



Making Assessment Measure **Up**

ATL RESPONSE TO THE CCEA CONSULTATION
'Proposals In Relation To New Assessment Arrangements'

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1.0 Introduction and General Comments

The ATL welcomes this opportunity to respond to the CCEA consultation 'Proposals in Relation to New Assessment Arrangements'

ATL, the education union, recognises the link between education policy and our members' conditions of employment. Our evidence-based policy making enables us to campaign and negotiate from a position of strength. We champion good practice and achieve better working lives for our members.

We help our members, as their careers develop, through first-rate research, advice, information and legal support. Our 160,000 members – teachers, lecturers, head-teachers and support staff – are empowered to get active locally and nationally. We are affiliated to the TUC and ICTU, and works with government and employers by lobbying and through partnership.

1.1 The ATL believes that this is indeed an excellent opportunity for all stakeholders in education to build a consensus on assessment. The two purposes of pupil assessment should be to support learning (formative) and to report achievement resulting from learning (summative). Formative assessment serves the purpose of promoting the further learning of pupils. Summative assessment judges pupils' performance at a point in time. In order to achieve these aims, both forms of assessment need to be integral to the curriculum and to teaching and learning. So teaching, learning and assessment should be understood as a complete package.

1.2 The terms 'testing' and 'assessment' are sometimes used interchangeably. It is our understanding that testing is one method of assessing; like other methods it has strengths and weaknesses. Policymakers in CCEA and DE should evaluate tests against the other kinds of assessment.

1.3 The ATL believes that excessive weight is placed on the outcomes of pupil assessments. Any assessment tool, including tests, has to be designed for a specific purpose; for example, according to whether the intended purpose is either formative or summative. Yet, according to the former Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in England test results are used for 22 different purposes¹. Many of these, particularly those connected with accountability, are inappropriate. The ATL suggests that DE and CCEA to distinguish clearly the differences between the intended and actual uses of assessment in this era of data collection and analysis in schools.

Test results are used to measure overall, Northern Ireland wide, pupil performance and its changes over time. These results are also used by other stakeholders to evaluate the work of schools. They have a high local and Northern Ireland wide profile and are subject to intense and often misinformed political scrutiny. The result is that teachers and particularly school leaders, believe that a single set of test results might well damage or end their careers. This is despite the fact that, even within the narrow parameters of testing, evidence shows that five-year rolling results give a better picture of performance in the areas covered by assessments than one year's results. In such circumstances, risk averse behaviour such as teaching to the test and aversion to innovation is highly rational.

In short, there is now a large and excessive network of accountability mechanisms affecting schools and teachers. These mechanisms include multiple methods of staff monitoring, PRSD, and ETI inspections, as well as the legitimate expectations of parents. School accountability needs rationalising as a matter of urgency and while assessment arrangements are a part of this process the ATL hopes that the current policy development process will provide an

opportunity to all interested parties in education to build an unambiguous understanding of the purposes of the proposed statutory assessment arrangements.

2.0 Consultation specifics

2.1 The ATL acknowledges the statutory context upon which the new assessment arrangements will be developed and welcomes the fact that the new arrangements will not apply until 2012. In the time remaining before this date it is important that CCEA, DE and ETI provide the necessary leadership to ensure that all education partners have confidence in, and a full understanding of, the new arrangements.

2.2 In adopting the new arrangements it is essential that no ambiguity among teachers arises with regard to the application and interpretation of levels of progression to pupil assessment..

2.3 The ATL realises that schools will not only develop assessment arrangements to meet the requirements of their statutory obligations but will also continue with, what some see as supplementary assessment arrangements to support teaching and learning. These include standardized tests such as NFER, Yellis class tests and whole school/year group testing, often from a value added point-of-view. Indeed there is base-line testing, target setting, INCAS and pupil tracking making full use of the SIMS technology already in place. Against this background there is a danger that schools, teachers and pupils will experience assessment overload.

