

Report of the Assessment Systems for the Future Conference Scotland

Held in Glasgow, April 3rd 2006

The conference was held in the afternoon of April 3rd, at the Radisson Hotel, Glasgow. The programme is given in appendix A. Following a buffet lunch, the 65 participants (see appendix B) were welcomed by Carolyn Hutchinson, Head of Assessment Branch, SEED, who set the Assessment systems for the Future Project (ASF) in the context of developments in assessment in Scotland. Wynne Harlen, project director, presented the main findings of the project. Louise Hayward then introduced Martin Montgomery, Assessment Development Manager, of the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment. Martin described recent developments in assessment in Northern Ireland, prefaced by the health warning that policy changes had not been finalised, although it would cover formative and summative, a pupil profile and quality assurance.

George Macbride, EIS convener, then introduced questions for discussion in the eight discussion groups. Each group was allocated specific questions for a 60 minute discussion and reported main points in the feedback session chaired by George. The discussion questions and main points made follow below. Note that questions 3 and 4 were allocated to two groups which may account for some repetition in the reported outcomes.

In conclusion, Carolyn Hutchinson asked participants to identify a few main messages that emerged from the conference. Six 'big' messages were identified, as given below. The conference ended soon after 4.00pm.

Outcomes of the discussion groups

Question 1: *To what extent and in what ways can teacher assessment for summative purposes draw on the principles of formative assessment?*

- We need to arrive at a working definition of 'summative assessment', its scope and content.
- It would be helpful to think in terms of 'rich tasks' for assessment, integrating knowledge and skills across the four capacities of A Curriculum for Excellence (ACfE) (SEED, 2004), viz successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.
- There is a challenge for secondary subject departments in identifying how their subject contributes pupils' development of the four capacities
- For consistency and quality assurance of assessment by teachers, it may be helpful to think in terms of 'layers' of moderation, local to national.
- There are considerable benefits to teachers in being involved in the process of moderation
- It will be important to capture the 'pupil voice' in summative assessment, so that pupils contribute to judgements about their progress.

Question 2: *What further steps might be taken to develop teacher assessment for summative purposes so that it is more supportive of learning?*

- There is merit in the idea of ‘accrediting’ schools as competent to carry out moderation of assessment and thus sharing understanding of standards.
- The university model of peer evaluation could be useful for monitoring the process; local authorities would have an important role to play.
- We need to establish clear national expectations about assessment so that all stakeholders understand that judgements are based on a range of different kinds of evidence and are confident about their integrity. Public confidence is crucial. If not, then at the point of pupils’ exit from school teachers would find themselves under unacceptable pressure – they need to be protected.

Question 3: *In the context of A Curriculum for Excellence, how might teacher assessment be used to record and report on a wider range of pupil achievement than is contained within traditional definitions of attainment and certification?*

- Progression in the four capacities will be assessed as part of both subjects and cross-cutting and other learning experiences. Capturing and reporting pupils’ progress and achievements within this broad framework is likely to be a challenge – previous attempts (eg Records of Achievement) have not been very successful.
- It will be important to involve pupils, through the personal learning planning process. Some practical ways of doing this might be ‘de-briefing’ time after particular learning experiences; tutor group activity; PSE provision (which might need to be reviewed to involve less content and more reflection).
- Teachers need to be involved in the whole moderation process, including discussion of the detailed criteria they will use to arrive at judgements about learning.
- Discussions about assessment need to be set in the context of ACfE, and the four capacities.
- For the recording/reporting process to be effective there needs to be a significant shift towards pupils’ self- and peer-assessment, so that pupils take part in the assessment process and teachers have a role in evaluating this self-assessment.
- There is a need for exemplification of what this process might look like in different contexts and subjects, particularly for the secondary sector, where the process is more complex.
- There would be benefit in establishing cross-establishment networks for local moderation.
- The four capacities should be the main organisers for national assessment and National Qualifications.
- As part of shifting the system in this direction, there will need to be increased support and CPD for teachers, and sharing of information with parents, employers and the FE and HE sectors.

Question 4: *In the context of A Curriculum for Excellence, taking into account what we are already doing, to what extent and in what ways might teacher assessment contribute to certification of attainment in the future?*

- There are four key issues around using teacher assessment for certification that need to be addressed: the autonomy of teachers in making professional judgements; the role of ICT in the process of assessment; the current arrangements for TA as part of Standard Grade arrangements; the role of teacher-assessed national assessment bank (NAB) items in present national qualification arrangements.
- Moderation has a key role to play in developing teachers’ confidence and competence in assessment.

