

**Response to the final report of Lord Bew's review of KS2
assessment**

ATL, the education union

12 July 2011

ATL response

- ♦ ATL believes that assessment involving all pupils should focus on enhancing their learning, not on evaluating schools. Other forms of evaluation should focus on institutional effectiveness. Sample tests should be used to help evaluate the education service as a whole.
- ♦ ATL has argued for the development of a new accountability system that rebalances schools' accountability, by enhancing the position of parents and the community, while rationalising the position of central government. We believe that government needs to rethink the role of Ofsted and of local inspection and improvement work. The government's role as judge, jury and executioner for school accountability, through its responsibility for setting targets and for deciding on school closures and redesignation, is unhelpful in this context.
- ♦ National assessment at the end of the primary phase should be based on teacher assessment, which if conducted in a low stakes environment, can be at least as reliable and valid as the use of tests.
- ♦ We believe that Government should re-establish an authoritative trend line of national performance through annual sample testing in Year 6, on a national basis, covering the National Curriculum.
- ♦ Initial teacher education and CPD requires a radical overhaul in order to enhance the capacity and confidence of teachers to assess achievement and to embed formative assessment within everyday practice.
- ♦ Moderation of teacher assessments, locally led by nationally accredited teacher experts, should be funded and supported.
- ♦ Professional development and moderation will need to address particularly, the concerns about inconsistency and bias in teacher assessment.
- ♦ A national bank of assessment materials should be developed from which teachers can choose to draw to check their assessments, in order to support consistent moderation.
- ♦ Teachers need a restoration of properly accountable professional autonomy in both curriculum and assessment in order to empower them to make assessments.

The review of Key Stage 2 assessment goes some way towards those aims, although we continue to have concerns about the development of a new assessment and accountability framework within the current climate of competition and fragmentation in the state education system.

ATL welcomes:

- ♦ The review's acknowledgement that changes to the accountability system are vital if changes to assessment are to make any difference to pupils' learning
- ♦ The importance placed on summative teacher assessment as part of the statutory assessment system

- ♦ The use of moderated summative teacher assessment to assess creative writing and the weighting of results in writing towards teacher professional judgement rather than tests
- ♦ The focus on pupil progress, including the progress of the lowest attaining pupils
- ♦ The introduction of a measure of progress for those who have been in a school for the whole of Years 5 and 6, to lessen the impact of those pupils newly arrived in a school on that school's results
- ♦ The introduction of three-year rolling averages, as we know that a single year's results can be volatile, particularly in smaller cohorts
- ♦ The value placed on cluster moderation, in particular as part of professional development, including clusters across Y6 and Y7, and across Y2 and Y3
- ♦ The continuation of sample testing in science.

Some concerns remain; in particular:

- ♦ The review's model of accountability remains one of holding individual schools accountable to national government above all else. It does not consider the role of governing bodies nor local authorities in holding schools to account, not does it consider the impact of individual school admissions and other policies on the results of neighbouring schools. A better system of local accountability would encourage greater collaboration between schools, and go some way to stop the perverse consequences of individual school accountability.
- ♦ These proposals continue to use small aspects of English and mathematics as a proxy for the quality of a school's overall education provision. Government will continue to use these data as a way of closing schools and reopening them as Academies, rather than providing professional support. This will ensure that these assessments continue to be high-stakes, with all the perverse consequences attached.
- ♦ While tests remain, the danger is that test data will continue to be viewed (by government, the press and the public) as more reliable and more objective than teacher assessment data. The review suggests that different aspects of different subjects should be assessed differently, but does not make the intellectual argument in ways that can be easily reported. We are concerned that test data will (continue to) be viewed as somehow 'validating' or proving wrong teacher assessment data.
- ♦ Although it is right that the most able pupils are challenged, the proposals continue to assume that challenge must mean moving on up the curriculum, rather than considering the possibility of challenge through additional breadth and depth. This becomes increasingly pertinent if the national curriculum review leads to 'ramping up' the difficulty in the content of curriculum subjects. We would like to see greater consideration of the NFER's proposed 'high-five' instead of increasingly teaching the secondary curriculum in primary schools.
- ♦ Increased focus on moderation at KS1 and, potentially, cluster moderation at KS1/2 and 2/3, implies a greater role for Local Authorities. It is unclear how this will be developed when local authority services are being cut, and when increasing numbers of schools are removing themselves from the LA family through becoming Academies.
- ♦ It is unclear who will carry out 'external' moderation of teacher assessment of writing composition. We recommend that government considers the development of expert assessors, such as the Chartered Educational Assessor.

- ♦ Although we welcome joint moderation of teacher assessment between year 6 and 7 teachers, both as part of ensuring reliability of data and of supporting the transition to secondary school, the proposal that year 7 teachers might be moderators of year 6 teachers' assessments, rather than for example year 6 teachers from another school implies an unhelpful hierarchy of professional knowledge. We recommend that government considers very carefully who might become moderators of teacher assessment, and what training and support they will need.
- ♦ Increases in summative teacher assessment and cluster moderation requires high quality and ongoing professional development support. Equally, the review suggests that there will be implications for non-statutory teacher assessment of the proposals for statutory assessment, including implications for professional development. We recommend that Government proposals for teachers' initial and continuing professional education must take into account the needs of all teachers and not only those involved in year 6 statutory teacher assessment.
- ♦ We would like to see proper, evaluated trialling of benchmarking and 'families of schools' data, in order to understand how Ofsted and others will use it, and how it will impact on schools.
- ♦ While we welcome continuation of sample testing in science, alongside the use of summative teacher assessment, we believe research is needed to develop an understanding of sample testing and its uses in a proper professional accountability system, and further consideration should be given to the possibility of national sample testing in English and mathematics too.
- ♦ It is unfortunate that this review was remitted to consider only key stage 2 assessment. Its implications for key stage 1 assessment are widespread. We are concerned that government may make proposals for KS1 assessment based on the needs of KS2, rather than considering assessment throughout primary school, including EYFS.
- ♦ It is unfortunate also that this review precedes changes to the national curriculum. Much of the detail of testing and teacher assessment proposals is subject to the changes proposed in the content, attainment targets and levels developed through the national curriculum review. We hope that in responding to the Bew review, Government will not pre-empt consultation on English and mathematics in the national curriculum.

We would welcome assurances from Government that the new national testing agency within the DfE will work with the teacher unions and professional associations to ensure teachers' voices are heard in the development of testing. We also call for open dialogue with this government, the DfE and agencies to develop teacher assessment, testing and accountability systems that work for pupils and their parents, for teachers and schools, and for local and national government.