Therefore it is essential that CCEA, DE and ETI provide clear guidance to schools on the new statutory assessment arrangements in respect of the N. Ireland Curriculum. A statutory curriculum with its reliable and valid assessment arrangements in place should come as a package which does away

with the need for extraneous 'in-house' assessments which inevitably lead to assessment duplication and overload. The ATL would suggest that greater emphasis be placed on promoting formative assessment (Assessment for Learning) and internal standardisation within schools. There is some concern in some schools over INCAS in terms of hardware availability and cost in terms of both finance and time but the ATL would assume that INCAS will have more kudos among teachers when they become embedded in the statutory assessment system. Furthermore, we would contend that a computer tracking system for each child should form part of the INCAS once they have been perfected.

2.4 The statutory curriculum and its assessment arrangements should allow teachers not to feel they have to tailor their teaching to Key Stage tests² because in the past this constraint tended to produce 'surface' or 'shallow' learning, in which facts can be recalled but without deep comprehension. Recall deteriorates after the test, which is partly why measured pupil-performance dips between primary and post primary schools. Hence the need to put in place a comprehensive formative assessment system with its associated levels of progression. We would go further to recommend that the reported levels at the end of the key stage should be subdivided for each child in relation to quality / coverage.

3. Overview of Broad Principles and Key Characteristics of Assessment

3.1 **Characteristics of Assessment:** The ATL endorses the key characteristics of assessment as outlined in the consultation document. However, the use to which assessment data is put can often be problematic for teachers and schools. Clearly the pre-eminent function of assessment for teachers is to support teaching and learning.

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Assessment is the key feedback linkage between teaching and learning. It is, therefore, essential that the proposed assessment arrangements do not undermine this complex and subtle relationship by putting too strong an emphasis on school and teacher accountability. The ATL would be concerned that a narrow view of assessment would have a detrimental impact on the Northern Ireland Curriculum and its full implementation over the next few years.

3.2 Assessment of Areas of Learning and 'Other Skills' The ATL welcomes the view there will be no requirement to assess the areas of learning of 'language and literacy' and 'mathematical and numeracy' twice.

3.3 and 3.4 Levels of Progression/ Expected Levels The ATL welcomes the designation of the levels of progression as 'can do' statements. However, for teachers to develop a common understanding as to how 'can do' assessments can be developed in classroom contexts CCEA must provide exemplar material and ensure they are opportunities for professional development. These professional opportunities must be of high quality and focussed. We would recommend that exemplar material should be working examples from schools that have Intended Learning Outcomes / Success Criteria / Peer and Self-Assessment Opportunities attached. Examples of observation sheets related to these examples should also be provided with relevant success criteria included.

3.5 Means of Assessment for cross-curricular skills The ATL welcomes the primacy of teachers' professional judgement as those best placed to assess pupils' progress. This is current practice in many schools and is consistent with the Northern Ireland Teacher Competences which now apply across the whole profession.

The outline provided at paragraph 3.5 is a useful summary of the proposed moderation

processes. The Council also understands that CCEA is seeking to promote a cultural shift away from a 'heavy engineering' approach to moderation to one that recognises the professionalism and expertise of teachers. In this context, the concept of accredited schools is a welcome development. However, there may well be merit in developing a formal professional recognition for individual teachers *vis-a-vis* their assessment

3.6 System Check

The ATL recognises that systems checks are important in order to maintain public confidence in the statutory assessment arrangements. However, it is essential that bureaucratic demands on teachers and schools be such that system checking is allowed to continue.

3.7 Workload Issues and Cross-Curricularity

The ATL acknowledges that decisions regarding the new assessment arrangements have been informed by the Northern Ireland Teacher Competences and the emphasis in the consultation that *'assessment should support - and not impede - the core business of teaching and learning and the scope of teachers to engage in that core business'*. In this CCEA should be unambiguous in stating that the curriculum and assessment are a complete and interdependent system.

The ATL asks CCEA and DE to ensure that 'assessment time' is put in place to enable teachers to fulfil the requirements of competence 18 which states:

*'Teachers will manage their time and workload effectively and efficiently and maintain a work/life balance'*⁵.

While it is recognised that DE Circular 2010/05 provides for 5 additional School Development Days each year for the period 2010/11 - 2014 the ATL would welcome frank and open discussions take place with

DE on long term planning, preparation and assessment time. Within the context of 'Every School a Good School', the Northern Ireland Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements and given the emerging proposals around special needs and inclusion, it is critical that these discussions bear fruit and for once bring some stability to the school environment.

