² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/561411/Rochford_Review_Report_v5_PFDA.pdf

²³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/566914/STA_review_-_Final_report_FINAL_.pdf

²⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/574186/Ofsted_annual_report_education_and_skills_201516_web-ready.pdf

²⁵ <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/9816071e.pdf?expires=1492070122&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=0CBBC6696F251F07DA214D4D2B0B3DCB>

2017:

- The NAHT's Independent Assessment Review Group published its report 'Redressing the Balance' in January 2017, examining the arrangements in place for assessment between the start of school and KS3. Its recommendations included decoupling ongoing and statutory assessments, and two statutory assessment points at the start and end of primary schooling.²⁶
- Schools Minister Nick Gibb said to the Education Select Committee in February that pupils will sit a times table test at the end of primary school from 2019.
- Ofqual announced in March 2017 that the first National Reference Test, sat by pupils in year 11 that Spring, was implemented according to plan.
- In March 2017 the Department for Education launched two public consultations. One focused on primary assessment including the role and operation of teacher assessment and the best starting point from which to measure the progress pupils make at primary school.²⁷ The other sought views on the assessment of pupils working below the level of the National Curriculum tests.²⁸
- ASCL, the NFER and SSAT released their 'Refocusing Assessment' resources, to help school leaders plan coherent whole school approaches to assessment and develop formative assessment in EBacc subjects.²⁹
- In April 2017 the NAHT launched a members-only consultation on the government's proposed reforms to primary assessment.³⁰
- The Education Select Committee published findings from its inquiry into primary assessment in May 2017, arguing high stakes testing has been "harming teaching and learning in primary schools".³¹



²⁶ www.naht.org.uk/_resources/assets/attachment/full/0/65197.pdf

²⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/primary-assessment-in-england>

²⁸ <https://consult.education.gov.uk/assessment-policy-and-development/rochford-review/>

²⁹ <https://www.ascl.org.uk/index.cfm?originalUrl=utilities/document-summary.html&id=AE22A152-CFAE-4698-93201B9BA2061907>

³⁰ <http://www.naht.org.uk/welcome/news-and-media/key-topics/assessment/consultation-on-primary-assessment-is-published/>

³¹ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news-parliament-2015/primary-assessment-report-published-16-17/>

2.3 Challenges for assessment

i) Negative perceptions

On balance, teachers and parents feel negatively about testing and assessment in schools, but tests for older pupils including GCSEs and A-levels are much more likely to be viewed positively.³²

a) Stress and pressure

Views of assessment, particularly where younger children are involved, tend to be negative. Spontaneous associations with assessment and testing are much more likely to be negative than positive, with teachers and parents alike linking them with stress and pressure.³³

The PISA 2015 results suggest that anxiety about schoolwork, homework and tests correlates negatively with performance in science, reading and maths. Furthermore, the fear of making mistakes in tests can lead pupils to “choke under pressure”. However, despite a perception among teachers and parents that children and young people’s anxiety comes from ‘testing overload’, the results indicate that the number of assessments pupils sit seems unrelated to pupils’ level of schoolwork anxiety. Rather, “it is students’ perception of the assessment as more or less threatening that determines how anxious students feel about tests.”³⁴

This was corroborated in the Education Select Committee’s inquiry into primary assessment, in which some pupils said “they could get nervous or anxious about taking the tests, and that feeling nervous during the test might affect how well they did.”³⁵

b) Fairness

A sizeable minority (47%) of teachers and parents feel tests and assessments do not provide a fair measurement of students’ real achievements.³⁶ Furthermore, many do not feel their children are adequately prepared for assessments and tests (34% of primary parents and 38% secondary parents say their child seemed ‘well prepared’ during their last assessment and testing period).

Primary school leaders do not believe that new accountability systems will be an improvement in terms of accurately reflecting their school’s performance. On the other hand, secondary school leaders are more positive about the new Attainment and Progress 8 measures.³⁷

Some have expressed concern that assessment is inaccessible for some children, particularly those with forms of special educational need and disability (SEND).³⁸ The Rochford Review explored the assessment of children working below the

standard of the National Curriculum, including those with forms SEN. The review emphasises the need for assessments to help pupils demonstrate their achievements and progress, while also capturing the complexity and breadth of young people’s needs across the system.³⁹ The government is currently consulting on the Rochford Review’s recommendations.



³² BritainThinks, on behalf of Pearson (2016) *Assessments Attitudes of UK Teachers and Parents*.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ OECD 2017, *PISA 2015 Results (Volume III: Students’ Well-Being)*, (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2017).

³⁵ House of Commons Select Committee, *Primary Assessment: Eleventh Report of Session 2016-17* (London: House of Commons, 2017), p. 27.

³⁶ BritainThinks, on behalf of Pearson (2016) *Assessments Attitudes of UK Teachers and Parents*.

³⁷ The Key, *State of Education Survey Report 2016*.

³⁸ House of Commons Select Committee, *Primary Assessment: Eleventh Report of Session 2016-17* (London: House of Commons, 2017), p. 12.

³⁹ The Rochford Review: final report – Review of assessment for pupils working below the standard of National Curriculum tests (Coventry: Standards and Testing Agency, 2016).

c) Narrowing the scope of the educational process

High-stakes accountability and pressure to achieve results can have negative consequences, which, in their respective ways, reduce the breadth, depth and enjoyment of the educational process. These can include:⁴⁰

- Teaching to the test;
- A culture of pay-by-results;
- A narrowing of the curriculum, and;
- An emphasis on rote learning over deeper learning.

These findings were corroborated in Pearson's 2016 survey, in which over half (56%) of teachers said they feel that the 'culture' of testing has a negative impact on the quality of their teaching, and some feel it distorts the curriculum. Nine in ten teachers said that their performance evaluation is too dependent on students' results.⁴¹

ii) The many functions of assessment

There are tensions between the purposes served by assessment and, at present, there is a lack of balance between its various functions.⁴²

a) Assessment for learning (formative assessment)

Assessment that provides feedback to teachers and pupils about learning is generally referred to as 'formative'. Assessment forms a critical part of the learning process, providing information about what pupils do and do not know and understand. Research undertaken by the Education Endowment Foundation finds that feedback – *"information given to a learner and/or the teacher about the learner's performance relative to learning goals"* – tends to have a very high effect on learning.⁴³ Giving good feedback is challenging, though, and will:

- Be specific, accurate and clear;
- Compare what a learner is doing now with what they have done before;
- Encourage and support further effort, but be given sparingly so as to be genuine and meaningful, and;
- Provide specific guidance on how to improve.

As part of our online consultation we asked what assessment is useful for. The two most commonly cited uses for assessment, mentioned by around a third of respondents, were to check pupils' learning (what they have and have not grasped about a particular topic, process or skill) and identifying the steps necessary to move their learning forwards.

Teachers, governors, parents and young people in our workshops also stressed the importance of assessment in serving these two purposes.

"[Assessment is useful] to assess what has been learned and improve teaching."

Online consultation respondent

"[Assessment is useful] to enable teachers to plan for progression in learning."

Online consultation respondent

"[Assessment is useful] to recognize what help is needed and why."

Online consultation respondent

Only a handful of respondents to our online consultation talked about the value of assessment in providing pupils themselves with feedback, although this element may be implicit in respondents' comments about the processes of checking learning and identifying next steps.

