

Report of Assessment Systems for the Future Conference

Belfast, April 4th 2006

This was the third event to launch the Assessment Reform Group pamphlet - *Role of teachers in the Assessment of Learning*. It was held at the CCEA headquarters in Belfast on Tuesday 4 April 2006.

People involved in all areas of education in Northern Ireland were invited. A total of 64 attended. (See Appendix 2) Professor John Gardner from Queen's University Belfast chaired the conference. Mr Gavin Boyd, Chief Executive of CCEA welcomed the delegates. Presentations were given by Professor Wynne Harlen (director of the ASF project) on the findings of the working group and by Martin Montgomery (CCEA) and by Carolyn Hutchinson (SEED) on developments in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Following the presentations, the Conference broke into eight discussion groups and focused on the following questions with specific reference to Northern Ireland. Set out below is an edited summary of the outcomes.

The Conference closed at 4.00 pm.

Questions and Responses

1 How can the system encourage teachers to take responsibility for assessment in high and low stakes assessment/examinations?

- Concern was expressed that all assessment was seen by parents as “high stakes”. There was therefore a need to:
 - educate parents to ensure a more realistic perspective;
 - reduce competition amongst schools;
 - blur the boundaries between high and low stakes assessment as appropriate.
- Training would need to:
 - empower teachers and make them feel confident and competent to make dependable judgements;
 - build education communities of best practice drawn from both primary and post primary schools.
- Time be built into school day/year to assess effectively and to reflect.
- Smaller classes to improve the quality of formative and summative assessment.
- Ongoing Support people to ensure continued professional development.
- Moderation/quality assurance systems which will ensure credibility teacher assessment for all stakeholders particularly parents.

2 Teachers and parents in Northern Ireland are very focused on testing often at the expense of sound teacher assessment. How do we improve the credibility of teacher assessment?

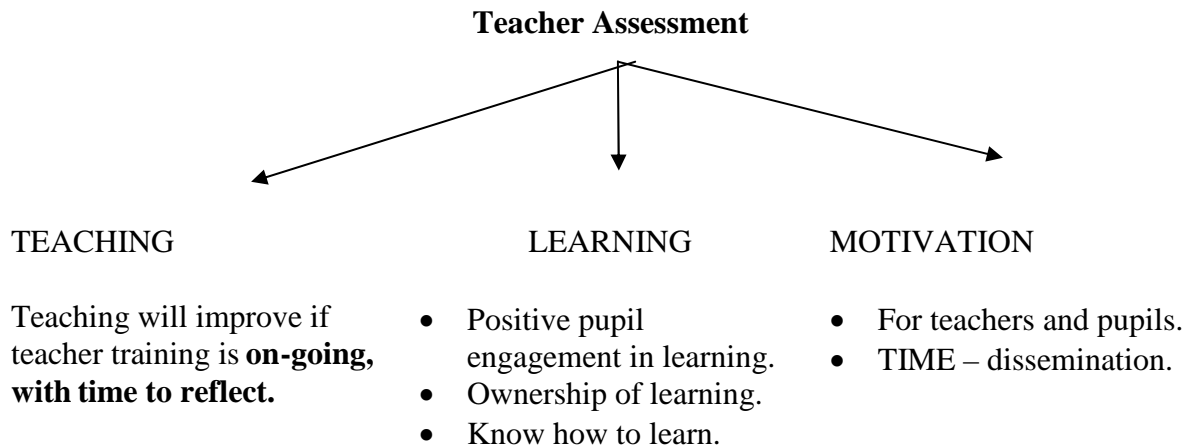
- Develop a common approach across schools to assessment and reporting.
- Increase teacher confidence through effective initial teacher training and continuing professional development.
- Ensure that the training/CPD provides:
 - a clear idea of criteria and how they should be interpreted;
 - support both inside and outside school.
- Provide a rationale and backing for the use of teacher professional judgement in education.
- Ensure that there is good leadership at the top of school.

3 Do you think that the suggestions for improving reliability of teacher assessment in the pamphlet will really work? If not, why not? What other suggestions would you make?

There was broad agreement that they could be made to work. Confirmed the need for:

- clear criteria for assessment and guidance on interpretation. Concern was expressed that the process might end up with teachers doing what they are told rather than what they need to do;
- sustained professional development to ensure that teachers become comfortable with system;
- the development and use of a bank of tasks (as in Scotland) to support teacher judgements;
- sufficient time for internal standardisation and moderation.

4 How can we ensure that teacher assessment will have desirable consequences for teaching, learning and motivation?



- CPD to build teacher confidence and professionalism and increase reliability of teacher assessment.
- Clear criteria setting out progression and supported by well constructed assessment (scaffolded?) tasks.
- Ensuring that there is a common understanding of the focus for assessment and the criteria to be used.
- Ensure there is a wider not narrower base of evidence for achievement.
- Share what success looks like including modelling and exemplification.
- Build in transparency in assessment for pupils, parents and teachers and sound quality assurance systems and good communication.
- Develop explicit links between assessment for learning and assessment of learning.
- Use school self-evaluation to evaluate policy and practice and ensure internal ownership.
- Visionary leadership at all levels that can change mindsets and ensure joined up thinking.