- Teachers need to be involved as professionals from the start in discussion about their role in assessment and the CPD needed to support them.
- Internal assessment should make an important contribution to a summary of pupils' achievements at the 'gateway' to their future lives
- ICT has an important role to play in promoting a shared understanding of standards as part of assessment arrangements
- Current use of teacher assessment in certification is more about teachers authenticating work before passing it on for subsequent external assessment, rather than having a meaningful role in assessing pupils' work internally as part of the overall certification process.
- If teacher assessments have a greater potential to provide dependable judgements than tests, then we could consider more use of them, to the point of replacing external examinations with properly moderated teacher judgements.
- If that is a step too far, too soon, then we need to find ways of reconciling internal and external assessments as part of the certification process, not least because the purposes of ACfE won't be easily assessed by external subject-based exams alone.
- Because summative assessments can serve many purposes, we need to be clear about the role teacher assessments will play in certification. If this doesn't happen, external assessments will continue to take priority.
- If the three broad areas of assessment for certification can be described as core skills and aptitudes, course work and subject-based knowledge and understanding, then internal (teacher and pupil) assessment would be most effective for the first two areas and either external assessment or a combination of both for the third.
- Teachers also have a high dependency on external tests and exams, rather than trusting their own judgements. If teacher assessment is to be dependable, extensive professional development will be needed.

Question 5: *To what extent and in what ways might teacher assessment for summative purposes contribute to quality assurance processes?*

- In the future, summative assessment might become much more the responsibility of teachers. This would have implications especially for local authorities, who would need to have a much greater role in summative assessment and its quality assurance.
- One part of this role might be to validate their own schools as competent to carry out summative assessment.
- In this case, to achieve national consistency, it would be possible to establish a national moderation framework for sharing understanding of standards and 'pair' local authorities to work co-operatively within that framework.
- The advantages of operating a moderation system in this devolved way could be to reduce overall costs without compromising agreed standards.
- Assessment banks could make a useful contribution to helping teachers validate their own judgements, and possibly the effectiveness of learning and teaching.

Question 6: *What can we do to ensure that our teacher assessments are sufficiently reliable?*

- At present there are significant differences in moderation practices across schools in Scotland.
- If moderation is to become a key part of assessment, teachers' confidence in assessment will be crucial to its success.
- Building teachers' confidence in assessment and moderation will require considerable investment in Initial Teacher Education and CPD, involving national agencies (LTS, SQA especially).

- The approach of networking groups of associated schools as a form of CPD has proved to be successful for the teachers involved and might usefully be continued and extended.

The Big Messages

1. We need to make the connections amongst curriculum, learning and teaching, and assessment more explicit
2. Building on what we've already learned, we need to re-connect internal and external assessment
3. Moderation, local and national, as a means of sharing understanding of standards and CPD, is central to developments in assessment
4. Teachers need time built-in to their working lives to reflect on learning through discussion with peers and pupils
5. We need to engage all our stakeholders in discussion about developments in assessment and the use of evidence
6. We need an open, public debate about the best use of resources – time and money - for assessment and qualifications

Appendix A

The Assessment Systems for the Future conference for Scotland

To be held at the Radisson SAS Hotel, 301 Argyll Street,

Glasgow, G2 8DL

Monday, April 3rd 2006

Programme

12.15	Buffet lunch
13.00	Welcome and introductions
13.10	Key messages from the project, followed by discussion Wynne Harlen, Project Director Chair: Carolyn Hutchinson
13.40	Implications of the project for Northern Ireland Martin Montgomery, CCEA Chair: Louise Hayward
14.00	Proposal of questions/issues for discussion George Macbride
14.05	Tea (taken into syndicate rooms to begin discussion)
14.10	Group discussions focused by agreed questions/issues
15.10	Looking forward: main points from group discussions Chair: George Macbride
15.50	Concluding remarks Carolyn Hutchinson
16.00	Conference ends