⁴⁰ House of Commons Select Committee, *Primary Assessment: Eleventh Report of Session 2016-17* (London: House of Commons, 2017); NAHT, *Report of the Assessment Review Group: Redressing the Balance* (Haywards Heath: NAHT, 2017); The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2015/16 (London: Ofsted, 2016).

⁴¹ BritainThinks, on behalf of Pearson (2016) *Assessments Attitudes of UK Teachers and Parents*.

⁴² Peter Hill, *Stimulus Paper* (2016) (internal document for Pearson); NAHT, *Report of the Assessment Review Group: Redressing the Balance* (Haywards Heath: NAHT, 2017).

⁴³ Education Endowment Foundation, 'Feedback – Teaching and Learning Toolkit' (2017), available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/resources/teaching-learning-toolkit/feedback/>.

Responses to our online consultation reflected practitioners' and parents' interest in understanding how young people's performance at a given point in time compares with their previous performance.

"[Assessment is useful for] tracking progress and highlighting areas of concern."

Online consultation respondent

"[Assessment is useful for] seeing where students are in relation to their cohort."

Online consultation respondent

They also acknowledged the role assessment could play in quality assuring and enhancing teaching. The responses tended not to elaborate on whether this should be primarily through developmental processes such as coaching and training, or more 'formal' processes such as performance reviews. This also came up during the workshops, and these discussions suggested 'assessment' here could refer to one or both of two things:

- Assessment of pupils' learning in order to see how effective teaching in a particular area has been, and where teaching needs to focus next, or;
- Assessment of teachers themselves.

"[Assessment is useful] to see where teachers need to focus teaching."

Online consultation respondent

b) Assessment for grades and qualifications (summative assessment)

The purpose of summative assessment is to evaluate the extent of pupils' learning of material in a course, and produce some form of mark or grade that a range of people will understand.⁴⁴ In England pupils sit exams at age 16 and 18 (although sometimes earlier or later), a major function of which is to award them with grades and qualifications and therefore communicate information to colleges, universities and future employers.

Pupils sit national tests at the end of Key Stages (KS) 1 and 2. These are summative, evaluating the extent of pupils' learning of National Curriculum content, and also serve to indicate whether pupils are 'working towards', 'meeting' or 'exceeding' expectations.

Summative tests are sometimes used for formative purposes, for example using an exam paper to test pupils' understanding of a particular topic and using the results to inform future lesson preparation and revision, although this practice should be exercised with caution.⁴⁵

c) Assessment for accountability

Test data is also used to hold teachers and schools to account. This can occur when information is collected about class' attainment and progress so that schools can monitor pupils' (and consequently teachers') performance. It also occurs when test results (such as those currently collected at the end

of Key Stages 1, 2 and 4) are used to hold schools to account through performance tables and floor standards.⁴⁶ Ofsted also uses schools' data to inform its judgements.

However, John McIntosh CBE, Chair of the Commission on Assessment without Levels, noted:

"Teachers are subject to conflicting pressures: trying to make appropriate use of assessment as part of the day-to-day task of classroom teaching, while at the same time collecting assessment data which will be used in very high stakes evaluation of individual and institutional performance. These conflicted purposes too often affect adversely the fundamental aims of the curriculum, particularly regarding breadth of content and depth of learning."

Final Report of the Commission on Assessment without Levels, p.3.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Daisy Christodoulou, *Making Good Progress?: The future of Assessment for Learning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 55-56; Dylan Wiliam and Paul Black, 'Meanings and Consequences: a basis for distinguishing formative and summative functions of assessment?', *British Educational Research Journal*, 22(5), pp. 537-548.

⁴⁵ Daisy Christodoulou, *Making Good Progress?: The future of Assessment for Learning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 56.

⁴⁶ Peter Hill, *Stimulus Paper* (2016) (internal document for Pearson).

⁴⁷ Final Report of the Commission on Assessment without Levels (London: Department for Education, 2015).

Furthermore, the Education Select Committee noted in its report on primary assessment

“Many of the negative effects of assessment are in fact caused by the use of results in the accountability system rather than the assessment system itself. Key Stage 2 results are used to hold schools to account at a system level, to parents, by Ofsted, and results are linked to teachers’ pay and performance. We recognise the importance of holding schools to account but this high-stakes system does not improve teaching and learning at primary school alone.”

Report by the Education Select Committee, p. 19.⁴⁸

A number of respondents said in our online consultation and during workshops that – for better or for worse – assessment is useful for holding schools to account. In some instances participants saw this as a good thing, although others said that while assessment *is* useful for this, they had reservations about the purposes to which accountability data are put.

“[Assessment is useful for] testing the effectiveness of schools at achieving progress for students.”

Online consultation respondent

“[Assessment is useful for] measuring schools.”

Online consultation respondent

A small handful of respondents said assessment is useful for providing more objective measures in order to evaluate pupils’ learning, and the performance of the education system more broadly.

“[Assessment is useful] to give a fair and objective view of performance.”

Online consultation respondent

“[Assessment is useful for] cutting through flannel and giving objective measures of progress.”

Online consultation respondent

iii) Teachers’ expertise and capacity

Teachers’ capacity and expertise can affect their willingness and ability to conduct assessment appropriately.⁴⁹ What is more, the current round of testing and exam reforms, including the reduced role of teacher assessment and the simultaneous shift towards terminal assessments, have in part been motivated by a perceived lack of reliability and fairness across the system.

a) Workload

Teachers express concern about the effects assessment can have on their workload. In response to the Department for Education’s Workload Challenge, teachers said lesson planning, assessment, and reporting administration were the main causes of unnecessary workload. Specific issues included recording and entering data, the duplication of effort, and heavy marking.⁵⁰

The government has since launched three independent teacher workload review groups, focused on providing guidance regarding marking, planning and teaching resources, and data management.



⁴⁸ House of Commons Select Committee, *Primary Assessment: Eleventh Report of Session 2016-17* (London: House of Commons, 2017), p. 19.

⁴⁹ Peter Hill, *Stimulus Paper* (2016) (internal document for Pearson).

⁵⁰ Sarah Gibson, Lizzie Oliver and Mary Dennison, *Workload Challenge: Analysis of teacher consultation responses* (London: Department for Education, 2015).

⁵¹ Peter Sellen, *Teacher workload and professional development in England’s secondary schools: insights from TALIS* (London: Education Policy Institute, 2016), p. 7.

⁵² John Roberts, ‘Tech in schools isn’t all bad: it can help manage behaviour’, *Schools Week*, 01.04.17, available at: <http://schoolsweek.co.uk/tech-in-schools-isnt-all-bad-it-can-help-manage-behaviour/>.

⁵³ Peter Hill, *Stimulus Paper* (2016) (internal document for Pearson).

An Education Policy Institute report found that teachers in England work, on average, longer hours than teachers in most other jurisdictions, noting that:

“Although the time that teachers in England spend teaching lessons is around the average, it is time spent planning lessons, writing assessments, marking and other functions that is driving long working hours in England.”

Teacher workload and professional development in England's secondary schools: insights from TALIS.⁵¹

Additionally, a further challenge highlighted by the Education Policy Institute is that teachers' long working hours restrict their access to continuing professional development:

“Of the 36 jurisdictions in the dataset, England ranked 30th in terms of the average number of days spent in a year on certain types of professional development.”

