

Statement by the National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Head Teachers



NAHT
The Association for all School Leaders



1. Despite the Government's acknowledgement that, "over nearly two decades of the National Curriculum and its assessment regime, the end of key stage tests had often stimulated controversy", we still have no definitive end in sight for the end of the regime in KS2.
2. Research evidence, including that from the Assessment Reform Group, continues to conclude overwhelmingly that the current high stakes system of National Curriculum assessment undermines children's learning through narrowing the curriculum and encouraging teaching to the test. Other countries in the United Kingdom have acted on this evidence and only England remains with an assessment system for the curriculum which is fundamentally flawed.
3. While the National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Head Teachers welcome the decision by the Secretary of State to replace compulsory national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 by teacher assessment, his refusal to take the same course for the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 2 and for the arrangements at Key Stage 1 shows that the Government's views on testing have shifted, but not far enough. It is worth remarking that there has been a sea-change in attitude between May 2008 and February 2009, however. From a position of refusing to negotiate on any aspect of key stage testing, we now have the abolition of the SATs and KS3 and the formation of a Review Body, the 'Expert Group', to look at a wider remit of assessment including testing at KS2. One problem for this group is that the Secretary of State's description of the fundamental principles of testing and assessment continues to conflate very different purposes of assessment and evaluation as his remit to the Expert Group on assessment arrangements demonstrates:

"a testing and assessment system should:

 - *give parents the information they need to compare different schools, choose the right school for their child and then track their child's progress;*
 - *provide head teachers and teachers with the information they need to assess the progress of every child and their school as a whole, without unnecessary burdens of bureaucracy; and*
 - *allow the public to hold national and local Government and governing bodies to account for the performance of schools."*
4. As the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority itself implied, in its evidence to the House of Commons' Education and Skills Committee Inquiry into Testing and Assessment (Evaluating Assessment Systems, QCA June 2007), the existence of at least 22 uses applied to the current arrangements is illustrative of the Government's confusion about the purposes of testing and assessment.
5. The National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Head Teachers believe that it is vital that the Government understands that its current assessment system cannot continue to carry the burden of expectations on its shoulders.
6. We believe that it is the use of National Curriculum assessment for high stakes institutional evaluation and summative purposes which has undermined fundamentally children's learning and has led to unjust descriptions of schools failing when, in fact, they have often been going the extra mile in making a difference to children's lives. This is particularly true for schools with large proportions of children with learning difficulties and those from communities that have never seen the value of education and have never been encouraged to do so.

7. Despite the Government's intentions to introduce a measure of fairness into the system, the introduction of Contextual Value Added (CVA) as applied to National Curriculum assessment results for summative and evaluative purposes has embedded even further the erroneous assumption that National Curriculum test outcomes paint a true picture of the overall levels of achievement in each school.
8. The need to tackle the confused and damaging nature of England's current multi-purpose National Curriculum assessment and testing system was highlighted by all the main teacher organisations in a joint statement by the National Union of Teachers, the National Association of Head Teachers, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, the National Association of School Masters and Women Teachers, the Professional Association of Teachers and the Secondary Heads Association in June 2005. The paper focused on Key Stage 2 assessment.
9. The joint paper recommended the following:

"if assessment at Key Stage 2 is to support the highest quality of teaching and learning, we believe that the following must be part of the new system:

 - *greater use of assessment for learning as well as teacher assessment for summative purposes;*
 - *a coherent strategy that targets resources for real learning where they are needed, rather than short-term measures to increase test results;*
 - *a system of national summary data collection, similar to that previously carried out by the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) in order to measure trends over time in the education system;*
 - *a single form of external accountability which is positive rather than punitive;*
 - *a properly-funded entitlement to continuing professional development.*

Any changes to systems of assessment and school accountability must be subject to a rigorous and comprehensive workload audit to ensure that the working conditions of teachers are protected and that gains for pupils are not undermined by the imposition of additional burdens on schools and their staff."
10. While there have been a number of major developments in assessment since the publication of this joint statement, we believe that this statement provides a positive benchmark for our proposals to address the current primary/secondary divide created by the Government in its 14 October 2008 announcement.
11. We believe that the Expert Group should not have any constraints placed on the scope of its work. It should consider, in particular, the nature and purposes of assessment and the use to which data is put. Lessons should be learnt from the introduction of the Foundation Stage Profile and new Key Stage 1 assessment arrangements, and the unintended outcomes from these should also be fully considered as part of the review.