5 What actions and resources are needed to pump-prime better teacher assessment and to ensure that it is more widely used? How would you prioritise them?

- Political will to back the use of teacher assessment.
- Promote change in the culture of assessment.

- Mount an effective PR campaign in public and in schools to support TA.
- Accredite schools that have established sound assessment policy and practice.
- Provide a forum for professional debate – grow a vocabulary to ensure a shared understanding.
- Develop a bottom-up culture.
- “Re-professionalise” teachers and their role in education/assessment.

6 Are there any teacher-related obstacles to improving the quality of and increasing the level of teacher assessment in our system? How can they be overcome?

Perceptions

- Redefine values underpinning the assessment process, for example, attitudes to assessment for learning, perception that tests are always sound and teacher assessment unreliable.
- Overcome the mistrust of teachers of other teachers’ assessments through effective quality assurance and CPD.
- Change the mindsets of and methods used by teachers for formative and summative assessment through CPD.
- Empower teachers to engage in dependable teacher assessment and accept the responsibilities associated with teacher assessment.

Lack of time to teach, assess and reflect

- Reduce initiative overload.
- Prioritise initiatives through school development plans.
- Ensure that the schedule for rollout of the revised curriculum and assessment arrangements in Northern Ireland is appropriately paced.

Leadership

- Principals need to give leadership – develop an ethos in the school.
- Manage the tension between what schools have to offer and external forces.
- Develop a shared understanding of policy and practice and standards.

- Put in place strategies for developing parental understanding of assessment and its outcomes.
- Reduce the fear of accountability.

7 Are there any student/pupil-related obstacles to improving the quality of and increasing the level of teacher assessment in our system? How can they be overcome?

Lack of motivation and engagement of pupils

- Increase the relevance and explain the value of what is taught and assessed.
- Increase the competence and confidence of pupils to engage in peer and self assessment.
- Develop the ability in pupils to express opinion and take responsibility for own learning.
- Avoid “spoon feeding” and set out for/with pupils their role and learning expectations.
- Give pupils greater ownership in what is being taught and assessed and how – listen to what they have to say.
- Emphasise learning with understanding (not just knowledge) and learning how to learn. (Seen as a major difficulty in Northern Ireland.)

External Factors

- Class size
- Timetabling
- Extremes of ability within classes.

8 Are there any system-related obstacles to improving the quality of and increasing the level of teacher assessment in our system? How can they be overcome?

- Schools are confronted by a range of challenges – falling roles, competition, political uncertainty, re-organisation of support services – need for school management to understand how to manage change including strategies to phase in new developments building in time to reflect, plan, review and evaluate.
- Initiative overload – prioritise initiatives according to need through school development plan – put emphasis on developing skills and competences associated

with teacher assessment. Explore different models of school organisations to ensure flexibility.

- Lack of transparency in assessment - open up the school to pupils, parents and community and communicate effectively, sharing with all an agreed curriculum model for teaching, learning and assessment.
- There is baggage associated with assessment which will inhibit implementation of effective teacher assessment – engage in CPD and ITE which will deal with these issues (for example, learner dependency) and provide ongoing support to schools. Implement a shared vision of assessment processes and outcomes.
- Lack of trust in teacher assessment by parents and teachers – develop a collaborative learning culture/network that will share good practice and standards based on sound CPD. Build in appropriate quality assurance systems to reassure teachers and parents. Explain to parents why “test scores” are not always appropriate.
- Fear of taking risks – increase professional competence and confidence and create a professional ethos within the school.
- Government pressures to improve quickly – develop the networking and feedback mechanisms to ensure that expectations are realistic.
- ETI support the emphasis on self-review and self improvement being undertaken in schools.

Summary of Key issues

- Managing workload and prioritisation of initiatives through effective school based planning.
- Effective management of scarce resources particularly time.
- Changing the mindsets of teachers and parents with regard to assessment.
- Ongoing professional development in assessment to empower teachers.
- Understanding the assessment process and the criteria to be used.
- Leadership at all levels in education.
- Communicating and sharing a vision of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Improving the motivation of pupils by engaging them in the teaching, learning and assessment processes.
- Developing effective quality assurance systems to ensure confidence in the system.