Teacher workload and professional development in England's secondary schools: insights from TALIS.⁵⁶

Technology is seen by some to have important and often untapped potential for reducing teachers' workload,⁵² and making assessment more efficient,⁵³ although others warn about the potential negative effects of classroom technology on learning and emphasise it should be used with care, if at all.⁵⁴

b) Training

One challenge – highlighted by the Carter Review of Initial Teaching Training – is that there are gaps in some teachers' and schools' capacity *“in the theoretical and technical aspects of assessment.”* Of all the areas of ITT reviewed, *“the most significant improvements are needed for training in assessment.”*⁵⁵

While this is not solely down to assessment, it seems that a negative cycle has emerged whereby teachers' ability to conduct assessment may be hindered by a lack of access to training throughout their careers and, in turn, their access to training is hindered in part because assessment practices are unreasonable and inefficient.

c) Accuracy

Another major challenge for assessment – and in particular forms of teacher-led assessment – is the reliability and accuracy of judgements. To give three examples, this issue has been explored in recent years with regards to:

- The mark distributions arising from the phonics screening check at the end of year 1, which in 2012 and 2013 showed a 'leap' in the marks awarded *at the pass mark*;⁵⁷
- The between-school consistency of teacher assessed writing moderation at Key Stage 2, and pupils in different schools being awarded different results for writing of a comparable standard, and;⁵⁸
- The speaking and listening component under the former English GCSE, which the exams regulator Ofqual decided was leading to unreliable and therefore unfair results across schools.⁵⁹

Furthermore, teacher assessment has been found to discriminate against poorer pupils, minorities, and those with forms of SEND.⁶⁰ However, the challenges of teacher assessment are because *humans* (rather than teachers specifically) are prone to bias, both conscious and unconscious.⁶¹

⁵⁴ Tom Bennett, *Creating a Culture: How school leaders can optimise behaviour – Independent review of behaviour in schools* (London: Department for Education, 2017); Tom Bennett, 'Anti-socially mobile? What I really think about classroom tech', TES, 31.08.15, available at: <https://www.tes.com/news/blog/anti-socially-mobile-what-i-really-think-about-classroom-tech>.

⁵⁵ Andrew Carter OBE, *Carter review of initial teacher training* (ITT) (London: Department for Education, 2015), p. 9.

⁵⁶ Peter Sellen, *Teacher workload and professional development in England's secondary schools: insights from TALIS* (London: Education Policy Institute, 2016), p. 7.

⁵⁷ Praful Whiteman, *Phonics screening check and Key Stage 1 assessments in England, 2016* (London: Department for Education, 2016), p. 4.

⁵⁸ Daisy Christodoulou, *A valid and reliable timesaver? Comparative judgment of year 6 writing*, available at: <https://livestream.com/L4L/rED16/videos/135285911>.

⁵⁹ Glenys Stacey, *Our announcement on speaking and listening assessments*, The Ofqual Blog (2013), available at: <https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2013/09/04/our-announcement-on-speaking-and-listening-assessments/>.

⁶⁰ Daisy Christodoulou, *Tests are inhuman – and that is what is so good about them*, The Wing to Heaven (2015), available at: <https://thewingtoheaven.wordpress.com/2015/10/11/tests-are-inhuman-and-that-is-what-so-good-about-them/>.

⁶¹ Daisy Christodoulou, *Why is teacher assessment biased?*, The Wing to Heaven (2015), available at: <https://thewingtoheaven.wordpress.com/2015/11/01/why-is-teacher-assessment-biased/>.

3. How do people feel about assessment?

Throughout our conversations with teachers, parents, governors and young people, participants stressed how assessment has the potential to support excellent teaching. Yet while the potential impact of assessment is significant, there were a number of concerns raised through the online consultation and workshops. Here we look at these concerns, and include suggestions about how to address them throughout.

This analysis is based on responses submitted online by the 5th April 2017, and the assessment workshops. We coded responses to each of the three questions online to help identify overarching themes, and reviewed notes taken at each of the workshops. The codes and themes are emerging, and may change as the consultation progresses.

3.1 Concerns about assessment

Here we look at some of the main concerns raised through the online consultation and workshops, and include suggestions about how to address these concerns throughout.

3.1.1 Stress and pressure

One of the most commonly cited concerns in the online responses – and something that came up in most of the workshops – was the stress assessment can cause teachers, parents, and young people.

i) Pupils' wellbeing

A significant concern here relates to the stress that tests and exams can cause young people as well as the subsequent impact this might have on their mental health.

"I am concerned about the impact on children's mental health."

Online consultation respondent

a) The fear of being labelled a failure and of the consequences of failure for young people can be very intense. We heard anecdotes during the workshops about primary and secondary school children losing sleep and being physically sick before sitting tests. Teachers, governors, parents and young people themselves emphasised how stressful tests and exams can be for children, and how the detrimental effects of this stress (including a lowering of self-esteem) far outweigh any potential benefits (such as motivating revision). Generally respondents felt summative tests and exams could cause stress, but that young people do not feel so worried about forms of formative assessment.

b) The likelihood of being labelled a 'failure' has increased for primary children under the new assessment system. A large proportion of children are 'working towards' the expectations of the National Curriculum. Participants in our workshops – both teachers and parents – felt it was acutely unfair that pupils who may have made excellent progress could be told they are still 'below' the expected standard.



c) Teachers and parents sometimes pass stress ‘down’ to young people. Responses in this area were mixed. Some parents in our workshop described how they and teachers try to protect young people from the stress of tests and exams. However, a number of workshop participants – in many cases teachers or parents themselves – said the pressure felt by teachers and parents to secure good test and exam results for their children means they pass this stress ‘down’. Several teachers said this could happen in the Early Years, although it was generally seen to be more of a problem at the end of Key Stages 2 and 4. The young people we spoke to said they have felt pressure from teachers and parents both ‘directly’ (being asked to work hard and take their exams seriously), and indirectly (seeing that how they perform might affect their teachers and parents).

Discussion point: How can schools take further steps to protect children’s mental health, contextualise tests and exams, and talk about anxiety and stress?

d) Young people may not perform at their best under pressure. Teachers, governors, parents and young people said during workshops and in online responses that they feel tests and exams inhibit rather than enable young people to demonstrate what they can do. This ties into other concerns about standards, fairness and access, which we address separately below.

e) Children are assessed too early. Another concern respondents have is *when* children are assessed, and the impact this has on their mental

health. Four respondents to the online consultation, and a number of Early Years and primary teachers in our workshops said they feel summative assessments (including the Early Years Profile) can put undue pressure on young children.

f) The pressure is unnecessary and extreme.

Teachers, governors, parents and young people said, both in online responses and during workshops, that they feel the pressure pupils are put under is intense, but also in many cases unnecessary. One online respondent said assessment could be “*overwhelming and onerous.*” School leaders and teachers said during the workshops that assessment is a critical part of teaching, but that it is often undertaken ‘for the sake of it’, as a ‘tick box’ exercise, or motivated by accountability rather than learning.