In addition, teachers suffer excessive workload which has often been imposed. Any proposals to change teacher assessment practice are received in that context. It has been estimated in England that a Year 6 class teacher spends 400 hours in the year on preparation activities for end of Key Stage testing. It is difficult to make the equivalent estimate for a system of teacher assessment as a replacement for tests, but it is inconceivable that it could approach that figure. When test preparation is stripped away, the amount of time spent on assessment has the potential for reduction, not an increase.

For teachers, workload is not just about counting hours. They resent work which is imposed, unproductive and unnecessary. They give their time to do things which they believe contribute to their pupils' learning and over which they have professional control. For teachers, excessive workload is about loss of control through centralised imposition in areas which should be in the locus of their proper professional judgement: curriculum detail, pedagogy, and assessment.

When teachers are given the responsibility to make judgements on how to manage assessment in their classrooms in a non-bureaucratic environment, it will cease to be a workload issue because it will no longer be an imposition.

It is against this background of ideas that the ATL is taking part in this consultation with CCEA on Assessment.

4.0 Part B Proposals relating to Quality Assurance and Moderation Processes

The ATL recognises that CCEA and DE are trying to engage positively with the profession regarding the practical arrangements for statutory assessment. An underestimated drawback to any Northern Ireland wide assessment system is its effect on the stock of professional knowledge and skill within the teaching force. The most effective teaching requires the continuous interplay of formative assessment and lesson planning⁴. The skill of a teacher is to know what a pupil has securely learnt in order to plan the next steps in learning. However, there is evidence that the inappropriate emphasis on summative assessment because of end of Key Stage tests critically undermines formative assessment practices⁵. The level focus of summative assessment undercuts the improvement and task-oriented focus of formative assessment.

4.1 Over the years CCEA has developed significant expertise in respect of moderation processes and in terms of quality control (External Moderation). The ATL acknowledges that CCEA sees external validation as intended to recognise the primacy and professionalism of teachers as those best able to assess the progress of their pupils. However this must provide a level of rigour that should command confidence by confirming that judgements made when assessing pupils' work are consistent across schools.. In this context, the proposed Code of Practice proposed in paragraph 8 page 7 will provide an important guide that should underpin best assessment practice.

4.2 The ATL recognises that for the first two years of the statutory assessment processes (i.e. 2012/13-2013/2014) all schools will be required to take part in external moderation. With any new assessment system this is inevitable in order

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to build confidence. However, the ATL would urge CCEA/DE to move towards sample modernisation of schools at the earliest opportunity on the understanding that a robust moderation process is in place and embedded.. Moreover, a highly competent and engaged profession will provide an opportunity to move towards sample moderation procedures while, at the same time, ensuring that the confidence in the assessment arrangements is sustained.

4.3 In terms of the employment of teacher moderators two options are given in paragraph 8.5 (page 8). Both options have certain advantages and disadvantages and individual preferences will certainly come into play. The ATL would like to suggest that there might be merit in trialling both options over two successive years and basing the final decisions on an evaluation of these trials.

In terms of the support for moderation outlined at paragraph 8.7, the ATL is satisfied that these arrangements are fit-for-purpose and recognise teacher professionalism within local teaching communities. In terms of the support arrangements for statutory assessment arrangements, the time allocation for teachers of year 4 and 7 {up to 3 days of substitute cover to be made available) and for each year 10 class, 1 day of substitute cover to be made available is needed. While welcoming this need ATL is of the view that a review of teachers' planning, preparation and assessment time referred to earlier is important in its own right.

The ATL would like to place emphasis on the role of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in assessment, recording and reporting developments. In dealing with issues of standardisation and assessment, CCEA and DE should be contributing to a general improvement in the assessment skills of teachers.

The development of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and its associated assessment proposals present an ideal time for CCEA and DE to direct substantial resources towards developing teachers' capacity to develop formative assessments and to make reliable summative assessments.

It has been a common aim amongst teacher organisations and support staff unions that the demand for, and supply of, appropriate professional development should be improved and that the introduction of a contractual right to CPD would stimulate rethinking at school level on its provision.