Appendix 1 Conference Programme

The Northern Ireland Assessment Systems for the Future Conference

**To be held in the CCEA Conference Hall,
Clarendon Dock, Clarendon Road, Belfast BT1 3BG**

Tuesday 4 April 2006

Programme

Chair: John Gardner, Queen's University

12.15	Buffet lunch
13.00	Welcome: Gavin Boyd, Chief Executive, CCEA
13.10	Key messages from the project, followed by discussion Wynne Harlen, ASF Project Director
13.40	The Northern Ireland context: Martin Montgomery, CCEA
14.00	Implications of the project for Scotland Carolyn Hutchinson, SEED
14.20	Proposal of questions/issues for discussion
14.25	Tea/Coffee (To taken to the tables to begin discussion)
14.30	Group discussions focused by agreed questions/issues
15.25	Looking forward: main points from group discussions
15.55	Concluding remarks
16.00	Conference ends

Appendix 2 List of Attendees

Ms	Carole	Anderson	Assistant Principal Officer	CCEA
Prof	John	Anderson	Strategy Co-ordinator	C2K
Dr	Clifford	Boyd	Director (Subject Studies)	Stranmillis University College
Mr	Gavin	Boyd	Chief Executive	CCEA
Mr	David	Causby	Teacher	Newtownbreda High School
Ms	Sharon	Cousins	Assistant Adviser	Southern Education and Library Board
Mr	Gerry	Devlin	Education Officer	GTCNI
Mr	Arthur	Dillon	Teacher	St Patrick's Primary School
Mr	Mark	Feeney	Assistant Principal Officer	CCEA
Ms	Lorraine	Finlay	Head of Curriculum and Qualifications	Department of Education
Mr	Peter	Finn	Acting Principal	St Mary's University College
Ms	Rosemary	Flanagan	Adviser	Southern Education and Library Board
Ms	Carmel	Gallagher	Business Manager Curriculum and Assessment	CCEA
Prof	John	Gardner	School of Education	Queen's University Belfast
Ms	Karen	Hamilton	Teacher	The Armstrong Primary School
Mr	Wesley	Hamilton	HTL (Technology and Design)	Stranmillis University College
Prof	Wynne	Harlen	ASF Project Director	University of Bristol
Ms	Christine	Harper	Principal	Greenwood Infants' Primary School
Ms	Sandra	Hayes	Principal Officer Primary Assessment	CCEA
Ms	Elaine	Horner	Principal Officer	CCEA
Ms	Carolyn	Hutchinson	Head of Assessment Branch	Scottish Executive Education Department
Prof	Mary	James	Deputy Director ESRC Teaching and Learning Programme	Institute of Education, London
Mrs	Hazel	Kealey	KS1-2 Moderator	CCEA
Ms	Bernie	Kells	Programme Manager (Post Primary)	CCEA
Ms	Clodagh	Kelly	Department of Education	University of Ulster
Ms	Ruth	Kennedy	Principal Officer Primary Assessment	CCEA
Dr	Ruth	Leitch	School of Education	Queen's University Belfast
Mrs	Anne	Marshall	Principal Officer	CCEA
Mr	Eddie	McArdle	Registrar	GTCNI

Mr	Dan	McCall	ETI Inspectorate	Education and Training Inspectorate
Ms	Karen	McCann	Assistant Principal Officer	CCEA
Dr	Ron	McCartney	Staff Tutor Education	Open University
Mr	Michael	McClellan	Principal	Aquinas Diocesan Grammar
Ms	Hilary	McConnell	Teacher	
Mr	Sean	McElhatton	Assistant Senior Education Officer	Belfast Education and Library Board
Prof	Carole	McGuinness	School Of Psychology	Queen's University Belfast
Ms	Shirley	McKee	DP Curriculum and Qualifications	Department of Education
Ms	Mary	McKernon	Assistant Advisory Officer	North Eastern Education and Library Board
Mr	Alan	McMurray	Assistant Principal Officer	CCEA
Ms	Aideen	McNeill	Teacher	St Patrick's Grammar School
Mr	Sean	McNia	Principal Officer	CCEA
Mr	Martin	Montgomery	Business Manager	CCEA
Ms	Christine	Moorehead	Assistant Principal Officer	CCEA
Dr	Sean	Moran	Staff Tutor, Education	Open University
Ms	Doreen	Mullan	KS1-2 Moderator	CCEA
Ms	Eithne	Mullan	Education Adviser	BELB
Ms	Una	Mullan	Key Stage moderator	CCEA
Mr	Terry	Murphy	Senior Education Adviser	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
Ms	Claire	Murray	Teacher	
Ms	Margaret	O'Rourke	Principal Officer	CCEA
Ms	Sheila	Patten	Teacher	St Patrick's PS, Holywood
Mr	Ed	Paynter	Principal Officer	CCEA
Ms	Careen	Roddy	Teacher	St Patrick's PS, Holywood
Mrs	Patricia	Roe	Assistant Principal Officer	CCEA
Ms	Esther	Ross	Adviser	Southern Education and Library Board
Ms	Vivienne	Scott	Tutor - Reading Recovery	South Eastern Education and Library Board
Mr	Tony	Scullion	Principal Officer	CCEA
Mr	Philip	Sheerin	Key Stage Moderator	CCEA
Mr	Brian	Spiers	ETI Inspectorate	Education and Training Inspectorate

Ms	Ruth	Stevens	Assistant Adviser	South Eastern Education and Library Board
Mrs	Marilyn	Warren	Programme Manager (Primary)	CCEA
Ms	Carol	Weatherall	Assistant Adviser	Belfast Education and Library Board
Ms	Joan Ann	Wilson	Adviser	North Eastern Education and Library Board
Mr	Brian	Yeats	Education Adviser	Belfast Education and Library Board