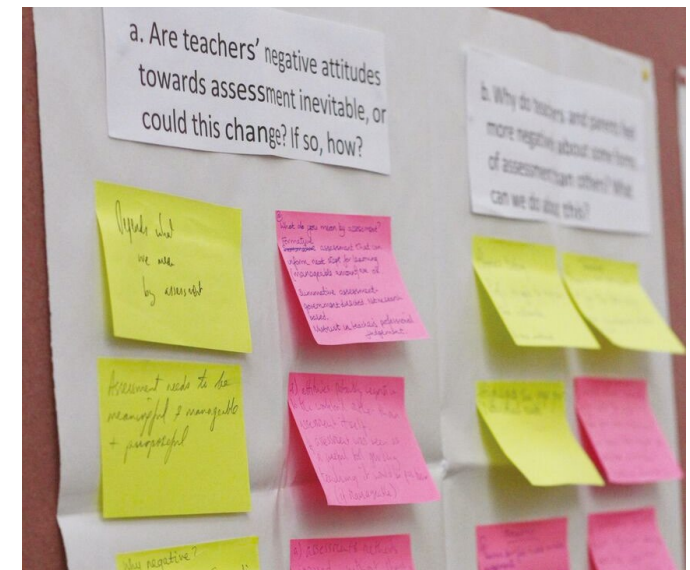
“[My biggest concern about assessment is] putting unnecessary pressure on teachers and pupils.”
Online consultation respondent

ii) Staff wellbeing

a) Tests and exams cause significant stress for teachers. A dominant theme during the workshops in particular was the stress tests and exams cause teachers. In online responses this concern came through more clearly in teachers’ and governors’ responses than it did in parents’ responses. During the workshops teachers talked at length about the pressure they feel to prepare their pupils and obtain good results. Meanwhile, although post-16 teachers said during their workshop that tests and exams are a source of pressure, they see exam preparation as a more fundamental part of their role.

b) Teachers feel simultaneously motivated and pressured to deliver results. Teachers are motivated to help pupils do well in assessments because they want the best for them, and consequently want to prepare them well so that the young people they work can flourish. Alongside this more intrinsic motivation to help pupils succeed, though, teachers, governors and parents talked in our workshops about the pressure from school leaders on teachers to secure good results, often to improve or safeguard the school’s standing in league tables, or through tying test and exam results to pay and professional progression.

Discussion point: How can school leaders and governors be supported in adopting sensible working policies that seek to minimise workload while maximising classroom impact?



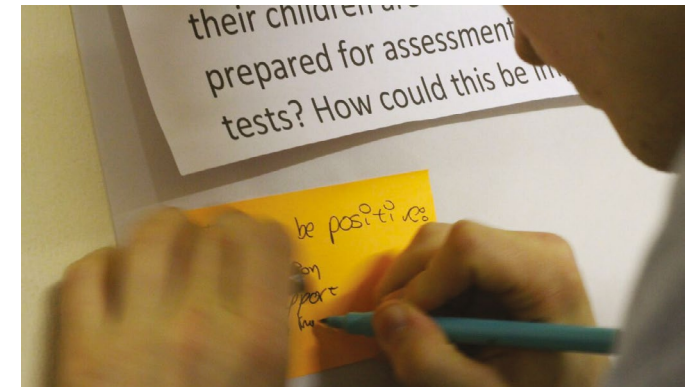
*iii) Workload***a) Assessment often adversely affects workload.**

Closely tied to the issue of staff wellbeing is the issue of workload. During the workshops school leaders and teachers talked at length about the impact assessment can have on their workload. They explained this could happen for a number of reasons:

- Teachers spend considerable time marking books and practice tests. Some teachers said their schools set unrealistic expectations about marking, and simultaneously expressed concern about the utility of marking as a form of feedback, particularly where pupils focus on marks or grades rather than comments on how to improve.
- On a related note, while virtually everyone we spoke to during the workshops emphasised how critical formative assessment is in helping pupils make progress, a number of teachers and governors expressed concern that teachers feel compelled to provide written feedback over other forms of feedback (including verbal), so they have 'something to show' for the lesson.
- Teachers spend a lot of time gathering and entering data. Many saw this as an administrative burden, and more about teacher and school accountability than supporting learning.
- The pressure to deliver results means teachers can feel compelled to run extra lessons and revision sessions.

"[My biggest concern about assessment is] that it could create additional workload for teachers already stretched."

Online consultation respondent



Some possible ways forward and areas for further discussion

Our online consultation and workshops raised a number of ways in which pupils' and teachers' wellbeing in relation to assessment could be enhanced.

Suggestions included:

1. School leaders and teachers taking deliberate steps to protect children's mental health, by contextualising the tests, and talking about strategies for dealing with stress and anxiety.
2. School leaders and governors ensuring they protect their teachers' mental wellbeing, both by adopting sensible working policies and by bringing mental health 'into the open' as a topic for discussion.
3. Schools limiting the amount of tracking data teachers need to submit.
4. Schools streamlining the workflow processes associated with tracking, such as avoiding duplication of effort (by for example entering data more than once).
5. Schools emphasising the quality rather than quantity of marking.
6. Schools ensuring their teaching staff receive adequate training in assessment, supporting effective and efficient classroom practice.
7. Schools and government implementing standardised tests and exams only once children have reached secondary school.
8. Schools reducing the number of summative tests administered to pupils.
9. Schools increasing the number of formative assessments administered to pupils.
10. Assessment organisations and schools continuing to explore the potential for technology to make forms of formative and summative assessment more efficient and effective.

3.1.2 Balance

Another key set of issues for assessment relate to the balance between different forms of assessment, and between assessment and other parts of the learning process. By and large teachers were not calling for assessments to be scrapped, but for them to be put in the right context – a means of assessing progress at a moment in time, but only one measure of a child's achievements and of how well a teacher (or a school) teaches.

i) Accountability

a) The accountability system shapes what pupils learn. This concern came through clearly, particularly during workshops, where there was a strong sense that accountability measures can profoundly shape and limit what pupils learn about in school. Teachers, governors, parents and young people all expressed concern that accountability measures can create pressures to narrow the curriculum to focus on those aspects assessed in national tests and exams. This concern was mirrored in teachers', governors' and parents' responses to our online consultation.

"[My biggest concern about assessment is] that the curriculum narrows to match the tests."

Online consultation respondent

b) The accountability system shapes how pupils learn. Another issue flagged during the workshops was the manner in which accountability can shape pedagogy, and subsequently how pupils are taught. Primary and secondary teachers expressed concern that pedagogy – particularly as pupils approach key public exams – becomes disproportionately focused on practising test and exam technique, over and above other activities they deem valuable such as interactive pair and group activities.

"[My biggest concern about assessment is] that teachers are only focusing on last year's questions."

Online consultation respondent

c) Accountability negatively shapes the focus of in-school assessment. Responses in both our workshops and to our online consultation indicate significant concern that accountability measures, including both schools' performance in league tables, and evaluations of teachers' performance by their schools, can move emphasis away from forms of assessment that inform teaching towards testing that is used to produce tracking data in order to monitor teachers' performance, or to replicate and therefore prepare pupils for summative exams. There was a powerful sense among participants – teachers, governors, parents and young people alike – that this often actively detracts from the learning process, hindering the creation and transmission of meaningful formative feedback to identify gaps and enhance learning. One respondent even said a lot of assessment *"is of no actual use for teachers."*

"[My biggest concern about assessment is] that it is misaligned with the objective of learning."