Appendix B

List of Participants

Stuart Allison - Quality Improvement Officer - East Renfrewshire Council
Alex Black - Education Officer - Stirling Council
Isabel Bolton - Headteacher - Kingswells Primary School
Colin Brett - Operations Manager Support and Development - Dumfries and Galloway Council
Alistair Cairns - Head of Post-Primary Learning - Learning and Teaching Scotland
Garry Cameron - Scottish Further Education Unit
David Clark - CPD Co-ordinator - Scottish Council of Independent Schools
Margaret Clarke - Programme Director - Learning and Teaching Scotland
Frances Colgan - Advisory Service Manager - South Lanarkshire Council
Nora Conlin - Education Officer - Fife Council
Elaine Cowan - University of Aberdeen
Margot Cram - Service Manager Learning and Teaching - Perth and Kinross Council
Angela Davidson - Head of National Qualifications Branch - Scottish Executive Education Department
Alasdair Deans - AifL Development Officer - Learning and Teaching Scotland
Jim Docherty - Assistant General Secretary - Scottish Secondary Teachers Association
Mary Docherty - Quality Manager - West Dunbartonshire Council
Tom Drake - Director of Operations and Quality Assurance - Scottish Qualifications Authority
Rhona Dynowski - Glasgow City Council
Linda Fenocchi - Assessment Branch - Scottish Executive Education Department
Sandy Graham - Quality Improvement Officer - Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Lena Gray - Scottish Qualifications Authority
Pete Hancock - National Qualifications Branch - Scottish Executive Education Department
Wynne Harlen - University of Bristol - ASF project Director
Tom Harrison, Performance Manager, Education Services – Falkirk Council
Louise Hayward - Chair of Higher Education Research and Development Sub Group - University of Glasgow
Carolyn Hutchinson - Head of Assessment Branch - Scottish Executive Education Department
Valerie Irving - Quality Assurance Manager - East Lothian Council
Gary Johnstone - Quality Improvement Officer - North Ayrshire Council
Barbara Jones - Depute Headteacher - Kingswells Primary School
Alison Kidd - Quality Improvement Officer - City of Edinburgh Council
Sonia Kordiak - Educational Institute of Scotland
Mary Larkin - Quality Improvement Officer - East Dunbartonshire Council
Fiona Lavin - University of Dundee
Ken Lowson - Learning and Teaching Officer - The Moray Council
George Macbride - Convener, Education Committee - Educational Institute of Scotland

Tom Macintyre - Director of Studies - University of Edinburgh
Cathie MacLeod - Gaelic Curriculum Development Officer - Learning and Teaching Scotland
Elaine Magor - Argyll and Bute Council
Douglas Malcolm - AifL Development Officer - Learning and Teaching Scotland
Alistair Marquis - HM Assistant Chief Inspector - HM Inspectorate of Education
Dave McCartney - Educational Adviser - Highland Council
Carole McConville - Quality Improvement Officer - East Ayrshire Council
Pat McDaid - Adviser in English - Glasgow City Council
Peter McGhee - Quality Improvement Officer, English, Drama and Classics - North Lanarkshire Council
Gordon McKinlay - Education Adviser - Renfrewshire Council
Joe McLaughlin - Development Officer, Numeracy - Learning and Teaching Scotland
Martin Montgomery - Assessment Development - Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, Northern Ireland
David Morrison - Advisor of Primary - Glasgow City Council
Elliott Morrison - Quality Improvement Officer - Argyll and Bute Council
Lillian Munro - 5-14 Assessment Manager - Scottish Qualifications Authority
Stewart Murray - Quality Improvement Officer - North Lanarkshire Council
Margaret Nicol - Equality Convener - Educational Institute of Scotland
Helen O' Hagan – Quality Improvement Officer - South Ayrshire Council
Stuart Osborough - Management of Information Officer - Stirling Council
Jane Polglase - Policy Manager - Association of Scottish Colleges
Margaret Robertson - Quality Development Officer - Inverclyde Council
Gregor Robson – Quality Improvement Officer - Angus Council
Pam Slater - Education Manager - West Lothian Council
John Tease - Education Officer - West Lothian Council
Suzanne Thayne - Education Officer - Midlothian Council
Alison Walsh - Assessment Branch - Scottish Executive Education Department
Paul Watson - Quality Improvement Officer - The Moray Council
Maitland Wilson - Aberdeenshire Council
Eric Young - Education Consultant
Myra Young - Assessment Branch - Scottish Executive Education Department