12. We are convinced that the 'Expert Group' should necessarily consider the use to which the summative results of assessment are put. Whatever the merits or demerits of initiatives, such as 'Making Good Progress' and the 'School Report Card', the intended effects will be skewed and distorted by their use for high stakes purposes. If implemented nationally, the results of 'Making Good Progress' would still be used for School Performance Tables and the 'School Report Card' summative results would actually serve as a new version of performance tables.
13. In this context, any advice that the Government's Expert Group gives in response to the Secretary of State's request for guidance on how to, *"ensure that preparation for National Curriculum Tests and Key Stage Two is proportionate, educationally appropriate and that the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum is not inhibited"*, will be marginal to teachers' practice. The fact that percentages of test results are used as national floor targets and that early inspection and aggressive local authority intervention can be triggered by schools failing to reach test result targets will mean that teachers under pressure to maximise the number of level 4s in English and mathematics will largely ignore such advice.
14. The need for fundamental change to the arrangements is highlighted by the exchange of letters between the Secretary of State and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, in December 2008, including the QCA's comment that: *"there are a number of significant risks which cannot be fully mitigated that result cumulatively in a residual risk of failure to deliver the Key Stage 2 results (for 2009) on time"*.
15. At least three new factors, therefore, contribute to existing questions about why the Government is continuing to go ahead with the National Curriculum Tests at Key Stage Two.
 - The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has raised questions about the operational reliability of the Key Stage 2 tests for 2009.
 - The contract issued to Edexcel lasts for just one year.
 - The Government itself has raised questions about the nature and form of National Curriculum testing through its decision to continue with the 'Making Good Progress' pilot at Key Stage 2.
16. We believe, therefore, that the high stakes nature of the 2009 tests should be addressed. While we note that the Secretary of State has asked the Expert Group to provide guidance to schools on limiting preparation for the test, we believe that is not enough. The National Union of Teachers believes that, for 2009, National Curriculum tests should be made available at Key Stages 1 and 2 for primary schools to use on a voluntary basis. Teacher assessment would be used for determining National Curriculum levels in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. Schools would have the choice of using the National Curriculum tests as a way of moderating teacher assessment processes or as part of teacher assessment.
17. The arrangements set out by the Chief Advisor on School Standards, in her 13 January 2009 letter to schools for Key Stage 3, should apply to Key Stages 1 and 2. We note that teacher assessment data will only be published at local authority and national levels for Key Stage 3 and that the DCSF will not publish school level teacher assessment data at that key stage. The same arrangements should apply at Key Stages 1 and 2.

18. In order to ensure that pupil tracking to assess progress is done properly, the same assessment processes should be in place at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.
19. We note that both the Welsh Assembly Government and the Scottish Parliament commissioned independent reviews of school testing and assessment arrangements. The recommendations of the Daugherty Review in Wales and the Peacock Review in Scotland were largely adopted by the Governments of both countries. The reason for this consensus was the thorough approach taken by both review teams which involved comprehensive input from all interested individual people and organisations.
20. We believe, therefore, that it is vital that no time should be lost by the Government in initiating a review of National Curriculum assessment at all key stages and for the early years, with the implementation of decisions arising from the review to be effective from 2010 onwards. This may seem a tight timetable, but there is a developing consensus and practice which can be drawn on in constructing assessment arrangements post-2009.
21. **We believe that the following approach should provide the basis for new assessment arrangements from 2010 onwards.**
22. Teacher assessment should provide the basis for National Curriculum assessment at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. Funding freed by the removal of the expensive test production arrangements and their accompanying security requirements should be provided directly to primary schools in order to help teachers conduct between-school moderation of teacher assessment during the school day. In this context, there should be a national audit of whether there is sufficient funding available to schools for professional development for assessment for learning.
23. A national bank of assessment tasks should be made available which can be drawn down by teachers when they assess pupils' learning. Teachers should be at the centre of contributing to the tasks. The national bank would also replace the current optional tests. This would eradicate teaching to the test and the current over-concentration on pupils whose achievements borderline levels 3 and 4 at Key Stage 2 at the expense of pupils at other levels.
24. A national sampling system should be introduced to provide information about National Standards in English, mathematics and science at all three key stages. Lessons should be learned from the national sampling models developed in Scotland and other countries and also from the discontinued Assessment of Performance Unit in England. Its purpose would be to provide a summative picture of trends in pupil achievement without subjecting schools to the vagaries of School Performance Tables. Pupil achievement would be sampled from the ages of 0-19 years and dovetail in with the current international studies; TIMMS, PIRLS and PISA. Standards cannot be measured accurately when the means of measuring them are constantly changing. Under sampling, the tests would not have to be altered every year, the results would be accurate and there would be far less disruption to children's education as the high stakes nature of testing would be replaced by sampling.

25. School Performance Tables should no longer be compiled or published. They paint an erroneous picture of school achievement and damage the confidence and stability of school communities. There is no reason for the Government to collect school specific end of key stage assessment data. National sampling will enable the Government to evaluate trends in standards over time. Local authorities would provide teacher assessment data to government which will complement national sampling.
26. Both the NUT and the NAHT recognise that the Government's proposal for a 'School Report Card' triggers an opportunity to explore the current overlapping contradictory national mechanisms for school inspection and evaluation. Currently, the national arrangements for evaluating schools are deeply unsatisfactory, as the rapid evolution of Ofsted's inspection arrangements implies. Single word, number and percentage summative judgements of school performance are crude and damaging. We believe that if the Government is serious about looking at a fair way of describing school achievements, it should commit itself to ending data collection which leads to School Performance Tables and include, as part of an independent review of testing and assessment, a wider review of the effect of current accountability mechanisms on teaching and learning and on schools as communities.
27. There should be an examination of how pupils' achievement, at all levels and in all areas, can be recognised. Many schools are moving to find ways of recognising the breadth of their pupils' achievements without creating excessive workload. One successful way is through Pupil Profiles.
28. Both the National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Head Teachers believe that there is no reason why the Government should not move towards adopting the proposals above. Very many countries across the world, including member countries of the OECD, have highly successful education systems with high common standards of achievement without the forms of assessment and evaluation in operation in England.
29. Both organisations call on all those involved and interested in education to campaign for a fundamental change in the nature, uses and purposes of National Curriculum assessment so that children and young people can benefit from assessment which enhances, not inhibits, learning.