Online consultation respondent

d) The accountability system serves multiple and perhaps conflicting functions. A point made particularly strongly by teachers during the workshops was that assessments are used to both judge pupils' successes in particular areas of learning, *and* to hold schools to account.



"[My biggest concern about assessment is] conflating pupils' performance with schools' performance."

Online consultation respondent

Discussion point: How can schools be supported to ask 'what do we want our pupils to learn?' and ensure assessment helps them understand pupils' grasp of these topics?

ii) Perverse incentives

a) School- and national-level accountability creates perverse incentives to game the system by individual teachers and schools.

Several teachers and young people we spoke to during workshops felt that the accountability system and pressure to achieve good results means teachers and schools sometimes 'game' the system, whether deliberately or not. At an individual teacher level this might include giving extensive feedback on coursework. At a school level it might include narrowing the curriculum or streaming pupils into different qualification 'pathways'.

b) The accountability system means pressure is not spread evenly across different stakeholders.

Teachers and school leaders noted in our workshops how intense the pressure can be for them to produce results. Governors in our workshops sympathised with the pressure teachers and school leaders face, and noted they do not face the professional pressures in the same way.

iii) Teaching (and assessing) to the test

a) Tests and exams can alter the underlying purpose of learning.

In our conversations we heard how, at its best, assessment could help teachers understand their pupils' learning, and identify gaps in their knowledge. We also heard, though, that assessment can undermine rather than support teaching, and a key anxiety to come through both in the online consultation and workshops is how a focus on tests and exams shapes the underlying rationale for learning. This was perhaps expressed most starkly by some of the young people who, in their workshop, talked about the frustration of learning in order to pass tests and exams, rather than learning because of the inherent enjoyment of doing so, or any longer-term benefits of acquiring those knowledge and skills. This was more of a concern among primary, and Key Stage 3 and 4 teachers in our workshops. Post-16 teachers tended to see exam preparation as central to their role, but expressed concern that accountability reforms and funding cuts may affect the post-16 curriculum. Specifically, they said in light of EBacc fewer pupils may sit arts and vocational subjects at GCSE, which could mean, in turn, fewer students go on to study these subjects post-16. Funding cuts may then mean sixth forms cannot justify running courses with smaller class sizes.

"Children should learn, and not just learn to pass tests."

Online consultation respondent

"Assessment rather than learning is becoming the main focus of education."

Online consultation respondent

"[My biggest concern about assessment is] teaching to the test so learning gets lost."

Online consultation respondent

b) Teachers can spend too much time doing the wrong sorts of assessments. There is a sense among some respondents to our online consultation that teachers are simply *"spending too much time assessing children."* Whilst some teachers in our workshops agreed, others felt the problem was more that they felt compelled to spend time on the *wrong sorts* of assessment. Specifically, they felt that assessment was too focused on securing data that helped school leaders to track and monitor pupils' progress, and *"that it doesn't actually support learning."*

Discussion point: How can teachers be supported so that they can prioritise regular, formative forms of assessment?

iv) Trust in teachers

a) Teachers generally do not feel their professional judgement is valued. Teachers expressed this concern in every workshop we conducted, saying that the increasing tendency to structure assessment around tests and exams undermines their professional judgement. Disconcertingly, teachers also explained that their ability to apply their professional judgement while using formative assessment during lessons is limited.

"[My biggest concern about assessment is a] lack of opportunity for professional judgement.

Online consultation respondent



Some possible ways forward and areas for further discussion

Our online consultation and workshops raised a number of ways in which the balance between accountability and different forms of assessment might be redressed.

Suggestions included:

1. Schools focusing first and foremost on developing their curricula, rather than putting the 'cart before the horse' and working 'backwards' from assessment frameworks.
2. Schools using assessment to provide richer information about pupils' learning in specific areas of the curriculum and to map out next steps.
3. Teachers and schools tipping the balance back towards assessment that supports learning rather than accountability, perhaps through improving training for teachers and reviewing the frequency with which teachers must submit data.
4. Government and regulators finding ways to present more rounded overviews of schools' performance and, in particular, the teaching taking place beyond the 'pinch points' of the end of KS2 and KS4.
5. As part of this, school leaders, regulators, government and assessment organisations showing they value teachers' professional judgement. This might involve reviewing how teacher assessments and coursework contribute to pupils' final outcomes.
6. Schools adopting a 'peer challenge' model to hold one another to account and stimulate school improvement, whereby peers engage in quality assured peer review activities in clusters, taking into account a wide range of assessment evidence in the process.
7. Schools and possibly assessment organisations expanding the forms of evidence they accept as indications of pupils' achievements and progress.
8. Considering the abolition of universal standardised tests for the purposes of monitoring schools' performance altogether, and their replacement with national sampling to provide a measure of school performance nationally.
9. Government reviewing the information special schools are required to publish, to ensure this performance data is a fair and accurate portrayal of these schools' successes.

3.1.3 Accuracy and consistency

The most frequently highlighted concerns in our online consultation related to the accuracy and consistency of assessments, although these took a number of forms.

i) Making accurate judgements

a) It is difficult to make accurate assessments of pupils' achievements and progress. One striking theme, particularly among online responses, is how challenging it is to make accurate and reliable assessments of pupils' learning, whatever the assessment itself is for. The online responses suggest this is particularly a concern among school governors and academy trustees, and among parents, rather than among teachers.

"Formal assessments are a snapshot."

Online consultation respondent

b) Training in assessment for teachers is patchy nationally. In workshops, school leaders and teachers expressed anxiety that the training available to teachers both during initial teacher training and then on an ongoing basis is inconsistent across the country, and dependent very much on the school a teacher works in. This in turn affects teachers' abilities to conduct assessment.

Discussion point: How can government and training providers (including schools, universities and assessment organisations) find ways to ensure the training new and more experienced teachers receive has a positive impact on their ability and confidence to choose and undertake assessment appropriately?

c) There is a lack of consistency between schools. Participants in our workshops and online consultation emphasised the difficulty in drawing comparisons between pupils' achievements and progress in different schools, because of a lack of commensurability between their assessment systems. One challenge here, an online respondent suggested, is that there is *"no common system; all schools can use their own."*

"[My biggest concern about assessment is the] haphazard development of varied, poor-quality systems across the country."

Online consultation respondent

d) The quality of assessment varies between schools. In addition, respondents to our online consultation expressed concern that the quality and implementation of assessment varies between different schools. There are two main issues here:

- One is that feedback is *"is too detached from the action"*, as one online respondent put it, given too late to be of value to the pupil.
- Another is that the feedback itself lacks the specificity and clarity to help pupils build on their learning.

"[My biggest concern about assessment is that it] lacks real-time value and meaning to learners."

