



## OXFORD UNIVERSITY CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT

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### **The Future of National Testing in the UK**

*Notes from the Roundtable held at 15 Norham Gardens on November 13, 2008.*

The roundtable discussion was held under 'Chatham House Rules' and involved some 26 assessment professionals. These notes made by Laura Reynolds and Imogen Wild provide a record of points of view expressed during the roundtable.

#### **Deskilling of teachers**

- Teachers have suffered from a lack of trust and now have a lack confidence in their own judgements
- Teachers need to get back to the original values of what it means to be good at a subject
- It is not deskilling but a lack of training in the first place, therefore teacher training should include the skills required to create a range of valid assessment tools
- Teachers do use a range of methods from the resources that are available but there may be a reliance on the now abolished KS3 test resources for assessment as teachers have not had the sole responsibility in classroom assessment before
  - Would be inclined to use past KS3 tests due to lack of confidence in making judgements and a belief in the credibility of test structure and mark scheme
- Time should be made for teachers to develop a portfolio of both teaching and assessment resources
  - Greater repertoire would allow appropriate assessment to be deployed to individual students
  - Model of assessment tools and assessed work should also be supplied
- Teachers make constant judgements on the ability of each student and so should be able to provide a more in-depth understanding than one examination could identify
  - However, training on grade alignment is necessary for the validity of these judgements
- Schools should be under pressure to develop alternative assessment techniques
  - Headteachers need to think more inventively about assessment, implementing strategies to broaden the range of assessment methods used
  - To encourage heightened involvement of teachers in assessment choices

#### **The accountability issue in assessment**

- In current national policy, schools are held accountable to provide a free market for parents.
- External accountability of assessment allows the results to be displayed in high stakes league tables creating added pressure on teachers to obtain the desired percentage of passes/grades

- This results in teachers altering the content of lessons to maximise the test results instead of teaching the wider curriculum
- The same assessment cannot be used both for good learning and also accountability purposes
- Assessment used for accountability usually becomes high stakes
  - The majority of assessments that are high stakes tend to be distorted in validity
  - High stakes will always be made a feature of formal assessment- how can a system be developed that recognises this without being reduced in credibility?
- Accountability may be a more influencing factor than stakes in assessment value
  - When the test is used for accountability all other purposes e.g. the formative ideal, are pushed aside

### Single level tests

- This assessment method should be used as part of a package and not an entity of its own
  - SLTs provide additional evidence to support the judgements already made by teachers about the ability of each student
- The group recognised the shift of emphasis towards teacher assessment in the Making Good Progress report but were concerned that the SLTs as currently piloted may not be consistent with an effective implementation of the model
- Are they intended for accountability purposes?
  - Even if results are not collated nationally into league tables by the government, they may still be created by the media
- Potential to put students forward for testing as and when the teacher judges that they have reached each level
  - This would allow for teaching along the developmental continuum
  - When SLTs used for tracking purposes rather than high-stakes fewer reliability criticisms
- Presently there seems to be confusion over what these tests aim to assess whether it is ability or attainment etc. and the meaning of the levels used
- Concern that if SLTs become part of national policy they may be used in the same way as KS3 tests solely to assign accountability to teachers, schools and authorities which may increase pressure on teachers resulting in grade inflation
- Problem with aligning current KS2 multilevel data with that of single level testing
- Complex logistics of running externally marked national tests twice per year
- Concerns over unreliable tests- sooner or later the pupil will pass a higher level than they are actually working at by retaking the test

### The Future

- Deviation from the current monolithic system of assessment to one of a more diverse nature, two options
  - 1- establish and define a set of guidelines and allow individual schools to operate assessments within those rules
  - 2- Allow more freedom for the system to set up its own practice, however schools would have to show evaluation and reasoning behind different assessment choices
- It would be necessary to have comparability nationally this could be achieved by:

- Matrix light sampling instead of the current blanket technique
  - Creating a common scale across different assessment methods
- How would you make this valid without having a single national measure?
- The problems faced by national testing are complex and so require a solution which matches this complexity
  - If SLTs are to be used the intention must be to broaden the current assessment methods so that a wider range of analysis is encouraged
    - This should deter the creation of league tables solely based on grades and their accompanied high-stakes nature
  - Different assessment data is required for different purposes (e.g. accountability) through from national level down to each individual student
    - Alternative approaches should be piloted for accountability, such as asking professionals what they want to be held to account for.