The impact of integrating assessment into everyday pedagogy is so great that CPD in teacher assessment should be a priority. A one-off crash CPD programme would be unsuitable. Teacher assessment should be a permanent feature of the CPD offer for all teachers.

As with much of the best CPD, local peer group discussion and reflection would be the most effective means and would integrate with interschool moderation practice under the leadership of teachers who have been trained as 'experts' in assessment.

5.0 Part C. Proposals and options in relation to making summative judgements and evidence for external moderation.

5.1 The description at paragraph 9 'Making summative judgements' is a useful summary of how teachers should judge a pupil's level based on what he/she can do. however, in the professional development provided for teachers, emphasis will have to be placed on the concepts 'best fit' and 'can do' in the context of a pupil being able to work consistently and independently in most aspects of that level.

paragraph 8.5?&
8.7 mentioned
below

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5.2 Summative judgements

The ATL concurs that the models laid out for Communication, Using Mathematics and ICT are appropriate. The use of the mode is really the only statistical measure of central tendency available in these contexts.

In terms of the evidence demands for external moderation, the ATL welcomes CCEA's reassurance that it will 'take steps to ensure the demands on schools are the minimum necessary to support professional competence and maintain the integrity of the end of key stage assessment, as required by DE'.

Moderation of assessment (internal standardisation) between teachers at the same school and between teachers at different schools is a key aspect in developing reliability in teacher assessment. Moderation is any process by which teachers submit their judgements of pupil achievement to scrutiny. The evidence is that teachers appreciate the opportunity for peer discussion about their practice, both within a school and between schools. The fact that pupils are not identified within inter-school moderation enables questions of bias to be brought out and resolved neutrally.

While all teachers improve their skills by means of such discussion and reflection, there is undoubtedly an opportunity to develop a cohort of teachers who are expert in assessment and who over time will build a support system for all teacher development in assessment strategies and interpretation. Accredited Assessment teachers would be a significant development in improving teachers' professionalism in assessment strategies.

Whatever the approach to moderation, it must be teacher-led, locally organised, and be accompanied by a resource that supports standardisation within and across all schools in Northern Ireland.

In terms of the guidance at 10.2 on the use of assessment tasks, the ATL welcomes the reassurance that tasks should not be regarded as tests but instead be a support mechanism for teachers to use as part of their ongoing classroom practices. Also these tasks should include AfL strategies, Intended Learning Outcomes, Success Criteria and Peer and Self assessment Opportunities

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 The ATL looks forward to working with CCEA on matters relating to curriculum and assessment. and welcomes the comprehensive training and communications strategy being put in place in respect of the statutory assessment arrangements. Moreover, comprehensive guidance needs to be issued to schools vis-a-vis statutory assessment, and especially how the arrangements can blend with the routine work of schools in terms of teaching and learning. Crucially, schools themselves will need to critically evaluate their own 'in-house' assessment processes to ensure that they 'fit' with the statutory requirements and, to ensure that unnecessary assessments do not burden pupils and teachers. The essential ingredient to any assessment, recording and reporting system is the professional judgement of the teacher.

The ATL concurs that the models laid out for Communication, Using Mathematics and ICT are appropriate

References

- 1 House of Commons – Children, Schools and Families Committee (2008) *Testing and Assessment Third Report of Session 2007 – 08, Volume I*, HC 169-I.
- 2 Alexander R. (ed.) (2009) *Children, Their World, Their Education: Final Report and Recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*. Routledge.
- 3 Harlen W. (2004) *A Systematic Review of the Evidence of the Impact on Students, Teachers and the Curriculum of the Process of Using Assessment by Teachers for Summative Purposes in Research Evidence in Education Library*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.
- 4 Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B. and Wiliam, D. (2007), *Working Inside the Black Box: Assessment for Learning in the Classroom*. King's College London.
- 5 Smith C., Dakers J., Dow W., Head G., Sutherland M., and Irwin R. (2005), *A Systematic Review of What Pupils, Aged 11-16, Believe Impacts on Their Motivation to Learn in the Classroom in Research Evidence in Education Library*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.