Online consultation respondent

e) Assessment does not align between different phases of education. Participants in both our workshops and online consultation said there could be disconnect between primary and secondary schools, and a lack of understanding of the curriculum and assessment each has in place. This creates educational and practical challenges, meaning pupils' learning can be disrupted as they transition between phases, but also that teachers may end up duplicating effort. Several teachers and governors said during workshops that secondary schools sometimes do not fully trust KS2 results because children have likely been 'hot housed' before sitting the tests.



f) New 'actors' in the education space are developing their own approaches to assessment and moderation. Several of our workshops highlighted the work multi-academy trusts (MATs) are undertaking to develop their own approaches to assessment, tracking and moderation. Some participants felt this was a welcome and necessary development, perceiving some MATs' expertise in this area to be more advanced than elsewhere in the sector, namely because of the work dedicated assessment specialists within these organisations. Others expressed concern that this could further embed fragmentation in the system.

g) There are serious concerns about the reliability of local authority moderation processes. This was a concern raised in our workshops by primary school leaders and teachers, who said they feel local authority moderation of teachers' assessments lacks consistency nationally, producing unreliable results.

h) There is a lack of alignment and understanding between the mainstream and special sectors. Teachers and school leaders working with pupils with forms of SEND explained assessment could sometimes feel like a 'bolt on', based on the mainstream curriculum's frequently inappropriate requirements and expectations. Furthermore, greater understanding is needed about how to assess pupils with SEND in mainstream schools (both in terms of assessing their needs, but also assessing their learning). Governors and special school leaders noted in our workshops that there is a lack of communication about assessment between the mainstream and special sectors, which can leave some parents of children with SEND feeling isolated.

Some possible ways forward and areas for further discussion

Our online consultation and workshops raised a number of ways in which the accuracy and consistency of assessments might be improved.

Suggestions include:

1. Teachers, assessment organisations and regulators finding ways to make different forms of assessment reliable and valid.
2. Schools, training providers and assessment organisations improving the training on offer to teachers working with or for them.
3. Schools, professional bodies (including possibly the Chartered College of Teaching), regulators, and government standardising school-level assessment, so that schools' internal systems are more comparable to one another.
4. MATs continuing to evaluate the success of their research and development of curricula and assessment systems, and sharing their results with the wider educational community.
5. School, local authorities, regulators, and government developing new or improved forms of moderation to replace or enhance local authority moderation. As part of this, considering whether moderation might take place in a different format, such as within clusters of schools across local authorities and MATs.
6. Assessment organisations and government producing clearer guidance well ahead of test and exam reforms, outlining the standards expected of pupils taking the assessments.
7. Secondary schools and their feeder primary schools working more closely together to improve alignment between each other's curricula and assessment systems, and smooth pupils' transition between primary and secondary schooling.
8. Assessment organisations and government evaluating the relationship between the curriculum and assessment in the mainstream and special sectors, developing solutions that work for the special sector.
9. Assessment organisations and government setting a national benchmark for pupils working outside the National Curriculum.

3.1.4 Fairness

A key theme to come through in both the workshops and online consultation was fairness.

i) Government reform

a) Respondents feel assessment is ‘imposed’ on them. There was a strong sense in workshops that reforms to assessment are done *to* teachers, parents and pupils, not *with* them. Teachers and parents voiced this concern in relation to reforms to standardised testing, exams, and accountability.

b) Teachers, governors and parents question the rationale behind many of the government’s reform to assessment. This view was voiced particularly strongly by teachers, school leaders and parents in our workshops, who feel assessment is too ‘political’ and subject to the whims of individual politicians.

c) Teachers and school leaders feel frustrated that the goalposts keep moving. This is a concern because it has practical implications for the implementation of assessment in schools, such as confusion around what appropriate expectations of pupils should be. In addition, teachers feel it can undermine the value and quality of assessments and targets that preceded these reforms.

“Changes to assessment are too frequent.”

Online consultation respondent

“The government keep changing the ‘goalposts’”.

Online consultation respondent

“[Assessment] doesn’t mean anything, the goalposts are shifting so fast.”

Online consultation respondent

d) Teachers and parents feel more clarity and guidance about the direction of travel and standards in assessment is needed. In our workshops, teachers talked about a lack of communication in relation to where assessment reform is headed, and the standards expected of their pupils. This has a known impact on parents and governors, many of whom said they have felt confused by the level and pace of reform. One online respondent commented, *“schools using and reporting different progress measures...confuses parents.”*

Discussion point: What is the role of professional bodies such as the College of Teaching in setting the direction of travel for assessment reform and practice?



ii) Meaningfulness

a) Some feel the standards expected in national and standardised tests and exams are inappropriate, either for the age groups sitting the assessments, or because there is disparity between standards at different stages of the education system. The meaningfulness of assessments is reduced if they are too difficult for the pupils taking them.

"[Assessment] tests children against unrealistic standards."

Online consultation respondent

"[Assessment] requirements are too high in primary; not high enough in secondary."

Online consultation respondent

b) The accountability system does not reflect whole-schools' achievements. Another concern was that the accountability system disproportionately emphasises the effects of teaching at the end of Key Stages 2 and 4, over and above the teaching that takes place throughout schooling. Again, this reduces the meaningfulness of the measures. While participants did not feel this was a problem with year 6 or GCSE assessments per se, they expressed anxiety about the uses to which results from these assessments are put.

c) The accountability and reporting system can adversely impact special schools. Special school teachers and leaders voiced their dismay in our workshops that their schools have to publish – and are subsequently held to account on – performance data primarily orientated towards the needs and expectations of pupils in the mainstream sector. For

instance, several special school leaders said it is not fair their schools are required to publish attainment data in the same format as mainstream schools, because their pupils are not competing on a level playing field.

iii) Accessibility

a) Teachers, parents and pupils feel exams focus disproportionately on memorising knowledge over applying skills. This came up in a number of workshops, and also featured in responses to our online consultation. This relates to fairness for two reasons:

- Respondents – including the young people we spoke to – feel an emphasis on memory might disadvantage certain (namely 'less academic') pupils.
- An emphasis on memory does not permit young people to demonstrate wider skills and accomplishments.

"[Assessment] is made for students with a good memory."

Online consultation respondent

b) Participants feel a reliance on 'paper and pen' testing means many pupils cannot demonstrate what they can do. A number of teachers and school leaders expressed this concern passionately during the workshops. This relates to fairness in two ways:

- Respondents feel such assessments test pupils' literacy skills, rather than the knowledge and skills under examination.
- Other forms of assessment would help pupils better show what they can do.

c) National assessments place pupils with SEND at a particular disadvantage. Special school leaders and teachers expressed concern that the style and format of national assessments presents significant access challenges for many pupils with forms of SEND. Again, two main points arose here:

- 'Paper and pen' assessments – or the conditions under which such assessments are sat – may not be conducive to pupils with SEND demonstrating what they can do.
- Young people with some forms of SEND rely on technology as part of their day-to-day learning. If the style of assessment does not permit them to use the technology during the test they cannot demonstrate their full potential.



Some possible ways forward and areas for further discussion

Our online consultation and workshops raised a number of ways in which the fairness of assessments and the assessment regime might be enhanced:

1. Government making a concerted effort to explain well ahead of time when schools can expect changes to take place, and rationale for any changes.
2. Government and assessment organisations ensuring schools 'know where they stand', and how changes in the goalposts may affect schools, teachers and pupils.
3. Reducing the government's role in overseeing assessment, and increasing the role of professional bodies (possibly including unions and the Chartered College of Teaching) in determining the course of assessment reform and shaping assessment practice.
4. Teachers having a more prominent voice in assessment decision-making.
5. Assessment organisations and schools relying on a wider range of assessments, including practical assessments, and teacher assessment (including coursework).
6. Schools, assessment organisations and government reviewing access arrangements for pupils with additional educational needs, including those with forms of SEND.



