

GTCNI

Professional

UPDATE

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► Issue 1: Your Views on Statutory Assessment



This is the first of a series of **Professional Updates**, (short, focused e-mailed leaflets from GTCNI replacing the **termtalk**

magazine) which aim to provide you, on a regular basis, with readable summaries of important research or other news relating to teaching, learning and assessment to inform your professional practice.

This first issue provides a summary of the responses of 500 teachers in 500 schools to our June 2013 survey about the

manageability, reliability and usefulness of statutory end of key stage assessment.

Professional Update is being sent to each school's inbox with a request that it be distributed to each individual teacher's mailbox. One paper copy of the first few issues is being sent to the principal of each school requesting that it be drawn to teachers' attention (*perhaps photocopied and*

distributed to each teacher) or put on the staffroom notice-board.

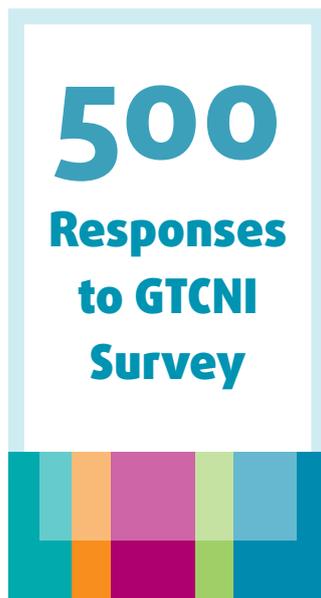
We hope that **Professional Update** will prove interesting and useful to you as professionals in the classroom. If you would like to receive your own individual copy of **Professional Update** please email us at: info@gtcni.org.uk ■

Summary of 500 Responses to the Independent GTCNI Survey:

Teachers' views on Key Stage Assessment – June 2013

Introduction

Assessment, as we know, is an essential and integral part of teaching and learning. Quality and timely teacher feedback from relevant and clear assessment activities, which focuses on the 'next step for improvement', is one of the most powerful tools to improve pupils' learning. This is why it is so important that we continually improve assessment practice and that we use the outcomes



effectively for the correct purpose.

This survey was undertaken in response to an invitation from the Minister, John O'Dowd, that GTCNI should provide advice on assessment in light of the widespread concerns being voiced by teachers and their union representatives about the new statutory assessment arrangements. A big thank you to the 500 teachers who responded to the survey. ■



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Your Views on Statutory Assessment

Purpose

The purpose of this independent GTCNI survey was to gather teachers' views about the manageability, reliability and usefulness of the end of key stage statutory assessment arrangements introduced in 2012-13.

Responses

- **One response** was invited from each school.
- **500 responses** were received, representing potentially 50% of schools involved in statutory assessment at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.
- **227 Primary School responses** were received from: 34 KS1 teachers, 51 KS2 teachers, 21 assessment co-ordinators, 45 teaching principals and 76 non-teaching principals.
- **250 Post-primary School responses** were received from 186 KS 3 teachers; 46 assessment co-ordinators; and 18 post-primary principals.
- **33 other teacher responses** did not identify a category.

Main Findings

(1) Usefulness of numerical outcomes (levels):

The great majority of respondents (*between 82% and 89%*) regarded numerical outcomes (*Levels*) **to be of limited or no use to ...**

	Useful %	Not Useful %	Total of Responses
• Individual pupils in informing their on-going learning	17%	83%	469
• Teachers in informing their teaching	23%	77%	469
• Board of Governors in judging value added to pupil learning	16%	84%	468
• Parents in understanding their child's progress	11%	89%	468
• Receiving schools informing them what a pupil knows	18%	82%	463
• ELBs to inform the support your school may need	18%	82%	466
• ETI in understanding school value-added to pupils	19%	81%	467
• Politicians in understanding system performance	14%	86%	467

(2) Usefulness of level statements of attainment:

The great majority of respondents (*between 82% and 89%*) regarded the statement of attainment **to be of limited or no use in informing ...**

	Useful %	Not Useful %	Total of Responses
• Teacher judgements about pupils' work	34%	66%	461
• Teacher feedback to pupils on next steps of learning	25%	75%	461
• Adjustments to teaching	27%	73%	461
• Annual Report to parents	26%	74%	456

(3) Internal moderation:

Almost 60% of respondents (*268 teachers*) found involvement in internal school moderation useful or very useful in informing their understanding of progression and standards of pupils' work.