3.1.5 Meeting the needs of different stakeholders

Assessments are used to provide information to a number of different stakeholders including teachers and pupils, but also parents, governors, employers and politicians. Providing each of these groups with useful information is challenging.

i) Parents' needs

a) Parents can feel isolated and dis-empowered by assessment. Some of the parents in our workshops expressed feelings of powerlessness in relation to their children's schools' assessment practices, a sentiment reflected in several responses to our online consultation. These parents do not feel their voices are listened to by schools whose priorities are twofold: dealing with a raft of changes to the curriculum and assessments, and; focusing on safeguarding or improving their standing in league tables. One online respondent said that, *"as a parent, you are not involved in any way."*

"[My biggest concern about assessment is] NOT BEING LISTENED TO AS A PARENT."

Online consultation respondent

b) Assessment and performance data can be unhelpful or confusing. A number of parents in our workshops explained that they are not hugely interested in schools' performance data, so long as they feel confident their children are safe, happy and learning. Several respondents to our online consultation said data could be difficult to read.

c) There may be a disconnect between what school leaders believe parents want, and what parents say they want from assessment. School leaders in our workshops tended to stress that parents want two things: firstly grades, and secondly, a sense of their child's progress relative to his or her peers. However, a number of the parents in our workshops said they placed greater value on formative feedback about their child's learning, including suggestions about how they might support them at home. They also said they liked to have a sense of their child's 'overall' progress educationally, but also socially and emotionally.

d) Parents may worry that 'booster' and revision classes 'make up for' ineffective classroom teaching. Several parents and teachers we spoke to during our workshops expressed concern that some parents may feel the provision of additional revision lessons to help pupils prepare for high stakes tests and exams indicates teaching in regular timetabled lessons is ineffective.

e) Some teachers believe parents feel certain forms of assessment are more rigorous and valid than others. Specifically, school leaders in one of our workshops said they feel parents think tests 'count' as assessment, but that self- and peer-assessment do not.

f) Teachers and parents worry young people are over prepared for assessments. Some of the teachers and parents we spoke to during our workshops expressed concern that a disproportionate focus on certain summative tests during school means children are over prepared for them, not under. Both groups lamented what they feel is an excessive focus on a narrow range of assessments, particularly at primary.

Discussion point: How can schools ensure they are giving parents the information they really want?

ii) Governors' needs

Governors depend on headteachers, and headteachers depend on governors. The governors we spoke to during our workshops emphasised how important it is for headteachers to be 'data literate', and able to highlight important trends in their school's data to their governing body. However, they also stressed the need for governors to have the training and skills necessary to be critical friends and hold headteachers to account.

*iii) Employers and the world of work***Teachers, parents, and governors alike feel assessment can lack 'real world' relevance.**

Participants in our workshops highlighted several concerns in this area:

- Pupils leaving school with an array of numbered and lettered grades experiencing difficulties entering the jobs market further down the line if employers do not understand what these results mean;
- 'Paper and pen' assessments not testing the sorts of skills pupils will need when they leave school and enter the workplace;
- 'Exam hall conditions' not reflecting the world pupils are going into, and consequently limiting the value of this experience.

*iv) Government and politicians***While many teachers agree school performance should be monitored, most feel the balance is not currently right between learning and accountability.**

A range of views were put forward during our workshops by teachers, governors and parents about accountability, with some saying performance tables should be abolished. Most, though, felt some form of accountability was necessary and important. However, these respondents felt the system currently prioritises the government's desire for data rather than high quality learning and classroom assessment.

Some possible ways forward and areas for further discussion

Our online consultation and workshops raised a number of ways in which assessment might more adequately meet a range of stakeholders' needs, including:

1. Schools communicating more proactively and openly with parents about changes to assessment, and how these changes affect pupils.
2. Schools ensuring they listen and respond to parents' questions and concerns about assessment.
3. Governors attending training where their knowledge of assessment and data is not yet sufficient.
4. Governors supporting headteachers to deliver key messages to parents about assessment.
5. Schools and government helping parents understand and contextualise performance data.
6. Schools and assessment organisations talking to employers, and finding opportunities to give (and possibly assess) a range of experiences more immediately relevant to the world of work.

4. Initial conclusions

This interim report reflects an initial set of findings, and we anticipate these will shift and develop as the consultation progresses and we continue to explore, in particular, teachers' perceptions of and attitudes towards assessment. However, a number of key themes clearly emerge at this stage. What comes through loud and clear is that classroom teachers value assessment greatly as a tool enabling them to evaluate their pupils' learning, and to identify next steps, but that they also have concerns about the uses to which assessment and assessment data are currently put.

- Teachers do not feel their professional judgement is valued highly enough by government and assessment organisations. They would like more of a voice in assessment reform, but also for their assessments in class to hold greater weight in external measures of school performance. Schools and training providers could also provide a more consistent standard of assessment training for new and existing teachers.
- Teachers, parents and young people are concerned about the impact assessment is having on the curriculum, resulting in a situation where the cart is being put before the horse, with schools shaping their curricula around test and exam content. Schools and MATs need to begin by thinking about their core curriculum before, then, thinking about how to conduct assessment.

- There is exciting work taking place in some MATs to research and develop approaches to assessment, tracking and evaluation, although some feel concerned this work is taking place in a silo and may further fragment the system. MATs, assessment organisations and government should think about how to share best practice and evidence to enhance the rigour and consistency of assessment taking place across the system.
- Special teachers and school leaders are concerned that their children and settings are put at a disadvantage by current access arrangements, and the need to publish certain performance data.
- Teachers have significant concerns about how the different uses to which assessment is currently put interact with and affect one another, and in particular how assessment for accountability tends to dominate, and take precedence over assessment for day-to-day learning. Many suggest a fundamental reassessment of how accountability measures are used to evaluate school performance.
- Teachers, parents, governors and pupils all feel anxiety over the impact high stakes summative tests can have on pupils' and teachers' wellbeing, and suggest schools and government can do more to shield their staff and pupils from this pressure.
- Assessment can cause unreasonable workload pressure for teachers, resulting from inefficient practices spurred by a perceived need to produce written feedback and data for tracking and accountability purposes. Schools need to review their assessment and marking policies to ensure expectations of staff are realistic. There may also be room for technology to better support teachers' 'behind the scenes' with tracking and reporting pupils' progress.
- Teachers and parents have significant concerns about the accuracy and consistency of assessments, resulting primarily from the development and use of different assessment systems across the country in response to the removal of levels.
- Teachers, parents and young people can feel summative tests and exams prioritise specific skills over others, unfairly disadvantaging some pupils. Others feel these assessments do not allow pupils to fully demonstrate what they can do, and suggest a wider range of assessments be used.
- Assessment provides information to a wide range of stakeholders. Currently, teachers and parents feel the needs of government are prioritised over and above the needs of teachers and pupils.

You can respond to our online consultation and share it with colleagues, friends and family by following this link to our mini-site:
www.pearson.com/uk/web/testingthewater.html.

You can Tweet about the consultation using #TestingTheWater, and speak to us @LKMco and @pearson_UK.

Appendix 1

Workshops

We ran the following workshops in collaboration with the following organisations. As stated previously, the views expressed throughout this report do not reflect the views of any single individual or organisation.

Who was the partner organisation?	Who were the participants?	Where did it take place?
Ambition School Leadership	Middle leaders	Southwark, London
ASCL	Senior leaders	Birmingham
British Youth Council (at the Hounslow Youth Centre)	Young people, aged 13 to 19	Hounslow, London
Challenge Partners	Early Years teachers	Lambeth, London
Challenge Partners	Special school leaders	Islington, London
The Essex School Governors' Association	Governors and academy trustees	Chelmsford, Essex
NAHT	Secondary school senior leaders	Haywards Heath, Sussex
The National Association for Special Educational Needs (nasen)	Special school teachers	Webinar
NASUWT	Post-16 teachers	Birmingham
The National Governors Association	Governors and academy trustees	Birmingham
Pearson	Researchers, teachers and school and MAT leaders	City of London, London
Pearson	Researchers	City of Westminster, London
The Portsmouth Teaching School Alliance (through Challenge Partners)	Senior leaders	Portsmouth, Hampshire
Rescue Our Schools	Parents	City of Westminster, London
ResearchEd	Teachers and researchers	Hackney, London
SSAT	Senior leaders	Islington, London
Teach First	Class teachers	Bristol

Appendix 2

Online consultation

We asked respondents to tell us about themselves, and the following tables and charts give a breakdown of their responses. As the consultation progresses we anticipate collecting a larger range of responses, including (and importantly) from classroom teachers.

Question: What best describes you? (Please select all that apply):

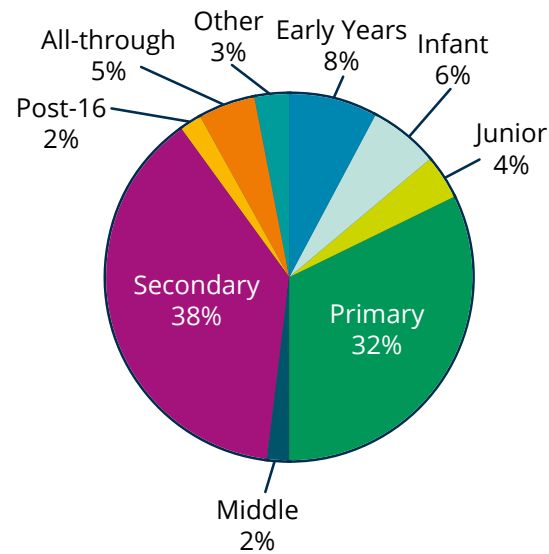
Response	Number
I work in a school	61
I am a school/academy governor/trustee	103
I am a parent or guardian of a child currently in school	98
I am a parent or guardian of a child, but they are not in school	11
I work for the government/Civil Service	4
I am a researcher/academic	10
I work for an organisation with a specific educational focus (e.g. special educational needs, literacy, sport)	12
Other	15

As well as individual, independent responses, we received responses from individuals from a range of organisations including:

- ADHD Wise UK
- Bedford Borough Council
- Cape UK
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Driver Youth Trust
- Imperial College London
- Low Farm Therapy Centre
- Plymouth University
- Portsmouth City Council
- University of Birmingham

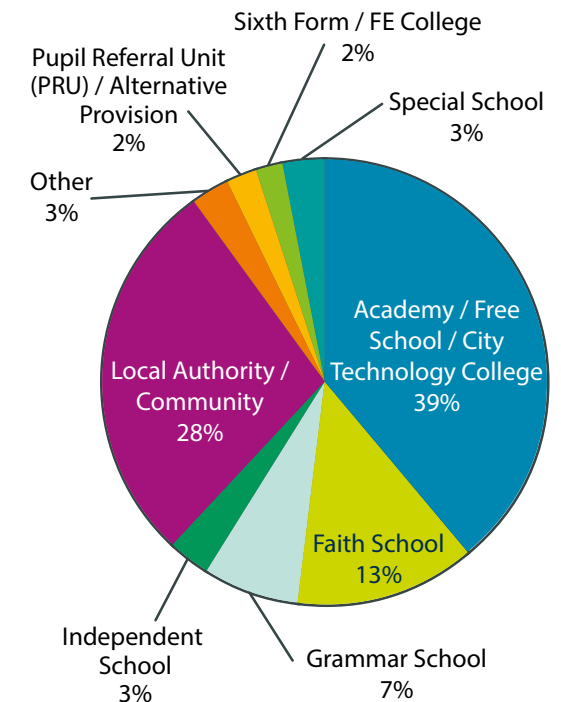
The following chart gives a break down of the phase respondents based in schools work in:

What phase is your school / setting? (n=57)



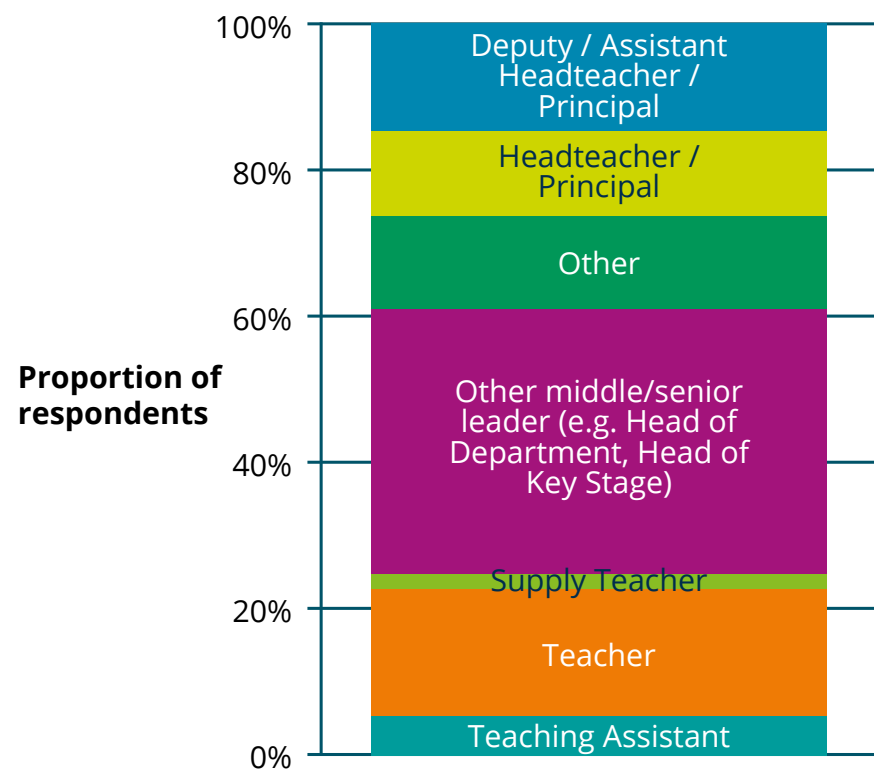
The chart below shows what type of schools respondents said they work in:

What best describes the type of school you currently work in? (n=57)



This graph outlines respondents' professional roles, where they said they work in a school:

Which one of the following best describes your current professional role? (n=57)



“Society should ensure that all young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood.”



This report was written by the education and youth development ‘think and action tank’ LKMco. LKMco is a social enterprise - we believe that society has a duty to ensure children and young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood.

We work towards this vision by helping education and youth organisations develop, evaluate and improve their work with young people. We then carry out academic and policy research and advocacy that is grounded in our experience.

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