4) External moderation:

While many respondents said they did not participate in external moderation, of those who did:

- Only 1 of the 459 respondents considered the process easy to manage.
- 91% considered the process burdensome or very burdensome.
- 42% of those who prepared portfolios said they prepared over 30 portfolios each.
- 51% of these included 4-6 pieces of individual pupil's work in each portfolio.
- 86% of 351 respondents considered the timeframes associated with end of key stage assessment to be inappropriate.
- 70% (*310 of 437 teachers who responded to this question*) considered external moderation of limited usefulness or not at all useful in informing their understanding of progression and standards of pupils' work.

- Almost half of all respondents (246 teachers) answered an open question about the usefulness of CCEA feedback from external moderation. The majority of comments were negative. The researcher who compiled this report independently selected the following as an illustration of the views expressed:

The feedback from moderation was hugely disappointing. It undermined the professionalism of the staff concerned... The result of moderation changed the levels of pupils ... that they were now seen to be achieving a level comparable with other pupils who are known to be clearly working at lower levels. (Key Stage 3 teacher)

It was useful to see the feedback as it confirmed awarded levels and procedures. As it was the first year of this assessment this was useful in an unfamiliar area. (Key Stage 3 teacher)

The feedback was one line to say that the levels were not verified and no other attempt to give us feedback was made... found it highly unhelpful and disheartening. (Key Stage 2 teacher)

Feedback was extremely poor. It was vague and didn't give you any specific advice on how to 'fix' pupil portfolios. Overall, to have spent so much time preparing these portfolios for moderation, the feedback that was given was disgraceful. (Key Stage 2 teacher)

Our feedback was not helpful and I had to follow it up with an email. I then received a phone call which clarified things somewhat but we do not feel that we will be any more aware of how to show enough evidence next year. (Teaching Principal, Primary)

(5) Reliability of Level outcomes:

The majority of respondents considered the numerical end of key stage outcomes (levels) to be of limited reliability or not at all reliable for:

	Very Reliable	Reliable	Limited	Not at all
Their Class (430)	7%	27%	48%	18%
Their School (433)	7%	28%	47%	18%
Other Schools (433)	>1%	11%	56%	32%
NI system as a whole (437)	>1%	11%	49%	39%

This distrust of the reliability of level judgements indicates that an external moderation system, no matter how rigorous, is unlikely to be able to guarantee the reliability of end of key stage assessments, simply because teachers do not value other schools' judgements.

(6) Use of Levels for accountability purposes:

71% of respondents (313 teachers) felt that using teacher assessment for accountability purposes could distort the process. Only 8% (36 teachers) believed that this would not be the case. The comments below illustrate this:

There is no doubting the distortion within the reporting of levels. Any of the main stakeholders, ETI/ELBs/Principals will all 'off the record' admit the results are completely at odds

with reality. Why do we have to persist with this farce? Are we not a mature enough profession to stand up and call this situation as it is? (Principal Primary).

In my experience as a teacher of 24 years, I have seen how teachers can distort assessment results to match parental expectations, class results and NI outcomes. (Teaching Principal Primary).

Teachers have been assessing the end of key stage 3 levels since 1993. The teachers' involvement does not invalidate the process. It is the pointlessness of the process that negates it. This is an ill-conceived process. (Key Stage 3 teacher)

When asked if teacher assessment should be used for assessment for learning purposes only and separated from accountability, 67% said yes, 11% said 'no' and 22% were not sure. The following is an independently selected sample of the views offered by 41 respondents:

Unreliable data is being used for accountability purposes at the minute. This was never the purpose of levels or teacher assessment. (Key Stage 3 teacher)

Teachers are being put under pressure to meet targets at KS3 and then show further improvement at KS4. Assessment should be about learning and not hitting targets. (Key Stage 3 teacher)

I believe the whole system of levels is of limited use...a level means very little to a pupil but a constructive comment with clear indicators of what needs to be done to bring about improvement can help. (Assessment Co-ordinator Post-primary)

Please just let us teach! Education is being ruined by all this accountability and limiting of children's experiences. (Key Stage 1 teacher)

Insights from research

The clear recommendation from assessment experts (*The Assessment Reform Group: Gipps; Tymms etc.*)* is that the processes of teaching, learning and assessment should focus on improving learning and should not be over-burdened with bureaucracy or exposed to potential manipulation for accountability purposes. Virtually all of the research into the use of teacher assessment (*and levels of attainment in particular*) advises against the use of numerical assessment outcomes for target setting and accountability purposes. The following quotations give a flavour of researchers' views:

- *Reducing attainment to a single figure or grade while attractive to politicians and the public 'as a form of shorthand in which to report performance masks complex nuances in ability and performance (Gipps, 1994)*.*
- *Trying to achieve multiple objectives with a single policy instrument is not feasible (Hanushek & Raymond, 2004)*.*
- *No single measure can fulfil both the formative and summative functions (Harris, 2010)*.*
- *Assessments should be treated as approximations, subject to unavoidable errors (Gardner, 2008)*.*
- *Use of assessment evidence for accountability is based on*

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the idea that measuring itself leads to improvement. Over the last 20 years there is no solid evidence from research or practice that investing in increasingly sophisticated measurement devices drives change (OECD–Scotland Report, 2007)*.

- Performance indicators lose their usefulness when used as objects of policy... When used as the sole index of quality, the manipulability of these indicators destroys the relationship

between the indicator and the indicated' ('Goodhart's Law' - former chief economist at the Bank of England quoted in William, 2001)*.

- ...Put bluntly, the clearer you are about what you want, the more likely you are to get it, but the less likely it is to mean anything (William, 2001)*. ■

* See www.gtcni.org.uk for Research References

Recommendations on assessment arising from this survey

The assessment arrangements which had operated between 1993 and 2006 (which were similar to those made statutory in 2012-13 but less burdensome) were abolished precisely for the reasons outlined above by researchers.

Time now needs to be taken to think about how future assessment arrangements can be better aligned with the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum, in particular its focus on 21st Century Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities.

The European Commission has highlighted that 'the key challenge for education systems in many Member States is the assessment of these competences. Assessment is one of the most powerful influences on teaching and learning but it tends to put too much emphasis on subject knowledge, and less on skills and attitudes, and to neglect altogether the increasingly important cross-curricular competences such as learning to learn or entrepreneurship' (European Commission, 2012).

The recently published OECD 'Review of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Synergies for Better Learning - An international perspective on evaluation and assessment' (April 2013) recommends that countries should 'align assessment with educational goals, designing fit-for-purpose evaluations and assessments, and ensuring a clear understanding of educational goals by school agents' (OECD 2013).

Finally, the country which leads the world in international league tables, Finland, does not have an inspection service and invests 30 times more funds in the professional development of teachers and administrators than in evaluating the performance of students and schools, including testing. (This ratio is the opposite to that of many countries, where the majority of funding goes to evaluation and standardized testing). Given the current pressures on the education budget, Northern Ireland might consider taking a lesson from Finland (Sahlberg 2010)*. ■

Schools need time to build expertise and trial models of assessment that they will value and that do not distort learning. GTCNI recommends the following:

1. Commission international research and development to assist CCEA in developing appropriate 21st Century assessments and examinations.
2. Separate teacher assessment from accountability to safeguard assessment for learning.
3. Develop wider indicators to 'enable progress in all important learning goals to be reported' ARG (2008) and to broaden measurement of 'value-added'.
4. Use standardised testing data sensitively and only within schools for diagnostic, formative and value-added purposes to prevent teaching to the test.
5. Use pupil attitudinal and 'well-being' surveys sensitively to gain insight into the correlation between 'motivation', 'liking' and achievement (Sturman, 2012).
6. Develop 'unseen' thinking skills assessments 'to ensure that important 21st Century skills become valued in the education system' (OECD, 2011).
7. Develop new qualifications for N. Ireland which reflect the needs of young people, the economy and employment in the 21st Century (CBI, 2012).
8. Revise the Programme for Government Targets to reflect these recommendations, based on a realistic understanding of peer and school effects and of selection.
9. Use light sampling to provide robust and independent monitoring data over time, disentangling teacher assessment from accountability (Tymms & Merrill, 2007).
10. Use International data (PIRLS, TIMSS and PISA) to provide additional quantitative and qualitative information as a broader comparative measure.
11. If a sampling methodology provides sufficiently reliable data; consideration needs to be given whether there is a need for statutory assessments at all.